D. W. A.

PROCLAMATION.

St. Louis, Mo., July 25th, 1877.

Fellow-Citizens: The daily press of the city—both English and German—persisting in misrepresentation of our movement in the present great struggle of our fellow-workingmen against the overbearing oppression of capitalists and monopolists,—we are compelled to issue the following in order to clear ourselves of the charges and abuses, which the daily press of St. Louis sees fit to throw upon us. Liberal thinking men may then judge, who is right and who is wrong.

As you all well know, work is very scarce now in all branches, and the compensation for work done is so little, to make it almost impossible for any man to make his bare living, and it is utterly impossible for married men to support their families. Where shall this end? If now, during the summer season, such is the case, what shall we do next winter? Has our government done anything for us workingmen? We say No! emphatically No! Therefore, fellow-workingmen, we must act ourselves, unless we want starvation to stare to our faces the coming winter. There is only one way—**Help yourself!**

"To this purpose a meeting was held last night at the Lucas Market, where the following resolutions were passed!

Resolved, that we, the authorized executive committee of the Workingmen's party of the United States, do not hold ourselves responsible for any act of violence which may be perpetrated during the present excitement; but that we will do all that lies in our power to aid the authorities in keeping order and preventing acts of violence, and will do our utmost to detect and bring to punishment all guilty parties. We make an issue for our constitutional rights as American citizens—that is, the right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Our motto is, "Death to thieves, incendiaries and murderers."

Resolved, that, as every man willing to perform a use to society is entitled to a living, therefore, if our present system of production and distribution fails to provide for our wants, it then becomes the duty of the government to enact such laws as will insure equal justice to all the people of the nation.

Resolved, that, as the condition of an immense number of people now in forced idleness, and the great suffering for the necessaries of life caused by the monopoly in the hands of capitalists, appeals strongly to all industrial classes for prompt action, therefore, to avoid bloodshed or violence, we recommend a general strike of all branches of industry for eight hours as a day's work, and we call on the legislature for the immediate enactment of an eight hour law, and the enforcement of a severe penalty for its violation, and that the employment of all children under fourteen years of age be prohibited.

Resolved, that it is our purpose never to give up the strike till these propositions are enforced. **The Executive Committee.**

Mitbürger!

Da ein Theil der deutschen Presse — die „**Westliche Post**"—sich in größter Lüge und Gemeinheit über uns ereifert, sehen wir uns genöthigt, Euch Nachstehendes bekannt zu geben, und dann mögt Ihr als billig denkende Menschen urtheilen.

Wie Euch Allen bekannt ist, trotzdem daß wir jetzt Sommerzeit haben, die Arbeitslosigkeit allgemein, der Lohn der noch Arbeitenden aber so niedrig, daß es einem ledigen Arbeiter kaum möglich ist, sein Leben anständig zu fristen, noch viel weniger aber einem Familienvater. Wo soll das Alles noch hinaus? Wie muß es da erst im **Winter** werden? Hat unsere Regierung schon irgend welche Schritte gethan um die herrschende Noth zu beseitigen? — Nein! — Darum, Niederleiter, müssen wir uns selbst helfen; sonst können wir nächsten Winter in den Suppenanstalten oder als „Tramps" unseren Unterhalt suchen, während unsere Kinder in Lumpen gehen und verhungern müssen. Darum sei unsere Losung: **Selbsthülfe!**

Um nun dieses auszuführen hat die gestern Abend am Lucas-Market stattgefundene, von mehr denn Zehntausend besuchte Massenversammlung nachstehende Beschlüsse gefaßt:

„In Erwägung, daß die heutigen gesellschaftlichen Einrichtungen einer großen Menschenmasse unserer Mitmenschen nicht das Recht auf Leben erlauben, indem alle Producte und Productionsmittel von den Monopolisten mit Beschlag belegt sind, ordnen wir, daß die Regierung dahin gehende Gesetze erläßt, welche jedem Menschen das Recht auf Arbeit und mithin auf Leben garantiren.

Um daher Blutvergießen und sonstigen drohenden Vorkommnissen in unserem Lande vorzubeugen, fordern wir die Arbeiter in allen Zweigen der Industrie auf, die Arbeit einzustellen und sie nicht früher aufzunehmen, bis wir

1. einen durch das Gesetz garantirten achtstündigen Arbeitstag, und
2. das Verbot der Arbeit der Kinder unter 14 Jahren in den Fabriken—errungen.

Es sei ferner beschlossen, daß wir, als autorisirtes Executiv-Committee aller St. Louiser Sectionen der Arbeiter-Partei der Ver. Staaten, nicht verantwortlich sind für irgend welche individuelle Gewaltthätigkeiten, welche während der gegenwärtigen Aufregung verübt werden mögen, sondern daß wir nach Kräften darauf bedacht sein werden, Diebstähle, Brandstiftungen u. s. w. zu verhindern und die Verbrecher den respectiven Autoritäten zu überliefern. Wir machen dies als anerkannte Bürger zu unserer Hauptpflicht. Unser Motto ist: Tod allen Dieben, Brandstiftern und Mördern!"

Das Executiv-Committee.

REIGN OF THE RABBLE

The St. Louis General Strike of 1877

By

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I

PROLOGUE

The prosperous French fur-trading settlement of St. Louis and the nearby village later called Carondelet somehow acquired, early in their existence, the derisive nicknames of "*Pain Court*" and "*Vide Poche*" respectively. "*Pain Court*" has by some been interpreted to mean "Short-of-bread" or "Little Bread"; and "*Vide Poche*" means "Empty Pocket".

Some hundred years later, in the year 1877, these forgotten taunts might have had real meaning. In that year, St. Louis was a greater trading center than ever, and not merely of furs. Its flour mills provided much of the nation's bread; and the foundries of Carondelet, now part of the city, supplied important materials for the nation's industries. Yet, after four years of steadily deepening, nation-wide business depression, St. Louis workingmen could see nothing ahead of them but . . . little bread and empty pockets.

The country was struggling through the most serious and prolonged economic crisis of its history; and the distress of St. Louis workingmen resulted in one of the chain of social explosions that rocked America from coast to coast in the summer of 1877, giving notice of the beginning of a new era of violent and sometimes bloody conflict between workers and employers, out of which American industrial society and its labor movement took form.

What happened in St. Louis during the last week of July was characterized by none of the bloodshed and little of the destruction of property that marked the strikes and riots in other cities. Yet the disturbances in St. Louis were, in certain respects, even more alarming to business men and property owners. Only around St. Louis did the original strike on the railroads expand into such a systematically organized and complete shut-down of all industry that the term *general strike* is fully justified. And only

there did the *socialists* assume undisputed leadership. The consternation produced among respectable people by this combination of circumstances is summed up in one horrific newspaper catchword: "The Commune".

The Paris Commune of 1871 was a fresh memory. Contrary to popular belief, the true socialists or communists had been a minority in the leadership of the Paris Commune; but an informed observer might have noted that the leaders of the St. Louis general strike were, indeed, just such a miscellaneous collection of enthusiasts as had led the Commune of 1871. There the analogy ends. The St. Louis strikers had neither the talent nor the opportunity to set up a "Commune", and probably did not desire to do so. But in this sweltering July, six years later, imaginative St. Louisans were sure they scented powder smoke from the barricades of revolutionary Paris. And the remarkable fact is, that no American city has come so close to being ruled by a workers' soviet, as we would now call it, as St. Louis, Missouri, in the year 1877.

St. Louis lost its character as a French settlement early in the 1800's. Americans from every part of the Union poured into the city, and through it, on their way west. On its upper levels, by the middle of the century, St. Louis life was Southern; but there was a strong admixture of Yankee. And soon there came wave after wave of Irish and then German immigrants, supplying labor for the city's industries, and, in the case of the Germans, skilled workers in many trades, as well as scholars and men trained in the professions, who had an enduring effect on cultural life. As early as 1850, Germans constituted one third of the population; their gymnastic and singing societies flourished, and the city blossomed with forty breweries.

In 1877, St. Louis was a great manufacturing and distributing center, stretching eighteen miles along the Mississippi River, facing Illinois. The chief industries were flour milling, meat packing, and the manufacture of foundry and machine shop products, tobacco products, and iron and steel. Steamboats still lined the levee; but the great days of the river were over, and the focus of St. Louis life had shifted from the north and south traffic of the

river to the east and west traffic of the railroads. With the opening, in 1874, of Captain James B. Eads' great bridge across the Mississippi, connecting St. Louis with the railroad center of East St. Louis, Illinois, there was a brief and unsuccessful struggle with Chicago for the title of railway gate to the West. Nevertheless, St. Louisans liked to think that their city was only exceeded in population by New York and Philadelphia. (Actually, the population of St. Louis in 1877, was closer to 300,000 than the half-million frequently claimed). And a local publicist, L. U. Reavis, had for some years been urging, in a torrent of books, pamphlets, articles, and lectures, that the national capital be removed to this "future great city of the world," on the banks of the Mississippi.

St. Louis rose ridge by ridge from the levee. In the central part of the city, close to the river, were the business offices, the best hotels and shops, the fashionable restaurants and places of amusement. These are spoken of by Walt Whitman, (in *Specimen Days*), as "store-streets, showy, modern, metropolitan, with hurrying crowds, vehicles, horse-cars, hubbub . . . rich goods, plateglass windows, iron fronts often five or six stories high." The business district was surrounded by factories and slums. On the upper ridges, stretching west to Grand Avenue, were the homes of the wealthy.

In the early summer of 1877, there was little evidence in the St. Louis business district of the economic crisis paralyzing the nation. At the more fashionable beer gardens, representatives of the best families could be seen sipping the products of the local breweries and listening to Strauss waltzes. In the tenement neighborhoods, the Irish and Germans thronged the sidewalks; and street life had some of the animation of a European city.

There were games and music in the parks. On warm evenings, the poor swarmed out of their alleys, and well-to-do families gathered on their front porches. Negro washerwomen chose the early evening to carry home on their heads baskets of dirty clothes.

The alleys and tenements that the poor tried to escape from, and to which the washerwomen carried their baskets of clothes, bore picturesque names: "The Cross Keys", "Clabber Alley",

"Wild Cat Chute", and "Castle Thunder" – the latter named after a Confederate prison where Union soldiers had suffered from the short rations. In dilapidated tenements that often fronted only on alleys, a large population lived in conditions of filth and overcrowding. These buildings were highly profitable to their owners, who did not inquire into the sources of their rents or the conditions under which their laundry was done. The city's Health Commissioner was obliged to admit that "the rights of property are ever jealously guarded, but the rights and interests of the pallid children of poverty are not so closely looked after."

Lafcadio Hearn's impressions of the slums of Cincinnati, another river-city, speak with equal truth of the slums of St. Louis:

> The same rickety room, the same cracked stove, the same dingy walls bearing fantastic tapestry of faded rags and grotesque shadow-silhouettes . . . the same pile of city coal in one corner, the same ghastly candle stuck in the same mineral water bottle . . . the same heavily warm atmosphere and oppressive smell . . . Shadowy tenement houses and dilapidated cottages, and blind, foul alleys with quaint names suggestive of deformity and darkness . . . A dream of reeling buildings of black plank, with devious corridors and deformed stairways; with interminable suites of crooked rooms, having sloping floors and curving walls; with crazy stoves and heavy smells.

The slum population of all the great cities sank to new depths of misery in the course of the depression which followed the Panic of 1873. The chilling shadow had fallen first on New York. The suspension, on September 18th, 1873, of the Wall Street firm of Jay Cooke and Company, was followed by a train of similar disasters. In the grim years from 1873 to 1877, the bankruptcy rate doubled, unemployment mounted rapidly, and symptoms of a new kind of social unrest became apparent.

In January, 1874, an immense demonstration of the unemployed in New York City, led by socialists, was attacked by the police, and many in the crowd were injured. The number of the unemployed rose to a peak of perhaps 5,000,000 – with a population less than one-third of that today. The American Iron and

Steel Association, in June, 1877, considered the possibility that, within a few years, the furnace-stacks of the industry "would only be useful as observatories for the study of astronomy."

The effects of the panic were felt very soon in St. Louis, even though it took some time for the full magnitude of the economic collapse to be revealed. Following the Civil War, the city had grown rapidly in population and wealth. New industries sprang up and old industries expanded. But the post-war prosperity came to an abrupt end. In December, 1874, a St. Louis newspaper, discussing the establishment of a "soup and bunk house" for the unemployed, remarked that if January brought severe cold, the poor would experience entirely new "depths of misery and poverty." *Gould's St. Louis Directory*, looking back on the year 1877, declared that it had been a year "of panic and great shrinkage in values, and for widespread disaster to mercantile firms and financial institutions must rank with the year 1857." The financial institutions referred to included the National Bank of the State of Missouri, oldest and supposedly strongest bank in the city, which closed its doors early in the summer of 1877; and a whole series of bank failures and suspensions began on July 10th, continuing for a week.

In the winter of 1876-77, there were two municipal soup kitchens in operation: the more select of the two being known as "The Lindell", after the city's finest and newest hotel, while the other was called "The Rabbit House", and was for those "lost to all sense of personal cleanliness." The St. Louis Social Science Association turned its attention to the subject of pauperism, which "in anything like threatening magnitude, is a new thing to us." The St. Louis *Globe-Democrat* remarked that the unemployed had no idea what had "struck them down and blasted their lives"; but, the editorial continues, "they see the sharp contrast between their sufferings and the splendor of the rich; they have been made desperate by want, they are ready to follow any leader. . . ."

The placid surface of polite society masked the discontent beneath. Francis Grierson, writing of ante-bellum St. Louis, describes the crowds attending the fashionable churches on a Sunday morning in the year 1860, and speaks of "an overpowering

sense of the frailty of wealth, the inutility of fashion, the fatality of beauty, which came with a presentiment of languid decay and predestined calamity . . . a delightful promenade around a paradise of ease and contentment, where luxurious growths hid the vapor of the volcano under their feet." In 1877, wealth was far less frail; there was perhaps less beauty, fatal or otherwise; and languid decay was hardly characteristic of the era of the Robber Barons. But the volcano, though a different one, was there. Wendell Phillips, in 1871, put it bluntly: "Scratch the surface of New York society, and you will find the Paris Commune." A good many St. Louisans, six years later, were horrified to find what looked like the dreaded Commune beneath the "luxurious growths" of *St. Louis* society. It was the nation-wide railroad strike of July, 1877, which touched off the eruption, as happened in many other cities.

By 1877, the railroads had fallen on evil days. Only one of fifteen lines tributary to St. Louis was paying dividends. The panic of 1873 was itself, to a considerable extent, the result of railroad over-expansion following the Civil War. A period of wild speculation was accompanied by a ruinous rate war, in which the private empires of the railroad tycoons battled with each other, the chief beneficiary being John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company, the first of the great trusts. The revelations of the Crédit Mobilier scandal made the name of the industry synonymous with fraud, chicanery and corruption. Engineering enterprise was matched by speculative plunder.

As the living standards of workers and farmers plunged, popular anger at the railroads, banks, and the corporations generally, reached a high pitch. Western farmers, through their National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, struck at the railroads, demanding lower freight rates. The "Granger Laws", which the movement forced through the State Legislatures, represent the first concerted effort to regulate the railroads in the public interest. The Grange declined in power; but from 1874 to 1877, ephemeral parties with various kinds of anti-monopoly programs sprang up all over the Middle West. Radical reform was in the air.

The thievery of the corporations was almost equaled by the

thievery of government officials. The Grant administration, falling apart in liquescent corruption, seemed about to bring Republican rule to an end. The Whisky Ring scandal reached a climax in the St. Louis trial early in 1876. Republican politicians anxiously cast about for a means of defeating the revived Democracy – and found it in Rutherford B. Hayes, Governor of Ohio, a pure and prudent candidate. But the election of November, 1876, resulted in a deadlock; and four months of wrangling and tension followed – the nation, meanwhile, without a President. The atmosphere of rumor and threatened civil war with which the year 1877 began, hardly contributed to social stability in the following months.

The election deadlock was broken by means of a compromise with Southern politicians which allowed the Republican Party to quietly shake off its radical past and which unobtrusively returned the Negro population of the South to the care of their former masters. Henceforth, conservative white leaders in the South took their stand with Northern industrialists, against agrarian and labor radicalism. American Negroes, hardly awakened from the long sleep of slavery, might have taken as a macabre portent of their fate the rumors, current in the summer of 1877, that Abraham Lincoln's body no longer rested in the tomb at Springfield, Illinois. And in fact, as a consequence of an attempted tomb robbery, the President's body *had* been secretly removed from the sarcophagus, by its guardians. In the St. Louis strike, Negro workers made a last gesture of defiance and protest.

Against this background of governmental corruption and industrial piracy, the widespread popular support of the 1877 strikes, and the irresistible sweep of the movement once it got started, can be better understood. Only the element of indignation at corruption in high places, added to the economic pressure of four years of industrial stagnation, can account for the explosive quality of the Great Strike.

Yet the strike is astonishing in view of the prostration of the American labor movement in 1877. The national unions which had developed during the sixties, disintegrated almost completely between 1873 and 1877. Samuel Gompers estimated that the total union membership of the *entire country* amounted to only 50,000

in 1878. Local unions and trades' assemblies faded away everywhere, and the employers took advantage of the situation with vigorous anti-union drives.

There was, moreover, no national labor federation in existence in 1877. The American Federation of Labor would not have its first, tentative beginnings until 1881. And although the Order of the Knights of Labor had been in existence since 1869, it is doubtful if its total national membership in 1877 exceeded 5000. It still had a very loose, decentralized form of organization, and was handicapped by rigid secrecy – even the name of the Order was not publicly revealed until after 1878. In the 1877 strikes, the Knights of Labor, as an organization, played no discernible role.

Since the Great Strike was primarily a strike on the railroads, the weakness of the railroad unions in 1877 is also astonishing. These unions were practically all fraternal insurance societies, with a no-strike policy, although they were obliged now and then to resort to strike action. They were for the most part ineffective, with the possible exception of the oldest and largest, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. The engineers, the aristocrats of railroad labor, had about two hundred lodges. But the Brotherhood was by no means a militant organization; its policy with regard to strikes was confused; and it showed little or no interest in collaborating with other branches of railroad labor.

The Great Strike had, in fact, nothing in the nature of central leadership or direction. As an entirely spontaneous outburst of labor discontent, it has never been paralleled on such a large scale, in the United States. The railroad employees, subjected to special and galling pressures by their companies, were ready to strike in sheer desperation; the conservative leaders of the brotherhoods were in no position to get a hearing for their counsels of caution and moderation, once the movement got under way. And the railroads served as a fuse, carrying the spark of rebellion to the unemployed multitudes in the great cities, who were even less disposed than the railroad workers to pay attention to the advice of conservative labor leaders – whose organizations existed mostly on paper.

Railroading was a far more hazardous occupation in the 1870's

than it is today; most of the safety devices now in use were then either entirely unknown, or little used and in imperfect form. It was still the era of the clumsy handbrake, which threw so many railroaders to their deaths, and the treacherous link-and-pin coupling, which maimed so many more. Fearful of establishing expensive precedents, the railroad executives seldom offered their maimed employees more than sympathy; and after all, a few fingers missing proved that a man was an experienced worker, and, when it came to hiring brakemen and switchmen, was just the recommendation a yardmaster valued.

The railroad corporations made up their losses in the rate wars by shoddy operating practices and continuous wage cuts. On the Baltimore and Ohio line, in June 1877, passenger brakemen received $1.33 per day, and faced at least their third wage cut in three years. By a dozen different strategems, the railroads pared the already meager earnings of their employees, and forced them to perform unpaid labor — as when engine hostlers were eliminated, and firemen were obliged to spend a couple of hours cleaning the engine on each trip, for which they were not paid. Firemen and brakemen might average only fourteen days' regular pay per month. Crews were reduced; and at a time when trains were controlled entirely by manual means, this meant much hardship and added danger. When employees finally fell so far in debt that their wages were garnisheed, they were immediately discharged. Conditions of this sort led to a number of strikes between July, 1876, and July, 1877, all of which were unsuccessful. The employers made effective use of the Pinkerton and other detective agencies to crush the strikes.

The immediate cause of the Great Strike was a new ten percent wage cut scheduled to go into effect on a number of lines in the early summer of 1877. Petitions and protests from the employees were wholly disregarded by managers and boards of directors. The railroad managers merely expounded the prevailing philosophy of business when they declared that it was absurd to say that a man was *entitled* to a living wage: if a man could by frugality get along on fifty cents a day, and would work for that wage, another man requiring a dollar a day was *not* entitled to the job. Ar-

bitration implied that the employee had certain *rights;* and so arbitration was peremptorily rejected by the employer.

The established unions of railroad employees made little attempt to resist the new wage cuts. It was a newly formed, secret union, organized at Alleghany City, Pennsylvania, which first attempted to take action. This Trainmen's Union was formed in June, 1877, under the leadership of twenty-five year old Robert Ammon, the black sheep of a well-to-do Pittsburgh family. Ammon prepared to call strikes on the Pennsylvania, New York Central, and Baltimore & Ohio lines on June 27th.

But the attempt failed. It was not the Trainmen's Union which precipitated the nation's first major railroad strike. It began on the Baltimore & Ohio, at Martinsburg, West Virginia, under the leadership of another young man, Richard Zepp, and entirely without Ammon's knowledge. On July 17th, the day on which the line's wage cut was to take effect, an exchange of gunfire at Martinsburg left a striker fatally wounded — a portent soon and horribly fulfilled. Ammon's union went into action in the vicinity of Pittsburgh, stopping all freight traffic on the Pennsylvania Railroad. And in Baltimore, on the 20th, the strikers were throwing up barricades "in the French style". On the evening of that day, the militia fired on a crowd of strikers and sympathizers, killing, according to one account, twelve and wounding eighteen. The rifles of the Maryland militia established the procedure by which the demands of the railroad workers throughout the country would be dealt with. A peaceful solution now became impossible.

Almost before the public was aware of what was happening, the strange contagion had spread as far west as Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City. Within a few days, 100,000 men were on strike. At every railway center the strike touched, autonomous, local committees of the railroad workers sprang into existence. These committees were connected with each other in only a very loose and informal manner, and sometimes even came into conflict on matters of policy. Where the strike spread beyond the railroads, local strike committees representing all trades and industries came into existence overnight and exercised varying degrees of authority. (The railroad men generally maintained their own, separate

committees). But the strike had no centralized leadership whatever.

The elemental sweep of the movement created consternation and bewilderment in the business community and public authorities. The newspapers bewailed the appearance of this new and strange social malady, but often acknowledged with surprising candor the provocation to which the railroad employees had been exposed. Popular anger at the railroads, outside the ranks of the strikers, was a fact that could not be ignored.

Faced with spreading revolt on the part of their employees, the railroad officials either hedged, to gain time, or bluntly rejected all appeals made to them. William H. Vanderbilt, President of the New York Central, declared blandly that his interests were as much affected as his employees, and though he had his millions and they only the rewards of their daily toil, "still we are about equal in the end!" John W. Garret, President of the Baltimore & Ohio, (who was often accused of acting as if he were Lord Proprietor of the State of Maryland as well), expressed his horror at the refusal of West Virginia militia to shoot down strikers, and demanded Federal troops to protect his property. Jay Gould, formerly of the plundered Erie, and in 1877 deep in the richer loot of the Union Pacific, was reported to have said that what the country needed was a monarchy, and ex-President Grant was the man for the job.

Another figure contributed a maladroit comment which has become a classic expression of the pious savagery approved by the Gilded Age. Speaking before his wealthy Brooklyn congregation, the Reverend Henry Beecher asked, "Is the working class oppressed?", and replied "Yes, undoubtedly it is." Nevertheless, "God has intended the great to be great and the little to be little. . . . The trade union, originated under the European system, destroys liberty. . . : I do not say that a dollar a day is enough to support a workingman. . . . Not enough to support a man and five children if he insist on smoking and drinking beer . . . But the man who cannot live on bread and water is not fit to live!"

His remarks were widely discussed by spokesmen of the strikers. (His advice about doing without beer must have out-

raged *St. Louis* workingmen especially!) Mr. Beecher was generally advised to try his diet on himself. And at a strikers' meeting in Chicago, an even more pointed comment was made: "The reverend gentleman said that men could live on bread and water; but *he had physical ability which had been tested in various ways*" — an acid reference to the charge of adultery which had been brought against Beecher by his former associate, Theodore Tilton, in a *cause célèbre* of the 1870's.

The Republic had celebrated its Centennial in July, 1876, with oratory and fireworks. Exactly a year later, the industrial working class of the nation celebrated *its* coming of age. Oratory was common to both celebrations; but the fireworks of July, 1877, took the form, in Baltimore and Pittsburgh, of lethal gunfire and blazing freight cars. In St. Louis, things took a different turn, but one that seemed, to many, even more ominous.

II

SUNDAY, JULY 22ND

"To render thanks . . . for property destroyed
at the hands of the people!"

Respectable St. Louisans, sitting down to ample Sunday breakfasts and the calm perusal of the *Republican* or the *Globe-Democrat*, had their appetites ruined this summer morning by the horrifying news from Baltimore and Pittsburgh. "REIGN OF THE CANAILLE!", blared the *Republican;* "GLUTTED WITH GORE!", shrieked the *Globe-Democrat.* The *Republican* and the *Globe-Democrat* were the city's two most important newspapers – in each case, their politics were exactly the opposite suggesed by their names. The *Westliche Post* and the *Anzeiger des Westens* were the two principal daily papers in the German language. Beginning on Sunday, these and the other St. Louis newspapers would, for a full week, devote more than half their space to strike news, local and national: as one paper put it, "The war in Turkey will be suspended until the conclusion of the great American strike," and only the patent medicine advertisements mitigated the wartime aspect of the press. Dr. Radway's Ready Relief, his Sarsaparillian Resolvent (The Great Blood Purifier), and his Regulating Pills, all publicly and enthusiastically endorsed by the New York political boss, Thurlow Weed, kept their usual full-column ads. The nation was, in fact, undergoing a purge fully as drastic as any provided by Dr. Radway's pills.

While denouncing the strike, most of the papers could still express sympathy for the strikers: the *Globe-Democrat* remarked that there could be "no analogy between a man whose scanty ration of bread and meat has been cut in half, and a man whose mortgages only net him three percent instead of six"; and another paper went so far as to declare that "if the laboring men of this

country must choose between revolution and abject submission to the heartless demands of capital, they will certainly not be condemned by the *Journal* if they prefer war to starvation"!

The abyss that suddenly opened before men of property, on Sunday, July 22nd, created less consternation in St. Louis than might have been expected. This was due, perhaps, to the semi-comatose condition which is a usual result of the city's summer climate, and to the fact that many business men were at various summer resorts, getting rid of their catarrh and their creditors. Neither employers nor municipal authorities appear to have felt, on Sunday, that there was any serious danger of disturbances in St. Louis similar to those already occurring in the Eastern cities. But however sober the St. Louis workingman might be, he could not have escaped having his faith in established institutions shaken by national events and given an extra jolt by local events.

As for economic institutions, their collapse had been revealed over several years by the steadily mounting unemployment, and, most dramatically, by the series of bank suspensions which had begun in St. Louis on July 10th, and continued right up to the beginning of the strike. As for political institutions, their breakdown had been disclosed by the revelations of flagrant corruption during the Grant administration, by the Hayes-Tilden election stalemate, and locally by the corruption revealed in municipal affairs during the mayoralty election of 1876 – also a contested election – when the city chose its first German-born mayor, Henry Overstolz.

Mayor Overstolz was an easy-going man, and apparently felt there was no need to take precautions against rioting in St. Louis. He went for a drive, and then spent the day quietly at home. There had been no serious interruption of rail traffic at or near St. Louis since 1873, when a strike of engineers and firemen had blocked traffic at Moberly, Missouri. On that occasion, a detachment of St. Louis police had travelled over a hundred miles, to Moberly, to restore order, and did so without difficulty. There were, in fact, too few railroad employees in St. Louis to cause any concern. More concern was felt about the railroad center just

across the river, whose population consisted chiefly of railroad employees.

The railroad strike, having spread as far west as Chicago, must inevitably reach East St. Louis, Illinois, which (taken together with St. Louis), constituted a western railroad center second only to Chicago in importance. A network of railroads from the North, South, and East converged on this drab collection of railroad yards, sheds, and rickety wooden buildings housing the railroad workers and the purveyors of food, drink and lodging to them. Freight and passengers for St. Louis and points farther west were taken over at the Relay Depot in East St. Louis, and moved across the Mississippi via the new Eads Bridge and a tunnel on the Missouri side, to the new Union Depot in St. Louis, located at 12th and Poplar. East St. Louis, a town of under 9,000 population, was, in fact, a connecting link between the eastern and the western railroad systems, and a center of vital strategic importance to both strikers and railroad companies. But, up to Saturday, July 21st, there had been no sign on either side of the river of any move to mobilize the railroad employees.

On Saturday night, the first strike meeting in the vicinity of St. Louis seems to have taken place. A large meeting of employees of a number of lines met in East St. Louis and adopted resolutions expressing support of the strike *in the Eastern states*. Some kind of committee may have been elected; but its purpose was not, apparently, to issue a strike call in East St. Louis.

The papers reported, on Sunday, much bitterness among railroad employees, with regard to the recent wage cuts, which left many of the brakemen, switchmen, yardmen, and shop employees with less than their rock-bottom cost of living. Railroad officials, for the most part, could not approve of even the mildest expressions of sympathy for the strikers, and refused to consider complaints, or put them off with pious phrases.

Before noon on Sunday, there may have been some stoppage of freight traffic at East St. Louis, even before a formal strike call had been issued. But it was on Sunday night that the full force of the storm struck East St. Louis: At Traubel's Hall, representatives of a number of lines assembled: the Ohio & Mississippi; Indiana-

polis & St. Louis; St. Louis & Southeastern; Vandalia, Rockford & Rock Island; Cairo Short Line; Cairo & St. Louis (Narrow Gauge); and probably the Union Railway & Transit Company, the sole link between St. Louis and East S. Louis. At this meeting, an Executive Committee was elected which, henceforth, would direct the strike on the East Side. The exact structure and membership of the East St. Louis Committee is unknown; but it is clear that it represented various roads and branches of railroad labor; and it would appear that this broad committee chose a smaller committee of perhaps not more than five members, which actually directed the East St. Louis strike during the next few days. Similar Committees came into existence in a number of other cities in the course of the Great Strike.

With a speed, efficiency and discipline unequalled by any other strike center, the East St. Louis railroaders clamped down the blockade. "General Order No. 1" stopped all freight traffic after midnight. Passenger and mail traffic were not to be interfered with.

At a great open-air meeting at the Relay Depot, the strikers cheered speakers of their own and various well-wishers, including visitors from the Missouri side, and at least one East St. Louis politician, Judge William G. Kase, a former member of the State Legislature, who declared thunderously that that very morning, in church, he had rendered thanks "not only for property gained, but for property *destroyed at the hands of the people*" – a reference to the rioting in the East. The strikers themselves, in their speeches, did not express such fiery sentiments, but confined themselves to forthright presentation of their grievances against the railroads and free-swinging attacks on the "monopolies". Operators at the telegraph offices continually took off dispatches to be read to the crowd; and a St. Louis paper commented on the "unanimity with which each and every announcement of disasters to the militia in Pittsburgh was cheered."

It is noteworthy that in all the newspaper reports of the strike in East St. Louis there is no mention of the established brotherhoods of railway labor. Of these, the only one strong enough to play any role in the strike would have been the Brotherhood of

Locomotive Engineers; but the engineers took little or no interest in the problems of lesser categories of railroad labor, and as a matter of policy, stood aside from strike movements. In East St. Louis, (as was the case in most rail centers), no pre-existing organization fomented the strike, and no new organization emerged from it. However, at the East Side mass meeting of the railroaders, on Sunday night, there were visiting speakers from St. Louis who represented an organization that would very quickly assume leadership of the strike movement on the *Missouri* side of the river. This organization was the Workingmen's Party of the United States; and it sent as speakers three of the principal leaders of its St. Louis branches or *sections*, as they were called.

These men were Peter A. Lofgreen, Albert Currlin, and Henry F. Allen. Another speaker from St. Louis, Thomas Curtis, while perhaps not a member of the Workingmen's Party, would achieve a notoriety equal to the others in connection with the strike in St. Louis. The Workingmen's Party does not appear to have had a section in East St. Louis in 1877; but it had at least one influential member there, Harry Eastman, a railroad machinist who was Chairman of the East St. Louis strikers' Executive Committee, and whose invitation may have brought Lofgreen, Currlin, Allen and Curtis to the mass meeting.

The Workingmen's Party was a socialist organization with a membership made up primarily of Germans, who tended to be solid trade unionists not easily roused to revolutionary fervor; the "Americans" in the Party, much in the minority, were a cross-section of the confused anti-monopoly and Greenback radicalism of the seventies. Lofgreen was an untypical spokesman for the latter group: he had the appearance of a German, but was actually a German-speaking Dane; he was about thirty-one years of age, and one of those rare party members who could speak fluent English. He was a graduate of the University of Copenhagen, had come to America in 1867, taught German in the Milwaukee schools, had studied law and had been admitted to the Chicago bar. By the end of 1873, he had settled in St. Louis. Under a new name, he began a new life; he did not practice law, but was employed by the *Globe-Democrat* as a clerk, and prior to 1877 had

acquired only some small notoriety as a freethinker. In the summer of 1877, he was Financial Secretary of the English, (that is, English speaking), section of the Workingmen's Party.

Currlin, spokesman for the larger German section of the party, was even younger: in 1877, he was only twenty-four years of age. He was an effective orator, though in German only. He had come to the United States in 1874, to escape military service, as was the case with so many German emigrants. He had lived first in New York, and then in Philadelphia. In the latter city, he had become active in the German-American socialist movement, where his ability soon won him recognition. He was a baker or confectioner by trade, and mostly self-educated, though he was able to create an impression that suggested he had had a university education in Germany. He seems to have come to St. Louis early in 1876; and in the summer of 1877 was a full-time functionary of the German section of the Workingmen's Party, at a salary of thirty dollars per month – about as much as a railroad worker was able to earn.

These two men were the leading spokesmen of the Workingmen's Party in St. Louis. Henry F. Allen was a more typical representative of the English-speaking socialists than Lofgreen. He was a confused and worried little man, a sign-painter, self-taught physician, and Swedenborgian, whose connection with the socialists dated back at least to 1871. He was a Utopian social reformer of a kind common in the seventies, uninfluenced by even the diluted Marxism of the Workingmen's Party. It is hard to see how he could have been regarded as anything but quite harmless.

Thomas Curtis was an Englishman of fifty-eight, the owner of a news or book stand, who gave the impression of being of more than ordinary intelligence and, while not an official spokesman of the Workingmen's Party, acquired the reputation of being "the most dangerous speaker the strike brought forward," as one St. Louis newspaper put it. He had, indeed, a trenchant oratorical style; but he was an old-fashioned equalitarian radical rather than a revolutionary; and much of the horror he inspired among respectable St. Louisans was due to his vigorous espousal of atheism and anti-clericalism. This was his chief interest, rather than poli-

tics; he had, in fact, founded the first organization of freethinkers in Philadelphia, as far back as 1850.

For a year prior to the strike, the Workingmen's Party had been publicly but inconspicuously carrying on its activities in St. Louis, attracting little or no attention and agitating not for insurrection but for an orderly program of social legislation. The Workingmen's Party as a national organization had been founded in July, 1876, at a conference in Philadelphia, which brought about the amalgamation of several German-American socialist groups which had been feuding for years over questions of doctrine and policy which had their roots in disputes among the socialists of Germany between followers of that brilliant *bon vivant* and architect of the German labor movement, Ferdinand Lassalle, and that dour and vituperative scholar, Karl Marx. The Lassalleans emphasized *political* activity, and dismissed the trade unions as insufficiently socialist in character; the Marxists emphasized the importance of building the unions, and feared the consequences of premature ventures into politics.

The program of the Workingmen's Party was a compromise which pledged the socialists to "turn their back on the ballot-box" for the time being, and concentrate on building the unions; it put forward demands for legislation prohibiting child labor, setting up a system of factory inspection, establishing State bureaus of labor statistics, and similar legislation regarded as profoundly subversive in the 1870's. The program ended with more far-reaching proposals for government ownership of railroads, telegraph lines and all means of transportation – in fact *all* industrial enterprises.

The new party had less than three thousand members at its founding; in July, 1877, it seems unlikely that it had more than 4,500 members, although, during and following the Great Strike, fantastic over-estimates of the party's membership, (in one case, 600,000!), gained currency. In St. Louis, at the beginning of the strike, the party had perhaps a thousand members, organized into German, English, French, and Bohemian-speaking sections or branches. The German section, with around six hundred members, was by far the largest.

When the party held a picnic in June, 1877, there was certainly

no cause for alarm in the *gemütlich* gathering of workingmen and their families around a beer barrel in Lindell Park. So little of the reputation of wild revolutionaries did these people have, that the German and English sections of the Workingmen's Party were officially invited to join in the city's Fourth of July parade. Both sections turned down the invitation, with caustic references to the plight of the nation's workers. But this passed unnoticed; and even when the news of the strike on the East Side reached St. Louis employers, they could not have felt they had anything to fear from such an organization and from such leaders as Lofgreen, Currlin, and Allen. On the afternoon of Sunday, July 22nd, when the strike reached the railroad center on the east bank of the Mississippi, the German section of the Workingmen's Party, meeting at the St. Louis Turner Hall, was concerned with nothing more revolutionary than listening to Albert Currlin discuss "The Laws of Solon in Contrast to the Corrupt Conditions of the Present Day." A lecture about ancient Greece on a warm, Sunday afternoon could not even have kept all of his audience *awake*. But on this harmless note the week of the "St. Louis Commune" began.

As for the city's trade unions, the disastrous decline in membership that they had suffered during the preceding four years was well known to the employers. Although unions or the remnants of unions existed in many trades and industries, the general strike would not be of their making. In the summer of 1877, there was not even a Trades' Assembly of what unions remained; and there was no newspaper representing the interests of labor.

The Order of the Knights of Labor had only a scattered membership outside the Eastern states. In St. Louis, a local Assembly was not established until after the general strike, nor did the Order take root in East St. Louis until later. But it did have at least two members in St. Louis, that summer, who were actively concerned with furthering its aims; and one of these, Joseph N. Glenn, a shoe workers' organizer, would become one of the leaders of the general strike.

Of all the organized trades, only the iron molders, the steel workers, and the cabinet makers or furniture workers seem to have identified themselves wholeheartedly with the strike. It was

principally these trades that had preserved their organizational morale. The other unions were simply too feeble to play any significant role in the strike; and craft barriers and union officials alike were swept aside by the tidal wave of employed and unemployed, organized and unorganized.

The support of the German furniture workers' union was guaranteed by the fact that many of its members were also members of the Workingmen's Party; as for the iron molders and steel workers, they had shown some militancy even during the depression. In the fall of 1876, there had been a prolonged strike at the great Vulcan Iron Works, in Carondelet, which the company had attempted to break by importing Alsatian workers.

Carondelet, on the extreme south end of St. Louis, where James B. Eads had built his iron-clad gunboats during the Civil War, was a concentration point of heavy industry: iron furnaces, zinc works, foundries. It was also a focal point of labor unrest. On Saturday night, (July 21st), a meeting had been held there in support of the railroad strikers everywhere, and Albert Currlin and P. A. Lofgreen, of the St. Louis Workingmen's Party, were among the speakers; another was Martin Becker, who would soon become an important figure in the strike at Carondelet. No move to call a general strike resulted from this meeting; but it may be said that in Carondelet the first signs of the strike appeared.

At the Union Depot in St. Louis, on the evening of Sunday, July 22nd, there was a marked absence of passengers, and long lines of Pullmans and sleepers pulled out almost empty. Travelers, frightened by the news from Pittsburgh, decided not to proceed further East, and returned to their residences and hotels. Fifty United States cavalrymen, who had been quartered at the St. Louis Arsenal, were leaving by train, and were jeered by a group of railroad workers. This was about the only incident on the Missouri side of the river.

But one resident of St. Louis was not reassured; he took a far more gloomy view of the situation than Mayor Overtolz; and in the behind-the-scenes history of the St. Louis strike, as indeed in the strike throughout several Midwestern states, his activities were of crucial significance. James H. Wilson, once a famous cavalry

officer under Grant, and in 1877, one of the Receivers of the St. Louis & Southeastern Railway, wrote a personal letter to Carl Schurz, Secretary of the Interior in the Cabinet of President Hayes. In this letter, (written prior to the Sunday evening mass meeting in East St. Louis), Wilson stated that he foresaw serious trouble ahead, and urged immediate and resolute action by the Federal government. As manager of property in the custody of the United States Courts he would not, he declared, allow his employees to fix their own rates of pay nor dictate to him in any manner what his policy should be.

Wilson's interest in the Southeastern dated back much earlier than his appointment as Receiver of that railroad. He had been actively connected with it from the beginning, as promoter, contractor, director and vice-president. In this emergency, he could make use of an influential network of relatives, business and military associates, and political friends. And his zeal in behalf of the company and against the strikers was perhaps augmented by the circumstance that the strike was unexpectedly interfering with the completion of a personal and profitable business venture involving the purchase of St. Louis & Southeastern bonds.

Carl Schurz, to whom Wilson would transmit, in the course of the next week, a series of increasingly urgent reports, suggestions, and demands, was as Secretary of the Interior, a key figure in the formation of Federal policy in the strike. His ties with St. Louis were close, as a former United States Senator from Missouri and one-time leader of the Liberal Republican movement in the State. In 1877, he still retained a financial interest in St. Louis' leading German newspaper, the *Westliche Post*, which would soon find itself in some trouble, as a consequence of its opposition to the general strike.

During the coming week, there would take place a three-cornered consultation, by wire, between Wilson, in St. Louis, Circuit Judge Thomas Drummond, in Chicago, (by whose appointment Wilson was Receiver of the Southeastern), and District Judge W. Q. Gresham, in Indianapolis. Judge Gresham had, in July, 1877, two important roads entering East St. Louis in receivership under his jurisdiction: the St. Louis & Southeastern, and the Ohio

& Mississippi. The former extended from Nashville, through Evansville, to St. Louis; the latter from Cincinnati to St. Louis. At one time, a large part of the railroad mileage in Illinois and Wisconsin had been operated by Receivers appointed by Judge Drummond and the U. S. District Judges of those States. The saying was that "God rules in Israel, but Thomas Drummond rules in the Seventh Circuit."

On Sunday night, following the strikers' mass meeting, Wilson wired the Secretary of the Interior a report of that meeting, again characterizing the situation as alarming, and inquiring if there were any United States troops at the U. S. Arsenal in St. Louis, which could be used in an emergency. He placed his services at the disposal of the government; but it would soon become apparent that what Mr. Wilson actually had in mind was that the United States government should place its services at *his* disposal.

Through the U.S. Signal Service, Federal officials were keeping in touch with local and state officials throughout the nation. In Washington, at the Soldiers' Home, (once the favorite summer retreat of Abraham Lincoln), President Hayes was receiving regular reports. Governor Hartranft of Pennsylvania, caught by the strike in far-off Wyoming Territory, urged the President to use U. S. troops to restore order in his State. Governor Cullom of Illinois urgently requested ammunition from the Rock Island Arsenal.

In Chicago, where the Workingmen's Party had its national headquarters, leaders of the Party were taking an active part in the strike agitation. During the week, Philip Van Patten, National Secretary, and G. A. Schilling and Albert Parsons of the National Committee, would be arrested in connection with the strike. (Parsons, ex-member of the last Republican legislature of Texas, proved a tireless agitator; he would remain one until his tragic end, nine years later, on a Chicago gallows, for the Haymarket bombing).

It was on Sunday the 22nd, that Van Patten sent a letter to all sections of his Party, urging aid for the railroad strikers and emphasizing the Party's chief demands: government ownership of

the railroads and telegraph lines and an eight-hour day in all industry. There is no evidence, however, that Van Patten actually attempted to direct or guide the strike movement, through the local branches of the Workingmen's Party. The initiative that the Party took in St. Louis was quite exceptional.

On Sunday night, in St. Louis, news from the Eastern States "created an excitement more profound and general than any event . . . since the stirring scenes of the rebellion." Across the river, the ominous celebration inaugurating the rail blockade continued to a late hour; the crowds paraded through the streets with a band, and at times the cheering was so loud it could be heard on the Missouri side.

III

MONDAY, JULY 23RD

"General Order No. 1"

Monday morning's *Republican* brought to St. Louisans the sensational news of the Pittsburgh "insurrection". The paper proclaimed the "Reign of Terror" there, and the "Bloody Crisis of the Great Labor Agitation." The military had been overwhelmed and dispersed by the strikers, and the Union Depot in Pittsburgh had been destroyed by fire the previous night, along with miles of loaded freight cars and one hundered thirty-three locomotives. At one time, the destruction of the entire city had been feared. A Vigilance Committee had been organized and armed, and the *Republican* declared that the city had been "Rescued from the Hands of the Mob". But the paper had announced the previous *Friday* that the backbone of the strike movement had been broken. So St. Louisans had reason to doubt, on Monday morning, that Pittsburgh, that shy virgin, had actually been rescued from the mob.

As for the prospects of that well-padded Teutonic maiden, St. Louis, being ravished, the *Republican* could only remark that St. Louis had never been known as a mob city; but it cautioned its readers not to be too confident. The *Republican* mentioned the thousands of Union and Confederate veterans in the city, and suggested that they be organized for the protection of property under the leadership of ex-Generals Smith and Marmaduke, Union and Confederate respectively, and residents of St. Louis. All places where arms were stored or sold should be guarded, and all unusual assemblages should be dispersed. The St. Louis *Times* jeered at the *Republican's* solemn warnings, quoting the latter's phrase about the railroad men striking at "the very vitals of society": on the contrary, said the *Times*, it was "the very vitals of society" which were on strike, "and hungry vitals they are, too!"

From all over the country came reports of the undependability of the militia; and in Washington, pressure was being brought to bear upon the President to send Federal troops into the strike-bound States. Two-thirds of all United States troops in the Military Division of the Atlantic, (embracing twenty-seven of the thirty-eight States), around two thousand men, would be sent into Pennsylvania. And the result would be a new policy of far-reaching consequences, permitting the use of Federal troops to suppress strikes. Railroad officials like Thomas A. Scott of the Pennsylvania and John W. Garrett of the Baltimore & Ohio were urgently demanding of the President that he place the strikers in the position of levying war against the United States, and that the State of Pennsylvania be declared in rebellion. The President was said to be considering the suspension of the right of *habeas corpus*. On July 18th, he had issued, at the request of the Governor of West Virginia, a proclamation concerning the disturbances at Martinsburg, which admonished all against aiding or taking part in "such unlawful proceedings." On July 21st, the President had issued a similar proclamation at the request of the Governor of Maryland, this time referring to "insurgents" and hinting at the use of Federal troops to "suppress insurrection." On July 23rd, he issued a third proclamation, at the request of the Governor of Pennsylvania, who wired the President that there existed, in his state, a "domestic insurrection" which the State authorities were unable to suppress, and that the whole country would soon be in "anarchy and revolution" unless prompt action were taken.

Spurred by James H. Wilson, Receiver of the St. Louis & Southeastern, the Secretary of War authorized General Pope, Commanding General of the Department of the Missouri, at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to send to St. Louis such forces as he could, and to proceed with them himself if necessary.

In East St. Louis, the strikers had taken possession of the Relay Depot, which they made their headquarters; they were in full control of the town, and behaved, on the whole, with coolness and discipline. It was said later that not a pound of freight or a dollar's worth of property was stolen or destroyed in East St. Louis during the strike. The strikers closed all saloons within six

or seven blocks of the Relay Depot, and the following week may well have been the soberest in all East St. Louis' history. Meanwhile, the strike spread to other industries on the East Side: a car works, the stockyards, etc., although East St. Louis being primarily a rail center and only a small town in comparison to the metropolis across the river, the extension of the strike movement beyond the railroads would not reach significant proportions until *St. Louis* became involved.

On Monday afternoon, General Order No. 1, forbidding freight trains to leave any yard, was posted by the Executive Committee, and it brought an immediate reaction. Judge Drummond, at Chicago, gave orders to the U.S. Marshal of the Southern Illinois District to identify anyone who interfered with the operation of the trains of companies under the control of the Federal courts, with a view to eventual punishment. James H. Wilson conferred by wire with U.S. District Judge Gresham, in Indianapolis.

But for the moment, there was no force in East St. Louis capable of resisting the strikers. Mayor John Bowman had only about a dozen police at his disposal, and it was common knowledge that these could not be depended upon for use against the strikers: during the previous year, they had been paid very irregularly, and as a result of a politico-legal imbroglio of a type for which East St. Louis was long famous, there was serious doubt as to whether they had the power to arrest anyone. But the strikers showed no disposition to destroy property, and there were practically no opponents of the strike to be protected; so the Mayor may have felt that the best contribution he could make to law and order was to avoid any provocation of the strikers. He later claimed he took a position of strict neutrality in the strike; but the strikers regarded him as a friend, and men of property formed the worst possible opinion of him.

There were, however, certain facts about Mayor Bowman's past not generally known at the time of the strike which, had they been known, for example, to the St. Louis *Republican*, would probably have led that paper to picture the Mayor as a veritable Arch-Fiend of Anarchy. It is doubtful if Bowman's past actually

sheds any light on his role in the 1877 strike. Yet he may have been one of those German-American politicians whose sound American opportunism was faintly tinged, on occasions, with the radical idealism of their youth.

John Bowman, (originally Bauman), had been involved, as a young man, in the 1848 revolution in Germany or Austria. This, of course, was nothing unusual. So many 48ers settled in St. Louis and vicinity that the 1848 Revolution is almost part of St. Louis history. But Bowman, before he came to America, spent a brief period in London, where he was actively involved in a conspiratorial movement of disappointed revolutionists from all over Europe, known as the Fraternal Democrats. The organization did not last much beyond 1849, and was not in any sense socialist or communist in character but one of democratic nationalists like Mazzini and Kossuth. However, in the spring of 1878, when these facts were revealed in a St. Louis newspaper, some people were no doubt willing to believe that their worst suspicions of Mayor Bowman had been confirmed.

While in London, Bowman may have heard of another revolutionist, the German student, Carl Schurz, who would later rescue from Spandau-penitentiary the poet and democratic leader Johann Gottfried Kinkel. Schurz became United States Senator from Missouri, and, in 1877, was Hayes' Secretary of the Interior. Bowman became Mayor of East St. Louis. Each of the ex-revolutionists found himself in a difficult position, for which each could in some degree blame the other, as a result of the near-revolution of July, 1877. Schurz during his political career, found himself alternately condemned for *being* a dangerous revolutionist and for *not* being true to the revolutionary principles of his youth. When Bowman died in 1885, shot by an unknown assassin, he was praised as a friend of the railroad corporations, while at the same time trade unionists charged that he had been murdered by the Pinkertons, presumably at the order of the "corporations"!

In 1877, Bowman ruled the East Side with an iron hand; he was enough of a political power to make the State authorities cautious about interfering in his bailiwick. While some of the Mayor's subordinates seem to have gone further than he in active

collaboration with the strikers, political expediency demanded that he keep on the good side of the railroad men, who made up most of the population of the town. It was already rumored on Monday that several of the lines were prepared to settle with the strikers; and the Executive Committee appointed Mayor Bowman as an arbitrator, to visit the various companies and see what could be done in the way of negotiation. He reported to the Committee that nearly all of the roads were willing to negotiate with committees of their own employees, but none were willing to go into any "union arrangement". He proposed that the strikers select men whom he would appoint as special police to guard railroad property. The latter proposal was accepted by the strikers; put into effect, it increased the already tight hold the strikers had on the town; but its chief effect was to ingratiate the Mayor with the strikers and outrage the railroad officials and municipal authorities in St. Louis. The Executive Committee refused to negotiate separately with the various lines.

During the day, the superintendent of the bridge company was obliged to go to the Relay Depot and ask that the strikers allow him eight or ten men to attend to the switches at the Relay and approaches. His request was refused, but he was assured that the strikers would see to it that trains passed safely, and would pay switchmen out of their own funds. This was done, and no trouble of any kind occurred from the handling of switches. The strikers took possession of several engines for their own use, to transport committees and messages from point to point.

The strikers also controlled the telegraph lines between the Relay Depot in East St. Louis and the Union Depot in St. Louis, which became the center of the *railroad* strike on the Missouri side. St. Louis merchants were becoming concerned because they could not move merchandise which had arrived for them in East St. Louis or which was waiting there for shipment east. The transfer drivers on the East side were on strike.

In St. Louis, no one knew exactly what to expect, and the most exaggerated rumors were current in the streets. Crowds stood before the bulletin boards of the newspapers, eagerly reading the news that was posted each half-hour. Among the city's industrial-

ists, the easy optimism of the week-end was beginning to wear thin; and the more prosperous citizens, over their midday meal at Tony Faust's renowned Café and Oyster House, were coming to the conclusion that something had better be done about the situation. At Faust's, in rooms lavishly decorated with walnut panels and plate-glass mirrors, one could ordinarily enjoy "delicate brook trout, the most delicious wines, the excellent Anheuser beer, a fragrant cigar," and be at ease. But such amenities did not provide their usual satisfaction on this Monday. The uproarious events of the next few days would preclude such quiet pleasures — which may have been just as well, since the trout was not arriving on schedule.

Mayor Overstolz addressed a letter to the managers of the various railroads, in which he referred to the deplorable consequences of a railroad strike and suggested that, while the managers could not be expected to yield to "arbitrary and extravagant exactions," the strikers' demand for the rescinding of reductions in pay for certain categories of employees was "not wholly unreasonable." This approach did not please the railroads, and the Mayor got nowhere. His troubles had just begun. The Police Commissioners began to concentrate their force at the Four Courts Building and arm the police with rifles. Yet during the day there was no real disturbance anywhere in the city.

Some railroads, on Monday, reported no difficulties on the Missouri side of the river; others were blockaded by the strike. The news was conflicting. The Missouri Pacific agreed to the demands of its shop employees in St. Louis and granted a wage increase of about twenty-five cents a day, which seems to have amounted to a restoration of the pay scale prior to January 1st, 1877. On the basis of this settlement, the railroad announced on Tuesday that it was prepared to accept all freight. But separate agreements of this sort were not approved by the railroaders' Executive Committee; and on Tuesday a committee from East St. Louis enforced the "all or none" rule.

A delegation of shop employees of the Iron Mountain line, which had its terminus in Carondelet, demanded that the company rescind the ten percent wage-cut of the previous January,

and establish a regular monthly pay-day. (This road was reported to be about four months behind in its pay-roll). The Union Railway & Transit Company, handling all traffic between St. Louis and East St. Louis, withdrew a scheduled wage reduction. On Monday evening, however, the switchmen at St. Louis' Union Depot went on strike.

But the developing strike in St. Louis would not be based on the railroads. Some lines out of the city, west of the Mississippi, do not appear to have been completely shut down, as regards freight shipments, at any time, though a number of such lines were certainly affected by the strike far beyond St. Louis. In Carondelet, at the south end of the city, there was a mass meeting Monday evening attended by both railroad men and employees of the Vulcan Iron Works, where there had been a prolonged strike the year before. This latter meeting may have signalled the transition from the railroad strike to the general strike.

But there was another mass meeting that evening, in the very heart of St. Louis, at Lucas Market, located in the middle of what is now Twelfth Street, from Chestnut to Olive. This market, where, twenty years before, a down-at-heel ex-officer named Ulysses S. Grant had sold wood from his father-in-law's farm, was on the western boundary of the business district and near the Four Courts Building and the City Hall. It was a market where just about everything was sold, and was regarded, in 1877, as something of a nuisance, bad for property values. Mass meetings of various kinds were often held there. During the last week of July, when Lucas Market became the very symbol of the "reign of the canaille," it had a very bad effect indeed on property values.

The Lucas Market mass meeting was called by the Workingmen's Party, which up to that time had done nothing more to attract attention than march a few hundred German-American socialists to East St. Louis the previous evening for the purpose of expressing sympathy for the railroad strike. That such a small and obscure organization could, at hardly more than a moment's notice, mobilize a mass meeting of such size and enthusiasm as the one which astounded St. Louisans on Monday night, must have caused employers and municipal authorities to radically revise

their views as to the volume of popular discontent and its possible consequences. The wide range of estimates in the press, of the size of the crowd, from 500 in the St. Louis *Westliche Post*, to 25,000 in the Chicago *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, suggests that everyone was too surprised to see anything very clearly. The *Westliche Post* was bitter that German-Americans should get mixed up in such doings, and so, no doubt, minimized the meeting; the Chicago paper was an organ of the Workingmen's Party, and might be expected to exaggerate. The estimates of four or five thousand are probably closer to the truth. But the impression is created that the crowds at all the Lucas Market mass meetings were constantly in motion; and as many as twice that number may very well have circulated through the market on Monday evening: a very large gathering for a city of not more than 300,000 population. Observers declared that no such demonstration had ever before taken place in the city, certainly not during the recent election campaign.

By half-past seven, a large crowd had gathered around a transfer wagon in the center of the market, which served as a speaker's stand. The newspapers agreed that the meeting was free from disorder, that the appearance of the workingmen was respectable enough, and that the speeches were *not* of the "cut-and-dried political order" but "came from the heart" and held the attention of the crowd. P. A. Lofgreen, the Workingmen's Party spokesman in the English language, was elected chairman. As the meeting proceeded, the crowd grew to such proportions that a second speaker's stand was set up at some distance, and then a third, so that three meetings were going on at once.

"All the speakers," declared the *Republican*, "spoke in deep sympathy with the strikers, generally premising their remarks with an outline of the difficulties and privation in the way of making a living by honest toil. . . . It was the sight of wives and children, hungry and unprovided for, which was driving them to assert what they believed to be their rights. . . . Denunciations were unsparingly showered on officials now in office – notably members of the municipal assembly – and upon Mayor Overstolz, for not using sufficient diligence in placing public work to give employment to idle men."

Among the speakers were Albert Currlin, who spoke in German, and Thomas Curtis, who have been mentioned in connection with the Sunday mass meeting in East St. Louis. There was also Joseph N. Glenn, a shoe workers' organizer, who deserves to be specially noted because he is the only leader of the St. Louis strike who can be positively identified as a member of the secret Order of the Knights of Labor. (He had been elected a national officer of the Knights at a conference in Pittsburgh the previous May). Glenn spoke with even more vigor than generally characterized the orators at the mass meetings: he evoked the days when the people of France had "become desperate with hunger and feasted on blood," and when the English Chartists had taken possession of the streets of London and had "proceeded to help themselves." The chairman introduced a Negro speaker, whose remarks were frequently applauded.

The meeting then adjourned, at about 11 P.M., after electing a committee of five to "wait upon Mayor Overstolz and request him to inform the Governor of Pennsylvania of the sympathy of this meeting with the suffering laborers"; and that the Mayor be invited to request the President of the United States *not* to send troops to St. Louis. The committee consisted of P. A. Lofgreen, Thomas Curtis, the Negro speaker referred to only as Wilson, James McCarthy, and James E. Cope.

McCarthy and Cope were two more members of the Workingmen's Party who would become well known during the next few days. McCarthy, like Glenn, was a shoe worker, and an "uncouth though fluent speaker" with a "phenomenal voice." Cope is of more interest; like the Mayor of East St. Louis, he had a past which might have been used against him, had it become known during the strike. He was organizer of the "English" or "American" section of the Workingmen's Party. He is described as a small, sallow-skinned, gray-haired man, of around fifty-four years, a shoe-fitter by trade, and an active union organizer. He was an Englishman, and his sallow skin was the brand of the English factory system. Friedrich Engels' grim picture of *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* was the reality of Cope's youth; those were the same years that saw the great pop-

ular uprising known as the Chartist Movement; and Cope's adult life in England was during the period of the beginnings of trade unionism and the fierce struggle for factory legislation.

In 1864, he had been a delegate from the Bootclosers' Society to the London Trades' Council, members of which sat on the Central Provisional Council of the International Workingmen's Association, the notorious First International of the socialists, which was founded in London in 1864. Cope became a member of the I.W.A.'s Central Provisional Council; and his union, the bootmakers, was one of two British unions to affiliate with the International. George Odger, a bootmaker and friend of Cope, was Secretary of the London Trades' Council and first President of the International. Cope was still a member of the General Council of the International during 1865-67, though he did not serve on the permanent Central Council of the I.W.A. He was still living in London in 1868-69, and when he came to America is not known. It is possible that his attention was turned to St. Louis by the report Karl Marx made to the I.W.A., in 1865, in the course of which he commented on the publication, that same year, of a long excerpt from his *Inaugural Address* to the I.W.A. in a St. Louis labor paper, the *Daily Press*.

No reference to Cope as a founder of the dreaded International appears in the St. Louis papers either during or subsequent to the general strike. And, in fact, the First International no longer existed in 1877, though its entirely undeserved reputation as the fountainhead of Revolution still lingered. In 1872, Marx and Engels had succeeded in having the General Council of the International transferred from London to New York, as a means of preventing Bakunin and the anarchists from gaining control of the Council. Marx felt that the I.W.A. had outlived its usefulness and could be allowed to quietly die in the wilderness of the United States, as indeed it did. The Philadelphia congress of the socialists, in 1876, at which the Workingmen's Party was founded, dissolved the moribund First International.

In the summer of 1877, there were three stages in the development of the International represented in St. Louis, by individuals conspicuously connected with the strike: the remote origins of the

International, in 1849, in the person of John Bowman, Mayor of East St. Louis; the actual founding and first years of the International, in the person of James Cope; and the end of the International in the person of Albert Currlin, who had been a delegate to the Philadelphia congress of 1876.

The Monday night mass meeting suddenly conjured up the ghost of the International to frighten prosperous and peaceable St. Louisans as they had never been frightened before and would never be frightened again. Yet no call for a general strike issued from the Monday night meeting, nor does it appear that the *St. Louis* Executive Committee, which would direct the general strike, was formed on Monday night, though Albert Currlin later claimed that delegations from various unions attended the meeting.

A speaker at the mass meeting who was tactfully ignored by some of the papers, was the Reverend John Snyder, minister of a fashionable Unitarian church. He urged the workingmen to organize for political action. Evidently his parishioners were not pleased by his presence at the meeting, and he was obliged to explain, in the press, that he had attended the meeting merely for informational purposes. He denied sharing the strikers' opinions, but also denied that they were "Bummers", "Communists", or "Red Republicans". Dr. Snyder was about the only well-known citizen to say even that much for the strikers, publicly and during the strike.

Monday night, the police received word that there was to be an attack on the offices of the *Republican.* (The *Daily Journal* commented on the "general indignation manifested against the *Republican* on account of its attitude towards the strikers"). Hose was attached to fire-plugs throughout the *Republican* Building, and a special guard of police was detailed to watch over what the *Journal* referred to as the "sacred thing". As long as the *Republican* was safe, the foundations of society, in St. Louis, were still intact.

Elsewhere, it was not so certain. In Reading, Pennsylvania, on Monday night, strikers were being shot down by the militia. In San Francisco, a mass meeting was taken over by anti-Chinese

rowdies; and the strike degenerated into prolonged rioting, out of which that redoubtable demagogue, Dennis Kearney, formed his own Workingmen's Party, (not connected with the socialist party having its headquarters in Chicago), and came briefly to power in California. At Kansas City, a "monster meeting" of railroad workers declared a general strike, to begin Tuesday noon, and demanded the restoration of wage rates as of January 1st, 1874. Reporting this meeting, the *Western Watchman*, St. Louis Catholic weekly, remarked that it was "unnecessary to state" that the railroad employees had "the sympathy of the entire community." In Chicago, thousands of workmen assembled in a mass meeting, and the movement for a general strike there got under way.

Reporting on the increasing tension in Chicago, the *Globe-Democrat* gave the text of circulars and manifestoes distributed by the Workingmen's Party there. This publicity given the Party's agitation in Chicago may have contributed to the ease with which it took control of the strike in St. Louis. The highly colored reports on the spread of disaffection westward, must have had some effect in mobilizing workingmen to action in several cities. Chicago businessmen, in fact, called upon the editor of the city's first penny newspaper, to urge him, without success, to suspend publication, in order that his workingclass readers might not become further inflamed by the strike news.

In view of the outcry in the press over the way tramps were alleged to be flocking to the cities to take advantage of the disorders of the strike, the story of one tramp who, somewhere in Kansas or Missouri, was slowly making his way east on Monday night, provides an odd footnote to the Great Strike. His name was Nikolai Vassilevich Chaikovski; and in the circumstances of his failure as a settler in Kansas, in his appearance, in his meager knowledge of English, he was like thousands of other emigrants who wandered back through St. Louis after finding the reality of life in the West vastly different from the picture in the railroad prospectus. He was, however, a man of education, trained as a chemist; and some years previously, at the University of St. Petersburg, had helped to organize what became known as the

"Chaikovski Circle", a seed-bed of the Russian revolutionary movement.

Lacking sympathy for conspirative and terrorist activities, he drifted into what he termed later "religious self-absorption". Seeking an environment in which he could carry on his spiritual search, he led a group to America in 1875, and founded an agricultural commune in southeast Kansas. It lasted about two years. At the end of July, 1877, he was on his way east, as a slightly superior kind of tramp, bribing freight conductors along the way. He was almost immediately caught in the strike. It took him *twenty-three* days to reach Philadelphia, and aged him ten years. He had to *walk* over four hundred miles. The hardships of a tramp's life –farmers were often unwilling to give him even a cup of water – brought him to the brink of suicide.

Most American socialists in the 1870's looked forward only to an ideal Commune like that the Russians tried to found in Kansas. But as the little colony in Kansas broke up, the events in Baltimore and Pittsburgh suddenly caused Americans to speculate on the possibility of another kind of Commune, the 1871 Parisian variety. The Monday night mass meeting at Lucas Market seemed to point in that direction; even more did the military preparations of the city government. It was on Monday night that Company A of the National Guard met at its armory and prepared for action. One hundred breech-loading Remingtons owned by Company A were transferred secretly to the Four Courts Building, together with ammunition; and the members of the unit made their way, as inconspicuously as possible, to the Four Courts, where they took up quarters, with three thousand rounds of ammunition distributed by nine that night.

In sweltering tenements, something besides the heat kept the poor from their sleep: the excitement of the time when the canaille turn on their masters, eager for one bite in return for many kicks..

IV

TUESDAY, JULY 24TH

"An awfully suggestive spectacle . . ."

On Tuesday morning, the *Republican*, exhausted already by superlatives, presented the news under a simple and comprehensive title: "The Great Strike". The Middle West was now involved, and a blockade of freight traffic prevailed in many cities. The Pennsylvania Central and the Erie railroads refused to compromise with the strikers, but the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific were said to have come to terms. In Pittsburgh, the "Better Classes" were "Becoming Very Bitter" – as well they might, with the "Damage . . . Estimated at Ten Millions." Nearby, in Allegheny City, young Robert Ammon, who had for three days held absolute control of that important railway center on the Pennsylvania line, (and ruled without mistake or accident, in the words of the Pittsburgh *Post*), resigned his leadership and withdrew to what the newspapers termed his vine-covered cottage and the solace of his wife and child. He was said to have objected to any limitation of his authority by his own organization. But "Boss Ammon" remained a dread symbol of anarchy and revolution; and the strike continued in full force at Allegheny City after Ammon's withdrawal. In Philadelphia, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, and Chicago, the situation was menacing. In Indiana, Benjamin Harrison, who twelve years later would become President of the United States, was leading the militia against the strikers, and later would prosecute their leaders in the courts.

President Hayes and his Cabinet met on Tuesday morning. The President was optimistic: his personal notes of this meeting record that the strike was spreading but that violence was diminishing, and United States troops were "everywhere respected". Troops were "wanted at New York to guard 100,000,000 U.S. treasure" there; and the Secretary of the Navy proposed that a monitor be

sent to New York "to clear streets around Custom House", a proposal which aroused the wit of other Cabinet members: the Secretary of the Treasury thought that the streets around the Custom House were "too crooked" to be cleared by any such simple means, but the Secretary of State remarked that "the big guns will straighten them."

In Missouri, the strike had spread all the way across the State, and disturbed Kansas City for some five days. At Sedalia, Missouri, the employees of the Missouri, Kansas & Texas struck for the cancellation of wage-cuts and for three months' back pay owing to them. At Hannibal, north of St. Louis, the workers on the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy and the Hannibal & St. Joseph lines joined the strike. The latter road acceded to the strikers' demands. The Hannibal *Clipper*, in an editorial unusually favorable to the strikers, declared that "The mighty army of the dust-besmeared firemen and brakemen have suddenly come forward with a raging demand, which startles the country and compels the most respectful attention, and before which the great railroad kings and monied aristocracy, heretofore all powerful, are impotent."

In St. Louis, the *Daily Journal* remarked prophetically that "if one-half of the promises of the leaders of the movement are fulfilled, there will be plenty of excitement during the next few days." The *Daily Market Reporter*, summarizing the news that afternoon, declared roundly that not a freight car was moving between the Mississippi and the Atlantic, and all the trunk lines centering on East St. Louis were idle. The strikers in East St. Louis were "sober and orderly" said the *Reporter*, and the St. Louis authorities had "no fear of any such riotous demonstrations as prevailed in Pennsylvania – the wild mob spirit is unknown here." Most industry was still operating in St. Louis, though perhaps hampered by the supplies of coal from Illinois having been cut off. No call for a general strike had as yet sounded.

The *Republican* lectured the strikers in magisterial tones: they were the victims of "vile demagogues and incendiary agitators," and would only succeed in raising prices; when it was all over, "when passion has calmed, when the peaceful tide of life once

more ebbs and flows with unruffled waters, when the books of the great social machine are balanced, the rich are found richer and the poor poorer."

The Chicago *Tribune* stated that there were grave apprehensions in St. Louis of developments of the "most disastrous and sanguinary character." The meeting of the "Internationalists" at Lucas Market on Monday night had "served to set the lower classes on fire," said the *Tribune*, and rumors were mentioned to the effect that Eads bridge was to be burned and the railway tunnel dynamited.

The *Globe-Democrat* began to pay attention to the Workingmen's Party, and warned the "real workingmen" that the "Communists" were "making artful and determined efforts to utilize the movement so as to bring themselves out on top."

As a matter of fact, the Workingmen's Party had no need to be particularly artful or determined in order to take over the leadership of the strike in St. Louis. Only the slightest jar was required to set the avalanche in motion, and the Workingmen's Party provided that jar. From then on, it is difficult to distinguish to what extent the Party *led* the strike movement, and to what extent was *carried along* by it.

The feeling of an avalanche hanging over their heads must, indeed, have been more widespread on Tuesday, within the St. Louis business community, than the easy optimism of the *Market Reporter* would indicate. Although the *Republican* seemed to speak from secure heights, and the *Globe* from an only slightly less elevated position, the St. Louis *Times* was distinctly nervous. It cautioned that military suppression could be made to answer in the case of a riot, but "here we are face to face with a *revolution*"; the proposal that "citizens must arm and organize and put down the lawless strikers" was the "extremity of evil" – it would "change a partial revolution into universal devastation." The *Times* declared that the railroad companies must yield, because they were "in the wrong."

In Illinois, Governor Shelby Cullom issued a proclamation calling upon the people to keep the peace. In East St. Louis, the strikers' Executive Committee posted their "Order No. 2", de-

claring that the strikers' rule was "All or none", and that no one was empowered to settle with any road except the Executive Committee.

Due to some confusion within the Committee on the subject of passenger trains, a Vandalia mail and express train was stopped on the East Side, and the conductor and some lady passengers, who could only think of the horrors of Pittsburgh, were given a bad fright. It was decided, however, that if passenger trains were to be stopped, it should be done at the Union Depot in St. Louis, so that passengers would not be inconvenienced. In any case, the St. Louis & Southeastern, the Ohio & Mississippi, the Chicago & Alton, and other lines, decided to abandon passenger service altogether; the Pennsylvania had already done so. It is likely that the abandonment of passenger service was dictated as much by a desire on the part of the companies to bring a quick crisis in the strike as by actual difficulties in maintaining such service.

The Receiver of the St. Louis & Southeastern, James H. Wilson, wired Secretary of the Interior Schurz, around noon on Tuesday, that the strikers had stopped all passenger trains at East St. Louis, and would permit nothing to go through but the mails, which his line would also have to suspend. He wired later that the U.S. Marshal had come to his assistance, but could do nothing without fifteen hundred or two thousand United States troops.

Throughout the nation, the railroad strike was reaching the peak of its effectiveness; and in East St. Louis, as elsewhere, it tended to spread beyond the railroads, although it was not necessarily the railroad men who took the initiative in this. Packing houses on the East Side were closed down by the strikers without any difficulty; and at one such plant, they permitted the slaughter of one hundred and twenty-five head of cattle on condition that the company donate five hundred cans of beef to the strikers. The company seems to have raised no objection to provisioning the enemy.

East St. Louis was surrounded by coal fields, and it was rumored that the miners were about to join forces with the strikers at East St. Louis. The Merchants' Exchange, in St. Louis, announced, on Tuesday afternoon, that the possibility of the participation of the

coal miners in the strike was "exciting anxiety among all manufacturing interests." The Belleville miners, had, it was rumored, offered fifteen hundred men to the railroad strikers, in case of need.

In St. Louis, the outlines of the general strike began to appear. Albert Currlin, leader of the German section of the Workingmen's Party, declared after the strike that, on Tuesday, workers from different shops and plants began to appear at the Workingmen's Party headquarters at Turner Hall, requesting that committees be sent around to "notify them to stop work and join the other workingmen, that they might have a reason for doing so." And so the Party, having seized the initiative on the Missouri side of the river with the mass meeting of the previous night, did begin to "send around" to the various shops – with results that must have astounded the leaders of the Party.

The coopers went on strike, marching from shop to shop with fife and drum, shouting "come out, come out! No barrels less than nine cents!" There was a partial strike at the St. Louis Gas Works. Newsboys went on strike against the *Dispatch*. And there were walkouts on the levee, among the boatmen: engineers on the packet *City of Helena* won an increase of $10, bringing their wages to $40 a month, and there were other similar increases.

Memoirs of the St. Louis strike are almost non-existent: it was an episode in which no one behaved in a particularly heroic manner, and it could not easily be made into an instructive tale for one's grandchildren. However, one fairly detailed memoir has survived, in the published reminiscences of a businessman named Albert Warren Kelsey. Kelsey, a Bostonian by birth, treats St. Louis institutions and events with the slight condescension that is proper in a Bostonian; and his account of the strike has a mildly acid flavor.

He describes the feelings of himself and his friends on Tuesday by stating that there were "rumors of utter social demoralization from every quarter" – "it appeared as if society was about to be resolved into its original elements." Mr. Kelsey prepared for the dissolution of society into its original elements by filling all the bathtubs in his house with the muddy fluid that St. Louisans used

for water, as it was expected the strikers would shut down the waterworks. And, to provision his residence for a siege, he went so far as to buy a large ham, a kind of meat he could approve of only in an emergency, when fresh meat might not keep. His family was instructed not to undress at night, for fear of fire; and he made arrangements to get them out of town at the first opportunity. Thus many well-to-do families must have spent the evening: with father, in the parlor, fretfully denouncing the irresponsibility of the lower orders and the torpor of the higher orders; with the children, upstairs, whispering together in a state of pleasurable excitement, and with the Irish servant girls keening in the kitchen.

The municipal authorities, too, were waking up to the horrid possibilities of the situation, although they did not fully grasp what was happening until the next day, when they experienced one of those sudden and painful awakenings that snap the teeth together and jar the spine. The thought of Pittsburgh, with its miles of burning freight cars, was in everyone's mind. Mayor Henry Overstolz saw looming before him an abrupt and discreditable end to his political career. The city had only a little over three hundred police available for duty. They were already concentrated about the jail and the law courts, but were worn out from constant duty, night and day, and seemed to offer little protection. As for militia units, there is some confusion as to just how many such organizations were actually in existence in St. Louis at the beginning of the strike, but it is clear that they amounted to very little. Albert Warren Kelsey speaks of three companies of militia, "either ex-Confederates, Germans, or Negroes" – all about equally unreliable, one would gather, from Mr. Kelsey's viewpoint.

It appears probable that the only unit upon which Mayor Overstolz could place much reliance was Company A, 1st Regiment Infantry, Missouri National Guards. This company consisted of one hundred twenty-six men. On the previous evening it had taken its position, fully or almost fully armed, at the Four Courts Building, which the city government had chosen as a strong point. Most of the militia companies in the State, formed after the war, had dissolved by 1875. In the spring of 1877, the General Assem-

bly had finally passed a new militia law, which created the "National Guard of Missouri" as the only organized militia, taking the place of the many private militia companies that had once existed. Provision was made, in the new law, for mobilizing the Guard in civil disorders; but officers were strictly enjoined to maintain a defensive attitude, and to fire on mobs only when absolutely necessary. Company A was part of the Missouri National Guard; the remnants of several of the old private militia units still existed, however, and could furnish a few trained men.

In spite of the alleged incompatibility of "the wild mob spirit" and the St. Louis temperament, it was plainly time to take action, from the standpoint of both city officials and employers. Just who took the initiative, is not clear; but the *Republican's* advice of the previous day was followed: ex-Generals Smith and Marmaduke, representing the North and the South respectively, were put in charge of the resistance to the "revolutionaries."

On Tuesday morning, a number of prominent citizens met in the Mayor's office, to decide what should be done. Among those present were Judge Thomas T. Gantt, General John S. Cavender, General John S. Marmaduke, ex-Governor Thomas C. Fletcher, Colonel D. H. Armstrong of the Board of Police Commissioners, and the ubiquitous James H. Wilson. Captain Pearce, of Company A, National Guard, later declared that he and General Cavender had urged the Mayor on the previous day (Monday) to issue a call at once for eight to ten thousand volunteers. But there is some suggestion that, on Tuesday morning, the Mayor was still not ready to recruit and arm a volunteer militia; and it is not clear what, if any, action issued from the meeting at the Mayor's office. One account remarks bitingly that the formation of a *posse* armed "with canes and clubs" was the most some of the gentlemen present would advise; "eloquence" was made to take the place of a "soldierly plan of campaign."

Albert Warren Kelsey, in the memoirs already referred to, supplies a version of what transpired at the Mayor's office, which, in certain of its most curious details, cannot be confirmed elsewhere. Mr. Kelsey, secure in the knowledge that his bathtubs had been filled with water and there was a large ham in his pantry, set out

that morning with no more intention of getting himself personally involved in the strike than of "taking service under the Sultan of Turkey," although he knew that "a howling mob of would-be Anarchists" had surrounded the Four Courts Building, and the police "were having their utmost energies taxed to hold it against the crowd." (There was, of course, no "howling mob" around the Four Courts on *Tuesday;* Mr. Kelsey was a little ahead of his story). But he ran into Karl Daenzer, editor of the *Anzeiger*, who whispered to him mysteriously to be at the Mayor's office at noon. Kelsey also fell in with a group of clerks and bookkeepers from some of the larger wholesale establishments, whose employers had urged them to enroll in the militia companies about to be formed by the city government and the businessmen; and he resolutely assumed leadership of this group, telling them to remain where they were until he returned with instructions from the Mayor's office.

There he found a secret meeting in session, "a most solemn and portentous assembly of grave and reverend fathers, who bore upon their features such evidence of unwonted perturbation" as gave him a chill. The Mayor was presenting an extremely gloomy report of the situation: no less than *thirty thousand* fully armed socialists, he said, had been planning for a long time to overthrow the city government; the police were worn out; and the Governor at Jefferson City, while he had plenty of arms and ammunition, had an insufficient body of organized militia to cope with the situation. However, a member of the Board of Police Commissioners took issue with the Mayor as to the gravity of the crisis, and proposed that vigorous measures be taken. It was voted that a public meeting be held that same evening to organize the "conservative forces of the community." (Kelsey's account confirms the impression conveyed by others, that the "conservative forces of the community" lost faith in Mayor Overstolz and took matters into their own hands).

But as the meeting was about to adjourn, a question was asked by Bishop Ryan, the active leader of the St. Louis Catholics. (He was coadjutor to Archbishop Kenrick; that eminent churchman was living in semi-retirement at the time, as a result of his disagree-

ment with the Vatican on the doctrine of papal infallibility, promulgated only a few years before). The Bishop seems to have felt, correctly, that the demands of the railroad workers had precipitated the crisis and that if the railroad workers could be quieted down and put back to work, there would be little reason to worry about thirty thousand armed socialists overthrowing the city government. Apparently referring to the East St. Louis Executive Committee of the railroad strikers, he asked if they had presented any demands in a regular and formal way to the companies. He was told that the railway officials had been given until nine o'clock the next morning to concede the increased wages, (or the cancellation of the recent wage cuts). Upon asking what the railroad companies intended to do, he was told that they intended to reject the demands of the strikers and to call upon the constituted authorities to protect railroad property.

"Right here," says Kelsey, "was shown the superiority of a skilled mind over crude, brute force." (Under the latter heading, Mr. Kelsey was perfectly willing to include all that city officials and businessmen could offer!) "With a suave smile, the Bishop demanded if anyone in St. Louis was in a position to give a binding and conclusive concession to all the demands"? He was told, certainly not: only the railroads' boards of directors could take action in such complicated matters, and these boards met, for the most part, in the Eastern cities, and would require much time for their deliberations. Local representatives of the lines could give no conclusive reply to the strikers' demands. "'Then,' continued the venerable Bishop, 'any action these subordinates might take . . . could be disavowed and annulled by the subsequent action of the directors?'" Such, he was informed, was the case. "'Very well,' said the Bishop, 'why not instruct these subordinates to concede all that the men demand?' It was plain to be seen that this would deprive them instantly of all possible reasons for any riotous or violent action . . . and, at all events, gain the necessary time for preparing the dilatory forces of law and order."

Kelsey gives no hint as to whether the Bishop had any opinion of his own regarding the justice of the strikers' demands, or whether he understood the risky nature of his proposal. But the

railroad companies were not even willing to make concessions in poor faith; and the Bishop's stratagem was not adopted. If the meeting adjourned, as Kelsey says, "with something like a feeling of hope replacing the general feeling of despondency that had prevailed on hearing the Mayor's report," it was not because of anything the Bishop had said, but perhaps because the businessmen had definitely decided that there was "next to nothing to expect from the impotent and imbecile city officials," and "something like the 'Vigilance Committee' of the earlier California days" was required.

Meanwhile, the strike was gaining force in St. Louis. For the first time, the new Union Depot, at 12th and Poplar Streets, became a center of attention. The Depot had been quiet during the morning; but in the late afternoon of Tuesday, a crowd numbering several thousand gathered there, mostly clerks and businessmen on their way home and curiosity seekers. A strike committee was functioning at the Depot, because a similar strike committee at Mattoon, Illinois, protested, that day, to the Union Depot committee, that the latter had refused to allow passenger coaches to leave on regular trains.

During the day, groups of strikers arrived from East St. Louis on engines and flatcars they had commandeered, and moved through the St. Louis railroad yards enforcing the "all or none" rule. There was no police interference; and one procession of strikers numbered as much as two thousand men. A wire works was shut down by the railroad men; and from these actions on Tuesday, it is possible that the pattern of action emerged for the general strike. The *Republican* was obliged to admit that the conduct of the railroaders had been good, and that no one had shown the "slightest indication of a desire to do violence." The only man arrested at the Union Depot was an outspoken opponent of the strike, who had apparently spent much of the day in a saloon.

President Hayes, in his personal notes of his Cabinet meeting on Tuesday, mentions that troops were wanted in Cincinnati and St. Louis, and that General Pope had asked if United States troops should be used at St. Louis before the Governor of Missouri called for them. The answer should be *no*, the President thought. He was

in a difficult position. Owing to a dispute over a clause in the Army appropriation bill, the army was behind in its pay – always an unfortunate state of affairs when the military is called upon to suppress civil disorders. As was made clear by the instructions of the Secretary of War to the Adjutant General, relative to sending troops to St. Louis, the use of such troops to put down "insurrection against State law" would have to wait until a call was received from the State itself. But the protection of Federal property was something else again; and such property was interpreted to include railroads in receivership, under the jurisdiction of the United States courts.

The Governor of Missouri did not, however, call upon the Federal government for troops to put down the "insurrection" in St. Louis. And the *Globe-Democrat,* which at the beginning of the strike warned the railroad officials against treading "on the coat-tail of a mob," could comment querulously after the strike that "the very best material in the world for putting down a riot was at hand, sent here expressly for that purpose, and yet it was not made use of . . . because some of the ancient Bourbons whom the Lord in His inscrutable wisdom allows to muddle municipal matters here had Constitutional scruples about using United States troops."

The "very best material in the world for putting down a riot" were six companies of the 23rd U.S. Infantry, which arrived at Union Depot about 6 P.M., without having been invited by the Governor, and after having been sidetracked for a few hours at Sedalia, by the strikers there. The troops were under the command of Colonel Jefferson C. Davis. The Colonel, no kin to the former President of the Confederacy, had held the rank of Brigadier General in the Union Army, and after serving in Missouri, had acquired a certain notoriety through a little affair in a private dining room of the Galt House, at Louisville, in the fall of 1862. Major General Nelson, also of the Union Army, slapped General Davis; General Davis shot General Nelson with a revolver, at point-blank range; General Nelson called for a clergyman to baptize him and died; and General Davis got off scot-free, probably through the influence of Governor Morton of Indiana, whose

protégé he was. The charges against Davis were still pending while he commanded his division at Chickamauga.

One of the leaders of the East St. Louis railroad men who had toured St. Louis that afternoon had mentioned in a speech the report of the imminent arrival in the city of "nigger troops" from the West, and had allegedly urged the strikers to "kill a few . . . the balance will run like sheep." But the troops were not Negro, nor was there any disturbance when they arrived. The *Republican,* with evident relish, described the six companies as comprising about three hundred men, "bronzed and hardy-looking, and armed with breech-loading rifles of the Springfield pattern and sixty rounds of cartridges each," having with them "two very cold and suggestive looking Gatling guns, and a quartermaster's wagon with ammunition and supplies." In the course of the week, Colonel Davis's command increased to around four hundred men, with four Gatling guns.

The troops marched, without incident, to the old U.S. Arsenal, about two miles south of the Depot; and the Colonel announced that his men were in St. Louis "merely to protect government and public property" – they were not there "to quell the strikers or run the trains, and were subject to orders from the War Department only." The watchful Mr. Wilson of the St. Louis & Southeastern line, complained to Secretary of the Interior Schurz that the troops should be stationed at the center of the city or in East St. Louis, rather than at the Arsenal; and further suggested that arms and ammunition be shipped to St. Louis from the Rock Island Arsenal, by boat. But he seems to have been perfectly satisfied that when the time came, the troops could be used for the purpose he had made clear to the Secretary of the Interior, in spite of Colonel Davis's pronouncement.

The municipal House of Delegates met on Tuesday evening, but concerned itself with purely routine business. Almost as this official body met, the real power in the city was shifting to two unofficial organs of government, both created on Tuesday, and representing elements of the population at opposite ends of the social scale.

In spite of the absence from the city of many prominent citizens

who would have been on hand had not the crisis occurred at such an inconvenient time of the year, the evening meeting at the Four Courts, prepared that morning at the Mayor's office, was well attended, and set to work energetically. A Committee of Public Safety was created, (following the examples of Pittsburgh and Indianapolis), consisting of one judge and no less than five ex-generals. Two members of the Committee, Generals A. J. Smith and John S. Marmaduke, became joint commanders of the citizens' militia which they were empowered to mobilize.

Both Smith and Marmaduke were West Point graduates. In the Mexican War, General Smith had served as a young officer of the Mormon Battalion, recruited from the Saints on their trek West; in the Civil War, he had fought, as a Union officer, in the Vicksburg and Red River campaigns. After the war, he had become Postmaster at St. Louis; in 1877, he was City Auditor. General Marmaduke had distinguished himself as a Confederate officer at Shiloh; in 1877, he was a member of the Missouri Railroad Commission; and a few years later, would become Governor of Missouri. (General Marmaduke's family circle included a far more daring conspirator than any the General would find among the German socialists in St. Louis: he was a brother of Vincent Marmaduke, who had been a leader in the extraordinary "Northwest Conspiracy", hatched by the Confederacy in the last years of the war). The two Generals had faced each other on the battlefield in '64; in '77, they were joining forces against a new enemy, confirming in the most positive way the rapprochement which had been revealed two years previously, when the Union Merchants' Exchange of St. Louis had dropped the "Union" from its name.

Other members of the Committee of Public Safety were General John W. Noble, who would become Secretary of the Interior in the Cabinet of President Harrison; General John S. Cavender; and Judge Thomas T. Gantt.

The last-named gentleman, in an address several years later, boasted that "in 1877, when civil war disturbances, which had wrapped other cities in flames and given them over to rapine, approached our border, we once more performed our duty, preserving the good order of society by the performance of those

duties which, in a popular government, belong to the people." Albert Warren Kelsey is more specific: the meeting inspired confidence, he says, because of the "united action of the solid business interests in calling upon their employees to take arms, and to rely upon the employers to care for their wives and children in case of serious injury." (The employees referred to were not, of course, the industrial workers but the *clerical* employees of the large wholesale houses, banks, etc.)

Meanwhile, the Workingmen's Party and the trade unions were organizing *their* forces, although not in quite so efficient a manner. The Party had its headquarters at the well-known Turner Hall, on Tenth Street between Market and Walnut, where, in the seventies, many organizations, including unions, held their meetings. Built in 1855 as the home of the German gymnastic societies, or *turnvereine*, it became in 1861 the organizing center of the German troops that saved Missouri for the Union; and the *Turnhalle* thereafter was known, among the Germans, as the "Cradle of Liberty". There, the Party was openly recruiting members, and the top command of the St. Louis strike was taking shape. Sometime on Tuesday afternoon or evening, the Workingmen's Party, in collaboration with delegates from certain unions which are never clearly identified, set up an *Executive Committee*, which would thereafter exercise undisputed leadership in the St. Louis strike. (In *East* St. Louis, across the river, the railroad men's Executive Committee controlled its own territory, and continued to exercise authority over the *railroad* employees in St. Louis. But the latter were not the most important element in the St. Louis general strike; and when the Executive Committee is referred to, hereafter, without further qualification, it may be taken to mean the *St. Louis* Committee, set up by the Workingmen's Party).

A circumstance which may have encouraged the Party to act as boldly as it did, was the reception given by the Mayor to the committee elected at the strikers' mass meeting the previous evening. The mayor received them politely, expressed his "sympathy", but stated that he could not, in his official capacity, urge the Federal government *not* to send troops to St. Louis, as the committee wished him to; he had not himself requested the troops

then on the scene. It appears that this Tuesday afternoon conference with the Mayor gave the leaders of the St. Louis strike false confidence in his "neutrality".

Another mass meeting had been announced for Lucas Market that evening; and it was preceded by a parade which hinted that the strike in St. Louis had entered a new and alarming phase. Some fifteen hundred men, mostly moulders and mechanics, marched grimly, four abreast, to Lucas Market, headed, dramatically, by a single torch and a fife and drum. Some of the men carried laths or clubs on their shoulders. It was, said the *Times*, "an awfully suggestive spectacle," its effect being enhanced by an occasional yell, beginning at the head of the line and gaining volume as it rolled back to the rear.

The crowds at Lucas Market could be estimated, said the *Times*, "by acres". The *Daily Journal* estimated the crowd at ten thousand – an assembly of immense, perhaps unprecedented, size for St. Louis. P. A. Lofgreen, of the Workingmen's Party, called the meeting to order, and a chairman was elected.

This Tuesday evening mass meeting was the real beginning of the general strike, and the speeches made there are of special significance. The first speaker was J. P. Kadell, a cooper and member of the Workingmen's Party, and he opened on a note which was, indeed, "awfully suggestive": "There was a time in the history of France," he said, "when the poor found themselves oppressed to such an extent that forebearance ceased to be a virtue, and hundreds of heads tumbled into the basket. That time may have arrived with us." He ended by stating that the strikers had seven thousand stands of arms at their disposal. This announcement, which was greeted with enthusiastic cries of "Let's have them!", seems to be the first public mention of a report which was repeated on various occasions during the strike, and may have been based on hopes some of the strike leaders had of obtaining arms either by raiding an arsenal or by getting strikers' squads the status of militia units and so getting them armed legally! That the strikers actually had access at any time to any such quantity of arms is most improbable.

A railroad worker told the crowd that many railroad bridges

were in such a rotten condition as to threaten disaster daily, and accused the Missouri Pacific of settling with the strikers just to enable the road to bring United States troops to the city. There was a speech in German by Albert Currlin, leader of the German section of the Workingmen's Party. And a Negro steamboatman asked the crowd if they would stand behind the levee strikers, regardless of color. He was answered with cries of "We will!" This speaker described the plight of the Negro roustabouts: "We work in the summer for $20 a month, and in the winter time we can't find the men we worked for!"

James McCarthy, a member of the committee that had visited the Mayor that day, called upon the workingmen to organize into companies of ten, twenty, and a hundred, to establish patrols to "protect property" and to "organize force to meet force." This speech was the first call for the formation of armed, workers' squads, and it is the only such call that is directly attributed to a specific leader of the strike – though how accurately McCarthy was quoted, or how seriously his proposal was meant, it is impossible to say. There is no clear indication at any time during the strike that such *armed* squads were being formed; the authorities were unable, later, to offer any proof to this effect. And it cannot be determined, of course, to what extent McCarthy spoke for the newly-formed Executive Committee, of which he was a member.

Another speaker on Tuesday evening revealed, in angry words baldly reported, what rankled most in the hearts of many workingmen: "You are just as law-abiding as those men who rob the public treasury. Just as decent as those lecherous bondholders who derive their revenue by cutting off coupons. Your wives are just as virtuous as the wives of the rich capitalists, who, decked in silks and satins, ride in their carriage with a nigger driver dressed like a monkey; and your children are just as pure and upright as the bastard offspring of these bastards themselves!"

J. J. McBride, an attorney well-known to St. Louis workingmen, also hammered at this theme: "He denounced the men who called the masses of the people the canaille, which literally meant 'dog'. He threw back the epithet in their teeth and called them 'curs of dogs'." Mr. McBride was quite at home in an atmosphere

of revolution. He had been a speaker at Lucas Market, at the great demonstration for an eight-hour day, in May, 1867. He was an enthusiastic Fenian; and was one of those questioned by Federal authorities following the Fenian raid on Fort Erie in 1866. Volunteers from St. Louis had been in the Fenian "army" which had attempted to strike a blow for Irish freedom by way of Canada.

The climax of the mass meeting came when H. F. Allen, in the name of the Executive Committee, introduced a resolution which called directly for a *general strike* with the two principal objectives of an eight-hour day and the prohibition of child labor. The resolution carried, and was printed in the form of a "Proclamation" in English and German, (see frontispiece), which was distributed the following day. The Lucas Market meeting then adjourned; and the crowd, forming a procession four abreast, marched several times around the market place, and then proceeded across the bridge to the railroaders' headquarters in East St. Louis, where there were more speeches. "A more orderly procession has seldom been seen," said the *Republican.*

The term *general strike* can, of course, be applied to a strike of one entire industry within a certain geographical area: the 1877 *railroad* strike was very nearly a nation-wide general strike in this sense. But the term is more properly used to refer to a strike of *all* industry within a certain geographical area. A general strike may thus be a local one, as was the case in St. Louis in 1877; or national, as was the case in England in 1926. Furthermore, the objectives of the strike may be either economic, or political, or a combination of the two, though the St. Louis strike cannot be readily classified on this basis; and a political general strike may have either a revolutionary or non-revolutionary character: the history of the world labor movement furnishes examples of all these types of general strikes. The St. Louis general strike of 1877 was certainly one of the first strikes anywhere in the world to paralyze a major industrial city; and without doubt was the first general strike of the modern, industrial labor movement in the United States. The Philadelphia strike for the ten-hour day, in 1835, is sometimes termed our first general strike, but was hardly so in the modern sense. During the last week of July, 1877, strikes

in other cities besides St. Louis, notably Chicago and Toledo, assumed or tended to assume the character of general strikes. But in Chicago, there does not appear to have been any central leadership of the strike, and it is doubtful if the shut-down of industry was as complete as in St. Louis; while Toledo had a population only one-tenth that of St. Louis, and the strike there cannot be considered in the same category as the one in St. Louis. The St. Louis strike, hitherto unknown to historians of the general strike, therefore deserves to be recognized as the first exercise in America of labor's ultimate weapon. Following 1877, the next American general strikes were those at New Orleans in 1892; at Philadelphia in 1910; the most famous of all, at Seattle in 1919; and at San Francisco in 1934; followed by a number of such strikes in the 1930's and 40's, of which the last and most important was at Oakland, California, in 1946. Among European socialists, prior to World War I, the idea of the general strike assumed the status of a "social myth" which profoundly affected the development of the socialist and labor movements.

With its call for a general strike, the Executive Committee set up by the Workingmen's Party placed itself squarely at the head of a suddenly revived labor movement. The Committee would now be carried forward by an irresistible wave of popular discontent – a flood which even the invulnerable St. Louis levee could not hold back. Yet exactly who the members of the Committee were, what its size was, to what extent it won the support of the trade unions, how it functioned, what its plans and objectives were, remains unknown and can only be guessed at. A leader of the American socialist movement in later years, Morris Hillquit, could only say that the Committee "seems to have been a rather loose body composed of whosoever chanced to come in and take part in its deliberations," and "had no definite plan of action," limiting its activities to "tying up all the industries in the city."

Whatever plans the Committee had, or should have had, a necessary first step was to make the strike effective throughout all industry and the entire city. This it proceeded to do in a fairly systematic manner. But many things suggest dissension within the

Committee, and this may have lessened its effectiveness. The old struggle in the national Party between the "political" and the "trade union" factions was heating up; and it is not unlikely that this factional line-up was reflected in the St. Louis Party in some way. But just how is not clear, nor is it easy to see how such a factional struggle is reflected in the strike. That there was a "radical" or "revolutionary" faction and a "moderate" or "reformist" faction within the Committee is not improbable, because in such a situation such a division of opinion is almost inevitable. But more than this, it is not safe to say. Who on the Committee or within the Party represented what point of view, remains a mystery to this day, as does the whole question of the influence of such differences on the course of the strike.

The relationship of the existing trade unions to the Executive Committee is equally obscure. The Committee is generally referred to in the newspapers as the Executive Committee *of the Workingmen's Party;* and there is a singular dearth of references to the unions in the newspapers, during the strike. Yet some unions were certainly represented on the Committee, or at least sent delegates to its meetings: the German cabinet makers or furniture workers, the iron molders, and the shoe workers certainly collaborated with the Committee. Other German unions probably followed the example of the cabinet makers. There was, of course, antagonism between German and Irish workers, and the unions with a predominantly Irish membership may have tended to hold aloof. Yet the lack of mention of specific unions in connection with the Executive Committee is perhaps more indicative of the organizational weakness of *all* the unions in 1877 rather than of any deliberate withholding of support. This weakness had the effect of placing the leadership of the strike entirely in the hands of the Workingmen's Party, which found itself, overnight, at the head of an angry mass movement of the organized and unorganized, German and Irish, black and white alike – a responsibility which the Party was perhaps not prepared to assume.

The newspapers, of course, portrayed the Executive Committee in a highly romantic light. The "arch conspirators", according to the *Globe-Democrat,* were five in number and did not appear

at the mass meetings. "From the seclusion of the star chamber, they issue their orders"; "like Robespierre and his brace of fellow conspirators, they sit in darkness and plot"; "there are few Americans in the order – restless, scheming, turbulent inhabitants of European nations compose the body." (The *Globe* forgot that St. Louis industry owed almost everything to these "inhabitants of European nations," whose restlessness, and objection to oppression and poverty in their native lands, had brought them to America and to St. Louis; and whose scheming to keep body and soul together contributed to the prosperity of the city.)

The *Globe*, like all the papers, constantly contradicted itself, in an effort to characterize or exorcise the strike movement. It spoke of the leaders of the strike as Communists who owned no property themselves and were consequently reckless with other people's property; and then a few days later informed its readers that they were not poor men, but "in the enjoyment of comfortable income." And, in fact, among individuals who had been or were active in the St. Louis sociailst movement there were some who fitted this category; while Peter Lofgreen, who shared with Albert Currlin the leadership of the St. Louis Workingmen's Party, was in education and background, if not in income, far removed from the working class.

All day long, on Tuesday, Federal officials in Washington had been flooded with reports from Signal Service observers, local officials, and business men throughout the country. A few of the dispatches were encouraging, as from Chicago, where all had been quiet during the morning; from New York City, where the Chief of Police declared himself and his department equal to any emergency, and said that the socialist leaders counseled moderation and that the chances of escaping a riot were better than they had seemed Monday; and from Philadelphia, where United States troops and citizens' militia seemed to have the situation in hand.

But in Buffalo, a Signal Service observer wired that the Lake Shore round-house and shops were in flames. And the storm center of the strike was shifting west: there was rioting in Cincinnati, where the Workingmen's Party and the boot and shoe

trades offered assistance to the city authorities in preserving law and order; and from Indianapolis came word that nearly all the roads had struck, neither passenger or freight trains were permitted to leave, and the depot was filled with sleeping cars occupied by passengers, though the strikers were orderly. (From Erie, Pennsylvania, a "Committee of Firemen, Brakemen and Citizens" informed President Hayes that the Lake Shore railroad had refused to allow mail to proceed east, and the President was asked to direct the *company* to permit mail and passenger trains to go through!)

Washington had all day been receiving more alarming news from St. Louis than from most other cities. There had been James H. Wilson's wires, early in the day, regarding the situation in East St. Louis. Then General Pope, at Fort Leavenworth, had wired a report obtained from a "reliable source" in St. Louis to the effect that while the strikers, (presumably the railroad strikers), were "not disposed to violence," the "Internationals and desperate characters," (presumably the Workingmen's Party), were "organizing into threatening attitude" and the outlook was serious. General Pope had ordered six more companies of U.S. Infantry to St. Louis, to assist Colonel Davis in protecting "public property". The Cabinet considered the question of when and how United States troops should take action in such a situation as existed in St. Louis. As to whether a United States officer should move his men against a mob before a call from the Governor, Secretary of State Evarts could only reply with the quip that "It will be given him in that hour what he shall do."

Following the Tuesday night mass meeting at Lucas Market, the Sergeant in charge of the Signal Service office in St. Louis wired Washington a summary of what had taken place, remarking that the demand for an eight-hour law now seemed to be as much an object of the strike as the rescinding of the railroad wage cuts – but this was probably not true so far as the *railroad* employees were concerned.

The size and spirit of the mass meeting caused the newly-formed Committee of Public Safety a spasm of panic on Tuesday night. The Committee wired the Secretary of War for ten thou-

sand stands of rifles, two thousand revolvers, a battery of artillery, and ammunition. Among the signers was James H. Wilson, of the St. Louis & Southeastern Railroad, who was not officially a member of the Committee. As a consequence of Wilson's persistent efforts to bring the Federal government into the situation in the St. Louis area, and through consultation between Wilson, Circuit Judge Drummond, in Chicago, and Judge Gresham, in Indianapolis, a policy was taking shape which would have decisive effect on the strike in both Indiana and Illinois. James Wilson and his brother, Bluford, (solicitor for the St. Louis & Southeastern), signed a petition formally requesting protection, by Judge Drummond, of property under the control of the Federal Courts, i.e., the St. Louis & Southeastern Railroad – the valuable enterprise which its owners were so willing, on this occasion, to regard as "public property".

In Washington, Secretary of War McCrary considered the request for arms received from the Committee of Public Safety in St. Louis; and Mayor Overstolz was informed at 10:30 P.M. that the ten thousand rifles, etc., would be sent to the Officer in Command at St. Louis, for delivery to the St. Louis authorities upon requisition of the Governor. A little later, however, the Federal officials learned that it would be impossible to furnish even one tenth of the arms called for; and it was necessary to send another wire to the Mayor, evading a direct reply to the request for arms, and merely stating that General Pope was in full charge, and all appeals for arms would have to be referred to him. This evidence of confusion and weakness on the part of Washington could hardly have been reassuring to the embattled business community of St. Louis.

It was on Tuesday, in Cleveland, that John Hay, (one-time private secretary to Abraham Lincoln, soon to become Assistant Secretary of State), wrote his wealthy father-in-law: "Since last week, the country has been at the mercy of the mob, and on the whole the mob has behaved better than the country. The shameful truth is now clear, that the government is utterly helpless and powerless in the face of an unarmed rebellion of foreign work-

ingmen, mostly Irish . . . Any hour the mob chooses, it can destroy any city in the country – that is the simple truth."

The British Consul in St. Louis had about the same comment to make that day, reporting to his superiors in London: "the city was practically in the hands of a mob, whilst the inhabitants were in perpetual terror of some outbreak which should excel in horror the stories that were hourly coming from the City of Pittsburgh . . . Parades of the discontented were permitted on all principal streets without a show of countervailing force, and nightly mass meetings were held in the most public places, where thousands of the most ignorant and depraved in the community were made riotous by the incendiary speeches of their orators."

The clubs that the workingmen carried over their shoulders as they marched to Lucas Market on Tuesday night provided some basis for the *Times*' foreboding that St. Louis was about to witness "tumult in every shape and form," and that "the night would close in upon scenes of horror, confusion and bloodshed." And the St. Louis police seemed to be doing nothing beyond setting up two Gatling guns in the yard of the City Jail. After three-quarters of a century, the memory of this night was still vivid for one St. Louisan: he recalled how, as a fifteen-year-old boy he had, on his father's instructions, mounted guard at a second-story window, with a very large, double-barrelled shotgun, while his father served with one of the élite militia companies. The boy defended the household against a mob that never showed up, until he dozed off sometime in the early hours of the morning. But any citizens who took comfort from the fact that Tuesday night had passed without the expected "horror, confusion and bloodshed," would receive a violent shock on Wednesday.

V

WEDNESDAY, JULY 25TH

"Reign of the Canaille"

Wednesday morning's *Republican* brought news of "The Movement Rapidly Extending in All Directions," with "The People Excited and Agitated from Ocean to Ocean." All the main railway lines were now affected, and employees of some Canadian roads were joining the strike. Business in many cities was feeling the effect of the freight blockade: New York's supply of Western grain and cattle had been cut off. There were strike reports from Kansas City, Chicago, Indianapolis, Terre Haute, Columbus, Cincinnati, Louisville, Pittsburgh, and Baltimore. Pittsburgh, in spite of having been "Rescued from the Hands of the Mob," was "Rapidly Assuming the Appearance of a Camp": the strikers were throwing up earthworks by the tracks, and proposed to occupy an abandoned Confederate fort that had been constructed by Lee when he invaded Pennsylvania.

The Vice-President of the St. Louis, Alton & Terre Haute line, at St. Louis, received from the President of the company, a telegram instructing him to accede to demands "for continuance of wages existing prior to July 1st"; but as for demands for an increase over the old rates, the company would be guided by the actions of the other roads. James H. Wilson announced for the St. Louis and Southeastern that passenger and mail service had been abandoned.

It is not surprising, at this stage of the strike, that John Hay confided to his father-in-law that it was probable that the railroads would have to surrender to the demands of the strikers. This, he felt, was disgraceful, but it was hard to say what else could be done: "We are not Mexicans yet – but that is about the only advantage we have over Mexico!". (This was a refer-

ence to the recent revolution in the latter country). The British Consul in St. Louis noted an example of how society was being turned upside down: on a railroad in Ohio, the strikers had "taken the road into their own hands, running the trains and collecting the fares," and felt they deserved praise because they turned over the proceeds to the company officials. The Consul commented stiffly that "it is . . . to be deplored that a large portion of the public appear to regard such conduct as a legitimate mode of warfare."

In New York, there was great concern over the mass meeting to be held that night by the socialists, in Tompkins Square, scene of the bloodily suppressed demonstration of the unemployed during the winter of 1872-73, and breathing space of the already vast and heterogeneous slum population of the Lower East Side. Over a thousand sailors and marines stood ready at New York, in addition to the militia.

In Chicago, the strike was gathering strength. During the day, there were many collisions between a mob variously estimated at twenty-five to forty thousand, and the police.

In London, the news of the strike was being carefully studied by Karl Marx. He knew as little about the American socialists as the American socialists knew about him; but his drab existence during these years was seldom enlivened by news of revolution, and he wrote, on Wednesday, to his old friend and benefactor, Friedrich Engels, commenting, with much satisfaction, on the American events. He felt the uprising would be suppressed, but might lead to the development of a labor party. A "nice sauce" was being stirred up, he thought; and he ended, somewhat wistfully, with the remark that the transfer of the General Council of the International to the United States, (in 1872), might, after all, turn out to have a "very remarkable *post festum* opportuneness". (This was a year after the formal dissolution of the International, and several years after Marx and Engels had given it up as a lost cause). If Marx's attention was later called to the surprising prominence of the socialists in the St. Louis strike, he must certainly have thought of his old friend and chief collaborator in America, Joseph Weydemeyer, who had commanded

the military sub-district of St. Louis during the Civil War, had been elected Auditor of St. Louis County, (on the Republican ticket), in 1865, and had died the following year. Weydemeyer's circumspect activities in St. Louis were having their own long delayed results in 1877.

On this Wednesday, also, the farmers of the Bitter Root Valley of Montana Territory were deserting their lands in fear of a threatened invasion by Nez Percé Indians, led by the wily and courageous Chief Joseph – who had been driven off *their* lands, farther west, by white settlers. Well-to-do St. Louisans felt much the same fear as the Montana farmers, at the invasion of the main streets of the city by rabble demanding an eight-hour day.

Not much besides strike news was provided by the St. Louis press, but there were some reminders of more tranquil days. Jobs for domestic servants were still offered at nine to fifteen dollars a month; and a dozen packet companies still advertised daily departures. But Wednesday, July 25th, 1877, would for a long time be remembered as a day of alarms only parallelled by that day in the spring of 1861 when St. Louis' Camp Jackson, where the city's Southern sympathizers were entrenched, was captured for the Union, and Missouri was saved for the Union. There was an ironic parallel that may very well have been apparent in 1877, and may have caused irritation in certain quarters. The volunteers of 1861 who saved the city and the State for the Union were mostly German workingmen. In 1877, German workingmen once more, but without the advantage of arms, faced the same kind of élite militia that had held Camp Jackson in '61.

Part of the press still applauded Mayor Overtstolz' passive policy as the best way to avoid a riot, and minimized the possibility of violence. This was to some extent wishful thinking, but was also based upon a sound appraisal of the character of the city's vast German population, from which the socialists drew most of their members. This population included many skilled workers noted for their orderly habits and their dislike of any kind of rash action: characteristics exemplified by the mighty Social-Democratic Party of Germany in later years, by most

German-American organizations, and suggested by the neat lawns and scrubbed doorsteps of St. Louis German neighborhoods even today.

But the Lucas Market mass meetings had convinced the business men that the "Internationalists" were about to proclaim a new Commune; the *Republican* furiously demanded the most severe measures against the strike, and the Mayor, together with his policy or lack of policy, was pushed into the background by the Committee of Public Safety.

St. Louis commerce was centered at the Merchants' Exchange, which ordinarily made few concessions to the city's notorious summer climate. But on Wednesday, the Exchange was closed. The Mayor urgently requested all business concerns to temporarily suspend operations in order that their owners and employees might "take advantage of the opportunity to enroll themselves" in the citizens' militia being formed. All bar-rooms and saloons were ordered to close.

The police were on duty at the station houses, which were reinforced with units of the militia, but the city was almost entirely unpatrolled. Mr. Kelsey, who on the previous day had offered his services to the authorities, took it upon himself to suggest to the Mayor that all gunshops be closed. The Mayor agreed; and when Kelsey made some request to the Chief of Police, he found him "quite as biddable" as the Mayor, neither of whom had asked for credentials of any sort!

Mr. Kelsey felt that in a crisis of this sort, he had special qualifications for command. His father had commanded one of the crack militia companies in the city of Boston, and Mr. Kelsey "had been raised, so to speak, in the atmosphere of his military experience." One of his father's axioms had been that, in dealing with a mob, "the thing to be done was to make an example in the first place": bloodshed could be saved by loading with ball *at first,* and only using blank cartridges after a few citizens had been made a bloody example.

Mr. Kelsey the Elder had guarded the Boston Court House against Wendell Phillips' abolitionists, and had turned out his troops to quell the rioting caused by the arrest of Professor

Webster of Harvard College for murder. In 1877, Wendell Phillips was something of a symbol of the rising labor movement, although he had nothing actually to do with the strikes; and Mr. Kelsey the Younger was no doubt beginning to feel that he would have the opportunity to defend the established social order against Wendell Phillips in 1877 as his father had done in 1851. But, of course, no such crisis faced St. Louis as faced Boston when a Harvard Professor was arrested for murder.

Kelsey was one of those placed in command of the militia at the Police Station in Lafayette Park, along with ex-Governor Thomas C. Fletcher. Governor Fletcher had some personal knowledge of the technique of the coup d'état: in 1865, when Governor, he had effectively used the State militia to intimidate his political opponents and the Supreme Court of the State. As for Kelsey, during the last phase of the late war, he had operated, for a group of New England investors, a plantation in a part of the South supposedly occupied by Union forces but actually swarming with Confederate guerrillas. Neither had much confidence in the "patrician element", the wealthy citizens of the Lafayette Park neighborhood, from which they were obliged to recruit part of their forces. These gentlemen, who had "enrolled themselves in a moment of very great enthusiasm, without regard to their manifest unfitness for the actual service it appeared likely they would be forced to attempt," shared one idea: "each had convinced himself that the proper base of operations was in his own front or back yard." The obese son of the city's richest grocer, who required *two* belts, fastened together, to encircle him, unwound this military symbol from his person and resigned, when he discovered he could not take his meals and sleep in his father's mansion, just opposite the Park.

Fortunately, some of the militia under Kelsey's command were not of "patrician" stock and were ready to go on night patrol duty; while some of the wealthy recruits had seen military service either in the Civil War or in the Franco-Prussian War – "several had been at Sedan and witnessed the surrender of the Third Napoleon" – and had some conception of discipline. They needed no drill in the manual of arms; and Kelsey feared,

indeed, that they might be *too* ready to shoot. On the whole, however, the Lafayette Park forces were not formidable, although they were well armed; and other units of the militia must have been of comparable quality. The strikers had some reason for their contemptuous attitude towards the citizens' forces, as the situation stood on Wednesday.

The offices of the municipal government were almost completely shut down, and everything was centered at the Four Courts Building, which had become the headquarters of the Committee of Public Safety. "Vigilance committees" were being organized in the various wards, with the cooperation of prominent citizens. The Board of Police Commissioners, which had not so far acted with much vigor, supplied the legal basis for the enrollment of the militia, by directing the Sheriff to "summon the *posse comitatus* to the number of five thousand men . . . and report to General A. J. Smith." Young men flocked to the colors; and some of them were looking primarily for excitement, with scarcely more laudable motives than the tramps who attached themselves to the strike movement. The *Republican* declared that it was designed to have fifteen thousand men under arms within three days; but the total number of militiamen actually enrolled hardly reached one third of that number; and the British Consul noted that only six hundred militiamen were *under arms* by Wednesday night.

His Excellency, John S. Phelps, Governor of Missouri, had been notified of the precarious state of affairs in the State's principal city, and announced that he had ordered the shipment to St. Louis, from the State Arsenal at Jefferson City, of muskets, ammunition, and two pieces of artillery, and that he would proceed to the scene of action himself, to take personal charge. Governor Phelps "thought it advisable to have some force which might be able to demolish barricades," and so commissioned a former Confederate artillery officer to enroll a battery. This was done in the yard of the City Jail, under the gallows; and the battery started out with some forty experienced artillerymen and four brass cannon, which had belonged to a private militia company. (The members of the private company temperamentally

refused to serve under any but their own officers, and therefore withdrew).

All freight service to the East was now cut off; only mail, and sometimes passengers, were permitted by the strikers to go through. But passenger service had been for the most part abandoned by the railroads themselves. An official of one of the western lines stated frankly that by stopping all passenger trains, the companies cut off the strikers from mail facilities and prevented them from sending committees from one point to another along the lines. Mail service was stopped by the railroads themselves, in some cases, to provoke Federal intervention, and gain the sympathy of the public. In at least one instance, strikers attempted to maintain mail service without the cooperation of the railroad. The Executive Committee of the East St. Louis railroad men issued a statement denying any intention of interfering with the mails.

Illinois Central trains were stopped at Effingham, Mattoon, Decatur, and Carbondale, Illinois. Governor Cullom of that State, in his 1879 Biennial Message, declared that "the railway trains, and machine shops and factories, in Chicago, Peoria, Galesburg, Decatur, and East St. Louis were in the hands of the mob, as well as the mines at Braidwood, La Salle, and some other places." Members of the St. Louis turners' and sharpshooters' societies, on their way back from their National Turnfest in Milwaukee, were sidetracked at Effingham by the strikers, who were suspicious of travelers carrying arms. A day later, the group was still at Effingham; and considering the July heat, it is unlikely that the town's supply of beer had held up under the strain imposed by the visitors from St. Louis. The turners may not have had the same friendly feeling for the strikers that prompted a large group of passengers marooned at Erie, Pennsylvania, to sign a statement denouncing the railroad company and praising its employees for their courtesy and kindness. The strikers had even paid the hotel expenses of some of these travelers!

During the day, a crowd of two or three thousand surrounded the Union Depot in St. Louis, and only one passenger train was

Currlin and Fischer experienced some difficulty in gaining admission to the Mayor's office – it may be assumed that the Mayor did not know quite what to make of this unexpected visit! Currlin asked his artless question about the Mayor's "pledge", "in plain German". The Mayor's reply is not given; perhaps it was not printable; perhaps it was merely the "secret signal", upon which Currlin and Fischer were arrested. Currlin was locked up in "Murderers' Row, Cell No. 17."

In an interview in the *Times*, a week after his arrest, Currlin describes his meeting with the Mayor in more detail. Whether the conversation was "in plain German" on both sides, is not revealed. "I asked the Mayor," said Currlin, "why he arrested parties who had been guilty of no harm, but who had kept the peace themselves and even tried to make others do so. I said we had consulted with him and acted in accordance with his orders." This accusation, which placed Mayor Overstolz in somewhat the same position as Mayor Bowman in East St. Louis, was never discussed further on either side. The Mayor merely replied that Currlin had advised people to kill and burn. Currlin answered that "there were thousands in the city who knew that was a lie"; all his speeches had been "in favor of the law". This, of course, was a clear repudiation of the *Republican's* charge that Currlin had made a highly inflammatory speech at Lucas Market on Thursday night. To the Mayor's question as to how Currlin "came to act with such men," Currlin replied that he acted with the Workingmen's Party because there were "thousands and thousands of poor, hard-working, honest men" who couldn't find work "to earn bread for their wives and children." The Mayor asked if Currlin was a citizen of the United States, and Currlin replied that he couldn't be yet, but intended to be one, (and, in fact, *did* become a citizen). The Mayor finally asked if the Executive Committee planned to hold a meeting that night. Currlin said no, and the Mayor then declared that if any more meetings were held, they would be broken up, even if he had to spill blood to do it. Overstolz then ordered Currlin arrested, and said he had no doubt that Currlin had a bottle of petroleum in his pocket, with which to set the city on fire. Currlin was

seized by the police as if he had been "a ruffian and a dog," and locked up. As he was taken away, a member of the Committee of Public Safety, standing near, suggested that Currlin be put in a place "where he can never see daylight again."

Currlin's account of his meeting with the Mayor naturally portrays Currlin in a favorable light; but there is a note of honest indignation in it that is convincing. When arrested, he had in his pockets orders for a meeting with striking quarrymen; and this suggests that he may not have expected to be arrested! If so, he and Fischer had great faith, indeed, in due process of law. The Mayor and the Committee of Public Safety felt justified in stretching the law a bit. The editor of the *Times* asserted that "it was not improper to thwart the movements" of the Executive Committee "in advance of the commission of an overt act." "We presume," said the *Times* with engaging frankness, "it will generally be conceded that the arrest of the men at Schuler's Hall was not strictly lawful. There was no warrant for their arrest, and they were not disturbing the peace."

Arrangements had been made for three public meetings of the strikers on Friday evening: one at Lucas Market, one on the South Side, and one on the North Side. This was the first time that more than one mass meeting had been scheduled; and the fact that *three* such meetings were to take place on Friday night suggests that the Executive Committee, before the afternoon's debacle, had begun to make a serious effort to regain influence lost in Thursday's confusion. The police dispersed, without incident, the small crowds that gathered, *trotz alledem,* at the meeting places. At Lucas Market, the speaker's stand, from which workingmen had voiced their discontent in a manner entirely new to St. Louis, was demolished. "The excited, egotistical, sanguine and provisional orator," as the East St. Louis *Gazette* put it, had "ceased his harangue."

The rank and file, that night, were confused and discouraged, but not all were fully convinced that the general strike was ended. A lone worker, over his midnight beer, put up a brave front for a reporter, and maintained that the Executive Committee still carried on, that its headquarters had been transferred to

another North Side hall, where, the next morning, the workingmen would meet for the purpose of swearing in five hundred special police "to clean out the nigger mob"! Earlier in the evening, a *Globe* reporter, disguised as a railroad man, had talked to other strikers in the same saloon, near or at Schuler's Hall. One of these remarked that the Workingmen's Party was "busted", had "gone higher than a kite." "That's through treachery," replied another; "there may be some detectives or some Dutch here, but I'll tell you it's the Dutchmen that's betrayed us." "How do you mean?" "Why, don't you see? Nearly all the Executive Committee are Dutchmen, and none of *them* are arrested." Someone in the group commented that "if this was Chicago or Pittsburgh, that Four Courts would be a heap of ashes, but the workingmen of St. Louis have got no spunk!" Not all had given up hope, though: "The thing's not dead yet by a hell of a pile. The Committee's not in jail, and they'll work matters." One man was still passing out Workingmen's Party manifestoes. But an Irishman summed up bitterly: "America's a son-etc. of a country!"

And one of the *Republican* reporters, swept in with the arrested strikers, told of the indignation of an Irish fellow-prisoner: "Sthrike? Sthrike nawthin! I wuz jist goin' to me wurruk, which thim divilish naygurs dhruv me away from on Chewsday, whin I was crassin' a sthrate, an a policeman on a horse says, says he, 'Get back there, ye ——!' I thought he couldn't mane me, so I made a dash for the ither side, an jist as I was makin' the last jump, he grippit me be the back av me neck . . . Och, wurra, wurra! That I should live to be ordhered out av me employment by a naygur, an thin arresthed an disgraced for the mischief that the very naygur done!"

In one saloon, an Irishman blamed the Germans and the Negroes for everything. In another saloon, a German blamed the *Irish* and the Negroes. The English press blamed *all* the "foreigners" and, of course, the Negroes. The Negroes must have had their ideas too, but no one paid any attention to them.

On Friday night, the cigar makers met at Turner Hall and drew up their demands. The inconspicuous item in the press

recording this fact has special significance. That the end of the general strike did not mean the end of the St. Louis labor movement, was to be demonstrated forcefully by the Cigar Makers' Union. The local union, which had been in existence at least as early as 1863, had fallen apart in the course of the depression, and now was being revived. By 1879, it would become one of the leading labor organizations in the West; and in later years, this union would exercise greater influence than any other single organization within the St. Louis labor movement. The union had many socialists in its ranks from the beginning. It was in 1877 that *David Kreyling* joined the Cigar Makers. He eventually became the first President of the Missouri State Federation of Labor, and was Secretary of the St. Louis Central Trades and Labor Union from 1900 to 1933. Through such men as Kreyling, the Era of the Great Strike of 1877 is linked with the Era of the Great Strikes of the 1930's, and the beginning of a new chapter of American labor history.

In Carondelet, too far from the center of the city to be immediately affected by the events of Friday afternoon, the general strike did not at once collapse, but the Carondelet Executive Committee did. That peculiar body, in which some business men had been obliged to collaborate with the strikers, had an agreement with the Division Superintendent of the Iron Mountain railroad, that if the Committee could not at any time guarantee the operation of passenger trains, the Superintendent would be immediately notified. Sometime during the day, he was notified that no more passenger trains would be allowed to run except express, mail and Carondelet accommodation trains. And that evening, he received a communication, signed by Martin Becker, Chairman of the Carondelet Executive Committee, to the effect that the Committee had done its best to preserve order, but these efforts had been misunderstood, and the members of the Committee were now being branded "dangerous characters". The Committee was therefore being "dissolved", "and our responsibility from henceforth ceases."

The Superintendent took this to mean trouble ahead; and, in fact, there were rumors in Carondelet on Friday night that

the strikers planned to attack the engine-houses of the Iron Mountain line and destroy the railway bridges over the River Des Peres. A militia company of one hundred thirty men, with an artillery piece, arrived in Carondelet about midnight; and the business men of the district were able to organize, for the first time, their own militia. Traffic on the Iron Mountain line was resumed on Saturday.

The strike on the Missouri side of the river was over. "Had a single man of good executive ability taken hold of the movement," said the *Times*, "it could never have been crushed so easily." Governor Phelps was able to say, in his First Biennial Message to the State Legislature, in 1879, that "quiet was restored in that great city, with no collision between the armed men and the rioters, with no destruction of property, and without the shedding of a drop of blood." The Governor's serene words a year and a half after the event, are in sharp contrast to the horrified clamor of the newspapers *during* the strike, which would lead the reader to believe that the city was being razed and looted by the strikers.

But the destruction of property and the looting were trifling; and, aside from some police clubbing on the last day or two of the strike, about the only bloodshed occurred when one of the militiamen slipped off a windowsill of the Four Courts, where he had been sunning himself, and scratched himself on his own bayonet. *One* shot was fired, on Friday night, through a window of the Four Courts. No one was hurt, and it could not be positively said who fired it.

In view of all the talk in the newspapers about the St. Louis "Commune", the Committee of Public Safety showed a nice sense of history by choosing for its coup the anniversary of the fall of Robespierre and the first Paris Commune, of 1793-94.

On Friday evening, the municipal Council and the House of Delegates held meetings. But both meetings were brief and there were an unprecedented number of absentees: the city fathers were inclined to be cautious about taking in their hands the reins of government, which they had so precipitately abandoned a few days before.

It was on Friday that Governor Phelps of Missouri wrote to Governor Cullom of Illinois, suggesting that while United States troops were not needed to restore order in St. Louis, they might very well be used to end the strike in East St. Louis. Governor Cullom issued a proclamation which had the effect of declaring martial law. And, in the course of the day, the full realization of what was going on in East St. Louis seemed to hit the surrounding communities. The Belleville *Weekly Advocate*, on its front page, announced "REVOLUTION", but was careful to mention that the strikers in East St. Louis were not a "wild, undisciplined . . . mob," but ran the town, appointed their own police, and maintained perfect discipline.

The Mayor of Belleville summoned the citizens to an afternoon meeting to consider what should be done with respect to the "continued disturbances in our immediate vicinity." The *Advocate* carried the news that the coal miners were holding strike meetings. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that, at Mt. Carbon and Murphysboro, the companies had shut down their mines, and the miners had been out of work for some weeks, with wages owing to them. At Edwardsville, on Friday evening, a home guard was organized, although there had been no disturbances in the town.

In East St. Louis, at the Relay Depot, much excitement was created among the strikers by the news of the raid on Schuler's Hall; and plans were discussed to resist any attempt on the part of the St. Louis militia to cross the river. During the morning, the railroaders' Executive Committee had been in session for several hours. A serious dispute of some kind developed within the Committee: probably the sort of dispute that so often breaks out between compromisers and last-ditchers in the final stages of a strike which has begun to assume the character of a lost cause. It is possible, also, that there may have been involved in the dispute the question of whether or not to collaborate more closely with the *St. Louis* Executive Committee, which was at that moment attempting to broaden its base. According to one account, four members of the East St. Louis Committee resigned, with the implication that Harry Eastman and Alexander Kissinger

were among those remaining on the Committee. These two were both members or sympathizers of the Workingmen's Party. According to another account, four out of five members resigned, leaving Jack Benson alone, of the original Committee. Four new members were then elected, and the Committee resolved to hold firm.

(It may be noted that the relative anonymity, so far as the press is concerned, of the leaders of the East St. Louis strike stands in sharp contrast to the attention given by the press to the personalities of the leaders of the St. Louis strike. One reason was the very *effectiveness* of the strike on the East Side; at no time before Saturday were the railroaders seriously challenged in their control of the city, so the strike in East St. Louis lacked excitement. Its leaders, moreover, were plain workingmen, with none of the flamboyance of some of the leaders of the general strike in St. Louis. The plain workingmen and trade unionists associated with the St. Louis Committee also remained, for the most part, anonymous. Lofgreen, Currlin, Allen, Cope, and the other orators at the Lucas Market mass meetings, the spokesmen of the Workingmen's Party and its Executive Committee, were inflated, in the St. Louis newspapers, far beyond life-size, although no clear characterization of their individual roles in the strike was ever made).

The East St. Louis Executive Committee received reports that a thorough job had been done in carrying out the Committee's decision to close down all saloons. The question of involvement in the St. Louis strike received attention: acting on a request from a delegation of Missouri Pacific strikers from St. Louis, that the East St. Louis Committee render assistance in stopping freight trains on the Missouri Pacific line, the Committee decided that it was best not to interfere on the Missouri side of the river. The attitude of the Committee in this case underlines the increasing friction between the strike movement in East St. Louis, which was a strike mainly in a single industry, with purely economic objectives, and the strike movement in St. Louis, which was a *general* strike of a semi-political character. The railroad men may also have been afraid of provoking the intervention of United

States troops, if they carried on their activities across State lines. "After this decision," said the *Republican*, "it was determined that East St. Louis should be the battleground to prevent the thirteen roads from running trains east, north and southward."

A meeting of the Executive Committee, with delegates from St. Louis present, was adjourned when a rumor spread that a Southeastern passenger train would attempt to leave that evening; and the strikers marched in a body to the Relay Depot, to stop the train. The rumor proved false. But the Southeastern was a line in Federal receivership; and the strikers were probably aware of the persistent efforts of the Receiver, James H. Wilson, to enlist the aid of Federal authorities in restoring traffic on this road, both in Illinois and Indiana.

Mr. Wilson was not alone in this effort; and by Friday night, the United States government had been convinced that the time had come to intervene at East St. Louis. One reason for this decision, was the general recognition of the unreliability of the Illinois State militia. Governor Cullom of Illinois had ordered all central and southern Illinois militia to East St. Louis, and was about to appear on the scene himself, to direct operations, following the example of the Governor of Missouri. But Cullom admitted in his memoirs, many years later, that the Illinois National Guard had been "inchoate" in 1877, and "almost entirely without military equipment." The Governor had found that in Chicago, the populace had refused to take the National Guard seriously. And this had been the experience of the authorities elsewhere – in New York, for example, where the fact that the strikers merely soaped and greased the railroad tracks, instead of tearing them up, convinced the State military authorities that the strikers had a "cynically contemptuous" attitude towards the militia. The "corn-stalk" militia of Illinois, as the St. Louis *Times* termed them, were no worse than the Missouri National Guard; but St. Louis had the resources and population which made it possible to quickly raise and equip an emergency force, whereas nothing of the sort could be done in East St. Louis.

During the mobilization of the State militia for duty in East

St. Louis, the St. Louis and East St. Louis press do not mention any breaches of discipline. But two years later, a St. Louis labor paper, commenting on new labor disturbances in East St. Louis, mentions that, in 1877, the Montgomery Guards, (from nearby Montgomery County), had refused to serve against the railroad strikers.

U. S. Adjutant General Townsend, on Friday night, made a detailed report to the President on the situation in the St. Louis area. He stated that a dispatch received at 10 P.M. from Colonel Davis conveyed the information that the Colonel had, as directed by the President that morning, consulted with the governor of Missouri and St. Louis officials, who had declared that they had three thousand citizens under arms, and were "masters of the situation." They advised the use of United States troops to "open commerce" at East St. Louis, where the situation was "not so quiet", and freight traffic was still blocked. Colonel Davis did not doubt the ability of the authorities on the Missouri side of the river to maintain order without the help of United States troops, but felt that action by his troops in East St. Louis would "give moral support" to the Missouri authorities.

In fact, the legal excuse for Federal intervention in East St. Louis, that certain railroads there were in receivership under the jurisdiction of the United States Courts, must have weighed less with St. Louis officials and business men than the plain fact that so tight was the control of the railroad strikers in East St. Louis, and so uneasy the situation in the adjacent mine fields, that *only* United States troops could break the strike there. And only the suppression of the strike in East St. Louis could open the freight blockade that was cutting off St. Louis from the East and crippling St. Louis industry. Even with the crushing of the general strike in St. Louis, the continuation of the freight blockade for only a few days more would shut down much of the city's industry. And under these circumstances, who could be sure that a new strike movement in St. Louis might not begin to take form?

During the day, U.S. District Judge Samuel Treat, at St. Louis, and Judge Drummond, at Chicago, made every effort to bring

about the intervention of the United States troops in East St. Louis; and on Friday night, U. S. Marshal Leffingwell, at St. Louis, requested the President to permit the use of the troops to aid him in enforcing the process of the United States Courts, i.e., to protect the Receivers of the Illinois & St. Louis Bridge Company, the St. Louis Tunnel Railroad Company, and the Ohio & Mississippi Railroad Company in their control of these properties. United States Attorney-General Devens authorized the use of the troops for this purpose. Colonel Davis, in command of the United States troops in St. Louis, prepared to move.

All Friday evening, the East St. Louis strikers expected an invasion from St. Louis. The street cars on the bridge were stopped, and the railroad men made an intensive search for arms — they were accused of breaking into several shops where fire-arms were sold, and also taking arms stored by one of the militia units. The day ended, for East St. Louis, in an atmosphere of wild rumor. Everyone fully expected violence and bloodshed, should an invasion of the East Side be attempted. St. Louisans still found it difficult to believe that "Fort Schuler" had been so easily captured on Friday afternoon. But not all the members of the St. Louis Executive Committee were behind bars, and no one knew whether or not the strike was really ended. Everything would depend on what happened in East St. Louis.

VIII

SATURDAY, JULY 28TH

"No remedy . . . but bullets and bayonets"

In the early hours of Saturday morning, the United States troops moved in force upon East St. Louis. First, they took control of Eads Bridge, encountering no resistance by the strikers. Then, while it was still very dark, twelve companies of infantry, under the command of Colonel Davis, entered a barge, moored at the U. S. Arsenal where the troops were quartered, and were towed by the City Harbor Boat up the river and to the east shore, where eight companies landed opposite Chouteau Avenue, on what was called the Pittsburgh Dyke. These troops proceeded along the dyke to the mainland, and followed the railroad track to the northeast until they reached a point near the Relay Depot. The boats continued up the river to a landing near Eads Bridge, where the other four companies disembarked. Part of this force moved eastward along Bowman's Dyke, and part along the dyke next north. About the same time, the company guarding the bridge marched across it. Thus, four bodies of troops were closing in at once on the Relay Depot. The total force numbered three hundred fifty, according to the St. Louis *Republican*, and one thousand, according to the East St. Louis *Gazette*. But this latter paper, which supported Mayor Bowman, might be expected to exaggerate a bit; or the figure of a thousand might include militia units which arrived later.

The crisis drew near. But as the troops approached the Relay Depot, the strikers scattered; and the soldiers whose object was simply to take possession of the Depot and disperse the crowd, made no effort to pursue them. The only strikers found at the Depot were two men whom Mayor Bowman had commissioned as special police, on the recommendation of the railroaders' Executive Committee, to guard railroad property. The fact that

railroad property had been well protected in East St. Louis did not prevent the arrest of these men.

The East St. Louis strikers offered no more resistance than had their comrades in St. Louis. They simply had no intention of fighting United States troops, and there is no indication that their leaders urged them to. An invasion by the militia might have been an entirely different matter. The East St. Louis *Gazette*, Mayor Bowman's paper, declared that "had the *militia* come to East St. Louis Saturday morning instead of U. S. troops, there would undoubtedly have been bloodshed, as many of the militia understood that every man, woman and even sucking babes were armed to the teeth."

Eight companies of Colonel Davis's regulars were stationed along the lines of the different railroads, with one company left to guard the Relay Depot. A squad of St. Louis militiamen, composed of men from the offices of the St. Louis & Southeastern line, was on hand to protect the property of that railroad, having, no doubt, been held ready for the purpose by the indefatigable Mr. Wilson, who had contributed so much to bringing the U.S. troops to East St. Louis. Illinois militia units also moved in on Saturday.

No serious effort was made by the strikers to recapture the Relay Depot, upon the control of which the success or failure of the strike largely depended. But they were not quite ready to admit defeat, as the Governor of Illinois discovered for himself. Governor Cullom says in his memoirs that when he arrived in East St. Louis that day, he found several thousand men sitting about on the curbs, looking entirely harmless; so he decided there was no reason the trains should not move. However, as the first train was ready to leave, "these mild-mannered laboring men, to the number of five or six hundred, gently closed in upon the train, and put out the fire in the engine." The St. Louis papers recorded a brief and forceful speech the Governor made at this point, to the effect that it and all other trains would go out "if there was enough power in the State of Illinois to send them." Apparently there wasn't, because the engineer refused to take the train out unless the Governor occupied the cab with him.

And this the Governor could not do, having important business in East St. Louis.

That evening, General Pope, passing through St. Louis, informed President Hayes that the freight blockade continued in effect at East St. Louis, and, in his opinion, it would require more force to break than Governor Cullom expected. But the Governor had no scruples about using the full force of the United States government against the strikers, as far as that force was made available to him. A later Governor of Illinois, John Peter Altgeld, sacrificed his political career by protesting the use of Federal troops in the Pullman strike of 1894. His predecessor, Governor Cullom, having no disposition to become an "Eagle Forgotten", helped to establish the precedent for the use of Federal troops in '94.

The arrests in East St. Louis were made by the United States Marshal for the Southern District of Illinois. Among those arrested was City Marshal John B. Carrol, who was charged with "inciting the mob and advising them to organize into companies for a more thorough resistance to the military." Mayor Bowman was not bothered; and the East St. Louis *Gazette* defied his critics with an editorial which boldly blamed the railroad strike on bondholders and directors, who cut freight and passenger rates and then reduced wages in order that dividends might be maintained. Laborers, the editorial said, might voice their objections singly, and merely get fired; but when three or more voiced their objections, "they are called a *mob*, and the strong arm of the law is invoked."

During the day, several hundred striking coal miners arrived by train from nearby Belleville. They were closely questioned, and several shotguns were confiscated. The miners declared their intention had been merely to hold a meeting to voice their own wage demands; and, in the course of the day, they were all allowed to return to Belleville.

This visit seems to have been originally planned for a much earlier hour, when it might have had bloody consequences. Shortly after 2 A.M. that morning, about the time the troops were taking control of Eads Bridge, the railroad strikers seized

a train and proceeded to Belleville with the purpose, it was said, of bringing a body of miners to East St. Louis, presumably for aid in resisting any invasion from St. Louis. It is possible that the railroaders were seeking the miners' aid in direct response to the news of the troops' appearance on Eads Bridge.

The Belleville Sheriff was informed of this move by a railroad official; and the Belleville Guards, together with other citizens, mobilized in time to switch the train off at a coal mine – where, as a result, the engine lost its smokestack and the roof of its cab, when it ran under a coal dump. So the forces of law and order managed to do more damage to railroad property than the strikers had done in the entire preceding week!

The men on the train were captured and taken to Belleville. A representative of the East St. Louis Executive Committee, who came on horseback, bringing a message to one of the leaders of the miners' union, was also arrested; and so was the miners' leader himself, as he was out waking his members. The miners would perhaps have been more ready than the railroaders to actively resist the military: the history of the Molly Maguires in the Pennsylvania coal fields suggests as much, and some of the Mollies were even supposed to be hiding out in Illinois. The failure of the railroaders to get reinforcements from Belleville may have had something to do with the quick surrender of the Relay Depot.

One of the St. Louis papers reported a conversation between an old German laborer and a railroad striker, sometime on Saturday: "I was in two rebellions, in '48 and '49, and I know just how things ought to be done . . . you boys had better be guided by me!" "You'll see worse times tonight than you ever saw in '48, old man!", was the reply. But, although no freight trains left East St. Louis that night, the prediction did not prove true. At one time, the crowd outside the Relay Depot got "very pressing in its attention," but scattered when the soldiers advanced with fixed bayonets. On both sides of the river, the strike seemed to be ending in anticlimax.

In St. Louis, Colonel John Knapp, one of the owners of the *Republican*, must have been reflecting with satisfaction on the

outcome of an eventful week. Sixteen years before, he had commanded the First Regiment, (composed of Confederate sympathizers), at the city's Camp Jackson; and he had been obliged to break his sword rather than surrender it to a German officer of the Union forces that captured the camp. This time, the *German* had been forced to surrender to Colonel Knapp. His paper triumphantly announced the end of the Great Strike throughout the nation. Only around Scranton was the state of affairs still dangerous. In Pennsylvania and West Virginia, miners and railroad employees had joined forces in the strike, as they had attempted to do around East St. Louis.

As for local news, the *Republican* chronicled the glorious exploits of Friday under the head "Crushing a Mob", with the further jubilant announcement, "St. Louis Redeems Her Credit as a City." The paper referred lightly to the "amusing" scenes at the capture of Schuler's Hall: "Soldiers and Militia Attend a Meeting . . . And Produce a Most Decided Impression." Yet the long editorials on the subject of "those blood-thirsty communists" reveal no tendency to lightly dismiss the "St. Louis Commune" or minimize the "crimes" of its leaders. In Saturday's *Republican* there also appeared Albert Warren Kelsey's pontifical summing-up, which is completely typical of the conventional wisdom of the day. "There is and can be," said Mr. Kelsey, "no conflict between capital and labor, as such, while every healthy workingman has it in his power to turn capitalist by practising privation of certain luxuries. . . . There is but one, single, painful road out of this entire complication, and that is for every workingman to study how to produce more and consume less." But St. Louis workingmen had been "practising privation of certain luxuries" – and necessities – for a number of years, and would continue on this "painful road" of learning how to consume less for at least a year or two more, meanwhile being given little opportunity to produce anything at all. Not many of them became capitalists by the process.

The *Republican* could now turn to the pleasant task of lambasting the rest of the St. Louis press for its alleged spinelessness. The *Globe-Democrat*, the *Republican's* chief competitor, was blasted

by the righteous indignation of the Knapp brothers: "If the American commune had been as successful as was that of Paris in 1871, the *Globe-Democrat* would have been the organ of the party in power!" (There is an exquisite humor in this accusation for readers of the present-day *Globe-Democrat*, familiar with its long record of conservatism).

The *Globe* contributed to the discussion of the late "Commune" with the mysterious hint that its leaders had not all been poor men. Although the active leaders of the strike were none of them "in the enjoyment of comfortable revenue," as the *Globe* charged, it is not unlikely that some well-to-do citizens had at one time or another shown some interest in the socialist movement, and now may have found themselves the objects of suspicion. The *Globe* further complained that the names of the individual members of the Executive Committee had in no case been signed to its proclamations!

The *Times* furnished a military analysis, complete with map, of the raid on Schuler's Hall; and, in an editorial, discussed the strike in a more thoughtful way than the other papers seemed capable of. "Society," said the *Times*, "is frightfully diseased; labor is in revolt against hardships which it feels but cannot comprehend; the dangerous classes are increasing in numbers and deadly purpose; yet the Republican Party can propose no remedy for these evils but bullets and bayonets."

The *Daily Journal* quoted the Chicago *Times'*, backhanded compliment to the effect that St. Louis had retained its position as a one-horse town by getting through the strike without any killings, and observed, "we rest content under the imputation." The *Journal* remarked that the strike gave evidence of "a national organization directed by some kind of central authority." (This was a natural conclusion to draw; but there is certainly no basis for it with respect to the *railroad* strike; and it is very doubtful that the Workingmen's Party exercised or attempted to exercise any sort of national control of the strike movement).

The German newspapers engaged in much the same kind of mutual recrimination as the English-language press. The Democratic *Anzeiger* chided the Republican *Westliche Post* for its

conciliatory attitude towards the strikers—although the strikers themselves had come, very quickly, to regard the *Westliche Post* as an enemy only second to the *Republican* in virulence.

The city was quiet on Saturday, but there were signs to distinguish it from the usual hot, somnolent, summer week-end. Militia, marching through the streets, attracted some attention. The companies in the various wards continued to perfect their organizations; new companies were formed in the County; and at the Four Courts, there was nothing so distracting as the suppression of an insurrection to interfere with military routine, although the friends of the militiamen were "spoiling them by sending them too many goodies," and the artillery branch was "in especial danger of dyspepsia from high living."

Yet the police and military were exercising the utmost vigilance, and an additional supply of Colt revolvers was turned over to the police. The New York *Herald* noted "an undercurrent of wrath still existing among certain classes" in St. Louis—who suffered not from the same kind of dyspepsia that afflicted the militiamen at the Four Courts, but from an ailment sometimes known as "skip-meal colic."

At the Union Depot, all was peaceful; passenger service to the West was normal, but not yet to the East. Freight traffic to the East had still not been resumed.

The only disorder of the day occurred when "a party of young roughs" drove bricklayers from their work on a new building. The police arrived, nine men were arrested, and one of them was wounded in the shoulder by a revolver shot. This was about the most serious injury received by anyone during the strike.

Work was not generally resumed on Saturday. Difficulty in getting coal prevented some plants from operating: the price of coal had risen from twenty cents per bushel on Friday, to thirty-five cents on Saturday, and not much was available.

In the afternoon, the Governor and city officials reviewed one of the militia regiments. Some units of the militia were already disbanding; and the Sheriff issued an order dissolving the *posse comitatus*, except for certain units which had received arms.

Meanwhile, the arrested strike leaders were being held in-

communicado at the Fourt Courts. At 9 A.M. Saturday morning, Local 12 of the Cabinet Makers, (the German union closely associated with the Workingmen's Party), held a special meeting and heard a report from a committee that had visited Mayor Overstolz to request the release of Currlin and the others. The Mayor had refused the request, and had refused to permit any public meetings. (When quarrymen met that day to discuss wage rates, their meeting was dispersed by the police). Local 12 discussed its wage demands, elected a committee to confer with employers, and made plans for a mass meeting.

Trouble had been expected at Carondelet, where the strikers controlled the area in a manner similar to East St. Louis. The Carondelet strikers attempted to avoid arrest by going outside the city limits, "beyond the River Des Peres, to a suburb consisting principally of butcher shops and beer saloons, called Luxemburg," where they held a meeting and made plans to continue the strike. But St. Louis police, disregarding the city limits, broke up this meeting; and police and militia took complete charge in Carondelet.

Twenty-seven alleged members of the Carondelet Executive Committee were arrested on Saturday, including Martin Becker, the Workingmen's Party member who was Chairman of the Committee. None of the business men who had served on the Committee were arrested. Becker was released almost immediately, on parole, apparently because he was an "old man". The records of the Committee were also seized – but these could not have been particularly incriminating, since they are not mentioned again.

Early Saturday evening, General John Pope, in St. Louis, wired the U. S. Adjutant General that he had been assured by the Mayor that the latter had complete control of the city. General Pope left that same evening for Chicago.

There was little or no effort on the part of the St. Louis press to analyze carefully the causes, development, and effects of the strike. The *Globe* published a list of sixty St. Louis factories that had been closed by the strike, *not* including the "mercantile firms from Fifth Street to the river . . . which closed down for pru-

dential reasons." Beyond this, there was not much more than high-flown rhetoric about the horrors of communism and the glorious victory of the forces of law and order.

An anonymous letter in the *Daily Journal* denied that the strike leaders had been lawfully arrested, and upheld the right of free speech. Hardly another voice was raised in defense of the arrested men except for what they said themselves in interviews. The *Journal*, however, did criticize the railroad managers, declaring in an editorial that "the recent uprising of underpaid railroad employees was a protest, not of labor against capital, but of American freemen against a privileged class."

The St. Louis *Christian Herald* thought otherwise. It identified the "Internationals" as "the same sort of men, only worse . . . as were once called Chartists in England," and "Communists in France" – "levellers, agrarians, despisers of authority, despisers of all that is great or good." "There is," said this Christian journal, "a maudlin sentimentality . . . and a pseudo-philanthropy which already begins to talk about 'enlarging the accommodations and increasing the provisions for the multitudes of poor that will be in the city next winter.' " But by whose acts were the city's factories closed down, asked the editor? "Are you going to make the property holders pay a large amount, as they will have to do, and do it willingly, for suppressing the rioters, and then, indirectly at least, reward the rioters for their acts?" "The course proposed by those mistaken philanthropists," said the editor, "is simply equivalent to a general invitation to idlers, tramps, and vagabonds to 'come and winter with us.' "

A catholic weekly, the *Western Watchman*, was no less opposed to strikes in principle. Yet it published a protest from a correspondent, who objected to the indiscriminate application of the term "communist" to every striker. There were both individuals and corporations, said the writer, who "richly merited all the abuse heaped upon them by the 'Executive Committee.' "

The *Globe-Democrat* published a summary of the events of the week which began with a magnificent flourish: "When brave Anderson, cooped up in Fort Sumter, witnessed the evolutions of the enemies of the nation in Fort Moultrie, he knew well that

the first gun fired by them would be the signal for an uprising of the loyal people of the country!" This delicate compliment to Colonel Davis, who had fired the first answering shot from Fort Sumter, must have seemed in rather bad taste to the editors of the anti-Republican *Republican.* The *Globe* published, a couple of weeks after the strike, a letter dated "Ludlow Street Jail, New York City, August 6th," addressed originally to a New York labor paper, from the leader of the strike on the Erie railroad, giving the employees' side of that strike. One of the *Globe's* advertisers made topical use of the recent disturbances: a patent medicine company announced that "A *Successful Strike* is when the attack is made on complaints of the bowels . . . with Maguire's Benne Plant"!

Only one contemporary, published account of the St. Louis strike reveals any serious effort to understand what actually happened and why. James A. Dacus, a St. Louis newspaperman, in his *Annals of the Great Strikes in the United States,* devotes a chapter to the general strike in St. Louis. He may or may not have been in the city at the time of the strike: his account is based mostly on the *Republican,* and has little or none of the flavor of first-hand observation. In his reflections on the meaning of the strike, however, he reveals some insight – more, in any case, than can be found in most of the contemporary homilies on the subject.

His analysis of the elements of the population involved in the strike attempts to be objective. He believed that there were not less than 15,000 men unemployed in St. Louis through no fault of their own, with not less than 3000 more who were unemployable. He thought that the strike brought to St. Louis, in addition, "a vast horde of peripatetic vagrants." Here were twenty to twenty-five thousand people who, in Dacus' opinion, "had no individual interest in the maintenance of law and order." But Dacus also recognized the existence of another class, "perhaps as numerous as any other . . . of St. Louis," consisting of "tradesmen and artisans, with here and there a man of thought and culture," who were "removed from immediate want," but who "were not inclined to be precipitate in assisting to crush working-

men, when they believed to the depths of their hearts that the laborers were contending for that which was their due." From these strike sympathizers, Dacus felt, no help in crushing the strike could be expected "until mobs sought to apply the torch and wield the bloody knife." (This last is, of course, literary hyperbole: the torch was never applied nor the "bloody knife" ever wielded in St. Louis).

In its handbill issued on Friday, the Executive Committee had claimed to represent 22,000 workingmen, and Dacus seems to support this claim. That a large part of the population sympathized with the strikers on the railroads and in other industries, is clearly revealed in the press of all the large cities. Yet Dacus' conclusion is a strange one. "It is true," he says, "that at one time nearly all the shops, mills, and factories in the city were closed"; "the employees of a few foundries and other shops also struck"; and there was a strike among the longshoremen and roustabouts on the levee. But the strikes in the foundries were "unimportant", and the strike on the levee only lasted "a few hours". "In most instances, shops, factories, mills, and foundries were closed by a disreputable rabble, in the ranks of which very few members of the operative and industrial classes were to be found." There was, in fact, "no such thing as a united and enthusiastic labor strike in St. Louis"!

Yet in spite of the success of the "rabble" in shutting down all St. Louis industry, Dacus declares that there was, in St. Louis, "at no time danger of such a catastrophe as befell Pittsburgh," because, from the very beginning, "none were more staunch in their devotion to law and order than the mass of workingmen" of St. Louis. This, of course, directly contradicts the claims of the Committee of Public Safety, which asserted it took action precisely to prevent "such a catastrophe as befell Pittsburgh."

Dacus' thesis that "there was no such thing as a united and enthusiastic labor strike in St. Louis" does not fit the facts very well. It is probable that the unemployed, as distinguished from the unemployable, *were* an important element in the mass meetings and parades. Theirs was the most desperate situation. As for vagrants from outside the city, they probably did play some part

in the strike: some weeks after it, a spokesman of the Workingmen's Party stated that the Executive Committee had "worked like Trojans to control the vagrant enemy that society and capitalists had thrust upon the movement." But it must be remembered that many of these vagrants were simply unemployed workingmen from other cities, looking for work in St. Louis.

It was the role of the Negroes in the St. Louis strike which aroused apprehension in many quarters. There is no indication in the press that they attended the mass meetings in large numbers; to what extent they appeared in the parades on Wednesday and Thursday, is not clear. What aroused comment and apprehension was not their numbers but the mere fact that they were *there:* this was a new departure that could not fail to impress.

As for the "disreputable rabble" that closed the factories, all accounts of the *Wednesday* procession, at least, leave no doubt that it was well controlled by its leaders during the time it accomplished its main tasks, and was composed in the main of workingmen, not rowdies. Dacus falls into the same error that has confused innumerable later discussions of the "labor question". He fails to understand that workers may be ready, even eager, to strike, and yet require some kind of pressure from outside ("intimidation") before they will actually stop work. It can safely be maintained that the core of the strike movement consisted of authentic workingmen, present and former union members, who received the active support of a large proportion of the unemployed, and the passive support, at least, of a large body of employed but unorganized workers in many industries.

Moreover, the general strike was launched by the Executive Committee of the Workingmen's Party; it was *not* a spontaneous movement of the "rabble". And the Executive Committee maintained its leadership in the strike, after a fashion, right up to the end. If the Committee was never able to fully control the strike movement, it at least exercised a far higher degree of centralized control than was the case in any other city. This was what made the St. Louis strike a *general strike* in the true meaning of the term, as distinguished from the strikes and riots elsewhere.

The leading role of the Workingmen's Party, which distin-

guished the St. Louis strike from those in other cities is hardly referred to by Dacus, although the *American Almanac and Treasury of Facts*, (New York and Washington, 1878), in its review of the Great Strike, mentions that "at St. Louis, the Workingmen's Party, as it was called, almost put out of sight the railroad strikers by their high-handed movements"; and the strange events in St. Louis were duly noted in the press of other cities. But even the socialist press seemed to lack curiosity about the "St. Louis Commune"; and an address issued by the National Committee of the Workingmen's Party merely refers to a manifesto published in St. Louis. The Leipzig *Vorwärts*, organ of the socialists of Germany, only noted briefly that the influence of the Workingmen's Party was apparent in Chicago, Louisville, Cincinnati, and St. Louis.

Implicit in Dacus' interpretation of the Great Strike, is his optimistic belief, (after four hundred pages of detailed description of violent class conflict, from the Atlantic to the Mississippi), that "there can be no conflict between labor and capital." In spite of this, he remarks also that "even in America, the *proletariat* is becoming great in numbers and dangerous in disposition." This is a contradiction of the type that moved William Graham Sumner to comment, a few years later, that although everyone vehemently denied the existence of social classes in America, their existence was nevertheless assumed as a simple fact in most discussions of social problems.

On one point, Dacus showed excellent hindsight: "The leaders of the Commune in St. Louis made a mistake," he remarks, "when they supposed that they had engaged all the thousands who attended their open air meetings as converts to their doctrines, or adherents of their cause." It was this mistake, he goes on to say, which led the Executive Committee "to fulminate those wonderful proclamations, which, in the light of subsequent events, appear so much like grim humor, uttered at the expense of a panic-stricken population. The same sort of mistake was made by the citizens and the municipal authorities, and fear fell upon the people and upon their rulers."

IX

EPILOGUE

Civic Virtue had emerged triumphant from a difficult week. The lady's disheveled appearance was only partly due to her tussle with the "canaille"; it was also the result of her association, over a period of years, with certain shady characters who controlled one of the city's principal industries: the extraction of cash from the sucker, by means of certain processes known as Poker, Faro, Keno, etc. These gentlemen, the end product of the roistering river era, were reputed, in the seventies, to exercise a mysterious influence in civic affairs.

On Sunday, July 29th, as the St. Louis clergy preached their sermons on the late strike, police guards met the boats on the levee. "The roustabouts have had their turn," said the *Republican;* "they are . . . altogether undemonstrative, and will, without doubt, only murmur quietly when they find their pay reduced to the former rate." In Carondelet, industry was preparing to resume operations on Monday.

It was on this Sunday that the *Republican* interviewed Henry Allen, in the City Jail. This interview was never publicly repudiated by Allen. And since only two of the ex-members of the Executive Committee made statements of any length, (the other was Currlin's, in the *Times*), Allen's remarks, which are unusually frank, deserve attention.

According to Allen, he had been elected Secretary of *something* by "at least fifty different societies," meeting at Turner Hall just one week before his interview – which would place the meeting on Sunday, July 22nd, when the Workingmen's Party *did* meet at Turner Hall. But there is no reason to believe that the Executive Committee came into existence that early; and how the "fifty different societies" happened to have representatives at the Turner Hall meeting, as well as what these societies

were, is not clear. Here, Allen may have been mixing up the Turner Hall meeting with delegate meetings later in the week.

He candidly acknowledged that various proclamations he had written for the Executive Committee seemed "silly enough . . . on second thought"; but he protested that he had advocated only a "peaceful solution of the labor question," and declared that he and the entire Committee had stood firm against advocates of violence. Allen casts little light on *who* the advocates of violence were. He discusses, however, the incidents of Thursday night, when he attempted to have certain incendiary orators at Lucas Market arrested. "Outsiders", he declares, "were always clamoring for leaders, and wanted to be led on to acts of violence." These "outsiders" wanted to close down the water-works, the gas-works, the street railway systems, etc.; the Executive Committee refused to approve, "but you might as well try to rule a lot of wild heathen." "I never stood between two such fires in my life," he remarks with obvious feeling, referring probably to the Committee of Public Safety on the one hand, and the unruly elements among the strikers on the other. The latter, said Allen, "did us no end of damage, for when the trade representatives saw how boisterous they were, they went off and left the Committee to deal with them." As for the "armed" squads that the workingmen tried to form towards the end of the week, Allen insisted that these were formed for the purpose of keeping order, and that the first such were sent to the Belcher Sugar Refinery to protect it from damage.

Allen blamed the looting of a bakery on Wednesday afternoon on "those International fools carrying that red flag." This interesting remark is not further elaborated; and Allen merely insists that there was no connection between the "Internationals" and the Workingmen's Party except that they both had certain common objectives, such as the eight-hour day and the abolition of child labor. Beyond that, there was "no communism" in the Workingmen's Party; and Allen fervently declared that he detested "that doctrine" and would cut his own throat rather than have anything to do with it; only a few communists belonged to the Workingmen's Party. Yet he refers mysteriously to certain

things the Party did "not consider good policy to advocate now – advanced principles which people must be educated up to by degrees, and which can only be reached by slow progress."

Former members of the International Workingmen's Association, (the "Internationals"), were, of course, members of the Workingmen's Party—the American branch of the I.W.A. had been one of the bodies out of which the Party was formed. Allen's confused resentment at "those international fools" probably reflects chiefly a certain incapacity on the part of most American radicals and reformers to understand even the dilute Marxism of the German-American socialists. Everything Allen says suggests unplanned and unorganized violence by rowdy elements among the strikers, egged on perhaps by a few extremists among the rank-and-file socialists, rather than any kind of planned violence by an organized group within or without the Workingmen's Party. Actually, the St. Louis strike was marked by singularly *little* violence; and members of the Executive Committee reacted to what little did occur with almost as much indignation as did the members of the Committee of Public Safety!

"Why, there never was a time," said Allen, "when a single policeman might not have sent away the Executive Committee," merely by telling the Committee "not to hold any more meetings." The Committee was "almost ready to quit, anyhow," Allen thought, "on account of the mob." And he had been in more danger from the "mob", (that is, those strikers who demanded violence), than anyone else. Because he resisted their demands, they accused him "of having sold out to the city"; and on Friday morning, after the mysterious events of Thursday evening, "they" tried to get hold of Allen, but he "eluded" them.

The statements by both Allen and Currlin, following the strike, must have had the effect, among people who wanted to believe the worst, of confirming their conviction that the Executive Committee, whatever its intentions, had led the "mob" to the point where the slightest jolt might have resulted in massacre and arson.

The *Times* published the complete program of the Workingmen's Party. A document widely distributed by the Party, long before the strike, was published as a sensational disclosure. A

careful reading of this program should have been reassuring to those who feared a violent uprising led by the Workingmen's Party. But no one among the victors was in a mood to be reassured in such a manner.

In East St. Louis, on Sunday, July 29th, there was a last flare-up, when railroad strikers made a final effort to enforce the freight blockade. Many strikers were arrested, and confined in baggage cars. Mayor Bowman was on hand, and secured the release of a number of the prisoners. About this time, the *engineers* on the Vandalia and on the Indianapolis & St. Louis lines went on strike, demanding cancellation of the wage cut of July 1st. These are the only strikes of engineers mentioned in the vicinity of St. Louis during the entire week; it was, said a St. Louis newspaper, "what the doctors would call the after-pains."

On Sunday, in St. Louis, the militia were being gradually mustered out. The Four Courts Building was beginning to lose its warlike aspect, and the Court of Criminal Correction would reopen on Wednesday: the petty squabbles of obscure citizens were about to replace the martial exercises of the fathers and sons of the best families. But sentries still patrolled the building.

On Tuesday, the militia was formally disbanded, with a great parade through the city. Five regiments participated, with artillery companies and their ordnance, and a detachment of United States Artillery with two Gatling guns. There were units of militia from Illinois, (it was hardly possible to have any similar celebration in East St. Louis!); and, in all, about three thousand militiamen took part, many, if not most, in uniform and carrying rifles. General A. J. Smith, of the Committee of Public Safety, with a staff of a dozen colonels, headed the parade, which was reviewed by Mayor Overstolz and the Board of Police Commissioners. Officers were rewarded for gallant conduct with the presentation of such mementos as silver-mounted and ivory-handled revolvers, and cameo sleeve buttons; and the Belleville Guards created a sensation, as they marched by, in spiked Prussian helmets of shining leather and brass, headed by their Bavarian band, playing airs from *Faust*.

On Sunday, the 29th, railroad strikers still held out at a few

points in Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia; and miners in the northern coal fields of Pennsylvania, numbering about 100,000 declared their own general strike. Around Scranton, the railroaders and anthracite miners provided news for a couple of weeks more, and this latter situation was considered even more alarming than the Molly Maguire disturbances. Around Springfield, Illinois, the coal miners were on strike from May 15th to about August 20th. On July 31st, in the vicinity of Du Quoin, Illinois, miners also went on strike. On the previous day, Negro laborers on the New Orleans levee had been reported on strike.

On Monday and Tuesday, July 30th and 31st, President Hayes was still being pressed to make further use of United States troops, especially in the Pennsylvania mine fields and at Cleveland, where the situation was still considered dangerous. The Cabinet meeting on Tuesday was devoted to a calm, if not particularly fruitful, discussion of the causes of the Great Strike and the measures that might be taken to prevent another such catastrophe. Secretary of State Evarts had the last word: "The war," he said, "made water run up hill!"; and, as to an unwelcome invitation to visit Nashville, he hoped that "another strike may come to our relief." On August 5th, General Myer, the Chief Signal Officer, could report to the President, with a valedictory flourish: "*Pax Semper Ubique*". Actually, it was not till the latter part of the month that all the isolated spots of resistance gave in; and the atmosphere in which, during the first week or so of August, the prosecution of the leaders of the St. Louis and East St. Louis strikes was discussed, was somewhat unsettled.

It now remained for the victors to punish the vanquished. Prisoners were being held, and new arrests made, on both sides of the river. In East St. Louis, the United States Marshal was said to have warrants for some twenty active leaders of the strike whom James H. Wilson, of the St. Louis & Southeastern, was especially anxious to have arrested.

One of those already arrested was City Marshal John B. Carroll, who was alleged to have issued a proclamation calling upon the citizens of East St. Louis "to assemble and protect the city against foreign troops"—presumably the United States troops under

Colonel Davis. Carroll claimed that this proclamation had been someone else's idea, and the East St. Louis correspondent of the St. Louis *Times* was mentioned. The *Times* was said to have fired their correspondent. And the East St. Louis *Gazette*, Mayor Bowman's mouthpiece, which defended the City Marshal, expressed horror at this violation of the freedom of the press! But Marshal Carroll found himself "playing checkers with his nose, at the window of Sangamon County Jail," as one paper described his situation.

As for Mayor Bowman, the opposition newspaper on the East Side, the *St. Clair Tribune*, attacked him as "our imbecile mayor", and classed him with the mayors of Galesburg and Braidwood, who had also attempted to conciliate the strikers. (The Mayor of Braidwood was charged with *personally* leading the "mob"). The *Gazette* naturally defended Bowman, and denied the hints in the St. Louis press, (which respected the Mayor as an exceptionally shrewd politician), that he had somehow "made more out of the strike than anybody else." The Mayor himself justified his actions, or his inaction, in a long letter published in the *Gazette* on August 11th: the appointment of special police from the ranks of the strikers and similar measures had been necessary because there was a "very large amount of perishable property in proportion to the population" of the town—property with a value of over $8,000,000—which had to be protected.

The number of East St. Louis strikers who actually came to trial seems to have been far short of the twenty that the Receiver of the St. Louis & Southeastern had his eye on, and it is hard to judge how successful the authorities were in capturing the real leaders of the East St. Louis strike. The arrested men were tried in Springfield, beginning on August 4th. The prosecution was handled by Bluford Wilson, brother of James H. Wilson. Several of the prisoners, including the former East St. Louis City Marshal, had the charges against them nol-prossed. Six others received ninety-day sentences.

But on September 3rd, Judge Treat, following the example of Federal judges in Chicago and Indianapolis, released all the convicted strikers on $500 recognizance each, requiring them to

refrain, for one year, from interfering with property under the control of the United States courts. Petitions for the men's release, circulated during August, were said to have included, among their signers, some railroad officials—but probably not James H. Wilson.

The East St. Louis strikers were thus dealt with rather leniently. In spite of their anger, the railroad officials, or most of them, must have realized that East St. Louis would remain in the hands of the railroad workers. And Mayor Bowman demonstrated that he was very well aware of this: he went to Springfield to help defend the arrested strikers; and less than two months after the strike, he was speaking at a picnic of the Workingmen's Union of East St. Louis, on the same program with Martin Becker, one of the leaders of the strike in Carondelet, Thomas Curtis, one of the most fiery of the orators at the Lucas Market mass meetings, and John Hinchcliffe, a well-known leader of the coal miners.

In St. Louis, the Executive Committee had dissolved in a disorderly anticlimax, its members and supporters dropping from the porches of Schuler's Hall, and fleeing over roofs, as the police and militia surrounded their headquarters. The Committee of Public Safety, on the other hand, disbanded in a burst of martial glory and self-congratulation, its objectives fully achieved except for the punishment of the leaders of the general strike. It is true that the city government was not able to share fully in this glory. Of the mayors of Cincinnati and St. Louis, the Cincinnati *Enquirer* remarked caustically, "Let their forms be tenderly folded in petticoats and their names handed down to posterity in pap-spoons, while monuments are builded in soft soap to commemorate their courage." And a good many St. Louis industrialists no doubt shared these sentiments, in spite of the vigorous action that Mayor Overstolz had finally taken.

By much talk of the horrors of the Paris Commune of 1871, and the just-barely-averted horrors of the "St. Louis Commune", the press fostered the belief that the strike leaders had committed heinous crimes—or, at least, had been *about* to commit such crimes. With a certain pride, the newspapers advanced the claim of St. Louis to the only *genuine* Commune of the several around

the country. The strikers were "indiscreet enough", said the *Republican,* to proclaim a revolution, "and it *was* a revolution." Though a "very contemptible one when brought to the test," the strikers would have made it "destructive and pitiless enough if they could have had their way." "The Commune is the same savage beast the world over," declared the *Republican.* "It did very little harm with us last week, but it showed its teeth." A letter was published in this paper which suggested, with learned references to the law, that the arrested Executive Committee members were guilty of *treason.*

Although the Russo-Turkish War began once more to take first place in the news, all the St. Louis papers continued for some time to devote a good deal of space to discussions of the strike, both local and national, communism and socialism, the trade unions, etc., most of this wordage tending to convey the impression that if the arrested men were not dealt with harshly, the last chance of stemming the revolutionary tide would be lost. This was entirely typical of the tone of the press throughout the nation. Even the country's leading religious journals attacked the strikers with ferocity. The New York *Independent* proclaimed that "if the club of the policeman, knocking out the brains of the rioters" would not suffice, then the remedy was "bullets and bayonets, canister and grape – with no sham or pretense . . . but with fearful and destructive reality." Napoleon was frequently quoted to the effect that the only way to deal with a mob was to exterminate it, and the Emperor of the French seemed to be in high repute with the religious press as an authority on the social question.

The St. Louis area had its own Napoleon. General Bates, commanding the Illinois militia, had his quarters in a "Pullman palace car" in the East St. Louis railroad yards. He was visited there, on July 30th, by a deputation of St. Louis merchants. General Bates expressed the opinion that "a strong standing army, with the quartering of several regiments in the principal cities" was now a "necessity", in spite of the fact that this had hitherto been regarded as "an adjunct of monarchy." The President of the St. Louis Merchants' Exchange, who was on hand, said that "a standing army would give employment to and keep out of mischief a dangerous

portion of the community, a class which was growing larger, and would always be a weight on the community." On another occasion, apropos of a rumor of new disturbances on the East Side, the General remarked bitterly, "You see that it don't do to be merciful and take prisoners!"

On August 2nd, the railroad officials showed their appreciation of the services of Colonel Jefferson C. Davis, commander of the regular troops. There was a private dinner—so private that it does not seem to be even mentioned in the press—at St. Louis' finest hotel, the Lindell. General Pope was also present.

On the same evening that the military were being wined and dined by the railroads, St. Louis newspapers had in their hands, to be published the next day, an open letter signed by twenty-seven prominent St. Louisans, including Thomas T. Gantt and John W. Noble, both of whom had been members of the Committee of Public Safety. These gentlemen had come to the conclusion that the strikers had had genuine grievances and that the time had come to speak out with respect to "the failure of the railroads to pay regularly and promptly their operatives." "We are informed, (it seems incredible, but our information is precise), that in some instances this class of employees, to whom cash payment is a *necessity*, have not been paid in full for months; that in one instance the pay for several months is entirely in arrears, and that a portion of what is due in money has been paid in certificates on which they suffer a ruinous discount." The railroads were called upon to vindicate themselves; but the railroads maintained a discreet silence, and there was no noticeable improvement in the condition of their operatives.

A day or two after the strike, a member of the St. Louis Workingmen's Party wrote the Chicago socialist paper, *Vorbote*, that almost the entire Executive Committee, together with a considerable number of other members of the Party, were in jail; but that efforts were being made to secure the release of Currlin, Fischer, Cope, and Lofgreen, at least.

Arrests continued for some days. As late as August 19th, *Die Laterne*, a German humorous weekly published in St. Louis, protested the vindictiveness of the authorities. A few of the Lucas

Market orators do not appear to have been arrested at all. But rank-and-file strikers were promptly dealt with. Some were fined, and being unable to pay, were sent to the Workhouse: six months was about the most severe sentence. A number of cases were dismissed, the charge in most of these being "riot".

The arrested members of the Carondelet Executive Committee were fined $100 each on such charges as disturbing the peace, resisting an officer, etc. The *Daily Journal*, on August 3rd, mentioned that Patrick Eagan, a well-known Democratic politician in Carondelet, was to have his connection with the strike investigated. M. J. Brennan, another Democratic politician in Carondelet who had been a member of the Executive Committee there, was also under fire.

A writ of *habeas corpus* had been issued for Albert Currlin by Monday, July 30th. On the following day, a warrant was sworn out charging Currlin, Lofgreen, and the other arrested leaders of the St. Louis strike with the felony of riot, "by forcibly compelling peaceful laboring men to quit their employment" on the previous Tuesday. That was on the day *before* the first great parade of the strikers. But it was the day on which the general strike had been proclaimed by the Executive Committee, and it may have been the day on which the Committee first began sending delegations to various plants, to close them down.

Bail was set at $3000 for each of the prisoners, which their attorneys termed exorbitant. Currlin and Cope were released on bail, the former having spent six or seven days in jail. That the other prisoners were able to raise bail is not certain. But Albert Currlin was received in triumph by a crowd of friends, and had a long interview printed in the *Times*.

On Wednesday, August 1st, just five days after the raid on Schuler's Hall, there was a private meeting of some sixteen members of the German section of the Workingmen's Party, at the Hyde Park Brewery Garden. Thus, soon after the forcible suppression of the strike, and with its leaders still in jail, the socialists felt secure enough to meet in a public place, in the very opposite of a conspiratorial manner.

On August 5th, at Turner Hall, from which the Executive

Committee had been ejected, the Workingmen's Party held its first regular meeting since the end of the strike. The *Times* estimated there were fifty persons present. But none of the members of the English section were among them. And the *Globe-Democrat* declared later that the latter section had been "utterly demoralized". Henry Allen claimed that the English section had doubled its membership in the course of the strike; but these new members were lost, at least temporarily, with the collapse of the strike. The much stronger German section held together better, and made, in fact, a rapid recovery.

The meeting at Turner Hall took notice of the story, (printed, for example, in the New York *Herald)*, that Albert Currlin was paid $3000 a year by "Communist societies" of Europe and America. The Party declared that Currlin received but thirty dollars a month as an "agitator" for the organization, and offered to display the books of the German section to confirm this fact.

At this meeting, there was also adopted a resolution honoring a leading member of the Party who had just died: Ferdinand Lingenau. Lingenau, who may be taken as fairly typical of the older generation of German-American radicals in the 1870's, had come to America in 1849, settled in St. Louis in 1856, and, as a traveling agent for an insurance company and for German newspapers had amassed a considerable estate. The *Illinois Staatszeitung*, Chicago, termed him a "sort of general agent of all revolutions," and remarked of this "thoroughly just man" that his paradise in the next world would be a wine garden where he, Robespierre, Marat, and other famous revolutionists could toast each other and await the arrival of Friedrich Hecker. The latter, noted forty-eighter and Union officer in the Civil War, was one of Lingenau's heroes. The St. Louis *Anzeiger* mentioned that Lingenau had allowed to grow up around him a myth to the effect that he was a Russian prince who had suffered in the cause of freedom.

His role in the St. Louis strike is uncertain. F. A. Sorge, a leading American socialist of this period, years later identified Lingenau as an actual member of the St. Louis Executive Committee, but he is not mentioned in the newspapers during the strike. He

died of typhoid fever on August 4th, so it is not likely that he was in any condition to participate in the strike.

The St. Louis socialists honored this veteran by marching behind the hearse, at his funeral on August 6th, to the number of a hundred, headed by Albert Currlin and by both the Stars and Stripes and the Red Flag. A few days later, the details of Lingenau's will were revealed in the St. Louis press. He had left an estate estimated at from $13,000 to $19,000 to the "social-democrats of the world," for the purpose of establishing "free governments" everywhere. Careful instructions were given for dividing the estate among the socialist organizations of Europe and America. The estate was still in litigation in 1881, and seems to have gone eventually, not to the social-democrats of the world, but to a distant relative in Germany.

In spite of the comparison of St. Louis in 1877 with Paris in 1871—a far-fetched parallel which the defenders of law and order became very fond of—the city's business men and municipal officials displayed little talent for the iron-handed suppression of revolt, *à la* Gallifet. The quarters in the City Jail, occupied by the leaders of the strike, were luxurious compared to the dungeons at Versailles, into which the most hated of the Communards had been thrown. And while few of the latter emerged entirely sane, there is no evidence that the leaders of the St. Louis "Commune" had to endure anything worse during their confinement than dyspepsia caused by the jail diet. (There was some talk later of Currlin's health having suffered; but he lived to a ripe age.)

On August 8th, the city officials were still so nervous that they gladly accepted Governor Phelps' offer to leave a thousand rifles, together with ammunition, in their hands. On August 10th, Mayor Overstolz, speaking to the Municipal Assembly, congratulated the city on its remarkable immunity to violence, bloodshed, and the destruction of property; but he nevertheless emphasized that the lesson of the strike was the necessity of increasing the strength of the police force.

For some days, the newspapers had been extraordinarily silent with respect to the exact status of the case against Currlin, Lofgreen, and the others. But not a word had been printed to suggest

that there was any possibility of their escaping punishment. And the strike leaders, when their cases came up in the Court of Criminal Correction on August 10th, had every reason to believe that they faced terms in the Missouri Penitentiary. The full horror of a sentence to that institution in 1877 may be judged from a first-hand contemporary account of it, which describes the average cell as of stone, four by seven by six feet, and swarming with vermin and rats. The prisoners slept on the stone floor, on a mattress stuffed with corn huskings; lived on a diet consisting largely of potato soup, corn bread with molasses, and black coffee; and for infringement of the rules were flogged with a four-foot cowhide strap or confined in a pitch-black dungeon in ball-and-chain. Insane convicts were kept in partly underground cells, and shackled. With this prospect before them, the leaders of the general strike behaved, on the whole, with courage and dignity, marred by understandable signs of panic in only one or two.

The best known figures among the men who stood in court on August 10th, were Albert Currlin, Peter Lofgreen, James E. Cope, Joseph N. Glenn, Thomas Curtis, William B. Fischer, and Henry F. Allen. These agitators and orators, pushed forward by the Great Strike, were a strangely-assorted lot. The newspapers referred to them as "Communists"; but they had behind them no organization even remotely similar to the modern Communist Party, and in their make-up, as individuals, there was nothing of the mechanized Machiavellism of the modern Communist.

Albert Currlin, full-time "agitator" of the German section of the Workingmen's Party, was a small, stooped man of twenty-four, with a pleasant smile. He was unmarried, and a baker or confectioner by trade; though self-educated, he had the appearance and manner of a scholar. The *Globe-Democrat* told its readers that Currlin had served a sentence of seven years in Germany for political activities—failing to explain how he could have become a "prominent political agitator" in his homeland at the age of fourteen. He had, in fact, come to America in 1874 to escape military service, as was the case with so many of the best emigrants. It is not known that he had any contact with the socialist movement before arriving in America. He had assisted in found-

ing the Workingmen's Party, at the Philadelphia convention in 1876, and was a well known figure among the German socialists. His English was poor, and he spoke mostly in German.

Peter Lofgreen, leader of the English section of the Workingmen's Party, was identified in the press as a German of middle age, but was actually a German-speaking Dane. He had the degree of Master of Arts from the University of Copenhagen, and had practised law in Chicago, although these facts seem to have been unknown to the St. Louis press. For four years, he had been a mail clerk for the *Globe-Democrat*, and had been "accounted a faithful employee." The *Daily Journal* referred to him as a "notorious Communist, spiritualist, and general demoralizer."

James E. Cope was an Englishman of fifty-four, a shoe-fitter, married, with a family. He was called "a determined little man, with a ready flow of volcanic language," and must have irritated the authorities by his freely expressed conviction that he would be released "when those boobies," (the militia, that is), got through "playing soldiers." The *Westliche Post* spoke of Cope as Chairman of the Executive Committee; but the St. Louis newspapers do not seem to have known the even more interesting fact that he had been one of the founders, in England in 1864, of the terrible International, which in spite of its dissolution in 1876, was still a popular bugaboo. The New York *Herald* asserted that Cope, Currlin, and Allen had all been compelled to flee to America as a result of their connection with the International. But this was probably untrue in all three cases.

Joseph N. Glenn, another shoe worker, had been a union organizer in his trade for ten years. He was an official of the secret Order of the Knights of Labor; but that organization had not yet expanded into the Middle West, and there is no indication that it played any role in the St. Louis strike. Even the name of the Order was secret in 1877.

Thomas Curtis, an elderly book-seller, was described as a man of more than ordinary intelligence with some of the strongly marked personal qualities and eccentricities that were said to be characteristic of the city's antiquarian book-dealers. He was a veteran free-thinker; the Catholic *Western Watchman* called

him "an apostle of atheism." Curtis had publicly denied that he had been a member of the Executive Committee or of the Workingmen's Party; but he made no secret of his sympathies "with the poor and oppressed working people of this country." He had a ready wit, revealed in a sardonic comment he made on the subject of his imprisonment. He occupied a cell just above the one occupied some months previously by William McKee, publisher of the *Globe-Democrat*, who had been convicted of aiding distilleries to avoid Federal taxes, in connection with the famous Whiskey Ring scandal. "*I* was incarcerated," said Curtis, "because I had not taken *enough* care for other people's property, while *Mr. McKee* was restrained in durance vile because he took *too much* care of their property. Who shall teach us how to draw the line?"

William B. Fischer was a German printer who had been a compositor for the *Westliche Post*. He seems to have been closely associated with Currlin. His younger brother Adolph became world-famous some ten years later, in connection with the Haymarket Bombing in Chicago—a case with which Currlin himself would also be connected. Fischer was married and had three young children.

Henry F. Allen, a small Welshman, "with a very large head," was a sign-painter and self-taught physician who dabbled in Swedenborgianism. He was married, and had two children. Allen had maintained relations with the St. Louis socialists since 1872 at least; but his own social philosophy had a more Utopian character than the official philosophy of the Workingmen's Party. "Report has it," said the *Globe-Democrat*, "that the doctor has been of unsound mind for several years past." The books he published later reveal only a mild eccentricity, however.

Henry Allen and his family had suffered severely during the depression; and now, facing a prison sentence as a consequence of a few speeches at Lucas Market, he had every reason to be disillusioned. The *Globe-Democrat* said that he made no secret of the fact that he had been the Secretary of the Executive Committee, was "proud of his position" and "sorry for nothing." But the *Re-*

publican published an interview with him, (already noted), in which he expressed somewhat different sentiments.

These men who faced the court on August 10th may have noted the irony of being arraigned for revolutionary activities by a Prosecuting Attorney who was himself engaged in raising funds to promote a Fenian revolution in Ireland! It is possible that the Prosecuting Attorney, for this very reason, felt his own position, and that of the city, to be a trifle insecure. In any case, though up to that moment there had been no hint to the public that the strike leaders might escape punishment, the fact was quickly revealed that the authorities either had no evidence, or chose to present no evidence, against the leaders of the general strike.

The court proceedings were brief. The Prosecuting Attorney asked for more time to round up witnesses. Counsel for the defense objected that the ten days already elapsed since the warrants had been served was time enough; the Court overruled the motion for continuance; and the prosecuting Attorney thereupon declared that he was obliged to enter a *nolle prosequi* in all the cases. (This freed the defendants, but was not equivalent to acquittal, and did not bar future action against them).

The *Republican* commented regretfully that the members of the Executive Committee could not be convicted because they had not actually taken any part "in the active operations of the mob," and had not signed their names to any incriminating documents. The hundreds of witnesses who were to testify to the guilt of the agitators simply did not exist. And the way the *Republican* glumly limited its account of the "trial" to the bare facts, revealed the editors' awareness that the sudden collapse of the strike had been matched by the sudden collapse of the case against its leaders. Albert Currlin, Peter Lofgreen, and the others, left the courtroom free men, surrounded by jubilant friends. In October, the Grand Jury was instructed to look into the disturbances of the past summer. But the Jury reported that they were "compelled, although reluctantly, to see those who, of all others, were most guilty, and who had been instrumental in bringing all of this trouble upon the city, escape any punishment whatsoever." The Jury explained its inability to act, on the grounds that grave doubt

existed as to the constitutionality of a law upon which reliance had been placed to punish the strike leaders.

Yet it may be that something more than a legal technicality prevented the prosecution of the Executive Committee members, or at least contributed to the anti-climax. It is possible that the authorities decided, as soon as tempers had a chance to cool, that the situation was still too tense, the strength of the Workingmen's Party and its sympathizers still too great, to safely permit the prosecution of these men.

This dénouement has, indeed, failed to satisfy all historians. Scharf's *History of St. Louis City and County*, (Philadelphia, 1883), states merely that the Executive Committee members were "captured and punished." Samuel Yellen's *American Labor Struggles*, (New York, 1936), declares positively that Currlin, Cope, Fischer and Lofgreen were fined $2000 each and sentenced to five years in the penitentiary! Philip Foner's *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, (New York, 1947), repeats this error.

The full impact of the nation-wide strikes of 1877 on the American economy, and their influence on the thinking of business leaders and on the development of the labor movement are topics that have received little attention from historians, and cannot be treated in detail here. Representatives of the new plutocracy reacted with horror and indignation and, with few exceptions, showed no disposition to inquire more closely into the *cause* of the strikes and the feelings which motivated the strikers. All unions were damned as subversive, Communist-led conspiracies. And in a nation which had always prided itself on its egalitarianism, the press more and more frequently advised the American workingman to become reconciled to the station of life to which it had pleased God to call him. A contemporary history of the Great Strike rejected governmental regulation of freight rates and arbitration of railroad labor disputes as impractical and inconsistent with republican institutions: the laboring man must depend, said the author, solely on the "liberality, kindness and justice of the rich"; the strike allowed of "but one remedy—the bullet,"

and taught but one lesson—"the sooner and more unsparingly it is used, the better."

Although the labor rebellion had ended in what seemed to be a defeat for the workingmen, and no single labor organization of any sort emerged from the strike immediately and markedly strengthened, the strike nevertheless had important consequences for the labor movement. The Workingmen's Party, as a national organization, did gain membership; but it was the Greenback-Labor Party, with a program of currency reform and moderate demands in behalf of labor, which eventually became the chief political beneficiary of the Great Strike.

The Order of the Knights of Labor, although it had played no role in the strikes, received new life. At its General Assembly in January, 1878, the Order established its first permanent, national organization, which became more and more highly centralized as time went on. The Order became a broad, semi-political body, and developed into the dominant labor organization of the 1880's. Between 1881 and 1886, the American Federation of Labor took form, reacting quite differently to the events of 1877. In the A. F of L., autonomous national unions of skilled workers united in a loose federation which came to have rigid anti-political principles, and left the unskilled workers, the Negroes, etc., on the outside.

The depression continued into or through 1879. In St. Louis as everywhere else, the labor movement revived slowly. But the Great Strike had made a decisive break in the steady drift into demoralization that had been going on since 1873 for American labor as a whole.

The St. Louis Workingmen's Party, under the same leadership that had led the general strike, renewed its activities. On September 3rd, the Party held another mass meeting at Lucas Market, attracting a crowd of two or three thousand. Most of the orators of the previous meetings appeared and had their say, defending the role of the Workingmen's Party and the Executive Committee in the general strike.

In October, at the city election of School Directors, the Workingmen's Party elected its candidates in five of the twenty-eight

wards—a surprising victory for a Party which only two months previously had been denounced as beyond the pale of civilized society! However, it seems that the Party's candidates were elected chiefly on the basis of their support of the program of German instruction in the schools; this was an issue that all the German-Americans were deeply concerned about. (Irish citizens demanded that if tax money was used for German instruction, then Irish should also be taught!) Other issues, including the retention of the city's pioneer kindergarten system, were involved. Early in 1878, the Socialistic Labor Party, (the new name adopted by the national Workingmen's Party at the end of 1877), was collaborating with prominent St. Louis German-Americans in organizing support for German instruction in the schools. Among the latter was Emil Preetorius, editor of the *Westliche Post*, who had so vigorously denounced the Workingmen's Party and the general strike the previous July! About this time, unfortunately, the Party discovered that the School Directors it had elected could not be depended upon to support the Party program for the schools.

But this blow was softened by the election, during 1878, of two S. L. P. members to the municipal House of Delegates—a more important body than the School Board. In the spring of 1878, less than a year after the collapse of the general strike, the S. L. P. could claim three to four thousand German-American members in the city. This, undoubtedly, was a gross exaggeration of the Party's *dues-paying* membership, but may not have been far out of line as an estimate of the total number of members and sympathizers the S. L. P. could count upon. The active socialist agitation going on in St. Louis and the surrounding country in the spring and early summer of 1878 led, in fact, to much apprehension as to what might happen when the fateful month of July arrived.

The socialists now had their own press. As early as August, 1877, there began to appear, apparently as a daily, the *Star*, edited by Thomas Curtis, formerly of the Executive Committee. Curtis used as the paper's motto a text boldly chosen from one of his most famous speeches during the strike: "Do you know what a

poor man's poverty means? It means ignorance and crime for his sons and prostitution for his daughters!" The *Star* was at first endorsed by the socialists but later repudiated by them. But it did not, in any case, last more than a few months at the most.

Sometime toward the end of 1877 or early in 1878, Henry Allen, one-time Secretary of the Executive Committee, began publication of another paper, a weekly called the *Voice of Labor*. This was supported, at the beginning, by the S. L. P. and the unions in which it had influence. But it did not flourish. Allen complained that he had to burn his furniture that winter to keep his family from freezing; and the paper went under, probably by the end of 1878. Allen, a political maverick like Curtis, defected to the Greenback crusade.

The socialists had much greater success in launching a paper in the German language. It began publication, as a daily, before the end of September, 1877, with Dr. August Otto-Walster, a well-known German socialist, as Editor, and Albert Currlin as City Editor, under the name *Volksstimme des Westens*, or "People's Voice of the West." Its motto was "Justice for All," and it firmly rejected all advertising by "soothsayers, fortune-tellers, wonder-doctors and other frauds," while carrying the advertising of such respectable commercial institutions as the "Famous" department store. This paper continued publication until sometime in 1881; and it appears that Currlin was one of its editors to the very end.

In St. Louis, during the first half of 1878, Revolution was in the air. There was a "Revolution Cash Grocery House" on the revolutionary North Side. At Bessehl's Pictorial Bazaar, the portraits of some of the city's leading socialists were on display, along with the pictures of other local celebrities. And it was in 1878 that Dacus and Buel's *Tour of St. Louis* made known such unpleasant details of the city's slum life as to render the volume unsuitable for the parlor table, in the opinion of outraged business men who had paid good money to get their notices in the book and into the parlor.

There was some talk of a new general strike. The disturbing news was published that the socialists were drilling with arms. Indeed, Albert Currlin admitted that a "Socialistic Workingmen's

Protective Association," with about two hundred members, was drilling with Springfield rifles. There is no reason to believe that this group had more than a very few Springfield rifles, or arms of any sort. But similar armed groups *were* being set up, ostensibly for self-protection, by German-American workingmen in several cities. The National Committee of the S. L. P. disapproved of these groups, and the result, in time, was an irreparable split in the organization.

While the workingmen drilled, the newly organized Police Reserves also drilled; and who began first, no one can say. But the month of July, 1878, passed without disturbance; and the St. Louis S. L. P. seems to have passed the peak of its activity and influence at about the same time.

In October, the Party elected two of its candidates in a School Board election, one of which was re-elected in 1880. But the municipal and congressional elections of November were the real test of socialist strength. This was the high tide of Greenbackism. Throughout the country, the Greenback-Labor Party put on a spirited campaign, aided by such crusaders as Lydia Pinkham; and elected some fifteen Congressman. In 1876, in St. Louis, the Greenback Party had received only a trifling vote; in 1878, it got seventeen percent of the total vote in the city, though none of its candidates were elected.

The S. L. P. did not do as well as it had expected; it elected no one. But one candidate for the City Council received 7,232 votes, as against 13,700 for the Republican, and 16,730 for the Democrat.

In April, 1879, there were elections for the city's House of Delegates in the two wards which had previously elected socialist members. One of these wards again elected a socialist; in the other, the socialist candidate was defeated. With this election, the S. L. P.'s threat to normal St. Louis politics came to an end, for all practical purposes.

The one concrete achievement of this brief socialist upsurge was the establishment of a State Bureau of Labor Statistics. It was created in August, 1879, (the seventh such State Bureau to be set up); and W. H. Hilkene, a leading member of the St. Louis cigar makers' union, Secretary of the local Trades' Assembly, and

probably an S. L. P. member, was appointed Commissioner by Governor Phelps. P. J. McGuire was appointed Assistant Commissioner. McGuire, a new arrival in St. Louis, (who would later become a founder of the American Federation of Labor and one of its outstanding leaders), was a full-time agitator for the S. L. P. Only a little more than two years after Governor Phelps had sent arms to St. Louis for the suppression of the socialist-led general strike, he was appointing a widely-known socialist agitator to an official position!

In some other cities, the Party had been winning minor victories also. But, within the national organization, factional disputes over the question of collaboration with the Greenback-Labor Party, and later, in 1880-81 even more serious disputes over the so-called "military" question—the organization of armed workers' militia—split the Party. The left wing, favoring the organization of armed groups and repudiating peaceful and parliamentary means of achieving socialism, formed the short-lived Revolutionary Socialist Party, which had a semi-anarchist or syndicalist program. The right wing retained the name of Socialistic Labor Party, and lapsed into a sectarianism and isolation aggravated by the fact that very few of its members could speak English easily.

The socialist movement of the seventies and eighties gave organized labor some of its best leaders. But all that time, and through the nineties, the socialists struggled, for the most part unsuccessfully, with the problem of adapting themselves and their program to the facts of American life. It was only during the most hopeful period of the movement, beginning about the turn of the century and extending into the period of World War I, that the Socialist Party, offspring of the S. L. P., seemed to approach the solution of this problem, in spite of the political contradictions and ambiguities revealed by its growth. The Socialist Party was virtually destroyed, however, by the Communist split at the end of World War I. The Communist Party became a fanatical little sect in which revolutionary idealism was harnessed in the service of a police state after a fashion that no one in the old socialist movement would have conceived possible. And so the

results of fifty years of painful growth on the part of the American socialist movement were to a very large extent cancelled out.

During the early 1900's, and up to the end of World War I, the St. Louis socialist movement flourished, and individual members of the Party exercised much influence in certain trade unions. In Granite City, Illinois, adjoining East St. Louis, a socialist mayor was elected in 1911, 1913, and 1917. (In the latter year, East St. Louis workingmen staged a bloody race riot!) But only a few "old timers" occasionally referred to the stirring days of '77, and no attempt seems ever to have been made to piece together the story of the strike. With the brief, and not very impressive, revival of the movement in the depression years of the 1930's, (which the surviving old guard Germans in the Party regarded with some suspicion), not even a word on ceremonial occasions recalled the days, more than a half-century before, when respectable householders had waited apprehensively, with shotguns in their hands, in the expectation that their homes were about to be pillaged by howling revolutionists.

As for local historians, always more concerned with the Social than with the social history of the city, they managed, up until quite recently, either to ignore the general strike entirely or to casually misrepresent it. To the city's business leaders, the strike was certainly an episode to be forgotten as quickly as possible.

Yet, aside from Dennis Kearney in California, St. Louis contributed about the only two strike leaders to achieve any prominence in the years following the strike. The careers of these two, Peter Lofgreen and Albert Currlin, deserve to be examined in some detail.

Most of the leaders of the St. Louis strike lapsed quickly into obscurity. Joseph Glenn and James Cope continued to lecture and organize for the S. L. P. for at least a few years. Cope owned a shoe shop in the business district for many years; it may be wondered if the bankers, brokers and insurance men whose offices surrounded his shop, and who no doubt patronized him, were aware that they had in their midst a member of the notorious Executive Committee of 1877, and a founder of the even more notorious International!

Henry Allen, the Swedenborgian sign-painter, should be remembered for a Utopian romance he wrote under the pen-name of "Pruning Knife"—a rather grim *nom de plume* for a singularly inoffensive individual. This book, published in St. Louis in 1891, bears the title *A Strange Voyage, A Revision of the Key of Industrial Cooperative Government, An Interesting and Instructive Description of Life on Planet Venus.* It is a clumsy combination of Edward Bellamy and Emanuel Swedenborg; but Allen goes further than Bellamy in denying that he had been influenced by other social theorists; he insists that he had "kept in the van of economic reforms," without having read "a single work on political or social economy" in his entire life! Thus, he felt, he had avoided having his mind influenced "by the prejudices of others." Like Bellamy, (and very much in the American tradition), he is intensely concerned with such practical matters as methods of transportation, building materials, and sewage disposal. His is the only Utopia in which the "sewer pipes, vault receptacles and slop bowls are all heavily coated on their insides with *gold*, for sanitary reasons," this being "the most non-corroding natural metal known." Allen's painfully-acquired knowledge of the St. Louis slums, which up until quite recently were notorious for their primitive plumbing, accounts for such details.

His voyage is also notable for the abrupt way it begins: "A beautiful maid approached, and invited me to embark with her on board an aerial ship, to visit the planet Venus, whence she had come. It was a strange and surprising request; I looked at her scarcely knowing how to reply." Allen recovered his composure, however, and followed his lovely guide to Venus, where in between sightseeing, he found time to court her. The process is described in a memorable passage. Although it was very explicitly a chaperoned interplanetary tour, the time finally came when the author's arm "encircled her fair form and her matchless head found a welcome resting place" on his shoulder. Thereafter, "in sweet content," they "sat there for hours *discussing many phases of the economic question*..." In 1894, Allen's book was being distributed throughout the country by the Socialist Newspaper

Union of St. Louis, and was highly praised as a means of winning recruits for the S. L. P.

Thomas Curtis represented another tendency among the leaders of the St. Louis strike. Sometime in 1878, his newspaper having failed, he seems to have dropped out of the socialist movement; but he continued active in the field of his special interest, the free thought movement, which he had been associated with as early as 1850. He finally moved to San Francisco, and in 1890 was speaking there on the 290th anniversary of the burning of Giordano Bruno by the Inquisition. He died in San Francisco in 1898, at the age of seventy-nine, mourned by his fellow freethinkers as one of their movement's "best speakers and brightest poets."

The St. Louis strike brought forward one man who influenced some of America's best minds during the 1880's and 90's. This was Peter Lofgreen, graduate of the University of Copenhagen, former member of the Chicago bar, clerk at the *Globe-Democrat*, and leader of the English section of the Workingmen's Party at the time of the 1877 strike. In 1878, he was the proprietor of a cigar store at the same address as that of the socialist newspaper, the *Volkesstimme*. That same year, there was published in St. Louis a pamphlet by Lofgreen, entitled *The Coming Revolution: Its Principles*, a well-written summary of the ideas to which he would devote the rest of his life. The range of quotations in this pamphlet, including De Toqueville, Mill, Bastiat, Spencer, and Ruskin, display both his learning and his political eclecticism. (The author sent six copies to Karl Marx, in England).

The Coming Revolution seems to have been the only thing he ever published under the name by which he was known in St. Louis, Lofgreen. Sometime after 1878, he moved from St. Louis and resumed the name, presumably his real name, which he had used prior to his arrival in St. Louis in the early seventies: Laurence Gronlund. In 1884, Gronlund's first and most important book was published: *The Cooperative Commonwealth, An Exposition of Modern Socialism.* This was the first systematic treatise on the subject to be published in America, and one of the very first to be published in the English language.

Gronlund claimed his book was an exposition of "*modern*

Socialism, *German* Socialism," but frankly admitted that he had submitted the German Socialism "to a sort of winnowing process, separating that which is distinctly German from that which is universally true." The "compact, logical system" which resulted was, he thought, "in line with the most advanced and soundest Anglo-Saxon ideas"; his object was, in fact, "*to lead Socialism into the main current of English thought.*" And in a measure, this was what Gronlund accomplished, through his influence on the English Fabians. Gronlund visited England in 1885, and participated in the work of the Socialist League, founded by William Morris. George Bernard Shaw edited, or, as he claimed, practically rewrote the English edition of *The Cooperative Commonwealth.*

Gronlund's "winnowing process" winnowed away much of the Marxian element in "German Socialism"; but the result, a kind of ethical socialism based on little in the nature of historical analysis, was exactly suited to the socialist movement of the day in both America and England. And the ebullient American movement of the first two decades of the twentieth century actually owes more to Gronlund, (by way of Debs), than to Marx. William Dean Howells was one of the more important American thinkers to be influenced by Gronlund. Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward,* published a few years after *The Cooperative Commonwealth,* reveals the latter's influence, although Bellamy himself does not seem to have acknowledged it. Gronlund, in the following years, published other books, but none aroused as much interest as his first.

He continued to have close connections with the socialist movement, though he tended to side with that wing which favored communitarian or colonizing ventures in the older tradition which the Marxists opposed, but were never entirely able to suppress.

It would be hard to say what effect his experiences in the St. Louis strike had on Gronlund. The main outlines of his ethical socialism may have taken shape before 1877. But it may be noted that one of the elements in his thinking is a certain distrust of "the majority," who "are always ignorant" and "never have brought about consciously and deliberately any great social change." Socialism, he felt, was not so much the cause of the "poor and

weak" as of the "capable, gifted and cultured"; it was necessary that the "violent and coarse elements" be controlled. It is not impossible that his difficulties with the "violent and coarse element" in 1877 helped to form his views.

Gronlund, though rejecting the doctrine of the class struggle, remained a firm socialist to the end of his life. But in the rapidly shifting reform movements of the 80's and 90's he could find no secure place for the exercise of his talents. For a while, he held a position as a statistician in the office of U. S. Commissioner of Labor Carroll. He was a well-known lecturer. But in 1898, when his last book, *The New Economy*, appeared, he was living in poverty. With the assistance of friends, he obtained the relatively well-paying position of labor editor of the New York *Evening Journal;* but this was less than a year before his death, in 1899, at the age of fifty-five.

There seems to be some unexplained mystery connected with his incognito interlude in St. Louis. It certainly seems to have been a chapter in his life that he did not care to recall. The identity of Peter Lofgreen and Laurence Gronlund is revealed only by the fact that Lofgreen's pamphlet *The Coming Revolution* is included among the published works of Gronlund, in a notice in the first edition of *The Cooperative Commonwealth*. His obituaries and biographical notices, (for example, in the *Dictionary of American Biography*), do not mention the years he spent in St. Louis.

The career of the other outstanding leader of the St. Louis strike, Albert Currlin, presents certain curious contrasts with that of Gronlund. Currlin, as chief spokesman of the German socialists in St. Louis and an editor of their newspaper, might have made a respectable career for himself in the city's German labor movement. By 1881, however, the socialists were split over the issue of collaboration with the Greenback-Labor Party, and Currlin was spokesman of the anti-Greenback faction, which eventually turned out to be the minority.

A revolutionary left wing, of a semi-anarchist character, was taking form, nationally, in the Socialistic Labor Party, over the issue of arming the workers. Proposals to form armed workers' militia groups developed out of the 1877 strikes; but the majority

of the socialists opposed such ideas. In 1880-81, however, Albert Currlin's objections to collaboration with the Greenbackers seem to have been based not so much on revolutionary principle as on a desire to arrange more fruitful collaboration with the *Republican* Party. In October, 1880, Currlin, speaking for his faction of the S. L. P., announced their support of the Republican candidates in the forthcoming election, who had agreed to support the eight-hour law and compulsory school attendance. Currlin and his friends took part in a Republican parade, on October 30th, which was headed by none other than A. J. Smith and John S. Cavender, one-time members of the Committee of Public Safety which had suppressed the general strike and imprisoned Currlin!

The climax of the evening was a mass meeting at Lucas Market. Thus, just a little over three years after the forcible suppression of the "St. Louis Commune," former leaders of the Committee of Public Safety and former leaders of the "Commune" joined forces at another Lucas Market mass meeting – to cheer for Republican candidates! That same month, Currlin became a United States citizen; and he seemed to be celebrating, in his own way, the peculiar freedom from political scrupulosity, (or political principle!), which often characterizes American politics.

In the spring of 1881, Currlin announced that his faction of the socialists would put no ticket of its own in the field but would support all candidates who pledged themselves "to advocate the establishment of public baths and the appointment of a committee for the sanitary inspection of factories." The majority faction of the S. L. P. repudiated Currlin and declared he was no longer a member of their Party. The mayoralty election was won by the Republican candidate, who defeated Mayor Overstolz, running as a Democrat, by a margin not so large as to rule out the possibility that the influence of Currlin and his friends in swinging the German labor vote to the Republicans had something to do with the outcome. Whether or not the Republican candidate did advocate the revolutionary measure of setting up public baths and did receive Currlin's active support, is not clear. But it is difficult to believe that Currlin could have resisted the temptation to contribute to the defeat of the man who had so rudely

thrown him in jail when, just after the raid on Schuler's Hall, he had called on the Mayor with the laudable object of discussing with him calmly and in "plain German" how to settle the strike — which had already been "settled" by the bayonets of the militia. In any case, Currlin was given a city job later on, by the Republican administration.

The *Volksstimme* seems to have gone out of business about this time, and was taken over by the *Westliche Post*. That paper, which had denounced Currlin and the socialists so bitterly during the general strike, now made Currlin its City Hall reporter, a position which he filled in an entirely satisfactory manner until he became a water inspector for the city, in 1883 or 84. For a year or two he quietly pursued this occupation until, in 1887, just ten years after his first appearance before the public, he found himself catapulted to a position of even greater notoriety, on a national scale.

While he unobtrusively did his work as reporter and water inspector, there is a hint that he was concerning himself, in his spare time, with much more exciting matters. It was during these years that a revolutionary anarchist, or what would now be called syndicalist, movement developed among the German socialists and outside the S. L. P. Chicago was the revolutionists' stronghold. But groups were formed in various cities, including St. Louis, where, in fact, the anarchists came to exercise considerable influence in the German union of machinists and metal workers, and where, in 1885 or 86 a German anarchist paper, *Die Parole*, began publication. Currlin seems to have been associated, though perhaps not very prominently, with this group. The advocate of public baths became the advocate of revolutionary anarchy; and some conservative citizens no doubt regarded this as a perfectly logical development.

This anarchist movement, which flared up during the 1880's and collapsed after the Haymarket bombing in Chicago, is an extraordinary chapter in the history of American labor. The anarchists' dynamite-politics was mostly a long, noisy, literary fuse, with a negligible quantity of real explosive at the end of it — except for the Haymarket bomb. Yet the movement, by 1885,

had several thousand members, for the most part non-English speaking, organized loosely in around eighty local groups. Johann Most, in New York, distributed his *Science of Revolutionary Warfare*, a brochure in German on the manufacture and use of bombs, poisons, inflammable compounds, etc.; the *Labor Enquirer*, in Denver, quoted the current price of dynamite at the top of its editorial page; the *Alarm*, in Chicago, urged tramps to avail themselves of "those little methods of warfare which Science has placed in the hands of the poor man"; and in San Francisco, Burnette G. Haskell plotted to blow up the County Hall of Records and so bring the Millennium by destroying all property titles.

Everywhere there was talk of a repetition of 1877. On May 4th, 1886, the Chicago revolutionists assembled for a mass meeting at the Haymarket, and a bomb exploded as police attempted to disperse the crowd. Eleven persons were killed, over a hundred wounded, and a general round-up of anarchists and suspected anarchists followed throughout the country. In Chicago, eight of the leading revolutionists were arrested; but no real evidence was ever produced to connect them with the bombing, and the nation was split into opposing camps over the issue of the guilt or innocence of the Haymarket defendants. In St. Louis, also, there were several arrests, but Albert Currlin remained at large.

The entire staff of the Chicago *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, organ of the revolutionists, were arrested. In this emergency, Currlin was called upon to assume the editorship, or at least become one of the editors, of the paper. He accepted the assignment sometime in the latter part of 1886, at a time when to assume such a post required no little courage.

Currlin may have been influenced in accepting the post by the fact that one of the defendants, Adolph Fischer, had been his political associate in St. Louis, after the 1877 strike. It is not certain that Adolph Fischer was involved *in* the St. Louis strike; but his older brother, William, was one of the strike leaders arrested along with Currlin.

As new editor of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, in an extremely tense and dangerous situation, Currlin's actions apparently once again

belied his mild manner and harmless appearance. The Knights of Labor accused him of calling for the arming of the workers, and of disrupting the campaign of the United Labor Party, which the anarchists ostensibly supported, (inconsistent as it may appear).

Four of the Haymarket defendants were hanged; one blew his own head off in jail; and three spent seven years in prison, to be finally pardoned by Governor Altgeld. On Sunday, November 13th, 1887, a quarter of a million people lined the Chicago streets, as the funeral cortége passed, on its way to Waldheim Cemetery. Albert Currlin was one of the speakers at the cemetery; he was, said the Chicago *Tribune*, "in good voice and spoke with all his accustomed bitterness and reckless spirit of mischievous hatred." Speaking in German, and castigating the American working class for its spinelessness, he urged his hearers to devote all their energies to the task of "avenging the crime" committed against the martyrs. His speech was widely reported and commented on. The St. Louis *Globe-Democrat* called him "a dangerous man," whose following was "rapidly assuming the proportions of that of the one-time editor of the anarchist organ, who is now in his grave." And in fact it seems that Currlin did devote himself to perpetuating the memory of August Spies, Currlin's predecessor as editor of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. He edited Spies' reminiscences, and perhaps helped with the publication, in St. Louis, of Spies' drama, *Die Nihilisten*.

In December, 1887, the final interment of the anarchist leaders took place at Waldheim Cemetery, and once again Currlin spoke. He was no longer editing the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* at this time. In the 1888 St. Louis city directory, he is listed once more as a reporter.

Captain Michael J. Schaack, of the Chicago police, who is supposed to have personally concocted much of the "evidence" that convicted the Haymarket defendants, wrote a melodramatic and highly inaccurate history of the case, entitled *Anarchy and Anarchists*, (Chicago, 1889), in which Albert Currlin is referred to as the "wandering missionary of Anarchy." A vignette of the revolutionary agitator disappearing into the obscurity of the slums of the great cities would be a most suitable one, from a literary

standpoint, with which to end Currlin's story. And, indeed, so far as his *public* career is concerned, he began it as a revolutionary orator in Lucas Market in 1877, and ended it as a revolutionary orator in Waldheim Cemetery in 1887. In 1888 or 1889 he was back in Chicago, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Illinois State Federation of Labor. By the middle of 1889, he was in San Francisco, busily engaged in organizing clubs of Edward Bellamy's Nationalist Movement.

At Waldheim Cemetery, he had urged the workers to devote all their energies to avenging the Haymarket martyrs. Currlin had a family to support, however, and he had no doubt come to realize that the debacle of the political movement he was associated with had deprived him, in St. Louis or Chicago, of the hope of even a minimum livelihood. He thereupon displayed the resiliency which his more thoughtful and politically consistent associate of 1877, Peter Lofgreen (Laurence Gronlund), seemed to lack. In one of the very few references to the 1877 strike in the St. Louis socialist press in later years, there is mention of "Mr. Currlin" being the publisher of a "little weekly paper in Northern California." This rather cold allusion, by the socialist editor in 1909, owes some of its coldness, perhaps, to the social-democrat's dislike of Currlin's anarchist past. But the remark conceals a typically American success story.

In 1889, Currlin had pulled up stakes and moved with his family to San Francisco, where he must have had friends in the German-American labor movement. He became editor of a German labor paper. In due time, he branched out and eventually came to own several newspapers in Sacramento, San José, Oakland, and San Francisco. He became a prosperous and respected business man, died in 1925, at the age of seventy-three, and is enshrined by the Daughters of the American Revolution in their *Records of the Families of California Pioneers*. The Daughters would not have been happy to know that Albert Currlin had been identified with a kind of Revolution they did not approve of. But he was as much an *American* phenomenon as any pioneer in the book.

There is a certain irony implicit in the contrasting careers of these two agitators of 1877, Gronlund and Currlin. Both of them

were emigrants, both intellectuals, though Gronlund had a university education and Currlin seems to have been mostly self-educated. Gronlund, who undoubtedly had the better mind of the two, and had nothing of the fanatic but much of the idealist in his makeup, succeeded very early in adjusting himself to "Anglo-Saxon ideas" but was much less successful in adapting himself to the awkward realities of American life. While Currlin, who had much more of both the fanatic and the opportunist in his makeup, and who showed at first little disposition to modify his Germanic attitudes, in the end proved highly successful in adapting himself to American life, and was able to transform himself into a successful American business man, a "pioneer" of that State which is surely the most perfect embodiment of the American Dream!

Only one other strike leader of 1877 matched Currlin's success story. Robert Ammon, who had ruled the rail junction at Allegheny City, had the advantage of having wealthy relatives. In any case, he became a financier with a Staten Island estate next to one of the Vanderbilts. True, he was sent to Sing Sing in 1904 for a Wall Street swindle; but he was back on Wall Street before he died in 1915.

In St. Louis, the general strike and its leaders were forgotten. But a hideous monument of the strike remained: the slums. They spread like gangrene, eating out much of the heart of the city, and gained nation-wide notoriety for their alley tenements and their outhouses. The poor moved into the mansions of the '70's; and wave after wave of new arrivals, Jews, Italians, and finally Negroes, following the Irish and Germans, passed through Castle Thunder and its neighboring sinks.

In the depression years of the 1930's, St. Louis became once more a "city of little bread"; but the rabble never reigned again. Some of the unemployed, under the devious leadership of Communists whose motives and loyalties were very different from those of the agitators of 1877, threw bricks at the police in a "hunger demonstration", and got brutally clubbed in return, but that was all.

How long did Castle Thunder, reputedly one of the worst of

the tenements of 1877, survive? Probably at least until 1908, perhaps much longer– acquiring a rich patina of horror from decade to decade. In the latter year, a report on St. Louis housing conditions stated that "a description of New York's tenement streets in 1860 sounds as though they are Seventh and Eighth Streets in St. Louis in 1908." (Castle Thunder faced an alley in the block bounded by Seventh and Eighth, Carr and Biddle).

Was it still standing in the hungry thirties, rotting along with the unemployed and the unemployable whom it sheltered, offending the professional nostrils of social workers, and still bringing in rent to some complacent landlord? (If not, other equally horrible tenements of the 1870's were). Happily, it would not appear that it was standing in 1941, when the St. Louis Housing Authority tore down other buildings on the block. On this site, in 1952, a low rent housing project was completed, consisting of a group of six and twelve-story buildings, with balconies and playgrounds.

Many or most of the old slums have been cleared away. But the new housing projects have not been received with the enthusiasm that was expected, by the evicted population of the tenements. New Negro slums have taken form, stretching all the way west to the city limits. Some of the housing projects have been plagued with vandalism and crimes of violence. The nightmare of so many decades of squalor and misery cannot be so easily dispelled.

Schuler's Hall, where the Executive Committee met and where the general strike ended, was still standing in 1956, when it was razed to make room for the Mark Twain Expressway. The Junior Chamber of Commerce, which has marked many spots of historic interest in the city, never got around to identifying the headquarters of the "Commune". But over the years, in the saloon which seems to have occupied the ground floor of the building during most of its existence, there flowed a Mississippi River of beer, consumed by factory hands, truckers, and employees of the nearby produce market. The *German* socialists, at least, would have felt that the Hall was not a mere historic relic, and the spirit of rebellion could not be dead.

The St. Louis general strike was a "first" which almost every-

one found somewhat inconvenient to remember, and it has just about slipped beyond the range of living memory. As it slides off into an occasional cold and sometimes inaccurate footnote in texts on American social history, the philosophers, agitators, cranks, and plain workingmen who took part in it deserve a last word. If they felt the need to justify themselves, they might agree in choosing the words of that great American and great agitator, Wendell Phillips, speaking in September, 1877, on the subject of the recent strikes:

> "We have more than enough of the babble and chaff of 'supply and demand'. That is a political economy which forgets God, abolishes hearts, stomachs and hot blood, and builds its world as children do, out of tin soldiers and blocks of wood. Here every man reads, votes and carries arms!"

NOTE ON SOURCES

My account of the general strike is based primarily on the reports in the St. Louis and East St. Louis newspapers. Where a newspaper is quoted directly, the source is generally made clear. The newspaper stories are, however, both confused and conflicting. I have constantly been obliged to form an over-all opinion as to what really happened by comparing, weighing and combining statements in more than one paper; and it would be awkward and even misleading to attempt to make specific citations in such cases. Other published sources are of minor importance.

I failed to find, unfortunately, unpublished sources of any importance except the official communications regarding the military and judicial aspects of the strikes in St. Louis and East St. Louis, to be found in the U. S. Adjutant General's Records, in the National Archives, the Schurz Papers in the Library of Congress, and the Rutherford B. Hayes Papers in the Hayes Memorial Library, Fremont, Ohio. (Thanks are especially due to Mr. Watt P. Marchman, Director of the Hayes Memorial Library, for his assistance).

More specific information as to my sources may be found in the notes and bibliography appended to my Microcard publication, *City of Little Bread: The St. Louis General Strike of 1877*, (St. Louis, 1957), which may be found in a number of large libraries. In the Microcard publication, of which *Reign of the Rabble* is a condensation, will be found some additional details concerning the events of the general strike, and much additional information on the background and consequences of the strike. On the history of the socialist movement in St. Louis, prior to the strike, see also my article, "The First International in St. Louis", in the *Bulletin* of the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, January, 1962.

The full story of the Great Strike throughout the nation was made available to us in Robert V. Bruce's definitive study, *1877: Year of Violence*, (Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1959). And

Wilfrid H. Crook has brought up to date his history of the theory and practice of the general strike with the publication of *Communism and the General Strike*, (The Shoe String Press, Hamden, Conn., 1960), which provides information about American general strikes following 1877, not to be found elsewhere. I feel complimented that both Dr. Bruce and Dr. Crook have made use of and referred to my study of the St. Louis strike. Dr. Crook offers a sympathetic presentation of my thesis that the St. Louis strike of 1877 was the first *true* American general strike.

David T. Burbank