

# United Strike

## Did It Really fail?

Frank H. Joyce

1967

"No man knows what vibrations he sets in motion in his lifetime." —Loren Easley

So too, it is too early to judge completely the effects of the General Strike for Unity called in support of Adam Clayton Powell for last February 13.

That the city failed to grind to a halt as a result of the strike is certain. Most of Detroit's Negro community admittedly did not participate. In the absence of any apparently unified sentiment on the part of the nation's black people the Congress is moving toward a severe punishment of Rep. Adam Powell.

That the strike as a weapon has great potential, however, was clear from the nature of the opposition to it and the interest and debate which it generated.

"If you weren't worried, you wouldn't be here" stated strike co-chairman Milton Henry to a large gang of local and national press which had gathered at a press conference on February 13. The press seemed delighted and relieved that the strike had by their criteria failed. They sobered when attorney Henry noted, "If we had closed down every plant in the city, your attitude would be different."

As was expected, the press consistently underestimated the participation in the boycott of jobs, schools and stores. In some schools and factories Negro absenteeism was well over 50%. An average involvement of 15% of the black community is probably a reasonable figure.

Fear of the potential of the strike to seriously inconvenience if not paralyze the white populace was manifested by white and "responsible" Negro leadership. The mighty General Motors Corporation felt compelled to announce that it would take disciplinary action against any of its employees who participated in the strike. The Detroit Public Schools did the same thing in a less formal and public way. All of the newspapers and radio and TV stations came out against the strike. Anyone opposing the strike was given large amounts of space and air time.

Francis Kornegay, director of the white, corporation financed Urban League and Horace Sheffield, employed as the U A W's Second Most Important Negro were delegated the responsibility of opposing the strike in the Negro community. They were joined as usual by the executive board (although not the dwindling membership which is rarely if ever consulted about anything) of the NAACP.

Their reason, if one reads between the lines of the rhetoric they had devised was essentially fear that the strike would be successful and would cause massive white retaliation. In the case of Horace Sheffield this was made explicit in his column in the Michigan Chronicle.

In addition to concern that they would lose their jobs had they failed in their assignment to kill the strike one supposes that they feared for their organization particularly in the case of the Urban League and the NAACP. Had the strike been "successful," it might very well have been more difficult to sell tickets to the Governor, Mayor, School Superintendent, and corporation presidents for the NAACP's \$100 per plate dinner which annually raises more than \$125,000 for the organization. Of course had it been successful, black people might have gotten some real respect from the white power structure instead of the cheap \$100 per plate respect they now get once a year.

Negro opposition to the strike pointed up once again one of the major paradox's of race relations today and one which is usually missed by whites. Those Negro leaders generally known as Uncle Toms might be expected to know whites better than others since they work more closely with them (or for them as the case may be). And yet they are the ones who are most fearful of retaliation and backlash should Negroes do something which would displease white folks.

It was Roy Wilkins, national president of the NAACP, remember, who called for the moratorium on demonstrations during the 1964 presidential campaign so as not to swing votes to Barry Goldwater. And it was Roy Wilkins who said "black power means black death" at the NAACP convention last August. The "Toms" know, in some sense at least, better than anyone else, what a passionately racist country this is. They have seen it close up. That is why they are afraid and that is what they are telling.

Some people are not afraid, however, or at least they have decided they prefer death to slavery. One of them is Comedian Dick Gregory, who served as honorary national chairman of the United Strike Committee. He announced to more than 1,500 people who had gathered in Ford Auditorium for a post-strike rally that another strike would be called for March 23.

He also asked for a boycott of all 1968 automobiles by black and white alike until and unless:

1. The War in Vietnam ends from which Ford, GM and Chrysler are reaping enormous profits both directly through supplying war material and indirectly through the artificially stimulated war economy.
2. Cars are made safer so that thousands of people are not slaughtered on the highways.
3. Cars are redesigned which don't contribute to the poisoning of the very air we breathe.

In his remarks on the war Gregory went on to observe, "Asking the United States to fight for freedom and democracy in Vietnam is like asking a convicted child molester to baby sit with your daughter. If one of those Vietnamese who we're getting instant freedom for tried to move into the suburbs anywhere in this country they'd blow up his house."

For 1,500 people in Ford Auditorium, the strike was a success. The future remains to be seen but as Milton Henry said, "The Strike technique is here to stay."

In a complementary action, People Against Racism (PAR), the only group in the nation devoted exclusively to combating racism and white supremacy in the white community, picketed the Democratic State Central Committee office in downtown Detroit. Although "whited out" by the press, more than 50 people, all of them white, turned out to demonstrate for two hours in the 20 degree weather.

They addressed themselves to their own white congressmen, James O'Hara, Martha Griffiths, Lucien Nedzi, William D. Ford and John Dingell, charging them with racism and the enforcement of a double standard for their action in removing Adam Clayton Powell from his chairmanship and his congressional seat.

Their leaflet distributed to more than 1,000 downtown passers-by stated in part:

"We believe that the Democratic Party must take responsibility for the unseating of Adam Clayton Powell as well as the seating of the illegally elected Democrats from Mississippi despite the 1965 Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party challenge to their right to be seated. Any system which allows such an inversion of values must be changed."

# fifth Estate

Frank H. Joyce  
United Strike  
Did It Really fail?  
1967

<https://www.fiftheastate.org/archive/25-march-1-15-1967/united-strike>  
Fifth Estate #25, March 1-15, 1967

**[fiftheastate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://fiftheastate.anarchistlibraries.net)**