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# THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR IN BELGIUM

By Léon Watillon TRANSLATED BY FREDERIC MEYERS

Institute of Industrial Relations • University of California, (Los Angeles)



# **THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR IN BELGIUM**



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THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR  
IN BELGIUM,

By Léon Watillon .

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*Translated and with an introduction by Frederic Meyers,*

INSTITUTE OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (Los Angeles)  
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# Foreword

*The Institute of Industrial Relations is pleased to offer, as the third in its monograph series, The Knights of Labor in Belgium, by Léon Watillon, which has been translated by Professor Frederic Meyers. This series is intended to include studies of medium length and will receive a distinctive cover treatment to set them apart from the Institute's other publications.*

*The Knights of Labor in Belgium sheds light on a little-known episode in the history of the American labor organization. American labor historians, if we are to judge by their writings, have been unaware of the interesting and important activities of the Order in Belgium. M. Watillon's history illuminates those developments.*

*The manner in which this manuscript was discovered is set forth by Professor Meyers in the Introduction. He tells us there, as well, something about the author. The translator, Frederic Meyers, is Professor of Personnel Management and Industrial Relations in the School of Business Administration and Research Economist in the Institute of Industrial Relations at the University of California, Los Angeles. Mrs. Anne P. Cook edited the manuscript. The cover design is the work of Marvin Rubin. Lloyd Hamrol prepared the map of Belgium.*

GEORGE H. HILDEBRAND, *Director*  
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# Introduction

AMERICAN LABOR HISTORIANS have paid little attention to the extremely interesting ventures of the Knights of Labor overseas. Consequently, during a stay in Belgium engaged on another piece of research, I thought it worth while to pursue a bypath seeking out the history of the Knights of that country. Unfortunately, I was able to find little remaining in the way of source documentation—time and two wars had destroyed much. But a Belgian trade unionist referred me to Léon Watillon, who, he thought, had done some work on the subject. I approached M. Watillon, who is now Director General of Social Security in the Ministry of Labor and Social Security. He produced out of his files one badly battered copy of a brochure he had written in the early twenties. As a student at the Ecole Ouvrière Supérieure in the 1922–23 session, he had written a thesis on the Knights of Labor in Belgium. It had interested the Belgian mineworkers' union, which had printed a version of it as a brochure, on newsprint. It apparently received very limited distribution, largely in the Belgian labor movement, and, so far as I know, only two copies remain in existence. The only scholarly attention it received was a very brief reference in Léon Delsinne's *Le Mouvement Syndicale en Belgique*.

In the meantime, Henry Pelling had been working on the history of the Knights in Great Britain. His study appeared in the *Economic History Review*, December, 1956, under the title "The Knights of Labor in Great Britain, 1880–1901." Pelling's study gives in some detail the American as well as the British side of the story—the actions of the governing bodies of the Knights and the reactions of the leadership to the foreign ventures.

It occurred to me, then, that a useful contribution could be made by translating Watillon's study for American readers. Taken with Pelling's work, it gives a rather complete picture of the activities of the Order in the two European countries in which they became



most important. Watillon's point of view is, of course, uniquely his own. But any method of presentation other than translation would amount to mere plagiarism. The study is of obvious scholarly distinction; it had apparently exhausted sources existing in 1922, many of which have been lost or destroyed. Yet the form and medium in which it was published were such that it was not and is not available to scholars who should have access to it.

With Watillon's consent and collaboration, then, and to complete the picture, partly presented by Pelling, of the European connection of the Knights of Labor, I have translated the central portion of the brochure dealing with the history of the Belgian Knights while they were affiliated with the American organization.<sup>1</sup> The first section, dealing with the structure in the United States, seems unnecessary for an English-speaking scholarly audience; sufficient knowledge can be presumed. The final section deals principally with the activities of the "Chevaliers du Travail Belges" after they had severed connections with the American movement, and is of importance as part of the Belgian, rather than the international, story.

Two significant differences appear between the Belgian and the British pictures as seen respectively by Watillon and Pelling. The first lies in the apparent willingness of the glassworkers of Assembly 300 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to aid their Belgian brothers by accepting immigrants, in contrast to their apparent exclusiveness described by Pelling. This willingness appears in Watillon's account of the 1884 strike and the Falleur case. It is symbolized, perhaps, by the name of a Pennsylvania city near Pittsburgh—Charleroi.

The difference may be accounted for by time—the period discussed by Pelling in this connection is three or four years after the 1884 strike in Belgium. It may also be explained by the fact that Pelling had access to United States sources unavailable to Watillon, who simply recounts what happened viewed from Belgium, without direct knowledge of the basic attitudes of the American leadership.

The second principal difference lies in the fact that while in Britain the organization seems to have disappeared rather quickly,

<sup>1</sup> Most of Watillon's footnotes have been retained. Additional explanatory notes are signed "Ed."

in Belgium, although connection with the United States was severed in 1889, the Belgian Order remained in existence until the late 1930's and was of importance among the Charleroi coal miners nearly as long.

Watillon remarks in the conclusion of his study that the Belgian Knights as they existed in 1923 had nothing in common with the original organization but the name. Both he and Delsinne<sup>2</sup> observe that at that period they served as a medium for Communist infiltration.

But Delsinne, also writing largely from the viewpoint of sympathy with and participation in the socialist mainstream of Belgian trade unionism, observes: "The Knights of Labor imported into Belgium methods and points of view which did not harmonize with Belgian conditions and mentality."<sup>3</sup> Writing in 1898, Vandervelde and Destrée ascribe the tardy growth of cooperatives in the Charleroi region in part to the Knights' attitude favoring the establishment of small business.<sup>4</sup> This is made explicit in a quotation from a Knights leader, Jean Callewaert, appearing in the untranslated portion of Watillon's study, addressing certain retailers. Callewaert hailed the demonstrated community of interest of which the Knights had given proof by a formal promise, well kept, not to establish cooperatives in the Charleroi region.

Thus, while the Knights may have been outside the mainstream of the Belgian movement, their strength and their persistence may be accounted for in part by an appeal, in Belgium as in the United States, to one side of the "mentality" of some Belgian workers through ritualism, militancy toward economic goals, lesser emphasis than the socialists on political party action, and immediacy of goals resting on longer-range optimism as to individual economic opportunity. Likewise, their more rapid disappearance in Britain as compared with Belgium may be explained in part by the emphasis put on these same goals by the indigenous British unions. In Belgium, the predominant national trade-union center was in

<sup>2</sup> Léon Delsinne, *Le Mouvement Syndicale en Belgique* (Brussels: Ancienne Librairie Castaigne, 1936), p. 180.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> E. Vandervelde and J. Destrée, *Le Socialisme en Belgique* (Paris: Giard et Brière, 1898).

large measure a creature of the Workers' Party and, as such, was more deeply committed to primacy of socialist political action than were the unions in England. Seen from the perspective of subsequent American union history, the Knights appear as political reformers. But seen from a European socialist perspective they appear as business unions; and the glassworkers' assembly was among the most devoted to short-range economic goals.

Though the spread of the Knights beyond the glass industry and their persistence in Belgium may be attributed to such factors, their initial infiltration into the glass industry of both Belgium and England appears to be an interesting case consistent on an international scale with the "Wisconsin school" theory of the labor movement.<sup>5</sup> John R. Commons and his students and associates explain the origins and expansion of the American labor movement largely on the basis of the initial impact of competition, resulting from expanded markets, on the wages and skills of the workers and the breaking down of a corporate community of interest vis-à-vis the consumer. Expansion of the labor movement tends, then, to coincide with expansion of markets, and a national labor movement arises with the development of a national market.

In this case, market developments in the window-glass industry appear to have stimulated the development of an international labor movement—an interpretation advanced by Watillon in 1923, though he did not then know of the work of the Wisconsin school. A similar explanation is advanced for unionism in the glove industry.

However, this view fails to explain why the international movement should have taken the trade-union form developed by Assembly 300 of Pittsburgh, nor does it account for whatever influences new techniques may have had, except as they may have had their origin in market developments. One might note, however, that the Union Verrière—the Glassworkers' Union—has remained continuously in existence, though its ties with the United States have long since been broken. Furthermore, throughout most of its

<sup>5</sup> John R. Commons and Associates, *History of Labor in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1926-1935); see also Commons, "The American Shoemaker," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, XIV (1909), 39-83, and Selig Perlman, *A History of Trade Unionism in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1937).

history, it has remained more particularistic and pragmatic than most Belgian labor organizations—characteristics to which Watillon rather sadly alludes. This might suggest that special characteristics of this industry and its workers made the general American form of trade unionism somehow more appropriate than that which developed in other Belgian industries, and, in particular, the Knights of Labor form (as well as Knights of Labor subsidies) appropriate as the mold into which an international glassworkers' movement was to be cast.

These observations, however, are somewhat by the way. The role of the author of this introduction is primarily to introduce English-speaking scholars to Watillon's neglected piece of scholarship.

# THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR IN BELGIUM

## The Glassworkers

### *The Glassworkers' Monopoly*

The glassworkers were the first Belgian workers to join the Order of the Knights of Labor. They had some important reasons for doing so, which we will attempt to analyze.

The workers in the glass industry, and especially the blowers, had always enjoyed high wages; this arose in large part from the special circumstances in which they practiced their difficult trade. Vandervelde explains them in his *Enquête sur les Associations Professionnelles*; it will suffice to summarize them as follows:

1. Rare skills; laborious, long, and difficult apprenticeship.
2. Physical strength to handle the pipe, which weighs from fifteen to eighteen kilograms; strength of the lungs in order to blow air continuously.
3. Danger and unhealthfulness of the trade: frequent burns; hot and unhealthy atmosphere which inevitably induces alcoholism.
4. Labor market favorable to the workers, thanks to the rapid development of the glass industry.
5. Independence of the workers vis-à-vis their employers, because of the ease with which the workers emigrate and also the serious consequences for the master glassmakers of the extinction of a furnace due, for example, to a strike.

These several factors creating a powerful monopoly were to lead the glassworkers to be the first to found a trade union.

### *Evolution of the Window-Glass Industry*

Until 1850, the window-glass industries of the different countries produced almost exclusively for the national market. Because of their scarcity up to that time, the glassworkers succeeded without

difficulty in obtaining exceptionally high wages and in restricting apprenticeship in the trade to their sons.

But the development of means of transport, especially by water, expanded the horizons of the glass industry and made it necessary for employers to recruit workers outside the families of glassmakers in order to increase production. With the creation of an international market, foreign competition made itself felt, and the Belgian employers from time to time tried to reduce wages. The workers reacted against this by creating an organization which was called a mutual aid society but which was probably obliged to concern itself primarily with direct craft interests.

This association, however, had but an ephemeral life. There was scarcely any open warfare between employers and workers. By reason of the development of the industry, for twenty years the supply of manpower was less than the demand, in spite of the number of workers recruited by the employers outside the "blood."

Similarly, it is to material rather than ideological influences that one must attribute the creation among Belgian glassworkers of three sections of the socialist First International (at Jumet-Heigne, Jumet-Brûlotte, and Lodelinsart) which survived until 1870.

Beginning with the Franco-Prussian War, the glass industry was subject to all the fluctuations of the international market. Periods of shortage and of surplus succeeded each other at the mercy of events abroad. Two important factors worked to the detriment of the glass industry in Belgium. The first was the competition of plate-glass factories; plate glass was used more and more for the windows and displays of great buildings. The second was foreign competition, especially American. The United States industrialized rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century and created a glass industry. By protectionist measures this country, which had previously been a huge outlet for Europeans, was closed to imports. Moreover, the American industry was favored in that it had more advantageous conditions for heating glass furnaces.

This new American industry succeeded in attracting European glassworkers—the blowers and other skilled workers that it lacked. These workers received lower wages in their native countries since, to meet competition, the industrialists had to take measures to



reduce the cost of production. To this end, the employers first improved their manufacturing processes, especially by substituting the gas furnace for the grilled coal furnace. When this did not suffice, the master glassmakers undertook a vigorous campaign to reduce the cost of labor. To achieve this objective, they used the following techniques:

1. The employment of a large number of apprentices.
2. The elimination of short-term labor contracts as a means of avoiding strikes.
3. The prolongation of the apprenticeship period (seven years instead of three) in order to profit for four years from productive but poorly paid labor.

### *Origin of the Glassworkers' Union*

Long-term work contracts impaired the independence that the glassworkers had enjoyed; they were one of the greatest causes of discontent among the workers and occasioned frequent conflicts followed by legal proceedings. The latter, before the ordinary courts, ended almost necessarily in favor of the employers. The first demand by the glassworkers which aroused general agitation, therefore, was for the creation of a *Conseil de Prud'hommes*.<sup>1</sup> In an article in the journal *Les Chevaliers du Travail* for June, 1892, Lambillotte gives the following account of the origin of the Glassworkers' Union:

In 1879, certain glassworkers, having had to sustain against their employer a long and costly trial concerning hiring and wages, adopted the proposal made by citizen Albert Delwart to organize a vast petition among the workers around Charleroi to obtain the creation of a *Conseil de Prud'hommes*. The first meeting was held in the Salon du Palot in Charleroi. Thereafter this group of glassworkers organized others in all the communes of the arrondissement. During the years 1879-1882, more than a hundred meetings with this object took place. They were pre-

<sup>1</sup> *Conseils de Prud'hommes* had been established in France by Napoleon, following local precedents in certain industries, particularly silk, and practices going back to the guild period. In their Napoleonic and subsequent form, they became local labor courts, with jurisdiction principally over disputes arising out of the individual employment contract. Their distinguishing characteristic was that they were bipartite, with elected worker and employer members. Local justices of the peace had a casting vote when necessary.—Ed.

sided over by a committee of glassworkers, but the principal speaker at all the meetings was the devoted Albert Delwart; we recall our debt to him with gratitude and friendship.

At the same time, the petitions with several thousand signatures had been brought to the Legislative Chambers, where a bill had been introduced and sent to committee. M. Vandamme, deputy from Charleroi, had been named Reporter. But, as long delays appeared, the glassworkers, and especially the blowers, decided to organize into a "society of resistance" to defend the interests of their associates against the employers. This society took as its title "Union Verrière Belge"—Belgian Glassworkers' Union. Founded in 1882 at Lodelinsart, it moved to Charleroi in October, 1883.

The executive committee of the union, having envisaged from its foundation an international union of glassworkers, had directed citizen Delwart to establish relations with the unions of European and American workers. The American glassworkers' union was then engaged in a colossal strike; work was suspended in all the glassworks of the United States. In order to underline its desire to see all the glassworkers of the world united for the defense of their trade interests, the Belgian Glassworkers' Union, in spite of its recent origin, sent 1,000 francs to the American glassworkers' union.

The following year it was the turn of the American union to come to the aid of the Belgian in that justifiable but still misunderstood strike for work of two for one.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Strike of 1884*

Lambillotte makes reference to the strike which the glassworkers conducted in 1884, the history of which Vandervelde recounts in his work. After the American strike, during which the Belgian industry, freed of competition, had prospered, the Committee of Glassmakers, an employers' association, decided that it was an ap-

<sup>2</sup> Vandervelde quotes an explanation of this demand from the *Journal des Intérêts Maritimes d'Anvers*, March 19, 1884: "The rules in force in the glassworks provide that in case of disability or absence of the worker, he himself sends a substitute without hiring of the replacement by the employer. It is this right which the Glassworkers' Union wishes to make a general rule; that is, that each worker bound by contract to an employer would have his double, his official replacement, or rather his associate and collaborator. And instead of the latter coming only occasionally to blow glass as replacement for the titular occupant of the job, he too would come each day, take up the task and continue it." E. Vandervelde, *Enquête sur les Associations Professionnelles d'Artisans et d'Ouvriers en Belgique* (Brussels: 1891), p. 123. This seems to have been a share-the-work proposal.—Ed.

propriate occasion to effect a general reduction in wages. The employers based the cut on the competition of the French and Germans, who were free of competition in internal markets, thanks to the protective legislation of their countries, and so could sell their products at a high price internally and wage a victorious fight in export markets. They pointed out that the Belgians and the English were therefore at a disadvantage, despite their cheaper fuel and less demanding labor force. Likewise, they complained of the position of the Belgians in the American market resulting from the high duties imposed on foreign glass. The Committee of Glass-makers concluded: "The cost of labor must be reduced or the Belgian industry must perish."

Although the Glassworkers' Union agreed to the reduction, the deepening crisis forced the employers to extinguish a large number of furnaces (37 of 167) employing altogether more than 1,200 workers. Wishing to prevent the unemployed from offering to work at reduced wages, the new organization demanded that the employers adopt the rule of "work of two for one." This system already had been applied in the case of absence from work, an eventuality provided for in the hiring contracts. The employers' refusal of the proposal was the signal for the strike.

Since the glassblowers had long-term contracts, they were assessed damages by the court for breach of contract. They defended themselves by claiming that the strike was a consequence of the employers' violation of one clause of the agreement, but they lost their case.

### *The Pittsburgh Assembly*

The Order of the Knights of Labor of America was composed of Local Assemblies comprising members of the several trades, craftsmen, and farmers; of District Assemblies with jurisdiction over at least ten locals; of State Assemblies; and of the sovereign organ, the General Assembly.

Independently of these multitrade divisions, the necessities of organization had obliged the General Assembly to create certain trade assemblies, having limited powers to govern themselves. Article 287 of the constitution provided:

A general trade assembly can fix wages, make rules and regulations and such laws for the government of the trade as will appear to be in the common interest; all in conformity with the general laws of the Order.

But another article provided that the approval of the District or State Assembly, depending on the extent of the region interested, was necessary before undertaking an action which "in all probability would lead to a strike or a lockout." The trade assemblies thus had to subordinate their action to the consent of superior assemblies each time that a demand was to be presented to the employers, since such action could always lead to a strike or lockout.

The American glassworkers, strong in their monopoly and accustomed to demand rather than to confer, were not satisfied with such methods. They were the only ones to have a strictly trade organization which accepted no worker outside the trade. Their association was known as the "Assembly of Glassworkers No. 300 of Pittsburgh" (Pennsylvania). However, all the glassworkers did not work in the same region; the difficulty of organizing them in the same assembly led the leaders to create "preceptories," or branches, subject to the rules and customs of Assembly 300. It was the latter which issued the certificates of initiation; accordingly, no one could join the association without the consent of the officers of Assembly 300, and without payment of an initiation fee of ten dollars. Similar methods are still used today to make access to a trade difficult.

The glassworkers' desire to organize internationally was clearly expressed in Article 283 of the Order's constitution. It was that article which allowed the Belgian glassworkers to join the Pittsburgh Assembly. It reads:

The duly commissioned organizers of Local Assembly 300 will receive from the General Master Workman the privilege of organizing locals in foreign countries and of attaching the locals thus organized to the General Assembly of America.

It was by virtue of this provision that, during the strike of 1884, Assembly 300 sent its president, Isaac Cline, and a member of its committee, Andrew Burtt, to confer with the Belgian Glassworkers'

Union and to establish the international organization of glassworkers.

*Introduction of the Knights of Labor into Belgium*

During the strike the Glassworkers' Union was largely subsidized by the glassworkers' union of Aniche, France, and by the Pittsburgh Assembly. The latter informed the committee that 600 to 700 jobs were vacant in the United States and offered to pay transportation costs for glassworkers who might decide to emigrate. There was then no longer any reason to continue the strike. The union gained considerable moral and material strength from this series of events. The number of its members, which had been 1,500 at the beginning of the strike, rose to 2,700. The gatherers, the flatteners, and the furnace tenders, who had previously been hostile, requested affiliation. The fines which the Charleroi court had levied against the strikers were paid out of the union's fund, but even that did not prevent it from becoming prosperous.

During the strike, in April, 1884, a congress preparatory to the formation of an international organization took place in Charleroi. English, French, Italian, Belgian, and American delegates were present; but it was not until the next month that the Universal Federation of Glassworkers was established at the Congress of St. Helens in England. Albert Delwart was elected secretary of the organization to whose creation he had contributed so much, and was initiated as a Knight.

Here is how Lambillotte describes what followed:

Furthermore, the congress decided that Assembly 300 should send to Europe a delegate especially commissioned to organize assemblies of the Order in Europe. In conformity with the wish expressed by the Congress of St. Helens, brothers Isaac Cline and Andrew Burt, immediately upon their return to Pittsburgh, urged the appointment of a special organizer for Europe who would initiate us into the work and the discipline of the organization.

Brother Denny of Assembly 300 was designated for these functions. He went first to England, where he organized branches at St. Helens, Spon Lane, Plank Lane, and Sunderland, and established the last-named group as the headquarters of Assembly 3504 of the glassworkers of England.

Then he came to Charleroi, where he organized the first assembly on the European continent, that of the Belgian glassworkers, No. 3628.

Henceforth the Glassworkers' Union, called "Eureka," belonged to the Order of the Knights of Labor of America. It was not slow to become active. In 1885, a year of particularly serious crisis, the employers again had to extinguish furnaces and reduce wages. The union was able to impose "work of two for one" in certain factories, and in others where the workers continued to work singly, it levied an assessment of 5 per cent of their wages. It obtained in this way more than 25,000 francs which it distributed to the needy unemployed, thus keeping them from accepting too unfavorable conditions of work.

### *The Glassworkers' Union and the Workers' Party*

Although the Knights of Labor was a purely economic organization, the Glassworkers' Union was not obliged to conform at all points to the principles which it had accepted when initiated by the American organizer. Its leadership had been influenced by another philosophy; Delwart, notably, had been among the most active members of the First International.

On April 5, 1885, Delwart represented the Glassworkers' Union at the congress in Brussels which established the Workers' Party [Parti Ouvrier Belge], and he became one of its most devoted propagandists. This did not prevent him from being designated three months later as general organizer for Europe of the Knights of Labor of America.

By the end of December, the Workers' Party had its own journal, *Le Peuple*. Delwart was to use it to defend the glassworkers, who were being increasingly mistreated. Certain employers, taking advantage of the economic crisis, imposed on the workers both wage reductions and a new measure longer than an inch to determine the quantity of production. Others required of the blowers "doubles for semi-doubles," that is, glass thicker and consequently heavier, without any increase in the piece rate. Tank furnaces constituted the latest progress made in the technology of glass manufacture. These furnaces had been installed a short time before



at the factories of Baudoux & Co., and had provoked considerable reaction among the workers. Delwart claimed that this innovation was quite as detrimental to the interests of the small industrialists as to those of the workers because, he wrote, it must result in the "suppression of the middle classes." Installation of the furnaces required large amounts of capital and, accordingly, favored the creation of corporations.

It was this tendency toward change in the techniques of production in the glass industry that Delwart denounced. He saw in it a deterioration in the lot of the worker, exemplified by the factories of Baudoux & Co., where working conditions even more unfavorable than elsewhere had already been imposed. While placing in operation a new, more dangerous furnace, the employer had introduced a new clause in the contract of hire which made the worker responsible for all work accidents he might suffer. The employer also reserved the right to cancel the employment contract if the work were imperfect, while the worker was held to its requirements whatever might happen during the term of the contract.

For all these reasons the glassworkers were very discontented. The Glassworkers' Union organized a series of conferences beginning with one at Jumet on February 21, where Jules Destrée first appeared in the labor movement. The same day another meeting was held at Damprémy, where Volders, editor of *Le Peuple*, and Delwart urged the workers to unite to defend their wages and to demand their political rights. Oscar Falleur, secretary of the union, presided at the meetings and insisted that the workers read and distribute the socialist newspapers and attend the demonstrations for universal suffrage that the Workers' Party was planning.

Other meetings took place one after another. At Jumet-Brûlotte they were held at Greffe Hall in the very center of the glass factories. Meetings of the Glassworkers' Union were held at the Café Central in Charleroi. It is interesting to note that the working class of Charleroi has built its "Palais du Peuple" opposite that spot. At the site of the first strong organization has been constructed the fortress of a working class at last educated and disciplined. It is a sad fact that the glassworkers are virtually the only ones who are not represented there.

In all these meetings the glassworkers proclaimed their desire to obtain a uniform standard of production. That was the principal demand at the moment.

### *The Events of 1886*

The economic crisis was not limited to the glass industry; it extended all through industry and to the coal mines in particular. The workers, exasperated by the continual worsening of their situation, finally revolted. The events of 1886 are too well known to need description here.<sup>3</sup> Let us note only that the courts placed the blame for the fires and destruction upon the campaign led by the Glassworkers' Union. Several glassworks were sacked and the furnaces of the Baudoux factory rendered useless, for the mob dropped into them 40,000 kilograms of iron and other material.

The officers of the union were arrested and their homes were searched, but without result. Delwart sent a long report to all the societies affiliated with the Universal Federation, in which he protested the calumnies directed against him and the union. He declared that where workers were organized, excesses like those

<sup>3</sup> The year 1886 was a period of such social turmoil in Belgium that Marc-Antoine Pierson, *Histoire du Socialisme en Belgique* (Brussels: Institut Emile Vandervelde, n.d. [1953]), describes it in a chapter heading as "The terrible year." Culminating a most severe depression that had begun in 1884 was a near nationwide series of riots, "an explosion of collective anger, without preconceived plan, without leadership, without definite goal, guided only by the contagious example of the exasperated masses." Henri Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique* (Brussels: Maurice Lamertin, 1932), vol. 7, p. 303.

The riots began in Liège on March 18, where, the day after a memorial demonstration for the Paris Commune, bands of workers ceased work and rioted throughout the city, breaking windows and engaging in general destruction. The coal mine and glass strikes discussed by Watillon contributed to the spread of the walkouts, and before long the whole of Belgium's industrial belt from Liège to the Borinage was on strike. Accompanying the stoppages was widespread rioting, involving unemployed workers and the industrial population, but without approval or leadership of any of the union or political organizations of workers. The riots were ended by the troops, but only after numbers of workers had been killed or injured by gunfire.

The explosion was not caused by mass unemployment alone; it was also the culmination of political movements for universal suffrage, educational reform, and general democratization which formed the basis of the dramatic *Catechism of the People* (see note 7). The riots took, in part, an antichurch turn, with the destruction of an abbey in Gilly, a suburb of Charleroi. After the riots subsided, many "leaders" were tried and convicted, though no real leadership of the movement existed. A parliamentary investigation of the condition of the working class was undertaken and certain moderate reforms instituted in the years immediately following 1886.—Ed.

committed in the Charleroi region never happened. This allegation, moreover, has often been verified since then.

In spite of their protestations of innocence and the efforts in their defense, Destrée, Englebienné, Falleur, and Schmidt (another glassworker) were condemned to twenty years at hard labor. As Vanderelde says, simply reading the proceedings of the trial is sufficient to convince one of the injustice of these sentences. The aim was to destroy the Glassworkers' Union, and the effort succeeded, for its membership fell after the riots from 2,300 to a few hundred.

### *The Campaign for Amnesty*

Two days after the judgment, the first demonstration for universal suffrage took place at Brussels. The glassworkers, who had been stunned by the verdict, were represented by about fifty delegates carrying a black flag and signs demanding amnesty. It was the beginning of a great campaign to free the political prisoners; the Workers' Party participated wholeheartedly in the movement.

On November 1, a second demonstration took place at Charleroi, bringing together 40,000 to 45,000 workers from the Center, the Borinage, Brussels, and even Ghent. On this occasion a proclamation was affixed to the walls of the city; it exhorted the workers to be calm and was signed by Delwart in the name of the workers' leagues and the trade societies of the Charleroi basin. The workers' leagues were affiliated with the Workers' Party, and the trade societies both with the Workers' Party and the Knights of Labor of America. This is proof that Delwart was not only the leader of the glassworkers but also the representative of the whole working class.

Independently of the movement created by the Workers' Party, a group of women of the region organized a petition for the freedom of Falleur and Schmidt. They gathered 9,361 signatures, of which 4,094 were those of bourgeois qualified voters. An audience with the Queen was requested to beg her to intervene, but this was not granted.

On the occasion of the reopening of Parliament on November 9, a cortege of 1,300 women, dressed in black and including a certain number of bourgeoisie, went to Brussels to the City Hall. The petition was presented by Falleur's mother to the Burgomaster in his

capacity as deputy, and he placed it before Parliament. This demonstration, led by delegates of the Workers' Party, received a warm welcome from the population of Brussels. On their return to Charleroi, the demonstrators were greeted by the Glassworkers' Union and congratulated by comrade Delwart, who had conceived the project.

The campaign for amnesty was continued by the Workers' Party press and resulted in passage of a law granting conditional liberty to the political prisoners of 1886.

### *The Exile of Falleur*

After twenty-six months of imprisonment, Falleur was freed, but he had to promise to leave the country before August 15, 1888. The Knights of Labor then appealed to the Minister of Justice, Lejeune, sending a delegation composed of four glassworkers and two miners, who on July 25 presented a petition signed by 600 glassworkers demanding complete liberty for the innocent. As a result, Falleur was given permission to remain in Belgium; but on August 2 he was again called before the Minister, who told him that because of denunciations accusing him of relations with anarchists, the government felt obliged to require his departure.

Actually, this decision was a consequence of Falleur's resumption of activity with the Glassworkers' Union after his liberation. He had been gravely disappointed to find that, after his imprisonment, membership had fallen considerably and the working conditions of the glassworkers had become still worse. It was because he wished to bring the glassworkers back into the union that Falleur had to leave the country. Quite against his will, he decided to join the exiles of the 1884 strike. With the help of the Pittsburgh glassworkers he counted on finding work there. His departure was the occasion for lively demonstrations of sympathy. The Glassworkers' Union held a farewell meeting for him, and 3,000 persons accompanied him to the station and cheered him vigorously.

His arrival in the United States gave rise to other incidents. The Commissioner of Immigration, by virtue of a law forbidding the debarkation of convicts, wished to send him back to Europe. The Knights of Labor of Chicago, learning of this, protested strongly

and sent a delegation to let Falleur know that the Order supported him fully. The Belgian Consul General, M. C. Mali, interceded in his behalf because, as he explained to the commissioner, the case was quite exceptional.

During his detention in port, Falleur expressed himself in these terms in a letter to his father:

... but it is hoped that, having been the victim of a conservative, arch-reactionary organization, I will succeed in proving the utter infamy of my conviction. The costs of the proceeding will be paid by the Knights of Labor. The lawyer is Frederick Gesleq, former judge and one of the foremost jurists of the United States.

After listing the names of several Belgian workers who had come to reassure him, he ended as follows: "I beg you not to worry. I am well treated here, and the Knights of Labor are brothers to me."

At the end of the hearing, Falleur was given permission to live in the United States and he remained there until his death. The Glassworkers' Union was thus deprived of a devoted leader and a sincere socialist, who perhaps could have prevented it from being transformed into the purely "business" union which we know today [1923].

# The Miners

## *Situation of the Miners before 1886*

In the past a miner's life was the most miserable imaginable. Although considerably improved in recent years, this occupation is still a very arduous one. At the time the miners began to organize, they toiled twelve or fourteen hours a day in an unhealthy atmosphere, for the mines were insufficiently ventilated. Accidents were frequent because of poor work organization, inadequate supervision, and lack of safety and health measures. Gas was especially dangerous; all too often it struck deadly blows within the workers' families. Children from the age of eight or ten, and women until marriage, went down regularly into the pit.

The workers in general did not know how to read. The brutalization resulting from their harsh labor led them almost inevitably to alcoholism. The ignorance in which they were kept prevented them from finding ways to improve their lot. If, pushed to the limit by their misery, they sometimes reacted against their oppressors, it was always by violence. At Charleroi especially, a great many riots occurred.

On the morning of February 1, 1867, the miners of Damprémy deserted their pit and went to Marchienne; by the time they arrived there, their numbers had swelled to 2,000. After pillaging the flour mill they tried to burn it.<sup>4</sup> They believed they could end their hunger and oppression by taking possession of a few sacks of flour. They paid dearly for the futile attempt—four of them were killed by the soldiers.

The following year, in April, at almost the same place, a new riot occurred.<sup>5</sup> This time the movement started at Châtelineau. Protesting a wage reduction, the workers at the Gouffre pit went out into the region threatening to cut the cables at other mines if the mechanics refused to bring their personnel up to the surface. The procession, which grew at each of the pits visited, had entered the yard of the L'Epine mine at Damprémy when the army intervened

<sup>4</sup> J. Dauby, *Des Grèves Ouvrières* (Brussels: Gustave Mayoles, 1884).

<sup>5</sup> L. Bertrand, *Histoire de la Démocratie et du Socialisme* (Brussels: Dechenne, 1907).



to force the workers to retire. As usually happened, some stones were thrown by the strikers and the commanding officer ordered fire. The result was ten killed and as many wounded, several seriously.

At the beginning of 1869, less than a year later, forty-two sections of the First International had been founded in the region of Charleroi, most composed almost wholly of miners: the massacres had after all served for something. But these organizations had only a fleeting life.

Other efforts were made. Here and there an association was created, sometimes by pit, sometimes by commune; each disappeared after a strike. The first few years following the Franco-Prussian War were prosperous years for Belgian industry, which explains the temporary slowing down of the movement. But in 1875 the mining industry was less well off. The employers wished to effectuate a 20 per cent wage reduction. Thereupon a congress of miners which met in the Center called an immediate strike. It extended throughout almost the entire Charleroi basin, and ended in defeat after four weeks of battle. No other movement of such importance had taken place before in the region.

### *The "Eureka" Union of Miners*

We have established without too much difficulty the reasons which led the glassworkers to join the American Knights of Labor. It is not possible to explain the miners' affiliation by the same facts of economic interdependence.

The miner's trade does not require an apprenticeship as long and difficult as that of the glassworker, nor does it require special physical characteristics. Foreign workers, especially the Flemish, had depressed the labor market in the mines for a long time.

There is another essential difference between the two industries—mining and glassmaking. The former finds its outlets nearby; it competes chiefly with neighboring regions, because transportation costs quickly increase the price of coal at its destination. The latter, by contrast, can find its markets in distant countries, such as Japan, China, Australia, and so on. Accordingly, competition is intense among glass manufacturers of all the producing countries.

Thus the glassworkers had united in order not to pay the costs of the battle between the industrialists in the various markets of the world.

The miners did not have the same basic reasons for seeking alliance with the Americans, but they were greatly influenced by the glassworkers. As we saw in the preceding section, they had already tried to organize several times. But they lacked method and a powerful ideal to keep up enthusiasm. Then the Order of the Knights appeared with its rites, its symbols, its mysterious signs. All this machinery interested people who felt deeply the injustice of their condition but who had only confused ideas as to what a union could be. The principles of the Knights of Labor, moreover, accorded quite well with their aspirations, and it must not be forgotten that at that time the Workers' Party had not yet been created. Furthermore, the Pittsburgh Knights' large financial contributions to the glassworkers during the strike of 1884 made a deep impression on the miners, who counted greatly on the generosity of the Americans.

Delwart had become very popular in the region through his meetings during the campaign for the *Conseils de Prud'hommes*. He had maintained relations with his former comrades of the International, and he had little difficulty in persuading them of the necessity of founding a miners' union. Together with Denny, the American organizer, he helped to organize the Miners' Union, "Eureka," which was initiated on May 10, 1885, as No. 3846. Its headquarters was first established at Jumet-Gohissart.

Citizen Jean Callewaert, formerly an active member of the International, was designated as Master Workman. "Eureka" could not, for the present, extend its activities to regions which had not been influenced by the glassworkers. It was not until later, owing to other circumstances, that it developed throughout the Charleroi basin and the Basse-Sambre.

In the region of Jumet-Charleroi alone, the Order succeeded very rapidly in organizing 3,000 members who, unlike the glassworkers, remained strongly unified after the riots of March, 1886.

The authorities tried hard to destroy the new organization of miners, but despite the numerous searches which they made of the officers' homes, they could not find the slightest cause for indict-

ments. During the trial of Falleur, the prosecuting attorney could not keep from revealing his attitude. Here is what he declared:

The union [of glassworkers] had scarcely been founded when it affiliated with an American society called the "Knights of Labor." It is a veritable freemasonry: everyone is controlled and obeys its orders.

This society has alongside it another society of coal miners, which was brigaded under the same conditions as the Glassworkers' Union.

However, the membership could not be maintained for long. Before too great a deterioration of its strength, the Miners' Union undertook, some months later, a movement which had disastrous consequences.

### *The Amercoeur Strike*

Following the imposing demonstration at Charleroi for "amnesty and universal suffrage," enthusiasm was greater than ever. A single incident was to suffice to set off a general strike of the Knights of Labor.

On November 2, 1886, the workers at the Bois de la Ville mine refused to go down because the chief foreman had discharged a worker. Soon the strike was extended to the Belle Vue, Chaumonceau, and Amercoeur pits. It shortly affected 4,000 workers, of whom 3,000 were Knights of Labor. Later it was to be limited almost wholly to the Amercoeur mines, employing altogether 1,600 workers; its objective was an increase in wages.

During the struggle the Miners' Union met almost every day, and the Knights maintained absolute secrecy concerning their decisions. The Workers' Party did not remain inactive. Its orators, Verrycken and Minne, came to Jumet and Courcelles on the invitation of the miners, encouraging them to keep up the fight. After the March riots, thanks to the socialists' propaganda, workers' leagues had been created in all the communes of the region. They were really miners' unions which provided financial support for the Amercoeur strike. The Workers' Party opened a subscription list which raised more than 13,500 francs. The cooperative bakery, "Le Progrès," at Jolimont, though of recent origin, gave bread to the most needy. From time to time one of its wagons, flying a red

flag, appeared in the region; each time it was received enthusiastically, for there was great misery.

During the course of this fight, Callewaert used the columns of *Le Peuple* to demand arbitration. At that time there was complete agreement between the Workers' Party and the Knights of Labor, and nothing foreshadowed the dissensions which were later to divide them.

After three months of battle the strikers had to capitulate. On the one hand, the employers had succeeded in finding foreign workers for part of their requirements; on the other, assistance was insufficient to meet the needs of 1,600 families.

The consequences of the defeat were terrible; 185 workers, including Callewaert, could not find work and had to go into exile or to other coal basins. Assistance from America, which the miners had counted on, did not materialize.<sup>6</sup> The miners were greatly disillusioned, and the Knights' membership fell to a low of forty-three.

### *The Knights of Labor and the Workers' Party*

The Workers' Party had scarcely been founded before two factions appeared: the followers of Volders who wished to organize the workers into trade unions, and the impatient advocates of an immediate and revolutionary general strike, who, with Defuisseaux at their head, became very popular. *The Catechism of the People* had especially enthusiastic support in Charleroi.<sup>7</sup> The Knights of Labor had succeeded in forming branches in certain communes, especially at Charleroi and Courcelles. They tried to extend their organization, but found themselves in competition with the Workers' Party, which was organizing workers' leagues everywhere.

A week after the resumption of work at Amercoeur, the General Council of the Workers' Party, on the proposal of the Federation

<sup>6</sup> According to the Gloveworkers' proceedings of November 14, 1887, a sum of 6,500 francs had been voted by the American Knights to aid the Amercoeur strikers. But it is certain that if this sum were sent, it did not arrive until after the resumption of work. This does not seem impossible; it might explain the re-entry into the organization of members who had deserted after the strike.

<sup>7</sup> *The Catechism of the People* was a pamphlet written by Albert Defuisseaux in March, 1886, describing, in question and answer form, the condition of the people and the injustice of the suffrage laws. It called for a mass demonstration for universal suffrage in Brussels on June 13, 1886 (Pentecost). See Bertrand, *op. cit.*, and Pierson, *op. cit.*—Ed.

[of workers' leagues] of the Center, called a congress of miners at Jolimont on February 7, 1887. Influenced by the ideas of Defuisseaux, the Jumet Miners' Union proposed that only miners' delegates be allowed to take part in the debates. Faced with such an attitude, the delegates of the Workers' Party left, after which a resolution for the general strike was adopted by a two-thirds vote. But the following Sunday the General Council met at Brussels. It took a firm position against the general strike and decided to call a congress of the Workers' Party in the Charleroi region on April 10, 1887. Furthermore, it adopted a resolution excluding Defuisseaux from the party.

The congress took place at Damprémy. After a long discussion, the question of the general strike was postponed until August 15. But the miners were determined to strike. In spite of the exhortations of speakers from the Workers' Party, the movement was launched. It began in the Center and included Charleroi, the Borinage, and then Liège. The Knights of Labor did not participate this time. As the correspondent of *Le Peuple* wrote, "it is misery which silences them and forces them to remain quiet." The strike at one time involved 10,000 workers in the Charleroi basin, including the metalworkers of Montignies, Châtelaineau, and Gilly.

On June 4, the federated workers' leagues and trade societies decided that all the workers should return to work until an undetermined date. Despairing of their own strength, they had voted a resolution appealing to the bourgeoisie to join the working class to obtain the resignation of the government and the dissolution of Parliament. The idea of this alliance was dear to the Knights of Labor. It will be seen from what follows that they did not abandon it. As early as March, Feroux of the Knights had asked to confer with the Miners' Union. He had proposed then the union of the working class and the liberal bourgeoisie. Other meetings were organized, at which the bourgeois were invited to explain their views. This new policy was opposed by the Workers' Party. Thus, dissension was not slow to arise between the party and the Federation of Charleroi. It came to a head at the Congress of Mons on August 15, 1887, called to discuss the question of the general strike.

The General Council had decided that groups that had never

paid affiliation fees to the Workers' Party would not be allowed to take part in the deliberations. This resolution, without any doubt, was directed against the Knights of Labor, who limited themselves to payment of dues to the American Order. The congress, by a vote of 88 to 49, agreed with the General Council. After discussion, sixteen societies, of which twelve were from Charleroi, left to found the Socialist Republican Party.

### *The Knights of Labor and the Socialist Republican Party*

The splinter party had only an ephemeral life. It held its first congress on December 25 and 26 at Châtelet, at which the Knights of Labor were represented. Callewaert was named a member of the executive committee and became one of the lieutenants of Defuisseaux, who had fled to France to avoid serving the sentence to which he had been condemned in connection with the *Catechism of the People*. Several interviews took place across the frontier, in the course of which Callewaert met with his chief and received his instructions. Unfortunately, Defuisseaux had other relationships, especially with the notorious Pourbaix, who was spying on behalf of the government.

The goal of the Socialist Republicans was to resume the general strike as soon as possible. They voted to do so at the Châtelet congress of December 2, 1888. Their efforts failed, however, and the delegates present at the congress were haled before the Court of Assizes of Hainaut. It is this affair which is known as the "Great Plot."<sup>8</sup> Callewaert was not tried because he had not been present at the Châtelet congress. He had become a member of a Conseil de Prud'hommes, and the Conseil had met on the very day of the congress. Thus for a second time he escaped official justice.

<sup>8</sup> The participants in the congress were accused of plotting to change the form of the government. Evidence at the trial was given by government agents who had infiltrated the Socialist Republican Party, including one Laloi who had presided over the Châtelet congress, and the aforementioned Pourbaix. In the coal mine strikes preceding and following the congress, there was some ineffectual dynamiting, possibly the work of agents provocateurs, for, as Pierson remarks, miners knew how to use dynamite. There was general reaction against government methods, and most of the accused were acquitted. See Bertrand, *op. cit.*, and Pierson, *op. cit.*—Ed.



# The Metalworkers

## *The Metalworkers of Couillet*

The metalworking industry is less localized than mining. While basic steel, for economic reasons, is found almost necessarily in the mining basins, metal fabrication is dispersed throughout the country.

Workers employed in the metal industries belong to diverse trades, have very varied skills, and require a wide range of physical aptitudes. Thus, the conditions of labor and especially wages differ greatly from one craft to another. In consequence, the first associations were craft unions, such as the molders of the Center and the patternmakers of Brussels.

Beginning in December, 1886, the Workers' Party succeeded in grouping the craft associations into a Federation of Metalworkers. By the following year the federation included nineteen societies, of which three were in the Charleroi basin. These were the United Metalworkers of Châtelineau, the Metalworkers of Couillet, and the "Future of the Metalworkers" of Marchienne-au-Pont. They included especially workers of the rolling mills, puddling furnaces, blast furnaces, and steel mills.

One of these societies, that of Couillet, soon joined the "Noble Order"; its story is rather interesting. Following the massacres of 1886, certain comrades of Couillet and of Marcinelle, among them Antoine Bailly, founded a union, the Metalworkers, at Roux-chèz-Leurant (called Mouquet). They had chosen this commune eight kilometers from their own in order to work more freely. They believed that the workers would be less hesitant to meet there because they would have less fear of employer reprisals.

Their predictions were borne out. Whereas there were eight members at the union's founding on July 4, 1886, more than 300 assembled at the meeting held on November 14. While returning home that day they improvised a demonstration which went about the streets of Charleroi chanting "Amnesty."

*The Metalworkers' Union*

The metalworkers' headquarters at Roux was only a short distance from that of the miners at Gohissart. Moreover, a good number of the Knights of Labor, among them Henri Guesse, one of the officers, lived nearby.

Both groups had the same fear of the employers, and on this basis relationships were established between the officers of the two associations. It was all the easier for Delwart to gain acceptance of his methods by the metalworkers in that affiliation with the Knights permitted the 300 members from Couillet to return there. It appeared unnecessary to meet outside the commune when there was a way to preserve secrecy at Couillet.

In January, 1887, the society took the name "Metalworkers' Union" and was initiated as No. 9967 of the Order of the Knights of Labor. It installed itself first in a small room, and then, as the membership quickly reached 1,000, it had to build a large hall.

The new organization was not slow to reveal its existence. On October 6, 1888, a conflict between the management and several rollers accused of having caused a stoppage broke out at the rolling mill of the Société de Couillet. When the accused workers were discharged, the entire work force took their part and obtained their reinstatement after a three-day strike. The puddlers wished to continue the battle with a view to a wage increase, but the police intervened and ended the walkout by arresting four principal strikers for interfering with the freedom to work.

The remaining members of the Society of Roux, for the same reason as the workers of Couillet, moved their headquarters to Monceau-sur-Sambre and likewise founded a section of the Knights of Labor.

# The Gloveworkers

## *The Glovemakers' Union*

Immediately after the miners joined the Knights, the American organization had a certain success at Brussels. It was accepted first by the glovemakers.

The Belgian glove industry, concentrated almost wholly in the Brussels region, employed at that time almost 1,300 workers divided into four distinct trades: the leather dressers, the bleachers, the glovemakers, and the dyeworkers. For a long time each group had its own "resistance" fund, and each had been originally a simple mutual aid society.<sup>9</sup> After intermittent periods of strength and weakness, these associations had been reconstituted: the Glovemakers' Union, March 27, 1882; the "Future of the Dressers," February 3, 1884; the dyers about 1885; and the bleachers at the same time.

The glove industry is one in which international competition is severe. To deal with its impact a Universal Federation of Glovemakers had been organized very early. As soon as the Belgians had reorganized, they were invited to join the federation by the glovemakers of America and of Grenoble, France. They therefore approached the glassworkers in order to obtain information concerning the functioning of a similar organization. The latter group gave them the desired information and took advantage of the contact to advise their joining the Order of the Knights of Labor of America. After several interviews, the Glovemakers' Union accepted and on June 13, 1885, joined the American organization as No. 4004.

The glovemakers, about 730 in number, constituted the most skilled and consequently the best paid craft. Most of them worked at home. They had already been able to establish a series of restrictive rules based on a narrow self-interest. Their association was indifferent, even at times hostile, to the demands of the other crafts. Thus it scarcely conformed to the principles of the Knights of Labor. It limited itself, at least in the beginning, to adopting a part of their rites and customs.

<sup>9</sup> Vandervelde, *Enquête sur les Associations Professionnelles*, *op. cit.*

But the union was to show even greater severity than the Knights toward members who refused to conform. A typical case is worth recounting. A member by the name of Vermeiren professed anarchist ideas and abhorred anything smacking of dogmatism. He refused to take the Knights' oath of honor. This act cost him exclusion from the society and, by consequence, discharge from the shop, because the Glovemakers' Union had been able to achieve a monopoly of the labor force. Vermeiren brought an action against the officers, but it was dismissed. The costs of the trial, amounting to 900 francs, were paid by the Knights of Labor of America.

The glovemakers made special use of the "court" instituted in conformity with the rules of the Order; they called it the Tribunal of the Knights of Labor. This tribunal dealt especially harshly with "delinquent" members. One of the most frequent infractions was that of the worker going to work outside the Brussels region. When he wished to rejoin the organization, and this was indispensable because the employers could hire only unionists, he was haled before the court, which imposed fines up to 50 or 100 francs. This measure was intended to keep the monopoly of the glove industry in the Brussels region.

### *The Amalgamated Gloveworkers*

About 1885 the four categories of workers together formed the Amalgamated Gloveworkers [Collectivité Gantière]. Vervenne, of the leather dyers, became its secretary. The dressers, bleachers, and dyers were almost obliged to follow the glovemakers into the Knights of Labor. They made up three sections which were initiated by Delwart.

The rites, the signs, the ceremonial served to strengthen the union. The "Future of the Dressers," which covered the least well paid craft and which had not been able to reach 50 per cent of the workers, saw its membership increase until it included almost all the dressers. The general feeling was that the Order had limitless resources and, when necessary, would send enough money to win every strike.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Much was made of a check for 5,000 francs which had been sent to the striking glassworkers and shown by Delwart during the founding of the Workers' Party in April, 1885.

However, the Amalgamated Gloveworkers had scarcely been born when it became clear that the interests of the several crafts were too divergent. Thus, at the beginning of 1887, the glove-makers, by only four less than a unanimous vote, decided to let the employers know that they had nothing in common with the leather dyers.<sup>11</sup> The dyers, for their part, had succeeded in getting the employers to agree to a rigid regulation of apprenticeship.<sup>12</sup> They were, moreover, much less numerous than the glovemakers. The Society of Leather Dyers included almost all the 140 workers employed in dyeing. It was in a very prosperous condition because of high dues (35 centimes per week) required for the "resistance" fund.

The Society of Bleachers included 80 of 120 workers. From the point of view of wages and of qualifications required, the bleachers were closest to the dyers.

### *The Colin Verelst Strike*

The Amalgamated Gloveworkers, however, did show some activity. In 1887 a strike broke out at the Colin Verelst shop among the dressers, who earned less there than elsewhere. They worked by the piece and demanded 45 centimes per piece in place of the 40 centimes they were being paid. The bleachers in the shop made common cause with the dressers. Soon the Amalgamated was involved and the firm's glovemakers and dyers laid down their tools.

It was the time to count on American generosity. From day to day the arrival of a considerable sum of money was expected. Confidence was so great that the unionists working in other shops voluntarily agreed to contribute 2 francs per week from their wages, credited against the American grant.

Finally, the employer had to capitulate. In the course of the struggle, he had succeeded in hiring ten foreign workers. The strikers demanded the discharge of these "yellows" as a condition of their return to work. The employer had to agree to discharge them, but at the same time he advised them to make a complaint against the officers of the Amalgamated for infringement of the freedom to work.

<sup>11</sup> Proceedings of meeting of Glovemakers' Union, February 28, 1887.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Acquitted by the lower court, the eight accused men were condemned on May 23, 1888, by a decree of the Brussels Court to a fine of 50 francs each and joint damages of 100 francs to each of the plaintiffs. With the costs and the 500-franc fee paid to the defense attorney, Robert, the expenses amounted to 2,000 francs and were divided among the four unions.

The "Future of the Dressers," the weakest of the four, had spent the sum of 11,000 francs in the course of the strike. The workers' belief in the power of the Order had disappeared and, although victorious, the dressers abandoned the union. Only the most devoted remained united, and they were too few to have any influence.

Shortly after the resumption of work, despite the constitution of the Knights of Labor, the glovemakers refused to admit delegates of the other unions to their assembly. With the glovemakers no longer concerned about the interests of the other crafts, the Amalgamated Gloveworkers disappeared.

# Mutual Assistance

The American Knights of Labor, among other welfare enterprises, had created "mutual aid funds," or life insurance societies, and "mutual assistance funds" which gave aid to needy members.

This type of activity was imported into Belgium. The Miners' Union, upon its creation, had only a "resistance" fund. Each member paid an initiation fee of 5 francs and then small monthly dues. Four months later, on September 6, 1885, the assembly decided to set up a mutual assistance fund, called the "Humanity Fund," which was supported by a monthly contribution of 10 centimes per member. Jean Callewaert, fortunately, later described its functioning in an article of which the following are the essential passages:

For greater ease and safety, a book of coupons was given to the almoner, the person charged with visiting and helping distressed members. When, after a visit, he had determined the need to help a member, he gave him a coupon on which he placed his signature, the name of the member, the sum granted, and the date. The same information was written on the stub which he retained. The member went to the treasurer, who, in exchange for the coupon, gave him the sum indicated.

Our hopes were surpassed and we would never have believed that, with the payment of so modest a sum, so much good could have been done, so much misery alleviated.

The aid was regulated according to the number of children and their age, the need of the family, and so forth.

What surprised outsiders was that the monthly payments made to needy families varied from 5 to 20 francs and the total of these small payments amounted to several thousand francs.

The Humanity Fund was the only one to function until April 1, 1889. On that date a true mutual aid fund was created, with higher dues and fixed benefits provided for in the rules. However, the old fund remained until January 24, 1892, when a decision of the assembly made affiliation with the mutual aid fund obligatory on all Knights.

The Glovemakers' Union also had a Humanity Fund, but its aid was distributed in less careful fashion. The proceedings of its meet-

ing of November 14, 1887, state that "there is granted a sum of 50 francs from the Humanity Fund to member Van Campenhout who is afflicted with an incurable disease."

It is likely that other sections also had similar institutions, but no trace of them has been found.



# The State Assembly

Still other early groups belonged to the Order of the Knights of Labor of America. It appears that they had no history and contented themselves with attending the meetings of the State Assembly created in Brussels at the end of 1887. No indication has been found that their affiliation with the Noble Order had any influence whatsoever on these societies.

According to Lambillotte, the composition of the State Assembly at the time of its founding was as follows:

1. Glassworkers' Union at Jumet
  2. Miners' Union at Jumet-Gohissart
  3. Miners' Union at Charleroi-Nord
  4. Metalworkers' Union at Couillet
  5. Metalworkers' Union at Monceau-sur-Sambre
  6. Cast Iron Molders at Herstal
  7. Machinists at Grivegnée
- and the following, all of Brussels:
8. Glovemakers' Union
  9. Leather Dressers
  10. Leather Dyers
  11. Leather Bleachers
  12. Lacemakers
  13. United Molders
  14. Wood Patternmakers
  15. Confectioners
  16. Tinworkers
  17. Furcutters
  18. Machinists

The secretary of the Belgian Assembly was successively: Dupont; Mattens of the leather dressers, who shortly replaced Dupont; and finally Lambillotte of the glassworkers, who became a deputy in 1894. Delwart remained in the post of Master Workman until the disaffiliation from the American Knights in 1890. At that time almost the only groups left in the organization were those with which we have dealt here: the glassworkers, miners, metalworkers, and glovemakers.

# The Independent Belgian Knights of Labor

After the "Great Plot" trial the two socialist parties had reunited; the dissidents of the Borinage and the Center had resumed their places in the Workers' Party. The workers' leagues of the Charleroi basin had also, with some exceptions, rejoined the main body of workers. But the Knights of Labor, profiting from the split, had succeeded in absorbing a half dozen miners' sections.

We have already indicated that the success of the Knights was due in large part to the support given to the glassworkers in their strike of 1884. But all of the affiliated organizations had by now put this American source, reputed to be inexhaustible, to the proof.

The workers of the glove trade had vainly awaited the aid expected during their strike of 1887. They remained affiliated after the resumption of work only in the hope of regaining the considerable sums they had had to spend.

The miners, during the Amercoeur strike, had been supported by the whole of the Belgian working class affiliated with the Workers' Party. They had even received sizable grants from English miners; but the American generosity which they felt they had a right to expect had not shown itself. Nor had the metalworkers of Couillet received any assistance in their strike of October, 1888.

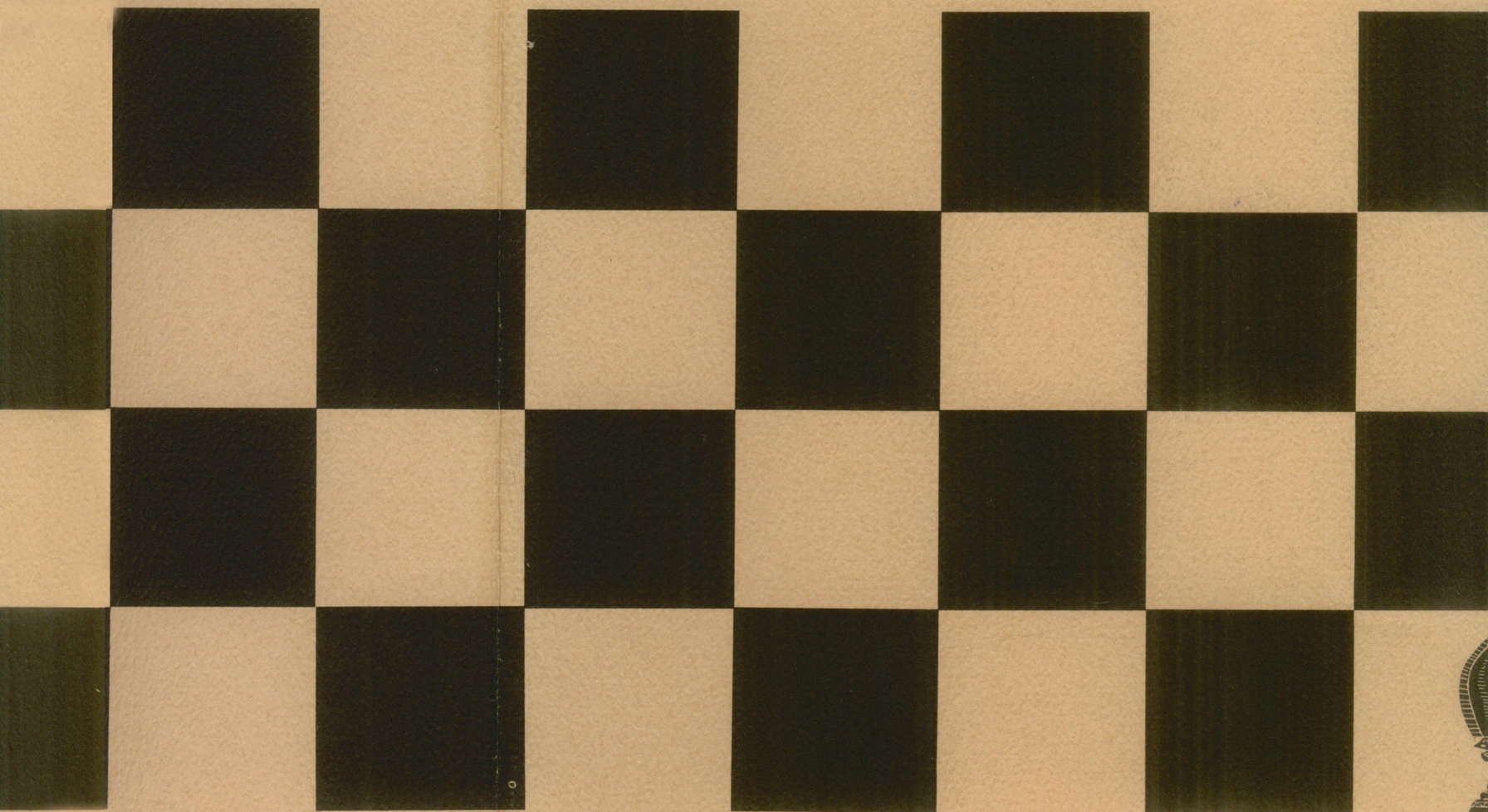
Only the glassworkers had been helped in any significant way by their Pittsburgh colleagues. But the Glassworkers' Union was very weak by now, and had almost no influence in the State Assembly.

Moreover, the Knights of Labor of America had already entered its period of decadence. The American Federation of Labor, founded by the craft unions, was making progress at the Order's expense. The decline of the Knights was not conducive to continued Belgian affiliation with the General Assembly of the United States.

Delwart was charged with presenting Belgian demands at the General Assembly of the Order at Indianapolis, but they were not granted. Hence agreement on disaffiliation was easy to reach at the Brussels State Assembly in September, 1889.







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