EMPLOYERS AND BARGAINING UNITS

Local 27 was defined by its relations with employers as much as it was by interaction among its members. People became union members by gaining employment in a workplace organized by the local or by organizing their own bargaining unit. Employment was the key to membership. A plant closure led to the loss of members, while the successful organizing of a new plant led to more people joining the local’s ranks. Relations with employers were thus critical to the local’s development during the post–World War II years. Workplaces, unlike the local union hall, were contested terrain that were owned by employers yet occupied by workers. They were also places where people forged dual identities: worker and union member. This chapter, focusing on the way in which Local 27 organized workplaces and the work performed in them, considers some key questions: What workplaces did the local organize, and what was manufactured in them? Was deindustrialization a factor? How did employers respond to Local 27? How successful was the local’s organizing? And finally, how does Local 27’s interaction with employers relate to the existing literature on post–World War II labour relations?

From the 1960s to the 1990s, the local negotiated solely with private corporations, all of whom were somehow related to manufacturing. The list of employers grew and changed over the years, but bargaining remained focused on manufacturing industries rather than services. Interaction with employers occurred through two principal activities: organizing new workplaces and collective bargaining once a workplace had been organized. The collective bargaining process was further divided into two realms: negotiation of collective agreements and administration
of those agreements. The state was indirectly involved in this process since the organizing and collective bargaining processes were regulated by law, but it was also more directly involved if the union or one of the employers with which it negotiated chose to apply to the government for intervention in the bargaining process.

Local 27’s composite form led it to experience collective bargaining differently than most autoworkers’ locals. It had to negotiate with thirty-two employers over a forty-year period. Some bargaining relationships spanned that entire time, while interaction with other employers lasted only a few years. Local 27 successfully achieved many of its bargaining goals in the workplaces that it organized, and the aims that it pursued were influenced by wider UAW policy objectives and by rank-and-file activism. Management generally mounted at least some resistance when the local began organizing a workplace.

The labour relations process in which Local 27 participated was primarily a product of 1930s and 1940s legal reform in both Canada and the United States. Unions in both countries had agitated for better legal protection for decades, and early legislation was implemented in some provinces — but not Ontario — in 1936 and 1937. While the development and progress of the postwar labour relations system has been the subject of considerable analysis in recent years, an overview is nonetheless germane to this discussion. Legislation contemplated in the mid-1930s was a precursor to substantial change, but the Canadian labour relations framework was in many ways modelled on the Wagner framework created in the United States in 1935 with the passage of the National Labour Relations Act. This act gave unions the legal right to collective bargaining and obliged employers to participate in the process. This latter aspect was particularly important, and the federal government in Canada introduced versions of it with Privy Council order 1003 (PC 1003) in 1944 and the Industrial Relations Disputes and Investigations Act (IRDIA) in 1948. Provinces across Canada, including Ontario in 1944, implemented similar legislation. Local 27, which fell under provincial labour law, was certified as a bargaining agent by the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB). Its principal collective
bargaining interaction with the state thus usually involved dealing with the OLRB or with the Ontario Ministry of Labour. PC 1003 and the IRDIA, and the labour relations system they created, helped establish industrial legality and illegality.

The Workplaces: When They Opened and What They Produced

The opening and closure of plants was shaped by a range of factors, including government policy and the prevailing economic environment. Most of the workplaces organized by the local, particularly the larger ones, were subsidiaries of major American corporations. While not just an automotive assembly local, therefore, it was still a branch-plant creation. The manufacturing aspect of Local 27’s collective identity was established when the Eaton Auto plant was organized in 1950, which began a decade of industrial expansion in London. Eaton Auto manufactured auto parts for Ford, which also had plants in Windsor and Oakville. Like the vast majority of Local 27 units, it was located on the outskirts of 1950s’ London. The London Free Press duly announced the opening of the Eaton plant, mentioning its purpose and its plan to employ two hundred workers. The plant maintained fairly even employment levels during most of its operation in London.

The Eaton Auto plant was followed relatively quickly by General Motors Diesel. Somewhat anomalous within GM’s broader Canadian operations as it never produced auto parts or finished cars, it was constructed to give GM access to the Canadian locomotive market. This facility was situated on the eastern edge of the city and would eventually produce an eclectic array of products, including transit buses, enormous Terex dump trucks, and light armoured vehicles (LAVs). The plant ended the 1980s focused on locomotive and LAV production, with the latter being particularly lucrative. GM’s employment levels varied somewhat in the early years of its operation. Unlike automotive production, with new models introduced yearly, the Diesel Division plant made durable machines that did not require frequent replacement. It consequently
suffered when railway and transit companies refrained from replacing their trains and buses. Employment at the plant appears to have stabilized somewhat with the LAV’s introduction in 1983.6

Several other manufacturers had moved to London by the end of the 1950s. Initially manufacturing abrasives and adhesives, 3M established its Canadian head office in London in 1952 — a major symbolic coup for the city. The plant employed four hundred workers, many of whom had transferred from a recently closed company facility in Brantford, Ontario.7 The Kelvinator appliance plant began its industrial life as a fire truck factory operated by the Ruggles Company. The plant was purchased by Kelvinator in 1927 and retrofitted for appliance production. It switched to munitions production in World War II, specifically Sten and Bren machine guns, then back to appliances in the postwar years.8 Like other Local 27 workplaces, it was situated in London’s industrial east end, and a collection of working-class homes was constructed around it. London Generator Service and Central Chevrolet were loosely linked to other Local 27 units, as the former provided repair services to other businesses and the latter was part of GM’s vast industrial web. Their workforces were dwarfed by the larger bargaining units.

Local 27’s range of workplaces expanded in the 1960s. Fruehauf transport was a logistics company that serviced industry, while Tecumseh Products, Unifin, and Bendix brought new auto parts production. International Harvester manufactured heavy equipment. The addition of Northern Electric substantially expanded the breadth of the local’s membership in manufacturing. It produced telephones and, unlike the other major bargaining units, was a Canadian firm. The bargaining units added in the 1970s and 1980s continued Local 27’s focus on manufacturing. Light bulb manufacturer Phillips Electronics and aluminum siding producer Alcan (later Gentek) reinforced its manufacturing orientation. The addition of Mastic Manufacturing (later Vytec), Firestone, A&W, Steego, Sparton, Universal Engineering, Globe Envelope, Wide-Lite, London Motor Products, Waugh and McKeown, and Form-Rite had a similar effect.

Local 27 members produced everything from locomotives to envelopes
to sonar systems. They also serviced cars and sold auto parts. Their workplaces fell into three basic groups. The first group comprised GM, Northern Electric and Kelvinator, which were the largest units during the 1960s; the former two anchored the local following the latter’s closure in 1969. GM represented a sixth of the local’s membership by the end of the 1980s, and Northern Electric accounted for a similar percentage. These major units were part of extensive networks owned by large corporations: for example, the Northern Electric facility was one of several in Canada owned by the firm. A collection of mid-sized workplaces with a few hundred workers each constituted the second category, including Eaton Auto, Phillips, 3M, Tecumseh Products, Unifin, Firestone, and International Harvester. They were also owned by multi-national companies. The third group of smaller companies — including the car dealerships — were locally owned, often by London families.

The Local 27 workplaces were each unique despite their common focus around manufacturing. Some people who were associated with the local believe that it grew in the 1960s and beyond as a result of the 1965 Auto Pact. This is certainly true to some extent, considering that the auto parts plants that were added in the late 1960s, and later in the 1970s and 1980s, focused on auto-related manufacturing. Yet other new units like Globe Envelope, 3M, and Alcan were completely unrelated to auto manufacture. The Auto Pact also had little impact on GM Diesel, which was not producing cars, but it undoubtedly led to the arrival of more auto parts plants in London. While benefiting from the addition of those plants, the local was still fundamentally rooted in established non-automotive manufacturing, and its broad mix of employers gave Local 27 strengths not possessed by other locals. The loss of a major unit like Kelvinator, grievous as it was, was offset by the almost simultaneous acquisition of Northern Electric. The local’s future was not inextricably linked to the vagaries of one industry or one employer. The challenge for the local was learning how to deal with a range of employers.
The Work Process and Technological Change

Most of the local’s members were engaged in some form of Fordist production. Assembly lines or continuous processes were found in a majority of plants. The exact methods of production are not described in print, but former members recounted working in some form of continuous process environment or on a line. The primary features of Fordism — rationalization of the work process, assembly production, and a closely controlled work environment — were all present to some degree in the various workplaces. Fordism is a feature of post–World War II labour relations across North America and is believed to have fostered worker alienation from the work process. The rigid work conditions usually associated with Fordism have been found in many workplaces across North America. For example, Don Wells found such working conditions in Ford Canada’s Oakville assembly plant.

Factories like Northern Telecom, Kelvinator, Bendix, and 3M all used one or more assembly lines. General Motors used a type of batch production, with the integration of some assembly lines. Only the auto dealerships — London Motor Products and Central Chevrolet — did not use assembly lines or continuous production processes. The fact that workers toiled on some form of line raises the questions of how much skill, including training and experience, they actually employed and whether they felt any sense of work degradation. A considerable body of research has focused on degradation and deskilling, including the important work by Harry Braverman and James Rinehart. People who recounted working across the range of Local 27 workplaces did not reveal feelings of work alienation; for example, they did not say that they disliked their jobs or had little control over them. They had varying perceptions of the amount of skill that their jobs required. Some, such as Jim Wilkes from London Motor Products, were trained in skilled trade occupations — in his case, as an autobody technician. Others — such as Roland Parris from GM Diesel, who installed wiring harnesses on locomotives — performed jobs that required some skill but no formal trade licensing. Some people saw skill in their jobs — like Bob Sexsmith, who moulded tools at Proto Tools...
— while others like Parris did not consider their jobs overly skilled. They all felt that they made good manufactured products and do not appear to have had second thoughts about production quality. When speaking with London media, Local 27 members generally made favourable comments about their workplaces and the products they made, except when talking about strikes.

The production processes in some work locations changed over time. Northern Telecom was a notable example since it initially manufactured all of the components used in telephone production, including the fasteners used to assemble the final product. As time progressed, the plant became more automated and focused more on final assembly than on component production. The work process in auto dealerships did not change substantially, although cars did become more technologically advanced from the 1950s to the 1980s and thus required a greater degree of knowledge to repair. Gender also played a role in how jobs were assigned in the production process in some workplaces. From the time Eaton Auto first opened, women were selected to work on specific production lines, on the assumption that they had greater dexterity than men. Similar hiring practices occurred in places like Northern Telecom. Hiring women on the basis of assumptions about manual dexterity showed that employers harboured gendered notions of what constituted workplace skill.

Technological change had a mixed impact on workers. Health and safety reflected this pattern, as technological change brought both perils and improvements. For instance, Hector McLellan recalled that GM was a difficult work environment when he first started there in 1975 due to issues like welding fumes:

When you walked into General Motors [in the 1970s] it was black from welding smoke. There was ventilation, but it wasn’t adequate. They used a different kind of welding then . . . flux core . . . and there was smoke everywhere. We [employer and union] got rid of the flux core welding, and went to M.I.G. welding [metal inert gas] . . . it was much cleaner. As years went on it [conditions in the plant] improved.
Workers felt confident refusing unsafe work, and they demanded improvements in workplace safety. Tim Carrie refused to work a shift at Firestone in 1985 until a lifting apparatus was installed to help workers lift heavy wheel rims off the line — a decision that drew threats from management:

We were lifting heavy wheels, it was our job. . . . I was the first one [in the plant] to refuse to lift these heavy rims by hand. I will never forget that — it was a midnight shift. We had this new wash line — called it the superwash — and they [management] asked me to load and unload the rims. I called my supervisor and said, “I am not unloading these. I believe it to be unsafe; it may be superwash but I am not superman.” I got gathered around by supervisors and was sent home.

Conditions improved at Firestone when lifting devices were introduced in 1986, but this was due to increased union diligence over health and safety matters and improved legislation. Carrie indicated that Ontario Ministry of Labour inspectors visited Firestone at the workers’ request and ordered that changes be made to how wheels were taken off the line.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act was passed in Ontario in 1978 largely as a result of the Ham Commission inquiry. Vivienne Walters notes that Bill 70 — as the act was formally known — was initially opposed by unions before finally being accepted. The act mandated the appointment of health and safety representatives in the workplace, joint health and safety committees in workplaces with more than twenty workers, and protection for workers from employer reprisals, and it outlined employer, worker, and supervisory responsibilities pertaining to health and safety. Bill 70 was built around the Internal Responsibility System, whereby workers and management were jointly responsible for workplace health and safety. Workers became aware of the new legislation and their right to use its provisions: both McLellan and Carrie mentioned the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act when describing conditions in their plants and felt that they were exercising their rights under the act when they raised health and safety issues.

The array of products manufactured by GM, and likewise by 3M, helped to ensure that these plants stayed open. All the same, changes in workplace
technology and production methods were constant issues for Local 27 members. On the one hand, the introduction of health and safety legislation, coupled with a growing awareness among workers of workplace safety issues, led to improvements in production technology and thus to better working conditions. On the other hand, technological change also led to automation and the loss of some jobs previously performed by unionized workers. For example, Northern Telecom gradually introduced more advanced products and production methods, but it also stopped manufacturing all of the constituent components used in the plant.

**Industrializing and Deindustrializing**

In many ways, Local 27’s development mirrored postwar industrial progress. The local grew during a period of substantial industrialization in Canada and the United States, but it also experienced two marked episodes of deindustrialization its first forty years. Those two events — at Kelvinator and Eaton Auto — revealed both the strengths and weaknesses of the local in dealing with plant closure. Many different American firms established subsidiaries in southern Ontario in order to access the Canadian and British Commonwealth markets. Kelvinator was following this practice when it established an appliance assembly operation in London. American Motors Corporation owned Kelvinator before its financial struggles led to the sale of Kelvinator to White Industries in 1968 and to the eventual closure of the London plant.²⁸

The closure was announced early in 1969 and attracted an immediate response from the union. Staff rep Bob Nickerson said that union representatives would soon meet with Kelvinator management to discuss terms of the phase-out program for employees, particularly pensions and supplemental unemployment benefits.²⁹ The union was in the midst of negotiations with the company at the time of the announcement of the closure, and Nickerson said that there had been no indication at the bargaining table that the plant may close. The *London Free Press* reported that a hundred office workers had been fired shortly after White Industries took over the plant the previous year.³⁰ Curiously, this mass firing does
not appear to have acted as a warning to the union of what could happen to bargaining unit employees.

The local was clearly shocked by the loss of Kelvinator. Long established in the city, it was the only one of Local 27’s units to predate the 1950s as a manufacturing operation. The local was still troubled by the loss when, in 1970, the closure of Eaton Auto was announced. The plant made parts primarily for Ford, and the production of new components was being shifted to the United States. Yet Eaton Auto had seemed profitable and had been expecting higher profits in the coming year. The overriding conclusion was that the London Eaton Auto plant was closing not because it was not profitable but because it was not profitable enough.31 The union, having learned from its Kelvinator experience, requested that the provincial government hold fact-finding meetings to ascertain the real causes of the closure.32 Regardless of these efforts, however, and despite worker protests (see figure 3.1), the plant still closed.

Those closures, grievous as they were, could not have been easily prevented by the union since they were triggered by broader corporate policy. The union was unable to challenge that policy since it did not have an ownership stake in either Kelvinator or Eaton Auto. The closures were thus a reminder that, while it was possible to challenge the employer through collective bargaining, management ultimately determined the fate of a factory. All the same, the union was able to use the collective bargaining process to secure some benefits for workers prior to the closures.

The Kelvinator and Eaton Auto closures were Local 27’s only real experience with deindustrialization. In fact, the local organized thirteen bargaining units after the Kelvinator and Eaton Auto closures, including larger units like Firestone (see Appendix A). Manufacturing employment had increased in London prior to the Kelvinator and Eaton Auto closures, with the employment index in that sector growing by 21 percent between 1961 and 1967. The Talbotville Ford plant just south of London, for example, was constructed largely as a result of the 1965 Auto Pact signed by the United States and Canada. The automotive industry, while already a vital part of the Ontario economy, would continue to become more central to the province’s economic future.33

Both closures attracted academic attention and were considered socially and economically important, but memory of them did not last. The closures would have seemed anomalous to London’s business and political leaders since they had experienced nothing but economic growth in recent decades. They were also accustomed to living in a city that was not synonymous with one particular industry, unlike Hamilton with steel production and Windsor with automotive assembly. Local 27 was similarly fortunate since it continued to organize bargaining units in a range of workplaces.34

**Employer Responses to Unionization**

The decision to join a union is an action taken in response to conditions in the workplace, and those conditions are usually the product of employer behaviour or policy. The people who joined Local 27 all did so because they were dissatisfied with at least some aspects of their workplace or
because other plants operated by their employer were already unionized. Most employers with whom Local 27 bargained accepted the parameters of collective bargaining while still testing the system’s limits. Eaton Automotive and GM were the first organizing and bargaining experiences for Local 27, and organizing and bargaining with other employers added to the local’s labour relations knowledge.

The founding of the local coincided with a major event in post–World War II North American labour history — the so-called Treaty of Detroit. Walter Reuther led the UAW GM membership on a six-month strike in 1945, arguing that the world’s largest automaker could afford to substantially raise the wages and benefits of its employees. He further pressed GM management to open their account books and share the firm’s true financial state. Management demurred, but they acquiesced to granting wage and benefit increases in return for the international union agreeing to refrain from encroaching on management’s right to operate the business.

The treaty represented the formalization of labour-management relations and labour’s decision to accept greater economic rewards in return for not interfering in managerial prerogatives. Many historians have reflected on the meaning of this informal agreement within the context of wider discussions of the postwar settlement. Peter McInnis suggests that “the entrapment of legalistic boundaries circumscribed labour’s ability to respond effectively to the incursions of ascendant capital, which often sought to counter these reforms and return to the less regulated era of prewar labour-management relations.”

If an accord could be said to exist during these years, it was less a mutually satisfactory concordat than a dictate imposed upon an all-too-reluctant labour movement in an era of its political retreat and internal division. At best it was a limited and unstable truce, largely confined to a well-defined set of regions and industries. It was a product of defeat, not victory.

These observations are relevant to relations between the UAW and the Detroit automakers as labour and management began to operate within established bargaining parameters, but those parameters were limited. For example, the terms of the agreement between the UAW and GM set
the pattern for bargaining with the other Detroit automakers — principally Ford and Chrysler. None of the major Detroit automakers remained non-union. General Motors thus accepted the organizing of its diesel locomotive plant in London because this was a pattern that occurred across the company and the broader automotive industry.

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to recount every organizing drive mounted by Local 27. Instead, some notable examples of organizing success and failure illustrate the challenges that the local faced. Some employers grudgingly accepted Local 27, while others did so after initially mounting significant resistance. A few did everything possible to stop the union from organizing. Only two — Universal Engineering and London Generator Service — actively encouraged unionization. Eaton Automotive was one of the companies that reluctantly accepted the union. As noted in chapter 2, Eaton Auto moved to London less to avoid outright unionization than to dodge the UAW. Its management ultimately accepted that its London employees were joining the union and began to engage in collective bargaining, but only after an extended period of first-contract negotiation. GM’s management did not resist the UAW organizing the plant and settled a first agreement before Eaton Auto. Having already fought its main battle over unionization in the late 1930s, GM instead chose to deal with the union through collective bargaining. While 3M adopted a similar stance, Kelvinator deviated from this pattern and initially mounted fierce resistance to unionization.

Kelvinator crafted an unwritten but comprehensive form of workplace paternalism from the 1920s to the 1940s, and it is important to note the foundations of this system in order to explain management’s response to the UAW’s organizing drive in 1954. Using paternalism to resist unions was not unusual in North America from the 1930s to the 1950s. Lizabeth Cohen and Sanford Jacoby comment on its effective utilization by firms as different as Kodak and Swift. Like other employers, the firms mentioned by Cohen in her study of meat packing firms in Chicago eventually abandoned paternalistic practices in the face of economic calamity during the onset of the Depression. Jacoby emphasizes the success enjoyed by firms like Kodak while staying non-union for many years. Robert
Storey and Joan Sangster examine similar behaviour — but within a Canadian context — at Dofasco in Hamilton, Ontario, and Westclox in Peterborough, Ontario.\textsuperscript{41}

Paternalism generally manifested itself in a variety of ways. Kelvinator’s methods ran the full gamut: the company sponsored numerous social events, and employees were eligible for discounts on household appliances and could join a plethora of social clubs ranging from choruses to a foremen’s association.\textsuperscript{42} Those measures were intended to forge and strengthen employee allegiance to the firm. The difference between Kelvinator and firms such as those described by Cohen is that paternalism at the London appliance manufacturer endured through the Depression and into the early World War II years.

Kelvinator was able to maintain paternalistic practices for so long primarily by using techniques like those described by Jacoby, including carefully cultivating a belief among employees that they were being treated fairly at work. Managers, particularly long-time plant manager Charles Hadden, were well known and respected. More importantly, Hadden made a gesture toward listening to the wage demands of plant workers.\textsuperscript{43} They felt that they were treated fairly and that plant management respected their contributions to the firm. The system of paternalism weakened somewhat during the later World War II years when workers chose to form the Kelvinator Industrial Association (KIA) in 1943. While ostensibly an independent union certified by the Ontario government, the KIA was in fact a company union. Former Kelvinator worker George Medland described a labour relations system that codified the informal paternalism previously practiced by Charles Hadden and his subordinate foremen.\textsuperscript{44}

The KIA’s origins are not readily identified, but the reasons for its creation can nonetheless be surmised. Worker militancy is generally acknowledged to have increased during the war years.\textsuperscript{45} Conditions in the plant, well-crafted paternalism aside, were highly regimented, if not harsh, during the 1940s. Albert Plumb, who worked briefly at Kelvinator during the early war years, remembered a rigidly organized workplace, with work stations and departments within the plant demarcated by boundaries painted on the floor. Plumb’s most vivid memory of wartime
Kelvinator was being severely rebuked by a foreman for inadvertently stepping across a line on the floor that marked departmental boundaries. These conditions, indicative of Fordism and combined with the demands to keep Bren and Sten guns coming off the line, probably spurred workers to seek some form of representation through an association, even though it resulted in only a pale version of full collective bargaining.

Management’s decision to cease granting acceptable wage increases to the association appears to have been the ostensible reason that Kelvinator workers chose to affiliate with the UAW. George Medland, a former plant steward and activist at Kelvinator, recalled that new management felt that the workforce was already being paid competitive wages. The practice of listening to the association’s bargaining requests ended, a poor decision that led to workers signing UAW cards. The contract language bargained by the UAW would give workers far more influence over the workplace than they had previously exercised as members of the association. As a result, management faced both a more sophisticated representative of workers’ interests in the workplace and an institution that would vie for workers’ allegiance. For example, there would now be parallel social functions run by both company and union, and workers could attend both. There would also be strikes and grievances from a union affiliated with the CIO rather than disagreements with an employee association.

The Kelvinator strike, which began in late June 1954, has been largely forgotten in London but was perhaps the most militant labour action to occur in the city in the postwar decades. This was the first negotiation between the UAW and Kelvinator, and wage increases were a central issue. The strike commenced peacefully but events became more confrontational when management elected to remove production dies from the plant so that they could be moved to Mel Hall Transport in London Township for shipment to Windsor. The exact reason for the shipment is unclear, but the strikers obviously thought that this was a precursor to them losing their employment. They attacked trucks leaving the plant and mounted a secondary picket at Mel Hall. Police fired twenty-five shots into the ground in front of strikers and into the air above them, supposedly to prevent them from damaging company property.
The strike drew national media attention, with coverage in the *Globe and Mail* and other papers outside of London. The city was doubtless unaccustomed to receiving such attention. The strike concluded on 11 August 1954 and the strikers filed back into the plant with UAW membership cards in their wallets, an actual collective agreement, and a wage increase. They had waged Local 27’s first major workplace confrontation.

Kelvinator management still successfully constrained the union to the shop floor when, in 1958, it expedited the decertification of an office worker bargaining unit a few months after it had been successfully organized by Local 27. This decertification case, one of two major organizing reversals suffered by the union in the 1950s and 1960s, revealed Kelvinator management’s desire to stymie union organizing efforts. Stan Ashworth, a clerical worker in the office, and two other employees led the effort to remove the UAW.

The office collective agreement that the UAW concluded with Kelvinator clearly outlined management rights, vacations, job classifications, wages, and other issues that were usually included in such a document. Because of the decertification effort, it was never voted on by the membership. Office worker Maida Miners initially voted to unionize but subsequently voted to decertify since she did not feel that the union was doing anything on the workers’ behalf despite collecting dues. Ashworth led the decertification drive not because of issues related to money but because of alterations to working conditions. Prior to unionization, the office staff did not adhere to a rigid daily schedule; they had some discretion over when they arrived, departed, and took their breaks. In contrast, the blue-collar staff had to punch a time clock when arriving and departing and had to adhere to a strict schedule for breaks and lunch. A similar system was introduced soon after the UAW organized the office staff. Bells were installed that signalled when the staff had to arrive and depart, and when they could take their breaks. The office was treated the same as the plant floor. Ashworth felt satisfied with the compensation that he had received at Kelvinator but was clearly agitated by the memory of the bells regulating his daily schedule.
workplace regulation, Ashworth vigorously worked to remove the union from the workplace because he blamed it rather than management for introducing greater regulation.

The company did not overtly support the decertification campaign. Ashworth recalled that he and his colleagues drove their lawyer, Oliver Durdin, back and forth to Toronto for labour board hearings in their own vehicles and on their own time. He also remembered collecting a few dollars from each office worker interested in removing the union in order to pay for legal fees. However, a representative of the Central Ontario Industrial Relations Institute, Mr. H.M. Payette, acted as a consultant on the decertification drive. 55

The UAW mounted a serious counter-campaign to challenge the decertification, placing notices in the workplace urging people to vote against it. However, the UAW was eventually forced from the Kelvinator office in 1959. Ashworth attributed the success of his campaign to support from his work colleagues. Although the company appeared not to have overtly influenced the campaign, Ashworth heard that after the union was forced from the office, a brand new refrigerator was sent directly from the Kelvinator factory to Oliver Durdin. 56

Ashworth managed to attract the attention of at least one anti-union lobby in Ontario, which sent him a newsletter called The Outlook, published by Responsible Enterprise, an organization from Toronto, and warning its readers of the dark perils of syndicalism and subsidized socialism. 57 Ashworth was pleased with the decertification; he had succeeded in removing the union, and Kelvinator obliged by removing the offending bells from the office. 58 The union referred to someone starting a decertification drive as a “red apple boy.” 59 Clearly, people so described were objects of derision among the union ranks. Although Kelvinator management was undoubtedly pleased to find a willing if unwitting agent to further their aim of limiting union influence in the company, they did not reward Ashworth for his efforts since he remained in administrative roles for the rest of his time with the company and was not selected for a managerial position. 60

Kelvinator employees joined Local 27 in 1953, the same year as workers
at Proto Tools, a medium-sized firm that had just opened in east London. They were followed in 1956 by Central Chevrolet Oldsmobile and in 1959 by London Generator Service. Compared to the Kelvinator or Eaton Auto workers’ rationale for joining the local, that of the workers at Proto Tools, Central Chev, and London Generator Service is opaque. The rapid expansion of the UAW in London — with large units certifying in a four-year period — would doubtless have been noted by blue-collar workers who were considering unionization. The UAW would have seemed like a union on the move both locally and nationally. Local 27’s success would probably have been a topic of conversation in east London neighbourhoods as the plants organized.

While the failed organizing attempt in the Kelvinator office was certainly a setback, 1964 brought the local’s most major reversal with a failed organizing drive at Wolverine Tube of Canada. Yet another plant in London’s expanding industrial east end, it opened in 1958 with 220 workers. Wolverine manufactured copper tubing for different applications and was a subsidiary of Calumet and Hecla, another sprawling American employer. The plant remained non-union until 1964, when the UAW began an organizing drive. The company immediately mounted fierce resistance and, despite workers initially voting for the UAW, refused to conclude a collective agreement. A strike began in August 1964 and continued into 1965. The company used replacement workers — universally known in the labour movement as “scabs” — to operate the plant. The picket line became emotionally charged as both sides became further entrenched, and twelve strikers were charged with violence, including lighting cars on fire.

The UAW Canadian office waged a desperate effort to turn government and public opinion against Wolverine management. Local and national leaders appealed directly to Ontario Premier John Robarts, who represented a London riding, to intervene in the strike. Following lobbying by both the UAW and the London Labour Council, London City Council voted to appeal to Wolverine management to end the strike. The company held firm against the strikers. Management agreed to a small wage increase but resisted the inclusion of a union security clause based on the
Rand Formula. A decertification vote held in July of 1965 was boycotted by all striking Local 27 members as the union felt that it was invalid. Nonetheless, all of the scabs were able to vote, and they handily removed the union by a vote of 165 to 2. Wolverine management successfully dealt the local the most significant defeat in its history.

The local and the Canadian UAW office struggled valiantly to sustain the strike and support the new bargaining unit. However, union resources were severely stretched, and UAW staff rep George Specht could not handle coordinating the strike while also meeting the demands of servicing other bargaining units. More importantly, Wolverine strikers became exhausted and distressed over what seemed like an unending struggle. Two members of the Wolverine strike committee wrote to George Burt in 1964 to advise that the strike had “reached a serious stalemate, with no obvious means of settlement.” They went on to say that they felt they had not had “the ‘personal’ leadership or attention that we might have needed or expected,” but added that “even if Walter Reuther had personally been in charge that the present circumstances would have been the same.” They suggested to Burt that Specht was “very definitely understaffed and over-worked” as he was running two strikes while also handling several different negotiations. The memory of the prolonged struggle at Wolverine stayed with Local 27 for many years. Former staff rep Bob Nickerson expressed a belief that “we should have had that sucker.”

The loss of the Wolverine organizing drive was almost immediately followed by the addition of one of Local 27’s most significant bargaining units — Northern Electric. That firm’s paternalistic approach was initially similar to that of Kelvinator’s management in the mid-1950s. Northern Electric did not have a long-standing operation in London. Management quickly worked to establish a paternalistic employment relations system but was much less successful in doing so than its counterpart at Kelvinator. Their principal method of attempting to implement this system was through a company union called the Northern Electric Employees Association, which operated in other Northern Electric plants. In contrast to the one at Kelvinator, however, this association does not appear to have been a success at any point in its existence: Northern Electric
management was simply unwilling to co-operate in discussions over routine bargaining matters.\textsuperscript{72}

The association became militant, mounting an unsuccessful strike in 1966 that lasted for fifteen days, but it could not effect sufficient workplace change.\textsuperscript{73} Tom McSwiggan indicated that management was intransigent over even basic requests such as the details of employee benefit handbooks.\textsuperscript{74} The Northern Electric association’s main similarity with its Kelvinator counterpart was that its primary intent was to satisfy employee interest in collective representation while helping management avoid the challenges of dealing with a legitimate industrial union that was free of employer influence. The increasingly militant nature of the association and the unwillingness of management to seriously bargain with it were the principal impulses for unionization.\textsuperscript{75}

Organizing at Northern Electric was complicated by competition between unions, red-baiting, and the basic challenge of reaching plant workers. Management did not respond well to the entry of the UAW into the plant. Nickerson remembered company management being very difficult to deal with during the early years of negotiating. With management support, the employee’s association issued notices in all Northern Electric plants across Ontario advising workers to “reject American unions” while offering to help workers in London stage another vote between the former employee association and the UAW.\textsuperscript{76} A strike followed the UAW’s organizing campaign.\textsuperscript{77} Local 27 was firmly ensconced at Northern Electric by the end of the 1968 strike, despite management’s dislike of the union.

Employers facing the prospect of being organized by the local in the 1970s behaved much like those in the 1960s, with some mounting substantial resistance and others ultimately accepting the union’s presence in the workplace. Strikes often followed initial bargaining unit certification, as they had during the 1950s and 1960s, and revolved around first-contract negotiations. For instance, there were strikes at Firestone and Phillips in the early 1970s. Firestone was particularly known for highly contentious labour relations in that period. Tim Carrie, who worked there in the late 1970s, had been in the military before settling in London as a civilian. He recalled:
I started at Firestone in 1979. Here I am, I come out of the army. I’m used to discipline, I understand the concept of discipline, and I felt that I was at least treated with more respect from my superiors in the army than I was from my superiors at Firestone. It was just a thumbs-down approach [by management].

Management at Firestone was heavy handed and did not want to deal with a union.\textsuperscript{78}

Two smaller employers, one locally owned, put up fierce resistance to the arrival of the union in the 1970s. \textit{AWL} Steego was the first to do so when it forced a strike over the negotiation of a first collective agreement. It was a small workplace with only thirty-four unionized workers, who began the strike on 14 March 1974.\textsuperscript{79} \textit{AWL} was a subsidiary of another American firm, American Sterling Precision Corporation, and local management led negotiations for the company.\textsuperscript{80} The strike quickly became contentious when the union accused management of planning to use replacement workers.\textsuperscript{81} A collective agreement was finally signed, but \textit{AWL} refused to take back all the strikers. Only seven were recalled after ratification, five were fired, and ten replacements were hired.\textsuperscript{82} Some strikers had found other jobs during the tumultuous two-month confrontation, but the union was determined to continue with the strike. An \textit{AWL} employee had been fired during the initial organizing drive, and the union had helped him find a job elsewhere, so management had already established a pattern of bad-faith bargaining even before the strike.\textsuperscript{83} Successive collective agreements were negotiated with \textit{AWL}, but the process of bringing Local 27 into that workplace had been long and difficult.

The last example of substantial employer resistance to organizing occurred in 1982, when the union fought a determined battle against Wilco, a local employer. The company — named after its founder, Grant Wilson — manufactured tubing for automobiles and refrigerators. The plant suffered from a litany of health and safety problems, principally a lack of respiratory protection, dating back to 1972.\textsuperscript{84} The impetus for unionization came entirely from within the workforce. Management, particularly Wilson himself, responded in a highly reactionary manner.
to the UAW. Wilson assembled the staff to address them during the organizing drive, and his comments were secretly recorded. His remarks revealed the depth of his resistance to the union:

A couple of things, I am little bit disturbed and not very happy, no threats, but I understand that you have a labour movement on your hands. If you want to put in your own union, then that’s your prerogative, to do what you wish to do. But I have my own prerogative that I want to do. I want to assure you that there will be no further growth in this plant. As a matter of fact, there will be a loss of jobs in many areas, and relocations, and this is what you’ve asked for and this is where you are going. . . . I am not threatening you, I would never threaten you, and I am not promising anything as a result of this, but I do run and control this plant, and let it be known by a labour union that wants to tell you otherwise.\textsuperscript{85}

Wilson was most certainly intimidating the staff, clearly threatening their jobs and the continued operation of the plant in London. The union responded to his hostility and outright intimidation by applying to the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) for automatic certification.\textsuperscript{86} Wilson, in the midst of the board’s hearing into the complaint, announced that he was closing the plant in London and relocating to St. Mary’s, Ontario.\textsuperscript{87}

Grant Wilson was one of the few employers who led Local 27 to file complaints before the OLRB. Indeed, he caused more actual hearings before the board than any other employer. For example, Wilco employee Robert Zizek was suspended for refusing unsafe work.\textsuperscript{88} Local 27 filed a complaint with the OLRB under the \textit{Occupational Health and Safety Act}, and the board ordered that Zizek be compensated for wages lost during the suspension. Wilson’s pattern of intimidating employees led to so many complaints and lengthy hearings at the OLRB that the board certified Local 27 as the union representing Wilco workers.\textsuperscript{89} Workers who lost their jobs because of their involvement with the union were reinstated.\textsuperscript{90} But the struggle against Grant Wilson ultimately became a hollow victory since he followed through on his threat to relocate to St. Mary’s, although he did not ultimately have lasting operations there.
Degrees of Resistance

As mentioned earlier, only two employers actively encouraged their workers to join Local 27, one of which was London Generator Service. But as staff rep Al Seymour remembered, London Generator was owned by a socially progressive family whose members gradually lost their social conscience. Universal Engineering was the other employer. It was a small machine shop founded by a former Kelvinator worker who liked to socialize in the Local 27 lounge. Al Seymour described being on a picket line at Firestone on Clarke Side Road in London and being approached by workers from Universal, which was a short distance down the road. When they expressed a desire to sign union cards, Seymour suggested that their boss could see them out on the road and that it would be better to meet elsewhere. They responded that their boss had sent them over.91

Although initial organizing proceeded uneventfully, the Universal Engineering plant manager was recalcitrant at the bargaining table. The owner himself initially took a decidedly hands-off approach to negotiations, but he eventually called Seymour directly, suggesting that they meet in the Local 27 lounge to resolve the bargaining impasse. Seymour recalled that he met the man, who, although inebriated at the time, sat and wrote down Seymour’s negotiating demands on a napkin, promising to move things forward at the bargaining table. The owner clearly kept his word because everything listed on the napkin was agreed to by his bargaining team.92 However, Universal Engineering was gradually taken over by someone named Kline, who added his surname to the firm after assuming control. He was less amenable to dealing with the union than his predecessor had been.93

The Universal Engineering organizing experience was atypical, but it illustrates some common aspects of dealing with smaller employers. Small and medium-sized business owners were more likely to be directly involved in negotiations, and their personal response to the process had enormous impact on the outcome. Employers like GM had well-established labour relations policies by the time Local 27 organized its London plant. Other employers, such as Northern Electric, gradually accepted the union,
choosing to challenge it through collective bargaining. Larger employers had labour relations managers, such as E.S. Brent at GM. The employers that Local 27 faced may have been involved in a variety of industries, but only two of them completely accepted and endorsed unionization. Struggles with employers were ongoing, even after bargaining units were organized. If degrees of employer acceptance of Local 27 were placed on a spectrum, Universal Engineering and London Generator Service would be on one end and Wolverine Tube and Wilco on the other. The rest of the employers fell somewhere in between.94

Local 27’s organizing and dealing with management was a complex process of getting bargaining units certified and then getting employers to recognize the union in the workplace. It was not simply a matter of being bound by legal boundaries of the type described by authors like McInnis and Lichtenstein. The local successfully used the postwar labour relations framework to organize new workplaces, a process that involved additional challenges since Local 27 organized such a diverse array of workplaces. Organizing bargaining units, dealing with plant closures, and countering employee hostility was not simply a matter of responding to management. Local 27 faced some defeats — such as Wolverine Tube — but enjoyed many more victories. The local thus set a pattern of organizing the workplaces that it wanted, regardless of how employers reacted.