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The Story of Labor: American Society and Politics in Ruth McKenney's *Industrial Valley*

İşçi Sınıfının Hikayesi: Ruth McKenney'nin *Industrial Valley* Eserinde Amerikan Toplumu ve Politikaları

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Abstract

Ruth McKenney's *Industrial Valley* (1939) is an American labor novel that portrays the encounters of rubber workers in Akron, Ohio, in the 1930s strike period. McKenney addresses the growth of American labor movement around the economic crisis, FDR's New Deal regulations, and labor unions. She juxtaposes journalistic, literary and historical narrative styles in her portrayal of the time. The labor activism of the 1930s reflected workers' neglected demands about wages, working conditions, and unionization. During the labor reform era, the struggle for organized labor between company unions, the American Federation of Labor and the workers triggered a strike period in the rubber and automobile industries. The labor efficiency methods and economic downturn resulted in periodical layoffs, rising unemployment rates, constant wage cuts, and low wages for workers. At this stage, sit-down strikes started to change the traditional view of unions and labor activism. This new peaceful organization of workers and unions opened a way to negotiate working conditions with employers. In this light, this article aims to present *Industrial Valley* as a microcosm of the struggles of the American working-class in the 1930s. As the article particularly underlines, McKenney's labor novel provides an insight into the process leading to the Akron rubber strike of 1936, which transformed communication and interactions between workers, union organizers, employers, mass media, and the US government towards a mutual recognition of their claims and positions. The article provides a narrative analysis to McKenney's docunovel by underlining the rhetorical uses of humor and irony, the hybrid journalistic-literary narrative, and the critical historical argument about the Akron rubber strike.
Keywords: Ruth McKenney, Industrial Valley, New Deal, union, Akron rubber strike.

Öz

Ruth McKenney'nin *Industrial Valley* (1939) eseri, 1930'lardaki grev sürecinde, Akron, Ohio'da lastik işçilerinin yaşadıklarını anlatan bir Amerikan işçi sınıfı romanıdır. McKenney Amerikan işçi hareketinin gelişimini ekonomik kriz, FDR'nin Yeni Anlaşma kapsamındaki düzenlemeleri ve işçi sendikaları etrafında ele almaktadır. McKenney bu dönemi anlatırken gazetecilik, edebiyat ve tarihe özgü anlatım biçimlerini eserinde bir araya getirerek kullanmıştır. 1930ların işçi aktivizmi hareketi, ücretler, çalışma koşulları ve sendikalaşmayla ilgili işçilerin göz ardı edilen

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taleplerini yansıtmaktaydı. İşçi sınıfıyla ilgili reform hareketi döneminde, şirket sendikaları, Amerikan İşçi Federasyonu ve işçiler arasında sendikalaşmış iş gücüne yönelik mücadele lastik ve otomobil endüstrilerinde grev sürecini tetikledi. İş yerinde çalışan verimliliğini arttırma yöntemleri ve ekonomideki gerileme, dönemsel işten çıkarmalara, artan işsizlik oranlarına, ücretlerin sürekli düşmesine ve işçilerin düşük ücretler almasına yol açtı. Bu aşamada, oturma eylemlerinin yapıldığı grevler sendikalara ve işçi aktivizmine olan geleneksel bakış açısını değiştirmeye başladı. İşçilerin ve sendikaların bu yeni barışçıl örgütlenme biçimi işverenlerle masaya oturup, çalışma koşullarını görüşmenin yolunu açmış oldu. Bu bilgiler ışığında, bu makale *Industrial Valley* eserini 1930lardaki Amerikan işçi sınıfı mücadelesinin bir örneği olarak ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Makalenin özellikle vurguladığı üzere, McKenney'nin işçi sınıfını anlatan romanı, işçiler, sendika temsilcileri, işverenler, ana akım medya ve Amerikan hükümeti arasındaki iletişimi ve etkileşimi, birbirlerinin taleplerini ve konumlarını tanıma doğrultusunda, değiştiren dönüştüren 1936 yılındaki Akron lastik grevine giden sürece ışık tutmaktadır. Makale McKenney'nin belgesel roman niteliğindeki eserine, mizah ve ironinin retorik kullanımını, gazetecilik ve edebiyatı birleştiren hibrit anlatıyı ve Akron lastik grevi üzerine yapılan eleştirel tarihsel tartışmayı vurgulayarak, anlatısal bir analiz yapmaktadır.
Anahtar sözcükler: Ruth McKenney, Industrial Valley, Yeni Anlaşma, sendika, Akron lastik grevi.

Introduction

Addressing the history of American labor, the rubber industry in particular, H. Wolf and R. Wolf (1936/2009) emphasize the quintessential roles of "price cutting" rubber barons and the New Deal initiatives of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s, through which rubber workers managed to have organized labor under the legal framework (p. 395). Although rubber workers received relatively higher wages than other industrial workers, beginning with the early twentieth century, they had not been valued as a workforce paid under the piecework production system. They complained about the rising pace of work and production demands, which would leave them exhausted and unemployed at the age of 40: "It is with the system that recruits or takes back the young men when the plants swing into peak production and leaves the older ones on the scrap heap" (Wolf & Wolf, 1936/2009, p. 396). In the early days, this system highly profited shareholders and bankers in the growing industry. Workers' wages and harsh working conditions were not significantly different from other industries. Therefore, the rubber workers' drive for organized labor was triggered by the labor unrest across the nation, especially the strike period of 1902-1903 and the emerging leadership of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). With strikes of anthracite coal workers, Chicago freight handlers, and artisans from Philadelphia and New York, rubber workers turned to the International Association of Allied Metal & Rubber Workers, resulting in union men losing their jobs and many union members participating in the parade on Labor Day (Wolf & Wolf, 1936/2009, pp. 396–397).

For a brief period, the Amalgamated Rubber Workers Union of America was established in Washington through the AFL charter, with Boston as the union's headquarters, and received great support. Workers recognized unionization efforts and demanded better wages, which, however, ended with the retaliation of companies, the arrival of strike breakers, and the expanding spy system in labor. By late 1912, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) sneaked into Akron and another national level strike period followed in 1913.[1] At the time, in the booming rubber industry of Akron, "Goodyear's factory payroll bore 6,000 names. Included were 300 women and 100 boys, all on 56 hours-a-week, day work. Of the men some 1,500… were on the three eight-hour shifts" (Wolf & Wolf, 1936/2009, p. 397). In the post-WWI era, the

[1] The Akron Strike of 1913 set a precedent for the struggle of rubber workers around the IWW and the AFL which would compete for organizing the rubber industry in the forthcoming decades. Beginning with the "bicycle craze" in the 1880s, the tire manufacturing market was established and expanded its marketing power with the automobile industry's rising demand, which turned to hiring young and strong male workers with high wages in automobile tire production (Woods, 2009, p. 400). The high demand for automobile tires prompted manufacturers to improve production levels by reducing the cost. Still, mass production of machine-built tires needed workers' strength for managing the tire building machine. As early as 1913, Firestone began to produce tires for the Ford Motor Company; however, the company's plan to cut costs and set the rates for workers who were producing machine-built tires and tires by hand triggered the walkout and the strike. Workers could not find IWW organizers who were willing to provide leadership for negotiations with employers and failed to create a unifying agenda for fellow workers. Both employers and the mayor of Akron remained reluctant to hear workers' demands, leading to the end of the strike (Woods, 2009, p. 400).

Akron rubber industry encountered the outcomes of booming automobile manufacturing, the growth of industrial production and urbanization through the population shift from farm regions to industrial towns, and the 1920s recession. With the centralization of the place of rubber in local economy, politics and socioeconomic prosperity, the Akron rubber industry staged workers' struggle with the Great Depression, aggravating living and workplace conditions ranging from heavy workload and periodical layoffs to unemployment, and the benefactors of industrial profitmaking during the 1930s labor movement.

Going through the post-WWI recession years of bankruptcy and industrial unemployment, Akron grew dependent on the manufacture and trade of tires, producing "two-thirds of all tires" in the country and employing more than half of the sector's workers by the late 1920s, which resulted in the industrial monopoly of three firms: the Goodyear Tire and Rubber, the Firestone Tire and Rubber, and B. F. Goodrich (Nelson, 1992, p. xii). The rivalry in the tire industry created booming production levels with an emphasis on labor efficiency in mass production and a company-controlled union, such as the Industrial Assembly, introduced by the production manager Paul A. Litchfield of Goodyear.[2] Furthermore, the Akron working-class community consisted of American workers from various regions of Appalachia and a growing immigrant population, ranging from German and Irish workers to eastern Europeans employed in tire and rubber plants, during and in the aftermath of WWI industrial boom (Nelson, 1992, p. xiii).

The booming rubber industry transformed Akron with its rising population and investments, such as new houses on mortgage credits and facilities for workers. Nevertheless, economic instability in the post-WWI and unemployment in the 1930s economic depression deepened communal insecurity and economic failure (Nelson, 1992, p. xiii). Despite aggravating socioeconomic conditions, working-class families still observed the power and influence of the industrialist over the city: "The attractive, well-built homes of Goodyear Heights and Firestone Park, close to the plants and to parks, churches, and community centers, were striking evidence of the manufacturers' power to shape and manipulate their environment" (Nelson, 1992, p. xiv). The economic boom and bust cycle in 1920s and 1930s Akron weakened local government as the provider of basic facilities, leading to the popularity of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and local political corruption, in the face of unresolved problems (Nelson, 1992, p. xiv). During the 1930s, the failure of the automobile industry in Detroit, Flint, Akron, and several Midwestern cities severely curtailed production levels and the number of workers, which introduced a "share-the-work plan" as a part-time job initiative in Akron where *Beacon Journal* reporter Ruth McKenney (1911-1972) witnessed the struggle of the workers to survive (Nelson, 1992, p. xiv).[3] Later, McKenney returned to Akron many times, and gained knowledge about issues quintessential to *Industrial Valley* from the *Beacon Journal* and the Communist Party (Nelson, 1992, pp. xv–xvi). In her 1936 essay "Uneasy City," published by the *New Yorker*, McKenney portrays Akron as a rubber city without aesthetic elements or features, and indicates corruption, contemptuous upper-class, and workers who challenged industrial slavery with union activities and sit-down strikes (Nelson, 1992, p. xvi).

As the story of the labor struggle in the Great Depression years, Ruth McKenney's *Industrial Valley* (1939) presents the experiences of the working-class in the rubber industry of Akron, Ohio, with local color and the voice of a journalist: "[I]t is about real people and events, but organized in the form of the radical

[2] During the 1920s postwar recession, company unionism staged another trial for organized labor attempts in rubber industry. The Industrial Assembly of Goodyear, the outcome of Litchfield's Industrial Relations Plan, countered strike attempts and initiatives to organize the rubber industry. Based on a paternalistic relationship between workers and employers, the Industrial Assembly denied trade unionism and adopted the US government structure through a bicameral legislature: elected employees and an executive branch having veto powers under President Litchfield (Woods, 2009, p. 401).

[3] The Depression-era rubber industry reflected severe reductions in employment and working hours. In the early 1930s, rubber companies endorsed "share-the-work policies" introduced by President Hoover's Emergency Committee on Employment as an alternative to layoffs (Nelson, 1988, p. 113). In the meantime, Litchfield came up with another scheme: dismissing workers every eighth week to have a rise in production. In Goodyear, the economic downturn turned the original plan into every fifth week layoff and resulted in the six-hour workday which would be adopted by other companies (Nelson, 1988, pp. 113–114).

novel and written from the perspective of the activist and social critic" (Nelson, 1992, p. xi). *Industrial Valley* is composed of brief sections with specific dates, which evokes an experience of reading local newspapers with references to stories and headlines from Akron papers. The novel thus emerges as a collage of literary, historical and journalistic narratives, referring often to the *Beacon Journal*, which conveys the labor conflict in the Akron rubber industry, working-class struggle with poverty, and underestimation of economic crisis with the efforts of media, churches, banks, and businessmen. As Fennell (1993) views, *Industrial Valley* comprises three books as a "docunovel" that integrates "short narrative accounts" and "journalistic vignettes" in its portrayal of the Great Depression and industrial unionism in Akron, Ohio (p. 747). Addressing the organized labor struggle of the rubber workers around the 1930s sit-down strikes, the first two books depict the dilemma of working-class families during the economic crisis as a transition to the last book in which McKenney elaborates the 1936 strike leading to the recognition of the United Rubber Workers of America by Goodyear Tire. McKenney's novel tells the story of industrial America in relation to unemployed councils, the CIO[4] involvement, and the New Deal politics of the 1930s (Fennell, 1993, p. 747).

The docunovel emerges as a juxtaposition of the novelistic conventions and historical reality by using the elements of fiction. In this way, the docunovel depicts historical occurrences through familiar facts that reappear in the text with multiple perspectives and new interpretations, which reworks the traditional understanding of fictional narratives and verifiable historical reality. Foley (1986) conveys that the "documentary novel" stands "near the border between factual discourse and fictive discourse" with its supposed fictional representation of the real (p. 25). In this regard, Foley (1986) points out the integration of the factual into fictional portrayals in the "pseudofactual novel" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which creates an impression of authenticity traditionally found in testimonial narratives, and the nineteenth century historical novel tradition (p. 25). In the modernist era, the documentary novel is divided into two genres: the fictional autobiography and the metahistorical novel. In the former, an "artist-hero" pretends to be a "real person" in a fictional setting, while the latter underlines the novel's connection to the "historical process" with an emphasis on the "very indeterminacy of factual verification" (Foley, 1986, p. 25). Principally, the documentary novel is characterized by its truth-telling claim by means of "empirical validation" of the truth (Foley, 1986, p. 26). Associated with the nineteenth century realism and the early twentieth century modernism, it is neither a subgenre of the novel nor essentially the same with the traditional novel. It notably asserts its "specific and verifiable link to the historical world" by insisting that characters, documents and incidents in the text refer to the reader's world (Foley, 1986, p. 26).

This article analyzes McKenney's *Industrial Valley* as a story of socioeconomic unrest, New Deal reforms and regulations, and organized labor movement during the Great Depression. The portrayal of the Akron rubber industry serves as a microcosm of the struggle of the American working-class, expanding power of business, industries and banks, and interventionist federal initiatives. McKenney's multidimensional labor narrative presents a montage of historical, journalistic and literary representations of the Depression-era, and elaborates on the Akron rubber strike of 1936 by underscoring the rivalry between unions, the organized labor efforts of the workers, mass production industries that enforce labor efficiency methods, the strategic use of sit-down strikes, and conservative responses to the labor movement. The Goodyear strike of 1936 contributed to the growth of the American labor movement by forging alliances among workers and further testing the ground for federal labor policies of the New Deal. In this regard, *Industrial Valley* depicts the Akron rubber workers' struggle for voice and power (Johnson, 1940, p. 246) with a technique pertaining to "the documentary film or the news reel translated into words" (p. 247). McKenney's narrative juxtaposes propaganda and historical material by using "hundreds of items compiled from newspapers, financial reports, workers' and union officials' stories, statements from rubber company publicity departments: all reduced to stark sequences of fact" (Johnson, 1940, p. 247). The novel thus depicts the years culminating in the Akron rubber strike of 1936 with a documentary-like narrative that portrays

[4] CIO was initially established as the Committee for Industrial Organization in 1935. Through its break with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1938, it was renamed the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), stating that the AFL refused to organize unskilled and semiskilled factory workers. The CIO reunited with the AFL in 1955, which resulted in the formation of the AFL-CIO (Rosswurm, n.d.).

rubber workers' experience in parallel to the historical sequence of events and the New Deal politics of labor. The storytelling of the novel reflects the perspective of a reporter in view of the working-class experience, organized labor efforts, and the Goodyear strike by means of the hybridity of the journalistic-literary narrative, historical commentary on the New Deal politics and labor regulations, and critical understanding of the Great Depression. As a docunovel, *Industrial Valley* narrates extensively the process leading to the Akron rubber strike of 1936 by depicting workers' encounters with employers, union organizers, media, and policymakers through which they realize their power and influence in shaping the American economy and defining political agendas. To this end, McKenney documents the economic crisis, the labor movement, and the New Deal decade in a fictionalized form that juxtaposes news and headlines from the local newspapers, historical occurrences in the Akron rubber industry, and a unique form of hybrid storytelling. The narrative strategy of the docunovel creates a multidimensional narrative of historical details, journalistic reporting and a coming-of-age story for the rubber workers, which provides an alternative reading of the Akron rubber strike of 1936. The combination of the reporter's eye and the camera eye of the omniscient narrator creates narrative shifts in content and multiple perspectives by moving from the Akron rubber industry to a broader view of the American labor movement, the Depression-era society and the New Deal politics.

Labor and Nation in Crisis

Industrial Valley begins with a parade for the unemployed in Akron during the Great Depression. In response to the growing discontent, the mayor declares a new "work-relief" program for unemployed people (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 3). On their way to the City Hall to hear the details of the program, people detect the rubber smell in the air that has sneaked into every aspect of their lives: "Mister Gettling and Mister Hendrick were veterans of the rubber smell. For ten years they had eaten, and slept . . . with the acrid rubber stench high in the nostril and deep in the throat . . ." (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 5). Job Hendrick's glance at the B. F. Goodrich Rubber Company reflects his reminiscence of rubber manufacturing with bitterness and fear because the rubber industry stands at the center of their lives through its promise of survival and threatening absence within the boom and bust cycles of industrial production: "The powerful black bulk, stretching up and down the street, and as far back as the eye could see, still, after all these years, made his heart heavy" (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 5). The omnipresence and sensory descriptions of the rubber smell and the factory symbolize the inescapable dominance of the rubber industry in the lives and circumstances of the workers. In the novel, the rubber industry functions as an overwhelming antagonistic character or entity that stands in direct opposition to the heroic working-class struggle.

In the portrayals of the turbulent 1930s, McKenney (1939/1992) depicts the collaboration between business associates, church ministers, and local officials, who stand as antagonistic characters in the novel, who challenge the working-class and union representatives, as they discuss prevailing economic insecurity during their club dinners and church services by overlooking the signs of economic failure and social unrest (p. 9). McKenney further conveys the blissful ignorance of the Depression-era economy by referring to media efforts that hide the First-Central Trust Company's failure from the bank's depositors and investors, and severe shortages of public services.[5] As a remedy to the still-unacknowledged economic crisis and

[5] Bernstein (1969/2010) states that the rubber industry of Akron, Ohio, was under the domination of the Big Four (i.e., Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, B. F. Goodrich Tire and Rubber Company, Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, and the United States Rubber Company). Bernstein notes that Akron was devastated by the 1930s economic depression as a "one-industry town, living on and smelling of rubber" (p. 98), indicating more than half of the residents who were unemployed at the time, home foreclosures, and people living on relief (pp. 98–99). In 1933, Firestone, Sieberling Rubber Company and many others were closed down while Goodyear was struggling with a two-day week work plan. The First-Central Trust Company had failed, which thus left the city and its depositors broke. The city administration was unable to run even basic municipal services: "Half the police force was laid off; all but three firehouses were closed; garbage collection stopped; street maintenance ceased . . . the school system staggered" (Bernstein, 1969/2010, p. 99).

related unemployment, prominent clubs such as the Rotary Club and the Lions Club promote a "make-work" program in newspapers with the slogan "'Buy! Build! Beautify! Help Akron's Unemployed!'", believing that the unemployed might have some solace in part-time work and construction projects (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 16). Thus, McKenney (1939/1992) points out the consumption and production-based solutions of the upper-class and the local government, which critically alludes to President Herbert Hoover's limited federal intervention economy model that accentuated business initiatives and individual efforts instead of direct governmental control or solutions for the economic crisis. In the novel, aligned with the joint private sector and federal government efforts, some Akron papers, namely the *Times-Press* and the *Beacon Journal*, promote advertisements and programs with such messages as the "don't-hoard-your-dollar-bills" and total support from Hoover, rubber manufacturers, and department stores (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 17). With her use of bitter humor in the novel, McKenney (1939/1992) portrays the ironic distance between the tragedy of working-class people dealing with unemployment, starving families and home evictions, and profit-minded schemes of industrialists, traders and policy makers.

The Great Depression necessitated relief initiatives and programs on local and federal levels; however, conditions of the poor also challenged the view of American philanthropy, volunteerism, and governmental involvement in the socioeconomic welfare of Americans. In *Industrial Valley*, McKenney (1939/1992) states that Family Service Society offers psychological help and groceries to Akron families, deemed to be "society misfits," even before the deepening socioeconomic crisis (p. 37). Steering away from professional progressive drive, social workers provide some services; yet families on relief feel offended by the stigma of being "unfit" members of Akron society with connotations of being un-American. Putting the blame on people's economic failure and inability to organize their lives, the same social service workers distribute some food and a diet program to families, while warning them against wasting the limited food supply (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 38). With reduced funds for relief services, unemployed people receive clothing occasionally through the Red Cross initiatives: "By this time, the desperate housewife had cut up her bedding for coats for her children, sold her furniture for food, and was months behind in rent, electric, and gas" (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 39). In the novel, McKenney (1939/1992) conveys that the 1932 election of Franklin D. Roosevelt[6] gives some hope to the rubber workers of Akron under these circumstances. To the City Hall, ministers and businessmen, the threat of radical action and foreign influences (i.e., labor unions, strikes, communism, and immigrants) seem more alarming than unemployed and homeless people on the streets or in the shantytowns, known as the Hoovervilles, in the 1930s. The representatives of rubber companies and upper-class residents remain indifferent to the economic decline as they indulge in their lavish dinners and meetings for charity, commercial activities, and church services (McKenney, 1939/1992). The underestimation of the economic depression as a policy in early 1930s American society and politics appears as a leitmotif in *Industrial Valley*. As the labor novel further conveys, the presence of class distinctions and the anti-radical politics of the 1930s hindered any progress for the working-class struggle with poverty and the labor movement. The 1932 election of Roosevelt provided some hope for a meaningful change in the Depression-era federal policies and programs. The narrative flow from the Hoover era to the Roosevelt administration signifies the historico-political shift in the policymaking with the onset of the New Deal years, which functions as a major change in the critical tone and satirical mood of the docunovel.

Industrial Valley depicts the historical rivalry for the market monopoly and increasing profits of the 1930s rubber industry. The three Akron rubber companies, Firestone, Goodrich and Goodyear, lower their prices by reducing the cost of production and workers' hourly wages, while imposing a speed-up system to boost their production levels (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 61). In the novel, the manipulative schemes of the

[6] During the New Deal years of the Roosevelt administration, federal relief remained a much-debated issue. Concerning work relief policy, Bremer (1975) states that it was a combination of programs that temporarily helped unemployed citizens with the "stigma of public dependency" (p. 651). As Bremer notes, the New Deal administration urged people on relief to seek permanent employment of their own, indicating the value of economic independence and self-reliance, although many of them were already working to receive the relief aid (p. 651). Bremer underlines the major concern of New Dealers who seemed to be wary of any misleading expectation about federal government's role in providing jobs, which thus resulted in "more relief than work, more charity than employment" policy (p. 652).

rubber barons aggravate the burden of the remaining workers in the industry who toil hours for lower wages; on the other hand, a third of the Akron population lives on relief or struggles with unemployment (McKenney, 1939/1992, pp. 62–63). For public services in Akron, the city government is unable to function without funds to pay for the police department, firemen and construction among others, while people learn farm foreclosures and bank failures from Akron newspapers (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 64). As McKenney (1939/1992) also underlines in the novel, the banking crisis highlighted the class conflict and social unrest between the working-class and the upper-class with a sense of insecurity towards sustainability of businesses, banks, and local government services. The narrative shifts in the novel bring forth the historical allusions from the novel's background to the narrative center through the voice of journalist-writer McKenney. Such narrative shifts that analyze the Depression-era economy and the labor crisis divert the readers' attention from the novel's storyline to the historical details and journalistic reporting on the 1930s.

The New Deal and Labor

Prior to the New Deal, the labor movement encountered outright government opposition to organized labor and union leaders' "cautious conservatism," which directly suppressed its power until labor regulations and active union leadership in the 1930s (Badger, 1989, p. 119). In the pre-New Deal years, the government (i.e., local, state and federal authorities) and courts remained silent to anti-union strategies of employers targeting labor organizers through layoffs, blacklisting, spying, violence and intimidation tactics, and the arrival of strikebreakers. The courts also declared several injunctions about strikes and pickets. Moreover, local government sided with employers, corporate powers and the middle-class community, while people on strike were deprived of rights and security in the face of anti-radical vigilantism. The state governors regarded the National Guard as a measure for protecting scab workers and plants from strikers. The Federal government sent troops, granted anti-union decisions, and provided little support through legislation, such as the Norris-La Guardia Act of 1932, which deemed "yellow dog" contracts illegal (Badger, 1989, p. 119) because they prevented workers from joining labor unions.

The Depression-era interventionist federal policies emerged with the Roosevelt administration that generated various relief, recovery and reform programs, known as the "3 R's" at the time. In this way, the New Deal politics of President Roosevelt handled regulation of business, the banking system, agriculture, and industries, including employment opportunities and the documentation of poverty for a reconciliation with Americans who suffered from the economic collapse and uncertainty. Having different acronyms, New Deal programs were labelled as the "alphabet soup." McKenney (1939/1992) refers to the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) as the "first of the Roosevelt alphabetical relief agencies," adding that the federal initiative is a sheer source of exhilaration and a sense of respite from "hunger" and "rotting idleness" (p. 88). McKenney (1939/1992) indicates the stark contrast between rubber workers who uneasily bend over the conveyor belt under intense heat with "inhuman" speed of work and almost suffocating smell of processed rubber, and the West Hill residents who cherish their club meetings and sheltered lives: "So while on West Hill Mrs. F. A. Seiberling entertained the ladies of the Garden Club on her estate, was duly photographed carrying a large parasol against the heat wave, in the factories a storm brewed" (p. 89). In her minimalistic depictions of Akron society, McKenney implicitly uses bitter humor and ironic situations to indicate the class gap between toiling workers and upper-class residents who remain indifferent to debilitating working conditions, demoralizing economic crisis, and rising labor unrest. The uses of humor and irony function to indicate McKenney's criticism and political commentary on the Akron rubber industry, labor movement and society. As McKenney also suggests in the novel, the New Deal labor laws and regulations coincided with the time of working-class distress about wages, working hours, and living conditions, the rise of unemployment, and the public demand for federal work and relief initiatives during the economic depression. The way McKenney juxtaposes the New Deal initiatives on the economy, the working-class resentment on unemployment and the speed-up production system, and the upper-class alienation indicates the rhetorical uses of humor and irony that convey the sociopolitical analysis embedded in the storyline.

During the 1930s, people of American industries (e.g., manufacturers, small business owners, and union people from the AFL) demanded government action and involvement, in need of cooperation, measures against competition, regulation of working hours, and new employment opportunities. Thus, the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 addressed the pleas of businesspeople, leftist labor organizers, and trade union representatives through "the suspension of antitrust laws, the drafting of cartel-like 'codes of fair competition,' and the introduction of minimum wages, maximum hours, and restrictions on child labor" (Nelson, 1988, p. 117). Section 7a granted workers the right to organize and collective bargaining. The most controversial aspect of the law among rubber manufacturers seemed to be the drafting of codes for the new controlled competition in total ignorance of such unregulated issues as prices and high production levels (Nelson, 1988, p. 117). The Great Depression radically changed labor relations and federal policies. The large-scale and lengthy economic failure challenged the labor policies and the distribution of national income, which laid the ground for "legislative support" in advancing collective bargaining and organized labor rights under the Norris-LaGuardia Anti-injunction Act of 1932, the section 7(a) of the NIRA (1933), the Labor Disputes bill of Senator Robert F. Wagner (1934), and the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (Tomlins, 1985, p. 23).

In *Industrial Valley*, McKenney (1939/1992) portrays the socioeconomic consequences of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) and the establishment of the National Recovery Administration (NRA) in 1933. As a result of the New Deal labor legislation, rubber workers of Goodyear have a direct encounter with organized labor efforts and unions, seeing the headlines on labor politics and labor organizers at the gates of the factory. Addressing the NRA, labor organizers hand out leaflets that discuss unionization as a measure against the speed-up system, constant wage-cuts, and the ultimate power of factory owners (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 93). In the novel, the New Deal reorganization of labor thus initiates union meetings and publications through which the workers adopt a new political voice, radical consciousness, and working-class solidarity, having a representative from the American Federation of Labor (AFL), to demand livable and workable conditions. In relation to this, McKenney (1939/1992) emphasizes the rubber workers' initial naivety about the upcoming union struggle against rubber barons and their company unions, "they thought President Roosevelt might just order the rubber bosses to raise wages and quit the speedup. . . . [W]hen they spoke about a strike, it was always something gay, like a picnic, a contest that you won . . ." (p. 101). In parallel to McKenney's portrayal of the workers' naivety about organized labor efforts, strikes, and political mechanisms behind labor issues, President Roosevelt's idealistic view of the labor policy failed to foresee the outcomes of the NIRA which resulted in labor unrest due to workers' growing grievances over organized labor, collective bargaining, fair wages, and working conditions. Similar to workers' high expectations from union organizers and policy makers, Roosevelt took it for granted that the NIRA would simply solve the labor conflict; however, the passage of NIRA triggered a wave of strikes, efforts to interpret the law, and hostility to unions: "The President and his Administration would be forced to improvise a national collective bargaining policy, searching frantically for new principles and new arrangements to deal with crises as they emerged" (Bernstein, 1969/2010, p. 172). The second half of 1933 reflected the highest number of work stoppages that had occurred since 1921. With rising tension, strikes in clothing, coal and motion picture industries addressed the workers' collective bargaining and union recognition demands, which employers responded with the establishment of company affiliated unions (Bernstein, 1969/2010, p. 173). Considering the negative impacts of labor unrest on economy and business, Roosevelt established the National Labor Board via the statement of the Industrial and Labor Advisory Boards of NRA. The board would presumably handle labor disputes between employees and employers through its mediator role; however, it lacked detailed planning, legal authority, and a precedent with its tripartite organization under Senator Wagner as the public member, three labor members, and three industry members (Bernstein, 1969/2010, p. 173).

As McKenney (1939/1992) depicts in *Industrial Valley*, to keep unionization under their control, Akron industries established company unions for the representation of workers' needs and interests. At first, Akron workers and employers get carried away with the NRA regulations that promote a consensus on "a five-day forty-hour week" schedule and a minimum wage of $13 for having industry codes, "Blue Eagle" signs as the symbol of allegiance, and citizens' total support (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 107). The public support for the New Deal labor reforms symbolically alludes to the wartime reorganization of American

society through youth groups, household support and public demonstrations: "Blue eagles blossomed in every store front. Every Boy Scout in Akron was drafted for a great consumer campaign, and the youthful patriots . . . toured every street in the city pushing, 'I will co-operate' cards at housewives" (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 107). With WWI mobilization and nationwide war propaganda in recent memory (e.g., assisting the war effort through the purchase of war bonds), the people of Akron embrace the NRA fervor for improving wages and working conditions in their struggle against the Great Depression and the failure of the American individual. However, workers in the rubber industry discuss the section 7(a) of the NIRA rather than blue eagles (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 108).[7] McKenney's labor novel (1939/1992) comments on the unexpected growth of the labor agenda through workers' involvement in organized labor and the politicization of the labor struggle through the New Deal legislations and programs. In this way, McKenney integrates historical arguments from the 1930s decade into the docunovel with her critical political commentary on labor.

In *Industrial Valley*, McKenney (1939/1992) also elaborates on the role of labor-saving mechanization and methods in industrial production. The labor efficiency principle promoted the speed-up system that reduced the number of workers but raised production levels by enforcing a heavy workload for those remaining at work with low wages. Moreover, the fear of radicalism, radical action and thought, targeted labor organizations, including local and the AFL led initiatives of unionization. In the novel, amid conservative capitalist politics and economy, the NRA code for the rubber industry symbolizes the New Deal promise of industrial reform with "a forty-cent minimum wage for workers in the industry, a thirty-six-hour week, and a $14 weekly minimum" (McKenney, 1939/1992, pp. 128–129). However, a Goodyear worker's letter entitled "Factory Hand, 1934 Model" to the *Beacon Journal* reveals crude realism of working conditions behind the political idealism of the New Deal. The letter portrays rubber workers surrounded by machines and turned into a piece of the great industrial machinery as it recounts a recent accident about a night shift worker who gets his arm caught in the mill: "'The mills stopped only long enough for us to pull him out, and then they resumed their steady turn. . . . [T]he foreman called for a Squad man to take his place" (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 133). Therefore, a rubber worker's observations alluded to the dehumanizing industrial pace that transformed factory workers into easily disposable instruments or a piece of replaceable machinery in the uninterrupted process of mass production in the 1930s. As McKenney portrays industrial workers' commodification in the production process and the mass production market, Kaufman (2012) likewise illustrates the state of the working-class during the labor strikes period and the New Deal's responsive labor policies: "[M]ass of workers, supported by a sympathetic Democratic administration, stood up against an autocratic form of industrial government where employers exercised monarch-like powers and workers were given no more legal protections . . . than were commodities in product markets" (p. 524). In *Industrial Valley*, McKenney emphasizes how industrial workers were deprived of any direct means to change unhealthy and unsafe working conditions under the labor efficiency system, during the New Deal years. The juxtaposition of industrial conditions and a worker's personal account confirms that economic progress, the drive for higher profit margins, and the resulting human cost have always been inseparable.[8]

[7] Concerning rubber workers' conditions in the industry, they were highly affected by seasonal unemployment in the automotive sector, the technological developments in tire manufacturing that replaced workers in the production process to a great extent, and cyclical economic decline. Rubber workers encountered severe price and wage cuts, which exacerbated with the speed-up system (Bernstein, 1969/2010, p. 99). The Section 7(a) of the bill, by May 1933, had encouraged some Akron trade unionists to view the possibility of organizing a rubber union under the leadership of Wilmer Tate, who was the president of the Machinists' local and the secretary of the Central Labor Union (Bernstein, 1969/2010, p. 99). Later, local rubber workers' enthusiasm to join and the AFL support further aided the agenda of forming a union (Bernstein, 1969/2010, p. 100).

[8] According to Nelson (2001), in the New Deal context, the "relationship between economic regulation and union growth" has not been sufficiently discussed (p. 385). Nelson (2001) states that the NRA politics prioritized the national economic recovery and measures to manage the labor crisis until "the naiveté of 1933 had given way to hard-headed realism" in 1935 (p. 385). The industrial regulations of the NRA created favorable circumstances that advocated industrial interests and union growth, as Nelson (2001) indicates, "collective bargaining with outside unions was a

In *Industrial Valley*, McKenney (1939/1992) also indicates the financial relationship between the rubber and automobile industries that rekindles the interconnection of workers based on shared concerns and organized labor interests. To this end, the novel depicts that news of strikes from the automobile industry in Detroit and the Diamond Match Company in Barberton, Ohio, swiftly reach Akron rubber workers who also struggle to have union recognition under the NIRA. Additionally, McKenney (1939/1992) conveys that the growth of labor activism is not only the outcome of New Deal regulations in business, given that the economic crisis comes to an unbearable stage in industrial centers like Barberton: "When the Depression came, factories laid off whole shifts until half the wage earners in the little city were out of work and their families starving on what relief passed out" (p. 144). McKenney's fictionalized portrayals of the 1930s underline that the New Deal labor legislation essentially granted a legitimate ground for the working-class political activism that had been repressed by the profit-based interests of industries and the radicalization of the labor movement. The novel refers to the rubber workers of Akron rallying around unions and organized labor efforts with their attempts to interpret labor legislation and reforms. Having federal assistance under the legal framework and recognition of unions in industries, workers participated in organized labor efforts to improve working and living conditions in the 1930s. With newly gained reassurance from the NIRA and the AFL, the rubber workers of Akron supported organized labor efforts and union membership to solve their problems through collective action and bargaining (Nelson, 1984, pp. 567–568). Seeing employers' resistance to unions, workers searched for more effective strategies, leading to the first sit-down strike at General Tire in 1934, the establishment of an international union under the United Rubber Workers (URW), and sit-down strikes taking place in rubber industry and other industries (Nelson, 1984, p. 568).

The Sit-Down Strike Era

In *Industrial Valley*, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) provides some knowledge and experience to rubber workers in the struggle for organized labor through its leadership, local labor meetings, and correspondence with Washington on labor issues and politics. Having direct communication and meetings with representatives of the federal government, the AFL takes the initiative to improve the rubber union's position for collective bargaining with employers. However, as McKenney (1939/1992) indicates, rubber workers and the unemployed of Akron lose their patience and confidence, seeing the power of the rubber industry, economic threats, and anti-union efforts of rubber companies. Throughout the novel, the ongoing struggle persists between rubber workers, AFL labor organizers[9], industrialists, and the local government for welfare, economic interests and community order. In the process, local unions adopt the strategy of peaceful resistance by means of picket lines, parades and sit-down strikes to prevent violent encounters with the police and the local government. Like McKenney's fictional representation of the labor movement in the turbulent decade, Brecher (2009) notes that the mid-1930s sit-down strikes contributed to the formation of a new type of unionism through mass occupations that took place in auto and rubber factories. As Brecher conveys, the "industrial unionism" was introduced by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and adopted by the AFL; nevertheless, the traditional view of labor organization, a mediator or negotiator between workers and employers, continued to exist (p. 74). In the 1930s, workers' dedication to the labor cause of establishing a union and improving industrial conditions stimulated the labor

small price to pay for price stability and steady profits" (p. 385). Although employers and union leaders mutually benefited from the federal policies, the working-class grievances persisted until the mid-1930s labor activism period.

[9] The organization principle of the AFL was originally based on the strict control and unity of craft-based unions. By the 1930s, the AFL emphasis on federation management and workers' skills seemed outdated with the expanding influence of industrialism and corporations which had replaced the pre-industrial small shops and technology, and the need for high skilled workforce with "large plants, a complex technology, division of labor, and dilution of skills" in industries, such as steel, rubber, oil, and automobile (Bernstein, 1969/2010, p. 353). The craft unionism of the AFL neglected low-skilled workers of mass production, fearing that their unionization would threaten the federation's power and control (Bernstein, 1969/2010, p. 353). The labor movement struggled with these major problems: how to unionize mass production industry workers, people working in the same industry with different skills, and how to handle the rivalry between the AFL and workers' newly established local unions under the NIRA with its section 7(a).

agenda, despite hindrances in the unionization of steel, auto and textile industries in 1934. With the onset of the Second New Deal (1935-1936), the discrepancies among labor leaders, who could not reach a consensus during the 1935 AFL convention about industrial unions and the labor unrest, culminated in the creation of the Committee for Industrial Organization (Montgomery, 1994, p. 353). The CIO embodied the drive for labor reforms and grassroots activism. Its leadership sustained the New Deal economic initiatives and labor regulations under the Democratic Party (Montgomery, 1994, p. 354).

In *Industrial Valley*, the sense of nostalgia to agrarian freedom remains with the rubber workers of Akron who feel entrapped in a "dirty smelly town" and "its prison-like mills," knowing that they are unable to earn a living on the mountains of the South or in the mills (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 201). These workers barely survive with relief efforts, the speed of the conveyor belt, low wages in rubber shops, and the bureaucratic power of rubber manufacturers. The fictionalized portrayals of the Akron rubber industry make a statement about the primary shift from agrarian to industrial economy which triggered a massive tide of migration to urban centers where the working class sought employment in mass production industries. The Depression-era unemployment and labor efficiency methods further destabilized working-class life. Tully (2011) underlines the use of machinery used to improve production levels in Akron rubber companies, especially the Big Three's investment in rubber technology. The companies viewed technological research and progress as crucial steps of securing higher profits as Tully indicates their rivalry in this regard, "Profit margins were slim and could only be maintained by quality control, efficient production, economies of scale, ruthless marketing, and the strict regimentation of the workforce" (p. 138). Within years of competition, the shift from handmade to machinery produced goods (i.e., mass produced and low cost) shaped the tire and automobile industries, which resulted in strict time and efficiency management of the workforce under the Taylor and Bedaux systems (Tully, 2011, p. 138). In *Industrial Valley*, embracing a speed-up production method, rubber factories promote efficiency-based wage systems on piecework. They adopt the Bedaux system's variations, basically setting a "base rate" for wages of groups of workers, who are thus forced to produce more for getting higher wages (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 225). At Goodrich, for instance, this system of production-based payment triggers competition and raises production levels, which gradually sets higher production standards for workers without a pay rise. At Firestone, the company's "time-study engineers" manage different base rates for each tire model through the involvement of pacemakers who set a standard rate for the whole department (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 226). In the novel, McKenney reflects the historical experience of the rubber workers of Akron under the wage-work system, insufficient relief aid, seasonal or long-term unemployment, and the power of rubber magnates. The story of the rubber workers thus indicates their search for a way-out via the United Rubber Workers of America (URWA) and their efforts to organize the rubber industry.

In the novel, on January 3, 1936, President Roosevelt's speech at the Congressional session incurs interests of West Hill residents living on rubber profits and the working-class of Akron, as they listen to his address from their radios (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 243). President Roosevelt's New Deal programs become the target of anti-communist and anti-radical attacks of these people who directly make profits from industries. Workers still appreciate union and labor codes of the federal government established by the New Deal labor legislation and conducted under the related programs, despite the opposition of rubber manufacturers and court decisions like the annulment of NRA (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 244).[10] In his

[10] The passage of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (NLRA or Wagner Act) secured both industrial workers' right to have labor unions through "majority vote" and unions' involvement in strikes, providing that the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) was established to supervise unfair labor practices (Skocpol et al., 1990, p. 1297). The Wagner Act differed from the early New Deal policies which lacked an absolute federal support or opposition to unions. Pre-1935 New Deal labor initiatives promoted the workers' engagement with organized labor (i.e., company unions and multiple unions in the workplace) and federal agencies to handle labor unrest (i.e., labor disputes and strikes). The section 7(a) of NIRA had exemplified the same federal approach to labor relations. The Wagner Act, however, not only denounced opposition to industrial labor unions but it also embraced a new federal stance: "a transition from mediation to enforcement and a move away from simple acceptance of company unions and of

speech, President Roosevelt heavily criticizes "big businesses" for their defiance of American ideals and constitutional rights with their self-interests: "Mr. Roosevelt, in cultured Harvard accents, heaped scorn and fury on the heads of the 'big boys'" (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 244). President Roosevelt's outright criticism of the industrialists who neglect American values such as the work ethic, individual merit and progress encourages the rubber workers to defend the federal government's labor policy and initiatives. McKenney conveys the working-class sympathy for President Roosevelt and the populist support for the federal government's interventionist labor policies.

In the novel, on January 29, 1936, the workers of the Firestone stop the conveyor belt, which gradually halts mass production in several departments as it turns into a collective nonviolent sit-in with the help of workers' committees and the URWA. The backbone of the mass production system is subverted by the sit-in strike of workers who break the non-stop continuity of the production line for the mass shutdown of the industry: "Engineers had worked for years to synchronize every labor process in the great factory. The most remote departments were dependent on the flow of materials from some other faraway corner of the great plant" (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 264). Thus, workers' passive resistance to the industrial system eliminates any public demonstration or encounters such as picketing, parading, damage to public property, and anti-union retaliation.[11] As a result, they gain their demands through a peaceful settlement: the return of Dicks to work, a three-hour pay for each day of the sit-down strike, and negotiation about the base rate (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 268). As the novel suggests, in this way, the sit-down strike and the presence of URWA gained legitimacy among rubber workers for unionization.

McKenney (1939/1992) elaborately depicts the Akron rubber strike of 1936 with the reporter's dedication to details and an insider's perspective of the Goodyear walkout, which narrates the rubber workers' union organization under the scrutiny of the company management, the police, and local government for each day of the thirty-three-day strike. In the novel, beginning February 17-18, 1936, Goodyear workers go on a strike through the picket line and sit-down, provided with the subsequent support of the URWA, the CIO (Committee for Industrial Organization), local unions, and other workers, for their right to have organized labor, union recognition, and collective bargaining with the company:

> Inside the plant hundreds of men and girls sat and sprawled on newspapers all over the factory, talking, eating, sleeping, [and] playing cards… None of them had eaten since the midnight before. The company had closed the cafeteria doors, and armed guards prevented lunchwagons from touring the struck departments.
>
> Just before eleven o'clock, a union delegate went quickly from the tirebuilders' room to the fabric department, to the pit, to the millroom. He carried the word, "This is a regular strike now. Come out on the picket line."
>
> At eleven-thirty squads of men arrived at the gates of the Goodyear plant on East Market Street. Bundled in layer on layer of sweaters and vests . . . the advance guard of pickets paced in close formation before the towering iron-barred doors.
>
> At midnight the sitdowners marched, singing, out of the factory to the picket lines.
>
> That was the first day. (McKenney, 1939/1992, pp. 299–300)

Such detailed portrayals reimagine the days of the Goodyear strike by creating a new perspective for readers beyond historical narratives that decentralized the working-class experience and the labor crisis with radical and aggressive connotations. Offering a humane look at the cultural and emotional associations of strikes, the docunovel's hybrid narrative of historical facts, the journalist-writer's nuanced portrayals, and all-

organizational pluralism to support for majority-elected unions independent of employer domination" (Skocpol et al., 1990, p. 1297).

[11] Different from picket lines and traditional strikes, sit-down strikes allowed workers to remain in the workplace by preventing the arrival of strikebreakers, halting production, and managing their safety away from aggressive attacks or any interference (Meyer, 2009, p. 204). Moreover, participants of sit-down strikes developed dedication to the cause while spending longer and more peaceful time together around the daily routine, union meetings and activities, such as the act of singing, which heightened morale (Meyer, 2009, p. 204).

encompassing storyline functions as several newsreels that depict the 1930s labor movement. In *Industrial Valley*, the growing support for the Goodyear strike and the union plan for a general strike in Akron incite a fear of radical action, social disturbance and lawlessness in the city. Consequently, on the twenty-seventh day of the Goodyear strike, local radio broadcasts of ex-Mayor C. Nelson Sparks spread provocative anti-union propaganda with the formation of the Akron Law and Order League. Claiming to lead non-striker Akron residents through the League and defend American ideals of "liberty, justice, and majority rule", ex-Mayor Sparks calls for vigilantism, namely vigilante justice, to maintain order and bring the strike to an end, "'It is this handful of miserable chiseling leeches, labor agitators, radicals, Communists, Red orators, flocking in here from all over the country. . . . They can't be called citizens, and it is stretching a point to call them Americans'" (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 359). The League and the radio broadcasts of ex-Mayor Sparks serve to the interests of rubber companies and the upper-class residents who directly benefit from the speed-up system, work efficiency methods, the system of base rates in industrial production that lowers the rubber workers' wages, and the company affiliated unions. The anti-radical language of the conservative capitalist front alludes to the anti-communist hysteria that was still prevalent in the 1930s American society. Labor organizers and unions were victimized by the fear of un-American ideologies and influences which signified violence, sociocultural decay, and chaos in the public mindset. In McKenney's labor narrative, Sparks and the League manipulate such fears and concerns to disempower workers and union representatives.

In *Industrial Valley*, the success of the Goodyear strike of 1936, which lasted more than a month, turns into a beacon of hope for the organized labor movement through the presence of unions, including a rise in union membership, and workers' new rights and privileges, such as their return to work, negotiation with the management about working conditions, and "the six-hour day" (McKenney, 1939/1992, p. 368). Moreover, Jim Keller, the secretary of the Akron Communist Party, foresees the Akron rubber strike's impacts on the great American industry and the labor movement, which refers to the rubber strike's historical role in leading to strikes and the formation of local unions:

> "The Goodyear strike is the beginning of a new world for the rubberworkers of Akron. Yes, and it is the beginning of a new world for workers all over America. They're waiting in steel, and in auto. When they hear you've won, they will be on the march!" (McKenney, 1939/1992, pp. 368–369)

As McKenney's docunovel places the Goodyear strike within the 1930s historical context of working-class struggle, the occurrence of Akron rubber strike was not a coincidence in a decade that culminated in a series of sit-down strikes in industries. From the mid-1934 to the late 1936, rubber workers introduced a new phase addressing the expansion of American industry and the public view of interactions between unions and industries. With economic turbulence and visible gains through organized labor, rubber industry workers set an example through the sit-down movement, though company managers, union leaders and public officials later regained their traditional place. Still, workers' collective actions strikingly changed "the duties of shop managers, the executives' conception of personnel management, and the role of union officials" (Nelson, 1982, p. 224). In that, they also transformed the structure of the union in terms of local organization, leadership and bureaucracy within the ranks of labor organization. The rubber workers of Akron forged a new path during the mid-1930s labor struggle, which left a legacy for all American industry (Nelson, 1982, pp. 224–225).

The social, economic and political disruptions that took place during the Great Depression, the New Deal, and World War II prepared solid ground for the unionization of semi-skilled and unskilled industrial workers. The outstanding wave of mass strikes, particularly between 1933 and 1943, set a precedent with the involvement of millions of industrial workers who demanded "union recognition, living wages, decent working conditions, and industrial democracy" (Brenner, 2009, p. 10). The combination of working-class activism and New Deal labor politics boosted the number of union members with a threefold increase, particularly in the membership of AFL unions, and the growing influence of the Congress of Industrial

Organizations (CIO).[12] In 1934, the mass strike of auto parts workers in Toledo, general strikes in Minneapolis and San Francisco, and 400,000 striking textile workers on the Eastern seaboard caught the attention of union leaders and triggered the CIO establishment. The resulting upsurge of sit-down strikes in 1937 and labor militancy further led to the United Auto Workers' triumph over General Motors in Flint, Michigan, and a series of successful sit-down strikes in industries and department stores, which would promote a drive for strikes during WWII (Brenner, 2009, p. 10). As Meyer (2009) indicates, the sit-downs that took place in auto and rubber industries helped the growth of organized labor in other industries (p. 207). Ranging from male dominated factories, white collar workers of Woolworth, and women workers of Detroit who managed to improve their wages and working conditions, to service sector, workers used sit-down strikes effectively, which led to the development of "retail unionism" (Meyer, 2009, p. 208).

The 1930s strikes drastically changed the American labor movement and society through the working-class solidarity and activism that confronted employers and government. Workers on strike directly observed the workings of American economy and politics, while acquiring awareness about their own role in transforming workplace, national economy and political agendas. As union members and representatives, they were able to improve their conditions and rights through "paid vacations, overtime pay, protection from arbitrary discipline and dismissal, pensions, and health care" (Brenner, 2009, p. 11). Furthermore, they acted upon their newly gained social and political consciousness in electing union representatives and political leaders who would support legislations leading to "Social Security, unemployment insurance, and fair labor standards," despite limited power of unions and the insufficiency of New Deal initiatives to override socioeconomic injustices (i.e., agricultural workers and African Americans remained excluded from the policies), employers' counteractions and conservative political reactions (Brenner, 2009, p. 11). In *Industrial Valley*, McKenney's narrative perspective on the New Deal conveys a high view of the federal regulations of labor, business, and economy in the 1930s. Underlining workers' initial naive expectations from the New Deal reforms and the federal authority in solving labor conflicts between workers and the rubber companies, *Industrial Valley* glorifies Roosevelt's election and progressive labor policy that motivated workers' political awareness and involvement in union organizations. The New Deal's primary concerns had been economic recovery and business regulations in the 1930s; nevertheless, it decisively guaranteed the rise of an organized labor movement (Badger, 1989, p. 118). The 1920s labor movement had remained active in certain industries (e.g., the railroads and coal mining) and craft unions, leaving semi-skilled or unskilled immigrant workers, mass production workers and employees of basic manufacturing industries mostly unorganized. The anti-union industrial corporations of "autos, steel, rubber, and electrical goods" had been unionized by 1940, and unions meanwhile gained political power and influence within the Democratic Party (Badger, 1989, p. 118).

Conclusion

Considering the social and political context of the 1930s, *Industrial Valley* directly provides an analysis of economic turmoil and New Deal initiatives through the unique documentation style of Ruth McKenney. From the perspective of a journalist, writer and social critic, McKenney enrichens the labor novel by juxtaposing critical historical commentary on labor policies, stories and headlines from Akron newspapers, and the rhetorical use of bitter humor and irony in her portrayal of the American working-class struggle with poverty, labor efficiency systems, profit minded industrialists who maintain the status quo,

[12] Regarding the union growth, it was the outcome of several factors that contributed to the visibility and success of the labor movement. To this end, Nelson (2001) argues that the New Deal (1933-1939) federal government policies addressed economic recovery, the rise of wages and prices, and collective bargaining without direct support for unionization. As Nelson (2001) suggests, the general historical view has singled out the federal policies for reinforcing the labor movement; however, the New Deal policymaking was not imperative to its development, considering several other incentives: "Had Congress not passed the Wagner Act, the number of union members in 1940 might have been lower…. Rather than any single measure, it was the New Deal approach to economic problems that was decisive" (p. 368).

and the rivalry between labor organizations. Thus, *Industrial Valley* presents a hybrid narrative of historical, journalistic and literary portrayals, and thus offers multidimensional perspectives on the Akron rubber industry and the labor movement, the Great Depression decade, and the New Deal years. The 1930s labor movement, particularly organizing mass production industries of rubber and automobile, triggered a drive for interpreting the New Deal labor policies, tested the domination of American Federation of Labor for union leadership, and created local labor unions. McKenney's docunovel portrays the mid-1930s organized labor efforts for union recognition and collective bargaining with an emphasis on the sit-down strikes in Akron rubber industry. In the novel, the success of the Akron rubber strike of 1936 underlines the resistance of Goodyear workers through peaceful and effective strategies of the organized labor, which particularly set an example for unionization in other American industries at the time.

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