THE 1894 TARIFF AND THE POTTERY STRIKE:  
The Rebirth of the  
National Brotherhood of Operative Potters  
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In the latter nineteenth century, the economic position of skilled craftsmen deteriorated as a result of rapid industrialization. Concerned with wages and working conditions, the tradesmen gravitated toward the "pure and simple" trade unionism of Samuel Gompers. But potters were slow to convert because of their independence and inherent conservatism, fostered through centuries of unchanging manual techniques. Piecework allowed potters freedom to set their own work load. In addition, suspicion of labor organizations increased with the influx of antilunion English potters. However, the impact of a new lower tariff forced the potters to reevaluate their attitude.

Faced with stiffer foreign competition, the pottery manufacturers reduced the potters' wages to protect their profits. Although reductions were not new, it was the first national application by the members of the United States Potters' Association (hereafter referred to as the USPA). Consequently, a coordinated strike took place, involving eastern and western potters of both union and nonunion persuasion. Out of this conflict the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters (hereafter referred to as the NBOP) evolved as a stabilizing force for labor in a rapidly developing industry.

The emergence of the NBOP added a complicating factor to the pottery industry's already complex set of problems. Foremost among the obstacles was the expense of American, compared to foreign, labor. Wages in the domestic pottery industry averaged 75 percent higher than in England. Compounding this situation was a general deficiency of technology. The reluctance to change time-honored methods of production perpetuated heavy dependence upon skilled craftsmen. Materials were also a costly expenditure and a matter of much concern to the pottery manufacturers. Although the United States had an abundance of kaolin, flint, feldspar, marl clay, and other materials, the great ex-

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pense of locating and refining these materials gave the well-developed extraction industry of England a definite advantage over the embryonic American efforts. During this period, East Liverpool potteries, besides utilizing Ohio clays, imported the fine clays from England, North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida; and silica and spar from Missouri and Maine respectively. Remarkably, prices declined during the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Pressed by intense foreign competition, the manufacturers lobbied for a higher tariff while reducing the prices of their wares to stimulate demand. To compensate for their financial squeeze, the manufacturers used direct wage reductions and the “stretch out” method to keep the piece rate stable while increasing the required units produced. This approach, however, precipitated difficulties with the skilled craftsman.²

While labor-management conflicts date to the late 1860s in New Jersey, Ohio experienced its first significant strike in 1879. The latter confrontation, caused by a thirty-three cent reduction of the piece rate, collapsed with the importation of English potters. Frustrated and forced to negotiate individually with the management,³ some potters organized a union. Under the auspices of the Knights of Labor, Local Assembly 1853 (LA 1853) of East Liverpool became the agent for a small minority of potters. As the Knights experienced success in other industries, the Ohio pottery manufacturers moved to dissolve this labor threat. In 1882, the owners purposely initiated rules designed to crush the union. The manufacturers outlawed union membership, threatened to terminate the employment of any union sympathizers or members, and locked out all employees whether friendly to the union or not. These moves caught the Knights completely unprepared. With the national and regional leadership in conflict with other industries, LA 1853 slowly succumbed during a nine-month struggle. This ex-

² Ohio Bureau of Labor Statistics, Nineteenth Annual Report, 1895 (Columbus, 1896), 15-16, 75-77 (hereafter referred to as Ohio Labor Statistics). United States Potters’ Association, Proceedings of the Eighteenth Convention (East Liverpool, 1894), 38-40 (hereafter referred to as USPA). The cost of ware purchased in 1860 for $160 declined steadily throughout this period until in 1893, the same items sold for $100. Floyd W. McKee, The Second Oldest Profession: A Century of American Dinnerware Manufacture (n.p., 1966), 2; Ohio Labor Statistics, 1879, 141-42. The Ceramic Engineering Department at the Ohio State University was established in September 1894 to aid the pottery industry of Ohio with its technical problems; Frank Hull, interview, July 10, 1972, East Liverpool, Ohio. Mr. Hull's association with the pottery trade dates to 1899. Through the span of fifty-seven years, he has worked within the trade as a jigger-man and was a union official of the NBOP, later known as the IBOP. He has held the office of local president, national organizer, and president.

³ Ohio Labor Statistics, 1895, 16.
perience rendered the unionist spirit ineffectual in East Liverpool and its environs, but it set the stage for later unionization.4

While the eastern potters remained associated with the Knights under the Potters National Union (hereafter referred to as the PNU), the western potters moved toward secession.5 Following the Knights of Labor convention at Trenton in September 1890, the western delegates insisted that the Knights could not effectively represent the operatives’ needs. A few potters met secretly, first in Toronto, Ohio, and then in East Liverpool, to determine viability for a new organization. Satisfied, the proponents set December 19, 1890, for an organizational meeting in East Liverpool.6 From these deliberations, the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters evolved. Constituted under bylaws similar to the American Flint Glass Workers, the NBOP was a skilled workman’s union. The founders hoped to build a compact organization for the protection of potters.7 Initiation fees for members was set at $2.50 (lowered to $1.50 in 1891, and to 50 cents the next year) with an additional assessment of 1 percent on each pay day for the defense fund, to be collected at each pottery by clerks appointed by the brotherhood. However, this was not a mandatory “check-off.” During the three days of conferences five locals came into existence: Toronto, Local 1; New Cumberland, West Virginia, Local 2; Kittanning, Pennsylvania, Local 3; East Liverpool, Ohio, Local 4; and Findlay, Ohio, Local 5.8 The membership in this early period totaled only 200 out of an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 workers and operatives. Nevertheless, until 1897 the NBOP represented the unionized potters (centering in the East Liverpool region) west of the Allegheny Mountains, while the PNU served Trenton and the eastern centers.

Originally the bylaws of the brotherhood specified that the president serve in a part-time capacity, with an annual salary of $25.00. Under this requirement Harry Layden, the first president, held a full-time job at the potter’s bench, while he organized the craftsmen in his spare

5 The Allegheny Mountains formed the demarcation line distinguishing eastern and western potters.
6 Thomas J. Duffy, An Early History of the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters (East Liverpool, 1939), 7 (hereafter cited as Duffy, History). Thomas Duffy served as secretary to the brotherhood at the time of the initial edition of this book in 1901. He became its president in 1903 and remained in this position until 1912.
7 National Brotherhood of Operative Potters, Constitution, 1890, Article XVII, secs. 1 and 2, 19-20. This is found in the Johns Hopkins University Library, Baltimore, Maryland.
8 Ibid., Article XI, secs. 1 and 2, 16; Duffy, History, 11, 16.
time. Accompanying Layden in the first year of the fledgling organization were Albert S. Hughes, vice-president, and Charles Dargue, secretary. Layden, as president-organizer, used extreme discretion in his new capacity, because his union activities, if discovered, would cost him his job. With the potter’s traditional independence and natural suspicion of labor unions, the quest for new members proceeded slowly. Only two locals, one at Wheeling, West Virginia, and the other at Tiffin, Ohio, joined the NBOP during the first two years. Shortly after the Tiffin success, Layden died following a sudden illness. In the interim, the 1891-1892 vice-president, John Hunter of New Cumberland, West Virginia, guided the brotherhood.9

When the 1892 NBOP convention met, the future looked dismal. The recently organized Tiffin local and Local 5 of Findlay had lapsed, while several other locals had declining memberships. At this convention, Albert S. Hughes, a former vice-president of the NBOP, motioned that for the union’s survival the president had to assume the duty of full-time organizer. This, according to Hughes, would free the president of the brotherhood from the bench and the threats of the manufacturers. The motion passed the assemblage unanimously.10

This convention also effected several other significant resolutions. A. S. Hughes, by unanimous consent, became the brotherhood’s third president with a salary of $800 a year. In a related matter, the brotherhood delegates dissolved the provision for a defense fund, ostensibly because the fledgling union could not simultaneously demand support of a full-time president-organizer and a defense fund from the scanty membership scattered throughout the Ohio-Pennsylvania-West Virginia region.11

Even though Hughes faced many obstacles, he proved to be a strong leader. He headed a small, weak organization of skilled operatives steeped in a lukewarm philosophy of labor combination. His Catholic faith handicapped him because many of the West Virginia anti-Catholic potters belonged to the American Protective Association.12 Hughes, nevertheless, persisted by using a soft-sell approach. Talking quietly to each skilled operative, he outlined the goals and benefits of the potters’ union. Hughes found that most men gave polite attention but were less than eager to embrace the organization. These

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9 Ibid., 12-17.
10 Ibid., 19.
11 Ibid.
12 Frank Hull, interview, July 10, 1972; The American Protective Association was a secret society formed in Clinton, Iowa in 1887 to oppose the influence of Roman Catholicism in labor and politics.
Harry Layden, first president of the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters, 1890-1892

Courtesy of the International Brotherhood of Pottery and Allied Workers
Homer Laughlin, prominent pottery manufacturer and United States Potters Association official from East Liverpool, Ohio

Albert S. Hughes, second president of the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters, 1892-1903

Courtesy of the International Brotherhood of Pottery and Allied Workers
English potters were proud of their skill and equally assured that they could fend for themselves. On a more candid note, others told Hughes that after their experience with the Knights of Labor, any labor organization was strictly "off limits." Still others professed ignorance, but, upon further discussion, revealed that they could not see any personal benefit in joining.

With these experiences in mind, President Hughes's report to the third NBOP convention was rather mediocre. Six new locals joined the brotherhood during the year, while two discontinued their activities. Interest in the union seemed to diminish as the distance increased from East Liverpool. To Hughes most potters seemed to join in order to stop the recruitment, because they remained inactive and avoided the meetings.

President Hughes's union reputation compounded the pall of discouragement. When the owners learned of his mission, recruitment became doubly difficult, because management's attitude forced workmen to shun and avoid him while in the factory. Hughes, therefore, had to do much of his organizing in saloons where the manufacturer could not observe the men talking to him. For the worker, if management discovered union association, it meant suspicion and possible dismissal from employment.

The new union suffered also from an abortive strike at the Wick China Company in Kittanning. In August 1893, the owner, John Wick, issued reductions and retentions in employees' salaries totalling 40 percent. Local 3 struck, and Wick offered to allow all to return to work at the old wages except twelve men. Local 3 mulled over the proposition and with Hughes's consent, accepted it. However, the owner reneged and rehired only a few. This action broke the local's solidarity and forced its demise.

Consequently, after three years of existence, the NBOP reached a crisis. During its short life, the union had made only a small impression on western potters. So disheartened was the union membership that some locals requested a meeting of the brotherhood's executive board to consider dissolution. The meeting was scheduled for December 4, 1893. A. S. Hughes, with the support of a few others,

14 Duffy, History, 22-23.
15 Ibid., 25.
16 Frank Hull, interview, July 10, 1972. Mr. Hull believes that A. S. Hughes was the outstanding president of the NBOP during the first three or four decades of the union's existence. Without Hughes, the organization would have ceased to exist.
17 Duffy, History, 28.
strenuously opposed the motion. In arguing for continuing the union, Hughes noted the possibility that the employers might compensate for a proposed tariff reduction in earthenware by trying to lower workers' wages. In this situation a weak union would be far better than none at all. Al Hughes's plea persuaded the board to sustain the union.\footnote{18}

During the four years of the highly protective McKinley tariff, the United States experienced economic instability and depression. Advocates of a freer trade policy blamed the ills of the marketplace on this 1890 tariff. Grover Cleveland won reelection in 1892 promising tariff revision as part of his program. Through the new president's urging and public pressure, Congress began the downward revision of the tariff.\footnote{19}

Meanwhile, the USPA tried to save the industry's high protection that averaged 55 percent ad valorem by campaigning for the status quo. This theme permeated the sessions of the 1892 USPA convention. The owners contended that under sixteen years of high tariff the pottery industry had reduced the price on its wares by 50 percent, while increasing its production from $2 million to $8 million. Moreover, the quality of work remained high.\footnote{20} The subsequent conventions in 1893 and 1894 did not dissolve the pall for the manufacturers. Between 1892 and 1893, production decreased by 33 percent. High importation figures for European pottery added to their alarm. These developments, coupled with the cutthroat marketing and production practices at home, lent an urgency to the USPA's campaign. At the 1894 convention, Secretary Day of the USPA reported that profits were at a minimal level with five companies in receivership, "and not one new investment during 1893."\footnote{21} Out of this series of meetings came a two-pronged lobbying theme. Their first argument stressed the loss of $2 million of revenue by tariff revision. The second theme rested upon the assumption that some industries, like pottery, by their very nature needed a favorable duty rate.\footnote{22} At the same time, the manufacturers, while trying to maintain the 1890 rates, established a contingency plan of wage reductions commensurate with the highest

European wage.23 Through these actions, the USPA members prepared for any eventuality.

Other industries devised strategy similar to the pottery owners. The Flint Vial and Green Glass Bottles Manufacturers planned wage cuts proportionate to the tariff revision. Likewise, iron mine owners considered reductions. As these industries reacted, retail merchants voiced concern that a lower tariff would mean a decrease in consumer buying, causing "chronically dull times." 24 With the situation worsening, wage reductions became fact. Wage cuts ranged from 2 to 44 percent in Ohio, depending on the city and industry.25

In January 1894, a committee of employers from Ohio and New Jersey, led by William Burgess of Trenton, journeyed to Washington. They attempted unsuccessfully to sustain the 1890 pottery rates under consideration by the House Ways and Means Committee. With this failure, the manufacturers generally conceded the necessity of wage reductions.26 The pottery workers, while seeking the same objective, tried pressuring their congressional representatives. They sent petitions representing thousands of potters to their Ohio and New Jersey representatives. Likewise, Baltimore operatives passed a resolution condemning the impending tariff legislation and urged Congress to maintain the existing McKinley rates.27

Efforts of the manufacturers as well as those of the potters were for naught, since they did not have enough political leverage and expertise to influence the lawmakers. However, other vested interests — sugar, lead, oil, coal, glass, chemicals, and many others — succeeded in gaining protection from the Wilson bill. In total, these lobbyists' efforts brought 600 amendments to the "free trade" bill.28 When the Wilson-Gorman tariff finally passed in August 1894, the pottery industry experienced a drastically lowered duty on foreign cookery. The cuts in tariff duties ranged from 30 to 40 percent ad valorem (see table 1). Wage reductions became a reality.

Throughout December 1893, rumors and speculation multiplied in the various pottery centers. How much of a reduction would there be? and, Can we live on it? were the thoughts of all workers. What

23 Ibid., Proceedings of the Seventeenth Convention, 8-9, 46.
24 Pittsburgh Press, Jan. 10, 1894; Editorial, Canton Repository (weekly), Apr. 19, 1894.
26 Evening News Review (East Liverpool), Jan. 4, 1894. This newspaper was the only unionized publication in East Liverpool.
27 Ibid., Dec. 19, 21, 27, 1893.
course of action should be followed? Is it feasible to strike? During this interlude, the NBOP, small and weak, encouraged the East Liverpool potters to solidify their position and oppose any reduction. At Trenton, the PNU took similar action. The break in this mounting suspense came from the Glasgow Pottery of Trenton. Its owner, John Moses, offered wage reductions equal to English wages plus the American duty. In making this offer, Moses sympathized with the workers, stating that lower rates "would cut deep into the wages of those who can least afford it" — especially women and boys.29

In East Liverpool, this scheme met with mixed opposition. The Homer Laughlin Pottery submitted a different plan to their employees that would temporarily reduce their wages by 50 percent. One-half of their pay would be retained by the employer until the enactment of the Wilson-Gorman tariff. When asked about the future of the money withheld, the company official guaranteed that "a portion of the amount" would be returned with the defeat of the bill. The potters deferred action on the proposal until another meeting could be scheduled.30 Several days later, the Laughlin employees met again. E. A. Stevenson, the management representative, explained that the low-waged men and women day workers would not receive a pay reduction. Despite the rhetoric, the meeting settled only one item of business. It barred the entrance of Al Hughes, brotherhood president, when he sought to restate the union's position. Apparently, the Laughlin employees felt that the meeting concerned only them.31

The first news of the actual wage reduction came from Wheeling, West Virginia. There, the manufacturers demanded a 10 percent outright cut in most areas, and a 20 percent retention of the gross earning. Although not openly stated, the retention fund served as insurance for the employer's profit margin. The Pittsburgh Press indicated

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29 Cleveland Plain Dealer, Jan. 3, 1894; Evening News Review, Jan. 9, 1894.
30 Evening News Review, Jan. 8, 1894.
31 Ibid., Jan. 11, 1894.
that the new wage scale sufficed to unify the potters, and a "fight to a finish" was likely. The operatives at Steubenville, Ohio, also rejected the new wage scale. With reductions from 10 to 25 percent, depending on the department, and retentions of 20 percent, the employees found themselves caught between submarginal wages and a strike.\textsuperscript{32}

While the official posting of the pay lists in East Liverpool did not occur until January 20, the local companies scheduled employee meetings to consider probable scales and hopefully to establish a date for work to commence. In the last few months of 1893, the tariff crisis had caused almost complete suspension of potting operations, with only a few plants continuing to operate on a limited basis. Now, with rumors of a reduction ranging from 5 to 20 percent with an additional 20 percent retention, potters were in a quandary. On the night before official posting, the NBOP met and officially recorded opposition to any wage reduction and retention.\textsuperscript{33}

The owners posted the new rates the following morning. The rates correlated with the predicted tariff duty, and a certain percentage was automatically deducted. The proclamation also listed a retention cut. This wage retention depended upon the final tariff rate established by the Congress. While the amounts retained from the potter's wage depended on his skill,\textsuperscript{34} the employers provided for the redistribution of this money if the final tariff proved to be more favorable than anticipated at the time. What these rates meant in hard cash for the potters of Trenton can be seen in table 2. Since piecework was the basis for pay, these figures are only averages for the old weekly rates and the new scale. Although this is only a partial listing of the skilled positions, the consequences for the employee were clear and applied to the East Liverpool situation as well.

The proclamations unified the pottery employees as no previous event had ever done. The employees at Laughlin's met and unanimously rejected the new wage scale. In the next few days, all the employees in East Liverpool followed their example. Most felt that the prevailing cost of living made it impossible to accept the employer's rates. In Trenton, a committee of operatives presented a resolution to the manufacturers condemning the new rate. They would strike if a liberal compromise could not be reached. Communications between the potters and manufacturers broke down and a strike did result. The region east of the Allegheny Mountains looked to Trenton for guid-

\textsuperscript{32} Pittsburgh Press, Jan. 15, 1894; Evening News Review, Jan. 24, 1894.
\textsuperscript{33} Evening News Review, Jan. 19, 20, 1894.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., Jan. 20, 1894.
ance where five to seven thousand operatives and workers were involved.\textsuperscript{35}

\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{Comparison of the Weekly Salary Rates Between the McKinley and Wilson Tariffs\*}
\begin{tabular}{lrrr}
\hline
Position & Old Weekly Scale & New Weekly Scale & Percent of Reduction \\
\hline
dishmakers & $14.98 & $7.72 & 48\% \\
platemakers & 16.18 & 8.00 & 50\% \\
kilnmen (biscuit) & 12.40 & 8.00 & 35\% \\
saucerman & 13.18 & 3.92 & 70\% \\
jiggerman & 19.46 & 6.98 & 64\% \\
presser (hollowware) & 13.93 & 8.52 & 38\% \\
turner & 16.50 & 6.00 & 63\% \\
saggermakers & 18.36 & 9.60 & 47\% \\
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\end{tabular}
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\textit{Evening News Review, Feb. 26, Mar. 9, 1894, from the Trenton State Gazette.}

In East Liverpool, the operatives, workers, and other interested individuals held a mass meeting on January 22. Speakers enumerated the injustices that had crept into the industry. Several discussed the ramifications the present cut would have on the standard of living. One man compared the difference between the present wage rate and the rate received in 1882. He vividly illustrated the decreasing trend over the twelve-year period caused by industry's practice of using the private contract system, whereby the employer negotiated privately with each employee. This system, according to the speaker, was notoriously abused at the expense of the worker. Not until the conclusion of the meeting did two union men speak on the history of the union, the need for organization, and the union position on the wage reduction. They held that the tariff revision did not dictate a reduction of the potters' wages and that the new wage list, if accepted by the men, would reduce wages to a level below that paid in England for similar work. Besides the rhetoric, the meeting produced two resolutions. The first categorically rejected all propositions of reductions and retention of wages subject to any legislation, while the second demanded the return of the 1885 wage scale in its entirety. These measures passed by unanimous voice vote.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Pittsburgh Press}, Jan. 23, 1894.
The resolutions committed the employees to a strike. Thus, organizing the workers became the most urgent order of business for the potters’ union. Strike proponents created an advisory board to guide strike activities. This board, although resembling an independent association, actually was controlled by the embryonic NBOP. The union took this low-key approach because a large number of potters, while opposing the reductions, also opposed the brotherhood. Thus, the advisory board became the voice for both the union and nonunion strikers. Under the provisions for its organization, each pottery in East Liverpool had one representative on the board. A temporary shop organization selected the representatives from each company. As a result, the forty-member board, empowered by the strikers, directed the course of the labor dispute and handled the various questions pertaining to law and order. At its first meeting on January 28, the advisory board selected A. S. Hughes as chairman and established two committees: one, a relief committee to obtain food, fuel, and money for the workers; the other, a public relations or press committee to handle press communications and, in general, to mitigate the impact of rumors. All other areas of authority remained with the advisory board.\(^{37}\)

The NBOP at this stage held the allegiance of only a few hundred employees. However, with his elevation to chairman of the board, Al Hughes was able to serve the total working population and concurrently increase the influence of the brotherhood. Early in the strike, Hughes traveled to Wheeling, Steubenville, Kittanning, and Trenton, pressing for cooperation. Without it, he maintained, the strikers could not be successful against the owners. Hughes concentrated his efforts in the west, encouraging and planning future policy. This period saw the growth of fourteen new locals. Findlay, Leetonia, Wellsville, and Steubenville in Ohio joined the ranks. Nevertheless, the greatest union gains came from East Liverpool. Hoping to enlarge its membership rolls, the NBOP placed a moratorium on initiation dues and decided to take all applicants. By January 30, the union enlistment rolls contained approximately 400 new members, bringing the total to 700.\(^{38}\)

During this period the employers contentedly sold their warehouse stock, while waiting for the strike to crumble. However, the strike assumed the characteristics of a siege, with both sides entrenched behind their arguments. For this reason, the principal duty of the press committee became one of separating truth from rumor. Constant whisperings of strike breakdowns in distant cities kept the com-


\(^{38}\) Duffy, History, 31-32; Evening News Review, Jan. 30, 1894.
mittee active. Such rumors engendered feelings of isolation and gnawed at the local strikers' morale. Whenever the situation merited action, the press committee published in the *Evening News Review* and other newspapers the "official" version, which either flatly contradicted the story, or reduced its impact.\(^{39}\) An example of this arose over the payment of property taxes. Unknown parties, reputed to be real estate agents, circulated a rumor that taxes must be paid immediately or the indebted owner would lose the property through public sale. Fear and near panic seized the idle workers. It took all the prestige of the advisory board, plus substantiation from the county government, to quell this rumor.\(^{40}\)

As the strike passed into the third, fourth, and fifth months, pressure increased for reconciliation with manufacturers. Meetings were held to reinforce strike determination. During these meetings the men discussed news from other areas, and in this manner, the strike leaders gauged the prevailing attitudes. This also aided in discovering defecting or waiving potters. Although gaps in the ranks were minimal, an effort to pressure strikebreakers mounted. The advisory board issued the number and names of known scabs for publication in the *Evening News Review*. The paper, however, refused to print the names, reasoning that it could be held for libel.\(^{41}\) Conservatively, the board did not pursue this policy any further; perhaps it too, feared legal action or alienation of public support. In addition, the advisory board inherited the responsibility of organizing morale-bolstering talent shows, dances, socials, and picnics. Besides these activities, and more importantly, the board dealt with the physical needs of the workers.

The pottery employees had ceased work without a strike fund or any thought of one. Therefore, relief became the most pressing concern of the advisory board. By February 8, they had instituted a program of relief. When individual need arose, the case went to the employee's shop committee and the members of the advisory board of that organization carried it forward to the relief committee, which investigated the claim. If a potter was in dire need he then received the available benefits.\(^{42}\)

The response from the townspeople of East Liverpool was magnanimous. The citizenry backed the strike. Public opinion reflected the increased intolerable working conditions in the potteries. The people,


\(^{40}\) Ibid., Apr. 25, 1894.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., Mar. 23, 1894.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., Feb. 8, 1894.
likewise, realized that any reductions would adversely affect the local economy. Initially, gifts of money from outside East Liverpool flowed into the board’s strike fund and local merchants granted credit to the workers while the labor conflict endured. East Liverpool livery stables offered use of horses, wagons, and even drivers to assist in hauling coal and other donated commodities. The area’s coal deposit owners extended free access to the fuel, while some even dug and hauled the coal without charge. Even the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) invited potters to frequent their lunch parlors. Toward the end of February, authorized committees of strikers began to journey into the countryside seeking contributions. In their visitations, some wagon teams took as long as two days to complete the circuit.\(^5\)

The township trustees appropriated $5,000 for striker relief. Paralleling this, the NBOP petitioned the East Liverpool city council to hire striking potters for public projects. The petition specified a nine-hour day at $1.50 an hour. The brotherhood also insisted that all contracts should be let to local contractors and merchants. In response, the city council announced its intention to comply as far as feasible. However, by the middle of March, the paucity of funds caused the township trustees to suspend cooperation.\(^4\) With the city’s welfare budget exhausted, the burden of relief fell to the local chapter of the WCTU. By May, the WCTU, in an effort to feed 200 persons daily, depleted its reserves and had to close the parlor. The increasing frustration of forced idleness made some men ugly and mean, while others sought employment elsewhere. In late April, between twenty and forty English families planned to return to the Staffordshire district in England. For them, steady English work was more attractive than the continuing strike or reduced wages. Others found extra money peddling pottery throughout Pennsylvania and Ohio countrysides.\(^5\)

As the strike began to take its toll among the potters, the manufacturers also felt the pinch. Several potteries, due to the hard times, looked for buyers. Two of these concerns sold out. Some began to investigate the merits of production on a cooperative basis, but this did not materialize.

The pottery strike starkly contrasted with the labor disputes of other industries of that period. The violence of the Homestead, Pullman, and various mining clashes captured the newspaper headlines for months at a time. However, the potters’ strike manifested an orderly

\(^3\) Frank Hull, interview, July 10, 1972.
labor dispute. In its formative stage, the advisory board pledged itself to preserve law and order for the duration of the strike. The board, as well as the brotherhood, urged individual potters to report any act of violence or conduct that could be construed as bad faith. Thus, the strike leadership reassured the townspeople and gained valued support from the local newspaper, the *Evening News Review*. The paper emphasized the workers' desire for "a peaceful and quiet [struggle], without the use of newspaper blackguardism and hurling insinuations at manufacturers." 46 The advisory board diligently pursued this policy. In one situation when "rowdy" behavior occurred, the board and brotherhood jointly disavowed the action and condemned the individuals involved.

Saturday night, March 31, the worst incident of the strike took place resulting in a mob scene. A crowd of pottery workers began harassing several members of the supervisory personnel of a few of the East Liverpool potteries. The crowd whistled the "scab march" and liberally doused their victims with a variety of epithets. Yet, remarkably, only one violent episode resulted. However, a force of special police composed of advisory board members quickly restored order. On Monday, in a tersely worded communiqué, Al Hughes, representing the advisory board and the NBOP, firmly denounced the unruly conduct and disclaimed any union connection. The only other breach of the peace stemmed from an exchange of bitter comments between strikers and scabs. Although several nonstrikers fired shots in the strikers' direction, no one was injured. The public reacted indignantly over the shooting, but neither Hughes, the board, nor the brotherhood took legal action. 47

The restraint shown by strikers under the guidance of the advisory board and brotherhood was impressive, considering the issues and length of the strike. Much of this success rested with the able leadership, but the craftsmen also deserve credit. Certainly, as the brotherhood poem indicates, the potters believed in fair play for all.

"TO ONE AND ALL"

There is trouble in the atmosphere
The strike is in full play.
Rumors are rife upon the streets,
Rumors by night and day.

46 Ibid., Feb. 3, 1894.
47 Ibid., Apr. 2, 3, 4, 5, 1894. Although three men were arrested, they were acquitted at trials in East Liverpool.
Don't put your trust in them, my lads,
But use your mother wit;
Conform at all times to the law.
Be with your brethren knit.

In unity is strength, my lads
Union of hearts and hand.
Be sure you're right, then go ahead,
From home and native land.

Yes, join the Potter's Brotherhood,
And battle for the right.
True men will back you up, my lads.
And in you take delight.

Don't dare to be oppressors, men;
Deal ever in fair play.
The employer has his rights, my lads
You will not say me "nay."

And if we want on middle ground,
And each his side will state.
Then act the part of honest men,
And aim to arbitrate.

Let each one make concessions — don't
Seek for petty flaws,
But aim to set the wheels awhirl,
The wheels of labor's cause.

And thus bring peace and plenty,
No longer need to roam,
But, thank our God, bring happiness
To every hearth and home.

—Brotherhood (1894)
Evening News Review, Jan. 27, 1894

Negotiations played only a small role in the East Liverpool strike. No significant discussions took place while the manufacturers had wares to sell. After the first few weeks, the owners generally believed that a settlement would not be possible until the June business upswing. Nevertheless, the arbitration committee composed of businessmen of the state Board of Commerce, made efforts to secure a conference between manufacturers and the potters, with arbitration as the objective. The initial attempt floundered when owners refused to recognize the advisory board as the bargaining agent for the strikers. The final effort by the arbitration committee failed when manufacturers insisted that each owner should bargain with his own employees. The
advisory board denounced this, stating that strikers would only negotiate collectively.48

On their part management insisted that labor bear more than its share of the burden for reductions in earthenware duties. Moreover, the owners continued to press for private contracts with key workmen. In one case, the owner offered the individual an advance on wages and a three-year contract. More common were offers of prestrike wages and steady work. Another ploy, similar to the Mohawk Plan of the 1930s, utilized rumors of business operation transfers or outright sale of existing plants.49 Obviously, the veneer on these tactics was too transparent to break the solid opposition of the operatives and workers.

Settlement of the strike ultimately came from outside East Liverpool as Senator James Smith of New Jersey brought the Trenton potters and employers together. At first the owners submitted two propositions. These proposals formulated wage cuts equaling the tariff losses (see table 2). Management was amenable to an 8 percent reduction of the 1885 wage list and a 25 percent retention; or acceptance of the new scale including a 15 percent retainer, making the pay reduction vary from 10 to 40 percent, according to the branch of the industry. The workmen rejected both of them.50 By July, the senator had the two parties negotiating again, this time fruitfully. Led by W. T. Goodwin, president of the Potters National Union, the operative potters accepted the owners’ proposal of a flat 12½ percent reduction without a retention factor.51

The regional reactions were mixed. The Pittsburgh Press reported that the news stimulated the "liveliest satisfaction" in that city. However, A. S. Hughes was not elated. For him, any reduction, with or without a retention figure, was unacceptable. Realistically, Hughes knew that the eastern potters would acquiesce with the Trenton agreement. As such, it would create a very difficult situation for the western union. With the consent of the advisory board, Hughes sent a request to Trenton for the new wage scale, hoping for a clearer indication of what to expect from the western employers.52

The western manufacturers, in the meantime, met in East Liverpool at the Homer Laughlin Building. Representative came from

49 Ibid., Mar. 3, 8, May 8, 1894.
50 Ibid., May 22, 1894.
51 Pittsburgh Press, July 12, 1894.
52 Evening News Review, July 12, 31, 1894.
Peoria, Evansville, New Cumberland, Steubenville, Kittanning, Beaver Falls, Wheeling, Toronto, and Cincinnati. First reports from the meeting indicated that the owners would abide by the Trenton formula of a 12½ percent reduction, but the question of the Wilson tariff schedule still remained in doubt. Later, one manufacturer clarified the proposal. He emphasized that the cut would be a straight 12½ percent, based upon the wage rates paid prior to the strike, and on the assumption the tariff rate would be 40 or 45 percent ad valorem. By this action, the western manufacturers moved from their hard-line position, apparently willing to absorb the losses beyond the initial reduction. At the 12½ percent cut, average wages would be about 26 percent above tariff protection. The next move was up to the employees.

On July 18, in the East Liverpool Grand Opera House, the potters met to vote on management’s offer. The meeting and balloting took place under the supervision of Al Hughes. The potters defeated the owners’ proposal by a 346 to 253 vote. Later that same evening, a committee representing the clay workers requested President Hughes to call another meeting for the next morning. Hughes complied. These men expressed great dissatisfaction with the results of the previous night. Hearing this, Hughes stated, “It would be the part of true wisdom, under the circumstances, to accept the owner’s proposal.” With that, the clay workers voted unanimously to approve the 12½ percent cut. Nevertheless, the pivotal group for any work resumption was the kilnmen. Some feared that they would reject any planned cut. The following day, 150, or one-half of the kilnmen, met with Hughes, who urged them not to resist the majority’s desires. Not all agreed with Hughes, and approximately twenty men stomped out of the meeting. However, when the groups balloted, a slim majority ratified the plan by a sixty-nine to sixty-one vote. The saggermakers likewise agreed to accept the new rate. Other skilled departments quickly followed suit, and, when the unskilled day laborers agreed, management established July 22 as the first day of work — six months exactly from the initial strike proclamation. Work did indeed begin, but not smoothly. Almost immediately, the female segment walked off the job over a threatened cut of their meager wages. The manufacturers had decided to reduce the women’s wages from 75 to 65 cents a day. While men continued working, the shop committee of the brotherhood successfully negotiated a no-cut policy for the women.

53 Ibid., July 16, 17, 1894.
54 Ibid., July 19, 20, 27, 28, 30, 1894.
The strike had a disastrous effect on the city. Before the shutdown, East Liverpool had “twenty white ware potteries, which, when running full time, distributed weekly about 20,000 dollars.”⁵⁵ The total revenue lost from wages during the six months of strike approximated $500,000. Throughout the strike, merchants supported efforts of the workers, feeling that business solvency rested with the potters. The store owners extended credit to the strikers and, in some cases, furnished services and goods without reservation. Because of the businessmen’s losses and goodwill, the advisory board and the brotherhood emphatically urged all employed workers to demonstrate their gratefulness and reinforce the local generosity. The operative potters and workers responded, and by October all debts owed the merchant community were paid.⁵⁶

In one respect the 12½ percent wage reduction was a victory for the manufacturers. The advisory board and the brotherhood had not been successful in thwarting the reduction. The union and the non-union personnel, on the other hand, reaped some long-term benefits. After the 1882 labor fiasco, the western pottery industry did not have a functioning labor organization. Even in the initial stages of the 1894 conflict, the skilled of the west had only a weak, skeletal organization in the NBOP. The unskilled throughout this time remained unrepresented. The labor crisis gave rise to an organizational need that the advisory board under Hughes satisfied. The labor leader successfully blended the union’s militancy with the nonunionist’s hostility. The work of the advisory board also cast an aura of respectability over the chairman that previously had not existed. By means of his position, Hughes parlayed the power and influence of his office into an effective mechanism for enlarging the membership and influence of the NBOP. At the expiration of the strike, nearly one-half, if not a majority of the potters of the west, were on the rolls of the union.

In spite of the 12½ percent salary loss, the employees felt they had gained a moral victory. They had fought and won a partial reprieve from the sizable reduction and retention plan of the manufacturers. Their united opposition exhibited to the owners that welfare of the labor force could not be lightly overlooked. For themselves, the workers regained the self-confidence that the 1882 strike had badly shaken. Thus, the various skilled workmen expressed their appreciation to the advisory board, and particularly to Albert S. Hughes.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Ohio Labor Statistics, 1895*, 34.
The efforts of these workers were indeed small when compared to some of the other labor disputes of the decade. Yet their solidarity, nurtured by despair and frustration, was the harbinger of the future. Certainly, the brotherhood existed only as a regional organization, but it ignited a spark that persisted. The leadership of the NBOP, aware of its tenuous position, endeavored to mirror the attitudes of the rank and file. At its annual convention in 1895, NBOP delegate H. P. McCarron epitomized this philosophy when he declared:

For us public opinion is so powerful and grand we must guard it sacredly. . . . How to retain the good opinion gained in 1894, is by a display of good common sense and conversation. Ask no advance until we are pretty sure of the manufacturers' ability to pay it, and at no time demand unless able to enforce. Be sure that money is in the business before you ask an advance, and be sure of your ability to fight before you take off your coat.\(^{58}\)

No doubt, McCarron articulated the NBOP's creed. During the strike, the union leaders had established a precedent for the redress of grievances. Hughes and his organization, with its new foundation, pursued goals that eventually made the NBOP spokesman for the skilled operatives in the pottery industry.

Within six years of the 1894 strike, the brotherhood, under Hughes, attained three major objectives that certified this pre-eminence. The first was the unification of the PNU with the NBOP, under Hughes's presidency. The next came with the repeal of the Wilson-Gorman Tariff. As a result, the potters regained the pre-1894 piecerate salary. By the turn of the century, the NBOP had negotiated the third accomplishment. The United States Potters' Association agreed to a national uniform scale for piecework. As such, it became one of the first national wage agreements. Hence, in retrospect, the pivotal event for the labor movement within this industry was the decision in December 1893 to sustain the NBOP, making possible its regeneration.\(^{59}\)

\(^{58}\) Quoted in Duffy, History, 41.

\(^{59}\) Several persons have contributed substantially to this article. Special thanks is accorded to Miss Dena Powell of the USPA for opening the association's proceedings to me. Also appreciation to Mr. G. R. Barbaree, secretary-treasurer, and Mrs. Evelyn Carey of the International Brotherhood of Pottery and Allied Workers for their cooperation in securing the early NBOP proceedings. These sources, along with the help of Mr. Harold H. Barth of the East Liverpool Historical Society, and Mr. Frank Hull, former national organizer and president of the International Brotherhood of Operative Potters, greatly facilitated the completion of this article. Special note is also accorded to Dr. Robert P. Swierenga for his critical guidance and encouragement.