

Bruce Cohen, "The Worcester Machinists' Strike of 1915" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Volume 16, No 2 (Summer 1988).

Published by: Institute for Massachusetts Studies and Westfield State University

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The Worcester Machinists' Strike of 1915

Bruce Cohen

In 1840, Worcester was a landlocked town of 7,500 people and it was not chartered as a city until 1848. By the 1850s, Worcester had become a leader in the boot and shoe industry. Worcester's industrial diversity helped make it the second largest city in Massachusetts by 1870, and by 1890, with a population of 85,000, Worcester became a "nationally known center of the metal and machine trades."¹ By 1880, Washburn & Moen was noted as the largest wire factory in the United States, and by 1900, when it had merged into the American Steel and Wire Company, it had 4,000 workers. While industrial diversity had been and would remain significant in Worcester, metal trades and machinery usually accounted for about forty percent of the city's industrial output by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²

Worcester's development as an industrial center was helped by two technological breakthroughs. The Norton Company's shift from pottery to abrasives was fully accomplished with the establishment of the Norton Emery Wheel Company in 1885. A spin-off, the Norton Grinding Company, was established in 1900.³ In

1. Roy Rosenzweig, Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City (Cambridge, 1983), p. 12.

2. Ibid.

3. Charles W. Cheape, Family Firm to Modern Multinational: Norton Company, a New England Enterprise (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 25-30 and 62-63.

1902, another local firm, Wyman-Gordon, which had been founded in 1883, developed the first forged crank-shaft for an automobile. In contrast to other cities, Worcester retained a family identity. While the original founders of Wyman-Gordon were dead by 1914, the firm remained in Worcester hands. Other local mergers included Crompton and Knowles in 1897 and Reed-Prentice in 1912.⁴

In contrast to Worcester's industrial development, its labor force was not well-organized, in part because firms like Washburn & Moen and Norton had recruited skilled Swedish craftsmen, who were treated with paternalism by their employers. John Jeppson, of Norton, for instance, was known for his paternalistic treatment of his employees, who quickly adjusted to "the Norton Spirit."⁵ The Norton Emery Wheel Company census of 1899 reveals that almost three-fourths of the employees, 152 of 208, were Swedish.⁶ As late as 1915, over one-fifth of American Steel and Wire's employees were Swedish.⁷

In addition to the paternalism of the managers, Worcester's labor history reveals a lack of union consciousness among the workers. The Worcester Central Labor Union (CLU) had struggled from its inception in 1888 until the early 1890s to get off the ground. The union label campaigns of the 1890s and the early years of the twentieth century had not been very successful. Thus the attempt by the Worcester CLU to organize Norton in 1901, by calling for a shorter work day than the prevailing ten hours, was ill-advised. While 89 of the 175 employees of the Norton Emery Wheel Company were organized by William Rossley of the Central Labor Union, the Norton union would last less than four months. The Norton Company refused to meet with the CLU grievance committee, and subsequently fired the union leaders. In response, the president of the Worcester CLU proposed that the local members demand the reinstatement of the fired men, and that they should strike if the company refused to do so. Rebuffed by the members, the president of the CLU dissolved the local union for refusing to support him.⁸ Where paternalism and

4. Charles W. Washburn, Industrial Worcester (Worcester, 1917), pp. 93-94, 127, and 270-272.

5. Cheape, Family Firm, pp. 40-44.

6. Census of Norton Emery Wheel Company Employees, November 1, 1899.

7. Washburn, Industrial Worcester, p. 166.

8. Worcester Telegram, August 14, 1901; Worcester Spy, July 18 and August 14, 1901.

ethnic loyalty had initially failed, anti-union actions succeeded in breaking the union at Norton.

This failure was not the exception but the rule in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Worcester. Not only did Worcester lag in unionization, but also in the number of strikes conducted. In 1901 Worcester's machinists had refused to join a national strike, and the molders had hesitated to strike despite failure to reach agreement with a number of Worcester's foundrymen.⁹ Nationwide more than 40,000 machinists went out because of the failure of the National Metal Trades Association (NMTA) to abide by the Murray Hill Agreement, which provided for a nine hour day and bargaining on wages.¹⁰

Even when a strike was conducted, it was often a defensive one. Fitchburg and Worcester molders struck in June of 1904, after an attempt to cut their wages by twenty-five cents a day. The Fitchburg molders refused to accept the cut, but the Worcester molders had tried to work out a compromise which would have them accept a wage reduction if their hours were reduced from ten to nine per day.¹¹ The employers refused and the Worcester strike of 250 molders at five foundries dragged on until the employers obtained injunctive relief in November of 1904 and the strike ended.¹²

The overall dilemma of organized labor in early twentieth century Worcester was one of lack of unity and thus lack of success in breaking the "Open Shop." An exception occurred in 1897, when the CLU compelled the Bowler Brothers Brewery to recognize the closed shop.¹³ There were also jurisdictional squabbles, such as the one between the painters' local and the brewery workers in 1909-1910. The political role of the CLU in fighting for the eight hour day by

9. Worcester Telegram, May 21, June 1, and June 25, 1901.

10. Mark Perlman, The Machinists (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 26-27.

11. Mellen's Magazine (July, 1904), pp. 518-519; Worcester Telegram, May 25, and June 24, 1904.

12. Mellen's Magazine (August, 1904), pp. 32-33, and (March, 1905), p. 70; Worcester Telegram, November 9, 1904, April 9 and 10, and September 5, 1905. See Worcester Telegram, September 27, 1905, which described how five union molders went on strike at the Worcester Tech foundry because two non-union molders were hired by a former Reed superintendent, Albert S. Buzzell. W. W. Bird, who was in charge, said that the Worcester Tech foundry was an open shop.

13. Charles Francis Johnson, "The Organized Labor Movement as a Social Force in Worcester, 1888-1913," (M.A. thesis, Clark University, 1935), p. 13.

forming a Wage Earners' Club had started well in 1910, but it faltered badly in 1911 because of a scandal. In addition, the attempt by the CLU to prevent non-union construction of the Warren Hotel (1906) and the Ascension Church (1911) by use of an "unfair list," failed in part because in the case of the former, the plumbers and electrical workers refused to follow the CLU's directives and in the case of the latter, because of religious factors. The CLU even had its charter briefly revoked for refusing to seat the delegates of the United Association of Steamfitters, instead of those of the International Association of Steamfitters, in a feud with the American Federation of Labor.¹⁴ Worcester's organized labor was also somewhat reluctant to build a labor "temple."

Other factors must be considered in explaining why Worcester remained an "open shop" city. Ethnic, religious, and political factors came into play, but perhaps the most significant factor was that the "Worcester manufacturers were well organized, united, and vigorously anti-union."¹⁵ In particular, the role of the Worcester branch of the National Metal Trades Association, founded in 1899, was decisive. The Worcester branch of the NMTA, led by George Jeppson, works manager of the Norton Grinding Company, and Donald Tulloch, the local MTA's secretary, would move forcibly and successfully against the machinists' strike of 1915-1916.

That strike was the largest in Worcester's history to that time, yet it was rather quickly organized and lacked supportive services from both its leaders and followers. Joseph H. Gilmour, of the International Association of Machinists (IAM), was the principal organizer of the strike and he spent several months preparing for it, including conducting a large membership drive from July to September of 1915, emphasizing better wages and the forty-eight hour week.¹⁶

Yet the five largest companies involved in the strike possessed a work-force that varied significantly in terms of ethnicity, skills, and wages. Crompton and Knowles Loom Works paid less than fourteen percent of its workers the "decency wage" of \$720, while the Norton Grinding Company paid forty-eight percent of its workers the decency wage, and Reed-Prentice forty percent. Leland-Gifford paid sixty percent of its workers the decency wage and Whitcom-Blaisdell

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12, 24-26, 36-38, 39-42, 54-56, 64.

15. Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours*, p. 12.

16. Worcester Evening Post, Worcester Telegram, Labor News, July-September, 1915.

paid seventy-two and a half percent.¹⁷ Some employers maintained that the Crompton and Knowles workers were paid significantly less than other machinists because "their employees were not of the first grade." It was said that the Crompton and Knowles men possessed less technical skill because they manufactured looms exclusively.¹⁸

If one considers a hierarchy of skills, the all-around machinists made an average yearly wage of \$800.25 -- a figure above the decency wage. The same could not be said of the lathe hands, assemblers, and drill hands.¹⁹ However, in all the plants the average work week was fifty-five hours.²⁰ The nationality of the worker was also important; American-born and northern European workers were paid more than southern Europeans. Crompton and Knowles had a much higher percentage of southern Europeans than did the other firms. In contrast, in the Norton Grinding Company, Canadians and northern Europeans composed over half of the employees. "In the Whitcomb-Blaisdell shops, the highest paid, the southern Europeans were entirely lacking, while 32.5 percent of the employees were North Europeans."²¹

Thus, organizer Gilmour would have to deal with many possible negative factors: wage and skill differentials, ethnic barriers between the machinists, and the strength of the Worcester MTA. On the other hand, wartime prosperity meant that the workers could argue for higher wages with the knowledge that the Worcester metal and machine trades industry could afford to pay its workers more money, and that it could not afford to lose its machinists. In addition, with the shortage of skilled workers, even if the strike failed the machinists would be able to find jobs elsewhere.

The machinists requested a union organizer in June of 1915, and Gilmour arrived in July. However, the machinists were far from united. American-born workers predominated in the three firms that struck in September of 1915, Reed-Prentice, Whitcomb-Blaisdell, and Leland-Gifford, while non American-born workers predominated in

 17. William Edward Zeuch, "An Investigation of the Metal Trades Strike of Worcester 1915" (M.A. thesis, Clark University, 1916), pp. 6-16. Zeuch's data was derived from the records of Local 339 of the IAM.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 7 and 13.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-22.

Crompton and Knowles and Norton Grinding.²² Reed-Prentice, Whitcomb-Baisdell, and Leland-Gifford workers prepared their demands, while Crompton and Knowles workers organized more or less on their own and the Norton Grinding Company employees joined only after the strike had begun. According to a study made in 1916, "The strike was organized and officered almost entirely by American-born workmen."²³ This might explain why the Crompton and Knowles workers struck in late October and the Norton Grinding Company employees joined also in October -- only after their organizing committee had been fired and they had been "locked out" by their employer. Those two companies had a large percentage of foreign-born workers.²⁴

When the demands were presented to the three firms in September of 1915, they were done separately. First Reed-Prentice was confronted on September first with demands for an eight-hour day, an increase of five cents an hour, time and a half for over-time, and double-time for Sundays, holidays, and after noon on Saturdays. Reed-Prentice rejected these demands, and the workers went on strike on September 20. Similar demands were presented to Whitcomb-Blaisdell, and after some negotiations -- the company conceded a fifty hour week and "half time for over time if the employees would agree not to present any demands collectively for one year." The workers refused President Whitcomb's terms and struck on September 23. Leland-Gifford soon met the same fate, as the workers walked out on September 27.²⁵

At this point, approximately 1,500 machinists were on strike and there was a great amount of unity among the workers who had gone out in September. Indeed, this unity was reinforced when Mayor George B. Wright called in the State Board of Conciliation and Arbitration, after the manufacturers refused to arbitrate their differences with the strikers.²⁶ The Board had limited powers under chapter 618 of the legislative acts of 1914. It had no fixed rules for

22. *Ibid*, p. 19.

23. *Ibid*, 20.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 26-27.

25. *Ibid*, p. 28; Worcester Evening Post, September 17, 20, 23, and 27, 1915; Worcester Telegram, September 19, 23 and 28, 1915; Labor News, September 18 and 25, 1915.

26. Worcester Evening Post, September 29, October 1 and 2, 1915; Worcester Telegram, September 28 to 30, and October 3, 1915.

procedure, although a stenographer was present at the Worcester hearing to take verbatim notes. The State Board, under Commissioner Charles G. Wood (business representative) and Frank M. Bump (labor representative), began its hearing on October 13 and concluded it on October 20.

During the hearing, testimony was presented by both employers and employees. The first shop to be taken up, on October 13, was Reed-Prentice. The vice-president and general manager, Albert E. Newton, agreed to bring the matter of arbitration of the strike before the company's directors on Monday, October 19. However, Reed-Prentice decided against arbitration and announced its decision to the board on October 20.²⁷ The second shop that was discussed was Whitcomb-Blaisdell, on October 14. This was the only shop that had been willing to negotiate with its employees. Alonzo N. Whitcomb, president of Whitcomb-Blaisdell, was willing to grant a fifty hour week with fifty-five hour pay, but the employees turned down his offer for two reasons -- collective bargaining was forbidden for a year, and if the employees accepted the fifty hour week, they would be breaking with the goal of a forty-eight hour week.²⁸

However, Whitcomb resigned from the firm about a week before the hearing, and testimony by Charles E. Hildreth, vice-president and treasurer of Whitcomb-Blaisdell, implied that his position was that of the MTA, that the company would not agree to arbitration of the workers' demands.²⁹ Hildreth soon became president of Whitcomb-Blaisdell and emerged as one of the leaders of the metal manufacturers, along with Albert E. Newton of Reed-Prentice, in maintaining unity during the negotiations, and in refusing to recognize the existence of labor unions. Alonzo N. Whitcomb, on the other hand, who opened a small machine shop, the Worcester Lathe Company, declared in December: "I am afraid, however, the killing of the strike will involve harm of an old industry of Worcester and be abortive instead of regenerative."³⁰

27. Worcester Evening Post, October 14 and 20, 1915; Worcester Telegram, October 14, 1915; Labor News, October 16 and 23, 1915.

28. Worcester Evening Post, October 14, 1915; Worcester Telegram, October 15, 1915; Labor News, October 16, 1915.

29. Worcester Evening Post, October 14, 1915; Worcester Telegram, October 15, 1915; Labor News, October 16, 1915.

30. Worcester Evening Post, December 27, 1915; Worcester Telegram, December 26, 1915.

Leland-Gifford's representative, Albert J. Gifford, partner of William H. Leland, testified on Friday, October 15, that his company would not engage in negotiations with his employees. For that attitude, he was sharply criticized by Commissioner Bump.³¹ Later "evidence of an MTA blacklist was brought out during the examination of John W. Olson of Auburn, formerly a foreman in the Leland-Gifford Company."³² The evidence was a letter from the Putnam Machine Company of Fitchburg, where he had sought employment since the Leland-Gifford strike. The letter suggested that although Olson was discharged by Leland-Gifford, he was considered a striker by Leland-Gifford and as such was unacceptable as an employee at the Putnam Machine Company.³³

While Crompton and Knowles was not on strike, the men had prepared for one as early as September 29, pending the results of the hearing. Monday, October 18, 1915, was the date when George F. Hutchins, the general superintendent of Crompton and Knowles, stated that he would confer with his men if they withdrew their demands. The men agreed to Hutchins' conditions, which were confirmed by the entire board of directors of Crompton and Knowles and announced by Lucius J. Knowles, the company's treasurer. The state board then announced on October 19 that the Crompton and Knowles hearing was temporarily suspended.³⁴ However, the conference produced little, as the 1,500 Crompton and Knowles workers, frustrated by the stonewalling of their employer, finally struck on October 28, just before the hearing's conclusions were announced.³⁵

During the October 19 and 20 sessions of the Board, much interest was expressed at the Norton Grinding Company's employment procedures, including discharges and lock-outs.³⁶ As early as

31. Worcester Evening Post, October 15, 1915; Worcester Telegram, October 16, 1915.

32. Worcester Evening Post, October 15, 1915; Labor News, October 16, 1915.

33. Ibid.

34. Worcester Evening Post, October 18 and 19, 1915; Worcester Telegram, October 19 and 20, 1915; Labor News, October 23, 1915.

35. Worcester Evening Post, October 28, 1915; Worcester Telegram, October 28 and 29, 1915; Labor News, October 30, 1915.

36. For the relationship between the Norton Grinding Company and the Norton Company, see Cheape Family Firm, p. 73.

September 25, 1915, the president and general manager of the Norton Grinding Company, George I. Alden, met with his employees and refused to accept any of the union's demands. Despite Alden's stand and the fact that twenty employees who had been active in organizing workers were discharged around October first, the employees, represented by a committee, presented demands that were identical with those of the striking machinists. The employer rejected these demands, and the employees met on October 8 to consider a strike.³⁷ "It was at the request of Commissioners [Frank M.] Bump and Charles G. Wood that the Norton Grinding Co. employees Friday night [October 8] deferred a strike vote, although it was evident that the sentiment of the workingmen was strongly in favor of walking out to enforce their demands [for the eight-hour day and better wages]," according to the *Telegram*.³⁸ In fact, Commissioner Bump "declared that the action of the Norton Grinding Co. is a positive surprise to the board, in view of the negotiations pending to bring the strikes to an end."³⁹

George I. Alden stated on October 9, "this firm does not propose to have its business held up by Mr. Gilmour or anyone else without cause It does not propose to allow Mr. Gilmour or any outside person or interest to interfere with its business, tell us how to run it, or interfere with our honest endeavor to have a happy working family of all of us employed by the company."⁴⁰ Gilmour responded: "Members of the union who were locked out met . . . and it was unanimously voted not to sign the application blanks furnished by Norton Grinding Co. The men feel that they have as much right to organize as the National Metal Trades Association, of which Norton Grinding Co. is a member. I told the men that I consider it unfair and un-American for employers to lock out their employees and that it shows the spirit that animates the employers."⁴¹

Commissioner Bump, President Alden of the Norton Grinding Company, and IAM organizer Gilmour were all referring to

37. Worcester Evening Post, October 19, 1915; Worcester Telegram, October 19 and 20, 1915; 1915 Annual Report of the State Board of Conciliation and Arbitration (Boston, 1916), pp. 202-204.

38. Worcester Telegram, October 10, 1915.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

a systematic lock-out that was instigated by a posted notice shutting down the Norton Grinding Company shops on October 9, 1915:

Norton Grinding shops will shut down Saturday, October 9, 1915. All those wishing to go to work on Monday, October 11, please report to the superintendent this morning at the receiving department.

The employees who wanted to work on Monday, October 11, were required to sign cards which read as follows:

I hereby promise to be at work on my present job on Monday morning October 11, 1915. I will not go on strike or knowingly do anything contrary to the best interests of the Norton Grinding Company.

While the employers stated before the State Board that 245 of 570 accepted the condition of employment and resumed work on Monday, October 11, the State Board ruled that the card-signing was in violation of sections eighteen and nineteen of chapter 514 of the acts of 1909:

Section 18: No person shall by intimidation or force, prevent or seek to prevent a person from entering into or continuing in employment of any person or corporation.

Section 19: No person shall, himself or by his agent, coerce or compel a person into a written or oral agreement not to join or become a member of a labor organization as a condition of his securing employment or continuing in the employment of such person.⁴²

In addition, the Board found during its October 20 session that the Worcester branch of the NMTA maintained an employment agency, which in turn maintained a "black list" of employees seeking work. Donald Tulloch, secretary of the Worcester branch of the NMTA, was asked to explain the uses made of record cards of discharged metal trades employees. In its November 20, 1915, report, the State Board

42. 1915 Report of SBCA, pp. 204-205.

of Conciliation and Arbitration condemned the Norton practices as well as those of the Worcester branch of the NMTA.⁴³

Indeed, several years later Norton's own files revealed that George I. Alden and John C. Spence, the Norton Grinding Company superintendent, had orchestrated the lock-out. In a letter to a Mr. Cushman, the manager of the Morse Twist Drill Company of New Bedford, Spence not only outlined the Norton "plan," but went further in his description of it:

We feel that the dumping out of the cause of most factory troubles was a great thing for us. We also feel that we could not have done this if it had not been for a strong and just Metal Trades Association. Most of the members of Metal Trades stuck to the principle that they would not hire men who were out on strike.⁴⁴

More interestingly, he depicted his technique in isolating the locked-out men on Monday, October 11, when they came to clean out their lockers. Only one door was left open and each man was checked off as he entered the shop. To prevent a "demonstration parade," only five men at a time were permitted to enter the building, and the police were summoned to maintain order. The locked-out men were forced to remove any union or eight-hour signs. Spence supplied a "foreman guide" for each group, and "told them that if they communicated with any men working in our plant, except the guide . . . , that we would not hesitate to knock them on the head with a chunk of steel and throw them out of the window."⁴⁵

The State Board of Conciliation and Arbitration's initial report was a strongly-worded indictment of the manufacturers' conduct both before and during the strike, particularly the manufacturers' refusal to submit the eight-hour day issue to arbitration. The Board concluded that the Declaration of Principles "appears to be a contract between the several members of the association, but it does not appear that it is a contract to which the employees are a party." The board found in particular that "the contention of the employers, that wages and hours of labor are not proper subjects of arbitration as defined in the 'Declaration of

43. Ibid., pp. 205-206; Worcester Evening Post, October 20 and 23, 1915.

44. John C. Spence to Mr. Cushman, November 22, 1917.

45. Ibid.

Principles of the National Metal Trades Association,' is not sustained." The Board further recommended an immediate conference leading to a settlement of the strike, either through negotiations or arbitration. Since the employees were willing to accept arbitration, the report clearly supported their side in the dispute.⁴⁶

Despite the Board's findings, the machinists' strike was essentially over by January 1, 1916, in good part because of the strike-breaking tactics of the manufacturers and the Worcester branch of the MTA. While the Board, at its October 20th session, accepted the Morgan Spring Company's version of the discharge of thirty-nine men on September 27, it would appear that Morgan Spring used the same tactics as the Norton Company.⁴⁷ But a number of other factors also have to be considered as leading to the strike's failure. Joseph Gilmour, the principal organizer, was beset by many problems, including police harassment, the lack of strike funds because of the rapidity with which Local 339 of the IAM recruited its members in 1915, as well as limited aid from both the national union and the Worcester CLU, as well as the simple fact that Gilmour was spread thin, covering other strikes as well as Worcester's. As a result, he suffered both physical and mental breakdowns and had to be relieved at critical times.⁴⁸

In addition, the diversity of manufacturing in Worcester meant that a strike in any one industry would not disrupt Worcester's economy. Thus, "most of the men would not scab upon another but to go from one trade to another in time of strike does not seem improper to the great mass of them." One source refers to a Crompton and Knowles machinist who displaced a hotel worker, who in turn immediately found a position at Crompton and Knowles.⁴⁹ The lack of union consciousness that has been mentioned earlier can be seen most clearly in the machinists' strike of 1915, when the workers were unable to employ a united front. One interesting example of this failure is that the molders at Rice, Barton, & Fales were also on strike. Although the machinists and molders cooperated

46. 1915 Report of SBCA, pp. 201-202.

47. Ibid, p. 206; Worcester Evening Post, October 20, 1915; Labor News, editorial "Worcester's Open Shoppers," October 23, 1915.

48. Zeuch, "Metal Trades Strikes of 1915," p. 6; see Worcester Evening Post, Worcester Telegram, and Labor News, September-December, 1915.

49. Zeuch, "Metal Trades Strikes of 1915," p. 35.

to a considerable degree, there were class and craft delineations. As one analyst stated: "The molders are considered in the labor world as being somewhat exclusive, indeed. They appear especially so to some members of the Machinists Union."⁵⁰

Either because of lack of strike funds or because of attractive job opportunities in other cities, such as Springfield and Bridgeport, where Remington Arms, desperate for help, cut its work week from 55 to 48 hours (over six days) and increased wages by one dollar a day, half to two-thirds of the strikers left Worcester. An historian of the machinists believes "That the IAM's successes were intimately associated with tight labor markets, not with the results of effective organization. In general, the period 1912 through 1916 was not a good one for the union as a bargaining institution."⁵¹ Foreign-born workers were a special case. Some of them had been specifically brought over by employers such as Norton, and they were intensely loyal to the company. Others held low skill jobs in companies such as Crompton and Knowles. Last but far from least, many of the workers did not speak English. It was reported that "all during the strike not one address or speech of any kind was made to the Finns, French Canadians, Swedes, Armenians, and so on, in their native tongue by any union organizer." That fact indicates "a decided defect in the organization, for the men who have filled the shops since the strike have been largely local workmen of these nationalities."⁵²

A final factor would be the failure of Worcester's public and private leaders to act more decisively to end the strike. While Mayor George M. Wright complied with the law (chapter 618, Legislative Acts of 1914) requiring him to notify the State Board of Conciliation and Arbitration of the strike, "and endeavored to induce the parties to join in a conference for the purpose of composing the differences," he did little else when the employers refused such a conference.⁵³ When the *Worcester Evening Post* called for a Citizens' Conference on Labor Trouble to arbitrate the strike, a committee of eight men was finally

50. Lester P. White, "Elements Affecting Organized Labor in its Relationship with the Worcester Branch National Metal Trades Association Since 1916" (M.A. thesis, Clark University, 1924), p. 43.

51. Labor News, November 20, December 11 and 25, 1915; Perlman, Machinists, p. 43.

52. Zeuch, "Metal Trades Strikes of 1915," p. 35.

53. 1915 Report of SBCA, p. 200.

assembled, but the employers refused to meet with them.⁵⁴ Mayor Wright's meager efforts to end the strike were sharply criticized by John Reardon, a former leader of the Street Railway Union and the Democratic mayoral candidate in 1915. However, the overwhelming victory of Wright, a wire manufacturer who in 1915 had locked out his own employees at his Palmer plant, indicated that new political leadership was not to be forthcoming. Wright's victory "symbolized the continuing limits on not only working-class political action but also working-class trade-union activity."⁵⁵

As it turned out, the final attempt to end the strike occurred on December 27, 1915, when the Ministers' Association requested that the Chamber of Commerce act in the matter. On January 1, 1916, the *Worcester Evening Post* announced that the Chamber of Commerce would take action. However, on January 15 the *Post* accused the MTA of obstructing such a meeting and declared that the newspaper itself had been threatened by Donald Tulloch, the secretary of the Metal Trades Association. The meeting between the clergy and the Chamber of Commerce was finally held on February 17, 1916, but the ministers did not take up the machinists' strike -- they simply addressed the need to prevent further industrial disagreements. While the *Post's* editorial of February 18 favorably discussed the ministers' suggestion for a permanent conciliation commission, it also pointed out that the machinists' strike was still on.⁵⁶

The *Post* was wrong -- the strike was long over. The Board of Conciliation and Arbitration had issued certificates of normalcy to Norton Grinding Company on January 7, 1916, to Leland-Gifford on January 11, and to Crompton and Knowles on April 19.⁵⁷ Although the *Post* insisted that the Board was wrong because Leland-Gifford had dropped its night shift and Norton Grinding was only producing at twenty-five to forty percent of its pre-strike output, even the Central Labor Union began to question the success of the machinists' strike, at its December 22, 1915 meeting.⁵⁸ Although at that meeting the CLU renewed its pledge of support to the machinists, at its April

54. Worcester Evening Post, October 7, 1915; Worcester Telegram, October 1, 1915.

55. Rosenzweig, Eight Hours, p. 20.

56. Worcester Evening Post, February 18, 1916.

57. 1915 Report of SBCA, pp. 226, 228; 1916 Report of SBCA, pp. 102-103.

58. Labor News, December 25, 1915.

4, 1916, meeting the CLU called off its assessments, ostensibly because the machinists were all at work. In fact, the CLU had raised only about twelve thousand dollars for the machinists.⁵⁹

A contemporary account of the machinists' strike argued that there was the possibility of another strike in the spring of 1916 if the membership of the machinists' union continued to increase, the more radical organizers rather than the local leaders of the machinists' union took control, and the "autocratic" metal trades manufacturers, continued to hold sway.⁶⁰ There would be another strike in the metal trades industry within a few years, but that strike would be a smaller one involving between 500 and 700 men, mounted by the molders' union in 1919-1920 under different economic, political, and social conditions. However the Worcester branch of the National Metal Trades Association, together with a more "controlled media," would play a major role in breaking it.

Meanwhile, Worcester returned to "normalcy." A study by the social service committee of the Memorial Hospital Aid Society concluded that trade unions had not taken an "active part in the campaign for social betterment and as a unit, cooperating with other organizations they take no part."⁶¹ The end of the machinists' strike and the re-election of Mayor Wright can be considered as a victory for the anti-union and open-shop policy of the Worcester branch of the NMTA and the metal trades manufacturers, who had systematically employed stonewalling tactics, firings, lock-outs, and blacklists in intimidating the forces for unionization in Worcester. No matter how weak the CLU and IAM efforts had been, they learned that any worker militancy would not be tolerated by Worcester's leadership, particularly that in the metal trades.⁶²

It is not surprising that George Jeppson would play an important role in local, state, and national politics. The tight ship he ran as the key executive at the Norton Grinding Company could be translated into Republican political victories, especially enhanced by Jeppson's political use of foremen in Worcester's Ward One and his

59. *Ibid.*, April 18, 1916.

60. Zeuch, "Metal Trades Strikes of 1915," pp. 37-40.

61. Memorial Hospital Aid Society, Social and Industrial Conditions of Worcester (Worcester, 1916), p. 50.

62. See Howell John Harris, "Give Us Some Less of That Old-Time Corporate History," Labor History, XXVIII (1987), especially pp. 78-79. Harris neglects the attempt to organize Norton in 1901, however.

"Swedish connection" in Wards 1, 2, 6, and 7.⁶³ Jeppson's and Norton's role in Republican state and national affairs could be foretold by his election on April 25, 1916, to the Massachusetts delegation to the Republican National Convention. A few days later, he wrote to Representative Samuel Winslow: "If you will look at the average caucus in Ward 1, you will find it larger by probably 30 to 100% than the average of the other Wards. This is brought about by a little intelligent direction that the other Wards lack."⁶⁴ Norton's and Jeppson's interests were served well by the election of the first Swedish mayor, Pehr G. Holmes, in December of 1916, over John Reardon, the Democratic candidate and unionist. Holmes was re-elected in 1917 and 1918.⁶⁵

While the local political scenario of the period immediately after the machinists' strike certainly seems to reflect the anti-union and open-shop mentality of the "City of Prosperity," Worcester was drawn with the rest of the nation into World War I. Increasingly, at that point, there was the need for more production as well as for more workers. Increasingly, the metal trades industry and the NMTA had to reassess its wages-and-hours scales as the war progressed, and as the federal government began to set up "boards" intended to assure that nothing conflicted with the nation's military needs. Increasingly, "new immigrants" had to be hired as workers, although often only as laborers.⁶⁶

In conclusion, the machinists' strike of 1915 and its failure should be viewed only as the tip of the iceberg in terms of the interests of the metal trades manufacturers and the Worcester branch of the NMTA. In May of 1916, Donald Tulloch, secretary of both

63. See George N. Jeppson to Nils Ebbeson, Arthur Nelson, and Ernest Enberg, May 3, 1916, and to John G. Johnson, April 28, 1916.

64. Jeppson to Rep. Samuel Winslow, May 3, 1916.

65. Kenneth J. Moynihan, "Swedish Elected Officials, 1899-1931," (Community Studies Program, Assumption College, 1978), p. 8, and Moynihan, "Swedes and Yankees in Worcester Politics: A Protestant Partnership" (Community Studies Program, Assumption College, 1979), pp. 8-10.

66. See Norton Company Memorandum -- Employment Dept., March 1, 1917, which states the percent of non-citizens by nationality (forty-six percent of the employees were non-citizens) and Norton Company Memorandum -- Training Department, March 29, 1917, which states the names of Greek employees. See also William Butler (employment dept.) to Mr. Jeppson, Nationalities in Plant, September 1, 1917, bar/graph, which indicates that only twenty-four percent of Norton's employees were Swedish.

the Employers' Association of Worcester and the Worcester branch of the NMTA, invited Dr. Samuel B. Woodward, president of the Worcester County Institution for Savings, to a meeting on May 19, "to discuss the purpose and policy of these two Associations with reference to the Open Shop."⁶⁷ Woodward responded on May 16: "I do not think it proper for me as President of a Savings Bank dealing with all classes in the community and largely with wage earners to be officially present at a meeting to which only those interested in one side of the matter are involved. It would be very easy to misconstrue my attitude on the matter of the open shop with which I have of course officially nothing to do and in which I should officially have no interest."⁶⁸

Jerome George, then president of the Worcester branch of the NMTA, wrote Woodward a long letter on June 5, 1916, in which he stated that there was no antagonism between the Employers' Association of Worcester and the "wage earners." He argued that "the opposition to the employers comes not from wage earners but from two classes of citizens -- first, those wholly without experience as shop workers or shop managers; and second, from members of the American Federation of Labor who are opposed to work and to about everything else from welfare work to national preparedness." George concluded that the situation was clearly recognized in Hartford by the fact of "active participation" by practically all bankers there in the Employers' Association.⁶⁹

George's and Tulloch's relentless pursuit of the open-shop and their antagonism towards organized labor is suggestive of the offensive that the metal trades manufacturers and the Worcester branch of the National Metal Trades Association, as well as such satellites as the Employers' Association of Worcester County, launched in the early twentieth century against their workforce, in the name of the "City of Prosperity." In the final analysis, however, the Worcester machinists' strike of 1915, the largest strike in the history of the city, was predestined to fail because of the climate of opinion in the city dating back to the late nineteenth century. At that time, an informal network of business, social, and cultural ties bound Worcester's industrial elite; this network led to local mergers rather than the standard process of consolidation, with national trusts taking

67. Donald Tulloch to Samuel B. Woodward, May 11, 1916.

68. Woodward to Tulloch, May 16, 1916.

69. Jerome R. George to Dr. S. B. Woodward, June 5, 1916.

over local firms. Worcester's unique arrangement was fortified through recruitment patterns of industrial leaders that "tended to ensure a continuing high degree of homogeneity in background and outlook, particularly in the metal trades."⁷⁰

A more formal path towards success in the metal trades industry meant attending Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI). Donald Tulloch, secretary of the Worcester branch of the National Metal Trades Association, wrote a book, *Worcester: City of Prosperity*, commemorating the holding of the 1914 NMTA convention in the city. He stated that seventy-two WPI graduates had reached key positions in the metal trades. Charles G. Washburn, himself a WPI graduate and the founding father of the Wire Goods Company, mentioned in his book, *Industrial Worcester*, 275 graduates who were then industrial leaders in Worcester. In addition, the opening of the Boys' Trade School in 1910 contributed to another echelon in the metal trades, the foremen. Moreover, the presence in Worcester of these graduates "tend[ed] to make the city one in which a feeling of solidarity as opposed to labor may be and is, easily fostered."⁷¹ The result was devastating to the machinists of the city in 1915, when they initiated the largest strike in the city's history and encountered more formal opposition, the Worcester branch of the NMTA.⁷²

70. Rosenzweig, Eight Hours for What We Will, pp. 14-15.

71. Ibid. See Donald Tulloch, Worcester: City of Prosperity (Worcester, 1914), p. 157; Washburn, Industrial Worcester, pp. 308-309; White, "Elements Affecting Organized Labor," p. 26.

72. See Rosenzweig, Eight Hours for What We Will, p. 15, for a discussion of the shift of the "solidarity against labor" from informal social and business networks to more formal arrangements, such as local trade groups in the early twentieth century, including the Worcester branch of the NMTA.