

# ROCHESTER HISTORY

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## Organized Labor in Rochester before 1914

By BLAKE MCKELVEY

The centennial of the organization at Rochester in February 1863 of the first central-trades council in America calls for a review of the history of organized labor in this community. Although Rochester in recent decades has not been a major center of labor-union activity, it often served as a battleground in former years and saw the introduction or early application of several basic techniques of organization. It also contributed to the development of important methods of conciliation and of labor-management accord. A review of the formative years, down to 1914, will shed much light on the city's history.

### Origins of the Movement

Rochester's contributions to the labor movement were a logical result of its early emergence as an industrial city. Established at the falls of the Genesee, water power quickly made the town a milling center, and the building of the Erie Canal transformed it into the world's leading Flour City. While the flour mills seldom employed more than a half-dozen men each, chiefly as partners or apprentices, they afforded a market for thousands of barrels produced by hundreds of coopers; they also stimulated the building of canal boats and the manufacture

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of other commercial accessories. As the pioneer blacksmith shops grew into stove foundries, carriage factories, and machine shops, and as enterprising tailors employed an increasing staff of seamstresses, the number of wage earners multiplied and standards of wages and hours became matters of public concern.

Disputes over these questions had appeared in the early 1800's in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, and later in Baltimore and Cincinnati, but they did not assume the importance there that they acquired in the 1840's and 50's in such industrial towns as Pittsburgh, Troy, Lowell, and Rochester where the wage earners comprised a major segment of the population. When the old journeymen's associations, dating from the late Colonial period, appeared in these new centers, they quickly assumed a more aggressive interest in local working conditions.

The first rumblings of discontent at Rochester occurred in the 1830's. A demand by the boat calkers for \$2 a day at local boatyards was considered unreasonable by the editor of the *Advertiser* in 1831, and two years later his counterpart on the *Democrat* warned that the plea by carpenters for a ten-hour day would lead to idleness and intemperance. Few gains marked these efforts or those of the Journeymen Masons or the Coopers Union, both of which broke into the news, and most of these efforts subsided in the depression of the late thirties. Even the wide use of due bills and other forms of private script, which postponed the hour of payment and reduced its value, produced only a succession of disorderly gatherings of mechanics in the court house square who were dispersed without serious incident.

By the late forties, when a number of merchant wholesalers of shoes and clothing began to establish large work shops to expedite the production of their contracting craftsmen, standards of wages and hours assumed a new importance. A bonnet shop, a glove and whip factory, and several large brickyards

each employed fifty or more workers, while the payrolls of two shoe firms exceeded one hundred. The introduction of sewing machines to speed the output of both shoe and clothing shops in 1848 precipitated the organization of a Women's Protection Union and a revival of the journeymen shoemakers. Although these efforts accomplished little and soon subsided, the increased industrial activity at Rochester brought the formation in 1853 of several more effective trade unions. The blacksmiths, tin-plate makers, machinists, and iron workers each established a union and won small concessions from their employers, while an earlier association of printers secured a charter as Local No. 15 of the national Typographical Union. A revitalized association of seamstresses, another of tailors, and still another of canal workers added to the mounting demands for wage increases in the fall, and the next March fifty carpenters paraded from one construction job to the next endeavoring to enlist their fellows in a united strike for better wages.

Spontaneous strikes erupted during the next few years in several local trades. In 1854, shortly after their first efforts to organize, both the cigar makers and the harness makers staged walkouts with sorry results, and the next year the canal workers and the printers suffered defeats. Of the early unions, only three—the Typographical, the Carpenters and Joiners, and the Masons and Bricklayers—managed to survive. Three additional unions appeared before the end of the decade—the Machinists and Blacksmiths, the Iron Molders, and the Laboring Men's Association, the last founded in May 1860. Strikes occurred in a cotton factory, among the workmen building the Erie railroad, and among those laying a public sewer, but no efforts to establish unions followed.

The Civil War aggravated some labor difficulties. Demands for increased output postponed moves for shorter hours, while

the call to the colors took off many experienced workers. Those who remained endeavored to maintain their ranks, but none of the local unions of the late fifties ventured to call a strike until a revival of the due-bill system in 1862 provoked such action by the Typographical Union. That strike failed, yet because of the hardships suffered by wage earners from inflated price, most of the other unions rallied to the aid of the printers. It was out of the ordeal of this strike that the Workingmen's Assembly of Rochester was born in February 1863, the first central-trades council in America.

### **The Workingmen's Assembly**

The Trades Assembly, comprised at the start of representatives of five unions, differed sharply from earlier labor bodies that had enrolled individual members for political or other reasons. In no sense a rival of the unions, the Assembly organized boycotts to support their strikes and spurred the formation of new unions. It even raised a strike fund to assist in organizational efforts, and it quickly established contacts with labor leaders in other cities.

Possibly the key to the Assembly's success was the speed with which it attracted the interest of distant unions. An invitation to J. C. Fincer and W. H. Sylvis of Philadelphia brought the presidents of two pioneer national unions to Rochester in July to address a mass meeting in front of the Court House and assured a wide discussion of the Rochester movement in other cities. Similar assemblies soon appeared in a half-dozen industrial centers, and in 1866, when the Baltimore assembly called the first national convention, the Rochester Assembly hastened to respond.

Within its first year the Rochester Assembly added five new unions to its roster. One of its founding members, the Carpen-

ters and Joiners Union, invited its fellows in other towns to Rochester in November to establish a state federation. The Typographical Union, the Iron Molders, the Cutters, and the Painters—all original members—and the new unions—the Machinists, the Coopers, the Tinsmiths, the Tailors, and the Shoemakers—were all represented at the first annual meeting of the Assembly on February 19, 1864, in the Court House. They hastened to deny any connection with a recently established Workmen's Independent Union, a newly formed third party, or with any other political or religious faction, and pledged the Assembly to work for the economic interests of its affiliates and their members.

The Assembly encountered many reverses in its early years. A strike by the Typographical Union for higher wages in 1864 proved unsuccessful, and agitation for relief for the underpaid seamstresses was equally unavailing. The tailors won a 25 per cent wage boost in 1865 as the clothing manufacturers hastened to prepare for post-war orders, but girls in the shoe shops, who struck against a reduction in pay, lost the strike and their jobs as well. In 1868 both the Molders and the Shoemakers engaged in unsuccessful strikes to avert wage cuts. Yet both survived, and the shoemakers, reorganized in July as the Knights of St. Crispin, took the lead at Rochester in establishing an International Grand Lodge.

Rochester was becoming a favorite center for state and national labor conventions. In 1865 local cigar makers entertained their state convention in the same week that local railroad men played host to the National Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. The Rochester Assembly sent delegates to the successive gatherings of the National Labor Union and staged numerous mass meetings in support of its campaign for an 8-hour day. When that pioneer national union expired, the

assembly invited its successor, the National Industrial Congress, to hold its second meeting at Rochester in 1874. Among the local union leaders of these years, Henry Cribben became a New York State Assemblyman, Christopher Kane became a secretary of the Knights of St. Crispin, and James B. Spinning attended successive Typographical conventions. Miss Susan B. Anthony urged equal rights for women workers before the Industrial Congress, which met in the hall of the Knights of St. Crispin on West Main Street.

In addition to its numerous mass meetings supporting 8-hour legislation, seeking the abolition of convict labor, and urging the formation of co-operatives, the Workingmen's Assembly sponsored a succession of Fourth of July picnics. The crowds that gathered on these occasions, generally at Maple Grove, increased each year until an estimated 11,000 at the fourth annual picnic in 1869 so overtaxed the horsecar line that the Assembly decided to hold its picnic the next year at the Rink downtown. The parade of several thousand workingmen to the Rink on the afternoon of July 4, 1870, was Rochester's first labor parade. All picnics and parades were rained out in 1871, and no labor picnic was reported the next year, but on July 4, 1873, the Assembly returned to Maple Grove in full force. The recent installation of double tracks enabled the women and children to make the trip by horsecar; many of the men marched the full distance with their unions. Numerous posters protesting layoffs and low wages appeared in the 1874 procession, and although the picnic at Maple Grove that year was again pronounced a success, it proved to be the last of the series.

Although the Workingmen's Assembly had early forsworn political involvement, several of its leaders could not resist calls for participation in this field. Indeed, Christopher Kane with a few associates organized a Labor Reform Party to run inde-

pendent candidates in the state election of 1870 and in the local election the next spring. Though unsuccessful, they tried again in 1871 when a rival labor party endorsed the Republican candidates. Friction between the two groups so weakened the Assembly that it began to disintegrate even before the Industrial Congress met at Rochester; the Typographical Union openly refused to participate in that venture.

No doubt the depression was chiefly responsible for labor's difficulties in the mid-seventies. Even the Co-operative Foundry, established by the Iron Molders Union in 1867 to counter a wage cut at the French foundry, which it forthwith absorbed, saw the bright prospect of its early years dimmed and announced a series of wage cuts that ultimately precipitated a strike by its workers against the union management. The Typographical Union, plagued by the willingness of some members to accept due bills from their employers or other unauthorized wage cuts—acts that required their expulsion—dwindled in numbers in 1876. The Crispins lost a bitter, month-long strike from which the union never recovered, though a remnant endured. A re-organized Tailors Union won a well-timed strike for the restoration of a wage cut in 1876, and the Journeymen Coopers got an improved scale of rates during a period of rush orders the next spring, yet these flurries soon ended and brought more drastic cuts in their wake. The establishment of a free employment office by charitable folk in July 1877 found jobs for some 253 applicants during the next six months, chiefly on neighboring farms.

Widespread railroad strikes, many accompanied by violence, halted trains in and out of Rochester for a few days in 1877, but the strike collapsed as troops boarded the cars. Many citizens sympathized, however, with the discharged strike leaders, and this response contributed to a revival of the Labor Reform

Party. Rochester unions sent delegates to a state convention at Troy in October at which numerous labor reforms were advocated as well as currency reform. Christopher Kane headed a reorganized Breadwinners Party, which made a surprisingly strong showing at the November election. A state convention of workingmen and greenbackers, held at Rochester in February 1878, named delegates to a national meeting in Toledo where the Greenback-Labor Party was formally organized. It ran a ticket in the Rochester election the next fall, but with discouraging results, and the movement soon disintegrated.

Scattered signs of economic revival in the late seventies foreshadowed happier days for organized labor as well as for industry. The International Union of Cigar Makers, meeting at Rochester in 1877, spurred the reorganization of a defunct local. The strike of the Molders Union averted a 10 per cent reduction at the Co-operative Foundry in 1879, but the next year, when the union sought an increase at four other foundries, the men were reluctant to press the demand and the strike was called off. Several Rochester industrialists presented turkeys, geese, oysters, or gold coins to their employees at Christmas time; the gesture, however, failed to satisfy many workers.

### **The Rise of the Knights**

Rochester's resurgence as an industrial center made it a fertile field for union activity. Most of its 735 "industrial establishments," tabulated by the census of 1880, were small, family enterprises, but at least a hundred had numerous employees, and the total of the city's wage earners exceeded 14,000. As the average wage was only \$357 a year, a sharp drop from the \$449 average of 1870, the pressure for advances was bound to mount. Although the city directory for 1880 listed but five local unions,



the remnants of several others revived during the year, and a new spirit of optimism appeared.

The Rochester shoe industry, fifth in size in the country and rivaled in the city only by the clothing industry, boasted the largest factories and became the most crucial battleground for labor. Only the Lasters, a small union of skilled specialists, had survived from earlier days by holding aloof from the struggles of the Crispins, and they assumed the lead in 1880. Victorious after a one-day strike in February, they relaxed their earlier exclusiveness and joined a new secret order of workingmen, the Knights of Labor, which enrolled several hundred shoe workers during succeeding months. The first hint of their progress came in August 1881, when the Bricklayers, Plasterers, and Stonemasons, having successfully reorganized and secured a new charter as No. 27 of their national union, staged a parade that brought out a column of unidentified shoeworkers—the largest of several union groups in the parade.

Another unidentified body in that labor parade was a group of carpenters, and ten days later they announced the formation of a local carpenters assembly of the Amalgamated Union, as the Knights were then called. Soon, groups of lathers and other woodworkers, including the carriage makers, took similar action. As the enthusiasm mounted, the furniture workers, the boxmakers, and the tinsmiths also joined the Amalgamated Union. In February 1882, David Healy issued the first number of the *International Laborers Advocate*, the first labor journal to be published in Rochester. Fully imbued with the idealism of the Knights of Labor and a newly appointed member of its national executive board, he proclaimed its purpose to be “to embrace everything that will contribute to the mental, moral, and physical elevation of the working classes.” He further declared that, instead of encouraging strikes and indulging in

inflammatory tirades, the Knights "will sanction and resort to a strike only after all amicable procedures have failed."

A prime example of that restraint had already occurred in Rochester. Indeed, nowhere else in the country would the Knights more deliberately follow their prescribed procedures than in the strike called at the Cunningham factory the week before. The local assembly of carriage makers had first presented their demands in December, and when rebuffed, had chosen a committee of "arbitrators" (as negotiators were then called) who had likewise been rebuffed by the management. The union had then appealed to the Rochester District Assembly No. 44, which also failed to open negotiations with Cunningham and referred the matter to the General Executive Board. Only after its investigation revealed an impasse was the strike finally authorized and financial support assured.

Unfortunately the Cunningham strike was almost unique in its display of discipline and restraint. Four days before it began, the Lasters Assembly had presented a sudden demand to the shoe firms, which, coming at the height of the season, could not be rejected. But the managers had promptly reorganized a former employers' association to meet such crises in the future. Thus when the other shoe workers, inspired by the success of the Lasters, presented demands the next day, they were refused. At the Kelly factory, one of the largest in the city, most of the workers hastily dropped their tools and walked out, leaving four thousand pairs of unfinished shoes to dry and spoil.

Of course these workers, not yet fully organized, received no benefits from the Knights, but that body suffered the odium their action engendered, and its failure publicly to condemn the strike encouraged other newly organized units to be less scrupulous in their strike procedures. The painters, tinsmiths, plumbers, and furniture makers, all submitted wage demands,

while the boxmakers and a newly formed assembly of printers demanded recognition. The astonished employers made concessions that averted strikes in most of these cases, though two stoppages lasted a week and the atmosphere of strife became so marked that the *Democrat* started a daily column on "Strike Notes." A burst of violence just before the end of the Cunningham strike on March 8 added to the uncertainty. But when that settlement proved amicable and brought a rush of work to the firm, other employers were encouraged to make settlements.

Grand Master Workman Terence V. Powderly made repeated efforts to discourage irresponsible strikes. Thus in April, when some 100 Knights in the recently organized Clothing Workers Assembly suddenly walked out at the Stein, Adler & Co. plant, the unit was expelled from the order, and efforts to organize this important body of Rochester workmen were suspended.

The Knights were determined, however, to hold on in the shoe industry. Denying responsibility for the Kelly strike, which still continued, they presented demands to the other firms in April for wage improvements in the next season. When the reorganized Shoe Manufacturers Association issued a manifesto on May 7 pledging 200 local firms to support any member who was injured in any way by union action, the Knights refrained from pressing their demands. Instead they quietly continued their organizing campaign and laid plans for a labor parade to demonstrate their strength. The parade on June 26, 1882 proved most impressive. More than thirty clearly marked local assemblies appeared in the line of march, as well as the Iron Molders, the Cigar Makers, and the Bricklayers, which were not affiliates of the Knights. Heading the parade of over 6000 men was a column of Shoeworkers numbering 1100,

and manufacturers watching from the curb had ample time for second thoughts as they marched by.

Second thoughts prompted caution, but not capitulation. Thus, when the shoe companies engaged men for the new season, they did so at the rates sought by the union though without granting it recognition. The Kelly firm, however, refused to rehire two union leaders, and all other Knights withdrew their applications there. As a result the Shoe Manufacturers Association continued its weekly subsidies to that plant, but its earlier plan to close all the factories in July was abandoned, and a committee of arbitrators was named to seek an agreement. The Knights, hailing this action as the procedure they had long been seeking, promptly named arbitrators, too. After a number of protracted sessions the negotiators reached a compromise agreement. They affirmed Kelly's right to select his own workers, but found employment for the two union leaders in another plant.

The surging growth of the Knights in the early eighties brought new problems and new responsibilities. Successive master workmen of Assembly District No. 44 often failed to give full satisfaction. Caught unprepared by the lockout of 400 girls at the Kimball tobacco factory, which they had undertaken to organize, they had no plan for action or support. Impatient with such leadership, the Shoemakers determined in 1883 to form a separate district assembly, No. 63, which called a convention at Rochester in August to explore the possibility of establishing a national shoemakers assembly somewhat along the lines of the trade unions.

Several of the older trade unions—notably the Molders, the Bricklayers, and the Cigar Makers—had experienced a growth in the early eighties comparable to that of the Knights. Lacking a central body of their own, they joined in 1884 with Assembly Districts 44 and 63 in organizing a Central Labor Union to de-

termine mutual policies and launch co-operative ventures. One such opportunity was the 8-hour movement widely agitated in 1885. Unfortunately the Central Labor Union took no action in this case until after a newly formed Rochester branch of the Socialist Labor Party had vigorously endorsed the 8-hour drive, thus greatly embarrassing the more conservative body. The latter welcomed Henry George to Rochester to address a mass meeting of 1500 at the Rink, but the chief effect was to prompt Bishop McQuaid to attack the Knights, as he had previously attacked Henry George.

Of course the shorter-day movement was nation-wide in its scope. A state law granting a half-holiday on Saturday on public jobs set a pattern for many firms. Although that compromise failed to satisfy most union leaders, intent on winning an 8-hour day, only the Bricklayers, the Masons and a few other building trades secured even a 9-hour schedule, while the laborers, ineffectively led by the Knights, suffered crushing defeats and one death in their battles for similar schedules. As a result many workmen welcomed a half day on Saturday as a substitute, and two thousand turned out to parade on the new Labor Day holiday initiated by Governor David B. Hill in 1887.

Numerous complications arose as the various unions pressed their demands. An unfortunate aspect of the Laborers' strike in 1886, when these workmen from "eastern Germany"—probably Poles, few of whom could speak English—were branded as "reds," was their replacement by another group of recent immigrants, Italians, equally bewildered by American ways. The hostilities thus engendered seriously marred the generally cordial relationships among newcomers in Rochester. Other instances of friction developed when manufacturers, seeking to avoid demands for wage increases from assertive craftsmen, installed new machines and hired fresh workers from recent

immigrant lists to man them. Idealistic and conciliatory men on both sides were often frustrated by the aggressive tactics of their opponents; and many were glad to submit the more troublesome issues to arbitrators. Prominent citizens proved ready to serve in such capacities on numerous occasions, and Rochester as a result escaped much of the violence that occurred in other industrial centers in the mid-eighties. The formation of the State Board of Arbitration and Mediation in 1886 (with William Purcell, editor of the *Union and Advertiser* as one of its members) provided state backing for a procedure already familiar in Rochester.

But the inability of the State Board to settle the Kelly lockout or to induce the building and construction contractors to attend their hearing soon revealed the limitations of that approach. Only effective unions could command attention, and confidence in the numerous ranks of the Knights began to wane. Thus in November 1887, when the several printing firms of Rochester refused to discuss the demands of their workers, organized in Knights of Labor Assembly No. 1735 and Typographical Union No. 15, which had collaborated in submitting a proposed schedule, there was little the men could do but strike. An appeal to the State Board produced after many delays some frustrating sessions, which absorbed attention while the companies brought in strikebreakers from the east. The presses were soon running at full swing again, and while the Typographical somehow survived, Assembly No. 1735 succumbed. The same fate awaited other assemblies of Knights in the late eighties.

### **Rise of the Central Trades Council**

Disillusioned by the failure of the Knights to give effective support in crucial negotiations or strike situations, many work-

ers turned with increasing hope to the trade unions. The success of the Bricklayers and other building trades in winning a reduction in hours without wage losses during the mid-eighties prompted the organization of their fellow workers in similar trades and led in July 1888 to the formation of a local Building Trades Council. Its object was to complete the unionization of this increasingly diversified field and to provide an over-all strategy that would avoid the chaos of a chain of strikes, as injurious to the workers as to the contractors. The success it enjoyed prompted a move a few weeks later to organize a local branch of the newly formed American Federation of Labor.

Representatives of seven locals of international unions met on August 9 and chose John C. Whiting of the Molders Union president of the Rochester Central Trades Council. The Cigar Makers, Bricklayers, and Masons, with the Molders, were most active and soon enlisted the co-operation of the plumbers, the roofers, the carpenters, and the stonecutters, each of which had or quickly formed a trade union. When the Central Trades Council got its charter on September 29, few if any recalled the organization 25 years before of the Rochester Trades Assembly, which had in effect launched the national movement.

The new Trades Council was still a minor aspect of the local labor movement. Although its members withdrew from the Central Labor Union, dominated by the Knights, they were ready to co-operate with the Knights independently and to support their strikes. Units of both bodies marched in the Labor Day parades of 1888 and 1889, and the number of marchers swelled to an estimated 4000 on the latter occasion. Speakers from both houses addressed joint mass meetings favoring the 8-hour day, and few signs of friction appeared.

The Knights were on the defensive, however, within their own assemblies. A succession of ineffective strikes revealed their weakness. Although the horsecar drivers, organized by the Knights, won a brief strike for minimal demands in 1888, a year later, when the company determined to reassert its full control and break the union, even the united support of all local unions proved unavailing. The horsecar drivers and the barnmen all walked out; the company, however, imported strikebreakers and introduced trained Pinkerton detectives to protect the scabs, even to operate the cars for a time themselves. Public opinion supported the drivers for several weeks, but an excess of violence and the general impatience for a restoration of service finally broke the strike. Although the Knights could hardly be held responsible, it was their loss.

The crucial test came in the shoe industry. After several years of comparative harmony, the Shoe Cutters Assembly late in 1887 demanded a 25-cent-a-day increase. When the companies, refusing to consider this and other demands, began to import strikebreakers, the cutters struck, closing most of the factories and throwing many other shoe workers out of work. Since the shoemakers had recently formed an independent District Assembly, they could not look to other local Knights for material support, and since all of District 63 funds went to the cutters, who were on strike, and not to their fellows, who were thrown out of work, the situation was fraught with danger. After several weeks of idleness the men began to drift back to work, and to save the jobs of its members, District Assembly 63 called the strike off.

A struggle among its leaders complicated the situation. Several, following H. J. Skeffington of Boston, were endeavoring to organize a national Shoemakers Assembly. That move, started at Rochester several years before, was consummated at a



gathering of shoe workers in the New Osburn House at Rochester, in June 1888, when Assembly No. 216 was organized. A threat to withdraw from the Knights secured its charter, but a year later the rupture came, and the Rochester shoemakers followed Skeffington and the other District 216 leaders into the Boot and Shoe Workers International, a newly constituted trade union.

Unfortunately that shift in allegiance did not solve the shoe workers problems. Late in 1889, when the Shoe Manufacturers Association, heartened by its victory the year before, announced a 10 per cent wage cut, the new union warded off that action by threatening a strike, but failed to secure full recognition. When the shoe workers staged a parade on April 17 to celebrate the anniversary of their new union, some 1500 men and women marched in six divisions, five representing thriving locals, and the sixth a column of women shoemakers not yet admitted to the union. Rochester prepared to entertain the second annual convention of the national union, but two days before it opened trouble broke out in the Cox shoe factory.

Patrick Cox, the workers claimed, was employing boys to operate several new lasting machines installed in his Fairport factory, displacing experienced lasters. Cox, on the other hand, claimed that the old lasters demanded the same piece rates they had made by hand, which destroyed the value of the new machines. Unable to reach an agreement, the men struck; they received the encouragement of speakers at the national convention, but Cox, having imported strikebreakers, reopened his plants. The union raised funds to support the strikers, and the Shoe Manufacturers Association pledged aid to Cox if needed.

So the matter continued until Cox, dissatisfied with the workmanship of his new force, persuaded the Manufacturers Association to announce a lockout at all plants to bring the shoe-

makers to terms. A score of shoe firms joined in the move, locking out over 2000 workers on November 29. A visit by the national leaders, Gompers and Skeffington, failed to open negotiations, but the attempt of the State Board to mediate the question at least brought the views of the contending parties more clearly before the public. After five weeks of idleness, the firms decided to open their plants. They announced a new set of rules that continued the old wage rates and assured equal treatment to all workers, but granted no recognition to the union. Indeed the rules stipulated that all employees should pledge never to participate in a strike. The union, confident that such a "yellow-dog" clause would never hold in practice, instructed its members to accept jobs at all plants except the Cox factories, which thus had to negotiate a separate settlement with the union. Both sides claimed victory, but both were in fact exhausted, and the era of relative peace that followed was in part due to this circumstance.

Although embarrassed by the inability of its strongest union to win a clear victory, the Central Trades continued to extend its coverage. Its leaders helped to found several new unions—the stovemounters and polishers, the woodturners and sawers, the ivory button workers, the barbers, the painters, and the truckers—all in 1890, bringing the total number of its affiliates to 22. Even the Iron Molders, one of the oldest and strongest, still had much to learn, however, as they discovered when a phrase in their contract, promising not to strike during the duration of the contract, forced them to work on the orders of strike-bound companies elsewhere, thus weakening the union's cause. They hastened to amend the clause in the 1890 contract.

By the close of 1890 the majority of Rochester's Knights were in five local assemblies of clothing workers. Together these bodies—one for cutters, one for boss tailors, one for women, and

two for apprentices—numbered almost two thousand but included less than half the clothing workers in the 25 leading factories. They had won a voluntary grant of a 9-hour day in 1889 and hoped to achieve further gains by negotiations backed by the threat of a national boycott rather than a strike. Thus in 1890 when L. Adler Bros. of Rochester failed to comply with their standards covering the number of apprentices and the hiring practices, the Knights voted a boycott. This action proved effective, since Adler and other Rochester clothiers were already developing brand names; Adler promptly paid a penalty of \$1500 to have the boycott removed. Determined, however, to put an end to such practices, he organized a new Clothiers Exchange and accused James Hughes, master workman of the cutters district assembly, of extortion. When the Knights refused to permit overtime until unemployed union men were hired, the Exchange announced a lockout in March 1891 of all Rochester cutters. Although only 350 men were directly involved, they occupied key positions, and the action threatened the jobs of more than 5000 workers.

Amidst the confusion resulting from this unexpected lockout, the news broke that James Hughes and five local officials of the union had been indicted for extortion. They were promptly arrested and released on bail, but when the State Board of Mediation and Arbitration opened its hearings on the lockout, these men were advised not to testify. The Exchange released copies or letters allegedly written by Hughes to local manufacturers exacting payments for lifting the boycotts. No spokesman appeared for the workers, and the State Board's report strongly deplored the use of the boycott. Nevertheless other local unions as well as the national assembly of the Knights endorsed the boycott and proceeded to aid the workers.

Meanwhile the clothing firms, preparing to reopen, issued a

“manifesto” to the workers inviting all who would renounce the Knights to return to their jobs at the existing rates and conditions. Many returned and the Exchange dropped its charges against all but Hughes, who was found guilty and sentenced to a year in jail. Hughes, however, appealed, seeking judicial vindication, and the Knights maintained their boycott. Since the boycott now embarrassed local workmen as well as the firms, the other clothing assemblies renounced their ties with the Knights and sought membership in the newly formed United Garment Workers Union. The Rochester Trades Assembly, previously on good terms with the Knights, refused to admit the new local until a message arrived from national president Gompers supporting the new union as a member of the A. F. of L. A few still-faithful members of the old clothing assemblies of the Knights took gloomy comfort from the announcement that plans for a U. G. W. convention at Rochester had to be cancelled in October 1893 because of the onset of the depression.

Discouraged by the defection of the shoe and clothing workers, the Knights of Labor rapidly lost power in Rochester. The old Central Labor Union had collapsed after the withdrawal of the building trades in 1888, and its successor, the United Labor Council, succeeded only in conducting a united parade on Labor Day in 1891 before it, too, succumbed. Even the Horse-shoers Assembly and the Brewers Assembly, the last of the once-proud divisions of the Knights in Rochester, were finally displaced by trade unions in 1892 and 1898, respectively. In these depression years the Knights made one last effort to achieve labor unity by organizing a Central Labor Congress in 1895; only the socialists joined them in this venture, however, and despite their own weakness the socialists, led by Frank Seiverman, soon took over from the Knights. When the latter

withdrew the next year, the socialists transformed the congress into the Labor Lyceum.

Seriously alarmed by widespread unemployment during the depression, trade union leaders in Rochester as elsewhere pursued defensive tactics. But many workers, made desperate by repeated wage cuts, walked out in spontaneous strikes that at least demonstrated that labor would not long remain content with the inadequate returns of the depression years. Seiverman, John F. Tobin, and Gad Martindale of the Boot and Shoe Workers reflected the increased radicalism of the day by the socialist doctrines they professed, but in the process their energies were increasingly diverted from union activity. The companies, striving to maintain the quality of their products, bid eagerly for skilled workers, a policy that helped after the turn to the century to boost wages and improve working conditions in Rochester.

The situation was not so favorable in clothing. Although the pressure for quality was equally insistent there, the extent of mechanization was not so great; only the well established firms maintained model factories, while a host of fiercely competing subcontractors produced under sweatshop conditions with little regard to the worker's welfare. A state factory inspector's report on some of these outside shops shocked local complacency in 1899 and again in 1911 when the evidence provoked some bitter jibes from papers in New York and Toledo against the local boast of quality products made by the "exploitation of the flesh and blood of children." Of course the indictment was somewhat overdrawn, since even in this industry working conditions were excelled only by those in Chicago, another quality center.

Rochester clothing workers also hastened to follow those of Chicago in the revival of the U. G. W. after 1910. In 1912 the reorganized Clothiers Exchange, unwilling to grant an 8-hour

day and a 10 per cent increase, saw 3000 of its best workers walk out. The companies retaliated by shutting down entirely, hoping the nonstrikers among the unemployed would bring the union to terms. But other unions rallied to the cause and staged daily parades through the clothing district. A burst of violence on one occasion cost the life of a young striker, Ida Braimen, and rekindled popular sympathy. As a result the Union won a measure of recognition from the large manufacturers, who agreed to dispense with outside contractors and to maintain standard conditions throughout the industry.

The resurgent trade unionism invaded new fields after the turn of the century, but also stimulated increased resistance. The *Labor Journal*, a weekly sheet launched in 1902, was more enduring than earlier short lived ventures and lasted until replaced by the *Labor Herald* in 1913. The strength of the Typographical revived in these years and provided leadership to the workmen in all major printing and publishing firms. Two industries, tobacco and liquor, could not afford to fight labor—too many of their customers were workingmen. No other industrial groups received such consideration, however, and in both the metal and woodworking fields the anti-union reaction was unrelenting. The machinist and furniture workers, reorganized after the depression, won a restoration of the 9-hour day and other gains from several of the leading firms in 1901, but their victory also spurred the organization of new manufacturers' associations in these fields and promised difficulties ahead. An effort by the machinists to win compliance with union standards at the Davis Machine Co. in 1903 precipitated a strike and brought several court cases, which left so much bitterness in their wake that the concessions the union extracted were later withdrawn. Not only was the union's hold broken,

but several leading Rochester industrialists received scars that would not soon be forgotten.

Although repulsed after a few early intrusions into the manufacturing field, trade unions achieved enduring gains in the building trades. The plumbers among others demonstrated their ability to wage long strikes and won more favorable contracts in return. Only the electrical workers, who urged special hazards, equaled the plumbers' rates, but many other tradesmen and mechanics, some lacking any organization, benefited by the upward trend. Even the laborers finally benefited, but not without earnest and repeated strikes in their own behalf. The laborers faced a special difficulty because of the ethnic conflicts that erupted as contractors imported groups of Italians, Poles, and other newcomers to break the strikes of earlier immigrants. Fortunately a number of zealous public-spirited citizens imbued with a new social gospel helped to quiet the violence that often threatened; they also fostered a new spirit of conciliation.

Organized labor reached a high point in its unionization drive at Rochester during the early teens. In 1913, just a half century after the formation of the Workingmen's Assembly, the Central Trades represented 60 local unions which, with 17 nonaffiliates, claimed a membership of approximately 15,000. These comprised slightly over 17 per cent of the city's 75,000 wage earners, and the marchers on Labor Days, in the decade following 1903, fluctuated between ten and fifteen thousand.

Perhaps the climax came in November 1912 when the national convention of the American Federation of Labor met in Convention Hall at Rochester. Emanuel Kovalski, for many years president of the Central Trades, headed the local delegation, while D. J. Tobin, formerly of Rochester and now head of the Boot and Shoe Workers International, nominated Samuel Gompers for his 26th term. Gompers, who had been in Roch-

ester on at least six previous occasions, won by a vote of more than two to one over his socialist rival and reaffirmed the doctrines of business unionism so long maintained by the A. F. of L.

Labor's achievements in Rochester were most noticeable in the building trades and in the shoe and clothing and brewing industries. Old and strong unions, including the Typographical, the Cigar Makers, and the Iron Molders, endured, but many city firms had escaped unionization because of the specialized character of their activities and products. The extent of mechanization also had its influence, reducing the importance of traditional craft skills. Some firms devised new schemes for cementing the loyalty and spurring the efforts of their employees, such as Eastman's profit-sharing bonuses, awarded annually after 1912. But trade unionism had by 1913 achieved a respectable standing in Rochester. The movement had become the subject of a serious scholarly study by Boutelle E. Lowe, a graduate student in the newly formed Department of Economics at the University of Rochester. Although the city's technical industries posed serious difficulties to labor organizers, many union leaders looked forward hopefully to new conquests.