

THE RISE OF ORGANIZED LABOR IN MINNESOTA

BEFORE AN AREA can become a field for labor organization, it must have an urban population in which wage earners form a group large enough to be conscious of their potential power. In Minnesota, the first labor unions were formed during the territorial period, in the 1850's, and at least one group of workers not only organized before the Civil War but went so far as to affiliate with a national organization.

The population of Minnesota, about six thousand in 1850, increased very rapidly after the Civil War. The growth was most pronounced in the decade of the 1880's, when the number of people in the state jumped from 780,777 to 1,310,283. The growth of Minneapolis and St. Paul closely paralleled that of the state, though the latter had about ten times as many people as either city. The Twin Cities are the center of this story because it is there that organized labor has played its most prominent Minnesota role. The population of St. Paul, a struggling town of eleven hundred in 1850, with a fifth of all the white inhabitants of the territory, increased nearly a thousand per cent in the next ten years, and then doubled each decade until 1890, when the census showed an increase of more than three hundred per cent over the figures for 1880. Minneapolis started later, but, after absorbing St. Anthony in 1872, it passed St. Paul in the next census and went on to become the state's leading commercial and industrial center in the period of exceedingly rapid growth of the 1880's.¹

In spite of the fact that Minnesota was overwhelmingly rural, manufactures did develop and a wage-earning

¹ *United States Census, 1930, Population*, 1:10, 18, 19. The present article is based upon a longer study, covering the period from 1850 to 1890, prepared as a master's thesis at the University of Minnesota in 1939. The Minnesota Historical Society has a copy.

group, which felt that it had interests distinct from those of the employers or of the farmers who formed the bulk of the population, appeared. The gross value of manufactured products in Minnesota rose from \$58,300.00 in 1850 to over \$76,000,000.00 in 1880 and \$192,000,000.00 in 1890. The average number of employees engaged in manufacturing went from 63 in 1850 to 21,247 in 1880 and 79,629 in 1890; while the total wages increased from a paltry \$18,540.00 at the mid-century point to over \$8,000,000.00 in 1880, and then catapulted to \$38,000,000.00 in 1890. This industrial progress was faster than that of most other states, for the rank of Minnesota in number of employees rose from thirty-fifth in 1850 to fifteenth in 1890.²

The two principal Minnesota manufacturing industries in 1880 were flour milling, which accounted for about fifty-five per cent of the machine-made products, and lumbering. The employees in flour mills and sawmills were not among those who organized in the early years, however, and smaller industries were the leaders in the adoption of collective bargaining methods. By 1880 over five hundred employees in the state were engaged in each of the following industries: the production of boots and shoes, carpentering, the making of clothing for men, cooperage, masonry, and printing, publishing, and newspaper work.³

Early industrial development in Minnesota was hampered by the lack of transportation facilities, for it was not until the 1860's that the first railroads were built in the state, thus releasing it from dependence on water craft, wagons, and picturesque Red River carts. Railroad construction, which had been fairly rapid in the years immediately preceding the panic of 1873, was almost at a standstill during the middle seventies, but it picked up during the next

² *United States Census, 1890, Report on Manufacturing Industries in the United States*, pt. 1, p. 6.

³ *United States Census, 1890, Report on Manufacturing Industries*, pt. 1, p. 474-479.

decade to give the state nearly fifty-four hundred miles of track by the summer of 1890. With railroad growth came a more rapid development of manufacturing.⁴

The presence of a labor problem was officially recognized during the first year of the state's existence. At its first session in the summer of 1858 the legislature passed a law prohibiting children under eighteen and women from being employed more than ten hours a day in factory work in the absence of a contract making other provisions.⁵ Although this law was vitiated by the contract provision, it did recognize the existence of labor problems. In the same session, a bill to protect laborers on railroads and public works was introduced but failed to pass.⁶

That there was a labor problem as early as the fall of 1854 is illustrated by the fact that the journeymen tailors of St. Paul struck for higher wages at the time. The strike appears to have lasted at least two days, but no record has been found of its outcome.⁷ Such a strike is not necessarily proof of permanent organization, but it at least indicates

⁴ *United States Census, 1890, Report on the Transportation Business in the United States*, pt. 1, p. 21; William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 3:61, 141 (St. Paul, 1920).

⁵ *Minnesota, General Laws*, 1858, p. 154; Minnesota Department of Labor and Industries, *Biennial Report*, 1913-14, p. 23. The department that issued this report was organized in 1887 as the bureau of labor statistics; it has also been called the bureau of labor, the bureau of labor, industries and commerce, the department of labor and industry, and the industrial commission. Its reports, cited hereafter as Department of Labor, *Biennial Reports*, are not entirely consistent in the information they give about labor organizations. The reason is apparent in the following quotation from the *Biennial Report* for 1905-06, p. 364: "In presenting the report on organized labor in the state as collected and arranged for the year 1906 it has to be stated that the separate reports have been furnished this department by the secretaries or some other official of the respective organizations. The department having no means by which to verify these reports, but having impressed upon reporting members of the various unions the necessity of correct statements, can not accept responsibility for any errors that may be found in these reports."

⁶ *Minnesota, House Journal*, 1858, p. 665; *Daily Minnesotian* (St. Paul), June 15, 1858.

⁷ *Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), October 23, 1854.

organized activity on the part of laboring men and the probability that some temporary group had been formed to deal with a specific problem facing the trade. On the other side of the employer-employee ledger, it is only fair to note that as early as 1855 and 1856 St. Paul storekeepers were agreeing to close their places of business at the early hour of 7:00 P.M. In thus limiting the hours of work, they achieved an end which clerks later organized to obtain.⁸

Successful unionization in Minnesota started among the printers, members of a skilled trade which had a record of organized activity in the United States running as far back as the Declaration of Independence. On December 20, 1856, a St. Paul paper announced that the local printers intended to celebrate the birthday of Benjamin Franklin, but within a week their attention was turned to more ambitious plans when a notice appeared calling a union meeting. It was signed "R. Bradley, Pres't." and "A. P. Swineford, Sec'y," indicating some previous organization, unless the officers were self-appointed. The success of the meeting is indicated by an announcement, which appeared a few days later in identical form in four St. Paul papers, stating that the organization of a printers' union had been perfected at a meeting on December 30. A constitution and bylaws were adopted and permanent officers were elected for a term of one year; the naming of four officers and five directors indicates a minimum of nine members. The birth notice concludes with the claim that the organization "may now be considered one of the city's permanent institutions."⁹

Shortly after its organization, there was some friction between the new union and Thomas M. Newson, editor of

⁸ *Minnesotian*, November 1, 1856; *Minnesota Weekly Times* (St. Paul), December 20, 1856.

⁹ *Times*, December 20, 1856; January 3, 1857; *Minnesotian*, December 27, 1856; January 1, 1857; *Daily Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), January 1, 1857; *St. Paul Financial, Real Estate and Railroad Advertiser*, January 3, 1857; George A. Tracy, *History of the Typographical Union*, 17-139 (Indianapolis, 1913).

the *Minnesota Times*. Two journeymen left Newson's establishment, either because, as he said, they were discharged, or because, as J. Q. A. Ward, a union official, stated, it ordered them to leave.¹⁰ Wide recognition was not obtained until 1858, the year often given as the date of the organization of the St. Paul local, probably because it marks the entrance into the National Typographical Union. That entrance had been delayed by the negligence of the national secretary-treasurer. The union convention of 1858, however, ordered the issuance of a charter to the St. Paul group and named J. M. Culver of the new Union No. 30 to the national executive committee.¹¹ In the spring of 1858 another clash occurred between Newson and the union over the question of wages; charges and countercharges in the *Minnesotian* indicate that the union had at least twenty members at the time. Newson declared for a nonunion shop, and the union began a publicity campaign by running for several months a formal notice certifying to its existence and good standing in the other three papers of the city.¹²

The printers of Minneapolis and St. Anthony, not to be outdone by those living downstream, soon organized their own union and received a charter dated September 10, 1859, from the national organization. This charter, now in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society, named eleven men as the applicants, gave the union the number 42, and located it jointly at St. Anthony and Minneapolis. This group of typographers was either less ambitious for publicity or it was faced with less sympathetic publishers than the St. Paul men, for it failed to receive notice in the *Falls*

¹⁰ *Minnesotian*, April 5, 1858.

¹¹ Department of Labor, *Biennial Report*, 1905-06, p. 365, 373; Minnesota State Federation of Labor, *Official Yearbook*, 1915, p. 19; Tracy, *Typographical Union*, 172, 175.

¹² References to Newson's clash with the union appear in the *Minnesotian* for March and April, 1858. For the union notice, see the issue of April 5, 1858.

NATIONAL TYPOGRAPHICAL UNION

CHARTER

To All to Whom these Presents shall Come:

KNOW YE, That the National Typographical Union, of the United States of America, established for the purpose of effecting a thorough organization among Members of the Craft, and composed of Delegates from Typographical Unions in different sections of the Country, being Now in General Convention Assembled, doth, upon proper application granted unto *D. L. Reine, A. J. Underwood, J. R. Chang, H. W. Harris, A. E. Squire, H. E. Shaw, James Morrell, William F. Allen, William J. Camp, Benjamin Drake and H. W. Metcalf,*

and to their successors, This Charter, for the establishment and future maintenance of a **TYPOGRAPHICAL UNION**, at *St. Anthony and Minneapolis*, to be known as the *Typographical Union, No. 42, of Minnesota*,

Now the Conditions of this Charter are such, That said Union shall be subordinate to and comply with all the requirements of the Constitution of the National Typographical Union: That it shall not at any time fail to be represented at the Annual Sessions, and shall for all time be guided and controlled by the Enactments passed at such Sessions of the National Typographical Union.

So long as the said Union adheres to the above conditions, this Charter to remain in Full Force and Virtue; but upon infraction thereof, the National Typographical Union may revoke said Charter, when all privileges secured thereby shall be annulled.



In Witness Whereof, we have hereunto set our hands and affixed the Seal of the National Typographical Union, this 10th day of September 1887.

Thos. J. Walsh, Secretary.

Robert L. Smith, President.

Printed by J. W. Carter.

Evening News during September and October, 1859. D. L. Payne of Minneapolis was made a member of the union's national executive committee for 1860-61, thus giving recognition to the new group.¹³

Neither of the printers' unions was able to survive the strain of the Civil War period; in 1864 the national convention dropped both locals because of failure to report for at least two years. The St. Paul group recovered first; its charter was reissued in 1870 and one of its members was appointed to the national committee each year until 1874. The Minneapolis group was rechartered in 1873 and was likewise given representation on the national board. Both locals were listed in the city directories, a testimony either to their courage or to their general acceptance by the community.¹⁴

Tailors and printers were not, however, the only Minnesota craftsmen who were conscious of the advantages of collective bargaining during the 1850's. In the summer of 1858 the citizens of St. Anthony were disturbed by several hundred lumber workers, who met to discuss means of collecting wages due. Some favored violent action, but moderation prevailed and a committee of twelve workers was appointed to carry an ultimatum to their employers stating that if payment was not made by the following Wednesday the boom would be cut loose and the logs taken down river and sold. Since no further notice of the difficulty appears, it may be concluded that a harmonious settlement was reached.¹⁵ But this was an isolated case, and the continuous labor movement in the state cannot be said to have started before 1867. Minnesota apparently had no connection with the National Labor Union, which had its first

¹³ Tracy, *Typographical Union*, 187, 195.

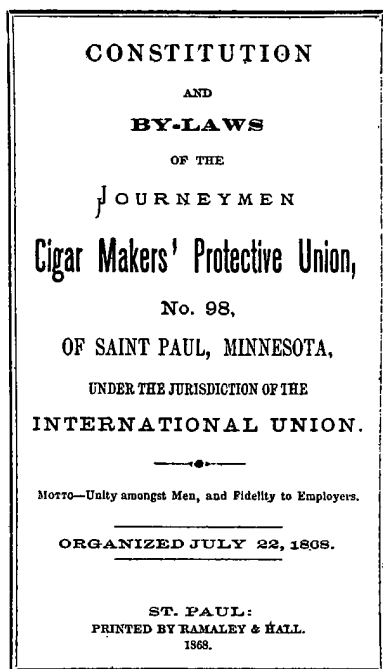
¹⁴ Tracy, *Typographical Union*, 187-276; State Federation of Labor, *Yearbook*, 1915, p. 19; Department of Labor, *Biennial Reports*, 1901-02, p. 457; 1911-12, p. 451; 1915-16, p. 178.

¹⁵ *Falls Evening News* (St. Anthony), June 5, 1858; *Minnesotian*, June 8, 1858.

convention in 1866, or with the eight-hour movement of the same period, led by Ira Steward.

There is evidence that the Minnesota labor movement continued to gain strength in the late sixties. In June, 1867, the workers engaged in the construction of the school for the deaf, dumb, and blind at Faribault quit work because of some difficulty with a subcontractor. About the same time fifty-two Germans in Minneapolis formed a workmen's society with the objectives of finding employment for all members and of supporting themselves and their families; this group was a mutual benefit organization with nationality as the principal basis for membership, rather than a labor union in the usual sense of the term. There is some indication that the St. Paul plasterers organized in 1867, but definite proof is lacking.¹⁶

In the following year, unions appeared in two or three other industries. The Journeymen Cigar Makers' Protective Union, No. 98, of St. Paul drew up and published a *Constitution and By-laws* which provided for a three-year apprenticeship period, monthly meetings, the semiannual



¹⁶ *Minneapolis Daily Tribune*, June 19, 21, 1867; *Faribault Central Republican*, June 25, 1867; State Federation of Labor, *Yearbook*, 1915, p. 20; Arthur J. Larsen, "The Rise of Labor in Minnesota," in *Minnesota Alumni Weekly*, 33:23 (August, 1933).

election of officers, a ten-dollar initiation fee, and dues of fifty cents a month. A quorum requirement of nine gives some indication of the size of the local.¹⁷ In September, 1868, about seventy-five Minneapolis and St. Anthony coopers, upon whom the flour mills were dependent for barrels in the days before the widespread use of cloth and paper sacks, struck for a fifteen per cent wage increase. The action was promoted by two unions, but failed when two of the leaders were arrested while directing a march on a nonunion shop. There is some evidence that the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association No. 78 of Duluth also was organized in 1868, but conclusive proof is not available. The mechanics of Minneapolis must have organized about this time, as their initial ball was held in February, 1869.¹⁸

During the early 1870's labor organization gained momentum, with an increasing number of strikes and new unions. For the year 1870 at least seven strikes can be traced through Minnesota newspapers; among the strikers, whose chief demands usually concerned wages, were telegraphers, coopers, railroad laborers, sawmill workers, and bricklayers. The locations of both strikes and new unions indicate that laborers were stirring in smaller towns outside the Twin Cities; unions organized at Lake City and Farmington admitted members without reference to their respective trades. Fifty voters were present at the organization meeting of the Lake City group and adopted a constitution declaring their object to be "to protect the interests of the laboring man against all encroachments of whatever form or nature." Political discussion was to be barred, though corrupt officeholders, political rings, and monied monopolies were listed as enemies; the initiation fee was set at twenty-five cents and weekly dues at five cents; and Monday and Friday were designated as regular meeting nights. The

¹⁷ The Minnesota Historical Society has a copy of the *Constitution*. See also State Federation of Labor, *Yearbook*, 1915, p. 26.

¹⁸ *Tribune*, September 8, 15, 1868; February 17, 1869; Department of Labor, *Biennial Report*, 1907-08, p. 104.

Lake City newspaper adopted an attitude contrary to that of most contemporary papers and urged every laboring man to join the union.¹⁹ In 1871 a serious outbreak occurred among the construction workers on the Northern Pacific Railroad, but quiet was restored when the ringleaders were arrested and sent to Fort Ripley. Some of the other participants were set at liberty when they paid their share of the damages. The predominant nationality group of New Ulm came to the fore in 1873, when it organized the Arbeiter Verein. According to its articles of incorporation, its purposes were the elevation of workmen morally and intellectually, mutual aid and assistance to members under affliction, and the maintenance of a library and hall.²⁰

John Lamb, Minnesota's first commissioner of labor, said in his initial report to the legislature in 1888 that the labor movement had its beginning in Minneapolis in 1872.²¹ The basis for this statement is not very clear, since it appears that at least four unions had been started in Minneapolis before 1872, that none was established in that year, and that three were organized the following year. In addition to the rechartering of the typographical union in 1873, there is some evidence to indicate the formation of a general workingmen's union and also the unionization of tailors and locomotive engineers. A millers' union that was holding regular semimonthly meetings in 1874 may have been organized earlier; the fact that its corresponding secretary was a miller at the Washburn B Mill indicates that this was not entirely an employers' organization.²²

In St. Paul the iron molders may have organized as early as 1872, but evidence for a definite statement is not avail-

¹⁹ *Lake City Leader*, January 7, 1870; *Tribune*, January 12, 1870.

²⁰ Record of Incorporations, book B, p. 713, in Minnesota Secretary of State's Archives.

²¹ Department of Labor, *Biennial Report*, 1887-88, p. 248.

²² *Labor Review* (Minneapolis), September 4, 1914; Department of Labor, *Biennial Reports*, 1905-06, p. 371; 1907-08, p. 101; *Minneapolis City Directory*, 1874, p. 40, 140.

able. There are several reasons for confusion about the organization dates of unions. Many groups found secrecy not only desirable, but absolutely necessary to their existence. A great number of unions did not maintain a continuous existence and dates of reorganization are often confused with the dates of original organization; the point at which a subsequent union in a trade becomes a new union rather than a reorganization of the original is often almost impossible to determine. The inaccurate memories or carelessness of union secretaries, slipshod newspaper reports, and conflicting official records do not make the solution of the problem any easier.

Some St. Paul leaders had ambitious plans when they formed the Workingmen's Association No. 1 of the United States in 1873; the constitution and bylaws opened the organization to all workingmen of eighteen or more years who depended chiefly on physical labor for their livelihood. The following year the Butchers Benefit Society of St. Paul was incorporated for the purpose of establishing sick and disability aids.²³

The railroad brotherhoods have long been famous for the effectiveness of their organization and the high quality of their membership. The first groups formed in Minnesota were brotherhoods of engineers. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers No. 102 of Austin, founded in 1870, is the oldest labor organization in the state with a record of continuous existence. In 1872 division No. 150 was organized in St. Paul. Its articles of incorporation, filed in 1875 and stating that its purposes were to advance the interests, increase the proficiency, and further the improvement and happiness of the members, were gentle enough not to cause alarm, but sufficiently general to allow definite organized action if such became desirable. In 1873 divisions were established at Minneapolis and Staples. The lat-

²³ Department of Labor, *Biennial Reports*, 1901-02, p. 455; Record of Incorporations, book B, p. 790, in Secretary of State's Archives.

ter group, which was named the Brainerd lodge, is sometimes listed as located in that city. The home of some brotherhoods varied from year to year, probably with the addresses of the officers, who were members of a highly mobile group.²⁴

On the periphery of organized labor there are usually many groups composed of laboring people, or dependent upon them for financial or political support, whose main object may or may not be the advancement of the cause of labor. Building and loan associations, composed of laboring people to a considerable extent, began in St. Paul as early as 1869, and during 1874 three were founded in Minneapolis. The very active Ancient Order of United Workmen was a workingmen's organization chiefly in title, for its purposes were mainly insurance and social activity.²⁵

Laboring groups, particularly in their infancy, have often found it difficult not to become involved in politics. The Minnesota groups were no exception, although they may have profited by some of the sad experiences of earlier groups in the East. In the legislative elections of 1870 certain candidates were listed as "Labor Union" candidates. The prime leader in the attempt to unite the farmers and laborers of Minnesota into a political group was Ignatius Donnelly. In 1873, when hard times were descending, he tried without much success to co-ordinate the forces of industry and agriculture behind his reform pro-

²⁴ Department of Labor, *Biennial Reports*, 1899-1900, p. 292-295; 1901-02, p. 498; 1905-06, p. 378; 1907-08, p. 103; 1911-12, p. 430, 452; 1913-14, p. 205, 215, 217, 220, 226; 1915-16, p. 179, 187; State Federation of Labor, *Yearbooks*, 1915, p. 20; 1917, p. 27; Record of Incorporations, book C, p. 225, in Secretary of State's Archives.

²⁵ United States Bureau of Labor, *Annual Report*, 1893, p. 138, 139, 321; *St. Paul Directory*, 1873, p. 57; Record of Incorporations, book B, p. 302, in Secretary of State's Archives; Albert Shaw, "Co-operation in the Northwest," in Johns Hopkins University, *Studies in Historical and Political Science*, 6: 282-287 (Baltimore, 1888); *St. Paul Daily Globe*, February 7, 1873; May 9, June 2, 1878; *Minneapolis City Directory*, 1877-78, p. 26; *Report on Trade Societies in the United States*, in *United States Census*, 1880, vol. 20, p. 1.

gram. In a pamphlet entitled *Facts for the Granges*, he urged farmers to follow the lead of mechanics in organizing, and reported a convention at Brownsdale which favored a union of farmers and laborers and called a "Farmers' and Laborers' Convention" for September, 1873. This clarion call does not appear to have had a decided effect on the forces of organized labor, although it helped to bring about the organization of the short-lived Anti-monopoly party.²⁶

Minnesota industry stagnated in the 1870's along with business throughout the nation. The financial depression following the panic of 1873, the deflation of the national currency, and the five-season grasshopper scourge which started in 1873 all helped to stop the wheels of the Minnesota factories. Labor organization suffered all over the country during this period, and it is not surprising that after the boom of 1873, only two new Minnesota unions were formed in 1874 and none in 1875, the only year after 1871 of which that may be said. But 1876 marked the beginning of a recovery in labor organization, although general business prosperity did not return until later in the decade. Throughout the nation very few of the trades assemblies of the sixties survived the depression of the following decade, but the years after 1876 saw a rapid growth in the number of local trade unions both in Minnesota and in the rest of the nation. The rate of growth was fairly constant until about 1884, when the Knights of Labor became exceedingly active.²⁷

In 1880, according to the census of that year, Minnesota had 21 trade societies out of the 2,440 in the whole country,

²⁶ For an account of eastern backgrounds, see Herbert Harris, *American Labor*, ch. 1, 2, especially p. 67 (New Haven, Connecticut, 1938). See also the *Tribune*, November 5, 1870; and Donnelly, *Facts for the Granges*, 1, 19. Although this pamphlet is not dated, there is evidence that it was published in 1873.

²⁷ Selig Perlman, *History of Trade Unionism in the United States*, 81 (New York, 1922).

a number which gave the state a rank of twentieth among the thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia. Nine of the Minnesota unions were railroad brotherhoods of engineers or firemen, and the others were composed of workers in manufacturing or mechanical pursuits, with three coopers' unions forming the largest trade group.²⁸ The number of strikes, which serves as a relatively accurate index of labor activity, rose sharply in Minnesota in the 1880's. Whereas only about fifteen strikes may be traced through St. Paul papers from 1849 to 1881, there were about seventy from 1881 to 1884; of these nearly half were ordered by unions, and half were mainly for the purpose of procuring wage increases. Minnesota employers of the early eighties rarely used the lockout, an instance in 1883 being the only one in the first half of the decade.²⁹

St. Paul was the chief center of union activity during the early eighties. In spite of the reorganization of 1870, the members of the Typographical Union No. 30 were unable to hold their group intact during the strain of the next few years. The present organization in St. Paul dates back to the spring of 1882; it reported 85 members for that year and 133 two years later. The great mobility of the printing trade at the time is indicated by the fact that in 1884 the local admitted 203 new members and 180 withdrew by card. In 1883 and 1884 the union had trouble with the managers of the *St. Paul Globe* about wages and the closed shop principle.³⁰ The German-speaking element in the city

²⁸ *Report on Trades Societies in the United States*, in *United States Census*, 1880, vol. 20, p. 2, 14-19.

²⁹ United States Bureau of Labor, *Annual Reports*, 1887, p. 272-289; 1901, p. 554; Hellen Asher, "The Labor Movement in Minnesota, 1850-1890," 1. The latter is a manuscript term paper; a copy is in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

³⁰ Department of Labor, *Biennial Reports*, 1907-08, p. 103; 1911-12, p. 430, 453; 1913-14, p. 218; 1915-16, p. 180; *Globe*, January 25, 1883; October 12, 1884; April 19, 1885; Tracy, *Typographical Union*, 359; International Typographical Union, *Report of Proceedings*, 1882, 1884. See also the minutes of the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly, vol. 1, p. 48, 49, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

had its own newspaper, the *Volkszeitung*, and the printers in turn had their own union, the German-American Typographical Union. Since this local went through at least one reorganization, its original date is not clear, but it existed as early as 1878, when its members participated in both a ball and a strike. This early strike was a result of a union demand for the wage scale set up by the national office in New York, and it thus forced recognition of one of the major problems faced by local unions with national connections. The printers were willing to accept a compromise wage agreement, pending approval by the parent organization; but when the approval was denied, they struck for the full union scale. The manager of the office agreed to a pay restoration, but could not swallow a limitation on his power to dismiss workers as he pleased. A pressmen's union also was functioning as early as 1883, and had twenty-five members the following year.³¹

During the early eighties the building tradesmen of St. Paul became union conscious. The masons, who were the first in line, incorporated the Bricklayers Benevolent Union No. 1 in 1881 for mutual protection, mutual aid in times of sickness and death, the securing of a fair and just remuneration for their labor, and the improvement of their skill. Any bricklayer of good moral character who would pay the three-dollar admission fee and the twenty-five-cent monthly dues was eligible for membership. The establishment of branches throughout the state was contemplated, but about two months after incorporation the major attention of the members was probably taken up by an unsuccessful strike for a closed shop. A strike the following year also was unsuccessful, but the influx of Chicago union men helped to maintain the union spirit.³² The plasterers, feeling the urge

³¹ *Globe*, May 5, June 23, 24, 1878; minutes of the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly, vol. 1, p. 81; Tracy, *Typographical Union*, 372; International Typographical Union, *Proceedings*, 1884, p. 251.

³² Record of Incorporations, book F, p. 265, in Secretary of State's Archives; Department of Labor, *Biennial Reports*, 1899-1900, p. 294;

to co-ordinate their activities about the same time, filed articles of incorporation of the Plasterers Protection and Benevolent Union over the signatures of twelve members. Trouble crept in, however, and an attempt was made to organize again in 1883, and finally in 1884 a membership of fifty-six was definitely reported. Other building groups that organized unions were the stonecutters in 1878 or 1880, the plumbers in 1882, and the carpenters. The latter organized in 1883 and incorporated two years later. It is interesting to note that the plumbers were able to boost their wage twenty cents a day and cut the hours of work on Saturdays from ten to nine.³³

Members of various miscellaneous craft groups also organized in St. Paul at this time. The Cigar Makers' International Union of America No. 98 enrolled over two hundred members, but failed in its strike against the employment of girls because there was an abundance of labor available. The Minnesota Cooks, Pastry Cooks, and Confectioners Association incorporated in 1881, but Bakers Union No. 21 apparently took its place three years later. Most of the original officers of the Journeymen Tailors Self-Protection Society were Scandinavians. Railroad engineers, firemen, and conductors, after organizing their locals, sent representatives to the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly. Among the other groups which organized were the boilermakers, stationary engineers, iron molders, shoemakers, and telegraphers. The general labor unions formed in St. Paul did not continue long; one founded in 1873 was

1915-16, p. 179; *Globe*, June 14, 1885; State Federation of Labor, *Year-book*, 1915, p. 22; United States Bureau of Labor, *Annual Report*, 1887, p. 272-281; minutes of the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly, vol. 1, p. 46.

³³ Record of Incorporations, book F, p. 107-110; book M, p. 75, in Secretary of State's Archives; minutes of the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly, vol. 1, p. 53, 137; treasurer's record of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Union No. 87, St. Paul, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

followed in 1878 by a Workingmen's Union organized with the help of a similar Minneapolis group. At the first regular meeting 120 members were registered, and a month later a meeting of the group filled the old Ramsey County courthouse. Its purpose was the discussion of political matters and city bonds for a proposed bridge to tap the trade area beyond Fort Snelling and thus prevent Minneapolis from monopolizing the business of the section. Such action reflects the fact that both employers and employees were admitted to membership upon the payment of a ten-cent fee, and indicates that the organization was more nearly a chamber of commerce than a labor union. Yet it did condemn a rather common device used by employers to reduce wages—that of publishing reports that work was plentiful in order to attract laborers.

At least two Minneapolis unions either survived the economic storms of the middle seventies or recovered very rapidly. The typographers admitted nineteen members during 1877, bringing their total to thirty-one, and their union continued to grow until in 1882 it had a hundred members. Beginning in the latter year a deputy was appointed from Minneapolis to encourage the formation of more local unions. Strikes for the union scale of wages in 1882 and 1883 were not successful, and in one controversy the union declared the strikers in error and ordered them back to work. The coopers stepped across municipal boundaries in 1878 to meet with the St. Paul Workingmen's Association, and in 1884 they prosecuted two strikes, the second of which was successful and brought congratulations from the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly. A bootblacks' union, started in 1878, raised the price of shoeshines to ten cents on Sundays, twice the regular weekday rate. The cigar makers and iron molders both organized in 1880 and won and lost strikes in the years following. The boiler-makers and the stonecutters were also unionized about 1880.

Among railroad men, the Minneapolis firemen and conductors added their groups to that of the engineers.³⁴

A Workingmen's Union, which may have been the one formed in 1873, took an active part in municipal politics in 1878 and lasted at least until 1880. Its president, Chauncy W. Curtis, had been active in the coopers' union and co-operatives, and he was to take a leading part in the future Knights of Labor. The union demanded an examination of the county books; sent a petition to Congress signed by over two thousand members asking for an income tax, the repeal of the resumption act, the abolition of the national banking system, and monetary reform; requested a state bureau of labor statistics; and promoted an independent political movement, the endorsed candidates of which were defeated. The organization forbade union members to take the jobs of striking construction workers; it forced employers to stop the practice of withholding twenty-five cents of the daily wage in order to keep employees from leaving; and it sent representatives to the funeral services for the unidentified victims of the Minneapolis flour mill explosion of 1878. On one occasion, members of the union listened to an address by the indomitable Ignatius Donnelly on the subject of the whole labor problem. The hostile *St. Paul Pioneer Press* predicted that the union would not last three months, but the friendly *St. Paul Globe* came to its defense by maintaining that it was not communistic.³⁵

The belief that co-operation among the various unions in

³⁴ The two preceding paragraphs are based upon various sources, including the *Globe*, *Biennial Reports* of the department of labor, the *Yearbooks* of the state federation of labor, the Record of Incorporations in the Secretary of State's Archives, the minutes of the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly, and the papers of the Cigar Makers' International Union of America, No. 98, St. Paul, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

³⁵ Various items about this union appear in the *Globe* from January to July, 1878. See especially the issues of January 16, 25, 30, February 24, March 13, 19, 26, June 2, 22, and 26, 1878.

a city was desirable took hold relatively early in the United States and resulted in the organization of groups usually known as city centrals, trade and labor assemblies, or councils. A central co-ordinating and liason body of which unions and not individuals were members could serve many obvious purposes in the attempts of laborers to improve their lot. It was necessary to have a group of well-established unions, a recognition of the need of centralized effort, and proper leadership before significant steps could be taken. These conditions did not exist in combination in either of the Twin Cities until the 1880's, the decade that marks the firm establishment of powerful and widespread Minnesota labor organization.

The minutes of the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly give a fairly complete picture of its work, beginning with its organization on November 12, 1882, by thirty-five delegates from five unions and two Knights of Labor assemblies. At its second meeting two weeks later, the assembly adopted a constitution, bylaws, and established an order of business. It ruled to admit three delegates from unions which had fewer than fifty members and to allow one more for each additional twenty-five members, and it elected officers to serve for terms of six months. The assembly heard discussions on a wide variety of topics at its semimonthly meetings; business conditions, the progress of strikes, prospective unions, the union label, and political subjects were all in order. The union representatives took action in calling mass meetings, black-listing or boycotting unfair employers, persuading legislative candidates to pledge themselves to oppose convict labor, and encouraging the formation of new unions. Socially, the group promoted a picnic and held an annual ball. The St. Paul organization attempted to prevent improper presentation of the case of labor to the public by making plans to operate a page in the *Sunday Herald*. Although at least five groups in addition to the original seven sent

Meeting of Organization.

St. Paul, Sunday, Nov. 12, 1882.

A call having been issued by various trade and labor organizations requesting all such organizations in the city to send delegates to a meeting to be held this day for the purpose of organizing a Trades and Labor Assembly, the call was responded to by a gratifying number of delegates, and the meeting was called to order at 3 o'clock p.m.

Mr. Chas. Wack chairman of the committee which issued the call, occupied the chair, and appointed Wm. P. Lynch temporary secretary.

On motion the chair appointed Messrs. C. T. Kelly, M. J. Devine, Peter Schoens, John Heidnreich and James Kennedy as Committee on credentials.

The Committee on Credentials reported the following delegates entitled to seats:

Cigarmakers' Union. 1

Chas. Wack, Chas. Schultz, A. J. Johnson, Phillip Fisher, John Heidnreich.

Tailors' Union. 2

Peter Schoens, Jacob. Pinker, F. Sweeney, Ignatius Pzybelaki, S. Pearson.

Boilermakers' Union. 3

Andrew Harty, M. J. Devine, Wm. Lynch, Wm. Hanley, Thomas Coddlen.

H. of L. - Assembly No. 2285. 4

P. J. McClelland, Frank Sherwood, P. P. Pomeroy, James C. Page, F. H. B. McDowell.

MINUTES OF THE ST. PAUL TRADES AND LABOR
ASSEMBLY, NOVEMBER 12, 1882

[Reproduced through the courtesy of the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly.]

delegates to the assembly during its first two years, there were periods when the organization not only languished, but even gasped for breath; but it did maintain its existence in spite of the fact that it went as long as four months without an officially recorded meeting.³⁶

The Minneapolis Trades Assembly, which probably was organized in September, 1883, also went under various other names—the Minneapolis Labor Council, the Minneapolis Trades and Labor Council, and the Trades and Labor Assembly of Minneapolis and Hennepin County. The leaders of the group were men who were prominent in many phases of city and state labor affairs; John Lamb, later state commissioner of labor, served as statistician. The assembly may have served as a sounding board for the general discussion of public questions by the Knights of Labor, whose sessions were otherwise secret, but it did include craft unions as well in its rather loose organization.³⁷

In the area outside the Twin Cities unions became increasingly numerous as the population grew and was able to support manufacturing and railroads. Proximity to the comparatively large metropolitan center does not seem to have been a great stimulus to unionism, as only two towns within a fifty mile radius of the Twin Cities had unions. The union coopers of Red Wing were dismissed in 1878 because they threatened to strike and an unidentified Union No. 1 drew up a declaration of principles which came into the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society sometime previous to 1888. The Stillwater molders were very busy in 1883 with meetings, a dance, and a wage strike.³⁸

³⁶ See volume 1 of the minutes of the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly, and the *Globe*, December 31, 1883; December 31, 1884; and June 21, 1885.

³⁷ *Labor Review*, August 29, 1913; September 4, 1914; *Globe*, July 19, 1885; minutes of the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly, vol. 1, p. 72.

³⁸ *Globe*, June 29, 1878; January 9, 13, 16, 17, 1883; Minnesota Historical Society, *Catalogue of the Library*, 2:105 (St. Paul, 1888).

In the fertile southern part of the state, railroad unions were numerous, for it was there that much early railroad development took place. Austin followed up on an early start by the formation of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen No. 126 in 1882, but Waseca was already on the scene with unions of engineers, firemen, and conductors. In Winona the trainmen may have organized in 1883, but a stationary engineers' union had been formed the preceding year. This thriving river city also had a branch of the United Laborers Association of the United States, which had its home office in Chicago even though it was incorporated under a Minnesota law in 1884 for the mutual benefit of the laboring classes and for the purpose of combating the evils of capitalists, monopolies, and corporations, of which latter it was one. The cigar-making trade prospered for a time, particularly in Winona and St. Peter, where the unions won and lost strikes on several occasions.

In the northern and western parts of the state, the forces of labor found several centers about which to rally. The granite cutters probably organized at St. Cloud and Ortonville in 1877. The St. Cloud union was active in promoting strikes, reporting nine stoppages in the three years from 1881 to 1883. In 1882 the Moorhead printers organized Typographical Union No. 186, probably a branch of a union at Fargo, North Dakota, and it immediately lost a strike for higher wages. The railroad brotherhoods added several unions—the Montevideo conductors in 1882 or 1883, the Dilworth engineers and Crookston-Barnesville firemen in 1883, and the Staples conductors and Melrose trainmen and firemen in 1884. The Duluth longshoremen were reported to have won a wage strike in 1883, although their union was supposedly not organized until the early nineties. In other trades, the carpenters of Morris requested incorporation of Union No. 41 of the Brotherhood of Carpenters

and Joiners of America in 1883, and the Brainerd iron molders were unionized between 1884 and 1886.⁸⁹

By 1884 at least seventy-three unions had been organized in Minnesota — seventeen in Minneapolis, twenty-seven in St. Paul, and twenty-nine in other centers. Such growth indicates a substantial amount of labor organization activity. Even though many of the early Minnesota unions were short-lived, there is evidence that the leaven of unionism spread through much of the state before the labor boom of the middle eighties, which came with the flowering of the Knights of Labor.

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⁸⁹ This summary for the smaller cities of the state is based mainly on the *Biennial Reports* of the state department of labor and the *Annual Report* for 1887 of the federal bureau of labor.



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