

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT

(From: "Important Events In American Labor History—1778-1963" by Willard Wirtz.)

- 1778- Journeymen printers of New York City combined to demand an increase in wages. After the increase was granted, the organization was abandoned.
- 1786- The earliest authenticated strike of workers in the United States in a single trade occurred when Philadelphia printers gained a minimum wage of \$6 a week.
- 1791- Philadelphia carpenters struck unsuccessfully in May for a 10-hour day and additional pay for overtime. This was the first recorded strike of workers in the building trades.
- 1792- The first local craft union formed for collective bargaining was organized by Philadelphia shoemakers. It disbanded in less than a year.
- 1794- The Federal Society of Journeymen Cordwainers was formed in Philadelphia by the shoe workers. It lasted until 1806, when it was tried and fined for conspiracy. (See below)
- Printers organized the Typographical Society in New York City. It remained in existence for 10 years.
- 1805- A Journeymen Cordwainers' union in New York City included a closed-shop clause in its Constitution.
- 1806- Members of the Philadelphia Journeymen Cordwainers were tried for criminal conspiracy after a strike for higher wages. The charges were (1) combination to raise wages and (2) combination to injure others. The union was found guilty and fined. Bankrupt as a result, the union disbanded. This was the first of several unions to be tried for conspiracy.
- 1825- The United Tailoresses of New York, a trade union organization for women only, was formed in New York City.
- 1827- The Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations, made up of unions of skilled craftsmen in different trades, was formed in Philadelphia. This was the first city central type of organization on record.
- 1828- The Workingmen's Party, including wage earners, craftsmen, and farmers, was organized in Philadelphia in July. It went out of existence in 1832.
- 1834- The National Trades' Union was formed in New York City. This was the first attempt toward a national labor federation in the United States. It failed to survive the financial panic of 1837.
- 1836- The National Cooperative Association of Cordwainers, the first national labor union of a specific craft, was formed in New York City. There is no further record of this organization after 1837. Other trades which formed national organizations within the next few years were the printers, Comb makers, carpenters, and handloom weavers.
- 1840- An Executive order issued on March 31 by President Van Buren established a 10-hour day for Federal employees on public works without reduction in pay.
- 1842- In the case of *Commonwealth v. Hunt*, the Massachusetts Court held that labor unions, as such, were legal organizations, and that "a conspiracy must be a combination of two or more persons, by some concerted action, to accomplish some criminal or unlawful purpose, or to accomplish some purpose not in itself criminal or unlawful by criminal or unlawful means." The decision also denied that an attempt to establish a closed shop was unlawful or proof of an unlawful aim.

Massachusetts and Connecticut passed laws prohibiting children from working more than 10 hours a Day.

1847-The first state law fixing 10 hours as a legal workday was passed in New Hampshire.

1848-Pennsylvania passed a State child labor law setting the minimum age for workers in commercial occupations at 12 years. In 1849, the minimum was raised to 13 years.

1852-The Typographical Union, the first national organization of workers to endure to the present day, was formed.

The first law limiting the hours of women to 10 hours a day was passed in Ohio.

1859-The Iron Molders' Union, the forerunner of the present Molders' and Allied Workers' Union, was organized in Philadelphia.

1862-The "Molly Maguires," a secret society of Irish miners in the anthracite fields, first came to public attention. The "Mollies" were charged with acts of terrorism against mine bosses. They went out of existence in 1876, when 14 of their leaders were imprisoned and 10 were executed.

1863-The present-day Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers was founded.

Laws providing fines and imprisonment for strikers preventing other persons from working were Passed in Illinois and Minnesota.

1866-The National Labor Union, a national association of unions, was organized. A federation of trades' assemblies rather than of national craft organizations, it included radical and reform groups. Drifting into social rather than trade union endeavors, it lost craftsmen's support and went out of existence in 1872.

1867-The Knights of St. Crispin was organized on March 7 to protect journeymen shoemakers against the competition of "green hands" and apprentices in the operation of newly introduced machinery in the shoe industry. The last vestige of the order disappeared in 1878.

1868-The first Federal 8-hour-day law was passed by Congress. It applied only to laborers, workmen, and mechanics employed by or on behalf of the United States Government.

The first State labor bureau was established in Massachusetts.

1869-The Noble Order of the Knights of Labor was organized in Philadelphia. It maintained extreme secrecy until 1878, then began organizing skilled and unskilled workers openly. By winning railroad strikes against the Gould lines, and advancing the program for the 8-hour day, the Knights of Labor gained many followers, claiming over 700,000 members in 1886. It declined thereafter with the emergence of the AFL.

1870-The first written contract between coal miners and operators was signed on July 29. It provided for a sliding scale of pay, based on the price of coal.

1873-The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen were organized.

1874-The Cigar Makers International Union made first use of the union label.

1878-The Greenback-Labor Party was organized by a fusion of the Greenback Party and Workingman's Party.

1881-The Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (FOTLU), which later became the American

Federation of Labor, was organized in Pittsburgh in November with 107 delegates present. Leaders of 8 national unions attended, including Samuel Gompers, then president of the Cigar Makers International Union.

The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, later to become one of the largest AFL unions, was organized.

1882-Peter J. McGuire, a New York City carpenter, suggested setting aside one day in the year in honor of labor. The first Labor Day celebration was held in New York City during September of the same year.

1883-The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen was organized.

1884-A Bureau of Labor was established in the Department of Interior. It later became independent as a Department of Labor without Cabinet rank. It then was absorbed into a new Department of Commerce and Labor, which was created in 1903, where it remained until the present Department of Labor was established in 1913.

1886-Under the initiative of the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, some 340,000 workers participated in a movement for an 8-hour day.

The Chicago Haymarket riot, in which one policeman was killed and several others wounded, aroused public opinion against unionism and radicalism and for several years stopped the movement for the 8-hour day. The meeting in Haymarket Square had been called as a peaceful protest against the killing of four strikers and wounding of others during a strike for the 8-hour day at the McCormick Reaper Works.

The American Federation of Labor was organized at a convention in Columbus, Ohio, in December as a successor to the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions. Other trade unions which had failed to gain autonomy within the ranks of the Knights of Labor also joined the AFL.

1888-The first Federal labor relations law was enacted. It applied to railroads and provided for arbitration and Presidential boards of investigation.

The International Association of Machinists was organized in Atlanta, Ga.

1890-The United Mine Workers was organized in Columbus, Ohio.

1892-The Homestead strike by the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers at the Carnegie steel mills in Homestead, Pa., resulted in the death of several strikers and Pinkerton guards. The strike failed and the union was ousted from most mills in the Pittsburgh area.

1893-NEWARK NEWSPAPER PRINTING PRESSMENS UNION LOCAL 8N organized in November.

1894-A strike of the American Railway Union led by Eugene V. Debs against the Pullman Co. was defeated by the use of injunctions and by Federal troops sent into the Chicago area. Debs and several other leaders were imprisoned for violating the injunctions, and the union's effectiveness was destroyed.

1898-Congress passed the Erdman Act, providing for mediation and voluntary arbitration on the railroads, and superseding the law of 1888. The act also made it a criminal offense for railroads to dismiss employees or to discriminate against prospective employees because of their union membership or activity. This portion of the act was subsequently declared invalid by the United States Supreme Court.

1900-The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (AFL) was formed.

