PAINFUL MEMORIES: THE HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF STEELWORKERS AND THE STEEL STRIKE OF 1919

Studies of the 1919 Steel Strike have generally assumed that the strike would have had a much better chance of succeeding if all the steelworkers had walked out. Contemporary observers and historians have agreed that the critical defections that prevented the steelworkers from presenting a united front took place in the Pittsburgh district where the majority of the skilled workers—almost all native born men—remained at work, enabling the steel manufacturers to maintain enough production to insure a relatively quick end to the strike.¹

David Brody, the historian who has studied the history of trade unionism in the steel industry most intensively, believes the skilled native-born steelworkers of the Pittsburgh district refused to strike in 1919 for several reasons: they identified with anti-radical, respectable elite opinion, which attacked the strike as the work of subversive agitators; they feared they would be demoted if they struck; and they had been co-opted by the higher wages and

fringe benefits offered to skilled workers by the steel companies. The Interchurch World Movement's famous Report on the Steel Strike of 1919 stressed the point that skilled workers feared they would lose their jobs if they walked out. The Report also noted the skilled workers' concern that if the steelworkers won union recognition, it would be more difficult to resist the pressure of immigrant steelworkers for promotion to the ranks of the skilled.

Certainly, all these motives were operative. But these studies have overlooked a vital additional factor in the reluctance of the skilled workers of the Pittsburgh district to strike. The historical consciousness of many skilled steelworkers of the Pittsburgh district played an important role in their decisions to remain at work in 1919.

Modern steel manufacturing in the United States originated in the Pittsburgh district. Trade union organization among steelworkers had its deepest roots in the mills of the Monongahela Valley. The events of the pivotal confrontation at Homestead in 1892, the abortive 1901 strike, and the lockout of 1909 were all part of the historical tradition of the skilled working class communities of the Pittsburgh region. Many skilled workers had personally participated in earlier strikes in the Pittsburgh district. Others, as members of the skilled working-class communities of the steel towns of the Pittsburgh district, were familiar with the history of trade unionism in the steel industry. As far as these skilled laborers were concerned, the 1919 walkout promised to be a rerun of an old show that had flopped repeatedly.

This essay will analyze the impact of the memory of defeat on the skilled workers who eschewed strike action in 1919. Of course, few decisions are made on the basis of one consideration. It cannot be claimed that the historical consciousness of defeat was the sole consideration for any skilled worker or for any proportion of the skilled workers. The evidence presented below demonstrates, however, that the memory of defeat and the specific circumstances that produced defeat in past strikes were an important consideration to many skilled steelworkers in the Pittsburgh district.

4. In his 1923 article David Saposs made a passing reference to the fact that Pittsburgh workers mentioned the failures of past strikes as a reason for not going out in 1919. Saposs did not develop this point. Henry David, in his study of the 1892
In the summer of 1920, in the aftermath of the great steel strike, David Saposs, a labor historian trained by John R. Commons at Homestead strike, noted the legacy of the strike. "When U.S. Steel absorbed Carnegie Steel in 1901, it also acquired a group of executives whose antiunionism had been hammered out on the anvil of the strike, and a body of workers who knew the meaning of industrial absolutism. In Homestead itself, where the anguish and the glory of the great strike were recalled with pride, the very air seemed charged with bitterness, hopelessness, and fear." "Upheaval at Homestead," in Daniel Aaron, American in Crisis (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), p. 170. In his study of the 1907 and 1916 strikes of iron miners on the Mesabi range in Minnesota, Donald Sofchalk speaks of "the consequent heritage among the miners—the majority's resignation to the power of the 'steel trust' and the minority's inveterate faith in radicalism" that had to be overcome by CIO organizers in the 1930s. "Organized Labor and the Iron Ore Miners of Northern Minnesota, 1907-1936," Labor History, 12 (Spring 1971): 170.

I am not arguing that the memory of past defeats was the only factor in the historical consciousness of the skilled steel workers. I am simply calling attention to the fact that the memory of defeat and the circumstances that contributed to defeat are an important element in the culture of many workers. Historians must analyze the manner in which a tradition of defeatism is created and how it is or is not overcome. The conclusion of this paper offers a theory about the manner in which the steelworkers in the Pittsburgh district and elsewhere obtained the confidence to ignore the painful memories of past failures.

Lack of evidence makes it impossible to comment on the way in which "new immigrant" steelworkers who participated in the 1892 strike at Homestead and later strikes remembered the events of the past. The Saposs interview sample is biased, as table 2 reveals, towards skilled workers who were either native-born or from the old immigration from Northern and Western Europe. Although there were significant numbers of "new immigrant" steelworkers in the steel industry by 1892, a study of figures taken from a 1911 Department of Labor study of a steel plant in the Pittsburgh district reveals that 14 percent of all the workers in the plant had twenty or more years of experience in the steel industry and that 20% of the workers with more than twenty years of experience were immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, whereas 35 percent of the veterans were U.S. born and 45 percent were immigrants from Northern and Western Europe. (See table 3.) The Saposs interviews did not allow a classification of immigrants into the two categories just enumerated. Nevertheless, they clearly underrepresented "new immigrant" steelworkers who had been in the steel industry for over twenty-five years. One possible explanation for this bias would be the probability that most of the "new immigrants" who worked in steel in the 19th century were unskilled or semi-skilled workers who had very high geographical mobility rates. Most likely, many of these workers left the steel industry or the Pittsburgh district where the Saposs interviewers concentrated their efforts. On the other hand, the skilled U.S. born and immigrant workers from Northern and Western Europe who were present in the Pittsburgh district in 1892 were much more likely to remain in the district and the steel industry. These generalizations are based on the mobility studies historians have made in the last twenty years. See Stephan Thernstrom, Poverty and Progress (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964) and the essays by Clyde Griffen and Peter R. Knights in Stephan Thernstrom and Richard Sennette, eds., Nineteenth-Century Cities (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965).
the University of Wisconsin, led a team of field investigators working for the Interchurch World Movement into the steel towns of Ohio, New York, and Pennsylvania. Saposs and his co-workers, Bertha Saposs, Mary Senior, and John Fitch,\(^5\) interviewed 166 steelworkers. The bulk of the Saposs interviews were conducted in the Pittsburgh district (See Table I). Both skilled, predominantly native-born workers and unskilled and semi-skilled foreign-born workers were interviewed. Twenty-two of the steelworkers who talked with members of the Saposs team specifically referred to the history of trade unionism in the steel industry. Eleven of these workers talked about the events of the 1892 Homestead strike and the lessons to be learned from the history of the strike. The other workers referred to the 1901 strike, the 1909 lockout, and several other smaller, twentieth-century strikes. All but two of the steelworkers who made historical allusions during their interviews were skilled workers. All but two lived in the steel towns of the Pittsburgh district. This geographical concentration is not surprising: the workers of the Pittsburgh district had the oldest historical tradition among the men who worked in the steel mills in 1919 and 1920—a tradition of heroic, class conscious struggle—and shattering defeat.

Despite their high pay, many of the skilled workers had complaints about their jobs: the twelve-hour day was too long; working conditions in the mills were often unpleasant, dangerous, and debilitating; and mill discipline was arbitrary and demeaning. "It's slavery and persecution," proclaimed Mike Connolly, a veteran heater in a Jones and Laughlin finishing mill. "It's a prison. We work behind locked door and can't leave the mill except for a few minutes at a certain time . . . . It's against the Constitution to work a man so that he can't live. We can't live when we work twelve hours a day with no day off. What right has anybody to go against God's law of making slaves of human

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Table 1

Geographical Distribution of Interviewed Steelworkers

**Pittsburgh District**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestead</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKeesport</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braddock</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duquesne</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Kensington</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rankin</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swissvale</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donora</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Vandergraft</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub Total:</strong></td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pennsylvania (other than Pittsburgh District)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Johnstown</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethlehem</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub Total:</strong></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**New York District**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Buffalo and Lackawanna</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngstown</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Chicago</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL:** 166

Connolly had worked in the steel mills for 41 years. He saw the eight-hour day as a way out:

Now if I worked 8 hours I could have enough time to spend an hour or so on a car. Then I could live in a suburb, have a garden, a couple of hundred chickens and know my family, as well as have friends. A man could live twice as long if he
had the 8-hour day. This way one doesn’t want to live long.
What is the use of living, since one doesn’t enjoy life?  

Another skilled worker, Mr. Jenkins, a roll table man in a North Braddock mill, echoed Connolly’s views on the twelve-hour day. “It’s slavery, the mill, slavery worse than what the niggers had before the Civil War.” After twenty years of the twelve-hour day, Jenkins claimed that his health had been ruined. An injury had left him deaf and he claimed he could not sleep well when he was on night work. Mary Senior described Jenkins as “a sick man, abnormally fat, with white unhealthy looking flesh, inflamed eyes with puffy lids, and a way of yawning every minute or so.

Few of the skilled workers were as angry about mill conditions as Connolly and Jenkins. Most skilled workers clearly appreciated and did not want to lose the high wages and fringe benefits that the steel companies gave the skilled employees to build up good will and form bonds of dependency between employer and employee. Skilled workers had more to lose than the semi-skilled and unskilled laborers. Some had no complaints. Edward Rawlings, an open hearth foreman in Swissvale, Pennsylvania, believed that twelve hours was not too much for a man with a strong physique. If men worked only eight hours, Rawlings warned, they would spend their extra time in saloons, pool halls or just standing around street corners “watching women’s legs as they lift their dresses and so on,” as David Saposs phrased it. Rawlings told Saposs that Judge Gary, the head of the United States Steel Corporation, was the greatest man alive.

6. Bertha Saposs interview with Mike Connolly, South Side, Pittsburgh.
7. Mary Senior interview with Mr. Jenkins, North Braddock. An interview with Clair Hill, a head screw man in a plate mill in Homestead, provides us with an example of a complaint by a skilled worker about working conditions inside the steel mills. Hill, who worked a ten-hour day shift and a fourteen-hour night shift, with a twenty-four-hour shift every two weeks, complained that the levers he handled were so hot he had to douse them with water before he touched them with his hands. Mary Senior described his work as follows: “He said that it was so hot on the platform where he stood fourteen hours long that he had to stand on first one foot and then the other. . . . In the winter, he says, the wind blows up from the river so fiercely under the shed that he had to wear his overcoat . . . and wraps his legs in sacks, while gas fires were built around the rolls to keep the men from freezing to death.” Hill struck in 1919. Mary Senior reported that Hill claimed “that in the ten months since he has been out of the mill, he has had more days of health than during the eleven years he worked in it.” Mary Senior interview with Mr. Clair Hill, Homestead Park.
Another relatively contented steelworker, a rail straightener who invested all the surplus from his $2,786 earnings in 1919 in U.S. Steel stock, agreed that the eight-hour day was preferable to twelve hours. But as he put it, “you can’t buck the Steel Company.” Therefore, “What can’t be cured has got to be endured.” A retired veteran of thirty-five years in the industry who had been given a job as a gardener around the homes of the mill superintendents in North Braddock told Mary Senior that, “I have nothing to say against the company.” But he wryly added, “As a corporation goes, it’s one of the best. It does things as fair as any corporation can—but then you know what a corporation is. Still, I don’t blame it: the rule in this country is each man for himself and devil take the hindmost.”

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the threat of repression was an integral part of the welfare policies of the steel companies. The favored skilled workers had to accept what the companies doled out. They dared not ask for more. As the next section of this essay will demonstrate, the skilled workers who spoke of past strikes clearly understood the relationship between welfarism and repression. Workers with long historical memories knew that the paternalistic hand that distributed favors could quickly close to form a lethal fist.

III

The Saposs interviews are largely close summaries, with a considerable amount of near-verbatim paraphrasing of the comments of the steelworkers who talked with the research team. The interview write-ups also include many direct quotations of the viewpoints of the workers. With the aid of the sympathetic members of the Saposs team, the steelworkers will now speak about their history. With the exception of quotations, the author has written the vignettes presented below.

Charles Strophel was a stationary engineer, working a twelve-hour day, seven days a week in the Homestead mills. He was a descendent of a German family that had emigrated to the United States to farm. Strophel’s father had come to Homestead to work in the mills. Strophel was a Socialist. He knew his history.

9. Mary Senior interview with Mike Gessner, Homestead.
10. Mary Senior interview with Mr. Snider, North Braddock.
Table 2

Job Classifications and Nativity of Interviewed Steelworkers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Foremen</th>
<th>Skilled</th>
<th>Semi-skilled</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native-born and immigrants from Northern and Western Europe</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>22 white, 2 black</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRAND TOTAL:</td>
<td>166</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strophel told the interviewer that although American workers supported the demand of the striking immigrant workers for an eight-hour day, the Americans remembered the 1892 strike and therefore would not take any chances. The Americans knew (a) that United States Steel had enough resources to starve out workers, and (b) that the company had spotters to identify strikers and union activists. Consequently, the steel company could withstand a long strike and they would punish strikers by firing them or demoting them to a lower paying job. Strophel also knew that the skilled worker was easily replaceable. He told Bertha Saposs that anyone who had worked in the mills for a short time could easily master the most skilled work.

Political action was the only hope the workers had.

12. Other steelworkers interviewed made fascinating comments about politics. Two workers complained that when labor union officers ran for public offices, laborers did not have enough sense to vote for them. A repair shop machinist put it this way. “It’s the workingmen who elects everybody, because they are the majority. But the workingman don’t know what he wants, so the Democrats and Republicans do what they want with him.” Mary Senior interview with Mr. Fenstermacher, Bethlehem. See also David Saposs interview with German worker, South Chicago. Workers in Lackawanna, New York told the interviewers that during the strike a mayoral election was held in which the incumbent mayor, a Democrat who was a company tool, was endorsed by the Republican
Table 3

Nativity of Steelworkers in a Representative Plant in the Pittsburgh District in 1911

A. Total of veterans: 883 (14% of the 6,372 workers in the plant)
   Native-born veterans: 309 (35% of total of veterans)
   Immigrant veterans from—
      Northern and Western Europe (= N+W Europe): 394 (45% of total of veterans)
   Immigrant veterans from—
      Southern and Eastern Europe (= S+E Europe): 174 (20% of total of veterans)

B. Skilled workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total no.</th>
<th>% Veterans</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native-born</td>
<td>1140</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N+W Europe</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S+E Europe</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Semi-skilled workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total no.</th>
<th>% Veterans</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native-born</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N+W Europe</td>
<td>857</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S+E Europe</td>
<td>1138</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unskilled workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total no.</th>
<th>% Veterans</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native-born</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N+W Europe</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S+E Europe</td>
<td>1769</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Workers in this sample had twenty years or more of experience in the steel industry. Thus, they were working in steel in 1892.

maintained that if workers elected their own men to public office they would be able to secure government ownership or regulation of the steel industry.

Another skilled worker who lived and worked in Homestead also remembered. Mr. Lodeman had spent thirty years in the steel industry, the last eight as a first helper on an open hearth furnace. He hated the twelve-hour day. Good wages were not enough. The twelve-hour night shift wore a man out. "What kind of arrangement do you call it," he complained, "when a man can't go twenty miles away to visit his mother for fear he won't get back in time to go to work." But fear kept Lodeman at work during the 1919 strike. He had been in the 1892 strike, Lodeman told John Fitch, and had been kicked out of the Homestead mills three times for organizing activity. Now, Lodeman averred, he was too old to lose his job and find a comparable one.

Lodeman sensed that to organize the steel mills the workers needed outside help. But he was not optimistic about any such aid. All interests were against the working man and nothing could be expected from the major political parties.

After forty-three years of steelmaking, Jack Pfeifer, a roller in one of the North Braddock mills, worked twelve hours a day. He believed that the steel companies could adopt the eight-hour day without any loss in productivity because workers would work at a faster pace if they knew they only had to work for eight hours. However, Pfeifer did not think that unions or strikes were the way to improve working conditions. Pfeifer believed that one had to be reasonable and not expect too much from the company, which, he asserted, had always been considerate of the welfare of its men. In time, the eight-hour day, as it spread throughout the United States, would come to steel. While there is no doubt that Pfeifer was influenced by the high wages and good treatment and status he received as the head of a work gang of seven men, he was also acutely conscious of past repression. Homestead loomed large in Pfeifer's memory. He remembered how the 1892 strike against

13. John Fitch interview with Mr. Lodeman, Homestead.
14. Mary Heaton Vorse tells the moving story of a steelworker who was six months away from retiring on a company pension. He had been in the Sons of Vulcan and the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin workers. He did not strike because he feared losing his pension. His wife told Vorse, "His heart's broke. He can't rest. He talks in his sleep that he's a scab." Vorse, op. cit., p. 106.
15. David Saposs interview with Jack Pfeifer, North Braddock.
wage reductions had failed and how after the Carnegie Company had licked the men it had punished them by introducing the twelve-hour day.

Bill Gardiner was a bottom maker who had worked at Homestead until the 1892 strike. After the strike failed he had moved to McKeesport where he took the job he held in 1920 when David Saposs interviewed him. Bill Gardiner still worked a twelve-hour day, but he did not have to work on Sundays. He did not believe in strikes. Gardiner told Saposs that because he remembered the defeat at Homestead, he had not gone out during an early twentieth-century strike in McKeesport. Striking would have been useless. The failure of the McKeesport strike convinced Gardiner that his analysis had been correct. In 1919, Bill Gardiner kept working.

Gardiner felt that only government could help the steelworkers, but he had no confidence in the state of Pennsylvania. Gardiner believed that the Steel Corporation owned and controlled Pennsylvania. The United States government seemed to be the only hope for the steelworkers. But Gardiner had not yet seen enough evidence of effective federal intervention on behalf of the industrial worker to be very hopeful that the government would aid the steelworkers.

During the height of the 1919 steel strike the Committee on Labor and Education of the United States Senate conducted hearings in the field on the causes and conduct of the strike. Several of the steelworkers who testified made historical allusions. Richard Raymond, a Pittsburgh man, explained that he had left the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers after the Homestead strike. At sixty-seven years of age, the owner of a six-room house, Raymond had no complaints. Joseph Smith, a roller who lived in Homestead, also left the union in


17. The members of the Senate committee were hostile to the steel strike. They did not appear interested in the reasons workers had for striking. When interviewing foreign-born workers the senators asked perfunctory questions about factory conditions and home living standards. The senators were more interested in determining what the workers knew about bolshevism, who had asked them to strike, the ability of the immigrants to speak English and whether or not the workers sent their children to school. The field hearings of the Senate committee were held in Homestead. The committee began its hearings on 25 September 1919. See Investigation of Strike in Steel Industries, Hearings Before the Committee on Education, United States Senate, 66 Cong., 1st sess., 1919. Hereafter cited as Investigation.

18. Ibid., pp. 690-691.
1892. One year after the Homestead strike he had been rehired at the "bottom" and "had to work up again." In the next twenty-six years Smith had prospered. Now he had thirty shares of United States Steel's common stock. Smith was unwilling to risk a rerun of the 1892 scenario that had cost him so dearly.19

Unfortunately, neither the Senate committee nor the interviewers of the Interchurch World Movement spoke with many Eastern European steelworkers who had been in the steel industry at the time of the Homestead strike. David Saposs did find one such worker, an un-named Slav who labored twelve hours a day as a finisher in the Jones and Laughlin mills.20 This worker did not strike in 1919. His memory was too good. During the Homestead strike he had joined the Amalgamated. The result: after striking for a long time, the men had returned to work. They lost the union and the eight-hour day. In 1919 this Slav did not strike because, in Saposs' words, "he knew from his experience . . . that it was no use striking . . . ." What particularly impressed this worker about the futility of striking was the staying power of the giant steel companies. As Saposs paraphrased his comment, "It is nothing for the company to shut down six months, but how can a poor man remain idle that long."

An interview with an anonymous American worker who was a pair heater in a McKeesport mill brought out another historical memory—the memory of betrayal by union leaders.21 This worker had participated in an 1892 strike that had started as a sympathy strike in support of the Homestead workers. After thirteen or fourteen weeks the worker believed that the sympathy strike had been on the verge of victory. But this worker alleged that national officials of the Amalgamated Association had settled the strike so that the men returned to work as losers. This worker and his companions believed that in 1892 their leaders had sold them out. Since the 1892 strike he had twice rejoined the Amalgamated, but

19. Ibid., pp. 453-459. Another roller interviewed by the Committee was T. P. O'Connell of New Philadelphia, Ohio. He was a thirty-two-year veteran of steel making. Although he did not mention the Homestead strike, he admitted that in 1901 he had been a member of the Amalgamated. O'Connell deserted the union after the 1901 strike failed. He felt it was hopeless to fight the U.S. Steel "combine." It was too strong. O'Connell said that for him conditions in the mills had improved every year. By 1919 he had an eight-hour work day and was earning $20 daily. He could see nothing to be gained from re-joining the Amalgamated or from striking. Ibid., pp. 324-327.


had dropped out each time because he did not think the leaders
were honest and competent. This worker did not strike in 1919,
although he believed conditions in the mills were deteriorating.
He also told David Saposs that he had once been a reader of the
Socialist newspaper, *Appeal to Reason*, because it was more truthful
than the Pittsburgh papers.

The sell-out charge was made by another worker.\(^2\) William
Thompson, an outspoken assistant foreman at the Donner Steel
Company, felt that his employers were stupid because they did
not understand that the twelve-hour day encouraged workers to
labor half-heartedly. An eight-hour day would raise productivity.
Thompson mentioned an unidentified past strike in which he had
participated. He said that the officials of the Amalgamated had
sold out the strikers. Thompson also charged that the local leader
of the Amalgamated in 1919 had scabbed on the strikers at Ton-
awanda, New York in 1901. Experience had convinced Thompson
that all union leaders were fakers.

Robert Allen was a roller in a U.S. steel mill in New Kensing-
ton.\(^3\) He worked an eight-hour day and averaged $20.00 daily.
He disliked the work schedule which made him work at night,
from 4:00 p.m. to 12:00 midnight and from midnight to 8:00 a.m.
Allen believed in unions and labor party politics, but he opposed
strikes. Allen had been a member of the Amalgamated during
a 1908 strike, when he worked at Point View. The strike ended in
defeat. Nevertheless, Allen remained a union member and moved
to New Kensington, where there was an Amalgamated local. The
Steel Company had an ingenious strategy for dealing with the
New Kensington local, which they wanted to destroy even though
they did not recognize it. The company operated the mills very
irregularly. Then the superintendent of the New Kensington mills
told the local that if it surrendered its charter and the members
dropped out of the union the mills would be run steadily. The
workers came to terms and the mills began to operate continu-
ously. With two demonstrations of the power of the Steel Com-
pany vivid in his memory, Allen did not walk out in 1919.

Leo Sigel worked as a tube inspector in the McKeesport plant
of the National Tube Company.\(^4\) In 1901 he had struck with the
Amalgamated. The strike had failed. Since then, conditions had

\(^2\) Interview with William Thompson, South Buffalo.
\(^3\) David Saposs interview with Robert Allan, New Kensington.
\(^4\) Bertha Saposs interview with Leo Sigel, McKeesport.
improved in the mills. Sigel was especially impressed by the new safety policies of the Steel Company. As a Jew, he was pleased that the company now allowed him to be absent on the high holy days, but he did not like the long hours. Sigel did not see any hope in striking for a shorter work day and work week. “You can’t do nothing to the company,” he told Bertha Saposs. “They are smart fellows and they won’t let the fellows do anything to better their conditions.” In particular, Sigel emphasized, the Steel Company was so rich it could shut down for six months, lose millions of dollars in revenue, and still not give in to the men.

In South Buffalo, New York, another veteran of the 1901 strike, Mr. McCarthy, a blower, was for the eight-hour day. In 1901 McCarthy had struck, unsuccessfully, at Tonawanda, New York. Thereafter, he had come to the conclusion that the steelworkers could never win a strike.

Mr. Getz, a heater at a pair furnace in McKeesport, worked an eight-hour shift. He was satisfied with his conditions and believed that the steel company was his benefactor. But he also remembered the sting of defeat. Getz told David Saposs that it was foolish for workers to strike; thirteen years earlier Getz had walked out in a strike for union recognition. He had been out a long time and had gained nothing.

Some steelworkers remembered past strikes because they were participants. A larger number must have heard about these strikes from older workers. Stories about past strikes, told by participants and others, were part of the culture of the skilled working class communities in the steel towns. Tom Mansell, an American, worked in a plate mill in Homestead. Mansell owned a comfortable house. He disliked the long hours he worked—a ten-hour day shift for a week followed by a fourteen-hour night shift. “We night shift men all say,” he told Mary Senior, “that one-half of the year we live and one-half of the year we are dead.” But Mansell did not strike. Tom Mansell’s father had been active in the 1892 Homestead strike. His father told all five of his sons to leave Homestead rather than strike because “union leaders always sold out.”

Working class fathers educated their sons. Old timers in the steel towns educated the younger steelworkers. James Bissell was

25. Interview with Mr. McCarthy, South Buffalo.
26. David Saposs interview with Mr. Getz, McKeesport.
27. Mary Senior interview with Tom Mansell, Homestead.
a machinist in the McKeesport tube works. Bissell felt that U.S. Steel was a good corporation to work for because it paid well and offered the workers other benefits. But he also knew, because he had been told by old timers, that joining a union was useless. Bissell told David Saposs that Americans "had their bellyfull" from past experience with unions and strikes. The strikes were lost and union leaders ran off with union funds. Bissell also knew that his father, who had once struck against the Steel Company, had, in Saposs' words, "gone through the mill."

James Conn, head blower on two Jones and Laughlin furnaces in Pittsburgh, came from a long line of steelworkers. His father had worked in the mills for thirty-two years and so had his grandfather. Conn was able to draw on his own personal experience as well as the experiences of two generations.

Conn reported that in 1918 the men in his department had struck. Jones and Laughlin had simply banked the furnaces and waited. Hunger drove the men back. In 1919, none of the workers in his department went out. Conn was acutely conscious of the power of the steel companies. If the steelworkers all went out the company would just "sit back and let the grass grow green over the furnaces rather than give the men eight hours. Let them strike for months; when they're hungry enough they will come back. J & L are rich and independent."

Working class daughters also had long memories. The wife of Bob Mitchell, head roll man in a Homestead plate mill, remembered that her father had been fired in 1892 for joining the Amalgamated. Her husband had gone out in 1919 and had been punished by a drastic demotion. Now Mrs. Mitchell was bitter against unions on two counts—the fate of her father and the harsh treatment of her husband. Unfortunately, we have no record of the words she and her husband must have exchanged before he went out on strike in 1919.

Historians have long been aware of the role that ethnic conflict played in the 1919 steel strike. Clearly, many American-born workers were reluctant to strike with "foreigners," not only

29. Mary Senior interview with James Conn, Pittsburgh.
30. Mary Senior interview with Mr. and Mrs. Bob Mitchell, Homestead. In addition to talking with 166 male steelworkers, the members of the Saposs team interviewed 67 women. These interviews are a valuable source for the study of the attitudes of the wives of American workers. They have not been exploited by historians.
because the latter were unskilled but also because of their national and religious backgrounds. In the Saposs interviews, there is additional evidence which suggests that the memory of ethnic divisions during past strikes influenced the behavior of workers in the 1919 strike. Two workers in the Pittsburgh district, one foreign-born, another an American, mentioned this phenomenon.

An American worker, who operated a cold roll that polished steel in a Pittsburgh mill, noted that one reason that many American workers refused to strike in 1919 was their memory of the refusal of immigrant steelworkers to go out in previous strikes. Another worker, a Polish craneman in a Braddock mill, had struck in 1892. He was familiar with the aforementioned justification used by American workers who stayed at work during the 1919 strike. He explained the scabbing by immigrant workers in 1892 in practical terms—they lacked savings and could not strike.

IV

Historical analysis of the strikes that loomed so large in the memory of this sample of steelworker opinion demonstrates that most of these workers recalled fact, not myth. The interviewed workers also uncannily pinpointed the strategic and tactical conditions that had produced defeat in past strikes and would undermine the 1919 effort.

The Homestead strike of 1892 was the most important conflict between labor and capital in the steel industry prior to 1919. In 1892, the Carnegie Company, the largest American steel producer, precipitated a conflict with one of the strongest unions in the United States, the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers. Andrew Carnegie and his chief aid, Henry Clay Frick, wanted to drive trade unionism out of the steel industry. The skilled workers of the Amalgamated Association were confident they could never be replaced. Expecting victory, they joined battle with the company.

At Homestead, the skilled workers felt secure. Homestead was a working class town and the steelworkers dominated the local

political scene. The Burgess of the borough of Homestead was a member of the Amalgamated. With the exception of the owners of the town's single hotel, which catered to the managers of the Carnegie Company, the merchants of Homestead sympathized with the steelworkers who constituted their main clientele.  

Although the Amalgamated Association was a craft union of the skilled elite in the Homestead mills, with about 800 members out of a total of 3,800 workers in the plant, the skilled workers asked the unskilled and semi-skilled laborers, many of whom were foreign-born, to join their strike. Without exception, the unskilled and semi-skilled workers walked out. This stirring display of class solidarity made the skilled workers feel even more secure in their belief that they could humble the Carnegie Company.  

But the Carnegie Company bested the Amalgamated and its allies. The Amalgamated received a blow from which it never recovered. Henry Frick's strike-breaking strategy had two integrally related parts. First, strikebreakers were to be brought into the Homestead mills. Second, the strike-breakers were to be trained, on the job, until they had mastered the same skills that the striking members of the Amalgamated possessed.  


34. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to determine the proportion of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers in Homestead who were "new immigrants."  

35. Wolff, op. cit., p. 166.
strikebreakers, physical force would be necessary because the striking workers could be expected to use force to prevent scabs from entering the mills. Training the new recruits would be simply a matter of time. The Carnegie Company was strong enough financially to wait until production could be resumed with the new labor force and with defectors from the ranks of the striking workers who would be driven back to work by the necessity of poverty.

Frick's plan was implemented and was successful. The striking workers at Homestead turned back the attempted landing of the Pinkerton guards Frick hoped to use to reopen the mills. But the governor of Pennsylvania succumbed to the pressure of Frick's request for protection of laborers who wanted to work in the mills. On 11 July, nine days after the strike began, the Pennsylvania National Guard was dispatched to Homestead, where it seized control of the town from the strikers. Strikebreakers began to enter the mills. By early September, the Homestead mills were producing quality finished products, despite the fact that none of the skilled workers on strike had defected.36

Shortly after the National Guard entered Homestead, workers at other Carnegie Company mills in Lawrenceville, Beaver Falls and Duquesne walked out in sympathy strikes. National Guard troops quickly broke the strike in Duquesne. After a riot between strikers and troops on 8 August, in which several strikers were arrested, the strikers lost hope and returned to work. The strike at Beaver Falls lasted four months. But with their financial resources exhausted and the Amalgamated Association unwilling to aid them, the sympathy strikers returned to work. The Lawrenceville strike ended early in August. Few of the strikers were re-employed.37

Late in September, the repression of the Homestead strike entered a new phase. A special grand jury, acting under the direction of Edward Paxon, the virulent anti-union chief justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, returned 167 treason indictments, based on a little used statute of dubious constitutionality, against the Amalgamated leaders in Homestead and strikers who had taken part in the battle of 5 July with the Pinkertons. Many of the indicted men were arrested; others fled. Bail for the arrested

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men totalled more than a half million dollars. Although trial juries exonerated all the indicted workers, the treasury of the Amalgamated was severely depleted by the cost of defending its members.  

By mid-October, some skilled workers were returning to the Homestead mills. On 21 November, the Amalgamated officially called off the strike. But most of the skilled workers never were allowed to go back on the payrolls of the Carnegie Company.  

The Homestead strike demonstrated that the steel manufacturers could and would call on the forces of the state to break mass strikes. The Homestead strike also proved that green hands could be trained to turn out steel in a relatively short time. Under these circumstances, skilled steelworkers who went out on strike could not outlast the large employers who increasingly dominated the steel industry. Why were the skilled steelworkers replaceable? By 1892, mechanization of steel production had significantly reduced the degree of skill needed for steel manufacturing. An increasing number of workers were semi-skilled operatives who could be trained easily. Many of the skilled workers were now essentially skilled machine operators. The traditional manual skills and expert judgement of many skilled workers had been incorporated in new machines. In the ten years after 1892, the mechanization of steel production proceeded with a vengeance and without opposition from the skilled workers since the Amalgamated was now too weak to challenge the basic steel producers. By 1902, few skilled workers remained who were not machine tenders. As

38. The strike cost the Carnegie Company $250,000. The wage loss of the strikers was about $800,000. Expenses for the deployment of the National Guard came to $500,000. Burgoyne, op. cit., p. 229.
39. Wolff, op. cit., pp. 217-223. According to Wolff, none of the hard core of 325 strikers, all skilled workers and members of the Amalgamated, were rehired. Thirteen hundred of the other strikers were rehired. There is abundant evidence in the Saposs interviews of the widespread demotion of workers who dared to strike in 1919. See David Saposs interview with “Polish worker,” Youngstown; Mary Senior interview with Mr. Massic, McKeesport; David Saposs interviews with John Momer, Youngstown and Frank Graff, Homestead; Bertha Saposs interview with “Polish shearmen,” Homestead; and Mary Senior interview with Mr. and Mrs. Funak, Homestead. John Fitch reported that Jack Hartnett, a rougher in Bethlehem before he struck, had been placed in his old job after the strike by his foreman, but had been ordered to take another job by the plant employment office. Hartnett, who had been a non-compliant member of the government mandated Employee’s Committee during the war, was re-employed as a heater’s helper. His pay cut was $80 per month. Mary Heaton Vorse reported that older workers were often not rehired at all. Vorse, op. cit., p. 168.
Katherine Stone concluded in a recent study of mechanization in the steel industry, "The effects of the new technology were to eliminate the distinction between skilled and unskilled workers and create a largely homogeneous work force." For example, by 1902, the most highly skilled worker at an open hearth furnace was the melter. A totally inexperienced worker could be trained to be a melter in six to eight weeks.

In 1892, when there were still a significant number of genuine skilled workers, these workers had failed to cripple production at the Carnegie Company's Homestead mills for a long enough time to put enough financial pressure on the Company to make it surrender. The new skilled steelworker of the twentieth century was even more replaceable than his predecessors.

By 1901, the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers was dead in the basic steel mills. It survived, precariously, in the factories making sheet steel, tubes, and tin plated steel where the need for skilled workers was greater than in the basic steel mills. In 1901, the Amalgamated's leaders decided to take the offensive against the newly formed giant of the steel industry, the United States Steel Corporation. Aware that the directors of the Steel Corporation wanted to avoid a strike while the stock issue of the new combination was being marketed, the Amalgamated struck for a uniform wage scale in union mills producing sheet steel. U.S. Steel made a conciliatory offer which increased by four the number of mills in which the Amalgamated Association would be recognized. Only five of twenty-three sheet mills would remain nonunion. Now the leaders of the Amalgamated overreached themselves. They demanded union recognition in all the sheet mills. The steel corporation refused. The Amalgamated Association then ordered sympathy strikes by union members in the tin plate mills.

The two top leaders of the Amalgamated journeyed to New York to see J. P. Morgan. Morgan was furious. He backtracked, offering a settlement that excluded the four mills that U.S. Steel had earlier been willing to concede to the union. President Shaffer and Secretary Williams accepted Morgan's offer, but the executive board of the Amalgamated rebuked this settlement. In desperation the Amalgamated called for a strike of all steelworkers.

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But the few workers who responded to the call received no aid from the Amalgamated. The union retreated, accepting a contract that covered only a few mills. It also promised to abstain from organization efforts in all nonunion steel factories. 42

Skilled workers learned two lessons from the 1901 strike. They learned that the leadership of the Amalgamated was incompetent. More importantly, they learned that sympathy strikes were dangerous because the Amalgamated was not strong enough to support such efforts. William Rumberger, a steelworker who testified before the Senate Committee on Labor and Education in 1919, reflected the sense of betrayal felt by the sympathy strikers of 1901. Rumberger had been a member of the Amalgamated. He had struck in support of the hard pressed tin plate and sheet steel workers. Rumberger remembered that when the sympathy strikes had proved futile and the sympathy strikers turned to their union for aid until they were re-employed, the Amalgamated had indicated it would not provide assistance. Asked by a Senator, "Did you leave the union?" Rumberger replied, "No, the union left us." 43

The negative image of the Amalgamated that existed among many native-born steelworkers was based upon the Amalgamated's historical record. Undeniably, the Amalgamated had suffered from poor leadership. But its basic failings stemmed from the intrinsic weakness in the bargaining power of the skilled workers. The organizing scheme adopted in 1918 and 1919 by the National Committee for Organizing the Iron and Steel Workers called for a uniform initiation fee for all workers, which would be collected by its teams of organizers. But all workers would subsequently be transferred to the craft unions which the AFL recognized as having jurisdiction over their jobs. The Amalgamated received half of the new recruits. The prospect of joining the Amalgamated could hardly have appeared encouraging to steel workers with an intimate knowledge of the union's historical record. And workers who were enthusiastic about the idea of a single union for all steel workers were disappointed when they were ordered to join the craft unions. 44

42. My account here follows Brody, op. cit., pp. 61-72.
43. Investigation, pp. 287-288.
44. David Saposs interview with "American," McKeesport. A reading of the Amalgamated Journal for the entire year of 1919 indicates the timidity of the union's leaders. History was their justification. A 20 February 1919 editorial noted that
Many of the workers interviewed by the Saposs team in 1920 made specific references to the sticking power of the steel companies—their ability to outlast their workers in a battle of the pocketbook. In 1892, despite a massive outpouring of aid from workers throughout the United States, the Homestead strikers had been driven back to the steel mills by the exhaustion of their financial resources. In 1919, the steel companies' treasuries were overflowing with record breaking earnings. They had never been stronger financially, and experienced workers knew this.

In 1919 the financial strength of the steel companies, combined with their political influence with the Pennsylvania state government and their dominance of the governments of most steel communities, resulted in widespread assaults and arrests of striking workers as local police and the Pennsylvania State Police, the infamous "Cossacks," disrupted picket lines and union meetings. These actions were hardly surprising to the skilled workers who remembered the role of the Pennsylvania National Guard in the strikes of 1892. And the indiscriminate arrests of strikers on sedition charges and other counts by the police and U.S. government agents in 1919 were reminiscent of the bogus legal assault directed against the Homestead strikers in 1892. Government repression was an integral part of the legacy of the skilled steelworkers.

Many of the skilled steelworkers concluded that the power of the steel companies was so great that the eight-hour day and union recognition could be obtained only with the assistance of federal legislation. Samuel Gompers and the leaders of the National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers also recognized that the steelworkers desperately needed government intervention on their behalf.

Employers would not capitulate when workers struck. "Past history has shown they will resist organized labor to the bitter end." History had proven that trying "to take employers by surprise by hasty and impulsive strikes, for the purpose of enforcing concessions, had failed to produce permanent results." Beginning with the 10 July issue, the *Amalgamated Journal* regularly printed editorials stressing the importance of adhering to contracts if a union was to be successful. From 18 September to the end of the year, a statement by President Tighe along the same lines was printed on the front page of every issue of the *Journal*. The local lodges of the Amalgamated that officially were on strike during the steel strike were locals of workers employed by small, independent steel firms. The only large-firm local of the Amalgamated to strike was the Lebanon, Pennsylvania local at a Bethlehem Steel Company plant. See especially *Amalgamated Journal*, 2 October pp. 5, 7.


46. The labor leaders hoped President Wilson would be sympathetic to their cause. After Wilson's collapse on 26 September, four days after the strike began,
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The drive to organize the steel industry had started after the successful completion of an organizing drive in the Chicago stockyards on 30 March, 1918. On that day a federal judge, who had been appointed arbitrator of the wartime labor dispute between the big meat packing companies and their employees, awarded the stockyard workers an eight-hour day and partial union recognition. But by September 1919, the war was over and the federal wartime agencies which had protected union organizing in basic industry to preserve uninterrupted war production were already dismantled. Yet John Fitzpatrick, chairman of the National Committee, predicted on 20 July 1919, that the U.S. government "would intervene and see to it that the steel barons be brought to time, even as the packers were . . . . President Wilson would never allow a great struggle to develop between the steelworkers and their employers." But Fitzpatrick was, in reality, only speculating. No one could be sure that the government would aid the steelworkers. 47

Many steelworkers with long memories were inclined toward pessimism. They sensed what their leaders did not sense or did not want to admit to themselves. Nothing had transpired between 1892 and 1919 to increase markedly pro-union sympathy among most politicians and government bureaucrats. During war, labor peace had to be bought. But peacetime was different. Most of the steelworkers interviewed by Saposs and his team had no faith in politicians or the existing political parties. Demagogues and rogues, who were only out for themselves, could not be expected to side with the steelworkers against big business.

The immigrant steelworkers and the native-born workers whose memories were not as long as the skilled workers of the Pittsburgh district were eager to strike in 1919. 48 Rank and file the labor men transferred their hopes to the upcoming Industrial Conference of 7 October. Ibid., pp. 248-250.

47. Brody, Labor in Crisis, op. cit., p. 102.

48. Historical memories were not the only factors involved in the decision to strike or not strike. For example, immigrant steelworkers who had moved into the ranks of the skilled told the Saposs interviewers that they feared losing their jobs and homes if they struck. John Honroth, a young Polish second helper in a Pittsburgh mill told Bertha Saposs that the strike was "a laborer strike." He feared that if he struck he "would have been boycotted. Then what would I do with my house? Carry it away on my shoulders?"

William Z. Foster's testimony before the investigating commission of the Interchurch World Movement indicates one important reason why the skilled workers in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, an old steel community on the fringe of the Pittsburgh district, struck in large numbers in 1919. According to Foster, after the
pressure forced the showdown with the steel companies well before the leaders of the organizing drive wanted a confrontation. With a strike date set for 22 September, Gompers and the National Committee knew that the strike was doomed unless the federal government intervened on behalf of the steelworkers. But President Wilson refused to pressure the steel companies to negotiate with the National Committee. Once the strike began, the top officials of the U.S. government, with the exception of President Wilson, who collapsed on September 26, acted to break the strike. Joseph Tumulty, Wilson's private secretary, and most cabinet officials viewed the strike as a manifestation of a pernicious revolutionary mentality that was sweeping across the nation. These top government leaders either advocated or condoned the use of the resources of the Army, the Justice Department and the Immigration Bureau to break the strike. Another generation would have to pass before the national government began to support the right of trade unions to organize.

V

After 1919, all the steelworkers, skilled and unskilled, native-born and foreign-born, had congruent historical memories. They all had witnessed or directly participated in an unsuccessful struggle against the giant steel producers. They all had seen or experienced government repression of their efforts to unionize and strike for better conditions. Recent oral history interviews with "new immigrant" steelworkers who participated in the 1919 strike or were raised in communities in which many of their elders had taken part in the strike suggest that in the 1920's a mood of terror permeated the steel towns of the United States. Fear of organizing drive began, the steel mills in Johnstown began to fire large numbers of veterans. This intimidation backfired, since the skilled workers no longer felt secure with the steel companies. The skilled workers in Johnstown were enraged and wanted to strike immediately. Foster reported that the local leaders told him, "We have held them as long as they can be held, and hundreds of men are walking around with families starving. They demand redress, and the only way they can see to get it is to strike." Foster was able to delay the strike action. Apparently, the U.S. Steel Company realized that its management had acted unwisely. A new president of the Cambria Steel Company was sent to Johnstown. See the typed minutes of the Interchurch World Movement commission in Box 26, Saposs Papers, 4-8.

informers, the blacklist, and a repetition of the physical intimidation of 1919 made "new immigrant" steelworkers reluctant to challenge the steel companies again.  

A first-hand account powerfully illustrates the atmosphere of fear in the steel towns. In 1922 a sixteen-year old boy who lived in Gary, Indiana wrote an essay based on current observations and the diary he kept in 1919. Old timers, he said might forget a lot of things about Gary but 1919 never. That was the time friendships broke-up, credit went to hell, brother fought brother and the bayonets walked the streets. Some say it was like any other strike and some say it was nothing but those who went thru it don't say anything . . . the old timers—the “union boys of 1919” they KNOW something but they don’t talk. You ask and they look at you and go.  

And most of the steelworkers who did talk about 1919 had only painful memories to recount.

Stanley Aronowitz has recently argued that younger workers were the most dynamic force in the organizing drives in steel in the 1930's. “The younger workers,” Aronowitz writes, “were more militant because they had not experienced the dismal defeats . . . [of 1919] . . . and were thus more optimistic about the chances of winning.” Although there is some truth to this analysis, it overlooks the impact of the historical tradition of the 1919 steel strike that was preserved in the steel towns. To the steelworker of the 1930's the direct experience factor was not as decisive as the knowledge that conditions now differed from those of 1919 in two fundamental ways. First, after 1935 the unionization effort was led by a totally new organization, the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee of the CIO The SWOC and the CIO came
into the steel towns untarnished by the record of incompetence and defeat that belonged to the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers. The SWOC also organized the steel industry on an industrial basis. Furthermore, the CIO gave unequivocal support to the SWOC. In 1919 the AFL's national leaders and many member unions had been unenthusiastic and in many ways hostile to the organizing drive and the steel strike.  

A second new historical condition was even more important. After 1933 and especially after 1935, the national government supported trade union organization to a degree previously unknown in the United States. The repressive government of 1919 had been transformed not merely into a neutral bystander, but had become an active ally of the trade union movement. In addition, on the state and local level the new political influence of the organized working class prevented the steel companies from unleashing state policemen and local vigilantes against steelworkers as they had in 1919.

Changed circumstances were decisive in convincing members of the steel working communities that the specific traumas of the past would not be repeated. The most painful memories of the past gave way to a feeling of confidence that a new tradition of victory, not defeat, could be established. By the end of World War II unionism had come to stay in the steel industry.  

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55. For a good survey of the steel organizing drives see Bernstein, op. cit., pp. 432-496. Of course there were many local and state and national politicians and government officials who were hostile to organized labor during the 1930's. The new element in the picture was the growing number of politicians and elected officials who were sympathetic to labor out of conviction and in return for political support. David Brody, “The Emergence of Mass-Production Unionism,” in John Braeman, Robert H. Bremner and Everett Walters, eds., Change and Continuity in Twentieth-Century America (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964), p. 250.