

**“If You Want Blood”:
Violence at Work in the
North American Auto Industry, 1960-1980**

by

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Abstract

Violence in the workplace has attracted widespread scholarly and media attention in the United States and Canada since the 1980s. Governments and corporations on both sides of the border have identified this violence as a serious problem affecting the health and safety of workers. However, there is still much that is unknown about workplace violence. Is the problem of workplace violence more serious than it was today? How has it changed over time? What are the factors that have produced violence at work? How have workers, management, and governments defined violence at work? How have they approached the problem? This dissertation historicizes the phenomenon of workplace violence, investigating on-the-job violence in the North American automotive industry between 1960-1980. It embeds violence at work in its economic, political, and cultural contexts and investigates how violence shaped the North American workplace and identities of class, gender, and race on the job.

A comparative, transnational approach is central to this study. If we seek to understand the structural factors causing workplace violence, the national context cannot be ignored. This is especially true when considering the US and Canada, two countries which are extraordinarily integrated economically but often contrasted socially and culturally. My research has uncovered a significant history of violence in the automotive workplaces of Detroit and Windsor, and shows that national and local contexts were crucial in determining the level of violence. Violence was a regular element of shop-floor culture and workplace conflict in both countries, but was different in each. In Detroit, violence at work reached epidemic levels and was a major factor in the crisis that gripped the city's auto plants in the 1960s and 1970s. This was not the case in Windsor. Yet in both cities workplace violence became a major concern outside the factory when work-related murders seized national headlines and challenged citizens to understand these tragedies. The thesis demonstrates that, though the patterns and levels of violence were different in each place, violence was no aberration, no freak occurrence, but an ongoing phenomenon that influenced the labour process and workplace culture in both Detroit and Windsor.

KEYWORDS: violence; workplace violence; automotive industry; Detroit; Windsor; working-class history

For Sarah, with love and devotion

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Chapter 1.

“Why Is This Happening Now?” Confronting the History of Workplace Violence

“Waging War in the Workplace,” screamed the headline of *Newsweek*’s July 1993 investigation into the troubling phenomenon of violence at work. The report began by highlighting the perceived strangeness and newness of death on the job:

Americans are used to seeing a stream of funerals for victims of violent crime. But consider 10 particular July funerals, each for someone who was killed, in the space of one week, in a place that seemed the least likely to be visited by violent death. Each was killed at work.¹

These shocking murders were just the “tip of the iceberg,” according to Joseph A. Kinney, executive director of the National Safe Workplace Institute. *Newsweek* quoted another source that claimed there were at least 30,000 violent incidents a year at America’s workplaces. *Newsweek* asked: “Why is this happening now?”²

The answers they proffered included a more violent society, the flood of guns into American life, domestic violence showing up at work, the economic downturn, job stress, and downsizing. However, they failed to consider a simpler answer: it was happening now because it had happened before.

Newsweek would not have had to look far afield to discover that violence had long been present at American workplaces. A perusal of its own back issues would have

¹ Jolie Solaman and Patricia King, “Waging War in the Workplace,” *Newsweek*, July 19, 1993, 30.

² Solaman and King, “Waging War,” 30.

sufficed. In July 1970, *Newsweek* published an article titled “Violence in the Factories,” featuring a report from Chrysler’s Dodge Main plant in Detroit:

a grimy, 59-year-old pile of red brick and concrete harboring 9,000 of the most frightened, angry workers in America. The work force is a volatile mixture of Poles, blacks, and southern whites and, to hear some of them tell it, the man who doesn’t pack a gun, a knife, or a length of pipe with his lunch break sandwich is either a fool or suicidal.³

The article went on to quote a lurid tale from a United Automobile Workers (UAW) official about a “racial throat-cutting” in the plant’s parking lot, before discussing violence in other factories around America, including household names like Westinghouse, McDonnell Douglas, and Lockheed. One security chief at a Midwest plant warned: “Let’s face it. We have armed conflict –guerilla warfare in this country. I think that armed invasion of the plants is entirely possible.” This time, *Newsweek* identified racial conflict, in-plant radicalism and inter-union fights, drugs, street crime, and working conditions, the “car-a-minute monotony of the assembly line or the hellish heat of tending a blast furnace,” as the culprits. Clearly, workplace violence was around long before the early 1990s.⁴

In the early 1970s, *Newsweek* was not the only national news source reporting on violence in Detroit’s Chrysler factories. That same July, while the *Newsweek* warning of America’s violent factories was still on newsstands, James Johnson, a black autoworker at a Detroit Chrysler plant, shot and killed two supervisors and a coworker after being suspended from his job. The shootings and subsequent trial made national headlines. The racism, violence, and unsafe conditions that Johnson’s lawyers argued precipitated his massacre were described in *Time* under the headline: “Hell in the Factory.”⁵

In 1973, the national media returned to Dodge Main. *New York Times* reporter William Stevens hung out in Mickey’s Bar, across the street from the plant, and talked

³ “Violence in the Factories,” *Newsweek*, June 29, 1970, 66.

⁴ “Violence in the Factories,” 66.

⁵ Hell in the Factory,” *Time*, June 7, 1971, 41.

with the workers coming in for a Stroh's or a Coney Island hot dog. They talked to him about forced overtime and skipping work. They also talked about violence, even stabbings and shootings, "real Jesse James stuff"; stories Stevens confirmed with a Chrysler spokesman.⁶

Novelists and filmmakers were also drawn to the conflict of the automotive shop-floor, and produced major works portraying the plants as brutal, miserable workplaces seething with frustration, anger, and violence. In *Wheels*, novelist Arthur Hailey, famous for *Airport*, set a blockbuster novel in Detroit's auto industry. The second chapter opens with a plant foreman considering that his current job was more stressful than his days as a Second World War bomber pilot. The foreman is then called to settle the issue of a worker fired for punching a foreman who had called a black worker "boy." Rollie Knight, the novel's representative of Detroit's black autoworkers, responds to the harassment of a coworker by dropping an engine block on the man's hand, destroying it. He later becomes involved in running numbers, drug dealing, and a fatal robbery in the plant, before being murdered himself. Paul Schrader, fresh from the success of his screenplay for *Taxi Driver*, made his directorial debut with 1978's *Blue Collar*, a relentlessly grim film that tells of three autoworkers, played by Richard Pryor, Harvey Keitel, and Yaphet Kotto, who work in an auto plant where workers threaten their foreman, the foreman harasses workers, and a stressed-out worker destroys a soda machine that takes his quarters. The three workers end up robbing, and then blackmailing their union, which results in Kotto's character's on-the-job murder. The film ends with former friends Pryor and Keitel hurling invective at each other, closing with a tableau of the two men, weapons brandished, about to brawl.⁷

Workplace violence was not just a problem in automotive plants, as *Newsweek's* article demonstrates. Nor was it a uniquely American phenomenon. Across the Detroit

⁶ William K. Stevens, "In A Dodge Plant, Long Days of Heat, Noise, and Violence," *New York Times*, September 14, 1973.

⁷ Arthur Hailey, *Wheels* (New York: Doubleday, 1971); Leonard Schrader and Paul Schrader, *Blue Collar*. Directed by Paul Schrader (1978; Los Angeles: Universal Pictures). There is a useful recent discussion of *Blue Collar* in Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 334-36, although I disagree with Cowie's contention that the film is unrealistic and too critical of the era's unions.

River, Windsor Chrysler plants experienced violence as well, including fights on the floor and even at least one stabbing and one shooting.

Nor was violence strictly a child of the turbulent 1960s and 1970s. Violence forged the very history of auto work and auto unionism. In the 1920s and 1930s, workers on both sides of the border had to defend their union organizing against the violence of the state and company thugs, which in Detroit culminated in the 1937 "Battle of the Overpass," a brutal assault on UAW organizers by Ford Company plant guards. In Windsor, too, the fight to organize was often accompanied by physical confrontations.⁸

Violence shaped the automotive workplace in other ways, from the hate strikes white men and women conducted against the hiring or promotion of black men and women, to the sexual harassment and assault directed against female workers flooding into wartime auto plants.⁹ The legends and lore of the plants are also studded with violence. The apocryphal story of heavyweight champion and former autoworker Joe Louis, whose Alabama-to-Detroit journey mirrored that of so many autoworkers, punching out an abusive supervisor at Ford Motor Company is one notable example. In the summer of 1970, just a couple weeks after that *Newsweek* article, UAW Local 3 President Ed Liska took time out from the struggles at Dodge Main to reminisce in his diary about "knockout artists" he had worked with in the organizing era, men like Steve Kwiatkowski and Joe Adams: "When they punched someone, they usually were knocked out cold," the president recalled.¹⁰

⁸ Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Charles Williams, "Reconsidering CIO Political Culture: Briggs Local 212 and the Sources of Militancy in the Early UAW," *Labor*, volume 7 number 4 (2010); Charles Brooks, "20 Years in the UAW," *444 News*, June 11, 1956, in Unifor Local 444 private collection, (hereafter cited as UL444).

⁹ On racism within the plants and the UAW, see David M. Lewis-Colman, *Race against Liberalism: Black Workers and the UAW in Detroit* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2008). On racialized and gendered conflicts within the plants during the Second World War, see Kevin Boyle, "The Kiss: Racial and Gender Conflict in a 1950s Automobile Factory," *The Journal of American History* volume 84 number 2 (1997).

¹⁰ Liska Reports, June 1970, Box 2, File 13, Ed Liska Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit (hereafter cited as ELC).

Beyond the fights and assaults, there was the simple fact that the often-dangerous conditions of auto plants, “gold-plated sweatshops,” in Walter Reuther’s phrase, posed a real threat of death and dismemberment to those that worked the line. As autoworker Charles Denby wrote in his classic memoir *Indignant Heart* of autoworkers’ perceptions of Ford, “they said it was the house of murder.”¹¹

What are we to make of this history of violence? *Newsweek’s* historical amnesia on individual workplace violence is certainly understandable. Despite the long history of violence at work, both individual and collective, in North America, individual workplace violence has largely remained unhistoricized. Academic research on individual workplace violence did not even exist until relatively recently. In the last two decades, however, growing awareness of the scope of the phenomenon has resulted in workplace violence becoming a burgeoning area of academic study. One study estimated that the body of published research on the topic grew from thirty-two articles in 1988 to several hundred by 2006.¹² The major benefit of this explosion of inquiry is that our understanding of the breadth and impact of workplace violence is much improved from an earlier era. For example, it was not until 1992 that the US Bureau of Labor Statistics began to track incidents of violence at work.¹³

Thanks to this increased attention, we now have a much better idea of the prevalence and impact of the violence experienced by contemporary workers. From 1992 to 2010, 13,827 American workers were murdered at work. If one subtracts the murders that occurred as a part of the commission of a crime, that number drops considerably, but remains high.¹⁴ While the numbers are much lower in Canada, the nation is certainly no stranger to high-profile incidents of workplace violence: Ottawa bus

¹¹ Charles Denby. *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 35.

¹² P.A.J. Waddington, Doug Badger, and Ray Bull, *The Violent Workplace* (Cullompton, UK: Willan, 2006), 1.

¹³ “Occupational Violence,” Center for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed 1 July 2014, <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/violence/>.

¹⁴ It is common practice to conceptually separate violent incidents in this way, but it should be held in mind criminal violence is often as much a workplace safety issue as protection from hazardous chemicals or machinery being run at a safe speed. For examples from the fast food industry, see Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 83-87.

driver Pierre Lebrun's shooting of six coworkers in 1999 or an injured worker's taking of nine hostages at a Workers' Compensation Board office in Edmonton in 2009 are just two well-publicized examples.

Recent research also shows that while high-profile incidents of workplace violence attract headlines, workplace violence is a far more common and insidious problem. How is workplace violence generally defined? According to the United Nations' International Labour Organization, workplace violence includes: "any action, incident or behavior that departs from reasonable conduct in which a person is assaulted, threatened, harmed, injured in the course of, or as a direct result of, his or her work."¹⁵ This definition includes intimidation and harassment, which are common forms of violence faced by workers. Sexual harassment is another widespread form of workplace violence. While women have many more options when confronted with sexual harassment than in the days when it was considered simply part of what women signed up for by working for wages, it remains endemic. In 2010, the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) received 11,717 complaints of sexual harassment discrimination, 85% of which were submitted by women. This probably represents a tiny fragment of all incidents when one considers that sexual harassment still often goes unreported or is resolved before it reaches the EEOC.¹⁶

We know now that violence is no aberration or freak event. It is as much a part of North American working life as layoffs and coffee breaks. Fifty per cent of Canadian white-collar workers recently reported being targets of incivility at least once a week.¹⁷ Harassment and bullying cause heightened levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. The medical consequences of violence on the job are an enormous cost to society.¹⁸ Workers who experience violence at work usually accept it as part of their jobs; one

¹⁵ Duncan Chappell and Vittorio Di Martino, *Violence at Work* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2006), 10.

¹⁶ US Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, "Sexual Harassment Charges," 2010, http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/statistics/enforcement/sexual_harassment.cfm (accessed July 1, 2014).

¹⁷ Robert Sutton, *The No Asshole Rule: Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't* (New York: Warner Business Books, 2007), 125.

¹⁸ Charlotte Rayner, Helge Hoel, and Cary Cooper, *Workplace Bullying: What We Know, Who Is to Blame, and What Can We Do?* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 43-60.

study on bullied workers found that 75% of them try to “stick it out” without raising an alarm.¹⁹ Clearly, our workplaces are places of silent suffering for many people.

Psychologists and management theorists produced much of the early scholarly literature about workplace violence. As a result, functionalist understandings of workers and workplace dynamics predominated. Many articles were written not to present understandings of workplace violence itself, but to provide guides to management about how to best maintain order in the workplace, identify possible problem employees, or protect the organization from liability.²⁰ The journalist Mark Ames, who investigated workplace and school massacres for his book *Going Postal: Rage, Murder, and Rebellion from Reagan’s Workplaces to Clinton’s Columbine and Beyond*, concluded that efforts to “profile” workers as violent have been futile. Ames contends that economic and societal factors need to be considered as causes of workplace violence.²¹

The study of domestic violence provides us with a useful example. Before the 1970s, domestic violence was generally understood as a personal problem, if it was seen as a problem at all. It was something to be kept behind closed doors. The concerted work of feminist activists in the 1970s and 1980s revealed how this violence, and the societal silence about it, served to enforce patriarchal power.²² Many employed the developing language of human rights and equality to argue that domestic violence was a societal problem deserving of government interventions. These activists also understood that an individual’s experience of domestic violence was influenced by the

¹⁹ Sutton, *The No Asshole Rule*, 125.

²⁰ For monographs and edited collections that represent this orientation, see, for example, Robert A. Giacalone and Gerald Greenberg, eds., *Antisocial Behavior in Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997); R.V. Denenberg, *The Violence-Prone Workplace: A New Approach to Dealing with Hostile, Threatening, and Uncivil Behavior* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Michael Kelleher, *Profiling the Lethal Employee: Case Studies of Violence in the Workplace* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997); Gary R. VandenBos and Elizabeth Q. Bulutao, eds., *Violence on the Job: Identifying Risks and Developing Solutions* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1996); and Waddington, Badger, and Bull, *The Violent Workplace*.

²¹ Mark Ames, *Going Postal: Rage, Murder, and Rebellion: From Reagan’s Workplaces to Clinton’s Columbine and Beyond* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2005).

²² Nancy Janovicek, *No Place To Go: Local Histories of the Battered Women’s Shelter Movement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

dynamics of gender, race, region, and class. Far from being the personal problem of private family units, domestic violence is now understood as a societal issue, inextricable from the broader dynamics of the society in which those families live. Katalin Fabian, analyzing the current literature on domestic violence, contends that: “until we address every fundamental and powerful political, economic, social, historical, and religious force that contributes to the tolerance of domestic violence,” lasting progress will be impossible.²³ It is now time to extend that kind of far-seeing, nuanced perspective to violence at work.

More nuanced research into contemporary workplace violence has emerged. Some researchers are investigating how violence’s causes, effects, and definitions are connected to power differentials within the workplace. Another promising development has been the widening of the investigative lens. At one time, the literature focused heavily on the most sensational, most easily detected, but also least common incidences of egregious physical violence. Researchers are now considering the wider spectrum of violent behaviours that workers are subjected to, including harassment, bullying, and intimidation.²⁴

However, there remains much to be done to better understand violence at work. The extant literature too often presents a static, featureless image of the phenomenon. The research methods are often surveys or the analysis of surveys done by others. The results are compiled in a way that eliminates the context of incidents and blots out the differences between workplaces, workforces, regions, and cultures. In these analyses, conflict can appear a matter between atomized individuals, separated from the factors that construct their individual identities. Workplace stress is considered, but often appears as a free-floating miasma, unconnected to management styles, regimes of

²³ Katalin Fabian, “Introduction: The Politics of Domestic Violence in Postcommunist Europe and Eurasia,” in Fabian, ed., *Domestic Violence in Postcommunist States: Local Activism, National Policies, and Global Forces* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 18.

²⁴ See, for example, Stale Einarson, ed., *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2003); Jerald Greenberg, ed., *Insidious Workplace Behavior* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Dave Holmes, Trudy Rudge, and Amélie Perron, eds., *(Re)Thinking Violence in Health Care Settings* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012); and Rayner, Hoel, and Cooper, *Workplace Bullying*.

production, or local and national influences. Researchers confirm that the problem is widespread but produce few actual arguments about workplace violence, beyond generalities about more research being needed or tautologies about stressful workplaces producing violence. Since all workplaces are stressful to one degree or another, we need more effective forms of investigation that can explain the shifting contours and causalities of workplace violence.

As part of this process, it is critical to ask new, historical questions about workplace violence that can better explain the phenomena's complexities. For example, how have the definitions of what constitutes violence changed over time? Sexual harassment was once dismissed as harmless fun or part of the job. Today it is recognized as violence, humiliation, and a violation of human rights. Moreover, do current definitions of workplace violence obscure a more comprehensive understanding of violence at work? More specifically, should not the violence of unsafe working environments—from sped-up assembly lines, to inadequate supervision and training, to faulty equipment—inform our understanding of what violence is and how it operates at work? While many of the deaths caused by such phenomena are routinely defined through official channels as “accidents,” this interpretation has always been resisted. In particular, individual workers and their communities have continually mobilized counter-narratives to contest the language and meaning of so-called accidents, insisting instead that they be understood as structural forms of violence, that is, deaths caused by management's prioritizing of production and profit over the health and safety of the worker. Indeed, these allegations of systemic violence are not without basis. In 2009, 4,340 workers died on the job in the United States, and over 50,000 more died from occupational disease.²⁵ 1,097 workers were killed in Canada in 2005, an average of five deaths per working day.²⁶ Who decides which deaths at work are violent and which ones are just accidents? More attention to how definitions of workplace violence have been

²⁵ American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations, “Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect”, 2011, at http://www.aflcio.org/content/download/6485/69821/dotj_2011.pdf (accessed July 1, 2014); Aaron Goings, “Red Harbor: Class, Violence, and Community in Grays Harbor, Washington,” (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2012).

²⁶ Andrew Sharpe and Jill Hardt, “Five Deaths a Day: Workplace Fatalities in Canada, 1993-2005”, Report, Centre for the Study of Living Standards, 2006, <http://www.csls.ca/reports/csls2006-04.pdf> (accessed July 1, 2014).

produced and contested, how those definitions have changed over time, and the understandings of violence by workers and in workplace culture is needed, as is a better appreciation of the relationship between structural violence and individual violence.

Many more fundamental questions about workplace violence remain unanswered. Are our workplaces more or less violent than they once were? What factors explain an increase or decrease in levels of workplace violence? How can we understand workplace violence without knowledge of how structural changes in the economy, union density, regulatory regimes, and national and local contexts may have worked to produce or reduce violence? Have workers, management, or government proposed solutions to this problem in the past? Were they tried, and to what effect? What did previous generations identify as causes of violence at work? Investigating how the nature and prevalence of workplace violence has changed over time; uncovering how it has been understood in the past; investigating the historical causes, uses and definitions of violence in the workplace; all of these approaches are essential to understanding why workplace violence has happened and how to interpret and reduce violence. Put simply, individual violence at work has been pathologized and psychologized. It now demands to be historicized. In doing so, this dissertation reveals how contests over the labour process, shop-floor power, and identity at work produced individual workplace violence in the automotive industry, and also how that violence shaped those workplaces and the people who worked there.

There have been many previous histories that have considered the connection between labour and violence. Indeed, Marx conceived of capitalism as a system of inherent violence, founded on the expropriation of the means of production, which drove now-landless peasants into the wage labour market, where surplus value was extracted from their labour by capitalists. In *Capital*, he wrote: “if money, according to Augier, comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek, capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt.”²⁷

²⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (1976; reprint, New York: Penguin Classics, 1990), 926.

When primitive accumulation was replaced by industrial capitalism, the violence of expropriation was superseded by a different violence, born of the struggles of industrial relations. Historians, Marxist and otherwise, have long appreciated that the establishment and development of industrial capitalism in North America has sparked violent open conflict, all the way back to Louis Adamic's famous *Dynamite*, first published in 1931. More recently, scholars such as Beverly Gage and Thomas G. Andrews in the United States, and Stephen Endicott in Canada, have written histories of the deadly violence that often resulted from early twentieth-century labour conflicts. Perhaps the greatest contribution of these works is to remind us that at other times in the continent's history, violence arising from workplace conflicts was not seen as aberrant or incomprehensible, but fundamental. This violence was understood as a manifestation of class conflict, a systemic problem arising from a rapacious capitalist system -- conflicts that threatened the very survival of capitalist democracy itself, were the inequality and exploitation that sparked them not mollified. Stephen Norwood's wide-ranging work on violent strikebreaking highlights how integral violence was to union organizing, strikes, and even everyday corporate management at anti-union employers like Ford, who ran a paramilitary anti-union organization under the auspices of Harry Bennett's Service Department. Norwood also outlines how important these violent conflicts were to constructions of race and masculinity, identifying workplace violence as a wellspring of identity for men white and black, working-class and college-educated.²⁸

²⁸ Important works concerning class, capitalism, and violence in North America include, but are in no way limited to: Louis Adamic, *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America* (1931; reprint, New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1958); Ames, *Going Postal*; Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Michael Belleseilles and Christopher Waldrep, eds., *Documenting American Violence: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Cal Winslow, eds., *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s* (New York: Verso, 2010); Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labour Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Beverly Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in Its First Age of Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012; first published by St. Martin's Press, 1975); Aaron Goings, "Red Harbor,"; David Goldberg and Trevor Griffey, eds., *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010); Reinhold Kramer and Tom Mitchell, *When the State Trembled: How A.J. Andrews and the Citizens' Committee Broke the Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010);

After the Second World War, capital, labour, and the state established a system of “industrial legality,”²⁹ in Eric Tucker and Judy Fudge’s phrase. This postwar settlement, epitomized in the auto industry by Canada’s Rand Formula and the 1947 Treaty of Detroit in the US, recognized and safeguarded non-radical unions. It shifted the boundaries of industrial labour conflicts and eliminated their bloodiest excesses. Collective bargaining became less violent. Nevertheless, violent labour conflict was certainly not extinguished. It is true that in the era of the postwar settlement, anti-union legislation, red-baiting, capital flight, and highly paid union-avoidance attorneys replaced Pinkertons and strikebreakers as the cornerstone of anti-union efforts. However, workplace struggles still exploded into violence on many occasions. Canadian examples include Hal Banks’s paramilitary campaign against the Canadian Seamen’s Union, the violent struggles of the *gars Lapalme* against the federal government and eventually their union, the Quebec United Aircraft strike, which was marked by physical altercations, bombings, and attacks on the homes of United Aircraft executives, and the 1978 murders of Robin Hood strikers in Montreal by a gang of paid strikebreakers.³⁰

In the United States, violence stemming from Teamster job actions resulted in the National Guard being called out in several states during the 1970s. The United Farm

Stephen Meyer, "Rough Manhood: The Aggressive and Confrontational Shop Culture of US Auto Workers during World War II," *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 1 (2002); Stephen Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1999); Donald Wayne Rogers, *Making Capitalism Safe: Work Safety and Health Regulation in America, 1880-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Joan Sangster, *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); and Roger Stonebanks, *Fighting for Dignity: The Ginger Goodwin Story* (Edmonton: AU Press, 2004).

²⁹ Eric Tucker and Judy Fudge, *Labour Before the Law: The Regulation of Workers' Collective Action in Canada, 1900-1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

³⁰ On Banks, see Peter Edwards, *Waterfront Warlord: The Life and Violent Times of Hal C. Banks* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1987). On the *gars Lapalme*, see Desmond Morton, *Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Labour Movement* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 284-86; and Bryan Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 237. On the United Aircraft strike and the murders of the Robin Hood strikers, see Morton, *Working People*, 284-86 and 292. Morton notes these struggles prompted René Lévesque's PQ to pass legislation that forbade the use of replacement workers during strikes, provided for automatic check-off of union dues, made certifying a union easier, and safeguarded workers' return to their job after a labour dispute.

Workers of America's campaigns in California were marked by repeated incidents of violence. Violence was a continual feature of struggles between Harlan County, Kentucky coal miners and the coal companies. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated while in Memphis to support a bitter strike of sanitation workers. Violence was delegitimized as an element in labour conflict in the postwar era, but not eradicated.³¹

Nor did the post-war settlement usher in an era of working-class quiescence. Recently, American historians have challenged the received image of the 1970s as a time of defeatism and stagnation among workers, pointing to the continuation, and even intensification, of class conflict: an upsurge in grassroots, rank-and-file activism in the face of capital and the state's nascent neoliberal restructuring.³² Thanks to this work, we have a good understanding of the causes and effects of collective labour violence. We also know that violence inherent to capitalism, the structural violence of workplace injuries and death, has certainly continued. What needs to be explained, however, is the changing form of violence employed by workers.

Over the last several decades, the historical trend of violence *by* workers gradually shifted from collective violence towards individual violence. Norwood contends that after World War II, anti-union efforts "came to rely less on brute force, and "men's labour militancy, declined considerably."³³ As the title of one monograph of anti-unionism

³¹ On Teamster strikes in the 1970s, see Dan La Botz, "The Tumultuous Teamsters of the 1970s," in *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s*, ed. Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner and Cal Winslow (New York: Verso, 2010). On violence and the United Farm Workers, see Frank Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (New York: Verso, 2014), 426-37; and Miriam Pawel, *The Crusades of Cesar Chavez: A Biography* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 269-71, 288-95, and 404-05. On the decades of struggle between workers and capital in Harlan County, see Alessandro Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). On King in Memphis, see Michael Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011).

³² For this, see especially the authors collected in Brenner, Brenner, Winslow, *Rebel Rank and File*.

³³ Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation*, 229.

and class conflict puts it, briefcases replaced blackjacks.³⁴ However, while violence between groups of workers and the organized forces of capital or the state is almost unheard of today, individual violence remains a significant concern. Therefore, there is real reason to question Norwood's conclusion that, in the 1960s and 1970s, violence became a far less important component of working-class masculinity, though its form has changed from collective to individual violence.

Indeed, researching the automotive shop floor indicates that masculinity, the production, performance, and maintenance of a gendered male identity, remained strongly linked with violence during the 1960s and 1970s. While one must be extremely wary of essentializing working-class men as inherently violent, one must also bear in mind, as R.W. Connell has pointed out, that violence is crucial to masculinity and to the wider structure of gendered inequality of which masculinity is a part. Connell identifies two major purposes of male violence: to preserve men's status as the dominant group, and to contest power relations among fellow men. Both uses of violence were present in the Chrysler factories of Detroit and Windsor, places where a dangerous labour process and consistent class conflict on the job prompted men to use violence to attempt to maintain their manliness and to defend their prerogatives at work. In its exploration of these incidents, this study takes up Ava Baron's challenge to historians to "[take] seriously the significance of the ways that masculinity is conferred by men on other men." It also explores the "homosociality of the workplace" and, briefly, the "homoerotic content of male work culture,"³⁵ previously "silent dimensions" of working-class history, in Baron's words.

Violence was not only an aspect of men's power over men, but it was also part of men's power over women. Men used violence against women in these plants, sometimes, as in the case of Windsor Chrysler, to try to drive women off the job and maintain the workplace as a male preserve. Women themselves used violence to

³⁴ Robert Michael Smith, *From Blackjacks to Briefcases: A History of Commercialized Strikebreaking and Unionbusting in the United States* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003).

³⁵ Ava Baron, "Masculinity, the Embodied Male Worker, and the Historian's Gaze," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, Volume 69 Number 1 (2006): 151.

maintain gender and status boundaries or to settle workplace conflicts, but their use of violence was not valorized or accorded the same status as masculine violence. So, while collective violence was supplanted by individual violence, gender and violence at work remained connected long after the Second World War.

Historians are beginning to produce important treatments of this heretofore hidden history of individual workplace violence. Stephen Meyer has shown how workers in the World War II automotive industry leveraged violence to produce the confrontational masculine identity they employed to defend their interests on the shop-floor. Joan Sangster's work about grievances and "horseplay" elucidates how the adjudication of grievances related to violence and harassment reveals the profoundly gendered nature of the postwar Fordist Accord and the industrial relations regime it established. Heather Thompson has demonstrated that the breakdown of the postwar accord and UAW liberalism resulted in widespread individual violence in Detroit auto plants.³⁶ However, as yet we do not have a full-length historical study of individual violence in the workplace.

How can we best place individual workplace violence in historical context? We must pause to consider how to approach violence in history. Over the past three decades, many scholars have de-emphasized the concept of lived experience in evaluating the lives of historical subjects, contending that all experience is constructed discursively, and therefore does not exist outside the contexts in which meanings are produced and absorbed by subjects.³⁷ However, violence often confounds this binary between material and textual understandings of history, existing simultaneously as both a material force and a profound cultural and psychological influence. It is perhaps helpful to think of violence existing along two tracks: the material track and the cultural track. Violence works, both materially and discursively, to demarcate the boundaries between groups, the spaces in which one can go and not go, and the possibilities of one's life.

³⁶ Stephen Meyer, "Rough Manhood,"; Sangster, *Transforming Labor*, 145-98; Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

³⁷ For a perceptive and sensitive treatment of these debates, see Sangster, *Transforming Labour*, 12-15.

The powerful cultural effects of violence upon historical actors have rarely been better expressed by the novelist Richard Wright in his recollection of the power of white violence to affect his fundamental view of himself in his world, the pre-Second World War American South:

The hostility of the whites had become so deeply implanted in my mind and feelings that it had lost direct connection with the daily environment in which I lived...It was as though I was continuously reacting to the threat of some natural force whose hostile behavior could not be predicted. I had never in my life been abused by whites, but I had already become conditioned to their existence as though I had been the victim of a thousand lynchings. The penalty of death awaited me if I made a false move and I wondered if it was worthwhile to make any move at all. ... Indeed the white brutality that I had not seen was a more effective control of my behavior than that which I had seen.³⁸

Wright's words testify powerfully to violence's ability to exert influence beyond the particulars of any single incident, conditioning identity, behavior, and possibility. If, as Marx wrote, one makes their own history but within circumstances not of one's own choosing, violence is a key way in which those circumstances are circumscribed.³⁹ If those circumstances are unbearable, as Wright's South was for so many, violence is often used in an attempt to blast them apart, as historians of the long civil rights era in the United States have discussed.⁴⁰

The deep, tangled roots of violence, its multiple forms and unpredictable impacts challenge us to move our understanding of violence beyond disconnected pathology, or a false binary between either structural causes or cultural influence. Historians over the

³⁸ Richard Wright, *Black Boy (American Hunger): A Record of Childhood and Youth, 1945* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1998), quoted in Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 1.

³⁹ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (New York: International Publishers, 1963); 15.

⁴⁰ Curtis J. Austin, *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2008); Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). There are useful remembrances and discussions of workplace violence and Southern black workers in this era in Michael Honey, *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation, Unionism, and the Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 83-176.

past few decades present the experience of violence as inextricably linked to North American dynamics of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationhood. The work of Richard Slotkin, who identified violence as the crucial variable in Americans' expansion across the continent and their cultural view of themselves, was pioneering in this regard.⁴¹ Recent histories of violence outside the workplace reveal how American experiences have been shaped by violence national and local, spectacular and everyday, against identities and to create identity, as cultural communication and lived experience.⁴² For scholars concerned with violence, the next step is to map the locations between these poles to gain a fuller sense of how conceptions of violence create a lexicon of meanings, conditions, and possibilities. In the introduction to the edited collection *Violence*, anthropologist Neil Whitehead points out that: "the question of why such violence might take particular cultural forms ... has not been adequately addressed."⁴³ This is particularly true of our understanding of workplace violence. Consider that while exploitative workplaces and private gun ownership in North America both go back centuries, the phenomenon of the lone sniper unleashing hell in the office was largely unknown until the 1980s. What combination of material conditions and culture interacted to produce this new form of violent expression? Ames views the individualistic, neoliberal culture of Reaganomics as the culprit, but his analysis does not

⁴¹ Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973); Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985); and Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).

⁴² Some excellent recent work that considers the roles violence has played in American history includes James Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: New Press, 2005); Melani McAllister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); John Pettegrew, *Brutes in Suits: Male Sensibility in America, 1890-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); and Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*. There has been little recent work evaluating how violence has affected Canadian history; two notable exceptions are Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Montreal and Kingston, ON: Queen's University Press, 1997); and Kramer and Mitchell, *When The State Trembled*.

⁴³ Neil Whitehead, "Introduction: Cultures, Conflicts, and the Poetics of Violent Practice," in Whitehead, ed., *Violence* (Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2004), 3-4.

take up the forms individual workplace violence took before the 1980s. Again, this question demands a historical approach that allows a view of not only what factors caused workplace violence, but also how that violence was understood by working people.

In short, to understand violence at work we must transcend a view of violence as simply a socially constructed product of various conflicts or something stemming solely from individual psychology, and treat violence as a variable worthy of sustained attention in itself. This dissertation considers violence simultaneously as a material reality experienced by North Americans, embedded in economic and social contexts, and as a discursive practice, a complex group of cultural discourses constructing the experience of those realities. As Whitehead notes, violent practices are “deeply infused with cultural meaning and are the moment for individual agency within historical embedded patterns of behavior.”⁴⁴ From a public lynching to an exploded bank, from labour riot to a war movie, from rocks thrown at a car speeding to the town line to a joke about a murdered cheater, violence has always been a medium of communication – as tangible as a radio and as ephemeral and sinuous as the music the speakers pump into the air. It is time to turn up the volume and take a closer listen. This dissertation does so, placing an analysis of violence at the centre of its scrutiny of work at Chrysler plants in the 1960s and 1970s.

Because violence is a culturally constructed phenomenon, the definition of violence is subject to historical change. Here we return to the question, what is defined as “violence,” and what is considered an “accident” or “just part of the job?” Autoworkers in Detroit and Windsor attempted to disrupt the prevailing definitions of violence at work presented by Chrysler, the UAW, and society at large. They did so in order to draw attention to health and safety issues and in-plant racism as forms of structural violence faced by workers, and to argue for a connection between structural violence and individual violence. In his book *Violence*, the theorist Slavoj Žižek makes a similar argument. Žižek contends that in contemporary life, the focus on *subjective* violence, the interpersonal violence committed by individual actors, diverts our attention from systemic

⁴⁴ Whitehead, “Introduction,” 9.

and symbolic violence, the “often-catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems,” and the relationships of domination embedded in our language.⁴⁵ Since systemic violence shapes the contours of everyday life, and everyday life is the “normal” against which the shocking transgressions of subjective violence are measured, systemic violence is often, Žižek claims, “invisible But it has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise seem to be “irrational” explosions of subjective violence.”⁴⁶

The radical Detroit factory newspaper *Eldon Wildcat* raised this critique four decades ago, under the headline “What Makes A Story ‘News?’” A worker was killed at Mack Avenue Stamping Plant, his head crushed by an unsafe press, yet the newspapers and TV stations did not cover the story. But when a fired worker lashed out by attacking his foreman and two others with a wrench, that story did make the newspapers, newspapers that “present the bosses’ view of life – a view that never examines WHY something happens – why a man is driven to kill another man or why workers are killed on the job.”⁴⁷ Clearly, there is much at stake in what is and has been considered violence at work. Rather than imposing a unitary definition of workplace violence onto the automotive workplaces of the 1960s and 70s, then, this dissertation is more concerned with exploring how the very definition of violence at work has been a site of struggle.

With these precepts in mind, the automotive industry of Detroit and Windsor in the 1960s and 1970s is an ideal site to investigate the history of workplace violence: its causes, the role violence played in shaping the workplace, and its effects on the lives of workers. First, the automotive industry of that time was one of North America’s most important, employing thousands of workers and occupying a central place in the economy and the labour market. Second, thanks to American car companies setting up branch plants in Canada and the Canada-US Auto Pact of 1965, automotive was North

⁴⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008), 2.

⁴⁶ Žižek, *Violence*, 2.

⁴⁷ “What Makes a Story “NEWS”?”, *Eldon Wildcat* 72, October 5, 1972, Unprocessed Manuscript Box, Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit (hereafter cited as EW-UMB).

America's most continentally integrated industry. This gives us an opportunity to look at workers in one industry, working for one company, across national borders, allowing us to isolate national and local variables and assess their role in producing levels of workplace violence. A transnational approach also enhances our understanding of how violence operated culturally, by enabling a comparison of the cultural expression and reception of violence in two different national contexts, Canada and the United States. While scholars, notably Thomas Sugrue, Sidney Fine, and Heather Thompson, have deeply engaged with the many ways violence shaped the city of Detroit and the experience of Detroiters, the ways in which violence shaped Canada, Canadian cities, and Canadian experiences is an area in which much work needs to be done.⁴⁸ Finally, automotive workplaces in both cities witnessed a significant amount of violence, both structural and interpersonal, in this era. Studying violence in the auto industry of this period allows a view of how violence in the workplace presented a significant challenge for both Chrysler and the UAW.

Besides its historical significance, another reason the automotive industry has been such a frequent site of investigation by historians is because of the rich documentation available. This study has benefitted significantly from that documentation, but it has also drawn upon a variety of other sources in order to obtain the clearest possible view on a subject that is often obscured in the shadows. The documentary records of UAW Chrysler locals in Detroit and Windsor, held at the Archive of Labor and Urban Affairs at the Walter Reuther Library in Detroit, are a major source of data. They include union newspapers, inter-union or UAW-Chrysler correspondence, meeting records, and, most importantly for our purposes, grievance records.

The Reuther Library holds the grievance records of UAW Local 3, the union representing workers at Dodge Main and its associated Huber Foundry, between 1950-1975. These records were indispensable in crafting a picture of violent incidents as they were reported at the time. Using them allowed me to track the rise and fall in the levels

⁴⁸ On violence in postwar Detroit, see Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989); Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*; Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*

of interpersonal violence in these workplaces over a 25-year period, as well as violence's changing forms. However, these sources also contain challenges for the historian. It must be assumed that many, many incidents of violence at work were never reported or discovered, and thus never made it anywhere near the grievance record. The records themselves obscure or omit some important contextual information, especially the ethnicity of the parties involved in a violence grievance. Often, the grievance records leave out the ultimate disposition of the grievance; whether the worker was fired or returned to work, or what other disciplinary measures were employed. Therefore, it has been necessary to combine my view of these documents with oral interviews and contemporary writings on plant conditions, especially those collected in the Detroit Revolutionary Movements Collection and secondary sources.

While the Reuther Library does contain much of value about Windsor Chrysler plants and Local 444, the UAW Canada (now Unifor) union for Windsor Chrysler workers, it does not hold a store of grievance records for these plants, making a paired empirical study of violence grievances between Local 444 and Local 3 impossible. However, this turned out to be a blessing, as the different tack of my research on violence in Windsor drew out valuable dimensions of the history of violence at work, dimensions not easily grasped through grievance records. Present-day Local 444 management granted me access to a significant collection of local union files, not currently available to historians. The rich store of union newspapers, in-plant bulletins, election materials, and leaflets produced by competing union political factions provided an illuminating perspective on the levels and understandings of violence in Windsor plants during the era. Oral interviews with former Windsor Chrysler workers were invaluable in apprehending how workplace violence was understood, and the role violence played in workplace culture.

This dissertation's investigation of workplace violence in Detroit and Windsor Chrysler plants, guided by the precepts and sources discussed above, revealed three major themes that required further exploration. First, while the causes of workplace violence were complicated, and sometimes elusive, it became clear that workplace factors, including the labour process, workplace conditions, and the social relations of work at Chrysler, played a significant role in the levels and forms of violence in the

workplace. The national and local contexts were also important in influencing the levels of workplace violence in these plants. Moreover, one's risk of exposure to violence in these plants depended significantly on variables such as class, gender, and race.

Second, workplace violence, both structural and individual, was not an occasional eruption, but an ever-present factor in the workplace culture of these plants. Workers used violence to settle disputes among themselves, to regulate the conduct of supervisors, and to produce and defend their own identities at work. Violence was particularly strongly linked with conceptions and performances of shop-floor masculinity.

The final major theme that emerged follows from these first two. Because violence was present, materially and culturally, in many ways, workplace violence played a significant role in forging the automotive workplace in Detroit and Windsor during this era. Violence shaped the labour process and social relations at Chrysler; it also influenced the identity and consciousness of workers, and often the strategies they pursued on the job.

In the chapters that follow, I explore these themes in detail. Chapter 2, "If You Want Blood, I'll Give You Blood': Workplace Violence at Dodge Main, 1965-80," probes the reasons why incidents of individual violence skyrocketed at Dodge Main during the 1960s and 1970s. It shows how the labour process, UAW-Chrysler conflict, racism, and national and local factors combined to produce the dangerous levels of violence at Dodge Main that attracted the attention of *Newsweek* and the *New York Times*. It also demonstrates that many workers understood individual violence as a legitimate response to brutal working conditions and racism.

Chapter 3, "The Way Boys and Men Took Care of Business': Masculinity, Moral Economy, and Violence at Windsor Chrysler Plants," investigates violence in Windsor plants. These plants experienced lower levels of individual and structural violence than their Detroit counterparts. This chapter investigates how local, national, and industrial contexts in Windsor, Canada worked to create a somewhat safer workplace, and thus demonstrates the important role these contexts played in influencing the relative levels of workplace violence in Detroit and Windsor's Chrysler plants. Nevertheless, violence played a significant role in workplace culture at Windsor Chrysler, especially as part of

the hypermasculine tenor of the era's almost all-male plants. Here, we explore how violence was constructed as part of workers' masculine identity, and how violence was used to regulate the conduct of co-workers and bosses.

The next chapter, "Heads Full of Trouble: Responses to Workplace Violence in Chrysler Plants" outlines how violence was handled in these plants, and draws out the ongoing effects of workplace violence on the consciousness and strategies of workers, radicals, Chrysler management, and UAW leaders. What were the various definitions of workplace violence they put forward? What remedies did they propose to reduce the risk of violence in their workplaces? Answering these questions reveals how crucial violence was in constructing how stakeholders understood their workplace, the challenges they faced, and the possible strategies they might pursue. This underlines the way in which violence, far from being an occasional eruption, shaped workplace dynamics on an ongoing basis.

Chapter Five shifts the focus to the world outside the factory, by highlighting three shooting cases in the auto industry of the 1970s: James Johnson's murders at Detroit's Eldon Axle Plant in 1970, the 1974 shooting of UAW dissident Billy Harrell by UAW official David Mundy in Dearborn; and the murder of beloved Windsor UAW Local 444 president by fired worker Clarence Talbot. Looking at these cases, we can historicize wider understandings of workplace violence by appreciating how the media, the public, prosecutors, and radical lawyers presented competing visions of how to understand these events: were they brutal individual transgressions or the logical outgrowth of job stress, violence, union conflict, and racism in the plants? The final chapter extends this investigation of how understandings and definitions of workplace violence are historically constructed, by exploring how the phenomenon of workplace violence as a discrete social problem was created and defined in the 1980s, after several horrific workplace massacres, particularly at US post offices. What was part of the definition of "workplace violence" that emerged in this era? What was left out?

Investigating the history of violence at work teaches us much about the ways in which violence has shaped the North American automotive workplace. It also tells us about how power and social relations have operated in that workplace. What becomes

quickly apparent is that when we investigate violence, we are investigating power. Notable observers, from Marx to C.L.R. James, from Fanon to Foucault, have all reached this conclusion. Foucault noted that hierarchical power functions most effectively when it is mystified, when it is made invisible. Violent incidents can throw power relations at work, and contests over them, into sharp relief. In the early 1970s, for example, James Johnson's massacre revealed Chrysler Eldon Avenue as an unsafe, inhumane workplace roiled by industrial conflict and racism. Researching incidences of workplace violence, then, illuminates how power operated at workplaces in the United States and Canada.

This study contends that acts that are generally considered the unfortunate result of individual pathology are also heavily conditioned by historical context and the dynamics of class, gender, and race. It calls for a greater understanding of the role these dynamics played in conditioning who experienced violence in North American history, who used it, and how violence affected their identity and actions. It historicizes in the most fundamental sense, by showing how wider trends in society worked to transform individual lives.

Workplace violence is a difficult subject. It is a natural human response to trauma to try to forget, to dismiss it and move on, rather than examine it and bring painful emotions to the surface again. Furthermore, as Fabian notes in the case of domestic violence, confronting our history of violence, at work or elsewhere, is profoundly disruptive. Doing so interrogates power relations, questions social patterns, challenges our ideas of what is acceptable and tolerated in our workplaces, and raises questions about who bears ultimate responsibility for violence.⁴⁹ Perhaps we have avoided thoroughly examining the history of violence at work because we are afraid of what we will find, afraid of considering what actions will be necessary to actually create safer workplaces. We are afraid of what the findings will say about our workplaces, and our history. What follows is an attempt to reckon with this history.

⁴⁹ Fabian, "Introduction," 26-30.

Chapter 2.

“Fights and Knifings are Becoming Quite Commonplace:” Workplace Violence at Dodge Main and its Causes, 1965-80

Between 1965 and 1975 the flagship plant of the Chrysler Corporation, one of America's ten largest enterprises, was the site of frequent, severe incidents of individual violence. There were four such incidents mentioned in Local 3's grievances for 1964. In 1965, there were 15. In 1966, there were 16; in 1968, 28; in 1972, 41. For 1973, there were 62 incidents of violence in the grievance records, almost as many as the entire total for the fifteen years between 1950 and 1964, despite the plant employing about half the number of workers it did during the 1950s.

These incidents were not just fistfights between coworkers. Workers increasingly attacked their supervisors brutally as well as each other, and used weapons to do so, posing a terrifying challenge to the shop-floor order. While there were just four grievances between 1950-64 that mentioned attacks on supervisors or plant guards, there were 15 in 1968 alone and 19 in 1973.⁵⁰ Supervisors worked each day knowing that they risked being beaten, stabbed, or shot. Workers knew of their fear and leveraged it against them. In 1972, James Netter responded to a suspension by invoking fellow Detroit autoworker James Johnson and his 1970 murders of two Chrysler supervisors and a coworker at the Eldon Axle Plant, saying to the General Foreman: "I'll

⁵⁰ While the increasing numbers of grievances related to violence might partly be a product of the much higher numbers of grievances overall, it is worth noting that there is a noticeably greater severity of violent incidents in the grievances. It is also crucial to remember that in the 1950s, violence at work was not a major concern of unionists and workers, nor was it the topic of investigations in the mass media.

wipe you all over Joy Road if I catch you outside...This place is not above an Eldon Axle incident if enough pressure is applied to an individual."⁵¹

By 1969, the violent disorder in and around the plant was a major concern for Chrysler and the UAW. In February 1969, UAW staffer Frank Menendez informed UAW Regional Director George Merrelli that:

My understanding is that fights and knifings are becoming quite commonplace in the shop now. Six people have been discharged in the Paint Shop alone this week: the latest of whom stabbed each other with screwdrivers, Friday morning, February 14, 1969. Both suffered from multiple wounds that required hospital attention; fortunately no one was killed. A question naturally comes to mind as to the cause of the deep-rooted discontent that is prevalent in the Hamtramck Assembly Plant.⁵²

By this time, the violence at Dodge Main had become a national news story. It was the plant featured in *Newsweek's* 1970 article on workplace violence in America titled "Violence in the Factories."⁵³ A report issued by a Washington news agency the next spring read more like war reporting than labour analysis:

Insiders report near chaotic labor conditions at Chrysler Hamtramck Assembly Plant. Like sitting on powder keg say executives who estimate one out of every five assembly workers is on narcotics. One in three carries a gun to work. Situation is almost out of hand, with management afraid to supervise workers for fear of physical attack. As result Hamtramck now has reputation of turning our poorest quality cars of any Chrysler plant. Whereas it was one of the best only few years ago. Closing at end of 71 model run of Chrysler's old Los Angeles Assembly Plant could stand as warning to Hamtramck.⁵⁴

By 1980, Dodge Main itself would be destroyed by the wrecker's ball.

⁵¹ For more on the Johnson shootings, see Chapter 5; the James Netter incident is detailed in 72-551-387, Box 95, File 3, UAW Local 3 Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit (hereafter cited as L3C).

⁵² Frank Menendez to George Merrelli, 18 February 1969. UAW Region 1 Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit (hereafter cited as UR1C).

⁵³ "Violence in the Factories," *Newsweek*, 66-67.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Liska Reports, May 1971, Box 2, File 22, ELC.

What happened at Dodge Main? In this chapter, I investigate the nature of workplace violence at the plant: what caused the violence, what forms violence took, and how violence was used. The United States was marked by violence and turbulence during this era. In Detroit, growing frustration with police brutality, racism, and black poverty would explode into the 1967 rebellion, during which 43 people were killed and 2,000 buildings were destroyed, forever changing the course of the city's history.⁵⁵

However, violence at Dodge Main cannot be explained as simply a symptom of the national mood. The primary causes of the skyrocketing violence were inside the plant. The increased violence of the labour process at Dodge Main and the barriers that denied black workers better, safer jobs or meaningful power within Local 3 were major contributors to the increased risk of violence faced by workers and supervisors. The local context outside the plant -- Detroit's urban crisis, crime, and the drug trade in and around the factory gates -- was also crucial in conditioning the levels of violence at work. None of these factors can be isolated as the one reason violence exploded at Dodge Main; all of them played their part. The violence at Dodge Main did not simply spring from the hearts and minds of individual Dodge Main workers, though workers often adopted violent postures on the job to defend their identities and increase their power. It was the proliferation and interaction of many intertwined violences in their lives that resulted in the rise of individual violence at work.

The primary source of violence in the lives of workers was the labour process at Chrysler. Working at Dodge Main took an enormous toll on the bodies and spirits of the men and women who worked there. While late-twentieth century auto work is often conceptualized as a good, if dull, job under the protection of a strong union, working at Dodge Main was both monotonous and dangerous. It presented significant risks to workers, including both the trauma of a single incident and the hazards of long-term

⁵⁵ On the 1967 uprising, the fundamental reference remains Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City*.

exposures to the Dodge Main environment.⁵⁶ During the 1960s, Chrysler made two major changes to the labor process in the plant, changes which contributed significantly to injury and violence. First, as Steven Jefferys's history of the plant describes, Chrysler's wave of hiring in the 1960s divided workers into two groups: the older, higher seniority, mostly white first shift, and the young, lower seniority, mostly black second shift. During the 1960s, job and pay security increased for the first group, "while parity of conditions was denied to the new labour."⁵⁷ By 1968, black workers made up approximately 50% of the Dodge Main workforce.⁵⁸ While the threat of losing enviable wages and benefits was a powerful hammer Chrysler held over the heads of the first group, the second group, without these benefits and security, had much less reason to fall in line. Last hired and first fired, alienated from a management and union they felt belonged to others, these workers more often saw their working lives in individualistic terms. Their jobs may have been less stable, but with the auto industry at a production peak in the late 1960s, they also knew they could get fired at one plant and be back to work there or at another auto factory almost immediately.⁵⁹

Chrysler's policies intensified the racial stratification within the plant, where black workers were overwhelmingly restricted to the jobs with more dangerous conditions and less pay and security. Chrysler simultaneously accelerated the pace of work at Dodge Main while doing nothing to improve conditions or replace outdated, unsafe equipment and stock. By the late 1960s, working conditions at Dodge Main were perhaps worse than they were fifty years earlier, when an observer of the plant commented:

⁵⁶ On postwar automotive work, see Robert Asher and Ronald Edsforth, eds., *Autowork* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism, 1945-68* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Steven Jefferys, *Management and Managed: Fifty Years of Crisis at Chrysler* (Cambridge, UK: CUP Archive, 1986); Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit*; Lichtenstein and Stephen Meyer (eds.), *On the Line: Essays in the History of Auto Work* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Jason Russell, *Our Union: UAW/CAW Local 27 from 1950 to 1990* (Edmonton: AU Press, 2011); Pamela Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma: The Gender Politics of Auto Workers in Canada, 1937-79* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); and Charlotte Yates, *From Plant to Politics: The Autoworkers Union in Postwar Canada* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

⁵⁷ Jefferys, *Management and Managed*, 162.

⁵⁸ Jones, "Rank and File Organizing," 284.

⁵⁹ Jefferys, *Management and Managed*, 161-62.

human haste, sweat, and anxiety have been reduced to a minimum by a combination of ripe experience, far-sighted planning, and bold expenditure of money, and whatever strain is involved in enormous production falls on the machinery, not on the men. Nobody in the whole Dodge Plant seems under tension.⁶⁰

The increasing concentration of black workers in lower-echelon jobs at Dodge Main and the dramatic intensification of work that posed significant dangers for workers were central to Chrysler's business strategy. After the mid-1960s, foreign manufacturers captured a greater and greater proportion of the American automotive market, forcing the Big Three to scramble to defend their bottom line. Chrysler relied on increased production to outcompete foreign manufacturers on price. Because foreign automakers had a head start in producing the smaller vehicles that were eating away Chrysler's market share -- and because they were far more technologically advanced than Chrysler, which had never invested much in physical plant -- the only way to do this was to squeeze as many cars as possible from the bodies of their workers. A.C. Jones characterizes this strategy as cutting costs "by way of an all-out assault on their workforce, especially through the reduction of employment and the radical speeding up of work."⁶¹ Chrysler not only ran its plants faster, it ran them longer, often instituting mandatory overtime. Workers were in the plant for unrelenting 12 hour shifts, six and seven days a week.⁶²

Faster work was more dangerous work. Chrysler workers were regularly injured and killed on the job by unsafe equipment running too fast.⁶³ Twenty-two year old Gary Thompson survived Vietnam but not Chrysler's Eldon Axle plant, crushed to death under an overturned forklift that had been pulled out of a repair bay and pushed back into service without being fixed.⁶⁴ In 1973, a group of workers cornered Local 3 president Ed Liska and protested that: "two people died on Saturdays due to safety hazards in the

⁶⁰ Charles K. Hyde, ed., *Riding The Roller Coaster, A History of the Chrysler Corporation* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 55.

⁶¹ Jones, "Rank and File Organizing," 283.

⁶² Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 59.

⁶³ The best discussions of the deteriorating conditions at Chrysler are Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, 85-100; Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 58-63, and Rachel Scott, *Muscle and Blood* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1974), 119-73.

⁶⁴ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 107.

skilled division.”⁶⁵ Workers lost fingers and hands, forced to forgo safety equipment at work because as one worker pointed out, “you can't keep the speed up if you're going to use it.”⁶⁶ Conditions at Dodge Main were so unhealthy that in 1972, 24 workers in one area of the plant tested positive for tuberculosis.⁶⁷

Occupational injuries may have been called “accidents,” but they were actually a facet of Chrysler’s profit-making strategy. Unsafe plants that killed, maimed, and injured workers were better business than upgrading to safe conditions, journalist Rachel Scott revealed in her 1974 book on occupational health and safety, *Muscle and Blood*. Scott quotes a Chrysler official who admitted to her that Chrysler had judged it was “more profitable to plan for disability and compensate sick and injured workers than it is to install safety measures to protect them.”⁶⁸ Chrysler plants also cut the number of floaters, or relief workers, making it more difficult for sick or injured workers to go to first aid.⁶⁹ Even if they did see a doctor and were declared unfit to work, foremen harassed workers at home to come back to the plant, a practice that had tragic consequences in the case of Mamie Williams. Williams, ordered by doctors to stay home with a blood pressure condition, was sent a telegram threatening her with firing and the loss of her benefits if she didn’t return to work at the Eldon Avenue plant. One week after she went back, she collapsed on the job and died shortly afterwards. She had worked for Chrysler for 26 years.⁷⁰

Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin’s enduring study of Detroit radicalism in this period was named for the deadly price extracted by the Big Three’s labour practices. In *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, they cite a study commissioned by the UAW that estimated that industry-wide there were:

65 on the job deaths per day among auto workers, for a total of 16,000 annually, about half from heart attacks. There were also some 63,000

⁶⁵ “MEETING - TUESDAY, APRIL 10, 1973,” Box 44, Local 3 UAW General File, 1973, UR1C.

⁶⁶ Scott, *Muscle and Blood*, 162.

⁶⁷ “TB at Dodge Main,” *Eldon Wildcat* 71, September 7, 1972, EW-UMB.

⁶⁸ Scott, *Muscle and Blood*, 126.

⁶⁹ Scott, *Muscle and Blood*, 163.

⁷⁰ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, 87.

cases of disabling diseases and about 1,700,000 cases of lost or impaired hearing. These statistics did not include many long-term illnesses endemic to foundry workers and others exposed to poisonous chemicals and gases, nor did they include deaths or injuries by accident. Even these limited figures made it clear that more auto workers were killed and injured on the job each year than soldiers were killed and injured during any year of the war in Vietnam.⁷¹

To ensure that workers were meeting the new production standards despite the hazards that surrounded them, Chrysler added more supervisors, "increasing the number of foremen in the early 1960s from one to 75 to 80 [production workers] to one for every 25 or 30," according to Jefferys.⁷² Heather Thompson points out that these line foremen had less and less in common with the young black workers they supervised. Without the social lubricant of shared cultural identification or interests, conflict flourished.⁷³ Jefferys called the new influx of supervisors "white-shirted strangers." Black workers called the intersection of speedup and their concentration in auto work's toughest jobs "Niggermation."⁷⁴

Thompson identifies "unmitigated foremen aggression" as the major cause of the era's increased shop-floor conflict. While it must be remembered that these foremen were only symptoms of a larger regime of production at Chrysler, the bullying, racist, and even tyrannical behavior of many supervisors was certainly a frequent trigger for violent incidents. The *Eldon Wildcat* diagnosed how the role of supervisors in Chrysler's production process exposed them to a greater risk of violence:

The only job protection a foreman has is to be riding our backs to get out as much work with as few people as possible. And if there's a chance that some foremen will be cut out, then that's more reason for them to be pushing us harder. The problem is that conditions are already pretty bad. And if foremen start pushing more, in an attempt to save their jobs, they will have to expect that more workers will be fighting back.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, 88.

⁷² Jefferys, *Managers and Managed*, 154.

⁷³ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 60-61.

⁷⁴ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, 85.

⁷⁵ "Foremen Layoffs," *Eldon Spark* 108, February 13 1974, EW-UMB.

At Dodge Main, workers were faced with “harassment, intimidation, and coercion” by foreman like one Reilly, who the union charged “may do bodily harm to a worker because of a lack of emotional control”⁷⁶ or Sally Brown, supervisor of the instrument panel line, who “shouts, threatens, swears, and picks on employees, causing extreme tension and impossible conditions of work.”⁷⁷ The inspection department, which performed quality control on the vehicles built at Dodge Main, was a particularly contentious area. Under pressure to keep the cars rolling off the line, foremen and inspectors constantly clashed over whether cars were to be approved or not. In 1966, a new general foreman overseeing a new model allegedly harassed inspection workers, trying to browbeat them into approving defective cars by screaming.⁷⁸ Another time, the union alleged a foreman was erasing defects inspectors had marked on cars, and attempting to rule by fear for writing up inspectors who left work one or two minutes early. In 1967, the union complained foremen were refusing inspectors the right to drink coffee or sit down: “I guess you must work until you drop dead. It is like working in a concentration camp,”⁷⁹ wrote their steward. Given the levels of conflict and stress in the inspection department, it is unsurprising that physical violence occasionally resulted. In 1967, department employee Virginia Gagnon, a 48-year-old with almost twenty years of seniority, was discharged for striking her supervisor. Another female inspector was allegedly told to “keep her mouth shut” and had a door slammed on her by her foreman before she slammed a car door on him.⁸⁰ James Netter, the worker fired for his dark allusions to “another Eldon Axle incident” also worked in this department.

Some foremen delighted in bullying their workers. Foreman N. Tessmar repeatedly told one worker that he was a lousy toolmaker who would never be as good as his father in front of the man’s coworkers, including his father.⁸¹ Chrysler management had to talk to supervisor McConnell about “goosing employees in the

⁷⁶ Grievance AD706-791, Box 69, File 19, UAW Local 3 Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit (hereafter cited as UL3C).

⁷⁷ Grievance AD857-922, Box 70, File 11, UL3C.

⁷⁸ Grievance AD733-713, Box 72, File 12, UL3C.

⁷⁹ Grievance AF209-213, Box 75, File 9, UL3C.

⁸⁰ Grievance AF1203-948, Box 78, File 24, UL3C.

⁸¹ Grievance 72-108-72, Box 95, File 13, UL3C.

buttock” and using abusive language.⁸² When Jean Kaminski reported for her night shift, her foreman returned her hello by calling her a pig. When she asked him to repeat himself he responded that she was a dirty pig, and later bizarrely suggested that he had "no idea that the employee would feel anything derogatory was directed towards her... nothing wrong was intended."⁸³ A 1967 grievance complains one foreman was driving Mrs. G. Bubenburr "to a point of exhaustion. Workers are giving Mr. Szeiglia a fair day's work. What else does he want, blood?"⁸⁴

Some foremen went beyond threats of firings or bullying to actual physical violence. Foremen placed workers in unsafe situations. A worker named Manley was told by a foreman to use an unsafe machine that had cut his hand two months earlier, requiring several stitches. When Manley refused, as the machine had not been restored to safe condition, the foreman threatened him with termination.⁸⁵ A 1968 grievance alleged a foreman repeatedly harassed an employee to the point when, enraged by the employee taking a break, he physically removed the worker from the plant with the aid of three Plant Protection staff. You "do not even see this many guards guarding a prisoner in prison," protested the union. They called it a "violent willful outburst of rage" and warned that "any employee injured by Mr. Templeton's unstable condition will be the sole responsibility of mgmt."⁸⁶ Grieving the firing of John Milledge in 1973 for striking supervisor James Range, the union claimed Range had first slapped Milledge, who "had to protect himself. Management was the aggressor."⁸⁷ In 1967, management spoke to foreman Larry Adler after Adler raised a hammer over his head and threatened to bash a Chief Steward's head in.⁸⁸ It was widely known that many foremen, like many workers, carried guns. This knowledge must have worried workers, who were well aware foremen could act out violently under the pressure of constant job stress and conflict, as did foreman P. Auclair in 1969. Auclair allegedly pushed a

⁸² Grievance HC658-497, Box 91, File 7, UL3C.

⁸³ Grievance 70-330-211, Box 90, File 6, UL3C.

⁸⁴ Grievance AF 531-497, Box 77, File 10, UL3C.

⁸⁵ Grievance HC245-188, Box 84, File 16, UL3C.

⁸⁶ Grievance HB340-235, Box 80, File 6, UL3C.

⁸⁷ Grievance 73-726-592, Box 100, File 8, UL3C.

⁸⁸ Grievance AF126-138, Box 76, File 18, UL3C.

steward after being crowded by four union members, while screaming incoherently, abusing one worker racially, and repeatedly threatening the stewards to “take you three on the street one at a time.”⁸⁹

If physical assaults by supervisors were comparatively rare, harassment and intimidation by supervisors was an everyday experience for Dodge Main workers. As part of the violence of an intensified Chrysler labour process, it was a significant contributor to the individual violence that ravaged Dodge Main after 1965. In 1969, a group of Dodge Main workers met with Local 3 President Ed Liska, to protest the conduct of their supervisor, John Gerycz. Their complaints give an idea of the experience of Dodge Main workers under Chrysler’s high-volume production regime. They accused Gerycz of harassing employees by telling workers they had five minutes to learn the job or be fired, threatening employees who filed grievances, refusing to show attendance and penalty records when the union requested them, calling for plant protection to remove a steward trying to discuss a problem with him, and refusing to call a steward when a worker asked for one. Liska noted, in the all-capitals style that was his habit:

IT IS REPORTED THAT IF THE SUPERVISOR CONTINUOUS (SIC) TO HARASS THE EMPLOYEES, THERE WILL BE BODILY HARM TO HIM. THIS IS THE FEELING OF THE GROUP AND THE UNION IS MAKING A DIRECT REQUEST TO HAVE THIS SUPERVISOR TRANSFERRED OUT OF THE GROUP IN ORDER TO AVOID SERIOUS TROUBLES.⁹⁰

The union was generally unable to curb the excesses of harassment and speedup, or to make the plant a safe place to work. After the UAW abandoned all claims to have a say in production standards and conditions after the Second World War, they placed themselves partially in a management role, guaranteeing the automakers they would be able to ensure a certain amount of productivity from the membership. This created conflict between the UAW and its membership at times and hampered the union’s ability to fight speedup and unsafe working conditions.

⁸⁹ Grievance HB352-255, Box 84, File 14, UL3C.

⁹⁰ Liska Reports, June-July 1969, Box 2, File 2, ELC.

By the 1960s, when Chrysler was running its decrepit plants faster than ever, the UAW was in a bind. According to Jones, UAW officials were “ever more reluctant to challenge the companies’ ‘right to manage,’ dependent on the companies’ profitability but needing to retain legitimacy with the rank and file.”⁹¹ By the late 1960s, the gap between the UAW leadership and the workers they led was probably larger than at any point in its history. One worker told the journalist Rachel Scott that union representatives were co-opted by the desire to stay in their comfortable, high-paid sinecures, especially because “in the process of these guys following orders and making it for themselves, they have climbed over the dead, injured, maimed, schizophrenic co-workers who they were supposed to represent.”⁹² Under pressure from company speedup and its own membership, UAW leadership turned to “coercion, ever less on consent,” in Jones’ words, to control the rank and file and keep production moving.⁹³ Moreover, while the workforce, especially in Detroit, was increasingly young and black, the leadership remained almost exclusively older and white. The result, as David Lewis-Colman points out in his study of race and the UAW, was “many younger workers viewed the UAW and auto companies as indistinguishable.”⁹⁴ While that view overstated the situation somewhat, certainly workers, especially black workers, had the understandable feeling that their health and safety was often not a priority for their union.

On the floor at Dodge Main, the bureaucratic “work now, grieve later” dispute resolution system, which had replaced more informal methods of job control, was hopelessly ill suited to the harassment, dangers, and risks workers endured every day. In the 1950s, workers and Local 3 possessed several accepted informal techniques they could use to slow down their work or have a safety concern addressed. By the 1960s, these traditions were gone, and the company enjoyed far more control over the labour process. As Jefferys points out, “there were no longer any fixed points of self-evidently

⁹¹ Jones, “Rank and File Organizing,” 285.

⁹² Scott, *Muscle and Blood*, 158

⁹³ Jones, “Rank and File Organizing,” 285.

⁹⁴ Lewis-Colman, *Race Against Liberalism*, 93.

'fair' conduct or worker-influenced workplace rules by which management was constrained to operate."⁹⁵

The grievance process became the primary means by which workers attempted to resolve problems. Autoworkers at other Detroit Chrysler plants argued the draining grievance process actually fomented further resentment and conflict, while doing little to resolve the original issue. Workers seethed while waiting for a grievance to be processed. Hundreds of grievances were simply dropped every year, without resolution or explanation.⁹⁶ Therefore, as Jones notes, "UAW membership was left with little choice but to resist ever increasing company pressure on their own," which they did through forming radical insurgent groups, leading wildcat strikes over working conditions or harassment, or choosing individual remedies including absenteeism, drug use, and violence.⁹⁷

At Dodge Main, black radicals formed the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM). DRUM was the era's most potent manifestation of black power in the workplace. It presented a militant internal challenge to both Chrysler and the UAW. It also celebrated and advocated violence in response to the violence of racism and the labour process at Dodge Main. One DRUM leaflet threatened that "before we allow these racist guards to use teargas roit [sic] sticks and MACE on us, we will not only

⁹⁵ Jefferys, *Managers and Managed*, 165.

⁹⁶ Scott, *Muscle and Blood*, 164-65.

⁹⁷ Jones, "Rank and File Organizing," 285.

destroy this motherfucking plantation but them too. JOIN DRUM, JOIN DRUM.”⁹⁸ The RUMs quickly spread to several other Detroit plants. Later in this chapter, I will explore DRUM’s role in the levels of workplace violence at Dodge Main; in Chapter 4, I discuss how violence profoundly shaped DRUM’s outlook and strategies.

In this climate of danger, rage, and conflict, violence against supervisors proliferated. Writing about this era, Thompson identifies violence between coworkers as particularly revealing of in-plant tensions, but grievance records indicate that these types of incidents occurred throughout the 1950s.⁹⁹ The greater frequency of violence between coworkers in the 1960s and 1970s is notable, but what is truly revealing is workers’ new willingness to attack those above them in the plant hierarchy. The grievances record just four such incidents in the fourteen years between 1950 and 1963. There were five in 1963 alone, three in 1964 and four more in 1965. Then there were 12 in 1966, 15 in 1968, and a peak of 19 in 1973. Perhaps no data point demonstrates individual violence’s bottom-up threat to order and hierarchy at Dodge Main better than the regularity and severity of violence directed at company personnel, which company officials identified as not only misconduct but as a clear danger to their orderly control of the plant and production. One common flashpoint was the very crux of the relationship of authority between supervisor and supervised: discipline.

⁹⁸ In addition to the works of Georgakas and Surkin, Jeffreys, and Thompson, other important studies of the RUMs include James A. Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Steven Jeffreys, *Management and Managed: Fifty Years of Crisis at Chrysler* (Cambridge: CUP Archive, 1986); Elizabeth Kai Hinton, “The Black Bolsheviks: Detroit Revolutionary Union Movements and Shop-Floor Organizing,” in Kai Hinton and Marable, eds., *The New Black History: Revisiting the Second Reconstruction* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); David Lewis-Colman, *Race Against Liberalism*; A.C. Jones, “Rank and File Organizing in the UAW during the Long 1970s,” in Brenner, Brenner, and Winslow, eds., *Rebel Rank and File*; and Kieran Taylor, “American Petrograd: Detroit and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers,” in Brenner, Brenner, and Winslow, eds., *Rebel Rank and File*. Recently, David Goldberg’s chapter “Community Control of Construction, Independent Unionism, and the ‘Short Black Power Movement,’” in Goldberg and Griffey, eds., *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010) significantly expands our understanding of independent black workplace organizing in Detroit; the relationship between the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, DRUM, and the independent black construction workers’ union Local 124; and the role violence played in creating a space for these struggles and influencing how they unfolded.

⁹⁹ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 69.

After 1965, threats of violence became a common response to discipline. M. Fischer, for example, given a five-day suspension for absenteeism, returned to the plant at 11:30 and "became extremely disorderly, threatening to kill the Superintendent and threatening the General Foreman with bodily harm."¹⁰⁰ He also tried to encourage his fellow workers to go out on a wildcat strike. R. G. Christianson was discharged in 1966 for drinking on the job. After his firing, he became belligerent, threatened a supervisor with physical harm, and waited for four hours at a plant gate, presumably to ambush the supervisor. H. Crumpler was instructed to drive a different forklift truck after arriving at work intoxicated. That he was allowed to drive heavy machinery while drunk itself testifies to the state of workplace health and safety at Dodge Main. Crumpler refused, and when the supervisor called for Crumpler's steward, Crumpler "threatened to cut out the supervisor's heart and put it in his mouth if the supervisor, L. B. Rose, caused him to lose his job."¹⁰¹

Some workers went beyond threats. The case of W. Cowan is a particularly brutal example of a worker responding to discipline with violence. While leaving his workstation to punch out one day in 1972, Cowan was told by his supervisor to go back and finish one operation he had left undone. Cowan refused. The next day Cowan was told he had been given a 30-day unpaid disciplinary layoff, the Chrysler term for a suspension, with 25 of those days held back provided Cowan stayed out of trouble after returning to work. Later that night, Cowan walked off his job, tracked down his supervisor, and "repeatedly struck the supervisor in the mouth with his fist and as the supervisor attempted to leave the area, Mr. Cowan struck him on the back of the head with a hammer."¹⁰² Cowan then fled the plant, while the supervisor was later hospitalized. When foreman J. Elliott began discussing E. Snyder's performance as a repairman, "Mr. Snyder became enraged and struck Foreman J. Elliott with his fist. He was temporarily restrained by other employees working in the area, but broke loose from

¹⁰⁰ Grievance AD5-2, Box 70, File 5, UL3C.

¹⁰¹ Grievance 72-1333-973, Box 97, File 15, UL3C.

¹⁰² Grievance 71-1021-820, Box 95, File 22, UL3C.

them. He then proceeded to pick up a flat steel bar and struck General Foreman Bill Blackwell across the back." Snyder was fired, then reinstated.¹⁰³

Another significant source of increased violence at Dodge Main was crime. During the 1965-75 period, violent crime proliferated in Detroit. Criminal activity was common at Dodge Main and other Detroit auto plants during this time. Drug dealing in the plant led to violence, and was a major reason many workers began carrying guns.¹⁰⁴ Rip-offs and robberies in the plant were another source of violence, as in the case of L.J. Gray: caught breaking into a vending machine with a crowbar by a Plant Protection officer, Gray assaulted the man with the weapon and fled.¹⁰⁵ Crime was also common in the streets around Dodge Main, which meant workers had to fear for their safety coming to and leaving work, as well as during work.¹⁰⁶ Workers leaving a night shift with a freshly cashed paycheck were targets for violent muggings. Many workers heading off shift discovered that their car had been stripped of its tires while they worked.

While crime was not mentioned often in grievances of the time, likely because the Hamtramck police and Detroit courts handled criminal activity unrelated to the work process, it was a major concern for workers, unionists, and Chrysler management. Local 3 President Ed Liska's daily diary is suffused with discussion of crime in and around the plant. One particularly alarmed entry reads:

GAMBLING, NARCOTICS, ROBBERIES, HARASSMENT,
PROSTITUTION ARE GOING ON THROUGHOUT THE WEEK....

WORKERS FEAR GOING TO AND FROM WORK. POLICE
PROTECTION IS NIL. COMPANY PLANT PROTECTION IS ROUTINE
WITH LITTLE TO SCARE AWAY ANY CRIMINAL ELEMENTS.

NARCOTICS ON THE LOTS AND IN THE PLANT IS ON THE
RAMPANT..PILLS AND CIGARETTES OF NARCOTIC NATURE ARE
COMMON AS CANDY BARS.

¹⁰³ Grievance 73-298-251, Box 99, File 11, UL3C.

¹⁰⁴ Jefferys, *Managers and Managed*, 164.

¹⁰⁵ Grievance A69-899-617, Box 88, File 14, UL3C.

¹⁰⁶ *Click* 13, pen-dated April 13, 1972, Box 44, File 3, UR1C; William K. Stevens, "In A Dodge Plant."

NEED FULL PROTECTION ON PARKING LOTS ... MORE PLANT PROTECTION SECURITY ALSO POLICE PROTECTION"" THIS IS AN URGENT PROBLEM.¹⁰⁷

The high level of crime at work was one issue that management, Local 3 leadership, and many dissident workers agreed was a priority. An issue of *Click*, a leaflet for skilled trades workers, complained "There are shootings, theft and muggings in and around this plant constantly, which endangers Tradesmen."¹⁰⁸ Not all dissidents condemned crime in the plant, however. *DRUM* responded to a robbery of workers maintaining the plant's vending machines by saying "If a black brother reaches a point of frustration and is forced to rip in order to survive at least he remembered who his real enemy was ... Black brothers DRUM does not believe in apologizing for anything a black worker does." To DRUM, robbery was justified payback of how workers were robbed every day, in ways both small: the rip-off vending machines, and large: wage work under Chrysler, which, DRUM claimed, owned the vending machine company, which in turn had a racist employment policy. Indeed, the vending machine was a powerful symbol of the everyday racism and rip-offs, the unending torrent of small, grinding indignities that characterized so much of a black worker's day at Dodge Main. The *DRUM* newsletter went on to complain that "when a brother goes to collect his money lost in the machines the white racist women handling the cash have the damn audacity [sic] to get an attitude."¹⁰⁹ DRUM's position, that violence in response to these slights was not only justified but part of a revolutionary awakening to the real conditions of blackness and autowork that bound workers, is a telling example of how DRUM's critique legitimated violence as a valid response to the stresses of autowork at Dodge Main.

Another major way that workers responded to those stresses was by numbing themselves with drugs and alcohol. Substance abuse and the illicit trade in drugs and alcohol created yet another set of conditions under which violence could erupt, both in and out of the plant. Scott interviewed one female Chrysler worker who told of "a lot of

¹⁰⁷ Liska Reports, September 1970, Box 2, File 16, ELC.

¹⁰⁸ *Click* 13, UR1C.

¹⁰⁹ "ROBBERY," *DRUM* volume 1 number 8, undated, Box 44, Local Union 3 DRUM Activities 1968, UR1C.

alcoholism” among her coworkers. While she described herself as not much of a drinker, this woman told one job where “my floorlady was such a bitch ... in order to keep from hitting the woman everybody had to have a drink at lunchtime.”¹¹⁰ Alcohol abuse was a common aspect of working-culture at Dodge Main going back to at least 1950, but illicit drug use became a major issue in the late 1960s, reflecting the greater use and awareness of drugs in America generally at this time.¹¹¹

A 1971 report relayed the Chrysler estimate that one of every five Dodge Main assembly workers was on narcotics.¹¹² Heroin addiction was so rampant among Detroit autoworkers that Local 961 of Chrysler’s Eldon Avenue Axle Plant received National Institute of Drug Addiction funding for Curb Heroin In Plants (CHIP), an innovative, union-run program that combined methadone therapy with job and family counseling and union involvement for addicted workers. CHIP’s board quickly expanded the program to serve all UAW members in the Detroit area, evidence of how common the problem was in all plants.¹¹³ Chrysler’s response to drug use among its autoworkers is harder to discern. Former Local 3 president Ed Liska recalled that drug use was big business at Dodge Main, with both stewards and supervisors part of a network of dealers inside that plant that was connected to larger criminal organizations in Detroit. According to him, the company generally turned a blind eye to drug use as long as production was maintained. Perhaps, as he hints, the company was afraid to tackle a large and dangerous criminal enterprise in its midst.¹¹⁴ Perhaps Chrysler preferred narcotized workers to radicalized ones. Certainly, there are very few grievances where workers were fired for drug use or possession, although again, the Hamtramck police may have handled many of these matters.

Selling drugs was big business that resulted in the criminal violence that everywhere accompanies the illegal drug trade. Liska’s diary mentions “A former steward ... was found dead in a trunk of a car just a few weeks ago. He was involved in

¹¹⁰ Scott, *Muscle and Blood*, 159.

¹¹¹ Jefferys, *Managers and Managed*, 164.

¹¹² Liska Reports, March 1971, Box 2, File 20, ELC.

¹¹³ CHIP Board Meeting Minutes, 19 June 1974, Box 39, File 3, UR1C.

¹¹⁴ Jefferys, *Managers and Managed*, 164.

narcotics and dealt with the big people downtown ... Did this former steward supply this youngster and others with dope?"¹¹⁵ Yet the violence of drug and alcohol abuse can also be seen in less obvious, but no less damaging ways. Workers turned the violence of monotonous assembly line work inwards through chemical escapes that numbed their brains and ravaged their bodies and spirits. Substance abuse was one way the violence of this toxic workplace spread beyond the factory gates, into the bodies and minds of its workers, who then carried it into their neighbourhoods and homes. As Ed Liska's diaries report, for example:

Steward Larrie Gardula's wife called saying she is disturbed with his drinking and his poor health ... She said that he should give up his steward job because it is not worth the problems occurring with Larrie ... She said he is often drunk, vomits and even passes out when he comes home late ... he spends a lot of money on drinks, claiming that is how politics are run at our plant. His wife is 48 years old, Larrie is 57. She cried a lot over the phone.¹¹⁶

Clemens Fitzgerald, a psychiatrist and an expert witness in the James Johnson case who studied hundreds of autoworkers in his career, concluded that the aggression and frustration autoworkers battled at the plant often spilled over into family life. Fitzgerald told Scott that he was struck by the number of fights that took place in the homes of autoworkers, fights he diagnosed as workers' hostility towards the company or foremen being redirected at their wives and children.¹¹⁷

Stress at home was also carried into the plant. William L. Lynch, when approached about being drunk on the job, threatened his foreman with a rubber hose, pulled the foreman's tie off and would not allow him to call for assistance. Local 3 objected to the company firing what it called a "sick man" who should be sent to a rehabilitation facility "for another try at a cure."¹¹⁸ For his part, Lynch claimed his drinking was caused by family problems. A note in the file claims he did not want to go back, although it is unclear whether he was rejecting a return to rehabilitation, home, or his job.

¹¹⁵ Liska Reports, May 1971, Box 2, File 22, ELC.

¹¹⁶ Liska Reports, September 1969, Box 2, File 4, ELC.

¹¹⁷ Scott, *Muscle and Blood*, 156-7.

¹¹⁸ Grievance 73-929-710, Box 100, File 3, UL3C.

Many autoworkers apparently never did make it home after work. A black worker at Detroit's Ford Rouge said shift change at his plant:

made Indianapolis [500] look like a cake walk. And you say to yourself, what in the hell makes them drive like that and you realize – just trying to get away from that place... And we've had guys killed half a mile from that plant before they got to the freeway, because they were driving sixty or seventy miles an hour when they should have been driving twenty-five or thirty, but they just had to get away from there. They drive like crazy. And they are crazy. They've been driven crazy by working conditions.¹¹⁹

These testimonies remind us that workplaces were permeable membranes. Conflict over the labour process and racism at Dodge Main was an important reason why working there became more violent, but it was certainly not the only reason. Dodge Main, like any other workplace, was not a hermetically sealed world unto itself, but a place influenced by its surrounding environment. The violent crime that flourished in workers' neighbourhoods and around the plant did not wait outside the factory gates. The growth of violence outside the plant dramatically increased the risk that violence would be used inside.

Management was well aware of the connection. In 1973, a Chrysler spokesman admitted: "crime is as much a problem in the inner-city plant as in the inner-city neighbourhood."¹²⁰ Violence entered as a material fact. For example the crime that was actually committed in the factories, such as drug dealing or robbery, increased the threat of related violence. Violent crime in the plant alarmed the union and management, which we will explore in Chapter 4. But it also entered as part of the consciousness that workers brought to work: their traumatic scars of having lived in the shadow of violent crime, and the concomitant knowledge that violence might be necessary to survive at Dodge Main, just as it was in the neighbourhood or the prison.

The prison metaphor is appropriate, for incarceration became an increasingly common experience for Dodge Main workers after 1965, with the advent of Heather

¹¹⁹ Scott, *Muscle and Blood*, 157.

¹²⁰ Stevens, "In A Dodge Plant."

Thompson has termed "the carceral state."¹²¹ Workers, in what would become an important dynamic in the American workplace in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, frequently traveled between wage work and incarceration. Twenty-one year old William Enos, for example, fired in 1966 for threatening Plant Protection while intoxicated, had been incarcerated twice between his hiring in 1964 and his discharge in 1966.¹²² In 1969 a worker named Reid:

was discharged because he hit a supervisor over the head with a metal piece. He was in jail for a while..He had four years of seniority. Had a reputation of being abusive in the plant and this time he got into real trouble and there is no doubt he is through working.¹²³

So common was incarceration that after 1965, Dodge Main workers were frequently fired for falsifying criminal records when applying for employment. When Johnny Hatcher was discharged for striking a supervisor with a car door, the subsequent investigation revealed he had falsified his police record.¹²⁴ The issue became so widespread that it prompted a general union grievance complaining that employees caught falsifying their records, which generally meant hiding a criminal offence or exaggerating one's level of education, were being harshly treated. The grievance, titled "Criminal Treatment of Employees by Trim Management" alleged that two workers fired for the falsification of employment:

experienced the humiliating practice of being escorted out of the plant by Plant Protection personnel. The Union alleges further that since there were no disorders of any nature, treatment of the employees in this manner was uncalled for, and the Union demands that those responsible for this procedure be properly educated.

Local 3 demanded this practice be halted. Management called the it "a general procedure implemented in this plant for the protection of the employees and facilities." The union responded that

management was out of order in treating well behaved employees in the above described manner. This action created ill will, bitterness, and

¹²¹ Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters."

¹²² Grievance AE329-337, Box 74, File 4, UL3C.

¹²³ Liska Reports, October 1969, Box 2, File 5, ELC.

¹²⁴ Grievance AE197-194, Box 77, File 2, UL3C.

resentment towards management among the other employees. The atmosphere in the department is tense and charged with bad feelings.¹²⁵

The dispute shows that the criminalizing of discharged employees with what would become widely known during the 2000s as the “perp walk,” the humiliating escort of dismissed workers out of the workplace by security personnel, had become part of Chrysler practice by the 1970s. This was perhaps in response to the violence that was often directed at supervisors who disciplined workers. The growing presence of incarceration in the lives of Dodge Main workers is another indication of the crisis of violence in Detroit and at Dodge Main after 1965. It was also another factor increasing the likelihood that Dodge Main workers would themselves commit violent acts. The experience of incarceration no doubt exposed many Dodge Main workers to violence as a traumatic experience but also as a legitimate means of preserving personal autonomy, dealing with authority or conflict, or policing the frontiers of one’s identity.

The violent consciousness workers carried into Dodge Main with their lunchpails can be seen in the increased number of grievances involving weapons, specifically guns, after 1965. In the 1950-65 period, there were no grievances involving guns; after 1965, there were several. For example, probationary employee J.M. Peck was fired in 1968 after a Browning pistol was found in his locker under his motorcycle helmet.¹²⁶ Later that year, 22-year-old W. Etheridge was detained while trying to leave the plant. Slurring and unsteady, when he tried to produce his pass a .25 calibre automatic pistol fell out instead.¹²⁷ Roy Ware Jr. was fired when, while engaged in an argument that in an earlier era might have been settled with fists, he pulled out a gun and fired at his coworker.¹²⁸ Foremen at Dodge Main also carried firearms.¹²⁹ The 1971 report on the plant included estimates by Chrysler management that one in three assembly workers at Dodge Main carried a gun to work.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Grievance AF439-391, Box 77, File 4, UL3C.

¹²⁶ Grievance number missing, Box 79, File 20, UL3C.

¹²⁷ Grievance HB663-401, Box 86, File 17, UL3C.

¹²⁸ Grievance A70-1200-747, Box 90, File 2, UL3C.

¹²⁹ Jefferys, *Managers and Managed*, 179.

¹³⁰ Liska Reports, March 1971, Box 2, File 20, ELC.

This volatile mix of race and class conflict at Dodge Main, urban crisis, and the political struggle taking place in Detroit is the context for the emergence of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement. DRUM arose out of relationships between staff members at the radical newspaper *Inner City Voice* and Dodge Main workers, most importantly the autoworker and organizer General Baker. Baker and the *Voice* shared a commitment to organizing workers at Dodge Main. In May 1968 Baker and other workers supported a wildcat strike of several white women frustrated with speedup and the treatment of women. Chrysler fired just two of the white women, but five black men who supported the strike. The company believed Baker was the real ringleader. Baker and a few other activists formed DRUM with the support of the *Inner City Voice*. To mark DRUM's genesis, Baker wrote an open letter to Chrysler. The letter touched on the history of structural racism at the plant: the barring of black workers from many areas of the plant until the 1950s, and the hate strikes many white workers launched in protest of working beside blacks. It also noted that black workers "are brutally oppressed and overworked and harassed on the production lines."¹³¹

With the formation of DRUM, the black power struggle came to the American shopfloor.¹³² Between 1968 and 1971 DRUM would be a major political force at Dodge Main, consistently challenging Chrysler management and the UAW on racism, speedup, dignity, and health and safety. One example of how important DRUM was as a player in plant politics is a grievance that alleged management was allowing DRUM to hand out leaflets in order to undermine Local 3. The grievance shows how contested power relations had become at Dodge Main with Chrysler, the UAW, and DRUM all attempting to win allegiance from workers.¹³³ DRUM led several wildcat strikes, nearly ousted members of the ruling Liska slate during violently contested union elections, and exerted significant pressure on plant management through less formal means, notably by mobilizing the threat of violence.

¹³¹ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 108-09; Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 21-22.

¹³² Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 20.

¹³³ Grievance HD163-103, Box 92, File 28, UL3C.

What, then, was DRUM's contribution to the levels of individual violence at Dodge Main? Every aspect of DRUM's critique was informed by an understanding of Chrysler, the UAW, and America itself as violent towards African American workers. In response, DRUM articulated a vision of rugged, physical black manhood. DRUM leaflets reported and celebrated in-plant violence directed at supervisors. One DRUM leaflet congratulated the worker who dealt with the harassment and physical abuse of the aforementioned foreman Larry Adler "in a manner in which we can all be proud of, he stomped this drunken white sonofabitch into the floor."¹³⁴ More directly, DRUM members frequently used violence themselves. This ranged from spitting on members crossing a DRUM picket line, members they called "UAW pigs," to assaulting plant guards and supervisors.¹³⁵ The most notorious example of the latter was the case of DRUM member Rushie Forge, who, while being escorted from the plant after being discharged, stabbed Labor Relations representative L. Young, an African American, three times before fleeing the plant and eventually the city of Detroit.¹³⁶

DRUM's celebration of the Forge incident as a heroic act of resistance to Chrysler was tersely noted by management in its response to Forge's grievance: "there is no question of this incident.... for it was proclaimed in not one, but two issues of a paper named *DRUM*; also a front page article in Wayne State's collegiate paper, the *South End*; and on television, most recently, the program, "Haney's People."¹³⁷ The UAW, despite their antipathy to DRUM, nonetheless grieved his firing, perhaps to deny DRUM a further rallying point among sympathetic workers.

There was also a considerable amount of violence directed against DRUM by Chrysler, the UAW, and the Hamtramck Police. DRUM Leader General Baker claimed that, after a gunshot through a window paralyzed Detroit housing activist Fred Holsey, he was told by a Chrysler official that the shot was meant for him, and the assassination

¹³⁴ "Will You Be Next?" *DRUM* 1, no. 5, Box 44, Local Union 3 DRUM Activities 1968, UR1C.

¹³⁵ Grievance HD163-103, Box 92, File 28, UL3C.

¹³⁶ Grievance A69-128-122, Box 85, File 12, UL3C; the information about Forge fleeing the city is from General Baker, in discussion with the author, 26 July 2012. Baker said that Forge eventually returned to Detroit and was murdered in a drug-related incident.

¹³⁷ Grievance A69-128-122, Box 85, File 12, UL3C.

attempt was organized by the UAW. Baker also recalls that after DRUM's first attempt to win a Local 3 elected position, running Ron March for a trustee slot, Hamtramck Police went through the bars near Dodge Main where DRUM supporters congregated and beat the workers they found there with ax handles. Baker alleged the police were concerned that, as a trustee, March would learn that Local 3 had been secretly lending union funds to the police department, an revelation echoed in the title of the DRUM-produced documentary *Finally Got The News*.¹³⁸ March won the initial election, prompting the police reprisals, but lost a run-off to the Liska-backed candidate in an election many workers believed was stolen.¹³⁹ In 1970, *DRUM's* article on the Local 3 elections charged that "Liska won at the point of a gun," referring to the use of Hamtramck police to confiscate ballot boxes. Liska himself notes of the election that "IN PLANT RUMORS INDICATE VIOLENCE WAS GOING ON AND MANY FEARED TO VOTE."¹⁴⁰ Baker alleged that many times during union elections, police would pick up DRUM activists and hold them all day, preventing them from getting the vote out.¹⁴¹ As Trevor Griffey has pointed out, because of the difficulty of obtaining records, the history of state and corporate repression of left groups is somewhat elusive, leaving historians to overascribe strategic weaknesses and internal dissent in evaluating the failures of these groups.¹⁴² In addition to the questionable but ostensibly legal and longstanding tactic of laying off militants, Chrysler employed violence and repression, backed by police power, to crush an dissident organization.¹⁴³

Obviously, DRUM's rhetoric and actions, as well as the corporate and union reaction to them, contributed to the violence at Dodge Main. Yet it is important to note that DRUM was by no means the only, or even primary, cause for the rise of in-plant

¹³⁸ Baker, discussion; the full quote is "We finally got the news of how our dues are being used," which protesters are seen chanting in the film. Stewart Bird, Rene Lichtman, Peter Gessner, and John Louis Jr., produced in Association with the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, *Finally Got the News* (1970; Detroit: Black Star Productions) accessed July 2, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgJd_MvJVzg

¹³⁹ Jefferys, *Managers and Managed*, 176.

¹⁴⁰ "ELECTION NOTES," Local Union 3 Election 1970, UR1C.

¹⁴¹ Baker, discussion.

¹⁴² Trevor Griffey, "History Declassified: Using U.S. Government Intelligence Documents to Write Left History," *Left History*, volume 16 number 1 (Summer 2012).

¹⁴³ Jefferys, *Managers and Managed*, 181.

violence. Violence at Dodge Main began escalating years before DRUM formed. As the grievance data shows, violent incidents at Dodge Main were already increasing in 1965, three years before DRUM's formation, including violence directed at supervisors and plant security.

Moreover, violence, including violence directed against supervisory personnel, did not decrease after 1971, when DRUM ceased to be a meaningful presence at Dodge Main. In fact, it increased, peaking in 1973 at 62 total grievances involving violence, with 19 of those concerning violence directed against supervisors and plant protection. After DRUM disbanded, there were still workers using violence, like T. Felder, who in 1972 replied to a supervisor asking why he was missing jobs with the directive to "stop fucking with"¹⁴⁴ him and a flurry of punches, or Charles Williams, who in 1975 beat his supervisor with a board after being docked for leaving the plant early for lunch.¹⁴⁵ While there is no doubt many DRUM members were quick to employ violence, both as a material force and a cultural weapon, violence among workers at Dodge Main certainly did not begin and end with DRUM. Indeed, it is possible that DRUM's defeat, the demise of the most effective collective response to racism and poor working conditions at Dodge Main, increased the likelihood of workers turning to individual violence instead.

Overall, DRUM's willingness to use violence and especially its celebration of violence as a legitimate response to on-the-job grievances had an impact in legitimizing and disseminating violence among workers. However, the increase in violence before DRUM's heyday and the even greater increase after its dissolution indicates there was a more complicated relationship between DRUM and workplace violence at Dodge Main. DRUM was reacting to the violence already present on the job in developing its critique of auto work and racism as violent and its promotion of violence as a useful form of resistance. As we will explore further in Chapter 4, it is just as important to consider how violence was partly responsible for DRUM than to say that DRUM was partly responsible for violence.

¹⁴⁴ Grievance 72-1073-756, Box 99, File 5, UL3C.

¹⁴⁵ Grievance 74-1112-883, Box 103, File 13, UL3C.

To fully understand the wave of individual violence in the years 1965-75, and how that violence operated to construct work, identity, and struggle at Dodge Main, we must go beyond solely structural explanations, and also consider the other ways in which violence manifested itself in the lives and consciousnesses of the people who worked there. Specifically, we must look at the roles violence played in worker's identities.

Exploring the connections between violence and the production and maintenance of identity at Dodge Main allows us a fuller understanding of the different sources and uses of violence at work. Closely reading incidents of violence at one workplace reveals that violence in auto work was not merely the reflexive outgrowth of class, gender, and racial conflict, but also a resource drawn on by workers in order to express and defend their own identity. It gives us a glimpse of how important violence was to a crucial dynamic of labour history during the neoliberal period that began in the 1970s – the definition, and self-definition, of workers as atomized individuals, not as members of a collective class.¹⁴⁶

For example, workers at Dodge Main were not just divided by race and status, but also by age. The massive cohort of young workers entering the workforce at this time, with different attitudes and consciousness from their parents' generation, was a key reason for the rank-and-file militancy and rebellion of the era. As A.C. Jones notes, autoworker rebellion was “no doubt enhanced by the rising number of young people within their ranks, workers under thirty constituting between 25 and 30 percent of the auto labor force in the late 60s.”¹⁴⁷ At Dodge Main after the 1967 rebellion, young workers, especially young black workers had decided “not to take the shit they used to take,” in General Baker's words.¹⁴⁸ Absenteeism became a chronic problem, as younger workers showed a weaker identification with work they found harsh and unfulfilling. The number of young workers chafing against authority and factory discipline was likely

¹⁴⁶ An excellent discussion of how this dynamic was treated by intellectuals of the 1970s can be found in Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 216-21.

¹⁴⁷ Jones, “Rank and File Organizing,” 284.

¹⁴⁸ Baker, discussion.

another reason for the growth of violent incidents in the mid-1960s on, as workers responded to challenges violently instead of suffering in silence or going through traditional channels.

Examining the grievance records post-1965, one finds a large number of cases of violence involving young workers or workers with little seniority. For example, consider the case of 23 year-old Clyde Coulter, who in 1966 got in an argument with a coworker, stabbed him several times and then fled the plant.¹⁴⁹ Another grievance concerns 25-year-old C. Wilson, who became argumentative and abusive when twice told to clean up his work area. Wilson pushed his supervisor off the platform upon which he stood.¹⁵⁰ L. Davenport was cautioned by his foreman about smoking while working with a flammable chemical. The two-year man spilled some of it, lit a piece of paper, and tossed it on the fluid.¹⁵¹ Nineteen-year old S. Thomas was fired for threatening bodily harm to his foreman after being suspended for insubordination. The suspension came after Thomas had refused to accept being put on a fourth different job in one day.¹⁵² O.L. Johnson had less than one year's seniority when he exploded after his job performance was criticized. Said Johnson, "If you want blood, I'll give you blood and you will have something to remember."¹⁵³

Given that racial hierarchy, speedup, and harassment from supervisors were reinforced by the expectation that workers grit their teeth and adapt to the bureaucratic, conflict-ridden environment of the Chrysler workforce, it is unsurprising that it was so often small, seemingly trivial slights that precipitated violence. When Jerry Haskins was questioned about parking his unauthorized vehicle in the salary workers' parking lot he became enraged and hit the plant guard several times.¹⁵⁴ Willie Copland was told at his department office that his check would be ready at 3:30. It was not, and, when he asked about his check, Copland "was given a very negative answer by Mr. Bob Coffee in harsh

¹⁴⁹ Grievance AE104-104, Box 74, File 4, UL3C.

¹⁵⁰ Grievance AE677-633, Box 76, File 16, UL3C.

¹⁵¹ Grievance AG 831-68, Box 80, File 2, UL3C.

¹⁵² Grievance HB336-158, Box 83, File 2, UL3C.

¹⁵³ Grievance A70-601-359, Box 92, File 25, UL3C.

¹⁵⁴ Grievance A71-293-228, Box 38, File 25, UL3C.

terms.” Copland told the superintendent that he had better give him his check or he would “fill his fat belly full of hot lead.” He further stated “I never did anything here but if I don't get my check I'll get my gun and really - - - this place up.”¹⁵⁵ It turned out Copland needed the money to purchase clothes and equipment for his newborn baby, coming home from hospital that day with jaundice and in need of medical attention. When Charles Williams hit his foreman with a board, it was a response to being docked on his time card for leaving the plant early for lunch. Dennis Brown hit his general foremen in the head with a metal rod after a dispute over what day his paycheck was to be released. The following Friday, Brown returned to work brandishing a handgun, threatening coworkers. “Mr. Brown stated, while in his work area, that if he did see the General Foreman he was going to kill him.”¹⁵⁶ When Willie Ross’s supervisor told him he had to be at a meeting, Ross shot back “Don’t bother me while I’m eating lunch,” even though the scheduled lunch break had ended 30 minutes earlier. Told again to attend the meeting, he pushed his supervisor several times. In support of firing Ross, management argued ““He has had ample opportunity to adjust to his working environment and he has demonstrated, clearly, that he doesn't intend to.”¹⁵⁷ At a workplace not steeped in racism, speedup, harassment, and crime, or one with a union effectively addressing these workers’ concerns, like the Dodge Main of the 1950s, perhaps these small conflicts could have been resolved after a discussion or some harsh words. As the crisis at Dodge Main deepened, workers often responded to slights with force.

Some workers took advantage of the disorder, using violence, or the threat of violence, to bully their way into what they wanted. Steve Barry pointed a gun at his foreman and threatened him if he did not get picked to work overtime. The next day, “drunk with power of getting away with this latest incident, Barry ... threatened the foreman and reached for his pocket. The foreman grabbed him and held on, etc...” and Barry was fired.¹⁵⁸ Despite this, Barry apparently saw “no reason for being discharged”

¹⁵⁵ Grievance A71-1021-820, Box 95, File 22, UL3C.

¹⁵⁶ Grievance 74-389-271, Box 102, File 2, UL3C.

¹⁵⁷ Grievance 72-674-482, Box 95, File 9, UL3C.

¹⁵⁸ Liska Reports, August 1969 Box 2, File 3, ELC; Liska Reports, July 1969, Box 2, File 2, ELC.

and said he “will be waiting for the foreman after work to seek his job back.”¹⁵⁹ Despite his record of violence and two previous firings, Barry was returned to work at the Huber Foundry within less than two months, and was quickly back in trouble for threatening the captain of Plant Protection there.¹⁶⁰ Two months after that, Barry was out of work again, and making threatening calls to Liska’s home at 11:00 at night, saying “I am a black nationalist,” “I hate all honkies,” “Tired of all the bull shit,” and “You better not be at the local in the morning, I am going to bring a machine gun and kill everyone in the Local Hall.”¹⁶¹ Liska, who had been trying to get Barry rehired again at the time of the call, also noted in his diary Barry’s history of threats and threatening calls, his giving a gun to a girlfriend at the plant, and his attempt to run over a coworker at the Huber Foundry. Barry repeatedly employed violence and the threat of violence to intimidate management, union, and coworkers, with success and with virtual impunity.

This was partially because Barry was operating in a climate where many justified acts of individual workplace violence. When a Local 3 worker, Fred “Too Sweet” Simon, shot and killed a Huber Foundry plant guard, John Elock, after “receiving harsh disciplinary time off for a simple infraction of Chrysler’s rules,” some rushed to his defence. According to a radical leaflet that was circulated after the shooting, Simon was “driven to shoot the guard. Finding the union leadership incapable of helping him, ‘Too Sweet’, like James Johnson and other fellow workers of the past resorted to the only means left to individuals: acts of terrorism and resistance to the exploiting and humiliating conditions we Chrysler workers are being force to submit to by the owners of Chryslers.”¹⁶² The leaflet, excusing a man’s murder because of management harassment and union failure, reveals just how legitimate violent reactions to the indignities of working for Chrysler had come to seem, all the way up to murder. As Ed Liska recalled of working on grievances, “A lot of the guys didn’t think hitting a foreman or stabbing him is doing anything wrong. So they say they’re innocent.”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Liska Reports, August 1969, Box 2, File 3, ELC.

¹⁶⁰ Liska Reports, August 1969, Box 2, File 3, ELC.

¹⁶¹ Liska Reports, November 1969, Box 2, File 6, ELC.

¹⁶² Undated Handout, Violence In Chrysler Plants, Box 31, File 10, Arthur Hughes Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit (hereafter cited as AHC).

¹⁶³ Jefferys, *Managers and Managed*, 179.

The performance of masculinity was also an important way that violence and worker's identity intersected. In a plant that was comprised of a greater and greater number of black workers supervised by almost exclusively by whites, that masculine identity was inextricably tied to race. As we have seen, racism caused conflict that sparked violence. But race and violence also interacted in more complex ways. While both white and black workers alike employed violence, it is worth investigating how many black male workers at Dodge Main articulated an aggressive, rugged black masculinity, as a way to maintain dignity and self-respect in a plant that often worked to deny them both.

Whereas an earlier conception of masculinity may have defined manliness as the ability to endure the capricious treatment by supervisors in order to earn the comparatively high wage of an autoworker, a new understanding of manliness took hold at Dodge Main in the late 1960s. Influenced by high employment in the industry during an economic boom, the individualistic culture of young workers both white and black, the ideas of the Black Power movement, and conflict and violence on the job, manliness at Dodge Main emphasized personal autonomy and demanded that respect be paid.

The 1967 uprising in Detroit provoked a major change in how many workers carried themselves in the factory. Baker recognized several coworkers from Dodge Main while locked up in prison during the Detroit uprising of 1967. According to him, the experience of battling state authority altered their outlook. As Baker put it, "the same people that walked back into the factory after we got out of the penitentiary... were not the same people that walked out." The Afro hairstyles many black workers wore and the spent .50 calibre shell casings many workers hung from their neck upon their return to the plants were a militant symbol of a new determination not to be "fucked with." Supervisors noticed the necklaces and treated those workers wearing them differently.¹⁶⁴ Fear now ran in the other direction as well.

Violence often resulted from clash between this assertive masculinity and Chrysler's treatment of its workers, a clash exemplified by the phrase: "You better quit

¹⁶⁴ Baker, discussion.

fucking with me.” The expression appears nowhere before 1965, but is common afterwards, suggesting not only the link between masculinity, identity, and violence at Dodge Main, but workers’ developing perception of their identity and experience on the job as essentially individual, not collective. T. Felder’s presaged his assault with the phrase. The term echoes Chrysler Jefferson Assembly worker Tilden Engle’s chilling explanation to a security guard of why he murdered his foreman Regis Lantzy, after being laid off: ““because he fucked over me.” The security guard testified that the Engle said he had shot Lantzy because “a man can only take so much, he’s dead, he ain’t going to bother nobody any more” and “I am a man; nobody wants to be walked over by nobody.”¹⁶⁵ When violence against supervisors in the plant became far more frequent and sometimes deadly, even threats no doubt carried a chilling edge. A similar conception of masculinity appears in many other incidents captured in the grievance files at Dodge Main. When F. Jenkins was disciplined for horseplay and poor quality work, he threatened to blow the General Foreman’s head off. The grievance record states: “Mr. Jenkins then approached even closer and repeated the threat....If you don’t stop f----- with me, I’ll blow your head off.”¹⁶⁶ E. Butler was suspended for insubordination for telling his foreman “if you f--- with my money, I am going to f--- you up.”¹⁶⁷ After R. Haley’s spectacular demonstration of manliness while performing his job driving cars off the line, including speeding, squealing tires, and eating a sandwich with one hand while driving with the other, earned a warning, Haley approached foreman Zarko and said “I am tired of your fucking over me, you were on my shit list but now you’re on my death list and if you keep fucking with me, I’ll kill you.” Haley then got another car and drove it at high speed before skidding to a stop on an exit ramp, then remarked to Zarko: “I guess you’ll want me in your office now.”¹⁶⁸ Haley attempted to imprint a monotonous, repetitive job – driving cars off the line – with the risk-taking masculinity exemplified by reckless driving. When Haley was cautioned for doing this, he responded with the threat of violence.

¹⁶⁵ Engle v. Koehler, 727 f.2d 241 (6th Cir. 1983), <https://law.resource.org/pub/us/case/reporter/F2/707/707.F2d.241.82-1470.html>, last accessed 18 June 2014 .

¹⁶⁶ Grievance A71-179-127, Box 93, File 8, UL3C.

¹⁶⁷ Grievance number missing, Box 102, File 14, UL3C.

¹⁶⁸ Grievance 73-1788-1405, Box 102, File 16, UL3C.

Other forms of masculine identity were also articulated with violence in this period. Charlie Ranier was charged with being a day late returning from a five-day DLO for poor workmanship, a charge he disputed. Supervisor Luke anticipated problems because Ranier had been hostile in the past, so Luke asked stock foreman Dennis Stanton to be with him when he penalized Rainier. Luke called Ranier over and issued a ten-day suspension for poor attendance. In response, Ranier protested, drawing on his identity as a male breadwinner. According to the grievance: "At this point, Mr. Ranier then stated that he wasn't accepting any time off because he had a wife and several kids to support, and then he struck the supervisor Luke with his fist in his left eye, knocking him to the floor, and then jumping on him beating him about the head with a mirror."¹⁶⁹ This indicates that masculine family responsibility could be used to justify violence. We also see, in Supervisor Luke's request that Stanton accompany him to confront Ranier, a glimpse of how foremen attempted to protect themselves while performing a job that exposed them to a regular risk of serious retaliatory violence.

Masculinity was also an aspect of another role violence played at Dodge Main: violence as a celebratory expression of power. In the 1965-75 period, workers drew on violence to cow the forces, the UAW and Chrysler management, which controlled their lives on the job, just as many may have defied Detroit police in the 1967 uprising. The same is true of workers at Dodge Main in this era. By displaying aggressiveness or by manipulating the currents of violence and fear that ran through the consciousness of company and union officials, workers had fun, relieved monotony, and asserted their own power to stick a wrench in the gears of control at Chrysler. This kind of attitude can be glimpsed in the grievance of W. Banks, who was disciplined because, when told to stop banging a jack handle against the floor and boxes in his work area, he replied "If you are big enough, try to take it away."¹⁷⁰

Workers also exploited the climate of fear in more playful ways. While sometimes violence was open and overt, in other instances workers sowed fear with threats and tall tales. In 1970, foreman M.D. Blount informed his superiors of a conversation he

¹⁶⁹ Grievance 74-533-405, Box 104, File 3, UL3C.

¹⁷⁰ Grievance A69-1207-917, Box 91, File 3, UL3C.

overheard in a restaurant near the plant. According to Blount, he was having a cup of coffee at Mattie's Restaurant when two men entered and sat beside him. The two men, young, black, dressed in factory uniforms, began talking about "all the terrorism in Philadelphia and New York, the police station bombing and the Weathermen...What really made me take notice was when they mentioned the Hamtramck plant." The two men discussed at length a planned firebombing of Dodge Main, speaking with firsthand knowledge of different areas of the plant, much to Blount's alarm. He noted that "they were sharp fellows. They talked like Detroiters. They had either been to college or were graduated from high school. It impressed me that they really meant business." The report went on to speculate what part of the plant the men might have worked in and whether the waitress on duty might be able to help them identify these plotters.¹⁷¹

Why would two workers casually discuss a bomb plot in front of a foreman at a busy coffee shop near the plant they intended to blow up? The simplest explanation is that there was no plot: the workers were simply playing a prank on a foreman. Seeing Blount at the next table, recognizing the white shirt and tie that was standard apparel for Chrysler supervisors, they whiled away 15 minutes before getting on the bus winding up a member of management by exploiting the fears of terrorism. Perhaps they even hoped that a search for a bomb might win them a day off from work; after all, bomb threats were regularly called into Dodge Main. While no explosion ever occurred, Molotov cocktails were found at least once and fires were periodically set in different areas of the plant.¹⁷² If the two plotters had hoped to raise a false alarm and scare Chrysler managers, they certainly succeeded, given that the foreman's statement was typed up and distributed among management personnel. A copy also ended up in the union's possession, evidence that the union and corporation saw the violence in the plant as an area of shared concern. Whether serious or not, the two men leveraged the consciousness and fear of violence and exerted symbolic power over management. A similar dynamic can be seen in the union's 1970 request for plant protection to be stationed 24 hours a day in the main mixing room after the area received "numerous

¹⁷¹ "Confidential Statement from Foreman M.D. Blount, 16 September 1970, Box 31, File 10, AHC.

¹⁷² Liska Reports, September 1970, Box 2, File 15, ELC; Liska Reports, December 1971, Box 3, File 7, ELC.

bomb threats and crank telephone calls."¹⁷³ Violence at Dodge Main was not just a response to harassment or a means to defend identity; it was also a celebration of power and vitality at a time when management and unionists alike often looked upon the rank and file, especially its black members, with fear.

While the production of masculinity at Dodge Main was often done with violence, the evidence cautions historians against essentializing violence as an inevitable part of being a man at Dodge Main. Violence was integral to the experience of being female there also. This included not only the gendered violence directed at women, but also the violence women employed on the job. A particularly terrifying example of the former is detailed in the 1972 grievance of Donald Meade. After receiving a medical pass to go home, Meade entered the work area of a female employee and began harassing her. Shortly after, Meade grabbed her by the throat in a stairway, and attempted to drag her off, striking her several blows on the head. A coworker broke up the assault. The next day, Meade was observed removing the woman's car battery, presumably to facilitate another assault. When he returned to work, he was suspended. Incredibly, the union grieved, arguing: "The Union feels the discharge is too severe there were two people involved the Union demands - double standards be done away with. Man employee should also have been counselled and not discharged."¹⁷⁴

This incident shows that, despite the resurgence of feminist activism throughout the 1960s and 1970s, very little had changed at Dodge Main concerning union consciousness of male-on-female violence. There is no evidence of any company or union initiative to mitigate the risk of violence to female employees. As in an earlier era, women walked the plant knowing that sexual predators roamed it too. One of Ed Liska's reports details one attack in a way that betrays more concern for the transgression of racial boundaries than the safety of female workers:

A girl was trapped between stock on the receiving area by two young blacks and they attempted to rape her. A black jitney driver drove by and

¹⁷³ Grievance 70-1436-1015, Box 90, File 2, UL3C.

¹⁷⁴ Grievance 73-1413-1102, Box 100, File 2, UL3C.

the two young blacks ran away. A search did not ... find them. The girl was shocked, she could not scream because of the fear.¹⁷⁵

Women workers were not simply targets. They employed violence themselves. Like every other measure of workplace violence at Dodge Main, violence by women rose after 1965. Female employees were disciplined for fighting with each other and striking supervisors. Violence involving women could also redraw boundaries jeopardized by socializing with coworkers off the job and then having to maintain respect on it, as was the case with Rosa Fox. The 1974 grievance discussing her discharge reads:

Ms. Fox engaged in the art of horseplay with employee Robert Switzer, badge 3352-4971, which resulted in attempt on the part of Ms. Fox to do bodily harm to Mr. Robert Switzer by stabbing him with a knife. Further investigation reveals that prior to this act Mr. Switzer and Ms. Fox became involved in a conversation about Ms. Fox's conduct the previous night and her alleged being under the influence of intoxicants. Ms. Fox was angered by this conversation and proceeded to stab Mr. Switzer in the posterior with a knife.¹⁷⁶

As the use of the knife suggests, while female employees appear less often in grievances as perpetrators of violence, women could perform violence that was as spectacular and dangerous as male violence in the plant. Georgia Turner had to be subdued by Plant Protection to stop her from doing bodily harm to another employee in Parking Lot 3 with a vehicle. The grievance reads:

After attempting to run down another employee Mrs. Turner crashed her car into the parking lot fence she left her car and went after another employee with a brick and a piece of broken glass in her hands and at one point threw a quart pop bottle at him and the plant guard who was attempting to intercede.¹⁷⁷

Despite the seriousness of this female violence, it was often considered cute or inferior by male observers. It was not taken seriously as an issue or problem, but was laughed off as the antics of less emotionally controlled, physically inferior women attempting to access a display of power and dominance reserved for men. When Ed

¹⁷⁵ Liska Reports, May 1971, Box 2 File 22, ELC.

¹⁷⁶ Grievance 74-105-79, Box 102, File 8, UL3C

¹⁷⁷ Grievance number missing, Box 97, File 12, UL3C. Turner later returned to work.

Liska writes of a fight between two women, one of them steward Edith Fox, his tone is one of amused interest: "The ten fingers on both gals were arched in cat's paws style and they went after each other. Annie got the best licks and got Fox's eyes and face... they were really going after each other's eyes."¹⁷⁸ He sums up another fight between two female workers disputing how much sewing work each was doing as "chicken fighting going on."¹⁷⁹ It is doubtful a fight between male workers of the same seniority (one woman had 35 years, the other 31) would have been described so dismissively. The condescension reflects what a female autoworker told the journalist Scott about the "paternalism, the degrading attitudes" faced by both female hourly workers and supervisors alike.¹⁸⁰

On-the-job sexuality also intersected with violence and identity. While men could deploy heterosexual power as part of a rugged masculinity, homosexuality presented risks. Heterosexual relationships were common at Dodge Main, but the discovery of a homosexual coupling was remarkable and scandalous. Liska's diary notes in 1970 "Two black men were caught in the act in the body shop inside of a welding booth. One had his pants down and the other man was intercouring him from behind. Alexander reported the incident which is well publicized in the body shop areas."¹⁸¹ Defending one's masculinity from unwanted same-sex advances was presented as a justification for violence. According to Gina Braxton, her husband Eugene's discharge for hitting a coworker "across the head and shoulder with a torsion bar"¹⁸² was unfair because the incident was provoked by another man's sexual harassment. Braxton claimed that Eugene, who did have two previous incidents of violence on his record, was doing his job when "a homosexual who tried to molest him" approached him. She wrote: "my husband defended himself as a man and as a human being due his respect. I don't feel

¹⁷⁸ Liska Reports, March 1970, Box 2, File 10, ELC.

¹⁷⁹ Liska Reports, May 1971, Box 2, File 22, ELC.

¹⁸⁰ Scott, *Muscle and Blood*, 162.

¹⁸¹ Liska Reports, March 1970, Box 2, File 10, ELC.

¹⁸² Grievance 74-812-625, Box 104, File 8, UL3C.

that a man should have to endure with this kind of nonsense to keep his job. No one wants to be humiliated by having someone approach them sexually in public."¹⁸³

David Johnson, during a graveyard shift in March 1973, became "involved in a discussion with another employee over Mr. Johnson's being a homosexual. Mr. Johnson took offense to being heckled about being a homosexual and assaulted the other employee with a knife." The union further noted that the other worker hit Johnson with a motor and yet was still working. Perhaps violence against an alleged homosexual was defined as justifiable self-defence.¹⁸⁴

For David Johnson, Georgia Turner, Willie Copland and thousands of other workers at Dodge Main, violence was crucial in producing, defining, and circumscribing both their working day and their identity at work. Violence was central to producing identity, and not only the identities of rough masculinity or powerful blackness. Femininity, youth, sexuality, and of course, one's class identity as a production worker or foreman could all be produced and imperiled by the violence that shot through work on the line, contests with supervisors, and relationships with coworkers, be they friends, enemies, dealers, or lovers.

Because violence marked virtually every aspect of life in the plant, the experience of workers was often grim, marked by fear and desperation. The grievance of Donald Wesley, fired in 1973 for possession of a handgun, eloquently testifies to this anomie and illustrates how disputes in the community or neighbourhood could also enter the plant and trigger violence on the job.¹⁸⁵ In a statement he wrote, Wesley describes how a fight between him and his wife's current boyfriend, Melvin Brown, led to Brown harassing him at work, calling him a "punk" and threatening him. Frightened of Brown's threats and cognizant of Brown's criminal past, Wesley claims he asked his General Foreman if there was any plant policy that would keep the two apart. There was not.

¹⁸³ Gina Braxton to Local 3. Box 45, File 13, UR1C.

¹⁸⁴ Grievance 73-725 591, Box 100, File 3, UL3C.

¹⁸⁵ This account and all quotes regarding the incident, are taken from Wesley's grievance and the attached letter he submitted in support of his grievance: Grievance 73-1785-1402, Box 97, File 10, UL3C.

When Brown threatened him with a knife, Wesley went to see his foreman again, but both the foreman and the Detroit police advised Wesley that they could do nothing until something actually happened. After hearing from his wife that Brown had acquired a gun from his cousin and was threatening to kill Wesley, Wesley, “afraid for my life like I had never been before,” went to his father’s house and got a gun of his own. On the way to work the next day, he stopped at a friend’s office for advice. The friend recommended that he explain the situation to Chrysler Labor Relations. On his way to work, “nervous as hell but still trying to compose myself,” Wesley met another one of his foremen in the parking lot.

Wesley explained to the foreman that Melvin Brown was going to try to kill him; that Wesley himself had a gun “for the purpose of my protection,” and that he wanted to go to Labor Relations. The foreman told Wesley he would send him to Labor Relations once he was in the plant. Wesley parked his car, got out, and started for the gate. When he reached the Bismarck Gate overpass Brown confronted him. Wesley later wrote that “for him to reach the [traffic] light at the same time I did he had to be watching me.” Brown had his hand in his jacket, and Wesley believed he had a gun: “but the question in my mind was whether or not he was going to use it.” According to Wesley, he tried to ignore Brown but Brown followed him and hit him with on the head with the gun before vanishing into the crowd of workers. Wesley left to get his “badly” bleeding head wound treated at the plant hospital, where they put him to bed and “people started asking me a lot of questions.” When his gun was discovered and removed from his person is unclear, but that gun cost Wesley his job. As management stated in reply to Wesley’s grievance, “The possession of a weapon whether carried for a real or imagined reason... is a serious breach of the plant rules of good conduct and absolutely cannot or will not be tolerated... the discharge of Mr. Wesley was justified and proper.” No mention of any discipline toward Brown appears in the files.

Wesley’s account vividly depicts the fear felt by many workers who lived in dangerous circumstances and worked in a violent plant where there were little safeguards or protections against even known threats of harm. In such a dysfunctional environment, the propensity for workers and foremen to arm and protect themselves is understandable, even if it led to more individual violence, or as a worker described it in a

New York Times article of that same year, “Jesse James stuff.”¹⁸⁶ Fred Pierson worked at Dodge Main from 1945 until 1973, when he was shot dead by coworker John Holston. A Hamtramck Police officer called it “the old story of “if he didn’t have the gun with him he wouldn’t used it. It appeared to be the kind of argument in which one guy might bust the other guy in the mouth, but unfortunately he had a gun with him when he shouldn’t have.”¹⁸⁷

Dodge Main limped along until the end of the 1970s, but the giant, rusting hulk had become an inefficient relic of an earlier era of car production, especially as Chrysler slid into economic crisis by the end of the 1970s. The ongoing violence at the plant undoubtedly played a role in Dodge Main’s closing, as the 1971 report had warned. Violence certainly shaped the manner of its closure. A 1979 letter from one UAW staffer to another discussing the transfer of Dodge Main workers to other plants notes “Obviously, the corporation is pushing for something to tell these people before they go down January 4 to keep down violence and damage to the facilities. As you might recall, when the January 4 closing date was announced, there was coincidental (sic) sabotage.”¹⁸⁸ The plant’s closing was itself a traumatic blow to its community. The eminent environmental historian Samuel Hays said at a 1979 symposium on the future of Hamtramck: “It’s almost as though you’re seeing the death of the manufacturing city right here. And my point is: don’t resurrect it. Why try to rebuild something that is gone?”¹⁸⁹ A *Detroit News* headline called December 7, 1979, the 48th anniversary of the Pearl Harbour attack, “The day the ‘bomb’ fell on Hamtramck.”¹⁹⁰

Before that bomb fell, working at Dodge Main had wounded countless workers, some fatally. There was no one single reason for the explosion of violence at Dodge Main, the “deep-rooted discontent” that Menendez wrote of to Merrelli. Many different

¹⁸⁶ Stevens, “In A Dodge Plant.”

¹⁸⁷ “Worker Slain at Dodge Plant,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 3, 1973.

¹⁸⁸ Larry Hartman to Ken Morris, 12 December 1979. Box 114, File 26, UAW Region 1B Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit (hereafter cited as UR1BC).

¹⁸⁹ Barrett Seaman, “In Michigan: Goodbye, Dodge Main,” *Time*, February 11, 1980, 10.

¹⁹⁰ “Dec. 7, The Day the ‘Bomb’ Fell on Hamtramck,” *Detroit News*, undated clipping, in Box 114, File 26, UR1BC.

factors interacted to produce the crisis of workplace violence at the plant. The labour process, structural racism, union impotence, and rising crime all contributed to create an environment that posed severe risks of violence to everyone that worked there. Violence played many important, if at times contradictory, roles in the processes and culture of the plant. Structural violence, especially related to on-the-job racism and a dangerous labour process, was no blip, no aberration, but something essential to production at Dodge Main. It helped shape how the cars were made, who did what job, how the work was gotten out, and how union politics were pursued.

Violence did not only flow from the practices of Chrysler, and the UAW, but from workers themselves. Violence was both the glue that kept the industrial regime together and a solvent that threatened to make that structure collapse. Organizations like DRUM advocated violence to dismantle the relations of exploitation at Dodge Main. Individual workers resisted harassment and discipline with individual violence, or the threat of it. While violence unmade workers, workers also used violence to produce and defend themselves and their identities.

However, violence was ultimately a profoundly destructive element. Violence at Dodge Main, and the inability or unwillingness of Chrysler and the UAW to address it, encouraged workers to pursue individual, not collective, solutions to the frustrations of work at Dodge. Individual workplace violence was a response to workplace dynamics at a dysfunctional, conflict-ridden plant, a reflection of the criminal violence that marked the lives of Detroiters, and a way to develop and defend an individual identity by workers who felt less affective loyalty to either company or union than workers had in previous years. As traditional hierarchies and collective solidarities collapsed, violence became not just a material force, but also a cultural resource that workers drew upon. This worked to legitimate violence, which in turn produced more of it. After the factory was demolished, deindustrialization, capital flight, crime, and mass incarceration continued to ravage Detroit and Detroiters for decades. Today, the graffiti stenciled into the pavement outside where Dodge Main used to stand notes how the processes of deindustrialization contain their own violent logic. It reads:

“Ain’t it funny how the factory doors close/round the time the school doors close/round the time the doors of the jail cell open up to greet you”

Table 1. Violence-related Grievances at Dodge Main

Year	Number Of Violent Incidents Found in Grievances	Number Involving Mgmt. Personnel	Approximate Dodge Main Workforce
1950	5	0	
1951	9	0	33,000 ¹⁹¹
1952	4	0	
1953	16	1	
1954/1955	10	2	25,000 ¹⁹²
1956	4	0	
1957/58	4	1	
1959	1	0	
1960	2	0	
1961	2	0	
1962	0	0	
1963	6	5	8,357 ¹⁹³
1964	4	3	
1965	15	4	
1966	16	12	
1967	12	4	
1968	28	15	12,000 ¹⁹⁴
1969	36	6	
1970	24	7	
1971	16	6	
1972	41	7	
1973	62	19	
1974	21	8	
1975	14	6	10,000 ¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ "The Chrysler Era 1928-80," Dodge Brothers Motor Car Company History, accessed June 18, 2014, <http://dodgemotorcar.com/factories/hamtramck/1928-1980.php>.

¹⁹² Boyle, "The Kiss," 501.

¹⁹³ "The Chrysler Era 1928-80." Figure refers to production workers only.

¹⁹⁴ Jefferys, *Managers and Managed*, 173

¹⁹⁵ Nabeel Abraham, "Detroit's Yemeni Workers," *Merip Reports* (1977): 7.

Chapter 3.

“The Way Boys and Men Took Care of Business:” Masculinity, Moral Economy, and Violence at Windsor Chrysler Plants

In the spring of 1975, while Canadians discussed a coming influx of Vietnamese refugees fleeing the victorious Communists and the Maple Leafs being swept from the National Hockey League playoffs by Philadelphia’s Broad Street Bullies, workers at Windsor Chrysler plants were talking about a number of violent incidents in their factories. The *444 News*, their local union newspaper, called on workers to stop the violence:

Several incidents of violence have broken out around the plant. One brother has died as a result of a violent situation. Two brothers have been seriously hurt and hospitalized. Horseplay has led to the incidents, and your local union takes this opportunity to remind all brothers: to hold a card in your union and a job in the plant carries with it a responsibility to respect each other ... Fun is fun and helps break the monotony but violence is out!¹⁹⁶

Some workers saw something more serious taking place than simply horseplay getting out of hand. They argued that the violence, especially a stabbing incident that had resulted in the hospitalization of two workers and the arrest of a third, was symptomatic of something deeply rotten within the plants. The *Rank & File Bulletin*, the pink-coloured leaflet radical workers they handed out at the plant gates, charged that “Chrysler was the direct instigator of this stabbing by its ruthless exploitation of the workforce which pushed workers to vent their frustration by turning on each other. The

¹⁹⁶ “Horseplay, Violence,” *444 News*, May 16, 1975, UL444. While the “two brothers” incident likely refers to the stabbing mentioned below, it is unclear what the “violent situation” was.

day before this incident, the line where these men worked was sped-up by over 10 cars an hour.” The leaflet went on to tell Windsor workers about the James Johnson shootings at Detroit’s Chrysler Eldon Axle Plant, warning:

The circumstances that drove Mr. Johnson to this action has many parallels with the recent stabbing. The terrible working conditions, the indifferent UAW, and racism were all similar ingredients to the Plant 3 incident. For those of you that feel this would not happen in Windsor, best consider this: DETROIT IS IN OUR PLANTS...¹⁹⁷

Their analysis was both revealing and misleading. Yes, injuries and even deaths on the floor did occur because of in-plant health and safety risks. Conflict between workers and management over conditions, speedup, and discipline was vociferous and continuous. Perhaps surprisingly for Canadians who traditionally view violence as central to American life but a rarity north of the border, individual violence at work, arising out of conflicts on the job and a high-production labour process, was a regular aspect of autowork and working-class masculinity in the city’s Chrysler factories.

But was “Detroit in their plants”? This chapter investigates violence at work in Windsor’s Chrysler plants between the 1950s and the late 1970s, focusing on the latter part of that era, a time when violence skyrocketed in Detroit plants while remaining relatively stable in Windsor. While the lack of grievance records makes it impossible to count discrete incidents of violence, a review of in-plant bulletins and leaflets, union newspapers, radical publications, and election material, supplemented by interviews with Chrysler workers and unionists, has produced a clear picture of violence at work in Windsor Chrysler plants. It both confirms and denies what the workers were arguing in the *Rank & File Bulletin*. Yes, violence was real and regular in Windsor. In the hypermasculine environment of Windsor Chrysler plants, violence was an ultimate resource employed by workers to settle interpersonal conflicts or exert power over a supervisor. Violence was, as in Detroit plants, not an aberration or a freak occurrence, but an understood part of the industrial culture at Windsor Chrysler. However, different racial dynamics, the greater economic stability of Windsor Chrysler plants, a more

¹⁹⁷ *Rank and File Bulletin*, May 7, 1975, UL444.

effective union, and a safer city worked to limit the incidence of individual violence compared to the crisis of violence that exploded in Detroit Chrysler plants.

The varying experiences of Chrysler workers in the two cities demonstrates how important structural factors were to conditioning the risks of individual violence, and also how important the national context was in constructing workers' lives and experiences on the job, even in two cities as tightly linked as Detroit and Windsor. Windsor's development has been inextricably entwined with Detroit's, and with the auto industry that was so pivotal to both of their histories. In the 1910s and 1920s, thousands of workers from all over Canada, including scores of recent arrivals from Europe, migrated to Windsor in search of employment in the United States. They crossed the river on ferries to work in Detroit's auto shops by day and returned to their homes in Canada at night, until a 1931 law banned non-resident workers from employment in the United States, an effort to protect US jobs at the height of the Great Depression.¹⁹⁸ While that eliminated most of the work available in the US, the branch plant automotive industry in Canada continued to grow, drawing on the armies of unemployed workers looking for jobs during Canada's Great Depression. Competition and conflict were fierce. Writing years later, UAW Local 444 president Charlie Brooks claimed the vicious atmosphere of the era was the foundation of a combative class consciousness and his union's leftist orientation. This orientation, for Brooks, meant shop-floor action as much as wider political struggle, deployed in part to defend working-class manhood:

Each morning we came to work we had to push our way through the crowd of men and women standing at the gate. We were the lucky ones (so-called) who knew someone who could get you the chance to earn (really earn) 20 cents an hour. Across the street at the GM Plant supervisors were selling jobs, taking bribes, and propositioning husbands. Some of the supervisors were later exposed and fired.

We were working 16 and 18 hours a day and the girls who took jobs had their reputation at stake. The employment manager had a free hand, a field day. One hundred and fifty hours would give us a pay check of 29.00

¹⁹⁸ Ashley Johnson, "Illegal Detroiters: Undocumented Europeans and Unions in America's Motor City, 1924-42." Paper presented at the North American Labor History Conference, Detroit, October 2012; Holly Karibo, "Detroit's Border Brothel: Sex Tourism in Windsor, Ontario, 1945-1960," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no. 3 (September 2010): 362-78.

for two weeks. One became a part of machine, who could not stop because of perpetual motion, little rest, no time for play, just work like hell, yet hundreds of willing hands stood at the gates.

This was Motor Products of the 1933-35 era in Windsor, producing parts for Ford and Chrysler, and out of it came many of the UAW's good union men. Sure we had meetings, and those that did the talking were fired the next day. We wanted a union, but the bosses called us reds. As one brother put it... "If fighting for decent working conditions is being a Red, than I am a damn good one."¹⁹⁹

The battle to unionize auto factories was a physical battle. In Brooks's telling, "Our contracts were written in the blood of many of the brothers who bravely fought."²⁰⁰

Brooks's account of early auto work presents a violent world where women's bodies and reputations were at risk and men asserted their rights with their fists as well as their politics. This hyper-masculine conception of auto work would remain an essential aspect of work and violence in Windsor plants in the decades to come.

By the 1950s, Local 444 had established itself as the bargaining agent for workers at the city's three Chrysler factories: Plant 1, the Windsor Assembly plant, Plant 2, the engine plant, and Plant 3, the Tecumseh Road truck plant, as well as representing those who worked at a Chrysler foundry in Walkerville and at Young Spring and Wire, a parts supplier that Chrysler eventually bought outright. In the 1970s, the foundry closed, as did the Tecumseh Road plant. However, the latter was replaced with a new truck factory on Pillette Road, built to satisfy Chrysler's domestic production obligations under the Auto Pact.²⁰¹

The continuing growth of the auto industry provided for the continuing growth of Windsor itself. However, the 1950s and 1960s were not simply a time of placid prosperity in the city. While it was the heyday of Fordism, Fordism did not eliminate economic instability, even in the auto industry. The business cycles of the automotive industry caused frequent unemployment for many Windsorites, and fears of factories

¹⁹⁹ Charles Brooks, "20 Years in the UAW," *444 News*, June 11, 1956, UL444.

²⁰⁰ Brooks, "20 Years in the UAW."

²⁰¹ Gary Parent and Rick Laporte, in discussion with the author, 25 February 2013.

leaving town were ever-present. Still, the thousands of jobs at Chrysler, Ford, and their many suppliers provided an economic base for a reasonably stable and solvent working-class city. Unlike Detroit, there was no “urban crisis” in Windsor during the postwar decades. The city’s major automotive employers stayed rather than fleeing for the suburbs or the South. Windsor’s black community struggled against racism and discrimination in employment, accommodations, and police harassment, but as people of colour made up a far smaller proportion of the city’s population, Windsor remained comparatively unaffected by the white flight and reckoning with racism that roiled Detroit.²⁰² In 1967, while Detroit burned, Windsor watched.

Because of the relative stability of its hierarchical structures, Windsor was also spared the twin crises of rampant crime and mass incarceration that plagued Detroit after white flight and disinvestment had eaten away at the city’s economy and isolated its African-American population, as well as many poor white Appalachian migrants, in crumbling ghettos. Crime rates in Windsor rose during the 1960s and 1970s but remained well below rates in Detroit, reflecting a larger difference between crime rates in Canada and the United States. Therefore, one significant vector of violence in the lives of Detroit’s autoworkers in the 1960s and 1970s, violent crime in their neighbourhoods and factories, was far less prevalent in Windsor. While Detroit’s yearly homicide count swelled from 188 in 1965 to 607 in 1975, the corresponding figures in Windsor were 2 and 16. There were 24 murders in Windsor in the five years between 1969-73; in Detroit, there were 2,784, a staggering disparity even considering Detroit’s much larger population.²⁰³

²⁰² Rudolf Helling and the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC), *The Position of Negroes, Chinese, and Italians in the Social Structure of Windsor, Ontario: A Report Submitted to the Ontario Human Rights Commission*, (Toronto: 1965); H.C. McNeil, “Target of Wrath,” *The Guardian*, May 15, 1964, UL444.

²⁰³ Detroit homicide statistics are from Peter Gavrilovich and Bill McGraw, eds., *The Detroit Almanac: 300 Years of Life in the Motor City* (Detroit: Detroit Free Press, 2000), 484-85. Windsor homicide statistics are from Statistics Canada, *Publication Crime Statistics 85-205, 1962-76*. Computing and comparing homicide rates is difficult, given the different methods of collecting and calculating population and homicide statistics. However, it is clear that, estimating Detroit’s population as being just less than ten times Windsor’s during this period, its number of homicides and homicide rate were far greater.

Because there was much less violent crime outside the plant, much less violent crime came in. In the city's Chrysler plants, organized gambling and drug dealing certainly took place, much of it run by members of the several motorcycle gangs that were active in the region. Workers knew that RCMP officers investigating the trade, and perhaps keeping one eye on radical political groups, were working undercover in the plant.²⁰⁴ However, the type of drug-related violence that plagued some Detroit plants does not appear to have been a factor in Windsor Chrysler plants. The greater stability of the community was reflected in safer factories.

While a less violent community helped produce a less violent factory, Windsor plants were no haven of industrial peace. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, workers and management continually clashed. Windsor Chrysler workers and their union fought speedup, supervisory harassment, and plant conditions that sometimes killed workers suddenly through violent accidents, or slowly through years of toxic exposures. During the 1950s, the practice of American managers being brought in to speed up lines was a constant source of conflict. Compared their counterparts in the United States, Canadian autoworkers produced many more models of car on an individual production line. In 1965, for example, GM Oshawa produced 595 various models of vehicle, over twice as many as any American plant.²⁰⁵ Although this meant slower-moving lines, it also led to job stress as workers scrambled to switch lines over to keep the production of different models going with the least possible downtime. Workers thus resented the attempts of head office to rationalize their work along American lines: "Many of the Company Programs are brought over by the imported experts who are accustomed to plants where only one division of Chrysler runs down a line. Here the situation is different, where every division is on one line," wrote Brooks in 1960.²⁰⁶ In 1957, Chrysler tried to get more production from its workforce. UAW 444, claiming that workers were maintaining production despite a reduction of 1400 workers, charged a

²⁰⁴ Gord Gray, in discussion with the author, 26 February 2013.

²⁰⁵ Chris Roberts, "Harnessing Competition? The UAW and Competitiveness in the Canadian Auto Industry, 1945-90," (PhD diss., York University, 2004), 234, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/docview/305287576>.

²⁰⁶ Charles Brooks, "Membership Determined to Correct Company Abuses," *444 News*, March 10, 1960, UL444.

speedup was taking place. The fight over production standards went public and led to the union being accused of sabotaging production in the *Windsor Star*.²⁰⁷

Brooks and his union consistently blamed the company's work processes for the injuries and deaths suffered by members. Rallying workers for a 1960 strike vote, Brooks wrote of

Matt Pavlic ... dead in a pool of blood, in spite of the many protests of the union to have no man work alone on a ladder. No man works alone now, but Matt is gone.

Leo Schmidt, the faithful loading dock worker, after 24 years was crushed by a runaway truck in a boxcar. After being hospitalized for months, he is still suffering from internal trouble. The Company wanted to prove that fewer men could load more loads and they didn't care who got killed, the figures must be right. The foremen would still stand over the men, faster, faster. Leo, at his age, will never be right.

Bro. Bugelli, a beautiful specimen of a man weighing 240 lbs., now walks the street a feeble cripple for life, because of the speed-up in the metal shop. He severed the arteries and muscles in his wrist on the razor-sharp panels he had to handle. Yes, he gets a small pension for life, but with tears in his eyes he would like to maim every stupid pusher in the Chrysler Corporation. How can I tell my wife and children back home in Malta that me, a big strong man, am a useless cripple unable to earn a living?²⁰⁸

While work at Windsor Chrysler was difficult, dangerous, and sometimes deadly, here again local and national factors worked to give Windsor Chrysler workers safer, cleaner factories than their Detroit counterparts.

The major event that altered the labour relations context in Windsor and revitalized Local 444 was the signing of the Auto Pact between Canada and the United States in January 1965. The agreement exempted the major US car manufacturers from duties on the cars they exported to Canada in exchange for a commitment to maintain certain levels of production and employment in Canada. For Windsor Chrysler workers,

²⁰⁷ "Company Charges Fall Flat," *444 News*, March 14, 1957, UL444; "Layoffs Due to Poor Public Relations," *444 News*, June 6, 1957, UL444.

²⁰⁸ Brooks, "Membership Determined."

the Pact brought immediate challenges. As Chris Roberts notes in his history of the postwar Canadian industry, “Canadians would now be faced with American management, faster assembly lines producing fewer models, tighter work standards transferred from faster US lines, and the rationalization of Canadian work practices.”²⁰⁹ The Pact increased employment in Canada’s auto industry while simultaneously challenging Canadian workers to win wages and work standards that were as good or better than those of their American counterparts. The nationalist orientation of the fight for parity would be a unifying force strengthening the union during a time of internal challenges and social upheaval.

Furthermore, the late 1960s was a time of increased worker militancy and contestations of both corporate and union authority across Canada, and Windsor Chrysler was no exception.²¹⁰ Many of the younger workers streaming into the plants complained bitterly about the speedup on the lines and the concomitant disciplinary crackdown. Two days before Christmas 1966, tensions exploded. Cushion room workers refused to work overtime. Foremen responded by recruiting replacements from other departments. A brawl ensued between cushion room workers, foremen, and the replacement workers. A combination of worker-management hostility and Christmas drinking almost turned into a “wholesale riot.” A union report noted that the company photographed 28 empty whiskey bottles in one department.²¹¹

Younger workers chafed at the stern discipline and grueling workday at Chrysler. A union-management conference held in 1965 described younger workers as “impatient - challenging - eager for action.”²¹² A 1969 union election leaflet produced by John Horne, Local 444’s most influential dissident of the time, identified the issues of the “vast majority” of membership who were under 30 as relief time, production standards, petty

²⁰⁹ Roberts, “Harnessing Competition?.” 517.

²¹⁰ On the era’s militancy and worker resistance, see Peter McInnis, “Hothead Troubles: 1960s-Era Wildcat Strike Culture in Canada,” in Lara Campbell, Dominique Clément, and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Palmer, *Canada’s 1960s*, 211-41; and Joan Sangster, “‘We No Longer Respect the Law:’ The Tilco Strike, Labour Injunctions, and the State,” *Labour/Le Travail* 53 (Spring 2004).

²¹¹ “CHRISTMAS SCHEDULE, SABOTAGE” in Box 27, File 3, CDC.

²¹² “Special Union-Management Conference,” 19 November 1965, Box 27, File 3, CDC.

discipline, and the right to refuse direct orders not related to a worker's job assignment. Some of Horne's allies produced a leaflet that charged "people at the plant are abused by supervisors who constantly nag, refuse, or hold up first aid passes, speed up the line to steal jobs, and threaten the men." This type of management, Horne implied, presented a direct threat to the manhood of Windsor Chrysler workers: "Such supervisors must be proud to know they can whip a man who can't fight back."²¹³

Despite the intensification of work that resulted from the Auto Pact, the agreement helped produce a better work environment for Windsor Chrysler workers, and thus mitigate some of the issues that sparked increased individual violence in Detroit. Most importantly, the Pact safeguarded Windsor auto jobs, rescuing the auto industry in Windsor from a decade-long slump. The increased employment and prosperity in the city was a marked contrast to the growing deindustrialization and crime across the river. Unlike Detroit's Chrysler unions, forced into the untenable position of trying to quell rebellion on the lines and help Chrysler keep the plant going at all costs for fear of a plant closure, Local 444 knew that a certain amount of Windsor production was likely to be maintained.²¹⁴

Pressure on workers, Roberts concluded, "was directly connected to speedup and the deterioration of working conditions, as well as job insecurity."²¹⁵ That combination produced a crisis in Detroit Chrysler plants that encouraged insurgency and violence, a crisis averted in Windsor thanks in part to the Auto Pact and the leverage it gave Local 444. While in Detroit, union locals were undercut by the Big Three moving production out of the city, Canadian auto jobs stayed in Windsor. When the industry added jobs, it did so in Windsor, bolstering Local 444's material strength and credibility.²¹⁶

The Pact not only provided for Local 444's stability and growth, it encouraged militant union action on plant conditions. Unlike their counterparts in the US, Windsor workers had no right to strike during the contract over working conditions. This

²¹³ John Horne, 1968 Election Handout, UL444.

²¹⁴ Roberts, "Harnessing Competition?," 510.

²¹⁵ Roberts, "Harnessing Competition?," 532.

²¹⁶ Roberts, "Harnessing Competition?," 510.

paradoxically encouraged Canadian locals to be more effective on in-plant issues. Without the option to use brief in-contract strikes either to gain temporary redress of a specific grievance or as a safety valve for frustrated workers, Canadian locals had to negotiate better contractual language on working conditions during bargaining periods. In the US, shop-floor issues were not a primary concern at the bargaining table. In Canada, the UAW was forced to be more committed and effective in resolving the in-plant concerns of its members, because bargaining periods were the only time that they could achieve lasting improvements in health and safety.²¹⁷

The result was that, by the early 1970s, when the crisis in Detroit's Chrysler plants was at its peak, Canadian plants were cleaner, safer, and saner. Despite their vehement disagreements on union policy, one thing 444 president Brooks and his chief antagonist Horne agreed on was that Canadian plants were a better place to work. In 1970, Brooks wrote:

Absenteeism and huge numbers of quits indicate the auto industry is off track. The turnover of manpower in US plants due to poor work practices and other reasons makes their plants operate like a cheap paying car wash where a guy works just enough to get bus fare to travel on. Instead of green stamps, instead of discipline and overtime smorgasbord, they need to humanize the work place, they need to increase the pay to make up for shorter hours and more family time. They need more contracts like Canada.²¹⁸

Horne concurred, claiming three years later that:

Working conditions in most US plants are intolerable. Compulsory 12-hour shifts are forced upon workers and there is no right to refuse any overtime. Steady night shifts are assigned to younger workers, there is inferior health and safety legislation, and some workers in Chrysler plants are still under discharge for heat walk-outs.²¹⁹ Job opportunity and transfer provisions of their contracts are virtually non-existent. Beatings,

²¹⁷ Roberts, "Harnessing Competition?," 513.

²¹⁸ Brooks, "Chrysler Presses Vigorously – Again??" *444 News*, September 3, 1970, UL444.

²¹⁹ Intolerably hot conditions were a constant summertime issue in Chrysler plants. Heat walk-outs were wildcat strikes that occurred when workers walked off the job because of the sweltering conditions.

gangsterism and even murders are becoming commonplace events in U.S.A. factories.²²⁰

While factors both internal and external contributed to a safer environment in Windsor, violence still occurred at the city's Chrysler plants. Windsor and its auto factories were not besieged by the crises and insurgencies that beset Detroit and its plants and thus were spared the high levels of violence they provoked. Nevertheless, like their counterparts across the border, Windsor Chrysler workers used violence to maintain order and status in a hypermasculine workplace.

"It was a man's world,"²²¹ recalled Gord Gray of the Windsor Chrysler plants he entered as a teenager in the mid-1970s. Unlike Dodge Main, which had a significant cohort of female workers as far back as the Second World War, Windsor's Chrysler plants remained almost exclusively male well into the 1970s. In the mid-1970s Local 444's membership was at its peak of approximately 13,000 active members.²²² Almost none of them were female. Chrysler did not hire women in any significant number until the mid-to-late 1970s, when they were forced to by the federal government as a condition of receiving funding for the construction of the new truck plant on Pillette Road.²²³ Remembered Gray: "The gender of the factories was male."

The factories were a haven of rough working-class masculinity. Pornographic magazines were pasted up all over the assembly lines, where men worked long, arduous shifts with cigarettes clamped between their teeth. In some areas of the plant, the hard physical labour workers did produced impressive physiques. "Most of these guys were ripped," Gray recalled.²²⁴ On the job, workers faced the slow dangers of foul smoke and toxic chemicals, the challenge of boredom, and the risk of the occasional horrific injury or even sudden death. In his study of manly culture at Ford Motor Company, Wayne Lewchuk argues that Ford "created a fraternal system, a men's club,

²²⁰ John Horne, "Letter From Rank and File Action Committee," UL444.

²²¹ Gray, discussion.

²²² Laporte and Parent, discussion.

²²³ Pat Cunningham, in discussion with the author, 25 February 2013; Jim O'Neil, in discussion with the author, 24 April 2013.

²²⁴ Gray, discussion.

to help male workers adjust to a world of monotonous repetitive work." Ford believed the benefits of a fraternal, single-sex workplace outweighed the advantages gained by hiring women into his plants at lower wage rates, and thus Ford plants became an almost exclusively male preserve until the 1940s.²²⁵ The almost total absence of women at Windsor Chrysler plants, and the boys' culture that flourished there, suggests a similar process was at work.

In their spare time on the line, workers indulged in manly recreation. Drug use and gambling rings providing action on horses or college sports were so widespread that the RCMP often had undercover officers working the lines. Despite the presence of the police, many workers were members of the region's motorcycle gangs and would display their colours in the plant. Another way workers broke the monotony was by playing pranks on new hires. They would hide rookie workers' lunches or pour grease in their boots. If a new worker could take abuse like a man, with a smile, he would be welcomed into the fraternity. If the new worker could not, he risked social ostracism and the loss of his job.²²⁶

Manly recreation included physically affectionate behavior among male coworkers. Interviews with Jim Monk, a Windsor Chrysler autoworker and political activist in the 1970s, reveal the "affectionate physicality" that was common on the floor in this era:

Guys rubbed each other's backs, kissed — mainly on the cheek but sometimes on the lips — grabbed each other's balls, did dry runs at a bumfuck.....You know, when you're uptight and somebody grabs your balls some of it's gotta go....If you suggested that it was homosexuality to these guys, they'd vehemently deny it and get really upset.²²⁷

²²⁵ Wayne Lewchuk, "Men and Monotony: Fraternalism as a Managerial Strategy at the Ford Motor Company," *The Journal of Economic History* 53, no. 4 (1993).

²²⁶ Gray, discussion; Laporte and Parent, discussion.

²²⁷ Monk shared these reminiscences in an interview with Toronto newspaper *The Body Politic*. See Gerald Hannon, "Gay on the Line," *The Body Politic*, September, 1978. I read of Monk and the interview thanks to Miriam Frank, who discusses Monk in her book *Out In The Union: A Labor History of Queer America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014). The interview in *The Body Politic* is quoted on 39. Dr. Frank shared this material with me via private correspondence before publication. I am truly grateful for her generosity.

When Monk came out as gay in the plant in 1978, he did experience some social ostracism for a time, but never feared physical attack, because of his reputation as a capable amateur wrestler. Monk's prowess at manly physical competition perhaps afforded him more space in the plant to express a non-dominant and feared sexual identity.²²⁸

The men's club at Windsor Chrysler plants was a harsh and unwelcoming environment for the few female workers who began entering the workplace in the 1970s. Several of their male co-workers crossed the line from unfriendliness to intimidation and harassment. Pat Cunningham spent four years at the spring and wire plant as a young woman in the mid-to-late 1970s before moving to the Windsor Assembly plant. When she started at Chrysler in 1975 there were only about five women in her plant. She recalled a "brutal" atmosphere, not because of the work but "the comments and the stares and the ... some days you just wanted to go crawl under a rock ... a lot of days ... I went home crying." One male coworker brandished a pornographic magazine at her, making obscene gestures. When another asked her "Have you ever been gangbanged? Have you ever been raped?" she responded with direct action, throwing down her tools and sitting at a picnic table. When her supervisor asked her as to why she had stopped work, she told him "I'm not working beside that pig any longer." The man was taken off his job immediately and eventually moved out of her section.²²⁹

Cunningham did not receive any assistance from her union until later, when another coworker began following her home repeatedly, slowly driving by her front porch as she sat having a beer after work. She went to her union representative with the problem. Her reps spoke to the man, and the stalking stopped. Did they threaten him with violence? "I don't know, that was the old guys... it could have been a threat." Cunningham recalled: "It took me a long time to get my voice [in the plant]... to say 'shut up' not to walk away." Eventually, though, she became active in creating a women's committee at Local 444, and a key figure in making Windsor Chrysler plants a safer and more equitable place for women. Of the treatment she received as a young female

²²⁸ Frank, *Out in the Union*, 40.

²²⁹ Cunningham, discussion.

worker, she reflects “then I probably wouldn't have defined it as violence. Now, after the education I've had, I would define it as violence.” That violence arose directly from the hypermasculine work culture at Windsor Chrysler plants, and the perceived threat to that culture presented by the arrival of women like Pat Cunningham. Her ability to do the same tough work that men did “emasculated” macho coworkers. “That takes away some masculinity... most guys define themselves by their job,”²³⁰ she concluded.

The language and cartoons used in worker publications further illustrates how deeply workers saw their life on the job in terms of masculinity and maintaining manly status in the face of the company's threats to that masculinity. Workers would refer to negotiating with the company to get a fired worker back on the job with a mordant reference to oral sex, calling it “wearing the knee pads.”²³¹ A cartoon in the *444 News* vividly depicts the connection men made between working at Chrysler's and their manhood, and the emasculation in store for any man who lost his job. In it, a depressed-looking man is scrubbing his floor at home on his hands and knees, while his wife looks on and says to a female friend: “Now that Chrysler's fired him, I've hired him!”²³² Jim Monk recalled that cartoons of “a supervisor fucking a worker” were regularly drawn on bathroom walls.²³³

In this hypermasculine environment, workers widely accepted the use of violence among themselves to settle disputes and enforce acceptable standards of behaviour. In his study of masculine culture in midcentury Detroit auto plants, Steven Meyer observes that fighting was a “prototypical form of masculine behavior ... a common and frequent means for the aggressive settlement of shop floor disputes between workers.”²³⁴ Windsor Chrysler workers had a similar understanding of masculinity, violence, and interpersonal conflict. Violence was, according to Gray, “just the way boys and men took

²³⁰ Cunningham, discussion.

²³¹ “Rank and File Reply to Plant 2 Bulletin,” 10 March 1972, UL444.

²³² Cartoon, *444 News*, May 31, 1973, UL444.

²³³ Frank, *Out in the Union*, 40.

²³⁴ Stephen Meyer, “Work, Play, and Power: Masculine Culture on the Automotive Shop Floor, 1930-60,” *Men and Masculinities* 2, no. 2 (1999): 124.

care of business. You pay the punishment if you want to be an idiot.”²³⁵ At Chrysler, violence and masculinity informed each other. Masculinity justified using violence to resolve conflict, and the use of violence buttressed masculine status. Gary Parent and Rick Laporte, two longtime Chrysler workers who rose to executive offices in Local 444, recalled that when disagreements would come to a head, “in those days workers went out the parking lot and had a fistfight.”²³⁶ Gord Gray concurred. “A good many times it was a fisticuff ... you get smacked in the head and hopefully the supervisor didn’t see it.”²³⁷ If a fight did not happen on the job, it might take place at one of the bars where many workers drank on their lunch hours and after their shifts ended. The Embassy, French Canadian Club, Fleming House and others were places where “if people couldn’t deal with at work they dealt with it outside the plant, and that meant you’re out with a couple buddies at a bar and you see the guy there’d be a beating going on.”²³⁸

As Gray suggested, violence was used to resolve interpersonal disputes without involving management. It was also employed instead of bringing a union representative into the situation. Gray contended, “We didn’t wait for the rep to come down... we had to deal with our own personal issues.”²³⁹ One prominent example of workers settling job conflict with violence involved Clarence Talbot, who would become infamous a few years later for murdering Local 444’s president. Talbot was a relief man: his job was to fill in for workers who were away from the line on breaks or perhaps receiving medical attention. According to Parent, Talbot was a “bully in the plant” who pressured workers to hurry back to work, cutting their own relief short so Talbot could have more “ass time,” or breaks. “He intimidated workers as far as their relief time was concerned. He took time away. And if you didn’t like it, he beat the crap out of you. Or threatened to beat the crap out of you.”²⁴⁰

²³⁵ Gray, discussion.

²³⁶ Laporte and Parent, discussion.

²³⁷ Gray, discussion.

²³⁸ Gray, discussion; Laporte and Parent, discussion.

²³⁹ Gray, discussion.

²⁴⁰ Laporte and Parent, discussion.

One coworker took exception to Talbot's tactics, and the issue culminated in a "huge fight" in a storage shed. Despite being a professional heavyweight boxer, whose career had been chronicled in the Local 444 newsletter, Talbot lost a brawl that became the stuff of Local 444 legend. According to Parent, Talbot's opponent always said he regretted not killing Talbot in that fight, because it would have meant that Talbot could never have shot Brooks. No discipline resulted from the incident, simply because neither worker ever reported it. As Laporte insists, "In the olden days it was really kept between the workers ... It was just two people working stuff out."²⁴¹ The incident shows not only how workers used violence, but also the mythic status a notable episode of violence could attain within workplace culture.

According to Parent and Laporte, it often fell to representatives to deal with bullies at work. When union representatives were regulating conduct on the job, they too drew on violence as a resource. "Representatives probably did more intervention than management did. Because management was as afraid of the individuals doing the bullying."²⁴² For union representatives, standing up to bullies and threatening to beat them up if they did not change their behaviour was "part of the life." "You can not be a representative and have someone bully you. You will get run over." Laporte and Parent remembered that bullies would back down in almost every case, in part because the representative was backed by the solidarity of his co-workers. "Management wouldn't live up to the responsibility, but the rep always would, because the workers were who he was protecting."²⁴³ Violence, class consciousness, and ideas of masculinity and brotherhood were deployed in varying degrees to create and maintain the workers' shop-floor order in the plants.

The code of violence at Windsor Chrysler was complex and sometimes contradictory. While using violence was accepted and even valorized as part of shop-floor masculinity, a reputation for violence could be a hindrance for workers who sought to rise from the shop-floor to executive positions in the Local 444 hierarchy. Ken Gerard,

²⁴¹ Laporte and Parent, discussion.

²⁴² Laporte and Parent, discussion.

²⁴³ Laporte and Parent, discussion.

a worker running against Charlie Brooks for the local presidency in 1968, complained of being smeared as "Wildman, Slugger, or Butch."²⁴⁴ Gerard had not helped his reputation as a brawler with his own pamphlet, issued during the 1966 election, in which he boasted of saving Brooks from a member who "was about to clobber him over the head with a beer bottle when I was standing beside him. If it were not for me there is no question the Hero would have suffered a serious head injury." The pamphlet also accused Brooks of not intervening when another member was being beaten at the UAW's summer camp in Port Elgin. While Gerard promised, "If I'm elected, my only fight will be to make management correct your problems, each and every one," workers were unconvinced, and they re-elected Brooks. Workers might have occasionally opted for violence on the line and in the bars, but they clearly expected a different approach from their local president.²⁴⁵

Though violence may have been part of their life on the line, Windsor Chrysler workers saw violence in their plants as much different than violence at plants in Detroit. Workers talked about the violence in Detroit plants, but according to Laporte, there was a "huge difference between the Detroit plants and us," a difference he connected to the levels of violence in the cities themselves: "You get 600 murders there, you might get one murder in Windsor."²⁴⁶ While this is an exaggeration, certainly homicide was far more frequent in Detroit in this period. According to Parent, workers worried not so much about whether the violence in Detroit plants would spread to Windsor as they were chagrined that Detroit plants would get production that they felt should be in Canada.²⁴⁷ Jim O'Neil became a steward at age 19 in 1965, after one year on the line and recalled dealing with very few incidents of violence in Windsor plants between 1965-75, which supports the idea that what violence there was largely occurred outside the official channels of plant governance. When he became an international representative in 1975 and began servicing plants in Detroit, violence was much more of an issue. He was cautioned not to walk through Detroit Chrysler plants alone, for fear of being jumped by

²⁴⁴ "Blue and White Bulletin," 1968, UL444.

²⁴⁵ Ken Gerard, "Blue and White Slate Opposition News and Facts," 1966, UL444.

²⁴⁶ Laporte and Parent, discussion.

²⁴⁷ Laporte and Parent, discussion.

workers who were known to force their coworkers to sign over their paychecks at gunpoint. Union officials at Detroit Forge told O'Neil of a particularly unpopular supervisor, whom, they believed, workers had thrown into a vat of boiling metal after hours one night, never to be seen again. O'Neil does not recall violence being an issue at the new Indiana plants he serviced, which further illustrates how crucial specific local dynamics, including plant conditions, were to violence in Detroit plants.²⁴⁸

In Windsor's more functional Chrysler plants, the role violence played in workplace culture is more elusive. To O'Neil, it was not a significant factor. Parent and Laporte remembered several incidents of violence but did not believe there was a resulting climate of fear in the plants. According to Gray, however, that fear was there all the time, and it contributed to the maintenance of order among the men of Windsor Chrysler. After seeing "some of the beatings that people had taken,"²⁴⁹ he knew "people would clean your clock on the job, so you always kept to your own Ps and Qs and treated everybody with respect." Pat Cunningham agreed that the awareness of violence was part of plant culture: "everybody was aware that something was out there...there was an understanding."²⁵⁰ Perhaps a worker's understanding of how crucial violence was to plant culture had a great deal to do with their position in the workplace's hierarchies of power, and how vulnerable to violence they felt they were. Younger workers or female workers may have sensed a greater risk of violence than more established male workers. Workers who employed violence, or the threat of violence, regularly, like Clarence Talbot, may have seen violence as fundamental to their job. A union official, primarily dealing with conflict in offices and on grievance forms may have been largely unaware of violence on the shop-floor.

While Laporte and Parent highlighted the way union representatives used violence in their own work, Gray recalled that the union largely left the men to regulate interpersonal issues themselves. The union was focused on the company so the attitude among workers was, "You're a man? You get yourself into trouble, you take care of

²⁴⁸ O'Neil, discussion.

²⁴⁹ Gray, discussion.

²⁵⁰ Cunningham, discussion.

business at work."²⁵¹ As we shall see below, "taking care of business" sometimes meant using violence to control or influence supervisors.

Violence in Windsor Chrysler plants was largely self-contained. It never became a public issue like it did at Dodge Main. Violence involving knives and guns was extremely rare, and uniformed police rarely came into the plant, situations that were common in Hamtramck. Considering the level of violence directed at plant guards provides an instructive comparison between Detroit and Windsor Chrysler plants. In Hamtramck, assaults on these representatives of Chrysler authority occurred regularly. In Windsor, the suspension of several employees for using "abusive language" to the guards was itself worthy of a warning notice in the *444 News*.²⁵² However, just as workers occasionally committed acts of violence towards each other, workers also occasionally directed violence, or the threat of violence, at their supervisors. Windsor Chrysler plants may not have been "barrel[s] of dynamite" like Dodge Main, but they were workplaces where violence against management was a recognized element of class conflict and the shop-floor order.

Historians have identified the racialization of the hardest, dirtiest jobs in Detroit auto plants, or what radical Chrysler workers succinctly dubbed "Niggermation" as a crucial factor in the breakdown in industrial order there. As workers had less in common with their supervisors, both in terms of race, age, and employment security, and supervisors employed racial abuse in managing employees, levels of conflict and violence spiraled. This dynamic did not exist at Chrysler plants in Windsor, where the workforce was almost exclusively white. But despite the fact that workers and supervisors in Windsor appeared to have more in common superficially, a real hostility and separation between the two groups existed nonetheless. This demonstrates that the labour process, class, and workplace conflict, not just race, were key causes of auto plant violence.

²⁵¹ Gray, discussion.

²⁵² "Watch That Language..." *444 News*, January 12, 1968, UL444.

Windsor Chrysler management during the 1960s and 1970s was “old school ... very militant,” recalled Gray. Supervisors drove their workers with intimidation, fear, and verbal abuse. “A lot of this [conflict] was put on by the company with their old style management: ‘You’re a piece of shit... Do the fucking job’ ... a person can only take so much of that.”²⁵³ A union bulletin complained of a “little Siberia” in Plant 3 under supervisor Gagnon, charged with “arrogant, ignorant, foul language and mistreatment of his men.”²⁵⁴ The bulletin claims 30 men quit in one week rather than endure Gagnon. The *444 News* alleged that foreman Wright forced injured workers back to work when they were still hurt. Wright was “known to insult and humiliate injured workers with his tirades – ‘You’re a nuisance around here, why don’t you quit?’ is a pet line.”²⁵⁵ As in Detroit, foremen often telephoned sick and injured workers at home to cajole them back to work. Often workers’ wives answered the phone to be confronted by a foreman accusing their husband of goldbricking.²⁵⁶

Many workers experienced this type of treatment as a direct threat to their manhood. Recall Horne’s bitter connection of supervisors run amok with the emasculation of the line worker: “Such supervisors must be proud to know they can whip a man who can’t fight back.” While some workers, like Pat Cunningham, appreciated the directness of the old-line supervisors, it is clear that the combination of old-line management and the younger workers flooding the plant in the 1960s and 70s spurred significant conflict.²⁵⁷ While Chrysler promoted from within, hostility and distrust between hourly workers and their managers was so high that social ostracism was the penalty for those who traded in their union card for a supervisor’s shirt and tie. Workers employed an “intimidation factor” to remind their peers not to fraternize with foremen: “Supervision’s supervision. We’re the union,” Gray remembered. For their part, supervisors feared going back on the line: “You’d be treated like a traitor.”²⁵⁸ Before

²⁵³ Gray, discussion.

²⁵⁴ “Gate-line Misery,” *444 Bulletin*, November 16, 1966, UL444.

²⁵⁵ “Wright Is Wrong,” *444 News*, October 9, 1969, UL444.

²⁵⁶ Brooks, “New Contract Geared to Solve In-Plant Problems,” *444 News*, February 22, 1968, UL444.

²⁵⁷ Cunningham, discussion.

²⁵⁸ Gray, discussion.

some supervisors returned to hourly work, the union sometimes conducted trials where they were held accountable for their crimes against workers while part of management. If the tribunal deemed these offences serious enough, the former supervisor would be denied union membership, and thus denied work.²⁵⁹ These trials stand as an example of the maintenance of informal systems of worker control in Windsor long after management had eviscerated many of these controls in Detroit. They also show workers enacting a reversal of the power of economic violence: the deprivation of a worker of his livelihood that was traditionally the exclusive province of management.

Despite this social separation, workers and supervisors often encountered each other in the taverns of the small city of Windsor. The combination of alcohol, masculinity, and an informal atmosphere meant that shop-floor tensions often spilled over into barroom brawls. The worker publication *Workers Unity* recounted one such incident in its October 1970 issue:

Recently at the Coronation House, a former employee of the 6-line in Plant 2 who had a taste of harassment from Huggard, now a 9841 Foreman, got additional harassment at his table. Huggard told him how useless he was when he worked for him. So this guy decked [Huggard] and his buddy who attempted to intervene---The union on many occasions has appealed to management to stop this guy from harassing people and this is the result!²⁶⁰

The *444 News* warned workers to mind their conduct when encountering supervisors in the tavern. In 1969, it published a report on engine plant supervisor Bill Doherty, who

has tried to humiliate and harass them in every way possible. Other foremen who have to work with this guy are disgusted as well, though they'll not admit it.

This particular foreman (now dept. 9841) boozes regularly at a local bistro 'til closing time and works off his resultant hangover next day by intimidating and aggravating his employees on the job.

²⁵⁹ "Chrysler Goes on Legal Kick," *444 News*, June 4, 1967, UL444.

²⁶⁰ "Plant 2 – Not Again, Edgar?" *Worker's Unity* #2, October, 1970, UL444.

His antics don't stop in the shop but continue on after working hours against his employees who strongly object to his presence being forced on them outside the shop. This sometimes encourages disastrous actions from the employees - on one occasion this individual encountered employees who sooner than accept his presence and threats just upset his chair and upset his brew, and tore his shirt.

While under the influence, he'll pretend to be an all around good guy by promising employees he'll clear their record cards and such. But, when confronted with reality the next day, he refuses and denies his promises.

The paper cautioned: "Don't drink with him; don't talk to him outside the plant; if he bothers you outside, call the police; don't buy his phoney good guy make-up; don't do him any favours because he's only using you; pity this mental hang-up."²⁶¹

Despite this advice, union officials were not always above their own tavern altercations with management personnel. Gary Parent recalled one election night party when the arrival of four Chrysler Labour Relations officers at the festivities triggered a brawl. What started the incident? "Them being there." No discipline was issued for the brawl, which was consistent with how these off-hours incidents were customarily handled.²⁶²

Worker-supervisor violence was not restricted to the bars. Workers occasionally assaulted supervisors in the plant as well. Both publications of the time and the present-day recollections of Chrysler workers give the impression that workers believed this type of violence was usually provoked by management conduct, and that this violence was often justified. As the *444 News* wrote in 1963, "When you hear of workers breaking down and crying on the job, or being carried out sick, or being restrained from punching the foreman in the nose, you can't help but wonder what gets into a guy. Work is heaped on the backs of workers to the extent that he will do it."²⁶³ In 1966, the paper wrote about "Georgie in the cushion dept. who stuck his nose in once too often and wound up in a

²⁶¹ "Engine Plant Report," *444 News*, 21 August 1969, UL444.

²⁶² Laporte and Parent, discussion.

²⁶³ Brooks, "Full Force of UAW to Correct Grievances," *444 News*, October 17, 1963, UL444.

pile of cushion springs. Sure, the worker was fired for allegedly driving him there, but every man in the dept. knows just how this foreman asks for trouble."²⁶⁴

An incident the following year involving a 16-year old employee named Kelly provides a window on what provoked on-the-job violence towards supervisors, how the company handled these situations, and how the union understood this type of violence. The reports that appear in the union newspaper are not clear as to what sparked the fight, but it seems the carnival-like atmosphere of the Christmas season, a time when alcohol flowed freely inside and outside the plant, may have played a role:

Twas the night before Christmas and the Union had asked the Company to close the plant and let the night shift out. No dice, was the answer, and so the spirit of - Peace on Earth - Goodwill to Men prevailed and little George in his red suit gave 16 year old Kelly the gate, but not until Bradt's usual foul tongue got in a few licks.

Kelly was in the plant underaged and after being told he was fired he proceed to do what many of the other people in this area have said they felt like doing. Kelly swung at Bradt several times but never landed a blow.²⁶⁵

After his firing, Kelly moved to Prince Edward Island. While he apparently never actually struck Bradt, the incident still qualified as an assault under civil law. Chrysler took the incident seriously enough to pay for police to go to PEI and bring the boy back to Ontario handcuffed to a detective. According to the union, the fracas was the fault of both sides, and two employees had to intervene to "prevent the white shirts from clobbering the boy. Both Shelley and Dupuis were discharged for their part in trying to break it up."²⁶⁶

The union's defence of Kelly included vociferous attacks on Bradt's character and supervisory ability. In their words, "Numerous complaints have been made to top management about the attitude of Mr. Bradt ever since he quit the union plant chairmanship and went on Supervision. Prior to that the Company complained about his

²⁶⁴ Brooks, "Improvement In Management's Attitude," *444 News*, July 15, 1966, UL444.

²⁶⁵ Brooks, "Chrysler Goes on Legal Kick."

²⁶⁶ Brooks, "Chrysler Goes on Legal Kick."

attitude towards the Company when he was a Union Rep.²⁶⁷ The union also alleged that Bradt had been driving his car recklessly near the plant without penalty. The charges were eventually dropped by Chrysler, but not until Kelly had spent 12 days behind bars.

The union argued that that workers' violence against supervisors was an understandable reaction to poor management, and that it was incumbent on management not to risk the wrath of Windsor Chrysler workers:

The company claims that they charged Kelly because their foremen are afraid of their lives when they leave the plant at night. The Union replied that of the hundreds of foremen there may be a few afraid and that is because they know they are rotten beyond the call of duty and could expect people to lose their tempers. If a foremen acts halfway decent with his men, he has nothing to fear.

Corporation foremen have hit lads in the plant and could have been convicted of assault. The better part of wisdom told the Union to keep the matter within the Chrysler family and that's where it stayed. The new policy of the Corporation's leaves us no choice but to support charges laid by the members against violent foremen and bring them to trial.²⁶⁸

The union closed by cautioning members not to argue with foremen and to report any threats or violence by supervisors.

The testimony of workers also indicates that assaults on foremen were seen as justified under certain circumstances. Gary Parent said, of the reaction to such incidents: "if it was an asshole ... there would be a celebration. If it was a supervisor generally seen as a 'good guy that got smacked,' then there was another reaction: "A different ballgame."²⁶⁹ As the Kelly incident suggests, workers saw violence as a resource, a last resort that reined in out-of-control overseers in a way management would not or could not. Gord Gray told the story of a particularly difficult supervisor he had while working on the trim line in 1981. The supervisor, a "confrontational" person who read the hyper-macho survivalist *Soldier of Fortune* magazine on his breaks repeatedly threatened

²⁶⁷ Brooks, "Chrysler Goes on Legal Kick."

²⁶⁸ Brooks, "Chrysler Goes on Legal Kick."

²⁶⁹ Laporte and Parent, discussion.

Gray, saying "You're a piece of shit ... I'm gonna fuck you up ... I'm gonna punch you in the head."²⁷⁰

After about a year of this treatment, Gray was ready to "blow up," so he secured a transfer to another part of the plant. Unfortunately for him, the supervisor was soon transferred into his new area. Gray warned his union representative "something's going to happen, someone's going to hurt him." If the retaliation were not a physical assault, Gray thought, perhaps a disgruntled worker would slash the supervisor's tires, another way workers struck back at unpopular foremen. Eventually, one workday when Gray was not in the plant, a confrontation erupted between the supervisor and Gray's work partner. The work partner seriously assaulted the supervisor with "fists and boots," and the supervisor was taken out of the plant on a stretcher and missed an extended period of time.

According to Gray, the supervisor's privileged position within Chrysler's corporate structure, as the brother-in-law of a plant superintendent, insulated him from the type of company discipline that may have forestalled the attack; in his words, "Management knew he was a total jerk and didn't deal with it." Gray also pointed out that there was "no training for supervisors like there is now." Gray's work partner faced assault charges after the beating, but won the case when the court considered the supervisor's provocations a mitigating factor. While the incident was violent, it was not surprising, and was seen by many in the plant as the reaction the supervisor's actions deserved. Gray concluded, "everybody saw it coming ... A lot of people felt good about what happened, about taking a beating as bad as he did."²⁷¹

Sometimes workers struck back at supervisors in more creative ways. The Lucier brothers were among Chrysler's most notorious supervisors, famed for tormenting workers verbally and plotting to have them fired or suspended. One worker painted murals throughout the engine plant, a project the company paid him for in an effort to beautify the dirty conditions. He painted the glass doors of the Luciers' office in a

²⁷⁰ Gray, discussion.

²⁷¹ Gray, discussion.

Western-style OK Corral motif, an image that emphasized masculinity and confrontation. Brothers Bob, Roy, and Vern would congregate in front of this backdrop. One day, they left their coffees unattended and the word went out up and down the lines to keep an eye on the Lucier brothers. Their coffee had been drugged, and “whether it was THC, windowpane, mescaline...about 20 minutes later, they were flying high. ” The brothers were hospitalized. Police were called in to search workers’ lockers, but no one was ever caught. One of the Lucier brothers stayed off work for an extended period of time, while another went to work at the General Motors transmission plant. Even fellow supervisors, who believed that hard-liners like the Luciers made their own jobs more difficult, commented that the incident “looks good on those idiots.”²⁷²

The union publications of the time show workers drawing on awareness that supervisory overreach could be met with retributive violence. Writers leveraged violence’s rhetorical force, raising the spectre of physical assault to warn foremen to change their conduct. An engine plant bulletin from 1970 mentions “one young supervisor on midnites, who is going into the bathrooms and the plant, trying to find someone sleeping or away from their work station. Perhaps Mr. Lebouefe should be on guard for barrels rolling down stairs when he makes his rounds of the washrooms.”²⁷³ A Plant 3 bulletin from 1978 warns:

a particular general foreman who likes to go around bragging about the discipline he gives out and refers to the workers as F...Ups. My advice to this particular arrogant and ignorant parasite is that if you think that the metal shop brothers are going to continue to put up with your attitude then you are going to find yourself "TITS UP." [i.e., seriously injured or dead; quotation marks in original]²⁷⁴

One reason workers may have believed violence was justified in certain cases was that they saw violence as an effective tool that modified supervisory conduct in real and noticeable ways. Gord Gray recalled a “remarkable” supervisor who treated him nicely. When he asked his coworkers why his supervisor was so nice, he was told that the man had been beaten up a few years earlier and spent significant time outside the

²⁷² Gray, discussion.

²⁷³ *444 Engine Plant Bulletin*, 26 April 1970, UL444.

²⁷⁴ *Plant 3 Bulletin*, 3 October 1978, UL444.

plant recuperating. When he came back from this trauma, his attitude towards his workers had changed.²⁷⁵ Though rare, violence was the ultimate resource workers in Windsor plants employed to retaliate or intervene against supervisors that they felt had crossed a line.

This violence was not intended to overthrow the workplace power structure, but was one of a variety of tactics workers used to enforce accepted norms of behaviour, or what the historian E.P. Thompson called a “moral economy” of violence.²⁷⁶ In Windsor Chrysler plants, where, according to Jim Monk, there was a “war being waged” over production rates, the length of the workday, and working conditions, workers employed several strategies to control supervisors, temporarily upset the hierarchy of the plant, gain an advantage, or simply blow off steam.²⁷⁷ These included direct action, such as sit-downs, walkouts, sabotage, and vandalism. These incidents were so common Chrysler senior management sent letters to UAW Canada officials every few weeks detailing them. In 1971 alone, for example, 68 incidents of sabotage at Chrysler Canada plants appear in these reports, almost all of which caused work stoppages and the loss of production, along with 37 walkouts and 18 sit-downs.²⁷⁸

At times, the distinction between workers employing direct on-the-job action and workers using violence and harassment against supervisors was blurred. For example, consider one slowdown Jim Monk participated in while working a job inflating tires and then loading them on an assembly line. The time study men had set a target for the work that the workers found intolerable, so they employed slowdowns and harassment in order to maintain three workers on the job, not two, and improve working conditions:

We used every considerable form of slowdown we could think of to prevent them making production with six men, let alone three. We

²⁷⁵ Gray, discussion.

²⁷⁶ On the concept of moral economy, see E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century." *Past & Present* 50, no. 1 (1971).

²⁷⁷ Jim Monk, "Working on an Assembly Line," in Walter Johnson, ed., *Working in Canada* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1983), 49.

²⁷⁸ The incidents of May 1971 are discussed in John McGivney to Dennis McDermott, 11 June 1971. Box 253, File 8, Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (hereafter cited as CAW); Box 253, File 8, CAW.

tormented our foremen so much that he had a nervous breakdown and was removed from our department, and put on the night shift to recuperate.²⁷⁹

The dispute came to a head when Monk and his coworkers initiated a sit-down, which was supported by workers from parts of the plant. Chrysler made the improvements the group demanded.²⁸⁰

Monk and his coworkers were not the only ones employing psychological warfare. During one campaign of harassment in the chassis division, workers broke into a foreman's office, removed his record cards, poured glue on his files, and removed his schedule sheets "for the third time in one shift." Less than one month later, the power tools locker was found jammed with a piece of wood. The door had to be forced and the lock replaced. Eight days after that, the wires of the area's public address system were cut, something that had been done several times already: "To this date this calendar year the cost of repairs to the system has been \$5,000."²⁸¹ Some workers went a step further and attacked their supervisor's personal property. During a midnight shift at the Windsor Assembly Plant in March 1973, the general foreman of the Maintenance Division learned that his leased car "had been sprayed with a white spray bomb on the right side (fenders, doors, quarter panels, tires, and both rear tail lights). Also, there were derogatory statements on the door."²⁸²

Violence among co-workers and towards supervisors, then, was one tool among many that these workers employed to defend their prerogatives as workingmen in the hypermasculine environment of the auto factories. As was the case at Dodge Main, violence at work in Windsor Chrysler plants was not aberrant, bizarre, or senseless. It was just the opposite: in both Detroit and Windsor plants, violence was built into labour processes, workplace practices, and the shop-floor culture. The major differences between Dodge Main and Windsor's Chrysler plants with respect to violence is that first, individual violence occurred more sparingly in Windsor, an extreme resource workers

²⁷⁹ Monk, "Working on an Assembly Line," 53.

²⁸⁰ Monk, "Working on an Assembly Line," 53.

²⁸¹ McGivney to McDermott, 20 October 1971. Box 253, File 8, CAW.

²⁸² McGivney to McDermott, 4 February 1973. Box 253, File 7, CAW.

occasionally used either rhetorically or actually, while violence at Dodge Main rose to endemic levels; and second, the severity of individual violence was greater in Detroit plants, with stabbings and shootings occurring far more often. Violence in Windsor occurred in a confrontational, but functional plant, while violence at Dodge Main occurred in the context of a plant plagued by Chrysler's economic pressures, racism, the collapse of the UAW's racial liberalism, and Detroit's urban crisis. This underlines just how crucial racism and the national context were to the situation in the two cities and their plants, and thus the corresponding levels of violence at work that occurred in each.

Workers in Windsor experienced far less violence in their lives, both on the job and off. Outside the plant, Windsor workers lived in safer neighbourhoods. Unlike Detroit, the city of Windsor was not confronted by white flight, corporate disinvestment, urban uprisings, and a spiraling crime rate in the 1960s and 1970s. At work, Windsor workers faced less violence from the labour process. While workers were injured and killed on the job in Windsor, working conditions were safer than in Detroit's decrepit, dysfunctional Chrysler plants. Different labour relations and industry dynamics, especially after the Auto Pact came into effect, headed off the worst management excesses that were seen in Detroit during the same period, enabled the union to take a stronger, more confrontational approach with Chrysler Canada management, and provided a level of plant-level job security unknown in Detroit. The pact kept capital, jobs, and production in Windsor, and created a context in which Windsor workers' collective job action was more likely to succeed. Nationalism, and the drive for parity or better in wages and conditions compared to their US counterparts acted as a unifying factor for Windsor workers.

The Auto Pact revitalized local 444, a more militant and democratic organization than Local 3. The provisions of Canadian contracts along with the drive for parity with the United States encouraged the union to be aggressive in improving plant conditions, and thus Windsor workers had a union better able to maintain standards on the floor and act as a vehicle for collective struggle. Unlike Local 3, Local 444 managed to incorporate, not crush, dissident challenges and was much more effective at resolving on-the-job conflict. The widespread disillusionment with an ineffective union that legitimated individual violence in Detroit was thus muted in Windsor. Meanwhile, the city

thrived on the continued presence of the automakers and the well-paid working-class jobs of autoworkers.

While the national context worked to bolster the position of the mostly white Windsor Chrysler workers and their union, they were also largely insulated from the coruscating racialized struggles that drove a crisis which ravaged the black and white workers of Detroit, its Chrysler plants, and the UAW during the same era. Racism and inequality produced the white flight that took place in Detroit in the 1950s and 1960s, which was exacerbated by the uprising of African American Detroiters in 1967 against decades of racialized underdevelopment, overcrowding, and police brutality. Structural racism and the struggles against it were other key reasons why levels of violence were higher in Detroit plants. While there was certainly racism inside Windsor plants, race was far less of a dividing issue, and the labour process was not heavily racialized.²⁸³ Nationalism, conversely, acted as a unifying factor for workers in their struggles with the company, government, and International Union. All of these factors combined to make the lives of Windsor Chrysler workers, spared the crises of a city in revolt and a collapsing industrial order, generally much safer and saner than that of their counterparts across the river.

Conversely, the hollowing out of central Detroit created a crime wave that visited violence on many Dodge Main workers outside and inside the factory. Plant after plant left the city of Detroit, deepening the city's economic crisis and pressuring UAW locals such as Dodge Main's Local 3 to acquiesce to a high-volume, violently unsafe system of production. The workers brought in to carry out this high-stress, dangerous system of car production were overwhelmingly black workers who enjoyed fewer benefits and protections than the mostly workers who preceded them. The combination of the crisis in the streets, boardrooms, and union offices, and the increased violence of the labour process produced increased individual violence in Detroit's Chrysler factories. That violence, in turn, created more fear, conflict, and distrust in the plants, deepening the shop-floor crisis and spurring yet more violence. As the industrial order at Dodge Main

²⁸³ On racism in Windsor auto plants, see *Naraine v. Ford Motor Co. Ltd.*, BOI 96-023 (1996), https://archive.org/details/boi96_023, last accessed 18 June 2014.

collapsed under the weight of several racialized strains, the factory that had once been Chrysler's flagship became a "Wild West" marked by lawlessness and individualized violence.

This structural crisis did not exist in Windsor's Chrysler factories, where national and local conditions created a workplace that, while it boiled with rough masculinity and class conflict, was functional and responsive to worker action in a way that Detroit's Chrysler factories were not. Violence in Windsor was a part of a system of understood roles and practices, a system that endured largely intact until the late 1970s. Comparing violence at work in the Chrysler plants of Windsor and Detroit underlines that it was not simply the product of individual conflicts and choices, but instead a phenomenon influenced by structural factors industrial, local, and national.

Chapter 4.

“The Constant Companion of All That Earn Their Living Here”: Responses to Workplace Violence in Chrysler Plants

Willie Brookins was hungry. On the night of 7 September 1967, Brookins, a stock checker with 17 years seniority at Dodge Main, walked up to the plant gate at the end of his lunch break. He carried a paper bag. He showed the bag's contents to the plant guard stationed at the gate -- two hot sausages, purchased at a nearby deli -- and passed through.

As Brookins continued walking to his spot on the assembly line, a second guard demanded Brookins show him the bag, hinting that perhaps it contained a bomb. Brookins ignored the guard and got on an elevator. The second guard followed Brookins onto the elevator. When Brookins got off on the third floor, so did the second guard. He watched Brookins work for a while and then phoned for the captain of the plant guards.

When the captain arrived, an altercation broke out between Brookins and the two guards. One guard allegedly dumped Brookins's meal and stomped it into the factory floor. According to another source, Brookins hit the captain in the arm with a pair of wire cutters and punched him in the face with his fist. The plant guards retreated and called the Hamtramck police to arrest Brookins.

When the officers arrived, “they were greeted by a hail of washers, bolts and nuts and catcalls thrown at them by the workers on the line.” Instead of being arrested, Brookins was taken to the Labor Relations office before being sent home.²⁸⁴

Four days later, Brookins was called back into the plant and fired. In addition to the industrial discipline, Brookins was charged with felonious assault and arrested. He paid a \$500 bond to secure his release. If convicted, the married father of four faced up to five years in prison. The assault charge also made Brookins ineligible to collect state unemployment insurance.²⁸⁵

A year later, after two criminal trials, Brookins had been found not guilty of assault, but had not been reinstated to his job. DRUM alleged, in the feature story of the very first issue of its newsletter, that Local 3 had abandoned Brookins, claiming that Brookins’s steward now chided him for “making it hard for all of us” and that black Local vice-president Andy Hardy had told Brookins “you should not have gotten a black lawyer to handle your case.” DRUM’s implied message was that the union was punishing Brookins for having challenged the racial hierarchy of the plant. “Damn the grievance procedure,” *DRUM* concluded its article on the Brookins case. The headline atop the story asked black workers “Will You Be Next?”²⁸⁶

High-ranking UAW officials had not forgotten Brookins’s case either. UAW staffer Tony Conole wrote to UAW Chrysler Department head Doug Fraser in October 1968, noting Brookins’s acquittal and discussing whether the UAW should pursue Brookins’s grievance again. Conole warned that the Brookins incident “was one of the sensitive areas utilized by DRUM for propaganda purposes” and reopening it “might give them

²⁸⁴ This account of the Brookins case is based on his grievance, found in Box 79, File 12, L3C; “Will You Be Next?” *DRUM*, volume 1 number 1; and “Racism Costs,” *DRUM*, volume 1 number 13.

²⁸⁵ “Racism Costs,” *DRUM*.

²⁸⁶ “Racism Costs,” *DRUM*.

another opportunity to propagandize on the matter.”²⁸⁷ The UAW declined to file a second grievance on Brookins’s behalf.

Willie Brookins’s case clearly indicates that some incidents of workplace violence echoed long after the particular fight or attack was quelled, prompting responses and critiques from workers, unionists, and management. When Brookins clashed with the plant guards, rank-and-file workers employed direct action and anti-authoritarian violence in support of a co-worker. Radical workers seized on the incident to excoriate Chrysler and the UAW. Local 3 and the UAW, caught between grieving on behalf of a fired worker and combating radicals, sought to maintain their legitimacy as the only vehicle for autoworkers’ struggles. Chrysler used the police and courts to subdue a violent worker and send an example to others, while also making changes that it hoped would prevent similar incidents, such as adding more black foremen and stepping up its hiring of the so-called “hard core unemployed” of Detroit’s inner-city neighbourhoods.

In this chapter, I draw out the ongoing impact violence had on the automotive workplace by looking at the responses to violence at work. There are two important points to note when considering what was done about violence. First, as the opening section of this chapter will show, plant-level responses, the practices of security, discipline, grievance, and returning offenders to work, failed to seriously reduce levels of in-plant violence. Second, because of this failure, violence remained a significant part of workplace culture. Therefore, violence on the job -- the very definition of which was contested --shaped the outlook of those struggling to control these workplaces, as examining the diary of a union president, the leaflets of radical autoworkers, and the initiatives of automakers demonstrates. Workplace violence was more than just a product of tensions on the job or crime in the plant. It was a productive force in its own right: a dynamic affecting the consciousness of individuals and groups that influenced their strategies and actions.

²⁸⁷ Tony Conole to Doug Fraser, 8 October 1968. Box 24, File 31, Local 3 Correspondence 1968-69, CDC. The letter also notes that the International never received material from the local after Brookins first grievance, which may suggest that the local was lax in grieving Brookins’s firing. It may also suggest that the international was considering going over the heads of local leadership on the matter.

Let us begin by looking at primary responses. How did the company and the union deal with incidents of violence and with workers accused of committing a violent act? These acts were expressly banned by Chrysler policy. The 1960 company-issued “Guide to Good Conduct for Chrysler Employees” states, “Certain . . . acts of misconduct are considered sufficiently serious to warrant no less than an immediate suspension and disciplinary layoff (Example: Fighting).” The “Acts of Misconduct” include several different forms of violence: “4. Inflicting grievous bodily injury upon any other employee or any person.” “5. Assaulting any member of supervision.” “9. Fighting.” “19. Threatening, intimidating, or coercing supervision or employee,” in addition to proscriptions against abusive conduct towards supervisors and horseplay.²⁸⁸ In both Detroit and Windsor, Chrysler employed a range of frontline responses to violent incidents, including suspensions, discharges, and police involvement. Eventually, these situations were often resolved with company discipline and the union’s defence of a disciplined worker, both of which are detailed in grievance records.²⁸⁹

At Dodge Main, Chrysler’s plant protection staff, sometimes reinforced by Hamtramck police, was the primary respondent to workplace violence. Guards snuffed out violent incidents and escorted workers to the Labor Relations office or off plant property entirely, sometimes into the custody of the police. However, this system often worked to create conflict and violence, not prevent it. For example, at Dodge Main, most guards were white, and the workforce they oversaw was largely black. This was a sore point with radical workers who saw it as evidence of the “plantation” system they worked in.²⁹⁰ Among DRUM’s formal demands, for instance, were that 50% of all guards be black and that “every time a black worker is removed from plant premises that he be led by a black brother.”²⁹¹ Mainstream unionists echoed this point. Alonzo Newkirk, Willie

²⁸⁸ “Guide to Good Conduct for Chrysler Employees,” Box 121, File 5, UAW Region 7 Files, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit (hereafter cited as UR7C).

²⁸⁹ Of course, not every incident of workplace violence resulted in discipline; many were likely never witnessed or reported. Nor did the union grieve every disciplinary action meted out for a violent incident. Probationary employees were new hires who had yet to accrue 90 days service at Chrysler, and so were not officially UAW members. If fired for a violent incident, these workers would lose their jobs without a grievance being filed on their behalf.

²⁹⁰ “Pressure,” *DRUM*, volume 1 number 2.

²⁹¹ “DRUM Demands,” *DRUM*, volume 1 number 9.

Brookins's shop steward, protested to Liska in 1969 that "white plant protection men should not be called when black workers are in trouble because it provokes an incident. Officers should talk to management about having black men come to take a black man out."²⁹²

After a violent situation was suppressed, Chrysler discipline would follow, usually taking the form of a suspension or a firing. The union would grieve virtually any discipline meted out to a worker accused of a violent incident, no matter how severe. The outcome of grievances filed by workers accused of violent incidents varied.²⁹³ The success of a grievance depended on the strength of management's case, the level of provocation of the violent incident, and the griever's work record and character, as perceived by management and the union. Political horse-trading between Local 3 and Chrysler management was also a factor in the resolution of grievances. As we explored in Chapter 2, during the 1960s a formal grievance system superseded older, informal methods of conflict resolution that were rooted in workers' power to slow or halt production. With that power greatly diminished, union representatives had less authority with management. They now resorted to "pleading a case" instead of "bargaining by threat," according to Ed Liska. To resolve one matter in a worker's favour, then, a union representative would often have to acquiesce to the company's wishes in another.²⁹⁴ All of this meant that a worker might be reinstated or permanently dismissed after being accused of a horrific incident of violence.

While the final disposition could vary greatly, Chrysler's policy was to fire the aggressor in a fight; this is similar to the practice observed by Joan Sangster in the

²⁹² Liska Reports, November 1969, Box 2, File 5, ELC. When blacks were moved out of plant protection, radicals propagandized that this was a precursor to a violent campaign against black workers by plant protection staff. "Well DRUM has proof that they now have teargas, night-sticks, riot helmets and the new untested chemical MACE which might blind you on plant property . . . they know no true black brother would use this gas and mace on his own brothers," in "Prepare For the Worst," *DRUM*, volume 1 number 8.

²⁹³ It is impossible to exactly track the success of the grievances filed by Local 3, as most of the grievance files do not include a statement of the grievance's eventual outcome. However, enough of them contain handwritten notes and other information about their disposition to enable the drawing of some general conclusions about the responses to violent incidents that were brought to the grievance arena.

²⁹⁴ Jefferys, *Management and Managed*, 165.

Ontario arbitration cases she examined.²⁹⁵ There is also evidence that incidents involving a weapon were treated more seriously. Clyde Coulter, for example, was fired after allegedly stabbing a coworker several times during an argument and then fleeing the plant. The union concluded that the facts did not warrant pursuing his grievance beyond the initial stage. When workers Burns and Shelton came to blows, both were discharged. Burns was returned to work but Shelton, who threatened Burns with a knife, was not.²⁹⁶

While the handling of violent incidents varied, the overall effect was that many workers accused of serious violence were returned to work, and thus the company and the union made no real progress in making the workplace safer. In 1972, a Dodge Main worker named T. Felder's foreman asked him why he kept missing jobs. Felder allegedly "told the supervisor to stop f-----g with him and struck the supervisor with his fist on the back of the head and the middle of the back. After again telling the supervisor not to f--- with him employee Felder struck the supervisor a third time."²⁹⁷ Despite the severity of the incident, Felder was returned with the only the loss of his seniority as penalty.

Often, grievances arising from discipline for violent incidents were resolved through less formal channels. "Will talk to him" or "Will interview" are common handwritten notes on grievance files. Rome Kinderick's discharge grievance was resolved with a combination of these informal methods, Alcoholics Anonymous, and counseling. In 1971, Kinderick, a man with over 25 years seniority at the plant, allegedly approached a female co-worker "and became abusive and directed derogatory remarks toward this female employee and threatened to kill her." Kinderick's record featured many previous discharges, but the grievance file was marked "this man should be talked to" by Local 3 staff with the recommendation: "COUNSEL AND AA."²⁹⁸ Other workers

²⁹⁵ Taylor quoted in Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 92; Joan Sangster, "Just Horseplay? Masculinity and Workplace Grievances in Fordist Canada, 1947-1970s." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Labor and Working Class History of the Americas (LAWCHA), New York City, 7 June 2013.

²⁹⁶ Grievance AE104-104, Box 74, File 4, L3C; Officer Level Grievance Meetings, August-September 1965, Box 1, File 8, ELC.

²⁹⁷ Grievance 72-1073-756, Box 99, File 5, L3C.

²⁹⁸ Grievance 71-572-438, Box 94, File 5, L3C.

were also occasionally referred to AA or the Greater Detroit Council on Alcoholism. However, most employees who were returned to work after being disciplined for violence were simply put back on to the job with no more than a warning to improve their behavior.

Workers accused of serious incidents would often end up in court, as Willie Brookins did. In 1963, E. Mattson was discharged "because of a drinking problem and a fracas with the Chief of Plant Protection. Mattson threatened the Plant Protection man with a knife. He was taken to a civil court and charged with assault and battery and was found guilty."²⁹⁹ George Dowd was fired and returned to work several times, but he was finally discharged permanently after being found guilty in court for threatening a Labor Relations director. Even after the conviction, Liska tried to get him back to work at Dodge Main but the Labor Relations director, William Prokopy, was "not budging" because there had been "too many threats in the past. Prokopy said that he had his home guarded all night by police who circled the house all the time after George Dowd threatened over the phone to kill him."³⁰⁰ The incident shows just how far Local 3 would go in some cases to return workers to the plant. It also provides evidence of the impact of workplace violence on the lives of Chrysler managers, and how seriously they, and the police, viewed it.

Many workers accused of violence, however, were simply returned to work in the same plant. Liska's diary discusses Tiny, a worker at Dodge Main who "LAST WEEK BEAT UP A GOOD MAN AND IT TOOK 5 MEN TO TAKE TINY OFF THE GUY, HE WOULD HAVE KILLED HIM. YET NOTHING WAS DONE, EVERYONE COVERED FOR TINY."³⁰¹ Instead of being fired, Tiny was moved into a different area, an action that co-workers and DRUM still protested. No further discipline appears to have been imposed.

²⁹⁹ Officer Level Grievance Meetings, August-September 1965, Box 1, File 8, ELC.

³⁰⁰ Liska Reports, March 1970, Box 2, File 10, ELC.

³⁰¹ Liska Reports, October 1969, Box 2, File 5, ELC. The same report notes that in Tiny's area, one worker had been fired for being abusive towards a supervisor and another fired for beating up a plant guard. The union got both back to work. Emphasis in original.

Foremen accused of violence towards workers were also regularly returned to work, a practice that radicals repeatedly condemned. *Dodge Workers Speak* asked “Is it Chrysler Policy to Have Mad Dog Foremen?”:

Another foreman pulled a knife on a worker. The foreman and the worker were both suspended. But the foreman wasn't really suspended, he was just transferred. He went to 9190. Then he turned up working in the employment office. Now he's crawling around somewhere else.³⁰²

Another issue discussed the case of a foreman who:

was sent to Dodge Main because he was in a fight at another Chrysler plant. He was then sent to Dodge Main on day shift. He was involved in a fight on days and pulled a knife on a man.

When he became a foreman at Dodge on night shift (he was transferred to nights for fighting), his first group walked out on him for his mad-dog tactics, causing line one to shut down that day.

In his next group, he got into a fight with a woman employee. In Feb. this year, he got into a fight with a repairman. He tried to hit him in the head with a couple of seat belt motors. Then he tried to hit the repairman in the head with a 2 by 4 plank, which Labor Relations took from him.

The repairman was fired but the foreman never missed a day. He was shipped to 9190 the next day and was sent home because his presence was causing agitation. He was then sent back to Foreman Training for the second time. Then he was put in the employment office at Dodge on days. No one wanted him around there. Now he is back on second shift, fourth floor, 9150, where he is bound to start more trouble.³⁰³

In 1968, the *Inner City Voice* reported that a white foreman at Dodge Main threw a welding gun at a black worker, who assaulted the foreman. Both were suspended five days, but the foreman was back at work the next day, prompting workers to walk out in protest.³⁰⁴

³⁰² “Is It Chrysler Policy to Have Mad-Dog Foremen?” *Dodge Workers Speak* 61, March 14, 1973, Box 44, Local 3 – UAW – General, 1973, UL3C.

³⁰³ “A Letter,” *Dodge Workers Speak* 67, 1973, UL444.

³⁰⁴ “Racism at Chrysler,” *Inner City Voice*, March 1968.

Many workers and foremen returned to work after being accused of serious violence, while underlying factors that sparked that violence remained unaddressed. This contributed to the prevalence of violence and dysfunction in Detroit plants. For example, a *Time* magazine article about violence at Dodge Main claimed “union officers insist that the fear spread by such incidents has damaged plant discipline because foremen shut their eyes to infractions rather than risk personal attack.”³⁰⁵ Many foremen carried guns on the floor, either for protection or to intimidate their workers. Some Chrysler personnel even insisted that a foreman had a right to preemptively assault employees. Discussing a foreman who threatened a worker with an iron bar, Labor Relations representative Carl Paulsgrove asserted: “Any Foreman or Supervisor has a right to defend himself against any employee, and even attack the employee if necessary if in the supervisor’s judgment the employee is a threat to him.”³⁰⁶ For frontline managers, like workers, the absence of effective collective solutions to day-to-day violence encouraged more individual violence.

In Windsor’s more functional plants, violence was a less urgent concern, but, as we saw in Chapter 3, it was an acknowledged part of shop-floor power relations and workplace culture. Workers fired for fighting usually got their jobs back, albeit often after an extended period off work. Even when workers hit foremen, Local 444 could usually return them to the plant, although it took six months to a year on average. Gary Parent and Rick Laporte recalled three occasions when Chrysler criminally prosecuted Windsor workers for striking supervisors. Two of the incidents occurred on the job, one off of it. At least one of the prosecuted workers was returned to work, having been acquitted in court because his supervisor was found to have provoked the assault. While workers fired for violence sometimes got their jobs back, workers fired for theft were almost never rehired. This suggests that theft was beyond the pale of shop-floor morality, while violence was not. Perhaps theft, a furtive activity that directly injured company profits, was viewed as irredeemable, while the hypermasculine culture of the plants rendered violence an understandable, “boys will be boys” offence.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ “Black Rage on the Auto Lines,” *Time*, April 11, 1969, 109.

³⁰⁶ “Jordon Sims Appeal Board Case 5351,” Box 27, File 22, CDC.

³⁰⁷ Laporte and Parent, discussion; Gray, discussion.

In both Windsor and Detroit, frontline responses to workplace violence reinforced existing dynamics. In both cases, workers accused of violent incidents were often returned to work. There was no larger plan to resolve conflicts and reduce violence beyond the grinding, adversarial mechanism of the grievance process. In Windsor, responses to violence underlined violence's understood place in work culture as an occasional "part of the job," if not one to be officially encouraged. In Detroit, the effectiveness of the union at reinstating workers accused of violence, combined with the lack of meaningful action from all parties in creating a safer, saner work environment, made Detroit Chrysler factories iron cages that locked violence in instead of keeping it out.

UAW dissident Jordon Sims, later a UAW leader at Local 961, eloquently described the miasma created by the ongoing violence in Detroit's Chrysler plants: "On all shifts and in all the departments and among all of our people, this same feeling of apprehension, uncertainty, distrust, and fear are the constant companion of all that earn their living here."³⁰⁸ Sims was writing about work at Chrysler's Eldon Avenue Axle Plant, but he could have just as easily been describing Dodge Main. Ed Liska, president of Dodge Main's Local 3 during the critical years 1968-70, kept a diary chronicling his workdays. His diary is suffused with stories of violence in the plant, at the union hall, and on the streets. It shows the serious challenges in-plant violence posed for the local leader and how that violence influenced his outlook. Liska's response, guided by his conflation of militancy, race, and violence, produced a reactionary leadership that prioritized order over addressing the issues responsible for Dodge Main's discontent.

Liska was elected president in 1968, as the white leader of a unity slate that included black unionists on the Local 3 executive in exchange for their delivery of the votes of black workers. As president, Liska devoted much of his time responding to violent incidents. In June 1969, for example, he had to deal with the case of Steve Barry, a worker fired after he threatened foremen and flashed a knife. There was also a report that a group of workers were going to physically attack an abusive supervisor unless he

³⁰⁸ Jordon Sims, "Employee-Foreman Confrontation Points Up Need For Improvements," *The Criterion*, February 12, 1969, Box 27, File 22, CDC.

was transferred out of the department. The next month, Liska was confronted by the cases of a woman threatening a man's life over an alleged theft, Barry pointing a gun at a foreman, a foundry employee shooting five policemen one weekend, and an incident of racial abuse that could have led to a shooting. In his diary, Liska concluded: "Explosive situations going on."³⁰⁹

One of the most combustible elements in the Dodge Main mix was in-plant racism. Racial tension was rampant at the plant when Liska took office, and DRUM became a force at the plant just as Liska became president. In August 1969, he was called on to respond to an incident where General Foreman Ed Sowa allegedly called worker William Lewis a "black motherfucker." This same month was marked by assaults on management members by DRUM activists Rushie Forge and Chuck Wooten. As we have seen, neither racism nor DRUM was the sole factor producing violence in the plant. But as a white unionist leading a mostly black membership, challenged both by in-plant violence and radical black power insurgents, Liska saw the situation in racial terms.³¹⁰

Thus, DRUM and black violence became inseparable in Liska's thinking. Among his first diary entries was a report on key DRUM leaders that was particularly concerned with their possible connections to violence. While Liska recorded almost nothing about DRUM's program or its critiques of Chrysler and the UAW, he repeatedly noted links between DRUM and violence. The month after the Forge and Wooten incidents, Liska wrote about DRUM member Sidney Lewis beating up a supervisor and putting him in the hospital. When confronted by DRUM's radical challenge, Liska was primarily concerned with repressing its violent potential. Therefore, he focused on maintaining order rather than responding to DRUM's critique by implementing needed reforms.

Incidents of racialized violence at Dodge Main that escalated into major disturbances fuelled Liska's fears. In September 1969, an argument between a black worker and a plant nurse turned into a violent brawl in which workers threw heavy automobile wheels at plant protection men and Hamtramck Police were called in. From

³⁰⁹ Liska Reports, August 1969, Box 2, File 3, ELC; see also Liska Reports, June-July 1969, Box 2, File 3, ELC.

³¹⁰ Liska Reports, August 1969.

this "Near Racial Riot," as he called it in his diary, Liska concluded that "Management must hire Negro plant protection men. At present they only have a few on the staff."³¹¹ When a similar incident occurred just two months later, Liska feared that this was no spontaneous eruption, but a co-ordinated action by the plant's black workers:

A young black man had a problem with a white skill man. About 2 AM, he went into the washroom and hit the skill man in the face. The black man was taken to the office and discharged. He was taken to the plant protection office and he was quiet but played a delaying game. He wanted to talk and kept looking at his watch. Near 3 AM the police were called and when it was 3 AM he went with the police. This is the time the plant second shift end their work and were coming out, this black man with the two policemen on his side then began to scream "police brutality etc." Within seconds others blacks joined in and hit the policemen and damaged the car. Other blacks in the plant on upper floor threw objects at the car, damaging it some more. Police were called and they had to use mace in order to bring things under control. The man was taken to the police station.³¹²

Liska feared Dodge Main was about to be consumed by a race war. He quoted a fellow unionist's account of the riot that "200 young blacks at the urging of about six blacks converged on the Police and had intents of killing them. They acted like madmen."³¹³ He soon wrote that "Management ought to make up their minds to take them [black militants] on now and show they will not buckle under pressure. Buckling under Militant thinking will hurt or bring down the system in which our country prospers."³¹⁴ Even the moderate black unionists in Liska's coalition were viewed in a new light. Liska grouched: "The United Membership blacks have shown their true feelings after years of appearing loyal."³¹⁵ These unionists were being pushed by DRUM and black workers to demonstrate more forceful initiative in solving plant problems, especially racism. The challenge Liska faced was put to him bluntly in February 1970:

³¹¹ Liska Reports, September 1969, Box 2, File 5, ELC.

³¹² Liska Reports, November 1969, Box 2, File 6, ELC.

³¹³ Liska Reports, November 1969.

³¹⁴ Liska Reports, November 1969.

³¹⁵ Liska Reports, February 1970, Box 2, File 9.

"Blacks stated we have been allotted what the whites gave us in the past, now we are telling you what we want."³¹⁶

Race and violence were consistently paired in Liska's thinking. When discussing violent incidents, he invariably considered the race of the people involved. In September 1969 he noted that:

two skill people in the assembly plant had a vicious fight near the tunnel on Saturday night. It is said that one skill man cut up the tires of the other man and he found out and seeked [sic] him out and some chains were used in the vicious fight (both white men). The man who did the beating just came off supervision.³¹⁷

When discussing a worker arming himself, he again considered the situation to have racial overtones:

A fellow from Trim Shop came by saying he was involved in a fight with a young black man and that it was a bloody mess. He was hit in the eye and he hit back. Irons were tossed around before things cooled down. Both men are fired. This white man has 18 years of seniority. In the Local Hall while talking to the President, a large pistol was observed alongside his right belt line. He said the gun is for his own protection. "I ain't going to take nuthin from anybody etc."³¹⁸

Incidents like this were understood by Liska as evidence that white workers were under siege from black aggression. In August 1970, he wrote about talking to a suspended young white worker: "After talking to him and checking out the story, it has a theme [sic] what is going on in the plant." According to the worker, he and a black coworker had been arguing constantly on the shop floor. One day "the black man asked him to come to his car, after work, he had a pistol and aimed it at the white man, who somehow didn't show any fear to the black man even when he displayed the gun." The white man began carrying a gun of his own. Liska continued:

Last week, while arguing in a playful mood according to him, at the time card at quitting time, both men wrestled and the white man according to

³¹⁶ Liska Reports, February 1970.

³¹⁷ Liska Reports, September 1969, Box 2, File 4, ELC.

³¹⁸ Liska Reports, November 1969, Box 2, File 6, ELC.

witnesses pulled out a gun and fired three times at the black man, missing him. When things cooled down, and the man brought to the office, he was searched but the gun was not found.

Management suspended the white worker, and according the plant committee, he risked losing his job, as they believed black workers would refuse to work with him. To Liska, this was another case of white workers being unfairly penalized for defending themselves in the face of black aggression:

This is an odd case because the man actually seems to be a quiet type of person who brought the gun for protection and lost his job. While the other man who seems to be the culprit of picking on him and other whites also having a gun on person goes scott [sic] free.³¹⁹

Liska's opinion of the situation may have changed after the fired white worker violently confronted him at the union office. The man claimed he had no gun, despite 10 witnesses saying he passed his gun to an accomplice after the shooting and three shells being found at the scene. He became "belligerent," complaining that blacks get away with everything, and boasting that there was no way he had fired at the man, for he would have killed him if he did. Before he left he "kept raving about killing," and made threats to the union, warning "this is the last time I am coming to see you two about my job."³²⁰

Liska was right, of course, to see racial tensions as a crucial part of the violence at Dodge Main. But his racial paranoia blinded him to the entire picture. Liska everywhere saw signs of a violent reckoning between black and white, and viewed everything that took place at Dodge Main through that lens. He ignored other factors causing violence, such as speed-ups or structural racism. He devoted little energy to improving working conditions, tackling racism in the plant, or creating unity among black and white workers. To Liska, black workers were a group that Hardy, Local 3's black vice-president, was supposed to deliver to his coalition. Beyond that, he had little sympathy or understanding for their situation at Dodge Main. Steven Jefferys assesses Liska, a man who idolized Walter Reuther and Franklin Roosevelt, as someone whose

³¹⁹ Liska Reports, July 1970, Box 3, File 1, ELC.

³²⁰ Liska Reports, November 1971, Box 3, File 6, ELC.

“self-congratulation” and “complacency” about the UAW and race “was unacceptable to many hundreds of black workers whose outside political experiences were teaching them to stop requesting civil rights and to start fighting.” When they did begin fighting back, Liska responded with suspicion and fear.³²¹ Rather than alerting him to the underlying problems of speedup, racism, and poor working conditions, in-plant violence fostered a siege mentality in Liska.

Liska’s state of mind was reinforced by the violent crime that was everywhere around him. Reading his diaries provides a visceral sense of how the crime that gripped the city in the late 1960s and beyond instilled fear and despair in Detroiters. Liska often wrote of people he knew from Local 3 falling victim to crime:

One fellow from the body shop came over requesting some blood for his brother who also works in the body shop. Watson a grinder was shot last week while getting his auto ready to go to work early in the morning. The [person] who shot him used a large caliber gun and the bullet went inside of his chest his [sic] some vital organs. He is fighting for his life and needs a lot of blood.³²²

Another worker named Bernice “won a raffle, got her paycheck and went home early. She was attacked on the street and beaten up badly and the money taken away from her.”³²³ The murder of A. Busch must have been particularly disturbing for Liska. Just before his death, Busch visited the local and had a pleasant chat with the president:

He was in fine health and jovial mood. He talked about his boat and was awaiting to go fishing as soon as the ice melted. He was an avid fisherman.

On Wednesday Tuesday evening he was slain in an attempted holdup of a tavern. Shocking the way things are going.³²⁴

In September 1970, Liska wrote of a worker at the nearby Huber Foundry who went out for lunch and while standing by the parking lot, was shot twice. The man, a

³²¹ Jefferys, *Management and Managed*, 166.

³²² Liska Reports, February 1970, Box 2, File 9, ELC.

³²³ Liska Reports, March 1970, Box 2, File 10, ELC.

³²⁴ Liska Reports, March 1970.

worker with over 20 years seniority, died the next day. The incident prompted Liska to recall another murdered worker:

About a year ago, a paint shop worker was the first to leave the plant and ran to his auto which was parked on the company lot. Investigations reveal, he was stopped by a couple of men who robbed him of his money and his throat was cut. His body was found Sunday after inquiries from his wife who called Police that her husband did not return from work on Friday. His body was found in the car lying across the front seat and his throat cut.³²⁵

The frequent robberies and homicides that took place in the plant parking lot led Liska to think of it as a “battle ground.”³²⁶

Workplace violence did not just happen to friends or fellow members. Liska was affected by his own direct experience of danger. In the course of his workday at the Local 3 hall, workers upset over a firing or suspension often threatened Liska, either in person or over the phone. Some of these workers were carrying guns. One day in 1971, Liska pretended to have a gun in his pocket to disperse a group of “ten angry young blacks” who had gathered in his office to seek retroactive pay. “Officers felt like sitting ducks. We must do something to protect the Local Officers and Staff in the future,” wrote Liska.³²⁷ Guns were so prevalent that at a membership meeting the year before, Liska scanned the group to see who was packing heat: “Guns at the meeting were identified by the following men who toted them positively: Andy Hardy, VP. John Smith PLT Comm, Willis Marshall Anti Administration, Albert Dawkins Anti Everything.”³²⁸ Even at a UAW convention in Atlantic City, Liska found himself at gunpoint, the gun held by a Dodge Main skilled trades delegate looking for money. When Liska related this story to another delegate, the man reached into his suitcase and offered Liska a gun of his own.³²⁹

³²⁵ Liska Reports, September 1970.

³²⁶ Liska Reports, September 1970.

³²⁷ Liska Reports February 1971, Box 2, File 16, ELC.

³²⁸ Liska Reports, February 1970, Box 2, File 9, ELC.

³²⁹ Liska Reports, April 1970. Box 2, File 11, ELC.

Indeed, violence and militancy were major concerns for Liska and other UAW officials. At a fractious 1970 meeting where UAW officials discussed them, Liska stated: "If beating the hell out of SDS [Students For A Democratic Society] is what must be done, we may have to do it." It is unclear why Liska referred to SDS; there is no indication they were organizing at the plant, so perhaps Liska simply misidentified where dissent was coming from. UAW Region 1 head George Merrelli stated his concern about "Local Officers Being threatened so much." Another attendee, Gordie Buchanan, asked "What do we do if someone gets violent and before the cops come one of us gets killed, it's too late to wait for the cops."³³⁰ Buchanan then asked a UAW lawyer about carrying a gun. As Liska concluded about the work of his stewards, "it is a tough dangerous job to represent people today in this plant."³³¹ Basic safety became a serious issue, diverting time and energy from representing workers and pressing the company.

Beset by so much violence, racial conflict, and internal strife, Liska's leadership was reactive. Maintaining order dominated Liska's agenda. There were few new initiatives or sustained pressure on Chrysler to address safety, speedup, racism, or harassment. Summing up his first term in office, Liska wrote: "The past two years were probably the most turbulent in our Local #3 History. Problems of a new nature developed during the past two years which threatened the existence of the Assembly Plant."³³² His listed record of accomplishments consisted of little more than restoring financial security to the local and winning a few more grievances. No progress was made on working conditions, speedup, job security, racism, or sexism; violence and racial militancy occupied and preoccupied the Local president.

Even his claim to have restored financial health to the local was strongly contested: the title of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers' film *Finally Got The News* is a reference to their accusation that Local 3 dues money was being surreptitiously funneled to the Hamtramck Police Department to cover the department's payroll shortfall. This was the same department that harassed and assaulted DRUM

³³⁰ Liska Reports, March 1970.

³³¹ Liska Reports, July 1970, Box 3, File 1, ELC.

³³² Liska Reports, February 1970, Box 2, File 9, ELC.

members during their election campaigns against the incumbent Local 3 administration headed by Liska. In his diary notes, Liska called the Hamtramck Police “saviors of Local #3. They are close and always gave the DRUM guys trouble. They can be counted upon to do a job if needed.”³³³ Workplace violence, in-plant radicalism, and rampant crime prompted Liska to view safety, security, and order as his highest priorities. His solution was to seek a closer working relationship with those he thought could help enforce order: Chrysler management, plant protection, and local and state police, whether or not they were allies of his Local 3 membership.

In September 1970, two years after Liska assumed office, two incidents brought his fears of violence and black militancy to a head. First, about two dozen paint shop workers, joined by some workers from other departments, walked off a night shift in a wildcat, or illegal, strike. The paint shop workers expected their action would be part of a plant-wide walkout, but most other workers stayed on the job. After drinking across the street from the plant for about an hour they returned to the plant parking lot and began causing havoc. According to Liska’s account, they slashed the tires of 100 cars on the company lot, blocked a road outside the plant with a concrete bench, trash cans, and other debris, and chained the main plant gate closed. They then began hurling projectiles at the cars on the blocked street. Many workers were “irate seeing their automobiles damaged.” Some came out of the plant at 3:00 AM with bolts and hurled them at the wildcatters, who fled. Afterwards, several Molotov cocktails were found inside the plant. Liska blamed DRUM for the violence: he believed outsiders were involved in fomenting the situation, a theory he felt confirmed by his observation that influential radical organizer “General Gordon Baker was out in the morning passing out leaflets.”³³⁴

In the wake of the incident, Liska and Hardy met with Chrysler Labour Relations head William Prokopy and Dick Clancy, Dodge Main’s personnel manager. At the

³³³ Liska Reports, March 1970, Box 2, File 10, ELC.

³³⁴ Quotes and the account of the incident are from Liska Reports, September 1970, Box 2, File 16, ELC. The incident proved unpopular with Dodge Main workers, and Steven Jefferys identifies it as a turning point for the “new relationship” between Chrysler executives and Local 3 Leadership against DRUM, as a larger group of anti-militant, anti-strike workers mobilized against the wildcatters. See Jefferys, *Management and Managed*, 183.

meeting they also discussed the bomb prank outlined in Chapter Two. Management placed all supervisors and Plant Protection on 12-hour shifts to police the plant, with vital areas being watched 24 hours a day. Liska and Hardy were asked to keep the bomb threat from their workers, likely because workers would not enter the plant if they knew. The request put the two unionists in a bind. As Liska put it, "If something did develop in the plant and people were hurt or killed, how could we explain our silence?" Nor did Liska fully trust Chrysler management. He noted that "Actually, no proof of any bombs have been shown to any union representatives." Nevertheless, Liska kept his silence, and later called Clancy to suggest that the union stewards on night shift be informed of the situation so that they could help with the surveillance of the plant.

Just over a week later, the union and management met again to discuss, in Liska's words:

the violence and bomb threats at the assembly plant . . . the incident on Monday September 14th, Molotov cocktails located in the plant, parking lot violence, murderers on the loose, workers afraid to go to parking lots, narcotics, drinking, prostitution, thefts, beatings etc. at rear of bars by parking lots . . . the entire situation was discussed at length.³³⁵

Discussing "the entire situation," however, did not include a consideration of violence arising from job stress, racism at the plant, supervisory harassment, or the health and safety violations that were injuring and killing workers. The company and the union framed the problem of violence at Dodge Main in a way that reflected their shared interests in suppressing DRUM and cleaning up the crime around the plant. The other sources of violence, issues that the UAW and Chrysler may have had very different opinions about, were placed outside that frame. The meeting ended with a commitment to bring law enforcement officials into the process. Liska's summary of the commitments was "clean up the rear of the bars, police the lots more frequently, check in plant areas for bomb threats etc. On the DRUM representation, March and Johnson [DRUM activists] will be straightened out and they and others will abide by the rules."³³⁶ It is

³³⁵ Liska Reports, September 1970, Box 2, File 16, ELC.

³³⁶ Liska Reports, September 1970.

unclear whether “straightening out“ March and Johnson meant conversations, threats, firings, physical violence, or something else.

In October, the union and management met representatives of the Michigan State Police, Detroit police, Hamtramck police, and the county Sheriff’s department at a Howard Johnson’s, far from where they might be observed by Dodge Main workers, to discuss “crimes near and on the company parking lots across from the assembly plant.” While all parties expressed their concern about the situation, Liska mentioning that “the fear is gaining among workers” and that “we could lose the plant if we cannot solve this problem,” few specific plans were put forward.³³⁷ At the same time that Liska was working with Chrysler and law enforcement on the violence issue, the *Inner City Voice* accused Liska of doing nothing in local bargaining to combat racism, improve safety and working conditions for rank-and-file workers or settle grievances. The *Voice* noted that while guards in parking lots was an item on the negotiating list, Chrysler had provided union officials with greater safety and comfort, such as locks, telephones, and fans for steward rooms.³³⁸ This reinforced the notion that the union and company looked after each other, while ignoring the needs of workers.

The article also charged that corruption was a key reason why Liska was unwilling or unable to press for better conditions:

All stewards are given the right to leave and enter the plant at will. If you disbelieve call for one now. The plant committeemen are receiving double pay for their threats. Most carry their time cards in their pockets. Some let their stewards punch them in and out, giving them 11 and 12 hours a day when they are on Official Union business (which pays for loss time). Plant Protection complains daily about the gate activities but to no avail. Management, Labor Relations and Personal [sic] just call Liska to remind him that they know.³³⁹

³³⁷ Liska Reports, October 1970, Box 2, File 17, ELC.

³³⁸ UAW Contract Talks,” *Inner City Voice*, October 1970.

³³⁹ “UAW Contract Talks,” *Inner City Voice*.

Enabling union officer corruption had been a management strategy for many years, according to Jefferys.³⁴⁰

By 1972, Liska was out of power, defeated by Andy Hardy, Local 3's first black president. Despite the change in leadership, violence inside and outside the plant continued to be an issue for Local 3 until the plant closed in 1979. Executive member Joe Elliott wrote to UAW staff and Michigan Senator Donald Riegle about dangerous situations at the union hall. In 1979 then-Local 3 president John Smith put forth a resolution to a UAW convention that an impartial committee be formed to investigate "disputes involving physical contact between members of management and our union."³⁴¹

Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, violence was the crucial issue for Ed Liska. It instilled fear and mistrust in him, producing reactive policies, alienation from rank-and-file workers, especially black workers, and a tendency to view management as partners in order. One moment from 1969 poignantly conveys that alienation. After gazing at the workers streaming in and out of Dodge Main, Liska wrote:

The workers who came to work or left the plant were keenly observed by the local president. It is his feeling that 98% of them are OK. They are hard working and responsible workers who want to work and make money and expect their union leadership to [protect] their jobs and help them in times of troubles. Sometimes we spend too much time on radicals and plain nuts who only talk in general terms and destroying everything in sight [sic]. They must be heard and rolled over when decisions are made for the good and welfare of the entire membership.³⁴²

To Liska, violence was fundamentally the product of outside crime and a few dangerous radicals. The solution to violence, then, was to work with management and the police to root out the bad apples, repress radicals, and restore order. Liska's radical critics contended that violence went much deeper than that, and so would any solution. As with Liska, violence played a crucial role in their understanding of the situation.

³⁴⁰ Jefferys, *Management and Managed*, 158-59.

³⁴¹ John Smith to Emil Mazey, 26 March 1979. Box 46, File 14, L3C; on safety at the local hall, see letters from Joseph Elliott to Steve Yokich and Donald Riegle. Box 45, File 13, L3C.

³⁴² Liska Reports, October 1969, Box 2, File 5, ELC.

According to DRUM and other dissidents, violence was a product of the dangerous, degrading work environment at Dodge Main and the larger structures of capitalism and white supremacy. Plant violence resulted from the violence embedded in those systems, not in the minds of a handful of “plain nuts.”

In an article titled “Bonus Vs An Ass Kicking,” *DRUM* made plain this link between structural and individual violence:

We all know that the less equipment a foreman uses such as gloves and drill etc., the bigger his bonus. When profit becomes more important than workers safety, then it is time to take a stand. Since the work force is 70% black, this means that more black people are affected by this policy. In the Body Shop, this situation is more acute, due to the fact that most of the stock is razor sharp. The Brothers in the body shop are told, by the white foreman’s [sic], that they have to wear their gloves a week, whether they last or not. DRUM feels that since our safety is in danger, than it’s only fair that somebody else’s be in danger also. So it’s a bonus vs. an ass kicking, and you can have both.³⁴³

To radical workers, individual workplace violence was inseparable from the violence done to workers by their jobs.

While less celebrated than their critiques of racism and the UAW, a perceptive analysis of workplace violence was one of the most important contributions made by radical autoworkers. In the 1980s and 1990s, when the phenomenon called “workplace violence” was first named and defined, experts and policymakers quickly restricted our field of vision to the violence of individuals. But according to voices emerging from Detroit and Windsor auto plants in the 1970s, individual violence was a symptom of the wider violence essential to the functioning of the dominant systems of production, distribution, and governance.

As the *Eldon Wildcat*, a regular publication produced by a secretive group that white autoworker radical John Taylor described as “Old Left,” observed of a 1971 union election campaign:

³⁴³ “Bonus Vs. an Ass Kicking,” *DRUM*, volume 1 number 10.

Some of the candidates have included a "law and order" plank in their platforms. They want to "Take a tough stand on Violence in the plant." But it isn't clear which violence they are talking about. If they are talking about the year-round violence that Chrysler uses against us, most of us would agree. Eldon workers haven't forgotten the brutal disregard of our health and safety that last year led to the deaths of Mamie Williams, Rose Logan, and Gary Thompson.³⁴⁴

An article titled "Murders for Profit" compared the death of driver at Dodge Main who was crushed by a forklift truck to gas explosions that killed miners: "Both Chrysler and the coal companies say these were accidents. But really these workers were murdered. The bosses set things up so that many workers are killed or seriously injured every year." The article alleged that since there were no safe places to take a break at Dodge Main, the worker rested near his station and was crushed by the driver shoving stock against a wall. The article concluded: "This policy of speed-up led to a worker's death. The mine owners and factory workers commit murder every day. Some workers are killed outright. Others die the slow deaths of black lung, cancer, and other diseases. Other workers are killed by the alcohol, heroin, and many other drugs which they use to put up with the horrible conditions."³⁴⁵

According to radical workers, the violence of capitalism went beyond health and safety violations and was intrinsic to the very system of wage labour. Commenting on automation, the *Spark* charged, "In a world where it takes money to eat and get along, it is criminal to take away peoples' jobs -- and their life. The companies that do this are criminal!"³⁴⁶ As *Dodge Workers Speak* put it, "'THIS IS TERRORISM. The company uses the terror of poverty against the workers."³⁴⁷ After 24 workers tested positive for tuberculosis at Dodge Main, the *Wildcat* attacked management for keeping the plant running, and identified the fundamental issue as systemic: "Under any humane system

³⁴⁴ "Unite Against Violence," *Eldon Wildcat* 36, May 12, 1971, UMB; on the outlook and practices of the *Wildcat* group, see the interview with John Taylor in Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 96.

³⁴⁵ "Murders For Profit," *Eldon Spark* 167, March 25, 1976, UMB.

³⁴⁶ "Fewer Jobs, More Machines," *Eldon Spark* 126, November 13, 1974, UMB.

³⁴⁷ "Is It Chrysler Policy to Have Mad-Dog Foremen?," *Dodge Workers Speak*.

we would be warned of all these dangers. But this system isn't humane. Chrysler isn't about to shut down its plants just to save lives. All they care about is profits."³⁴⁸

Radical autoworkers in Canada drew on events in Detroit to conceptualize the situation in their factories. As we saw in Chapter 3, when a stabbing occurred in a Windsor plant, the *Rank and File Bulletin* compared it to the James Johnson shootings, blaming Chrysler, the UAW, and in-plant racism for provoking both incidents. Their admonition "Detroit is in our plants!" was an attempt to convince their Canadian coworkers that the border was not a defence from speedup, racism, and violence.³⁴⁹ Canadian workers also insisted that workplace violence arose directly from the labour process. As one man interviewed in the publication *Worker's Unity* succinctly argued, auto work was "violent work that breeds violence."³⁵⁰

ELRUM, the publication of the radical black power insurgency at Eldon Axle, made an explicit connection between industrial capitalism, the US war machine, and the violence American blacks faced at home. Lambasting a Chrysler campaign exhorting workers to spend their Chrysler wages buying Chrysler products, the author pointed to Chrysler's government contracts building tanks and their military transport vehicles: "There sure as hell ain't no highways in Viet-Nam and you better believe that you'll see these monsters rolling down Grand River, Twelfth St., Linwood, Mack, and anywhere else where 'hot niggers need cooling off!'"³⁵¹ After the uprising of 1967, of course, *ELRUM's* writers had direct experience of the US Army violently putting down an insurrection in their neighbourhoods and this informed *ELRUM's* conception of the logic of American capitalism and racial hierarchy, in which black workers were not only alienated from the product they built, they were helping build the very equipment that would be used to crush them.

Radical responses to violence were much more complicated than a simple redefinition and condemnation, however. While violence was fundamental to radicals'

³⁴⁸ TB at Dodge Main," *Eldon Wildcat* 71, September 7, 1972, UMB.

³⁴⁹ *Rank and File Committee Bulletin*, May 7, 1975, UL444.

³⁵⁰ Rumbblings From The Lines," *Worker's Unity*, May 1971, UL444.

³⁵¹ "Het'...Two....Three: Bolder Than Bold," *Eldon Ave. Liberator*, undated, ELRUM Police File.

understanding of the predicament of workers in the automotive industry, it was also a tantalizing, if potentially double-edged, weapon for radical change. Many radical workers viewed violence against foremen as understandable and sometimes even laudable, considering foremen's role as the sharp end of the dangerous, fast-paced Chrysler labour process. As the *Eldon Wildcat* saw it,

The only job protection a foreman has is to be riding our backs to get out as much work with as few people as possible. And if there's a chance that some foremen will be cut out, then that's more reason for them to be pushing us harder. The problem is that conditions are already pretty bad. And if foremen start pushing more, in an attempt to save their jobs, they will have to expect that more workers will be fighting back.³⁵²

At the same time, they warned workers of "mad-dog foremen." As they complained in 1973, "There are foremen in here that believe in packing pistols. That's not helping the situation any. The worst of it is that one of them drinks a lot. A drunk foreman armed with a gun is surely going to get somebody annihilated, possibly more than himself."³⁵³

Radicals believed foremen's aggression towards workers made them logical targets for violence. A 1974 *Wildcat* piece discussing a new Chrysler policy of issuing foremen yellow badges instead of ties mocked: "Now they don't have to sneak into the plant and then put on their ties, or worry about taking them off before they go out into the dark parking lot, to face "their" employees. Chrysler "sure picked the right color for those badges!"³⁵⁴

DRUM, *ELRUM*, and the other organs of the various Revolutionary Union Movements were even more openly confrontational than *Wildcat/Spark*. *DRUM* regularly justified and celebrated violence against company personnel, including robbery and assault. As Chapter 2 detailed, *DRUM* was not the cause of violence at Dodge Main -- violence was rising before *DRUM*'s inception and continued to rise after *DRUM*'s influence waned. However, the violence of auto work and American racism was central

³⁵² "Foremen Layoffs," *Eldon Wildcat* 108, February 13, 1974, UMB.

³⁵³ "Foreman Packs Pistol," *Eldon Spark* 90, June 14, 1973, UMB.

³⁵⁴ "Yellow Badges," *Eldon Wildcat* 120, August 21, 1974, UMB.

to DRUM's analysis of the dilemma facing the black autoworker. DRUM cultivated a fearsome, violent image that its members believed was crucial to fostering a revolutionary outlook among black workers. General Baker, one of the leaders of both DRUM and the League of the Revolutionary Black Workers recalled that "we advocated violence and fighting back. We thought we had to break with the passivity. We took too much stuff from supervision and union people too." Any time violence broke out "we ended up backing it and supporting it."³⁵⁵

A good example of DRUM's celebration of violence as revolutionary and heroic is a 1969 article titled "Rebellion Inside the Gates." A black worker named Harris was fired for an altercation with a white millwright, the same incident that Liska discussed above. Harris physically resisted being handed over to the Hamtramck police, and as black workers left the gates at the 3:00 whistle they found Harris struggling with four officers, who cuffed him and threw him into the back of a police car. According to *DRUM*, "our black brothers rose up as one and rescued him from the car." An officer responded by macing several workers. According to DRUM:

At this point some black workers retreated inside the plant and began bombarding the police cars with auto parts and 50 gallon drums, bolts, washers and scrap steel. A long steel shaft thrown through the windshield of one of the police cars barely missed the driver. All of the plant guards fled to safety. The police were barely able to get Bro. Harris back in the car as it was being rocked by black workers. After the 2nd surge by gallant black workers, the police fled for their lives.³⁵⁶

DRUM celebrated the clash as a heroic victory, no doubt seeking to rally more workers to their side. The writer proclaimed triumphantly: "The day is long gone when black workers can be brutally assaulted with impunity."³⁵⁷ The RUM papers were also far more likely than the *Wildcat* or *Spark* to celebrate violent workers. James Johnson was repeatedly hailed as a hero, with one article claiming that the largely apolitical Johnson "has moved Black Workers' struggle at the point of Production to a new and higher level." The same article praised Rushie Forge, Sidney Lewis, and Chuck Wooten, all

³⁵⁵ Baker, discussion.

³⁵⁶ Rebellion Inside the Gates," *DRUM*, volume 2 number 27.

³⁵⁷ "Rebellion Inside the Gates."

DRUM members fired for violence against supervisors. It also mentioned Ike Jernigan, not a DRUM or UAW member but a California aerospace worker who killed his foreman, union president, and another union official after being harassed and fired for black power organizing.³⁵⁸

DRUM argued that employing violence was a crucial part of black workers reclaiming their manhood and overcoming their oppression. Violence, masculinity, and revolution were inextricably linked in their writing and practice. As one letter to the editor put it, their enemies “only understand violence. We must get on their ass like black on white and let them know that we are black men and not boys and proud of it.”³⁵⁹ To DRUM, the auto plants were simultaneously a place that emasculated black workingmen and an arena where those workers could reclaim their manhood and wrest away power from white capitalists.

This arena was imagined as a man’s world, one with little role for women as part of the revolution. One DRUM article even described the introduction of female workers into the traditionally male grease pits at Dodge Main as “a form of castration.” The article concluded with the exhortation “BROTHERS AWAKE!! /FIGHT FOR MASCULINITY/JOIN DRUM!!”³⁶⁰

The aggressive masculinity DRUM believed crucial to reclaiming the manhood of black workers was a double-edged sword. In the short term, it certainly posed a ferocious challenge to the UAW and the auto companies alike that could not be ignored. In an article titled “What Has DRUM Done?” the organization claimed its aggressive posture “ended brutal and physical abuse of Black Workers by the racist thugs in supervision” and that “DRUM has instilled a new measure of pride in the Black workers to the point where they won’t tolerate any harassment in or out of the plant.”³⁶¹ However, the RUMs veneration of rough masculinity alienated many older and female

³⁵⁸ “Hail James Johnson,” *DRUM*, volume 3 number 1.

³⁵⁹ “Letter to Editor,” *DRUM*, volume 1 number 15.

³⁶⁰ “300 Years Ago,” *DRUM*, volume 2 number 25.

³⁶¹ “What Has DRUM Done?” *DRUM*, volume 2 number 13.

autoworkers.³⁶² The RUMs largely ignored the difficulties a hypermasculine culture presented for women workers or for men who did not fit the mold. John Taylor notes that older female workers at Eldon Avenue were terrified of ELRUM activists, who carried guns and who they thought were going to “go berserk.”³⁶³ The veneration of violence and machismo cost the RUMs potential allies and votes in union elections. Radicals did occasionally consider some of the specific violence female workers faced in the plants, however. *DRUM* called out foreman Robert Brooks for firing a female worker who rejected his sexual advances.³⁶⁴ Indeed, female workers often faced harassment and sexual abuse at work and the *Spark* called on men to play their part in redressing these wrongs. Writing about a foreman sexually harassing a female worker, they noted the

many other cases of foremen or supervisors using their job to try to force a woman worker to have sex with them. Women workers have hard jobs and lousy working conditions. Often they also have to deal with this kind of pressure from a foreman to put out. There is the threat that if they don't, the foreman will have her fired [or] put her on a harder job. The other side of this pressure is the promise that if she is nice to him, maybe he will make it life easier for her. Sometimes a foreman plays this game really openly. Union reps know about it but say nothing. No wonder that sometimes women get caught in the trap and go with [foremen]. On the other hand you see women that won't go along with this game. Some will let the foreman know they will take a harder job if necessary. Some fight as militants in the plant and in the union.

But women should not have to fight this crap alone. It is not just a problem for women workers. They suffer from this -- but so do men workers. Because this is one of the ways that the capitalist system tries to divide workers. As long as men workers think of women as fair game and go along with foremen trying to pressure women like this, or stay quiet, it will be harder to stick together and fight against the company.³⁶⁵

Violence was also a major part of the critiques of Canadian unionists and workers. In Canada, we have seen, the much lesser impact of racial turmoil, a relatively calm and prosperous city and a comparatively stable local auto industry created a

³⁶² For more on DRUM turning off many potential allies and DRUM's gender politics, see Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 168-72.

³⁶³ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 92.

³⁶⁴ “B.X.9,” *DRUM*, volume 1 number 7.

³⁶⁵ Pressure on Women,” *Eldon Spark* 122, September 18, 1974, UMB.

springboard for militancy. Local 444, unlike Local 3, was able to focus on improvement, not simply survival. This militancy can be seen in the willingness of Windsor union officials to condemn unsafe conditions in terms not very different from those used by Detroit radicals. After the deaths of two men and crippling injuries to others, 444 official Gary Parent called the Windsor truck plant a “slaughter house.” When a foreman who drove a truck marked “Do Not Drive” on the assembly line at the truck plant killed worker Jim Medwick, president Brooks charged that what the company called an accident was actually criminal. The local pressed for criminal charges of negligence to be filed against the foreman. Brooks argued the prosecution “would serve notice on all supervision that the workers’ safety comes ahead of production.”³⁶⁶ Windsor union officials also pointed out the less immediately visible toll that car production was taking on some workers. In 1979, local second vice-president Gerry Bastien contended “I feel very strongly that the incidences of suicide by some of our members may be directly related to their inability to cope with all the harassment.”³⁶⁷

As a result of Local 444’s militancy and its willingness to absorb dissident members into the local power structure, the critiques of Windsor radicals often sounded similar to those of their local leaders. For example, the man in *Workers’ Unity* who observed “We do a lot of hard work -- 8 hours -- it takes a lot out of you. It’s violent work that breeds violence. Sometimes you only feel like going out for a beer or hollering at your wife and kids,”³⁶⁸ would likely have had sympathy with Local 444 president Charlie Brooks’s repeated calls for shorter workdays and workweeks in industry.

The major radical faction in Windsor Chrysler plants was the Rank-and-File caucus. Jim Brophy, a black autoworker from Detroit who left the US to resist the draft and found work in Windsor, was a key caucus member and an example of the flow of radical workers and ideas across the border. Unlike Local 444 publications and the writings of other dissident groups, the Caucus-produced *Rank and File Bulletin* (RFB)

³⁶⁶ Charlie Brooks, “United Action: The Only Way To Fight Bosses’ Abuse!” *Local 444 News*, April 15, 1974, UL444.

³⁶⁷ Gerry Bastien, “Management on Collision Course With Workers,” *Local 444 News*, May 25, 1979, UL444.

³⁶⁸ “Rumblings From the Lines,” *Workers’ Unity*, May 1971, UL444.

criticized racism in Windsor Chrysler plants. When replacement workers were brought into the V8 block department because the workers there refused to work overtime, the *RFB* observed: "These 3 scabs from the V8 blocks were all 'good Canadians' -- one young, two older. This is mentioned because of the racist remarks that are heard daily in the plants and the common belief that it is the immigrants that do all the overtime."³⁶⁹ The *RFB* also charged that "the racist attitudes of Canadian workers" were a contributing factor in a stabbing in Plant 2, and the UAW was guilty of "outright neglect to combat racism and prejudice in the plants."³⁷⁰

Like the RUMs and *Wildcat/Spark*, the *RFB* contended that worker violence arose from in-plant pressures and the "violent nature of assembly lines."³⁷¹ One article argued that layoffs and speedups would lead to violent reprisals:

Autoworkers are some of the most distressed workers. The daily monotony of the job 5 days a week is and the ever increasing speedup is bad enough, but throw these guys out on the street who "worked steadily and haven't gotten into trouble before" and many flip out

The auto worker isn't a criminal but pressure him, threaten him, and push him around and then the auto companies have a problem. For example, tell him he'll work through Xmas then tell him he won't. Tell him he'll get Xmas pay then tell him he won't. Tell him he'll be called back then tell him they won't. With psychiatric facilities strained to capacity this is hardly a game the company should be playing

The company has S and A [sickness and accident] benefits for any worker that is driven nuts in the plant, but we find it ironic since they caused the situation. The problem is getting out of hand and if anyone does flip out he should know he'll be among other friends -- autoworkers.³⁷²

While the violence of the labour process was central to the *RFB*'s understanding of auto work, the group stopped short of advocating or celebrating violence. Perhaps this was because, compared to the black Detroit workers who joined the RUMs, they faced far less violence in their neighbourhoods, from police and the state, and on the job. Their

³⁶⁹ *Rank and File Bulletin*, March 28, 1973, UL444.

³⁷⁰ *Rank and File Bulletin*, May 7, 1975, UL444.

³⁷¹ *Rank and File Bulletin*, May 7, 1975, UL444.

³⁷² *Rank and File Bulletin*, November 7, 1973, UL444.

greater exposure to violence, inextricably linked to their everyday experience of racism, was likely the major reason why the RUMs celebrated violence and adopted it as a part of a revolutionary identity. They believed that only violence would ultimately achieve black liberation, and to think otherwise was a delusion. As *DRUM* argued, “the factory is the tool of violence used by the union and management to crush all resistance put up by the workers.” To *DRUM*, nonviolence was a dead end that would cause black workers to “be uncomplaining to their destiny” when the situation demanded any means necessary to force management and the union to change their policies.³⁷³

The *Wildcat/Spark* and *RFB*, like the RUMs, understood autowork, capitalism, white supremacy, and imperialism as violent processes, but they stopped short of celebrating individual violence. While cognizant of the violence that beset workers on all sides, the *Wildcat* stressed organization and solidarity, not individual violence. One week after the Johnson murders, the *Wildcat* argued “his solution was wrong, not because it was violent, but because it was aimed at the individuals involved, and not at changing the basic situation.” After his trial ended, an article summed up its position:

Most of us can understand how Brother Johnson felt, and why he struck back at his foreman, the daily symbol of his oppression. But he fought alone, as an individual. And now he is out of our fight, but the problems are still here. Individually we can do little to change a giant corporation like Chrysler, United, there is no limit to what we can do. Maybe even build a world in which men like James Johnson can be allowed to live in peace.³⁷⁴

Despite their differing judgments of whether violence was an efficacious solution to problems on the job, radical workers shared an understanding that violence in their plants was integral to the processes of their working lives. Violence at work was a major influence on their consciousness and a central aspect of their critique of Chrysler, autowork, and capitalism.

Was Chrysler listening? The RUMs certainly had the company’s attention, because of their wildcat strikes, their challenges to the UAW power structure, their

³⁷³ “Negro Lovers,” *DRUM*, volume 2 number 5.

³⁷⁴ “James Johnson Found ‘Not Guilty’,” *Eldon Wildcat* 37, May 25, 1971, UMB.

support among Chrysler's black workers in Detroit, and, not least, because of their threats of a violent reckoning with Chrysler and the UAW. Chrysler's responses to violence and militancy indicate that, like the UAW and the radical workers, the company saw in-plant violence as a serious concern. We have already seen how unionists and radical workers defined and responded to violence. Understanding how Chrysler perceived the violence in and around its factories is more difficult. Unlike Local 3's Ed Liska, Chrysler has not made any of its internal files from the period available. Unlike *DRUM* or the *Rank and File Bulletin*, Chrysler was not in the habit of publishing and distributing its take on everyday in-plant incidents. Much of what we know about Chrysler in the period is reflected, taken from media accounts and the critiques of hostile organizations. The second challenge is discerning what elements of Chrysler's response were directed at violence in the plant generally, and what were attempts to head off the radical black power organizing of the RUMs.

There was significant overlap between the two objectives. Like the UAW, Chrysler often conflated in-plant violence with the RUMs and crime. This overlooked relevant facts. The vast majority of in-plant violence had nothing to do with the RUMs, who were dedicated to political change, not illicit gain. Workplace violence, crime, and militancy occasionally overlapped, but were distinct phenomena. Still, Chrysler was extremely concerned about the RUMs not only because of the widespread support they attracted among black workers, but because of their willingness to advocate violence and the commission of violent acts by DRUM members.³⁷⁵

So what did Chrysler do in response to the violence raging inside its Detroit assembly plants? In important ways, it did nothing. As we will consider in greater detail in the next two chapters, an awareness of "workplace violence" as a specific issue did not exist at that time; nevertheless, in-plant violence at Chrysler was an issue so serious that it prompted articles in *Time* and *Newsweek*. Yet there is little evidence that Chrysler acted to address issues that caused much of the in-plant violence, such as sped-up assembly lines or dangerous working conditions, during the 1970s. Nor were there specific programs aimed at tackling workplace violence or protecting workers. Asked

³⁷⁵ See Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 118-19.

why Chrysler did not do more to protect workers from violence, General Baker replied: “I don’t think they really gave a damn.”³⁷⁶ As long as output could be maintained, Chrysler saw all other issues as being of little importance.

That is the point on which Chrysler’s concern over in-plant violence pivoted. Chrysler may have been largely unconcerned with the well-being of its production workers, yet it is clear from its actions that it took the violence and disorder in its plants seriously as a phenomenon that hampered production and threatened industrial order. In the late 1960s, Chrysler invested heavily in weaponry and surveillance equipment for its plants, and placed itself in the vanguard of a nervous US capitalist class that was deeply concerned about violent revolution. The National Association of Manufacturers held a counter-insurgency seminar in Detroit in 1968, one of 15 seminars NAM conducted around the nation. In addition to the seminars they distributed 600,000 copies of a pamphlet titled “Industrial Planning Guide Against Civil Disorders.”³⁷⁷

The Detroit conference included speakers from the US military, FBI, and Detroit police. *DRUM* reported that

The Association plans such things as new higher fences and windows as is already recently constructed at Dodge Main and Eldon Ave. New security identification systems with photographs on badges, electric eye spy systems and this will probably lead to strip down searches at the gates as was used in atomic plants during W.W. II. They further projected arming the plant protection guards with revolvers and in the key areas guard towers with semi-automatic rifles.³⁷⁸

While some of this did not come to pass, by January of the next year Eldon Avenue had electric devices to close plant doors, special camera equipment, new fences, and searchlights. Because of high tensions that month, Detroit police were patrolling the plant 24 hours a day and its Tactical Mobile Unit was on standby.³⁷⁹ Chrysler also provided steward rooms with the locking doors, in-plant phones, and fans

³⁷⁶ Baker, discussion.

³⁷⁷ “Plants Arm Against Worker Struggle,” *Inner City Voice*, October 1968.

³⁷⁸ “N.A.M.,” *DRUM*, volume 2, number 20.

³⁷⁹ “Calling Black Workers Everywhere!” Police File, League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

mentioned above. The safety and comfort these additions provided were likely welcomed by stewards, but they increased the distance, both actually and metaphorically, between workers and their representatives.³⁸⁰ While plant protection officers were never armed with guns, DRUM claimed that they were provided with tear gas grenades, riot helmets, and batons, all stored on plant property.

Despite the increased security, a poem in the *Inner City Voice* warned that such measures would be useless in plants where the greatest threats came from the very workers who passed through the gates every day:

FENCES CAN STOP SDS OR THE SWP

BUT THEY CANNOT STOP A DRUM WORKER

ARMED WITH TNT³⁸¹

At the same time it was building new fences and stocking up on tear gas, Chrysler was attempting to improve relations with black Detroiters in the factory and the city at large, primarily by increasing its hiring of the so-called “hard-core unemployed”: jobless young black males who were seen as the principal drivers of the 1967 uprising. While maintaining the order needed for production was Chrysler’s main concern, the politics of the era, exemplified by black organizing and the 1967 uprising, pressured Chrysler to make gestures towards being a good corporate citizen in the Detroit community. Thus Chrysler, along with GM and Ford, participated in a program to recruit workers from the ghettos. They also began ignoring some criminal records during the hiring process, suspending a traditional barrier to the hiring of young black men. Chrysler also held racial sensitivity seminars for foremen.

However, Chrysler’s efforts to combat racism were themselves based on a racist assumption: that black workers were wide-eyed simpletons unable to manage the transition to industrial life. To Chrysler, the primary issue facing black workers was not

³⁸⁰ “The 1970 UAW Contract Settlements,” *DRUM*, volume 3 number 15.

³⁸¹ “Fences Can Stop,” *Inner City Voice*, October 1969, Box 17, File 10, DRMC; on increased security at Dodge Main see “N.A.M.,” *DRUM*.

structural racism, it was the unsuitability of blacks for modern industrial life, or what a *Saturday Evening Post* article on Chrysler's programs termed "the gap between White America and Poor Black America." According to the article, Chrysler learned of this gap after 60 per cent of the first 600 new hires failed to show up at their assigned factories, while others quit after a day or two. According to one Chrysler official, "the first inclination of many people here was to use the old cliché about the Negro being too lazy to work. But then someone higher up decided to look into it, and we realized how wrong we were."³⁸²

That "someone" was Chrysler chairman Lynn Townsend, a "new-breed executive with a master's degree from the University of Michigan." According to Townsend, he chose to discard racist stereotypes and approach the issue as if it were a "marketing problem." He sent investigators from Chrysler's personnel department to interview each absentee, and the results were, in the *Post's* estimation, "pathetically revealing. Many men who didn't show up for work were immigrants from the South who couldn't read and who never before traveled out of the ghetto." These men couldn't navigate the bus system "and they ended up in distant sections of the city. They became discouraged, and thinking they had already lost their new jobs they went home." Those who did make it to the factories were overwhelmed by "the complexity of the industrial process" and their inability to read or count to ten. "We found out," Townsend said, "that they quit because they were simply were terrified."³⁸³

Townsend's assessment that ignorance and naiveté were the primary problems faced by these new workers is puzzling, considering that black and white workers had made the transition from the rural South to the auto factories for decades. Moreover, many of the new hires were likely Detroit natives who would have little difficulty navigating the city. Chrysler preferred to frame the problems faced by black workers as rooted in

³⁸² Bill Davidson, "If We Can't Solve The Problems of The Ghetto Here..." *Saturday Evening Post*, October, 1968, 31.

³⁸³ Davidson, "If We Can't Solve..." 31; Townsend's master's degree was in Business Administration. See Melody Petersen, "Lynn Townsend, Ex-Chrysler Chief, Dies at 81," *New York Times*, August 22, 2001, accessed August 7, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/22/business/lynn-townsend-ex-chrysler-chief-dies-at-81.html>.

their own cultural underdevelopment, not the product of racial inequality in Detroit's streets and factories.

Therefore, Townsend hired 50 high school teachers as counselors who "led the men by the hand through the transportation system. They taught them just enough to identify signs and numbers." They provided alarm clocks so that workers could get up on time. According to Chrysler, these trained "ghetto men returned to their Chrysler jobs and most of them have stayed there." The article describes a training class funded by the new public-private Job Opportunities in the Business Sector (JOBS) program, where a black adviser named Al McPherson taught men between the ages of 18-30 "personal hygiene, industrial responsibility, and punctuality He even teases the men about their Bushman haircuts, referring to them by such names as 'Bramblebush,' and the trainees usually cut their hair.' This adviser, together with a "pretty blond" teacher named Marlene Jackson taught the men to count, follow directions and "adapt to the disciplines of the factory. Then they go to work on the assembly line as 'entry workers' and earn up to \$3.50 an hour, more than they had ever dreamed of making in their lives."³⁸⁴

The mentors the Big Three chose were figures capable of deploying a rough, violent masculinity to get through to the "hard-cores." Ed Spicer, who Chrysler selected to help integrate "hard-cores" into the plants, was a burly white man with 18 years boxing experience. In *Do You Think A Job is the Answer?*, a 1969 documentary, Spicer is shown hitting the heavy bag and doing road work while talking about how he is well-suited to reach out to ghetto youth. Ford held out Harry Palmer as a success story. After being hired through an outreach program, Palmer rose to a semi-skilled job and began saving money for a ranch house in the suburbs. Ford hoped he would serve as a model for its young black workers. The *Post* marveled at Palmer, a man with a criminal record for breaking into a jewelry store, especially his "influence on younger, more militant Negroes. In a strange way, he is a folk hero to them because of his prison record for a daring crime, and this awe is being transmuted into further admiration for the way he has reorganized his life." According to Ford, "if we can develop a lot of Harry Palmers to

³⁸⁴ Davidson, "If We Can't Solve..." 31.

influence the others, we *may* have the situation licked.”³⁸⁵ The Palmer example is a fascinating insight into how management approached the radical challenge in auto factories. Ford hoped to leverage the respect in the factory they thought a worker of Palmer’s criminal past and prison experience commanded, and use it to inculcate respectable values and habits.

Chrysler’s outreach efforts may have provided some good publicity for the company, but the initiatives also had many critics. DRUM noted that the program showed Chrysler was willing to hire blacks to work on the assembly line, but hiring of black foremen, skilled trades workers, and salaried employees was still virtually nonexistent. *Do You Think A Job Is The Answer?* argued that the efforts of the auto companies did not do enough to address the structural racism, underdevelopment, and poverty faced by Detroit blacks. In fact, Reverend William Fitch, a member of the Detroit Industrial Mission, a religious group attempting to heal race and class conflict in Detroit, argued that hiring black workers at the bottom of a industrial system that oppressed them was reinforcing racism, not transcending it.

The film also noted that the splashily publicized hard-core hiring initiative coincided nicely with a period of peak auto demand and a high need for workers among the Big Three. This criticism is borne out by Ed Liska’s diary. In 1969 he wrote of meeting with Dodge Main Labor Relations head Bill Prokopy who was “in a very sad and begging mood” and upset about poor car quality. “Prokopy said that we can’t even get new guys to hire. We get trucks to visit the inner city to seek out guys who want a job.”³⁸⁶ As *Do You Think A Job Is The Answer?* shows, after the articles had been written, and perhaps after the demand for employees had peaked, Ford, for one, stopped sending buses into the ghetto to take workers.

Chrysler approached the challenge of the RUMs with a similar mix of repression and outreach. DRUM activists were monitored and many of them were fired. The Hamtramck Police also moved against DRUM more directly, likely at the instigation of

³⁸⁵ Palmer quotes from Davidson, “If We Can’t Solve...,” 32; the film *Do You Think A Job Is The Answer?*, directed by Gary Gilson, 1969.

³⁸⁶ Liska Reports, November 1969, Box 2, File 6, ELC.

Chrysler and Local 3. Yet Chrysler also maintained back-channel communication with DRUM. General Baker and other DRUM leaders often spoke informally with a black public relations employee. It was this Chrysler man who told Baker that the shooting that paralyzed Detroit housing activist Fred Holsey, an attack likely targeting Baker, was the responsibility of the UAW, not Chrysler. There is evidence Chrysler management and DRUM activists communicated at the in-plant level, as well. In 1970, Liska complained of "Management cuddling DRUM organization and its leaders in plant." He feared DRUM activists like Ron March were usurping union stewards in representing workers and that DRUM had more access to the labour relations office than elected union representatives did.³⁸⁷

While programs such as JOBS may have been window dressing, Chrysler combined these PR initiatives with more concrete responses to the demands of DRUM and other dissidents. It promoted several of Local 3's black activists, including those who had almost joined DRUM, or echoed similar positions, to foreman. It also stopped defending in-plant racism.³⁸⁸ Some foremen were trained in people skills, or as *Dodge Workers Speak* charged, "instead of harassing the workers, Chrysler decided to try to trick the workers into getting out more production. They are training the foremen how to psyche the workers out when threats don't work. It's a con game."³⁸⁹ Chrysler also built up conservative black unionists in Local 3, "allowing them to 'win' a few victories," in Jefferys' words. These wins undercut DRUM's position that it was the only force capable of getting results for black workers.³⁹⁰ By the time Andy Hardy succeeded Liska and became Local 3's first black president, DRUM, like the RUMs elsewhere, was a spent force. Once in power, Hardy proved a pliant ally, enthusiastically helping the UAW break a wildcat strike at the Mack Avenue Plant and he "got on very well with Clancy," the Dodge Main superintendent.³⁹¹ Through this combination of approaches, Chrysler

³⁸⁷ Baker, discussion; A. Muhammad Ahmad, "A Study of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers," Baltimore: Collective Action Notes, 1979, 10; Liska Reports, September 1970, Box 2, File 16, ELC.

³⁸⁸ Jefferys, *Management and Managed*, 181.

³⁸⁹ "Why Foremen Go To School," *Dodge Workers Speak/Spark*, February 6, 1974, Box 44, Local 3 1974 General File, UL3C.

³⁹⁰ Jefferys, *Management and Managed*, 181.

³⁹¹ Jefferys, *Management and Managed*, 185.

outlasted the RUMs. At Dodge Main the company regained effective control over of the plant and production. Workplace violence, however, continued to occur regularly right up until Dodge Main's closing. This again indicates that workplace violence had many causes, and was an issue before and after the heyday of black power unionism at Chrysler. At Chrysler Windsor, where the UAW more successfully integrated radical perspectives, a much more militant orientation persisted. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the UAW in the United States acquiesced to concessions, their Canadian counterparts were much better placed to resist. The American UAW's more co-operative stance may have been influenced by its collaboration with Chrysler to quash violence and militant challenges.

Whether left or right, white or black, union or management, workplace violence affected the consciousness, strategy, and actions of those working in Detroit and Windsor's auto industry during the 1960s and 1970s. The impact of workplace violence did not end when a fight was broken up, a worker discharged, or a union election won and lost. Because the discipline and grievance systems of Chrysler and the UAW failed to meaningfully reduce workplace violence, violence remained part of the experience of working at Chrysler. Therefore, it remained active in the hearts and minds of the assembly line workers, radicals, unionists, foremen, guards, and executives that went to work at Chrysler every day. It impacted the families and friends of victims and perpetrators; the families of those fired, suspended, threatened, injured, and killed.

Violence was the most important factor shaping Ed Liska's outlook during his tenure as Local 3 president. It alienated him from his membership, infected him with fear and despair, and pushed him closer to management. Throughout his tenure, Liska saw himself not as the elected leader of a dynamic workers organization pressing to improve work at Dodge Main, but as an embattled figure trying desperately to keep the barrel of dynamite at Hamtramck from exploding. This pushed him towards collaboration and identification with Chrysler management, who he saw as his partners in keeping order in the plant. In Windsor, a more effective union leadership, operating under better conditions and with a closer connection to its workers, was much more outspoken about the everyday violence of health and safety conditions in their plants.

Chrysler executives in Detroit, while making a more serious effort to combat racial inequality in the plant than Liska, combined practical measures and public relations to tamp down the flames of workplace violence and black power organizing. In doing so, they deployed machismo as one way to win alienated workers over to their way of thinking. They also combined reform with repression, firing many workplace activists. These strategies, combined with the slowdown in the auto industry in the early-to-mid-1970s, enabled Chrysler to retain effective control over its shop-floor, although violence was never totally eliminated.

Radical workers on both sides of the Detroit River responded to the situation in their factories by presenting a much broader conception of workplace violence than the one shared by Chrysler and Local 3, and the one formalized and accepted by corporations, unions, experts, and policymakers in the 1980s and 1990s. Their definition identified the labour processes of the auto companies as inherently violent and the cause of much of the individual violence in the plants. Some radicals advocated violence as a way to reclaim dignity and manhood on the job and obtain better treatment, better working conditions, and perhaps even a revolutionary awakening at the point of production. In Windsor, and especially in Detroit, there was a crucial linkage between workplace violence and radical consciousness and practice.

A few high-profile incidents of violence in these plants had an even wider impact, sparking wider struggles in the cities of Detroit and Toronto. These struggles attracted national and international media investigation, and made this linkage even more apparent. It is to those incidents that we now turn.

Chapter 5.

“Chrysler Pulled The Trigger:” Radical Legal Practice and Competing Understandings of Workplace Violence During the 1970s

Long before incidents of workplace violence became regular features of cable news, before “going postal” became a macabre punch line in late-night monologues, three workplace shootings sent shockwaves through the automotive industry and the cities of Detroit and Windsor. These were certainly not the only shootings or murders that took place in the auto plants of the era, but the murders of two foremen and a coworker at Chrysler’s Eldon Axle plant by worker James Johnson in 1970; the shooting of skilled trades worker William Harrell by United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 600 executive David Mundy in 1973; and the murder of UAW Local 444 President Charlie Brooks by fired Chrysler worker Clarence Talbot in 1977, produced remarkable outpourings of emotion and legal struggles that attracted national media attention.

For while workplace violence became a widely recognized social problem during the late 1980s, violence at work existed long before that time. In the auto industries of Detroit and Windsor, as we have seen, these cases were notable, but not unique. Interpersonal violence, including fights, beatings, and stabbings, was a regular part of the auto workplace culture in both cities, a recognized way to settle disputes between workers or strike out against an oppressive boss. Domestic violence and the violence of the drug trade was also part of factory life, especially in Detroit plants. Beyond this, some workers and unionists in both cities argued that the daily hazards of their working day or night had to be considered violence: the punishing pace of the line; the constant harassment by supervisors to get the work out; the toxic fumes that destroyed a worker’s lungs; the unsafe machinery that mutilated a worker’s hands; the dangerous forklift that could flip and crush a worker to death. Violence was no aberration in these plants.

Whether individual or structural, it was an important part of the working experience. In Detroit, union leaders, plant management, and local police met secretly to try to figure out how to stop the violence, which they attributed to black militants and crime. In Windsor, local union leaders pleaded with individual workers to eschew violence, while simultaneously condemning the everyday violence of speed-up and unsafe working conditions.

Radical workers in both the United States and Canada charged that violence on the job was directly related to workplace exploitation, and challenged workers to expand their definitions of violence, as we explored in Chapter 4. For example, one issue of Detroit's *Eldon Wildcat* featured the headline: "What Makes A Story 'News'?" The story below claimed that when a worker was killed at Mack Avenue Stamping Plant, his head crushed by an unsafe press, the story was not reported in local media. But when a fired worker lashed out by attacking his foreman and two others with a wrench, that story did make the newspapers, newspapers that "present the bosses' view of life -- a view that never examines WHY something happens -- why a man is driven to kill another man or why workers are killed on the job."³⁹² Clearly, the very definition of violence was itself a contested topic.

What made the Johnson, Mundy, and Talbot cases different was not their violence, but that they attracted widespread, sustained attention beyond the factory or the union hall. These incidents had the power to shape broader understandings of workplace violence because of the widespread attention they received in the cities where they took place, cities marked, to varying degrees, by class divides, racial stratification, and conflict. These shootings posed troubling questions to Detroiters and Windsorites. They took the issue of workplace violence beyond the plant gates, and brought a larger group of people into the debate of how to explain and understand individual violence at work. Therefore, they allow us the chance to investigate first, what understandings of workplace violence were possible during the 1970s, just before workplace violence became a widely recognized societal issue, and second, what forces and factors determined their conditions of possibility.

³⁹² What Makes a Story "NEWS"?, *Eldon Wildcat* 72, October 5, 1972, UMB.

How did observers, both within the automotive workplace and in the wider public, understand these incidents of workplace violence? How was violence defined, and what causes were incriminated? To what extent did these incidents prompt Canadians and Americans to look at the objective and symbolic violences that produced them? Here we will consider what was said and done in the wake of three workplace shootings, and what remained unsaid and undone. The cases of James Johnson, Clarence Talbot, and David Mundy indicate that while workplace violence arose from work-related conflict, and workplace power hierarchies, the understandings of that violence outside the workplace varied widely depending on the historical context in which that violence occurred and the nature of the cases themselves. These understandings of workplace violence in turn tell us much about the workings of class and race in the communities affected.

The anthropologist Begonia Aretxaga observed a similar process in the aftermath of the 1995 murders of two Basque Country police officers by Mikel Otegi. Like her study of political violence and the unconscious, which argues that the significance of the Otegi case “is manifested in the proliferation of narratives it engendered,” these three cases demand our attention because they too “became a battleground where the media and different political formations took their positions.”³⁹³ In each case, legal proceedings were at the heart of this process. In both Canada and the United States, the courtroom has been a crucial site of struggle against the inequities of capitalism, racism, and the patriarchy. Scholars have demonstrated that legal contests shaped the Canadian industrial relations order, free speech and dissent within unions, and the rights of women at work.³⁹⁴ An increased emphasis on individual rights and activism through legal challenges has been a critical feature of politics in the United States since the 1970s. American left legal scholars have pointed out both the opportunities and pitfalls of this turn to legalism. While its focus on rights can produce legitimate victories for marginalized groups, critics such as Wendy Brown and Janet Halley caution that the law is ultimately a liberal structure that works to co-opt or stunt left aims. Even when

³⁹³ Begonia Aretxaga, “Before the Law: The Narrative of the Unconscious in Basque Political Violence,” in Neil Whitehead, (ed.), *Violence* (Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2004), 135.

³⁹⁴ See, for example, the articles collected in Judy Fudge and Eric Tucker, eds., *Work on Trial: Canadian Labour Law Struggles* (Toronto: Irwin Law for the Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History, 2010).

successful, these "left-endorsed liberal legalist" projects, such as the fight for affirmative action rights or against sexual harassment often "generate troubling new subjects and subjectivities" that actually delay social justice and strengthen reactionary forces.³⁹⁵

However, historians remind us that the courtroom has not only been a site of liberal cooptation, but one of radical possibility. In her study of labour defence campaigns and lynching prosecutions, historian Rebecca Hill notes that defence campaigns have been "the place where radicals most directly attack the power of the state, and the representative claims of the mass media."³⁹⁶ Radical legal practice, of the kind Hill notes was used in the defences of John Brown, the Intdustrial Workers of the World's free speech fights, Sacco and Vanzetti, and the Scottsboro Boys, has been an important element of Left struggles and "one of the most popular elements of leftist politics."³⁹⁷

Indeed, attorneys and defendants have often succeeded in using the legal process to advance radical critiques. Hill observes that defence campaigns and anti-lynching campaigns have worked to "defend and resuscitate people who come to symbolize their communities in the mass media and to criticize the moral systems of law and the media."³⁹⁸ In so doing, they have created and sustained "a new popular counter-history of the United States."³⁹⁹ Radical legal practice makes arguments about justice and history that present alternative understandings of class, race, and gender, understandings that reverberate far beyond the walls of a courtroom. In 1970s, radical lawyers were key figures in the contests that resulted from high-profile incidents of workplace violence, although the success of their critiques was heavily influenced by the local political context.

³⁹⁵ Wendy Brown and Janet Halley, eds., *Left Legalism/Left Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 18.

³⁹⁶ Rebecca Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law: Anti-Lynching and Labor Defense in US Radical History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 16.

³⁹⁷ Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*, 1.

³⁹⁸ Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*, 15.

³⁹⁹ Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*, 1.

“What Manner of Man Is James Johnson Jr.?” asked the *Michigan Chronicle* in July 1970, shortly after his shootings made headlines.⁴⁰⁰ “Who is James Johnson?” echoed the radical *Inner City Voice*.⁴⁰¹ In the wake of Johnson’s murder of three men at the Chrysler plant where he worked, it was a question that the media, lawyers, and unions, liberals, radicals, and conservatives all grappled with. An extremely quiet and reserved man, immediately tagged with the label of “loner” that would come to be a cliché in workplace shootings, Johnson seemed to offer a blank canvas upon which observers could project their own ideologies, fears, and dreams. He spoke little during the aftermath of the shooting and the trial. Like Mikel Otegi, the young Basque on trial for killing two policemen, Johnson claimed not to remember the shootings, and offered little of his own explanation over why he had done it. He had simply “lost control.” No matter what one’s interpretation of Johnson’s actions, however, it became apparent that his life history was marked by several of the major factors that had shaped the African-American experience in postwar Detroit. His was not the shocking crime of an unrecognizable outsider. He was a product of the city, and his rampage challenged Detroiters to understand why it had happened. As they would in the case of Otegi, observers rushed in to explain the causes of his shocking act of violence in the workplace, the perpetrator defined primarily as a “displaced sign of something else.”⁴⁰² In Johnson’s case, he was represented a disturbed perpetrator, a helpless victim, and a black working-class hero.

Heather Ann Thompson, who used James Johnson’s story as a recurring motif in her compelling study *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City*, writes that Johnson’s life is “a metaphor for all of the disappointments, frustrations, and hopes that had characterized their [black Detroiters] lives in the Jim Crow South, the

⁴⁰⁰ Bill Black, “What Manner of Man is James Johnson Jr.?” *Michigan Chronicle*, July 25, 1970.

⁴⁰¹ “Hail Brother Johnson,” *Inner City Voice*, April 1971.

⁴⁰² Aretxaga, “Before the Law,” 142-43.

Motor City, and the auto plants between 1945-1985."⁴⁰³ Thompson perceptively draws out many of the different grievances and anxieties that were highlighted by the James Johnson case, notably the ongoing frustration with institutional racism and shop-floor unrest in the city's auto industry. She demonstrates that the Johnson case was a key battleground in the ongoing struggle between liberals, conservatives, and radicals for control of the city. She also establishes that the defence of Johnson at trial demonstrated the power and effectiveness of a radical critique of racial hierarchies and the practices of the automakers in early 1970s Detroit.

However, our purpose here in considering the Johnson case is different. This chapter focuses on the competing understandings of workplace violence produced in the aftermath of Johnson's shootings, and their reception. Reading Johnson's case not only highlights conflicts over race, class, labour, and urban politics in Detroit, it provides evidence of how Detroiters and the media understood workplace violence in the early 1970s. The reactions to the Johnson case reveal that many recognized that individual violence at work was an outgrowth of the brutal processes of Detroit factory labour and the racial and other hierarchies that were central to how that labour was organized and carried out. However, many others resisted this interpretation, insisting that workplace violence was a product of individual pathology and the pernicious influence of radical organizations active in the auto factories.

The factory where Johnson had worked, Chrysler's Eldon Avenue Gear and Axle plant, was a dirty, dangerous place of great unhappiness, where workers clashed with managers, union reps, the unforgiving line, and themselves. In May 1970, two months before Johnson's killings, a twenty-two year old Vietnam veteran named Gary Thompson was killed at Eldon when his jitney, which was not in safe working condition, overturned and crushed him under a massive pile of scrap metal. Rose Logan and Mamie Williams,

⁴⁰³ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 228. This book contains a superlative summary of Johnson's case and the contests that surrounded it. My account of both the case and the reaction to it owes a substantial debt to Thompson's research and analysis, especially her presentation of the case itself, her explanation of the major figures, and most of all, her perceptive rendering of the historical context of Detroit factories, courtrooms, and politics during the 1970s. Particularly helpful was her analysis of how radical attorneys were able to leverage these dynamics to win several high-profile criminal cases and push for their political objectives.

two black women workers at the plant had also died in work-related incidents in the weeks previous to Thompson's death.⁴⁰⁴ In response to the racism, speedup, and unsafe conditions at Eldon, workers led wildcat strikes, created insurgent worker organizations like the Eldon Safety Committee and the Eldon Avenue Revolutionary Union Movement (ELRUM), and committed acts of individual sabotage and violence.

Despite the toxic atmosphere at Eldon Avenue, when James Johnson was suspended and sent home from his job unloading brake shoes from an oven on 15 July 1970, he was devastated. Working at Eldon was the best job he'd ever had, and he desperately wanted to keep it. It may have been "the worst job at the plant"⁴⁰⁵ as a quality control auditor later described it, but Johnson saw it as his "only source of survival."⁴⁰⁶

Johnson, an employee of the plant since 1967, had recently returned to work after a four-month layoff. On 15 July, he was at work in the cement room when a temporary foreman, Hugh Jones, ordered Johnson off his job to go work the brake shoe oven, the hot, dirty, and dangerous assignment that Johnson believed he had escaped when he was promoted to the cement room. According to Thompson, the fact that Jones, like Johnson, was a black man added the sting of betrayal to a work order he already felt was unfair.⁴⁰⁷

Johnson reported to the oven, but, because he was not provided with the proper safety gloves for the job, he refused to start working. Johnson had his union steward, Clarence Horton, summoned in order to mediate the situation. The temperature at the oven that July day was over 120 degrees Fahrenheit, so Horton tried to secure a "heat

⁴⁰⁴ Kieran Taylor, "American Petrograd: Detroit and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers," in Brenner, Brenner, and Winslow, *Rebel Rank and File*, 323.

⁴⁰⁵ Ricke, "Worker on Trial For Three Killings at Plant," *Detroit Free Press*, April 26, 1971.

⁴⁰⁶ Tom Ricke, "Murder Trial Witnesses Tell of Violence at Auto Plant," *Detroit Free Press*, May 6, 1971.

⁴⁰⁷ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 125.

pass” for Johnson. He was unsuccessful, and Jones suspended Johnson for “insubordination.”⁴⁰⁸

To Johnson, the suspension was the final indignity in a history of racist and degrading treatment by Chrysler. Two months earlier, Johnson had suffered head and neck injuries in a car accident. Taking time off to heal, he was ordered back to work by the company against his doctor’s wishes, under threat of firing. This was a common Chrysler practice. His request to have his health benefits cover his medical bills was denied. Later that month, he took a few days vacation with a supervisor’s permission. But upon returning to work he found he had been charged with going AWOL. The next month, an arranged temporary promotion for Johnson was quashed when his white foreman, Bernard Owiesny, placed a white friend of his in the job instead. These incidents fed a growing feeling of harassment and racial persecution in Johnson, even though the discipline meted out to him was reversed after he contested it. The work reassignment and suspension of 15 July, which he feared was a dismissal, accelerated a smouldering frustration into a bonfire of rage and despair.⁴⁰⁹

An hour after he was sent home, Johnson returned to the plant gate. He told the guard that he was arriving late for his shift. The guard called the plant foreman and learned of Johnson’s suspension. The guard denied Johnson entry to the plant and confiscated his employee badge. Johnson left the gate and climbed over a fence surrounding the plant. At 4:55, he reappeared in his department, demanding the man who had suspended him: “Where’s Jones?”⁴¹⁰

When he found him, Johnson removed a carbine he had stashed in his coveralls and shot the foreman in the leg, knocking him to the floor. Johnson then continued to shoot Jones as he lay prone on the factory floor. Edward Lacey, an autoworker who

⁴⁰⁸ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 125.

⁴⁰⁹ Thompson, 124-25.

⁴¹⁰ “Ousted Worker Kills Three In Chrysler Plant Shooting,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 16, 1970.

witnessed the shootings, recalled: "He was standing over him, pumping bullets into him. He was going to make sure he was dead."⁴¹¹

Johnson reloaded his gun and turned a corner around a group of bins. A coworker then attacked Johnson in an attempt to stop him. "I gave him all I had, right from the floor," said the unnamed witness. "The gun flew out of his hands in one direction and he [Johnson] went in another direction."⁴¹² The gun loose, fellow workers shouted to foreman Gary Hinz, "Get it Gary, get it!" Hinz and Johnson both dived for the weapon. Johnson wrestled it free and shot Hinz twice in the chest, killing the man who two years earlier had sold Johnson a lawn mower at a bargain price.⁴¹³ Johnson then killed job setter Joseph Kowalski, shooting him as he tried to find shelter under a time clock, before eventually being persuaded to stop by Local 961 union steward John Moffett.⁴¹⁴

Johnson's rampage was a major news story. It made national headlines in the *New York Times* and covered the front page of the next day's *Detroit Free Press*, jarringly juxtaposed with a photo of Leonard Woodcock shaking hands with GM executive Earl Bramblett, their performance of industrial peace in the auto industry subverted by the news of Johnson's one-man war. Detroiters, workers, union leaders, and media all struggled to answer the *Michigan Chronicle's* question: "What Manner of Man Is James Johnson Jr.?" The radical black newspaper *Inner City Voice* had an answer: "James Johnson is you and me." The violence that erupted from Johnson, the *Voice* argued, could have come from anyone exposed to the racism, harassment, and "inhumane conditions" at Eldon Avenue. The article went on to detail the circumstances that led to the shootings, claiming, "in a manner which all of us oppressed by the foul, racist machinery of Capitalism, are capable, of being driven James Johnson was pushed

⁴¹¹ John Griffith and Louis Heldman, "Worker Kills Three In Plant," *Detroit Free Press*, July 16, 1970.

⁴¹² Griffith and Heldman, "Worker Kills Three."

⁴¹³ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 142.

⁴¹⁴ Tom Ricke, "Murder Trial Witnesses Tell of Violence at Auto Plant," *Detroit Free Press*, May 6, 1971.

to the breaking point.” Because any black worker could have been James Johnson, it was incumbent on all black workers to resist his prosecution for murder:

All of us, and not just James Johnson, are on trial beginning April 26. And that is why all of us in turn must put Chrysler on trial that day, put the sellout UAW on trial, must put the vicious system of Capitalist exploitation on trial, must put US “homegrown” racism and imperialism on trial. We cannot afford any more James Johnsons to be “judged” and sentenced by the same racist dogs who daily push the James Johnsons in us to the breaking point.⁴¹⁵

The radical narrative, that any black worker could have been James Johnson, existed literally side-by-side with a more active, heroic portrayal of his actions. Beside the article was a poem, “The Ballad of James Johnson,” which praises Johnson as a man who “does what he has to do,” a martyr who “has given his soul.” The poem concludes with the cry “James Johnson needed a Thompson!”⁴¹⁶

DRUM, the newsletter of the black radical autoworker insurgency named the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, also featured the narrative of Johnson as a heroic black working avenger who “supposedly asked all of his fellow workers to stand back for he was not going to hurt him. Who ended his rampage by coolly throwing down his gun and saying ‘I’m satisfied.’” Johnson, according to *DRUM*, “has moved the Black Workers struggle at the point of production to a new and higher level.” *DRUM* explicitly placed Johnson in a lineage of other black workers who had employed violence in the workplace, including Rushie Forge, Chuck Wooten, Sidney Lewis, and “another black worker in Dept. 9150 at Dodge” who “became outraged and locked his foreman in the trunk of a car on the assembly line.”

The article also included Ike Jernigan on its list of heroic black workers. Jernigan was a member of the International Association of Machinists working at an aerospace plant in California, who helped organize a dissident worker caucus, the Lockheed Workers Unity Association. In 1970, Jernigan shot and killed his foreman and two union executives after repeated conflicts with management and his union. All of the people

⁴¹⁵ “Hail Brother Johnson,” *Inner City Voice*.

⁴¹⁶ “The Ballad of James Johnson,” *Inner City Voice*, April 1971.

mentioned in this leaflet, with the exception of the unnamed individual from Dept. 9150, were either DRUM members, or, in the case of Ike Jernigan, consciously political black worker activists, unlike the quiet, apolitical Johnson.⁴¹⁷

DRUM's construction of Johnson's violence as a heroic act of rebellion makes sense when one considers that the primary purpose of the newsletter was as propaganda designed to inflame and inspire black workers inside the plant. General Baker, one of the leaders of DRUM, recalled that when violence would break out in the factory, DRUM would get behind it, viewing violent incidents as an opportunity to craft a revolutionary consciousness among black autoworkers.⁴¹⁸

It was certainly true that Johnson's murders had an immediate impact on relations in the workplace. William Serrin's book about the 1970 negotiations between the UAW and the automakers quotes a militant worker who told of the day after the shooting. He said a fellow worker returned to his plant after skipping two days of work. When the worker was confronted by his foreman, the militant claimed: "I took the front page of the fucking *Free Press* and I went over there and held it up to his fucking face. He turned his back."⁴¹⁹ Union officials, meanwhile, were concerned that workers seemed to enjoy the fear foremen now had of them.⁴²⁰

Radicals were not the only ones who saw deeper meanings in Johnson's murders. While stopping far short of calling him a hero, others asserted that Johnson's rampage was a logical consequence of racism and working conditions in Detroit's auto plants. Bill Black was a prominent writer for the *Michigan Chronicle*, which was a progressive newspaper of Detroit's African American community. Black argued, much like the writer of the *Voice* article, that Johnson was an ordinary workingman pushed into

⁴¹⁷ "Hail James Johnson," *DRUM*, volume 3 number 13; "League of Revolutionary Black Workers," *Inner City Voice*, June, 1970, accessed 12 May 2014, <http://www.freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/Black%20Liberation%20Disk/Black%20Power!/SugarData/Journals/League.S.pdf>.

⁴¹⁸ Baker, discussion.

⁴¹⁹ William Serrin, *The Company and the Union: The "Civilized Relationship of the General Motors Corporation and the United Automobile Workers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 235.

⁴²⁰ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 179.

a horrific outburst, a “man-machine, ready and willing to perform his hard, hot, heavy, dirty, and dangerous job.” While Black refused to condone violence, he concluded: “Anyone familiar with conditions on Detroit's auto plantations would not be entirely surprised by what James Johnson did” because “work in Detroit's auto shops, particularly for black men, breeds violence.”⁴²¹

One of the factors breeding violence was in-plant racism. Black located evidence of Chrysler's racist practices in the very victims of Johnson's attack. He pointed out that Jones, the black foreman Johnson killed, had put in 22 years of service to the company; by contrast, Hinz, the white foreman, had been promoted to the same position in less than six years. Kowalski, who held the semi-skilled position of job setter, was white, while almost all 80 workers in Johnson's department, the “worst job in the plant,” were black. To Black, they were flesh and blood examples of “the hoax known as “Equal Employment Opportunity,”⁴²² the federal organization that had been established five years earlier to end discrimination based on race, among other factors, in the American workplace. Black held that Johnson's murders were an indictment of the Commission's failure to change the racial calculus of auto work.

Much like the disgruntled workers in the auto shops, Black shared out his criticism between both the company and the union. Black opined that the union had failed Johnson in not vociferously defending him against his suspension. Therefore, Johnson, of whom Black quotes a coworker's description as “a good man who got pushed too far,” then “went home and got his gun.”⁴²³ Black's criticism of the union and working conditions at Eldon attracted a rebuke from Local 961 officials, who, in a written statement signed by the local's president, secretary, and Region 1 representative, accused Black of “playing up Johnson as a hero.”⁴²⁴ As Johnson's union remained largely silent during the trial, the statement is a rare indication of UAW and Local 961 attitudes towards the Johnson incident and wider issues of race, gender, and conflict in the plant. In response to the structural issues raised by radicals and liberals alike, the

⁴²¹ Bill Black, “What Manner of Man Is James Johnson Jr.?” *Michigan Chronicle*, July 25, 1970.

⁴²² Bill Black, “What Manner of Man?”

⁴²³ Black, “What Manner of Man?”

⁴²⁴ “Unionists Dismiss Johnson Story as ‘Distorted Facts,’” *Michigan Chronicle*, August 8, 1970.

union countered with a narrative that stressed that Johnson's murders were the product of his own individual pathology.

That the union contested Black's claim that Johnson's steward did not represent Johnson adequately before the shootings was to be expected. Historians have shown, however, that, while not reaching the same levels as their campaigns against communist unionists of the 1940s and 1950s, the UAW leadership of the day combated black radicals with ferocity, while largely ignoring other dissident groups. UAW leadership called DRUM "fanatics" and "black fascists," and consistently denounced them in union publications. They employed violence and harassment against black leaders, forcibly broke the picket lines of DRUM-led strikes and underhandedly interfered in union elections to sink black radical candidates.⁴²⁵

In this context, the union's criticisms of Johnson, as a "sick" man, a loner who often did not get along with his coworkers, emerge as elements of a counter-narrative contesting the adoption of Johnson as a symbol by black radical elements opposed to 961's leadership. Both Black and those radical elements would have been bitterly amused by the statement's defence of working conditions in the plant itself. The union heads acknowledged that Johnson's job in the brake shoe department was the lowest-paying work in the plant, but defended it by claiming there were fewer requests for transfers from it than from any department. "If it's such a rugged place to work," they asked, "why do they have women working there -- and contented?"⁴²⁶ This complacent approach to both working conditions and the struggles of black and women workers illustrates why so many production workers had become dissatisfied with a local union leadership they saw as uninterested in improving the jobs of black, female, and lower-status workers.

At Johnson's trial, his defense lawyers, Kenneth Cockrel and Justin Ravitz, expertly blended the narratives of radicals and progressives to construct a narrative that made Johnson's acts explicable, and excusable, to a jury. The two were political

⁴²⁵ On UAW and company attacks on radical black organizations, see Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 117; Jones, "Rank and File Organizing," 293.

⁴²⁶ "Unionists Dismiss."

radicals, Cockrel being one of the leaders of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, who were also able attorneys. Cockrel and Ravitz were uniquely suited to the task of making radical critiques palatable, both in a courtroom setting and to the media. Exploring the racism and poor working conditions Johnson endured was the foundation of their defence. As Cockrel said, “the trial gives us a chance to question both the auto companies and the union.”⁴²⁷ Cockrel and Ravitz would stress Johnson’s lifelong struggles with mental illness, arguing that it predisposed him to snap under the strain of racist mistreatment at Chrysler that another worker might have endured. They emphasized the racism that shaped Johnson’s life at every turn. Cockrel and Ravitz also took pains to demonstrate that workplace violence at the Eldon Avenue plant contributed to an intolerable situation that sparked Johnson’s violent reaction. They presented an understanding of workplace violence as caused in large part by structural factors.

Cockrel and Ravitz demonstrated that work at Eldon was defined by racism through the testimony of Johnson’s coworkers. One of the first witnesses called, production worker William Threet, testified that a foreman had called Johnson “boy.” When asked if the foreman had ever spoken to him in that way, Threet replied, “He hasn’t yet -- I hope he don’t, because there’ll be trouble.”⁴²⁸ Witnesses revealed that racism at the plant worked both structurally and informally. In his own testimony, Johnson alluded to this, discussing his frustration with both the racialized hierarchy of work at the Eldon Avenue plant and with the countless small insults and indignities that contributed to his fraying mental state.⁴²⁹

The second major element of Cockrel and Ravitz’s defence was a sustained presentation of the poor working conditions and violence experienced by Johnson and other Chrysler workers. “Working conditions and treatment of workers by foremen have become the main issues of the trial,” wrote Tom Ricke, who covered the trial for the *Free Press*. A parade of witnesses would testify to the epidemic of shop-floor violence at Eldon Avenue. John Moffett, the union steward whose intervention helped end

⁴²⁷ Tom Ricke, “Trial Opens In 3 Slayings”, *Detroit Free Press*, April 26, 1971.

⁴²⁸ Bill Black, “Word Battle Marks Opening of Axle Plant Slaying Trial,” *Michigan Chronicle*, May 8, 1971.

⁴²⁹ Tom Ricke, “Worker Tells Why He Killed At Plant,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 12, 1971.

Johnson's rampage, said he was "shot at by a worker two weeks ago as he tried to defend another man who was in trouble for not coming back from lunch on time." He also told of "dangerously greasy floors, unprotected conveyers, and dangerous aisles crowded with workers and hi-low trucks at the same time."⁴³⁰ Quality control auditor Don Thomas called Johnson's job "the worst job at the plant" and said he "has frequently witnessed foremen pick on workers who are doing the best they can." Suspending workers for refusing to work on the brake shoe ovens, which precipitated Johnson's shootings, was common.⁴³¹ That Thomas, who claimed to be a friend of all three men murdered, would offer such testimony speaks to his understanding of how fundamental exploitation and harassment was to the production of Chrysler automobiles. Clemens Fitzgerald, a psychiatrist called by the defence, identified the entire environment at Chrysler as toxic, citing the "total despair and frustration" felt by workers "with no chance of upward achievement."⁴³²

Moffett indicated that little had changed at Eldon Avenue since the day of Johnson's terrible vengeance. This was corroborated by the testimony of others. Foreman John Pietrzewicz "told how he was attacked by a worker he suspended last week. He said he was hit on the head from behind and knocked into a "skid box."⁴³³ In fact, according to the testimony of Ellsworth J. Rhodes, the plant's general foreman and an apparent target of Johnson's on 15 July, the problem was getting worse, not better. Rhodes testified "that violence has been "rather markedly increasing" at the factory for the past few years, especially since the Johnson shootings, including "workers hitting foremen with iron bars and things like that. There's been fights between workers too."⁴³⁴ Rhodes' testimony underlined the defence's point that violence was an everyday part of the Eldon Avenue environment. This enabled the jury to understand Johnson's shootings

⁴³⁰ Tom Ricke, "Murder Trial Witnesses Tell of Violence at Auto Plant," *Detroit Free Press*, May 6, 1971.

⁴³¹ Ricke, "Murder Trial Witnesses."

⁴³² Tom Ricke, "Old Mental Scars Blamed in Killing Of 3 at Factory," *Detroit Free Press*, May 19, 1971.

⁴³³ Ricke, "Murder Trial Witnesses."

⁴³⁴ Lee Winfrey, "Witness Reveals Violence in Plants," *Detroit Free Press*, May 4, 1971.

as a reaction to the everyday racism and violence at the plant, not a shocking revenge murder from outside the bounds of comprehensibility.

To counter Cockrel and Ravitz's structural explanation of Johnson's killings, prosecutors attempted to personalize and pathologize Jackson's actions. In his cross-examination of Johnson, assistant Wayne County prosecutor Avery Weiswasser focused on the fact that Johnson left the plant and then returned with a hidden weapon. This showed, he argued, that Johnson acted as a rational individual perpetrating a crime would. To Johnson's definition of committing the murders and other violent incidents of his life as "losing control," Weiswasser countered that Johnson was actually "losing his temper." The prosecution also called its own psychiatrist who opined that Johnson was capable of distinguishing right from wrong at the time of the shootings. This construction of Johnson's mental state replaced an explanation of a man being driven beyond reason by the strains of the factory with one that identified Johnson as an actor in full control of his faculties and wholly responsible for his violent crimes. He called Johnson "evil" and said "his soul is sick, not his head."⁴³⁵

Weiswasser did include one outside factor in the understanding of Johnson's shootings that he presented to the jury. During his cross-examination of Johnson, he asked Johnson whether he read dissident newspapers like the *Eldon Wildcat* or the *Inner City Voice*: "Was your attitude created in any way by some of the things you read in the newspapers?"⁴³⁶ He also pressed Johnson as to whether he belonged to ELRUM, DRUM, or the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. These questions appear to be part of a strategy by Weiswasser to undercut the defence's argument that racism contributed significantly to Johnson's actions.⁴³⁷ The defence, he charged, was being used as a "cat's paw" by "revolutionary elements."⁴³⁸ In Weiswasser's telling, in-plant racism was nothing more than the persecution complex of a violent paranoiac.

⁴³⁵ Tom Ricke, "Killer of 3 Called Evil," *Detroit Free Press*, May 21, 1971.

⁴³⁶ Paul Harris, *Black Rage Confronts the Law* (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 100.

⁴³⁷ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 141.

⁴³⁸ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 141.

However, Weiswasser's dismissal of racism as a factor in the murders would dramatically backfire:

Under cross-examination by Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Avery Weiswasser, Johnson testified to incidents he considered "harassment" by company foremen, "no job upgrading . . . no consideration" and a "conspiracy to get me fired." "They were all just picking on you, I suppose, Weiswasser said." "Not just me," Johnson answered. "It happened to a lot of people there." "How do you know?" Weiswasser asked. "I saw it all with my own eyes," Johnson said. "I supposed you mean all the black boys [were being harassed]" Weiswasser snapped. Groans rose from many of the courtroom spectators and jurors. Weiswasser was silent. Defense attorney Kenneth Cockrel stood up slowly and said calmly: "Your honor, I object to the word 'boys.'" Recorder's Judge Kenneth Colombo agreed."⁴³⁹

Nevertheless, Weiswasser continued to explain Johnson's violence along personal lines, concluding on the final day of the trial that he was "just a big baby."⁴⁴⁰

The prosecution's explanation of Johnson's workplace violence as essentially the product of his own individual agency was further weakened by the jury's visit to the Eldon Avenue plant, an event radical attorney Paul Harris concludes "had the most profound impact"⁴⁴¹ and Thompson called "the most important moment of the trial."⁴⁴² Chrysler had done its best to whitewash the plant for the visitors. "Eldon Avenue looked as if Mr. Clean, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and the White Tornado had gone through it," reported the *Michigan Chronicle*.⁴⁴³

Nevertheless, jurors were moved by the solemnity of the workers who stood silently as the jurors, court officials, and press toured the plant, and by the expression of support by one young black worker who called out to the defendant: "Hey Brother Johnson." Jurors tried out loading and unloading the brake shoes. While Johnson remarked, "It wasn't like this when I was here," the jury's view of the plant affected their

⁴³⁹ Ricke, "Worker Tells Why."

⁴⁴⁰ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 144.

⁴⁴¹ Harris, *Black Rage*, 108.

⁴⁴² Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 143.

⁴⁴³ Bill Black, "Murder Plant Revisited By Chrysler Slayer," *Michigan Chronicle*, May 22, 1971.

understanding of Johnson's actions deeply. The trip, Thompson concludes, "impressed upon the jury the alienating and dangerous nature of the oven job" in a way that even the eloquence of Cockrel and Ravitz could not.⁴⁴⁴ As *Time* reported, during deliberations one member commented "Did you see that cement room? Working there would drive anyone crazy."⁴⁴⁵ While the jury's deliberations were heated, they arrived at a decision in less than four hours. They found Johnson not guilty due to insanity.

Why did the understanding of workplace violence as a product of structural racism and exploitative work presented by Johnson's defenders resonate with Detroiters inside and outside the courtroom? Race has rightly been identified as a major factor in the Johnson defence and its understandings. Thompson sees the Johnson verdict as primarily a symptom of the changing alignment of forces in the struggle for control of Detroit. Pressed by the actions of black radicals, city liberals moved leftward during the late 1960s and 1970s. The Johnson verdict was one of a series of high-profile acquittals that infuriated white conservatives, who believed that "liberals [were] now in cahoots with radicals to promote black interests over white."⁴⁴⁶ However, there is an important class element of the acquittal that must also be considered. Cockrel and Ravitz had to win over a jury that was made up of blacks and whites. Class was also a key factor in the jury's makeup. Ten of the twelve had worked in the city of Detroit, two as autoworkers. Three more were married to autoworkers.⁴⁴⁷ *Time* noted that even Judge Colombo's working-class sympathies were engaged by the defence strategy:

A villain to many liberals for having once sentenced a marijuana defendant to 9½ years, Judge Colombo was nonetheless scrupulously fair to the defense. "I used to work on the line in an auto plant during the summers," he recalls. "That's a lot of what persuaded me to go to law school. I hated the men who wore white shirts and always knew how to do your job better than you."

As Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin wrote in *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution*, Cockrel turned "defense into offense" by "emphasizing class" in a

⁴⁴⁴ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 143.

⁴⁴⁵ "Hell in the Factory," *Time*.

⁴⁴⁶ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 155.

⁴⁴⁷ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 10.

true “jury of your peers” strategy that mean “the Chrysler corporation was put on trial.”⁴⁴⁸ Attorney Paul Harris writes that: “the genius of these two young lawyers was in creating a strategy to help the jurors understand how race and class destroyed a fellow human being.”⁴⁴⁹

Further evidence of the effectiveness of this radical, structural critique of workplace violence was attorney Ronald Glotta’s 1973 suit against Chrysler seeking worker’s compensation for Johnson. Glotta argued that Johnson was in the Michigan mental health system, where he had been ever since his trial, because of a mental illness that had been caused by Chrysler’s inhumane working conditions; therefore, his mental illness was as much a workplace injury as a slipped disc suffered lifting an overloaded box would have been. The 1960 case of *Carter v. General Motors* had established a precedent for compensating mental disabilities stemming from work in Michigan.⁴⁵⁰ In March 1973 Judge John Conley decided that Chrysler was responsible for Johnson’s predicament. He awarded Johnson benefits of \$75 a week, effective from the day of the shootings.⁴⁵¹

The precedent-setting ruling underlined the ability of radical legal practice to define workplace violence as a phenomenon stemming from racism and poor conditions in the workplace. Glotta declared after the ruling, “Chrysler pulled the trigger which resulted in Johnson’s insanity and the death of the three men.”⁴⁵² Conservatives expressed shock and dismay at such arguments, finding Johnson’s 1973 award for mental disability disturbing. A suburban Detroit editorial reiterated the argument that only Johnson was responsible for the killings, claiming that “the same working conditions did not drive other employees insane,” and Johnson’s very real experiences with racism and

⁴⁴⁸ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 164-65.

⁴⁴⁹ Harris, *Black Rage*, 93.

⁴⁵⁰ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 176.

⁴⁵¹ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 177.

⁴⁵² Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 177.

harassment at work were “contrived grievances conjured up by a sick mind.”⁴⁵³ The *Detroit Free Press* argued that Chrysler’s suspension of its personnel test, a measure aimed to facilitate the hiring of more African American workers after the 1967 uprising, resulted in the hiring of a worker who was “insane to begin with.”⁴⁵⁴ The *Detroit News* claimed that Johnson’s court award would leave workers with a history of mental illness “virtually unemployable,” leading to higher workmen’s compensation premiums. Ironically, this critique of the verdict echoed the perspective of radicals in its understanding of the intersection of trauma and workplace stress as widespread: “Who among us hasn’t had some trauma that work might ‘aggravate?’ Who among us, far short of killing or violence, couldn’t claim an impairment of earning ability as a result of this ‘aggravation?’” editorialized Detroit’s mainstream press.⁴⁵⁵

Despite the outcry, the wider impact of the verdict fulfilled neither the dreams of radicals or conservative nightmares, however. While a press release issued by Glotta after the verdict stated “it is hoped that the Johnson case will become the spearhead for a new effort to improve working conditions not only in the Eldon Plant but in all plants across the United States,”⁴⁵⁶ directly linking the verdict to the political struggle and wildcats led by radical workers at Eldon Avenue, that hope was in vain. As Thompson notes, the UAW, “blinded by political paranoia,” was completely uninterested in using Johnson case to pressure the automakers on race, safety, or violence.⁴⁵⁷

Cockrel, Ravitz, and Glotta’s radical legal practice effectively defended Johnson by advancing a structural understanding of their client’s violent actions at work. However, the aftermath of the Johnson ruling reflected the limits of radical legal practice in creating durable understandings of violence at work as structural. That Judge Conley

⁴⁵³ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 177–79; These pages also pointed me towards the newspaper reaction quotes, from “Ruling Favoring Plant Killing Needs Reversal” (editorial) *Macomb* (title cut off), March 17, 1973, Box 5, File 23, Detroit Revolutionary Movements Collection (hereafter DRMC), Reuther Library.

⁴⁵⁴ “A Ruling Against Reason” (editorial), *Detroit Free Press*, March 13, 1973, Box 5, File 23, DMRC.

⁴⁵⁵ “It Harms The State” (editorial), *Detroit News*, March 8, 1973, Box 5, File 23, DRMC.

⁴⁵⁶ “Press Release”, Box 5, File 23, DRMC.

⁴⁵⁷ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 180.

ordered Chrysler to pay James Johnson, a man who had killed three people at work, \$75.00 a week in worker's compensation was certainly an important, precedent-setting ruling. Glotta called it "an important case for people in the plants" that made it much easier to receive compensation for psychiatric conditions caused by job stress.⁴⁵⁸

Once the criminal and workplace compensation cases were over, though, public concern about workplace violence evaporated. In an age of crusading journalism and muckraking, few observers, aside from the occasional journalist like Bill Black or Rachel Scott, who featured the Johnson case in her book *Muscle and Blood*, called for any action to address the violence that was common in Detroit auto factories.

How prevalent was it? What caused it? Did workers in other sectors face violence on the job? What could be done to reduce the levels of violence at work? These questions remained unasked. While many people understood that Johnson's violence was partly the product of his experiences at Chrysler, the concept of workplace violence as a discrete issue, much less as a problem that could be solved, simply did not exist in the 1970s. Little was done in the plants to reduce the high risk of violence that autoworkers faced on the job. Nor was there any consideration outside of the factories of the true scope of violence, either in the auto industry or the wider working environment. In a real sense, Johnson was excused for his violence in a way that allowed that violence to continue.

In 1973, Bill Black wrote: "The only thing unusual about the Johnson case is the fact that such tragedies don't happen more often. Conditions in the auto plants are such that on any working day one or several auto workers could be impelled to do exactly what James Johnson did."⁴⁵⁹ As little was done to reduce violence at work, the violence - and the homicides and attempted homicides - continued. In the automotive industries of the United States and in at least one instance, Canada, there were several more work-related shootings during the 1970s. As two of the most prominent cases show,

⁴⁵⁸ Ron Glotta, in discussion with the author, 14 May 2012.

⁴⁵⁹ Bill Black, "Back to Black," *Michigan Chronicle*, undated, found in Box 5, File 23, DRMC.

presenting the structural understanding so effectively employed in Johnson's legal battles in other cases was difficult.

Nine months after Johnson's victory in the worker's compensation case, an auto industry shooting in Detroit would again make national headlines. David Mundy, the African American chairman of UAW Local 600's 5900-member casting centre and foundry unit, stood trial, accused of shooting white skilled trades worker William Harrell. Once again, Kenneth Cockrel led the defence of the accused. Unlike in the Johnson case, however, Cockrel largely eschewed placing structural factors and workplace issues at the centre of his defence. The Mundy case shows that that, for radical attorneys and others, diagnosing workplace conflict, racism, and stress as a precipitator of violence was not equally possible in every case of violence at the automotive workplace, even if these factors were present. The specifics of the case mattered a great deal to what understandings of workplace violence were possible.

The shooting occurred in the context of a historic struggle within the UAW. Skilled trade workers were vigorously contesting the union's proposed contract with Ford. They objected to provisions that would allow production workers to replace them on overtime shifts if they refused to work them. In a time when automakers were attempting to squeeze as much production as they could from their workforce, overtime emerged as a major quality of life issue. Workers were forced to work hours and hours of overtime a week as the Big Three opted to combat foreign automakers by squeezing maximum production from aging plants through speedup and extended hours.⁴⁶⁰ Ford's skilled trade workers felt a provision that allowed management to put production workers into their jobs if they refused overtime was a backhanded way to erode their job security and force them to accept longer workweeks. The disagreement exposed deep fissures within the union. Skilled tradesman Louis Rucker, a worker with 15 years in at the Ford Rouge plant, said "Just because I don't want to work overtime, that shouldn't give the company the right to bring in a production guy to fill my job."⁴⁶¹ Asked to comment on the

⁴⁶⁰ Taylor, "American Petrograd," 311-12.

⁴⁶¹ Agis Sapulkis, "UAW Tries to Overcome Opposition to Ford Pact," *New York Times*, November 13, 1973.

skilled trades revolt, Leonard Woodcock averred: "I'm not a psychiatrist. I'm just a collective bargainer."⁴⁶²

This tension erupted into open conflict after the skilled trades workers rejected the contract by a four-to-one margin. It was the first time that a UAW contract had ever been rejected by the rank and file. The Detroit workers were the only workforce in the country to vote against the contract, an indication of the local nature of the grievances and the serious problems with working conditions in Detroit plants. In an article headlined "Labor Rebellion Stuns UAW Leadership," *Free Press* labor reporter Ralph Orr portrayed the union as out of touch. "The UAW, which had its roots in dissent, now faces dissent in its own ranks and appears bewildered by it," wrote Orr, saying the union was now looking for "scapegoats," blaming "the media, outsiders, and agitators" for the ballot box defeat. But this response came after, when it was too late. During the lead-up to the vote, a picture of the formerly revered leader Walter Reuther was torn from the wall at one Local 600 debate. One picket smashed a lock to attempt to get into Solidarity House, the enclave of the UAW leadership. Yet these leaders were slow to react to the forces trying to scupper the deal. Woodcock did not make a statement arguing in favour of the contract's ratification until 25 per cent of the vote was already in, well after membership had made up their minds against the contract.⁴⁶³

According to Orr, this inaction cost the leadership. He concluded, "tradesmen appear to have turned down the contract mainly because the leadership did so little to sell it."⁴⁶⁴ And while the UAW directed concerted repression towards the radical, race-based challenge of the RUMs, they were caught flatfooted by a grassroots protest by mostly white skilled workers, supported by the United National Caucus (UNC), a reform caucus within the UAW. The leadership's response to their developing crisis of authority

⁴⁶² Agis Sapulkis, "They Can Wildcat the Union, Too," *New York Times*, November 18, 1973.

⁴⁶³ Ralph Orr, "Rebellion Stuns UAW Leadership", *Detroit Free Press*, November 19, 1973.

⁴⁶⁴ Orr, "Rebellion."

in Detroit among skilled trades workers would place an enormous amount of pressure on local union leadership, and spark inter-union violence.⁴⁶⁵

After the initial defeat of the deal with Ford, the UAW decided to issue a call for a second round of balloting of the skilled trades unit; in essence, they asked for a do-over. Behind the scenes, top leadership exhorted local leaders to bring the skilled trades workers into the fold. The situation was contentious. Trades workers were irate at a leadership they saw as unconcerned with their best interests. As one worker said, "Forty years ago you could lead people around by the nose. Now they're educated. You can't do that anymore."⁴⁶⁶ The call for another vote added to workers' feelings of being unheeded by leadership. At Local 600 offices in Dearborn, where workers and leadership had gathered in preparation for the ratification revote, "there were fistfights and bitter exchanges between dissidents protesting overtime rules for skilled tradesmen in the new agreement with Ford."⁴⁶⁷

In the hallway, David Mundy argued with a group of workers. It was about 2:30, after what had been a long and grinding day. One of the workers, a 27-year-old white millwright named William Harrell, and Mundy, began shouting at each other. "Why don't you go out and negotiate a contract?" challenged Mundy. "OK. I could. I could." responded Harrell. What happened next is a matter of some dispute. Harrell tried to assault Mundy, but was initially held off by some of Mundy's assistants.⁴⁶⁸ After that, Harrell was able to punch Mundy in the face, severely injuring his eye. Harrell fled the offices on foot, pursued by Mundy, a former heavyweight boxer, and three other men. Mundy took out a pistol. He would later say at trial that he had been carrying the gun because of death threats he had been receiving that week.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁵ On the UNC, see Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 108. On earlier inter-UAW struggles over bargaining, see Serrin, *The Company and the Union*, 266-88. This chapter discusses tensions within the UAW over the 1970 contract settlement, as well as touching on the worker rebellion at the General Motors plant in Lordstown, Ohio.

⁴⁶⁶ Sapulkis, "Skilled Trades Reject Pact at Ford."

⁴⁶⁷ Ralph Orr, "Tradesmen Reject Ford Pact" *Detroit Free Press*, 14 November 1973.

⁴⁶⁸ The preceding from Billy Bowles and Jo Thomas, "Union Aide Arrested in Shooting," *Detroit Free Press*, November 14, 1973.

⁴⁶⁹ John F. Head, "UAW Aide Hazy on Shooting," *Detroit Free Press*, 31 January 1974.

Mundy fired two shots at Harrell, missing both times. Harrell ran down the streets of Dearborn, eventually seeking sanctuary inside the Hi Tower gas station. “Call the police. Call the police. They’re going to kill me. They’re going to kill me,” Harrell implored Walter Hopper, the attendant. As Harrell attempted to call police from a phone inside, Mundy and the three other men arrived at the station. Also present was a camera operator from a Detroit TV station, capturing a clip of the incident. Mundy fired three shots through the glass from of the station, hitting Harrell once. After Harrell fell to the ground, the four men walked away calmly. Hopper, the gas station attendant, said: “They walked away like they owned the place.”⁴⁷⁰ Harrell, fortunately, had only been slightly injured by the shot that wounded him in the buttock. Meanwhile, the second balloting for the skilled trades unit had been cancelled.

The shooting added a tragic bizarre, element to the dispute, and guaranteed that it made even bigger news. Agis Sapulkis, a *New York Times* reporter who witnessed most of the altercation, called it “an extreme example of the intensity of feeling that has been evident on both sides during and after the negotiations.”⁴⁷¹ The camera footage appeared on several local newscasts. Woodcock weighed in on the outcry, calling one account of the shooting “sensationalism.”⁴⁷² Media observers connected the shooting to the struggle over the new contract, diagnosing the incident as a symptom of UAW dysfunction. In an editorial, the *Detroit Free Press* stated “The problems for the UAW leadership in securing ratification of its contract settlement with Ford have only been heightened by the tragic, senseless shooting that took place Tuesday . . . Guns should not replace reason in the heat of debate at the union hall, and local union leaders should be as aware of that as anyone else.”⁴⁷³

The *Free Press*’s editors, like Orr, thought that the debacle demonstrated that UAW leadership was largely out of touch, not understanding its members’ positions and

⁴⁷⁰ Sapulkis, “Skilled Trades Reject Pact at Ford.” Sapulkis was present for the entire confrontation bar the shooting itself.

⁴⁷¹ Agis Sapulkis, “They Can Wildcat.”

⁴⁷² Ralph Orr, “Rebellion.”

⁴⁷³ Editorial, “UAW Ought to Heed Lesson of Ford Fiasco,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 15, 1973.

issues. "There is a restlessness among the auto worker force that has caused Leonard Woodcock, the UAW president, and his key aides, to take a new and proper look inside the plants and to form a better understanding of those who work in them," they wrote. The controversy showed that "UAW leadership needs to work even harder towards that goal."⁴⁷⁴ In the headline above its story on the dispute and the shooting, *The Times* appeared to offer its own wry comment on an incident that occurred at a time of widespread grassroots worker action against management: "They Can Wildcat the Union, Too."

In January 1974, Mundy's trial on a charge of assault with an attempt to commit murder began. The trial started on a note of low comedy, Prosecutor Healy cracking that "The saving grace is apparently Mundy is a lousy shot."⁴⁷⁵ Many witnesses stepped forward during the next three weeks to reiterate the facts of the case – the argument in the hallway at Local 600 offices, the scuffle, the chase through Dearborn streets, and finally, the shooting at the service station. As in the Johnson case, the details of the matter were little disputed.

However, while in the Johnson case Cockrel painted his client as the victim of degrading work, and racism and violence both in the plant and out, there was little of that type of defence presented here. Perhaps Mundy's position as a union leader made this critique more difficult to advance, though it is clear that local union leaders like him were being squeezed between the pressure of UAW leadership to bring the skilled trades workers onside and the desire of skilled trades workers to have leadership hear their demands. Cockrel did mention external factors at times: commenting on the videotape of the shooting before the trial, he argued the tape was "only a segment. It does not show the racial implications ... It does not show the other implications."⁴⁷⁶ However, Cockrel's defence of Mundy pivoted instead on a technical point: that, as reported in the *Free Press*, "after receiving the blow to the face, Mundy, a former professional heavyweight fighter, was 'out on his feet' and was mentally incapable of forming the intent to commit

⁴⁷⁴ "UAW Ought To."

⁴⁷⁵ Louis Heldman, "UAW Official's Trial Starts," *Detroit Free Press*, January 22, 1974.

⁴⁷⁶ "Accused UAW Official Faces Trial In Shooting Incident", *Detroit Free Press*, November 24, 1973.

murder."⁴⁷⁷ Mundy himself testified that he had no memory of the shooting, saying "I just don't remember pulling a gun . . . I don't deny it, but I don't remember it, either."⁴⁷⁸ After deliberating for two and a half hours, the jury convicted him of the most serious charge available to it, assault with the attempt to commit murder.

The transcript of Mundy's sentencing hearing reveals the UAW's vastly different reaction to Mundy's crime compared to its reaction to Johnson's. Whereas Johnson was largely forsaken and the criticisms of his working conditions rebuffed by Johnson's local leadership, UAW brass rushed to Mundy's defence. At his sentencing hearing, several prominent UAW leaders asserted that a man like Mundy, who had escaped a harsh upbringing in the Cincinnati ghettos to become a respected union leader, was a man needed in the streets of Detroit and the union hall, not locked up in prison. Even UAW president Leonard Woodcock sent a letter of support. Despite their forceful testimony on behalf of Mundy's character, Judge James Canham said he was unable to overlook the fact that the jury had convicted on the most serious charge, and this verdict must be taken into account. Mundy was sentenced to a minimum of five years in prison.⁴⁷⁹

It is somewhat ironic that a political defence of Mundy was not really attempted, given that Mundy was politically active while Johnson was reclusive and withdrawn. Furthering the irony was Local 600 vice president Buddy Battle's testimony that he would call Mundy in the middle of the night to act as a peacemaker when racial tensions would explode in Detroit neighbourhoods. Another major factor in Mundy's sentencing was gun violence, which was an increasing concern in Detroit. Here, too, David Mundy had attempted to stop the violence. In the early 1970s, a police unit named STRESS (Stop The Robberies Enjoy Safe Streets) conducted particularly aggressive and controversial police incursions into Detroit's black neighbourhoods, raiding properties without warrants and practicing entrapment. During STRESS's first year of operation, Detroit had the highest rate of civilians killed by police of any US city, with STRESS responsible for over

⁴⁷⁷ John F. Head, "UAW Aide Found Guilty of Assault," *Detroit Free Press*, February 6, 1974.

⁴⁷⁸ Head, "UAW Aide Hazy."

⁴⁷⁹ *Michigan v. Mundy*, Wayne County Circuit Court (hereafter WAYCC) Criminal Case No. 73-58433, 20 March 1974, Wayne County Clerk's Office (hereafter cited as WCCO), Detroit, Michigan.

one-third of these deaths.⁴⁸⁰ Mundy was a speaker at a major rally against STRESS. Battle, an important figure in Detroit's black liberal community and later UAW Region 1A director, said "it would be an injustice to the community and a loss to me and the membership" if Mundy were jailed.⁴⁸¹

Unlike Johnson, an isolated worker who became a hero to many radical workers, Mundy was an integral part of mainstream black unionism in Detroit and his shooting of Harrell was condemned by radicals. Mundy had been a member of Battle's Trade Union Leadership Council, the moderate, leadership-aligned black faction of the UAW. After the shooting incident, the *Eldon Spark*, generally no friend of the almost exclusively white skilled trades, claimed Mundy's shooting of Harrell was part of a wider UAW campaign against dissidents and democracy: "How can the UAW bureaucrats be surprised if local bureaucrats end up shooting at UAW members? These little bureaucrats are only following the example of the big bureaucrats in Solidarity House!"⁴⁸²

Like James Johnson, dynamics of race, workplace violence, and job stress were present in the case of David Mundy. The violence of both men sprang directly from stressful job situations and a workplace marked by conflict. The case of Mundy shows that workplace violence did not just flow in a simple direction from "exploited worker" to "boss," but, in a reflection of the contentious union situation of the time, produced violence based on the UAW's conflicts with its own rank-and-file. Mundy's position as both black worker and union leader placed him at the centre of a conflict between skilled trades workers and the UAW leadership. This hybrid position may have been why Cockrel opted for a relatively apolitical defence. With no widely understood framework of "workplace violence" into which to place the incident, and no simple narrative of worker vs. company to present, Mundy's action was seen as symptomatic of workplace conflict, not produced by it.

⁴⁸⁰ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 168.

⁴⁸¹ Michigan v. Mundy; for more on STRESS see Thompson *Whose Detroit?*, 90-94, 145-52; and Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 151-75.

⁴⁸² "More UAW Violence," *Eldon Spark* 103, November 29, 1973, UMB.

The deployment of radical legal practice to an incident of workplace violence, then, depended on both the political context surrounding the case and the specific facts of the case itself. This is underlined by the final case considered here, the 1977 murder of UAW Local 444 president Charlie Brooks by fired autoworker Clarence Talbot in Windsor, Ontario. Because of Brooks' widely beloved status in the community, Talbot's history of violent criminality, the differing racial and political context of Ontario, and the conventional defence of Talbot pursued by Talbot's attorneys, the question of whether workplace conflicts, racism, and inter-union politics may have played some role in Talbot's actions was largely ignored at trial. Nevertheless, some of the public discussions of the case indicated that issues of union conflict and racial friction were not unknown in Windsor or in the Canadian auto sector. Radical legal practice primarily intersected with the Talbot case not at Talbot's trial, but at the Law Society of Upper Canada prosecution of two civil rights lawyers who attempted to assist Talbot after his arrest. This prosecution resulted in a public clash over the Talbot case and a notable victory for radical, antiracist legal practice in Canada.

Windsor in the 1960s and 1970s was not as dominated by racial conflict as was Detroit, its neighbour to the north. The city had a much smaller black population, and racism, while certainly evident, thus stayed largely in the background, although local activists like Howard McCurdy, a future New Democratic Party (NDP) Member of Provincial Parliament, fought well-publicized battles against racial inequality. As McCurdy and others pointed out, Windsor was certainly a city with a racial hierarchy in which blacks were largely at the bottom both socially and economically.⁴⁸³

A 1965 report for the newly formed Ontario Human Rights Commission, which made Windsor the site of its very first field office, agreed. It concluded: "Negroes in Windsor are at the base of the city's social structure." This racial hierarchy was deeply established. Despite the longstanding presence of African Canadians in Windsor, "newcomers have advanced more rapidly."⁴⁸⁴ Of any non-majority group in Windsor,

⁴⁸³ "Race Views Spark Row," *The Guardian*, May 15, 1964; H.C. McNeil, "Target of Wrath," *The Guardian*, May 15, 1964. These articles discuss a seminar at

⁴⁸⁴ Rudolf A. Helling and the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC), *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians in the Social Structure of Windsor, Ontario* (Toronto, 1965), 8.

“Negroes have experienced the greatest difficulties. They encountered problems in restaurants, taverns, with law enforcement officers, educational officers, employers, fellow workers, and previous employers.”

This racialized hierarchy was clearly visible in Windsor’s workplaces. Helling found that of the city’s 15 largest companies, 9 had zero black employees, and none had a black manager.⁴⁸⁵ Helling wrote that: “the marginality of Negroes can be seen in the considerably high rate of unemployment even through generations.”⁴⁸⁶ Compared to workers of Italian and Chinese descent, blacks reported trouble finding employment in much higher numbers, and were much more likely to attribute discrimination as the cause.⁴⁸⁷ For those black workers who made it past racial bias into a job, further racism abounded at work. Thirteen of 87 workers reported unfair treatment by fellow workers, and 14 of 88 said supervisors had treated them unfairly. Helling recommended that: “union programs to increase the acceptance of minority group members among fellow employees might be appropriate.”⁴⁸⁸ Noting that blacks of varying income levels reported the same incidence of discrimination, Helling concluded Windsor’s race problems “were race problems, not social class problems.”⁴⁸⁹

This was the city where Clarence Talbot grew up a young black man in the 1960s. Years later, a friend would describe his upbringing as “brutal,” marked by prejudice, violence, and paranoia. A gifted artist, he dropped out of school by seventh grade, apparently over the frustration of being illiterate. He began to box. He was talented and powerfully built. In 1972, after over a decade of amateur boxing he was headed to a pre-Olympic qualifying tournament in Northern Ontario. The month before the tournament, though, he clashed with a man at a Windsor bar. They went outside to

⁴⁸⁵ Helling and OHRC, *Position of Negroes*, 10.

⁴⁸⁶ Helling and OHRC, *Position of Negroes*, 79.

⁴⁸⁷ Helling and OHRC, *Position of Negroes*, 80-86.

⁴⁸⁸ Helling and OHRC, *Position of Negroes*, 79-81.

⁴⁸⁹ Helling and OHRC, *Position of Negroes*, 107.

the parking lot, and when Talbot assumed his boxer's crouch, the man shot him four times, a response which a jury later ruled was self-defence.⁴⁹⁰

Talbot's work in the auto industry was also marked by conflict. Employed at Chrysler for over a dozen years, he had been fired several times and then returned to work after successfully grieving his dismissals. In January 1977, he was out of work again, fired for lateness and absenteeism. The father of ten children, he arrived at the offices of UAW Local 444 to discuss getting his job back.⁴⁹¹

Talbot was a well-known figure among the union leadership, the type of member who consistently brought issues and problems to his union representatives. As noted in Chapter 3, Talbot had a reputation as a bully in the plant, and had been involved in at least one major brawl with a coworker. For his part, Talbot saw his union officials as being racially discriminatory, unconcerned with the problems of a black man at Chrysler. That January morning, Talbot spoke to local leaders, including president Charlie Brooks, about his dismissal. The union had initially grieved Talbot's firing, but the fate of that grievance is unclear. Some allege that Talbot's grievance was withdrawn, unbeknownst to him, during contract negotiations with Chrysler in November 1976.⁴⁹² Others insist that the grievance was still in process.⁴⁹³ At trial, union second-vice-president Gerry Bastien, present at the fatal meeting, would recall that, although he felt he was being discriminated against, Talbot "calmly discussed"⁴⁹⁴ the problem and "only showed

⁴⁹⁰ Lloyd McLachlan, "Remains of a Dream: The Man Who Shot Charlie Brooks Looks Back at his Tragic Past and His Future Hopes," *Windsor Star*, June 11, 1994.

⁴⁹¹ Susan Brown, "Murder Suspect Faces Life in Windsor UAW Shooting," *Detroit Free Press*, January 19, 1977.

⁴⁹² Charles Roach, in discussion with the author, 29 February 2012.

⁴⁹³ Roach and Smith both recalled that Talbot's grievance had been dropped: Roach, discussion; Michael Smith, in discussion with the author, 14 March 2012. They are supported in this belief by an article in the *Globe and Mail*: Thomas Claridge, "Wanted Job Back, Man Tells Murder Trial," *Globe and Mail*; undated, Charles Brooks Biography File, Vertical File Collection, Walter Reuther Library (hereafter cited as CBB). However, according to Gary Parent, the grievance had not been dropped; Laporte and Parent, discussion.

⁴⁹⁴ Thomas Claridge, "Wanted Job Back."

emotion during a brief dispute with Mr. Brooks over whether the union president had promised to get the job back."⁴⁹⁵

Talbot certainly had strong feelings about his firing, however. "He felt he was being discriminated against. He described to me how he felt as a black and said he felt he was not properly represented concerning his dismissal," Bastien later testified about a discussion he had had with Talbot in November or December 1976. At the January meeting, according to Bastien, Brooks insisted he had only promised to try to get Talbot's job back. After this discussion, Talbot left the office. He went to his car and got a rifle. He returned, forced his way into Brooks's office, and shot Charlie Brooks to death. Police arrested Talbot immediately afterwards.

The killing of Brooks sent Windsor into a state of shocked grief. Charlie Brooks was a beloved and revered figure locally. A UAW member for over forty years, he was serving his eleventh consecutive term as Local 444 president. He had fought for the Auto Pact and for wage parity between Canadian and American autoworkers. He was also a strong social unionist, who used his platform to press for wider transformations of society. Current Unifor/CAW 444 members remember him as a "visionary."⁴⁹⁶ He helped create co-op housing for Windsor workers, and pressed for reductions in the workweek. A particular passion was nuclear disarmament, a controversial cause to spearhead in the repressive climate of the 1950s. John McArthur, publisher of the district's UAW newspaper remembered: "He always believed strongly in that, even when he was branded left-wing and pro-communist."⁴⁹⁷ In the 1960s, Brooks pushed the Canadian branch of the UAW to oppose the Vietnam War, a stance credited by later president Ken Lewenza as establishing an antiwar orientation for the CAW.⁴⁹⁸ He was a tough-minded leftist, perhaps a Communist, who often clashed with international and nation UAW

⁴⁹⁵ Claridge, "Wanted Job Back."

⁴⁹⁶ Laporte and Parent, discussion.

⁴⁹⁷ *Windsor Star*, undated, "Here's how Charlie Brooks is Remembered", CBB.

⁴⁹⁸ Don Lajoie, "Brooks' Legacy 'With Us Forever'", *Windsor Star*, January 17, 2002.

leadership, and seemed beloved by his 13,000-member local. The day of his funeral, workers shut down four Chrysler plants by leaving the line to pay their respects.⁴⁹⁹

Mournful messages and tributes appeared in the local and national media, and in Detroit, immediately. UAW international president Leonard Woodcock and Canadian president Dennis McDermott said Brooks' "tragic and senseless" death "diminishes us all -- because Charlie Brooks is gone and because of the way he died."⁵⁰⁰ In addition to scores of Local 444 members, McDermott and the mayor of Windsor were at the funeral. UAW international vice-president Doug Fraser, soon to take over as UAW head, spoke to the mourners.⁵⁰¹

Meanwhile, Clarence Talbot sat in the Windsor jail. Newspaper articles reporting Talbot's arraignment stated that Talbot did not have a lawyer. These articles came to the attention of Toronto civil rights lawyer Charles Roach. Roach, together with his partner Michael Smith, had been active in civil rights law and antiracist activism in Ontario for several years. Both were members of the International Committee Against Racism (INCAR), an affiliate of the Progressive Labor Party. The two lawyers made national headlines in early 1978, when they challenged the federal government's deportation of seven Jamaican-born women working in Canada. The government was deporting them on the grounds that they had lied about having children before entering the country. Roach and Smith countered that the women were encouraged to do so by Jamaican and Canadian officials because their labour was in demand in Canada. When unemployment rose, they alleged, the government used the child issue as a pretext to discard women workers who were no longer needed in the labour market.⁵⁰²

It was through their contacts in the anti-racist community, who feared for the plight of a black defendant in a city marked by racism, that Roach and Smith were prompted to look into the case. Roach and Smith, together with a social worker named

⁴⁹⁹ Unnamed and undated article, CBB.

⁵⁰⁰ UAW Press Release, January 17, 1977, CBB.

⁵⁰¹ "Ranks Join in Farewell to Charlie," *Windsor Star*, undated, CBB.

⁵⁰² Kathleen Rex, "Black Women Being Deported to Ease Job Market, Group Says," *Globe and Mail*, January 28, 1978.

Owen Leach, traveled to the Windsor jail to visit Talbot and to see if there was any assistance they could offer him. After informing the officer on duty of the purpose of their visit, they sat down to wait for Talbot to be brought out. After about 40 minutes, a Jaguar pulled up outside the courthouse. According to Roach, the car's driver, a Windsor attorney named Harvey Strosberg, said to Roach and Smith: "Are you folks here to see Talbot?" I said yes. He said: "I'm representing Talbot. I tried to shake his hand. He didn't shake my hand." Talbot's brother Clayton Talbert accompanied Strosberg. Roach, Smith, and Leach left the jail without seeing Talbot. Roach and Smith would not meet him until years later, at the provincial mental health facility at Penetanguishene.

The three men drove back to Toronto. Roach recalled:

Coming back with my two friends . . . we in some kind of way figured what was going to happen. They're going to put this guy in an asylum and say that he's crazy. We hadn't even seen him! But what tipped us off was when Harvey Strosberg says "professional," used the word "professional assistance," some word like that. It's like a code word for lawyers saying they'll come in here and do something.⁵⁰³

After consulting Toronto lawyer Edward Greenspan and John Laskin, Strosberg recommended charges against Roach and Smith to the Law Society of Upper Canada, the professional body that regulates lawyers in Ontario.⁵⁰⁴ Roach and Smith were charged with touting, attempting to poach another attorney's client. Roach was also charged with misconduct in an older case. Because of these professional charges, neither Roach nor Smith had any contact with Talbot or his family or any other involvement with Talbot's criminal trial, though Roach recalls being "really keen to get into the depths of this case."⁵⁰⁵ That trial took place in Toronto. Public outcry over the murder was so great that the trial had been moved from Windsor, as it was believed that it was impossible for Talbot to receive a fair trial there.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰³ Roach, discussion.

⁵⁰⁴ "Records of the Law Society of Upper Canada (hereafter LSUC) Discipline Committee," November 28, 1978.

⁵⁰⁵ Roach, discussion; "Records of the LSUC Discipline Committee."

⁵⁰⁶ Canadian Press, "Talbot Trial is Moved To Toronto," *Globe and Mail*, September 14, 1977.

The moved venue was not the only unusual aspect of the trial. There was a disagreement between Talbot and his attorney, the renowned Canadian trial lawyer Edward Greenspan, about how Talbot should plead. As in the Johnson and Mundy cases, the facts of the trial were not in any real dispute. Talbot told Greenspan “he would not allow a defence of insanity.”⁵⁰⁷ Whatever the reason, there was a serious dispute between Talbot and his legal counsel as to what explanation of his violent act they would present to the court.

The debate was so intractable that Judge Patrick Galligan took the rare step calling witnesses from the bench to testify to Talbot’s mental condition.⁵⁰⁸ In effect, Talbot was forced to plead insanity over his own objections. This was an infrequently employed practice. According to Roach, Talbot would later tell him that he had been denied the chance to tell his side of the story at trial.⁵⁰⁹

With judge and defence attorney focused on the issue of Talbot’s mental state, little else was brought into the trial’s consideration of how this act of violence occurred. Unlike Cockrel and Ravitz’s defence of Johnson, or the defence Roach and Smith would have likely put forth for Talbot, Greenspan presented a medical, non-structural claim for Talbot’s insanity. This defence defined Talbot’s act of workplace violence as a purely internal, psychological matter. Therefore, other factors that may have contributed to Talbot’s mental instability, like past experiences of racism in Windsor or the plant, or conflict between Talbot and his managers or union representatives, were largely considered irrelevant.

The only mention of racism or union-worker conflict at trial to appear in the media was Bastien’s testimony that Talbot “felt he was being discriminated against. He described how he felt as a black and said he felt he was not being properly represented

⁵⁰⁷ “Man Who Killed Leader of Union Sent To Hospital,” *Globe and Mail*, December 17, 1977.

⁵⁰⁸ “Man Who Killed Leader,” *Globe and Mail*. Psychiatrists testified that the reason Talbot rejected an insanity claim was he preferred prison to an indefinite stay in a mental facility; see “Unionist’s Killer Ruled Insane,” *Toronto Star*, December 17, 1977.

⁵⁰⁹ Roach, discussion.

concerning his dismissal."⁵¹⁰ In the context of Windsor, Clarence Talbot, and Charlie Brooks, however, this evidence added up to proof of Talbot's disorder -- a paranoid persecution complex, arising from within, not, as radical attorneys like Cockrel, Glotta, Roach, or Smith may have argued, evidence of experiences of a lifetime of racism and on-the-job stress which created an uncontrollable violent reaction to a contentious situation.

Talbot was duly found not guilty by reason of insanity and committed to Penetanguishene. However, the Law Society's hearing into the touting charges against Roach and Smith remained active. The prosecution of Roach and Smith for attempting to provide aid to Talbot is evidence of the legal profession's resistance to radical legal practice in 1970s Ontario. Ironically, however, while issues of race and workplace conflict were never raised at Talbot's trial, the Law Society proceeding intended to chill Roach and Smith's oppositional legal practice brought these issues into public discussion. Even more ironic was that Roach, Smith, and their supporters turned the hearing, ostensibly a weapon of the establishment, into a politicized total environment that directly challenged the Law Society's practices and biases. In doing so, they won a significant victory for the anti-racist movement in Ontario.

In November 1978, almost one year after the conclusion of Talbot's trial, the Law Society of Upper Canada's hearing began. Roach and Smith's supporters formed a defence committee to apply political pressure to the Society. The committee appears to have been comprised of allies Roach and Smith had gained through their work as civil rights lawyers and anti-racist activists.⁵¹¹ Each of the committee's publications highlighted Roach and Smith's previous work. Peter Rosenthal, a University of Toronto professor, and later a lawyer and anti-racist activist in his own right, was one prominent member. The defence committee produced a pamphlet titled "ORGANIZE TO DEFEND CIVIL RIGHTS LAWYERS" which alleged that suppressing anti-racist legal activism was the real purpose of the Society's charges against Roach and Smith: "It is clear that certain members of the legal establishment are determined to curtail the fight that

⁵¹⁰ Claridge, "Wanted Job Back."

⁵¹¹ Royson James, "Law Society Controls with 'Reign of Terror,'" *Contrast*, January 18, 1979, in Personal Papers of Charles Roach, Toronto (hereafter cited as PCR).

Charley Roach and Mike Smith are waging against racism and for civil liberties,” it charged.⁵¹²

To fight the charges against them, Roach, a member of the National Conference of Black Lawyers (NCOBL) drew on his contacts in North America’s radical, anti-racist law community. The Conference was the leading anti-racist legal organization in North America, with experience defending high-profile political clients including Angela Davis and the Black Panthers. From the United States, attorneys Lennox Hinds, the Conference’s director, who had defended Assata Shakur; Leonard McMann of the Michigan Alliance Against Racial Oppression; Victor Young, also of NCOBL; and Leora Mosston arrived to lend their skills to the defence. From Canada, James Lockyer, who would later help exonerate Guy Paul Morin and David Milgaard, also joined the defence team. Their participation in the case is an example of a transnational anti-racist legal practice, forged in struggles around the continent, deployed in opposition to Ontario’s legal establishment.⁵¹³

The crucial tactic in Roach and Smith’s wider political campaign against the charges was to open the hearing to the public. The Society’s standard procedure was to conduct disciplinary matters *in camera*. Roach and Smith demanded the right to face their accusers in public. The Society acceded to this request, but insisted on holding the hearing in a small room that held no more than thirty spectators. When Roach and Smith requested a room big enough to accommodate all interested parties, the Society responded that, in Roach’s words: “For 135 years we’ve held hearings in this room, in Osgoode Hall . . . this is where it’s going to be held.”⁵¹⁴

However, Roach and Smith’s supporters overwhelmed the Society’s attempt to control the space and the parameters of the hearing. They vocally demanded entry, and defied the Society’s attempts to prohibit them from the proceedings or constrain and limit their presence by the size of a room. Once they gained admission, they filled a large meeting room with around 200 people, some sitting in the aisles. Throughout the

⁵¹² Roach-Smith Defense Committee, “Organize to Defend Civil Rights Lawyers,” PCR.

⁵¹³ “Records of the LSUC Discipline Committee.”

⁵¹⁴ Roach, discussion.

hearings, supporters would regularly interrupt the proceedings with heckles for the prosecutors and applause for Roach and Smith.⁵¹⁵ The pressure succeeded in destabilizing the Law Society's normal way of doing business, brought external issues into the deliberations, and took away the Society's home field advantage.

Before the hearing, demonstrators carried signs reading, "anti-racist lawyer harassed," "defend civil rights lawyers" and "fight racism". Inside, the LSUC's lawyer told the hearing that the pair had not taken reasonable steps to ask whether Mr. Talbot was already represented.⁵¹⁶ Roach and Smith's attorney disputed this claim. Furthermore, Roach and Smith insisted that their motivation for action in the Talbot case was not to gain financially by poaching a client, but to intervene constructively in a racially combustible situation. As Smith wrote to Peter Rosenthal, one of the organizers of the Defense Committee:

I should make it clear that our interest in the Clarence Talbot case was related to our involvement with the International Committee against Racism and the anti-racist movement generally. We wanted to insure that the charges made against Clarence Talbot did not become the source of increased racism in Canada. We wanted to investigate the circumstances of the shooting because we suspected that elements of racism were aggravating Talbot's problems and frustration. Finally, we wanted to insure that Talbot was not further victimized by the trial process because of his race. We had no intention of representing Mr. Talbot.⁵¹⁷

Roach and Smith's defence team contended that this was not an isolated prosecution of two attorneys for violating the accepted rules of professional conduct, but rather part of a pattern of persecution of radical and antiracist advocates by bar associations and law societies in the United States and Canada. Hinds viewed Roach and Smith's prosecution as an example of "the increasingly widespread use of professional sanctions to muzzle legal advocates who espouse unpopular clients and causes throughout the world."⁵¹⁸ Hinds was speaking from direct experience, having

⁵¹⁵ "Records of the LSUC Discipline Committee."

⁵¹⁶ "Charges of Touting Against Two Lawyers Dismissed by Board," *Globe and Mail*, December 21, 1978.

⁵¹⁷ Michael Smith to Peter Rosenthal, 6 February 1978. PCR.

⁵¹⁸ Lennox Hinds, "Submission of Intervenor," PCR.

faced a disbarment hearing in New Jersey he believed was racially motivated. Hinds had been charged after referring to an in-progress murder trial in New Jersey as a “legalized lynching” by a “kangaroo court.” These comments, and a trip Hinds took to Iran to participate in a conference on American involvement there, also led a New York judicial committee to recommend he not be allowed to practice in that state. As with Roach and Smith, a group of Hinds’s supporters formed a committee in his defence.⁵¹⁹

The Society denied any racial bias or political animus. Strosberg testified that: “I don’t care if Mr. Roach had been pink, I would have sent the letter.”⁵²⁰ Criticisms of Strosberg and Greenspan’s handling of Talbot’s defence emerged at the hearing. Strosberg insisted there was no racial dynamic to the situation. In his view, there was no “racist tinge to the way community was inflamed.” Windsor was simply “enraged that a beloved person in the community generally was shot down.”⁵²¹

Exchanges at the hearing pitted Smith’s critique, that Talbot was merely being processed through the justice system with little concern for his desires or defence, against Strosberg’s depoliticized view the Talbot case, which gave little attention to issues of race or union conflict. “Did you say that: ‘We are trying to keep a lid on it?’” Smith asked of their conversation at the Windsor jail. Strosberg denied saying it, but admitted that “I certainly wasn’t looking to add any more material to the public position that was being set out as a precedent.”⁵²²

That public position was to treat Talbot’s slaying of Brooks as purely arising from Talbot’s own psyche, and declining to raise any other factors, such as race or union conflict, that might have had any bearing on the case, factors that Roach and Smith would likely have made a cornerstone of their approach. Asked why he rejected offers of assistance from Roach and Smith’s organizations, Strosberg replied blandly: “this was a

⁵¹⁹ “Rutgers Professor Fights Disbarment,” *Harvard Crimson*, September 20, 1980, accessed July 2, 2014, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1980/9/20/rutgers-professor-fights-disbarment-pnew-brunswick/>

⁵²⁰ “Records of the LSUC Discipline Committee.”

⁵²¹ “Records of the LSUC Discipline Committee.”

⁵²² “Records of the LSUC Discipline Committee.”

proceeding on the basis of insanity.”⁵²³ No other issues, he seemed to be saying, were worth mentioning, or as he put it in another answer: “the only question was one of capacity and intent.”⁵²⁴

However, it was not only Roach and Smith’s attorneys and political allies who felt that the two lawyers’s concern about the racial context of the Talbot case was warranted. Talbot’s brother Clayton, himself a former UAW local leader in Windsor, commented that Windsor was “a very, very bad place to live if you are black.” Noting that his family had been threatened and a general atmosphere of racial hostility existed, Clayton Talbert asserted that: “it was pretty nice of these guys [Roach and Smith] to see if there was anything they could do to assist my brother in his time of need.”⁵²⁵ Roach highlighted his attention to factors that other lawyers may have not considered, especially the extra-legal situation faced by Clarence Talbot and his family. According to the *Globe*, Roach “suggested bitterly to the discipline panel that there were some members of the society whose sole motivation was not personal gain and that there could be “humanitarian missions outside the strict legal capacity they have.”⁵²⁶

After three sessions, the Law Society’s prosecution of Roach and Smith ebbed away. The touting charges were dismissed due to a lack of evidence. The Society’s decision to abandon the prosecution denied the people who had mobilized in Roach and Smith’s defence the opportunity for a dramatic victory at the Law Society itself, perhaps a reason why the Society opted to quietly drop the case. Nevertheless, the outcome was still a significant victory. Anti-racist activists in Toronto, helped by their American allies, had rallied around two of their standard-bearers, and effectively taken control of the Law Society’s process, legally and politically. Rosenthal recalls Roach and Smith’s defenders “felt very good about this victory. The Law Society, with all its power, came after Mike and Charlie in a big way, and they were very successfully resisted.”⁵²⁷

⁵²³ “Records of the LSUC Discipline Committee.”

⁵²⁴ “Records of the LSUC Discipline Committee.”

⁵²⁵ “Charges of Touting.”

⁵²⁶ “Charges of Touting.”

⁵²⁷ “Charges of Touting;” Peter Rosenthal, in discussion with the author, 30 April 2012.

The Talbot, Johnson, and Mundy cases show how during the 1970s, notable incidents of workplace violence were catalysts that touched off contests over race, work, violence, and the law in both the United States and Canada. Like in the Mikel Otegi case, these were controversial events that prompted many different parties to struggle over establishing what understanding of these violent acts would be adopted. How workplace violence was understood was not stable, it was determined in part by clashes in the courtroom, in the media, and in the streets. In the Talbot and Johnson cases, radical legal practice was a crucial part of this struggle. Like earlier courtroom crusades over free speech or lynching, workplace violence has been an important springboard for radical law.

However, it must be remembered that radical legal practice, while important, was just one factor among many that shaped understandings of workplace violence in the 1970s. The Talbot, Mundy, and Johnson cases demonstrate that understandings of workplace violence -- what it is, why it happens, who is responsible -- are historically contingent. The local, national and legal contexts these incidents occurred in; the life history of the perpetrators and victims; the media construction of the cases; the strategies of attorneys; all helped determine how a particular incident of workplace violence would be understood. Over time, the understandings of a particular case could change, too. In the early 1980s, the Michigan legislature rewrote its worker's compensation laws to exclude more workers with emotional and cardiac conditions, citing the Johnson case as evidence that workers were abusing the system.⁵²⁸

As the 1970s turned to the 1980s, workplace violence incidents became more spectacularly violent and thus more widely reported. Now carrying automatic weapons, violent workers were committing acts that killed scores of people. A spate of killings at US post offices thrust workplace violence permanently into the national consciousness. These killings did what the workplace violence incidents of the 1970s, widely publicized though they were, did not: prompt a widespread understanding of workplace violence as a discrete social problem that required the deployment of knowledge and policies aimed at its eradication. Yet while awareness of the problem widened, the understanding of the

⁵²⁸ Harris, *Black Rage*, 119.

causes of workplace violence narrowed in the 1980s and 1990s. Policies tended to proceed based on a media-fueled image of violent workers as crazy, paranoid loners, ignoring the factors, like class conflict, the labour process, unsafe workplaces, racism, and patriarchy, which created the conditions for workplace violence. As we will explore in the final chapter, workplace violence was simultaneously everywhere and nowhere: a terrifying “new” phenomenon occurring all over North America, whose causes were troublingly buried in the unknowable hearts and minds of workers themselves. As Ron Glotta reflected in 2012, “I couldn’t win James Johnson today.”⁵²⁹

⁵²⁹ Glotta, discussion.

Chapter 6.

“Out of the Back Streets and Into the Workplace:” The Discovery of Workplace Violence in the 1980s and 1990s

On the morning of 10 September 1994, the union executive of Ford Local 600's operations and maintenance unit wrapped up their weekly committee meeting. Most of the men then walked from their portable trailer at the River Rouge complex in Dearborn to a second trailer, where they began working on an informational pamphlet. Another executive member soon joined them: Oliver French. French, a 47-year-old black man, was a member of the Unity slate, which had just lost power to a slate headed by white workers. French believed, as did other unionists, that the new slate was pushing black workers out of positions of power.

French's frustration with the situation was boiling over. On the previous Thursday, French, who would later be described as “a damn good guy” and “always a gentleman,” had kicked a door down at the office trailer, claiming he needed to use a fax machine. Others had a key to the door, but not French. This Saturday, he stalked into the trailer with a gun. French shot four of his fellow union members, killing Ron McTasney and Greg Couls. French then walked to an adjacent building and handed over his .357 Magnum to a worker there. “I just shot four people,” he said. When the Dearborn police arrived, an officer asked French: “Why did you do it?” French's answer could have come straight from the Dodge Main of the 1970s: “Because they fucked with me,” he replied.⁵³⁰

⁵³⁰ John Belbow, Paige St. John, and Said Deep, “I Just Shot Four People,” *The Detroit News and Free Press*, September 11, 1994; Belbow, St. John, Deep, “Suspect, Victims, Called Dedicated Union Advocates,” *The Detroit News and Free Press*, September 11, 1994.

Autowork, race, union politics, masculinity: the tragedy of Oliver French's murderous rampage carried many echoes of the violence that reverberated through Detroit auto plants in the 1970s. But when Oliver French left the Rouge building in handcuffs, he was walking out into a very different world than that of James Johnson, one that had different concerns and would understand his violent rage in a different way. The *Detroit Free Press's* story on the shootings was accompanied by a sidebar titled "Deadly Trail in the Workplace Keeps Growing" that argued "Murder in the work place has become the fastest growing type of homicide in America." Below, it listed several examples of deadly shootings on the job, in Michigan and across the US. In 1994, the United States was gripped by concern about the troubling "new" phenomenon of workplace violence. At the time of French's shootings, Ford Rouge officials and Local 600 members were preparing to meet to discuss on-the-job violence, 20 years after David Mundy chased Billy Harrell from the Local 600 hall and shot him in the street. In Detroit, this concern created unusual alliances. In the aftermath of the French shooting, for example, Ford called in Mike Hamlin to help lead the healing process. In the late 1960s, Hamlin was a leader of Detroit's radical black worker insurgencies. Now, he was a social worker specializing in the troubles of autoworkers.⁵³¹

When violent incidents in Detroit and Windsor's auto industries occurred during the 1960s and 1970s, they occasionally grabbed national headlines and pressed observers to consider the role of working conditions, racism, union politics, and alienation in producing these violent explosions on the job. Yet never was "workplace violence" understood as a discrete social phenomenon, a problem to be investigated, analyzed, and solved. In the 1980s, however, the age of workplace violence arrived. While the identification of workplace violence as a specific, solvable issue was a step forward in one sense, the framing of the problem often ignored the actual nature of violence at work and its causes. The solutions advanced by experts, employers, and governments have therefore failed to address the totality of the problem. The definition of workplace violence they established, and the solutions pursued, have produced

⁵³¹ "Deadly Trail in the Workplace Keeps Growing," *The Detroit News and Free Press*, September 11, 1994; John Lippert, Dennis Niemec, Amber Arellano, "Union Struggle Led To Slayings," *Detroit Free Press*, September 12, 1994; Mike Hamlin, in discussion with the author, 13 June 2012.

enhanced surveillance and security measures at work and additional layers of bureaucracy, but done little to address the root causes of workplace violence. An appreciation of the history of workplace violence, something this study has attempted to further, would have produced a much richer understanding of violence at work and likely resulted in better policy. It is unwise to try to solve a problem in the present while remaining ignorant of its past.

Workplace violence became an issue of US-wide concern following a series of deadly shootings at post offices by postal workers, including the 1986 massacre of 18 people in Edmonds, Oklahoma, by former postal worker Patrick Sherrill. The post office shootings were accompanied by multiple-victim shootings in other workplaces across the nation: offices, factories, and stores.⁵³² In 1992, for the first time, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration began tracking workplace violence fatalities.⁵³³ Major media outlets across North America ran stories on the terrifying new threat in the nation's workplaces: your coworker. A typical piece, from the *St. Petersburg Times* read:

"Look who is doing the firing now."

That thought, says a criminologist who studies mass murder, is often in the minds of men who slaughter their bosses and co-workers.

"Workplace homicide has doubled in about a decade," said James Alan Fox, dean of the College of Criminal Justice at Northeastern University in Boston. "More and more baby boomers are losing jobs. They're facing unemployment, they're angry, and they want revenge.

"More and more they are willing to take out the boss, as a way of saying, hey, look who's doing the firing now."⁵³⁴

A *Globe and Mail* piece began: "Surviving the working day can be a matter of life and death for some Americans, as murder on the job rises at an alarming rate." The

⁵³² The best account and analysis of the workplace massacres of the 1980s and 1990s is Mark Ames, *Going Postal: Rage, Murder, and Rebellion: From Reagan's Workplaces to Clinton's Columbine and Beyond* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2005).

⁵³³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Violence in the Workplace Comes Under Closer Scrutiny," Summary 94-10, August 1994, accessed July 1, 2014, <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/ossm0006.pdf>.

⁵³⁴ David Ballingrud and Carol Gentry, "Stress in Workplace Leading to Employee Violence, Say Experts," *St. Petersburg Times*, January 28, 1993.

Globe quoted Bruce Blythe, president of Crisis Management International, who contended that: "Workplace murder is now the fastest-growing kind of homicide in America."⁵³⁵ A chorus of voices echoed Blythe's conclusion. From *USA Today*:

"We like to think the workplace is safe," says Peggy Lawless, research project director for Northwestern National Life. Her company releases the survey "Fear and Violence in the Workplace," today. "The reality is that violence in America is spilling out of the back streets and into the workplace."

USA Today cited a survey of 600 workers that found that one in four claimed to have been attacked, threatened, or harassed on the job in the past year. It quoted Mark Braverman, president of the Crisis Management Group: "There's enormous rage being directed at the American workplace now."⁵³⁶ Nowhere in these stories were names like James Johnson, Clarence Talbot, or David Mundy mentioned. Workplace violence was something happening strictly in the present tense.

Concern about workplace violence did not stop at the 49th parallel. The Canadian media regularly published articles on the subject. In Canada, women's groups and union groups regularly launched campaigns to end violence against women and violence at work, often in tandem. The 1989 École Polytechnique massacre, when a prospective student denied admission entered a Montreal university building and murdered 14 women studying to become engineers, was a crucial moment sparking such activism.⁵³⁷ The date of the murders, the 6th of December, became a sombre anniversary and a rallying point, a time to remember and to combat violence against women. Two years after the killings, activists entered subways and boardrooms to demand action about violence against women, including violence on the job. In response, at least one

⁵³⁵ "Work's Murder: On-the-job Homicide on the Rise in U.S." *The Globe and Mail*, May 3, 1991.

⁵³⁶ Lawless and Braverman's quotes both appeared in Julia Lawlor, "Homicides at Work on the Rise," *USA Today*, October 18, 1993.

⁵³⁷ The women murdered that day were Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard, Annie St-Arneault, Annie Turcotte, and Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz.

employer, Ontario Hydro, developed an educational program designed to address violence against women both at home and in the workplace.⁵³⁸

In 1992, Leo Gerard, the Canadian director of the United Steelworkers, announced the union's pledge to fight violence against women in the home and at work, saying: "In order to change the behaviour of violent men, we must also change our own behaviour. We can no longer turn our backs."⁵³⁹ In 1994, on the five-year anniversary of the 14 women's deaths, the Quebec Federation of Labour announced its own campaign against workplace violence.⁵⁴⁰ Throughout this period, the CAW worked to get language about workplace violence into contracts, winning workers protections such as the right to refuse work if a risk of violence was present.⁵⁴¹ In Canada, then, the struggle against violence in the workplace has been an extension of the struggle against violence against women.

In the United States, conversely, a variety of causes for workplace violence were identified by a panoply of experts offering books, seminars, and videocassettes that promised to help companies combat the threat of "ticking time bombs" in the workplace. The causes they identified were both psychological and structural, but generally all constructed the problem and its causes as contemporary, ignoring the longstanding presence of violence in North American workplaces. Job stress, substance abuse, and the greater availability of guns were all often identified as contributing factors. The shattering stress of layoffs was also a popular culprit.⁵⁴²

Layoffs were a major and often-discussed aspect of middle-class life during the 1980s, but it is important to remember they had been a regular experience for blue-collar

⁵³⁸ Virginia Galt and Lila Sarick, "Breaking the Silence on Assault," *Globe and Mail*, December 7, 1991.

⁵³⁹ Virginia Galt, "Steelworkers Combat Attacks on Women," *Globe and Mail*, May 28, 1992.

⁵⁴⁰ Mike King, "Labour Federation Starts Campaign to Halt Violence in the Workplace," *Montreal Gazette*, December 6, 1994.

⁵⁴¹ Vinay Sharma and Julie White, in discussion with the author, 11 January 2012; Pat Cunningham, discussion.

⁵⁴² Julie Lawlor, "Homicides at Work on the Rise," *USA Today*, October 18, 1993; Solaman and King, "Waging War;" Sheri South, "Preventing Workplace Violence," *Montreal Gazette*, December 7, 1992.

workers for decades, as had autocratic workplaces and high levels of job stress. Indeed, one reason for the greater concern about workplace violence in the 1980s and 1990s, beyond the higher body counts that were the legacy of the availability of automatic and semi-automatic weapons, was that shootings were now occurring in occupations more typically considered middle-class, such as post offices and white-collar office buildings. Viewed in this light, the concern about workplace violence emerges as a powerful symbol of anxieties over the proletarianization and degradation of middle-class work in the early neoliberal period.⁵⁴³ A *Newsweek* piece on the phenomenon raised the spectre of class war:

But in a flat economy, many people with mounting bills, a pressured job or the loss of see their employers and other organizations as the source of the problem. Last week a man who officials said had lost his disability pay stormed a state insurance office in Las Vegas. Most employees who kill managers or colleagues have been fired or feel mistreated. When “employees are treated as disposable commodities,” says Bruce Blythe, president of Crisis Management International, the company loses moral authority. Reports of sky-high executive salaries exacerbate such anger, says a compensation expert. “We have a war of haves and have-nots,” says Ira A. Lipman, chairman of Guardsmark, Inc., a security firm. The have-nots probably won’t rise up and revolt. But the workplace has become an ad hoc battlefield.⁵⁴⁴

The article’s next question was not why toxic workplaces and inequality were accepted, or how dignity and fairness could be restored to workers. It was this: “When does someone angry become murderous, and who is likely to explode?” This focus perfectly reflected the main response to workplace violence: profiling potential problem individuals, by creating a picture of the person most likely to “snap,” or to “go postal.”

While variations on the profile existed, the experts presented a general image that was remarkably consistent. Violent workers were white men in their late 30s and 40s, socially maladaptive “loners” with few human connections. *Newsweek* confidently concluded: “Those who target the workplace fit a general profile: they are primarily white males who have few social supports, tend to ‘externalize’ or blame others for their

⁵⁴³ On this proletarianization, see Ames, *Going Postal*, 117-19.

⁵⁴⁴ Solaman and King, “Waging War.”

problems and are preoccupied with weapons.” The magazine quoted a Palm Springs security consultant: “His primary anchor to society is his job. When he loses his job, he goes ballistic.”⁵⁴⁵ In a sense, these experts asked the same question the *Michigan Chronicle* had when it pondered: “What manner of man is James Johnson Jr.?” Yet, unlike the *Inner City Voice*, none of the experts or media concluded that workplace shooters were “you and me.”

Instead, experts created a portrait of a lunatic in the office. Michael Mantell, a leading workplace violence expert and author of *Ticking Bombs: Defusing Violence in the Workplace*, provided *Psychology Today* with a “Portrait of a Violent Worker”:

- * White, male, 25-50
- * Low self-esteem
- * Loner
- * Fascination with the military and/or guns⁵⁴⁶

While Mantell and other experts also discussed workplace factors such as layoffs and toxic job stress, this individual profile became iconic. The figure of the homicidal loner, exemplified by Michael Douglas’s rage-filled laid-off engineer in the 1993 film *Falling Down*, emerged as a cultural archetype and dominated the thinking about workplace violence.

The fixation on profiling possible shooters was a mistake. Journalist Mark Ames, who studied workplace and school shootings for his book *Going Postal: Rage, Murder and Rebellion: From Reagan’s Workplaces to Clinton’s Columbine and Beyond*, characterizes such an approach as extremely unhelpful in reducing the level of workplace violence. While hundreds of profiles have been created, none have effectively

⁵⁴⁵ “Loner in 30s Called Typical Workplace Killer,” *New York Times*, December 19, 1993; Soloman and King, “Waging War;” Ames, *Going Postal*, 119-20.

⁵⁴⁶ “It’s Personnel as well as Personal,” *Psychology Today*, volume 27 number 1, January 1994, 20-21.

identified and predicted which workers would commit violent acts.⁵⁴⁷ Furthermore, focusing only on shooting incidents and shooters dramatically distorted the true picture of workplace violence, which includes fistfights, stabbings, bullying, harassment, unsafe work, and institutional and managerial violence, all of which were far more common than a shooting rampage.

The obsession with “loners” and “ticking time bombs” put the focus on a feared and despised boogeyman figure, and moved it away from the workplace. Because the problem was defined as something emanating from individuals, so were the solutions. Many workplace violence policies were designed more to protect the company from the elusive violent individual than to make the overall workplace healthier and safer. Consider Polaroid’s influential workplace violence policy, for example. Copies of it were requested by hundreds of companies. While the Polaroid policy had some useful initiatives, such as counseling for abusers and abused and short-term paid leaves of absence for emotional distress, it also stressed identifying and stopping problem individuals, including training managers to “recognize signs a worker could become violent and to look for signs of domestic violence.”⁵⁴⁸

Mantell’s model for “defusing the bomb” included extensive psychological screening for all prospective employees, a “golden rule attitude” at work, training supervisors to identify potentially violent workers, counseling, and security measures. The individual-focused prescriptions of these newly minted experts were duly enacted by many workplaces. Concern over workplace violence played a key role in justifying the encroaching securitization of the North American workplace, exemplified by the “perp walk:” security personnel escorting fired employees out the door like criminals.⁵⁴⁹ This practice made headlines in the white-collar world in the last two decades, but, as we have seen, was standard practice at Dodge Main at least as far back as the 1960s.

⁵⁴⁷ Ames, *Going Postal*, 119-20.

⁵⁴⁸ Donna Rosato, “New Industry Helps Managers Fight Violence,” *USA Today*, August 8, 1995.

⁵⁴⁹ See Gary and Ruth F. Namie, *The Bully-Free Workplace: Stop Jerks, Weasels, and Snakes from Killing Your Organization* (Hoboken: Wiley and Sons, 2011); Bob Rosner, “Fired in Real Time: The Perp Walk,” accessed January 17, 2014, <http://www.todaysworkplace.org/2011/03/22/fired-in-real-time-the-perp-walk/>.

When postal massacres and other office shootings captured North American attention during the 1980s, the rush to name and understand workplace violence distorted the issue in two important ways. First, the widespread belief that this was a new problem meant that it was approached without the benefit of historical perspective. Just one decade earlier, cases like James Johnson's, David Mundy's, and Clarence Talbot's captured national and international attention. Yet they were completely forgotten during the workplace violence discussions of the 1980s and 1990s. Historical perspective would have enabled a consideration of whether violence in the workplace was actually increasing, what forms workplace violence had traditionally taken, whether changes in the workplace were contributing to the problem, and what methods workers, unions, companies, and governments had employed in the past to reduce the risk of violence at work.

Second, when we look closely at workplace violence, we learn that individual violence cannot be separated from structural factors. Ames points out that the US post office, the site of many of the workplace massacres of the 1980s and 1990s, was the first US government agency to be "subjected to what was essentially a semi-deregulation and semi-privatization plan," under which managers increased profitability by "pushing its workers to work harder and . . . creating an increasingly stress-jammed atmosphere."⁵⁵⁰ These tactics mirror the approach Chrysler took in its Detroit plants during the 1960s and 1970s, with similarly tragic results. Acting on information he'd received from workers, Michigan senator Carl Levin investigated conditions in the state's post offices. He was so alarmed by the brutal management style and toxic atmosphere he found that he wrote to the US Postmaster General demanding action, only to be dismissed with a form letter. In 1991, not long after Levin was rebuffed, postal worker Thomas McIlvane killed five people, including himself, at his workplace in Royal Oak, Michigan.⁵⁵¹

While the focus on the individual obscured the structural dimensions of the issue, in another sense it was perceptive, if misdirected. Individual violence at work was a

⁵⁵⁰ Ames, *Going Postal*, 75.

⁵⁵¹ Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, *A Post Office Tragedy: The Shooting at Royal Oak*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992.

manifestation of one of the most important developments in how class was experienced in the postwar era and beyond: the replacement of external, collective class struggle by an internal, individualized struggle, a development chronicled by Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb in their 1972 book *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. The two sociologists wrote of the “frustration” and “powerlessness” of the Boston workers they interviewed, workers living in a society whose ideology insisted that opportunity and success were available to all who had the talent and initiative to grasp them: “All of [their] experience, which had to do with the structure of class, had presented itself to them as a problem in the structure of their own characters, and so there lay an unspoken distrust of themselves below the surface, a feeling of doubt.”⁵⁵²

This dilemma, of a structural experience of class felt as an individual tribulation, can be seen in the Chrysler plants of the 1970s. In response to the structural problems they faced, some workers joined collective efforts, such as DRUM in Detroit or the walkouts and sitdowns in Windsor, to maintain dignity on the job. But there were also many individual responses, actions that Sennett and Cobb would classify as motivated by “the internalizing of class conflict,” a desire “to heal a doubt about the self rather than create more power over things and other persons in the outer world.”⁵⁵³ These individual responses to frustration and pain, guided by a “logic of discontent [which] leads people to turn on each other rather than on the ‘system’” can be seen most clearly in many of the episodes of workplace violence recounted in the preceding chapters.⁵⁵⁴ Again and again during the 1960s and 1970s, autoworkers lashed out individually at those they felt had wronged them, often insisting on their dignity, insisting that the target of their violence “better quit fucking with me.”

Writing in 1972, Sennett and Cobb concluded that “the real oppression of the new working class,” that “everything in the society prompts a kid to believe that his insides are therefore all messed up” when he experiences dissatisfaction with his

⁵⁵² Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 182.

⁵⁵³ Sennett and Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, 98; Sennett and Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, 171.

⁵⁵⁴ Sennett and Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, 173; this and the above quote from page 98 of the same book are quoted in Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive*, 217.

working life, had created “a sense of mass bitterness and frustration that we believe will keep growing.”⁵⁵⁵ The next two decades, when collective workplace action stagnated and the working worlds of blue and even white-collar workers became ever more precarious, while individual workplace violence became a major societal concern, vindicated their gloomy prognosis.

Structural understandings of the causes of workplace violence were perhaps more widely understood and accepted in the early 1970s than they would be 25 years later, when Oliver French stood trial. In the early 1970s, courts found James Johnson not guilty by reason of insanity for his workplace murders, even extending him worker’s compensation for a mental illness they judged had been precipitated by working conditions at Chrysler. In the 1990s, while media and experts gestured towards toxic workplaces and the culture of layoffs, they more often presented workplace violence as the terrifying revenge of the wackos in our midst. Breathless media coverage encouraged workers to fear each other. The *St. Petersburg Times* asked: “How can you be sure the person sitting next to you at work won’t go over the edge and bring an Uzi to the office tomorrow? You can’t.”⁵⁵⁶

In the last fifteen years, the novelty and shock of workplace violence has faded. Workplace massacres still occur, but are now seemingly a regular, if tragic, aspect of North American working life. They have become a commonplace trope in our popular culture. In 1997, the videogame *Postal*, where the gamer played the role of a lone shooter gunning down his coworkers, attracted widespread censure. Almost twenty years later, a package delivery chain with outlets around America bears the name Goin’ Postal. This reflects a culture that has come to view violence at work as regrettable, but normal.

The institutional expectation of levels of violence at work as a mundane cost of doing business is clearly apparent in a 2009 worker’s compensation case in British Columbia. A manager at a grocery store sought compensation after being graphically

⁵⁵⁵ Sennett and Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, 185-86.

⁵⁵⁶ Ballingrud and Gentry, “Stress in Workplace.”

threatened and harassed by an employee she had disciplined. The employee's menacing gestures with a knife and threats to, for example, "cut open your jugular just to see what happens" had affected her ability to sleep and brought on acute anxiety. The BC commission did not dispute that the woman's condition was a result of workplace violence, and was thus a workplace injury, yet it still denied compensation for her condition. The board's reasoning was that the workplace violence she suffered was gradual and part of the normal work process. As it was not a "sudden and unexpected traumatic event," it was not compensable. Only acute, unexpected workplace violence, such as the police chasing a suspect into the store and shooting them in front of her, would have resulted in an acute and unexpected mental injury that was eligible for compensation. The board held that a certain level of fear and harassment, including experiencing death threats, was an expected part of working life.⁵⁵⁷

In recent years, it is provincial and state governments, not individual employers, who have taken the lead in combating violence at work. In 2009, the Ontario government passed Bill 168, intended to address workplace violence and workplace harassment. The act requires employers to assess the risk of violence in their workplace and report those risks to workers. It also requires employers to post their workplace violence policy at the workplace. Finally, it protects the right of workers to refuse work that exposes them to a risk of workplace violence. The CAW, a union deeply affected by workplace violence, having lost Charlie Brooks to it, was instrumental in lobbying for this legislation. The final passage of Bill 168 was galvanized by the 2009 murder of nurse Lori Dupont in Windsor. This tragedy occurred when a doctor who had become obsessed with Dupont shot her to death at her workplace.⁵⁵⁸

In the United States, meanwhile, 22 states have passed "Bring Your Gun To Work" legislation, which prevents employers from barring workers from having firearms in their car. Employers argue that the closer proximity to guns will create more fatal

⁵⁵⁷ Review Decision # R0052803, British Columbia Workers' Compensation Board, 12 October 2005, accessed 17 January 2014, http://www.worksafebc.com/review_search/decisions/compensation_decisions/r0052803_decision_letter.pdf.

⁵⁵⁸ Sharma and White, discussion; Cunningham, discussion.

incidents of workplace violence, while supporters of the laws, such as the National Rifle Association, contend they enhance workers' freedom and ability to protect themselves.⁵⁵⁹

While this wave of legislation may, in time, reduce the risks of violence in the workplace, it generally fails to define violence broadly enough. The definition of what constitutes workplace violence, we have seen, is always contentious. Studies have shown that "how violence in the workplace is defined depends on one's location in the organization." Much as radical autoworkers argued in the 1970s, scholars are increasingly calling for a greater understanding of how violence is "bred into the practices"⁵⁶⁰ of workplaces before turning our attention to interpersonal violence, as the latter is often caused and constructed by the former.⁵⁶¹ Thus the editors of a recent volume on workplace violence in health care settings argue that: "A single-definition approach has failed to "provide a way into [violence's] chameleon-like characteristics."⁵⁶²

Naming violence is not enough; a detailed understanding of how violence actually operates at work is needed. This requires going beyond defining only single incidents as "violent," and understanding how violence operates as part of workplace systems, in ongoing ways. To paraphrase E.P. Thompson, violence can only be understood in motion: in terms of relationships between workers, managers, owners, and labour processes.⁵⁶³

History supports this conclusion. It teaches us that defining workplace violence as something outside the workplace itself, something that can be kept out by the right legislation or policy, fails to appreciate the true nature of violence in the workplace. For Detroit and Windsor autoworkers in the 1960s and 1970s, violence was ever-present at

⁵⁵⁹ Sara Murray, "Guns in the Parking Lot: A Delicate Workplace Issue," *Wall Street Journal*, October 15 2013, accessed January 17, 2014.
<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303983904579095532026750354>.

⁵⁶⁰ Holmes, Rudge, and Perron, *(Re)Thinking Violence in Health Care Settings*, 7.

⁵⁶¹ Holmes, Rudge, and Perron, *(Re)Thinking Violence in Health Care Settings*, 8-9.

⁵⁶² Holmes, Rudge, and Perron, *(Re)Thinking Violence in Health Care Settings*, 7.

⁵⁶³ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963) 9-10.

work, whether in the foreground as a fight or a workplace injury, or in the background, as a subtle factor shaping work processes and culture. It injured and traumatized countless workers, and even cost some their lives. A great many structural factors contributed to the risk of violence workers faced on the job. The labour process, social relations at work, racism, gender, workplace culture, health and safety conditions, crime, the surrounding community, drug and alcohol abuse, political struggle, national and international labour relations and employment contexts all played a role. Many workers in Detroit and Windsor knew this, spoke about it, and wrote about it. Workers were and are well-placed to diagnose and explain workplace violence, and yet it is the perspectives of workers which are often ignored in contemporary discussions about workplace violence.

Violence at work in Detroit and Windsor Chrysler factories during the 1960s and 1970s was not a flashpoint, bursting into flame and then disappearing; it was a *current*, ever-present, shaping the labour process, workplace culture, and the consciousness, ideas, and strategies of workers, managers, unionists, and executives alike. Violence, then, could not have been barred from Dodge Main or the Windsor Truck Plant, because those workplaces were where much of the violence was created. It may be obvious, but it bears remembering: without workplaces, there would be no workplace violence. That does not mean that we must abolish workplaces. What it does mean is that, if we are to seriously confront workplace violence, we must interrogate the fundamentals of our working lives: how the work is done, by whom, under whose control; how that work is organized, and for whose benefit; and what kind of human interactions flow from those social relations. This is, to be sure, a much more difficult and soul-searching process than coming up with the standard lists of policies and best practices. But if we truly want to live and work in peace, we must fully reckon with our history of workplace violence.

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