VITAL ISSUES IN FLINT, MICHIGAN - PRICES, HOUSING, AND FLOOD CONTROL

PRICES

A. Cost of Meat

1. Beef roasts and steaks have been priced around $1 per pound since early spring.

2. In Flint, as in Detroit, workers in the auto plants feel that they must have meat at least once a day. Hence, the high cost of meat has become a grievance in thousands of homes.

B. Cost of Automobiles

1. In a city where Buicks and Chevrolets are manufactured, buyers must wait a year or 18 months to obtain new cars. The workmen in Flint feel there is something wrong in this situation.

2. The prices of new cars have gone beyond the reach of many men employed in the car plants.

3. Used cars can be obtained, but buyers must pay premiums of $300 or $400 over the prices of new cars.

4. A Grand Jury investigation of the motor car situation is now in progress.

5. Arthur Summerfield, an auto dealer and Republican National Committee man, is said to have solicited campaign funds through the Automobile Dealers Association.

HOUSING

A. Slums Scattered through the City

1. Many areas in Flint are shabby and run-down. The temporary housing projects are in bad condition.

2. Except for some temporary housing for war workers and for veterans, there have been no public housing projects in Flint.

3. Private contractors are doing considerable building, but nearly all the houses completed are priced at $10,000 or more -- far beyond the reach of the average Flint workingman.
A. Fear Aroused by Recent Floods

1. In the last two springs, there have been two serious floods which caused considerable damage.

2. The Flint River cuts the town in two, and the people are anxious about the recurrence of floods.
1. **Characteristics of the City.**

   a. A town that grew into a city very rapidly, Flint does not have a great deal of civic pride.

   b. Has a large foreign-born and second-generation citizen population, a large Negro and Southern poor-white population, and an especially large Polish group.

   c. The main Buick plant, the largest self-contained auto manufacturing plant in the world, is located here. Chevrolet, A C Sparkplug, Marvel Carburetor, Fisher Body, and Dupont, all have plants in the city.

   d. Most of the wealth produced in Flint is spent elsewhere. Few of the large stockholders in the plants live in the city. The old settlers and their descendants are often in friction with the new owners from foreign groups.

2. **Politics.**

   a. The Poles are almost solidly Democratic and are conscientious voters.

   b. During the Roosevelt years, the Negroes became Democratic.

   c. In 1944 the county (Genesee) went Democratic except for the offices of sheriff and prosecutor.

   d. In 1946, after the Democratic incumbents had fallen out with labor leaders, all county offices went to the Republicans except that of county clerk. Until 1946, Genesee County had been predominantly Democratic for fourteen years.

   e. Prospects in 1948:

      1. George D. Stevens of Flint and John Reil of Lansing are Democratic candidates for Congress. Both have good records, although Reil supported Harry Kelly, Republican, for governor against Murray B. Van Wagoner, Democrat. Stevens has local labor support and is expected to carry Genesee County.

      2. W. W. Blackney will probably be the Republican nominee. Blackney has a reactionary record in Congress and is not popular in the city of Flint or Genesee County.

      3. Democratic candidates usually win if there is a large vote. The League of Women Voters, the AFL and CIO, are now putting on campaigns to increase the numbers of registered voters, with good results. Most of the new registrations are expected to be Democratic.
3. Suggestion for President's Speech.
   a. Local residents in Flint hope the President will speak at the I.W.W. auditorium or Alwood Stadium.
   b. A Labor Day picnic is being planned at Flint Park, which is an amusement park and a difficult place in which to speak.
   c. It is suggested that many people who would not go to Flint Park would go to hear the President at Alwood Stadium or the I.W.W. auditorium.
   d. There is a great deal of interest in the President's coming visit, and many people who are not in the labor movement would like to see and hear Mr. Truman.
City covers 20 square miles in southeastern Michigan, is third largest city in the state.

1. People - Population is composed of heterogeneous racial and national groups. These groups have developed their own festivals and cultural activities. An annual May Festival, commemorating the Polish Constitution of 1791, consists of folk songs and dances, speeches and drills, and the singing of the Polish national anthem. Attired in native costume, the Serbian Society presents a festival with songs, folk dances and native plays. The Flint Robert Burns Club holds a yearly celebration, presenting Scottish dancing, bagpipe music and a concert. The Alhambra Club, a Syrian organization, has its own annual festival at its clubhouse in the business district of the city. A cosmopolitan banquet held annually is featured by a roll call of national groups present.

Negroes form the largest racial minority—about 7,000. Each New Year's Day since 1866, Emancipation Day has been observed in the schools and churches and at the Negro Civic Center. The first week in March is set aside by Flint Negroes as National Negro History Week. Pamphlets and journals issued by the Washington publishers, Carter & Woodson, who edit the Journal of Negro History are read in schools, churches and civic centers. Another Emancipation Day is observed by the Negro Men's League of Flint, who on March 28 acknowledge the full governmental representation given to their home islands on March 28, 1797.

2. Industry and Labor - Flint makes automobiles for the nation. Huge factories—long, span, and seemingly all windows—spread throughout the city. The Buick factory is in the north, the nine-mile-long Chevrolet plants and Fisher Body No. 2 Plant in the west, the 26 Spark Plug factories in the east, and Fisher No. 1 plant in the south. On the outskirts, far removed from the din of mechanical hummers and car loudspeakers, are the neatly aligned homes of businessmen and motor company executives.

The birth of the Buick Motor Company in 1904 marked the beginning of automobile manufacture in Flint on an organized scale. Labor, at first scarce, was imported from adjacent towns, farms, and states. Mechanization and simplification of work resulted in large influx of unskilled laborers, the majority of whom were Southerners. The number of foreign workers, although large, was not as great as in many industrial cities of comparable size, for Flint's major growth came after immigration restrictions went into effect.

The auto industry experienced severe growing pains in 1977, when Flint was transformed almost overnight from an open-shop town into a union town. Here was held the first large-scale sit-down strike in Michigan, starting December 20, 1936. General Motors Corporation refused to negotiate with the strikers' demand for collective bargaining. The strikers offered to evacuate, pending negotiations, if the corporation would pledge not to attempt operations or remove machinery. This General Motors refused to do; instead, the company obtained a
sweeping injunction against occupation of the plants, which the strikers disobeyed by sitting tight. Chrysler went out shortly thereafter.

Nothing broke out on January 11 when company police attempted to interrupt food deliveries to the sit-downers, despite the use of riot guns and tear gas, guards and city police were unable to disperse the strikers. Sixteen strikers and 11 policemen were injured or wounded. The next day, upon orders of Governor Frank Murphy, the Michigan National Guard marched into Flint. Under the direction of the Governor, the National Guard maintained order but adopted a strict neutral hands-off policy. On one occasion, when Chrysler endeavored to break the strike by turning off the heat in the plant, the National Guard prevented. (This was the first time that a governor had refused to use the guard as strike-breakers).

A widely-advertised bank-to-work movement completely failed on February 1st. Ten days later, after numerous conferences, the General Motors Strike was settled. On the night of March 11, strikers marched out of the plant and staged a tumultuous parade in celebration of their victory. Terms of the settlement granted the United Auto Workers bargaining rights for its members but it did not grant the desired closed-shop.

Production of automobiles and auto parts is, by far, Flint's most important industry. Products of the auto industry amount to $600,000,000 a year, with a payroll of $65,000,000. Industries of local character include a structural steel plant, a flour mill, and several breweries. Other industries include auto treads and sounders, trailer coaches, furniture, cigar, cement blocks, soft drinks, mattresses, bedding, and rubber stamps.

2. Local History:

A. V. Nash, one of the pioneers responsible for Flint's rise in the manufacture of autos, is still actively connected with the industry. Another, Walter F. Chrysler, was one of the industry's leaders until his death in 1940.

One man, even though slightly obscured by the passage of time, is still looked upon as a symbol of the romantic days in the industry—William G. Durant. Durant, who at the age of 25 was part owner with Jacob Rea of 17th vehicle plants, gained control of the Buick interests. In 1908, he organized the General Motors Corporation—another Cadillac, Oakland, and Oldsmobile companies. The next year he bid for, and almost obtained control of the Ford interests; his inability to get a large loan from bankers, who had previously promised it, stopped the deal. In 1910, Durant lost control of General Motors but, by brilliant maneuvering, regained it five years later.

4. History:

1812 — first settlement
1830 — first tavern, first ferry
1832 — road to Detroit
1837 — seat of Genesee County—had post office, small mill, two dry-goods stores, two grocery stores, two physicians, a lawyer and a U.S. land office
1840's — Development of lumbering, fur trade, and cart factories
1850's — Incorporated as a city
1890's — City's carriage shops, with total annual output of 100,000 vehicles, had international reputation
Flint, Michigan

Auto capital, exclusively built around automobile industry.

Considerable sentiment among Negro population for Wallace.

Suggested topics for speech:

1. Strong civil rights statement.
2. Social security and old age benefits.
3. Republican tax program, its affect on the man.
4. Rise in industry profits during period.
5. Housing.
6. Taft-Hartley Bill.
7. Cost of living.