

THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR IN MINNESOTA¹

WHEN CRAFT UNIONS were becoming fairly well established in Minnesota about 1880, a new and conflicting type of labor organization appeared with the founding of local assemblies of the Knights of Labor. The Noble Order of the Knights of Labor was founded by a group of tailors led by Uriah S. Stephens in Philadelphia in 1869. During the first nine years, its growth was slow and was confined almost entirely to the north Atlantic states and the Appalachian coal fields.

The organization of the Knights was based on local assemblies which might be made up of workers—men or women or both—in one or more trades. Lawyers, bankers, professional gamblers, stockbrokers, and those engaged in the liquor business were not admitted. The master workman, who served as the ruling official, had the assistance of about fifteen other officers, some elected semiannually and some appointed. This large and rapidly changing set of leaders provided a democratic rule, but one that might lack consistency of policy and ability if the local assembly passed the offices around among the members. The local assemblies were loosely bound together in district assemblies based either on geographical or craft divisions. Each year, beginning in 1878, a national general assembly was held at which delegates from the various district organizations and some unattached locals elected officers and decided questions of general policy. Theoretically, the central organization had considerable power, but practically, each local assembly

¹ This article, like that on "The Rise of Organized Labor in Minnesota," published *ante*, 21: 372-394, is based upon an unpublished study by the same author, covering the period from 1850 to 1890. The Minnesota Historical Society has a copy. Unless otherwise indicated, all manuscripts and newspapers used in the preparation of this article are owned by the society. *Ed.*

did much as it pleased. This lack of effective centralized control was a fatal weakness of the order.²

The Knights adopted a policy of secrecy as a fundamental part of their ritualistic work, and they maintained this policy to some degree throughout. Suspicious employers forced many locals to continue their secret practices more strictly than they might otherwise have done. As a result, comparatively little news of the order's activities appeared in contemporary publications, and there is a paucity of material, especially for the period before 1885.

The first local assembly in Minnesota was organized in Minneapolis, probably in October, 1878, with twenty-one members; and the order's general organizer, Richard Griffiths of Chicago, started the first local in St. Paul a year or two later. In 1882 two St. Paul assemblies, numbers 1998 and 2235, assisted in the formation of the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly. The first organizers probably came from the East, especially from Pennsylvania, but by 1884 R. H. Shadrick of Minneapolis, a well-known Twin City labor leader, was serving as a state organizer. Brainerd may have had a lodge of over a hundred members in 1882. Soon the impression that local assemblies were springing up all over the state and becoming the predominant force in many communities became prevalent.³

The national organization experienced a period of extremely rapid expansion in 1885 and 1886, mainly because of a series of successful strikes, the credit for which be-

² For a more complete discussion of the national development of the order, see Norman J. Ware, *The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895*, 18-373 (New York, 1929); and Knights of Labor, *Constitution of the General Assembly and for State, National Trade, District and Local Assemblies*, 33, 40 (Philadelphia, 1893).

³ See the page devoted to labor in the Sunday issues of the *St. Paul Daily Globe* for 1885 and 1886, particularly those for April 5 and 19, 1885, and November 14, 1886. See also Minnesota State Federation of Labor, *Official Yearbook*, 1915, p. 13, 25, 41; Joseph D. Weeks, *Report on Trades Societies in the United States*, 16, in *United States Census*, 1880, vol. 20; and Fred Ferguson, "Knights of Labor," a manuscript account.

longed only partly to the order. From a membership of about a hundred thousand in July, 1885, the Knights increased to over seven hundred thousand in the next twelve months. In 1886 the Minnesota Knights claimed ten thousand members who controlled twenty thousand votes, but their estimates were probably more hopeful than accurate. Yet the rapid national growth did result in the organization of at least ninety-five assemblies and the enrollment of over seven thousand members in the state by July, 1887. There were local organizations in at least thirty-eight communities scattered from Warren and Two Harbors on the north to Worthington and Winona on the south.

Evidence that the policy of secrecy was being maintained is to be found in a mysterious "special notice" appearing in the *St. Paul Daily Globe* for July 19, 1885. Through the use of numerals, it called a joint meeting of five locals—four in St. Paul and one in Minneapolis—on July 23 at 8:00 P.M. One of the locals indicated by number was No. 1998, a large mixed local, which was initiating twenty to fifty members at each weekly meeting in the spring and summer of 1885. Other locals were taking in proportionally smaller numbers. Although No. 1998 had one of the largest halls in St. Paul, members were forced to sit on the floor at the meetings as enthusiasm ran high and affiliation with this cryptic band became the normal step. Skilled and unskilled workingmen were rushing into the order like prospectors to a reported gold strike, leaving the impression that the Knights would soon supplant all other trade unions and that craft groups would merge with them as separate assemblies.⁴

⁴ *Globe*, May 17, August 16, 1885; *Daily Pioneer Press* (St. Paul), September 2, 1886; Selig Perlman, *A History of Trade Unionism in the United States*, 87 (New York, 1922); Edward Levinson, *Labor on the March*, 25, 28 (New York, 1938); Knights of Labor, District Assembly No. 79, *Record of Proceedings of the Twentieth Regular Meeting*, 13, 15 (Minneapolis, 1887). The only known copy of the latter item is owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

State-wide co-ordination was made possible in 1883 or 1884 by the formation at a meeting in St. Paul of District Assembly No. 79 of the Knights of Labor of Minnesota. This organization served as a clearinghouse for the activities of the Knights in Minnesota, but the Twin City assemblies continued to co-operate with other labor organizations. For example, the Knights retained their membership in the city organizations known as Trades and Labor assemblies. When established on the basis of political divisions, the district assembly was poorly adapted to modern industrial organization and was often dominated by the general assembly or by craft groups. A district assembly was composed of representatives of at least five locals and was staffed by a set of officers almost as large as that of the local assemblies. As the highest tribunal of the district, it was authorized to decide controversies between members and assess taxes for its expenses. No. 79 met quarterly or semiannually, and in public announcements called itself the Minnesota Protective Association. Its meetings, which were attended by sixty to a hundred delegates when the Knights were at their zenith, were held in such cities as Stillwater, Mankato, and St. Paul. In July, 1887, the district organization paid the railroad and hotel expenses, amounting to nearly three hundred dollars, of the sixty-one delegates to its convention. The funds came from per capita taxes, which brought in nearly eighteen hundred dollars in the first half of the year. An assistance fund of twenty-seven hundred dollars was also on hand. The Minnesota district never had to appeal to the national organization for financial help and avoided quarrels with the units of the American Federation of Labor, which marred the records of both groups in many cities.

At its regular meetings, District Assembly No. 79 considered a wide range of subjects, varying from the land question to whisky, the use of which the national officers

consistently condemned. In his address to the meeting in 1887, District Master Workman T. W. Brosnan of Minneapolis said that the land question was the most important issue before the organization, asked support of co-operative ventures, and made a plea for the purchase of products made by Knights. Routine business, such as the request of the St. Paul painters assembly that it be allowed to withdraw and join the National Trade District of Painters and Decorators of the Knights, was also handled. The district assembly served as a link between national and local groups. When the Richmond general assembly, which was attended by seven Minnesota delegates, ordered the cigar makers to choose between the Knights and the international union, District Assembly No. 79 protested. It wrote to Grand Master Workman Terence V. Powderly, pleading for exemption of the Minnesota assemblies, since dual allegiance had not been causing trouble in Minnesota. The following quotation from an organizer's report sent to the district executive board illustrates the paternalistic attitude of the order:

Doc. 7. From Brother Schweiger of Duluth, stating that a brand of whiskey known as K. of L. whiskey, and bearing a label as such, was being sold in that city. The secretary was instructed to notify Brother Schweiger that it is a fraud, and to advise the members of the Order there that the whiskey is bad and to let it alone.⁵

Powderly's visit to the Twin Cities and Stillwater in July, 1885, came just as the order embarked on its period of most rapid growth. Minnesota Knights turned out in large numbers to greet him and over a thousand members were reported to have heard his speech before a secret meeting in Harrison Hall in Minneapolis. He praised the co-operative cooperage shops he had visited during the day and commented favorably on the strength of organized

⁵ District Assembly No. 79, *Proceedings*, 37; State Federation of Labor, *Yearbook*, 1915, p. 13; Knights of Labor, *Constitution*, 23; Ware, *Labor Movement*, 384-386; *Globe*, May 17, 1885, October 3, 1886.

labor in Minneapolis. In St. Paul an audience of similar size was on hand to see this prominent labor leader, a new type of public figure in American life.⁶

Another high point in 1885 came in September, when, with appropriate ceremonies, Labor Day was first observed in Minnesota. Plans for the celebration were started in the spring and the official call to the mammoth picnic at White Bear Lake came from the trades assemblies of Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Stillwater. Since the employers did not generally attempt to oppose the observation, attendance was good, one estimate running as high as three thousand. District Master Workman J. P. McGaughey presided and the main address was given by Griffiths, the order's general worthy foreman. The speaker used this opportunity to describe the advantages of his noble order over the trade unions.⁷

The co-operative cooperage establishments were, according to one writer, "the most successful single venture in productive co-operation ever undertaken in this country."⁸ In 1868 a group of Minneapolis coopers led by Chauncy W. Curtis organized a co-operative barrel-making business, but this original attempt failed because of lack of capital when the flour mills shut down. The legislature provided a legal basis for co-operatives in 1870 by passing the necessary legislation and later amending it at the request of the coopers. The Co-operative Barrel Manufacturing Company was incorporated in 1874 with sixteen members and a nominal capital of ten thousand dollars, fifteen per cent of which was paid in. Stock was held equally among the members and profits and losses were to be divided in proportion to the amount of wages paid to each member of the group. By 1885 the company was said to have about a hundred and

⁶ *Globe*, July 19, 26, 1885; *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 21, 1885.

⁷ *Globe*, April 26, August 16, September 8, 1885; *Stillwater Messenger*, September 12, 1885.

⁸ Perlman, *Trade Unionism*, 56.

twenty members and a paid-up capital of fifty thousand dollars.⁹

With the growth of flour milling, the cooperage business also boomed, until by 1886 approximately seven hundred coopers were employed in Minneapolis. About four hundred and fifty of these skilled workers were employed in seven or eight co-operative shops. It was the task of the coopers of the city to supply enough barrels to ship about half of the product of the Minneapolis flour mills, which had a capacity of thirty thousand barrels a day. The coopers at Dundas, near Northfield, organized their own co-operative shop with thirteen members in 1876. Ten years later they were producing about fifty thousand barrels annually. One writer, who was very enthusiastic about the co-operative barrel shops, claimed that the movement had raised the moral and business standards of the men, increased their prosperity and wages, and enabled them to own their own homes. Both journeymen and co-operative coopers belonged to the coopers' assembly of the Knights of Labor, but that did not prevent friction from developing between the rival groups. This distrust, together with the increased use of sacks for the shipment of flour and the introduction of machinery into the barrel-making process, resulted in lower wages, strikes, and, finally, failure for the co-operatives by 1887.¹⁰

Although the coopers were the most successful organizers of co-operative enterprises in Minnesota, they were not the only group that attempted such organization. As early as

⁹ *Globe*, April 19, 1885; *General Laws*, 1870, p. 50-53, 1881, p. 28; Albert Shaw, "Coöperation in the Northwest," in Johns Hopkins University, *Studies in Historical and Political Science*, 6: 203-207, 308 (Baltimore, 1888); Record of Incorporations, book C, p. 188, and Official Letters and Communications, vol. 1, p. 321, in Minnesota Secretary of State's Archives.

¹⁰ Shaw, in Johns Hopkins University, *Studies*, 6: 206-242, 271-273; Richard T. Ely, *The Labor Movement in America*, 188 (New York, 1905); John R. Commons and others, *History of Labor in the United States*, 2: 434 (New York, 1918); *Globe*, October 17, 23, 24, 1886, May 6, 1887.

1861 a Farmers Protective Union was organized in Minneapolis as a consumers' co-operative to handle general merchandise. Capital was to be raised by the sale of stock at ten dollars per share, but no subscriber was to be allowed to buy over five shares. In 1868 another group of workmen started the Hennepin County Grocery Association, and it was followed a few months later by a similar group. The paucity of records relating to these early co-operative ventures indicates that their success, if any, probably was meager and short-lived. In 1885 a group of coopers formed the Minneapolis Co-operative Mercantile Company, with seventy-five members and fifteen hundred dollars in paid-up capital; it reported a net profit of a hundred and forty dollars on sales of four thousand dollars for the second quarter of 1886. Similar enterprises were also started at St. Paul, Brainerd, Duluth, Kelso, and in Hubbard County, but the term "co-operative" was used so freely as to cast doubt on the genuineness of some of the purported co-operation.

By 1886 there were probably fifty to a hundred building and loan associations scattered throughout the state, with thousands of members and assets running to millions of dollars, but they can hardly be classed as bona fide co-operatives. Minneapolis was the home of several attempts at producers' co-operation, undoubtedly encouraged by the example of the coopers and often sponsored directly by them. The painters and decorators found that co-operative effort produced better work and brought a larger income, but the cigar makers failed in their attempt at self-management. Printers, laundry workers, teamsters, bricklayers, and carpenters also tried the widely heralded road to wages plus profits, but their organizations, like many similar ventures, passed from the scene after making their main contribution in the form of experience, often sad.¹¹

¹¹ *Daily Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), January 25, 1861; *Tribune*, September 22, 1868, January 5, February 13, 1869; Record of Incorpora-

Partly because of these undertakings, but also because of McGaughey's enthusiasm, Minneapolis became nationally famous for its co-operatives. In the fall of 1886, at the Richmond convention, he was appointed secretary of the general co-operative board of the Knights of Labor; he had already been one of the leaders in the incorporation of the Co-operative Land Association in Minnesota and was sanguine about the future of co-operation as a mode of business organization. McGaughey sent out questionnaires as a means of getting a report on co-operative progress throughout the country, and he encouraged many kinds of co-operatives in Minnesota.¹²

In October, 1887, after the Knights had passed their zenith but before their decline was generally recognized, the general assembly was held in Minneapolis. Local enthusiasm ran high as several hundred of the nation's outstanding labor leaders gathered and the mayor and the governor lavishly praised the Knights, pairing the order with the Grand Army of the Republic as the greatest organizations in the country. The assembly met in secret session for two weeks and was only interrupted by the visit of President and Mrs. Cleveland.¹³ The general executive board opposed strikes and favored education and arbitration, but this policy did not always control the local assemblies, which were face to face with employer opposition. The Minnesota groups were not involved in any general strikes, although the craft assemblies occasionally had some trouble.¹⁴

The Knights of Labor made another contribution in the form of meeting places for its own assemblies and for trade

tions, book D, p. 314, book J, p. 242, book O, p. 321, book R, p. 557, book S, p. 237, in Secretary of State's Archives; *Globe*, May 10, 1885, October 17, 1886; Minnesota Department of Labor, *Biennial Report*, 1887-88, p. 238; United States Bureau of Labor, *Annual Report*, 1893, p. 338; Shaw, in Johns Hopkins University, *Studies*, 6:238-308.

¹² *Globe*, January 30, 1887; Shaw, in Johns Hopkins University, *Studies*, 6:244-248, 302-308.

¹³ *Tribune*, October 2, 3, 20, 1887.

¹⁴ *Labor Review* (Minneapolis), September 4, 1914.

unions. Labor halls gave the order an air of importance, stability, and permanence that served a psychological as well as a practical purpose. During the middle 1880's the meeting places provided by the Knights were the center for much of the labor activity in St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Duluth. In 1886 the St. Paul assemblies were using at least two halls, one in the loop on Jackson Street and another near the railroad yards at Park Avenue and Sycamore Street. Early in 1887 the Minneapolis Knights began building a three-story Labor Temple at Fourth Street and Eighth Avenue South. Funds for this seventy-five thousand dollar project, which was promoted by the Minneapolis Knights of Labor Building Association, were raised by a picnic, donations, and the sale of stock.¹⁵

One of the most important questions faced by the Knights was that of relations with trade unions. The craft groups fitted very easily into the organization of the Knights, who allowed local assemblies to be formed on the basis of occupation. The first railroad assembly of the Knights was said to have been organized in Minneapolis; a painters and decorators' lodge succeeded in getting wages increased from twenty-five to thirty cents an hour and hours reduced from ten to nine. In 1890 St. Paul had thirteen lodges, representing German stonemasons, teamsters, streetcar employees, shoemakers, boilermakers, machinists, painters, and butchers; there was also a musical society which, since it did not carry a lodge number, apparently cut across the other groups. Most of these lodges met weekly and not only dealt with trade problems, but provided opportunities for mixed social gatherings and open forum discussions.¹⁶

Consideration of the Knights of Labor alone does not,

¹⁵ *Globe*, October 24, November 14, 1886, February 6, 13, 1887; *Tribune*, October 4, 9, 1887; Department of Labor, *Biennial Report*, 1887-88, p. 248-251.

¹⁶ *Globe*, May 17, 24, 1885; *Labor Echo* (St. Paul), February 16, 1889; State Federation of Labor, *Yearbook*, 1915, p. 23; C. C. Andrews, ed., *History of St. Paul*, 601 (Syracuse, 1890).

however, give a complete picture of the Minnesota labor scene in the decade of the eighties, for the number of craft unions was increasing rapidly. In all the years before 1885 some seventy-three labor unions had been organized in Minnesota, but in the next five years over ninety locals were formed; of these, twenty were in St. Paul, thirty-one in Minneapolis, nineteen in Duluth, and twenty-three in smaller cities. At least twenty new unions came into existence in each year from 1887 to 1890. In 1886, however, less than a dozen were formed, probably because of the intense activity of the Knights, who were then riding the crest of the wave. The new unions were predominantly craft organizations, representing a wide variety of trades. The railroad brotherhoods made up about twenty-five per cent of the total, but the building trades were also well represented.

In the spring of 1885 St. Paul was reported to have twelve to fifteen hundred men organized in unions representing nearly every trade. The typographers were the largest craft group, with over two hundred members in 1885 and twice that number in 1889. The carpenters organized in 1885 and soon were actively engaged in promoting unions in other trades. The twenty new unions organized in St. Paul in the last half of the decade included such diverse groups as furriers, horseshoers, telegraphers, lathers, barbers, and letter carriers. Frequent strikes of cigar makers and stonecutters may have been partially responsible for the opening of a St. Paul branch of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency in 1887, a move that brought protests from the governor and the mayors of each of the Twin Cities, as well as from the Trades and Labor Assembly.

Many of the Knights' assemblies also belonged to the Trades and Labor Assembly and exercised considerable influence in directing labor affairs. The more progressive unions co-ordinated their activities through the work of the

Trades and Labor Assembly, which by 1886 had forty delegates representing seventeen organizations. The Assembly took care of elements in the broad program of organized labor which required the support of more than one union to be effective. For instance, it called a citizens' mass meeting to protest the Illinois Supreme Court decision against the Chicago anarchists who were sentenced to death as a result of the Haymarket bombing, and it sent a leading criminal lawyer to Pittsburgh to help defend the strikers arrested at Homestead. Like many of the unions, the Assembly placed young men in positions of leadership; in 1885 its president and its recording secretary were each only twenty-four years of age. In 1887 an embarrassing situation arose when a delegate from the Socialistic Labor Union presented his credentials. Several trade unions voted to withdraw their support if the newcomer was seated; but this became unnecessary when a committee reported that the new organization was not a legitimate trade union.¹⁷

Minneapolis, which by 1880 had passed St. Paul in the population race, experienced an even greater increment in labor organization. Its thirty-odd new unions in the later 1880's represented a diverse collection of skills, as everyone from musicians to rivet heaters sought security and fellowship in unionization. As in St. Paul, so in Minneapolis, the printers had one of the best-organized groups, with a membership that increased from a hundred and twenty-five in 1885 to over three hundred in 1890. Their union sent

¹⁷ *Globe*, March 29, April 19, May 10, June 21, 28, July 12, 1885, October 10, 17, 20, 1886; *Tribune*, October 16, 17, 1887; Record of Incorporations, book M, p. 75, book Q, p. 322, Secretary of State's Archives; International Typographical Union, *Report of Proceedings*, 1885, 1886, 1888, 1889; United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Union No. 87, St. Paul, 1885-96, treasurers' record, p. 4, 5, 27; Department of Labor, *Biennial Reports*, 1899-1900, p. 294, 1905-06, p. 498-503, 1907-08, p. 102, 1911-12, p. 452, 1913-14, p. 217, 1915-16, p. 179; United States Bureau of Labor, *Annual Reports*, 1887, p. 284-289, 1894, p. 498-503; State Federation of Labor, *Yearbook*, 1920, p. 16; *Labor Echo*, September 3, 1887.

its president to the national convention and a delegate to the local Trades and Labor Assembly, welcomed brother members attending the general assembly of the Knights of Labor, and dealt with the ever-present question of wages. Perhaps the printers were encouraged by the formation late in 1885 of the Job Printers Protective Association, with apparently harmless purposes, but an ominous title. The building tradesmen found Minneapolis a difficult city in which to organize—carpenters, plasterers, and painters all found the way to unionism a rough road on which more than one start had to be made. The painters organized under the Knights in 1885, had some success in raising wages and reducing hours, and then disbanded in 1888, only to start reorganization plans the following year.

Strikes were not uncommon in Minneapolis, particularly among stonecutters, coopers, and cigar makers. A switchmen's strike for a wage increase in the fall of 1886, which also involved railroads at Duluth and St. Cloud, was broken by the use of private police, or strikebreakers. McGaughy led the streetcar drivers of the city in a strike for the restoration of seats in their horse-drawn cars, and was successful mainly because Mayor Alonzo A. Ames refused police help to Thomas Lowry, president of the streetcar company. A few years later the loss of a serious strike resulted in the dissolution of the drivers' union. In 1888 two hundred and fifty women employees of an overall and shirt factory started a strike which ended disastrously when the firm failed, bringing to naught the arbitration attempted by the Reverend James McGoldrick. A Minneapolis branch of the national Anti-Poverty Society, which was founded by Henry George and thus was connected with the single-tax societies, was meeting in 1887 under the guidance of some of the leaders of the labor element. The Minneapolis Trades and Labor Assembly did much the same type of work as the St. Paul group in dealing with questions that

were of interest to laboring men and yet not entirely the responsibility of any one union. Interest sometimes lagged, but by 1886 the Assembly claimed that it represented ten thousand workers, since its actions were endorsed by every union in the city.¹⁸

Duluth did not become an important center of population until the railroads and iron mining tied it into the national economy in the 1880's. In the second half of the decade it rapidly progressed to the position of a well-unionized city. Craft groups and Knights of Labor assemblies were formed, a Knights' hall was built, and a labor paper, the *Industrial Age*, was established. The craft groups included the well-organized printers, cigar makers, building tradesmen, tailors, and others. Emil Applehagen, a former shopmate of Samuel Gompers, was one of the leaders of the local Federated Trades Assembly, and he probably helped to obtain its charter from the American Federation of Labor in 1889. Bloody labor riots at the end of the decade brought the labor question into politics, but did not stifle the unions.¹⁹

In the smaller Minnesota cities and towns the railroad brotherhoods were most numerous, but craft unions were often among the new arrivals, for each year after 1881 marked the birth of at least one new group. The Knights of Labor apparently touched a slightly larger number of towns, though its influence was very transitory when compared to that of the more permanent craft unions. Winona, with six unions started by 1890, led in number of organizations, and Waseca, with five railroad brotherhoods, was close behind. St. Cloud, Austin, and Brainerd each had

¹⁸ This summary of craft union activities in Minneapolis is drawn from a variety of sources, including the *Globe*, April 5, 12, May 14, 17, June 7, 12, 1885, October 17, 27, 1886; *Tribune*, October 3, 5, 9, 10, 17, 1887; International Typographical Union, *Proceedings*, 1885, 1890; *Labor Review*, September 4, 1914; and State Federation of Labor, *Yearbook*, 1915, p. 27, 31.

¹⁹ State Federation of Labor, *Yearbook*, 1915, p. 25, 30, 1920, p. 23-26; Walter Van Brunt, *Duluth and St. Louis County*, 1:269 (Chicago, 1921).

four unions by the end of the 1880's, and Two Harbors gave evidence of the mining boom when three brotherhood groups were formed in 1889. The iron mining industry itself was not readily organized, and unions in the range towns did not get started until about 1906.²⁰

Between 1856 and 1889 about a hundred and sixty new unions were started in Minnesota and nearly a hundred Knights of Labor assemblies were organized. Although there is not much evidence of organized opposition to labor combinations, each strike did represent a refusal to accede to labor demands. It is often assumed that foreign-born men were especially inclined to unionization. A study of Minnesota union members in 1893, however, indicated that American-born, in relation to foreign-born, membership was one and a half times greater than would normally be expected, considering the proportion of the state's foreign-born to its total population. In other words, fifty-eight per cent of the unions' members were of native birth, although only thirty-eight per cent of the state's residents were born in the United States. In this respect Minnesota probably is not typical of the nation at large, because so many of its people were Scandinavian immigrants living in rural areas, where union activity was very slight.²¹

Opposition to unionization in the various church groups was often provoked by union secrecy and the practice of holding meetings on Sunday. In 1868 the general council of the Lutheran church advised strongly against secret organizations. Its declarations were not enforced, however, although the Swedish Augustana Synod did take a definite stand against secret societies, including the Knights of Labor. Since the membership of the immigrant churches was mainly agrarian, their disapproval of secret associa-

²⁰ Department of Labor, *Biennial Reports*, 1905-06, p. 431-476, 1907-08, p. 107; G. O. Virtue, "The Minnesota Iron Ranges," in United States Bureau of Labor, *Bulletins*, no. 84, p. 394 (Washington, 1909).

²¹ Department of Labor, *Biennial Report*, 1893-94, p. 177.

tions was not a serious factor in Minnesota labor development. Even the attitude of the churches became more tolerant in the 1880's.²²

The degree of Catholic opposition or support depended to a large extent on the attitude of the bishops, and consequently varied in different places and at different times. An occasional clergyman could be found who was sympathetic, and Ignatius Donnelly knew of a South Dakota priest who was a member of the Knights. Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul, a pronounced liberal, insisted on the right of laboring men to organize, but was opposed to violence and the coercion of nonunion men and thought strikes should be avoided except in cases of extreme necessity. Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore conferred with Powderly and President Cleveland regarding the Knights of Labor, and while in Rome he came out clearly in support of the order, thus helping to obtain a reversal of a previous condemnation by the Holy See.²³

The struggle in Minnesota for shorter hours had its legal beginning in 1858, when ineffectual limits were placed on the hours of women and children. Ten years later an attempt to enact additional legislation failed in the senate after the house had passed the proposed measure, and further action was left to the labor unions. It was not until the middle 1880's, when organized labor was at the height of its power, that determined steps were taken to shorten the working day. The Minneapolis stonecutters secured an eight-hour day in the early 1880's, but in 1885 their St. Paul fellows were only threatening to strike if their hours were not reduced from ten to nine. The Minneapolis city council had to face a mass meeting of two thousand men in 1887, when

²² F. Bente, *American Lutheranism*, 2:207-209 (St. Louis, 1919); O. Fritiof Ander, "The Immigrant Church and the Patrons of Husbandry," in *Agricultural History*, 8:155-164 (October, 1934).

²³ John Ireland, *The Church and Modern Society*, 1:330, 363-370 (New York, 1903); Albert S. Will, *Life of Cardinal Gibbons*, 1:326-360 (New York, 1922); Donnelly Diary, October 12, 1889.

it passed an ordinance for an eight-hour day that was applicable to only a part of the city work.²⁴

The most widespread struggle for shorter hours in the later nineteenth century came in 1886, when a nationwide strike was dropped in the lap of the Knights of Labor by the dying Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions. The general officers of the Knights did not approve of the proposed strike, but the locals, especially those dominated by the Central Labor Union of Chicago, which had anarchistic and socialistic connections, went their own way and prepared for mass demonstrations. One of these meetings resulted in the Chicago Haymarket bombing, for which several apparently innocent men with anarchistic associations were executed. Laborers all over the country had taken steps to shorten their hours, however, before these incidents occurred. In the Twin Cities the building tradesmen were the moving spirit in demanding, not an eight-hour, but a nine-hour day, as they felt that one hour was all they could hope to cut from the generally prevailing ten-hour level. Although there was very little violence in the state, the strikers were partially successful. The Minneapolis sash and door workers, however, found their ranks divided, and those members of the Knights of Labor who demanded ten hours' pay for nine hours of work were dismissed.²⁵

The agitation for shorter hours culminated in the organization of the State Eight Hour League in 1888 or 1889. The leaders were the same men who had been active in the Knights and the trade unions of the Twin Cities. The League extended its work over the state by sending out lecturers and planning mass meetings at various minor centers. At a League convention late in 1889 about fifty or

²⁴ *General Laws*, 1858, p. 154; *House Journal*, 1868, p. 100; *Senate Journal*, 1868, p. 96; *Tribune*, February 6, 1868; *Globe*, April 5, June 21, 28, 1885; *Pioneer Press*, May 5, 1887.

²⁵ Ware, *Labor Movement*, 252, 299-319; *Pioneer Press*, April 30, May 1, 2, 1886.

ganizations were represented by delegates. Some of the representatives apparently felt that the new organization should form a bridge over which they could cross from the Knights of Labor to the State Federation of Labor, but those in charge did not wish to disband the League and it continued for a few years after the organization of the Federation in 1890. Although late in 1891 the League moved for co-operation with the Farmers' Alliance, the 1892 convention of that group paid little attention to the eight-hour enthusiasts.²⁸

Frequent resolutions by labor organizations to stay out of politics were often violated or tacitly evaded when such questions as the regulation of hours and working conditions, women and children in industry, or public works projects and convict labor were cast into the political hopper. Although the Knights of Labor did not claim to be a political organization, it was next to impossible for such a large group to function without touching on political affairs, even if only through the votes of its members. Perhaps the most important political contribution made by labor organizations has been the encouraging of workingmen to assemble, talk over their problems, listen to informative or exhortative speeches, and then go out to spread the gospel. Unions helped make the laboring class articulate, and gave its members a feeling of confidence as they demanded a better place in society. The ever-present danger was that of involvement in fruitless political quarrels under leaders who were mainly interested in using the voting power of labor for personal aggrandizement.

On the municipal scene, the unions of the Twin Cities found many matters which claimed their attention and invited political action. In 1883 the Knights objected when the legislature passed an act enabling Minneapolis to pur-

²⁸ *Pioneer Press*, October 14, 1889; *Minneapolis Journal*, December 14, 1891; *Globe*, January 7, 8, 11, 1892; State Federation of Labor, *Yearbook*, 1915, p. 11.

chase land for parks, and worked to prevent the necessary ratification by the voters of the city. After the Park Act had been in effect for a year or two, the local assemblies reversed their stand and advocated the purchase of even more land. The Trades and Labor assemblies usually led the labor elements of the Twin Cities in dealing with political questions. The group in Minneapolis protested the licensing of newsboys and bootblacks on the ground that such action constituted a tax on labor. It also sent petitions to the city council requesting an increase of wages on city projects and objecting to the proposed addition of a brickyard to the workhouse. The mayoralty race of 1885 was enlivened when Shadrick accused one of the candidates, George A. Pillsbury, of favoring the use of stone cut at the Joliet penitentiary for the Chamber of Commerce Building, but a committee from the Trades and Labor group failed to find evidence to support the charge. By 1887 the unions had persuaded the council to discontinue the use of contract labor on many forms of public work. In St. Paul a committee was appointed by the Trades and Labor Assembly to study the 1885 election situation, and the Democratic candidates whom it supported were victorious. As labor's prestige rose, its leaders came into favor and were appointed to such municipal posts as plumbing inspector and street commissioner.²⁷

After its entry into the field of labor legislation in 1858, the legislature gave intermittent attention to the welfare of the working class. During the 1870's and early 1880's several laws were passed dealing with such subjects as wage assignments, laborers' liens, and hours for locomotive engineers and firemen. Beginning in the middle 1880's, labor organizations began to bring pressure to bear on law-making

²⁷ Charles M. Loring, "History of the Parks and Public Grounds of Minneapolis," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 15:602; *Globe*, April 5, 12, 26, May 10, 21, 1885; Isaac Atwater, *History of the City of Minneapolis*, 1:99, 601 (New York, 1893).

bodies and participated more actively and more aggressively in political affairs; the Knights, trade unionists, Greenbackers, and members of farmers' organizations pooled their forces in this drive.²⁸

In September, 1886, a joint state convention was held in St. Paul, probably at the call of the trades assemblies of the Twin Cities. Among the delegates of the Knights of Labor was Dr. William W. Mayo of Rochester. Other organizations represented were the Farmers' Alliance, the Patrons of Husbandry, and the Trades and Labor Assembly. Donnelly was active in drawing up a platform containing the demands of both industrial and agricultural groups. Included were demands by labor for a bureau of labor statistics, the arbitration of labor disputes, industrial compensation, prohibition of child labor in mines and factories, the elimination of contract convict labor, the incorporation of trade unions, and a mechanics' lien law. These demands were presented to the two principal political parties when they met in convention later in the month; the response from the Republican convention was more favorable than that from the Democrats, though both parties included strong labor planks in their platforms. Most labor groups supported the Democratic nominee for governor, Mayor Ames of Minneapolis, but the Republican candidate, A. R. McGill, won by a narrow margin.²⁹

The penal code of 1886 contained several laws for the protection of workingmen—Sunday labor was forbidden, steam boiler regulation was instituted, and unions were

²⁸ *General Statutes*, 1878, p. 256, 388; *General Laws*, 1878, p. 145–147, 1885, p. 230–235, 276; *Changes in the General Statutes of 1878*, 111 (St. Paul, 1883); Solon J. Buck, *The Agrarian Crusade*, 127 (New Haven, 1920).

²⁹ *Pioneer Press*, September 2, 15, 23, 1886; *Weekly Pioneer Press*, September 16, 1886; *Globe*, October 3, 10, November 17, 1886; Donnelly Diary, September 1, 14, 1886; William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 3:169 (St. Paul, 1926). See also a clipping from the *Labor Echo*, September 4, 1886, in J. P. McGaughey's Scrapbook, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

declared exempt from conspiracy charges. On the other hand, picketing was discouraged by laws declaring the coercion of workers to be a misdemeanor. The legislature of 1887 ruled that railroad companies were liable for injuries suffered by their employees. The common custom of letting convict labor out on contract was generally followed until the forces of labor in Minnesota and other states were led by the report for 1886 of the United States commissioner of labor, Carroll D. Wright, to take steps to end the practice. The St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly had called a mass meeting in 1884 to discuss the question, and in 1885 the assemblies of the Twin Cities presented the question to the legislature. In the Minnesota state prison about three out of four hundred inmates were producing threshing machines, sashes, doors, and blinds worth nearly a hundred and fifty thousand dollars annually. Publicity and pressure brought results in 1887, when the contract policy was legally abolished.³⁰

From the viewpoint of labor, one of the most significant acts of the 1887 legislative session was the creation of the bureau of labor statistics. Massachusetts had led the field by establishing a bureau in 1869, and when the federal government followed suit fifteen years later it took the Massachusetts director, Wright, and gave him a wider sphere of action. The bill establishing the Minnesota bureau passed both houses without a dissenting vote and was signed by Governor McGill on March 8. The duties of the commissioner of labor were to collect statistics, to inspect factories, to enforce factory laws, and to report to the legislature; for this service he was to have an annual salary of fifteen hundred dollars, with an additional thousand for hiring clerks

³⁰ *The Penal Code of the State of Minnesota*, 53, 65, 87, 97, 118, 491 (St. Paul, 1885); *General Laws*, 1887, p. 69, 110; *General Statutes*, 1889, vol. 2, p. 699, 985; *House Journal*, 1885, p. 308, 341; United States Bureau of Labor, *Annual Report*, 1886, p. 18, 104, 556; *Pioneer Press*, October 12, 1884; minutes of the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly, vol. 1, p. 110, 113.

and five hundred dollars for expenses. John Lamb, the first commissioner, in his initial report noted several weaknesses in the law and requested additional funds. He was succeeded in 1891 by McGaughey, who served for only three months and then turned his office over to Le Grand Powers.³¹

The Farmers' Alliance continued to show an interest in the possibility of co-operating with the forces of labor and scheduled its 1887 convention to meet in Minneapolis at the same time as the national assembly of the Knights. A conference committee representing both groups discussed co-operation and legislative lobbying and recommended mutual support when feasible. The Farm and Labor party formed in 1888 was short-lived because Donnelly withdrew as the gubernatorial candidate; McGaughey was the nominee for lieutenant governor. Two years later there were fifty-three delegates from the unions of the Twin Cities at the Alliance convention. Although Donnelly claimed to be responsible for their inclusion, they repaid his efforts by swinging the gubernatorial nomination from him to S. M. Owen. These political maneuverings did not prevent the 1889 legislative session from passing laws to protect union labels, free a minimum wage from garnishment, and provide for boiler inspection.³²

The Knights of Labor played an important part in many phases of Minnesota economic, political, and social life, as the influence of the popular and rapidly growing organization reverberated throughout the state and touched agricultural as well as industrial workers. The Knights attracted

³¹ *House Journal*, 1887, p. 378, 492, 614, 775; *Senate Journal*, 1887, p. 31, 148, 197, 198, 559; *General Laws*, 1887, p. 199-201; Department of Labor, *Biennial Reports*, 1887-88, p. 10, 1935-36, p. 7.

³² *Tribune*, October 5, 1887; *Globe*, August 16, 29, 1888; John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 103, 154n., 158 (Minneapolis, 1931); Hicks, "The People's Party in Minnesota," *ante*, 5:537; Hicks, "The Origin and Early History of the Farmers' Alliance in Minnesota," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 9:203 (December, 1922); Donnelly Diary, July 18, 1890; *General Laws*, 1889, p. 53, 54, 325, 404-413.

many of the best labor leaders in the state and developed an organization that was widespread for years after the national decline started with the failure of railroad strikes and the Haymarket bombing of 1886. Renewed opposition by the Catholic church, employer combination, and the growing unwieldiness of a large organization all served to hasten its disintegration, which came first in the cities and thus increased the proportionate influence of the rural element.³³

In the late eighties the Minnesota skilled laborers, feeling that they did not wish to throw in their lot with the great mass of unskilled workers, began to shift their allegiance singly or in groups to craft unions affiliated with the rising American Federation of Labor. This disaffection was evident as early as the first half of 1887, when five local assemblies lapsed, mainly because of lack of interest among the members. The total membership of the Knights of Labor declined about a thousand in that period of six months. The Minneapolis painters assembly surrendered its charter in 1888 after a short but active career, and later organized under the Federation. This was only typical of a nationwide state of affairs between 1887 and 1894, for the rising organization fought the Knights on all sides and jurisdictional disputes were frequent and bitter. By 1890 the two organizations were about equal in size, but the Federation was growing slowly and the Knights were declining rapidly.³⁴

The shift from the Knights to the American Federation of Labor created a state of chaos for a time that weakened the power of organized labor. As the Knights declined on the national scene, the local assemblies shifted their loyalty, and by 1894 seventeen of them were affiliated with the Minnesota State Federation of Labor. As dissolution of the

³³ Perlman, *History of Trade Unionism*, 101; Ware, *Labor Movement*, 313-319, 371-376.

³⁴ District Assembly No. 79, *Proceedings*, 13, 15; State Federation of Labor, *Yearbook*, 1915, p. 23; Ware, *Labor Movement*, 206, 298.

Noble Order of the Knights of Labor progressed, interest in its achievements lapsed, until by 1896 even its magnificent Labor Temple in Minneapolis had been taken over by its creditors. A great organization had passed from the scene, but the lessons it taught and the experience it gave to laborers and their leaders were carried over into other organizations.³⁵

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³⁵ State Federation of Labor, *Yearbook*, 1915, p. 18, 27.



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