

YOUNGSTOWN SHEET & TUBE AND LABOR RELATIONS 1916-1920

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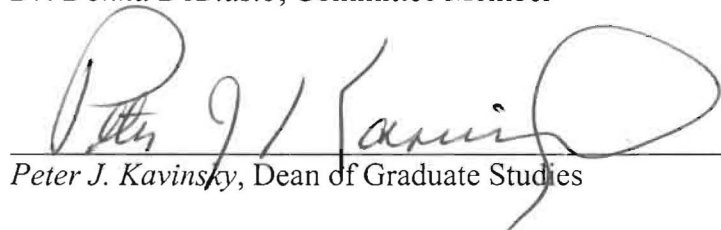
  
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## Abstract

Dissatisfaction characterized labor relations in the steel industry early in the twentieth century. The struggle for recognition by union organizers and determination by steel company owners to retain exclusive authority in business decisions relating to employees manifested itself through strikes and lockouts. These often-violent encounters left management and labor determined to impose their will upon the other. Conditions in Youngstown reflected industrial nationwide norm. Youngstown Sheet & Tube was one of the dominant steel making concerns and employers in the Mahoning Valley. Decisions made by Sheet & Tube affected thousands of steel workers and their families. In an attempt to stabilize a sizeable immigrant labor pool, Sheet & Tube changed the built environment in the Valley through company housing. It also sought to improve health and living conditions through construction of a state of the art hospital and creation of welfare, social and recreational programs. The one issue company President Campbell, along with other industrial leaders would not compromise was that of recognition of unionization in their industry. The refusal to recognize the collective bargaining power of organized labor in negotiating wages, hours and working conditions contributed to two significant strikes between 1916 and 1920. The strike and riot in 1916 resulted in several deaths and major property damage. The 1919 strike was in concert with a nation-wide effort to force union recognition by the industry.

## Introduction

Against the backdrop of World War I in Europe, another battle simmered in major industrial American cities early in the twentieth century. A weakened coalition of labor movements sought to regain a foothold in the organization of the vast pool of American steel workers. Faced with relentless and unified opposition from industrial leaders, the American Federation of Labor eagerly participated in local rifts that occurred between management and workers.

As the war in Europe intensified, and orders for military steel swelled, worker discontent manifested itself in many isolated disturbances. One incident that occurred in 1916 at Youngstown, Ohio reverberated throughout the industry and was, along with a series of other strikes, instrumental in fundamental changes in the relationship between big steel corporations and their workers. The dispute that originated with employees of Republic Iron and Steel expanded to Youngstown Sheet and Tube workers and ended with a violent riot that destroyed the entire business district of the village of East Youngstown. Several deaths and multiple injuries resulted, in addition to over a million dollars worth of property loss. The level of the violence and damage commanded the attention of the industry and the public alike, with sensationalized headlines in newspapers across the country. Before the embers cooled, the search for who was responsible for the destruction began. Community leaders expressed outrage at the drunken

excesses of uneducated immigrants. There were hints that foreign espionage related to the war may have played a part. Blamed too were outside union agitators, rumored to have been circulating among local strikers. In addition, the local American Federation of Labor organizer blamed Youngstown Sheet and Tube for orchestrating the strike to depress stock prices.

The sweeping investigation that followed resulted in a grand jury report that was highly critical of the companies involved and local officials, who it labeled incompetent. The Mahoning County grand jury indicted Judge Elbert Gary, U. S. Steel, Youngstown Sheet & Tube, Republic Iron and Steel, Brier Hill Steel Company, Youngstown Iron and Steel, and the Carnegie Steel Company for wage fixing. This indictment brought questions into focus about industry-wide wage and pricing procedures as well as working conditions. The 1916 strike and riot in East Youngstown and subsequent investigation brought to the forefront the simmering issue of how best to integrate the vast numbers of non-English speaking workers who labored in the steel industry into mainstream society.

The social welfare programs, Americanization efforts and employee representation plans that resulted from the steel industry's determination to avoid unionization cost the industry countless dollars, but improved living and, to a lesser extent, working conditions for its employees. Post World War I unrest, however, revealed that underlying

problems remained in the relationship between management and worker. The twelve-hour day and substandard wages bred discontent. In addition, the attitude of immigrant workers had transformed during the war. Fully participating in sacrifices, having worked long hours, bought Liberty bonds, served in the military and generally participated in the fight for democracy, they were not content to return to pre-war servitude. Encouraged by gains made during the war and a less hostile president, union organization tackled the previously intractable steel industry for organization in 1919. Embraced beyond organizers' wildest expectations, workers signed on en masse. The groundswell of participation soon overtook the leaders who sought to control it and the mass of new members demanded concrete action to back up promises made by union organizers. The resulting 1919 steel strike and subsequent defeat of the organized labor occurred despite passionate enthusiasm and near 100 percent participation by Mahoning Valley steelworkers. Lack of organization and funding on the part of the National Committee for the Organization of Steel Workers coupled with intense resistance from the industry doomed the effort.

The industry used residual public anxiety from World War I to label the movement 'Bolshevik' or 'red,' and characterized it as un-American. The industrial leaders also applied pressure on local officials to restrict access to public halls and refuse permits for meetings for organizational purposes. In many areas, the press was biased and

reported sensational rumors as fact. It would be more than twenty years and several more bitter strikes before the steel industry recognized union representation for their workers.

Early in the nineteenth century, the Mahoning Valley seemed an unlikely location for the major industrial center that it would later become. Located miles from Lake Erie and the Ohio River, this mainly agricultural area lacked population and significant water transportation necessary to access raw material and distribute finished product. However, the Youngstown region became one of two distinct districts that developed in the Ohio region between roughly 1890 and 1920.

With the desire for complex, integrated iron and steel making facilities, large flat sites with ready access to a significant volume of process water became desirable. As a result, mills dotted the Lake Erie shoreline between Lorain and Buffalo. Production in this region increased from 230,000 tons of iron in 1890 to 1,085,000 tons by 1900. Between 1888 and 1898, Buffalo grew from no production at all to 250,000 tons of iron and steel. Much of this new production was for merchant iron that supplied local foundries or the local manufacturers shipped it to locations short on pig iron. This supply of local iron encouraged the development of steel-finishing facilities along the



shoreline as well. Eventually, the early twentieth century found most of the premium sites along the Great Lake shoreline occupied.<sup>1</sup>

Prospects for the development of the Mahoning and Shenango Valleys had yet to be determined in the nineteenth century. Despite the lack of reliable water transportation, early iron makers did have access to local iron ore as well as limestone and timber for charcoal production. James and Daniel Heaton built the first blast furnace in the region in 1802 on the Yellow Creek, a tributary of the Mahoning River. The Hopewell Furnace produced two to three tons of iron per week.<sup>2</sup> While the iron industry did not flourish, it experienced slow growth over the next several decades. The discovery of black band iron ore and bituminous coal in the mid-nineteenth century invigorated pig iron production and the construction of new blast furnaces in the Valley. In addition, the development of an extensive railway system made the importation of raw materials and distribution of finished product easier. By 1875, twenty-one furnaces operated in the Valley, with a capacity of almost 200,000 tons per year, marking the region a major producer of iron and steel products.<sup>3</sup>

As local resources dwindled, better grade ore became available and desirable. By 1879, Lake Superior or Canadian mines supplied fully

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<sup>1</sup> William T. Hogan, *Economic History of the Iron and Steel Industry in the United States*, (London: Lexington Books; D. C. Heath and Company, 1971), 1: 183-210.

<sup>2</sup> James G. Butler, *History of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley* (Chicago and New York: American Historical Society. 1921). Vol.1 660.

<sup>3</sup> Butler, 668.

eighty-four percent of the ore used in production in the Mahoning Valley. The area also lacked sufficient raw coal necessary to increase production enough to be competitive. Freight costs alone also placed valley manufacturers at a distinct disadvantage. In addition, competition between Valley firms kept selling prices low, despite higher shipping costs. In order to thrive, the Mahoning Valley producers either needed to further reduce production costs or retain their own iron and process it to a more finished product, thereby covering the cost of importing raw materials. Lacking the necessary influence to persuade the railways to reduce shipping costs, Valley manufacturers looked to steel making, particularly specialized products not readily available through many mass production outlets.<sup>4</sup>

The iron and steel industry, as a whole, experienced an important transition late in the nineteenth century as the consumer's appetite for steel increased and for iron waned. At the same time, processes for the mass production of steel were easily adapted to mechanization, in contrast to wrought iron that was unyieldingly labor intensive and dominated by skilled artisans. Due to the inventiveness of steel-makers, production of steel outpaced that of iron by the late 1890s. While Valley manufacturers generally followed the industry-wide trend and transitioned away from painstakingly slow iron production to modern steel making techniques, they retained enough puddling mills to produce

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<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Warren, *The American Steel Industry 1850-1970; A Geographical Interpretation*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1973), 170-175.

specialty products. The more flexible steel-making process lent itself to a score of innovative mechanized processes. In the blast furnace operations, freight cars that hauled raw materials emptied into the furnace by huge mechanized dumpers instead of by hand. Later, skip hoists hauled raw material to the furnace top and filled the stacks automatically. Ladle cars hauled hot slag. As automation increased the scale of operating furnaces, production increased. By 1920, Valley manufacturers turned out more than four million tons of product annually<sup>5</sup>

Local executives, city officials and members of the press enthusiastically welcomed the incorporation of Youngstown Iron Sheet and Tube Company on November 22, 1900. With the formation of the company came the anticipation of building the industry's most modern and technologically advanced facility, and community leaders recognized the potential to the Valley economy. Led by local industrialists George D. Wick and James A. Campbell, the investors were a consortium of prominent businessmen. Those who contributed to the initial \$600,000 investment included seven members of the influential Wick family, H.H., John and George Stambaugh, members of the Tod family, Hitchcocks, Fords, W.A. Beecher, W. Scott Bonnell, and Joseph G. Butler Jr.

In addition to the financial backing of the established business community, the venture had a sound foundation with many of the

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<sup>5</sup> Butler, 669-670.

investors already experienced iron and steel men. Wick had formerly been associated with Republic Iron and Steel, and the Bonnell, Stambaugh, Tod, Hitchcock and Butler families all had similar ties to the iron and steel industry.<sup>6</sup> Campbell had been general superintendent, first at Trumbull Iron Company in Warren, then at Mahoning Valley Iron Company in Youngstown, and finally district manager for Republic Iron and Steel.

When Campbell replaced Wick as Sheet and Tube president in 1904, he provided the blueprint for the future development of the company. Campbell was close friends with Elbert Gary, president of the U.S. Steel Corporation and they shared the philosophy of investment bankers such as J.P. Morgan that the industry needed to control production and formulate minimum price levels in order to stabilize profits and stock value. Campbell also emulated Andrew Carnegie, whose pioneering empire had combined integration of iron and steel processes, production, and raw material in sourcing, which resulted in cost control and increased profit.<sup>7</sup> Campbell reflected this philosophy in an aggressive campaign of acquisition and development, initiated from the beginning.

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<sup>6</sup> "Million Dollar Mill To Be Built," *The Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 22 November 1900 3.

<sup>7</sup> Frederick J. Blue, William D. Jenkins, *Mahoning Memories* (Youngstown: Youngstown State University, 1995), 94-95.

The site for the new facility sat on three hundred acres in East Youngstown, flatland adjacent to the Mahoning River. Original construction proposals called for a modest plant with the capacity to manufacture iron sheets and pipes. However, the completed facility greatly expanded; it consisted of fifteen double puddling furnaces, a muck bar mill, skelp mill, three tube mills and six sheet mills.<sup>8</sup>

Production commenced in 1901 with Pickands Mathers & Company in Cleveland providing the iron ore. In 1902, YSI&T acquired the "Little Alice" blast furnace in Sharpsville, Pennsylvania from Pickands Mathers. The company paid \$300,000 in common stock for the furnace, providing members of the established Pickands Company with a financial interest in the company.<sup>9</sup> The relationship between the two companies was the first in a score of business affiliations for the Sheet and Tube. Whether the association was a shrewd business move or chance, it was key in the development of Youngstown Sheet and Tube.

James Pickands and Samuel Mathers formed their partnership in 1883. Pickands Mathers & Company originally advertised itself as simply dealers in pig iron and iron ore, but the founders had deep roots in the Great lake shipping and mining industry. From the beginning, they had a diverse operation and the company business evolved into the management of lands, mines, ships, docks, and the marketing of huge

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<sup>8</sup> Butler, Vol I, 701.

<sup>9</sup> *50 Years In Steel: The Story of The Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company* (Youngstown, Ohio: The Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company. 1950), 5-6.

volumes of iron ore, pig iron, coal, coke and other metals. In 1913, Pickands Mathers organized the Interlake Steamship Company, which became the second largest steamship operation on the Great Lakes.<sup>10</sup> The association with Pickand Mathers provided Youngstown Sheet and Tube vital in-house shipping and raw material capability and an infusion of much needed capital.

Sheet & Tube quickly became a fundamental component in the local economy, with a dizzying array of affiliations. From its incorporation in 1900, the company embarked on a furious, aggressive and continuous course of expansion. By 1904, production stood at about 1,000 tons daily. In 1905, the company built a Bessemer steel plant to provide material for sheet and tube mills and the company dropped the word "iron" from its name, reflecting the shift in production. Two 500-ton blast furnaces added in 1908 provided an internal supply of pig iron for steel production, material previously acquired from outside sources. The addition of ten double puddling furnaces indicates that YS&T continued extensive production of specialty iron products despite the steadily growing domination of steel. Specialty iron, not broadly available through the mass production of the Pittsburgh and Lakeshore steel producers commanded a price that would cover the higher shipping charges that the Youngstown producers faced. The addition of eight sheet mills and six tube mills, along with improvements to the power plants further

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Havighurst, *Vein of Iron: The Pickands Mathers Story* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1958), 35-37.

increased efficiency. Three years later the company built machine shops, pumping stations, another sheet mill, and other production related facilities. In 1912 and 1913, an open-hearth steel plant was constructed and the company acquired additional holdings in iron ore and other raw materials, furthering the company's goal of self-sufficiency.<sup>11</sup>

The prospects for lucrative war contracts and an overall surge in the demand for domestic steel provided incentive for the most extensive expansion program to date for YS&T in 1915-1916. The company allocated five million dollars to construct a fourth blast furnace, bar mill, sizing mill, three 100 ton open hearth furnaces, coke plant, pickling building, administration building, and laboratory. This program increased the company's existing capacity, expanded the product line, and further integrated production processes on-site.<sup>12</sup>

The acquisition of the Andrews & Hitchcock Iron Company in 1916 complemented the existing facility. Andrews & Hitchcock had been a major Valley producer of pig iron for more than fifty years with two furnaces located in Hubbard, Ohio, about six miles northeast of Youngstown. The addition of the Andrews facilities provided even more self-sufficiency for YS&T. The capacity to produce pig iron allowed Sheet and Tube independence from market conditions for steel-producing raw material. In addition to the local facilities, the acquisition also included

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<sup>11</sup> Butler, Vol.1, 702.

<sup>12</sup> "Youngstown Sheet and Tube Co. Completes Important Improvements." *The Iron Trade Review* (16 January 1916): 100-101.

over eleven hundred acres of undeveloped coalfields in Green County Pennsylvania. Perhaps even more important was that with the purchase of Andrews & Hitchcock, YS&T also obtained a twelve percent interest in the Mahoning Ore Co., which held a lease to the Mahoning mine on the Mesabi Range. The Mahoning mine, later, the Mahoning-Hull-Rust open pit mine, was one of the Mesabi's most substantial suppliers of iron ore, shipping more than two million tons in 1915.<sup>13</sup> By 1917 the Sheet and Tube was a fully integrated, self-sufficient industrial behemoth, with assets worth nearly ninety eight million dollars. Net profit for the year nearly doubled from 1916; \$30,554,313 up from \$16,741,502.<sup>14</sup>

Labor organizations whose traditions meshed with Sheet & Tube's early production processes had securely established themselves in the iron industry by the mid-nineteenth century. Trade unions such as the Sons of Vulcan, the Heaters and Rollers Union, and the Roll Hands Union combined in 1876 to form the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers. This organization successfully represented the majority of skilled iron makers in the late nineteenth century in plants located west of the Alleghenies. At the height of its strength, the Amalgamated represented more than 24,000 members, almost two thirds of those eligible. It did not hesitate to use its considerable power to provide the membership with protection. Agreements between the union

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<sup>13</sup> "Buys Andrews & Hitchcock Interests." *The Iron Trade Review*. (13 April 1916): 803.

<sup>14</sup> "Large Profits," *The Iron Trade Review*, (14 February 1918):1173.



and management contained pages of details that defined and limited the job description of members.

As the industry transitioned from producing predominately iron to focusing on steel making, the Amalgamated experienced mixed success in securing a foothold in the developing departments. The Amalgamated scrambled to adjust to changing technology and to find ways to remain relevant. Historically, the union and management relied on static factors such as tonnage output as the basis of a standardized wage scale. An unequal adaptation of new steel making technology between companies resulted in a modification of the traditional wage setting formula; each steel mill negotiated separately for local rates.

The Amalgamated additionally offered concessions in an effort to adapt to industrial changes; they acknowledged that increased production achieved by mechanical improvements would necessitate wage adjustments. They left the determination of hours to employers, and dropped the principle of output limitations used to protect the ironworkers.<sup>15</sup> Despite concessions made by the Amalgamated, union representation continued to be a serious and unending source of irritation to industrial management, who considered it an impediment of economic efficiency.

The great steel magnates, led by Carnegie and Gary, banded together to effectively cripple union influence on working conditions,

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<sup>15</sup> David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1960). 50-55.

wages and shift duration. The huge steel making conglomerates were able to shift orders from union represented plants to non-union, effectively starving out workers at the union mills. In 1892, the Carnegie's Homestead plant locked workers out after failing to come to terms over adjustments in wages. The official issue was the distribution of earnings gained by plant improvements. In reality, the company sought a showdown in an effort to rid itself of the Amalgamated. In June, after the placement of barbed wire topped fences and stockpiling of product, the company offered a contract and an ultimatum. If not approved by the June 24<sup>th</sup>, stated superintendent Henry Frick, there would be no further negotiations, and the shop would go non-union. The deadline passed and on July 1<sup>st</sup>, the plant shut down. Frick planned to re-open on July 6<sup>th</sup>, and contracted three hundred Pinkerton guards to fortify the mill. As the Pinkertons attempted to enter the works, strikers met them, determined to keep them out. The violence that ensued left several dead and provided steel men the principle upon which the industry based its rejection of unionization; that of property rights. Later Frick said, "The question at issue is a very grave one. It is whether the Carnegie Company or the Amalgamated Association shall have absolute control of our plant...Under no circumstances will we have any further dealings with the Amalgamated Association." <sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 52-56.

In addition, internal disputes among unions weakened labor's influence. The Puddlers comprised one of the most skilled traditional iron working positions in the mill. They possessed skill acquired after years of experience. Prior to industrial changeover to steelmaking, through Amalgamated negotiated contracts, puddlers earned acceptable wages and enjoyed the status befitting skilled labor. However, in 1907, puddlers became dissatisfied with the representation provided by the Amalgamated and withdrew; they reverted to the name of the old puddler's union, the Sons of Vulcan. A serious schism resulted between the groups at the Lockhart Iron and Steel Company of McKees Rocks Pennsylvania. Lockhart recognized the new union, but when the Sons of Vulcan struck for a significant wage increase, Lockhart replaced them with Amalgamated workers. The violent conflict that followed further deteriorated an already weakened organization.<sup>17</sup>

Youngstown Sheet and Tube declared an open shop in November 1913 after an on-going dispute with the United Sons of Vulcan who represented the puddlers. In September, the puddlers requested the rate of seven dollars per ton, a figure that the Sheet and Tube would not meet. At the same time, another major manufacturer, the A.M. Byers Company, with mills in Pittsburg and Girard, made a similar announcement, dislodging the union. It was an inopportune time for labor to take a definitive stand, since the puddling mills of Sheet and

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<sup>17</sup> Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 74.

Tube had been idle since June. At the same time, Republic Iron and Steel Company announced plans to shut down its puddling furnaces and rolling mills in the Mahoning Valley and only produce bar iron at its' facilities in Chicago. <sup>18</sup>

By 1917, the Youngstown district had overtaken Allegheny County in total production of pig iron, and was competitive in the production of steel and rolled products. In addition, Youngstown edged Allegheny in the number of active blast furnaces. <sup>19</sup> The steel industry dominated the Mahoning Valley economy; company executives were local business, social and civic leaders. The influence of James A. Campbell, President of Sheet & Tube was evident in the community. He was president of the Mahoning County Chamber of Commerce, War Chest and Community Corporation, director of the American Iron & Steel Institute, Mahoning Ore and Steel Company, First National Bank of Youngstown, and Dollar Savings Bank. <sup>20</sup> The village of East Youngstown was later re-named Campbell in honor of the Sheet & Tube's president.

Still visible in the geography of the city of Youngstown is the affect of the steel industry. Wealthy company owners built lavish mansions on the hill directly north of downtown along Fifth, Belmont and Logan Avenues.

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<sup>18</sup> "Declares Open Shop: Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company Breaks with Sons of Vulcan," *The Iron Trade Review* (12 November 1913): 848.

<sup>19</sup> Butler, Vol. 1. 700.

<sup>20</sup> Butler, Vol. 2. 4.

These neighborhoods retained exclusivity through land covenants and sheer expense. Those in upper and mid-management levels emulated mill owners by constructing smaller, less elaborate homes a few blocks in from main avenues. Working class neighborhoods sprouted and flourished in subdivisions along streetcar rails that provided access to the workplace. The masses of immigrant labor utilized by steel manufacturers located along the lowlands near the mills. Many of eastern European background found their way to the village of East Youngstown.

Population statistics demonstrate the extraordinary effect that the incoming labor force had upon the city near the turn of the century. In 1900, Youngstown had 45,000 residents; by the beginning of the 1930s, it had ballooned to 170,000. The numbers for East Youngstown were equally impressive. City Directories show the population for the village at 500 in 1900; by 1910, it had grown to 5,000 and by 1920, there were 11,000 residents.<sup>21</sup> Many of those that poured into the area were immigrant workers from Italy, and Eastern Europe. These workers seeking jobs in the iron and steel industry faced bleak living conditions and a harsh working environment. Enticed by the prospect of relatively high wages, (compared to their native country), and steady employment they arrived intending, in many cases, to stay a short time. Many were

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<sup>21</sup> Youngstown City Directories, 1900-1920.

single men who planned to earn money quickly and return home to purchase property.<sup>22</sup>

Those who did not intend to stay initially had no reason to make emotional or economic investments in their environment. Many lived in primitive boarding houses, others in rundown shacks in undesirable sections of the city. The unskilled labor lived close enough to the noise, smell and smoke of the mill to walk to work. Conditions in Youngstown were typical of many burgeoning industrial cities. Pittsburgh, Gary, and Johnstown all had their own version of tenement living conditions. Usually the area lacked such basic services as water and sewage. East Youngstown gained an early reputation as a rough area with a disproportionate number of saloons. An article by the investigative journalist John Fitch, who had previously participated in a path-breaking survey of social and industrial conditions in Pittsburgh, described the community in 1916:

As East Youngstown is a village of more recent origin, one need not be surprised, perhaps, at the lack of sewers and running water...But the mud of the unpaved streets of that desolated <sic> village-mud nearly hub deep...seems somehow to be symbolic of the community's civic development and its regard for human values.<sup>23</sup>

This sentiment reflected the discomfort that many established Americans felt toward the large number of immigrants that entered industrial cities in the early decades of the twentieth century. The war in

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<sup>22</sup> Blue, Jenkins, 102.

<sup>23</sup> John Fitch, "Arson and American Citizenship: East Youngstown and the Aliens Who Set the Fire," *Survey* (22 January 1916): 479.

Europe dominated newspapers articles, socialism threatened the American way of life and many middle class citizens related more readily to wealthy industrial benefactors than to poor, uneducated laborers who could not speak English. Therefore, an uneasy balance existed between the desire to be socially charitable to new immigrants and the desire to protect oneself from a nebulous threat.

The social division between English-speaking workers and those of foreign heritage was a significant factor in the mills as well. The native-born disdained the positions often filled by immigrants, and preferred unemployment rather than to be associated with these jobs. Native-born workers used derogatory terms such as "Hunkies" or "Dagos" to refer to immigrants and considered them to be of below average intelligence. The English speakers were anxious to disassociate themselves from the laborers. A tentative attempt by the AFL in 1912 to incorporate immigrant workers into the organization resulted in the estrangement of the native born.<sup>24</sup> Youngstown Sheet and Tube fully utilized the immigrant workforce. Of common labor employed at the mill by 1915, ninety one percent were of foreign descent as were seventy-one percent of skilled positions.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> David Brody, *Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 42-43.

<sup>25</sup> Raymond Boryczka and Lorin Lee Cary, *No Strength Without Union: An Illustrated History of Ohio Workers 1803-1980* (Columbus: Ohio Historical Society, 1982), 235.

Changes in steel making techniques paralleled the changing faces in the mills. For generations, iron and steel making required an expertise born of experience. Artisanry was the crucial element in the relationship between employer and employee. This skill formed the basis of the unions that developed and the dependency of the company upon the worker to keep production going was the worker's strength. As technology advanced, the number of skilled workers required for production lessened and the demand for unskilled, low-paid laborers increased. The unskilled positions consisted of the dirtiest, most unpleasant and dangerous jobs. Although its contemporaries considered Youngstown Sheet and Tube progressive, working conditions were extremely hazardous. One local steel mill superintendent summed up industrial philosophy to Dr. William Hudnot, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in a tour of the plant: "We work them out, and then get in a new batch."<sup>26</sup> The immigrant labor pool was immense early in the twentieth century. Labor relations between Mahoning Valley steel manufacturers and workers were typical. Reports of labor dissatisfaction and strikes were common around the turn of the century.

In June 1882, Senator John T. Morgan of Alabama said in an address that he advocated the appointment of a committee to investigate labor unrest because there were, at that time, 100,000 men on strike in the United States, including 700 steel workers at Homestead,

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Blue and Jenkins, 103-104.



Pennsylvania. This strike lasted until September, when members of the Amalgamated returned to work without gains due to an alliance of nearly all of the iron manufacturers west of the Alleghenies. <sup>27</sup>

Violence was common; in 1906, gunfire resulted from a clash between union structural ironworkers striking in East Youngstown and replacement workers.<sup>28</sup> The strike and riot that rocked the area ten years later had its origin in the disruption of the balance of the supply and demand of labor, the stability of the immigrant labor pool and dissatisfaction with wages, hours and conditions by the workers.

As early as June 1915, analysts predicted a shortage of labor for the steel industry, due to restrictions on immigration from Europe. Manufacturers took the prediction seriously, and upped the rate of mechanization and increased their production. Companies would not commit to smaller domestic steel orders, and delivery for large military related orders ran at least six months behind. To accommodate the pending steel orders, production of pig iron increased substantially, it went up more than one hundred thousand tons nationally in June from May. The squeeze on production resulted in higher prices for steel products.<sup>29</sup> The labor shortage became a reality as production rose to capacity. The demand for steel experienced a spike in 1915, prompted, in

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<sup>27</sup> Congressional Record, 47<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol. 13, Part 5, p. 161. quoted in John Fitch, *The Steel Workers* (New York: Charities Publication Committee, 1911), 108.

<sup>28</sup> "Shots Fired: Clash Between Union and Non-Union Structural Iron Workers," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 21 May 1906, 2.

<sup>29</sup> "Steel Trade fears a Labor Shortage," Special to the New York Times, *New York Times*, 11 July 1915, X9.

part, by orders for the construction of six ships contracted for Atlantic Coast service in October alone. The Coastwise Transportation Company in New York also placed orders for seven new vessels in a six-month period. At the same time, the railroad industry had large orders for steel plates and rails waiting for production.

In addition to American companies, Russian and French railways were in the market for thousands of tons of steel products. Although the British War Department had intended to contract war materials through Canada, David Thomas, head of the department, was reported as saying that Canadian mills were less reliable and more expensive than American. Orders for combat shells totaled over two hundred fifty million dollars by October, with larger orders pending. As orders fell behind, prices continued to rise.<sup>30</sup>

The demand for bar steel for the production of shrapnel further strained Valley manufacturers' production lines. Estimates for orders totaling over half a million tons of round billets were reported mid December. Nationwide, American steel manufacturers exported almost fifteen tons of shell steel to Europe weekly.<sup>31</sup> As military orders poured in for war related material, it became apparent that local production was unable to keep pace with demand.

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<sup>30</sup> "Steel Contracts Cannot Be Filled," Special to the New York Times, *New York Times*, 24 October, 1915. S5.

<sup>31</sup> "Steel Demand," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 18 December, 1915. 2.

## The 1916 Strike and Aftermath

By December 1915, Valley mills were running production at full capacity for months. Sheet and Tube experienced record-breaking production in all departments. Therefore, it rushed construction of three new open-hearth furnaces.<sup>1</sup> Even so, production was unable to keep pace with orders and on December 19<sup>th</sup>, an overtime schedule was posted in the skelp, open hearth, blooming mill and Bessemer departments of Youngstown Sheet and Tube.<sup>2</sup>

Local papers first reported on the steel strike on December 28, 1915. Initially, pipe fitters employed by Republic Iron & Steel Company struck, seeking a wage increase that would restore them to the level before concessions given the preceding February. At the same time, unskilled laborers employed in the tube mills walked out over working conditions and wages. Republic, like Sheet and Tube, operated on an open shop basis. Three years previously, they established a pay scale for unskilled laborers at nineteen and a half cents per hour, the same as Sheet and Tube. Now, the laborers demanded an increase that would put them at twenty-five cents per hour.

Throughout December, alongside Christmas advertisements, local newspapers trumpeted record-breaking production and earnings for

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<sup>1</sup> "Big Tonnage," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, Saturday Evening Edition, 4 Dec., 1915, 3.

<sup>2</sup> "New Schedule: Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co. Operating Its Mills Over Time," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 19 December, 1915. 2a.

valley steel industries during the fall quarter. Labor undoubtedly felt that they not only contributed to this record-breaking period, but that they should share in the profits.<sup>3</sup> While this walkout did not completely halt production, it did result in disruption at the tube mills and enough anxiety that the company increased police presence.<sup>4</sup> Although not united by language or education, the laborers remained on the picket lines. A meeting held in a civic hall on December 28 indicates that there were union organizers present at this early stage. Translators urged the men not to go back to their jobs, even though the company threatened the permanent replacement of striking employees. In addition to the wage increase, laborers wanted ten more minutes added to the standard lunchtime, early release on Saturdays, and time and a half for overtime.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, the strikers, mostly Hungarians, Slovaks and Croatians, exposed to the elements in the mill yards asked for the erection of a roof to afford better protection from the weather and better tools to increase efficiency and wage earning capabilities.<sup>6</sup> By January 3<sup>rd</sup>, Republic admitted that it had shut down tube mill production for lack of laborers. At this point, the media reported that striker leaders claimed almost three thousand workers, including electricians, machinists and structural ironworkers in the tube mill had gone off the

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<sup>3</sup> "Records Broken in Production and Earnings," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 15 December, 1915. 3.

<sup>4</sup> "Strike On: Laborers at Republic I&S Tube Mill Make a Demonstration," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 28 December, 1915. 2.

<sup>5</sup> "Still Out," *The Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 29 December, 1915. 2.

<sup>6</sup> "Additions Being Made To Original Demands," *The Youngstown Telegram*, 6 January, 1916. 2.

job in support of the laborers. Whether these skilled workers actually supported the laborers, or had no work due to the strike is unknown, but production ceased. On the same day, a *Youngstown Telegram* article stated, "one of the local plants not identified with Republic is said to have sworn in a large number of special deputies as a measure of precaution against possible trouble..."<sup>7</sup> Three hundred slag men and other laborers from Republic's open-hearth department joined the strike. The next target, according to a *Telegram* article was the coke plant, where the workers had been dissatisfied over wages and conditions and threatened to walkout.<sup>8</sup>

Within a few days, with the mills at Republic Iron and Steel, the Brown-Bonnell and Bessemer plants, tube mill and open-hearth departments at Lansingville and Haselton furnaces shut down, the tube mill laborers at Sheet and Tube walked out. The numbers of strikers at Sheet and Tube on January 5<sup>th</sup> ranged from twenty, as reported by the company, up to 600 claimed by labor leaders. All together, about 6,000 were off the job in the Mahoning Valley at this point. Of these, about 2,500 were laborers actually on strike. The rest were semi-skilled or skilled workers who could not complete their jobs with out the laborers. Although not officially on strike, many of the skilled workers sympathized with the laborers and were not wholly satisfied with wages and

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<sup>7</sup> "Workmen Leave Republic Plant," *The Youngstown Telegram*, 3 January, 1916, C3.

<sup>8</sup> "More Men Out With Strikers," *The Youngstown Telegram*, 4 January, 1916, 2.

conditions themselves. Negotiation between the company and workers was nonexistent. As executives from Republic asserted, the strikers had not “presented their demands in such a way as to be answerable,” labor leaders appointed a committee to meet with company officials. <sup>9</sup>

The defeats suffered by the Amalgamated over the previous twenty years made the steel industry coveted territory. Beleaguered labor organizers quickly responded to the unrest in Youngstown, and seized the opportunity to regain a foothold in the industry in the face of unrelenting opposition by the corporations. The American Federation of Labor sent Thomas Flynn as general organizer; he was followed Frank Sweeck from New York who arrived to organize for various electrician positions, including wiremen and crane men. The clay and mine workers sent men as well; John Tafelski for the clay workers and John Barafaldi for the mineworkers’ organization. David Ingar represented the International Workers of the World. The AFL wasted no time in signing up hundreds of unskilled labor for a charter of affiliation. The AFL also assisted in the organization of picketers and scheduled another mass meeting, this one to address the Italian workers.

On Wednesday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, Sweeck, Flynn and John Graney, a local labor leader, held an organizational meeting at the East Youngstown Moose Hall. Turnout was large, and more than 300 electrical workers created a core organization for their craft. As a result, Graney

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<sup>9</sup> “Republic Mills All Suspended as Men Strike,” *Youngstown Telegram*, 5 January, 1916. 1.

requested that the main headquarters in Springfield, Illinois send a charter for the newly formed organization.<sup>10</sup> Another massive meeting held the same day on Franklin Avenue resulted in a march by the crowd to the Center and East End Bridges to hold a public demonstration.

Over the course of a few days, more public rallies took place, with Tafelski and Barafaldi translating. Organizers chose an eight-man committee to present labor demands to company management, and on Thursday, January 6<sup>th</sup>, they met briefly with James Deetrick, general manager of the Republic operating department. The result of the meeting was disappointing to the striking workers. Sheet and Tube executives later echoed the statement to the press made by Republic. The press release outlined the company's position. In it, Thomas J. Bray, president of Republic Iron and Steel, dismissed worker demands; he said that current wages were fair and that his company was always willing to adjust levels when applicable, but since the wages that they paid were already the highest in the area, the increase was unreasonable.<sup>11</sup> His answer left no room for discussion or negotiation.

Tension quickly escalated between management and striking workers. The companies could ill afford to delay production, while workers long frustrated by poor working conditions, low pay and most importantly, lack of participation in representing their interests, relished

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<sup>10</sup> "Predict Addition to Strike Ranks," *The Youngstown Telegram*, 5 January 1916, 3.

<sup>11</sup> "Strikers Confer Over Rejection," *The Youngstown Telegram*, 6, January 1916, 1-2.

the opportunity to voice complaints. Union organizers, laborers, management, and local authorities struggled to maintain balance after the first walkout at the end of December 1915. Graney served as local spokesperson and mediator between the laborers and the media. Organized labor leaders maintained throughout the unrest that they had not initiated the problem; they were simply on site to assist. On January 5<sup>th</sup> 1916, Graney justified the AFL's involvement with the dispute by saying:

The city owes the American Federation of Labor a debt for taking hold of the strike situation here; for we hadn't there certainly would have been some bloodshed. We took charge first from the standpoint of the citizens of Youngstown and secondly to protect the federation, if any trouble, no matter how light had occurred the union labor movement would have been blamed even though it was innocent.<sup>12</sup>

With dark clouds gathering on the horizon, some local authorities began to implement contingency plans to deal with violence. Youngstown's police chief Hartenstein took charge initially and stationed his men where he felt the most volatile conditions existed, near the east entrances to Republic's mills. Trouble began sporadically, with isolated clashes between individuals and groups of strike supporters.<sup>13</sup> On January 4<sup>th</sup> police responded to complaints of intimidation and harassment of workers and arrested eleven strikers. Local newspapers

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<sup>12</sup> "Predict Addition to Strike Ranks," *The Youngstown Telegram*, 5 January, 1916. 3.

<sup>13</sup> "Little Disorder Follows Strike," *The Youngstown Telegram*, 5 January, 1916, 6.



reported isolated fights and arrests over the next few days.<sup>14</sup> Many of the incidents clustered around the east gate of the Sheet & Tube, near the residential area inhabited by many immigrant laborers.

Since many of the residents of East Youngstown originated in Eastern Europe, they observed the Eastern Orthodox Christmas holiday that fell during the first week of January 1916. Despite the strike, the mood was, at least in part, festive. Many who did not report to work in the mills spent the day celebrating by drinking and discussing the labor situation. City officials began to grow uneasy by the afternoon of January 7<sup>th</sup> at the prospect of so many idle men and engaged the crowd in an effort to diffuse the potentially dangerous situation. The officials were met with threats to “throw them into the Mahoning River” by the jeering crowd.<sup>15</sup> When Mayor Cunningham of East Youngstown gave the order to shut down the bars late in the afternoon, the edict ignited the crowd.

Events quickly spiraled out of control after the mass of men left the bars. Frank Spotleson was twenty-six years old in 1916 and an eyewitness to how the melee began. After officials escorted the men from bars, they milled onto Short Street in East Youngstown until Spotleson heard someone shout, “Let’s go into the mill. Let’s take the scabs out.” He estimated the crowd to be over a thousand men. It was at the east bridge leading to Sheet and Tube that the situation escalated in earnest.

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<sup>14</sup> “Eleven Strikers Taken by Police,” *The Youngstown Telegram*, 4 January, 1916, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Florence Galida, *Fascinating History of Campbell*, (State College, Pa.: Josten American Yearbook, 1976), 10.

Members of the crowd began to harass and throw bricks and rocks at the company guards at the gate. Unnamed sources later told newspaper reporters that the main agitators at this point were not local strikers, but outside influences. Michael Cvengros, who later became a city council member, corroborated this account as another eyewitness to the events at the mill gate. He would later say that the main troublemakers were “outsiders” and that after the fires were out of control, these agitators disappeared.<sup>16</sup>

A grand jury determined that gunfire originated with company guards within the gates of Sheet and Tube and that one of the guards belonged to the Ohio National Guard. Alarmed at the crowds of men congregated near the plant, he went to the local Armory where he appropriated arms and ammunition. Ten members of the guard returned to the mill with him. The problem was that he had no authority or permission to requisition the men, and when they were called to official duty to help restore order by the sheriff, they were absent from the Armory.<sup>17</sup>

The gunfire that erupted from behind the gate signaled the beginning of the disaster. The enraged mob broke into the Sheet and Tube offices to destroy company documents, including blacklists. The fire they set quickly devoured the wood frame company building. The crowd

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<sup>16</sup> Galida, 146.

<sup>17</sup> “Trust Combine to Keep Down Wages Has Been Charged,” *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 8 March, 1916. 1.

hampered attempts by the fire department to put out the blaze by cutting the water hoses. The volatile situation forced fire and police departments out of the area. The fire quickly spread to the nearby business district of East Youngstown. Still angered by the shootings, the mob looted businesses not yet in the path of the fire, and then set them ablaze. Unfortunately, many of the businesses were drinking establishments and the alcohol looted and consumed by the crowd further exacerbated the already bad situation. The crowd did not consume all the alcohol taken, however. The grand jury also indicted one group of six men for stealing 25 cases of wine and destroying it by throwing it into the street. The crowd did not ignore other businesses. They stole guns from the hardware store along with clothing and food items. The crowd may have been drunk, but some of the items stolen indicate clarity of thought. The indictment of Charles Wergo, on January 11<sup>th</sup> of grand larceny listed, for example the items that he allegedly stole. The list included the following items: one child's coat, nine hats, two caps, two pairs of stockings, two pair of canvass gloves, four pairs of shoes, ten single shoes, two pairs of boys pants, one pair of men's pants, one lady's wrapper, lady's coat, dress shirt, dress, one and a half yards of dress goods, one ladies hose supporters, one baby dress, a bolt of gingham, six woolen shirts, one dress shirt, two neckties and nine packs of cigarettes. <sup>18</sup> Domestic items characterized what Wergo stole, items he knew his family needed.

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<sup>18</sup> Mahoning County Grand Jury Indictment, 11 January, 1916. Mahoning

The looting and violence continued for more than twelve hours, many bystanders and rioters received wounds from gunshots fired into the air. Robert Davis was a 24-year-old railway worker struck and killed by a stray bullet while at work in a nearby rail yard.<sup>19</sup> The destruction continued, uncontested by absent East Youngstown police until City Solicitor Oscar Diser finally requisitioned guns from an intact hardware store and deputized twenty-five men. He spread rumors of incoming state troopers. Although notified, the National Guard could not arrive until morning. At his signal, the twenty-five deputies shot into the air, which encouraged the spent crowd to disperse.<sup>20</sup> The next morning dawned on a community in ruins, with the entire business district of East Youngstown burned, looted or damaged. The estimated cost of destroyed property topped one million dollars.

A partial list of businesses destroyed illustrates that many were small, family run businesses, common of the era. It included Mike and Mary Bogoeff's meat market, barbershop and residence, Eugene Crow's saloon, the Georcheff Brothers Restaurant, and Frank Porembski's drug store. In addition, a bank building, two doctors and dentists offices, furniture, hardware, grocery stores, an undertaker and post office burned.<sup>21</sup>

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County Courthouse.

<sup>19</sup> "Second Victim," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 9 January 1916, sec. A 3.

<sup>20</sup> Galida, 146.

<sup>21</sup> "Complete List of Destroyed Blocks Made," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 9 January 1916, 3A.

As a precaution against further violence, over 1,000 Ohio National Guard troops came to Youngstown. Members of the Fourth, Fifth and Eighth regiments, commanded by Brigadier General William Speaks took position in the YS&T tube plant and placed a machine gun at the Wilson Avenue approach to the bridge. Soldiers guarded the eastern perimeter of the plant. Although more than 100 additional guards arrived, they were unnecessary since the violence had ended. <sup>22</sup>

During the following week, East Youngstown police, led by Detective John Kane searched the village for property stolen during the riot. The search was comprehensive and thorough. Joseph Vrabel was a child in 1916 and remembered how deputies searched his house:

The National Guard came in the house. They tore the house up side down, threw everything all around the house. You should have seen. My mother cried. Then, they walked out. They didn't find a thing. Then, they went to the next house and the next house. They just went through the house and tore the whole house apart... <sup>23</sup>

Officials confiscated and hauled to police headquarters wagonloads of loot from homes in the village and arrested hundreds as curious spectators watched. Mahoning County Common Pleas court records show large numbers of arrests for carrying concealed weapons that ranged from brass knuckles to loaded guns.

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<sup>22</sup> "Guards Tighten Military Clasp in Burned Town," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 9 January 1917. Sec. A1.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Vrabel interviewed by William M. Kish, Oral History Program, Youngstown State University, 5 July, 1989.

A handful of men faced multiple charges as a group. Mike Anto, Harry Bepily, John Engle, George Lukesch, and John Marta faced indictments that included riot, arson, assault with intent to kill, malicious destruction of property, concealed weapon and burglary. Prosecution of those arrested was difficult in many cases. Of those arrested, most men pled not guilty initially. While many quickly changed their pleas to guilty and were fined anywhere from ten to sixty dollars, with time in the workhouse in Cleveland until the fines were paid, those who fought charges were often cases acquitted. Jury trials had mixed results; in several cases, appeals overturned convictions.

David Ingar was an International Workers of the World organizer arrested on various charges, including riot. A radical organization, the I. W. W. advocated the formation of a single union, as opposed to an amalgamation of trade or craft unions. Implicated in several violent clashes with police and management, they represented a most extreme and feared brand of unionism. Although acquitted of the riot charge, Ingar gained local notoriety in 1918 when he faced charges of violation of the espionage act in Chicago with "Big Bill Haywood," controversial leader of the I.W.W. Ingar actively organized in Western Pennsylvania and Ohio from his Youngstown office between 1915 and 1918 when the federal government raided his office in September. At the Chicago trial, letters written after the Youngstown riot from the Mahoning County jail

from Ingar to Haywood included details about Ingar's role in the strike.

He wrote:

On Wednesday night, January 5, a good percent of the tube department didn't come to work. Next day the sheet department, the tube and some men from the Republic Steel works placed a picket line on the Youngstown Sheet and Tube works thereby forcing the rest of the laborers and all mill wrights to go on strike." As was expected, the Americans who received better pay went home and did not show up until after the town of East Youngstown was burned. That settled the strike but it took twice as many yellow legs (soldiers) as there were strikers to quell the rebellion. <sup>24</sup>

The arrest of dozens and restoration of order in East Youngstown did not immediately signal the end of the labor dispute. The strike now had the attention of state officials, and on Sunday, January 9<sup>th</sup> the Ohio Industrial Commission sent Fred Coxtton, head of the State Statistical Bureau to mediate negotiations. Coxtton, along with two assistants met with both sides of the dispute and began to work toward a settlement.<sup>25</sup>

The striking workers expressed their resolve to hold out for concessions from management in a series of meetings and rallies that began as early as two days after the riot. They met in the outskirts of East Youngstown known as Robinson Park and had numerous separate meetings in the homes of strikers and supporters. The demands remained the same. The military presence discouraged the mass rally discussed at the meetings. Nervous city officials acted upon a rumor that

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<sup>24</sup> "I.W.W. Back of Riots In East Youngstown," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 1 June 1918, 1.

<sup>25</sup> "Mediator Here and Will Start Work at Once," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 9 January 1917, Sec.A 1.

striking workers planned to raid the city jail and release those arrested. Although officials quickly transported prisoners to county facilities, the strikers made no attack upon the city jail.<sup>26</sup>

Regardless of the destruction of the city and the ongoing dispute, wartime steel orders continued to accumulate at the local mills and it was vital to resume production. Despite misgivings by Campbell about the safety of non-striking workers, YS&T began preparations to resume operations on Saturday evening, one day after the riot. On Sunday, he issued a conciliatory statement indicating that the riot was over, the strike should end and work in the mill should resume as quickly as possible. Campbell's statement went on to say that the industry should be more responsive to the integration of immigrant workers to the community, and to insure that they receive adequate housing. *Youngstown Vindicator* headlines declared strike officially over with departure of mediator Coxtan for Columbus on January 16<sup>th</sup>. Strikers returned to their jobs several days before he left. Officials did not disclose terms for the negotiated settlement.<sup>27</sup>

While much of the community blamed the ignorance and drunken passion of "foreigners" for the destruction in East Youngstown, others faced questions as well. Thomas Flynn, organizer for the A.F.L. accused Youngstown Sheet and Tube executives of trying to depress the value of

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<sup>26</sup> "Strikers Vote to Hold Out at Night Meeting," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 9 January 1916, Sec A 3.

<sup>27</sup> "Strike Over; Mediator Goes," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 16 January 1916, Sec. A 3.



company stock by orchestrating labor unrest and disruption of production. In a statement issued on January 11<sup>th</sup>, Flynn claimed to have evidence that Sheet and Tube hired “paid sluggers” from Pittsburgh and that twenty-five of them were deputized by Sheriff Ulmstead. These 25 men, he said, were the gunmen who fired into the crowd at the bridge. “This whole thing was engineered by financiers. Organized labor demands that this rotten thing be investigated to the finish.”<sup>28</sup> Flynn based his assertion of a “stock ruse” on ongoing negotiations between YS&T, the Cambria Steel and Lackawanna Steel Companies for a proposed merger. Reports of the possible merger had been the subject of speculation in Youngstown and New York City financial communities through December. Following a meeting at company headquarters in Youngstown on December 16<sup>th</sup>, where Campbell outlined the proposal to Sheet and Tube stockholders, he left for New York City. There he met with John L. Roplege, owner a large block of Cambria stock, Harrison Williams a capitalist with interest in Cambria, and Frank Vanderlip, President of National City Bank to explore the possibility of a merger. From this meeting, stock prices were reported to been tentatively placed at \$80 per share for Cambria and Lackawanna stock and \$300 for Youngstown Sheet and Tube, the most financially successful of the companies. At the time of the strike, the merger was still under discussion. The companies involved in the merger plan denied knowledge

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<sup>28</sup> “Calls Riot a Stock Ruse,” *New York Times*, 11 January 1916, 9.

of any scheme, and John D. Rockefeller issued a statement saying not only did he and his father have no knowledge of any plan to depress Sheet and Tube stock prices, but they had no interest in any of the companies involved.<sup>29</sup> Whether there was a plot or not, the proposed merger fell through in February. Interestingly enough, it was dissatisfaction over stock prices that proved to be an obstacle. Since agreeing to prices early in December, earnings of the steel corporations grew substantially enough that Lackawanna and Cambria stockholders felt that their stocks should command higher prices, resulting in a pullout of the financiers who were to underwrite the project.<sup>30</sup> After Midvale Steel Company absorbed Cambria on February 13, the proposed merger was officially dead.<sup>31</sup>

The grand jury that convened to study the strike and riot may have further investigated Flynn's accusations of a stock ruse, but the summary of the report published by the media did not shed any more light on them. The grand jury listened to testimony for 37 days, the longest investigation in Mahoning County history to that date. Over 200 witnesses testified in 253 separate cases, most in reference to the East Youngstown riot.

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<sup>29</sup> "Denial by Rockefeller," *New York Times*, 11 January 1916, 17.

<sup>30</sup> "Bankers Abandon Steel Company Merger," *The New York Times*, 6 February 1916, 6.

<sup>31</sup> "Steel Combination May Keep Prices Up," *New York Times*, 13 February 1916, 19.

Judge W. S. Anderson, longtime Mahoning County attorney, supervised the investigation. No stranger to labor disputes, Anderson had successfully defended two men charged with serious crimes in the disastrous Homestead Riots in 1892. In Homestead, Anderson had joined a team of lawyers that included attorneys from St. Paul and Pittsburgh, to defend Homestead resident Jack Clifford. The trial for the murder of Pinkerton Detective T. J. Connors began in February 1893. A key contention for the defense was their objection of the replacement of the local prosecutor by an attorney hired by the Carnegie Company. With the acquittal of Clifford, the Carnegie attorneys dropped further prosecution of Homestead workers.

The grand jury over which Anderson presided in Youngstown in 1916 arrived at some startling conclusions. On March 8, 1916, *The Youngstown Vindicator* ran two headlines on the front page. Along with news of the Kaiser's invasion of Poland, it announced that the grand jury who investigated January's strike and riot had indicted Big Steel. The report released by the grand jury indicated their belief that there were several main issues behind the violence experienced in East Youngstown on January 7<sup>th</sup>. The grand jury emphasized the ineptitude of East Youngstown officials in handling the mob the day of the riot. It chastised Mayor Cunningham and members of the police force for not implementing more control earlier in the day, specifically for not closing the saloons. The report also criticized the company guards who opened

fire on the crowds, calling them substandard. However, the grand jury saved the most scathing criticism for the steel companies themselves, and the working and living conditions for both laborers and skilled workers. The formal charges filed against Youngstown Sheet & Tube, Republic Iron & Steel, the Brier Hill Steel Company, Youngstown Iron & Steel, and Judge Gary accused them of having formed a trust to fix the wages of common labor in violation of Ohio's anti-trust Valentine Act. Enacted in 1898, the Valentine Act regulated the railroad, coal, insurance and oil companies. Similar in intent the Federal Sherman Act, the Valentine Act prohibited price fixing, production limitation, and controlled sales that would harm the public good.<sup>32</sup> The *Youngstown Vindicator* listed Gary's indictment along with murderers, bigamists and burglars.<sup>33</sup> Although Prosecutor Henderson would not publicly disclose what information directly led to the indictments, he did express confidence that when the evidence came out at trial, his case against the industry "would be vindicated," he said:

We are firmly of the opinion that not only will this evidence show a lawless condition of affairs surrounding the labor conditions existing in and about the steel industries of this valley, but will also indicate an absolute disregard on the part of certain corporations and individuals indicted by us, either of the rights of, or justice to, the laboring class, or of the public generally.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Anderson's Ohio Online Documents "Ohio Revised Code," <http://onlinedocs.andersonpublishing.com/oh/lpExt.dll?f=templates&fn=main-h.htm&cp=PORC> (accessed June 30, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> "Keep Down Wages Has Been Charged," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 8 March 1916, 1-3.

<sup>34</sup> "News of Employers and Employees," *The Iron Trade Review*, (16 March 1916): 607.

Identical wage levels for labor among the companies involved in January's strike, coupled with the fact that within a two-day span, the same companies increased wages by ten percent indicated collusion to the grand jury. During the proceedings that outlined the indictment, Henderson voiced the feelings of many when he called Gary "the dictator of the iron and steel industry in the United States." Gary's indictment, Henderson claimed, was based on testimony from the officials of the other steel corporations, testimony that would become public at the ensuing trial.<sup>35</sup> Although Gary expressed his indignation at the indictments, calling them "an outrageous travesty,"<sup>36</sup> they probably did not surprise him. Since the late nineteenth century, the issue of trusts and monopolies formed the basis for political antagonism; and the definitive example of monopoly was U. S. Steel. From its inception, there was concern, within the industry and from governmental and public agencies, about the legality of the formation of U. S. Steel in relation to the federal Sherman Antitrust Act. Enacted in 1890 in response to a growing apprehension over trusts and monopolies, the Act stated that "every contract, combination in the form of trust or otherwise, or conspiracy, in restraint of trade or otherwise, or conspiracy, in restraint

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<sup>35</sup> "Indicts E. H. Gary and Six Steel Cos." *New York Times*, 8 March 1916, 6.

<sup>36</sup> "Gary Says Indictment an Outrageous Travesty," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 8 March 1916, 1.

of trade or commerce among the several states, or with foreign nations, is hereby declared to be illegal.”<sup>37</sup>

With incorporation, U. S. Steel controlled more than sixty per cent of American basic steel making capacity and a hefty portion of finished goods production. U. S. Steel could have dominated the steel industry through reduced costs and sheer volume of production, however. However, Gary trod carefully to avoid antitrust litigation. He theorized that if the corporation was given the opportunity to prove that it had no monopolistic intentions, it would be held within the law. Although viewed with suspicion by many, Gary and U. S. Steel maintained that fine distinction successfully for decades.

In addition to his management of U. S. Steel, Gary led the industry in the attempt to stabilize the steel market, a market notoriously volatile late in the nineteenth century. In contrast to the practice of slashing prices during recession and spiking them during prosperity, Gary advocated “cooperation” among steelmakers. The cooperation extended to pricing as well as the cost of production, including labor. This stability allowed manufacturers better financial control of their companies. For opponents of big business, Gary’s philosophy was a smoke screen for collusion and price fixing.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Sean W. Wakely, ed., *Making America: A History of the United States*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 590.

<sup>38</sup> Melvin I. Urofsky, *Big Steel and the Wilson Administration: A Study in Business-Government Relations*, (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1969), 1-5.

Fortunately for the industry, the Harrison, Cleveland and McKinley administrations did not vigorously pursue the precedent setting anti-trust cases against big business. When Theodore Roosevelt became president upon McKinley's assassination, he was not disposed to upsetting the relationship between government and the steel industry either. The president allowed Gary to pursue his goal of a stable marketplace, as long as the corporation did not abuse its' power and place public interest in jeopardy. The Bureau of Corporations created a wrinkle in the relationship between the administration and Gary when Progressives in the House of Representatives pushed for a more in depth investigation of the steel industry. Although causing momentary alarm for steelmakers, the ensuing investigation was, in reality, a cooperative effort between Roosevelt and Gary. Although the steel industry and government reached a rather uneasy agreement, the possibility of anti trust litigation was always present.<sup>39</sup> As a result, Gary was cautious about gaining the attention of the federal government. On March 22, 1916 attorneys for the State of Ohio and for the six steel companies under indictment argued in Judge Anderson's courtroom for most of the day. They discussed the motion, made by the defendants, to drop all charges against Gary and the companies that related to the strike.<sup>40</sup> In a crowded courtroom on the afternoon of March 28, 1916, Judge Anderson took a little over an hour to read his decision to agree to the

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<sup>39</sup> Urofsky, 11-13.

<sup>40</sup> "Argue Steel Indictments," *New York Times*, 23 March 1916, 18.

motion to drop the indictments. He cited three considerations in his decision; he maintained that the indictments were indefinite and uncertain and therefore would be impossible to obtain a fair trial. The second flaw in the indictments referred to the conflict of jurisdiction between the federal Sherman Act and Ohio's Valentine Act. Since the Valentine Act was created after the Sherman Act, it did not have jurisdiction except within the State of Ohio, and then only upon commerce conducted solely within the state; therefore it was not applicable to the steel corporations. The third consideration concerned labor and the fixing of wages. The indictments classified labor as a commodity and charged the corporations with conspiracy to set a unified and specific price for that commodity. Judge Anderson rejected that assumption because he said that labor was in no way a commodity. Anderson said in part:

Labor is person and individual to the man. It is his; it is own; no one can sell it for him in this land of ours, nor can any one take it from him..if we are going to regard it as a commodity...it puts the laboring man on the level with a slave, takes away his manhood and the respect that the community owes, and should give to labor...<sup>41</sup>

He further stated that the Valentine statute precluded labor from its terms and made no provision making it illegal for mill owners to fix the price of labor. While Judge Anderson found and cited the legal flaws in the indictments against Gary and the steel manufacturers, he granted an

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<sup>41</sup> "Motion to Quash Steel Indictments Was Sustained," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 28 March 1916, 1.



exception to Prosecutor Henderson and the state to allow the implementation of further action, but it was not pursued.<sup>42</sup> Although Anderson dropped the indictments, the widely publicized grand jury investigation and subsequent court action highlighted the issue of living and working conditions of local steel workers. Without publicly acknowledging blame, Youngstown's mill owners privately re-examined their relationship with steel workers.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

## 1917-1918

Very few company records remain of the Youngstown Sheet & Tube early decades. Various departments did compile statistics in 1916, they illustrate a company concerned about better understanding the dynamics of hiring and retaining its massive workforce. These records show an astonishing hemorrhage of workmen due to dismissal or desertion. Disruption of the rate of production caused by the constant changeover of employees, coupled with the persistent threat of disruptive strikes motivated the company to re-examine the established policy of “working them out, and then getting in a new batch.”<sup>1</sup>

Despite the widely reported industry wide labor shortage during WWI, Sheet & Tube hired 25,942 men in 1916. The real shortage was in retention. Of those hired, only 1,724 were still employed by year’s end; a dismal 15 to 1 ratio. The vast majority cited inadequate pay or dissatisfaction with working conditions as reasons for leaving. In November 1916, of 522 workers who left YS&T’s employ, 147 cited inadequate wages. Those most likely to leave because of low pay were American born, of the 147, one hundred were American workers, others included four Italians, eleven Hungarians and thirty-two labeled ‘all others.’ Just over half of these men had previous factory experience, mostly in the rubber industry, and when they left YS&T they did so

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Blue and Jenkins, 103-104.

without immediate prospect of subsequent employment. Other reasons cited for workers leaving included dust, heat, noise, hours, and fluctuations in earnings. Additionally, twenty-four workers had "trouble with superiors." Thirty left YS&T because they found employment with higher pay or that offered better quality of life potential and more than 100 left the city altogether for personal reasons. Most of the workers that quit Sheet and Tube in November were young single men, between twenty-one and thirty-years-old, only three were over forty; almost half of them worked in the mill for less than a month. Overall, American workers were most likely to leave the mill because of issues such as pay, personal situations, and general dislike of the work. Other ethnicities were more likely to cite noise, dust, housing conditions, lack of work, and reasons of health. YS&T tracked those dismissed as well. The company fired some workers for neglect of duty or poor workmanship, but cited "good of the cause," as the most common reason for dismissal. This was a catch-all phrase that undoubtedly covered union sympathizers and was applied equally between American and immigrant. The high rate of turnover affected American and foreign-born employees almost equally; for all plant departments for the month of November, forty-nine percent of those dismissed were listed as American compared to fifty-one percent of other ethnicities. Absenteeism plagued the company. In one department of 6,881 employees, 2,217 were absent in September 1916; over thirty-two percent. The reasons varied, but personal illness was the

most prevalent cause listed, followed by illness or injury to family members. Again, despite the labor shortage facing the industry, of the 2,000 workers that reported off in September, Sheet & Tube fired more than 900. In addition to monitoring the numbers of workers that passed through the gates, the Sheet & Tube kept track of the nationality, age and living arrangements of the workers. Total employment was almost evenly split between native and foreign-born workers. Although the records do not indicate positions held by individuals, American men held virtually all upper, mid- and lower level management positions, sales, clerical, accounting and marketing. Youth dominated the workforce, eighty percent were under 30; relatively few owned the home in which they lived. <sup>2</sup>

Youngstown Sheet & Tube responded to the volatility of its workforce by implementing a series of programs and policy changes aimed at producing stability among the workers and implementing more control by the company. The hospital built near the east gate entrance just before the 1916 strike serviced the 10,000 mill workers and provided first aid for injuries that occurred at the plant as well as general health care for employees. Sheet & Tube also created a company relief association for employees and their families. The company employed three nurses, who worked under the supervision of the company doctor. In addition to providing services to those workers on duty, the nurses

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<sup>2</sup> Youngstown Sheet and Tube Audiovisual Archives, MSS0140; Folder 92, Container 1040-6. Youngstown History of Industry and Labor.

made house calls to those injured on the job as they recuperated at home. The medical department kept busy treating patients. In January and February 1917, the nurses made 411 home visits and received 87 patients in the company office. A staff of physicians, nurses and surgeons were on duty twenty-four hours a day to provide medical attention to workers injured on the job.<sup>3</sup>

There were several benefits of the health care system to employee and employer. Workers who received quality healthcare required less time away from the job, and as a result, the company realized more control of absenteeism due to illness or injury. In an effort to improve attendance, the relief association expanded its programs to include providing instruction in home care, hygiene, sanitation, economics and family economics.

Sheet & Tube integrated the program with local school health organizations and worked in conjunction with the Mahoning County public school system to provide physical examinations for all school age children. In response to deplorable living conditions in which many employees lived, weekly 'bath classes' were held once a week for the children of employees. Additionally, they formed a Boy Scout chapter and 'little mother's league' created for young girls with instruction on housekeeping and hygiene. The company also offered night classes to instruct immigrant workers in English and to prepare them for the

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<sup>3</sup> "Welfare Work in the Home," *The Iron Trade Review*, 26 July 1917, 194-196.

examination necessary to become American citizens. <sup>4</sup> The movement to integrate immigrants was not new, but anxiety from the war, coupled with the violence of the 1916 strike resulted in a renewed Americanization effort in the Mahoning Valley. The Americanization of immigrants became the focal point of social reform; public, private and business leaders collaborated on strategy and implementation. Churches, public schools, and the Y.M.C.A. sponsored night classes in addition to those offered by the steel companies. Many local immigrants embraced the effort, eager to illustrate American patriotism; they enthusiastically took advantage of the movement. In September 1918, delegates from the Hungarian community in Youngstown attended a conference in Cleveland. Representatives from New York, Chicago, Detroit, Buffalo, Akron and Pittsburgh joined them with officials from state and federal agencies to discuss Americanization programs. Attendees listed such priorities as the teaching of English as well as providing social skills, especially to those in 'large industrial plants' through educational classes and cooperation. <sup>5</sup>

In 1917, the industrial relations department of Sheet & Tube expanded the education program. Utilizing the Gordon Avenue school building in East Youngstown, classes in reading, writing, spelling grammar and arithmetic were aimed primarily at immigrant workers.

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<sup>4</sup> "Welfare Work in The Home," *The Iron Trade Review*, (26 July 1917): 194.

<sup>5</sup> "Initial Plans to Americanize," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 3 September 1918, 5.

Classes were available four days per week and scheduled in hour long sessions; from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. for workers employed from noon until midnight, from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. for those on the night shift, and from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. for day shift employees. The company encouraged wives of employees to attend, but few did. Ninety hardy employees took advantage of initial classes, a surprisingly strong showing considering the daunting logistics of working the 12-hour shift and fitting in class schedules. The company added locations in Struthers and near the south gate of the plant in the fall of 1917 and utilized teachers selected from the Youngstown city public school system. By June 1918 more than 500 workers had attended company sponsored classes. <sup>6</sup>

The company publicly encouraged its employees to attend the classes, and viewed those who did as superior workers, but conditions and the working schedule made it difficult for most. In addition to a social welfare agenda, YS&T promoted recreational programs aimed at workers and their families. The company sponsored the annual employee picnic, inaugurated in 1911. Previously held at Southern Park on the south side of the city, in 1917 it moved to Campbell Park, named for James A. Campbell, located across from the company's main office building on Poland Avenue. Sheet & Tube provided food and entertainment, and sponsored sporting events with prizes. In 1918, attendance topped 15,000 people. The company transported workers and

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<sup>6</sup> "Americanizing Alien-Born Toilers," *The Iron Trade Review*, (1 August 1918): 264.

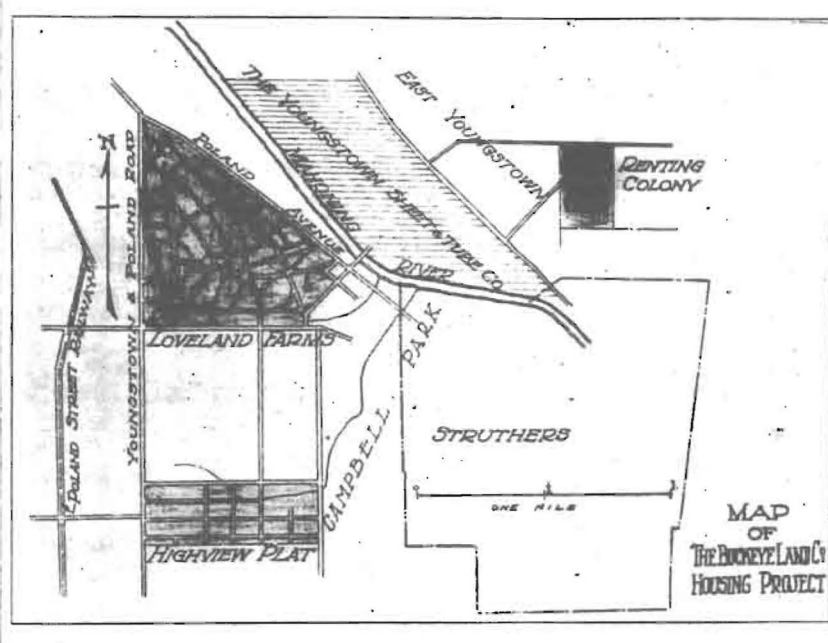
their families who lived in East Youngstown by trucks. The picnic in 1918 marked the first time that ethnicity did not distinguish participants. The lack of ethnic division, along with patriotic music and fireworks represented the very public Americanization sentiment that dominated the iron and steel industry at this point.<sup>7</sup>

The most ambitious and visible program in Sheet & Tube's effort to manage its enormous and unpredictable workforce was the formation of the Buckeye Land Company. In May 1916, the company appropriated \$250,000 for the acquisition of property from local East Youngstown resident Silas Blackburn for the development of company housing. The plan was comprehensive, and Sheet & Tube aggressively marketed it to employees, with financing and life insurance plan included with purchase. The initial blueprint called for three distinct and segregated neighborhoods and with the success of the program added a fourth development in 1920.

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<sup>7</sup> "Sheet and Tube Outing Plans," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 23 August 1918, 14. "Thousands and S.& T. Outing," *The Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 3, September, 1918. 3.





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Strategically located on a hillside near the east gate of the plant, Sheet & Tube placed the most basic development aimed at foreign-born and African-American renters in the Blackburn Plat. Here, the company constructed innovative concrete row houses with low maintenance stucco exterior and clay tile roofs. These 281 homes contained almost 450 square feet each with running water, electricity, and indoor bathrooms. Incorporating the Americanization spirit, the development provided amenities such as sidewalks, paved streets and landscaped green spaces. These units rented for \$15, \$18, and \$21 per month, which was within the means of most laborers who earned twenty-five cents an hour and worked six 12-hour days per week.

The second division contained homes for sale to foreign-born workers. The company purchased property about one mile south of the

<sup>8</sup> *Youngstown Sheet & Tube Bulletin*, 15 October 1919, 5.

main south gate in Struthers and divided it into 400 lots. The first phase of construction at Highview Plat consisted of fifty frame houses. Buckeye offered several floor plans from which to choose. Typically, these houses had five to six rooms, pine trim and floors and cast iron furnaces for central heat. They also advertised amenities such as a clothes chute, ironing board, and kitchen closet. Prices ranged from between \$5,000 and \$6,500.

The company placed Loveland Farms, the high-end development, in the southeast side of Youngstown. It initially consisted of about 950 lots, and it too, was within walking distance of the south gate.

Management, skilled trades, department heads, office men and company employed professionals such as architects and metallurgists were eligible to buy homes in this more exclusive neighborhood aimed at American employees. The houses were larger and more sophisticated in design. Here, oak replaced the pine trim found in Highview Plat homes and the furnaces had boilerplate instead of cast iron. The cost to buy a home at Loveland began at about \$4,500 and went up to \$8,000.

In 1920, the Buckeye Land Company began construction of a fourth development, called Overlook Plat in Struthers. It contained 110 rental units and received occupants in the fall of 1920.<sup>9</sup> It was designed to house white, American-born employees.

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<sup>9</sup> "Homes for Sheet and Tube People," *The Youngstown Sheet and Tube Bulletin*, (15 August 1919): 5.

Employees utilized housing opportunities offered by the company, and the Buckeye continued to build and sell additional homes. Sheet & Tube provided financing and life insurance to new homeowners. In addition, the company was active in the social lives of those who occupied the developments. Sheet & Tube sponsored contests and provided awards to those with the best maintenance and landscaping. The company provided playgrounds, parks and eventually schools to the neighborhoods and succeeded in engendering a sense of appreciation and loyalty by many workers.

Florence Aepli and her husband moved into Loveland Farms in 1925. She recalled that they bought their house from a seventy-year old employee fired by the Sheet & Tube. At the time of her interview, in 1985, she recalled their life in the neighborhood fondly. Employed as a supervisor in the machine shop, her husband found the location ideal. She said, "He wanted to be the first one down in the mill on the job if there was a breakdown...he really took care of his job, I always said he had two lives, me and his job at the Sheet & Tube." <sup>10</sup>

Living conditions improved for many workers through company housing and social welfare projects; however, the company reaped benefits as well. Well-publicized corporate programs improved public perception of the industry within the community. Employees had a distinct disincentive to participate in union organization with an

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<sup>10</sup> Aepli, Florence, interviewed by Jessica Trickett, *Oral History Program*, Youngstown State University, 19 February 1998.

employer-held mortgage. Additionally, terms of sale for those who desired to buy in Highview included provisions that employees must be “desirable” and have “made themselves valuable employees to the mill and are worth of living under better conditions than many other locations now afford.”<sup>11</sup> The company was an ever-present force in the lives of employees.

In August 1919, Sheet & Tube published the first edition of the company newsletter, *The Youngstown Sheet and Tube Bulletin*. Written, edited and distributed by management level employees, the *Bulletin* effectively marketed the homes built by the Buckeye Land Company. It ran articles that articulated the affordability and benefits of home ownership and listed the names and departments of those who purchased homes. The publication also enhanced a sense of camaraderie and loyalty between employee and employer with folksy and gossipy articles and it emphasized company and employee achievements.

The first issue of the *Bulletin* provided extensive information about the industrial relations department of Sheet & Tube, and it included an outline of the company’s Employee Representation Plan. Joining Midvale and Bethlehem Steel Corporations, Sheet & Tube implemented its plan late in 1917. The employee representation plan resulted, in part, from

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<sup>11</sup> “Homes for Sheet and Tube People,” *The Youngstown Sheet and Tube Bulletin*, (15 August 1919): 5.

the impact of World War I and government intervention on labor relations in the steel industry. The outbreak of war and subsequent labor shortage encouraged labor to redouble efforts in unionization of the iron and steel industry. International unions made great strides in 1918; the United Mine Workers added 50,000 members, the machinists and electrical workers experienced significant increases as well. In the steel industry, the Amalgamated Association utilized members to organize from within the working ranks, a departure from sending in official representatives. It realized limited success, organizing a lodge in Girard at the A.M. Byers Company in June 1917.<sup>12</sup> The industry confronted the newly confident unions with repression by firing union sympathetic workers and by patriotic rhetoric. Politically, conditions brightened for organized labor somewhat with the re-election of Woodrow Wilson in 1916. Not actively pro-labor during his first administration, Wilson modified his stance somewhat during the campaign of 1916. In order to gain support of independent Progressives, he depended on the passage of Keating-Owens bill, (later declared unconstitutional) which restricted child labor. Wilson based his campaign on the issues of having kept the United States out of the European war and the drive for increasing domestic democracy. In the summer 1916, when unions in the railroad industry threatened to strike, Wilson allowed Congress to legislate the 8-hour day for skilled railroad employees through the Adamson Act. At the same time, non-

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<sup>12</sup> Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 203-205.

operating employees such as seamen, dockworkers, electrical workers and machinists gained the same union recognition previously reserved for brotherhoods.<sup>13</sup>

Wilson's association caused further unease among the steel industry when he became the first president to address the American Federation of Labor convention in November 1917. Several factors affected his newfound support for the labor movement. Legislation advocating a more progressive stance on child labor and the 8-hour day required follow up in order to maintain these gains. In addition, the war had introduced more social justice advocates to federal agencies, many of whom were pro-union and worked to promote their ideals politically.

Once the United States entered the war, the administration and steel officials, led by Gary, reached an uneasy alliance due to the necessity of assuring continuous production of vital war related materials. At the same time, concerned with the extraordinary profits reaped by steelmakers, and volatile market conditions, the administration pushed for price controls and oversight through the War Industries Board. The result was collaboration between the WIB and a committee, headed by Gary, arranged through the American Iron and Steel Institute set up to counsel the government. Although governmental intrusion was undoubtedly distasteful to the industry, profit margins were high and the industry hoped, through cooperation, to avoid future

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<sup>13</sup> Melvin I. Urofsky, *Big Steel and the Wilson Administration*, (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press: 1969), 254-157.

interference in the labor issue.<sup>14</sup> No precedent existed for governmental involvement in the steel industry, but with the United States engagement in World War I, policy was subject to change.

The steel industry faced a setback when in 1918, the Administration created a War Labor Conference Board to deal with labor issues. Comprised of five members chosen by the private National Industrial Conference Board and five chosen by the A. F. L., the W.L.C.B. served to conciliate disputes and to examine the issues of the administration of wartime labor. Severely limited in its power, the Board only intervened by invitation and had no authority to enforce findings. By April 1918, the President recognized the impotence of the board, changed its title to the National War Labor Board and granted it authority to mediate labor disputes and determine and enforce its decisions.<sup>15</sup>

One of the most significant decisions made by the N.W.L.B. involved a dispute at Bethlehem Steel in April 1918. Grievances by workers at Bethlehem included hours, wages, overtime and a complicated bonus system that resulted in a considerable pay reduction. A walkout occurred when plant officials refused to meet with a committee that represented workers to discuss the complaints. Head of operations, Eugene Grace informed the W.L.B. representative that he agreed only to speak individually to each worker, not as a collective group, which, to him, too closely resembled unionization. After an investigation, the Board

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<sup>14</sup> Urofsky, 150-179.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

severely criticized Bethlehem, saying in part: “while America is sacrificing a generation of its best men, the executives of the steel company are devoting most of their attention...to perpetuate feudal control of labor.”<sup>16</sup> In a move that sent a collective shudder down the spines of steel officials, the Board not only sided with the workers on the grievance issues, but also ordered Bethlehem to bargain with elected shop committees.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the industry began a strategy of conciliation aimed at avoiding a more serious showdown before the end of the war.

Many companies viewed employee representation as a solution that they could live with, while keeping the W. L. B. at bay. It provided the perception of employee participation, retained essential control of the plants, and at the same time staved off government intervention or union organization. The industry did not view or promote these plans as a means of increasing the bargaining position of employees; instead, they were created to provide an outlet for specific job-related complaints and to promote mutual understanding and communication. John D. Rockefeller created the blueprint for employee representation programs at his Colorado Fuel and Iron Company following a violent coal strike in 1914. Steel companies eyed the program and by 1918, some deemed it successful enough to emulate.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 267.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 260-267.

<sup>18</sup> Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 226.



On the issue of employee representation, Campbell diverged from Elbert Gary's philosophies. Gary opposed the idea; he cited it as unnecessary and possibly a dangerous precedent. He remained committed to the prospect of gaining the loyalty of employees through welfare work, a policy Campbell also endorsed. Gary said:

...make the Steel Corporation a good place for them to work and live. Don't let the families go hungry or cold; give them playgrounds and parks and schools and churches, pure water to drink, every opportunity to keep clean...

At the same time, Gary adamantly refused to relinquish any semblance of control of operations to shop committees.<sup>19</sup>

YS&T publicly released the details of its employee representation plan to the trade journal *Iron Trade Review* in December 1918. The plan followed a standard industrial format, was comprehensive and included provisions for the election of employee representatives, committees, grievance procedures, and cause for dismissal. The preamble stated:

The Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company...establishes this plan of representation of employes <sic> in order to provide effective communication and means of contact between the management and the men on matters pertaining to industrial relations, and to insure justice, maintain tranquility and promote the common welfare.

The plan divided the company into nineteen divisions; the Coke works, East Youngstown furnaces, Hubbard furnaces, open hearth, converting mill, blooming and continuous mill, skelp mills, puddle mill,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 226-229.

plate mill, sheet mill, tube mill welding department, tube mill finishing, rod, wire and conduit mill, merchant mills, transportation, general labor and construction, general ships, general mechanical, and general electrical departments. The average number of employees in each division determined the number of representatives elected. Qualifications for those who wished to serve as representative included employment during twelve of the preceding eighteen months, and an age limit of at least twenty-one years of age. The candidates needed to hold American citizenship or declared intent to obtain citizenship. Upon election, representatives took a loyalty oath to the United States, State of Ohio and to the plan of representation of the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Co. and employees. The company retained the exclusive right to manage, hire, suspend, discharge, or transfer employees. Elected divisional employee representatives formed committees. The plan encouraged individuals to present issues or complaints to the appropriate representative, who then met with company counterpart, Roy Welch, Campbell's personal assistant.<sup>20</sup> Although the company carefully planned, articulated, and promoted the program, many employees recognized that it provided very little protection, and no meaningful input. With the representation plan, along with extensive housing and social welfare projects, Youngstown Sheet and Tube marched in step with other major industrial corporations in their determined effort to

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<sup>20</sup> "How Labor Representation Operates," *The Iron Trade Review*, (12 October 1918): 1349.

protect their shops from union organization. The industry expressed public optimism about the welfare capitalism promoted by Gary. When trouble loomed in the summer 1919, company officials nation-wide proclaimed confidently that their 'loyal' workers would not participate in a strike.

## 1919

World War I had unexpectedly breathed new life into the labor movement. Along with less hostile federal policies and a shortage of workers came a new sense of belonging and entitlement by countless foreign-born employees. By 1919, many were second-generation immigrants, with a strong sense of attachment to America. During the War, company-sponsored campaigns emphasized the importance of production in the fight for democracy and held rallies to celebrate record-breaking rates.

The industry created slogans and displayed them through banners and posters. "*Some must go, All must serve,*" and "*Not Just Hats Off To The Flag, But Sleeves Up For It!*" encouraged workers to sacrifice through long hours and seven day work weeks. Twelve-hour days re-appeared, and replaced the hard won 8-hour day. Absences were discouraged as anti-American and viewed as aiding the enemy. Liberty bond drives provided further opportunity for participation. Sheet & Tube encouraged its workers to buy bonds and viewed it as an opportunity for furthering the Americanization effort. Campbell explained the reasoning behind his campaign; "We were inspired chiefly by the desire to see our employees express their patriotism."<sup>1</sup> Workers also expressed patriotism through enlistment and participated in the draft. Sheet & Tube provided in-shop assistance for the workers who wished to serve overseas. By war's end,

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 192.

foreign-born employees had fully participated and sacrificed in the struggle for worldwide democracy. They had successfully answered the challenge to prove loyalty and worth during the war, realized a sense of empowerment, and proved unwilling to return to pre-war invisibility and servitude. Widespread dissatisfaction over hours, wages, and a feeling of betrayal, coupled with gains made during the war and a more open president created a feeling of urgency for union organizers to act quickly.

Representatives from fifteen international locals met at the New Morrison Hotel in Chicago on August 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> 1918 in a conference to discuss the organization of steel. The organizers recognized the magnitude of the project and the resolve of industrial resistance. They also recognized that an inclusive effort, with cooperation from workers involved in every step of the steel making process would be necessary for success. It was obvious that a swift comprehensive strike was necessary to organize the industry, before steelmakers had the opportunity to mount the formidable counterattack of which they were capable.

Union leaders created the National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers to oversee the management of the effort. Samuel Gompers of the A.F.L. volunteered to chair the committee, although John Fitzpatrick served as acting chairman, and Socialist William Z. Foster served as secretary treasurer. The formidable and diverse group of workers that united to confront the steel industry included the following:

- International Brotherhood of Blacksmiths, Dropforgers and Helpers
- Brotherhood of Boilermakers and Iron Ship Builders and Helpers
- United Brick and Clay Workers
- Bricklayer's Masons and Plasterers International Union of America
- International Assoc. of Bridge, Structural and Ornamental Iron Workers
- Coopers International
- International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
- International Brotherhood of Foundry Employees
- International Hod Carriers', Building and Common Laborers Union
- Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers
- International Association of Machinists
- International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelting Workers
- United Mine Workers of America
- International Molders Union
- Patternmakers League of North America
- United Association of Plumbers and Steam Fitters
- Quarry Workers International
- Brotherhood Railway Carmen of America
- Amalgamated Sheet Metal Workers' International Alliance
- International Brotherhood of Stationary Firemen and Oilers
- International Union of Steam and Operating Engineers
- International Brotherhood of Steamshovel and Dredgemen
- Switchmen's Union of North America

The logistics of integrating so many separate entities was staggering. The National Committee represented the transition in organizational structure between the strict segregation of craft unionism practiced by the Amalgamated Association and later implementation of industrial unionism, advocated by the Congress of Industrial Organizations, formed in 1935. The CIO organized unions that represented all production workers in an industrial company as opposed

to separate units divided by trade. In 1919, suspicion still existed about including industrial laborers; many still felt that the foreign-born were generally unorganizable.

A breakdown in coalition strategy occurred almost immediately with a universal reluctance to back up tactics with cash. All unions except for the Bricklayers, Molders and Patternmakers agreed to charge a standard \$3 initiation fee to new members. Of this, the Committee received \$1 to defray expenses. Additional support was limited to a one-time \$100 contribution by each member union. The lack of finances was one of several fatal flaws that doomed the seemingly promising opportunity.

Due to the shortage of money, organization was limited to Chicago, instead of the simultaneous nationwide campaign originally envisioned. However, workers in the Chicago area embraced it enthusiastically. Employees joined unions by the thousands. Encouraged by the success in Chicago, the movement then looked to the Pittsburgh and Cleveland districts, which included Youngstown.<sup>2</sup> The process was complex. Two levels of organizers worked an area; the floaters and the stationary. The floaters were men sent by international unions, they went from location to location assisting with the newly organized local unions. The stationary organizers represented the A.F.L., hired directly by the National Committee. The local secretary oversaw all operations, including

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<sup>2</sup> William Z. Foster, *The Great Steel Strike and its Lessons* (New York: B. W. Huebsch Inc., 1920), 16-36.

the circulation of the National Committee's newsletter, the organization of meetings, and the administration of new membership applications.

Organizers used one blank uniform application form for all new recruits; later, representatives of individual trades assembled and received those applications that related specifically to them to set up the formal local unions. In addition, the newly formed local unions consolidated into regional Iron and Steel Workers' Councils to strengthen and stabilize large numbers of new members.<sup>3</sup>

The local secretary forwarded membership dues, oversaw general finances and processed all new applications. The application forms all contained serial numbers that tracked both the applicant and dues. In lieu of permanent membership cards, new applicants received red, white and blue temporary ones, highly coveted by patriotic foreign-born workers. District offices placed in Youngstown and Chicago hosted weekly meetings and facilitated the massive paperwork generated by the influx of new members.<sup>4</sup>

When National Committee organizers arrived in Youngstown, they found a city already experiencing labor unrest. The first six months of 1919 witnessed strikes by telephone electricians, leather workers, railroad car men, chandelier hangers, bakers and barbers.<sup>5</sup> A sense of restlessness and dissatisfaction among workers permeated the region.

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<sup>3</sup> Foster, 33-35.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 17 April 1919, 21 March 1919, 24 February 1919, 13 March 1919, 2 April 1919, 30 April 1919, 2 June 1919.



Reformer and author Mary Heaton Vorse traveled with organizers and supported the steel workers. She described Youngstown as a place where the domination of plants and mills over workers was especially prominent. Even so, she sensed more hope and spirit there than most other steel towns. She observed and wrote about the restlessness of Youngstown's steel workers. In her book, *Men and Steel* she said:

They are talking over many things together. They do not know what they want-they do not want what they have...this talk goes on all the time; ...as perpetually and inevitably as does the making of steel; it keeps time with the rolling smoke by day and the fury of the fiery sky by night. In 1916 the discontent welled over. From one day to another Youngstown was on strike. No one knew why; there were no leaders. From one day to another, men quit work and streamed down the streets. The mills stopped. There was rioting. Strikers were killed. Houses were burned. The strike flared up like a furnace blast. Like the fire of the blast furnace their discontent has never gone out.<sup>6</sup>

Vorse described the industry as 'The Autocracy of Steel,' saying that although the steel industry perceived the discontent among workers, they chose to address it through paternalism and benevolence instead of genuine dialogue through mutual respect. She said, "...it (the Autocracy of Steel) rewarded loyal subjects-but it punished disloyal ones with banishment in times of peace, and in times of revolt it used armed force."

<sup>7</sup> Although industrial programs improved living conditions for workers, persistent wage and human dignity issues remained unresolved.

Although Youngstown Sheet & Tube spent millions of dollars for safety

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Heaton Vorse, *Men and Steel*, (New York: Boni and Liveright 1920), 39-41.

<sup>7</sup> Vorse, 47.

measures in the plants, improved housing, health benefits and welfare programs, workers still chanced dismissal by joining trade unions by the thousands. They sought a meaningful voice in decisions made regarding their livelihood. By June, A.F.L. organizers claimed to have more than twelve thousand new members comprising sixteen separate locals in the Mahoning Valley steel industry and one hundred fifty thousand throughout the Cleveland-Pittsburgh districts.<sup>8</sup> Although organization met with considerable success, it was not without struggle. Workers suspected of an affiliation with union activity faced abrupt dismissal. In June, the U. S. Department of Labor sent the commissioner of conciliation to Youngstown to investigate widespread complaints of Valley workers fired for union activity or association.<sup>9</sup> In addition to culling those workers known to be union sympathizers, steel companies found aid in the fight to repel union activity through local officials, press and in many cases, public opinion. The Pittsburgh district was especially impenetrable. City and town administrators restricted access to public meeting places and denied permits to rally. Organizers made very little progress there, when the strike deadline passed, relatively few men left the mills.

By late spring, union ranks swelled to previously unknown numbers. Thousands of new members joined, despite the constant threat

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<sup>8</sup> "Many Affiliate With A.F. of L." *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 5 June 1919, 1.

<sup>9</sup> "Workers Say Union Men are Discharged at Mills," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 30 June 1919, 1.

of dismissal and an uncertain future. The energy produced by the masses of frustrated but now hopeful workers resulted in intense pressure upon the unions to act. In response to the pressure from the rank and file, Committee leaders called for a general meeting on May 25, 1919 to discuss future action. However, workers pushed for action, not discussion, and presented a resolution that requested that unions affiliated with National Committee begin negotiations with individual steel corporations to discuss wages, hours, working conditions and collective bargaining. Dismayed Committee members doubted, with good reason, the wisdom of the resolution, but the enthusiastic membership pushed it through. Gary, who spoke for the industry, had steadfastly refused to meet with any union representative and did not show signs of changing his position. He did not. The letter sent by Gompers to Gary requesting a meeting received no response. The lack of respect infuriated the already surly steel workers and they pressed harder for concrete action.

In a meeting held by National Committee members on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1919, they compiled an official twelve-point list of demands.

- Right of collective bargaining
- Reinstatement of all men discharged for union activities with pay for time lost
- Eight hour day
- One day's rest in seven
- Abolition of 24-hour shift
- Increase in wages sufficient to guarantee American standard of living

- Standard scales of wages in all trades and classifications of workers
- Double rates of pay for all overtime after 8 hours, holiday and Sunday work
- Check off system of collecting union dues and assessments
- Principles of seniority to apply in the maintenance, reduction and increase of working forces
- Abolition of company unions
- Abolition of physical examination of applicants for employment

At the same meeting, the committee also reluctantly authorized a strike vote. Gompers still felt that that it was too early to initiate a showdown with the industry, but momentum was against him. Individual unions conducted the vote, after a month the results were in. At a meeting in the Hotel Ohio in Youngstown on August 20<sup>th</sup>, the committee tabulated the vote and announced that fully 98 percent favored a nationwide strike if the industry continued to rebuff them. Through August and September, Committee members feverishly sought to either crack Gary's resolve or provide workers a palatable alternative to the impending rush to strike. On August 26<sup>th</sup>, Fitzpatrick, Foster and David J. Davis, assistant president of the Amalgamated, requested a personal meeting with Gary at his office in New York. He refused to meet with them and suggested they send him a letter outlining their business with him. The letter sent to Gary again requested a meeting; again, he refused. The issue now became recognition of the legitimacy of the unions to negotiate for steelworkers. In Gary's response to Gomper's letter, he maintained that the unions did not represent the majority of steelworkers employed

at his mills. He also reiterated the position, echoed by other industrial leaders, including Sheet & Tube's President Campbell, that he believed in the open shop, "which permits one to engage in any line of employment whether one does or does not belong to a labor union."<sup>10</sup>

The flat refusal of Gary to speak with union representatives forced them to issue an ultimatum: meet with the union or face a general strike.

Committee members who issued the ultimatum were aware that President Wilson was at that moment creating precedence for governmental involvement in labor disputes by interceding in the nationwide railroad strike. They undoubtedly relied on his intervention, should a strike occur. Upon Gompers return from Europe, he met with the President, and asked him to facilitate a meeting between labor and steel officials. Wilson agreed in principle and sent his emissary, Bernard Baruch to apply pressure on Gary. Gary politely and firmly refused to budge. President Wilson was reluctant to become too deeply involved in the dispute. He was in a protracted battle over the League of Nations and was not willing to go too far out on a limb in a situation over which he had no legal grounds or precedent.

The Committee stalled until September 10<sup>th</sup>, then after conducting a series of meetings, issued the strike date for September 22, 1919. The next day, President Wilson requested that they postpone the strike until after the Industrial Conference of labor, management and public

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<sup>10</sup> Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 101-102.

representatives met on October 6.<sup>11</sup> In response, John McCadden local organizer in Youngstown answered, referring to the confrontational attitude of workers; “Nothing can stop the strike here excepting God or a settlement.”<sup>12</sup>

Youngstown was a prominent center of activity for union organization late in the summer 1919. On August 21, ‘Mother Jones’ encouraged workers at a rally sponsored by the A. F. L. and chaired by McCadden, held in the city. Just returning East from her participation in restoring order after the I.W.W. riots in the Pacific Northwest, she emphasized the widespread social dissatisfaction she had encountered. Jones maintained that with the current struggle, success obtained with the amalgamation of trade unions would result in ‘one big union.’ “It may be called I. W. W. or whatever name you care to give it, but it will prove a remedy to existing conditions where strong units are kept apart by separate craft organizations and one is unable to aid the other.” She also rebuked legislators for “wasting time defining what percentage of beer is intoxicating while the unrest has grown until a revolution has actually started,” referring to the debate over “near-beer,” a 2.75 percent alcohol beverage. <sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 100-105.

<sup>12</sup> “Steel Strike Not Delayed till Oct. 6,” *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 12 September 1919, 1.

<sup>13</sup> “Mother Jones Gives Address,” *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 20 August 1919, 3.

Uncertainty gripped Youngstown in the weeks leading up to the strike deadline. As the deadline loomed, management and union organizers prepared for the unknown. William Foster headed the local headquarters, which included Pittsburgh and Youngstown. In response to Foster's statement that emphasized that "every iron and steel mill and blast furnace in the United States not working under union agreements" were targets, rumors began that independent companies whose workers were partially organized were encouraging the rest of their employees to join to prevent shut-downs. Other plants, including the McKeesport Tin Plate Company shut down on the 18<sup>th</sup> in order to prepare for the strike.<sup>14</sup>

In Youngstown, YS&T, Brier Hill, and Republic Iron and Steel printed and distributed pamphlets printed in nine languages and signed by the heads of each corporation. In the message to Sheet & Tube employees, Campbell said:

Inasmuch as the officials of The American Federation of Labor publicly declared that a general strike in the Steel Industry is to be called Monday, September 22, it is felt that the employes are entitled to a statement of the company's position. The established policy of open shop operation will be continued. Under this policy an employe may or may not, as he chooses, belong to a labor organization, but it is absolutely not necessary that an employe join any organization in order to retain his job.

The Employes' Representation Plan now in effect throughout the works provides communication and means of contact between the management and the men on matters pertaining to industrial relations. The company will continue to deal with its employes under the provisions of this plan. It

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<sup>14</sup> "Organizers Sent From Pittsburgh," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 19 September 1919, 1.

is the intention to operate the plant Monday, September 22, and thereafter the same as usual.<sup>15</sup>

Managers of other Valley steel companies voiced sentiments that echoed Campbell, reiterating their commitment to the 'open shop.' They remained confident that operations would continue come Monday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>. The steel companies also made living provisions inside the mills. They stockpiled cots, blankets, and food so that those who remained on the job would not be forced to pass picketers to attend work on a daily basis.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, union leaders scheduled meetings on Saturday and Sunday before the deadline, and watched activities at the mills. They reported that Thursday, September 18<sup>th</sup>, one hundred and fifty men from Cleveland met with employment agents from a local independent steel manufacturer. Company officials hastened to explain that the workers were scheduled for construction projects inside the mill, not as strikebreakers. However, according to railroad officials, it was a moot point because rail workers were anticipated to refuse to haul or unload steel-related products to the plants.<sup>17</sup>

Organizers continued to sign workers up in feverishly held meetings in East Youngstown and Struthers over the weekend prior to the strike. Local union representative, T. S. Hammersmith refuted

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<sup>15</sup> "Local Steel Heads Plan to Operate Mills Monday," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 19 September 1919, 1.

<sup>16</sup> "Say Hundreds Rush to Unions," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 20 September 1919, 1.

<sup>17</sup> "Strikers Will Hold Meetings," *The Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 19 September 1919, 1.



editorials of the local foreign language press that maintained foreign speaking workers were ignorant of the meaning of the strike and that they would be the first prosecuted in case of trouble. He said that trained speakers informed workers in their own languages of issues and union demands. Union leaders reiterated their stand on maintaining non-violent conditions. Remembering the destruction that resulted from the 1916 debacle, many local businesses purchased riot insurance; Committee members assured the community that it would not be necessary. <sup>18</sup>

Two conditions distinguished the 1919 Steel Strike in the Mahoning Valley; the effectiveness of the walkout and lack of violence. On Monday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, production in the Mahoning Valley steel industry ceased. The level of participation was astonishing. Forty-four thousand men were idle by the second day of the strike. Hammersmark declared; "The success of the first two days is beyond belief." <sup>19</sup> The morning edition of the *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, characterized the strike as "practical paralysis...on the steel industry of the Mahoning Valley," with "absolutely no disorder." <sup>20</sup>

There were unexpected side affects when Youngstown's steel industry shut down. Members of the community had forgotten conditions

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<sup>18</sup> "Say Hundreds Rush to Union," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 20 September 1919, 1.

<sup>19</sup> "All Mills are Closed in Youngstown Field," *The New York Times*, 24 September 1919, 2.

<sup>20</sup> "Morning Passes Here Without Any Disorder," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 22 September 1919, 1.

prior to the domination of steel in the Valley. For the first time in decades, the sky was a brilliant blue over Youngstown, due to the lack of industrial smoke. Those who passed through East Youngstown noticed the range of color of the buildings, usually cloaked with smoke. Local residents also noticed changes in the Mahoning River. In contrast to the accustomed "red-yellow bilious color," it ran blue and cold for the first time since 1898.<sup>21</sup>

In preparation for the strike, Youngstown Sheet & Tube banked all its blast furnaces, and although the company claimed 50 to 60 percent production early in the strike, there was sign of little activity. In East Youngstown, large crowds of strikers gathered by plant gates and watched as salaried workers and administrators filed into work. One of the workers who left the plant told picketers that about fifty men had slept in the plant the previous night, mostly "boys and old men." He said that two of the open-hearth furnaces were charged and the only activity overnight had been in a few of the tube mills.<sup>22</sup>

In the first statement after the walkout from Sheet & Tube, Campbell emphasized a theme repeated by the industry throughout the strike. He reported, "practically every single American reported for work and is working, while practically every foreigner failed to report to work."

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<sup>21</sup> "Mahoning River Runs Clear First Time in Almost Quarter Century," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 27 September 1919, 1.

<sup>22</sup> "Morning Passes Here Without Any Disorder," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 22 September 1919, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Dubbed the 'Un-American' strike by steel makers, they charged "unscrupulous radical agitators" with the exploitation of the ignorance of the foreign workers. The industry greatly resented the implication that the 'lowest and most ignorant' of employees would be in the position of participating in managerial decisions regarding wages and hours. Steel trade publication, *The Iron Trade Review* righteously editorialized on September 25<sup>th</sup> 1919, "There is nothing in this strike to mark it as American. In fact, it is essentially un-American in its organization, its designs and its methods...the steel industry, in vigorously combating this menace of the clamorous and vicious minority, is upholding the banner of true Americanism."<sup>24</sup> If the thousands of foreign-born workers in Youngstown were ignorant of the details and implications of the strike, it was despite numerous meetings. On the first day of the strike alone, East Youngstown picketers held a massive street rally at 10:00 a.m. within the village at the corner of Twelfth and Trumbull Streets, with speeches delivered in several languages. Later that day, strikers met at the Croatian, Romanian, Italian, and Hungarian Halls.<sup>25</sup>

The effort by steel makers to distinguish between 'loyal American workers' and the 'ungrateful ignorant foreign' did not go unnoticed by local ethnic communities. The *Cosmopolitan Press Club* was an organization of foreign language newspapers printed locally. It included

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<sup>23</sup> "Morning Passes Here Without Any Disorder,"

<sup>24</sup> "An Un-American Strike," *The Iron Trade Review*, (25, September 1919): 806.

<sup>25</sup> "Street Meeting Held," "Strike Meeting Schedule," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 22 September 1919, 10.

the *American-Hungarian Journal*, *Youngstown Slovak News*, *Romanul*, the *Italian American Citizen* and the *Greek Weekly*. Prior to the strike deadline, editorials in these papers ran generally against it, warning that the foreign-born would bear the worst of any backlash. The first week in October, they collectively voiced concern over the battle for public opinion waged between management and union. They said,

The sentiment has spread among the American-born citizens that the foreign-born men of the mills are responsible for the strike...to our knowledge the strike was called by the American Federation of Labor, an American institution...in the mills, foreign-born and American-born alike, are workingmen and there should be no national or racial distinctions between them...therefore it is a great injustice to men, who have proved that despite their foreign birth they were good Americans during the war when the fate of the world hung in balance to accuse them of being entirely responsible for the strike.<sup>26</sup>

The *Press Club* repeatedly warned its readers to be vigilant in avoiding violence and lawlessness. East Youngstown still bore the scars of the 1916 riot and community leaders anxiously hoped to avoid losing whatever standing the foreign-born members had gained during the war. The *Club* had reason to be nervous; tension ran high in the neighboring Pittsburgh region, where the steel industry heavily influenced state officials and the press. Pennsylvania Governor W. C. Sproul implemented a heavy-handed policy early on that included liberal doses of mounted state constable intervention, backed up by zealous local officials.

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<sup>26</sup> "Foreign Born Not To Blame," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 2 September 1919, 1.

On September 20<sup>th</sup>, Alleghany County, Pennsylvania issued emergency legislation that prohibited the congregation of more than three people in an outdoor public setting. The legislation included a provision for permitting indoor meetings at the discretion of local officials, as long as conducted in English. Sheriff Haddock defended the measure by saying, "This is America...my observation has been... that practically 90 per cent of the offenders against the law in matters of this kind are either aliens or naturalized citizens of foreign extraction, who are easily led into attacks upon our government."<sup>27</sup> Requested and funded by steel companies, Sheriff Haddock deputized over 5,000 men to enforce the restrictive legislation. The policy was effective. When the strike occurred, production remained higher near Pittsburgh and surrounding communities than anywhere else in the country.

The routing of a meeting in North Clairton, north of Pittsburgh, characterized Pennsylvania officials' handling of the strike. Thousands of steelworkers and their families listened to speakers providing instructions about the upcoming strike on the afternoon of September 21<sup>st</sup>. Without warning, mounted state police galloped into the crowd with clubs swinging. As local union Chief Brogan mounted the platform and shouted at the attendees to go home, one trooper fired his gun into the air. Police arrested Brogan for disorderly conduct.<sup>28</sup> Four days later, more than one thousand Pennsylvania strikers gathered in Ohio.

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<sup>27</sup> quoted in Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 148-149.

<sup>28</sup> Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 148.

Standing three hundred yards from the Pennsylvania state line, they listened to Secretary Coates from the A. F. L. who represented unions of the boroughs of Sharon and Farrell, and organizer Olsen from Youngstown. The irony and injustice of the repression of civil rights dominated the discussion. "There's going to be another war," said Olson, "in which Pennsylvania will be annexed to the United States. You pay taxes in Pennsylvania, but you have to come over into old Ohio to exercise your right of free assemblage and free speech...remember this, men-when election time rolls around, pick and vote for a man who is not a tool of the bosses." <sup>29</sup> Governor Sproul defended the actions of his state troopers in North Clairton in a telegraph to Foster. He said, "Experience has shown that it is dangerous to permit the congregation of large numbers of people during times of stress and excitement...and the sheriff ...was acting for the public welfare in forbidding the gatherings and in enforcing his decrees...and will have the full assistance of the state."<sup>30</sup> Sproul also expressed his apprehension about radical elements taking advantage of the situation and reiterated his ironclad commitment to the maintenance of 'law and order' against any mobs that may cross the state line from Ohio.<sup>31</sup> Violence erupted from the beginning in Pennsylvania, when two strikers were killed and several strikers and

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<sup>29</sup> "1,000 Strikers Meet in Ohio," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 25 September 1919, 26.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> "Sproul Fears Ohio Mobs," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 25 September 1919, 2.

troopers injured in Farrell on September 22<sup>nd</sup>. Both sides blamed the other for the violence. In a telegram to John Fitzpatrick, who was to testify to the senate in an investigation into the strike, Hammersmark charged the state police with instigating the trouble. He said, "The same speakers and organizers who addressed all meetings of the same class of people in peaceful Youngstown were used in outraged New Castle and Farrell. Constabulary absolutely responsible for murders and reign of terror in polluted Pennsylvania."<sup>32</sup> In response, Mayor Newell of New Castle replied that the state police had not arrived in the city until after rioting had begun.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast to Pennsylvania's aggressive measures, Ohio Governor James M. Cox exercised restraint when dealing with the strike. Cox maintained a good working relationship with, and professed admiration for labor representatives in Ohio. When asked by worried editors from Cleveland and Pittsburgh newspapers about Pennsylvania strikers meeting in Ohio, his response was said to have been that as far as he knew Ohio was not exempted from the Constitution which provided the right of assembly.<sup>34</sup> West Virginia Governor Cornwell feared invasion from Ohio strikers as well. Toward the end of September, a rumor surfaced that strikers in Steubenville and Mingo Junction would march

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> "Youngstown Workers Vote Today on Strike," *The New York Times*, 26 September 1919.

<sup>34</sup> James M. Cox, *Journey Through My Years* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946), 218-219.

to Weirton in an effort to get steelworkers there to join the strike. At that time, Cox ordered the Ohio National Guard to be ready for deployment in case of trouble, but the march failed to materialize; there was no Guard intervention.<sup>35</sup>

The strike in the Mahoning Valley was peaceful through the end of September and much of October. Local police had no problem maintaining order and assemblies remained relatively calm. City officials were ambivalent toward strikers and did not interfere with picketing or labor meetings until late November. Youngstown Mayor Craver met and talked with strikers who complained that police would not let them talk to mill workers still entering and leaving mills. Although he assured them that they could indeed speak to employees, he clarified that they could not forcibly prevent them from going to work.<sup>36</sup> Members of the local American Legion volunteered to informally patrol city streets and watch for problem areas. Although labor organizers were initially apprehensive about Legion involvement, they eventually endorsed it as effective at the Central Labor Congress on September 24<sup>th</sup>.<sup>37</sup>

By late October, company owners appealed to Ohio's governor for "protection" by the state, as they began to pry the plants back open. Claiming to fear retaliation from picketers, the owners asked for state

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<sup>35</sup> "Ohio Troops are Mobilized," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 29 September 1919, 1.

<sup>36</sup> "Strikers Confer With Mayor," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 2 October 1919, 4.

<sup>37</sup> "Youngstown's Orderly Strike," *The Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 25 September 1919, 26.



police to escort workers into and out of the mills. In a carefully worded statement aimed at local mayors and sheriffs in the state, Cox outlined his position and defined the duties of the local police as he saw them. He clearly explained that transporting employees to or from work is not the function of the government. He maintained that if state or local did escort the employees, they would become “agents of one of the parties to the dispute.” He also upheld the right of strikers to maintain the picket lines, within the law, and avoiding violence. Cox expressed confidence in local law enforcement to control the situation, but also reserved the right to utilize state police if necessary. He said, “The law is supreme. I shall expect its enforcement by local officers. When they have rendered their utmost effort and failed to meet conditions, then the state will act promptly.”<sup>38</sup> The State never acted, the Ohio National Guard did not deploy throughout the strike.

While strikers in Youngstown picketed and bided time, organizers mounted a feverish campaign to try to force the industry into negotiation. On October 6<sup>th</sup>, representatives from three groups; the public, labor, and employers met in Washington D.C. for Wilson’s Industrial Conference. Not originally intended to discuss the steel strike specifically, union organizers nonetheless seized the opportunity to spotlight the ongoing stalemate. Members of the committee included Judge Gary who, ironically, sat on the committee representing the public interest, and

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<sup>38</sup> “Cox Defines Police Duty,” *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 17 October 1919, 5.

Samuel Gompers. Hoping to maneuver Gary into a position from which he would be forced into arbitration, the labor group quickly proposed a resolution calling for “adjudication and settlement” of the strike to a committee of six representatives chosen by the three groups participating in the Conference. At the same time, they presented a resolution that outlined labor’s rights, including the right to collectively bargain through trade and labor unions. After a meeting with fellow steel executives, Gary returned to the conference and countered the resolution that called for arbitration by forcefully pointing out the lack of authority of the Industrial Conference. He said; “I am of the fixed opinion that the pending strike against the steel industry of this country should not be arbitrated or compromised, nor any action taken by the conference which bears upon that subject.”<sup>39</sup> With that statement, Gary derailed the labor group’s attempt to change the mission of the Conference from finding a common ground for labor and capital to resolving the nationwide strike. Hope remained for the labor group; it still had the second resolution that dealt with collective bargaining rights. If the Industrial Conference adopted that resolution, the resulting public pressure may have forced steel companies to negotiate with the unions. Although everyone at the Conference agreed in principle with collective bargaining, the three groups could not agree how to define terms and apply principles. They failed to pass the second resolution. They could not come to a consensus

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<sup>39</sup> Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 118-120.

on whether trade unions, alone, would have the right to collectively bargain for steelworkers. Although Gompers and Foster entered the Industrial Conference with high hopes, the National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers received no immediate gain; the Conference ended in deadlock.<sup>40</sup>

The strike caused such a disruption in production and social anxiety that several investigations ensued. The Senate Committee on Education and Labor began interviewing participants early in the strike. The Committee interviewed all of the significant leaders of both sides of the strike as well as many steel workers. On September 26<sup>th</sup>, Gompers testified. The headline of the *Youngstown Daily Vindicator* characterized the focus of his testimony. It said “Tells Why Strike Wasn’t Postponed.” Although he attempted to focus the discussion on the right of collective bargaining through union representation, questions about the National Committee’s refusal to delay initiating the strike dominated. “Let’s get down to brass tacks. We would like to know now, why this strike was not postponed, as the President requested until after the industrial conference,” asked Chairman Kenyon. Gompers explained at length how he had tried in vain to postpone the strike, but grassroots pressure was too great. The strike would have proceeded with or without the leadership and guidance of the National Committee. Although Gompers spoke about the basic rights of workers to join the union, repressive

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 122-124.

practices and poor wages by the companies, the committee focused on his inability to delay the strike deadline.<sup>41</sup> Gary testified before the Committee after Gompers. He calmly outlined his position in terms easily understood by the reasonable and rational. He claimed that wages for steel industry employees were higher than for any other industry and how through technology, the work was comparatively light. He shared his understanding of the work done, in his mills by saying;

The boy who opens the door, I think, touches a button and opens the door, and the work of adjusting the heavy iron ingots is done by the pulling of a lever. It is largely machinery-almost all machinery. That is not saying there is no work in it, because there is. I would not belittle it, of course. It is hard work to work hard, whatever one does and to the extent one does work hard, he is of course is doing hard work.<sup>42</sup>

He also recited industrial doctrine regarding dedication to the 'open shop,' the dedication of steel men to open discussion with individual workers as opposed to 'outside' union negotiators. Through questioning, he clarified his commitment to avoiding interference of employer rights by union representation, even if the workers desired union representation.

Newspapers covered the Senate investigation and Gary's testimony extensively; they focused on the wage issue, job description and dedication of the industry to protect the rights of individual workers through the open shop.

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<sup>41</sup> "Tells Why Strike Wasn't Postponed," *Daily Youngstown Vindicator*, 26 September 1919, 1.

<sup>42</sup> "Senators Hear Gary," *New York Times*, 2 October 1919, 1.

Charges of radicalism associated with the effort to organize the steel industry, and William Foster in particular, began early and proved persistent. Foster quickly became the focus of intense scrutiny when his pamphlet, *Syndicalism* surfaced just days before the strike. Written in 1911, and filled with violent rhetoric condemning capitalism, it became an integral component of the 1919 strike through reprints and distribution by opponents of the National Committee. In it, Foster advocated abandoning the creation of a new labor movement and working from within existing organizations such as the A. F. L. to revolution them. Post World War I anxiety, along with revolutionary activity in Russia, created an atmosphere in which a radical conspiracy achieved credibility. Foster testified before the Senate on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Through his testimony, Gompers hoped Foster would thoroughly repudiate the ideas set forth in *Syndicalism*, when he faced the Senate Committee. Although in general he did, many of Foster's answers were vague and unclear. Unwilling to betray his personal convictions, Foster attempted to focus on his activities as he served the trade union and not his earlier rhetoric. He was not convincing, and his reputation both within the National Committee and with the public suffered as a result. The perception that Gompers and traditional leaders of trade unionism had lost control to new radical elements strengthened. <sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Brody, 138-144.

Residents in the Mahoning Valley had reason to be nervous about the possibility of radical elements in their midst as well. Late in August, federal officials raided a meeting in East Youngstown and arrested thirty, charging them with suspicion. Red flags, Bolshevik candy and other unnamed 'evidence of disloyalty was found at the meeting, along with a carload of red flags. The *Youngstown Daily Vindicator* ominously reported that the Bolshevik leaders "have become bolder owing to the fact that they have been unmolested, and they finally secured the use of a hall in East Youngstown."<sup>44</sup> Although police intended to file sedition charges against those arrested, they later released them. However, the headlines that accompanied the incident eroded public support for the strikers and heightened misgivings. Later, three union organizers, including Secretary-Treasurer of the Strike Committee, McCadden faced arrest, charged with criminal syndicalism after a meeting in Coitsville. They posted hefty bails-\$3,000 each and police released them. Police later dropped the charges.<sup>45</sup>

The unraveling of the loosely knit coalition of trade unions further weakened the strike movement. The Amalgamated, traditionally dedicated to skilled workers had, while working to organize steel, accepted unskilled members into its ranks. An existing contract prohibited the established, skilled workers from striking. Nevertheless, at

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<sup>44</sup> "Red Flags Seized in Bolshevik Hall," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 20 August 1919, 1.

<sup>45</sup> "Hold 3 Steel Organizers," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 23 November 1919, 17.

the outset of the strike, skilled Amalgamated men did go out, in support of their fellow steelworkers. Employers warned that if the skilled Amalgamated workers did not return, they faced the nullification of the entire contract. Faced with the prospect of the loss of hard-won recognition, Amalgamated President, Michael Tighe ordered his skilled men back to work.<sup>46</sup> When the news reached Youngstown, local secretary, John McCadden angrily denounced the decision. "Every man who returned to work in any steel plant where the strike exists would be considered a scab," he said. Although McCadden maintained that the National Committee as a body condemned the returning workers, Amalgamated Secretary Fred Keightley argued that union contracts bound the men to return to their jobs.<sup>47</sup> Right or wrong, the effect was demoralizing to strikers and aided in manufacturers attempts to increase their crippled production.

Disappointed by the failure of the Industrial Conference, and the Senate investigation's emphasis on Foster's radicalism, organizers in the National Committee concentrated on maintaining the moral of those at street-level. It was a monumental task. In Youngstown, plants slowly came back to life, powered by imported strikebreakers. Every day brought carloads of replacement workers to mills set up like camps with cots and provisions for the siege. Tension and frustration among strikers

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<sup>46</sup> Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 165-168.

<sup>47</sup> "Warn Amalgamated Men to Stay out of Plants," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 14, November 1919, 1.

increased along with production. In addition to recruiting African-American workers from the South, steel companies enlisted out of town American workers, telling them that the strike had effectively ended in Youngstown, and that there would be no problem with their employment.

On the evening of October 19<sup>th</sup>, in response to rumors that local companies were gearing to increase production, picketers guarded city railroad depots looking for incoming strikebreakers. At the station, they met eighteen American workers who arrived by the B. & O. from Pittsburgh. A man in Pittsburgh who claimed to be a master mechanic from Brier Hill Steel Company had hired them, assuring them that 90 percent of men had returned to work. One of the newly arrived workers told union representatives that he came to operate an engine in the Bessemer plant for eight-hour shifts at 72 cents per hour, with time and a half up to ten hours. A Pittsburgh newspaper also advertised jobs in Youngstown that promised no trouble, and represented the strike as over. Five additional men arrived from Columbus under similar circumstances that same night. The men spoke with union officials and local police, then left town. <sup>48</sup>

By the last week in October, the domestic ramifications of the strike became apparent. A month passed since Sheet & Tube and other local steel companies had distributed paychecks for hours worked prior to the strike deadline. The majority of strikers had no monetary cushion

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<sup>48</sup> "Strike Breakers Are Turned Back," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 19 October 1919, 1.



upon which to draw, financially devastating many families. The National Committee, although chronically short of cash, nevertheless realized that to maintain the will of strikers, aid was required. After living for five weeks with no income, rations became available to strikers through the establishment of commissaries. Each strike town had its own headquarters for the distribution of basic provisions. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, McCadden and Hammersmith announced the establishment of the Mahoning County commissary at 337 East Boardman Street. The program was funded in part by members of the International Garment Workers Association who gave \$2 each, contributions provided by other trade unions, and private donations from the rank and file. It implemented rationing cards aimed at families of six or more, based on need as determined by an investigative committee. The plan allowed for two weekly distributions. Each family of six or more received ten pounds of potatoes, five pounds bread, one can each of corn, peas, and tomatoes, five pounds navy beans, two boxes oatmeal, one pound bacon, and one can of milk at the first allocation. Later in the week, another distribution included the same items except that salt pork replaced bacon, the addition of one can syrup and the exclusion of coffee.<sup>49</sup> While food allocations eased the situation for some, one of the first local skirmishes with police demonstrated the level of stress, and the extent of the involvement experienced by families of the strikers. From her

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<sup>49</sup> "Strike Heads to Help Needy," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 27 October 1919, 1.

observations, Vorse wrote about how issues in the mill extended to the wives and children of workers. She said,

In the last analysis a home is what any strike is about. This strike concerned the right of organization, hours and conditions. Follow these things to their source and they will lead you back to a home and a woman sitting in it with a child in her arms. This fight for organization and hours will take you back from the sinister splendor of the mills to a kitchen where children are getting ready to go to school.<sup>50</sup>

The *Vindicator* headline read “Amazons Attack Men: Sheriff Routs Crowd: First Instance of Kind Here.” On November 4<sup>th</sup>, more than one hundred fifty employee’s wives joined the picket line at the south gate of the Sheet & Tube. Sheriff’s deputies arrested four women and five men when picketing became confrontational as carloads of replacement workers attempted to enter the plant. Local police showed restraint when the women became physical with them and the strikebreakers. Despite the arrests, no injuries resulted from the altercation and the women returned to their homes in Struthers and East Youngstown.<sup>51</sup> The glow of optimism and elation over early successes in shutting down the mills dimmed, replaced by uncertainty and desperation. Men gradually trickled back to the mills, driven by fear or need. As they returned and production increased, so did altercations at the plant gates and reports of retaliations within the community. Holdouts bitterly resented both fellow strikers who went back and imported strikebreakers. Strikers

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<sup>50</sup> Vorse, 138.

<sup>51</sup> “Amazons Attack Men; Sheriff Routs Crowd,” *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 4 November 1919, 1.

attacked returning workers at their homes and on the streets. Companies also played upon racial prejudice, counting on the demoralizing effects on strikers by having their jobs replaced with black workers. Incidents of violence and injuries and arrests dramatically increased as the strike deteriorated. Late in October, Hammersmark charged local steel companies with supplying new guns, not available locally, to its replacement African-American workers. Hammersmith based his accusation on an incident in which strikebreakers shot three strikers and stabbed three others in one night of violence. Although he appealed to Governor Cox to intervene, Cox maintained his hands off policy and repeated his statement affirming his confidence in local officials.<sup>52</sup>

Daily newspaper accounts through November conveyed a definite sense of defeat for strikers. The headlines repeated the same message; more men back, fewer pickets at the gates and more processes starting up inside the mills. Youngstown citizens not directly involved in the struggle undoubtedly wondered at the tenacity or stupidity of the holdout strikers. Wonder turned to impatience with the situation late in November. Local business leaders requested officials to either ban Foster from the city or limit his stay, because his presence 'would tend to cause trouble.'<sup>53</sup> Unnamed community leaders formed a citizen's organization,

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<sup>52</sup> "Hammersmark Requests Cox To Take Hand," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 22 October, 1919, 1.

<sup>53</sup> "Move Started to Keep Foster Away From City," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*

in response to a delegation of non-striking workers who appealed to city officials for protection. Stating that they wished to avoid state troop involvement, leaders of the citizen's organization circulated petitions and claimed thousands of signatures. Volunteers vowed to back up local police in an effort to stamp out "lawlessness and violence."<sup>54</sup> Both groups denied ties to any steel corporation, but by this time, management sensed victory and pressed its advantage. Two days later, under public pressure, city officials banned public meetings called by strikers. They also directed police to disperse crowds or groups gathered in the streets. Law enforcement strictly monitored picketers.<sup>55</sup> Despite the unfavorable turn of public opinion and steady trickle of defections, Committee leaders viewed the developing national coal miners' strike with optimism. This advantage failed to materialize because of stockpiling of coal by steel companies and government intervention that halted the miners.<sup>56</sup>

In contrast to the astonishing drama of the first days, the end of the strike came gradually in the Mahoning Valley. On the November 19<sup>th</sup> 1919, the sky above the city lit up with the glow of all three Bessemer converters back in operation.<sup>57</sup> Thick smoke blanketed the valley as the mills rumbled back to life. One week later, newspapers reported over a thousand men, lunch buckets in hand to have trudged back across the

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<sup>54</sup> "Organize for Suppression of Violence, *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 22, November 1919, 1.

<sup>55</sup> "Public Gatherings Are to Be Stopped," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 24 November 1919, 1.

<sup>56</sup> Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 170.

<sup>57</sup> "Sky Alight as Blasts Resume," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 20 November, 1919, 1.

bridge in East Youngtown.<sup>58</sup> By December, the strike had materially ended in most key locations nationwide, with only sporadic knots of dedicated strikers still out. With no hope of victory, the National Committee now faced the dilemma of officially ending the strike. They required some form of mediation; the industry still refused to recognize them. Federal intervention was no option with the failure of the Industrial Conference, so the Committee turned to the influential Interchurch World Movement. Directed by clergy leaders, Bishop Francis J. McConnell and Dr. Daniel Poling, the Movement represented the American Protestant interest in secular issues. The Interchurch Movement had initiated a Commission to investigate strike conditions early in October. Fitzpatrick approached this Commission on November 27<sup>th</sup> to appeal for aid in bringing the strike to an official close. After deliberation, the Interchurch Commission agreed; with the conditions that it would act independently and follow a plan of its own making. The plan consisted of three points. First, it would mediate on behalf of all steelworkers, including those still on strike and those who had returned; second, the intent of mediation would be to establish a new order in the industry, not simply an end to the present strike; and third, the strike should end with the distinct purpose of enhancing the success of the new order. Fitzpatrick and the National Committee agreed to the Interchurch Movements' ambitious plan and relinquished all of the

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<sup>58</sup> "Report 1200 Enter Sheet & Tube Gate," *Youngstown Daily Vindicator*, 28 November 1919, 1.

original twelve strike demands, leaving the Movement free to begin with a clean slate. On December 5<sup>th</sup> members of the Interchurch Commission met with Judge Gary. The meeting did not go as planned by the Commission. The representatives first defended themselves against a charge of radicalism that plagued the Interchurch Movement from inception to well after it published its report. Gary then dominated the discussion; not providing the Commission the opportunity to even present its plan of mediation. At the end of the meeting, Dr. McDowell asked, "In your mind, then, Judge Gary, you consider that for you and the Steel Corporation there is no issue to be discussed?" Gary replied, "There is absolutely no issue."<sup>59</sup> The failure of mediation by the Interchurch Movement left the National Committee with no viable alternatives. After deliberating for nearly a month, the Committee met in Pittsburgh on January 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 1920. Strike Leaders knew that as many as one hundred thousand workers remained away from their jobs. However, the steel industry had nudged production up to about 70 percent of capacity. Faced with the realization that the industry could hold out indefinitely, the Committee voted ten unions to five to call off the strike and instruct workers to return to work. They issued a telegram on January 8, 1920, that said in part, "All steelworkers are now at liberty to return to work pending preparations for the next big organization

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<sup>59</sup> Minutes, National Committee, 1 December 1919; "Public Opinion and Steel Strike," Interchurch World Movement, 71-74, 331-41; Foster, 156-60, quoted from Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 174.

movement,” bringing the strike to an official close.<sup>60</sup> The failure of the strike was a bitter disappointment to individual workers. Mary Heaton Vorse witnessed how devastating the realization of defeat was to the average worker. She said, “The steel workers’ sobbing in the dark hall outside the National Committee Office in Youngstown will always be to me the sound of the dying strike.”<sup>61</sup>

Gary and the other industrial steel mill owners prevailed in the 1919 strike and retained the upper hand throughout the 1920s. It would be more than twenty years before a union would represent the employees of Youngstown Sheet & Tube.

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<sup>60</sup> Foster, 192-193.

<sup>61</sup> Vorse, 167.

## **Conclusion**

The failure of the 1919 steel strike resulted in bitterness and humiliation for the workers that braved losing their livelihood to participate. Although many did return to their jobs in the mills, others never did. The workers who held such high hopes at the beginning, found scant consolation in the gains produced by the strike. Public and private debate provided groundwork for future organizational development. The main issue of whether unions held authority to bargain for steel workers was not resolved, but negotiations held at the Industrial Conference crystallized assumptions regarding workers rights to collectively bargain through an agent of their choosing. In a summary written by presidential counsel, Bernard Baruch on the findings of the Conference, he said, "...the right of the workers to organize for the purpose of collective bargaining with their employers through representatives of their own choosing, cannot be denied or assailed."<sup>1</sup> The determination that workers rights included collective bargaining through representation of their choice formed the basis for the 1935 Wagner Act that significantly strengthened the union movement.

Similarly, although the Interchurch Movement failed in its attempt to mediate an agreement between the steel industry and workers, the report it published in 1920 revealed unsavory details about corporate behavior during the strike. The industry's suppression of the rights of

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Baruch to Woodrow Wilson, 24 October 1919, Labor Dept. Files, quoted in Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 128.



assembly and free speech during the 1919 strike prompted the Lafollette Senate Committee hearing that exposed the tactics used by the corporations. The report also called attention to the prevalence of the twelve-hour day, working conditions, and low wages of steel workers. Although familiar charges of radicalism persisted and diluted the effectiveness of the report, it had significant impact on public opinion.

Perhaps one of the most important lessons learned by union organizers from the failed strike resulted from the collapse of unity of the coalition that comprised the National Committee. Although skilled workers walked out with the unskilled, they had stronger ties to management due to their value to the company. Many skilled workers also had more at stake within the community, as well. Some held mortgages and prestige within their neighborhoods. The skilled tradesmen were among the first to break rank and return. Years later, the Committee for Industrial Organization, advocated industrial unionism in which all workers entered under the same umbrella of representation, a structure that significantly strengthened the bond between workers at all levels of production.

The battles fought between organized labor and the steel industry between 1916 and 1920 decidedly favored the industry. The industry as a whole, and Sheet & Tube individually, failed to tackle persistent chronic sources of discontent. They simply could not find a palatable solution to the twelve-hour day. Finding it too costly to implement three

eight-hour shifts, they stubbornly retained a schedule universally hated by workers. Although tolerated by new immigrants desperately seeking wages in the early decades of the developing industry, the twelve-hour day became incompatible to workers seeking an “American” standard of living. Gary and the steel industry evaded the twelve-hour issue until in 1922, when President Harding invited forty-one industrial leaders to a meeting and offered his help in finding a solution. The committee created by the steel industry to investigate the issue, presented their findings one year later. Not, surprisingly, they reported that the changeover from the twelve-hour day would increase production costs by 15 percent and require 60,000 additional workers. The members of the Steel Institute deferred the changeover. Public opinion immediately turned against the industry. Religious and civic leaders denounced the decision and Harding called Gary personally to express his disappointment. It was only through this intense pressure that steel workers secured the eight-hour day.<sup>2</sup>

The dynamics that characterized this contentious relationship were complex and constantly changing. Technological advances transformed traditional processes so quickly that trade and craft unions simply could not adapt quickly enough. At the same time, economy-minded industrialists adamantly protected their exclusive policy-making authority in the areas of wages, hours, conditions and interaction with

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<sup>2</sup>Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 274-275.

employees. To them the issue paralleled private property rights. They viewed it as an absolute right of stockholders and management to conduct business without interference from non-financially entitled third parties. Fortunes made through war order profits backed the fight against outside interference in the form of organized labor. The same wealth provided the basis for welfare capitalism, designed to pacify and domesticate an unpredictable and volatile foreign-born unskilled workforce. Improved housing, health care, English classes, company sponsored social events and recreation were all implemented to produce a more well adjusted, reliable, and most importantly, loyal source of labor.

At the conclusion of the strike, Sheet & Tube management encouraged employees to return to their previous positions. Many did, but others sought work elsewhere and a few found themselves on the blacklist. Production resumed in fits and starts for Valley steelmakers. The ongoing coal strike resulted in shortages, which hindered manufacturing. A consequent railroad strike had the same affect. The 1920s passed uneventfully for many Youngstown Sheet & Tube employees. The company and labor established a pattern that mimicked pre World War I conditions. Steelworkers had little choice but to acquiesce to the will of management. The establishment of the eight-hour day, continued and expanded welfare programs and an ironclad resolve to repel any vestiges of unionization formed the framework for their

relationship. The company built new housing until 1922. Sheet & Tube continued its campaign designed to create a feeling of community between management and worker. The *Bulletin* kept workers updated on community events and employee accomplishments. On the surface, the employer, employee relationship seemed peaceful, but just under the surface the same resentments simmered.

Danny Thomas was a Sheet & Tube employee in the 1930s. He became an early union activist and organizer in the Mahoning Valley in 1936. He probably explained best why the détente of the 1920s did not last. He said, “A union had to be built for our own preservation, not because we needed better wages, but because we needed better conditions and respect. We were looking for dignity. That’s why I, personally, got interested in the labor movement, for the self preservation and dignity of the man...”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Danny Thomas, interviewed by Emmett C. Shafer, Youngstown State University, Oral History Program, O.H.5, 1 August 1974.

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