

WAITING FOR LEFTY / SEVERANCE

ACTOR PACKET

By Lizz Mangan

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A TIMELINE OF EVENTS

November 6, 1928	Herbert Hoover is elected President of the United States
October 29, 1929	The Great Depression begins
March 17, 1930	The Empire State Building is built
May 20, 1932	Amelia Earhart becomes the first female pilot to cross the Atlantic solo
November 8, 1932	Franklin D. Roosevelt is elected President
March 1933	New Deal is enacted
February 5, 1934	New York taxi drivers go on strike
January 5, 1935	Clifford Odet's <i>Waiting For Lefty</i> premieres
January 14, 1935	U.S. Passes Neutrality Act
July 5, 1935	The National Labor Relations Act is passed by Congress

What was going on?

After the hype of the “Roaring 20’s”, America was looking forward to what the next decade would bring. However, tragedy hit just two years before 1930 when the stock market crashed, ushering in The Great Depression. With this came a significant spike in unemployment, as well as a nationwide panic. The economic struggles led to political unrest, which affected the rest of the world as it braced itself for the potential to return to war. In a desperate attempt to renew itself, America passed several neutrality acts, hoping not to be entangled in the beginnings World War II.

Though times seemed dull, monumental events were still occurring, such as the building of the empire state building, or the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt. All these shaped the era of the Depression, and allowed for events that were the framework and commentary of *Lefty*.



AFRICAN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE DURING THE DEPRESSION

The Depression was difficult for the white members of the working class, but African American members had a much different and often more difficult experience. By 1932, almost half of African American workers were without work, and were often pushed to the side in order to allow more opportunities to get white workers back into the workforce. President Hoover did little to aid the situation, which changed the voting patterns of African American members of society from mostly Republican to dominantly Democrat. African American workers were often excluded from white labor unions and strikes, which caused them to form their own unions and movements.

The NAACP tried to work to stand up for African American workers, but unfortunately, a lot of the New Deal acts did little to include them



WOMEN DURING THE DEPRESSION

The dynamic of the depression was extremely different for women than for men. During this time, men claimed their roles as the breadwinner, the sole person who had to earn for his family, no matter what. Women, however, were seen as the ones who were responsible for keeping the home together anyway they could. Nevertheless, many women chose to work (though not without ridicule, due to the fact they were “taking away opportunities for men”). Many were secure in their jobs in sales and clerical positions, which was especially important for single or widowed women trying to keep their families together



THE NEW DEAL

Passed in 1933 by FDR, the New Deal sought to tackle the **3 R's of the Depression**

Relief (From the nation's pain caused by the Depression)

Recover (jobs and the nation's confidence)

Reform (Prevent the nation from going through this again)

Acts passed under the new deal include:

- Social Security Act
- National Labor Relations Act
- Civilian Conservation Corps
- Works Progress Administration
- Golden Reserve Act
- Farm Mortgage Refinancing Act

All of these (and *many* more) were set in place to help the country fight the Depression. Though the effects of the Depression didn't actually begin to fade until the beginning of the 1940's, they were a step in the right direction when it came to labor. One main issue, however, was that it worked mostly for the white male working class, and did not hold the same benefits for women and African American workers. FDR claimed this was because he wasn't focused on race or gender, but rather the good of the country.

UNIONS DURING THE DEPRESSION AND NEW DEAL ERA

* WHAT IS A UNION? *

By definition, a Union is a group of people who organize themselves together in order to protect and seek the advancement of their rights.

The 30's were difficult for the job market as was, and as a result, Union numbers plummeted from 5 million to 3 million by 1933. Those who were still in Unions belonged to specific crafting businesses, such as cigar makers, hatmakers (or even the Actor's Equity Association!¹) and were supported by the American Federation of Labor (AFL). However, industries such as steel and textiles did not enjoy the same benefits, and were not regulated as they are today. Strikes were an almost unworthy cause, because employers could easily fire workers and refuse demands.

This would change within the next few years...

¹ The AEA was founded in 1913

LIFE FOR A TAXI DRIVER

Though money was tight, the public transportation market was still as big as ever. Because of this, the job market for taxi drivers became flooded with men struggling to make ends meet for their families.



Though not a glamorous job, taxi drivers did not have an easy position. Drivers worked extremely long hours, and were at the mercy of their companies when it came to wages, due to the fact they would often either lease their vehicles to drivers or split their daily wages. Driver's education had only just started being required in 1930, and the first formal stoplights and traffic sign had only been established 15 years ago. Also, because of the sudden increase in taxis, the roads became congested, and accident rates skyrocketed. To regulate the number of drivers,

The average wage for a taxi driver, not including fare, was 50 cents an hour, which came out to about \$31 a week². In 1930, that was just barely enough to buy groceries for your family, let alone pay for bills and other expenses. Taxi drivers did not get to keep all of their fare, because they often had to share it with companies, use it for gas, or put it towards leasing their vehicle.

² About \$426 in today's money

TAXI WORKERS TAKE A STAND

During the Depression, the market for taxi drivers was flooded with men looking for work. While taxi use was not affected at all, the drivers were dissatisfied with working conditions. Many drivers felt they were being mistreated by their companies, who requested things such as high daily lease and/or large percentages of fares collected. The final straw came in the form of the repeal on the nickel tax on all taxi rides, due to Fiorello LaGuardia³ in 1933.

This led to the beginning of a series of month long taxi strikes, the second New York had seen (the first happening in 1908). The participants got violent: police officers were fought, taxi drivers smashed the windows of independent cabs, passengers were thrown out of cabs. Eventually, after a few weeks, companies issued return-to-work statements, and most taxi drivers complied. This was mainly due to the fact that Union organization wasn't at the level it is now, and many members of the strike were from rival companies to begin with. Even in the wake of defeat, a message had been sent, and ideas were being formed...

³ Mayor of New York City from 1933 -1945

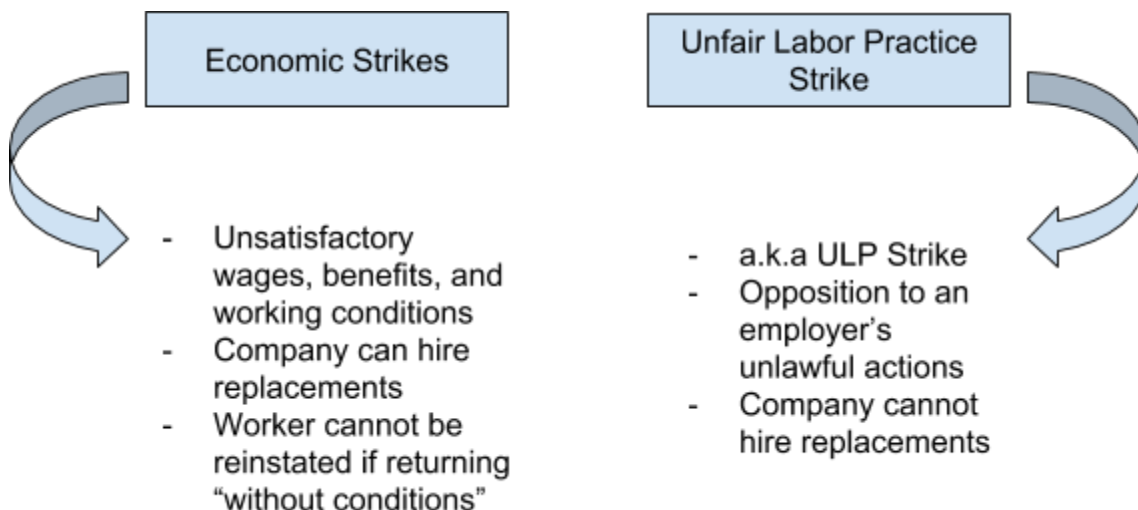
HOW TO STRIKE

Soon after the strikes, a new act was passed under the New Deal. This act was the National Labor Relations Act, and under it formed a National Labor Relations Board, who was in charge of organizing union activity. This act helped to form guidelines for future strikes.

The basics of NLRA⁴ protected strikes tend to be as follows:

- Employers cannot fire employees who decide to go on strike
- If employed by a healthcare facility, participants in the strike must give at least 10 days notice so management can arrange new staffing options

Choose your strike



Workers can be accused of misconduct if during their strike they:

- Block the entrance to the employer's place of business
- Engage in a sit-down-strike. This prevents the employer from using the workstations, as well as hiring replacement workers
- Try to force the employer to not engage in business with another company

⁴ National Labor Relations Act

WHO WAS CLIFFORD ODETS?

Odets was born in 1906 in Philadelphia, PA. He was raised in New York, and dropped out of school to pursue acting. Odets was one of the founding members of the New York avant-garde theatre ensemble, Group Theatre. This group played heavily in influencing Odets' interest in current events/issues, because of their extreme left-wing nature. After joining Group Theatre, Odets also became a member of the American Communist Party. Given these affiliations, it is not surprising that Odets was inspired by the New York taxi strike, an event that was the basis of *Waiting For Lefty*. *Lefty* was Odets' second play to be written, but the first to be produced.



BRIEF HISTORY OF *LEFTY*

Waiting For Lefty was originally meant to be a one-night-only production by Group Theatre, with Odets featured as part of the cast. Due to the extremely positive reception, *Lefty* was moved to the Longacre Theatre⁵, where it ran for four months.

Lefty was a symbol of hope and revolution for Union members, who often produced their own performances or staged readings during Labor events or strikes.



⁵ Located in what is now known as Time Square!

SNAPSHOT: MARKET AND LABOR IN 2013

Jobs

The job market of 2013 was relatively high, with a significant spike in December. This spike came as a sudden shock, and showed an unemployment rate of 6.7% due to workers leaving the labor force

Economy

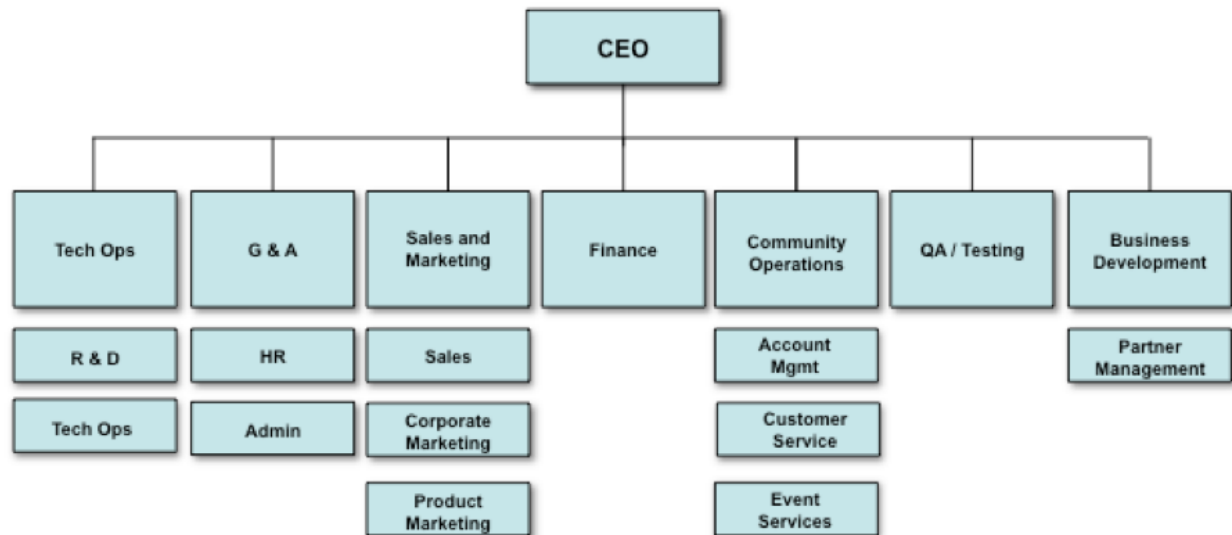
The Dow Jones had hit a record high, though we shouldn't forget the Flash Crash that started on October 1st 2013, and lasted through October 16th. This crash closed the government down due to complications with creating the budget for the upcoming fiscal year. This put 800,000 federal employees out of work, and closed National parks and zoos, which cost about \$76 million in lost revenue per day

Key People

Carly Fiorina - Former CEO of Hewlett Packard who was a candidate for the 2016 presidential election. Despite her many efforts to re-shape the company, she was let go by the board of the company due to complications, such as their stock dropping to half its value, and many jobs being cut.



WHAT A COMPANY LOOKS LIKE



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I will be available:

- **All day Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays**
- **Between 12:15 and 2 Tuesday Thursdays**
- **Anytime before 5:30 Saturday**
- **Anytime between 12 and 4 Sundays**