Ford workers won the Rand Formula in the historic 1945 strike. In 1977, there was still no legislation making the Rand Formula a right for all unionized workers.

“In the beginning Fleck looked like a routine, first-contract bargaining situation. It was a small auto-parts plant with 140 employees, mostly women. Conditions in that place were simply terrible. It was infested with rats and mice. The safety precautions were negligible, the machinery was dangerous and there were only four toilets. To make a bad situation worse, a good many of the women were being sexually harassed by men in senior levels of management.”

Bob White, Hard Bargains, 1987

Workers at Fleck, an auto-parts plant in Centralia, Ontario, produced wire harnesses and earned slightly more than minimum wage. In the fall of 1977, the UAW signed up the majority of the workers and certified Local 1620. By March the following year, a first contract was still not settled. The company refused to agree to the UAW demand for union security and the dues check-off. According to management at Fleck: “Employees should be free to be members of a union or free not to be.”
The union stood its ground, vowing: “We are not about to turn the clock back 30 years and throw out the Rand Formula.”

The ensuing strike lasted 163 days. Strikers had to face an astounding show of police force. By the second month, 500 OPP officers in full riot gear were lined up against the 80 striking women (average age 21) and their supporters. Police used extreme force, frequently hitting strikers. Eventually, it came out that the plant was part-owned by James Fleck, then Ontario Deputy Minister of Industry and Tourism.

As the strike dragged on it became a rallying point for thousands of UAW and other union members, as well as the women’s movement, the NDP, and the cultural community. The Fleck women showed great courage and solidarity, with some touring the province to raise funds for the strike.

Five and a half months after the strike began, a settlement was reached and workers won a modest raise. They also won a Labour Relations Board order for compulsory payment of union dues. The Fleck women had won union security. Their struggle led to amendments in the Ontario Relations Act in 1980. Unionized workers now had a legislated right to have the Rand Formula in their agreements.