

Dramatized account of the 1937 Republic Steel Memorial Day Massacre.

Unfriendly Fire

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/2989.html?s=pdf>

# Unfriendly Fire

By

Kevin P. Murphy

*Except for persons depicted in the Senate Hearing and other segments depicting official testimony, the characters in this play are fictional, based on events described in hearing testimony, written accounts, the memories of massacre survivors and/or community members who witnessed the events described. Any similarity between characters depicted in the non-Hearing/non-Coroner's Jury segments, and real persons -- living or dead -- is coincidental and not intended by the author.*

## Author's Note-Page 1 of 2

### Background of this production

When our group began to consider scripts we might choose for our first production, several members wanted to highlight the historical significance of the Southeast United Methodist Youth & Community Center building, in terms of people who fought to make the lives of American workers bearable, economically. This was to address the concern that our community might forget those important contributions to our present standard of living.

When we decided to create an original production, based on the 1937 Memorial Day Massacre at the Republic Steel Plant, we wanted it to be as historically accurate as the available records permit. We also did not want to take a vigorous position on one side or the other, although the preponderance of evidence suggests that the police overreacted to the threat that may have been present that day. We then had to ask ourselves, "What produces 'overreaction' in a situation like this?" We have tried to suggest probable answers to that question in our treatment of the event.

The Chicago Daily News, shortly after the event, stated, in effect, that good people on both sides were negatively programmed by circumstances and political rhetoric. We believe that is a fair explanation of a tragic foul-up.

The Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor, United States Senate -- Seventy-Fifth Congress ("The La Follette Committee") concluded:

1. The police had no authority to limit the number of pickets. The police argument that the marchers intended to storm Republic's plant was groundless.
2. Even if the police were justified in halting the marchers, "proper police work clearly required preparation."
3. "We find the provocation for the police assault did not go beyond abusive language and the throwing of isolated missiles. From all evidence, we think it plain the force employed by the police was far in excess of that which the occasion required."
4. "Treatment of the injured was characterized by the most callous indifference to human life and suffering. Wounded prisoners of war might have expected and received greater solicitude."

For its part, the Cook County Coroner's Jury found that all 10 deaths had been "justifiable homicide."

How, one might wonder, can there be such disparate views of evidence? Isn't somebody in this story a liar, a perjurer, a criminal in his own right? Perhaps. But, also, perhaps not.

You are driving down an unfamiliar road and see something disturbingly vague some distance ahead, seemingly on the road. You want to be certain that there are no obstacles in front of you that might endanger you. You try to make sense out of the vague shape long before you get close enough to see it clearly. Sometimes, when you do get close, the thing -- natural or man-made, turns out to be as you first perceived it, and sometimes it does not -- at times, turning out to be vastly different from your initial "take" on it. We don't usually condemn ourselves for our early misperceptions.

## Author's Note-Page 2 of 2

One of our creative team spent years teaching perception-related workshops to professionals and students who represented a wide variety of educational and professional experience. Some of the class exercises included physical stimuli that members of the group invariably "saw" differently, for a variety of reasons. On exposure to others' perceptions, sometimes participants were able to then see what the other person had seen -- and sometimes not. Yet neither person was being dishonest in such reporting. Physical and psychological factors combined to make physical "facts" appear different to equally honest viewers. And, in none of those classroom instances were there emotional stress factors of the magnitude of those present on the field the afternoon of May 30, 1937.

There are those who maintain that the police that day were sadistic bullies. And, given a population of 300-500 policemen on the field, it is probable that there may have been a handful who fit that description. But our team also includes at least one member who has served in a police capacity, and has also taught police officers from a wide variety of backgrounds from across the United States. That experience, and testimony in both the Senate and County hearings support the belief that there were police that day who were compassionate and protective, when circumstances permitted.

There are others who maintain that the marchers were a rabid mob of Communists, out to take over the steel plant, fully intending to physically attack the police who stood in their way. The testimony in the Senate hearing, and the actual disposition of the many cases tried in the local courts, dispel that belief. Yet, as there may have been "bad cops" on the field that day, so, too, may there have been "rogue marchers" -- people angered at their perception of prior injustices in the earlier marches -- and there may have been agents provocateur of subversive political movements who saw their opportunity to stir the bee hive. That some such hotheads, and some such "agitators" might have precipitated the police response is arguable from both sides of the event, based on the evidence presented by both sides. That most were not hotheads, nor subversive instigators is also borne out strongly by the testimony presented in both venues.

Were there people in authority who may have been clear about what was at stake and what was likely to occur? Given management's known past experience and performance, it seems likely that there were. Given the union higher-ups' experiences in prior strikes and at other locales, it seems likely that they, too, knew the potential volatility of the situation brewing -- and being nudged by both hierarchies for their own ends -- in South Chicago. But, the people in the trenches were not the generals who had crafted the encounter. They were simply the foot soldiers who kill and get killed in clashes of arms arranged by the generals.

Thus, on the field in front of Republic Steel two groups of predominantly decent people, under the pressure of conflict-laden conditions, came together in a tragic encounter where excessive force turned a manageable situation into a tragedy. That is what we have tried to show in this presentation.

*Kevin Murphy*

Dramatized account of the 1937 Republic Steel Memorial Day Massacre.

Unfriendly Fire

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/2989.html?s=pdf>