

Turnovers Keep Unions Out of McDonalds

Part 2 of 2

Kroc has long held the belief that he performs a valuable service in introducing youngsters to the labour force by teaching them how to behave in the workplace in what, for many, is their first job, and by giving them valuable skills which stand them in good stead when they leave. The training a teenager gets turning hamburgers when a beeper tells him to, however, seems hardly the path to a very good job, and it is hard to fight back the suspicion that Kroc, free enterprise lover that he is, would love to teach his valuable skills to workers in Taiwan and Korea, if only there were some way of keeping the burgers hot on the flight back to his American stands.

On January 24, union organizer Clark walked into the Wabash franchise and asked to speak to area supervisor Lee Esarove. When he came forward, she told him that local 593 represented a majority of the workers at his restaurant and that it was time to sit down to iron out a contract. While the managers had known that Sorriano and Cunningham were collecting signatures on union cards, Esarove nonetheless seemed amazed. When he turned around from his confrontation with Clark, he found all but five of the crew on duty wearing union buttons and a large grin. He wanted to take down the names of the button wearers, but found it easier to take down the names of the buttonless.

McDonald's formula

Things were not supposed to have got to that point. It is not in the McDonald's formula, and Lyon Weber had plainly screwed up. Certainly it had happened before, but never in a store so big. "Here we were, the cream of the crop," Cunningham said, "and it turned out to be not so creamy."

There is simply no place for a union in the McDonald's machine. First, the assembly-line method of production poses great difficulty to an organizer. Anyone, given a day's training, can do the job, so the system needs no one, everyone is replaceable. And the work force changes constantly; everyday, scores of employees decide McDonald's is not their kind of place, and turnover in some of the outlets reaches 300 percent a year. Unlike migrant farm workers, who, while they move from farm to farm, nevertheless remain migrant farm workers, few McDonald employees see themselves as hamburger turners for the rest of their lives, and so the motivation to wage a long fight for recognition of a union is often easily dissipated when management makes even slight concessions.

In addition, competition is promoted between crews, between shifts, between different workers at the same job, keeping employees from building any sense of solidarity and, at the same time, improving production. There's a \$100 club, for the cashier who rings up \$100 on his/her cash register in one hour. There's the Silver Spatula competition, the decathlon of the burger business, to find the select group who can bag ten orders of fries in 15 seconds; lay down ten Quarter Pounder patties in 8.5 seconds; lay down, turn, and pull 12 regular-sized hamburger patties in 2.25 minutes; set up, toast, pull, and dress 12 hamburger buns in 1.5 minutes, and do the same for ten Quarter Pounder buns in two minutes and six Big Mac buns in 2.5 minutes.

After the organizing drive started at Wabash, Lyon Weber began following the anti-union formula. The Christmas party, which had been postponed repeatedly,

was finally held at Dingbat's Disco on the day before Valentine's Day; originally, the party had been scheduled for the basement of one of the other franchises. Measurements were taken for basketball jerseys, though the sign-up sheet had gone around twice in the preceding four months without any followup by the company. A bowling team was formed, and attempts were made to start volleyball and softball teams. Workers began getting a free lunch for each shift they worked; previously, they'd had to pay for their meals. The numbers of lockers doubled, another dressing room was constructed, and music was pumped into the crew room. A game called McBingo was started; employees who attended training sessions for different crew positions received, in addition to their hourly wage, play money called McLee and McNorm bucks (bearing photographs of Lee Esarove, area supervisor, and Norm Donahue, Wabash manager). The play money was legal tender at the auction of a television and other prizes held after the training sessions ended.

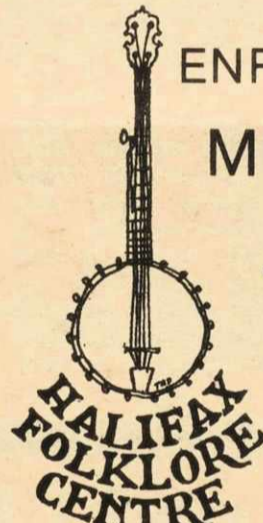
The company posted an article from the **Chicago Tribune** which named the Hotel and Restaurant Workers as one of the three major unions in the city under investigation by the Justice Department for crime syndicate influence. Management also began a cartoon series in which the union was represented by a Superfly sort of character in outlandish clothing (a black named Willie Popcorn), while the company was represented by Straight Speakin' Deacon, a white man in a dark blue robe with a clergyman's collar, holding a Bible in one hand and a scale in the other.

For a while, the managers also tried to split up Sorriano and Cunningham, offering the former a higher paying job

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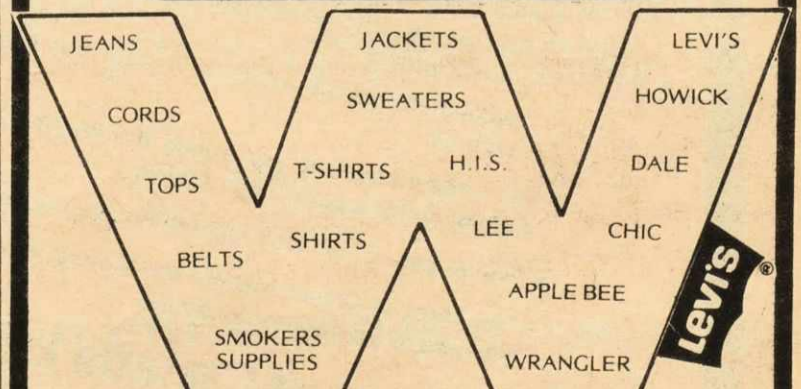


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