

Permanent Replacements and the Breakdown of the “Social Accord” in Calera, Alabama, 1974–1999

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In the summer of 1994, 150 workers at a cement plant in Calera, Alabama, abandoned a month-long strike after Blue Circle Cement Company permanently replaced more than three-quarters of them. The company’s tactics deeply alienated its experienced workforce. Tyrone Perkins, who had more than 18 years of seniority at the Calera plant, summed up how the experience of being replaced had transformed the attitude of workers to the company: “Before the strike, the men stuck together, people did more than they were expected by the company to do. You’d give that little extra to make your job better or to help each other out. That doesn’t happen now and it won’t never happen again.”¹

In the 1980s and 1990s, employers faced with strikes increasingly resorted to hiring replacement workers. This strategy represented a sharp departure from earlier responses to strike activity, a change that labor leaders traced to the anti-union political climate created by President Reagan’s dismissal of striking air traffic controllers in 1981.² Management in the post-PATCO era met unions head on and hired permanent replacements in a series of high-profile strikes, including bitter disputes at Greyhound

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¹Tyrone Perkins, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama; “Roberta Hourly Employees—Ages and Years of Service,” Oct. 11, 1993, untitled folder, Local 50537 Papers, held at Local 50537 Union Hall, Calera, Alabama, hereinafter cited as Local 50537 Papers.

²The air traffic controllers belonged to the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO). For details of the PATCO strike, see Herbert R. Northrup and Amie D. Thornton, *The Federal Government as Employer: The Federal Labor Relations Authority and the PATCO Challenge* (Pennsylvania, PA: Industrial Research Unit, Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, University of Pennsylvania, 1988); Arthur B. Shostak and David Skocik, *The Air Controllers’ Controversy: Lessons from the PATCO Strike* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1986). For a contemporary view that the PATCO strike encouraged the hiring of permanent replacements, see Eileen Boris and Nelson Lichtenstein, eds., *Major Problems in the History of American Workers* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1991), 598–600. For historians’ views that Reagan’s treatment of the PATCO strike encouraged employers to hire permanent replacements, see, for example, Robert H. Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions* (2nd ed.) (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 198; William C. Berman, *America’s Right Turn from Nixon to Bush* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 98. Robert Reich, Secretary of Labor during the first Clinton administration, also linked the increased hiring of permanent replacements to the PATCO dispute. See also U.S. Congress, House Committee on Education and Labor, *Legislative Hearing on HR 5*, 103 Cong., 1 Sess. (Washington, DC: 1993), 16–17.

Bus Company in 1990 and at Caterpillar Tractor Corporation in 1992.³ The hiring of permanent replacements was a departure from the temporary substitutes that management had traditionally turned to during labor disputes before the 1980s. Unlike temporary replacements, who left at the end of a strike, permanent replacements were assured of strikers' jobs. After the strike, the law gave strikers recall rights on their old jobs, but only if replacements left them.⁴

As was the case in Calera, in most strikes where permanent replacements were hired, unions were soundly defeated. The AFL-CIO indeed claimed that the tactic was inherently unfair and launched a major legislative campaign in the late 1980s to prohibit companies from hiring permanent replacements.⁵ Permanent replacement has proved to be one of the most contentious issues in recent U.S. history and has attracted a considerable amount of attention from policy makers, with at least nine separate congressional hearings devoted to the issue between 1988 and 1995.⁶

While scholars have examined the problems faced by organized labor in the 1980s and 1990s, there have been few studies of labor relations in the cement industry.⁷ Despite the recent growth of Southern labor history, cement workers in the region have

³"The Strikers Strike out: From Paper Mills to Football Fields, Workers Find They're Replaceable," *U.S. News and World Report*, Oct. 26, 1987, 41-42; Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions*, 198-200.

⁴Employers' right to hire permanent replacements originated in the *MacKay Radio v. National Labor Relations Board* Supreme Court decision of 1938. The decision, while ordering that several workers be reinstated in this particular instance, volunteered language in its decision that it is not an unfair labor practice to permanently replace striking workers. Prior to the 1980s, however, the use of permanent replacements was very rare and was mainly limited to smaller companies not susceptible to widespread public pressure. The position of unions was slightly strengthened in the late 1960s when the National Labor Relations Board ruled in the *Laidlaw* case that economic strikers who are permanently replaced are, after the end of the dispute, entitled to reinstatement when openings occur among the new workforce. *The Paperworker*, April 1991, 1; Boris and Lichtenstein, 598-599; Philip Mattera to Corporate Campaign, Nov. 14, 1988, "Replacement Workers," file, United Paperworkers' International Union (UPIU) Papers, held at the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical, and Energy Workers' International Union headquarters in Nashville, Tennessee, hereinafter cited as UPIU Papers. In 1999, the UPIU merged with the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers' International Union to form the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical, and Energy Workers' International Union (PACE).

⁵For details of this campaign, and the strikes which produced it, see Martin Halpern, "Arkansas and the Defeat of Labor Law Reform in 1978 and 1994," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 57 (1998), 99-133; "Stop Scabs, Union Leaders Demand in Washington," *The Paperworker*, April 1989, 12-13; "IUD Legislative Conference: Enact the Congressional Prohibition on Striker Replacements," *The Paperworker*, April 1991, 10-11; "Scab Ban Legislation High on the Agenda," *The Paperworker*, April 1994, 11.

⁶U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Human Resources, *Prohibiting Discrimination against Economic Strikers*, Hearings, 102 Cong., 1 Sess. (Washington, D.C.: 1991), 1; U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Education and Labor, *Hearings on HR 5, The Striker Replacement Bill*, Hearings, 102 Cong., 1 Sess. (Washington, DC: 1991), 2.

⁷Scholars have written a great deal about the reasons for the decline of organized labor in the 1980s and 1990s. See, for example, Michael Goldfield, *The Decline of Organized Labor in the United States* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism* (New York: Verso, 1988); Thomas Geoghegan, *Which Side Are You On? Trying to Be for Labor When it's Flat on its Back* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1991); David Brody, "Labor's Crisis in Historical Perspective," in George Strauss, Daniel G. Gallagher and Jack Fiorito, eds., *The State of the Unions* (Madison, WI: Industrial Relations Research Association, 1991), 277-311; Taylor E. Dark, "Debating Decline: The 1995 Race for the AFL-CIO Presidency," *Labor History*, 40 (1999), 323-343. Cement workers have not been totally neglected by historians. For a fine account of the labor and social history of the cement industry community of Ilasco, Missouri, see Gregg Andrews, *City of Dust: A Cement Company in the Land of Tom Sawyer* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1996). A good overview of labor relations in the cement industry is provided by Herbert R. Northrup, "From Union Hegemony to Union Disintegration: Collective Bargaining in Cement and Related Industries," *Journal of Labor Research*, 10 (1989), 337-376.

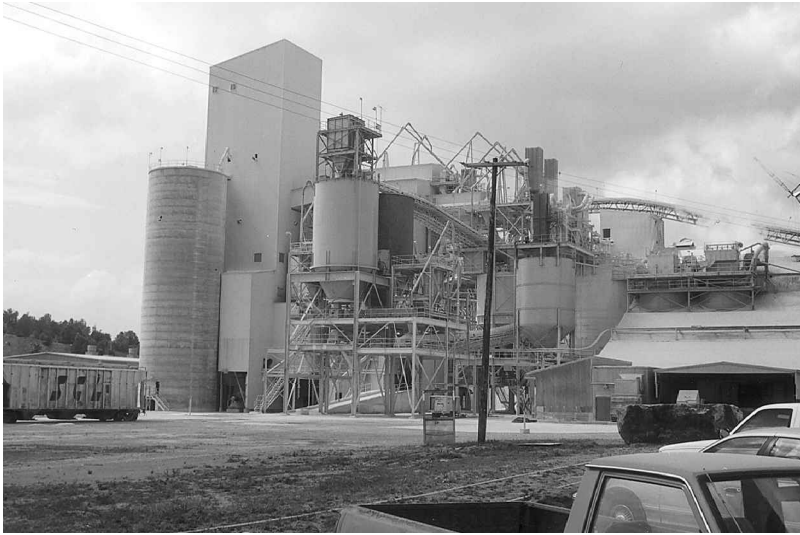
been largely overlooked.⁸ The history of the Calera local union epitomizes how labor relations became increasingly adversarial in the 1980s and 1990s, breaking the relatively amicable and stable collective bargaining relationship of the pre-Reagan era. A large number of scholars have argued that a "social accord" or "social compact" existed between organized labor and the corporate community in the decades following the end of World War II. Under this accord, companies agreed to provide high wages and good benefits while unions offered labor peace in return.⁹ The experience of Calera, and of the cement industry as a whole, highlights the way that this accord broke down in the 1980s, as companies became increasingly aggressive and demanded major concessions from unions, a pattern that was repeated in many other industries.¹⁰ In Calera, relations turned hostile in 1982, when the mill was bought by the UK-owned Blue Circle Cement Company. Indeed, the Calera story reflected the broader problems that many U.S. workers faced in the 1980s and 1990s as multinational companies sought to exact concessions from them.¹¹

⁸The last two decades have witnessed the emergence of a sophisticated body of historical scholarship on Southern workers. For an overview of this scholarship, see Robert H. Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth-century South* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1991); Robert H. Zieger, ed., *Southern Labor in Transition, 1940–1995* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1997). Much of this scholarship has concentrated on the textile industry, the South's largest. See, for example, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, James Leloudis, Robert Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones and Christopher B. Daly, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Gary M. Fink, *The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills Strike of 1914–1915: Espionage, Labor Conflict, and New South Industrial Relations* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1993); David L. Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880–1920* (Baton Rouge, LA: University of Louisiana Press, 1982); James A. Hodges, *New Deal Labor Policy and the Southern Cotton Textile Industry, 1933–1941* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1986); Douglas Flamming, *Creating the Modern South: Millhands and Managers in Dalton, Georgia, 1884–1984* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Daniel J. Clark, *Like Night and Day: Unionization in a Southern Mill Town* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Bryant Simon, *A Fabric of Defeat: The Politics of South Carolina Millhands in State and Nation* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Timothy J. Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960–1980* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). The best overview of much of the literature on Southern textile workers is Robert H. Zieger, "Textile Workers and Historians," in Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor*, 35–59. Other important works on Southern workers include Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988); Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Racial and Economic Policies from 1945 to the Present* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁹Accounts that have spoken of a post-World War II social accord include Samuel Bowles, David M. Gordon and Thomas E. Weisskopf, *Beyond the Wasteland: A Democratic Alternative to Economic Decline* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1984); Jack Metzgar, "Plant Shutdowns and Worker Response: The Case of Johnstown, PA," *Socialist Review*, 53 (1980), 9–49; A. H. Raskin, "Labor: A Movement in Search of a Mission," in Seymour Martin Lipset, ed., *Unions in Transition* (San Francisco, CA: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1986), 3–38; William Serrin, *The Company and the Union* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973); Bruce Nissen, "A Post-World War II 'Social Accord?,'" in Bruce Nissen, ed., *U.S. Labor Relations, 1945–1989: Accommodation and Conflict* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 173–208; Julius Getman, *The Betrayal of Local 14: Paperworkers, Politics, and Permanent Replacements* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998). For an overview of the use of these terms, see Nissen, "A Post-World War II 'Social Accord?,'" 173–174.

¹⁰Goldfield, *The Decline of Organized Labor in the United States*, 46–48; Charles Craypo, "The Decline in Union Bargaining Power," in Nissen, ed., *U.S. Labor Relations*, 12–27; Northrup, "From Union Hegemony."

¹¹The Calera story invites particular analogies with the lockout of workers at A. E. Staley Company in Decatur, Illinois, in 1994–1995. Staley was owned by the UK sugar manufacturer Tate and Lyle, which locked out the Decatur workers for over 20 months, inspiring a major union campaign in response. For a summary of the Staley lockout and other struggles against multinational corporations, see "The Special Projects Department Report to the UPIU International Executive Board," Feb. 1995, Papers of the United Paperworkers' International Union's Southern Regional Office, held at PACE Regional Office, Mobile, Alabama, hereinafter cited as UPIU—Mobile Papers.



FIGS. 1 AND 2. Blue Circle Cement Plant, Calera, Alabama, 1999.

Although scholars are beginning to explore strikes where permanent replacements were hired, much remains to be learned about these disputes, particularly how and why certain workers became “scabs.”¹² In Calera, however, replacement workers were

¹²The hiring of permanent replacements in the 1980s and 1990s has been written about a great deal from an industrial relations perspective. These works tend to be quantitative in nature and offer little insight into the motives of replacement workers. They do, however, effectively document companies’ increased willingness to hire permanent replacements after 1981 and the divisive response that these tactics produce. Important works include: John W. Budd, “Canadian Strike Replacement Legislation and Collective Bargaining: Lessons for the United States,” *Industrial Relations*, April 1996, 245–260; Roger D. Staton, “Hiring of Replacement Workers: An Insidious Weapon against Labor or Management’s Last Bargaining Chip,” *Labor Law Journal*, Jan. 1994, 25–32; Cynthia L. Gramm, “Empirical Evidence on Political Arguments Relating to Replacement Worker Legislation,” *Labor Law Journal*, Aug. 1991, 491–495; Harry

unusually willing to describe their motives for crossing the line in 1994, partly because most of them became members of the union after the strike. Although replacement workers led the successful efforts to decertify the union in September 1996, less than 2 years later, on March 27, 1998, Calera workers voted by a margin of 92–48 to recertify the local. The 1998 vote was especially notable because only 65 of the workforce of 150 were former strikers, meaning that those who were hired during the strike provided the margin of victory. Indeed, by 1998 former strikers had deliberately recruited those who had taken their jobs less than 4 years earlier. As international union representative Emory Barnette put it, what occurred in Calera represented "an amazing story of people putting aside old animosities to unite for the common good."¹³

Relatively few historians have studied labor relations in the cement industry, partly because the industry is capital-intensive and has never employed large numbers of workers. In the 1970s and 1980s, moreover, increasing mechanization and automation further reduced the size of the workforce. In 1987, the U.S. cement industry only employed 21,300 workers and the average plant had little more than 100 workers.¹⁴ Cement manufacture begins when rock ingredients are crushed, ground, and then burnt in a kiln. The pellets or "clinkers" which are produced from this operation are cooked and then mixed with gypsum and ground into cement. As the cement industry utilizes mined or quarried raw materials, the jobs involve operating heavy equipment and have traditionally been performed by male workers.¹⁵ In October 1993, for example, 156 of the 160 workers at the Calera mill were men.¹⁶

Between World War II and the advent of the Reagan era, the vast majority of cement workers were unionized. Chartered in 1939, the United Cement, Lime, and Gypsum Workers International Union (CLGWU) made steady progress in organizing workers during and after World War II. By 1950, over 90% of the plants in the industry were organized, a rate of unionization that was maintained until the early 1980s.¹⁷ Increased overseas competition helped to change this pattern. Like many U.S. industries, prior to the 1970s the cement industry faced little foreign competition. Lack of overseas competition allowed companies to absorb higher labor costs and grant generous wages and fringe benefits. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, the amount of cement imported into the U.S. increased steadily, from 4.8 million tons in 1972 to 17.3 million 15 years later. By 1987, indeed, imports accounted for more than 19% of total U.S. consump-

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R. Stang and Julie E. Patterson, "Labor Law Reform: A Management Perspective," *Labor Law Journal*, September 1994, 565–579; John F. Schnell and Cynthia L. Gramm, "The Empirical Relations between Employers' Striker Replacement Strategies and Strike Duration," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, January 1994, 189–206. James B. Atleson, *Values and Assumptions in American Labor Law* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), 19–34, provides a good overview of the *MacKay* case and its labor law implications. Several scholars have explored strike breaking, particularly in earlier eras. See, in particular, Clark, *Like Night and Day*, 168–198; Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1942); Rick Fantasia, *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), esp. 180–225; Hall et al., *Like a Family*, 345–349.

¹³"Blue Circle Local Makes Strong Recovery from 1994 Dispute at Cement Plant," *The PaceSetter*, July/August 1999, 1; "Votes from Replacement Workers Key to Re-certifying Union," *The Paperworker*, May 1998, 4.

¹⁴Northrup, "From Union Hegemony," 339, 340.

¹⁵Northrup, "From Union Hegemony," 338.

¹⁶Northrup, "From Union Hegemony," 338; "Roberta Hourly Employees—Ages and Years of Service," October 11, 1993, untitled folder, Local 50537 Papers.

¹⁷Northrup, "From Union Hegemony," 342.

tion. As was the case in other industries, cement companies began to seek concessions from unions because they claimed that the new competitive climate no longer justified high wages and costly fringe benefits.¹⁸

Incorporated in 1887, the small town of Calera is located around 30 miles south of Birmingham. The town is located at the heart of the lime-producing section of Alabama and its name derives from the Spanish word for "limestone."¹⁹ In 1949, the Roberta cement plant was built just outside Calera and was subsequently owned by a variety of U.S. cement companies until Blue Circle purchased it in 1982.²⁰ In 1994, Blue Circle was the parent company of about 300 subsidiaries, whose two core businesses were heavy building materials such as cement, and home products such as heating and bathroom equipment. The company is one of six giants in the global cement market, with other leading players including the German-owned Heidelberger Zement and the Italian group Italcementi. In the 1980s, these six companies, five of which were European, bought up much of the stagnant U.S. cement industry. Heidelberger Zement, for example, became an important player after purchasing LeHigh Cement, a major U.S. producer based in the LeHigh Valley of Pennsylvania. By the early 1980s, foreign owners controlled around 50% of the U.S. cement industry's tonnage. In 1992, Blue Circle itself had plants all over the world and employed more than 22,000 workers. In the same year, the company had a turnover of £1.4 billion. Although a global company, Blue Circle's most important market was in the UK, for the company generated 50% of its sales there.²¹

Prior to Blue Circle's purchase of the Roberta plant in 1982, the mill was operated by the U.S.-owned Martin Marietta company. The plant ran on a non-union basis until March 1974, when the CLGWU successfully organized it.²² Workers recalled that their primary reason for organizing the union was to improve wages and benefits, especially as the Calera plant had not received as generous benefits as union plants.²³ As a company which already owned several unionized cement plants, Martin Marietta quickly recognized the union at Calera. The local union established a particularly close bargaining relationship with workers at a unionized Martin Marietta plant in Atlanta. In the 1970s, union leaders negotiated a common contract for the two plants, a practice that continued when Blue Circle took control of both mills. The Calera plant, however, was considerably larger than the Atlanta facility, employing almost twice as many workers. Union leaders also regarded the local union in Calera as considerably stronger than the one in Atlanta.²⁴

Prior to the 1980s, the CLGWU was a small but powerful union that used management's fear of strikes to win high wages, good benefits, and protective work rules for its

¹⁸Northrup, "From Union Hegemony," 340; Richard Northrup, interview with author on Aug. 5, 1999 (phone interview).

¹⁹"Welcome to Calera, Al.," leaflet published by the Calera Chamber of Commerce, copy in author's possession; Barbara Baker Roberts, *Early History of Calera, Alabama* (Montevallo, AL: Times Printing Company, 1977), 23–26.

²⁰1997 *Alabama Manufacturers Register* (Evanston, IL: Manufacturers' News, 1997), 210; *Alabama Manufacturing Directory, 1997–98* (Montgomery, AL: Alabama Center for Commerce, 1998), 214.

²¹"Blue Circle Industries," Mar. 22, 1994, "Local 50537," folder, UPIU Papers (Communications Department), 2–3; Northrup, "From Union Hegemony," 341, 360.

²²V. W. Thompson to J. C. Andrews, March 22, 1974, "UCLGWU," file, Local 50537 Papers.

²³Gene Honeycutt, interview with author on Aug. 3, 1999 in Calera, Alabama; Bobby Watts, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

²⁴Starr C. Galloway to Richard A. Northrup, April 18, 1975, "UCLGWU," file, Local 50537 Papers; Donald Langham, interview with author on Aug. 4, 1999 in Mobile, Alabama.

members.²⁵ At the center of the CLGWU's power was its ability to secure pattern bargaining, which was firmly established in the industry following a nation-wide strike in 1957. Pattern bargaining led to the establishment of standard benefits across the industry, including premium pay for Sunday work, generous overtime pay, and compensation for any workers required to work outside their classification.²⁶ CLGWU leaders took great pride in their union's record of successful collective bargaining.²⁷ "We had one of the best labor agreements in the country," declared Richard Northrip, a former secretary-treasurer and president of the CLGWU. "The benefits and the working conditions granted by that labor agreement really were second to none ... the cement worker was right up there at the top."²⁸

In the 1980s, an era of general union decline, the fortunes of the CLGWU changed dramatically. In 1984, pattern bargaining was broken up after LeHigh Cement, one of the three largest cement companies at that time, refused to follow a settlement reached by another large producer. After bargaining to impasse, LeHigh imposed a concessionary contract that slashed wages and benefits. In May 1984, the CLGWU called strikes at nine LeHigh plants but these were quickly called off, as the workers feared being permanently replaced.²⁹ The fear of LeHigh workers was influenced by a major 1980 strike at Flintoke Cement Company, in which the company had permanently replaced strikers and then decertified the CLGWU.³⁰ Richard Northrip recalled the dramatic change in the union's fortunes, as companies, emboldened by their ability to hire replacements, simply refused to agree to pattern bargaining any more: "They just took the position that they would not reach agreement. They in essence tried to force us into strike situations and having outside replacements ready to move in the minute that the local went on strike. The cement industry was interested in breaking the union and not having contracts. It became obvious that we did not have the strength to force the issue and force pattern bargaining."³¹

Facing a serious loss of both bargaining power and membership, the CLGWU began to look for a merger partner, and eventually, in 1984, joined forces with the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Shipbuilders, Blacksmiths, Forgers, and Helpers (IBB).³² The merger proved to be short-lived. The cement locals quickly became dissatisfied with the representation they received within the IBB, a declining union that was experiencing an internal struggle for control. In 1987, many CLGWU locals, including those in Calera and Atlanta, broke with the IBB and formed their own union, the Independent Workers of North America (IWNNA). Four years later, following talks between the two organizations, the IWNNA was absorbed by the United Paperworkers' International Union (UPIU). Although the IWNNA became part of the UPIU

²⁵Northrip, "From Union Hegemony," 337-376. A brief history of the CLGWU is contained in the Oct. 1978 issue of *Voice*, the CLGWU's official publication.

²⁶"The Big Cement Strike," *Voice*, Oct. 1978, 13. For the successful operation of pattern bargaining in the cement industry, see, for example, "Collective Bargaining Review," *Voice*, Oct. 1965, 1; "March—A Month to be Remembered," *Voice*, May 1971, 3; "Wages and Benefits Negotiated in Cement 'Substantial,'" *Voice*, May 1978, 3.

²⁷Articles in *Voice*, the official CLGWU publication, frequently celebrated the union's record of winning wages and benefit improvements for its members. See, for example, "Before the Union, the Employers Ruled Like Despots," *Voice*, May 1977, 3.

²⁸Richard Northrip, interview with author on Aug. 5, 1999 (phone interview).

²⁹Northrip, "From Union Hegemony," 366-367.

³⁰Northrip, "From Union Hegemony," 361-363.

³¹Richard Northrip, interview with author on Aug. 5, 1999 (phone interview).

³²Northrip, "From Union Hegemony," 360, 368-369.

without the larger union changing its name, cement locals were much more satisfied with the representation they received within the paperworkers' organization.³³

Events in Calera mirrored those on the national level. In the 1970s, the local union was strong and successful, working constructively with Martin Marietta. Although membership was voluntary, close to 100% of workers consistently belonged to the local. Through pattern bargaining, Calera workers quickly secured the benefits that were standard in cement contracts at the time, including generous overtime pay and a transfer clause that compensated them for any work performed outside their classification.³⁴ Workers described the union's relationship with Martin Marietta as "very good" and "great." Bobby Watts, who started working at the mill just before the local union was organized, recalled: "When I first went there, after the union was voted in, we had good working relations, we had a good contract."³⁵ Calera workers were also very active in using the grievance procedure to exercise their power on the shopfloor and protect their job security. Demands for transfer pay were the most common cause of grievances.³⁶ Many of these grievances were successful. In the summer of 1978, for example, R. L. Godfrey secured 4 hours' transfer pay because he claimed that he had been asked to perform work that had "nothing to do with" his own classification.³⁷ Many of the grievances reflected a mood of confidence that was totally lacking by the 1980s. In 1976, for example, a group of workers declared, in a typical grievance, that "management should butt out of union business."³⁸

Following Blue Circle's purchase of the plant in 1982, however, conflict between the two sides increased as the company repeatedly demanded concessions at the bargaining table. In 1984, Blue Circle pushed for the abolition of the transfer clause, meaning that workers could be asked to perform other jobs without receiving extra pay. The transfer clause was a particularly valued part of the contract and workers opposed its deletion, working without a contract for over 3 years as a result. In 1988, a contract was finally signed after what union representative Doug McNeese called a "long struggle." The two sides only reached agreement, indeed, after a short and unexpected strike helped to bring Blue Circle back to the bargaining table.³⁹

Senior workers at the Roberta plant felt that Blue Circle adopted a hostile approach

³³Northrup, "From Union Hegemony," 370–371; Richard Northrip, interview with author on Aug. 5, 1999 (phone interview); "UPIU History since 1984," document supplied by PACE, copy in author's possession; Doug McNeese, interview with author on Aug. 2, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

³⁴"Martin Marietta Joint Conference," Jan. 24, 1975, "UCLGWU," file, Local 50537 Papers.

³⁵Luther Carter, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama; Bobby Watts, interview with author on July 15, 1999, in Calera, Alabama; Tyrone Perkins, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama; Jesse Burns, interview with author on July 16, 1999 in Calera, Alabama; Gene Honeycutt, interview with author on Aug. 3, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

³⁶In June 1979, for example, workers Bobby E. Hopper and J. C. Littleton filed a typical grievance: "We request that transfer premium be paid when work is performed out of one's classification. Specifically when labor tools are being used by employees that are not labors." Grievance 122–79, June 18, 1979, "1979–1980 Grievance," folder, Local 50537 Papers. For examples of other, similar grievances, see Grievance 112–79 and Grievance 123–79, both in "1979–1980 Grievance," folder, Local 50537 Papers.

³⁷Grievance 82–78, Aug. 8, 1978, "76–98–78," folder, Local 50537 Papers. For the importance of transfer pay as a whole, see C. A. Miller to John Patterson, Oct. 27, 1978, "76–98–78," folder, Local 50537 Papers; C. A. Miller to John Patterson, Dec. 21, 1977, "Union and Management Agreements," folder, Local 50537 Papers.

³⁸Grievance 173–76, Mar. 5, 1976, "Grievance 169–76 thru. 191–276," folder, Local 50537 Papers.

³⁹Michael Tomberlin, "Workers Walk off Their Jobs at Calera," *Shelby County Reporter*, Aug. 10, 1994, A1, A3; E. F. Muehlberger to All Union Employees, July 9, 1984, "Local Union Number 537 and Blue Circle Inc., Roberta, Alabama, 1984 Contract Negotiations," folder, Local 50537 Papers. Quotation from D. E. McNeese to Fellow Union Members, Aug. 10, 1988, "IWNA 1988–89," folder, Local 50537 Papers.



FIG. 3. Members of Local 50537 pictured shortly after the signing of a new contract in May 1999. From left to right, Randall Clecker, Local President Bobby Watts, International Representative Doug McNees, Danny Firth, and Butch Porter.

that forced them to steadily surrender the pay and benefits they had built up under Martin Marietta. In common with many of his coworkers, Luther Carter, who began working at the mill in 1975, felt that there were clear differences in the way that the two companies treated their workers: "Ever since Blue Circle took over the Roberta plant, it seems like we've been going downhill as far as benefits and pay ... They [Martin Marietta] seemed to care more about the employees than they did the plant ... My personal feeling now they [Blue Circle] care more about the plant than they do the people that built the plant and work there ... I feel like that's my plant as well as theirs."⁴⁰ Under Blue Circle, it was management who adopted a militant tone, repeatedly denying grievances by telling the union that: "The Company retains the right to exclusively control the plant and its operations; the direction, scheduling and running of the working forces."⁴¹ Most workers felt that Blue Circle never accepted the union and was determined to drive it out of the plant. Like Robert Wade, who had worked at the plant since 1973, many argued that a major conflict was inevitable. "I really believe," stated Wade, "that if we hadn't have gone on strike when we did, that it would have been three years down the road or whatever, because I just believe it was coming. I believe that the company had it in their mind that they were going to force us to go on strike, whether it was at that date or whether it was at a later date."⁴²

Blue Circle's continued demands for concessions did eventually produce an open and sustained conflict with workers in its two Southern plants. When the two sides started bargaining in the spring of 1994, health care and flexible working quickly

⁴⁰Luther Carter, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁴¹John F. Hertzog to Doug McNees, Mar. 21, 1988, "1988-89 Grievances," folder, Local 50537 Papers; Doug McNees, interview with author on Aug. 2, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁴²Robert Wade, interview with author on July 22, 1999 in Calera, Alabama. As Gene Honeycutt, another worker who remembered the Martin Marietta days, recalled, "Instead of trying to work with the men, work with the union, reach a happy medium, they didn't try at all, they just chose to not even honor the union, not have any respect for the union at all." Gene Honeycutt, interview with author on Aug. 3, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

emerged as major sticking points. Beneath these issues, workers believed that the company wanted to break the union, a fear compounded by the way that Blue Circle managers interviewed many replacement workers and offered them jobs well before the strike actually occurred. The company's proposals to change the health care provisions of the contract ultimately provoked the conflict. Blue Circle claimed that rising health care costs forced them to demand a significant increase in employee contributions, with many hourly workers being asked to pay three times their current contribution. Blue Circle president John Summerbell portrayed the company's proposals as a way of managing these costs: "We are not asking the workers to accept a reduction in the levels of coverage, but simply that they accept managed health care, which has been proven to be effective in containing these rapidly increasing costs. Managed health care is the norm today for U.S. workers who have health care benefits."⁴³

It was Blue Circle's proposal to terminate insurance coverage for retirees that really inflamed the union. The company wanted to end this provision after May 1, 1997. It also proposed that workers hired after May 1, 1994 would only have insurance upon retirement if they bore the full cost of it. The company argued that "the vast majority of American workers" did not receive health insurance after retirement. Local 50537 members reacted strongly to these changes, feeling that Blue Circle should not jeopardize the health care of retired workers who had given many years of dedicated service to the company. "A lot of people felt that if they do it to them," recalled former striker Jesse Burns, "eventually they're going to do it to us later on so we might as well get this thing on and try to show them this is not right, we don't agree with this. So that was the main issue was the insurance for the retired worker."⁴⁴

Blue Circle asserted that another cause of the strike was union opposition to the increased "flexibility" in work rules which had been a continual source of grievances ever since the company had bought the plant. The union claimed, however, that the company would continue to abuse flexibility in order to eliminate jobs and drive down wages. Blue Circle executives again argued that their proposals were "common in American industry" and asserted that the union wanted to continue "outmoded restrictions" on flexibility. John Summerbell indeed portrayed the Calera workers as a backward-looking group that feared work rule changes. In a letter written during the strike, he claimed that workers had walked out "because a change was seen as a threat rather than a benefit."⁴⁵

Although citing clashes over health care and flexibility as important issues, union members insisted that the underlying cause of the strike was the company's desire to break the union. Most argued that the company planned the strike, citing the advance hiring of replacement workers as evidence.⁴⁶ The local unions themselves facilitated the company's preparations by taking a public strike vote well before they actually walked

⁴³John Summerbell to Victor E. Thorpe, Sept. 12, 1994, "Local 50502," folder, UPIU Papers (Communications Department).

⁴⁴Jesse Burns, interview with author on July 16, 1999 in Calera, Alabama. Local union officer Keilan Gore confirmed that cancelling retirees' insurance was the main cause of the strike when he wrote: "The Union and company are apart on a number of items, the most important of which is retiree insurance." Keilan Gore to Wayne E. Glenn, May 16, 1994, "Negotiation Material," folder, Local 50537 Papers.

⁴⁵John Summerbell to Jennifer Pate, Aug. 29, 1994, "Unconditional Return," folder, Local 50537 Papers; Douglas E. McNees to Mark Brooks, Sept. 20, 1994, "Blue Circle—General," folder, UPIU Papers (Special Projects Department); Keilan Gore and Elmer Smith to Wayne E. Glenn, May 16, 1994, "Negotiation Material," folder, Local 50537 Papers.

⁴⁶Tyrone Perkins, for example, typically asserted that: "They planned this whole thing. They wanted us to go out on strike. We were forced out." Tyrone Perkins, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

out. On May 16, 1994, more than 93% of union members in Atlanta and Calera voted to authorize a coordinated walkout, refusing to accept the major concessions that Blue Circle demanded.⁴⁷ Union leaders asserted that the Calera workers were the driving force behind this vote and that the outnumbered Atlanta group went along with them as an expression of support.⁴⁸ Although most Calera workers were aware that they could be replaced, they still took the risk of walking out on August 3, 1994. Calera workers were influenced by a 2-day strike in 1988 that had caught Blue Circle by surprise and forced them to negotiate a contract.⁴⁹ Six years later, many believed that striking would produce similar results. "We really thought that we'd go on strike," recalled Robert Wade, "and within a few days we thought we'd be back in there negotiating and we'd get it settled because in the past we had done it before and that day they'd negotiate but they didn't do it this time."⁵⁰ Union leaders insisted that the key to the success of the 1988 strike had been that it had caught the company by surprise, forcing them to negotiate. In 1994, by contrast, the workers' strike vote gave the company almost 3 months to make preparations for a walkout, including interviewing extra workers in advance. Local union leaders themselves admitted in retrospect that they should have kept their strike vote a secret.⁵¹

Even before the strike had begun, Blue Circle warned all of its employees that it was preparing to hire permanent replacements.⁵² The company indeed interviewed a large number of job applicants well in advance of the dispute, claiming that it was "forced" to seek new workers in order to fulfill customer commitments.⁵³ Executives argued that if it allowed the plant to be idle, it would lead to "the destruction of our reputation as a dependable supplier." Management stressed that they operated in a "very competitive market" and that failing to operate the plant would "create undue hardship for our customers and cause possible layoffs among hundreds of construction workers in the Southeastern U.S."⁵⁴

In the course of the strike, Blue Circle hired 118 permanent replacements at Calera and around 85 at Atlanta. Most of the Calera replacements were recruited through the *Birmingham News* and other area papers. In Atlanta, the size of the labor market, combined with the fact that the company was only trying to fill a small number of jobs, helped managers to quickly replace the entire workforce. The fact that the jobs were high-paying also attracted replacement workers in Calera and Atlanta. In both locations, the vast majority of replacements started work in the first week of the walkout, although the company did continue hiring until the union called off the strike on September 4, 1994. The company sought to maintain the racial balance of the struck workforce. In Calera, for example, where 29% of workers were African-American, Blue

⁴⁷Keilan Gore to Wayne E. Glenn, May 16, 1994, "Negotiation Material," folder, Local 50537 Papers.

⁴⁸Donald Langham, interview with author on Aug. 4, 1999 in Mobile, Alabama.

⁴⁹"Talks End Blue Circle Strike," *Shelby County Reporter*, July 20, 1988, A5.

⁵⁰Robert Wade, interview with author on July 22, 1999 in Calera, Alabama; Luther Carter; interview with author on July 15, 1999, in Calera, Alabama.

⁵¹Doug McNees, interview with author on Aug. 2, 1999 in Calera, Alabama; Bobby Watts, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁵²Letter to Blue Circle Cement employees, July 29, 1994, "Negotiation Material," folder, Local 50537 Papers.

⁵³Thomas P. Marnell to fellow employees, Aug. 3, 1994, "Unconditional Return," folder, Local 50537 Papers.

⁵⁴John Summerbell to Jennifer Pate, Aug. 29, 1994, "Unconditional Return," folder, Local 50537 Papers; John Summerbell to Victor E. Thorpe, Sept. 12, 1994, and G. P. B. Mutter to Allan Black, Sept. 21, 1994, both in "Local 50502," folder, UPIU Papers (Communications Department).

Circle hired 38 blacks and 79 whites during the strike. There is no evidence, however, that this slight increase in the proportion of black workers was the result of a deliberate policy; instead, it appears that the company simply hired whoever was available.⁵⁵

By 1994, the permanent replacement of strikers was a common tactic, yet even union sources were surprised by the speed with which the Blue Circle strikers were replaced.⁵⁶ As the *Shelby County Reporter* noted, on the first day of the strike all Blue Circle workers received letters notifying them that they were being permanently replaced.⁵⁷ Workers were bluntly informed that: "In order for the Company to continue production, this is to advise you that you are being permanently replaced." Blue Circle encouraged strikers to "make an unconditional return to work."⁵⁸

Despite receiving these letters, few union members did return to work in either location. Only four Local 50537 members, claiming that they could not afford to lose their jobs, crossed the picket line during the strike. In a letter of resignation written to the union, for example, Orbins Campbell claimed that he was returning to work because "I have five children to take care of and need a JOB."⁵⁹ The Calera workers held out partly because they received a considerable amount of community support. A number of restaurants and other businesses in Montevallo and Calera donated food and money to Local 50537. Several churches, including Shelby Baptist Association, also made similar gifts.⁶⁰

Most of the replacement workers hired at the Roberta plant were attracted by the high wages and generous benefits available, with the average wage being around \$15 an hour. Roderick Harry, for example, was working in a lower-paid job at the University of Alabama in Birmingham when Alando McDonald, a childhood friend who was one of the first replacement workers hired, told him about the jobs at Blue Circle. A slim African-American man, Harry was 25 years old when he was hired during the strike. After serving in the airforce until 1992, he had worked in a succession of low-paid jobs and was attracted by the amount of money he could make at the cement plant. "Basically it was the money when I first came in here," he recalled. "I'd just got out of the airforce and just working jobs, just in and out, just jobs, not really no future, and the opportunity came ... it was just an opportunity for me to make money, because when they interviewed me they said it was a strike situation, we need you to work seven days, twelve hours a day to get everything going ... so I was just going to take a chance and make good money."⁶¹

Other replacement workers also stressed their economic motives. On August 23,

⁵⁵A detailed breakdown of replacement workers' names, race, and date of hire was supplied to the union during the strike. See "Blue Circle Inc. Hourly Employee Alpha Listing," May 9, 1995, "Labor Board Material 1995," folder, Local 50537 Papers. Details of the company's hiring of replacements was also provided in John Summerbell to Jennifer Pate, Aug. 29, 1994, "Unconditional Return," folder, Local 50537 Papers.

⁵⁶As *The Paperworker* noted after the strike, "The 1994 strike was notable even in the sad annals of corporate use of 'permanent replacements' for how quickly the threat was issued." "Votes from Replacement Workers Key to Re-certifying Union," *The Paperworker*, May 1998, 4.

⁵⁷Michael Tomberlin, "Workers Walk off Their Jobs at Calera," *Shelby County Reporter*, Aug. 10, 1994, A1, A3, quotation on both pages.

⁵⁸Thomas P. Marnell to Jimmy Baugus, Aug. 5, 1994, "Blue Circle—General," folder, UPIU Papers (Special Projects Department).

⁵⁹Orbins Campbell to Bobby Watts, Aug. 13, 1994, "Resignations from Local and Court Material/Labor Board," folder, Local 50537 Papers.

⁶⁰"Plant Strike Stretches into Second Month," *Shelby County Reporter*, Aug. 31, 1994, A1, A5.

⁶¹Roderick Harry, interview with author on Aug. 3, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

1994, Andy Lackey, a heavy-equipment operator from the nearby town of Alabaster, took a job at Blue Circle because of the wages and benefits available. Lackey was also attracted by company assurances that his new job was permanent: "I'd always heard the pay and benefits were very good. When I was hired on, I was told then that, what most of us were told was that the union had walked out, was told that if they left they would lose their jobs, that we were not coming in to fill in until they got things straightened out. We had permanent jobs as long as we did what we were told to do, did our job. The only way we could lose them was to quit or be fired." Lackey added that as he already had a secure job at a metal company, he would not have applied to Blue Circle if the job was only temporary.⁶²

Many of the replacements hired at Calera had worked during strikes before. In the summer of 1993, in particular, many were hired as permanent replacements during a strike at the National Standard company in the nearby town of Columbiana. Yet in May 1994, these workers found themselves out of a job when National Standard permanently closed the wire plant.⁶³ Thirty-six-year-old J. V. "Butch" Porter was one of a group of replacement workers who went to work at Blue Circle shortly after losing his job at National Standard. A towering man who had worked as a boiler maker mechanic all over the U.S., Porter recalled that Blue Circle recruited a large contingent of National Standard workers: "They interviewed a bunch of us. They interviewed us first because they knew we'd go across the picket line, were used to it." Like other replacements, Porter was attracted by the high wages on offer at Blue Circle, which he described as far better than at most other plants in the area. He also, however, stressed his desperate need for a job: "I didn't like it but, like I said, I had a back injury and I had to pay my bills, so I had to have a job, that's all there was to it. National Standard was the first strike I ever went across and this is the second and I pray the last that I crossed."⁶⁴

While most of the replacement workers were local, a few were drawn from further afield. Johnny Williams, for example, had worked all his life as a heavy-equipment operator in Tampa, Florida. At 53, he was one of the oldest replacement workers. He stumbled on the job at Blue Circle while traveling through Alabama. "Ninety-three was a bad year for me," he recalled. "I quit my job, got a divorce, and wound up with two kids and we hit the road, and we stopped in Alabama. We came to Alabama, we'd been to other places but we stopped in Alabama and they said, 'Dad, let's stay here.' I had come down to Blue Circle putting applications in and then they had called me so I come down and got the job and they were on strike."⁶⁵

Most replacement workers stressed that they had never belonged to a union before applying to Blue Circle. Several claimed that they had received little education about organized labor and did not fully understand the consequences of their actions. Johnny Williams, for example, recalled that "none of us had ever been in a union," adding that he had "never thought about unions until I got here." Roderick Harry also asserted that he knew little about unions when he was first hired. "I learned about strikes and everything at school," he acknowledged, "but I really didn't know everything until I got

⁶²Andy Lackey, interview with author on July 22, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁶³For coverage of the National Standard strike, see "Union Members Question Treatment," *Shelby County Reporter*, June 9, 1993, A4; "Employee Speaks," *Shelby County Reporter*, July 7, 1994, A4; "Officials Begin Plant Closure Procedures," *Shelby County Reporter*, April 13, 1994, A1.

⁶⁴J. V. "Butch" Porter, interview with author on July 22, 1999 in Calera, Alabama; Résumé of Butch Porter, Mar. 19, 1998, copy in author's possession.

⁶⁵Johnny Williams, interview with author on July 17, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

down here that day ... I was just going to take a chance and make good money, whatever. I didn't think, I didn't know. I didn't know Alabama was a right to work state. I mean I learned a lot. I didn't even know what a right to work state meant because I'd never been in that situation, I didn't know."⁶⁶

Many replacement workers went for interviews at Blue Circle before the strike began. Several recalled that they were interviewed in a suite that Blue Circle had rented at the local Ramada Inn and were promised jobs in the event of a strike. As Butch Porter put it, "Three months prior to the strike, I was interviewed and if they went on strike I had a job, that's all there was to it."⁶⁷ Former strikers claimed repeatedly that those hired were not well qualified and that Blue Circle's main concern was to hire a replacement workforce in order to break the union. Replacement workers themselves admit that the qualifications of those hired were poor. Roderick Harry, for example, stated that "ninety percent of the people that came in there didn't know anything about the cement industry." The company carried out very few checks when hiring new workers. "They really didn't screen the employees," he explained. "They were just hiring a body. So you had a lot of people with alcoholism, drugs, a lot of people laying out. Some people just up and quit. Any kind of scenario you can think of because they didn't screen the employees."⁶⁸ Replacement workers also shared strikers' feeling that the company was primarily interested in breaking the union rather than securing a well-qualified workforce. Johnny Williams went as far as to say: "That's all they worried about was to break the union and we were told that, that they wanted to break the union, they do not want the union here, they never have, and that was to break the union. That's why they let them get away with everything, we could do no wrong, whatever we wanted."⁶⁹

In the early stages of the strike, replacement workers entered the plant in full-size vans furnished by the company. Workers drove to a designated parking area in the nearby town of Jemison and then traveled in the vans into the plant. After 2 weeks, however, many replacement workers started to enter the plant in their own cars. In the second week of the strike, the picket line, which had been relatively peaceful, became more violent as strikers and their supporters threw rocks at replacements' cars. In some cases strikers followed replacement workers and fist fights broke out. Long-serving union president Bobby Watts admitted that the local union leadership struggled to control their members: "We had a couple of days of rock-throwing ... a few people got whipped on the side that nobody knew about and I really don't know who all did this but I do know that it was a few fist fights ... Basically we tried to keep things as calm as possible but it got out of hand a little bit."⁷⁰ Complaining that strikers were engaged in "outrageous and illegal conduct," Blue Circle was successful in obtaining an injunction against the union. Issued on August 17, 1994, the injunction limited the union to four pickets and prohibited them from coming within 10 yards of the plant's

⁶⁶Roderick Harry, interview with author on Aug. 3, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁶⁷J. V. "Butch" Porter, interview with author on July 22, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁶⁸Roderick Harry, interview with author on Aug. 3, 1999 in Calera, Alabama. Johnny Williams was similarly candid about the company's lack of selection checks during the hiring process: "I did no physical, no eye exam, no drugs, no nothing, went to work Monday morning ... They weren't doing no background check, no nothing on you." Johnny Williams, interview with author on July 17, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁶⁹Johnny Williams, interview with author on July 17, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁷⁰Bobby Watts, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama. Michael Tomberlin, "Plant Strike Stretches into Second Month," *Shelby County Reporter*, Aug. 31, 1994, A1, A5. The violence that occurred in the last week of the strike is clearly detailed in a video of the strike that Local 50537 members compiled. A copy of this video is in the author's possession.

entrance. Strikers were also barred from engaging in a variety of other intimidating tactics that the company had complained about, including throwing missiles, making threatening or harassing phone calls, and using mirrors to flash light in the eyes of replacement workers as they drove away from the plant.⁷¹

Replacement workers themselves remembered being very scared when they crossed the picket line, especially when they were in their own cars and pickets started to throw rocks. "When I was in the van I felt kind of safe but, man, coming in my car I was afraid, real scared, scared to death," admitted Roderick Harry. "This one Saturday when they was all out there, man, it scared me to death, when I was on night-shift."⁷² Other replacement workers reacted to the threat of violence by arming themselves. "I carried an automatic weapon with me," recalled Butch Porter. "I was heavily armed because I was coming to work and I was going home. If you were going to try to do me physical harm, well you know, that's the rules you make and I can play by your rules too. That's the frame of mind I was in and I wasn't the only one, but it was intense. At one time we came out and there was a lot of people out there, there was probably seventy-five to a hundred people out there and as we came down we turned to the right, everybody did, and they were stoning us, throwing rocks at us, one guy got injured."⁷³ Given the presence of guns on both sides, many in Calera expressed relief that the strike did not result in any serious injuries or deaths.⁷⁴

On September 4, 1994, strikers voted unanimously to call off the walkout. Although few union members had returned to work in either location, the hiring of the replacement workers led the local unions to abandon their protest.⁷⁵ The future of both local unions now lay in the balance, especially as many Blue Circle replacement workers were keen to become involved in decertification campaigns. In Calera, strikers who returned to the plant insisted that Blue Circle was treating them unfairly and was practicing favoritism toward the replacements. Most felt that the company was deliberately favoring the replacements because they wanted to ensure that they would decertify the union. Scores of grievances were filed by union members, highlighting the poor relations that existed between the company and the union.⁷⁶ In May 1996, for example, 32 union workers filed a joint grievance in which they accused the company of trying to "break the union."⁷⁷

The strike left many workers feeling extremely angry and bitter towards Blue Circle. Union workers resented the way that the company had replaced experienced and

⁷¹Complaint, Aug. 14, 1994, *Blue Circle Cement v. United Paperworkers' International Union*, quotation on 4; Temporary Restraining Order, Aug. 17, 1994, *Blue Circle Cement v. United Paperworkers' International Union*, 3-4, case files held at Shelby County Circuit Court in Columbiana, Alabama (case no: CV 94-499); Michael Tomberlin, "Plant Strike Stretches into Second Month," *Shelby County Reporter*, Aug. 31, 1994, A1.

⁷²Roderick Harry, interview with author on Aug. 3, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁷³J. V. "Butch" Porter, interview with author on July 22, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁷⁴Bobby Watts, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama; Doug McNees, interview with author on Aug. 2, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁷⁵"Calera Union Members Return to Work but Questions over Contract Remain," *Shelby County Reporter*, Sept. 7, 1994, A7.

⁷⁶In July 1996, for example, Luther Carter complained that replacement workers were being allowed more vacations than union workers: "This company elected to bend its Rules for replacement workers and treat Union employees different." Grievance 40-96, July 29, 1996, Bobby Watts files, Local 50537 Papers. For other examples of similar grievances, see "Third Step Meeting," Mar. 16, 1995, "Third Step Letters, 1995," folder, Local 50537 Papers.

⁷⁷Grievance 26-96, May 28, 1996, Bobby Watts files, Local 50537 Papers.

dedicated personnel with what they regarded as poorly trained, inferior workers. At the time of the 1994 dispute, the Calera workers were indeed an experienced group. The average worker was 45.3 years old and had nearly 19 years of service with the company.⁷⁸ These experienced workers insisted that although they had lost the strike, the company also paid a price. Around 30 of the most experienced workers, for example, took early retirement packages rather than return to the mill after the dispute. Other union members returned gradually as vacancies occurred, although many waited several years to be recalled. Most did wait for the chance to return because they found it impossible to find other jobs in the area that paid as well as Blue Circle. When they did return, however, former strikers insisted that they had lost all respect for the company. "Since the company has hired replacement workers," explained Bobby Watts, "I'd say ninety percent of the people don't have any trust in Blue Circle at all. They don't believe nothing they say. They know that they tried to replace them. They know that they were doing a good job in the plant."⁷⁹

Jesse Burns, who had worked at the plant since 1975, illustrated well the alienation that previously loyal workers felt when they returned after the strike. Burns, an amiable African-American man, recalled being consumed with bitterness when he was recalled: "When I first came back, I applauded every time there was a big mess-up out there. I mean I hated the place. I was ashamed to tell anybody that I worked for Blue Circle. It was kind of like a disgrace ... We was like family. You work with guys twenty, twenty-five, thirty years, and you know him, he know you. We thought that plant was ours. That was our plant and it was being destroyed and taken away from us, and that was terrible. Blue Circle let us know, 'it ain't your plant,' they let us know, but we thought it was." Burns added that even after 5 years, workers would no longer try to help the company to make the plant run as well as possible; "You do your job and you do it the best way you can, you try to make relations better, but as far as like going out on a limb to try to make it like it once was, it's going to be a long time."⁸⁰

Burns' feelings typify those held by many former strikers.⁸¹ Doug McNeese, the local union's long-serving international representative, explained how the strike had permanently changed the attitude of workers to the company: "The old guys, they built the plant, hell it's their plant. That was their attitude. That's what the company doesn't understand and what they lost. They lost that. You know a guy out there, been there twenty-five, thirty years, he don't even know how valuable he is. He could hear a motor going bad or a bearing going bad, or whatever, and stop it before it happens. Today, if they hear a damn motor tear up, they just laugh. Instead of going to tell somebody, they just laugh. That's their way of getting even. They can't whip them. They can't strike them. They can't do nothing, but they can get even, and they will."⁸²

From the very beginning of the Blue Circle dispute, UPIU leaders had been keen to warn the Blue Circle workers of the dangers of striking.⁸³ By 1994, the international union followed the working assumption that, as one staffer put it, "virtually all companies would replace permanently if given the chance."⁸⁴ Having lost a series of

⁷⁸"Roberta Hourly Employees—Ages and Years of Service," Oct. 11, 1993, untitled folder, Local 50537 Papers.

⁷⁹Bobby Watts, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁸⁰Jesse Burns, interview with author on July 16, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁸¹Tyrone Perkins, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁸²Doug McNeese, interview with author on Aug. 2, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁸³Wayne E. Glenn to Donald L. Langham, Sept. 6, 1994, "Letters from International Pertaining to Strike," Local 50537 Papers.

⁸⁴Keith Romig, interview with author on Aug. 13, 1999 in Nashville, Tennessee.

bitter strikes because companies hired replacements, the UPIU sought to dissuade local union members from walking out, encouraging them to instead use in-plant strategies as a way of fighting concessionary bargaining. In 1988, for example, the international union set up a Special Projects Department to assist workers in exerting pressure on companies without striking.⁸⁵ Using strategies that it had developed against other multinational employers, the Special Projects Department began to solicit support against Blue Circle from unions across the world. By highlighting the company's tactics in Calera and Atlanta, the international union aimed to bring pressure against the cement maker that would lead them to sign a contract. The Special Projects Department distributed thousands of letters and fliers that informed unions of the Blue Circle strike and the company's efforts to hire permanent replacements. The UPIU worked closely with the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, and General Workers' Unions (ICEF), which represented more than 15 million energy and process industry workers in over 100 countries.⁸⁶ With ICEF encouragement, unions from countries as varied as Trinidad, Turkey, Zimbabwe, and the UK sent letters of protest to Blue Circle management.⁸⁷ Several U.S. unions also registered their support for Local 50537. In October 1994, for example, Kenneth L. Coss, the president of the United Rubber, Cork, Linoleum, and Plastic Workers of America, strongly criticized Blue Circle's tactics. "Hiring replacement workers," he wrote, "is one of the most reprehensible actions an employer can take. It is tantamount to union-busting behavior. It is behavior beneath the dignity of one of the global giants in the cement industry."⁸⁸ The International Brotherhood of Teamsters also gave strong support to the Calera workers.⁸⁹

Between 1994 and 1996, Blue Circle cement was used to construct the Olympic village in Atlanta in preparation for the 1996 games. The UPIU used this Olympic connection as a major part of its drive to exert outside pressure on the company. Widely distributed union fliers asked: "Does the Atlanta Olympic Committee intend to have the Olympic Village, a symbol of brotherhood throughout the world, built with concrete supplied by Blue Circle, a company that treats its own workers like so many replaceable machine parts?"⁹⁰ The UPIU also adopted a slogan, "Blue Ring on the Olympic Flag:

⁸⁵For the setting up of the Special Projects Department, see Proceedings of the Fifth Constitutional Convention of the United Paperworkers' International Union, Sept. 28–Oct. 2, 1992, 88–89.

⁸⁶Victor E. Thorpe, ICEF general secretary, for example, wrote Blue Circle president John Summerbell in Aug. 1994 to protest against Blue Circle's "strike-breaking" in the U.S. Victor E. Thorpe to John Summerbell, Aug. 26, 1994, "Blue Circle—General," folder, UPIU Papers (Special Projects Department).

⁸⁷In a typical letter, for example, Errol K. McLeod, president of Trinidad's Oilfields Workers' Trade Union, wrote Blue Circle's John Summerbell: "We strongly condemn the attitude and behaviour of your Company Blue Circle in its refusal to meet and bargain with the Union and also to reinstate the workers whom you unceremoniously dismissed. We call on your management to reinstate the workers and meet with the Union in negotiations as to bring about a satisfactory settlement of the issues involved." Errol K. McLeod to John Summerbell, Oct. 10, 1994. For examples of other letters, see Adnan Ozcan and Bayram Yilirm to Keith Orrell-Jones, Sept. 12, 1994, R. E. Makuwaza to John Summerbell, Sept. 9, 1994; Len McCluskey to A. Johnson, Sept. 21, 1994, all in "Letters from International Union Pertaining to Strike," folder, Local 50537 Papers.

⁸⁸Kenneth L. Coss to John Summerbell, Oct. 12, 1994, "Letters from International Union Pertaining to Strike," folder, Local 50537 Papers.

⁸⁹John Wayne Garrett to Don Scott, Sept. 19, 1994, "Letters from International Union Pertaining to Strike," folder, Local 50537 Papers.

⁹⁰"You Can't Build Brotherhood on Injustice," Aug. 1994, UPIU flier in "Letters from International Union Pertaining to Strike," folder, Local 50537 Papers.

Yes. Blue Circle in the Olympic Village: No,” which was widely publicized within the labor movement.⁹¹ As a result of these efforts, many union leaders from around the world wrote Olympic dignitaries to protest against the use of Blue Circle cement by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). In September 1994, ICEF general secretary Vic Thorpe summed up the mood of this correspondence in a letter to IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch. “The Olympic Games are all about fairness and humanity,” he declared. “Blue Circle is just about the opposite.”⁹² Many other union leaders wrote similar letters.⁹³

Despite this widespread support, there is little evidence that the UPIU’s efforts pushed Blue Circle to change its bargaining position. For its part, the Olympic movement showed little concern about the company’s tactics during the strike and continued to buy Blue Circle cement. The Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) responded to union letters by arguing that the construction of the Olympic village was managed by the Board of Regents, an agency of the state of Georgia, and not by them. The ACOG also claimed that it was not anti-union, arguing that many union members were working on the construction of the Olympic village.⁹⁴ The union interpreted this response as a “rather lame excuse.”⁹⁵ UPIU leaders themselves admitted that they were unable to influence Blue Circle to substantially modify its bargaining position. Keith Romig, a staffer in the UPIU’s Special Projects Department who worked on the campaign, acknowledged that the union’s tactics “did not move Blue Circle very far ... Blue Circle’s bargaining position during the strike and the period immediately following did not change visibly ... in this case, we weren’t able to move the company’s management as far as we would have liked.” Romig added that the Olympic committee never acknowledged any public effect of the UPIU’s campaign and continued to do business with Blue Circle.⁹⁶

By the time of the Atlanta Olympics, indeed, Blue Circle seemed to have prevailed in its battle with the union. In May 1995, the local union was conclusively decertified in Atlanta. In Calera, a group of union activists were able to delay the vote, but Local 50537 was eventually decertified in September 1996 after a lengthy campaign launched

⁹¹“Wrong Blue Circle,” flier dated 1994 in “Local 50502,” folder. UPIU Papers (Communications Department).

⁹²Vic Thorpe to Juan Antonio Samaranch, Sept. 7, 1994, “Letters from International Union Pertaining to Strike,” folder, Local 50537 Papers.

⁹³Allan Black, a national officer of a United Kingdom union (the GMB), for example, wrote IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch to protest the fact that the Olympic village was being constructed by cement supplied by a company that had “dismissed members of the United Paperworkers” International Union for taking strike action.” Allan Black to Juan Antonio Samaranch, Oct. 4, 1994, “Letters from International Union Pertaining to Strike,” folder, Local 50537 Papers. For other letters from unions to the Olympic movement protesting the use of Blue Circle cement, see, for example, Adnan Ozcan and Bayram Yilirm to Juan Antonio Samaranch, Sept. 12, 1994, Kenneth L. Coss to Juan Antonio Samaranch, Oct. 12, 1994, “Letters from International Union Pertaining to Strike,” folder, Local 50537 Papers.

⁹⁴Shirley C. Franklin to Allan Black, Oct. 19, 1994, “Letters from International Union Pertaining to Strike,” folder, Local 50537 Papers; William J. Moss to Robert E. Wages, Oct. 4, 1994, “Blue Circle Cement, Atlanta, Georgia,” folder, UPIU—Mobile Papers.

⁹⁵The Special Projects Department was very disappointed with this response, feeling that the ACOG could have exerted pressure on the Georgia Board of Regents if it had wanted to. As Mark Brooks noted: “This is a rather lame excuse for ACOG’s inaction, since ACOG obviously has some influence with the Georgia Board of Regents to encourage the Board to stop using scab-made cement in the construction of the Olympic village.” Mark Brooks to Jyrki Raina *et al.*, Oct. 12, 1994, “Blue Circle Cement, Atlanta, Georgia,” folder, UPIU—Mobile Papers.

⁹⁶Keith Romig, interview with author on Aug. 13, 1999 in Nashville, Tennessee.

by replacement workers.⁹⁷ As Alabama was a right to work state, the replacement workers were not members of the local and had little contact with union members after the ending of the strike. Local union members complained that Blue Circle was deliberately practicing favoritism towards the replacements in order to encourage them to stay in the plant. They also asserted that the company was trying to delay the recall of union members who had lost their jobs in the strike. As close to 100% of workers had traditionally belonged to the union before the strike, Blue Circle was anxious to keep these workers out of the plant until after the decertification vote. The company was certainly successful in its efforts; when the decertification vote took place, replacement workers still made up the overwhelming majority of Blue Circle workers.⁹⁸

Despite the decertification, a core group of former strikers refused to accept defeat and set about the task of reorganizing. Even after September 1996, when the union no longer had bargaining rights, former strikers continued to meet on a monthly basis. Between 20 and 30 former union members attended these meetings and discussed their hopes of getting their local union reorganized.⁹⁹ Local union leaders Bobby Watts and Jesse Burns were particularly important figures in fighting for the union's survival. Born in 1943, Watts had worked at the plant since 1974 and was well respected as an honest and dedicated local union leader. Jesse Burns had worked in the mill almost as long as Watts but was 12 years younger. Both Burns and Watts realized early on that former strikers and replacement workers had to unite in order to secure the reorganization of the local union. Watts, in particular, befriended replacement workers and they in turn began to turn to him.¹⁰⁰

This willingness to approach replacement workers was unusual. In most cases where permanent replacements were hired, former strikers maintained strong feelings of hatred and anger towards replacement workers when they returned to the mill, hindering future organizing efforts. In the 1980s, a series of UPIU local unions were decertified after strikers were permanently replaced. Although the union tried to reorganize these locals, the hiring of replacement workers was usually extremely divisive.¹⁰¹ In November 1988, for example, UPIU vice-president Donald Langham described permanent replacement as a tactic that "destroys livelihoods, divides communities and tears families apart."¹⁰² At Blue Circle's Atlanta plant, the union was

⁹⁷Decertification information drawn from "Defense and Information Department, Legal Division, February 1998 Board Report," Feb. 23, 1998, UPIU—Mobile Papers.

⁹⁸Bobby Watts, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

⁹⁹Minutes of meetings of Sept. 25, 1996, Oct. 10, 1996, Oct. 24, 1996, Nov. 7, 1996, Nov. 21, 1996, Dec. 5, 1996, Dec. 19, 1996, Jan. 2, 1997, Jan. 16, 1997, Jan. 30, 1997, Feb. 13, 1997, Mar. 13, 1997, all in Local 50537 Papers.

¹⁰⁰"Roberta Hourly Employees—Ages and Years of Service," Oct. 11, 1993, untitled folder, Local 50537 Papers.

¹⁰¹The largest strike in the paper industry where permanent replacements were hired was the 1987–1988 dispute at International Paper Company (IP), which resulted in 2200 strikers being replaced and three large UPIU local unions being decertified. In the 1987–1988 IP strike, the main strike location was in Jay, Maine, where over 1000 people were involved. Since the strike, the UPIU has carried on a campaign to regain bargaining rights, but these efforts failed in representation elections held in August 1995 and again in May 1998. Hatreds from the strike had proved impossible to overcome. For details of the efforts to reorganize in Jay, see Getman, *The Betrayal of Local 14*, 200; Alan Morse, "IP Workers Vote No," *Lewiston Sun Journal*, Aug. 19, 1995; Richard Thomas, interview with author on July 3, 1998 in Satsuma, Alabama.

¹⁰²"Locked-out Workers in Mobile Return to Jobs after 19 Months," *The Paperworker*, Nov. 1988, 6. Similarly, in April 1990 UPIU president Wayne Glenn claimed that the use of permanent replacements caused "a lifetime of strife to solid working-class communities." "Scab Ban Central Theme at Region Ten Confab," *The Paperworker*, April 1990, 13.

unable to reorganize the local, partly because replaced strikers refused to even talk to those who had taken their jobs. There were other differences between Calera and Atlanta that made it easier to reorganize the union in the Alabama town. In Atlanta, Blue Circle had replaced the entire workforce, thus wiping out union sentiment more completely than in Calera. The size of the labor market in Atlanta also ensured that most replaced strikers were able to find comparable jobs even before the strike was over. Most therefore waived their recall rights, an option that was not as attractive in Calera, where few local employers paid as well as Blue Circle.¹⁰³

The change in the company's attitude following the decertification of the union was crucial in causing replacement workers to become more favorable to the union. Once the union had been voted out, the company unilaterally changed arrangements for vacation rules, shifts, and premium pay. Many replacement workers were also worried by the way that Blue Circle contracted out an increasing number of jobs. In January 1998, a rumor that the company was considering contracting out numerous jobs in the quarry caused some replacements to seek help from local union leaders.¹⁰⁴ "When I first went down there you couldn't even talk union," recalled quarry worker Roderick Harry. "But when we decerted, they started contracting out the jobs and all them guys got upset ... So all those guys voted for the union because they was upset."¹⁰⁵

Many replacement workers recalled vividly the sharp change in the company's attitude after the decertification of Local 50537. "They did so much to try to get the union out," explained Andy Lackey, "and when they did, they were like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. I mean they went from 'Hey, how are you doing?' to 'Who the heck are you?' and that's just the way they did. They made a complete turnaround."¹⁰⁶ Union representative Doug McNees felt this change of attitude was vital in explaining the union's re-emergence in Calera: "The mistake the company made was once it went non-union, they thought they had it. So all those things that they wanted to do to people that they couldn't before, you knew the replacement people that were not coming to work and all that kind of stuff, they put the hammer down on them. 'We're non-union now, we've got it made, right?'"¹⁰⁷

This change in the company's attitude began to alienate replacement workers. In December 1996, an important breakthrough occurred when Johnny Williams contacted Bobby Watts and asked if he could join the union. Williams acted as he did because he was disillusioned with the company's conduct after the decertification of the local and also concerned that Blue Circle was allowing poorly qualified replacements to jeopardize the safety of the plant. Williams, who had always been one of the most outspoken replacements, clearly recalled the moment when he joined the union: "I went down and joined the union. I was the first one to join it, and it was the things that I'd seen, all the things that I've heard out there, all the lies ... I didn't know if they'd let me join the union or not, I really didn't. When I seen everything that I did, I went to Bobby ... I just told it like it was, that I'd like to join the union. I know you don't have much respect for the replacement workers but I want to join the union. I want to be part of

¹⁰³Donald Langham, interview with author on Aug. 4, 1999 in Mobile, Alabama. Langham stressed that Calera had always been a stronger union location than Atlanta. He also explained that it was much easier for replaced strikers to find other jobs in Atlanta than it was in Calera. This meant that in Atlanta the union lacked a base from which to reorganize.

¹⁰⁴"Votes from Replacement Workers Key to Re-certifying Union," *The Paperworker*, May 1998, 4.

¹⁰⁵Roderick Harry, interview with author on Aug. 3, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

¹⁰⁶Andy Lackey, interview with author on July 22, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

¹⁰⁷Doug McNees, interview with author on Aug. 2, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

it. I see a lot of these things that's wrong out here and somebody has got to stop it. I'll help, I'll be part of it, so I joined the union. I came down to the union hall that day. Most of them would speak, most of them were pretty nice. There were some that would not speak. There are some out there today that doesn't speak, but I don't hold it against them."¹⁰⁸

Following Williams' lead, other replacement workers also began to approach the union. Before Local 50537 was decertified, both replacements and former strikers felt that Blue Circle had not enforced disciplinary rules against replacement workers. Anxious not to lose their votes, the company refused to reprimand replacement workers for unexplained absences and other violations.¹⁰⁹ Once the local was decertified, however, the company began to take a harder line. One of the first replacement workers to receive a written warning was Butch Porter. Porter was deeply hurt by the reprimand, because he had worked hard for the company and had been one of the leaders of the decertification effort. A man of considerable drive and energy, he decided to dedicate his services to the local: "I went into Bobby Watts' office ... I pulled out my check-book. I paid my union dues and initiation fees right then. I told Mr Watts that I had a job to do for Blue Circle, they hired me to do a job, I done my job. I was one of the top three or four people who was out there campaigning, walking up, talking to people on behalf of Blue Circle, to decertify the union, and we got it decertified ... I had a job to do they hired me for but what has been done to me today was like spitting in my face. I took that extremely personal, and from that day on he can consider me his right hand. He don't have to tell me nothing twice."¹¹⁰

The recruitment of Williams and Porter to the local union was important because both men were influential and energetic replacement workers who were to act as emissaries between the union and the replacements. Local 50537's leadership did indeed use Porter and Williams to organize replacements and were successful in getting many to commit themselves to the union.¹¹¹

The willingness of replacements to join the union would have meant little, however, if former strikers had been unwilling to accept them into the organization. Once replacement workers began to approach the union, former strikers faced a difficult personal decision about whether to accept them. The unequivocal example of Watts and Burns was crucial here; they adopted the view that if replacement workers wanted to join the union, members should welcome them and completely accept them. As Bobby Watts put it, "Once they sign the card, they're not replacements any more, they're union. That's the only way we can look at it."¹¹² Many former strikers, however, found it very hard to even consider being in the same organization as those who had replaced them just a few years earlier. Gradually, however, the barriers between the two groups began to come down. Personal contact clearly helped. Many replacements,

¹⁰⁸Johnny Williams, interview with author on July 17, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

¹⁰⁹For details of union complaints that replacement workers were not disciplined equally, see "Third Step Meeting," Mar. 16, 1995, "Third Step Letters, 1995," folder, Local 50537 Papers. Bobby Watts also felt that after the strike: "The replacement workers, they would get anything they wanted. The company would buy them anything they wanted, try to just keep them pacified, and the union people, they was trying to discourage us so that we would quit." Bobby Watts, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

¹¹⁰Butch Porter, interview with author on July 22, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

¹¹¹"Votes from Replacement Workers Key to Re-certifying Union," *The Paperworker*, May 1998, 4.

¹¹²Watts, quoted in "Blue Circle Local Makes Strong Recovery from 1994 Dispute at Cement Plant," *The PaceSetter*, July/Aug. 1999, 1.

upon joining the union, described openly their reasons for breaking the strike in 1994 and thus gained understanding from former strikers.¹¹³ Former strikers' determination to put aside negative feelings and forgive the replacements was central to the union's recovery. Calera was a strong Christian community and many workers claimed that their faith had helped them to forgive the replacement workers and welcome them into the union. Both Bobby Watts and Jesse Burns were keen Christians and urged their members to forgive the replacements. Doug McNees, the international union representative who had been servicing the Calera local since 1981, believed that workers' faith helped to explain their ability to reorganize after the 1994 strike: "The people that go to this union hall are the same people on Sunday that are in the churches and support the churches, and there's a part of them that knows they have to forgive, and once they can get past that first hatred, most of them can ... you can only hate so long ... religion, that's the big part of their lives, and that part teaches forgiveness."¹¹⁴

Support from the international union was also important in helping the union to reorganize. Recognizing that many Calera workers were determined to see their local reorganized, UPIU representatives concentrated attention on the Alabama town, encouraging workers to try to reorganize. Doug McNees played a particularly important role in organizing the replacement workers. A tall, forthright man, he assured the replacement workers that they were welcome in the union. "Before I signed them up," he recalled, "I met with a bunch of them and they said, 'We're afraid that y'all will hold it against us.' I told them, 'the only thing I can say is what you did I don't like. I wish you hadn't, but if you sign a union card, I'm going to wash you in the blood. I'm going to judge you from this day forward and what you did, you made one mistake in your life,' and that's sort of how I look at it. I'm judging them on what they do now."¹¹⁵

Other international union leaders worked on encouraging former strikers to unite with the replacements for the common good. Emory Barnette, a representative based in central Alabama, regularly addressed local union meetings and pressed home the message that the union could only be reorganized with the replacement workers' votes, a message that was unpopular at first: "I told them that we had to face the fact that they were there, they outnumbered us and if we were to become viable again we had to accept them. We had to quit calling them 'scabs.' We had to tell them that we don't like what they did but it's over and done with. If they will join the union and become a good union person, from that day forward that's what they are, a union brother or sister." Barnette, a charismatic figure, recalled that although he received a "good bit of

¹¹³Robert Wade, for example, remembered that: "It's still difficult to this day but you've got to try to do right, and some of them has come up and they've told us why they did it. It doesn't make me like it but at least they had the courage to come up and tell us and tell us they're sorry." Robert Wade, interview with author on July 22, 1999 in Calera, Alabama. Jesse Burns, who himself admitted that it had been very difficult to accept the replacements, cited personal contact as crucial: "If you'd of told me five years ago that I would be recruiting replacements to make union people out of them I'd of said, 'There's no way. There ain't no way I'd do that' ... I didn't like it but I knew in order for the union to survive, we had to do it ... I've become real good friends with some of them, a lot of them, because they see our point of view and some of them are becoming real good union people. A lot of them didn't know anything about a union. Once we got them and told them how a union is supposed to work, they've helped us a whole lot, a whole lot, and some of them told me the stories that they had, the reason that they crossed over, and some of them were pretty sad. I wouldn't want to be in that position. Wouldn't make me want to cross over a picket-line but, like I said, in due time all wounds do heal and you move on." Jesse Burns, interview with author on July 16, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

¹¹⁴Doug McNees, interview with author on Aug. 2, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

¹¹⁵Doug McNees, interview with author on Aug. 2, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

flak" from some members at first, he was ultimately successful in winning the workers over.¹¹⁶

Most union members found it very hard to accept the replacement workers but understood that Local 50537 could not be reorganized without their votes. Many were especially keen to see the local union reorganized so that it could negotiate to recall former strikers to the mill. As late as March 1999, for example, 10 former strikers were still waiting to be recalled and the union pressed hard for their return.¹¹⁷ Robert Wade, for example, summed up how many union members had accepted replacements out of necessity: "No-one didn't agree with it, but Bobby told us, said, 'Listen, it's got to be this way,' and for the most part that is why we get along like we do. We did it to save our union and our men that was out on the road ... We said we will do whatever it takes to get our men back to work and that's what it took ... It's a hard pill to swallow but you've got to do it."¹¹⁸

Wade's comments highlight the difficult personal challenge that accepting replacement workers represented to many former strikers. Most workers, however, accepted that they had no choice if they wanted to see the union reorganized. "In a sense you're going against everything you stood for," acknowledged Gene Honeycutt, "but then again you've got to say, 'do we want this union or do we want to take a chance on losing the union?' because the numbers wasn't out there unless we got some more members, and that's really what it boiled down to, and we opted to go with the new members, which was the replacement workers."¹¹⁹ Many workers took great pleasure and pride in the reorganization of the local union and felt that this proved that the decision to accept replacements had been right. Jesse Burns, like many others, recalled the exhilaration of winning the 1998 election: "That last election, oh Tim I wish you could have been there, it was good, man, it was good."¹²⁰

Replacement workers themselves paid credit to the way that former strikers had welcomed them into the union. Johnny Williams, who became an active union member, recognized the difficult adjustment that former strikers had made to accept him and other replacements: "I've got to admit that ninety percent of the union has been terrific, they've been terrific. They have accepted the replacement workers and they've really came a long way with it. I mean I'll come up here now, laugh, joke with them, I feel like I'm part of them. A lot of us do. So we make up a big part of the union now."¹²¹

Once the election had been won, however, union leaders recognized that they still faced a difficult struggle to win a contract. Both international and local union leaders realized that although a lot of replacement workers had voted for the union, many still did not feel welcome in the organization. Union leaders made the brave decision to ask Roderick Harry to serve on the bargaining committee as a way of showing the replacement workers that the union really had their interests at heart. Harry, for his

¹¹⁶Emory Barnette, interview with author on Aug. 4, 1999 in Thomasville, Alabama. Barnette's efforts to convince the Calera workers of the necessity of accepting replacements are also detailed in the local union minutes. See, for example, minutes of Mar. 19, 1998 local union meeting, Local 50537 Papers.

¹¹⁷Emory Barnette to Donald L. Langham, Mar. 8, 1999, Emory Barnette to Donald L. Langham, n.d., correspondence in author's possession.

¹¹⁸Robert Wade, interview with author on July 22, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

¹¹⁹Gene Honeycutt, interview with author on Aug. 3, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

¹²⁰Jesse Burns, interview with author on July 16, 1999 in Calera, Alabama. Robert Wade similarly recalled that: "Oh yes man we came up here when we found out, we were whooping and hollering and jumping up and down in this building." Robert Wade, interview with author on July 22, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

¹²¹Johnny Williams, interview with author on July 17, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

part, accepted and enjoyed the experience.¹²² Union leaders felt that this move, while unpopular with some, was crucial in making the replacement workers really trust the union because it disproved their fear that the union would, according to Emory Barnette, “negotiate them out the gate.”¹²³

Although they presented a united front against the company, Local 50537 members still found it difficult to secure a contract from Blue Circle. Emory Barnette, who led the UPIU’s negotiating team, asserted that the company had a “very arrogant” attitude and was reluctant to reach an agreement.¹²⁴ “The Company,” he wrote, “is not interested in sitting down and negotiating a fair and equitable labor agreement for its employees.”¹²⁵ Although a contract was eventually reached after 15 months of negotiations, union leaders admitted that it was not as strong as they would have liked, asserting that the union had to use the agreement as a building block. Under the contract, in fact, workers surrendered Sunday premium pay and moved towards a team-based agreement that was not popular with all of the rank and file. Union representatives did, however, secure all the basic conditions they needed for the local to function effectively, including company recognition of the union, the right to arbitration and mediation, and the automatic check-off of union dues. In addition, workers maintained the same comprehensive group health insurance plan that they had at the time of the strike, fighting off company demands for increased contributions. Crucially, retired workers were also covered by the same plan as active workers. The union also ensured that by the time the contract was signed, the 10 permanently replaced strikers who were still awaiting recall to the mill had been given the opportunity to return.¹²⁶ With the contract in hand, moreover, local union leaders continued to work on signing up those replacements who had not joined the union. They made steady progress, and by March 2000 almost 80% of workers had signed union cards.¹²⁷

The Blue Circle strike highlighted several central themes of contemporary labor–management relations. Like many workers in the 1980s and 1990s, the Blue Circle workers fought to uphold benefits rather than to seek a wage increase. At the time of the walkout, indeed, the Alabama AFL–CIO estimated that around 90% of strikes in the U.S. were caused by clashes over benefits rather than wages.¹²⁸ The health care issue that precipitated the Blue Circle strike has also been a source of increased labor–management conflict in recent years.¹²⁹ At the time of the Blue Circle strike,

¹²²Bobby Watts, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

¹²³As Barnette recalled, “We stepped on some toes, Tim, I don’t mind telling you, when we put Roderick on the negotiating committee. We fought that. The replacement workers, after we had organized them, were still very uncomfortable with us, and we fought and we felt that it would be a real good idea if we could take one of them and put one of them on the committee, not necessarily for the input, no other reason than they could be there to see that our aim is not to undercut them or to cost them their job. That was their one main concern, that we would negotiate them out the gate and our people back, and I think they were able to see that that was not our intent.” Emory Barnette, interview with author on Aug. 4, 1999 in Thomasville, Alabama.

¹²⁴Emory Barnette, interview with author on Aug. 4, 1999 in Thomasville, Alabama.

¹²⁵Emory Barnette to Donald L. Langham, July 15, 1998, correspondence given to author by Emory Barnette (copy in author’s possession).

¹²⁶Emory Barnette to Donald L. Langham, Mar. 8, 1999 and “Agreement between Blue Circle, Inc., Roberta Plant and PACE International Union Local No. 3–0537,” correspondence given to author by Emory Barnette (in author’s possession); Bobby Watts, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama; Doug McNeese, interview with author on Aug. 2, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

¹²⁷Bobby Watts, phone conversation with author, Mar. 25, 2000.

¹²⁸Statistic cited by a news report on the strike, Calera Strike Video (copy in author’s possession).

¹²⁹Blue Circle’s top managers themselves claimed during the strike that conflict over health care costs was a problem that “shouts at us from every day’s newspaper.” John Summerbell to Jennifer Pate, Aug. 29, 1994, “Unconditional Return,” folder, Local 50537 Papers.

indeed, the issue of health care reform dominated policy debate, and companies' demands that workers had to pay an increased proportion of health care costs precipitated many labor disputes.¹³⁰ For union leaders, the Blue Circle strike was a classic example of contemporary strikes. As Jim Albright, the president of the Alabama AFL-CIO, wrote during the dispute, "The company, like many today is attempting to destroy the union by demanding cut-backs in Health Care and other contract provisions."¹³¹

The Blue Circle strike also highlighted the increasing conflict that occurred between U.S. unions and foreign-owned companies in the 1980s and 1990s. U.S. union leaders became frustrated by the way that European companies, in particular, seemed to take a more anti-union position in the U.S. than in Europe. UK officials from the GMB union indeed reported that they had a "generally good relationship" with Blue Circle.¹³² UPIU leaders argued that this disparity was related to the weakness of U.S. labor laws. "Really what happens," commented UPIU vice-president Donald Langham, "is they treat the unions in the UK completely different than they do the unions in North America. They take advantage of the labor laws, that's what they do. They fully take advantage of the permanent replacements or anything else that they can get by with."¹³³ For the UPIU, only a major reform of labor law could have prevented Blue Circle's harsh treatment of its unionized workers in Calera and Atlanta, tactics that the company repeated in its other U.S. locations.¹³⁴ Blue Circle workers themselves found it difficult to understand why the company could recognize unions in the UK but not in the U.S. "If you've got a good working relationship and they are union, why can't you have it here?" asked Luther Carter. "What's always going to be a mystery to me is how the same company can go from one country to the next and take a big turnaround and treat people differently."¹³⁵

The Calera story also highlighted other, wider themes. Since 1981, one of the main methods that companies have used to break the "social accord" between labor and management has been the hiring of permanent replacements.¹³⁶ In the last two decades, companies have increasingly provoked strikes to use them as a weapon against unions. Workers have often complained that companies have forced them to strike in order to hire replacements and decertify the union. While unions have certainly suffered from this corporate attack, studies are beginning to show that, as in Calera, companies have

¹³⁰"Health Security: It's about Our Jobs," *The Paperworker*, June 1994, 16; "The President's Report," *The Paperworker*, May 1994, 2; "Region Ten Confab Backs Push for National Health Care," *The Paperworker*, April 1994, 10. For other strikes caused by health care issues, see "Health Care Cuts Spur Brief James River Walkout," *The Paperworker*, Aug. 1992, 3; "James River Strike Ends with National Health Care Talk," *The Paperworker*, Sept. 1992, 5.

¹³¹James Albright to all locals in Jefferson and Shelby County, Aug. 9, 1994, "Blue Circle Cement, Atlanta, Georgia," folder, UPIU—Mobile Papers.

¹³²Allan Black to Donald Langham, April 24, 1998, "Blue Circle Cement Case Number 10-RM-836," folder, UPIU—Mobile Papers.

¹³³Donald Langham, interview with author on Aug. 4, 1999 in Mobile, Alabama. UPIU representative Doug McNees expressed similar views to Langham, asserting that: "They're doing things to Americans they can't even do at home. Laws don't allow them to ... So they come over here and take advantage of everything they can." Doug McNees, interview with author on Aug. 2, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

¹³⁴Allan Black to Donald Langham, April 24, 1998, "Blue Circle Cement Case Number 10-RM-836," folder, UPIU—Mobile Papers.

¹³⁵Luther Carter, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama.

¹³⁶Philip Mattera to Corporate Campaign, Nov. 14, 1988, "Replacement Workers," file, UPIU Papers; "Fact Sheet on HR 1383, a Bill to Limit the Use of Permanent Replacements," n.d., "Striker Replacement," folder, UPIU Papers.

also lost a great deal when they have alienated experienced and dedicated workers. In the summer of 1999, one Blue Circle worker reflected on the price that the company was still paying as a result of the strike: “I know they’re in business to make money but if you’ve got a happy employee, you’re going to make more money because he’s going to give a hundred and ten percent instead of ninety-eight or a hundred. And I don’t see that out there.”¹³⁷

¹³⁷Luther Carter, interview with author on July 15, 1999 in Calera, Alabama. For other studies that have reached similar conclusions, see Getman, *The Betrayal of Local 14*, esp. 216–220; Timothy J. Minchin, “Torn Apart: Permanent Replacements and the Crossett Strike of 1985,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 59 (2000), 30–58; Adrienne Eaton and Jill Kriesky, “Collective Bargaining in the Paper Industry: Developments since 1979,” in Paula Voos, ed., *Contemporary Collective Bargaining in the Private Sector* (Madison, WI: Industrial Relations Research Association, 1994), 51–52.