AN INQUIRY INTO THE 1938 STRIKE AT
THE MAYTAG COMPANY, NEWTON, IOWA

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CHAPTER I

THE SETTING AND THE PROBLEM

A motorist traveling from Des Moines to Newton, Iowa, on highway 6 in 1938 would have to pass a sign, erected by the Chamber of Commerce, which proudly proclaimed that Newton was the home of "12,000 friendly folks."¹

The 1930 United States Census gave Newton a population of 11,560. Even allowing for the effects of the depression the Chamber of Commerce may have understated their case a bit. These twelve thousand people lived in a community which, in addition to the usual Iowa county seat features, contained twenty-five industries, employing approximately 2,500 workers with an annual payroll of $5,000,000.²

The traveler might reflect that Newton was a fortunate community which combined the serenity and informality of rural living with the financial advantages of a bustling industrial complex. Until 1938


most inhabitants would have probably agreed. Yet in the summer of 1938 a strike at the Maytag Company pinched off much of the payroll and so split the community that the Chamber of Commerce sign became a grim mockery.

It is the purpose of this thesis to inquire into more than just the causes and events of this strike. The writer also hopes to reach certain conclusions concerning why the strike was so prolonged and why emotions ran so high in the community.

The Maytag strike, involving only a few thousand Iowans for three months, is worthy of such an investigation. First, in these few months an extraordinary combination of events took place. The first sit-down strike west of the Mississippi River occurred. The governor of Iowa established an arbitration board in order to settle a major labor dispute, an attempt which failed, incidentally. Martial law was declared and the Iowa National Guard took control of the community. The governor of Iowa directly challenged the authority of the Federal government by refusing to allow the National Labor Relations Board to hold hearings within the confines of the state.

If press coverage is any indication, these
happenings caused extraordinary outside interest. Both Des Moines papers gave Newton column after column day after day. At periodic intervals the Chicago Tribune sent its own reporters to observe the scene first hand, and culminated its coverage with a thundering editorial demanding the impeachment of Governor Kraschel.\footnote{Editorial in the Chicago Tribune, August 5, 1938.} Periodicals as diverse as Time, Business Week, and Christian Century carried articles concerning the strike.

Second, the strike caused repercussions far beyond the community. Certainly this was true in the political field. After the plant reopened under the guns of the National Guard the union had no choice but to give up the strike. At that time James Carey, the international president of United Electrical CIO, angrily predicted, "The governor is doing what he thinks is politically necessary, but we think his position is political suicide."\footnote{"Friendly Folks," Time, XXXII, (August 15, 1938), 8-9.} At least one person who was influential in the Iowa Democratic party agreed that Governor Kraschel's action in sending the National Guard
to Newton was one of the factors which contributed to his defeat in the following election.\(^1\)

Third, the writer believes Newton in the 1930's reflected many of the strains and tensions which tormented the nation during these difficult years. The national union to which Maytag local 1116 belonged, the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers, was being infiltrated by Communists. President James Carey admitted this years later:

As the months passed I discovered that they were in complete control of the national office; they dominated the executive committee, ran the union paper, and were strongly entrenched in the locals and districts. All the organizers were party-liners.\(^2\)

The union organizer most active in Newton and president of District 8 of the CIO was William Sentner, "a left wing stalwart."\(^3\)

In a comparatively few years the Maytag Company

\(^{1}\)Jake More, A letter to the writer, April 9, 1964.


\(^{3}\)Ibid., p. 256.
grew from a small organization tightly controlled by its paternalistic and autocratic founder to a large impersonal institution whose leadership found great difficulty adjusting to the new situation, which was complicated by the economic distress of the depression.

The community leadership, culturally homogenous and comfortably inbred, suddenly found itself challenged by a group whose values and attitudes seemed diametrically opposed to almost everything they had been taught to believe.

Governmental organizations on the local, county, and state level were all organized to deal with situations inherent in the rural environment which existed when these institutions were organized. The urban growth and the depression years with its attendant social and economic distress naturally caused great and painful pressures on the fabric of government.

These conditions existed not only in Newton but also in many areas of the nation. A study of labor conditions in Akron, Ohio, reflects many extraordinary similarities, particularly in events and community attitudes.¹ Thus a study of Newton may contribute to a

greater understanding of the United States during this period.

Little research has been done concerning the Maytag strike. Authors discussing the labor movement, such as Galenson, mentioned the strike merely in passing. Neither the state Bureau of Labor nor the Iowa Historical Society could furnish any information. Back issues of union literature, such as the People's Press, the paper of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers, were unavailable. The card catalogue at the State University of Iowa lists only one source under the headings of Newton, Iowa or the Maytag Company - a biography of F.L. Maytag referred to later in the study. Works concerning the trade union movement and labor conditions in Iowa tended to concern themselves with events prior to 1938.

The writer, as previously stated, found no lack of material in the press and periodicals of the period. Also, materials locally printed in Newton have furnished much valuable information. Thirdly, many persons who were actively involved in the strike and the events preceding the strike have graciously given information available nowhere else.

Using personal interviews in historical research
requires cautious handling. Memories can play tricks over a period of more than twenty-five years. Emotions, still surprisingly strong, can color reminiscences. The writer, therefore, has used this type of material only when; the person interviewed could furnish material which was not available elsewhere, the person interviewed was not so emotionally involved in the events described as to be extremely biased, and the person interviewed would allow his comments to be published under his name. Whenever possible this information was rigorously cross checked against other sources. By observing these safeguards the writer feels he is justified in using this type of primary source material.

1These last two qualifications disqualified many people including the first president of the Maytag local, Wilbert Allison, who refused to speak for publication.
CHAPTER II

F. L. MAYTAG AND HIS COMPANY

The Maytag Profit News was a monthly magazine published by the company for its dealers, salesmen, and field representatives. The April, 1929, edition carried the following editorial, signed by, "One in the office."

You fellows out in the field may think you have the best of it because you do not have to stay cooped up in an office. I cannot agree with you.

Today as I sat at my desk going through the regular routine I happened to glance up and there not far from me sat Mr. F. L. Maytag. He was facing me and I wish all of you could have seen what I saw in that strong, serene, kindly face. He seemed to be at peace with the world.

I had a feeling of pleasure and satisfaction in the fact that I was in the employ of this great man. . . . He wants all of us to be happy and I can tell you that it made me happy just to look at him.

During February we heard much of Lincoln. I didn't know Mr. Lincoln - I have known Mr. Maytag.

What I want to say is this: It is something to have known Mr. Maytag. It is more to be in his employ. When he is home there is somehow a feeling that everything is all right and we feel secure, due to the knowledge that he is here. And that is why we have the advantage over you fellows . . . .

Such overblown comments, thirty-five years later, strike one as amazing or amusing. On further reflection one must come to the conclusion that, no matter
what motivated their writing, the man about whom they speak must have been an extraordinary human being.

In January, 1880, Frederick Louis Maytag left the family farm near Laurel, Iowa, and moved to Newton. He was twenty-three years old and had acquired a position as implement salesmen for the hardware company of McKinley and Bergman. His salary was fifty dollars a month. In the fall of the following year he bought an interest in the firm with eight hundred dollars of his own money and a twenty-seven hundred dollar loan. The business was now Maytag and Bergman. The firm became a family venture on September 20, 1882 when F. L. Maytag married Dena Bergman, his partner's sister.¹

Maytag and Bergman was part of a community which was developing a number of small industries. The type of product produced varied widely, ranging from a cigar called La Flor De Newton to Wheato, a breakfast food, and a soft drink called Cherry Blossoms. The largest industry in town was the Taylor-Newell Company which made men's and boys' trousers and employed sixty-five people, many of them women - the first plant in Newton

to do this. The Vernon Company was already producing advertising specialties. Small patent medicine concerns prepared such remedies as Hindorff's Headache Remedy and Skiff's Cough Syrup.¹

Even before the turn of the century the first washing machine was produced. It was a hand operated machine called the Ratchet Stat. This company soon failed. Undeterred by this failure the Bergman family organized the One Minute Washer Company in 1905. By 1910 three more organizations - Maytag, Automatic, and Woodrow - were offering products to ease the housewife's drudgery on washday.²

The struggling young industries were housed in brick and wood buildings which lined the Rock Island Railroad tracks. Production was geared to a six day, sixty hour work week. Wages ranged generally from fifty cents a day for an apprentice to a maximum of three dollars a day for a skilled workman. Labor relations were simple and uncomplicated. Getting a job meant finding the boss - who might be under a jammed machine

²Ibid., pp. 10-12.
or pouring over the books in the office - negotiating a price, which the boss jots down in the pay book, and going to work. Firing could also be equally informal. Mass production methods were unheard of and a man needed to be a versatile tinkerer.¹

F. L. Maytag's first venture into industry was in 1893 with the organization of the Parsons Band Cutter and Self Feeder Company. With an original capitalization of $2,400 George Parsons, F. L. Maytag, Will Bergman, and A. H. "Gus" Bergman made a feeder attachment for a threshing machine which cut the cord holding the shock and facilitated the feeding of grain into the machine. The company met with great success throughout the mid-West until farm equipment manufacturers attached their own device to their machines.²

Maytag's next ventures were disasters. He bought stock of the South Dakota Central Railroad which was building an independent line from Coulton to a point twenty miles north. When all the legal maneuvering was over the Great Northern controlled the railroad and

¹Ibid., p. 3.
²Ibid., p. 17.
F. L. Maytag had lost $60,000. Five years later, 1909, an abortive attempt to manufacture the Maytag automobile cost $300,000.¹

These setbacks, serious as they were, were only temporary. The Maytag Company was organized in December of 1909.² Much of the success of this struggling company was due to the inventive genius of an unschooled mechanic named Howard Snyder. In 1910 he developed the swinging reversible wringer. In 1914 it was a one half horsepower gasoline engine, so simple and dependable the average housewife could use it. In 1919, after years of experimentation he devised a forty pound, thirty inch aluminum washer tub which could be cast in one piece. Finally Snyder developed the gyrofoam washer principle in 1922.³ Formerly the washing machine dolly, shaped somewhat like an upside down stool dragged clothes through the water. Now, because of the shape of the tub and the shape of the aluminum dolly fins, the soapy water was so agitated that it was driven

¹Funk, op. cit. pp. 48-52.
²Woodrow, op. cit., p. 13.
through the clothes. This meant that the Maytag Company now had a machine far superior to anything on the market.

This technological step forward came just in time. The Maytag Company was in trouble. The previous year, 1921, had meant an operating and inventory loss of over $400,000.\(^1\) F. L. Maytag, now sixty-five years old and over one half a million dollars in debt, headed toward the West Coast with four demonstrator models. In Oakland, California, he found a dealer who had a reputation of being a "go-getter," and Maytag set out in the best Horatio Alger tradition to sell the salesman. The dealer bought a carload and the Maytag Company was on its way.\(^2\)

Its climb was meteoric. The new washer went into production on April 10, 1922, and within two years all bank indebtedness was gone. Less than one year later, in May, 1923, the first trainload of washers was shipped to the East Coast. At the beginning of 1922 the Maytag Company was eighth in volume out of sixty washing machine companies in the country. Within a few years

\(^1\)Funk, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 55.

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 56-62.
Maytag sales were larger than its four largest competitors combined.¹ For the years 1926 through 1929 the company earned an average of $6,000,000 annually.² By the end of the decade nearly twenty per cent of all the washing machines produced in the United States came from Newton, chiefly from the Maytag Company.³

Naturally such a sudden spurt of industrial growth in a city as small as Newton would affect the community very much. But because of the personality of F. L. Maytag Newton was changed even more than might be expected.

When F. L. Maytag moved to Newton, he found "a drowsy town of less than two thousand souls, without paving, water supply, or electric lights."⁴ Maytag became involved in community affairs long before he became a manufacturer. During the late 1880's and early 1890's he twice served on the city council. During this time he was the chairman of the committee which

¹Ibid., pp. 65-66.
²News item in the Des Moines Register, August 2, 1938.
⁴Funk, op. cit., p. 169.
installed the city light and power company. In 1919 he became mayor. During his term in office eighteen miles of paving was laid in Newton. Also while mayor, in 1920, he raised funds to establish the Skiff Memorial Hospital. In 1925 he supplied the capital which prevented the liquidation of the Jasper County Bank, the largest financial institution in Newton.¹

During the late 1920's and early 1930's Maytag money poured into the community in an almost astronomical stream. He built the Maytag Hotel and office building for $1,000,000, and the Young Men's Christian Association building for $250,000. Church contributions totaled $22,000, plus the Salvation Army building which came to another $75,000. His final gift was made in the middle 1930's when he converted the abandoned Jasper County Fair Grounds into the park which still bears his name. This gift, which came with an endowment fund so maintenance cost the city nothing, came to another $450,000.²

The growth of the company severely strained housing accommodations. During the boom years of the

²Ibid., p. 135.
late 20's tent cities were established on the County Fair Grounds to accommodate these people.\(^1\) F. L. Maytag and his son, E. H. Maytag, helped their employees buy homes. Any interested employee was given a prospective list of houses available for sale. Interest was suspended for the first year. After that it was three and one half per cent. Mr. Maytag allowed his employees thirty-five dollars from each two weeks pay check before anything was deducted for the house payment. The buyer could re-finance his loan with any company he wished when the house was more than half paid for.\(^2\)

Significantly for the future many of the people who flooded into town during the last 1920's and early 1930's were from the coal mining regions of southern Iowa. Originally many had come from Kentucky or Tennessee. Newton found it difficult to assimilate these people. To the people of the community these newcomers were different. Their attitude toward neatness of both their person and their property seemed lax. The rumor was that when they moved into a "nice" house they

\(^1\)Poik, op. cit., p. 13.

"stored coal in the bath tub." The newcomers seemed lax in other attitudes, too. Bootleggers were active in Newton on week-ends. Sections of town were "frowsy" to the more established people of the community whose German and Scandinavian background found it difficult to understand or accept these new people.

These people came to Newton from an area where unionism was an accepted part of life. The United Mine Workers had been in the coalfields for decades, although its power was greatly limited. They were tough minded with a strong in-group attitude developed by living with danger everyday. "When they felt they were being pushed, they pushed back."

While F. L. Maytag lived no problems seemed serious enough to disturb the community. His position in Newton was unquestioned. The depression of the early 20's and the 1929 crash eliminated most of the old established leaders of the town. To most people F. L. Maytag was Newton.

1 H. C. Berg, interview with the writer, March 26, 1964.
2 Ibid.
3 John Connolly, Jr., interview with writer, April 25, 1964.
4 Berg, loc. cit.
The square jawed, stocky old man loved the dramatic, the grand gesture. Sales meetings always began the same way. After everyone had assembled in the ballroom of the hotel, F. L. stalked in, flanked by two sides. The men jumped to their feet and thundered out song number five from the Maytag Song Book.¹ It ran, "We hope he lives to be a hundred/We hope he lives to be a hundred/We hope he lives to be a hundred/And then one hundred more." After the song came tumultuous applause which F. L. acknowledged by vigorously waving both arms.² On his seventieth birthday in 1927, without previous fanfare, he announced he was giving away $132,000 to his employees. For each year of service the employee would receive fifty dollars.³

The high point of the Maytag year came on F. L.'s birthday in July. The factory closed and all employees gathered at the courthouse square, in uniform, black trousers, white shirts, with black bow ties and a red

¹See the Maytag File in the Newton Public Library for assorted memorabilia of this period.

²Eugene Burton, interview with the writer, March 12, 1964.

overseas cap with Maytag in gold letters on each side. Then with F. L.'s touring car in the lead the procession marched off to the Jasper County Fair Grounds for a day of picnic, games, and speeches.¹

This event had more than local significance. Guests came from all over the nation. Governor Herring was the main speaker in 1933, and Congressmen, Senators, and men of nationwide importance attended the testimonial dinner held for Mr. Maytag that evening. James Rhodes, publisher of the Newton Daily News and general chairman of the picnic committee told businessmen to expect 10,000 people in town for the day. He suggested they make plans to "cash in,"² suggesting perhaps another reason why the community was so enthusiastic about celebrating Mr. Maytag's birthday.

Such mercenary advantages notwithstanding, much of the success of these birthday celebrations was a deep seated belief that F. L. Maytag had done so much for the community that he deserved a party. Needless to say, the old man loved every minute of "his day."

¹George Albee, personal interview with the writer, April 15, 1964.

²See "General Committee Instructions" in the Maytag File.
Obviously the Maytag Company meant more to a person with F. L.'s complex personality than merely a money making venture. W. I. Sparks, long time associate and Secretary of the company, indicated this when he said:

This organization is an outstanding exception to the rule that there is no sentiment in business. It has been built largely around one man, and it is more like a large family. In fact Mr. Maytag likes to call it the Maytag family. As an employer he has no peer, always thinking of his employees and trying to help them, insisting that the remuneration be well above average. Is it any wonder that the organization as a whole, employees, salesmen, dealers and all, is one of the most loyal in existence today."^1

This family, as Mr. Sparks called it, was becoming a large one. By the mid 1930's fifty thousand persons were directly dependent on the Maytag Company, including administration, dealers, salesmen, factory workers and families. The plant was the largest washing machine factory in the world covering fourteen acres of floor space which represented an investment of $4,600,000.2

F. L. was a benevolent "father." Lockers for clothing and small tools were provided in most departments and there were shower baths for the men who

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1 Funk, op. cit., p. 208.
2 Ibid., pp. 68-69.
worked in the foundries. The Maytag Company’s Employee’s Relief and Benefit Association was founded in 1909. In April, 1924, a full time doctor was secured. In August of the following year a trained nurse was on duty and early in 1934 two more nurses were hired so at least one would be on duty at all times. By the mid 1930's the association had purchased an X-Ray machine, a fluoroscope, an Alpine sun lamp, a microscope, two emergency beds, and a full line of drugs. Stretcher were located at strategic sites throughout the plant. An uptown office for after working hours calls was established in the Maytag building. Employees unable to work because of illness received five dollars the first week they were idle and then two dollars for each working day lost for an additional twelve weeks. (These sick benefits applied to all types of illness or accident except venereal diseases.) All these services were paid for by dues deducted from pay checks.

Such institutionalized benevolence was not enough for F. L. Maytag. He liked to wander through the plant,

1Ibid., p. 221.

shaking hands with some of the old timers and introducing himself to men he didn't know. Occasionally he would try out a machine. "Just to keep his hand in," he said.\(^1\) He enjoyed inviting people on the spur of the moment to spend the week-end at his palatial summer home, Ceylon Court, in Wisconsin. Even assembly line workers had a chance to sleep between silk sheets and be served breakfast in bed.\(^2\)

Maytag's relationship with the men may be best illustrated by an incident. After working for the company for a little over three years an employee was in serious financial straights because of a series of doctor bills. The depression was on and the doctors were demanding their money. Unable to borrow money anywhere the employee asked for and got an appointment with "the boss."

F. L. met him at the door. "Come in, Merle. What's your problem?"

The problem was three hundred dollars for medical and dental bills.

\(^{1}\)Albee, op. cit.

\(^{2}\)Berg, op. cit.
"These damn doctors charge too damn much." Maytag called each doctor and offered each of them one third of the amount of the bill. "Is that all right?" he asked them. It was certainly all right.

"You're square now, Merle. Suppose we deduct three dollars from your check until we get this one hundred dollars paid off. You're sure three dollars won't press you too much?"¹

In the early days he [F. L. Maytag] spent much time in the shop and knew most of the men by their first names. They were sort of a family - working together and instantly challenging anything that threatened the success or growth of the company. Under his direction they were happy and contented. Labor troubles and strikes were unknown. That was many years ago. Where there were dozens of men, then, there are thousands now. When he walks through the shop today he sees only an occasional face that is familiar. Yet, under his generalship, the men are just as happy and contented now as they were twenty-five years ago. There are still no strikes, no labor troubles, and not even unions. There has been no need for them. Fred Maytag has given them all that unions could give, and more.²

This paean of praise, written by the man who probably wrote the quotation which opened this chapter, was less than a year old before the men of the Maytag Company overwhelmingly voted to join the CIO. One year following

¹Merle Winters, interview with the writer, March 29, 1964. The writer realizes such a conversation, recalled after more than thirty years is not accurate, but he believes it does recreate the spirit of F. L. Maytag's personality.
²Funk, op. cit., p. 89.
this they were embroiled in a bitter strike. Surely conditions could not have changed so radically in such a short time. Even under F. L. Maytag certain conditions existed which disrupted the peace and harmony of his "family." Some of these conditions were created by the times. Some were caused by F. L. himself.

Hiring procedures were simple. The hiring agent walked to the gate, arbitrarily picked the men he wanted, assigned them to the jobs he wished, and went back inside. This "shape-up" almost automatically led to all sorts of minor injustices. The problem was compounded once a man was hired. His foreman had virtual absolute authority over him. Wage rates varied within each department for various jobs. The foreman could, and at times did, give the best jobs to his friends.¹ A complaint meant a dismissal or, at least, the foreman could give the man a "bad time." Only rarely could a man go over his foreman's head to rectify what he believed to be an injustice.² The foreman also made the sole decision as to who in the department would work on days when

¹Albee, loc. cit.
²Winters, loc. cit.
the plant worked short weeks. This made a big difference during the depression years when the company worked a full complement only two or three days a week.\textsuperscript{1}

Such situations existed in many industries at that time and were more or less grudgingly accepted. Certain other practices came about which were peculiar to the Maytag Company. As mentioned before F. L. Maytag was extraordinarily generous in his gifts to the community. Among other things he built a YMCA and Salvation Army building. He continued to support these charities handsomely. The employees also contributed, although perhaps not as happily as their employer. Departments in the factory vied with each other to see how much could be raised to support community charities. Some foremen used pressure. The men felt they were being coerced. One employee was told to take out a subscription to the Y.M.C.A. The worker demurred until told his job depended on it. Then he asked to take out a boy's membership and have this given to some poor youngster in his name. When the employee received his next paycheck he found both a youth membership and an adult membership had been deducted from his pay.\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1}Albee, loc. cit.

\textsuperscript{2}Winters, loc. cit.
Another severe problem in labor-management relations developed during the last years of F. L. Maytag's life. Certain factors caused an estrangement between him and the rest of his family. Being well past seventy most of his friends of early years were dead. Those who were left were awed by his immense wealth. He was in the paradoxical position of being worshiped by thousands but liked by no one. To a man of F. L.'s temperament this was an insupportable situation. This emotional void was soon filled by a little coterie of "unprincipled individuals"\(^1\) headed by John Herbst and Joe Longwell. Herbst was made plant superintendent, although top management officials objected. "F.L. thought he was the man for the job."\(^2\) Joe Longwell was the owner of the Pontiac garage. When F. L. returned to Newton late at night from a sales trip, it was Joe Longwell who met the train. The two became close friends with Longwell often serving as host at Maytag's hotel suite. Soon the community came to believe that Joe was a good person to have on one's side.

When the superintendent of schools hoped to in-

\(^1\)George Umbreit, personal interview with the writer, April 8, 1964.

\(^2\)Ibid.
interest F. L. Maytag in buying uniforms for the high school band, he felt it expedient to mention this to Joe Longwell first. Others in the community did the same thing. By the way, shortly after the school got its uniforms it was hinted to the superintendent that his car was old and perhaps he should be thinking about getting a new one - a Pontiac.¹

Such activities naturally caused great resentment among the employees in the plant. This was especially true in 1937 and 1938 when worsening economic conditions forced the company to lay off large numbers of men and to reduce the work week of others. The CIO used this resentment to argue its case by claiming credit for closing the Longwell Employment Agency.²

One worker filed suit against Longwell maintaining that he had been forced to buy a car from Longwell in order to get a job with the Maytag Company. After he lost his job he sued Longwell attempting to get his car payment back. Longwell asked for a change of venue maintaining he could not get a fair trial in Newton.³

¹ Berg, loc. cit.
² News item in the Newton Daily News, April 28, 1938.
³ Ibid.
F. L. Maytag was nothing more than an unwitting accomplice, but these incidents do indicate a climate of resentment which tend to indicate the Maytag organization was not quite the happy family which surface conditions might indicate.

On July 14, 1937, F. L. Maytag would have celebrated his eightieth birthday. For some time he had casually discussed the idea of staging some gigantic giveaway of wealth which would dwarf what he had done on his seventieth birthday.\(^1\) Plans were underway to celebrate the occasion with a pageant staged by the Chamber of Commerce. It was to have been bigger than anything Newton had seen.

Four months too soon F. L. Maytag died in his California home of a heart attack. In addition to the usual bequests he willed sums of money to distant relatives, some of his management associates, stenographers in the office, his personal servants at his homes in Newton, Wisconsin, and California, and his Negro chauffeur. He left nothing to the production line employees.\(^2\)

\(^1\)Umreit, loc. cit.
\(^2\)Palmer, op. cit., p. 17.
F. L. Maytag deserves more attention than this inquiry can give him. Something deep within his personality drove him to make immense sums of money. He gloried in having his picture taken with Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone, yet he still loved to hob-nob with the "boys on the line." He loved his community and smothered it with gifts. In return he expected unstinting applause and obedience. His death did not mean the end of the Maytag Company, but it could not be the F. L. Maytag Company. Things would have to be different.
CHAPTER III

E. H. MAYTAG AND HIS COMPANY

The growth of factories from small size to large was to have profound social consequences, was to create a labor problem of dimensions previously unknown, was to create sharply defined social classes.

Handling of employees is a different problem in a small factory then in a large one . . . Early industry, particularly in New England, was rather patriarchal in type . . . and this factory system . . . was not modified greatly as industry crossed the Appalachians.

But with a thousand man factory . . . conditions changed sharply. The owner was apt to be a non resident . . . His wife and children felt the mill town home out of keeping with their bettered situation . . . Plant managers with delegated authority, and with an eye only to profits, disregard the human problems of the mill room and machine shop. The result is strikes and lockouts.1

The above quotation was written by Hugh Allen about the Goodyear Rubber Company. Nevertheless these comments could easily be applied to the Maytag Company after the death of F. L. Maytag. With the death of its founder the company began a subtle but definite change. Much of the change was caused directly or indirectly by the personality of Elmer Henry Maytag.

E. H. Maytag assumed the office of company president in 1926 after the retirement of his brother, Lewis Bergman Maytag, who had been president for over ten years previously. F. L. Maytag was content to be chairman of the board. It was no secret, however, that the older man's will was not easily thwarted. It was his company; he ran it. In fact, rumors flew that a conflict of wills had caused L. B. Maytag's early retirement from the company.¹

For eleven years E. H. lived in the shadow of his flamboyant father. In many ways they seemed complete opposites. When well past seventy F. L. Maytag stood erect. His eyes were piercing under hooded lids. His chin was firm and bold. Even a faded snapshot seemed to exude an aura of authority and vitality. Elmer walked with a slight stoop. While the family resemblance was strong, his face seemed less square, less angular.

Elmer Maytag developed the Maytag dairy farms around a herd of cattle which consistently won national honors, but other than this he had no local project into which he poured his time and money. His father had lavished more than $3,000,000 on Newton. Elmer during

¹Berg, loc. cit.
the early thirties had purchased a plot of wasteland near Miami and had spent a small fortune turning it into a "Florida showplace."\(^1\) The community interpreted this to mean that E. H. Maytag was not as interested in Newton as his father had been. His natural reticence was taken as further proof that he thought "he was better than other folks."\(^2\) In a rural Iowa community this was a serious accusation. No longer did a Maytag come down from the main office and walk the assembly line, chatting with the men. In fact, one of his workers cannot recollect ever seeing Elmer in the factory.\(^3\)

Contributing in part to E. H. Maytag's withdrawal from active involvement in community and business affairs, was his physical condition. During 1934 he developed a severe heart condition, which forced him to pace himself carefully. He died of a heart attack in 1940.\(^4\)

Elmer Maytag's physical condition was not helped by the company's economic situation. The halcyon days

\(^2\) Berg, loc. cit.
\(^3\) Winters, loc. cit.
\(^4\) Umbrecht, loc. cit.
of the late twenties were over. Although the company never lost money, even during the worst of the depression, profits were well below fifty per cent of their 1929 levels. More immediately serious, 1937 saw a reversal of the gradual upward swing which had begun in 1933. Profits for the year were nearly half a million dollars less than they had been in 1936.¹

In addition to the normal problems faced by all businesses the Maytag Company was confronting a new and more serious type of competitor. During the early 1920's the washing machine industry was composed primarily of small industries scattered about the nation. By 1937, however, several large industries had entered the field. Maytag now had to sell its product in competition with General Electric, Norge, Westinghouse and others whose financial reserves, research facilities, and advertising budgets caused many sleepless nights for Maytag executives. The depression and this competition forced a price reduction on a Maytag machine from a 1929 level of $155 to $85 in 1938.²

To cope with this difficult situation the Maytag Company felt it had to introduce more efficient produc-

²Ibid.
tion methods. Many supervisory positions were filled with new men - some brought in from outside the community. One of these new officials was A. H. Taylor, who replaced John Herbst as Plant Superintendent.

Herbst's association with Joe Longwell also played a part in the decision to replace him. E. H. Maytag, aware of the unhealthy situation in the plant, had urged his father to replace Herbst, as had other management men, but the founder had refused to listen.¹

Mr. Taylor came from the East with a reputation for getting things done. He was short, cocky, and dogmatic, with no understanding of local conditions and not much inclination to learn.² Herbst had been a tyrant and dishonest at that, but he had grown up in Newton. Many of the men could remember when he himself had worked the line.

Taylor was different. Almost at once the men felt he hated them. He strode through the plant eager to criticize anyone who he felt deserved it. The noon break was shortened to fifteen minutes. One of the workers summed up his feeling about the new superintendent by

¹Umbreit, loc. cit.
²Ibid.
saying, "He treated us like we was a bunch of Wops."¹

Into this community facing an economic decline and a deterioration of labor-management relations came a complication which many people in Newton felt they would never see - the CIO labor organizer. The town's reaction was generally similar to that of the ladies who worked in the public library. When these strangers asked for certain information pertaining to labor problems, the ladies, after a hurried and whispered conference, decided to inform these outsiders they didn't have the facts they wanted. The librarians were not sure what these men were really after, but they were sure they didn't like it.²

The Maytag workers did not display this suspicion toward the organizers. The first organizational meeting was held in the National Guard Armory on April 20, 1937.³ A large and enthusiastic crowd turned out, although many of the men came out of curiosity rather than any serious interest in joining a union.⁴ Much of this disinterest

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¹Winters, loc. cit.
²Lucille McMurray, interview with the writer, March 9, 1964.
³Winters, loc. cit.
⁴Albee, loc. cit.
must have quickly evaporated. Nine days later an official announced fourteen hundred men had joined the union, and CIO representatives would soon meet with Maytag Company officials to discuss a contract.¹

Union activity was not confined to the Maytag Company. By May 13th the CIO had organized locals at the Automatic Washing Machine Company, the One Minute Company, and the Newton Foundry.²

The Maytag Local 1116 of the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers of America elected its first officers on May 24th and signed a temporary contract with the company on the following day.³ The contract called for an approximate five per cent wage increase, seniority protection in layoffs and a grievance procedure. The contract expired May 1, 1938.⁴

On June 13 the union overwhelmingly approved the contract by a vote of 1339 in favor to 234 opposed.⁵

So far this flurry of union activity had had little direct effect on the community in general. As the

¹News item in the Newton Daily News, April 30, 1937.
²Ibid., May 13, 1937.
³Ibid., May 24, 1937.
⁴Bryan Dye, "History of the Labor Movement in Newton and Hampton, Iowa" (a booklet published by the union) n. d. p. 3.
writer has intimated the industries of Newton employed people who generally were regarded, as a class, outside the life of the town. As the summer worn on, however, the union took steps which certainly intruded upon the life of nearly everyone in the community.

First, a serious attempt was made to organize the retail clerks. Strikes were called at grocery stores and the Montgomery Ward store. Picket lines were established and attempts to halt people from trading in the businesses brought about sidewalk scuffles and minor violence.\(^1\) Shopping routines were upset and some ladies refused to venture out on the square without their husbands.\(^2\) Labor problems now became as personal as the breakfast cup of coffee. It was disturbing.

Equally upsetting to the routine of life was a three week strike of Newton Daily News employees in August of 1937. The disturbance, too, was accompanied by threats of violence against the employees who refused to join the union.\(^3\)

Secondly, the CIO sponsored a candidate in the

\(^1\text{George Hansuld, interview with the writer, March 9, 1964.}\)

\(^2\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^3\text{Burton, loc. cit.}\)
1938 school board election. The school board election in an Iowa town is rarely more than a formality with a respected member of the "establishment" being chosen with a minimum of fuss or bother. This election was different. Ladies organized a telephone calling campaign to get out the vote, and appealed to their friends "to keep labor problems out of the schools."¹

With labor agitation not only in the factories but in the stores where they shop, interfering with their local newspaper, and even attempting to gain control over the education of the children, the typical conservative citizen of Newton might come to the conclusion that the union was preparing to make Newton "a CIO town."²

On March 22, the same day E. H. Maytag became Chairman of the Board of the Maytag Company as well as president, the union gave authority to its executive committee to call a strike if negotiations over the new contract warranted.³ This seemed an ominous move, es-

¹Berg, loc. cit.
²Hansuld, loc. cit.
especially since negotiations were not to open for two
weeks or more.

Perhaps this step was a reaction to a company
request to hold an election under the auspices of the
National Labor Relations Board to determine whether the
Maytag workers really wished to be represented by the
CIO. Management felt dissatisfaction with union policies
was growing among the rank and file. William Sentner,
organizer from St. Louis, shrugged off this grumbling.
He predicted to George Umbreit that the union would get
at least seventy-five per cent of the votes.¹

The election was set for April 22. Emotions were
high on both sides. A stink bomb was tossed into the
anti-union headquarters established in the Maytag Hotel
on the evening of April 19, and Vote-Yes (for the union)
stickers were pasted on business houses during the night.
The Daily News reported that, "These were soon washed
off, however."² Humor was rife among the union men that
a ninety per cent yes vote would mean the company would
accept a closed shop as an item in the new contract.³

¹Umbreit, loc. cit.
³Ibid., April 21, 1938.
The election was an overwhelming union victory, exceeding even Sentner's optimistic prediction. Not only did 81.5% vote yes but only one hundred eligible men did not vote. (To be eligible a voter had to be on the payroll list as of February 4, 1938.)

Interest in the results was high. From 5:30 on the Daily News got over thirty calls an hour asking for results. With the official announcement by the NLRB representative no one need have called anyone to find the results. Local 1116 staged a noisy and triumphant parade around the courthouse square and back to union headquarters. The marchers were led by the newly formed ladies auxiliary and the "formation was escorted by officer J. H. Lammers on the police motorcycle."

Time for negotiations was now growing very short. The one year contract expired May 1, 1938. The union negotiating team consisted of William Sentner, vice president of the UBERWA and district organizer for the CIO; John Connolly, Jr., well-known labor attorney from Des Moines; Wilbert Allison, president of Maytag local

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\[1\text{Ibid., April 23, 1938.}\]

\[2\text{Ibid., April 23, 1938.}\]
and Hollis Hall and Robert Kirkwood, vice-president and secretary-treasurer of the local. The company was represented by George Umbreit, A. H. Taylor, and attorney Edward H. Ford.¹

Edward Ford played an important and controversial role in the succeeding events. He was a young associate of the Chicago law firm of Pope and Ballard. The company stated he was hired because their regular Newton attorneys were inexperienced with labor problems.² The union pointed out Pope and Ballard also represented Republic Steel which had recently undergone a serious labor dispute. To the union, Ford was brought in to break the CIO.³

Also of interest was the absence of E. H. Maytag on the negotiating team. In fact, Mr. Maytag had left town for his home in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. He took little or no direct part in the events of the following months.⁴

On Monday, April 25, the union presented its de-

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¹Ibid., April 27, 1938.
²Umbreit, loc. cit.
³Connolly, loc. cit.
⁴Umbreit, loc. cit.
mands. They asked for a closed shop and a check off; a 10% wage differential for night work; revision of various points on the subject of seniority; a 62½¢ an hour minimum wage (present minimum was 50¢); and a one week vacation with pay for men working over one year, two weeks with pay for a man with over two years.¹

The company presented its counter proposal the following day. It declared itself opposed to a closed shop and a check off as matters of principle. A forty hour week, eight hour day could be agreed upon. Seniority clauses in the contract would be acceptable, but modification would be necessary to give the company more control. Concerning the all important matter of wages the company was ominously vague, "in view of the altogether uncertain economic conditions at this time."²

The May first deadline passed. The union worked without a contract and negotiations continued. On May 5th the company dropped a bombshell by declaring it would reduce wages within sixty days. Such reduction would not fall below a level which was five per cent

¹News item in the Newton Daily News, April 26, 1938.
²Ibid., April 27, 1938.
above the average paid in the washing machine industry.¹

The union representatives reacted as might be expected, but just before the session recessed - not to be reconvened until May 23 - William Sentner stated, "There will be no strike as long as the company keeps the doors of the factory open." John Connolly added, "That is, under the present wages, hours, and working conditions."²

That afternoon, Friday, May 6, the union held a mass meeting on the north side of the courthouse square. Over one thousand people packed the lawn and overflowed out into the street. Sentner was the main speaker. It was a long, involved, and highly emotional speech. "To the Maytag Company, we say watch out, don't bite the hand that's feeding you. To the Merchants, watch out, don't bite the hand that's feeding you." He sneered at the manner in which the Maytag family lived, maintaining this was proof they could well afford a pay raise for the workers. He denounced the Daily News and its publisher, James Rhodes, especially calling a story run by the paper concerning a union plan to sell gro-

¹ News item in the Des Moines Register, May 6, 1936.
ceries at wholesale prices to union members "'a lie.'"\(^1\)

With the wild oratory, including slurs against the Maytag family, with the huge crowd and tumultuous applause, with the crackling air of crisis hovering over the whole proceedings, it was a day which staid, little Newton had never experienced before.

The next edition of the *Newton Daily News* - Saturday, May 7 - naturally carried a long account of the events of the previous afternoon. It also carried another story on page one. It read, "It is reported that a notice was posted this morning on the bulletin board in the Maytag factory, announcing that on Monday, May 9, a reduction of 10% in hourly and piece work rates would be effective."\(^2\)

\(^1\)Ibid., May 7, 1938.

\(^2\)Ibid.
CHAPTER IV

THE STRIKE

The factory opened as usual at 7:00 a.m. Monday, May 9, 1938. Notification of an immediate ten per cent wage cut was posted on the main bulletin board. About the middle of the morning the men began to leave, and by noon the plant was empty. Forty or fifty pickets ranged themselves about the east and south gate. L. W. Erlandson attempted to force his way into the plant that afternoon and received a bloody nose in the ensuing scuffle.\(^1\)

On these bare facts there seemed to be general agreement concerning the events of the first day of the strike. Beyond this, controversy reigned. The basic question was: Was it a strike, or was it a lockout? Wilbert Allison, union president, maintained, "'The men returned to work this morning. They were ready to work under the same wages, hours, and working conditions that prevailed last year.

"There was posted upon the bulletin board notice of a ten per cent cut for all hourly and piece workers.

\(^1\)News item in the Newton Daily News, May 9, 1938.
The men did not leave the plant until the management requested the union officials to have the plant evacuated. ¹

Some weeks later at a National Labor Relations Board hearing seven Maytag employees—all union men—all testified that A. H. Taylor walked through the plant about ten o'clock "waving his arms in a gesture of dismissal," and shouting, "Get out!! Vacate the plant!!" ²

The union position maintained the men were in the plant ready to work and the company forced them out. It was a lockout.

Plant Superintendent Taylor said the seven o'clock shift refused to work. They stood at their machines, without making a disturbance but also making no move to start production. After an hour or so of this the union officials assembled in his office. Taylor accused them of calling a strike. One of the officials answered, "'Call it a strike or anything you wish, but the men are not going to work with a ten per cent cut.'" ³ It was then that Taylor insisted the men either work or leave. They left. It was a strike. ³

¹Ibid.
²News item in the Des Moines Register, August 7, 1938.
³News item in the Des Moines Register, August 14, 1938.
Much of the union's position rests on the proposition that the men did not know about the wage cut until they reported for work, and that May 9th was just another Monday morning. Some employees testified later that this was not the case. The watchman at the north gate, Robert Reynolds, claimed Allison was at the plant Saturday morning and had read the notice of the wage cut.  

Other men stated that William Sentner, in a union meeting on May 2nd, had advised union members to slow down production. More specifically one man claimed Sentner had suggested that the men report but not work if a pay cut went into effect.

Governor Kraschel also said in a speech at Toledo, Iowa, that union men had told him before May 9th that there was going to be a strike. His efforts to dissuade them were unheeded.

It is difficult to believe the union did not know

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1 News item in the Des Moines Register, September 28, 1938.
2 News item in the Des Moines Register, October 6, 1938.
3 Ibid., October 1, 1938.
4 News item in the Des Moines Register, August 3, 1938.
about the wage cut, even if the above testimony of the employees - who belonged to an anti-union faction - is discounted. After all it was recorded in the Newton Daily News the previous Saturday. From this point on the labor dispute will be referred to as a strike.

Deeply embroiled in the controversy, as he was embroiled in virtually all the controversy surrounding Newton's labor trouble was the figure of William Sentner.

Along with James Carey, Sentner was the main link between Local 1116 and the national union. These men, but especially Sentner, represented the CIO to the people of the community. To many they also represented the cause of discord.\footnote{John Mitchell, letter to the writer, April 28, 1964.} After all, Sentner was a Communist. Said one Maytag employee, "I knew he \[Sentner\] was a Communist as soon as I heard him speak . . . I feel this union is dominated and controlled by the Communist party and the Third International. You read about it in the newspapers."\footnote{News item in the Des Moines Register, August 19, 1938.} The last sentence, at least, is not debatable. Sentner was in the newspapers a lot. The Marshalltown Times Republican felt other Iowa towns should note what happened to a prosperous and peaceful
community after a man like William Sentner had been there a few months.¹ The previous day the Daily News, in a front page editorial entitled, "The Challenge is Sounded," accused Sentner of defying law and order, inciting mob spirit, using vile language, threatening to blow up the town, and bragging about being in jail twenty-eight times. The editorial ended its denunciation by asking, "Who is in charge in Newton right now? Is it William Sentner, who openly defies our courts and incites our citizen's to violence? Newton must answer this question in the immediate future."²

Sentner's background was one which even a sympathetic citizen of Newton would find hard to understand. Born and raised in a Jewish home in St. Louis he had joined the Communist Party in 1934 following a police beating during a picket line dispute. Before becoming a full time union organizer in 1935 Sentner had been a construction worker for eight years. He had also attended Washington University. He had indeed been arrested many times and was not hesitant about mentioning

¹Editorial in the Marshalltown Time Republican, June 18, 1939.
Such a person would be regarded with suspicion in central Iowa. The writer has found, however, that people who had direct dealings with Sentner were less antagonistic toward him than those who did not know him so well. A union man maintained that he never heard any "Communist talk" from Sentner, and there was never any literature at union headquarters which could be "pro-Communist." Another union man reaffirmed this belief but felt Sentner aggravated many people with "tactless comments." "He tried to use the same tactics he would in the big city, and this didn't go in Newton."  

John Connolly, Jr. believed Sentner to be the most able man on either side of the Maytag bargaining table, but admitted Sentner's arrogance intimidated and angered people needlessly. He completely rejected the belief, however, that Sentner encouraged violence - an opinion still current with many in Newton. When Judge Bechley issued an anti-union injunction, some of the local hot heads planned to force the judge's car off

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1 News item in the Des Moines Register, July 15, 1938.
2 Winters, loc. cit.
3 Albee, loc. cit.
the road one evening. Sentner succeeded in stopping them. Connolly also stated it was Sentner who urged the union to go back to work after the National Guard reopened the plant. To Connolly, Sentner was a moderating influence not an aggravating one on union policy.¹

George Umbreit, too, believed Sentner was interested only in settling the strike on the best possible terms for the union. He felt on occasion Sentner’s bad temper would cause him to make decisions or statements which he normally would not do.²

The theory that Sentner was an agent of the Communist conspiracy sent to Newton to foment discord and class struggle must be discounted. Yet, one can see why this brilliant, aggressive, and foreign personality could upset and infuriate many members of the community.

The first few weeks of the strike passed peacefully enough, although picketing continued. On May 15, Ralph Shelton, American Federation of Labor official gave full support to the CIO’s stand at Newton.³ This

¹Connolly, loc. cit.
²Umbreit, loc. cit.
³News item in the Des Moines Register, May 16, 1938.
was unusual in the late 1930's to find cooperation between the CIO and AFL, and perhaps indicated how important the mid-West labor movement felt the Newton situation to be.

Discussions also continued between Local 1116 and management. On May 25th William Houston, a commissioner of the U. S. Department of Labor, served as chairman for a series of discussions on wages, hours, and working conditions. The conferences lasted several days. They were not successful, although Mr. Houston stated, "Major provisions of the contract had been agreed upon, tentative to the working out of the wage structure." Unfortunately the wage problem was a rock on which all negotiations floundered.

One problem which festered and grew worse during May was the economic condition of the Maytag workers. Many had little or no savings to fall back upon. During May union officials tried to work out some arrangement with local merchants to exchange vouchers for food.

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2 Ibid., May 28, 1938.
3 News item in the Des Moines Register, May 28, 1938.
Union funds were extremely limited, however, and could supply financial assistance to only a small minority of the strikers.

Help from the state seemed ruled out when the governor told the county board of supervisors that state relief money could not be used, "For the purpose of prolonging the strike or for any other purpose than the needs of the clients."

County funds were nearly exhausted. Recently $20,000 had been transferred from the general fund. Soon this would be gone. Complicating matters, because of the county's low bonded indebtedness, the county would have great difficulty in gaining additional state or federal funds. Food was issued only in cases of direst emergency.

Late in the afternoon of June 3rd county supervisors Harry O'Brien and Hugo Reichelt were prevented from leaving the auditor's office in the county courthouse by a large crowd of over one hundred strikers. There was no violence, but the supervisors were held in the office by a solid and unyielding mass of humanity.

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1Ibid., May 25, 1938.
2Ibid.
The men insisted the supervisor's call Governor Kraschel. O'Brien did. The governor stated food should be given to families in need.

The men were still not satisfied, nor did they let the supervisors leave. They insisted food vouchers be made available for the next day. At 8:00, after unsuccessfully attempting again to push their way out of the auditor's office, the officials agreed to give grocery orders to those "cases which had been investigated." The men left, so did the supervisors, rather hurriedly.¹ The next day relief money was somehow found and 500 two dollar grocery orders were issued.²

Such a holding action might have been construed as a victory for the union, yet in long term effects it may have been most unwise. Not only did it seem to place the onus of "mob violence" on the union, but by interfering with county government officials they seemed to intrude on the domain of the rural interests in Jasper County. The following Monday a newly formed organization published a resolution in the Daily News. This group called themselves the Jasper County Farmers and

¹Ibid., June 4, 1938.
²Ibid., June 6, 1938.
Taxpayers Association. The resolution was signed by William Gannon, chairman, Jack Healy of Newton, and W. R. Hayes of Prairie City. The following excerpts from the resolution make clear their attitudes.

We do not favor a relief policy that would allow women and children to go hungry, but we feel that it is unfair for their husbands and fathers to expect us to support their families while they refuse to work at available jobs . . .

We don't presume to determine the merits of the entire controversy but we wonder why highly paid organizers and agitators from St. Louis and elsewhere must come to Jasper County to tell our intelligent, honest working men how to carry on collective bargaining. . . .

We feel that the Maytag men should shake off the foreigners and talk for themselves. We feel that this is the most objectionable feature of the situation and that if these outsiders who have no real interest in the welfare of the men or the community as a whole are dismissed, the whole problem will be more speedily solved . . .

We feel that the CIO organization is a selfish, unamerican institution, opposed to the best interests of our country and our local community, committed to a policy of violence and intimidation, and we feel it is not worthy of the devotion of our friends and neighbors at the Maytag plant. . . .

This statement expressed the feelings of many of the community - the strike was caused by outsiders, the entire CIO movement was an evil one, from which no good could come.

1Ibid., June 6, 1938.
A few days later another resolution was published in the paper.

We condemn the mass coercion and intimidation thrust upon the Board of Supervisors of Jasper County by any organization in their demands for unregulated relief.

We cannot approve the activities of any organization or group which sponsors class hatred, character assassination and contempt for law and order in pressing its demands upon the community.

We emphatically condemn all unlawful assemblies on our streets and in other public places, and more especially do we deplore the visitation to our city of agitators, trouble-makers, and strife breeders . . . .

We believe that every man or woman should and does have the right to work . . . and it is the duty of the law enforcing bodies of this community to see that the right to work is maintained and protected.1

The Newton Chamber of Commerce was lining up with the Jasper County Farmers and Taxpayers Association.

No one, not even the most optimistic union man, could have hoped for a much different attitude from these conservative elements. They were expected and generally discounted as not particularly important to the outcome of the strike.2

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1Ibid., June 10, 1938.
2Winters, loc. cit.
At this time, however, an organization was formed which could deal a death blow to the strike and perhaps even the union. A group of Maytag employees declared they were prepared to go back to work on the company's terms and were working to sign up additional men. The "back-to-work" movement was on.

The group announced on June 8th, that 102 employees had signed a card stating a wish to work, and a canvas was being taken to find other employees so inclined. Five or six hundred men would be necessary to work the plant. When this many men agreed to the plan, work would begin immediately. The Daily News was "optimistic," declaring that this goal would be reached in a few days and that the movement was "long looked for."  

The origin of the "back-to-work" movement is murky. An attempt to find information about its birth was made at the National Labor Relation Board hearing held later in the summer. Francis Woodrow, acknowledged leader of the group, said he approached A. H. Taylor on May 9th, the morning of the strike, because he was afraid the strike would cause him to lose his insurance rights. Taylor told him these benefits would

1News item in the Newton Daily News, June 8, 1938.
not be lost and that the factory was always open. Later Woodrow and Clifford Conn talked to other men about going back to work. A secret meeting was held in a woods north of Newton. About ninety-seven men attended, but Mr. Woodrow did not remember who had attended; he had lost any written records he had made.  

Advice on writing the card, which each "back-to-worker" signed, was given by attorney Tim Campbell. Mr. Campbell did not charge a fee, telling Art McMahon, another leader in the group, "I could pay him after we got back to work." The cards were printed at the Daily News. There is no record that they were paid for.  

The attitude of some of the union men was graphically expressed the next evening. A car driven by Fred Davis, a "back-to-worker," was stopped. Seven men "roughed up" Davis and destroyed a pack of unsigned back-to-work cards he was carrying. The seven were arrested. Four of these men were later arraigned before Justice Frank Sellman on riot charges.  

1 News item in the Des Moines Register, August 10, 1938.  
2 Ibid., August 11, 1938.  
3 Ibid.  
4 Ibid., June 10, 1938.  
5 News item in the Newton Daily News, June 14, 1938.
The outlook for the strike looked grim as the warm June days wore on. Several Newton citizens had stink bombs thrown in their cars, further alienating much of the community from the union cause.1

By June 10th, the Daily News reported that 463 bonafide production line employees had signed back-to-work cards. The paper reported that more and more men were becoming interested in the organization and over six hundred would be enrolled by Saturday, June 11th. District Judge Frank Dechley signed a temporary injunction prohibiting union officials or "all other persons whether members of the union or not from molesting or interfering in any way with the back-to-work movement."2

On the morning of June 15th a tense situation developed when thirty foremen, led by A. H. Taylor, attempted to pass through the picket lines and into the plant. The pickets closed ranks and a shoving match ensued. The foremen were repulsed, and Mr. Taylor was pushed to the ground and trampled. The picket line quickly swelled to many hundred men and there was a good

1Ibid., June 16, 1938.
2Ibid., June 11, 1938.
deal of shouting back and forth. No blows were struck, however.1

The following morning the Maytag Company petitioned the district court to issue an injunction prohibiting the union from interfering with company business procedure.2 That same morning William Sentner addressed several hundred union men in the street in front of the plant, urging them to stand fast. The Daily News reported he declared an injunction wasn't worth the paper it was written on.3

In the midst of these events, F. M. Woodrow suddenly resigned as mayor of Newton. Mr. Woodrow, aged seventy-two, stated for the press that ill health and worry caused his resignation. Chief of Police L. E. Simpson, also seventy-two, was given a thirty day leave of absence.4 Later, at the NLRB hearings Mr. Woodrow threw more light on the events leading up to his resignation.

1Ibid., June 15, 1938.
2Ibid., June 16, 1938.
3Ibid.
4News item in the Des Moines Tribune, June 21, 1938.
A few days before the 21st he had been approached by Councilman Maxon Stouder about retirement. He said Mr. Stouder felt his resignation might, "'Speed this thing up a bit and get rid of the strike.'"  

Woodrow believed the council discussed his resignation during a meeting on June 20th. He was not present. Mr. Woodrow said he hoped to be mayor again.2

Early in the strike Mayor Woodrow had sworn in four union members as special policemen. The action had been quickly annulled by city attorney L. L. Brierly as being justified only in an emergency, which at that time did not exist.3

Immediately after Mayor Woodrow's resignation Councilman Stouder nominated George Campbell to fill out the remainder of Mr. Woodrow's term. No other names were mentioned. He was unanimously accepted by the council.4

Mr. Campbell had been approached about taking on the job by Councilman Robert Hannon. Hannon told him  

1News item in the Des Moines Register, August 26, 1938.  
2Ibid.  
3News item in the Des Moines Sunday Register, May 14, 1938.  
that Woodrow was, "'An old man and wasn't firm enough in handling the situation arising out of the Maytag labor dispute.'"¹

Attorney George Campbell's background made it hard to believe he could be neutral in the labor dispute. Mr. Campbell had helped his brother Tim write the "back-to-work" card. Tim wrote it; he edited it.² Mr. Campbell was also president of the Maytag Loan and Abstract Company. Mr. E. H. Maytag was vice-president.³

The day following this political turnover District Judge Bechley issued the injunction sought by the company. It expressly prohibited:

1. Any union member and sympathizer from interfering with control and direction of the Maytag business.
2. Entering company property without permission.
3. Gathering to intimidate or coerce men wanting to go back to work.⁴

At this dark hour other union locals in Newton called a meeting to rally support for Local 1116.

¹News item in the Des Moines Register, August 27, 1938.
²Ibid.
³Folk, op. cit., p. 86.
⁴News item in the Des Moines Sunday Register, June 26, 1938.
President Dan Greeson of the local at the One Minute Washing Machine Company hinted at the possibility of a "labor holiday." Officers of the retail clerks called for support for the strikers. Yet nothing very specific was proposed, and the Daily News reported it had it on good authority that only sixteen of the clerks' claimed membership of 150 had attended the meeting. Of these sixteen, eleven voted for a sympathy strike.1

With declaration of opposition by powerful city and rural organizations, with growing numbers of employees seemingly ready to go back to work, with the inauguration of the new city administration, with the sweeping injunction hampering union activities, with the apathy, if not opposition, of other union groups, even the most ardent and optimistic striker would find it difficult to believe the strike was not on the verge of collapse. Perhaps it was the time for desperate measures.

A. H. Taylor was awakened early the next morning, June 23rd, by a call from foreman Ed Hall who informed him that, "There are 300 or 400 men in there just raising hell."2 The sit down strike had begun.

2News item in the Des Moines Register, August 2, 1938.
Taylor reached the plant shortly after six a.m. The deputy sheriff and mayor tardily arrived shortly after seven. All including the deputy sheriff were denied entrance by the barricaded workers. Four foremen in the plant for maintenance purposes were allowed to leave, although three were held until almost noon, and one was not released until four o'clock.

Taylor immediately accused the union leadership of organizing this new tactic, maintaining he saw William Sentner "hurrying away from the south gate," shortly after six a.m.

The union officials denied any advanced knowledge. Sentner stated, "I didn't know that there was an official occupancy of the plant until 8:00 a.m. when I was informed at the union headquarters."

It is hard to believe that hundreds of men would have gathered so early in the morning and spontaneously decided to rush the plant. Advanced planning could not have been carried out without at least the tacit approval of the union leadership. The very fact that the

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 News item in the Des Moines Tribune, August 13, 1938.
local officers could not be located for several hours that morning indicates they had reason to make themselves difficult to find.

The next day the union officers told a reporter they assumed, "that the men decided to take possession of the open plant to prevent other Maytag employees from returning to work."¹

Advanced planning also seemed to be seen in the efficient manner the ladies auxiliary appeared promptly at each mealtime and passed food baskets through the windows to their men inside.² This provisioning continued regularly for the duration of the sit-down strike.

If this maneuver had been planned, however, some of the rank and file had not been informed. At least one man went in to the plant on the mistaken assumption that the strike must be over, and the "boys" were going back to work.³

However controversial the events leading up to the sit-down strike, there was no controversy whatsoever about the conduct of the men while in the plant. It was

¹News item in the Des Moines Register, June 25, 1938.
²Ibid., June 24, 1938.
³Albee, loc. cit.
exemplary. Most of the time was spent in card playing and idle gossip. Despite the extreme heat, many of the men worked hard, putting the plant machinery in tip-top order. Even the foremen, when they reentered the plant following its evacuation admitted equipment was in "A number one order." ¹

The calm within the plant did not extend beyond its walls. Local law enforcement officials fired an emotional telegram to Governor Kraschel demanding troops because, "the situation is beyond our control." ²

The union, too, was anxious to contact the governor. They proposed to evacuate the plant if the company would agree to negotiate the 10% wage cut. The union said it felt "the sit downers" would accept this. ³

The next move was the governor's. He had tried desperately to avoid being involved in this dispute. The day following the sit-down strike he had hurriedly departed on a vacation to an undisclosed spot. The pressure became too heavy, however, and on June 29th

¹Winters, loc. cit.

²News item in the Des Moines Register, June 28, 1938.

³Ibid., June 30, 1938.
Robert Kirtly, the governor's executive assistant, announced he was returning from Wisconsin by car. "I have called a meeting for tomorrow morning [June 30th] at 9:30 here in the governor's office," Kirtly said. "This will take in representatives of the company and the union and the approximately 600 back-to-work employees."

Following a long series of conferences which extended into July 1st Governor Kraschel issued a terse statement. "I want that plant vacated tonight, and I want it kept closed until after these negotiations around this table are ended either in agreement or deadlock."\(^2\) The governor claimed to be optimistic, saying that, "in the State of Iowa reasonable men could carry out negotiations without violence."\(^3\)

Unfortunately for the governor's optimism, reasonable men seemed to be in short supply. The union felt they had won a victory. The "sit downers" vacated the plant on the evening of the first and joined by many sympathizers, paraded downtown, around the square, and

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\(^1\) News item in the *Newton Daily News*, June 29, 1938.

\(^2\) News item in the *Des Moines Register*, June 2, 1938.

\(^3\) Mitchell, *loc. cit.*
on to union headquarters. Some carried signs proclaiming, "Thanks to our governor." There were shouts and boo's for "back-to-workers" whom the men recognized.  

At union headquarters they were addressed by Don Harris, regional CIO director, who declared, "For the first time the Iowa governor's office has been used for the people, and not for the vested interests in an occasion like this."

Some days earlier Dr. L. B. Logan, the Methodist minister, had advised the union to end the strike. Now in the emotional heat of the moment, some of the paraders were carried away. A benefit missionary society musical recital was in progress in the church basement. It was interrupted by shouts of, "Come on out, Logan!," and a sign, bearing the inscription, "CIO is on top," was thrown down the steps.

The celebration was premature. While the plant had been closed, as the union wished, the governor had no authority to keep it closed, and the company was going to be open as usual the following week. The con-

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1 News item in the *Newton Daily News*, July 2, 1938.
2 News item in the *Des Moines Register*, July 2, 1938.
3 News item in the *Newton Daily News*, July 2, 1938.
ferences held by the governor were attended by delegations of Jasper County citizens who felt the mayor's call for troops still must be heeded. Frank Drake, President of the Chamber of Commerce stated as much and added, "Newton is not big enough for the Maytag Company and the CIO. The business men have decided they'd rather have the Maytag Company.""^1

The Rotary Club sent a telegram. "The Rotary Club of Newton, Iowa, urges you through your power as governor to protect all citizens of Newton who wish to resume work as employees of the Maytag Company.""^2

The Reverend Dr. Logan led a delegation of more spiritually minded citizens to Des Moines and declared, "This group stands squarely behind the mayor and sheriff in their request for troops, if it takes troops to settle the matter.""^3

Union spokesmen were beleaguered and outnumbered, but they had acquired an ally, at least in their desire for arbitration. During the sit-down strike the Des Moines Register took an editorial stand.

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"^1News item in the Des Moines Register, July 6, 1936.


"^Ibid."
So far as technical rights are concerned the Maytag Company is no doubt in a sound position. Its contract with the union had expired, and it refused to renew the wage scale. But the wisdom of refusing completely to permit arbitration is another matter. The prestige of the company enters in here. And the disinclination to permit an impartial group to study its position is not reassuring to the public generally.\(^1\)

After several days of conferences the governor offered his recommendation - go back to work, with the ten per cent wage cut, and arbitrate the other issues.\(^2\) The governor's statement was read to a union meeting held in the Junior High auditorium. Understandably there were no cheers. James Carey, international president of the United Electrical Union and recently arrived in town, tried to bolster the men's spirits. He declared, "I have received word that the company within the last three days has received unexpected opportunities for business . . . . The Maytag Company is anxious to get into production."\(^3\)

Perhaps buoyed up by Mr. Carey's speech the local rejected the governor's proposal and asked Chief Justice Edward A. Sager of the Iowa Supreme Court to

\(^1\)Editorial in the Des Moines Register, June 24, 1938.

\(^2\)News item in the Des Moines Register, July 6, 1938.

\(^3\)Ibid.
appoint an impartial fact finding board to investigate the controversy. The governor was asked to support the findings of the board "with the full force and power of his office."\(^1\)

The meeting was held at the end of a long and shattering day for Local 1116. Early that morning when the starting bell clanged in the empty factory over one hundred pickets were massed outside the gates. Rumors flew that coal miners were coming to town to help the strikers put down an effort by the "back-to-workers" to crash into the plant. Office personnel were turned back for the first time, and there was another pushing and shoving match.\(^2\)

Later in the day a special grand jury returned indictments, charging violations of Judge Bechley's injunction, against fourteen union members. Sentner was arrested while eating dinner.\(^3\)

The next day both Sentner and Carey were charged with violations of the criminal snydicalism act. The law, passed during World War I, defined criminal snydicalism act.

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1. Ibid., July 7, 1938.
3. Ibid.
calism in the Iowa Law Code as "the doctrine which advocates crime, sabotage, violence, or other unlawful methods or terrorism as a means of accomplishing industrial or political reform." ¹

The badgered governor still refused to budge from his position. If the National Guard came to Newton the plant would be closed. He tersely closed his statement by saying, "My services as mediator are now closed and I shall act from now on as the governor of Iowa, executing my responsibilities to the people without favor or assistance to any group." ²

On July 7th, following a meeting at the Maytag Hotel, a group of leading citizens asked the sheriff to organize a force of 1,000 deputies "to maintain law and order in the city of Newton and Jasper County." ³

Fearful these peace officers would be used to reopen the plant the union responded with vigor. The next morning four to five hundred pickets massed outside the plant. Attorney Ford and George Umbreit were chased away from the gate, and a "back-to-worker" was

¹ News item in the Des Moines Register, July 7, 1938.
² Ibid., July 8, 1938.
³ Ibid.
slapped and pushed into a car. The brick sidewalk outside the plant was torn up, and the bricks were distributed among the strikers.

During the afternoon a police car containing Robert Vance, bank official, attempted to cross the picket line to get some company records. The men picked up the car so its rear wheels spun helplessly. Then the car was allowed to back away.¹

Also that afternoon a full page proclamation appeared in the Newton Daily News declaring a state of emergency and asking all interested in volunteering for special law enforcement work to apply the next day, Saturday, at the sheriff's office or the police station.

Obviously an ugly situation was developing. Governor Kracheck reacted by ordering an arbitration board be established - an act he had previously refused to do. Under Iowa law both the company and the union were to submit a panel of five names. The governor then would select one from each panel. If one side or both refused to submit names the governor would name an arbitrator. These two arbitrators picked a third. If they

¹News item in the Des Moines Register, July 9, 1938.
were unable to agree the governor could appoint him. ¹

The arbitration board was composed of Frank Wilson, President of the Iowa United Mine Workers, E. H. Pollard, attorney for the Shaffer Pen Company, and B. F. Kauffman, President of the Banker's Trust Company of Des Moines.

These men were to hold their first meeting on Monday, July 11th. The governor instructed them to investigate the entire controversy, estimating they could wind up their inquiry within a week. Their decision, of course, could not be binding on either side. The Maytag Company refused to suggest any arbitrators and announced again it would ignore any suggestions the three might make. ²

July 8th also saw developments on the judicial front. District Judge Bechly was replaced by Judge Homer Fuller of Mount Ayr. It was felt that a man who was not associated with either party and did not normally hold court in that area might improve the situation. ³

¹Ibid., July 9, 1938.
²News item in the Des Moines Sunday Register, July 10, 1938.
³Mitchell, loc. cit.
The situation needed improving. Emotions were bubbling. A day and a half after the mayor's proclamation over three hundred men had volunteered for police duty. Nearly one hundred and fifty business men had signed up.¹

Wild statements abounded. Joe Griffin, teacher in the Newton schools and son of a leader of the "back-to-work" movement declared over WHO in a state wide broadcast that, "'American democracy was at stake in Newton'" and hoped, "'We aren't ready to adopt Russian principles in Iowa just yet . . . .'"²

F. L. Drake in a letter published in the Des Moines Register, July 13th lambasted the paper's moderate position and wondered, "'If a dictator could do a better job than our governor . . . .'"

The union bombarded the governor with telegrams complaining the company was using maintenance employees to bootleg repair parts out of the factory.³

Typifying the superheated atmosphere was the tragic climax to the affair involving Dr. Ramige, the

² News item in the Newton Daily News, July 12, 1938.
³ News item in the Des Moines Register, July 13, 1938.
minister of the Congregational Church. Dr. Ramige, who had served in Newton less than two years, wrote E. H. Maytag early in the labor dispute begging him to follow Christian principles in dealing with the union.¹

He also presented a resolution to the Newton Ministerial Association asking them to go on record stating the workers were within their legal rights to organize and ask the "non-labor groups . . . to respect the wishes of the majority of our laboring class and that there ought be no bitterness of feeling or of action expressed toward them."²

The Ministerial Association refused to accept the resolution, but the aforementioned Dr. Logan, Methodist minister, carried a copy to Jim Rhodes, publisher of the Daily News, who passed it on to other interested parties. When asked later why he did this Dr. Logan declared he felt Ramige was so clearly on the side of lawlessness that a departure from ministerial ethics was justified.³

Dr. Ramige also visited CIO headquarters and the

¹Christian Century, op. cit., p. 1007.
²Ibid.
³Palmer, op. cit., p. 7.
picket line. Soon rumors were flying that Ramige and Sentner were seen riding together in the minister's car even that Dr. Ramige had taken him to St. Louis. ¹

Other church members taunted Congregationalists about having a CIO minister.²

The criticism was climax by a letter from an influential lady in the church.

I am writing this in protest of the attitude you have taken in the present labor situation in Newton.

When I read a copy of the letter you wrote Mr. E. H. Maytag, also a copy of the resolutions you had prepared (which were never acted upon), it is almost unbelievable that our church have a minister, the leader of our young people, with communistic tendencies.

Since your sympathies are with the poor, unfortunate, and misguided people, I am wondering why you accepted a call to a nice church, built by the most substantial people and manufacturers, with a nice parsonage to live in.

You have humiliated our Church. If you did it in the name of Christianity, I am afraid there are not many Christians in your congregation.³

The writer finds the adjectives used by the lady in the third paragraph as most significant.

¹Ibid., p. 6.
²Ibid.
³Christian Century, loc. cit.
Dr. Ramige tendered his resignation to the church board on July 11th. Later the congregation formally voted on whether it should be accepted or not. Sixteen voted to reject the resignation. Sixty-four voted to accept.¹

If Judge Homer Fuller was sent into this explosive situation to pour oil on the troubled waters, the appointment can only be construed as a mistake. Judge Fuller curtly refused to acknowledge the governor's arbitration board, now gathering evidence. He ordered Sheriff Shields to gather enough deputies to enforce any order he might make and stated, "I will not tolerate any interference with your duties by any person outside Jasper County, no matter who he may be, in high or low position."²

On the following Monday, July 13th, Judge Fuller made a decision which the writer can only inadequately describe as incredible. Sentner, Carey, and Hollis Hall - local union official - were arraigned before him on charges of criminal syndicalism and violating the injunction issued by Judge Bechly. The judge offered

¹News item in the Newton Daily News, August 1, 1938.
²News item in the Des Moines Register, July 12, 1938.
them a bargain. If they would end the strike, he would parole them to Supreme Court Justice Truman Stevens, squash indictments pending against other union leaders, and drop other charges which might be brought against other union men.¹

Labor reaction to this on the local, state, and even national level was speedy and predictable. The legal reaction was also speedy. The Iowa Supreme Court went into special session. It rejected the offer of a bench parole and insisted the case be reopened.²

A few days later on July 16th, the governor's arbitration board presented its findings. The board condemned mass picketing and the sit-down, blaming outsiders for instigating these actions. These same outsiders and inept actions by local peace officers were blamed for the acts of minor violence. The board found no evidence that the company had sponsored the "back-to-work" movement. The board believed the wage cut was justified but felt the company should have explained its case more carefully. (Frank Wilson, United Mine Workers official did not feel the company had proved

¹Ibid., July 14, 1936.
²Ibid., July 15, 1936.
its case for a wage cut.) To help mitigate the effect of the wage cut the board suggested some sort of profit sharing plan. The board concluded its report by emphatically stating the National Guard was not necessary to preserve the peace in Newton.¹

The union quickly accepted the board’s decision. There was only one dissenting vote. Attorney Ford refused to accept for the Maytag Company, stating the arbitration in the settlement of wage disputes was "unsound in principle."²

Any hope that the arbitration board might serve as some manner of a mediator ended with the company’s refusal to recognize its findings — even though those findings were highly favorable to their point of view. With the closing of the arbitration hearing the union’s plight became dark indeed. For the first time many staunch union men openly began to admit the strike was failing. "The boys felt they were about played out."

The following Monday, July 18th, over four hundred men reported for work. New machines were coming.

¹News item in the Des Moines Sunday Register, July 17, 1938.
²News item in the Des Moines Register, July 18, 1938.
³Winters, loc. cit.
off the assembly line by 10:30. By the end of the day more than five hundred production workers were in the plant and eight car loads of washing machines had been shipped out by late afternoon. The few pickets in sight were strangely quiet, content merely to write down the names of many men who passed them.¹

Overshadowed by this resumption of production was the opening of the National Labor Relations Board hearing. Six hundred and fifty people gathered at the Junior High School auditorium.² They heard a dreary rehash of the same old charges and counter charges, spoken by the same cast of characters.

The next day trucks bringing washing machine parts from Crinnell to Newton were stopped by several car-loads of men. After some discussion the drivers, AF of L truckers, abandoned their vehicles and walked to town.³

This minor union victory seemed unimportant compared to another full production day at the plant. During the afternoon the company sent the following telegram to Local 1116, United Electrical, Radio and Machine workers of America:

²News item in the Des Moines Register, July 19, 1938.
The Maytag factory has been open continuously. Your jobs are available to you now, as they have been at all times since the start of the strike May 9, on the basis of the published decision of the company with respect to the findings and decision of the arbitration board. The company's position in this regard has been well known to you at all times. However, if you are in doubt as to this matter, please reread the company's published statement referred to above.\(^1\)

Again that morning no attempt had been made to halt the men going to work. If something drastic didn't happen at once the strike would become a fiasco.

That evening, July 19th, desperate men made plans for the next morning. An all out effort, using every available man, would be mustered to prevent the plant from opening. Delegates from the CIO local at the Rollins Hosiery Mill in Des Moines delivered $1,000 which they had collected for the Maytag local. Even this did nothing to clear the grim atmosphere. These men expected to be met by armed deputies. Suddenly the meeting was galvanized by amazing news. "Everyone found himself laughing and talking in a loud voice . . . .\(^2\)

Governor Kraschel had ordered the Iowa National Guard into Newton.

The governor had made some preliminary plans con-

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\(^{1}\)Ibid.

\(^{2}\)News item in the *Des Moines Register*, July 20, 1938.
cerning the use of the National Guard during the sit

down strike, at least to the point of appointing

Mathew Tinley, long-time officer in the guard and

power in the Iowa Democratic party, as commander. ¹

These plans were put into abeyance until urge

requests on the evening of July 19th from the Jasper

County Sheriff and Mayor Campbell predicting trouble

the following day. This time the governor heeded th

Two hundred and fifty guardsmen moved in during the

night to establish martial law in Jasper County and

close the Maytag plant "until the future peace in N

ton is definitely guaranteed." ²

Many people at Newton wanted a smaller number

men who would ensure the plant could open the next d:

Judge Fuller commented, "'If you'd send fifty men, I

guarantee we'll put the fear of God into those fell-

The reluctant governor, once he decided to move

went all the way. No assemblies of more than three

people were allowed, and no car with out of county

plates could remain in Jasper County without permis:


¹ Mathew Tinley, "Unpublished diaries." Found

the archives of the Iowa Historical building, Des Mo:

Iowa. Entry for June 27, 1938.

² News item in the Des Moines Register, July 20

1938.

³ Ibid.
of the commanding general. 1

The governor justified his position a few days later.

My sole concern over the problem now is the preservation of peace and establishment of it in such form and on such equitable basis that it will endure after the troops are withdrawn.

I am therefore maintaining the present order in effect and shall continue to do so until such time as the commanding general and the military commission inform me that in their opinion the peace of the community has been so firmly established that it will exist after the troops have been withdrawn. 2

General Tinley was notified at 6:45 on the evening of the 19th that he was to proceed from his home in Council Bluffs, Iowa, to Newton. With a short stop at the State House he did so and established himself - his staff and several state agents - in the Maytag Hotel. The rest of the night was spent in conferences with Judge Fuller and others. Shortly before six he managed to get to bed. Twenty minutes later he was awakened. A riot was in progress around the entrances to the Maytag plant. 3

Milling around the company gates since shortly

1Ibid., July 21, 1938.
2News item in the Des Moines Tribune, July 29, 1938.
3Tinley, op. cit., July 20, 1938.
after dawn was a large mob of strikers, back-to-workers, wives, spectators, peace officers - including some imported from other Jasper County towns, and several of Mayor Campbell's armed vigilantes. Scuffles and fist fights erupted spontaneously. More serious than the other episodes, one man was knocked unconscious and hospitalized. General Tinley's appearance seemed sufficient to quiet tempers, and the trouble was really over by the time the troops arrived.¹

The troops had moved directly to a pre-selected camp in south west Newton and were having breakfast when the "riot" broke out. The writer has been unable to discover why some of these men were not posted in front of the plant at once.

The tension, gripping Newton for weeks, now was broken. The town seemed titillated with the spectacle of armed men patrolling the streets and machine guns at the entrance to the Maytag Company. The National Guard camp was a magnet for young boys.

Behind the scenes long, serious negotiations were under way. The governor was in a precarious situation. Pressure to open the plant was mounting. In fact, the

Maytag Company would take legal steps if some action was not soon forthcoming.¹

Perhaps this pressure caused Governor Kraschel to make a serious blunder. The National Labor Relations Board hearings were continuing, and the testimony was recalling the events of the strike. On the stated position that this was aggravating the attempts to bring peace, the governor closed the NLRB hearings, prohibiting them anywhere in the State.²

The State government vs. federal government clash, caused a nationwide uproar, adding one more stone to Kraschel's burden. The reaction from Washington was firm but milder than might be expected. The governor's action was branded illegal, and the NLRB hearing examiner was ordered to move the group to Des Moines and open hearings in the Federal Building at 10:00 a.m., August 4th.³ The governor took no steps to prevent this, but revised his restraining order to apply only to Jasper County.⁴

¹Umbrecht, loc. cit.
²News item in the Des Moines Register, July 31, 1938.
³Ibid., August 3, 1938.
⁴Ibid., August 4, 1938.
Semi-secret conferences with E. H. Maytag and Fred Maytag III, John Connolly, Edward Ford, the general and the governor continued, many extending well into the morning hours.¹

Finally, on August 3rd, the governor announced he was ordering General Tinley to reopen the plant at noon the next day. The terms upon which the plant was reopened were:

1. All legal action against union members would be dropped.

2. Twelve troublemakers would not be rehired by the company.

3. Civil courts would be presided over by the regular judge.

4. The original ten per cent wage cut would stand. Any additional cuts would not be more than five per cent. If net earnings for 1938 equal an amount required to discharge dividends on outstanding preferred stock, a pay increase of five per cent would be granted for all of 1939. If during the eighteen month period starting January 1, 1938 the company meets dividend requirements on preferred stock plus an amount equal to twenty-five cents a share or outstanding common stock

¹Tinley, op. cit., August 1, and August 2.
then another five per cent increase will be granted from June 30, 1939 to June 30, 1940.¹

In his accompanying statement the governor glumly added, "This proposal in no sense of the word represents my personal views, nor do I desire to comment upon them excepting to say that I am convinced that it is the best offer available at this time . . . ."²

The next morning the union held a mass meeting at the Junior High Auditorium. Even with their leaders, including Sentner, urging them to go back to work, some still wanted to hold out. One white-haired man made an especially impassioned plea that they couldn't work while their twelve brothers were locked out. The majority were tired of futile gestures. They marched directly from the school to the plant, past the guardsmen, and into the plant.³

The rest was anti-climatic. The community was returned to civil jurisdiction by 10:00 a.m. August 19.⁴ On August 22nd the Maytag Company filed a motion to dismiss the indictments against Carey, Sentner, and

¹News item in the Des Moines Register, August 4, 1938.
²Ibid.
³Connolly, loc. cit.
⁴Finley, op. cit., August 19, 1938.
On August 26th the last skirmish was fought. The Reverend Doctor Logan filed assault charges against Mike Huston, one of the twelve men not rehired by the company. Dr. Logan swore that Huston threatened him with his fists. The charge was dropped. Peace had returned to Newton.

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1 News item in the Des Moines Register, August 23, 1938.

2 Ibid., August 27, 1938.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to discuss the events of the strike between the Maytag Company of Newton, Iowa, and Local 1116 of the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers of America. While the strike itself took place between May and August 1938, it was necessary to briefly trace the transition of Newton from a rural county seat town to a small city, which depended primarily upon an industry of national importance, The Maytag Company. This transition created strains and tensions which contributed greatly to the possibility of labor strife. The personalities of the two men primarily responsible for making this company what it was - F. L. and R. H. Maytag - were also sketched.

In gathering material the writer relied primarily upon newspaper and periodical accounts of the events described as well as personal accounts of a number of people who participated one way or another in the strike, or the events leading to the strike. By selecting persons with a relatively unemotional attitude and by cross checking their comments the writer has attempted to create as objective a picture as possible.
Certain questions still remain. First, what caused the strike? The ten per cent wage reduction of May 9th can only be a partial answer. While any reduction would be hard for a worker to take in 1938, wages had gone up twenty per cent from January 1, 1937 to May 1, 1938. The average hourly pay was over eighty-four cents an hour, a wage well over comparable factory pay scales in the Mid-West.1 A reduction would cause hard feelings or perhaps serious disputes, but more basic factors were necessary to cause such a prolonged struggle.

Many observers agreed. A reporter who covered the strike stated, "Maytag was chosen as a guinea pig in the growing pains stage of the CIO."2 The first editorial concerning the strike published in the Newton Daily News expressed the same belief. "There is considerable opinion to the effect that this community is serving as something of a guinea pig - to speak plainly - in this matter of industrial relations and adjustment."3

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1 News item in the Des Moines Register, July 2, 1938.

2 Cyril C. Clifton, a letter to the writer, April 4, 1934.

In accepting the "labor plot theory" events in Newton were fitted into a national pattern.

"Newton's troubles are simply an incident. They are duplicated here and there. Elsewhere men are standing idle or marching as pickets and the 1,400 days wages lost everyday at Newton is a drop in the bucket of a depression caused largely by . . . . Mr. Lewis and his Napoleonic drive for conquest of the dues of every worker."¹

"Prior to the time outside representatives of CIO reached Newton there was no serious labor trouble in Newton. That was the spring of 1937."² These comments by Joe Griffen, teacher in the public schools, were echoed by many people. This belief is accepted by many people in Newton today.

The UHKAWA and the CIO did seem to be unusually interested in the progress of this strike, considering the small number of men involved. The several visits of union president James Carey and the almost constant attendance of Sentner would seem to give credence to the "labor plot" theory.

On several occasions William Sentner admitted events in Newton were important in the national labor

¹Editorial in the Marshalltown Times-Republican, May 12, 1938.
Movement. Acceptance of a wage cut was rejected because, "We do not want to set the pace in reducing wages." Sentner also urged the union to accept the findings of Governor Kraschel's arbitration board although it virtually under cut the union's position. He favored acceptance because, "We will have won for the entire labor movement a recognition that the principle of arbitration is sound as a means of preventing and settling labor disputes."  

It is also true that worsening economic conditions had made inroads on the membership of the UERMWA. Over 20,000 fewer men were on the union rolls by mid 1938 than one year earlier.

The writer recognizes national union officials would view events in Newton in relation to the national picture, yet he must reject the theory that these men used Local 1116 as a pawn in a devious game. First, George Umbreit, who certainly had no reason to feel friendly to William Sentner, stated categorically that

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1Ibid., July 13, 1938.

2News item in the Des Moines Register, July 18, 1938.

Sentner worked to the best of his ability to help the local. Second, the extreme ease with which a great majority of workers joined the union and their overwhelming reaffirmation of their union affiliation at a time when a strike seemed very possible indicated that local conditions were basically bad—so bad that the Maytag employees felt radical measures might be necessary.

An authority on labor conditions presented another theory as to the cause of the strike.

Situated in a semi-rural community in which it was the dominant employer, the Maytag company was able to marshal the full force of community opinion, as well as the local and state police power, in a campaign to reduce wages and perhaps ultimately to destroy the union.¹

At the time many of the strikers were convinced the Maytag Company's ultimate purpose was to break the union.²

It was easy to see how these embattled men might get this impression. Calling for a new election a few short weeks before the expiration of the 1937 contract, unilaterally cutting wages after a very short period of

¹Ibid., p. 252.
²Winters, loc. cit.
collective bargaining could be interpreted in this way.

The existence of the "back-to-work" movement was considered an adaption of a "Mohawk Valley Plan" allegedly used by the Remington Rand Company as a union-breaking device. This plan called for a group, secretly sponsored by the company, to demoralize and ultimately destroy the union.¹

On the surface certain aspects of the "back-to-work" movement seem suspicious. The difficulty of the leaders in recalling specific people and places seem strange. The connection of the newspaper and Mayor Campbell - considering the close relationship of these men to the Maytag Company - might be considered significant.

A disinterested observer, however, maintained that the "back-to-work" movement was sponsored all right, but by "the sidewalk superintendents" not the company.² The writer tends to agree, if for no other reason than that the company did not have to help the organization. Many, many willing hands were glad to do that.

¹ News item in the Newton Daily News, July 12, 1938.
² Clifton, loc. cit.
The primary argument against the "union-breaking" theory, is that the company could have destroyed Local 1116 at the end of the strike, but did not. Three months of idleness had placed the union members in dire economic distress. The fact that so many were returning to work those few days before the National Guard closed the plant would indicate this.

With so many men willing to work on almost any terms, and with so much anti-union sentiment throughout the state, the company's actions seemed notably restrained if they wished to destroy the local. Of the twelve men discharged only one was a union official. After production was resumed the management, even down to the foreman level, bent over backwards to refrain from encouraging anti-union activity.\textsuperscript{1} The writer agreed with John Connolly, Jr., who felt the company wanted to prevent the union from gaining power rather than destroying it.

One cause for the strike was the national economic condition and the finances of the Maytag Company. The 1937 slump had caused company profits to drop for the first time since 1932. The first quarter of 1938

\textsuperscript{1}Winters, \textit{loc. cit.}
saw net sales nearly cut in half over net sales for the first quarter of 1937. Operating income was down to \$159,050.¹ With such a situation, with little improvement in sight, a wage cut would be a most attractive proposal.

The primary cause for the strike was a deepening belief in the minds of many of the employees that the management was no longer as sympathetic to the men, or their needs, as it had been. The personality of E. H. Maytag, when compared with that of his father, plus the actions of newly hired officials, especially the plant superintendent, created a feeling that the men must look out for themselves. "The main thing we wanted was an end to the absolute domination of the management," was the observation of the union secretary.²

A second major question to answer is why the strike was so prolonged. The union's position was that, "the individuals in the community who had no direct interest in the conflict lined up on sides and entered the dispute rather than leaving the matter as one between the Company and its employees."³ The writer agrees.

¹News item in the Des Moines Register, August 15, 1938, quoting figures from Standard Corporation records, Washington, D. C.
³Lye, op. cit., p. 4.
The union seemed to be alienated from the rest of the community, causing them to cling more tightly to their demands.

What caused this extreme community reaction?
First, there was a feeling that the Maytag Company was essential to Newton. A comment by F. L. Drake, President of the Chamber of Commerce stated earlier expressed this attitude. Editorials trumpeted that labor disputes could bring the ultimate disaster - the departure of the company for more favorable locations. Such an occurrence would affect the pocketbook of virtually every family in Jasper County. It was easy to convince oneself that almost anything would be preferable to that.

Second, the strike forced the "establishment" to realize that a new class of citizens was demanding a greater participation in the community. This class of people often displayed values and attitudes which the middle class Newtonians disapproved of. For example, the ladies' auxiliary fed the union during the sit-down strike, and marched, at times, in the picket lines.

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1See Newton Daily News, June 8, 1938. Marshalltown Times-republican, July 30, 1938, And August 1, 1938.
This caused a great deal of criticism.\(^1\)

The use of stink bombs, the parades of shabby people with the attendant noise, banners, and emotional displays created upsetting situations which frightened and angered many in the community.

The actions of the union leaders often fed and increased this mistrust. William Sentner's inflammatory comments, use of profanity, and bitter sarcasm about the Maytag family caused resentment among many people not directly involved.\(^2\)

The times, too, helped fan community apprehension. The sit-down strikes in the automotive industry, the "Memorial Day Massacre" the prolonged wrangles in the steel industry were still vivid in the minds of the people of Iowa. To have these same things coming to Newton, where life had been so placid was horrible and not to be condoned.

The JIO was a highly emotional issue to rural Iowa. Witness the attitude of Iowa's leading Democratic newspaper.

\(^1\)Albee, loc. cit.

\(^2\)Berg, loc. cit.
They [CIO organizers] are a menace to the peace and welfare of any community. They should be put aboard a box-car and shipped to some distant point. Russia might not be a bad landing spot. If the ship should sink at sea, there would be no great loss. The U.S. is too good a country for them.1

In the summer of 1938 these sentiments would be echoed by the great majority of Newton's citizen's who were not involved in the union.

The community's reaction called forth a counter reaction from the union, and the spiral of fear and hatred mounted.

Lastly, inept governmental actions contributed to the prolongation of the strike. The vacillations of the governor, however well intentioned, helped no one, although the National Guard prevented what might have been a tragic situation on July 20th. City and county government virtually broke down, and abdicated its authority, and the machinations of Judge Homer Fuller are still inconceivable to the writer.

To summarize, the strike came about because of fear, misunderstanding, and a breakdown in communication. As the summer weeks wore on, emotions mounted until weariness, as much as anything, brought about a conclu-

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1Editorial in the Democrat and Leader, (Davenport, Iowa), August 5, 1938.
tion. The Maytag Company was not destroyed. The union was not destroyed. The community was not destroyed. Each had learned some lessons on how to live with each other. Perhaps this was the value of the strike.
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