

Minneapolis Truckers Make History: Vocabulary

American Federation of Labor (AFL): Federation of craft unions founded in 1886. Most AFL unions distrusted unskilled and immigrant workers and focused on signing up skilled, native-born workers. Few women and minorities achieved membership. The AFL dominated the labor movement until 1935.

Bloody Friday: On July 20th, 1934, the police, teamsters, and Citizens Alliance supporters clashed in a battle known as "Bloody Friday." Minneapolis police shot at 67 strikers — over forty of them in the back. Two of these men, Henry Ness and John Belor, died.

Boycott: A tactic whereby workers and communities assert their power as consumers, to impact unfair employers or businesses. By refusing to buy certain goods or services, the people participating in the boycott can shift the power relations of labor and other struggles.

Citizens' Alliance: Groups of pro-employer individuals, associations and corporations who combined forces at the turn of the twentieth century to defeat organized labor by establishing anti-union policies and legislation at the city, state, and federal levels. The term "citizens' alliance" referenced a populist organization, the National Citizens' Industrial Alliance (created in 1891) which sought to strengthen the rights of working people. The employers' Citizens' Alliance sought to do the opposite by creating a "war between the owners of American industry and the working class." See *A Union Against Unions: The Minneapolis Citizens Alliance and Its Fight Against Organized Labor* by William Millikan.

Collective Agreement/ Union Contract: A contract between an employer and a group of workers organized into a union, which spells out the wages, benefits and working conditions of employment.

Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO): The CIO (originally named the Committee for Industrial Organization) split from the AFL in 1935 in order to organize workers on an industrial basis: everyone who worked in the same industry was eligible to be in the same union. This united workers across traditional divisions such as race and skill level. The CIO merged with the AFL in 1955.

Committee of 100: The 100 strike leaders, elected democratically by their peers, that coordinated the union's strategy, tactics, plans and decisions.

Communism: A form of socialism, which appealed to many working people during the Great Depression. Its progressive ideas, particularly about industrial unionism and civil rights, were influential within a number of CIO unions. Because it was considered revolutionary, supporters of communism were attacked by the government, employers, and the mass media.

Cruising Pickets: The name for the novel tactic in which strikers, in their own vehicles, followed “scab” trucks interested in breaking the strike, and stopped them from operating.

Farmers’ Holiday Association: A social movement (primarily in the Midwest) formed in the early 1930s to protect farmers’ rights. They used blockades/direct action, marches and other methods to collectively stop foreclosures and other indignities faced by farmers. The Association supported the 1934 Teamster strikes and donated food to the workers.

Farmer-Labor Party: A Minnesota-based populist third party formed by workers and farmers in 1918. It merged with the Democratic party in 1944. During its twenty six years, the party achieved a great deal for progressive causes in the state. Governor Olson, in office at the time of the 1934 Teamster strikes, was a member of the Farmer-Labor party.

Federal Reserve System: Also known as the Federal Reserve, and informally as the "Fed." The central banking system of the United States, created in 1913 by the Federal Reserve Act. Since one of its functions was to regulate the banking industry, President Roosevelt was able to use the Fed’s relationship to Minneapolis banks (these banks lent money to the trucking companies and other businesses that were part of the Citizens Alliance) as leverage for settling the strike.

General Strike: A strike by masses of workers, sometimes from a variety of industries in a particular city, state or country (such as the 1934 San Francisco General Strike), and sometimes in one industry (such as the 1934 Textile workers strike in the Southern U.S.). The Minneapolis strikes of 1934 were not considered general strikes.

Great Depression: A severe worldwide economic depression in the decade before World War II. In Minnesota, the Great Depression began in 1929 (when key businesses in Minneapolis went bankrupt) and quickly spread to the rest of the state.

Industrial Workers of the World (IWW): The IWW or “Wobblies,” still exist today (see list of suggested guest speakers). Founded in 1905, they believe in organizing all workers into one big union and combining

unionism with revolutionary political activity. They achieved some dramatic successes early on and many of the 1934 strike leaders had either been Wobblies themselves or were familiar with their tactics. The IWW experienced severe government repression during World War II.

Local 574: The teamsters local union in Minneapolis that organized the strikes of 1934.

National Labor Relations Act (NLRA): Legislation passed in 1935 (immediately following the 1934 strikes in Minneapolis and around the country), establishing the right of most workers to organize unions and to bargain collectively with their employers. The Act excluded public and agricultural workers, among others.

National Recovery Act: Legislation passed in 1933 that encouraged industrial recovery fair competition, and the construction of public works. It was designed to ease the economic pain of the Great Depression.

National Guard: A reserve military force comprised of state national guard militia members or active/inactive members of the US armed forces. The National Guard may be called up for active duty by state governors, as has been the case with many labor disputes including Minneapolis in 1934. On July 26, Governor Olson declared martial law and mobilized four thousand National Guardsmen, who began issuing operating permits to "scab" truck drivers.

New Deal: The name that President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave to a package of federal programs created between 1933 and 1935. The goals of the New Deal centered around "the 3 Rs;" relief to the unemployed and badly hurt farmers, reform of business and financial practices, and recovery of the economy. The New Deal included the National Labor Relations Act, the Social Security Act, The Unemployment Compensation Act, and the Fair Labor Standards Act (which established the right to overtime pay based on a standard 40 hour work week).

Picketing: The tactic employed by unions whereby people walk and/or stand (often holding signs) near an employer's place of business. Pickets exist to publicize labor disputes, to persuade workers to join or support a strike or to discourage customers from buying or using the employers' products and services.

Red-Baiting: Accusing people of being communist or socialist in order to discredit them or otherwise impair their efforts. The leaders of the Teamster strikes were often 'red baited.'

Socialism: A wide variety of economic theories that favor direct worker ownership and control of resources used to create goods and services. People who identify as socialists are often interested in achieving a society where everyone has equal access to the items that they need.

Solidarity: The fundamental ethic of the labor movement whereby workers experience mutual support and identify with the struggles of other groups of people.

Strike: When people come together to withhold their labor in order to improve their working conditions.

Strike Breaker, “Scab”: A person who continues to work or who accepts employment to replace workers who are on strike. By taking the jobs of striking workers, scabs may weaken or break a strike.

Teamster: The International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) is a labor union. Established in 1903, the organization takes its name from the word used to describe people who drove teams of animals (horses, oxen, etc).

Trotskyism: The theory of Marxism advocated by Leon Trotsky. Trotsky argued for the establishment of a ‘vanguard’ party comprised of people who favored mass action and revolution. His politics differed from those of Marxist Joseph Stalin (Stalinism) because Trotsky favored one international workers’ revolution rather than individual socialist revolutions in specific countries. Trotskyists were also more committed to democratic principles.

Unemployed Councils: Organizations of workers without jobs that were formed during the Great Depression in Minneapolis and other cities. By coming together, these workers were able to pool their meager resources and to avoid ‘scabbing.’ The unemployed councils supported the Teamster strikes and one of the two men killed by the police on Bloody Friday, John Belor, was an unemployed worker.

Union: A group of workers who decide to band together (through collective action) in order to improve their situation.

(Definitions adapted from from the CFT’s Golden Lands, Working Hands Project, the UMKC Institute for Labor Studies’ Labor Awareness Program Unit and other sources.)