

**TIN PLATE TOWNS, 1890-1910:  
LOCAL LABOR MOVEMENTS AND  
WORKERS' RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS IN  
THE STEELWORKERS' UNION**

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After the lockout at Homestead, Pennsylvania in 1892, the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers began its long decline as manufacturers reduced their need for skilled workers through mechanization and merged into large corporations with multiple locations.<sup>1</sup> By 1901, when the United States Steel Corporation was created, the union had decided to concentrate on sheet and tin plate mills where skill was still essential. The tin plate industry had only taken root in the United States in the decade after the 1890 passage of the McKinley Tariff, which enabled American producers to compete with Wales, the world leader of the industry. This set in motion a series of changes that mainly affected mill towns in western Pennsylvania, northern West Virginia, Ohio, and Indiana. In many cases, the arrival of the tin plate industry attracted a new workforce that changed the complexion of the local labor movement. These towns also entered the last chapter of an ongoing battle between the steel industry's management and the Amalgamated Association.

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Historians have previously focused on the conflict between national union officials and U. S. Steel executives. Though national currents of change gripped the mill towns, local conditions still shaped how the events played out. Three towns in particular, New Castle and Apollo, Pennsylvania, and Wheeling, West Virginia, demonstrate how local circumstances influenced workers' strategies and attitudes in this struggle between unionism and corporate power.<sup>2</sup>

### Tin Plate Industry Takes Root in New Castle, Wheeling, and Apollo

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the American steel industry began to assume a more important role in the national economy, but while American manufacturers successfully challenged British dominance over most steel products they were still unable to produce tin plate profitably. Tin plate is a very thin gauge of sheet steel coated with tin to prevent rusting. At one time it had been mainly imported from Wales and used only for specialty items. In the late nineteenth century, manufacturers found new uses for tin plate such as making tin receptacles for tobacco, cigarettes, and candy, and especially for canned food. After passage of the McKinley Tariff in 1890, American businessmen were able to tap into this new market with little risk, and in short order plants were constructed in small and mid-size towns in western Pennsylvania, northern West Virginia, Ohio, and Indiana.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, many businessmen had the wherewithal to build tin plate mills as it cost only about \$50,000 compared to the \$20 million required to build a basic steel mill. In fact, former steel managers and skilled workers alike sometimes formed partnerships to construct the new tin plate mills. Unlike other segments of the steel industry, local investors rather than Wall Street investment bankers controlled the tin plate industry during the 1890s.<sup>4</sup> The rapidly developing industry transformed these towns in ways that would shape the coming labor-management conflict in each.

The arrival of the tin plate industry in New Castle turned this small town into the "tin plate center of the world." Located about forty miles north of Pittsburgh and twenty miles east of Youngstown, Ohio, New Castle in the 1880s had only a handful of small manufacturing establishments including four blast furnaces, two rolling mills, a wire, a rod, and a nail mill, and two

window glass factories. Its population stood at about ten thousand. After passage of the McKinley Tariff, local banker and real estate investor George Greer formed the New Castle Steel and Tin Plate Company and began production at the "Greer plant" in 1893. Tin plate plants housed several stands of rolls that were individually called mills (but sometimes referred to collectively as a single mill). The Greer plant began production with eight mills and expanded over the next several years first to twelve and later to twenty. Following Greer's success, in 1898 the Shenango Valley Steel Company put a thirty-mill tin plate plant into production in New Castle, bringing the city's total to an impressive fifty mills.<sup>5</sup>

Wheeling, West Virginia experienced economic growth much earlier than New Castle. Located on the Ohio River and the National Road, Wheeling grew steadily from a small center of commerce to a factory town by the 1830s. While its economy grew increasingly diverse with glass, pottery, and tobacco factories, iron cut nails became its primary product in the 1860s and 1870s, and Wheeling became known as the "Nail City." The cut nail industry in Wheeling reached its pinnacle in the 1880s, and the city's population exceeded 34,000 in 1890. The development of the wire nail, which was a cheaper and higher quality product, ushered in hard times for Wheeling's cut nail producers. These years witnessed a desperate search for cost-saving measures, followed by strikes and bankruptcies.<sup>6</sup>

Salvation for Wheeling's nail factory owners came in 1890 with the passage of the McKinley tariff. Initially, local cut nail producers investigated converting to wire nails but found that their rolling mills could be more easily converted to roll sheet steel that could then be made into tin plate. Across the river in Martins Ferry, Ohio, the Aetna-Standard Iron and Steel Company became the first local company to start producing tin plate, and soon after the Wheeling Corrugating Company and the Laughlin Nail Works, also of Martins Ferry, added tin mills. By July 1895, the LaBelle Iron Works had four hot mills, as well as four stands of cold rolls and six tinning stacks. By the mid-1890s almost all of the nail mills in the Wheeling district had converted to tin plate. Tin plate, having only replaced an established industry, did not spark much growth in Wheeling as its population only grew by about ten percent between 1890 and 1900.<sup>7</sup>

Apollo, Pennsylvania experienced its first boom in the early part of the nineteenth century when some entrepreneurs discovered and exploited nearby salt deposits. In 1860 Apollo had a salt maker, tannery, brick works, a small rolling mill that produced nails, and a mere 449 residents. The rolling mill

languished as owners and investors came and went. In 1872, an English immigrant named William Rogers purchased the rolling mill in Apollo and converted it to make tin plate for flatware and tea-tray manufacturers. Tin plate ventures were risky without tariff protection, and the Panic of 1873 devastated Rogers's operation. The mill sat idle until Phillip Laufman became his partner in 1876. Rogers left the firm a few years later, and Laufman managed to keep the Apollo mill running and even expand its operations. In 1886, J. J. Vandergrift and several investors joined Laufman to create the Apollo Iron and Steel Company. Laufman then sold his interest in the mill to George McMurtry, who assumed leadership of the enterprise and transformed the company and the town.<sup>8</sup>

McMurtry, an Irish immigrant, had been an executive with the Jones and Laughlin company in Pittsburgh in the 1860s. He quickly entered into the elite iron masters' network and went into business for himself in 1880 before joining Vandergrift's partnership in the mid-1880s. McMurtry devised a plan to expand the Apollo mill and ordered that the iron puddling furnaces be razed and replaced by two fifteen-ton open hearth furnaces. Thus, the finishing mill became a fully integrated steel plant, requiring far more unskilled labor. Between 1880 and 1910, Apollo's population grew from 1156 to 3006. Following the success of the Apollo company and passage of the McKinley Tariff, McMurtry and his board of directors decided to double their production by building another plant two miles away in a new city of their creation called Vandergrift. The Vandergrift works eventually exceeded twenty-nine mills, becoming by far the largest sheet steel operation in the country with an annual gross ton capacity of 186,500 tons of sheets, dwarfing the next largest plant whose capacity was a mere 54,200 tons. The new town attracted nearly four thousand residents by 1900 and then more than doubled by 1910.<sup>9</sup>

### Rollers, Heaters, and Laborers in the Tin Plate Towns

From the 1890s when the industry began to flourish in the United States until the late 1920s, tin plate production required highly skilled rollers and heaters with many years of experience. In other parts of the steel industry, technological improvements enabled the mechanization of production processes that had previously required highly skilled craftsmen. Tin plate manufacturing proved difficult to automate though. The production of tin

plate began with steel bars, often purchased from a basic steel plant, that were heated and rolled into thin sheets, then reheated and re-rolled several times, sheared to size, run through acid baths as well as vats of molten tin, then inspected, polished, and packaged. Because of the thin gauges of the product, heating and rolling the sheets still required very skilled and experienced workers.<sup>10</sup>

W. C. Cronmeyer, a tin plate executive in the 1890s, claimed that American manufacturers made improvements to the production process that reduced the amount of labor needed as well as the consumption of raw materials.<sup>11</sup> Cronmeyer is right that American companies made improvements, but most improvements simply eliminated labor crews. For example, commonly in 1895, crews of laborers unloaded the slabs upon arrival at the plant and put them on buggies that were then pulled and pushed by other crews to the furnace. By 1910, it was common for cranes to do all the unloading and narrow-gauge locomotives to take the slabs to the furnace.<sup>12</sup> Tellingly, Cronmeyer believed that the use of electric cranes was one of the most valuable improvements.<sup>13</sup>

To produce a high quality product, American tin plate companies still had to rely on skilled workers who could not be replaced by American farm boys or Lithuanian peasants. For example, the heater, called the furnaceman in Wales, was a highly skilled worker who required "long experience and considerable practical knowledge of the heat treatment of metals." Furnace temperatures were "judged largely by the heater's eye," and a single error meant the "loss of a valuable steel slab."<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the roller in sheet steel and tin plate mills was another occupation that remained virtually unaffected by the technological changes around him. One description of the job said:

This is a very responsible and highly skilled occupation, which requires a special knowledge of the working of iron and steel that can be gained only by long experience. It is impossible to convey in a description the kind and degree of knowledge required to produce uniform plates of the proper width and thickness on which the loss shall be as little as possible.<sup>15</sup>

Even a company executive *conservatively* estimated that if a worker was "real clever he can learn the business in 3 years from the time he starts in."<sup>16</sup>

It was not until many years later, in 1927, that an automated process was successfully developed for rolling sheet steel for use as tin plate. In May and

June of that year, *Iron Age* reported that the Columbia Steel Co. of Butler, Pennsylvania and the American Rolling Mill Co. of Ashland, Kentucky were successfully rolling steel from the roughing mill through the finishing mill. The new production line was called a "stripsheet mill" because instead of making small square sheets, it produced long strips of steel that were the widths of the desired size of the final product. At the end of the process the strips were rolled into mammoth coils. Millworkers would say that now "they don't make tinplate by the box, they make it by the mile."<sup>17</sup> *Iron Age* announced that it was the "sheet mill of tomorrow" because it did "in a large part mechanically what is now done by hand." Its success depended on a number of technological innovations including roller bearings, furnaces between each roll, and large, individual, adjustable-speed motors at each set of rolls.<sup>18</sup> "Nicety of roll speed" was particularly important to the new process according to the editors of *Iron Age*. Plus, the temperature of the rolls and the material passing through them had to be closely monitored and fine-tuned. Finally, manufacturers realized that rather than have perfectly cylindrical rolls that were precisely parallel, rolls that produced a slightly convex strip kept the steel in the center of the rolls. Close inspection of old Welsh rolls revealed that they were not always perfectly cylindrical.<sup>19</sup> Thus, it would not be until the late 1920s that managers would finally discover all the secrets of the rollers and heaters.

The construction of a tin plate mill in a small town helped to change the composition of the local workforce. Historians have long noted that skilled tin plate workers were imported from Wales and England to help start up new ventures. Bart Richards recalled that the Welsh "thought that nobody but a Welshman could make tinplate."<sup>20</sup> One writer describes the arrival of the Welsh and Cornish tin plate workers or "goats" as they were known: "As they rushed down gangplanks in American harbors they hailed passing strangers with 'Hoy, mister! Show me the way to Wheeling!' or some other steel city."<sup>21</sup> Less heralded was the arrival of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe to work in the tin houses. After the rolled tin plate left the departments where the skilled rollers and heaters worked, it then went to the tin house where it would be dipped in vats of acid, flux, and molten tin before being inspected by "assorters." Women in the assorting room used knives to pry apart sheets that were partly welded together in stacks. Other women would inspect and polish the tin coated sheets. Finally, it would be packaged in boxes for shipping. Since it was considered unskilled labor, manufacturers often hired eastern

and southern Europeans to work in the tin house; the men were assigned to the dipping works and warehouse and the women to the assorting room.<sup>22</sup>

New Castle provides an excellent example of the changes to the local workforce with the arrival of the tin plate industry. Workers came by the thousands during the 1890s and 1900s to take advantage of the new opportunities, and the town's population tripled from 11,600 in 1890 to over 36,000 by 1910. Bart Richards's father, a Welshman, moved his family from Pittsburgh to New Castle in the 1890s when the Shenango plant opened. Bart remembered that many of the Welshmen that clustered on the south side near the plant could not speak English and that ministers gave their sermons in Welsh. By 1900, there were 1447 Welsh living in New Castle; the next largest group were immigrants from England numbering 861.<sup>23</sup>

According to Richards, New Castle was almost entirely Scotch-Irish, English, and Welsh at the turn of the century, but that changed as many new immigrants came from southern and eastern Europe between 1900 and 1910. Skilled Welsh workers gravitated toward nicer neighborhoods that approached middle-class status, while the unskilled, new immigrants clustered in the Eighth Ward and the "Bloody Fifth" Ward, so-called for its Saturday night barroom brawls. The Eighth Ward, which observers said was the "sootiest, grimiest, most congested ward in the city," was home to the Greer plant and many of the new immigrant groups like the Russians and Hungarians. By 1910, the city's nearly twenty-four hundred Italians comprised the largest immigrant group and clustered in the Fifth Ward living alongside some older Welsh residents. Historian John Bodnar found that as early as 1900, two-thirds of the laborers in the mills were Italian. Many of the new immigrants' institutions in New Castle date back to the first decade of the twentieth century including the Italians' St. Vitus Church (1906), the Greek Catholic Church Society (1907), the Polish Falcon Club (1909), and the Slovaks' St. Joseph's Church (1910).<sup>24</sup>

The pull of tin plate reached out to the most unlikely places, and after 1900 a Shia sect of Syrian Muslims known as Alawi began to settle in New Castle, numbering almost two hundred by the end of the decade. By 1910, 24 percent of New Castle's population was foreign-born. Additionally, a little over five hundred African Americans had moved into New Castle's downtown. Tensions arose between the old stock European residents and so-called newcomers from Eastern and Southern Europe, the American South, and the Middle East, and the words "nigger" and "hunky" were "used very freely" to describe the newcomers.<sup>25</sup>

Wheeling's work force remained dominated by old stock Europeans, especially Germans. German emigration to Wheeling was well under way by the 1850s, and in 1900 there were still more Germans, numbering over three thousand, than any other nationality. The next three largest immigrant groups were the Irish (876), English (648), and the Welsh (136).<sup>26</sup> A large percentage of Wheeling steelworkers were also old stock Europeans. Fifteen percent of them had been born in Germany, and nearly 40 percent of their parents had been born in Germany outnumbering even steelworkers with parents born in West Virginia. German steel workers had most likely dominated the cut nail mills of Wheeling. The conversion to tin plate required so few changes that it is likely that the local mills kept much of the same work-force after they abandoned the cut nail. As a result, the German workers would have dominated the tin plate mills as well.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Wheeling's trade unionists were also particularly hostile to new immigrants. They had worked actively to get employers to promise that they would prevent "Dagos" from working with "white" workers, and the major action of the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly (OVTLA) in 1902 was to petition Congress to bar immigrants from entering the U. S. because they were a "menace" to the position of workers. This may help explain why old immigrants continued to dominate Wheeling's workforce.<sup>28</sup>

Another interesting facet of the ethnicity of Wheeling steelworkers is their distribution in the skill levels of the mill. Industry-wide, native workers and old stock Europeans were over-represented among the skilled positions while new immigrants were largely hired as unskilled workers. But this was not the case in Wheeling where there were few new immigrants at the turn of the century to employ in unskilled positions. Workers born in West Virginia accounted for around half of both the skilled and unskilled workers as well as half of the helpers, who, although unskilled, would eventually become skilled rollers and heaters. Those who were born in Germany accounted for only 7 percent of skilled workers and only 12 percent of helpers and were most prevalent in unskilled occupations, holding 21 percent of those jobs. Similarly, workers whose fathers were born in Germany accounted for a third of the skilled positions, a third of the helpers, and nearly half of the unskilled positions. Out of a sample of 410 steelworkers in Wheeling, only two were from eastern or southern Europe. Whereas new immigrants typically filled unskilled positions, as in New Castle, Wheeling tin plate companies employed old immigrants and native-born workers in all departments.<sup>29</sup>



Apollo's manufacturers relied heavily on Welsh and English skilled workers in the early years of their operation. In 1880 there were twenty-one puddlers and rollers in Apollo, 81 percent of whom were English or Welsh having immigrated to the U. S. in the early 1870s. Apollo Iron and Steel became known for hiring teenage farm boys from the surrounding countryside in the 1880s and 1890s. Thus, during the early years of tin plate production, English, Welsh, and native Pennsylvanians accounted for almost the whole population, but as the company expanded into Vandergrift and became an integrated steel plant, that changed. While the workforce in the sheet and tin plate mills probably did not change much, the open hearths depended on large numbers of unskilled laborers and attracted increasing numbers of Greeks, Italians, and Lithuanians. While only 16 percent of downtown Vandergrift's residents were foreign-born, the surrounding neighborhoods of Vandergrift Heights and East Vandergrift were 39 and 93 percent immigrants. In 1910, over half of the English immigrants in the city were skilled craftsmen compared to less than ten percent of the Italians and Russian-Lithuanians. Conversely, only 3 percent of the English worked as laborers compared to 74 percent of Italians and 84 percent of Russian-Lithuanians.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the construction of tin plate plants in New Castle and Vandergrift changed the composition of the local working class attracting both "old" and "new" immigrants who would be divided by both neighborhood and occupation. Meanwhile the conversion of Wheeling's nail mills to tin plate changed little and merely saved the jobs of many first and second generation German steelworkers.

### Craft Unions and Tin Plate Workers

The rise of the tin plate industry coincided with the decline of the steelworkers' union, the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers. For most of its history, the Amalgamated Association had admitted only skilled workers whom union leaders viewed as naturally good union men since they pursued lifelong careers in the industry and kept abreast of the business as well. Skilled workers also enjoyed a tactical advantage since they were both irreplaceable and critical to the production process. Though they were in the minority in the mills, withholding their labor could shut down a whole plant. But, as mentioned earlier, steel industry managers were able to mechanize many of the production processes and eliminate the need for skilled workers. Whereas the puddlers and rollers of the 1870s had trained as

apprentices for years, by the 1890s company officials could recruit farmers and immigrants and train them for many of the new jobs in the automated production lines in a matter of weeks. This gave employers the leverage they needed to break the Amalgamated lodges in the big steel mills throughout the country, starting with Homestead in 1892.<sup>31</sup>

But in the 1890s, skilled workers were still critical to tin plate production, and the Amalgamated Association sought refuge in the sheet and tin plate mills. The union's failure to organize the large basic steel mills led them to the finishing mills by default, but the union also fit perfectly with these workers because in many ways the organization merely formalized long-standing traditions that rollers and heaters brought from their native Wales and England. Like many skilled artisans, they valued stability and worried that the labor market would become saturated and result in unemployment and depressed wages. As one tin plate roller from Wales explained:

My father was an iron worker, and his father before him. My people had been workers in metal from the time when the age of farming in Wales gave way to the birth of modern industries. They were proud of their skill, and the secrets of the trade were passed from father to son as a legacy of great value, and were never told to persons outside the family. Such skill meant good wages when there was work. But there was not work all the time. Had there been jobs enough for all we would have taught our trade to all. But in self-protection we thought of our own mouths first. All down the generations my family has been face to face with the problem of bread.<sup>32</sup>

As a result of these feelings and practices, the crews of rollers and heaters in the tin plate mills would be comprised of men who were relatives, neighbors, or close friends. One can imagine the solidarity that developed among this close-knit workforce, and this is the kind of solidarity and exclusivity upon which the Amalgamated Association was founded. The main goal of the organization was to achieve and preserve stable working conditions by putting limits on the number of apprentices and daily production. Historian Colin Gordon has called this "regulatory unionism," noting that at certain times business leaders came to see unions as a useful counterbalance to destabilizing forces such as regional wage inequalities and overproduction.<sup>33</sup>

For the unskilled worker, life in and around the tin plate mills was very different. In many cases it was temporary work, and why would it be otherwise?

They were largely excluded from the best jobs. If you were not related to a roller or heater, you had very little chance of getting on one of their crews. And while the skilled roller may have made as much as \$8.25 per day, the unskilled workers earned about \$15 *per week*. This meant that while the rollers and heaters bought houses and fine furnishings, unskilled workers tended to live in crowded boarding houses. The working conditions for the unskilled were unpleasant as well. The men in the dipping works had to tolerate the fumes of the acid, flux, and tin vats in addition to intense heat. Women in the assorting room endured very monotonous work and had to be careful that the sharp edges on the sheets did not slice their hands. These women received less than a dollar a day for their work. Gizella Dull Brown recalled the repetitive nature of the work in the assorting room: "You turned [the sheets] over and if you see anything that's bad you had to take it out and put it in another pile. And then we had to keep the pile straight." But she also said that she stayed clean and when she was young, the demands of the job did not seem that bad.<sup>34</sup> All of the unskilled jobs in the tin house paid low wages and demanded stamina and determination rather than skill and muscle.

In 1898, the Amalgamated Association demonstrated their policy of exclusion when union officials responded to a groundswell of interest in organizing among the tin house workers. The tin house workers approached the Association to petition for membership, but Amalgamated leaders told them to form their own organization as they would be able to more effectively protect their interests. Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, issued a call for a convention in Kansas City to create a national organization of the tin house workers, and on January 17, 1899, the Tin Plate Workers' International Protective Association of America (TPW) was created. While some predicted the TPW would fail because its numbers were limited and its members had little trade union experience, by the second convention in May, 1900, the union had thirty different lodges. "Strength does not always find its seat in a large membership," TPW union president George Powell told the delegates, "but its efficiency lies in the righteousness of its cause."<sup>35</sup>

### Mergers and the Union Crisis in Tin Plate

The fates of New Castle, Wheeling, and Vandergrift were drawn together when the business environment began to change in the late 1890s. A merger

movement swept the nation in the late nineteenth century. As the tin plate industry grew and competition became fierce, prices dropped by almost 50 percent from over \$5 per box in 1893 to less than \$3 in 1898.<sup>36</sup> One tin plate executive later recalled that there was a "condition of excessive competition, which simply meant that the strongest people, financially, and the best plants, physically, would continue in existence, and some of the weaker ones would go into bankruptcy."<sup>37</sup> Historian Naomi Lamoreaux has since found that very few tin plate manufacturers went bankrupt despite the falling prices, and none were able to gain a competitive advantage, which made consolidation the most logical choice.<sup>38</sup> Daniel Reid, the president of the American Tin Plate Company, an Indiana tin plate concern, teamed up with a small group of influential owners and executives and began offering stock options to the other tin plate companies from Indiana to Maryland. The American Tin Plate Company was organized on December 15, 1898, with \$46 million issued in capital stock, bringing together nearly forty different companies that, in all, had more than 275 mills, and employed between twenty and twenty-five thousand people in 1899.<sup>39</sup>

The plants at New Castle, Apollo, Vandergrift, and Wheeling all became subsidiaries of the American Tin Plate Company. Following the success of the American Tin Plate Company, investors organized the American Sheet Steel Company, and in April 1899, it acquired the enormous Vandergrift works, which itself accounted for nearly a fifth of the mammoth company's production capacity.<sup>40</sup> The new companies went through some quick changes, but their management was very familiar. Cecil Robinson, former president of the LaBelle company in Wheeling, became a district manager for American Tin Plate; George McMurtry of Vandergrift assumed the presidency of American Sheet Steel; and George Greer became the General Manager of both the Greer and Shenango plants in New Castle.<sup>41</sup>

After the new companies recognized the unions and renewed their contracts, workers were relieved but only temporarily. Steel managers had not been able to use new technology to defeat the union in the tin plate mills, but the mergers gave the new corporations excess tin plate capacity, which meant they had more skilled workers than they needed. Management began pitting the workers of one plant against those of another. It was more economical, executives claimed, to idle one plant while running another at full production rather than running both at half capacity. One worker responded: "What is only economy to you is starvation to us." Furthermore, management could be very selective in choosing which plants to run, leading the same tin plate

worker to complain: "Ostensibly we are idle through want of orders, but as a matter of fact we are locked out because we will not work at a lower rate of wages, as do the men of Monessen, nor turn out a larger output, as do the men of New Castle." Both actions violated the union's constitution.<sup>42</sup>

In an effort to prevent workers from being tempted to break union policies, the Amalgamated Association amended its constitution at the 1900 convention to read that "should one mill in a combine or trust have a difficulty, all mills in said combine or trust shall cease work until such grievance is settled."<sup>43</sup> This measure was designed to bring uniformity back to the working conditions in the various plants, but in effect it would handcuff union negotiators the following year since they would have to demand that all the mills of a particular corporation be included in any agreements with the company.

The following year the American Sheet Steel Company and the American Tin Plate Company merged with several other finishing companies and basic steel producers, including over half of the nation's steel producing capacity, to become the first billion dollar corporation, the United States Steel Corporation. In less than three years, the workers of the small tin plate mills like the LaBelle in Wheeling had gone from being one of 500 employees to one of 15,000 employees in 1899 to one of 150,000 employees in 1901. One Wheeling steel executive later recalled that because of the mergers, many of local plants "necessarily lost their purely local character" and "came to be directed from Pittsburgh or New York by men with little knowledge of or interest in Wheeling." The corporation would consider each of the "cogs" in the machine "according to its economic location and its temper with respect to labor."<sup>44</sup> U. S. Steel continued the policy of favoring non-union mills as well as union mills where the workers disregarded Amalgamated policies. Union leaders recognized that to survive, non-union plants would have to be unionized.

Obedying the dictates of their amended constitution, Amalgamated leaders attempted to bring uniformity to the subsidiaries of U. S. Steel during their first contract negotiations by bringing all the mills of each one under contract. Officials of all of the subsidiaries signed contracts for that first year except George McMurtry, president of the American Sheet Steel Company, who refused to sign contracts for non-union plants. This was undoubtedly in part because it would have unionized the plant at Vandergrift, and McMurtry had spent so much time and effort to prevent just that. Since American Sheet Steel refused to sign the new contract, the Amalgamated struck that subsidiary, but after a few days it became apparent that the company was not going to budge.

Amalgamated president, T. J. Shaffer, came out of one negotiating conference infuriated by the company's arrogance, and announced publicly: "I have preached conservatism and held to it for three years, but in return we get nothing but subjugation and humiliation, and now we revolt."<sup>45</sup>

On Monday, July 1, 1901, Shaffer ordered the men from U. S. Steel's hoop mills on strike as well and sent a message to Warner Arms, vice president of the American Tin Plate Company, that unless the strike was settled by Monday, July 8, that it would be his "very, very unpleasant duty to call from their work all of your workmen who are members of the Amalgamated Association," even though they had already come to an agreement.<sup>46</sup> When negotiations again failed, on July 27, Shaffer played the last card in his hand and called out the tin plate workers. In all, 38,000 people were now striking U. S. Steel. Shaffer wanted to expand the strike by organizing non-union mills, but Samuel Gompers advised him to seek a compromise with U. S. Steel. Shaffer refused to compromise, but after several plants in Ohio and Pennsylvania, including Vandergrift, began production again, it was obvious that the Amalgamated could not win. U. S. Steel once again offered Shaffer to sign for all the mills still on strike, but this time it meant the loss of fifteen plants that had been unionized before the strike. The new contract further handicapped the Association by including a clause that prevented the union from trying to organize non-union plants.<sup>47</sup>

The union lost much of its strength and its credibility among many workers and struggled to hold on to members over the next decade. After the 1901 strike, Shaffer issued a circular giving as reasons for the failure the demoralizing lies printed in newspapers, the betrayal by Amalgamated men who worked as strikebreakers, and the AFL's abandonment of its cause. "The A. A. [Amalgamated Association] still exists, but it must be strengthened," he lamented.<sup>48</sup> Michael Tighe, who originally worked for the Wheeling Iron & Steel Company and would later become president of the Amalgamated Association, said that after the 1901 strike, the union's policy consisted of "giving way to every request that was made by the company when they insisted upon it."<sup>49</sup> U. S. Steel quietly rid itself of many local lodges by shutting plants down until the workers signed contracts and disavowed any connection with any labor organizations. The union was powerless as more and more of the plants fell to this method that was dubbed "starvation and petition."<sup>50</sup>

On June 1, 1909, workers at the remaining unionized plants of U. S. Steel, including those at New Castle and Wheeling, arrived at work to find a notice

announcing that after “careful consideration of the interests of both the company and its employees,” commencing July 1, the mills of the American Sheet and Tin Plate Company would be run as “open” shops. U. S. Steel’s largest tin plate plants including those in Elwood, Indiana and Sharon, Pennsylvania, as well as the two plants in New Castle, two plants in Martins Ferry across the river from Wheeling, and the LaBelle in Wheeling were all shut down on July 1.<sup>51</sup> Over the next year, both Amalgamated and TPW members made their last stand, but by the summer of 1910, U. S. Steel had succeeded in running the union out of all of its mills across the country. This narrative of union officials fighting in vain against U. S. Steel, however, obscures the different strategies employed by workers at the local level.

### Local Labor Movements: Wheeling

While the establishment of the tin plate industry in the 1890s transformed the small towns of New Castle and Vandergrift, it did not have nearly as great an impact on Wheeling. First, the local mills merely converted from one product line to another, and second, Wheeling already had many other industries, having becoming known for its Mail Pouch Tobacco and Wheeling Stogies among other things. At the turn of the century, in addition to over 1600 iron, steel, and tin workers, Wheeling was also home to 762 textile workers (including tailors and milliners), 572 tobacco operatives, 531 potters, 471 glass workers, 846 workers in the construction trades, 227 railroad engineers and firemen, and hundreds of small shop artisans. Most of these workers had long been organized into craft unions.<sup>52</sup> The conversion of many plants into tin mills was certainly important, but the mills did not dominate Wheeling’s economy in the same way that they did in New Castle and Vandergrift.

Wheeling’s labor history roots ran much deeper than either of the other two cities, and its labor leaders had been raised on craft unionism. A strong trade union movement accompanied Wheeling’s economic growth after the Civil War, and the 1880s were especially important for the local labor movement as twenty-six local craft unions were organized during the decade. The central labor body, the OVTLA, was created in the early 1880s and had jurisdiction over Wheeling as well as neighboring towns like Martins Ferry across the river in Ohio. The OVTLA became influential in shaping the trade union movement in Wheeling after the violent Nailers’ Strike of 1885. The local



craft unionists also supported a labor newspaper after the late 1880s with few lapses. By 1903 the city had forty-two local craft unions and 4000 union workers, and had become a bastion of unionism in West Virginia.<sup>53</sup>

Organized labor in Wheeling was divided in the early 1900s between a small but vocal group of Socialists and the majority of staunch trade unionists who did not favor entering into politics. As one local unionist put it: "Wheeling is termed a hot-bed of unionism, and while it is true this community is strongly organized, ... all of its labor leaders are conservative and the radicals are few."<sup>54</sup> One of the standing rules of the OVTLA at the turn of the century was that partisan politics would not be "permitted in the meetings under any circumstances." While there were Socialists among the delegates of the OVTLA, they could not even secure the Assembly's endorsement for their bids for election in 1906.<sup>55</sup> As the strike of 1909-1910 approached, Wheeling's steelworkers could look back on decades of successful trade unionism and local solidarity.

Steelworkers stood at the center of Wheeling's labor movement, and the Amalgamated Association was the single largest craft union in West Virginia in 1902 with 1142 members organized into six locals. (The United Mine Workers of America was the largest industrial union in the state at the time with approximately five thousand members.)<sup>56</sup> The skilled workers in the tin plate mills at LaBelle organized the Prosperity Lodge. The Tin Plate Workers International Protective Association also had success organizing in the Wheeling district. Martins Ferry boasted two TPW lodges, the Standard Lodge No. 9 and Ohio Valley Lodge No. 12, while workers in Wheeling joined the Powell Lodge No. 8. In 1899, organizer Thomas J. Irwin reported that Martins Ferry's TPW local had secured the eight-hour day and an increase in wages.<sup>57</sup>

In 1901, over six thousand steelworkers in the Wheeling district heeded Amalgamated President T. J. Shaffer's call to strike, and other unions in Wheeling rallied around them.<sup>58</sup> On August 14, Shaffer addressed an "immense meeting" of strikers and union sympathizers at the Wheeling Island fairgrounds. Bands played as delegations from nearby Bellaire and Benwood led a parade that was joined by the Wheeling and Martins Ferry lodges en route to the fair grounds. At each factory, the cheers of the crowds attested to the "popular favor" for the strike. Shaffer bellowed: "The trust can't run the mills without you. There is not enough skilled labor left to make more millions for these men who have centralized capital."<sup>59</sup> The OVTLA declared that the "future existence of organized labor depends on the



outcome of this difficulty.”<sup>60</sup> Wheeling witnessed some violence as the strikers protected their picket lines, and the local lodges weathered the storm and were covered under the 1901 contract since they were able to keep their plants shut down, thereby proving their loyalty to the union. Additionally, not a single plant was dismantled in the Wheeling district, and, in fact, the Laughlin plant in Martins Ferry was expanded to become one of the most modern tin plate plants in the world.<sup>61</sup>

But organizing workers in the Wheeling district as elsewhere was increasingly difficult after the devastating loss in 1901. In some cases steelworkers tried to circumvent the Amalgamated to form their own unions. In 1908 at another plant in Martins Ferry, the skilled workers’ helpers tried to organize a separate AFL union. John Conkel, representing the roughers, pair heaters, heaters’ helpers, openers, and shear-men of the Aetna-Standard plant, also known there as the “day-hands,” wrote directly to AFL president Samuel Gompers complaining that the rollers and heaters had not treated them fairly. The day-hands had recently been put on the tonnage basis as opposed to a daily rate, and the result was a reduction in wages. Conkel said that they were interested in forming a new lodge, and he was confident that “the day hands all over the country will organize at once as committees from different mills have been to our meetings.” These workers, he assured Gompers, had never been members of the Amalgamated Association nor wished to be, which was why they wrote directly to Gompers. Conkel wrote that if they had contacted the president of the Ohio chapter of the AFL, Llewellyn Lewis, who was also a vice president of the Amalgamated Association, he was certain that Lewis would force them to join the Amalgamated rather than form a separate AFL union. And the day hands, as Conkel put it, “don’t want nothing to do with the A. A.”<sup>62</sup>

Upon hearing about Conkel’s request, Amalgamated Vice President John Williams told the secretary of the AFL that the Federation must refuse them a charter. First, he argued that the day hands’ “very admission of not having taken any interest in the affairs of the Association is one of the pungent reasons as to why we were compelled to take a reduction on sheet mills this year.” Second, he also disagreed that day hands were not members but had “been mainstays of our Association and their sub-lodges.” Williams concluded that the AFL could not be too severe in their condemnation of this upstart movement because “if carried out it cannot but result in the destruction of all organizations in that branch of the steel industry.”<sup>63</sup> The

Amalgamated leaders were evidently insensitive to the needs of the helpers but obviously feared that the helpers could be used as strikebreakers as they had elsewhere.

Vice President Llewellyn Lewis, who lived in the Wheeling district, became a vocal proponent of change, arguing in 1909 that the "strength of the Amalgamated Association (or any other organization) depends on its comprehensiveness, and our aim must be to spread out and have every man working around the iron and steel mills in one organization."<sup>64</sup> To achieve this, Lewis and others believed that the union structure needed to be more democratic, and the first step would be adopting the initiative and referendum so that the rank-and-file could change constitutional laws and elect officers directly. Then President P. J. McArdle immediately announced that he was opposed to the initiative and referendum proposition.<sup>65</sup> At the 1909 convention, the initiative and referendum resolution was again voted down, and many members, including Lewis, thought the failure of this resolution epitomized the problems with the union just as the 1909 strike began.

After U. S. Steel posted its open shop notice in 1909, Wheeling steelworkers enthusiastically answered the Amalgamated and TPW strike calls. They braced for company attempts to restart the LaBelle mill, but U. S. Steel decided instead to try to lure workers away from Wheeling to work in New Castle and other mills that had been restarted. As skilled men were required, executives had to hire from the existing labor pool, most of whom were on strike. Walking into striking mill towns to find willing "scabs" could be dangerous work. On July 8, only seven days after the strike had begun, the company hired William D. Eagan to, in his words, "assist in getting men to work in their plants and go and obey their orders, wherever they sent them."<sup>66</sup>

Though Eagan lived in New Castle at the time, he previously had lived in Wheeling, where he gained a somewhat notorious reputation. He returned to Wheeling on July 9 and later claimed that as soon as he got off the train he was followed by a man named "Sugar" Wiedman, which suggests that the union was prepared for this tactic. The next morning he went to see James Medill, superintendent of the LaBelle plant, and as soon as they left the plant a crowd of people surrounded them. They had a constable with them who arrested Eagan for possession of a gun. After the Justice of the Peace scheduled a trial for later that night, the crowd dispersed to the bars where strikers began boasting: "We've got that big bastard now," and "We'll get Bad Bill tonight."

When the hour for the trial came, a large crowd had gathered to watch. The Justice of the Peace fined Eagan, and the mill superintendent paid his fine. But when Eagan got out on the street, a mob was waiting. It was not just a crowd of strikers, but included townspeople and mill workers from another independent tin plate plant that was not on strike. As Eagan began to walk up the street, several men quickly converged on him and tripped him. One man opened up a gash on Eagan's face with a pair of brass knuckles while another man tore a paling off a picket fence and began beating him with it. Eventually Eagan was able to make it to his feet and ran into a house where a woman agreed to let Eagan wash his face in the kitchen while the angry mob waited outside. A "paddy wagon" arrived at the woman's house to take Eagan to a safe place, but instead took him to the city jail where he spent three days without being charged with any crime other than carrying a pistol for which he had already been fined. After his release, he went straight to a hospital in Pittsburgh's South Side where he recovered enough to sign an affidavit that had been prepared for him by a company lawyer.<sup>67</sup>

Eagan's affidavit outlined the events of the evening of July 10 and was submitted to U. S. District Court Judge Alston G. Dayton, who would later become infamous in labor circles for legalizing "yellow dog" contracts in his *Hitchman Coal & Coke Company v. John Mitchell* decision.<sup>68</sup> After reading the affidavits of Eagan, Medill, and several others, Dayton issued an injunction against the strikers on July 21 that forbade the strikers and their "associates and confederates" from "interfering in any manner whatsoever with the employees" of the American Sheet and Tin Plate Company or with its property. It also prohibited the placing of pickets or watchmen near the LaBelle works and included a myriad of other stipulations.<sup>69</sup>

While Wheeling's steelworkers could revel in their victory over the company agent Eagan, the celebration was undoubtedly cut short when Judge Dayton issued his injunction. Despite the injunction, all of the mills in the Wheeling district, including those in Martins Ferry, remained shut down throughout the strike. This was a tribute to the solidarity of Wheeling's local craft unionism. Unfortunately, in the new age of corporate power, it took more than local solidarity to win nationwide strikes. Thus, the fate of Wheeling's unionists had become wed to the labor movements in other mill towns like New Castle and Vandergrift.

### Local Labor Movements: Vandergrift

Unlike the situation in Wheeling where there were other industries, the steelworkers in Apollo and Vandergrift *were* the local labor movement in its entirety, and the turning point in the local labor movement occurred in the 1890s. At that time, about one quarter of Apollo's two thousand residents worked for Apollo Iron and Steel. It is uncertain how the installation of new technology including the open hearth furnace affected their working conditions, but as McMurtry made technological changes to the mill, Apollo steelworkers looked increasingly to the Amalgamated Association and Hope Lodge Number 17 for protection. Reacting to the economic downturn in 1893, steel manufacturers, including McMurtry, cut wages by 8 to 15 percent, and several rollers at the Apollo mill walked out in protest. McMurtry closed the mill down until orders picked up a few months later when he reopened the mill with non-union workers. A few of the local rollers and heaters abandoned the union to go back into the mill as non-union workers, but the company made it a point to import skilled workers from other cities and to train local teenage farm boys. The strike ripped apart the still relatively small community as fights broke out in the streets. Most of the locked out union workers did not return to their jobs and began to drift away from Apollo the following year.<sup>70</sup>

Geographer Anne Mosher has shown how, in the wake of the turbulent labor-management conflict, McMurtry decided to create a more stable environment that would encourage company loyalty and discourage unionism. He hired the firm of Frederick Law Olmsted of Brookline, Massachusetts, to help him design a town that would foster American values and good workers. While Olmsted himself was too feeble in his old age to devote much energy to the project, he was very enthusiastic about its possibilities, and the firm kept him informed of developments. The final plan for the new town combined McMurtry's ideas, the Olmsted firm's previous work on suburbs, and the constraints that the Apollo Iron and Steel board of directors placed on the two. McMurtry envisioned a sanitary environment with well-functioning sewers and water lines, streets bearing the names of American statesmen and commanders, and no taverns or alcohol. This was the kind of environment, he believed, that would shape workers into healthy, happy, and patriotic people. The Olmsted firm, on the other hand, believed that curvilinear streets, single-family detached houses, and plenty of trees and shrubs would create the stable,

peaceful environment McMurtry wanted. McMurtry also suggested that a separate section of town be laid out for the "Poles, Russians, and Negroes" who were "only laborers" and should be kept away from the plant in the center of town. The core of McMurtry's plan, however, called for high levels of home ownership that would tie workers to the town and the company. The company set lot prices low to encourage workers to buy their own lots and build their own houses, but the Board of Directors ultimately raised lot prices to recoup losses.<sup>71</sup>

Construction on the new, enormous Vandergrift sheet mill, which was the centerpiece of McMurtry's vision, began in 1895. It had twenty-one rolling mills by 1900 and was expanded the following year to twenty-nine. The neighborhoods of Vandergrift Heights and Morning Sun on the outskirts of town developed in unplanned ways as immigrants and unskilled workers moved in, sometimes living in boarding houses instead of single-family homes. But the core of McMurtry's plan remained in tact in Vandergrift proper acting as a strong influence on the workers who lived there.<sup>72</sup>

When T. J. Shaffer issued the call to strike in 1901, the American Sheet Steel company shut down its mills, including Vandergrift and Apollo, but restarted them in short order.<sup>73</sup> Some of the steelworkers there supported unionization but feared dismissal for voicing their support because as one anonymous letter writer from Vandergrift explained "even the trees have ears." Another writer claimed that those "poor fellows are so bound up by their property investments that they are afraid to make a move publicly in favor of organization, but the union sentiment is gaining ground even in God-forsaken Vandergrift..."<sup>74</sup> Clearly McMurtry's plan entailed coercion as well as creating a positive environment.

Other workers remained loyal to the company, having become disillusioned with the Amalgamated Association. E. D. Klingensmith claimed that he would quit before he joined the union again because he was "through with that organization forever." Others who had endured the 1893–94 strike in Apollo said that they "had experienced enough hardships to satisfy them." And Jack F. McIntyre, who was a roller at the time, believed that the union's ability to win new recruits was so poor that he would pay ten dollars for every man in the mill that they could win over.<sup>75</sup> In the years after the 1901 strike, since U. S. Steel continued to give priority to non-union plants, the steelworkers of Vandergrift could rest assured in slow times that when orders picked up they would be the first back to work, unlike the steelworkers of New Castle and Wheeling. Apollo Iron and Steel had worked hard to strengthen company

loyalty and silence union support, and clearly McMurtry's paternalism was winning over a number of Vandergrift's workers.

When the Amalgamated Association and the TPW went back out on strike in 1909, the steelworkers in Vandergrift, unlike those in Wheeling and New Castle, had been working in a non-union mill for over fifteen years, and many of them had come to rely on McMurtry's paternalism. While the union workers in New Castle and Wheeling left the mills on July 1st and vigilantly walked the picket lines, workers in Vandergrift remained on the job. Amalgamated leaders knew that the strike could not be won with several non-union mills in operation, so they set out to actively organize non-union U. S. Steel employees for the first time since the 1901 contract had forbidden them to do so. Amalgamated Secretary John Williams explained: "We were held in check more or less in the past because we did not want to injure our standing with the sheet and tin plate departments by pushing our organization in other unorganized mills."<sup>76</sup> Union leaders targeted the plants at Vandergrift and Apollo, Pennsylvania. Having long been considered company towns, they knew that winning over workers there would not only shut down the corporation's largest sheet mill, it would be a dramatic show of strength as well.<sup>77</sup>

Vice-president Llewellyn Lewis of the Wheeling district began the organizing effort in Vandergrift on Friday, July 9. Lewis initially found men in Vandergrift Heights "anxious to organize," but when he returned with three other Amalgamated organizers at a designated time, they found that the men had been threatened with discharge and everyone was "uneasy."<sup>78</sup> The organizers left the Heights to return to Vandergrift proper but ran into a mob led by two men named Steele and Dunn who were watchmen for the company. Lewis later recalled: "I tried to point out to them that we were there for the purpose of discussing the question of organization, when I was struck alongside the head with a broom handle in the hands of Mr. Steele, Mr. Dunn smashing my glasses at the same time." The mob then descended on the four organizers and started beating them. One organizer narrowly avoided being stabbed with a knife. They were taken to the depot and put on a train "with a warning never to return." The organizers left town in total defeat. During their time there, they could not even rent a hall for a meeting because property owners were afraid the American Sheet & Tin Plate Company would make it "so unpleasant" for them that they would "be compelled to leave the community."<sup>79</sup>

Robert Edwards was another organizer for the Amalgamated Association from the Wheeling district who also went to Vandergrift and began distributing circulars to the mill men. On July 22, Jack McIntyre, the roller who in 1901 said that he would pay ten dollars for every man the union won over, was now a foreman in the galvanizing department at the Vandergrift works. He told Edwards that he "was not wanted in that locality" and instructed him to leave town on the next train. When Edwards disobeyed, McIntyre told him again to get on the next train and that if he returned to Vandergrift he would "be taken out in a box." Edwards persevered and managed to rent a vacant lot in Apollo for a union meeting, but when the lot owner found out that Edwards planned to hold a labor meeting, he returned Edwards's money, saying he would be "ruined" if he let the meeting happen. Edwards insisted on having the meeting anyway. Four days before the meeting was to be held in Apollo, however, the city council in neighboring Vandergrift passed an ordinance prohibiting the "posting or passing of handbills, circulars, samples, printed or written matter of any kind" without the permission of the burgess. Llewellyn Lewis, who led the meeting, was undeterred and explained to reporters that it was the first union meeting held in Apollo in fifteen years.<sup>80</sup>

After the meeting, Oscar Lindquist, the superintendent of the Vandergrift plant, told the organizers they would have to leave town because "his word was the law." He told them that he was "the Scottish chief in that valley" and that "what he said must go." The organizers holed up in their hotel as a crowd of about two hundred people gathered outside, and Lindquist warned them that they would leave "if he had to burn the hotel down." Then the burgess of Apollo approached the organizers and told them he could no longer control the crowd, claiming that he had promised to make sure the organizers left town on the first train in the morning. If they did not, he said, there would be no way to "avert bloodshed." The Amalgamated organizers relented and left, having failed again to organize any of the Vandergrift steelworkers.

In a last ditch effort, Llewellyn Lewis planned to parade through the streets of Vandergrift on Labor Day as a show of strength that might induce workers there to join the strike and enlisted about one hundred-fifty men from Martins Ferry to carry out the plan.<sup>81</sup> But Vandergrift Burgess James Chambers refused to allow such an event to take place and, on August 31, issued a proclamation stating that the people of Vandergrift "deplore" anything that would "mar the peace and harmony" of the town. Since "outside influences seem to be at work," he outlawed parades, marches, meetings, and the "assembling of persons in large crowds upon the streets, alleys, highways,



or private properties." Either wanting to avoid a riot or incarceration, the parade of the Martins Ferry men set to go through Vandergrift was postponed indefinitely, and the efforts to organize Vandergrift came to an end.<sup>82</sup> Clearly the anti-union elements of Apollo's and Vandergrift's workforce enjoyed the support of local thugs and politicians, but also the benefits of unionization may have paled in comparison to McMurtry's welfare capitalism.

### Local Labor Movements: New Castle

Both of New Castle's Amalgamated locals and its Tin Plate Workers' locals survived the 1901 strike, but local steelworkers became increasingly radicalized by their experiences. Since they far outnumbered unionists from New Castle's other industries, the radicalism of local steelworkers had a profound impact on the local labor movement as well as local politics. By the time of the 1909 strike, steelworkers in New Castle had formed alliances with both the Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

John W. Slayton was an active Socialist from the Carpenters Union and an early leader of New Castle's radicals. He went to the 1901 national AFL convention and voted for the resolution calling for the collective ownership of the means of production. The next year he ran as a Socialist for councilman of the "Bloody" Fifth Ward and won. Other radicals began to take more prominent roles in the city. For example, the president of the New Castle Trades Assembly also ran for office on a Socialist Party ticket and became active in the IWW. Becoming a Wobbly, as IWW members were known, prompted the Assembly to remove him as president in 1906, but radicals continued to take leadership roles as a handful of other Wobblies ran for local offices during these years with varying success. These labor activists formed a nexus between the trade unions, the Socialist Party, and the IWW in New Castle, and shaped the local response to the 1909 strike.<sup>83</sup>

During 1908, New Castle's tin plate plants were idle as often as they ran, but historian Arnold Kaltinick, who studied Socialists in New Castle, found the local steelworkers expressed little dissatisfaction with U. S. Steel in the their letters to the *Amalgamated Journal*. Furthermore, only about a third of the eligible Amalgamated members had paid their membership dues in 1909. Both local lodges voted to strike after U. S. Steel's open shop announcement despite the waning enthusiasm for the Amalgamated Association. On July 1, of the three shifts of 1400 hot mill men scheduled to work that day, only one



man showed up for work. When the TPW's contract expired on July 15, 1909, nationally about three thousand tin house workers, or roughly 90 percent of the TPW membership, also came out on strike. Without tin house workers the operations at those plants were "crippled." One-third of the tin house workers were women, and over one thousand of the TPW members were located in New Castle. A final wave of workers in New Castle walked out when Charles McKeever, an electrical engineer, was dismissed for helping to organize the female assorters into the TPW. McKeever was the Socialist party secretary for Lawrence County and a district organizer for the IWW, and when he left, he took another 200 unorganized workers with him.<sup>84</sup>

New Castle's Socialists and Wobblies helped the strike effort locally. The IWW set up a relief station in New Castle that was open to all strikers. Since unskilled workers were neither eligible for Amalgamated Association membership nor the union's strike relief, they greatly appreciated the IWW's assistance, which strengthened the radicalism among local immigrants. While the strike was on at New Castle, the IWW won a victory for immigrant workers in a plant of the Pressed Steel Car Company in McKees Rocks, a suburb of Pittsburgh. Traditional union wisdom had held that immigrants made poor union men, but the IWW was proving otherwise.<sup>85</sup>

Amalgamated President P. J. McArdle, a staunchly conservative craft unionist, announced that the Amalgamated would not sign a contract unless the company also recognized the TPW and the IWW. He added that the Amalgamated Association would "maintain a faithful alliance with the Tin Workers Association and the I.W.W."<sup>86</sup> But privately he admitted that he was worried:

There is no question but that more and more of the foreign-born workers in the industry are becoming impressed by the vision held out by the Industrial Unionists, and the victory at McKees Rocks has given them a strong talking point so much so, in fact, that even our members are beginning to pay attention to what they say. While it was necessary for us to cooperate with them at New Castle, we certainly do not look forward to the prospect of their growing influence among the iron, steel, and tin workers.

There was no reason to "bemoan these unfortunate developments," McArdle continued, but the AFL had to prove itself "capable of winning the strike against the American Sheet and Tin Plate Company and move to organize all

the non-union mills in the industry." Otherwise, he implied, the Amalgamated and the Federation would soon see their members desert to organizations that were having success in the steel industry.<sup>87</sup>

Local courts in New Castle quickly granted U. S. Steel an injunction paving the way for reopening the plant with non-union workers. The company also won the support of the state government as the Pennsylvania State Constabulary transferred twenty constables from the strike at McKees Rocks up to New Castle. These "cossacks," as the labor press dubbed them, escalated the violence of the strike.<sup>88</sup> It is likely that company executives calculated that they would have greater success reopening a mill in Pennsylvania, where the state was in a position to protect strikebreakers and where the strikers were radicals and foreigners.

On July 14, two weeks after the start of the strike, an ad appeared in several Pittsburgh newspapers calling for "60 tin house men, tinner, catchers, and helpers to work in open shops, Syrians, Poles and Roumanians preferred."<sup>89</sup> By the end of the first month, the company succeeded in recruiting almost three hundred strikebreakers and getting them past the picket lines into the Shenango plant where they were to live.<sup>90</sup> The company brought new workers, often immigrants, directly into the plant on trains and successfully ran the mill without union workers. Bart Richards recalled that many of the strikebreakers were new immigrants who arrived in New Castle after 1900. They had gotten jobs in the mills, and, Richards said, "by 1909 when the big strike was on, they knew enough about making tinplate that many of them were used as strikebreakers in the 1909-1910 strike." Richards concluded that "1910 was the last year that the Welsh ever said that nobody could make tinplate but the Welsh."<sup>91</sup>

The use of new immigrants and even African Americans exploited preexisting divisions in New Castle's working class, but also tapped into a racism that had developed in the urban American working class since the antebellum period. David Roediger has argued that northern wage workers defined their "whiteness" as being the opposite of African American slavery, thereby incorporating racism into the construction of their own identity.<sup>92</sup> The results of this tradition of racism can be found in one "white" New Castle strikebreaker's bigotry, which drove him back to the picket lines after two days in the mill. He explained:

There is a great dirty crowd of negroes and syrians working there. Many of them are filthy in their personal habits and the idea of working with

them is repugnant to any man who wants to retain his self-respect. It is no place for a man with a white man's heart to be. The negroes and foreigners are coarse, vulgar and brutal in their acts and conversation. It was necessary for me to eat my lunch in the mill, and I found my stomach revolted to such an extent that I was unable to eat.<sup>93</sup>

As company officials gained confidence, they attempted to bait the strikers into violence. Armed guards and strikebreakers marched through the picket lines into the plant, but the strikers chose not to attack them.<sup>94</sup>

In December 1909, the IWW established a "Pittsburgh-New Castle Industrial Council" to coordinate the battle for industrial unionism, and the organization began publishing *Solidarity* out of New Castle. When twenty-four strikers were arrested for picketing in violation of the injunction and jailed for thirty days, *Solidarity* celebrated what they said was a new stage of the strike during which they would use "Spokane tactics" and fill the jails. The jails at one point held at least thirty-one strikers who spent the holidays singing labor songs and trying to keep their spirits up. However, the IWW understandably gave up on the strike as the company was increasingly able to import strikebreakers and as more and more mill workers returned to work.<sup>95</sup> Ultimately the injunction, the Pennsylvania State Constabulary, and desertion of skilled workers overwhelmed the ability of the radicals of New Castle to fight U. S. Steel.

### The Non-Union Era Begins

As U. S. Steel restarted the New Castle plants among others, Amalgamated leaders knew that their union could not win the strike by themselves so they turned to the AFL for help. Before the strike began, Samuel Gompers told P. J. McArdle that "it would be the desire of the A. F. of L. to help him with organizers to the fullest extent of our ability." Privately, Gompers wrote to AFL Secretary Frank Morrison that this strike might "be the turn of the tide" and that "the men of [the steel] industry may again take their position in the front rank of the organized labor movement."<sup>96</sup> But the AFL could only offer limited financial assistance and a handful of full-time organizers. In December 1909, at a meeting of national labor leaders in Pittsburgh, the central issue to be discussed was the strike against U. S. Steel. At the end of the meeting they passed a resolution that condemned U. S. Steel for its "mad

greed," for making and unmaking laws, and for centralizing its powers while it sought to individualize its employees. They also resolved that the Amalgamated Association and the TPW should combine and that "an earnest and systematic effort be made to thoroughly and completely organize all employees in the iron, steel and tin plate industry and subsidiary co-related trades."<sup>97</sup> Gompers made an official statement on January 1, 1910, condemning U. S. Steel for paying dividends on watered stock; having attorneys "notoriously present" at every legislative body where favors could be bought; controlling judges who handed down unjust injunctions; controlling newspapers to spread propaganda; destroying the free market in iron and steel; and "enslaving" labor. He asked that every member of all the AFL unions be levied ten cents so that the AFL could help fight U. S. Steel's anti-labor policies.<sup>98</sup>

According to P. J. McArdle, less than ten organizers from the AFL and its affiliated unions had reported by February, and three of them devoted a considerable amount of their time to their own organization rather than the Amalgamated Association. This, McArdle said, "precluded the possibility of them adapting themselves to any fixed program that we had agreed upon." McArdle complained that the organizing drive was a "huge farce" that was damaging to the morale of the strikers and could not continue.<sup>99</sup> Gompers's grand scheme for defeating U. S. Steel did not focus on extensive organizing efforts anyway. Gompers would recall years later that in 1909 in addition to organizing, his plan was to demand that the government investigate U. S. Steel's violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. He explained:

I did not believe in the Sherman Anti-Trust Law... but since the law was on the statute books and the practices of the steel corporation were in open and flagrant violation of that law and since the corporation denied to wage-earners the right of collective action which they arrogated to themselves, it seemed to me that the labor movement was in a strategic position to call attention to the situation.<sup>100</sup>

Little came of this strategy other than an admonition from Congress in 1911 because U. S. Steel had been setting prices for the whole steel industry. The strike officially ended in August 1910 when President McArdle and Secretary John Williams explained that the strike had "reached a point where little or no hope" existed of reaching an "amicable settlement" with the company and because of the "repeatedly expressed desire of a large number of men to have the strike declared off."<sup>101</sup>

After the strike was called off, the *Wheeling Intelligencer* criticized the union, pointing out that it had predicted the strikers would lose from the beginning. One editorial argued that many of the strikers probably had not wanted to quit work but that “the radicals and extremists” led them on and that the result was “one of the most disastrous labor conflicts ever carried on in this valley.”<sup>102</sup> In actuality, it seems the strike may have radicalized otherwise conservative trade unionists. Having done battle with an enormous corporation that had redundant production facilities around the country, the support of courts and newspapers, and seemingly endless resources, many steelworkers began to believe that radical change was needed.

Llewellyn Lewis, for example, changed his philosophy during the course of the 1909–1910 strike. Early on he had argued that trade unionism was the only way for working people to better their lives. Even after he was attacked in Vandergrift, Lewis still insisted that though “officials of a great corporation” were permitted to “lead mobs against honest citizens” that workers needed only to add “a little courage” to their convictions, and their trade union would carry them to “a place in life” that would give them “peace, prosperity and happiness.”<sup>103</sup> However, as time and time again the Amalgamated Association and the AFL failed, even Lewis became disillusioned. He resigned from the union and blamed the craft union approach for the failure of the 1909 organizing drive in which he had been so involved. He parted saying that the AFL’s policies were “antiquated and unfit for application to present day conditions. The policies of 25 years ago won’t do for today. The world is moving and we must move onward with it or be left far behind.”<sup>104</sup>

Socialist leader Eugene Debs undoubtedly struck a chord with steelworkers when, referring to the 1901 strike, he asked, “Why didn’t the steel trust annihilate the Amalgamated Steelworkers? ... The trust had its iron heel upon the neck of the Steelworkers’ Union, and could have, had it chosen, completely crushed the life out of it.” Instead, he argued, the steel magnates came to favor trade unions “because they knew that another and a better one would spring from its ruins.”<sup>105</sup> The Socialist Party gained support in the Wheeling district after the strike, beating the Republicans in some districts, but falling short of electing their candidates. In 1910 only 0.9 percent of Wheeling’s voters chose Socialist candidates, but in 1912 that figure had increased to 11.4 percent.<sup>106</sup> Over a year after the steel strike had ended, Debs returned to Wheeling on October 18, 1911, and commended the “valiant unionists” of the area “for the magnificent battle they put up against the Steel Trust.”<sup>107</sup> In the wake of the strike’s failure, even the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor

Assembly abandoned its long-standing policy of avoiding politics and endorsed Eugene Debs in a 1912 resolution written by Valentine Reuther, father of a future president of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), Walter Reuther. But while Socialism gained many new adherents in Wheeling, it never constituted a majority in the city.<sup>108</sup>

While the unions in New Castle were defeated during the strike, the Socialists scored a victory in 1911 when the voters elected their candidate Walter V. Tyler to mayor. Upon election Tyler said that he was “proud that the working class—my class—are waking up and taking charge of the political government so that they will be in a position to take industrial control of the country in the near future.” Several Socialists were elected to city council as well. While local conservatives bristled that the Socialists were a “menace to the welfare of the entire country,” New Castle’s Socialist newspaper explained that it was the “strike, the injunctions, the cossacks, the thugs, the scabs, the clubbings, the lootings,” and the other atrocities of the mill owners that inspired voters to elect a Socialist.<sup>109</sup>

Steelworkers in Vandergrift continued to enjoy the fruits of George McMurtry’s welfare capitalism. In 1917, the famous muckraker Ida Tarbell wrote that Vandergrift was one of the “most successful workingman’s town in the country.” Tarbell praised without restraint McMurtry’s paternalism and benevolence as she discussed the town’s paved streets and excellent health record. She claimed that it would be “difficult in the United States today to find a prettier town, greener, trimmer, cleaner, and more influential than this town of Vandergrift, owned outright by men who daily carry a dinner pail.” Skilled tin plate workers, it turned out, held most of the elected positions of the town, including burgess, three of seven council members, and seats on the school board and health board, and they even carried the collection plates on Sundays. She concluded without a hint of irony: “I never have found a community in which the kind of work a man does has apparently so little to say about the position he holds in the eyes of his fellows.”<sup>110</sup> Still Tarbell recognized that not all was perfect in Vandergrift:

It is not humanly possible that a community should go through the experience that Vandergrift has in the last twenty years—the enthusiasm of its founding and its success, the disappointment and dread of amalgamation, the struggle over unionism—without scars. The important thing is that it has preserved its integrity and that it believes in its own future.<sup>111</sup>

## Conclusion

While the rise of the tin plate industry and the decline of the Amalgamated Association took place on a national scale, local conditions greatly influenced how events played out in the small mill towns of western Pennsylvania and northern West Virginia. In Apollo and Vandergrift, tin plate workers dominated the local labor scene, but after the local lodges of the Amalgamated Association were driven out of the mill in 1894, George McMurty's welfare capitalism won over many steelworkers who became fiercely loyal to the company. Apollo and Vandergrift became anti-union strongholds. In New Castle, the local Amalgamated lodge became a center of Socialist activity while the TPW and IWW helped organize the unskilled workers. The presence of radicals and multiple unions could not defeat U. S. Steel, and the working class in New Castle turned to politics to try to make a difference. The Socialist ticket united workers at the polls as they elected Socialist municipal governments over the next several years. Steelworkers in Wheeling enjoyed the support of many other craft unions in the city and gave U. S. Steel the hardest fight. Most of them stayed on strike and kept the mill shut down until national union leaders officially ended the strike in the summer of 1910. But a local victory had become meaningless against a national corporation. Though some of Wheeling's steelworkers were radicalized by the experience, radicals remained in the minority locally. While U. S. Steel successfully drove unionism out of the tin plate towns, local circumstances shaped workers' strategies and reveal the diversity of workers' responses to national events even within this small segment of the steel industry.

## NOTES

1. I would like to thank Ronald L. Lewis, Liz Fones-Wolf, and Mike McMahon for their help when I was researching this subject for my master's thesis. And I would like to thank Ken Fones-Wolf for reading this article and making many valuable suggestions.
2. David Brody's *Steelworkers in America: The Non-Union Era* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) is the definitive work on the national story of the failure of the Amalgamated Association between Homestead Lockout in 1892 and 1929; also see John Garraty, "The U. S. Steel Corporation versus Labor: The Early Years," *Labor History* 1 (1960): 3–38; and Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880–1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992).
3. The McKinley Act of 1890 placed a duty of 2.2 cents per pound on tin plate imported into the United States. It also included a provision that the duties would be removed if domestic production



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- did not equal one-third of the imports by 1897. William G. Gray, "Tin and Terne Plate" in U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States of America* (1900) Vol. 10, *Manufacturing*, pt. 4, (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), 112-13; for more on the McKinley Tariff's tin plate provisions and its effect on the industry's development see D. E. Dunbar, *The Tin-Plate Industry: A Comparative Study of Its Growth in the United States and in Wales* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915), 13-24. In fact its effect is still debated by economists. See Douglas A. Irwin, "Did Late Nineteenth-Century U. S. Tariffs Promote Infant Industries?: Evidence from the Tinplate Industry," Working Paper Series, Working Paper No. 6835 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1998).
4. On the cost of the mills see Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 16-17; for examples of the partnerships see Louis C. Martin, "Causes and Consequences of the 1909-1910 Steel Strike in the Wheeling District," (M.A. Thesis, West Virginia University, 1999), 9-11.
  5. Arnold Kaltinick, "Socialist Municipal Administration in Four American Cities (Milwaukee, Schenectady, New Castle, Pennsylvania, and Conneaut, Ohio), 1910-16" (Ph.D. Diss., New York University, 1982), 174, 183; Interview with Bart Richards by Joe Uehlein, February 21, 1974, Pittsburgh, PA, transcript, United Steelworkers of America Archive and Oral History Collection, Historical Collections and Labor Archives, Pennsylvania State University, 2. Hereafter USA Archive and Oral History Collection
  6. Amos J. Loveday, Jr., *The Rise and Decline of the American Cut Nail Industry: A Study of the Interrelationships of Technology, Business Organization, and Management Techniques* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983).
  7. Loveday, *American Cut Nail Industry*, 116, 140-41; Henry D. Scott, *Iron & Steel in Wheeling* (Toldeo, OH: Caslon Company, 1929), 114, 128-29; Wheeling's population grew from 34,522 in 1890 to 38,878 in 1900, *Twelfth Census*, 117.
  8. Anne Elaine Mosher, "Capital Transformation and the Restructuring of Place: The Creation of a Model Industrial Town," (Ph.D. Diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1989), 52-62, 67-72, 105-8; also see her recently published book *Capital's Utopia: The Steel Industry's Search for Urban Order at Vandergrift, 1855-1916* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).
  9. Mosher, "Capital Transformation," 101, 108-17, 200-4, 263, 287.
  10. For descriptions of the production process see Martin, "Causes and Consequences of the 1909-1910 Steel Strike," 5-8; "Manufacture of Tin Plate," *Scientific American* 87 (November 1, 1902), 290; Dunbar, *The Tin-Plate Industry*; and Stewart, William R. "Great Industries of the United States: Part IV, Tin and Terne Plate," *Cosmopolitan* 37 (October 1904), 639-50.
  11. Cronmeyer quoted in Gray, "Tin and Terne Plate," 119.
  12. U. S. Congress, Senate, *Report on the Conditions of Employment in the Iron and Steel Industry*, 62d Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 3:516-22.
  13. W. C. Cronmeyer, "The Development of the Tin-Plate Industry," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 13 (January 1930), 119; John Fitch, *The Steel Workers* (Pittsburgh: Russell Sage Foundation, 1910), 56.
  14. U. S. Congress, *Conditions of Employment in the Iron and Steel Industry*, 3:181.
  15. U. S. Congress, *Conditions of Employment in the Iron and Steel Industry*, 3:184.
  16. U. S. Industrial Commission, *Reports*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1899-1901), 1:879.



17. Interview with Bart Richards, USA Archive and Oral History Collection, 4.
18. *Iron Age*, May 19, 1927, 1435–8, quote on 1435.
19. *Iron Age*, June 16, 1927, 1731–32.
20. Interview with Bart Richards, USA Archive and Oral History Collection, 6.
21. Earl Chapin May, *Principio to Wheeling, 1715–1945: A Pageant of Iron and Steel* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945), 202.
22. For a description of the sorting room see Elizabeth Beardsley Butler, *Women and the Trades: Pittsburgh, 1907–1908*, of the *Pittsburgh Survey*, ed. Paul Kellogg (Russell Sage Foundation: New York, 1909), 227–28.
23. Kaltinick, “Socialist Municipal Administration,” 174–75; Interview of Bart Richards, USA Archive and Oral History Collection, 13; U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States of America* (1900), Volume I. *Population*, Part 1 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), 800–3.
24. The Welsh (1,108) were the third most populous foreign-born group, and the English were fourth (834). But Russia (719) and Hungary (505) were next followed by Germany (491) and Ireland (449). Kaltinick, “Socialist Municipal Administration,” 176–80. Interview with Bart Richards, USA Archive and Oral History Collection, 13; John Bodnar, “The Italians and Slavs of New Castle: Patterns in the New Immigration,” *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 55 (July 1972), 269–78.
25. Anthony B. Toth, “The Syrian Community in New Castle and Its Unique Alawi Component, 1900–1940,” *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 69 (July 1986), 229; Kaltinick, “Socialist Municipal Administration,” 176–80; Quote from interview with Bart Richards, USA Archive and Oral History Collection, 13.
26. *Twelfth Census, Vol. I, Population, Pt. 1*, 800–3.
27. Random sample of steelworkers from the Sixth and Eighth Wards, and Elm Grove. United States Bureau of the Census, Manuscript Census of Wheeling, 1900.
28. David Javersak, “Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly: The Formative Years, 1882–1915,” (Ph.D. Diss., West Virginia University, 1977), 110, quote on 206.
29. Random sample of steelworkers from the Sixth and Eighth Wards, and Elm Grove. United States Bureau of the Census, Manuscript Census of Wheeling, 1900. Skilled occupations include roller, heater, machinist, millwright, puddler, boiler, nailer, rougher, annealer. Helpers include doubler, shearer, screw boy, catcher, helper, tender, hook up, hold up, shove under, pull through, nail feeder, lifter, rollhand, roll polisher, oiler, assistant millwright. Unskilled occupations include laborer, opener, separator, assorter, steel worker, iron worker, tin mill worker, nail worker, plate mill worker, tinner, polisher, box maker, packer, pickler. Company includes watchmen, foremen, superintendent, engineer, bookkeeper, clerk, secretary.
30. Mosher, “Capital Transformation,” 72, 82, 101–2, 130–31, 299.
31. Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, chapters 1, 2, and 3.
32. James J. Davis, *The Iron Puddler: My Life in the Rolling Mills and What Came of It*, (Bobbs-Merrill Company: Indianapolis, 1922), 30–1.
33. Colin Gordon, *New Deals: Business, Labor, and Politics in America, 1920–1935* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), chapter 3. On the Amalgamated Association’s policies see Brody, *Steelworkers in*

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- America*, 52-53; Naomi R. Lamoreaux, *The Great Merger Movement in American Business, 1895-1904* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 40. Also see U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, 58th Congress, 2d Session, Doc. No. 734, *Eleventh Special Report of the Commissioner of Labor: Regulation and Restriction of Output* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 246-62.
34. Kaltinick, "Socialist Municipal Administration," 186; Butler, *Women and the Trades*, 227-28; Gizella Brown, interview by author, tape recording, Martins Ferry, OH, Summer 2001.
35. Powell quoted in *Proceeding of the Second Annual Convention of the Tin Plate Workers' Protective Association of America*, 1900 from Reel 75, *Labor Union Constitutions and Proceedings, 1836-1974*. (Glen Rock, NJ: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1974), 6-7; Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 76, 131; Charles E. Lawyer, "History of the Trade Unions: Tin Plate Workers," *American Federationist* 10 (September 1903), 841.
36. Dunbar, *Tin-Plate Industry*, 75.
37. U. S. Industrial Commission, *Reports*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1899-1901), 1:855.
38. Lamoreaux, *The Great Merger Movement*, 38-41.
39. The annual capacity of the American Tin Plate Company in 1900 was almost as much as all of the manufacturers of Wales had produced in 1890, when that country produced 9.5 million boxes or about 1 billion pounds, Gray, "Tin and Terne Plate," 118; U. S. Commissioner of Corporations, Report on the Steel Industry (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911-1913), 1:3; U. S. Industrial Commission, Reports, 1:858. On the companies that consolidated, see Cronmeyer, "Development of the Tin-Plate Industry," 133, and Dunbar, *Tin-Plate Industry*, 79. Cronmeyer lists them all and says 40 and 279 while Dunbar says 39 and 289. Scott, *Iron & Steel in Wheeling*, 145, discusses mills purchased in the Wheeling district; a few remained "independent."
40. May, *Principio to Wheeling*, 202; Kaltinick, "Socialist Municipal Administration," 183; Mosher, "Capital Transformation," 260-63; Although the Apollo mill was acquired by American Tin Plate it was inexplicably operated under American Sheet Steel Company. Mosher, "Capital Transformation," 261, see note 3.
41. Scott, *Iron & Steel in Wheeling*, 121; Mosher, "Capital Transformation," 263; "Talk of Resort to Force," *New York Times*, August 12, 1901.
42. All quotes in this paragraph from U. S. Industrial Commission, *Reports*, 1:904-6.
43. Scott, *Iron & Steel in Wheeling*, 152; Fitch, *The Steel Workers*, 134; Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 61; Garraty, "U. S. Steel Corporation versus Labor," 8.
44. Scott, *Iron & Steel in Wheeling*, 143.
45. *National Labor Tribune*, July 4, 1901.
46. John Benjamin Moore, "Collective Bargaining in the Iron and Steel Industry, 1876-1910" (M. A. Thesis, University of Missouri, 1939), 118.
47. The 1901 strike is fully explored in Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, chapter 3, and Garraty, "U. S. Steel Corporation versus Labor."
48. *American Federationist* (October 1901), 415-17. Historians have used the acronym AAISW (see Krause, *The Battle for Homestead*, for example) for Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers. "Tin" was added to the title of the union permanently in the 1898 constitution, which would technically make AAISTW more accurate after that year. See Martin, "Causes and Consequences of the

- 1909–1910 Steel Strike,” 22–23 for a discussion of the union’s name. Nevertheless, workers at the time frequently called the Amalgamated Association the AA as in this quote.
49. William Z. Foster, *The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1920), 12; Horace B. Davis, *Labor and Steel* (New York: International Publishers, 1933), 230.
  50. Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 69.
  51. Notice reprinted in *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer* (June 2, 1909). For ease of reading, all instances where “employe” or “employees” appeared in primary sources, I have changed it to employee and employees. *New York Times*, July 1, 1909; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, June 30, 1909.
  52. Evelyn L. K. Harris and Frank J. Krebs, *From Humble Beginnings: West Virginia State Federation of Labor, 1903–1957* (Charleston, WV: West Virginia Labor History Publishing Fund, 1960), xi; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Occupations at the Twelfth Census* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 478.
  53. Javersak, “The Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly,” 10, 32–35; Amos Loveday, “Origins of the 1885 Strike in the Wheeling Iron and Steel Mills” *Upper Ohio Valley Historical Review* 13 (1983), 10–20; Harris and Krebs, *From Humble Beginnings*, xi–xii.
  54. Quoted in Javersak, “Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly,” 31.
  55. Javersak, “Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly,” 118, 124.
  56. Harris and Krebs, *From Humble Beginnings*, xiv. According to Harris and Krebs, there were actually more railroad and street railway workers in unions, but they divided into various craft unions. They also note that the membership of District 17 (West Virginia) of the United Mine Workers of America was “characterized by fluctuations.” Before the 1897 strike there were only 206 members, but after the strike there were 3683 organized into forty locals.
  57. *Proceeding of the Second Annual Convention of the Tin Plate Workers’ Protective Association of America* (1900), 4; *American Federationist* (September, 1899), 176.
  58. *National Labor Tribune*, August 15, 1901.
  59. “Ovations at Wheeling,” *National Labor Tribune*, August 22, 1901.
  60. *National Labor Tribune*, September 19, 1901.
  61. H. D. Scott wrote that the strike was accompanied by “considerable violence,” and the “local plants characteristically supplied their full quota,” in *Iron & Steel in Wheeling*, 152; “Manufacture of Tin Plate,” *Scientific American* 87 (November 1, 1902): 290.
  62. All quotes in this paragraph from J. A. Conkel to Samuel Gompers, August 27, 1908, AFL National and International Union Correspondence and Jurisdictional Dispute Records, Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers File, Reel 38–6. Hereafter cited as AFL-AA. Conkel was mistaken that Llewellyn Lewis would only consider organizing them into an Amalgamated Lodge because the year before Lewis had suggested that steelworkers in Zanesville be allowed to form an AFL local of their own. See Gompers to John Williams, June 10, 1907, AFL-AA.
  63. John Williams to Frank Morrison, September 4, 1908, AFL-AA.
  64. *Amalgamated Journal*, January 28, 1909.
  65. *Amalgamated Journal*, February 18, 1909.
  66. Unless otherwise cited, all information regarding William Eagen’s involvement in the 1909 strike in Wheeling come from Depositions in *American Sheet & Tin Plate Co. v. Frank Bowman, et. al.* July 1909, pp. 132–55, held at the West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.

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67. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Aug. 30, 1909.
68. "Yellow dog" contracts were individual contracts that employers forced employees to sign that forbade the employee from joining a union. Judge Dayton initially issued an injunction against the United Mine Workers for attempting to interfere in the contractual relationship between the Hitchman Coal and Coke Company and its employees. The Supreme Court upheld the legality of yellow dog contracts in 1917, and it was not until the Norris-LaGuardia Act of 1932 that they were finally outlawed. For an extensive discussion of the case see Richard D. Lunt, *Law and Order vs. the Miners, West Virginia, 1907-1933* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979), especially pages 19-22, 58-59.
69. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, July 17, 22, August 2, 1909, court order reprinted; also see *Amalgamated Journal*, July 29, 1909.
70. Mosher, "Capital Transformation," 101, 128-33.
71. Mosher, "Capital Transformation," 160-92.
72. Mosher, "Capital Transformation," 287.
73. The mills were probably shut down to prevent any union organizing efforts or perhaps to preempt any walk out by workers in those mills. In the negotiations with the union, however, the union and company came to an understanding that if workers did not come to work then that was a sign that they favored unionization. This probably encouraged McMurtry to restart the mills, which they had no trouble doing in Apollo or Vandergrift.
74. Mosher, "Capital Transformation," 278.
75. Mosher, "Capital Transformation," 279; here he is listed as J. F. McIntyre, but on page 306 he is listed as Jack.
76. *National Labor Tribune*, July 22, 1909; Also see Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 126.
77. *National Labor Tribune*, 1901 and Anne E. Mosher, "'Something Better than the Best': Industrial Restructuring, George McMurtry and the Creation of the Model Industrial Town of Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, 1883-1901," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85 (1995).
78. All descriptions of the organizing efforts in Vandergrift, unless otherwise cited, come from U. S. Congress, *Conditions of Employment in the Iron and Steel Industry*, 3:507-9 and U. S. Congress, Senate, *Investigation of the Strike in the Steel Industries Hearings Before the Committee on Education and Labor*. 66th Cong., 1st sess., 1919 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919), 3:124-25.
79. *Amalgamated Journal*, July 15, 1909.
80. *Amalgamated Journal*, August 12, 1909; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, August 6, 1909.
81. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, September 3, 1909.
82. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, September 6, 1909.
83. Kaltinick, "Socialist Municipal Administration," 190-91.
84. Kaltinick, "Socialist Municipal Administration," 189-90; *Iron Trade Review*, July 22, 1909; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, July 15, 16, 1909; Charles Lawyer to Frank Morrison, August 8, 1909, AFL-AA.
85. Philip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 4:300; Fitch, *The Steel Workers*, 237-38.
86. Kaltinick, "Socialist Municipal Administration," 189-90; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 4:300.
87. PJ McArdle to Frank Morrison, Oct 15, 1909 quoted in Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 4:302.
88. Kaltinick, "Socialist Municipal Administration," 192-93.
89. Kaltinick, "Socialist Municipal Administration," 191.

90. Kaltinick, "Socialist Municipal Administration," 192.
91. Interview with Bart Richards, USA Archive and Oral History Collection, 6.
92. David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991).
93. Kaltinick, "Socialist Municipal Administration," 199.
94. Kaltinick, "Socialist Municipal Administration," 192.
95. Kaltinick, "Socialist Municipal Administration," 195–96, 198.
96. Gompers to Morrison, June 18, 1909, AFL-AA; also Morrison to Executive Council, AFL, August 9, 1909, John Mitchell Papers, 1885–1919, Reel 16.
97. *Amalgamated Journal*, December 16, 1909; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Dec 13, 15, 1909; *Wheeling Majority*, Dec. 16, 30, 1909. It should be noted that the AA and TPW remained separate organizations until a few years later when the TPW ran out of money. See Martin, "Causes and Consequences," 95.
98. Gompers to Organized Labor of America, January 1, 1910, AFL-AA.
99. McArdle letters quoted in "ASSITANCE IN THE WAY OF ORGANIZING MEN (?) ... PROMISED ON BEHALF OF THE IRON, STEEL, & TIN PLATE WORKERS," in AFL-AA.
100. Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor: An Autobiography* (New York: Dutton, 1925), 155.
101. McArdle and Williams to "Sir and Brother," August 24, 1910, AFL-AA; John B. Moore, "Collective Bargaining in the Iron and Steel Industry, 1876–1910," (M. A. Thesis. University of Missouri, 1939), 132.
102. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, August 25, 1910.
103. *Amalgamated Journal*, August 12, 1909.
104. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 3:192.
105. Eugene Debs, *Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs*, (Hermitage Press: New York, 1948), 219–20.
106. Barkey, "Socialist Party in West Virginia," Appendix B, 249–50.
107. *Wheeling Majority*, October 19, 1911.
108. Javersak, "Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly," 128; Socialists were victorious in the mayoral election across the river in Martins Ferry, Ohio, however. Kaltinick, "Socialist Municipal Administration," 182.
109. Kaltinick, "Socialist Municipal Administration," 230, 231, 237.
110. All of Tarbell's quotes in this paragraph are from Ida Tarbell, *New Ideals in Business: An Account of Their Practice and Their Effects Upon Men and Profits* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1917), 150–55.
111. Tarbell, *New Ideals in Business*, 150–55.