

Ford bucks FPHA housing development in backyard of his Willow Run plant

Truman Committee on War Investigations starts action after Ford authorities put government surveyors and engineers off the site.

A hearing that may have the indirect result of determining the feasibility of operation of the new Ford bomber plant at Willow Run, Mich., will start July 16 before the Truman Committee on War Investigations.

National Housing Authority's whole program of construction of permanent housing wherever possible—to permit sale and recovery of some funds after the war—as well as its whole method of procedure in determining housing needs and supplying those needs, may well come in for a thorough airing during the hearings.

The hearing is an outgrowth of the Ford Motor Co.'s action recently in ejecting Federal Public Housing Authority surveyors from lands owned by the automobile manufacturer. The surveyors, making initial preparations for the proposed construction of several thousand homes for plant workers, had driven hundreds of stakes on the property before they were told to stop work.

Immediately after refusing permission to continue the work Harry Bennett, spokesman, issued a statement in the name of Henry Ford condemning the housing project as "unnecessary, wasteful and extravagant," and saying that construction of such homes was not needed. The statement was addressed to Col. F. Charles Stark, FPHA regional representative at Detroit, and added that Ford was prepared to fight construction of the homes "to the last ditch."

Complicated because of its relation to a very large general home building program for the Detroit-Ypsilanti industrial area, and because of some confusion over the exact number of workers to be accommodated in the area as a whole, the situation is briefly this:

Original estimates as to the number of workers to be employed at Willow Run were set and maintained until a few months ago at 100,000, great majority to come from areas outside the Detroit-Ypsilanti sector. The employment figure was recently cut to 58,000.

To accommodate this influx, NHA prescribed construction of dormitory housing for 10,000 single men, modified dormitories for 4,000 married couples, and estimated that private industry would build single-house units for another 30,000 persons in family groups.

Location of these buildings immediately brought controversy. Labor organizations wanted establishment of a model village near the plant (where no settlement now exists), while civic organizations and others in Detroit and surrounding towns

suggested the housing be scattered among the many existing communities in the area, where utilities, schools and other necessary accommodations already exist. Ford and others also suggested that such a town might become a "ghost city" when the war was over, if plant operation is discontinued.

FPHA finally went ahead with plans (as of April 24, 1942) to scatter some of the homes in nearby towns but build several thousand units, plus the dormitories, near the plant site.

The move was dictated by lack of transportation facilities for workers to the war plant from Detroit or other towns except by car or bus.

Authorities of Washtenaw County, site of the bomber plant, also strongly protested the project through George Meader, its prosecuting attorney.

NHA and FPHA officials last week conceded that sending surveyors without first obtaining owner permission may have been an error in finesse, but contended they had not until this time encountered an owner who objected to the procedure.

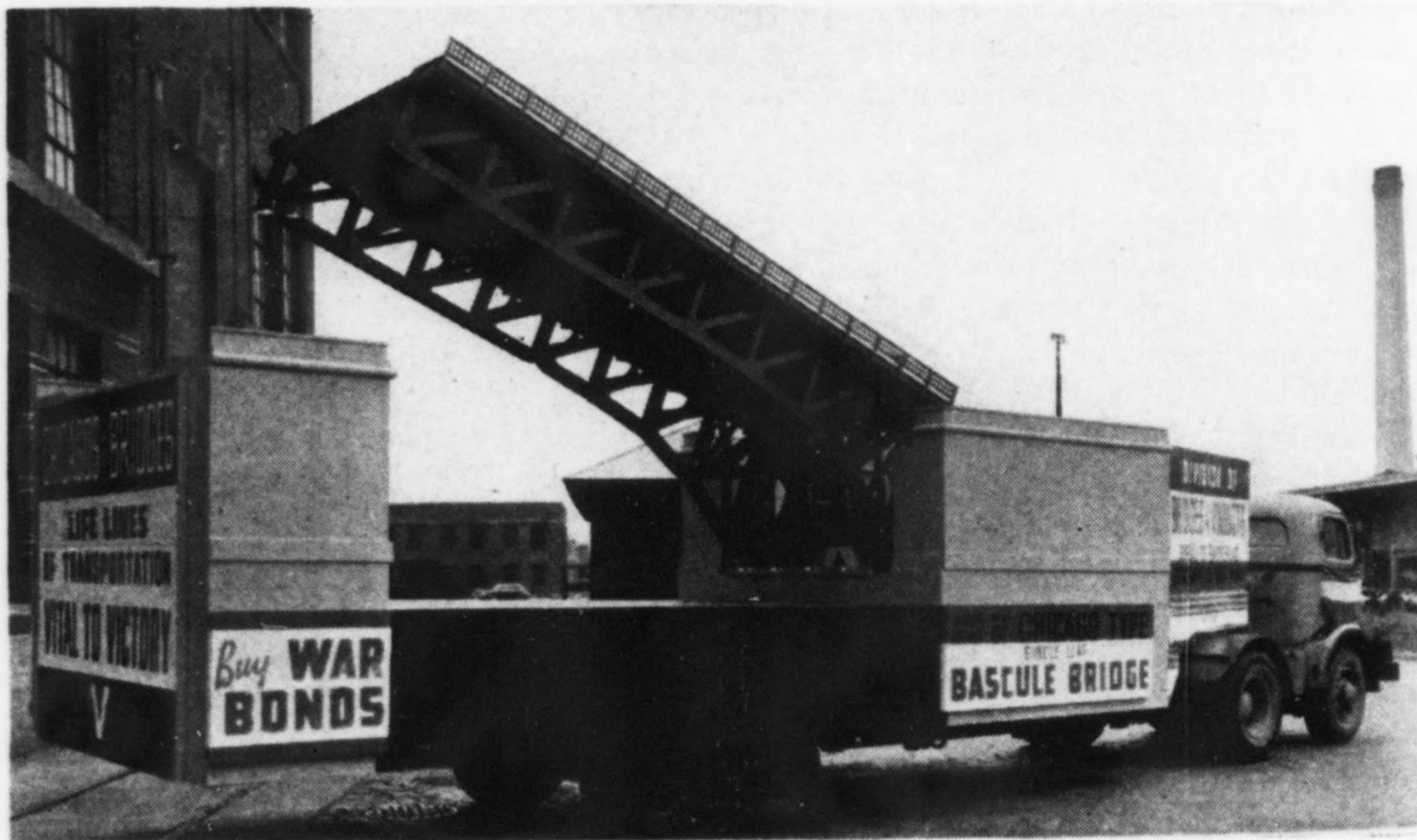
The whole situation might be changed, anyway, by changes in the general De-

troit labor picture. Original FPHA planning was based on the assumption that Detroit's war contracts would attract 200,000 workers of all types exclusive of the Ford employment. However, there is prospect now that this influx might be held forcibly to 75,000.

Ford's objections seem to turn on the expense of building a community complete with all utilities, schools, churches etc., when the company believes the workers can be cared for elsewhere. It is suggested also that Ford may not care to have in his backyard a community of workers who could easily be organized by unioners and use the political power of an incorporated governmental entity against him. Another objection might be his known enmity for attempts to curtail activities of rugged individualism.

Although exact nature of Washtenaw County's objections will not be available until the committee hearing is well under way, they may be two-fold—turning on the possibility of a "ghost town" if the bomber plant is abandoned after the war effort is over, and the political implications of a full-fledged new community of new residents.

FPHA and NHA contend, as defense, that operation of the bomber plant might now be impossible if workers' homes are not built near to the plant, and that the type of housing it plans to build (exclusive of the dormitories and apartments) has been accepted and approved everywhere as suitable for workers and even for sale after the war effort has subsided.



Chicago public works bureau on parade

In the greatest parade ever held in Chicago, lasting for 15½ hours recently, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 a.m. the city department of public works entered 16 floats and scores of other vehicles to depict to the public for the first time visual evidence of the department's activities. All employees of the department also marched in the parade, which included 1,500 floats and 600,000 marchers, staged to show Chicago's contribution to the war effort.

Largest of the city's floats was a 1/8 size working model of a single-leaf bascule bridge, which raised and lowered to the clanging of a real bridge warning bell as it travelled down Michigan Avenue. Several floats entered by the water division showed the plumbing testing laboratory, methods of cutting, calking, and tapping pipe, a sprinkler display containing a water conservation warning, various types of pipe and valves.