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# The Failure of Labor Management Cooperation at Two Maine Paper Mills: A Case Study,"Advances in Industrial and Labor Relations

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## **The Failure of Labor-Management Cooperation at Two Maine Paper Mills: A Case Study**

By Michael G. Hillard<sup>i</sup>

### **ABSTRACT**

Labor management cooperation, and the adoption of high-performance work systems (HPWS), are central topics in recent industrial relations research, with much emphasis given to “best-practice” success stories. This paper uses a case study analysis, relying on conventional *and* oral history interviews, to explore why managers, union leaders, and workers in two Maine paper mills *rejected* cooperation and the HPWS model. It explores how local history and culture, regional factors like the dramatic International Paper strike in Jay, Maine, instability in industry labor relations, management turnover, and instability in corporate governance contributed to these two mills’ rejection of Scott Paper Corporation’s “Jointness” initiative during the period from 1988 to 1995. The study argues that intra-management divisions blocked cooperation on the management side, and that the Jay strike created a “movement culture” among Maine’s paper workers, who developed a class-conscious critique of HPWS as a tactic in class warfare being perpetrated by paper corporations.

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper presents a case study of labor relations at two Maine paper mills, focusing on why union locals at these mills resisted Scott Paper Corporation’s “Jointness” initiative in the late 1980s and early-to-mid 1990s. This initiative sought to shape a cooperative relationship between Scott Paper and the United Paperworkers International Union (UPIU) at a time of heightened labor strife within the industry, and to use this cooperation to build high performance work systems (HPWS) in Scott mills. Other studies describe Scott’s Jointness program as a labor relations success story, hailing it as one of the few “high road” examples in an industry rife with “low-road” cases.<sup>ii</sup> But the failure of the Jointness program at Scott’s S.D. Warren mills in Westbrook and Hinckley, Maine is more than just a footnote. In a process where worker’s and union’s attitudes towards HPWS are crucial to their success, case studies of failure deserve at

least some attention, to underscore through contrast “what goes right” in the best-practice success stories that dominate the literature, and to identify lessons that may apply elsewhere.

Recent literature on HPWS acknowledges that, in most traditional manufacturing settings, a "Taylorist past" makes establishing the employer-worker trust essential for developing HPWS difficult:

... it is a major challenge for both managers and workers to reorganize the way work is done, to increase workers' job skills and responsibilities, *and to replace the mistrust that characterizes many traditional factory settings with the mutual trust and confidence that facilitates the functioning of an HPWS.* (Applebaum, et al., 2000:8; emphasis added)

Scott's “fostering” strategy was able to overcome this distrust at many mills – e.g. at Mobile, Alabama, Marinette, Wisconsin and Winslow, Maine – but failed in its two Maine S.D. Warren mills.<sup>iii</sup> This paper uses a case study approach to identify the reasons why efforts to establish cooperation failed at the latter two mills, and to explore the contrast between this failure and successes at the other Scott mills.

The analysis is based on two streams of interviews, each with its own methodological orientation. A first stream consists of interviews with key participants in the bargaining – corporate officials, mill management, International officials and leaders of the union locals.<sup>iv</sup> This stream fits the traditional profile of collective bargaining studies.<sup>v</sup> Whipp notes that in-depth interviews allow researchers to learn about how participants construct meanings, and about the culture of organizations. Oral histories comprise a second stream. These interviews give historical context to the attitudes of workers, union leaders, and mill managers, and to the origins of organizational cultures. Careful attention is paid to how workers and union leaders construct their memory of the past, and what the active construction of memory tells us about their attitudes about the present.<sup>vi</sup> These interviews are used to build an inductive analysis of worker and union rationality, one where cooperation was equated to capitulation. Source materials including company and union documents, historical documents, and secondary sources

supplement these interviews. Finally, the contrast is drawn with the experience at other Scott mills where the Jointness program had greater success.

Case studies based on qualitative research have an important place in industrial relations research, including research on paper industry labor relations and on HPWS.<sup>vii</sup> These studies are best able answer questions of “why”? and “how”? -- Why did Jointness fail at these two mills? How did local history, the legacy of Taylorist management-labor conflict, regional events like the Jay strike, a new regime of instability featuring threats of downsizings, sale of mills, and the accelerated turnover of mill management play in foiling efforts to transform the workplace? Why did these problems predominate at Hinckley and Westbrook, Maine, and not elsewhere?

### **SHIFTING LABOR RELATIONS IN PAPER IN THE 1970S AND 1980S.**

Virtually all the major paper companies were moving towards building HPWS by the early to mid-1980s. (Birecree 1993; Eaton and Kriesky 1994; Kaufman 1996) At that time, paper was one of the U.S.’s most unionized industries; the United Paperworkers International Union (UPIU) and the many craft unions representing skilled maintenance workers (IAM, IBCJ, IBEW, etc.) were deeply steeped in an identity and practice of protecting job and craft classifications, with their attendant lines of progression, using grievance and arbitration machinery to aggressively defend classifications and the various applications of seniority. These unions’ steadfast commitment to these practices augured a head-on collision with the industry’s drive to transform work.

In many ways, paper embodied the “transformation of industrial relations” going on in traditionally unionized industries, with employers seeking strategic changes in relations with the unions representing most of their workforce. (Kochan, Katz, and McKersie 1994) Labor

relations in the paper industry from the 1930s through the 1970s was a quintessential case of the “capital-labor accord” – where companies not only fully accepted the existence of unions and collective bargaining, but also conceded a great deal both economic issues and seniority issues. (Gordon, Edwards and Reich 1982) Paper companies, whose product markets have relatively inelastic demand and who have a very high ratio of capital to labor costs, saw labor stability as a premium and could afford to more easily absorb and/or pass along the costs of a unionized labor force than other industries. In the 1930s, wary of the implications of being unionized by the more strike-prone CIO, these companies welcomed unionization by two AFL craft unions that were seen as practicing responsible business unionism. (Zeiger 1984) This acceptance of unionism was especially evident in the South, where the industry grew the rapidly after the 1920s; the large, Northern paper corporations who expanded there tolerated nearly 100 percent unionization.<sup>viii</sup> While important regional differences persisted – e.g. with West Coast workers being most rebellious, and southern workers the least, the latter divided along racial lines and from a more conservative culture – the overarching pattern of acceptance by companies and of their granting generous union contracts to win stability – persisted up until the late 1970s.

Decentralization is the other major widely noted feature of collective bargaining in this industry. (Eaton and Kriesky 1994; 1998) This decentralization reflects the great diversity of product markets served by the paper industry, ranging from printing and publication, to consumer (toilet paper and paper towels), commodity (e.g. newsprint), and specialty (e.g. paperboard, paper plates, etc.) markets; individual mills may produce only a one or a subset of these product lines. Specific mills also vary in the age of their equipment, proximity to markets, and cultural and bargaining histories. The leading craft unions pragmatically accepted a highly local approach to bargaining from an early date to accommodate the very different conditions under which various mills operated. (Zeiger 1984) This historic pattern of decentralized

bargaining remains to this day. Eaton and Kriesky aptly note in their description of recent bargaining trends: “because bargaining is decentralized, particularly on the union side, labor relations actually occur at the mill level. Even within one company mill relations cover the spectrum of cooperative to adversarial.” (1994: 52)

In the 1970s and early into the 1980s, the UPIU (formed out of a merger of the Paper Makers and the Pulp, Sulfite, and Paper Mill workers in 1971) had been aggressive about using strikes to gain leverage in negotiations. As Walton, et al. (1994) note, this aggressiveness grew out of the decentralized nature of the UPIU and the highly democratic character of its locals.<sup>ix</sup> The need of paper companies to run their mills at over 90% capacity to be highly profitable, and the crucial role of operator knowledge and skill, led paper companies to avoid strikes and generally concede significant bargaining power to its unions, at least on economic issues. Consequently, compensation in paper grew more rapidly than in other industries, with the ratio of average hourly earnings in paper to that in manufacturing rising from 1.16 in 1960 to 1.56 in 1986. (Kaufman 319-320) This pattern was especially pronounced in the period from 1976-1986, when compensation awards in paper raced far ahead of manufacturing and of other comparable unionized industries. (Walton, et al. 1994:82)

By the late 1970s, paper companies’ stance began to change. Prior to the PATCO strike, several paper mill strikes where temporary replacements were successfully used led to a notable shift in industry thinking about its strategic options in collective bargaining. (Walton, et al. 1994:80-81) These events altered the perception that strikes were costly and to be avoided, and ushered in a period where forcing became the norm. The emergence of a significant non-union sector in mostly southern “greenfield” plants, led by Mead-Stevenson, with its “socio-technical job design,” and Proctor and Gamble, with its “technician system” at Charmin tissue plants – both early cases of high performance work systems - added momentum to paper industry’s

“forcing” campaign. (Kaufman 1996: 309-318; Walton, et al. 1994: 83-84) But the growing pressure faced by paper companies over their weak profit performance was the overriding force driving paper companies’ new labor relations strategy. (Birecree 1993) As Kaufman notes:

... after the mid-1970s, the paper companies experienced a growing squeeze on profitability and greater pressure by financial markets for higher returns on capital. These trends motivated companies to practice union avoidance in new mills and to adopt a more adversarial approach to collective bargaining in previously organized mills. (1996:323)

Even more than high wage and benefit costs, Kaufman notes, “restrictive work rules and other productivity impediments ranked even higher as an irritant within the industry.” (1996:320)

Thus, at the center of the strategic shift in paper companies’ approach to bargaining was a growing management perception that job control unionism was a major barrier to competitive success. Walton, et al. (1994) describe “management’s agenda” in the 1980s:

... operating managers thought that their highly structured systems used only a portion of their employees’ skills, and they knew that most employees were discouraged from pooling their skills and ideas both by work rules and by long traditions of managerial control and adversarial relations. (p. 83)

Walton, et. al. (1994) have theorized strategic change in bargaining by defining two levels of negotiations – that over *substantive* contracts (collective bargaining agreements, formal personnel policies, and other day-to-day features of employment relations), and that over the *social* contract (the overarching ideology which defines and governs bargaining over substantive contracts). Whereas the New Deal era was characterized by a social contract of “arm’s length accommodation and compliance,” the 1980s was a time in which management initiated strategic change, seeking to either move to the “containment/avoidance of unions” or to create a new model of “union-management cooperation” – i.e. forcing versus fostering. The key components of forcing and fostering strategies are *bargaining, managing internal differences, and shaping inter-group attitudes*. In fostering, employers use *integrative* techniques such as the open

exchange of information, exploration of underlying shared interests, and trust-building exercises. They in turn work to develop consensus about goals, both in one's own and in the union's organization. Finally, employers promote positive attitude affects and build trust. Forcing proceeds by means of threats and overstatements, the building of internal consensus on one's own side while exploiting divisions on the other, and the promotion of uncertainty and negative attitudes towards the other side. As we will see, paper companies utilized both strategies, sometimes even mixing the two.

Most paper companies thus began to pursue forcing strategies aimed at rolling back economic gains by its unions. Wage increases shrank every year after 1980, and by 1987-1989 were about zero -falling for the first time below wage increases for all manufacturing. Companies also aggressively pursued, with some success, work rule changes allowing for "team" forms of organization.

However, companies differed in the extent to which they took an aggressive stance – ranging from the well known case of International Paper (IP) along with Boise Cascade, at one end of the scale, to James River and Scott, at the other end of the scale, with Champion somewhere in between. As Walton, et al, note, even companies like Boise that embraced forcing in the mid 1980s began to move towards fostering by the early 1990s. It is important to see, moreover, that affects of this range and shifting mix of corporate bargaining strategies were interrelated through spillover effects on both management and unions in the various companies. For instance, Scott took the 1987-1988 IP strike as an instructive negative example that strengthened the case of those within Scott corporate management who sought to push a fostering approach. (Getman 1998:207) International officials in the UPIU embraced Scott's fostering initiative as an opportunity to reward a company that did not ask

for heavy economic concessions – e.g. allowing the continuance of Sunday premium pay – and to encourage an alternative to forcing through cooperation with the company.

Conversely, some local UPIU leaders took IP's and Boise's hard stance as indicative of a new mentality pervading the management of all paper companies, including Scott and James River; in turn, heightened suspicion on the part of these local leaders found ample ratification in local actions such as cost-cutting and retrenchment that were seen as proof of management's ulterior motives. These crosscutting forces thus helped to shape a complex and varied set of responses from actors on all levels of paper labor relations in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

## **JOINTNESS COMES TO SCOTT PAPER**

Scott, led by Labor Relations Vice-President John Nee, a former UPIU union official, initiated a new program of labor management cooperation in 1988. The goals of the program were to establish a more cooperative relationship between the UPIU and Scott, beginning at the corporate level, and then moving down to the local level through the establishment of labor-management cooperation committees at each mill. These committees were to engage in trust-building exercises with the assistance of consultants, and to also begin to design work processes that emphasized greater use of employees' skills, skill development, flexible work design and continuous improvement, especially in waste reduction and in the improvement of product quality.

Scott's Jointness initiative was more than just a reaction to perceived lessons of the IP strike; it grew out of a corporate strategy developed in the mid-1980s to improve Scott's lackluster earnings and overall performance. An internal review of the areas of competitive advantage held by Scott and other paper companies came to the conclusion that Scott had

none, whereas Proctor and Gamble, a direct competitor of Scott in the tissue business and a superior performer, had numerous areas of advantage. Under CEO Phil Lippencott, Scott began to pursue a long-term strategy to build competitive advantage by improving relations with Scott's "stakeholders" – including employees and their unions, suppliers, and customers. Thus, Scott sought to become one of several exemplars in the paper industry of what management theorists Michael Beer and Nitin Nohria (2000) have called the "Theory O" of strategic change. According to Beer and Nohria: "Theory O has as its purpose the development of the organization's human capability to implement strategy and to learn from actions taken about the effectiveness of changes made." (Beer and Nohria 2000:3)<sup>x</sup>

This led directly to the Jointness initiative. A former Scott executive describes it this way:

Part of that (Scott's stakeholder approach) was the recognition that our people and our unions were stakeholders in our business and therefore we had to think about how do we create win-win situations with them as part of that whole stakeholder concept. And that's when John Nee was brought in to try and help change the historical relationship we had with the union, and started to evolve into a cooperative environment... So the evolution of the Jointness strategy was driven by, I think, the corporate strategy at that point.

Part of Scott's analysis rested on a recognition that adversarial labor relations – former company and union officials both note that Scott had been "the most struck company since 1970" at that time – had acted as an impediment to improving work design.

Turnarounds in labor relations at its Muskegon and Mobile plants prior to 1987 served as models for the new effort. For Scott executives leading this effort, fostering was essential because of the importance of trust:

We've got to shift the mindset of the union leadership to one of cooperation and helping us do that, and we're not going to do that if we try to run roughshod over them and take away all their benefits and all the things they worked for over the years. So, it was a question of slowly evolving the trust and understanding both from a competitive standpoint, and for all the kinds of changes that need to be made.

This included a keen perception that the company needed to strengthen, not weaken union leaders; in turn, the latter needed to be perceived by their members as having won things of value at the bargaining table, and maintaining Sunday premium pay was a such an accomplishment.

Scott's strategy was to first bring the initiative to the UPIU's top leadership, and, once getting the International's support, to implement the concept at the plant level. By all accounts, the first phase of *integrative bargaining* went very well. (Getman 1993:1855-1862; Getman 1998: 207-208) With the help of consultants, deep misconceptions held by management and UPIU officials were punctured. Corporate officials complained that union officials seemed uninterested in the business success of the company, only to learn that union officials cared deeply about the success of each mill, knowing full well that layoffs or mill closings meant severe downward mobility for paper workers in rural locations with few comparable jobs. Union officials learned that management, despite perceptions to the contrary, cared about and valued employees, believing that "people are our most important resources."

For the UPIU leadership, accepting Scott's initiative was an act of great pragmatism, given its strong philosophical opposition to HPWS up until that point, generally known in the paper industry at that time as the "team concept." For a decade, the UPIU had preached to its local members that the team concept was anathema. One UPIU official describes this pragmatic shift:

Well, I think the way that I always approached it, and, again, ... if I wasn't writing cooperative language on the one side, I was teaching people how to play the inside game and destroy the boss on the other.

So, a lot of folks would look at me and say: "Well, wait a second, this is massively inconsistent, Phil.<sup>xi</sup> You were at the regional training seminar, teaching

people how to screw the boss last month, and here you are at a Scott Council meeting, or whatever, you know, preaching cooperation.

And what I always said then, was, and still say now, is that in effect that, it is, simply, absolutely consistent. That is, what *is* consistent is what the orientation to the outcome is, not necessarily what the tool is. That you keep your eye on the prize, and then you plan accordingly as to what vehicles are going to get you there. And that actually, it is all about member mobilization. You either mobilize the members to boycott the boss, you know, march through the center of Livermore Falls, or whatever. Or, you are mobilizing them to put the shoulder to the wheel with the boss, to try to beat the competition, and to try keeping the plants open.

Now, I had a lot of people though, who looked at it ideologically. They said: “How can you tell us that this guy is a (expletive) one day, and then, in a little bit, you’re going ‘no, you know, that other guy is a (expletive) but (this guy) *isn’t* a (expletive), this guy is our buddy,’ and all of sudden - you can’t do that.” They do (the) IWW, the working class and the employer class has nothing in common kind of a thing.

But to the UPIU leadership, Jointness was about sticking it to IP and other companies pursuing “the low road”; in their joint presentations with Scott executives to local mill managers and UPIU locals, they sought “to talk about the fact that our initiative was going on, and to talk about, our belief that it really was an alternative to the low road, and that *we needed to find ways to cooperate, and in effect, put the bad guys out of business, rather than vice-versa.*” (emphasis added)

The greatest challenge for Jointness was selling local leaders on both the management and union side, i.e. *managing internal differences* and *shaping inter-group attitudes*. One Scott executive recalls:

Most mill managers weren’t real receptive to it, and I would say most of the union, local union reps weren’t real receptive to it either. That was (sic) the areas where we had the biggest problems, was the mill and union leadership at individual sites; and we knew that was going to be a problem. Their whole career, they were brought up to be adversarial with each other, and now all of a sudden, we wanted to change that. And that’s a hard thing for a lot of people to do.

Thus, the key challenge lay in getting local mill managers and union leaders to embrace Jointness, and to begin the slow process of building trust and redesigning work. The varied circumstances of mills, the idiosyncrasies of the mill and local union leaders, and specific labor relations histories led to very different outcomes across the company's various mills.

In turning to look at some of these specific cases, a central theme is that organizational alignment at all levels of union and management was essential to success.<sup>xii</sup> As Kaufman, among others, has noted, the process of building a HPWS is fragile for several reasons: managers and union leaders, steeped in old ways and fearful of losing power, resist it; "financial pressures and economic downturns that force cost-cutting and layoffs" can quickly disrupt trust and shared control; and "the turnover of committed union and management leaders and their replacement" by those who are antithetical to HPWS. (Kaufman 1996:324) These were certainly all factors at Scott. As noted, many local managers and union officials were resistant. Importantly, despite Scott's overall commitment to fostering, it also had moved to a stricter emphasis on treating each mill as a profit center, being quick to downsize and otherwise pare back operations that were deemed to be weak contributors to Scott's bottom line. Thus, workers and union leaders in some Scott mills experienced cutbacks or threats of cutbacks or closing coming at the same time as the Jointness operation was being implemented, fueling cynicism. A more subtle force undermining possibilities for trust was the greater turnover and mobility of management in the mills. Whereas once, for better or for worse (there were plenty of cases of both), mill managers had tended to have come up through the local ranks, by the 1980s, middle and top mill management increasingly came from outside local mills, and often moved on within a relatively short number of years. This contrasted with local union leaders, international

representatives, and regional International vice-presidents whose tenure, and consequently “institutional memories,” typically ran into the decades rather than years. This set up an asymmetry where local union leaders often remembered the “sins of the past,” and either distrusted new management or actively wondered whether trusted managers might be eventually be replaced by newcomers who would ignore past understandings and accommodations. Further exacerbating these tensions was the split between Scott and S.D. Warren, the latter an independent company that merged with Scott in 1967; S.D. Warren’s management had been closely-knit, and Scott executives who later moved into the division were perceived as outsiders who lacked respect or appreciation for Warren’s culture.<sup>xiii</sup>

We begin, then, with a look at two examples of situations where Scott was able to overcome these many hurdles and succeed, over a period of roughly five years, to establish trust, significantly reorganize work, and begin to achieve long-sought after improvements in performance.

### **When Things Go Right: A Look at Mobile and Winslow**

Scott Paper’s Mobile plant was, around 1990, the largest integrated pulp and paper facility in the U.S.<sup>xiv</sup> It had three major operations: a huge pulp mill and power generation facility; a Scott tissue and towel mill; and an S.D. Warren Division mill. At that time, it employed nearly 3,000 workers including production, maintenance, and salaried. Labor relations prior to Jointness had been highly contentious, with four strikes in the preceding two decades, with two coming in the 1980s. The 1986 strike, waged partly over the company’s demands to relax work rules and widen job classifications, had been long, and ended when employees returned after a threat by Scott to permanently replace striking workers. However, at other points in the 1980s, there were moments of cooperation in

between strikes, including an effort by employees in the mid-1980s to get the local community to “buy Scott,” and perhaps, more importantly, an overture after the 1986 strike by management to reassign workers rather than lay them off during a period of weak sales.

In 1988, local management, with the help of John Nee, had presented an eight-point program to help instill a basis for cooperation. Scott invested significant monies at all sites to pay union officials to spend extensive time in meetings working with consultants and union officials to identify common areas of interest and to use these as a basis for building trust. Early on, one of the top local managers who opposed Jointness was removed from Mobile and sent abroad. Union leaders sensed both a shift in Scott’s approach and seemed persuaded by these overtures to at least give the new process a try. A new mill manager was also able to reinforce the tone of commitment from the top. Mobile, in this respect, parallels closely the example Walton et al. (1994:96-101) give of the “forcing, followed by fostering” at Boise Cascade’s DeRidder mill, a pattern also found in Champion over the late 1980s and early 1990s. (Eaton and Kriesky 1994: 45—53) A Scott executive who had worked at the mill in the 1970s sums up the early momentum this way, contrasting Mobile with Westbrook:

Well, they had a serious strike in Mobile, and that got everybody’s attention. And then, they brought in a plant manager ... who was really open to developing an improved relationship with the union. And clearly, he and the fellow who was the plant manager on the tissue side, were the two really started to push the change. So, clearly, I think, they had a significant emotional event that sort of kicked it off, and then they had leadership, from a management standpoint that was really open to trying to make an improvement.

To me, that was the big difference. ... At Mobile, I think you had union leadership that recognized something had to be different and were more open. The people who were then in the leadership were the people I had dealt with when I was back there in the seventies, and they were good people. And I think, once given an opportunity to work together, they were more open to it than the union leadership in Westbrook.

In the early 1990s, Scott-Mobile established a joint management-labor leadership team - comprised of an equal number of union and management representatives - that operated via

consensus decision-making. This model was attempted in many Scott sites. The new joint committee was able to move forward quickly in work redesign, creating “asset teams” of cross-trained workers responsible for entire processes. Absenteeism and safety quickly improved, and by 1994, productivity and quality had improved dramatically. For example, the mill was able to achieve top ranking out of 171 major pulp mills world-wide in its digester output, raising output from 800 to 1150 tons per day. (Connelly et al., 1994:56)

Scott’s Winslow, Maine, mill was a much smaller and older facility founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with approximately 800 employees in the late 1980s. Acquired from local owners in the mid-1950s, it produced a variety of products – tissues, paper towels, Cut-Rite plastic wrap, and S.D. Warren publication papers - on mostly older machines dating from the turn-of-the-century up through the 1950s. Other than a retrofitting of two paper machines to make the S.D. Warren papers and plastic wrap in the late 1970s, there had little in the way of capital improvements since shortly after Scott took over. Both management and union leaders had been adversarial in prior decades, and the union struck in 1980 over a demand by Scott to eliminate mill-wide seniority.

Several key developments between 1990 and 1992 gave momentum to Winslow’s Jointness efforts. First was the advent of new union leadership in the UPIU locals. These younger leaders represented a break with the sensibility, if not philosophy, of prior union leadership. Prior leaders had taken their cues on bargaining and leadership style from a fabled, fist pounding, UPIU international representative named George Lamberson. The new leadership felt that often differences were exaggerated, and that overly aggressive behavior was often counterproductive. One of these leaders recalls his thinking during the 1980 strike, when he was a member of the rank-and-file: “It appeared to me that, both sides were not that far apart. But each had dug real strong lines; nobody was going to give in; it was our feeling that the company

wanted to put us out for a short time, to show us.” The strike “helped mold me into the type of union leader that I wanted to be down the road... That there’s more than one way to get at something.” Initially, this new leadership retained a traditional outlook on the importance of defending job classifications, and never relented on fundamental matters like seniority.

Early on, Scott officials indicated that they saw Winslow – a smaller older mill “on the ropes” – as having a place in the long-term economic plans of the Scott as a producer of commercial tissue and towel products. The fact that this was signaled to union leaders – i.e. that a modestly downsized version of the mill, focused on a core business, had a long-term future, that is, *if* union leaders cooperated in redesigning work – is important because it offered a foundation for building trust. Even other Maine UPIU leaders adamantly opposed to team concept recognized that as a small, older mill facing possible closure, it made sense for union leaders to strike this type of deal. The president of one Winslow’s UPIU locals describes his slow realization of having few alternatives:

It took me probably two full years to believe that our mill, if it did not change from a traditional work system into what we call a HPWS, which would reduce our costs, head count would go down, we knew that, but it would make us more viable, we would be able to compete; our niche was the Northeast market. ...If we don’t change the way we’re doing, Winslow, the writing was on the wall..

Reassurance that Winslow had a future, reinforced by regular visits from Scott executives, offered a foundation for trust. Says the same union leader: “these guys are now, some of the top-ranking officials in Scott. People like me all of a sudden *like these guys*. These guys are telling us where our niche is in the company, how Winslow is going to fit in, in the overall plans and that. They came to Winslow, regularly. And so we started bonding, so to speak, with corporate headquarters, a whole new thing for us.”

Another crucial factor was the presence of a strongly supportive international representative in Gordon Roderick, and the on-going involvement of UPIU Vice-President

Jimmy DiNardo. Union leaders met constantly with Roderick, who re-assured them on the validity of trusting management and of making changes.

Perhaps no development was important than the advent of a new mill manager, Fred Boyd, in 1991. Boyd had been a highly trusted senior manager before in Winslow; and thus acted with great credibility from the start. A union leader tells this story:

Fred had been a paper mill superintendent at Winslow. He left, went down to corporate headquarters, and helped form the leadership team that was going to take the new mill, known as Owensborough, Kentucky. That was a new greenfield site that was being built, they were rumored, through the grapevine at Scott, that when they came on, Winslow would shut down. That was the plan. We at Winslow, some of us believed it, some of us didn't, and here comes this man Fred Boyd, who had been with us ... I had built a rapport with him... he goes down to corporate headquarters, he formed, along with ... some of the Scott leaders, a plan that he thought he could come back to Winslow and keep the mill running for the next 20 to 30 years.

Boyd started a joint mill leadership team in 1991 that decided through consensus on all major changes in mill operations, with regularly weekly meetings. All financial data on the mill was shared in these meetings, and the UPIU locals brought in a UPIU consultant to teach them the relevant accounting; the veracity of the data further strengthened the union leaders' trust. Union leaders also credit the consultant for being effective in a variety of ways – sharing “insider” Scott information with them, being willing to criticize Scott managers, assisting the local union leaders in developing leadership skills, and for helping them to understand the perspective of Nee and other corporate leaders of the Jointness effort.

Then, in 1992, came a difficult development – the announcement that Scott would indeed be shutting down all non-commercial tissue and towel operations, including shutdown of two paper machines and the loss of 250 jobs. The union leadership responded first by having Roderick pressure Scott directly:

Roderick was working corporate headquarters – “how you deal with the union people leaving the mill will have a lot to say about how the union leadership will

deal with you. The leadership can elevate to a new level, or regress right back to adversarial. The ball's in your court.”

They then came back with a plan asking for extremely generous early retirement and severance packages, and a promise of no future layoffs. Scott responded with surprising generosity:

We got early retirement, *enhanced* severance packages, we got people the opportunity to get consultation for career changes – everything I think a company can do for its employees – lo and behold, they did it.” The retirement package was \$7 or 8 million; we were allowed, initially 75 of the top senior people. It was the best retirement package ever developed in the industry, the paper industry. And I got this from the UPIU reps.

Scott further promised of no further layoffs after “core operation” was achieved after the 1992 shutdown of printing grades, with a guarantee that this promise would be upheld regardless of who ran the mill or the corporation.<sup>xv</sup>

The period between 1992 and 1994 saw significant progress. While only about twenty percent of workers initially participated in training required to get pay-for-knowledge advancement in the new technicians system, by 1994, eighty percent were not only participating, but had achieved Technician Three status – meaning they had acquire both new “people skills” for working in teams and business skills required for TQM-based work processes, training that took about eighteen months to complete. A pay-for-knowledge system meant substantial pay increases for this eighty percent. Scott made significant capital improvement, completing a major rebuild of a paper machine, installing new testing and computer monitoring equipment, heavily automating the finishing department. And, after an initial increase in “learning curve” costs, overall costs were steadily declining while quality improved, raising profit margins. Many of the cost improvements came not just on the shop floor, but also efficiencies in purchasing raw materials and machine parts identified by hourly worker teams. Along with Mobile, Winslow had become a model for the rest of Scott.

## **Spillover Effects From the IP Strike**

Maine was the epicenter of the paper industry's most intense conflict of the past two decades, the International Paper strike of 1987-88. Getman's *The Betrayal of Local 14* (1998) describes how a highly organized and motivated rank-and-file in Jay, Maine mobilized a grass-roots movement in support of the strike, a movement that reached out and enlisted support and involvement in communities throughout the Northeast, but especially in Maine. Caravans of rank-and-file strikers fanned out to union halls, college campuses, and community centers, bringing a "movement" message that was explicitly modeled on the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Communication with and "solidarity efforts" by – travel to Jay to participate in Wednesday night "revival" meetings and in large protest marches, dues-assessments and plant-gate collections to support Local 14's strike fund, and regular participation by strikers in local meetings – was strongest in other paper union locals (both UPIU and non-UPIU) across the state.

The impact of the strike on the thinking of both rank-and-file and union leaders was transformational. The Jay strikers' motto – "Stop Corporate Greed" – became a slogan for the state's labor movement, showing up in picket line strikes even 15 years after the Jay strike ended. Jesse Jackson's forceful message to Jay strikers and thousands of union activists from across the state who came to Jackson's October 1987 appearance in Jay, that workers needed to see the strike as part of a brewing class war declared by corporate America, resonated deeply. (Getman 1998:89-90) Indeed, Maine union activists subsequently flocked to Jackson's 1988 presidential bid, propelling Jackson to a strong second-place showing in Maine's Democratic Caucuses; all the more remarkable given that Maine, at that time, was the whitest state in the U.S.

Perhaps the most subtle and forceful aspect of this transformational experience was the impact of Jay strikers working at other paper mills and major industrial employers such as Bath Iron Works during the strike. One Jay strike leader describes the response of fellow workers when he was briefly at Scott's Westbrook mill:

Well, it was outstanding. What we would do is, present ourselves as strikers from Jay, to the members of the local. And, inevitably they would come over – the workers would come over to us and ask us what it was like ... The reason that they would indicate such a strong support is that they knew there was no doubt that what happened in Jay would be directly reflected in what was going to happen in Westbrook.... But the fight was so long lasting, so intense, and it involved so many people from across the country, not just in the area. And I think that probably they sensed that, and they were a big part of it. And, I mean they felt (they were) part of the struggle, I guess.

Another strike leader tells this story:

At the union hall at Jay, during and after the strike, when these guys from all over the state were working (in other) paper mills would come back, and they would talk about the conditions at these different places, and what the people were talking about, and how they were proselytizing, how they were constantly talking to people about what's going on.

And they were seen as leaders in those mills – people looked to them – but it was also, to me, it was gratifying to know that when you go through a strike, they become very political, and very conscious of themselves as workers. And where in the past, if they had gone somewhere else, they would have talked about snowmobiling, or deer hunting, or something, they (now) talked about *labor*, and conditions ...

Another strike leader's notes from his travels to work at other paper mills in the state:

I just remember that there was a heightened awareness of being a union member, and of what unions were about, and a political awareness about supporting unions, which primarily meant you supported Democrats. And the other thing that it meant was — and I think that this was relatively universally true — I found, in the state of Maine, but, clearly, I worked in these places for short periods of time, and *everybody still talked about the strike. I mean it was a topic of conversation... (emphasis added)*

Late in the Jay strike, the UPIU adopted a position that since workers could no longer effectively strike, that they had to find ways of resisting within plants. One labor activist argues that rank-

and-file workers would have embraced shop-floor militance regardless of what position the UPIU had taken

Now the other thing is that it's not just the leaders. Now remember, for the first time, you have a tremendous amount of communication going on amongst the actual members of the Paperworkers, both from the people from Jay being in the plants, and talking about their experience, and I think that even if the reps were not in favor of it, and weren't and resistant to it, there would have been resistance. I don't think they had a lot of control over it. But I think in their own self-interest, they would be supportive of it and fighting from within.

Finally, a focus of the Jay strikers struggle had been resistance to the team concept. Prior to the strike, IP's management at Jay had begun to try and implement a "QIP" program, the most controversial part of which was a plan to have workers develop manuals describing their jobs for training purposes. Organizing against this effort – local leaders describe being "tipped off" by union leaders in nearby Rumford, where Boise Cascade had hired replacements during a recent strike and used similar manuals to train them – was a key to laying the groundwork for Local 14's strong rank-and-file involvement during the strike, and also shaped workers' thinking about the significance of the team concept:

And so one of the things ... clearly was this writing manuals. And this was where they took a strong stand, in the mill, you know, before the strike. The lines were drawn, and that whole notion of class solidarity begins to develop around writing manuals. And this was where they took a stand, in the mill, you know, before the strike.

Thus, a conception of team concept as a dimension of a brewing class war perpetrated by the paper companies became part of Maine paper workers' movement culture in the late 1980s.<sup>xvi</sup>

### **Jointness' Fate at S.D. Warren, Part I: Somerset/Hinckley**

S.D. Warren's Somerset mill, located in Hinckley, Maine, was one of Scott's premiere mills, a state-of-the-art \$1.5 billion greenfield facility whose first paper machine came on line in 1982, with two machines added by 1990. Its primary products were S.D. Warren "Standard"

coated publication papers. Following a common industry practice, Scott recruited its core workforce from an existing mill, the Scott-Winslow facility several miles away. Scott agreed to union representation in order to avoid conflict at Winslow, and until 1985, UPIU Locals 431 and 911- that had been founded in Winslow in the 1940s – also represented workers at Hinckley. Thus, while a new mill, Somerset carried over the legacy and style of bargaining that had existed at Winslow. Indeed, the president of Local 911, whose tenure began as the union’s leader in 1970, was among the first group of workers to move over to Somerset in the late 1970s, and he remained president of through 1987, the last two years as president of the newly separate UPIU Local 9 at Hinckley.

The UPIU locals had a tradition of being very hard-nosed – one leader proudly recalls breaking his fist at the negotiating table, and then getting the company to continue his wages for being “injured on the job”; also, some managers who moved from Winslow to Hinckley are reported to have brought their grudges with them, reproducing tensions both on the shop floor and at the bargaining table. An S.D. Warren executive who came to the mill in the 1980s describes it this way:

I will say that when I got to Hinckley, I did not think that relations were very good. What I had heard, and there were some sense to it, is, we’re up here from Winslow, and we’ve got the worst contract in the world out of Winslow, the unions really killed us, and we’re not going to give them anything. And I think that was really a philosophy.

And so they really would go overboard to knock the union back, and as a result the union was very obstreperous. So I don’t think their thinking got (even) a little bit better while I was there...

Local 9 didn’t hesitate to strike in 1985 over its goal to have a 3-day on, 3-day off (with 12-hour shifts) schedule; management conceded after a three weeks.

For Local 9, one traditional concept was sacrosanct: the division in responsibilities between management and hourly. Says the long-time union president:

All I remember, is, I don't believe there's between a management or a union person. Either you're a management, or you're a union person. You can't be both. And this self-management, personally, I'm against it. What they're trying to do, more or less, is to put the responsibility on the worker's shoulders. That's not what I'm hired for. I was hired to do a pipefitting job, he's hired probably to be a machine tender, or whatever, and the supervisor should be doing their job. One of these days there's going to be friction, it's going to hit him right back between the eyes. And the reason I say that is, when you have this joint concept, so to speak, a crew leader – you're going to vote who is in your crew and who isn't. That's a management function. Not a union function. And discipline. They always say: "you don't have to discipline." Well I don't believe that either. When a problem comes, and arises, with the company, they'll call you in to testify.

So, no, you can't serve two masters. You're either union, or your management. You can't change it.

When Jointness was presented to managers and union leaders at Somerset, interest was weak on both sides. For management, it represented a "Scott" overture, something the "S.D. Warren" managers viewed with disdain. Here is one manager talking about his reaction to Scott corporate officials' presentation of Jointness:

That was pretty much (Scott CEO) Phil Lippencott and some of the higher guys. That was at the presidential level. And, I think it was another – Scott, I always thought, was great at fads. That's a great concept, if you can do it, but those aren't the guys to do it, (laughs) because they can't stay at it. So, yeah, I'd been to, I went to the meetings where Phil, Dick Layman and all of the Scott brass would come to, and *ply the platitudes*. (emphasis added)

Q: Did it have much of an impact, you think?

A: I don't think so.

Local 9 had a similarly cynical reaction:

We listened to what they had to say. We were skeptical about it: "yeah, yeah." It's "win-win," but it's something the company wants. We're happy with what we've got; we've got a contract; if the company violates the contract we have ways of dealing with it. We've got a new mill ...; we've got a contract; they're not going to shut the place down, so we're not going to need this Jointness.

The new president of the local found the HR manager's overtures would require him to cross boundaries that seemed too fundamental:

They was (sic) always after me: “we want to get together.” The local HR department, and manager, wanted together so that we could sit down and talk about this Jointness thing, so we could work together. My comment was: “ well, I’m not interested in it. We’ve got a good contract here, we’ve got a good mill; I’m not interested.”

I’ll tell you a funny story one time. The HR guy came down, and he says to me: “we’ve got to get together and sit down and talk about this. We’ve rented this place, down on the coast; we can go down there, and spend the weekend together, and talk about the Jointness program.” I said: “I don’t mind talking to you guys, and resolving issues, but I’m not going to bed with you.” “No, no,” he said. “We’ll get different rooms.” (Laughs)

Part of Local 9’s steadfastness came from a training session its president organized in fall 1988, with Jane Slaughter of *Labor Notes*. Then and now, Slaughter and her frequent co-author, Mike Parker, are the labor movement’s most vociferous critics of all variants of labor-management cooperation, quality circles, and other variations of the team concept. (Parker 1985; Parker 1993; Parker and Slaughter 1994) Slaughter recalls her standard presentation from that time:

And then I would ... do a session on “management by stress,” you know, what was that all about, which tended to be real eye-opening for people... And then we’d talk about management’s definitions of quality. “What did they mean about quality?” – it often actually meant productivity, not quality. And this was pretty eye opening for people, often, that when you define quality as waste-reduction, that’s really talking about productivity, and it also means job-loss.

And we would have talked about, explicitly, some of the dangers in these programs, ranging from making the union irrelevant, to swamping the union leadership because they are going to all these other meetings, to speed-up itself, to dividing the union among people who think this is great versus the people who don’t – calling each other the dinosaurs or the sucks.

Local 9, with the support of their International rep, who also serviced Westbrook’s UPIU Local 1069, invited Maine’s other Scott locals, along with leaders of other Maine UPIU locals. It is notable that such an event – bringing in a radical critic at the beginning of an important International initiative, might not have been tolerated in other, more centralized unions. But with the support of Westbrook’s international rep, who himself held a “class warfare” view of

developments in the paper industry, Local 9's leadership felt comfortable asserting their independence, and fortifying their views. Slaughter recalls from this training that "they were already in resistance mode; they were just looking for more information, ways to fight, things like that." A UPIU official involved in Jointness at the national level recalls of the S.D. Warren union leaders:

And I'm not saying they didn't have a reason to distrust the motives of others. But they assumed, I think, especially in light of the IP strike – you know, that if somebody said "Hi, I'm from headquarters, I'm here to help you" – that's the last thing they were going to believe. So that, I think that they had a tendency to have much of what was going on in their labor relations colored by what was going on generally in the concession wave, and that they were not necessarily buying that the low road and the high road were so substantially different.

*Their fear of being co-opted, in these programs, you could cut it with a knife.*  
And ... even in they had never read a line of Marx, you know, (they had a) very, very strong kind of local, nascent Marxist (view), in terms of their class analysis.  
(emphasis added)

Local 9's leaders embraced Slaughter's critique that Jointness would undermine both seniority and the allegiance of its members. In the end, they were convinced that newness of machines and competitiveness of their mill meant locals there were in a strong position to resist. They, along with UPIU leaders at Westbrook, saw advantage in being free-riders: they got the benefits of Scott's swearing off of aggressive concessionary demands – ending of premium pay for Sundays and overtime – while being able to maintain traditional job protections, grievance and arbitration rights and other provisions that Jointness was perceived to threaten. Local 9 felt like it didn't have to go along, so it didn't.<sup>xvii</sup>

"And then, there was Westbrook." *Former Scott executive.*

### **Westbrook's Local 1069 and Jointness: "The Toughest Local This Side of the Mississippi"**

We turn now to a more in-depth look at Westbrook, the original S.D. Warren mill, with its militant UPIU Local 1069. The main task here is to recount the dynamics of Local 1069's

resistance to Jointness, and to explore the cultural roots of its militant outlook. Established in 1854 and located in Westbrook, Maine, S.D. Warren Company is one of the nation's oldest paper mills. Historically, it has produced a great variety of products, but its principal lines have been high quality coated and other publication paper. In recent decades, its other products have included produced peel and stick labels and "Ultracast" (a patented synthetic leather and wood veneer designed in its own R&D lab). Many of its machines are more than a century old; repair of these machines often requires building new parts on machines whose makers went out of business decades ago. The layout of the 13-acre facility is not unlike Boston's streets - a crazy-quilt collection of buildings at odd angles and varying heights. People work there for years without seeing all of the mill's bowels. Because of this layout, S.D. Warren is inefficient compared to newer mills. While newer mills organize production stages in an assembly-line fashion, the Westbrook mill requires an extra layer of workforce simply to move product (typically large, multi-ton rolls of paper) from one stage of production to the next.

S.D. Warren unionized only in the late 1960s, several decades after the rest of Maine's major paper mills organized.<sup>xviii</sup> Local observers attribute this anomaly to effective, nineteenth-century style paternalism of the founder and his descendents until the mill was sold to Scott Paper Corporation in 1967.<sup>xix</sup> The dual shift to out-of state corporate ownership and unionization ushered in an era of tension-ridden job control unionism that continues to this day.

Because S.D. Warren unionized some thirty years later than the rest of Maine's paper industry, its early contract lacked many features of other mills.<sup>xx</sup> The achievement of mill-wide seniority in a 1977 strike, and later coordination of bargaining demands through UPIU's Scott Council, brought S.D. Warren's unions closer other UPIU locals in terms of bargaining demands, contract features, and general view of collective bargaining issues. Nonetheless, bargaining

between mill leadership and the mill's unions remained a decidedly local matter, particularly from the union side.

Managers characterized relations between unions and the mill prior to these negotiations as a mix of cooperation and conflict. All viewed the craft maintenance locals as more pragmatic, more intelligently led, and easier to deal with.<sup>xxi</sup> This sentiment was borne out, in management's view, by their greater success in getting cooperation from these locals in redesigning work in the past decade. The hiring of several past craft local leaders into the mill's human resources management made evident the closeness between management and maintenance unions. Dealings with Local 1069 of the United Paperworkers International Union (UPIU)<sup>xxii</sup>, on the other hand, who represented the vast majority of hourly workers, were generally more challenging. Asked if the mill had had good relations with Local 1069, a retired senior manager said:

Not always. Not always because they did, [and] we did stupid things. And there were certain issues you just had to have. And there were certain issues the union just had to have, and those were bitter moments . . . . [A]ll through negotiations, every negotiation, you just kept saying "we're going to have to work together, and don't forget this guys," when tempers were shot. And I think that most of the people realized that it was nothing personal. It was going to be over some day, and we were going to go back to making paper again."

Managers characterized their approach to bargaining as rational and impersonal, in contrast to Local 1069 leaders' more personal and emotional style:

[Y]ou'd have some very stone-faced looking managers sitting across from some folks that - had a lot of emotion on their face. [They] were used to dealing with each other on a one-on-one basis like that, on a very personal [level]... We don't really do that as managers. It's [a] very objective . . . fairly unattached way of dealing with work, [with] a lot of [management] people coming out of engineering backgrounds.

Both Local 1069 and the craft locals practiced traditional job control unionism, centered on protecting workers' opportunities to bid on jobs, and especially in getting access to frequent

overtime assignments. Paper workers are often required to work a second eight-hour shift known as an “extra.” Workers aggressively grieved missed opportunities to get these lucrative job assignments. A former manager observed:

Discipline was always grieved. Pay issues, overtime pay, who has got the right extra. Filling extras is a big bone of contention - in fact most of the grievances were related to filling extras. They had a very complex, convoluted system, with many pages of details of how you do it, don't do it.

Over time, “memorandums of agreement” specifying job allocation rules, and exceptions to these rules, proliferated. Managers overseeing specific machines or products, unchecked by human resource managers, had great autonomy in signing these agreements, which were often later added into the mill-wide contract. “The more complex the contract is, the more pages it has, the more opportunity to find out where you're wrong.” Another manager summed up the resulting frustration:

[There were] people who would spend all their free time, which they had lots of, trying to think of a way of getting money by analyzing the contract and see where management was going wrong. . . And I think for some folks, it was a kind of a game. Because we had an enormous number of grievances and they were focused on getting people more money. Free money, for doing nothing.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Interviews with former union leaders evoked a similarly mixed picture of how well the local got along with mill management. A former president stressed the union's willingness to meet with the company and solve production and staffing problems generated by fluctuations in the sales of particular products or machinery problems. On the other hand, Local 1069 did not shy away striking over important goals, or perceived excesses in the tone struck by company negotiators. The local conducted a five-week strike in 1977 primarily to win mill-wide seniority. The local struck again in 1983 over a company proposal to shift some of workers' health insurance costs on to workers' shoulders. Both management and union participants recall that this strike was precipitated by remarks made by the lead negotiator from Scott. A union participant recalled:

[I]n '83, it was a joke . . . They had a guy, corporate guy that was negotiating for them, [who] hated unions with a passion. And he got a little cocky at [those] negotiations. He shut us down real quickly, right at the end of it, two or three times, and I won't go into what he said, because it was quite derogatory to us, and we told him if he ever said it again, that it would be over - that our talks would be over. And he came back after a caucus and he said it again. And [we] just told him across the table: "you got yourself a strike on your hands. And you get home and get your clothes on, because we're not running them [paper machines] any more." So it was very stupid, and it was a dumb thing, because it was just personality stuff. He hated unions and he just wanted to bust our bubble a little bit, and it didn't pay off for him that time.

But these events didn't, by themselves, stiffen relations between Local 1069 and mill management. Asked if the strike hardened feelings, one union leader said: "[N]o, not as far as the union was concerned. There may have been some personality things about the company. They didn't like certain people. Like I say, we resolved an awful lot of stuff."

When it came to bargaining style, Local 1069's leaders routinely choreographed negotiating room dramatics. These included verbal outbursts and table pounding intended to express the importance to the local of a particular demand or issue.

Intensity in defending contract provisions was a matter of pride and principle, in the union's eyes:

We question authority at all times. We don't have a problem filing 50 grievances on an issue. . . . If there's a practice that they're trying to establish we'll grieve it and we'll - our term has been "we'll bury them in paper work." John Nee [Scott's Vice-President for Labor Relations] had labeled us the *toughest local this side of the Mississippi River* . . . and [with] the tenaciousness of a pit bull we . . . won't let them destroy our contract. (emphasis added)

The union president during the 1980s recalled that, during his leadership, there were 700-1000 grievances filed per year, more than any other within the Scott mills represented by the UPIU.

Finally, from the union's perspective, a change in management's make-up sparked an important transition in mill relations. It became more difficult to negotiate with management,

from the perspective of Local 1069, as familiar, local managers were replaced by “outside” managers.

Some of the local managers actually worked on machines on the floor and were given jobs as foreman, or even department superintendents - [they] came right out of the rank and file - and it was much easier to sit down and talk with them, because they knew the operation. They knew what shift work was, they knew how hard it was to work those kinds of hours. And in a lot of cases, you could resolve stuff with them easier because they understood.

And then, it got to the point where they were bringing in these people from outside the mill to take these jobs - foreman and department supers - and I'm not saying these were dumb people - they were very smart people, they'd been to college and they studied papermaking, and that sort of thing, manufacturing... But they were clueless as far as what the problems really were. I mean, they knew how to be a manager, they knew probably the technical end of it, but the really everyday, down-to-earth, problems, they didn't understand. And when you would talk to them on it, they'd just take a hard, fast position on something and stick to it. And in a lot of cases, it wasn't even good for the mill . . .

So, yeah, back in those days it was easier to talk about problems. And during the time I was president, there, we resolved a lot of problems...

### **Negotiating over creating a HPWS**

What makes S.D. Warren-Westbrook particularly interesting is the late date at which it was organized. Kochan, Katz, and McKersie (1986) and Jacoby (1997) describe how medium and large non-union employers in the post-World War II era developed work systems with strong similarities to HPWS and somewhat distant from traditional Taylorism. However, at S.D. Warren, where the organization of work by management was unfettered for more than a century by the presence or serious threat of unions or unionization, a somewhat disorganized mix of Taylorism and craft production typical of the early 1900s persisted until the 1960s. (Montgomery 1979:33-47) Thereafter, the aggressive job-control unionism practiced by Local 1069 and the craft locals embalmed these very old patterns of work, and built their identity around defending them. All told, this made establishing trust and succeeding in change an extremely tall order.

In the late 1980s, the strikes at Boise Cascade (Rumford, Maine) and International Paper hung like a pall over labor relations throughout Maine's paper industry. Paper workers throughout the state feared that their employers would similarly embrace these low-road tactics. For Westbrook's workers, these fears were palpable, and were whipped up by a particularly strong connection to the Jay strikers, especially for Local 1069's leadership. During the strike, Local 1069 raised money through regular membership collections to help pay the Jay workers strike benefits; it hosted strikers for local forums on the strike; and many leaders and rank-and-file made the 70-mile trip to Jay to join demonstrations against IP. And like most large industrial workplaces in Maine, a number of Jay strikers took jobs at S.D. Warren.

The Rumford and Jay strikes altered the stance Local 1069 took towards Westbrook's management. Bargaining over training illustrates this shift. Westbrook's management wanted workers to develop training manuals that codified what had previously been informal and closely held job knowledge. A former manager described how workers - especially highly skilled first and second hands - "would all have their unique way of running operations, which they weren't willing to share." This was particularly true of on-the-job training, which was the norm throughout the mill. He attributed this recalcitrance to a variety of reasons: to make themselves irreplaceable, because they were training another worker who was taking their job as part of a regression, or because they were taught "the hard way" and were invested in continuing this approach. But prior to the Rumford and Jay strikes, this resistance was mostly a "personal thing." However, in the Rumford strike, replacement workers were trained with the use of manuals that the striking workers had themselves helped to produce. Prior to the Jay strike, IP asked UPIU Local 14 to agree to do same; Local 14 refused, and IP took the matter to the NLRB. Together, these incidents firmly tied the concept of worker-developed training manuals to the threat of permanent replacement, thus making it a hot-button issue to paper unions throughout the

state. This was particularly true of Local 1069. To S.D. Warren management, which saw the issue as a matter of efficiency, the IP strike “strengthened” the issue as a point of contention with the union: “I remember one time, they [the union] wanted to have total control over all of the training documents. So if there was a strike they could walk away with them, which was just garbage.”

So, it was in this setting that Scott Paper initiated Jointness negotiations with local S.D. Warren unions in 1989. Between 1989 and 1994 these negotiations went through several phases. The first was an effort to increase general labor-management cooperation. Jointness was succeeded in the early 1990s by “enabling,” under which the mill and its unions developed pilot total quality management (TQM) projects such as waste/cost-reduction committees. Finally, the company sought acceptance of a plant-wide work redesign in negotiations during 1993-94. Rank-and-file production workers, members of United Paperworkers International Union (UPIU) Local 1069, ultimately rejected the proposal negotiated by union and management.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Interviews with local managers and union officials make clear that these negotiations were an uphill effort. First of all, there was a gap between the strategic shift in labor relations being made by Scott and the commitments and style of local managers. The new Jointness effort was seen as a dictate from “corporate,” and neither side locally rushed to embrace this new cooperation initiative. One former manager put it this way: “both parties didn’t come to the table with the best of intents. Or with the belief that it was going anywhere, or that it was a valuable use of time.”

While management perceived the union as recalcitrant, they admit that their side also was slow to put aside older ways of doing things. Early on, managers continued to take unilateral actions that conflicted with Jointness’ goals.

What usually got in the way, was the [conflict] between the process of trying to move forward in a different way and the need to manage back at home in the

same old way. You might jointly, within that meeting, talk about areas of cooperation, but you might walk out of there, and you might give that person a suspension. . . . You might, look at the workforce and see that you have too many workers and downsize. You might unilaterally make a decision relative to production or whatever and not consult the union.

Both sides were also unimpressed by the Scott executives who met with and presented the program to management and union officials in Westbrook. Indeed, the mill management's was contemptuous. Nonetheless, management officials recognized that the mill's age, and the increased competitive pressures it faced, necessitated efficiency efforts, and therefore that the mill's long-term survival depended on the mill redesigning its work processes. Local management never wavered from this central objective throughout the six years of negotiations.

Turning to Local 1069, throughout most of the 1980s the UPIU had been highly critical of quality of work life (QWL) programs and similar initiatives. The UPIU's critique resonated with the local's leaders:

In fact, the International warned us about it, prior to this. We used to get notifications, and training at our Area One training meeting, *to watch out for this Jointness stuff. It's just a way of stealing language and worker's rights, away from you, under the pretense that they are going to be your friends.* Quality of life, I think, was another buzzword. (emphasis added)

Another union official said that local's executive council "wasn't buying on to the theory because we had our own ... network that these job circles didn't work."

One feature of this education was a critique of global competition and especially Japanese work practices. The critique was important because it was, in union leaders' recollections, a dominant piece of the company's discourse about the need for change. From the International, Local 1069's leaders had learned the following argument centering on Japanese culture and especially job security:

Number one, Japan doesn't out-produce us. We out-produce them. And number two, there's no way I want to come into a plant - this may be their culture in Japan; they're not going to work for as much money as I'm working for - come in, [and] sing the

company anthem. Do calisthenics for a half hour or 45 minutes before they start, and then get to work, and never have a complaint, in all the time they're working. But the bottom-line... the biggest thing that's a difference, is also the Japanese corporation itself.

The executives in Japan, back during this time - it may have changed most recently - when you went to work for them, they were dedicated to you. They'd say: "hey look, you've got a job with us as long as you want to work." It didn't make any difference if they changed the product line they were producing. They could be making automobiles today, and they say "now, it's not profitable to make them any more." They'd convert their plant over and make furniture ... They'd keep their workforce doing something. So these guys that bought into what these executives wanted to do, actually got a payoff. They virtually didn't have to worry about losing their job, as long as they wanted to stay working for them.

Now you guys [at Scott Corporation] don't do that. You finish with the paper here at S.D. Warren, you're not going to convert this company into furniture making.

So, it is unsurprising that the initiative was met with strong suspicion by Local 1069. For one, the union argued that cooperation was an established practice in the mill's labor relations:

Scott Paper came on, and wanted to get involved in this union-management stuff. The "Jointness" program, their trick word for it was enabling, - it would enable the company to do an awful lot of stuff, resolving problems. And as I told John Nee and all of the rest of them, that they sent up here to sit across the table from us, trying to convince us that this was a good process to get involved in: "*You guys don't really know that we resolve thousands of problems every year. This isn't nothing new as far as solving problems - we've been doing it. It's an on-going thing.*" The company comes to the union, with a situation that's going on in the plant that's not good, to keep jobs. The union got involved with them to straighten that problem out. (emphasis added)

Moreover, they saw Nee's initiative as a direct threat to the union:

They had these little key words - Jointness, flexibility. *I mean, what the hell is flexibility? . . . .* I was no college graduate, but it didn't take me too long to realized just what the hell was up. And the thing that was up, was: *the company wanted the workers here in Westbrook to pretty much give up most of their rights under the contract, just under good faith.* [emphasis added]

The thing we won't do, is give them everything we've negotiated over the years. I mean, if you do that, you might as well decertify, and get the union out of there, and let the company do what they want."

Because the International had embraced Jointness, the local leadership was under pressure to set aside their reservations. But following the UPIU's shift in stance was a pill too big to swallow.

Our international rep at the time was coming on and telling us - oh no, this is a good thing now. We said wait a minute. You guys are almost as bad as the company officials that we talk [to], because, you guys have been telling us for years to stay the hell out of this. Don't get involved in this quality of life, Jointness, and that sort of a thing, because, it isn't going to work. So we said: you tell [us] what big thing has happened that makes it all right now? We want to know.

Initially, Local 1069 refused to seriously negotiate over work reorganization until the company addressed a large grievance backlog numbering in the hundreds:

They really don't want to hear your issues and all they want you to do is fix their problems. So we said: "Until you address some of ours' then the well's empty as far as we're concerned on taking care of your issues."

Management's perception is that the union treated the initial Jointness meetings as "an opportunity to get management to atone for its past sins. They had lots of stuff they were angry about. And [that] they wanted to get back at managers for." Eventually, enough grievances were addressed to allow negotiations to go forward.

Despite the hard initial stance, the union nonetheless participated in five years of negotiations and projects. Throughout, the union executive council debated seriously over the company's proposals, with some leaders expressing interest or support. There was also turnover within the union's leadership, with later leaders taking less of a hard line. And, the union fully participated in several pilot projects. One such project supported by the local was a major waste reduction project. The union was enthusiastic about the results.

[O]ne of the key components that we bought on to is that we could choose who went on these waste and yield teams and quality teams... So that's what we did. We went out and recruited as many of those people, who had [a] genuine interest to improve the process, take out cost in the process ... [And] that is one of the only successful things we ever did ... So in any case, this thing really took off, it was one of the best projects we ever dealt with or got involved with.

In the rare cases during this period where a new production process was created within the mill, the union also acquiesced to management's desire to organize work along high performance lines.

Whatever partial progress was made on particular projects, parallel events undermined this progress. Howard Reiche, a locally bred long-time mill manager trusted by both unions and management retired in 1988. After 1988, Scott brought in a series of mill managers whose tenure was brief, and in the case of one manager, disruptive. In 1991, a widely disliked mill manager gathered the entire workforce, surprising even the management, for a meeting that backfired. The mill manager stated, "All assets in the mill were 'under review'"; employees were asked to find ways to save money or expect parts of the mill to be shut down.

Lack of coordination among levels of mill management in implementing Jointness also bred problems. A paper machine supervisor recounts one story that illustrates this well. He describes he and other front line supervisors being sent down to Philadelphia to be trained in how to improve cooperative relations with hourly employees. This supervisor, a third-generation paper maker at Westbrook who was promoted from the ranks, prided himself in having long practiced the "new" philosophy being presented to them. Following a practice handed down from the mill's long paternalistic tradition, he had a bargain with his crews – leniency and respect, in exchange for a willingness to work extra hard when needed. The supervisor then describes how he was called on the carpet by the mill manager for not disciplining a worker who, in violation of a contract provision, had a third absence within a three-month period. This absence was to attend the worker's uncle's funeral; this uncle had raised the man, and "was like a father." Disciplining the worker under these circumstances was an act of aggression, and the supervisor refused to do – the matter was taken out of his hands resolved by a higher level of management according to mill managers' wishes. The supervisor wondered out loud why the top mill management had not been trained in the same "new philosophy."

Another critical event was the shutdown, announced in late 1992, of the mill's finishing operation, where rolls of paper were cut and packaged. This operation was still very labor-intensive, and represented hundreds of jobs. Union leaders claim that management had made a verbal promise that the operation would be retained if a joint, local cost-cutting committee could reduce the overall cost per ton in this area by \$100 per ton; the committee's final recommendations claimed a \$110 per ton reduction. According to union leadership, corporate management at Scott dragged their feet for months on responding to the proposal. Months later, Scott unilaterally announced that the operation would be shut down in Westbrook. The work was moved to a greenfield, non-union facility in Pennsylvania. This resulted in the loss of over 200 production jobs at a time that the mill's overall employment had recently dropped to 1500 from over 2000 in the late 1980s.

Scott eventually proposed reorganizing workers across the mill into cross-trained teams that rotated jobs. The union's reaction to this proposal was equivocal; some of Local 1069's leadership viewed positively certain aspects of job rotation. For example, job rotation reduced repetitive motion injuries, and it was thought that reduced hierarchy could improve solidarity amongst the rank-and-file.

Still, both the union's leaders and its rank and file had major problems with reorganizing work in this fashion. Workers on paper machines and in other areas were typically organized in a traditional hierarchy, with lines of progression that went from fourth or fifth hand up to first hand. One issue was how pay rates would be equalized within teams. In the company's proposal, an employee who was initially at a lower place on the line of progression, e.g. a fourth hand, would get their fourth-hand's pay plus up to \$1.83 per hour of "pay for knowledge." Many of the younger rank-and-file felt that if they were going to be trained to a first-hand level, they should be paid accordingly. More senior workers were also unhappy with job rotation. Having "paid your

dues” doing the intense physical labor characteristic of lower jobs, seniority-based promotion relieved older workers of heavy physical labor. Job rotation meant the end of that benefit.

Perhaps Local 1069’s leadership’s greatest concern was how job rotation would affect the status of injured paper workers on “light duty.” This is not a minor concern; injuries are a common, frequent, phenomenon within paper mills.<sup>xxv</sup> Under traditional lines of progression, many injured workers would be assigned particular jobs that they could still perform despite an injury.

A guy that had, say, a permanent back injury may be able to do, say, a third hand’s position, in the middle of the line of progression. And, he would stay there. And he would lock himself in ...

And the concept [according to management] was “no, everybody’s got to rotate or they’re out.” So there was no leniency or no latitude with the injured worker in the line of progression. *And we weren’t going to buy into a system that put every injured worker out of work.* (emphasis added)

One particular incident further illustrates the divide between union and management perception. In 1992, management and union leaders traveled to A.O. Smith, a Milwaukee auto parts plant that Scott’s consultant had worked for earlier and considered a benchmark example of HPWS. The consultant considered it a role model because union and management were able to cooperate and implement an HPWS, despite enormous layoffs. Scott’s managers were approving:

*Their union president talked like he was in management.* They talked about that there was value-added jobs, and those were the only real jobs. If the job wasn’t adding value, they weren’t going to protect it. They didn’t need to have people around just for the sake of being around. ... They were totally committed to the financial survival of that facility, and that they were going to do whatever was necessary. They were doing teamwork on problem solving and improvement work, and, they would personally go out and try to convince members who weren’t cooperating. They had job rotation, and those workers who didn’t want to cooperate feel the heat from their union leadership. (emphasis added)

Local 1069’s leaders recalled the trip in almost exactly the same detail, but with a different interpretation of the meaning of what they learned.

So we went out to see this great joy that was in Sol's [the consultant's] mind, and we met with the local union guys. And after being there for about two hours, *you couldn't tell the union officials from our managers here at the mill*, here in Westbrook. The way they talked, the way they acted.

Another union official described what the problem was:

[W]e didn't like what we saw. They had this full job circle in place, and we didn't like it all . . . . Number one, they had no accommodation for the injured worker . . . . What really bothered us . . . if the guy refused to rotate, the union would go down and pressure him: "What's the matter with you? We're going to end up taking you out of here. You're not going to work this, you're going to lose you're rate" and all this other stuff.

And so they were doing the company's bidding, and that was very distasteful to us.

Either side, under contract language defining the process's parameters, had the right to unilaterally fire the consultant.

The moment the visitors got back into a van to return to the airport, Local 1069's president announced, with the consultant sitting right there in the van, that he would immediately request that the consultant be fired upon returning to Maine. The president then turned to the consultant and said:

If you think that piece of shit that you just showed us is something that we want, I got a surprise for you. Because there's no way I'm going to let the union treat our members the way that these union officials are treating theirs. You might as well throw the contract out and you guys hire them as managers. In fact in some sense, they're worse than the managers in Westbrook. Some other managers in Westbrook wouldn't do to the people what these guys are doing.

This anecdote illustrates how fundamental the divide was between company and Local 1069. For management, it was a model of what was necessary to survive in an increasingly competitive world. The local clearly found the A.O. Smith union's abandonment of seniority and coercive enforcement of job rotation to be repulsive and antithetical to the very meaning of being a union.

In 1994, Local 1069's executive council recommended the work redesign to its membership put up for a vote of the membership, despite their serious reservations. While Scott

had moved significantly on one issue - offering large buyouts to injured workers unable to rotate - the following description conveys how this recommendation came under duress:

We did come back and [recommended]... the acceptance of this... [O]ur concern was we had a contract coming up within the next six... or eight months, and... that was in that high time of no strikes, you're kind of [committing] political suicide to think about asking for a strike vote or anything - *so we recommended it because we feared that they would force it down our throat anyway - either you get paid for it and take the buck-eighty ... or you'd get it come next fall and you wouldn't get a nickel for it, they'll just put it in, and you ain't gonna walk because of it...* (emphasis added)

It failed anyway, it didn't pass, it failed.

This ultimate failure came in an environment marked by instability: instability in the markets and competition faced by the mill, instability in the industry's labor relations, and instability in the management and ownership of the mill. From interviews with UPIU Local 1089's leaders, the latter appears crucial if not decisive. For them, work reorganization as proposed by the company required eliminating job allocation protection and forms of seniority considered to be sacrosanct, on "good faith." In turn, they were being asked, in their eyes, to trust in corporate negotiators and mill managers who came from outside, and turned over during this period with alarming regularity:

Now, my vision on it was, look, sometimes you [i.e. Scott Paper] will give us people to work with that are pretty honorable people. And they work here for a few months, and then they're gone. "Corporate" sends him somewhere else, and a new face shows up - we don't get along with that person too well. And he may not be too trustworthy. Now, how the hell are we going to have good faith, that you're always going to give us somebody whose going to be reputable to deal with.

And if it doesn't work out, a year, two years down the road - you say, "hey, the process is over." We look at our contract, and our contract's been torn apart, we can't get that back without negotiating it back. *And I think once it's gone, it's going to be awful hard to get it back. . . . Because you guys could be gone tomorrow. All of you sittin' here could be gone tomorrow. Then, we're dealing with a bunch of bastards that are not willing to give us anything back, and they're going to hold our feet to the fire on what's left of the contract. So we're not willing to do that.*<sup>xxvi</sup> (emphasis added)

This mistrust is seen as reflective of the character of the American employers:

American corporations don't have very good credibility with being honest and dedicated to their workforce or the communities that they're in. And all of that stuff was a burning issue with us.

### **S.D. Warren's Organizational History and Memory as Contributors to Jointness' Failure**

In this section, I propose to shed some additional light on this case by exploring the recollections of former workers and managers in oral history interviews.<sup>xxvii</sup> Attitudes and memories revealed in these interviews help to illuminate the connection between a "Taylorist past" and the low-trust/high conflict period when these negotiations occurred.

One widespread recollection is of intensely unfair job allocation practices. This is not too surprising, given that the mill remained a paternalistic employer until it unionized in 1967. (Hillard 2004) Up until, and even past, that time, a "foreman's (or some cases, department supervisor's) empire" reigned, unrestrained by central management.<sup>xxviii</sup> Both workers and managers vividly recall favoritism and abuse by foremen, and agree that one of unionization's major accomplishments was to address this problem was unionization of production workers. A former senior manager at the mill, who worked there both prior to and long after unionization said:

You can only denigrate people so long and tell them . . . don't give me any guff. "Gee, I like this junior person on this team, I'll move him up and put him over here." I mean, there was no progression. There was a great deal of uncertainty . . . And if I wanted to give you a job that was a real dog of a job, I'd give you that dog of a job. Uncertainty. A real uneasiness.

Another former manager, who came after unionization has this recollection:

I'm not sure what caused the union [to] come in and what the problems were. What I heard, and I can't document it or anything, is that management used their positions to take care of their favorites. That there was [sic] disparities relative to who got extra opportunities. I can believe that, too, because I knew managers who, even with the contract, would try and influence or . . . They would create work opportunities for people they liked.

Workers recall favoritism as rampant.

There was [sic] a lot of unfair things that went on there, as far as who got jobs, and who got the better jobs, who got the overtime, and who got the *best* overtime. Just a lot of unfairness going on. [emphasis added]

Failing in several attempts to get a better job, one worker stated:

I could have gone into the pipe shop two or three times, but back then, this is prior to the union, if you didn't know anybody, or you wasn't [sic] a suckass, you could go over and stay second class until the day you retired.

Favoritism overlapped with sexual harassment. In the 1960s, roughly one thousand of the mill's three thousand workers were women who worked in the finishing department. One woman who worked there from 1950 into the 1980s said that: "If you were a sweetheart or pretty, you would be given a prized bonus job." One male worker who became a shop steward in the finishing department shortly after unionization recalls that "women got jobs by giving sexual favors to foreman." Women who refused "had the shittiest jobs," and received "the worst treatment." Prior to unionization, there was no seniority system. Women with ten to twenty years of seniority were laid off in favor of men with only a few years' tenure. The mill also had categorized jobs into "heavy" and "light work." The so-called heavy jobs were, of course, better paid; women were denied access to these jobs. Through seniority, after unionization, many women gained access to formerly "heavy" jobs on the paper machines and driving transport vehicles. Summing up the change, one worker exclaimed:

They couldn't hide it any more, the little foremen that were dictators in their own section of the mill. All of a sudden they lost that power [about] what they did or said because they knew it would be heard upstairs [through the grievance procedure].

Seniority was thus perhaps the defining priority for Local 1069 in the first ten years of its existence, leading up to its first and most significant strike in 1977. The major issue in this successful strike was mill-wide seniority, which the company finally granted. Several layoffs in

the late 1960s, including a layoff of roughly 70 women with much greater - up to 15 years - seniority than many men who retained jobs, had added momentum. Without drawing a one-to-one correspondence, it makes sense that from this history emerged a rank-and-file that aggressively grieved job assignments. It also makes sense that leaders who had lived through this transition would tenaciously defend their contract.

Workers' memories of the shift from local to corporate ownership in 1967 also shed interesting light. Memories of the pre-1967 owners tend to stress the Warren family's beneficence. These "family" owners cared for workers and their families' well-being; the owners were willing to rescue workers in time of crisis; and they - typically remembered by name as the "Warren family" or "Samuel Dennis Warren" - were willing to heavily share the mill's profits through donations to build schools, ball fields, a library, a hospital, and a school gymnasium, to name just a few.

Many recount that this interest and desire to care for workers was expressed in the company's willingness to lend money on generous terms during times of crisis. A retired engineer recalled the 1940s' mill manager seeing workers individually to discuss their difficulties and personally requesting payroll to add a large sum to the paycheck of a worker deemed to be "needy."<sup>xxix</sup> When a worker or a member of his or her family needed an operation, the mill manager would make a loan to the worker. Interviewees said that the company would then deduct "a dollar a week, for the rest of your life." Workers could also buy a great variety of products, including furniture sets, through a "company store," where workers were allowed to pay the company back slowly in installments. Managers routinely arranged home mortgages for workers at local banks, and the accounting office did worker's tax returns for free each year.

It is important to note that these recollections are shared among former workers who worked at the mill prior to 1967, *and* those workers who were born at that time and who first

worked in the mill at least ten to twenty years later. The fact that young and old alike share this perspective suggests that it emanates from a community-wide discussion about the past. (Thelan 1989)

In turn, workers explain unionization as singularly the result of the loss of this “family” arrangement when Scott bought the mill in 1967. One man, who later became a union official, said, when asked why people unionized:

The biggest reason, most people voted in favor of the union was a national conglomerate, it was going to buy the Westbrook mill that has always been *family*- owned. There was a lot of uncertainty about the future, and I think that swayed the majority of the people to vote for it. At least at the time that was what I heard. It was the unknown. If Scott wasn't going to buy it, would it have organized? In my opinion, I don't think so. [emphasis added]

Q: So, there was a lot of trust for the Warren family?

A: Yes, and that's basically what kept unions out for a lot of these years. . . . And then, all of a sudden, there was talk in the late sixties that they were going to sell the mill. . . . And I think people got a little panicky, they didn't know anything about this *out-of-town, out-of-state organization* going to come in, and buy the mill. So they didn't know how they was [*sic*] going to be treated, how it was going to affect them. And I think there was a lot of concern about the sudden change from that closeness, that was originally there in the mill for years. Now it was going to change. (emphasis added)

And I think people was [*sic*] a little concerned about that - maybe we ought to have a union here looking over things to make sure we're treated all right.

Another worker remembers her reaction to Scott purchasing the mill in 1967. For her too, the Warren ownership was “family,” while Scott exploited the workers and the region's resources without regard for workers or the community.

Q: Did it matter to you that the company was bought by Scott?

A: Yes. In a way it did. Yes, in a way that bothered me.

Q: How so?

A: I felt it wasn't *family* any more. That it was from out of town. I really, I know the Warren family was from Massachusetts, originally, so that's out of town too, but no, I felt, no I felt that we'd been sold down the river. I wasn't too happy.

Q: Do you think Scott's. . . . owners treated the mill and the workers differently?

A: *They used us.* They used us. . . . They just milked us, I thought. Maybe it would have happened anyway - I don't know.

But, they cut the trees down. I mean, they weren't careful. They didn't care about Westbrook. They really didn't. They just wanted to make the money, and then sell it piece-by-piece. And get out. It's even worse now than it ever was.

Q: What were some of the ways that Scott used the mill differently than when the Warren family owned it.

A: It didn't feel like *family*. It was different. Just different.<sup>xxx</sup> [emphasis added]

These memories tell us something about how workers, including union leaders, make sense out of their relationships with the changing corporate owners of the mill. By the measuring stick of this remembered paternalism, the post-1967 corporate owners - who are "out-of-town, out-of-state" and not "family," come up short. It is also evident that these memories are filtered through the class-conscious ideology about "corporate greed" that spilt over from Jay into Westbrook in countless ways.

Following the work of oral historians on memory,<sup>xxxi</sup> it is possible to speculate that these memories reflect and are shaped by worker and community attitudes about the mill's recent owners. Under both Scott and the new owners after 1995, South African Pulp and Paper Industries (SAPPI), disloyalty and betrayal are seen as the norm. These memories suggest the important role unstable ownership and management play in union leaders perceptions have of why Local 1069 rejected HPWS, especially given the sharp contrast Scott poses to the stability and trustworthiness of the mill's former owners. And, perhaps, these memories shed light on the distrust that led Local 1069's rank and file to reject the 1994 proposal.

## CONCLUSION

There are thus several reasons why Jointness negotiations failed at Westbrook. One factor is self-evident from those interviewed for this study: for reasons of history and culture, both local management and the local union came to the process with deep reservations about their ability to cooperate, or to implement an agenda for change that emanated from the company's strategic level. Perhaps just as clear is that most features of Scott's proposed work reorganization were antithetical to Local 1069's culture of job control unionism. This culture was reinforced by the International's teachings, and further fortified by the perspectives of Jay strikers and Jane Slaughter. Cooperation, in the union's eye, ultimately meant something very different than what Scott was proposing. The gap in values and culture revealed by the A.O. Smith trip is particularly illustrative. Repeated downsizings and repeated efforts to sell the mill, described by a former manager as a process akin to "cutting the dog's tail off, one inch at a time," certainly added to a sour environment.

As previously noted, ultimate failure of these negotiations came in an environment marked by instability: instability in the markets and competition faced by the mill, instability in the industry's labor relations, and instability in the management and ownership of the mill. In this environment, union leaders saw themselves as taking a stand against a company asking for contract givebacks with little certainty of reciprocity. Scott's appeals to the exigencies of competitiveness were, for the most part, viewed cynically.

What then, of the contrast between Westbrook and Somerset, on the one hand, and Winslow and Mobile on the other? This paper's ethnographic study suggests several conclusions. First, a history of adversarial relations, per se, was not a barrier to successful cooperation. Both Winslow and Mobile had a contentious history of strikes and adversarial bargaining. Second, organizational alignment at all levels of both management and union was a precondition of success, at least in the two cases cited here. Having supportive and effective local mill

management, on the one side, and supportive International representatives, on the other, was crucial to success in managing internal difference and shaping inter-group attitudes, and given the parallel decentralization of Scott and UPIU, neither could presumed. Third, in drawing the differences between success and failure, Eaton and Kriesky's telling observation that because bargaining in paper is fully decentralized to the plant level, bargaining within one company can range from cooperative to adversarial, couldn't be more on the mark. In such a structure, a variety of local factors come into play: In Mobile, a host of regional factors militated in favor of cooperation. Generally, paper workers were less militant than their counterparts in the North. The emergence of a non-union sector in southern paper where HPWS was the norm, and the more rapid shift towards HPWS and economic concessions in the early 1980s in the unionized sector made the shift towards a new labor-management regime seem far more inevitable. (Birecree 1993; Kaufman 1996) And, there was no signal event, like the Jay strike, that could spark a movement culture.

A more interesting question is why Winslow diverged from the two Maine S.D. Warren UPIU locals. Strategically, the union leadership was more open to dialogue and persuasion, and Scott's effective message that an antiquated mill had a future – backed up by a series of compelling steps and measures, including generous early retirement and severance, a no lay-off commitment, and substantial capital investments, was ultimately embraced by the union leadership. The key role played by the trusted mill manager, and the support of the UPIU International representative were equally crucial. For these strategic and local reasons, the Jay strike's movement culture and class-conscious message failed to take root.

By contrast, the two S.D. Warren locals were swept up in the Jay movement culture, transforming and hardening traditional job-control unionism and adversarial traditions into something more profound. The strategic strength that Somerset's status as a brand-new facility,

along with the disinterest of “S.D. Warren” managers in a “Scott” initiative, appears decisive. In Westbrook, a panoply of factors spelled doom: a highly resistant mill management, rapid and disruptive turnover in mill management, downsizings and perceived betrayals, and a particularly strong connection to the Jay movement culture. By the 1990s, not only union leaders but also rank-and-file workers, and indeed, the larger community, had developed a culture that reinforced the class-conscious critique of paper industry labor relations-as-class warfare perpetrated by greedy, distant, and disloyal corporate chieftains. This perspective was built around a remembered past, in which a preferred type of capitalism – loyal, reciprocal, and therefore trustworthy, had been practiced by the “local” paternalistic owners. All this served to fortify the cynical interpretations of Local 1069’s leaders of the various thrusts emanating from the Jointness initiative. Ironically, Westbrook’s workers longed for a form of capital-labor relations that Jointness promised in rhetoric, but which the local experience with Scott failed to deliver.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the value of taking a qualitative approach to learning about both workers’ and managers’ attitudes towards HPWS and labor-management cooperation. The S.D. Warren case certainly bears some similarity to other in-depth accounts of unionized workers’ resistance to labor-management cooperation and work reorganization (see, e.g., Milkman 1997). It also sheds light on a less explored area, namely, the sometimes conflicting attitudes held by various aspects of management within various levels of the organization. Hopefully, others will follow in further investigating these questions.

## **Epilogue**

Westbrook had a worldwide reputation of making some of the best paper in the world, and we always prided ourselves on that. But as they began merging with these bigger companies, and more mills became part of the chain, they started taking our grades of paper and tried to make them in other mills, and they just couldn’t make ‘em like we did. And the quality suffered immensely, and eventually business got so bad for those particular grades that they just took them off the market, they disappeared. And I felt real bad about that, because we used to make some beautiful, beautiful paper. And when they found it wouldn’t work some other

place, why they never brought it back, I don't know. That's one of the problems with making decisions in Philadelphia for a mill that's in Westbrook Maine. (A Westbrook manager, laid off during a 1991 management downsizing)

Jointness came to an end during “Chainsaw Al” Dunlap’s brief CEO reign at Scott during 1994-1995. The fall out from the turbulent change in Scott’s governance was severe. Mobile and Winslow - mills that had laid the essential groundwork of trust and succeeded in implementing a HPWS producing tangible results – were eventually shut down in the wake of Dunlap’s reign. In the case of Winslow, Dunlap’s executive team reneged on the previous no lay-off commitment, though a hard stance by Winslow’s union leaders softened the initial blow. Nonetheless, the trust that had been effectively built up over four years was ruined. At the end of 1995, Scott was sold to Kimberly-Clark, a direct competitor in the tissue and towel business. Kimberly-Clark shut down the Winslow mill in 1997. Former union leaders there are still convinced that their mill’s productivity and quality was superior to that of Kimberly-Clark’s competing facilities. Mobile’s facilities were broken up when Dunlap sold the S.D. Warren Division to SAPPI in 1995. The S.D. Warren mill went with SAPPI, while the tissue mill and pulp mill stayed with Scott. According to a former Scott executive, the “synergies” that came from the cheap pulp and energy that advantaged the two paper mills on site were lost when the company was broken up. Within a few years, the two paper mills were buying pulp and energy on the open market, with the pulp and energy facilities being put out of business. Eventually, the cost advantages once enjoyed were lost. SAPPI closed its Mobile facility permanently in 2001.

While many factors contributed to the fate of these two mills, the fundamental question of corporate governance looms large. For the former UPIU (now PACE) leaders still active in Maine, especially those associated with the two former S.D. Warren mills, the fate of Winslow, Mobile, and other former Scott mills like Muskegon, serves only to reinforce and ratify long-held suspicions of the value of cooperation and HPWS.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>ii</sup> See, for example, Eaton and Kriesky 1998; Getman and Marshall 1993; and Walton, Cutcher-Gershenfield, and McKersie 1994. Getman and Marshall do acknowledge that Jointness failed to progress very far at mills like Westbrook. (Getman and Marshall 1993:1857)

<sup>iii</sup> The notion of “fostering” versus “forcing” bargaining strategies comes from Walton, Cutcher-Gershenfield, and McKersie (1994).

<sup>iv</sup> Twenty-one such interviews were conducted between July 2000 and October 2003; interviewee’s identities are anonymous per requirements of the University of Southern Maine’s Institutional Review Board. Approximately 40 oral history interviews were conducted with former Westbrook managers and workers over the same period.

<sup>v</sup> See Jim Kitay and Ron Callus, “The Role and Challenge of Case Study Design in Industrial Relations Research,” and Richard Whipp, “Qualitative Methods: Technique or Size?” in Whitfield and Strauss (1998).

<sup>vi</sup> On the interpretation of memory in oral histories, see Portelli (1991) and Thelan (1989).

<sup>vii</sup> See e.g. Kaufman (1993: 85, 106). Relevant examples in recent literature include Applebaum, et al. 2000, Eaton and Kriesky (1998), Getman and Marshall (1993), and Walton, Cutcher-Gershenfield, and McKersie (1994).

<sup>viii</sup> When building mills in rural areas in the South, paper companies had to attract skilled laborers to construct the mill from urbanized areas; these workers were already unionized, and the companies feared labor strife if they attempted to open mills non-union. (Minchin 1996:13) Paper companies also typically recruited an initial core of employees from already unionized paper mills, creating, in effect, and “in-house organizing committee.” (Kaufman 1996:308-309) This resulted in near 100% unionization of large integrated pulp and paper operations throughout the U.S. from the mid-1940s on; companies bought labor stability at brown field sites by voluntarily recognizing unions at green field sites via card-check recognition or “perfunctory” NLRB elections. (ibid.)

<sup>ix</sup> As Arthur Ross long ago noted, the political pressures on local leaders to be militant are far more intense than those faced by International leaders. (Ross 1948:30-31)

<sup>x</sup> Strikingly, Scott abandoned this approach in 1994, when it brought in “Chainsaw Al” Dunlap, the icon of what Beer and Nohria call the “Theory E” approach to strategic corporate change, i.e. a top-down strategy that seeks to rapidly increase shareholder value through dramatic (and typically disruptive) change. Indeed, Beer and Nohria profile Scott under Dunlop when introducing Theory E. (2000:4-6) I discuss this development in the paper’s epilogue.

<sup>xi</sup> A pseudonym is use here.

<sup>xii</sup> In Walton et al.’s (1994) terminology, the notion of organizational alignment fuses both *managing internal differences* and *shaping inter-group attitudes*. That is, Scott’s and UPIU’s leaders would be successful where it was possible to build unity within one’s own organization

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and to appeal successfully to open-minded counterparts on the other side. As we will see, this was possible in some mills and not others.

<sup>xiii</sup> A retired S.D. Warren executive whose career spanned the pre- and post-Scott merger era conveys this sentiment in the following statement:

And the other thing I'll fault Scott for, and I think one of the reasons, besides having a couple of guys that feathered their nest at the last of it, at the expense of the company, Scott never assimilated anybody that they bought. There was never any Scott culture, or any, but there was very, very little Scott culture.

<sup>xiv</sup> Besides interviews by the author, this account draws on interviews done by Julius Getman, and on Connelly, et al. (1994).

<sup>xv</sup> If further workforce reductions were needed, they would be accomplished by voluntary early retirements and severance along the lines of the 1992 downsizing.

<sup>xvi</sup> Labor historian Bruce Laurie describes Lawrence Goodwyn's concept of a "movement culture" as a way of accounting for "the ebb and flow of the labor movement":

To Goodwyn, and to anthropologist Sidney Mintz, culture is a kind of resource, a constellation of beliefs, practices, and organizations that deny or confirm conventional arrangements of "status, power, and identity." Cultures may therefore be either oppositional or accommodative; they may dare the status quo or confirm it. Oppositional cultures become movement cultures when they develop organizations and ideologies for mobilizing the dispossessed in the name of democracy or equality. (Laurie 1989:74)

Thus, in Laurie's formulation, the Jay strike created, if for only a short time, a movement culture amongst Maine's paper workers.

<sup>xvii</sup> One notable exception to Local 9's refusal to participate in Jointness was the OSHA 200 program, an extensive and dramatically effective safety program developed in Hinckley in the early 1990s.

<sup>xviii</sup> Skilled maintenance workers voted to unionize in 1963, but the company tied up the vote in NLRB and the courts until 1966, when it was ordered to recognize the several craft unions representing these workers. It took another year of negotiations for these locals to successfully negotiate a first contract. Two paperworkers' industrial unions won union recognition in 1967 after Scott paper had bought the mill.

<sup>xix</sup> See Hillard (2004).

<sup>xx</sup> This is taken from an internal UPIU document contrasting benefit levels from different mills for 1977 bargaining.

<sup>xxi</sup> These included a machinists' local (IAM), electricians (IBEW), carpenters and joiners (IBCJ), and the boilermakers (IBB).

<sup>xxii</sup> The UPIU merged with the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers (OCAW) in 1998 to form the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers International Union (PACE).

<sup>xxiii</sup> Another former manager, when asked if these grievances were costly, replied:

No. It was the old something for nothing – it made all the supervisors mad, because somebody was getting something for nothing. But in terms of dollars, it was a drop in the bucket.

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<sup>xxiv</sup>Union locals representing skilled maintenance workers, who make up about a quarter of the mill's hourly workers, had accepted contract revisions including cross-training in the trades, relaxation of work rules and pay-for-knowledge. After the mill's sale in 1995, the mill's new owner implemented a new TQM program known as "Cost of Quality." Following the earlier split, skilled workers have participated in Cost of Quality committees far more actively than Local 1069 members.

<sup>xxv</sup> Local 1069 conducted a study in the early 1990s, estimating that, on average, 60 to 80 of its 1200 members in any given week were injured and on light duty.

<sup>xxvi</sup>One noteworthy piece of context: two sister S.D. Warren mills in Mobile, Alabama and Muskegon, Michigan had agreed to the changes in contract and work organization proposed by Scott. At the time of these interviews in 2000 and 2001, Mobile had shut down, and the union leadership at Muskegon expressed regrets for "giving up" key portions of their contract, particularly in light of aggressive, hard-nosed approach to labor relations undertaken by SAPPI after these mills' sale in 1995.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Many studies in fields outside of industrial relations take this type of approach to understand how legacy works through memory to shape contemporary attitudes. Two excellent studies by historians are Bodnar's (1989) study of former Studebaker workers and managers, and Portelli's (1991) studies of Terni, Italy, and Harlan County, U.S.A. Wills (1998) takes a similar approach from a geographer's perspective.

<sup>xxviii</sup>In Jacoby's analysis, the 20th century corporate welfare movement took firm aim at ending the so-called foreman's empire. New human resource departments devoted careful efforts to constrain foremen from harsh, arbitrary behavior that engendered resentment and union organizing. Led by "vanguard" firms prior to 1950, this model became more widespread thereafter. (See Jacoby 1997) What is interesting about S.D. Warren's management organization and practice was that it continued to fit the pre-corporate welfare model through the 1960s, and, in some respects, up until the time period that this paper covers.

<sup>xxix</sup> These memories are corroborated by an extensive Harvard case study at the mill conducted in 1947. See Glover and Hower (1949): 300-311.

<sup>xxx</sup>It is also worth noting here that the interviewee reveals an awareness that founder Samuel Dennis Warren was from Boston, Massachusetts, and that he maintained his primary residence there throughout his thirty years as the mill's owner. Regardless, this qualification of her memory does not undermine her agreement with the community's view that the betrayal of the mill and of the city of Westbrook was authored by an entity that was "out-of-town," and thus - by virtue of the community's current thinking - not part of the "local family."

<sup>xxxi</sup> Memories are also organized and interpreted in response to need, particularly that provoked by disruptive change. For example, Bodnar (1989), in his study of former Studebaker workers and managers, discovered a widely shared narrative which contrasted an idyllic past of labor-management harmony and craftsmanship shared by father and son to an era of disorder that ultimately caused the company to go out of existence. His study also makes evident the importance of shared (and sometimes organized) interpretation and meaning. In the years after the company's closing, he notes, blame shifted from union or company to the complexities/difficulties of competing with the large, Detroit-based car companies. While meanings no longer originated in a common worksite, the newer interpretations "seemed to emanate from a community-wide discussion." (ibid., pp. 1217-1218)

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