

# History

A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Spring, 1992  
Volume 27, Number 1



*St. Paul in celebration, 1924. This photo from the Gibson-Wright collection shows St. Paul during the years of labor turmoil that followed World War I. The 1880s city hall-county courthouse is on the left, with the St. Paul Athletic Club beyond it in this view looking east down Fourth Street. See W. Thomas White's account, beginning on page 4, of the 1922 Shopmen's Strike in the Northwest.*

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**Acknowledgements:** The postcard views on pages 3, 21 and 22 were loaned to *Ramsey County History* by Robert J. Stumm, author of the article on St. Paul's Fish Hatchery, beginning on page 21. The drawing of American POWs in the Philippines on page 15 is by Benjamin Charles Steele, also a survivor of the Bataan Death March and is from the book, *Soldier of Bataan* by Philip S. Brain, Jr. The drawing is used with the permission of the book's publisher, the Rotary Club of Minneapolis. Photographs with the article, "Growing Up in St. Paul," beginning on page 18, are from the author and used with his permission. Photographs on pages 24, 29 and 31 are from the collections of the Ramsey County Historical Society. All other photographs in this issue are from the audio-visual collections of the Minnesota Historical Society.

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Publication of *Ramsey County History* is supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie, Jr., and by a contribution from Reuel D. Harmon.

## A Message from the Editorial Board

**T**he Spring issue of our magazine inaugurates a new feature that focuses on the personal experiences of individuals growing up in St. Paul or Ramsey County. Willard (Sandy) Boyd, who grew up in St. Anthony Park as the son of Dr. Willard Boyd, director of the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus, has written the first memoir that begins this new feature.

A graduate of the University of Minnesota Law School, Sandy Boyd was president of the University of Iowa from 1969 to 1981. He is now president of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago.

Boyd writes about his youth in Ramsey County during the Great Depression. We learn first hand, for example, what the great droughts of 1934 and 1936 meant to him and his friends. Editorial Board members hope that others will share their experiences with our readers.

—John M. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board

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## *A Nationwide Sense of Crisis*

# The 1922 Shopmen's Strike in St. Paul and t

*W. Thomas White*

Following victory in the First World War, the United States entered upon its modern era, and St. Paul was the preeminent rail center of the greater Northwest. The city's foremost citizen, railroad magnate James J. Hill, had played a fundamentally important role in the nation's and the city's development before his death in 1916. Through the construction and effective operation of his Great Northern Railway (GN), the Empire Builder, as Hill had come to be called, had opened up and fostered economic development in the region by carving metropolitan corridors of enterprise through the northern tier states from St. Paul to Seattle.

St. Paul was headquarters for the so-called Hill lines, which included the Great Northern, Northern Pacific, and Chicago, Burlington & Quincy railroads. Later, the city's position as a major rail center would diminish as the Burlington Northern—itsself the direct descendant of the Hill lines and the short-lived Northern Securities Company that Hill and Edward H. Harriman founded in 1901—dispersed its offices west and south of Minnesota. That decline occurred a half century later, however. At the close of 1918, the Hill lines and other transportation companies, with state government, formed the economic bedrock upon which the city flourished.

With the railroads, the nation's first big business, came an enormous work force to operate and maintain the industry's lines and equipment. Railroad employees became a fundamentally important part of the city's corollary position as a labor center. Their campaigns to organize collectively, subsequent union activities at system-wide headquarters in St. Paul, and increasingly, their willingness to engage actively in politics at a local and national level, inherently affected the city's general populace.

Railroad workers had made dramatic gains during the Progressive Era. The 1916 Adamson Act, reluctantly advocated in that election year by President Woodrow Wilson, established the eight-hour day for operating workers, who ran



*Jule M. Hannaford*

the trains, engaged in interstate commerce. After America's entry into the First World War, Wilson established the federal Railroad Administration (RA) to operate the nation's chaotic rail system. Before the management of the roads was returned to the private sector in 1920, the RA, anxious to avoid any labor turbulence on the rails, extended a number of benefits, including the eight-hour day, increased pay, improved working conditions, and the right of union membership, to all railroad employees.

After the Great War ended, however,

federal support for those gains began to erode. Railroaders reacted angrily. Their frustration found its most spectacular expression in the Shopmen's Strike of 1922. Arguably the greatest strike of the 1920s, that conflict was the first truly national labor conflict on the rails since the Pullman Boycott and Strike of 1894, itself the greatest strike of the nineteenth century. St. Paul, as headquarters for management and labor, inexorably became a center for the conflict as it was waged throughout the Northwest against the backdrop of the hysterical (and often anti-labor) anti-communist Red Scare, rising political discontent manifest in the Nonpartisan League and the new Farmer-Labor Party, and the still bitter legacy of the wartime loyalty campaigns in Minnesota and the other northern tier states.

### **The Discontents of 1919**

One of the first signs of dissatisfaction on the Hill lines occurred in February, 1919, when an estimated 1,200 shopmen staged a wildcat strike at Great Falls, Montana. Angered by the Great Northern's alleged violations of work rules, the strikers ignored instructions from their national leaders, as well as Railroad Administration protocols, and directly lodged their grievances with RA Director General Walker D. Hines. Unruly for a number of years, the shopcrafts, led by Henry Hudson, illustrated the underlying tensions which threatened to divide the general labor movement, as well as the tensions felt between regional officers of the Railroad Administration and railway workers during the nation's demobilization period. Under pressure from the RA, the carriers and the American Federation of Labor's (AFL) Railway Employees Department (RED), the strikers soon agreed to return to work and submit their grievances through the proper channels. Their underlying dis-

# the Northwest



*The Great Northern Railway's Dale Street shops about 1925, three years after the Shopmen's Strike. C. P. Gibson photo.*

satisfactions continued to smolder, however.

A more serious disturbance occurred that summer. At issue was a demand for a general wage increase to keep pace with inflation, which was sharply eroding the railway workers' standard of living. Shopmen, particularly machinists, were among the most insistent of railroaders, calling for an increase from the 68 cents per hour, approved in mid-1918, to 85 cents per hour so that they would earn a wage equivalent to that of shipyard machinists. The RA's Board of Railway Wages and Working Conditions took the matter under advisement until July 16 when it confessed its inability to resolve the issue.

While the wage crisis was under consideration, there were clear signs that the RA would not tolerate a national strike, even under peacetime conditions. Federal Manager W.L. Mapother confidentially informed his northwestern counterpart,

Jule M. Hannaford (of the Northern Pacific before the federal control period), of the situation on the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis railroad. The strike leader, C.F. Jackson, was in Mapother's view, "an irresponsible and dangerous man; in fact, nearly an anarchist." To accede to his demands for recognition and a wage increase "would be tantamount to a recognition of I.W.W. [Industrial Workers of the World] or Bolshevism." Then, presumably to reassure Hannaford in his own dealings in the Northwest, Mapother expressed his confidence that "the Administration will fully sustain us in our position—in fact, I have received assurances that the Management will be supported to the limit."<sup>1</sup>

Unaware of or undaunted by the hardening federal attitude, large numbers of shopmen from St. Paul to Seattle joined their counterparts in other regions and followed the example of Chicago shopmen who walked off the job on August 1. The

strike was not universal. Nonetheless, pro-strike sentiment was sufficiently widespread to alarm RA Regional Director R.H. Aishton, who warned all rail carriers operating in the Northwest that the strikers "are endeavoring to get [even] foremen to join them and are passing resolutions that foremen who do not quit work will not be permitted to continue in service when the men now on strike return to work."<sup>2</sup>

The situation seemed ominous, indeed, when H.H. Parkhouse interrupted Louis W. Hill's vacation at Pebble Beach, California, to report that 5,959 men were out on the Great Northern alone, including "3,322 from various shops; 1,422 from repair track; 1,215 from round house."<sup>3</sup> However uneven the strike turnout, unauthorized walkouts did occur at all important rail centers in the region. The growing momentum of the wildcat strike probably convinced RED President Bert M. Jewell to call for a strike vote over Hines' propos-

al that a general wage increase be deferred until a permanent board was named to decide such issues. On August 4, Jewell informed President Wilson that Hines' proposal would be unacceptable unless the RED rank-and-file decided otherwise, an event no one seriously anticipated.

Wilson, preoccupied by his campaign for the League of Nations and by his deteriorating health, countered four days later with a program which he hoped would reduce the cost of living by attacking profiteering and by a series of measures designed to hold down prices through the extension of wartime regulatory agencies and the sale of wartime surpluses. To mollify rail workers, he offered a 4 cents-per-hour increase—they had asked for 17 cents—and warned that a higher general increase would inevitably raise, not lower, the cost of living. On August 15, the remaining shopmen on strike in the Northwest followed the lead of those in St. Paul and elsewhere and returned to work. Although they initially had rejected Wilson's offer, under pressure from their national leaders they reluctantly agreed to end the dispute, which was too disorganized to have succeeded in any event, and waited to see the outcome of the fight in Congress over whether the railroad industry should continue under federal control or be returned to the private sector.

All parties awaited the outcome of the national debate over postwar railroad policy. "At a meeting of the Eastern [railroad] Presidents' Conference . . . the question of wage agreements subsequent to January 1, and of possible strikes, was discussed," Northern Pacific President Howard Elliott informed his executive vice president. "Some gentlemen claimed to have information that it was proposed to have a general strike in December, and, if not then, in January or February, to enforce additional demands against the railroads." For his part, Vice President Charles Donnelly was "inclined to doubt that a general strike is contemplated," but in light of current trends, he recognized "that almost anything may happen."<sup>4</sup>

### **Wildcat Strike of 1920**

The following year witnessed continued unrest that threatened to escalate into a



*Charles Donnelly*

general nationwide strike, but the railroad managers and the Wilson administration successfully contained dissatisfaction in the industry. The jurisdictional conflict between the established Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen (BRT) and the Switchmen's Union of North America (SUNA) also played an important role in the 1920 dispute, as the BRT pressured the Wilson administration and management to counter SUNA's attempt to supplant it. However, all joined in the effort to squelch the wildcat strike in the late spring of 1920.

In September, 1919, SUNA President S.E. Heberling began a new drive for recognition of his organization, contending that it would defuse the IWW's appeal to disgruntled workers. At a September 7 meeting, all SUNA lodges in the Twin Cities "were instructed to affiliate with the Shop Men in order to get their support for the recognition that is due the Switchmen's Union to adjust grievances," Heberling informed RA Director of Operations W.T. Tyler. He urged Tyler "to use your influence with the management of the Hill Lines" to recognize SUNA's jurisdictional right to "adjust personal and individual grievances."

Such an arrangement was highly desirable, Heberling argued, in light of "the unsettled condition in the Northwest" where a "convention has been called to convene at Great Falls . . . by the agitators for the

One Big Union [a radical, class-conscious Canadian industrial union] proposition . . . [who] are agitating that the present class organizations are obsolete and that the only way to obtain results is by direct action." The roads remained unconvinced, since, as J.M. Rapelje observed, the BRT was solidly organized and "very sensitive on this point [recognition of SUNA]."<sup>5</sup>

Elements among the rank-and-file, however, declared a pox on both union houses and staged the Switchmen's Wildcat Strike in April. The strike was triggered immediately by the Milwaukee road's dismissal of John Gruneau, who had formed yet another union, the Chicago Yardmen's Association, in January to challenge both the BRT and SUNA. On April 1, 700 switchmen walked off the job in Chicago to protest the Milwaukee's action, and the strike spread rapidly, affecting districts from New York to Los Angeles.

The response by switchmen and yardmen in the Northwest was not strong. A Northern Pacific labor spy, "Operative No. 10," informed Chief Special Agent W.J. McFetridge on the April 9 meeting of Hill lines and Milwaukee road employees in St. Paul. He reported that "the Switchmen's Union of North America had been the goat for years," Milwaukee Yardmaster John Hennfet had declared, and expressed the opinion that the wildcat strike was nothing more than an attempt "to break up the body of switchmen that was now getting strong in the Northwest." An unidentified Great Northern switchman also had counseled delay, since "this is not going to hurt the General Managers nor the Capitalists, but it is going to hurt the public, . . . yourself and the taxpayers." Rather than walk out, he had urged the assembly "to wire President Heberlin[g] and also [BRT President William G.] Lee telling them . . . to either call a legal strike or we will all join the Yardmasters Association." The assembly did neither, but the expressed resentments suggested a high level of worker unrest despite the lack of strong sentiment to join in the wildcat action.<sup>6</sup>

There were pockets of resistance on the Northern Pacific and Great Northern lines—although by May 13, C.O. Jenks



*Employees of the Great Northern's Sheet Metal Department at the Dale Street shops, May 4, 1929. It is likely that not many of these men were involved in the walkout. Only 27.7 percent of GN's original shopcraft workers remained on the job after the strike ended. Art & Emma Photo, Washington, D.C.*

reported "none out on the Milwaukee," particularly in the Twin Cities. Although the Hill lines were not substantively affected in any direct fashion by the strike, its indirect effects were significant. "I regard [the] switchmen's strike for the amount of men who have left [the] service as the most destructive strike we have had," Ralph Budd observed, "as it is stopping many industries in [the] East and has prevented Eastern roads from moving equipment to Western lines." Such disruptions had the effect of "restricting business in Western territory particularly the lumber business which is having direct effect of gradually increasing lumber prices all over the United States."<sup>7</sup>

The West Coast was a different matter. The strike apparently spread to Portland and other points from California over the Southern Pacific, Spokane, Portland & Seattle (also part of the Hill lines), President L.C. Gilman confided to Budd and Donnelly. The strikers at Vancouver, Washington, were replaced easily, "but at Portland all our men, including our Assistant Yardmasters, went out, and up to this

time only four have returned and one additional man has been employed from the outside." BRT members and other workers were recruited eventually, but Gilman bewailed the "unfortunate occurrence. We were getting an excellent start. Had accumulated . . . a trifle over \$1,000,000, after deducting outstanding checks and audited vouchers," and the SP&S president predicted, "while I do not see how the present strife can last long, it will apparently last long enough to result in considerable confusion and loss."<sup>8</sup>

After securing the assent of the BRT and SUNA, on May 18 the railroads delivered an ultimatum to holdouts, declaring "all Yardmen" not reporting to work by 7 p.m., May 19, "will be considered as having left the service." "The ultimatum did not bring them back," Tyler noted, "but it did clear the decks, and now we can proceed to permanently fill the vacancies. We are calling the B. of R.T. to fill all crews at once. The strikers voted to stay out," Tyler continued, "but in our case these are mostly new men and where older men are included we are well rid of them."<sup>9</sup>

Although the wildcat strike failed, it did demonstrate the continuing restiveness of many workers on the nation's roads, and it illustrated the gulf that still divided operating and non-operating workers when jurisdictional issues were involved. Strikes and threatened walkouts were characteristic of the postwar years. Inflation combined with the rising expectations engendered by William Gibbs McAdoo's policies as RA director general in 1918 to create a new insistence by workers for better pay and working conditions in the "new era." The policies of compromise and delay on such demands by Hines and, after passage of the 1920 Transportation Act, the Railway Labor Board did not compensate for the rising cost of living and only intensified worker unrest. Seen in this light, the Shopmen's Strike of 1922 was the logical culmination, perhaps an inevitable one, of the trends begun in 1918. Although general railroad policy after the war may have illustrated the continuity between the Progressive Era and the 1920s, the pattern of railway labor relations represented a distinctly new departure.

## The Shopmen's Strike

The first truly national work stoppage since 1894, the 1922 shopmen's dispute proved to be the greatest strike of the decade. As such, it had a profound impact upon labor relations. In one sense that impact was a negative one for railway workers. The strike failed, and that failure ushered in the era of company unionism which prevailed in the industry until the advent of the New Deal. Yet, the strike had other, more positive effects. Its militant, often radical conduct was an important factor in the election of many pro-labor senators and congressmen in 1922, the La Follette/Wheeler protest ticket of 1924, and the passage of the 1926 Railway Labor Act which abolished the hated Railroad Labor Board (RLB) created by the Transportation Act and established the basic legal framework for labor relations that has operated to the present.

In one sense the strike was a protest against the new transportation act, which the rail unions had opposed bitterly, and its mediation agency, the RLB. As one of its first decisions, on July 21, 1920, the board had granted a wage increase that amounted to roughly 60 percent of the unions' demands. Although the inflation rate declined in the second half of that year, labor leaders in the industry felt the award was inadequate. Dissatisfaction increased when the board declared an absolute wage reduction in 1921 in response to the declining cost of living, a ruling the effects of which were aggravated by the board's April 14 decision to terminate the rules, working conditions and agreements instituted by Wilson's Railroad Administration.

A flurry of decisions in April, May, and June, 1922, further reduced the wages of maintenance-of-way, shopcraft, clerical and station forces, stationary engine and boiler room employees, signalmen and others. That turn of events precipitated a storm of criticism from labor organizations to whom it seemed the board had accepted *in toto* the carriers' demand that wages be driven back to pre-1920 levels. Labor's contention that increases were justified and, indeed, necessary was buttressed later by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics *Bulletin No. 354*, which held that, even before the 1922 reduction went

into effect, shopcraft wages were lower than those paid for comparable work in other industries. The shopmen demanded better wages, restoration of overtime pay for Sunday and holiday work and the abolition of the hated practice of contracting out shop work. At the same time, they expressed their resentment of the board's apparent inability or unwillingness to en-

force decisions unfavorable to the roads' management. strikers were outlaws and, accordingly, urged drastic action to end the conflict. Secretary of Labor James J. Davis and Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover sharply disagreed, contending there was some justice in the strikers' demands, while they urged appeals to moderates, such as Baltimore and Ohio President Daniel Willard, to effect some compromise.

Initially, Harding wavered between those two poles of opinion, while outside the administration individual Republicans expressed different views. Senator William E. Borah of Idaho had sounded a strong pro-labor note in a guest editorial in the June 17 issue of *Labor*. Damning the boards' wage reduction for maintenance-of-way workers, the peripatetic senator thundered that the decision was "IN ITS NATURE PEONAGE."

In the Northwest, moderate system officials attempted a separate peace with the roads. In St. Paul, R.A. Henning headed a delegation which met with Northern Pacific President Charles Donnelly and Great Northern President Ralph Budd in early July. Budd and Donnelly indicated their willingness to consider overtime pay and an end to the practice of contracting out machine work. Also, they agreed to try to persuade other lines in the region to consider similar concessions on the condition that the strike was called off and that labor agree to abide by the Labor Board's decisions. Henning then approached RED leader Jewell, who squelched any notion of an individual settlement. Any solution would have to be national in its application.

While the Harding Administration vacillated, worker bitterness grew as the roads issued ultimatums demanding that the striking shopmen return to work or be fired. The Hill lines attempted to coordinate strike policy with other transcontinentals, such as the Milwaukee road, and with the National Association of Railway Executives to combat the strikers and to mobilize public opinion. By the end of July, however, Budd was disgusted with such efforts and ready to go it alone.

"I think it most unfortunate that further aid is given the strike leaders in holding their men in line by having more conferences," he informed Howard Elliott, now



Ralph Budd

force decisions unfavorable to the roads' management.

Frustrated by the rail managers' and the RLB's continuing intransigence, more than 400,000 shopcraft and other non-operating employees went on strike on July 1. Within two weeks *Labor*, an important publication founded in 1919 by the independent brotherhoods and AFL in Washington, D.C., to agitate against the return of the railroads to private management, claimed that 600,000 were out.

The fact that the national walkout came on the heels of the widely reported violent clash between striking coal miners and strikebreakers in Williamson County, Illinois, heightened the sense of crisis that permeated the nation in 1922. President Warren G. Harding quickly took a hard-line stand, declaring his intention to force both parties to accept the Railroad Labor Board's decisions. However, privately he and the Republican Party generally were uncertain as to the proper response to the labor crisis. Within his cabinet, Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty insisted the



Great Northern Railway passenger train at Cokato, Minnesota, around 1900.

chairman of the Northern Pacific, "and also by calling together all the roads, the labor leaders are going to have their contention that the railroad Presidents are dictated to by a small group apparently sustained by our action, which speaks louder than words." Budd felt "it would be to the very best interest of the railroads to immediately disband the Association of Railway Executives. Otherwise . . . by these conferences we are enmeshing ourselves deeper and deeper into the tangle of national recognition of labor matters."<sup>12</sup>

Increasingly, any settlement of the strike turned on the issue of seniority—i.e., whether all striking shopmen would be reinstated with full seniority if they returned to work. On that issue, the Hill lines remained firm, pursuing their own policy. The rival Union Pacific's managers took a different tack and on September announced that any employee who returned to work by September 15 would "be given any pension rights which he had as of date June 30, 1922."<sup>13</sup>

The seniority issue was related to the retention of experienced workers, most of whom had gone on strike. On the Northern Pacific, for example, 7,950 shopmen out of a normal work force of 8,421 had walked out. Although the road had recruited 4,724 replacements by September 23, it was still short 3,226 shopmen. Many

returned to work over the ensuing months, but by March 27, 1923, only a little over 36 per cent of the railroad's pre-strike work force was employed.

Not all were welcomed back. The Northern Pacific began compiling its "black list" in August, 1922. "This is the time to carefully analyze the situation and if opportunity offers when [a] final settlement is made," General Mechanical Superintendent H.M. Curry insisted, "to rid the service of chronic agitators, fault finders, time servers, etc." Curry's office compiled a detailed list, now in the Northern Pacific Records at the Minnesota Historical Society, which shows more than 1,800 such "undesirables." The Great Northern experienced a high percentage of walkouts and probably pursued similar policies of weeding out "undesirables." Of its authorized 9,252 man work force in June, 1922, only 596 stood by the road. By January, 1923, roughly 2,000 had returned to work, and, all totaled, only 27.7 per cent of the GN's original shopcraft workers remained on the job after the strike's termination.<sup>14</sup>

Other roads faced varying degrees of strike activity. "U.P. reports from Omaha indicate 71% normal force," C.R. Lonergan wired from Spokane, itself an important center of strike activity. The hard-pressed Milwaukee road, where a pattern

emerged reminiscent of the disputes of the 1890s, was hit harder. "They lost 100%, including all electricians" at Spokane with heavy defections at other points, Lonergan reported. "Their situation [is] more difficult than N.P.," he informed his superiors, "because division headquarters in small towns where employes control local situation and hold public offices, making it difficult to protect strikebreakers, also experiencing more trouble than we are having on account [of] sympathetic attitude of train and engine men towards strikers."<sup>15</sup>

### The Railroads' Allies

As the full magnitude of the strike became apparent, powerful forces mobilized to defeat the insurgents. The roads effectively enlisted the support of individual shippers, banks, newspapers, and small businessmen represented by commercial clubs and chambers of commerce. A number of elected officials, including U.S. senators and representatives, also supported management. Montana's Republican Senator Henry L. Myers was particularly clear. "If the Government will not try to compromise this issue [seniority] and will afford adequate protection to those who are working the roads," Myers confided to Donnelly, "in my opinion, the roads will win this strike and the issue will be settled once and for all and settled right." Insisting that there was a basic "principle" involved in holding fast against employee demands, Myers was confident that if the roads won an unconditional victory, "railroad employees would think a long time before again plunging the country into the throes of a nationwide strike."<sup>16</sup>

Unable to secure a national compromise and anxious over the political effects of the coal strike and the threat of a complete breakdown of the transportation network, Harding threw off his ambivalent stance and sided with the hard liners in his cabinet by launching an assault upon the unions in an address to a joint session of Congress on August 18. Less than two weeks later, he overrode the moderates in his cabinet and his party by authorizing Daugherty to seek an injunction against the strikers from Judge James Wilkerson of Chicago, who promptly issued the order on September 23.

The Daugherty-Wilkerson injunction



bore a striking resemblance to the "omnibus injunctions" levied against the American Railway Union in the Pullman strike. The 1922 measure rested primarily on the grounds of preventing interference with interstate commerce and the mails, while it also stipulated that there was sufficient evidence of conspiracies to violate the Sherman Anti-Trust Act and the Transportation Act of 1920. Among the most extreme federal measures ever executed regarding labor relations, the injunction forbade union officials from picketing and from encouraging in any way any person to stop work on the railroads.

Despite the harshness of that measure and similar orders issued by lower courts, the injunctions had little impact on the strike's outcome. Most strikers had either already left the industry or were in the process of reaching agreements with individual roads along the lines of the September 13 Baltimore and Ohio formula, which did allow for seniority rights. The Northwest proved an exception to that general rule. There, only the Milwaukee road signed the B&O agreement. All had ample opportunity to reach a compromise settlement, since both regional RED officials and those of the operating brotherhoods made a number of attempts to effect a reasonable solution. However, the other carriers in the Pacific Northwest had decided to make a clean sweep of the matter as most of their counterparts in other regions did later, despite the B&O agreement. The Hill and Harriman lines simply recruited new employees, accepted a few repentant strikers, and quickly established their own company unions.

### **The Strikers' Supporters**

In the face of the Great Northern, Northern Pacific and the other northwestern carriers' intransigence, a variety of opponents to the roads' policies emerged. An analysis of the character of striker supporters suggests both the change and continuity of regional attitudes toward railway workers. Viewed from the standpoint of community loyalties, pro-strike sentiment basically was threefold. Respectable moderates, especially influential in the area's small towns, supported the AFL organizations led by Henning and persisted in their hope for an equitable settlement of the dispute.

Outside the boundaries of polite society, the Industrial Workers of the World experienced a resurgence of strength among those inclined toward the older forms of radical protest, particularly in the more isolated Rocky Mountain towns along the Great Northern's main line. Finally, adherents of the new radicalism surfaced with the arrival of William Z. Foster, leader of the Communist-affiliated Trade Union Educational League, who traveled to the northern tier states' principal urban centers to preach the gospel of "amalgamation."

A remarkably strong current of moderate, pro-striker sentiment existed in the Northwest, despite the hysteria connected with the Red Scare of 1919-1920 and the general industrial crisis of 1922. The persistence of such restraint seems all the more notable in view of anti-strike publicity campaigns combined with localized violent clashes and the general militant stance adopted by insurgents.

Senator Borah, with an uncommon sense of the region's popular, insurgent mood in 1922, became a leading critic of the Daugherty injunction which, he charged, was a flagrant violation of the Bill of Rights and common justice and likely would "break down the courts of the country." In *Labor's* August 5 issue, he lashed out at employers who, since the end of the war, had been cutting wages "irrespective of whether they were reduced below the poverty line or not." Further, Borah contended, the real cause of the coal and railroad strikes was the employers' unabashed intention to destroy the unions.<sup>17</sup>

Another measure of respectable opinion was manifested in sentiments expressed in the region's smaller communities, where remnants of older patterns and loyalties persisted. Of course, there was nothing approaching unanimity on this score, and the solidarity so clearly apparent in the populist 1890s was much eroded by 1922. Yet, despite the general trend of modernization, the Red Scare, local clashes between strikers and authorities and an upsurge of IWW and CP activity on the roads, a substantial body of community support for striking shopmen did exist, particularly in the region's small towns. Main Street in the Northwest was sufficiently aroused that Great Northern

officials concluded it was simply "useless" to dispatch strikebreakers to many small communities.<sup>18</sup>

The pro-strike sentiments expressed by community leaders, including merchants, farmers, non-railroad workers and others, as well as by elected local, state and national representatives, were characteristic of the mood of an earlier time. Although they still had force by 1922, they did so primarily in the more isolated towns of the Northwest. This is not to suggest that moderate opinion was nonexistent in St. Paul or the region's other cities, but rather, that it carried more weight in smaller, more isolated locales. A key factor in the persistence of those patterns was the comparative homogeneity and isolation of such communities, where citizens tended to band together to a greater degree, and which, by comparison, were more buffered from the shocks of modernity and its changes, while they also were more dependent upon the railroads.

### **IWW and Old Radicalism**

The second form of protest in the Shopmen's Strike was that of the IWW. Never particularly strong within the railroad industry, the Wobblies made a concerted effort to expand their influence on the roads after the devastating attacks on the organization during the war and the Red Scare. In late 1920, Charles Donnelly relayed "a Secret Service Agent's report" to Northern Pacific Vice President W.T. Tyler. After conversations with IWW General Secretary-Treasurer George Hardy and Railway Organization Committee Chairman Robert Russell in Chicago, the agent warned "they are making preparations for the biggest campaign in the history of the I.W.W. to get members from the different Brotherhoods . . . and . . . to get good live speakers into the center of all of the A.F. of L. organizations and blow them up from the inside." Harry Trotter was named to head up the western organizing effort based in Seattle, and although it was "a little early for this movement to have spread to our territory," Donnelly still felt it "desirable to keep [a] pretty close watch of the situation."<sup>19</sup>

During the Shopmen's Strike, IWW activity increased notably, particularly in the more isolated towns along the Great



St. Paul's railroad yards from Dayton's Bluff, as they looked around the time of the Shopmen's Strike. C. P. Gibson photo.

Northern line. Commenting on a December 26, 1922, article in the *Boston Transcript*, L.C. Gilman of Seattle offered his view of the extent of radical activity on the road to GN President Ralph Budd. Gilman agreed that "in Washington and Montana there is enough radicalism to furnish a foundation for such an article . . . but so far as there being any danger of the I.W.W. and other radicals undertaking to overthrow the Government I do not think such danger exists." The Great Northern work force did include "a pretty large I.W.W. element . . . and there is no doubt . . . that our trainmen and engine-men sympathized with the strikers." However, the strike's failure and the fact that the roads agreed to take back some strikers "has rather curbed the activity of the radical elements in our employ." By February, 1923, Gilman saw "more danger from radicalism among the farmers than among the workingmen."<sup>20</sup>

Gilman's assessment, essentially, was accurate, although he was too sanguine about the Wobblies' tenacity. Substantial IWW activity at remote points on the Great Northern, Northern Pacific, Milwaukee and Soo lines, continued through 1924 despite the best efforts of the railroads and sympathetic elected officials like North Dakota Governor R.A. Nestor.

In general, the railroads in 1922 were so alarmed by the specter of the IWW threat that they went to unusual and, in one instance at least, bizarre lengths to combat

the Wobblies. After several tries, W.A. Godwin (nicknamed Three Fingering Jack) finally persuaded the Great Northern to hire him so that he could preach an anti-IWW gospel to the strikers and persuade them to return to work. In early 1922 before the strike, "Three Fingering Jack" wrote Louis Hill of an alleged meeting between himself and James J. Hill at Spokane in 1908. Having "turned my back upon a criminal or careless career," Godwin claimed to possess "the gift of speech" and felt equipped to carry the gospel to the railroad towns and abolish "the rabid radical anarchism from the minds of the most violent men." Then working in Pendleton, Oregon, for the lumber interests, Godwin hoped to add to the 40,000 IWW cards he falsely claimed to have collected by offering his services to the region's railroads.

When the Shopmen's Strike erupted several months later, the Great Northern finally and inexplicably took the huckster's claims seriously and hired him to spread the word throughout its territory. GN Special Agent H.H. Hanson ran a hurried background check on Godwin. Clearly, "Three Fingering Jack" wildly exaggerated his claimed conversions, he reported, but "there are several of my informants who seem to think that this man has done a lot of good in keeping down agitation among the I.W.W. in lumber and logging camps throughout Washington." Hanson never was able to determine whether the man was "a reformed gambler or 'card shark,' "

or a convicted felon who "had done 'his bit.'" The Hill lines blinked that ambiguity in early September, however, and commissioned "Three Fingering Jack" to roam the Northwest preaching the gospel of company unionism and collecting IWW membership cards wherever he could until they dispensed with his services in December.<sup>22</sup>

### The New Radicalism

While the upsurge in IWW sentiment in comparatively isolated small towns represented the old radicalism, a new variety surfaced, inspired by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. William Z. Foster arrived on the scene to preach the gospel of "amalgamation" under the auspices of the Communist-affiliated Trade Union Educational League (TUEL). No stranger to the Northwest or its railroads, Foster had worked briefly on the Oregon Railway & Navigation Company and, as a reporter for Seattle's *Workingman's Paper*, had covered the Wobblies' free speech fight in Spokane. Accordingly, he had some reason to expect a favorable reception.

Foster had outlined his plan for the railroads in a 1921 pamphlet, *The Railroaders' Next Step*. He saw railway labor's historical experience as a progression from individual craft unions to cooperative endeavors such as those of the operating brotherhoods in the Progressive Era and those of the non-operating unions in their creation and refinement of the Railway Employees Department within the AFL. Shared experiences in the Railroad Administration, the Plumb Plan campaign to continue federal control of the nation's railroads, the launching of *Labor*, and the wage movements of the immediate post-war era, were important events in the creation of permanent alliances between the operating and non-operating unions.

The next logical step was "amalgamation," or the formation of one industrial union within the industry by the existing organizations. "It will be the logical and inevitable climax to all the get-together movements, radical and conservative, among railroad men for a generation. Amalgamation of the sixteen railroad craft unions into one industrial union," Foster declared, "that's the railroaders' next step." Once that was achieved, "we will go on and

on, building up still greater combinations of Labor, until finally we have the whole working class solidly united in one militant union. . . . That hour will sound the death knell of capitalism."<sup>23</sup>

Not surprisingly, railroad managers kept a close watch on the proponents of such doctrines. The National Civic Federation kept its members well informed of the TUEL's activities and the dangerous "Lenin-Foster plan to destroy the American Federation of Labor and the railway brotherhoods preliminary to the establishment of a 'Soviet Republic' in this country." The roads also received detailed reports on TUEL activities from their normal channels, which included the Thiel Detective Agency, the Corporations Auxiliary Company, and the Pinkerton's National Detective Agency.<sup>24</sup>

When the strike began, the Great Northern took special pains to discover the extent of TUEL influence in the region. Foster had only "a skeleton organization in the Northwest." Although some train service and shopcraft employees were sympathetic, J.A. Cochrane opined that "such movements go in cycles . . . [and] in the end, the trend of thought will revert back to the conservative methods adopted by labor organizations in years past and which built them up to their present financial and business success."<sup>25</sup>

However, neither the TUEL's efforts in the region's more urbanized areas nor those of the IWW in the interior towns significantly affected the strike's resolution. Although the roads worried over the potential impact of radicalism spreading widely among their employees, the left remained divided, isolated, and nearly powerless to mount a sustained, effective challenge to management. The more moderate, established shopcraft unions fared little better. They enjoyed the public sympathy of some merchants, farmers, the operating brotherhoods and a substantial segment of the general populace. Yet, they lost the strike. Only the Milwaukee railroad agreed to the Baltimore & Ohio compromise formula. The Hill lines rehired a few repentants but replaced all others and implanted their version of the company unionism so characteristic of the "lean years" throughout their domain.

## Conclusion

The years 1917-1923 were ones of great upheaval in Minnesota, the Northwest and the nation. The postwar turbulence was occasioned by organized labor's refusal to surrender the major gains in union recognition, wages and working conditions that it had made during World War I. Defeats in the Plumb Plan campaign and the effort to obstruct passage of the 1920 Transportation Act were followed by a series of postwar decisions by the Railroad Administration under Hines and by its successor, the Railroad Labor Board, that eroded workers' purchasing power. The eruption of the 1922 Shopmen's Strike and the reactions to it were a logical culmination of railroad labor policy in the Harding era.

Hidden within this perplexing, often contradictory period was another, more beneficent trend, however. Operating and non-operating unions had drawn closer together as a result of their shared experiences under the Railroad Administration and its successor, the Railroad Labor Board. Although the operating brotherhoods did not walk out with the shopmen in 1922, they did vow "that under no circumstances [would] they do the work or take the place of striking shop craft men."<sup>26</sup> Further, the independent brotherhoods cooperated closely with the AFL in the fights over the course of postwar railroad policy, and together they launched the publication *Labor* as a platform to broadcast their mutual concerns.

Despite the fact that the 1922 conflict proved a decisive defeat for the shopmen and ushered in an era of company unionism that held sway until the early days of the New Deal, it nonetheless had important political consequences. 1922 was an election year, and railroaders joined with other disaffected citizens to register their protests. Throughout the Northwest, they played an important role in supporting candidates in both parties who had supported their struggles. Senators Borah of Idaho, Burton K. Wheeler of Montana, and Clarence C. Dill of Washington, as well as others, had identified themselves with labor's and farmers' concerns. Their victories were due in no small measure to the railroaders' votes and work on their behalf.

In Minnesota, the newly founded Farmer-Labor Party made dramatic gains. Most notably, Henrik Shipstead decisively defeated incumbent Republican Senator Frank B. Kellogg. Farmer-Laborite Shipstead won over 325,000 (47 per cent + of the votes) statewide to Kellogg's nearly 242,000 (35 per cent +), leaving Democratic challenger Anna D. Olesen a distant third with a little more than 123,000 (17 per cent +) of the votes. Ramsey County with its heavy concentration of railroaders surpassed the statewide endorsement of Shipstead, giving him over 48 per cent of the vote, compared with 32 per cent + for Kellogg and 19 per cent + for Olesen. In the special senatorial election to fill the deceased Knute Nelson's office the following year, Ramsey County again supported the Farmer-Labor candidate. Magnus Johnson easily carried the state with 290,000 (57 per cent +) of the votes to Republican J.A.O. Preus' 195,000 (38 per cent +) and Democrat James A. Carley's 19,000 (3 per cent +). The race was tighter in Ramsey County, but with labor's support Johnson won a majority with more than 51 per cent of the vote, compared with Preus' 40 per cent + and Carley's 8 per cent +.

1924 was an important presidential election year, and St. Paul and county voters again registered a strong protest against the established parties. Farmers and workers were furious over the perceived lack of real choices offered by the national political parties—the Republicans predictably named Calvin Coolidge for their standard bearer, while the deeply divided Democrats nominated conservative John W. Davis. As an alternative, insurgent Wisconsin Republican Robert M. La Follette and Montana Democrat Burton K. Wheeler formed a Progressive ticket with substantial aid from the railroad brotherhoods and AFL unions. Coolidge prevailed, of course, but the La Follette-Wheeler ticket won more than 5,000,000 protest votes nationally. In Minnesota, as in the northern tier states generally, the Progressive ticket did particularly well, again displacing the Democrats who got only 56,000 votes, as the principal opposition party, with 339,000 votes for La Follette to Coolidge's 421,000.



The Union Depot, left, and a view of Fourth and Sibley Streets in 1925. C. P. Gibson photo.

Once again, Ramsey County voters registered their own protests with 35,000 for La Follette, compared with 40,000 for Coolidge and a very distant 8,000 for Davis. In the regular senatorial election, Ramsey County voters, again presumably with a strong railroader element, defied the statewide and neighboring Hennepin County trend in which Minnesotans elected Republican Thomas D. Schall to replace Farmer-Laborite Magnus Johnson. In St. Paul and its environs, railroaders joined with other wage earners, progressives and dissidents in general to support the Farmer-Labor candidate over those of the established parties.

Labor's defeat in the bitter 1922 conflict had left an enduring legacy. St. Paul's railway workers and their supporters would play an important role in the emergence of the state's unique political development. They became a significant part of the labor element in the Farmer-Labor equation that displaced the Democrats in the Jazz Age as Minnesota's principal opposition party. Though it probably was scant comfort to the strikers and their allies of 1922, their loss of the greatest strike of the decade did have important and enduring results.

## Notes

Only direct quotations are cited here. This essay is based heavily upon the Great Northern Railway Company Records and the Northern Pacific Railway Company Records, Minnesota Historical Society; and the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations, Railway Employees Department Records, and other collections, Labor-Management

Documentation Center, M.P. Catherwood Library, Cornell University; and supporting secondary sources. For full documentation, consult my "Protest Movements on the Northern Tier: The Pullman Boycott of 1894 and the 1922 Shopmen's Strike," *Centennial West: Essays on the Northern Tier States*, William L. Lang, editor (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 194-226; and "A History of Railroad Workers in the Pacific Northwest, 1883-1934" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1981).

1. Private letter, W.L. Mapother to Hannaford, March 14, 1919, Federal Manager Subject File 679-3, Northern Pacific Records.

2. Aishton to Northwestern Railroads, August 5, 1919, President Subject File 591-G-48, Northern Pacific Records.

3. See translation of encoded message of H.H. Parkhouse to Louis W. Hill, August 6, 7, 1919, and *passim*, President Subject File 6860, Great Northern Records.

4. Howard Elliott to Charles Donnelly, October 17; Donnelly to Elliott, October (?), 1919, President Subject File 591-G, Northern Pacific Records.

5. S.E. Heberling to W.T. Tyler, September 12; J.M. Hannaford to R.H. Aishton, with enclosures, October 14, 1919, Federal Manager Subject File 679-5, Northern Pacific Records. S.E. Heberling to W.T. Tyler, September 12, 1919, Switchmen's Union of North America Records, Labor-Management Documentation Center, M.P. Catherwood Library, Cornell University.

6. Operative No. 10 to W.J. McFetridge, April 10, 1920, President Subject File 591-G-9, Northern Pacific Records.

7. C.O. Jenks to G.R. Martin, May 13; Ralph Budd to E.T. Nichols, May 12, 1920, President Subject File 6860, Great Northern Records. W.J. Barron to Hannaford, April 12; E.C. Blanchard to J.M. Rapelje, May 17, 1920, President Subject File 591-G-19, Northern Pacific Records.

8. L.C. Gilman to Budd and Donnelly, April 14,

27, 1920, President Subject File 591-G-19, Northern Pacific Records.

9. For a pre-publication copy of the ultimatum, see *ibid.* Marginal note by W.T.T. on May 20, 1920 "Memorandum for Mr. Tyler," President Subject File 591-G-10, Northern Pacific Records.

10. *Labor*. (Washington, D.C., July 1, 15, 1922).

11. *Labor*, June 17, 1922.

12. Budd to Elliott, July 28, 1922, President Subject File 10538, Great Northern Records.

13. Union Pacific System announcement, September 7, 1922, President Subject File 10598, Great Northern Records.

14. See "Personal" memoranda from H.M. Curry to his subordinates, November 27, December 22, 1922, with attached lists, Mechanical Engineer Subject File 15-E-8, Northern Pacific Records. "Statement Showing Old Employees in Mechanical Crafts Now Employed," January 25, 1923, President Subject File 10598, Great Northern Records.

15. C.R. Lonergan to J.G. Woodworth, July 27, 1922, President Subject File 591-G-38.

16. H.L. Myers to Charles Donnelly, July 27, 1922, President Subject File 591-G-38, Northern Pacific Records.

17. *Labor*, August 5, 1922.

18. Miller to M.J. Lins, July 19, 1922, and *passim*, President Subject File 10538, Great Northern Records.

19. Donnelly to Tyler, November 12, 1920, President Subject File 591-G-7, Northern Pacific Records.

20. L.C. Gilman to Budd, President Subject File 6860, Great Northern Records.

21. W.A. Godwin to Louis W. Hill, January 17, 1922, President Subject File 6860, Great Northern Records.

22. H.H. Hanson to H.G. Keith, August 13, 1922, Vice President-Operating Subject File 7-10, Great Northern Records.

23. William Z. Foster, *The Railroaders' Next Step*. Chicago: Trade Union Educational League, 1921 [?], 26-28.

24. Ralph M. Easley to Donnelly, with enclosures, March 25, 1922, President Subject File 2084, Northern Pacific Records, and President Subject File 10538, Great Northern Records.

25. J.A. Cochrane to C.O. Jenks, July 7, 1923, President Subject File 10538, Great Northern Records.

26. W.S. Stone to B.M. Jewell, June 29, 1922, AFL-CIO, Railway Employees' Records.

*W. Thomas White is curator of the James Jerome Hill Reference Library in St. Paul and is responsible for the general administration of the Hill Papers Department. He received his doctorate in history from the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1981, and has written widely on labor and railroad history.*



*The Hudson's Bay Company Fort at Pembina, now in North Dakota, from the Canadian Illustrated News, 1871. See the article on the Selkirk Colony, beginning on page 23.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society  
323 Landmark Center  
75 West Fifth Street  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

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