1948 Meatpackers Strike

by
William Lanoue

Surveillance photos taken from the Exchange Building show the National Guard gathered at the center of Concord Street at the height of the 1948 meatpackers strike. DCHS Collections.

Many were home from war and wanted more than ever to live a long full life. Others had worked long days and nights during the war to feed the troops overseas as well as Americans on the home front. Some had migrated to the cities from farms and small towns looking for work. They were raising children and trying to hold burgeoning families together in the face of a housing shortage, fears of inflation and the increasing drumbeat warning of a new foreign enemy with sympathizers and agents in our midst. There were those who wanted higher wages now, others more concerned with pensions and health care benefits, and still others dedicated to achieving social and political change, sometimes of radical proportions.

They lived in Chicago, Kansas City, Omaha -- and South St. Paul, Minnesota where many walked to work or took the blue and white jitney buses down the hill across Concord Street to the plants. They also lived on St. Paul's West Side and East Side; in neighborhoods along Rondo and Selby; in Hastings, Farmington and other small towns through out Dakota County. They were white, black, and Hispanic; of Polish, Croatian, Serbian, Romanian, Slovakian, Irish, German, French-Canadian and countless other ethnic backgrounds. They were male and female. And at 12:01 a.m. on March 16, 1948 they walked off the job along with 100,000 other union workers in a national strike against the nation's Big Four meatpacking companies.

Setting the Stage

Less than three years after the defeat of Nazi Germany and Japan, America was already a far different place. Through all but the last few months of the war President Franklin D. Roosevelt had led the United States. In fact he was the only president many Americans had ever known. Roosevelt had been elected to an unprecedented fourth term in November 1944 with a little known former haberdasher from Missouri on the ticket. It is hard to argue that Harry S Truman added much to the campaign, but in April 1945 the former Senator and friend – some would say crony of Kansas City Democratic Party boss Tom Pendergast - found himself presiding over what was now arguably the most powerful nation on earth. Upon expressing his condolences to Eleanor Roosevelt, Truman asked if there was anything he could do for her. Mrs. Roosevelt responded, "Is there anything we can do for you? For you are the one in trouble now."[1]

The widowed First Lady's words must have crept back into the new President's mind many times in the months and years to come. Truman presided over the surrender of Nazi Germany in May 1945, the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan and that country's capit-

ulation in August. Almost immediately he had to deal with a powerful, fully war mobilized country spread across a vast continent now bent on returning to a peace time economy as soon as possible. He had inherited a huge military machine of some 15 million strong, and with the end of the most destructive war in history, he faced the daunting task of demobilizing the men and women in uniform as part of the transition.[2]

Many of the world's capitals and major cities lay in ruins. Millions had been killed and still millions more were now displaced and homeless. Economies in Europe were in a shambles and there soon emerged a wariness of the perceived threat of global Communism. The outspoken former Missouri senator had his hands full from the outset, but his approval rating in the first Gallup pole of his presidency was a sky-high 87 percent. It was something neither Roosevelt nor Eisenhower ever achieved. He would need every bit of it.[3]

While certainly not perfect, labor relations during the war – at least at the national level – had generally been guided by the overriding priority of victory. When the United States entered the war, leaders of both the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) promised that there would be no strikes or walkouts as long as the nation was locked in war. The government established the National War Labor Board as had been done during World War I and empowered it to impose settlements in all labor disputes. Economic stability was seen as vital to the war effort, and the administration, industry and national labor leaders entered into collaboration to insure it. Of course there was give and take. Labor through its no strike pledge had foresworn use of its most vital weapon in the drive to secure higher wages, better benefits and working conditions.[4]

Congress passed the Economic Stabilization Act freezing, for all practical purposes, wages at the level established in September 1942. Unions now needed a reason or motivation to display to new and veteran union members alike the vitality and importance of the union itself. In exchange for the no strike pledge the Board set up maintenance of membership provisions under which union members would be bound to membership for the duration of the contract. The idea was to create a national climate whereby labor unions and management would enter into a cooperative relationship aimed at insuring an unceasing and booming production level in the war effort.[5]

On a national level the collaboration of labor, government and companies combined with the united effort and support for the war, virtually brought an end to strikes for the duration of the war. It was a remarkable success and evidenced a nation united in securing the one goal that counted most for everyone: victory, sure and complete and as quickly as possible. Five months after Pearl Harbor the chairman of the War Labor Board stated that not a single sanctioned strike had occurred. He called the no-strike policy an "outstanding success" and added that even during wildcat walkouts the labor unions had done everything possible to end it. There were however, strikes during the war. Most notably in 1943 the United Mine Workers staged a series of successful strikes against the coal industry, but for the most part, the unions held to the no-strike pledge throughout the war years.[6]

In the final analysis organized labor became much stronger during the war years thanks in large part to the cooperation of the government in the membership maintenance agreements. It is estimated that by 1946 some 69 percent of production workers in manufacturing were represented by unions. The unions, for the most part, were quite happy with the numbers at this time and more than willing to see the status quo of continued cooperation between organized labor, industry and government continue. But there were other interests and pressures being brought to bear after the rapid collapse of the Japanese Empire in August 1945.[7]

Instead of a gradual demobilization envisioned by the administration that had forecast a longer war involving a land invasion of the Japanese main islands, the war had come to an abrupt end after the use of the atomic bombs. Price controls which had operated with great success during the war quickly eroded, pleasing business leaders who desired a quick return to free market pricing. Wages however, for the most part, stayed mired at or near the September 1942 levels established by the War Labor Board. There were those who saw a rise in labor strife as inevitable. A little more than a year before the war ended the *New York Times* predicted "labor-management antagonisms which forecast a post-war period of great turmoil in labor relations . . ."[8] What was unknown at the time was whether the conflict would take the form of union sanctioned actions or wildcat strikes. During the war years the number of wildcat actions had increased dramatically and proved an effective tactic in the absence of union sanctioned actions. The country did not have to wait long for the answer.[9]

The ink was barely dry on the surrender instruments signed in September 1945 when the "greatest strike wave in United States history" kicked off.[10] Rick Halpern in his book *Down on the Killing Floor* summed up the national stage immediately following the war:

> As the war wound to a close, industrial workers in the United States grew increasingly restless. Four years of austerity, frozen wages, and constraints upon union activity had produced a widespread sense of grievance that

The South St. Paul Daily Reporter kept the community apprised of the developing strike.

> went beyond any single issue. While the cessation of hostilities and a return to normalcy was welcome, reconversion to peacetime production caused considerable anxiety. The elimination of overtime hours meant a sharp reduction in take-home pay – in meatpacking, where there had not been a wage increase since before Pearl Harbor, this cut was as deep as 30 percent – and postwar inflation was expected to make this problem more acute. Moreover, many new hirees feared that the return of eight million veterans would flood the labor market and, coupled with layoffs, squeeze them out of their jobs.[11]

Halpern goes on to recount that by the end of 1946 more than six thousand strikes had taken place involving more than seven million workers. While many of these actions were of the wildcat variety, the most effective actions were those sanctioned and run by the international unions. Among those directed by union leadership were nationwide strikes in the oil, coal, rubber, automobile – and meatpacking industries. By this time the strike had probably reached its peak as organized labor's most effective weapon in its drive for higher wages, increased benefits and improved working conditions. During the war the wildcat action had proved very effective in resolving local disputes and was generally of short duration. Immediately following the war the mass picketing at plants nationwide came to the forefront in economic conflict. So it is important to examine the events of the 1946 meatpackers strike in order to appreciate the backdrop and context within which the 1948 strike was waged.[12]

There were other conflicts and debates taking place which would have an impact in shaping and channeling the events of 1948. One was the debate in Congress following the strikes of 1946 over the enactment of Taft-Hartley legislation. The other was a current of competition, bitter at times, between unions making up the AFL and those of the more militant CIO, more particularly the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen, AFL, and the United Packinghouse Workers of America, UPWA.[13] If all politics is local, the same may be said for labor relations. The aspects of post-war American life, while often viewed on the broad national stage, would find much of their impact and legacy played out on the streets of South St. Paul much the same as in Chicago, Kansas City and Omaha.

On January 16, 1946 approximately 93,000 packinghouse workers[14] walked off the job. The dispute centered on pay and involved both Amalgamated Meat Cutters and UPWA as allies, albeit uneasy ones. On January 24, 1946 President Truman, utilizing wartime powers, seized the packinghouses on the grounds the strikes were impeding the war effort. This action came nearly half a year after the end of the war, but with auto and steelworkers also out on strike, the government decided to act. President Truman ordered the unions to cease the strike and Amalgamated obeyed immediately, accepting a settlement offer of fifteen cents per hour. The UPWA took a different course choosing to defy the order to return to work. Even in the face of threats of criminal prosecution the union persisted in its defiance, arguing they would hold out until the government guaranteed that the packers would be bound by the decision of a fact-finding commission. In the end the union won a sixteen-cent raise retroactive to the previous August. While it was not as much as they had sought it was more than what was agreed to by rival Amalgamated. Taking advantage of their strength, and what was widely perceived as a victory, the union again threatened to walkout in the fall of 1946. This time the packers folded their tents quickly and granted an additional pay increase of seven and a half-cents per hour as well as other concessions.[15]

The backlash against organized labor began almost immediately and culminated in June 1947 with the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act over President Truman's veto. The new law seriously curtailed the effectiveness of organized labor. Among the legal restrictions that came into play were the outlawing of the closed shop, the secondary boycott and jurisdictional strikes. The law also allowed the government to mandate a sixty-day cooling off period and permitted employers to sue unions for breach of contract. Unions were required to register with the secretary of labor and required union officers to file affidavits attesting to their non-Communist status. Those union leaders who were indeed Communists now faced the choice of resigning, concealing their affiliation or exposing their union to whatever tactics employers chose. To disobey the requirements of Taft-Hartley was to risk the unions' coverage and protection under the National Labor Relations Board, NLRB.[16] To put it mildly, the climate that had existed during the successful actions of the previous year had changed – perhaps forever.

Armour strikers were somewhat playful as the strike began in March 1948. DCHS Collections

Negotiation

In October 1947 the AFL voted to comply with the act while the CIO adopted a neutral position leaving it up to individual unions. One of the results of the different approaches by two umbrella organizations was the increased competition between Amalgamated and UPWA. The former was perceived to be more than willing to play ball with the government and the employers while UPWA was seen as militant and suspicious of involvement with, and reliance upon, the government to secure their rights. There were reports of raids by Amalgamated on UPWA organized plants raising the issue of increased risks to the workers through continued noncompliance with the requirements of Taft-Hartley. The contest between the unions for the hearts and minds - not to mention the loyalty - of packinghouse workers across the country was now in full swing.[17]

It was not long before the union reopened negotiations with the Big Four meatpackers, Swift, Armour, Cudahy and Wilson companies. Once again the main source of contention was pay. The UPWA demanded a raise of 29 cents per hour. The companies countered with an offer of nine cents. The stage was soon set for a confrontation much like what had occurred two years before, only this time the rules had been significantly altered. Taft-Hartley was firmly in place and the CIO had left the UPWA isolated in its defiance of the law through the larger organization's neutral stance on the matter. As if this was not enough for the UPWA, Amalgamated Meat Cutters quickly settled with the packers for the offered nine cents and would not be joining UPWA in any action against the companies. It should come as no surprise therefore that talks between the union and the packers quickly broke down. A strike vote was taken on February 1948 with 90 per cent of the UPWA membership voted to walkout on March 16.[18]

Halpern notes that UPWA President Ralph Helstein urged a strike even if in the end the union had to accept the companies' original offer. Citing the minutes of UPWA Executive Board meeting held in January 1948, Halpern quotes Helstein as saying "The people will still feel better because we fought about it and didn't take it right away."[19]

As expected President Truman requested that the strike be delayed pending the findings of a government inquiry. It was no surprise when the union rejected the President's request and set the deadline for the walkout.

Even though the UPWA could take nearly 100,000 workers out on strike against the Big Four packers, they would not enjoy the united front they presented in 1946. Amalgamated's acceptance of the nine cent raise meant the UPWA could not shut down the entire industry. In addition, Taft-Hartley requirements of notice of intent to strike, allowed the packers precious time to prepare, while at the same time, the increased use of court injunctions would place a drain on the union's financial resources through seemingly endless litigation. With the change in the legal and political climates since the 1946 strike, the companies had decided to fight.[20]

On December 3, 1947, the *South St. Paul Daily Reporter* informed its readers that the union had met the Taft-Hartley requirements by providing the companies 60 days notice of intent to strike. The President, despite the request for the union to delay the strike pending an inquiry, could have had the strike delayed through a court order enabling the President to create a board of inquiry under the national emergency strike provisions of the new labor law. President Truman declined this more drastic course of action.

On March 3 Helstein said for public consumption, "We are willing to continue negotiating with the companies, although it is apparent from our previous meetings that they are unwilling to give any realistic consideration to this serious economic needs of the packinghouse workers." He went on to say that a survey had been conducted of the economic conditions under which the packinghouse workers and their families lived. He maintained the survey revealed many families sinking into deeper debt and "almost all are being deprived of basic necessities."

In South St. Paul, the *Daily Reporter* informed readers that strike rumors were floating about the city freely, but that no new developments could be reported locally as "business at the plants and the stockyards continued to move along at a normal pace." Thomas Kaliszewski, a then 19-year-old stockyards worker employed by Central Livestock Association, recalled that things may have appeared to be going along as usual but the com-

pany he worked for was gearing up for what was to come. Central Livestock was making arrangements to move their operations from South St. Paul to the stockyards in New Brighton in the event of a strike. Kaliszewski said several other commission firms located at the St. Paul Union Stockyards made similar preparations.

The big problem facing the firms and the producers who supplied the animals was going to be the absence of the huge markets offered by the primary packinghouses. By the strike deadline, the 70-plus acre stockyards in South St. Paul would be virtually emptied of animals and workers. The city had been through strikes before, notably in 1921-22, 1933, 1942 and 1946. There were preparations to be made not only by strikers and the employers, but by those whose businesses and jobs were dependent on the unbroken operation of the huge packing plants, Swift & Company, Armour and Company in South St. Paul and Cudahy and Company across the river in Newport as well as the stock yards themselves.

Locally at least one of the packinghouses saw fit to issue a statement. Swift & Company General Manager A. Valentine, commenting on the UPWA announcement establishing a strike date, said, " A national strike in the meatpacking industry is unnecessary. The demand of the CIO Packinghouse Workers for 29 cents and hour increase, later reduced to 19 cents, is exorbitant and unrealistic. Two other unions, AFL and Independent, representing 40 percent of Swift's meat packing plant employees, have already agreed to a 9 cent increase in wages. This 9 cent raise more than equals the increase in the cost of living since the wage increase last June. Swift & Company has expressed its willingness to make the same settlement with the CIO union. Unreasonable demands and a strike called by that union will result in loss of wages to employees and a disruption of our normal services to live stock producers and consumers."

In the week prior to the deadline the papers were filled with reports of preparations for the approaching strike. A renewed notice was given on Wednesday March 10 to livestock feeders, shippers and truckers reiterating that the strike was set for next Tuesday at 12:01 a.m. and that all marketing plans should be "governed accordingly." One of these warnings came from the South St. Paul live stock marketing committee, a body representing various local marketing interests, and cautioned that there was no assurance that the packinghouses would be buying animals after Friday. The statement urged shippers to stay tuned to local radio and to keep an eye on the newspapers for future developments.

The tone of the warnings were matter of fact and non-threatening and were coupled with reports of continued negotiations by the union and the packers in Chicago. There was a note of hope attached to the pos-

Thomas Kaliszewski

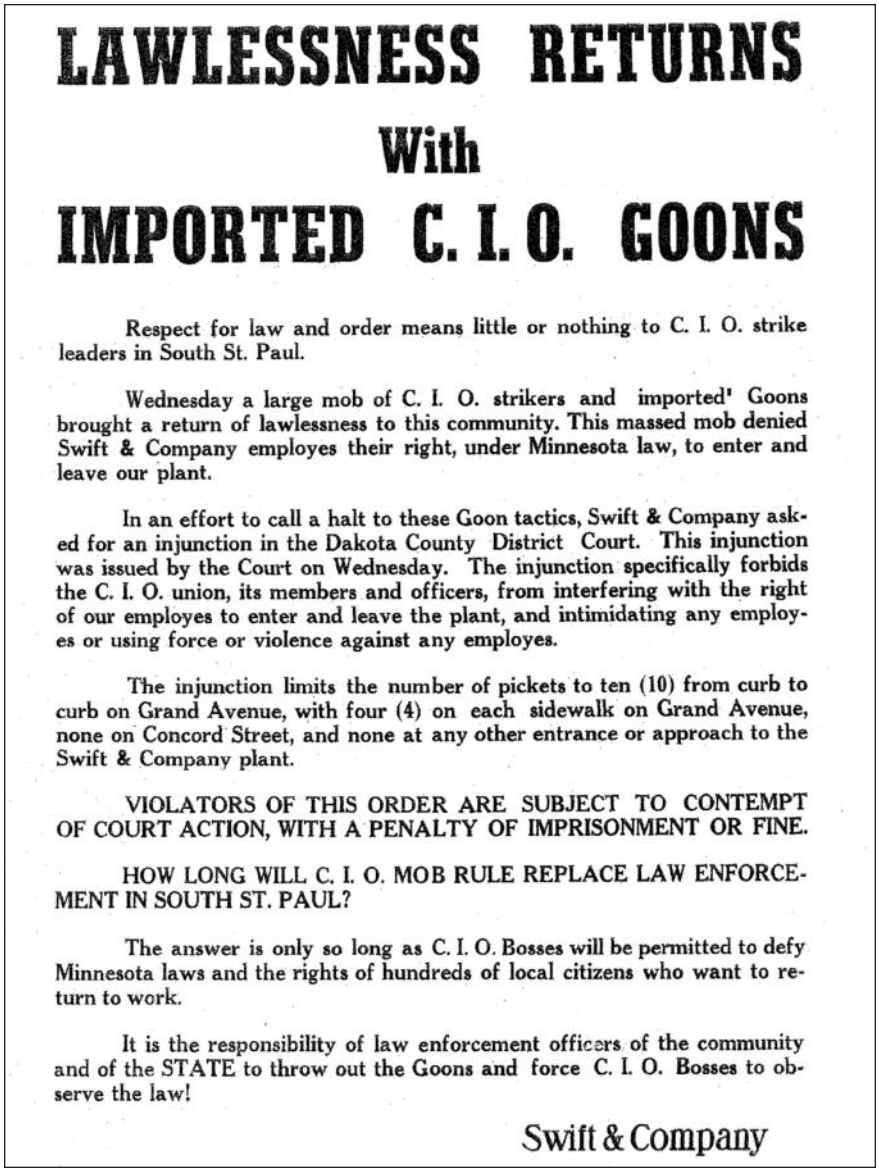
Tom Kaliszewski was just shy of 20 years old when preparations for a prolonged packinghouse strike began. He was working for Central Livestock Association at the St. Paul Union Stockyards as a yardman feeding and caring for the livestock Central handled. In time he would become a commission man with Central, working for the firm nearly 50 years.

While the UPWA and the Big Four meat packers – Swift, Armour, Wilson and Cudahy – futilely pursued a negotiated settlement and the March 16 strike date approached, Central management made the decision to move operations to the stockyards in New Brighton, Minnesota. Kaliszewski recalls the entire operation moving to the yards in the northern St. Paul suburb and where they remained for the entire ten weeks of the strike. He saw the move as a wise decision, even though at the time, there were those who predicted a short strike. It kept people working, kept livestock moving to those plants still operating in Green Bay, WI, southern Minnesota and Illinois as well as enabling at least some producers to continue raising and selling their animals.

Many of the 27 other commission firms operating in the St. Paul Union Stockyards at the time scrambled as well during these days to find space and facilities to continue their business operations during the long, bitter walkout. Kaliszewski said temporary pens were set up in such places as West St. Paul, the small yards in Hampton about 20 miles to the south, across the river in Wisconsin, west of the Twin Cities and near the sales barn outside of St. Cloud within sight of the penitentiary there.

Even though he managed to keep working during the strike while many others not directly involved in the strike were not as lucky he was happy and relieved when the strike ended. Many plant workers, he said, estimated that it took five or six years to make up the financial loses absorbed due to the strike. When it was finally over, he said, Central was back in full swing within a week.

But the worry did not end there. On Memorial Day 1948 Tom remembers standing on the steps leading from Camber Avenue watching the yards burn. The fire, huge and frightening to everyone who saw it, was particularly scary to those who relied on the yards for their livelihood. He remembers that it was mainly confined however, to the sheep division in the southwest corner of the facility, apparently the result of a discarded cigarette.



LAWLESSNESS RETURNS
With
IMPORTED C. I. O. GOONS

Respect for law and order means little or nothing to C. I. O. strike leaders in South St. Paul.

Wednesday a large mob of C. I. O. strikers and imported' Goons brought a return of lawlessness to this community. This massed mob denied Swift & Company employes their right, under Minnesota law, to enter and leave our plant.

In an effort to call a halt to these Goon tactics, Swift & Company asked for an injunction in the Dakota County District Court. This injunction was issued by the Court on Wednesday. The injunction specifically forbids the C. I. O. union, its members and officers, from interfering with the right of our employes to enter and leave the plant, and intimidating any employes or using force or violence against any employes.

The injunction limits the number of pickets to ten (10) from curb to curb on Grand Avenue, with four (4) on each sidewalk on Grand Avenue, none on Concord Street, and none at any other entrance or approach to the Swift & Company plant.

VIOLATORS OF THIS ORDER ARE SUBJECT TO CONTEMPT OF COURT ACTION, WITH A PENALTY OF IMPRISONMENT OR FINE.

HOW LONG WILL C. I. O. MOB RULE REPLACE LAW ENFORCEMENT IN SOUTH ST. PAUL?

The answer is only so long as C. I. O. Bosses will be permitted to defy Minnesota laws and the rights of hundreds of local citizens who want to return to work.

It is the responsibility of law enforcement officers of the community and of the STATE to throw out the Goons and force C. I. O. Bosses to observe the law!

Swift & Company

Swift & Company participated in a print war in the local newspaper.
South St. Paul Daily Reporter, May 13, 1948.

sibility that President Truman would declare an emergency and intervene to forestall the walkout. The UPWA statement issued the same day bluntly warned farmers not to send animals to market until the strike was settled. The union pointed out that once the strike begins, it would be impossible to dispose of animals in the yards for the duration. Though talks were continuing, A. T. Stephens, UPWA area director for Iowa, Nebraska and Colorado, flatly stated that there was no possibility of averting a strike.

The next day, Wednesday of the week prior to the strike deadline, the livestock committee once again warned producers and shippers about sending animals to the yards beyond Friday. Meanwhile in Chicago, UPWA President Helstein summoned the union's national strike committee for a meeting the following day to finalize plans for the strike. Negotiations continued with meetings between the parties and federal labor conciliators but a union spokesman said the meetings "are getting nowhere." Glen Chinander was named to represent the Minnesota union locals at the Chicago UPWA meeting. Milton Siegel, identified as a UPWA district representative, and later as a field representative, announced that a meeting of all local union members would be held on the approaching Sunday, March 14, at 3 p.m. in the St. Paul Auditorium. The subject of the meeting was to discuss plans for the conduct of the strike.

The weekend arrived with out any progress being reported in the Chicago negotiations. The marketing committee in South St. Paul ordered that live stock shipments to the market here should cease "until further notice." The packinghouses filled their immediate live stock requirements of stock for slaughter then withdrew from the market. The companies also held out hope that the dispute would be referred to the President under emergency provisions of Taft-Hartley. The President, a spokesman said, could then order the attorney general to seek an injunction delaying the strike while a fact-finding board investigated the issues. There was no promise however that the packers would go along with any recommendations that would come out of any such inquiry.

It was estimated that the strike would halt about a third of the nation's meat industry. It was not to be the clean sweep that the unions had realized in the walkout just two years before but they hoped it would be enough. A United Press story carried in the *South St. Paul Daily Reporter* on March 13, 1948 set the stage for the approaching strike and how the unions – the AFL's Amalgamated Meat Cutters and the CIO's United Packinghouse Workers – stacked up against each other. It is a description of a weakened position for the UPWA, ripe with portent for a long bitter fight.

If the strike were called, housewives would find less meat at the butcher counters, but enough to get by on. Some experts said there would be more meat available than there was during the wartime shortages.

Many of the big plants and most of the smaller ones will not be affected because their employees belong to the rival AFL Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen's union. The AFL, which settled for a nine-

cent hourly wage increase last month, has contracts at 76 Chicago plants, which will continue operations. The union represents employees at 14 Armour & Co. plants throughout the country, 11 Swift plants, two Wilson plants and three Cudahy plants. In addition, it represents 90 percent of the employees in branch houses of the "Big Four" packers.

The CIO union, however, would walk out at 28 Swift plants, 29 Armour plants, 11 Cudahy plants and seven Wilson establishments.

In downtown St. Paul, Frank Ellis, international vice president of the UPWA, addressed an estimated one thousand union members in Stern Hall of the St. Paul Auditorium on Sunday March 14. He outlined the issues surrounding the wage dispute and discussed plans for the walkout. The stockyards were reported as nearly empty, and in Chicago, company negotiators turned down an arbitration plan saying wages and major contract provisions should not be subject to arbitration. Union chief Helstein denounced the packers' decision saying it represented "evidence of unwillingness to meet the issues of the wage dispute." Despite their original demand for 29-cents, the UPWA had agreed to arbitration if the packinghouses would immediately grant a nine-cent hourly wage increase retroactive to January 12. The only hope remaining for averting a strike appeared to be direct intervention by President Truman under Taft-Hartley.

Besides the final preparations being made by union and company officials, city and police officials were making plans to handle "any situation that may arise." Whatever plans they made, it would not be enough.

The Strike

The picket lines went up before dawn on March 16, 1948 at the gates to Swift & Company, Armour & Company, Rifkin and Sons packinghouses in South St. Paul and the Cudahy Company plant across the river in Newport. The immediate focal points of attention were the Swift gates at Concord and Grand and the intersection of Concord and Armour Avenue leading to the Armour gates. Once the sun came up, people began gathering near the picket lines particularly those at the bottom of the hill near the Concord-Grand Avenue intersection. Soon hundreds of people were milling about including strikers, non-striking employees of the packinghouses and spectators.

Behind the picket lines the approximately 80 acres of stockyards lay empty and quiet. No new shipments of live stock arrived and little if any movement was seen in the deserted allies and pens of the huge complex. About halfway up the Grand Avenue hill from Concord, the Hollywood Theater marquee advertised a St. Patrick's Day Amateur Show set for the next night, The winner would be eligible to compete for a place on Cedric Adams' Stairway to Stardom on WCCO radio. The fea-

Strikers congregate on the Grand Avenue hill. The woman next to the car is Jean Tilsen Brust, who would become well known as a Socialist activist. DCHS collections.

James Capeti

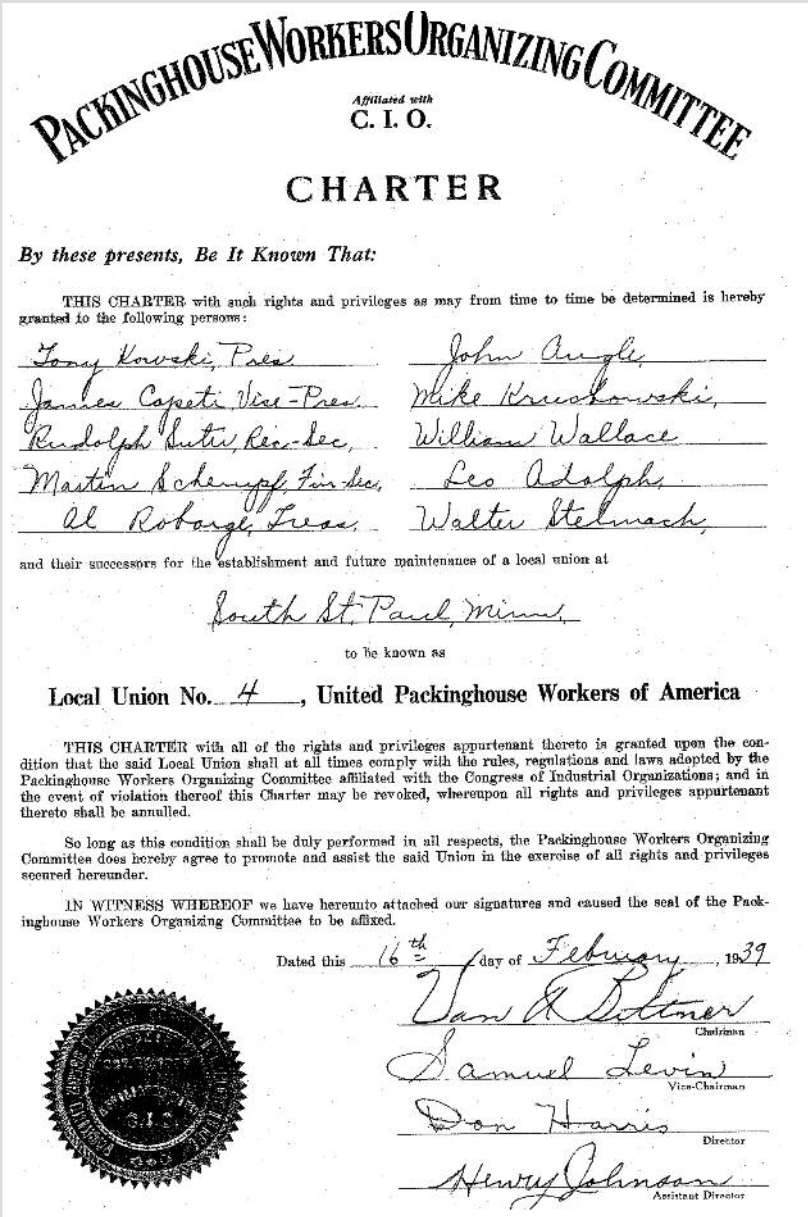
Jim Capeti was literally on the inside looking out when the strike began. He, along with other supervisory personnel, found themselves locked in the Armour & Company plant when the picket lines went up in the early morning hours of March 16, 1948. And they stayed locked in the plant for the first ten days of the strike. Only an agreement between the UPWA and the company that supervisory and office workers would be allowed to cross the lines brought them their freedom from the 24-hour a day existence in the massive red brick packinghouse.

Capeti's story, however, does not begin there, and to say his perspective of the strike was unique, is understatement at best. He came to this country from Romania following World War I and grew up near Rice Street in St. Paul. He went to work for Armour in 1937 and soon learned a lesson that changed the course of his life in a dramatic way. He explains that he had been at work in the plant "chiseling heads" and became ill. When he could no longer do his job he was summarily fired. Although rehired almost immediately after intervention by a friend, his vulnerability to the whim of the boss was not lost on him. Following New Deal legislation – the Wagner Act – Capeti and others set out to organize the workers at the South Saint Paul Armour plant. And in 1939 the UPWA issued the first charter for Local No. 4 of the CIO union. Capeti is a signatory on the charter, listed there as vice-president of the new local.

But things changed since 1939 and Capeti had risen to a foreman's position in the beef cut and was now a "company man." While in previous strikes, most notably in 1942, he had been a picket captain running the lines that shut down plant operations he now found himself unable to leave the plant and working side by side with non-striking workers to generate as much production as possible for the company.

Capeti said the decision to accept the promotion in the first place was an agonizing one simply from the standpoint that he knew he may find himself across the line from the men he had helped organize in the early union days. And it was as uncomfortable as he feared, but once he accepted the promotion he never wavered in his commitment. But he never lost his sympathy and sense of solidarity with working men either. He confirms that as the strike wore on, more workers crossed the lines and the plant continued to operate, albeit on a limited basis, through out the duration of the strike.

When it was over he remembers that the bitterness between those who stayed out and those who crossed over lasted for a long time. More than a half century later he still believes that sometimes the only way the workers are able to get their point across is by striking. But he also understands the company's obligations to continue operating in a healthy economic fashion. He believes that it is only through honest talk and mutual respect that destructive strikes – like that of 1948 - are avoided.



PACKINGHOUSE WORKERS ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Affiliated with C. I. O.

CHARTER

By these presents, Be It Known That:

THIS CHARTER with such rights and privileges as may from time to time be determined is hereby granted to the following persons:

Tony Kovecki, Pres. — John Angle
James Capeti Vice-Pres. — Mike Kruchowski
Rudolph Sutic, Rec-Sec. — William Wallace
Martin Schempf, Fin-Sec. — Leo Adolphs
Al Robergl, Treas. — Walter Stelmach

and their successors for the establishment and future maintenance of a local union at

South St. Paul, Minn.

to be known as

Local Union No. 4, United Packinghouse Workers of America

THIS CHARTER with all of the rights and privileges appurtenant thereto is granted upon the condition that the said Local Union shall at all times comply with the rules, regulations and laws adopted by the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations; and in the event of violation thereof this Charter may be revoked, whereupon all rights and privileges appurtenant thereto shall be annulled.

So long as this condition shall be duly performed in all respects, the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee does hereby agree to promote and assist the said Union in the exercise of all rights and privileges secured hereunder.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF we have hereunto attached our signatures and caused the seal of the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee to be affixed.

Dated this 16th day of February, 1939

Van A. Bittner, Chairman
Samuel Levin, Vice-Chairman
Don Harris, Director
Henry Johnson, Assistant Director

ture movie being offered St. Patrick's Day evening along with the amateur competition was "Desire Me" starring Greer Garson and Robert Mitchum. And in the back of this morning's *Daily Reporter* a classified ad offered a butcher's job at Lee's Grocery on the corner of 12th Avenue and Marie. It was quickly filled.

Administrative personnel, plant maintenance employees and stockyards workers were allowed through the lines but only after they obtained passes at union strike headquarters. The union estimated that there were some 12,500 members in the area, which included walkouts at Big Four plants in South St. Paul, St. Paul, Newport, Albert Lea, Winona, Faribault, Eau Claire, WI and West Fargo, ND. Four thousand of their members however, those at the George A. Hormel & Co. plant in Austin, were not on the picket lines, the contract at that plant not being open to renegotiations at this time. The vast majority of the remaining area membership were on strike at the plants in South St. Paul and Newport, and like nearly everyone else directly or indirectly affected by the walkout whether here, Chicago, Omaha, Kansas City, Milwaukee or Sioux City, the main thing on their minds was just how long the strike would last. The news coming out of Chicago was not encouraging.

Ralph Helstein, union president, sent a telegram to President Truman rejecting the President's eleventh-hour appeal for a delay to the strike. Helstein maintained that any delay "at this time would obviously serve no fruitful purpose in promoting a solution of this wage issue. At the same time [a delay] would seriously prejudice the rights and interest of the packinghouse workers to the sole profit of the packing companies." The only hope on the immediate horizon, it seemed, lay with the fact-finding board appointed by President Truman which was due to report back by April 1.

The strike began peacefully at nearly all of the locations across the country including South St. Paul. Both strikers and non-strikers as well as those not directly involved settled into a new routine. The South St. Paul Police Department, normally used to operating on three eight-hour shifts, doubled up their personnel and began working 12-hour shifts. It was noted the day after the start of the strike that the number of pickets at the Grand-Concord and Armour Avenue-Concord locations was about the same, and the union claimed that the Swift, Armour and Cudahy plants had been completely shutdown. Nationally, spokesmen for the Big Four packers claimed that several plants were partially operating using "previous employees" and not through the use of strikebreakers. A company spokesman for Armour refused to disclose which plants in the chain had resumed limited production, fearing stepped up union efforts to shut them down.

Despite the walkout at an estimated 133 plants nationwide United Press reported that "housewives" were refusing to be panicked into a meat buying spree and President Truman's board of inquiry was already meeting in an attempt to expedite their findings in order, some hoped, for the President to seek a court injunction under Taft-Hartley. The union pledged its complete cooperation.

It did not take long for things to deteriorate. A. I. G. Valentine, general manager of the South St. Paul Swift plant and Cyril Sheehy, his counterpart at the Armour plant, protested the union practice of refusing to permit non-striking employees to enter the plant and requiring passes for others seeking to enter the plants. Valentine took his complaints to the airwaves, broadcasting over the radio that even he had been "deprived of my right to go to my office." He added, "People of this state must deplore such lawless tactics. Such tactics should have no part in the efforts of all parties to settle this dispute as quickly as possible."

Sheehy said that the Armour plant remained closed and further complained that he had seen "no concrete evidence of any effort to enforce the law." In a thinly veiled threat, Sheehy pointed out that because insufficient employees had been able to reach the plant it would be impossible to compile payrolls and pay employees for work performed prior to the strike.

Union representative Milton Siegel replied that the union was willing to allow office workers into the plants providing they obtained union passes. "We have no way of knowing whether they are office workers or plant workers when they wish to seek entrance into the plant, and the only way we can identify them is through the pass system."

Meanwhile, South St. Paul Mayor Henry Gackstetter sought a meeting with company and union officials to discuss the picketing situation in his town. And the picket line would be focal point of much of what was to come. By March 30 Judge W. A. Schultz in Dakota County District Court in Hastings issued the first temporary restraining order of the strike. The court order, a ruling issued preliminary to a hearing on the merits of the dispute, centered on the picketing at the Armour plant. Armour officials charged that the union was guilty of unfair labor practices by taking over roads leading to the plant and unlawfully preventing rail cars from entering the plant to pick up meat product that was in danger of spoiling. Tempers had already started to wear thin on the picket line. The company charged that strikers were stopping employees from entering the Armour plant as well as threatening those who tried.

What is unclear is how far the local police and Dakota County Sheriff's office were willing to go to enforce this or any court orders. Dakota County Sheriff Norman Dieter was reported to have been issued the

court order to serve on the union but there is no indication his department did so right away. South St. Paul Police Chief Louis Fuller said on March 20 that the picketing on the Armour line was unchanged from the previous days and that there had been no efforts by non-striking workers to obtain police escorts through the line.

In Chicago the wire services reported hundreds of police being mustered near the plants and stockyards to deal with thousands of strikers. It was no secret that the city administration and the police department there sided with the companies. Trouble was reported on the picket lines and adjacent rail spurs near the plants there. In West Fargo, the sheriff issued an appeal over local radio for all available manpower to report to his office for duty as special deputies. At least one arrest had already been made and charges of assault and battery issued in John Doe warrants.

Despite the seriousness of Judge Schultz' court order, the situation in South St. Paul did not appear to be heating up with the same intensity as Chicago and West Fargo. Chief Fuller, the same day as the Fargo sheriff's appeal, was ordered by the city police commission to instruct his men to arrest any strikers bent on violence. The commission, consisting of Thomas Alcorn, Leonard Anderson and Thomas Peck, met with union representatives, Dakota County Attorney David Grannis, South St. Paul City Attorney Paul Thuet and Mayor Gackstetter. Swift and Armour were invited to send representatives but declined to do so.

The second week of the strike began with an expansion of Judge Schultz' restraining order to cover union activities at the Swift gate near Concord and Grand. Reports indicated that as was the case at the Armour plant, the court order did not seem to have any effect on picketing. The union had, in fact, doubled the pickets in anticipation of violence. One new wrinkle was introduced when the union offered to withdraw pickets to allow truckers hauling live stock into the yards and also to allow the yards to operate but with the proviso that picketing of both plants would be maintained on stockyards property. Anton Olson, president of the St. Paul Union Stockyards Co. turned down the offer on the grounds that they could not become a party to the strike by allowing such activities on private property.

All of this took on the cloak of routine, rather matter-of-fact and measured in both tone and substance. It is as if both sides and those caught in the middle or on the sidelines were well aware that rhetoric and hasty actions could ignite something no one wanted. But matters began to heat up as the strike entered its second week. There was talk of Sheriff Dieter requesting the help of Governor Luther Youngdahl's office in efforts to open up the picket lines. It was reported that the sheriff had tried unsuccessfully to enforce the court orders.

As tension mounted throughout the day Sheriff Dieter met with Chief Fuller and County Attorney Grannis. At the same time Judge Schultz issued yet another restraining order against the union at the request of the Chicago Great Western Railway similar to the previous two he had issued on behalf of the packing companies. Sheriff Dieter then announced that his office and that of the city police would enforce court injunctions. They tried but were turned back by the strikers.

The order called for the union to allow office workers and administrative personnel to enter the plant to do their jobs. Earlier in the day carloads of such workers had been turned back by the strikers. The sheriff approached the estimated 200 strikers at the foot of Grand Avenue along with three of his deputies and 10 police officers. As they passed through a thin outer line of picketers the chants and shouting began. "Hold that line! Hold that line!" and "Don't let them through!" and "Tighten up!" Milton Siegel, union field representative, was waiting for the sheriff. Dieter asked him if he knew the picketing was illegal and Siegel replied that he did.

"You know you're in contempt then," Dieter said.

"Well, I wouldn't know about that," Siegel replied.

Dieter and Siegel stared at one another then the Sheriff turned on his heel and all of a sudden cheers from the pickets rose into the air.

"Going through there would be like trying to crack Europe with a platoon," Dieter told one of the officers with him. "They've got us outnumbered ten to one." It was an assessment, which would remain accurate and definitive right up until the last week of the strike.

Meanwhile the UPWA and officials at Superior Packing Company in St. Paul reached an agreement enabling 250 striking workers to return to their jobs, prompting Gov. Youngdahl to try his hand at settling the larger dispute in South St. Paul. The union and Superior Packing agreed to continue trying to solve the wage dispute based on a management offer of 12-cents per hour. While not a final figure it was enough to persuade union negotiators to allow the strikers back to work while talks continued.

Gov. Youngdahl called representatives from the union, Swift and Armour together for a meeting in his office at the state capitol but said after the morning session that it "apparently is outside the realm of possibility" for him to negotiate a settlement in the lengthening strike. His hopes of modeling a settlement based on the events occurring at Superior were apparently quickly dashed during the morning long conferences.

At the same time the South St. Paul Welfare Board granted aid to 25 families affected by the strike.

The UPWA in South St. Paul met Thursday afternoon in a mass meeting at the local high school. Milt Siegel announced that the members had voted to allow

Joe Stoi

Joe Stoi worked for Armour & Company for 27 years from 1952 until the plant closed for good. But in 1948 he was fifteen years old living on north Concord Street not far from the violence at Grand and Concord, the focal point of the strike. He remembers the fighting, cars being tipped over and when the National Guard finally came to town to quell the disturbances.

"There was a war down there. They had fights and were tipping cars over and everything. It was a violent strike," he said. "There were guys that went to jail. We had a person that lived kind of kitty-cornered to us. The union people would come and march around his house. He was a scab. He came out of the house --- I can still see him. He came out of the house just raising hell. The cops came and made him go in, leave. It was a wicked strike." A photograph of the picketing of the private residence located at 402 North Concord and referred to by Joe Stoi survives as part of the archives at the Dakota County Historical Society and is included herein.

Stoi also remembered the guard soldiers patrolling Concord and how he and other young boys would crawl along the roof tops of the buildings along the main drag occasionally dropping rocks on the soldiers below. "It was wrong, I know," he said. "But we really didn't mean anything by it. Just kids, you know."

The bitterness lasted a long time inside the plants. He recalls in later years when he was employed at Armour that collections were routinely taken up for those workers retiring from their jobs. But if a worker had crossed the line during the strike no collection was taken. "They said he made his money in '48," Stoi said.

office workers at the affected plants to pass through the picket lines. Foremen, who had been locked inside the plants since the strike began, would also be allowed to go home. The action at the high school took place after Gov. Youngdahl, in his attempts to settle the strike, also requested a report from union representatives on their apparent failure to honor Judge Schultz' court order to allow the office workers through the lines.

In Chicago, UPWA President Helstein took notice of the court injunctions issued in South St. Paul and at other strike sites where arrests were being made almost daily. He denounced them as "part and parcel of a company campaign to smash our union . . . Our picket lines are solid and will remain that way until the packers give up adequate wage increases."

It was an early Easter in 1948, falling on March 28, the 13th day of the walkout. Easter services were held inside the plants for supervisory personnel who had elected to stay there and services were also broadcast to those strikers manning the picket lines outside. Rev. A.R. Grossman of Augustana Lutheran Church conducted the services inside the Swift plant while Rev. Delbert Harrell of Clark Memorial Congregational Church held services in the Armour facility.

Siegel announced on the Monday following Easter that some of the union members who were manning the picket lines would be heard on a radio program during the evenings for the coming week called "On the Picket Line." The idea was to offer a first hand account of the union's side of things from those who were directly involved in the action. The union seems to have recognized the need to put a face on their issues as evidenced by the promotion of the radio broadcast.

Day after day the front pages of the nation's newspapers evidenced proof that the meatpacking strike was not being waged in a vacuum. The competing interests were allied, opposed or neutral in regard to organized labor, but real nonetheless. In Chicago officials of the AFL International Teamsters union said its members would be unable to honor packinghouse workers picket lines, viewing such action as a secondary boycott now illegal under the terms of Taft-Hartley.

John L. Lewis, leader of the United Mine Workers, who also had his people out on strike, heeding a court order and threat of yet another contempt citation, went before a presidential board investigating the coal min ers' 16-day walkout. And the nation's railroads accepted a fact-finding board's recommendation for a 15.5 percent wage increase.

The National Live Stock Exchange sent messages to President Truman and Nathan Feinsinger, chairman of the Federation and Mediation service in Chicago, urging government intervention to end the strike. He cited the deleterious effect the walkout was having on collateral industries and business as well as the success of Marshall Plan objectives in rebuilding Europe. Members of the live stock trade were also reported to be upset with Gov. Youngdahl for being unwilling or unable to reopen the stock yard for at least limited business under conditions which would not be partial to either side in the strike. Trade members also publicly criticized the Truman administration for placing priority on settling the coal strike over efforts to end the packinghouse dispute.

On the morning of March 31 Dakota County District Court Judge W. A. Schultz walked into a packed courtroom of the old Dakota County Courthouse and opened a hearing into the requests by Swift, Armour and

Strikers often picketed outside the home of a person who crossed the picket lines to work. DCHS Collections.

Chicago Great Western for temporary injunctions against the UPWA. The judge took his seat on the bench and began by setting what he hoped would be not only the tone of these and all subsequent proceedings, but that on the streets outside of the packinghouses as well.

"We all stood when we entered the courtroom to show our respect for the court and the laws of the land. It was not merely out of respect for me because I stood too. In some foreign countries there are no courts to stand up in. If we feel that we want to take the law into our own hands, I'd suggest that we go to a country that has no laws. I hope you all feel you want the courts to function."

The crowd jammed the courtroom and the halls outside as Judge Schultz began hearing testimony from witnesses who had tried and failed to cross the picket lines. The night before testimony began, South St. Paul police were called to investigate what was described as the beating of two men about a block south of Grand Avenue. The men apparently were attempting enter the Swift plant. They told police they were bringing a pair of glasses to one of the men's father inside the facility.

As the strike moved into April and deeper into spring, the pressure began to mount on Gov. Youngdahl to take action. The St. Paul Committee on Industrial Relations, a pro-employer organization to put it mildly, organized in 1920 by William H. MacMahon,[21] sent a letter to the governor urging intervention in the packinghouse strike, citing the right of citizens to free and uninterrupted use of public streets and highways.

The statement read in part as follows:

> It is a matter of public knowledge that that section of the Minnesota Labor Relations Act is being violated at South St. Paul, Minnesota . . . Nevertheless, the picket line of the CIO union wrongfully obstructs ingress to and egress from the place of employment of the office employees of the meat packing companies . . . Reports from reliable sources state the sheriff of Dakota County has been unable to obtain compliance with the order of the district court . . . and still the order of the court is not enforced."

MacMahon, who had long lobbied on behalf of employer interests before the Minnesota legislature and former Gov. Harold Stassen,[22] upped the rhetorical ante by stating, "Therefore, since the sheriff of Dakota County is unable or unwilling to enforce the laws, then, in our opinion, it becomes the duty of the governor, the state's chief executive, to obtain compliance with the statutes enacted by the chosen representatives of the citizens of the great state of Minnesota."

The following day, April 2, matters heated up still further. Pickets again rebuffed Sheriff Dieter in an effort to open the lines at Grand and Concord. At the same time the Live Stock Exchange renewed a call for the embattled sheriff and local police to open the picket lines to permit commission firms to handle live stock at the South St. Paul yards in a limited way as was being done at other markets. The Exchange maintained that both the commission firms and producer farmers were losing large sums of money as a result of the strike and that some of the losses could be mitigated if law enforcement would open the lines enough to allow marketing to resume in the yards.

When Sheriff Dieter appeared at the picket lines in the morning of April 2, it followed on the heels of the arrest of Milt Siegel on a charge of contempt of court. Siegel, who was allowed to testify that day in front of Judge Schultz, was released after posting $1,000 bail. The sheriff and his men used the same tactics as before when they first tried to penetrate the picket line – and with the same results. The law enforcement officers walk straight down the Grand Avenue hill to where the strikers were massed along the tracks of the Chicago Great Western line in front of the Swift gate.

Dieter asked the pickets to open up. In response additional strikers joined the line and the sheriff had no choice but to withdraw. But the next day the strikers began to allow office workers into their jobs and matters eased. The same day the Dakota County Board of Commissioners was scheduled to meet to discuss a

request by Sheriff Dieter for funding for 300 special deputies needed to open the lines surrounding the meatpacking plants. Action on the request was deferred after it was learned that the office workers had been allowed through earlier that day.

Over at the Armour plant foremen were allowed through, including some of those who had spent the first 10 days or so of the strike living inside of the plant. One of the foremen was James Capeti, a signatory on the charter establishing the UPWA as the union at the Armour plant. Capeti had played a major role in organizing the union, and since the success of 1939, had risen to foreman of the beef cut, becoming part of management. Over a half-century later he recalled mixed feelings both while he was locked in during the early days of the strike, and in the days that followed when he crossed the line to perform his job.[23]

One office worker was also allowed through the lines at Armour on this day – the paymaster. The next day Swift & Co. paymasters began issuing paychecks to workers, striking and otherwise, for the work ending March 14 before the strike began. The average weekly paycheck was for $58.70.

There were by now four union officials involved in the contempt proceedings. Beside Siegel, action was also pending against William Nolan, president of UPWA Swift local, Harry Urban, picket line captain and Glenn Chinander, union field representative. Agreement was reached between the lawyers and the court to delay action against the four men until after a decision on the injunction requests before Judge Schultz. Judge Schultz also agreed to reduce bail on Siegel and Nolan from $1,000 to $250 each after the union argued that it needed the money now tied up in posting bonds to carry on strike activities.

On Tuesday April 6, UPWA President Helstein took the stand in Judge Schultz' courtroom. He was testifying over company objections that his testimony would be irrelevant. Helstein began by stating that the strike was called against the Big Four meatpackers due the companies' refusal to bargain in good faith. What followed were often three way legal arguments between counsel for the opposing sides as well as Helstein – also a lawyer - as to which law should apply in settling the matter of the injunction requests.

While in court Helstein and Bert Holland, Armour industrial relations representative, discussed an offer by Judge Schultz to arbitrate the wage dispute between the union and the packinghouses. Helstein told Schultz the union was already on the record as favoring arbitration, but Holland said his company was opposed to any such settlement. He explained that Armour & Company did not want to turn over the writing of a new contract with the union to a third party.

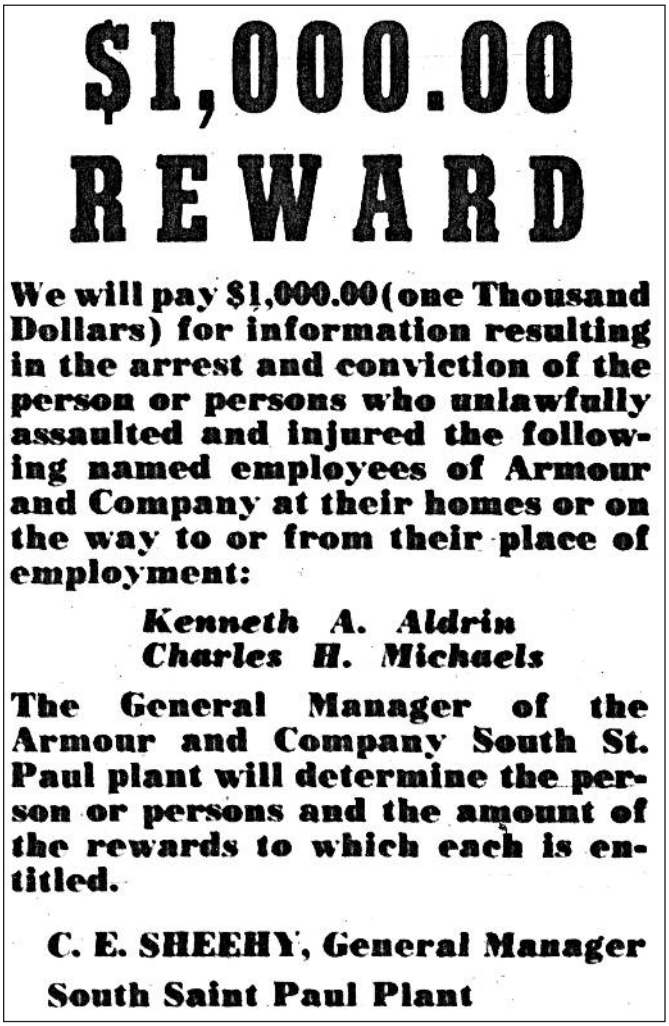
At one point the exchange between the judge and Holland grew even more interesting and imaginative. Judge Schultz suggested that Holland go to work inside the plant with the same wages and under the same conditions as the average worker to see "if you can make ends meet." The judge added that both the company and the union should "do unto others as you would want them to do unto you . . . There should be plenty for everyone. A broad method has to be devised on a national basis for everyone to lay his cards on the table and settle these problems."

Holland replied that it was "an incorrect concept to assume that Armour's wages are lower than they should be. They are liberal as compared to the rest of industry."

"What if all industry is too low?" Judge Schultz demanded.

"No one company should be singled out to lead the parade for the entire world," Holland replied.

The only concession hinted at by the company in



$1,000.00

REWARD

We will pay $1,000.00 (one Thousand Dollars) for information resulting in the arrest and conviction of the person or persons who unlawfully assaulted and injured the following named employees of Armour and Company at their homes or on the way to or from their place of employment:

Kenneth A. Aldrin
Charles H. Michaels

The General Manager of the Armour and Company South St. Paul plant will determine the person or persons and the amount of the rewards to which each is entitled.

C. E. SHEEHY, General Manager
South Saint Paul Plant

Armour and Company offered a reward for information on the persons responsible for assaulting persons who continued to work, in effect announcing the names of "scabs". South St. Paul Daily Reporter May 8, 1948.

court was a statement by Holland to the effect that the packers' nine-cent offer might be revised if "new facts are developed or the company takes some other view." The Chicago Armour office was quick to refute Holland's statement repeating that the nine-cent offer was, in effect, a final one and not subject to change.

At one point in the proceeding counsel for both sides agreed to enter a series of statistics into the record. Douglas Hall, UPWA attorney, stated that Armour's profits in 1947 were nearly $31 million. He argued that in light of these figures the company could afford to pay more than the nine-cents an hour offered.

Holland replied that the nine-cent raise alone would cost the company an additional $9 million a year. Holland argued that profit and wage were not necessarily linked. "If you tie wages to profits, then wages must go up or down as prices rise or decline," he said.

The same day they were quarreling over the numbers in a Hastings courtroom C. H. Johnson, executive secretary of the Dakota County Welfare Board, was reporting that since the beginning of the strike applications for assistance were up sharply. To date, he said, 126 packinghouse worker applications for help had been received in his office. Of these 79 had been accepted, and aid in the amount of nearly $3000 had been tendered; twelve applications had been denied and the balance were pending investigation. During normal times, Johnson added, his office received approximately 30 cases per month.

The next few days revealed the multi-layered depth of strike-related activity and its potential for spillover into other areas of life in post-war America. At the highest level the fact-finding board reported back to the President and called the packers' nine-cent offer "substantial" but refrained from making recommendations. President Truman urged both sides to read the report and analyze its contents with an open mind and work toward renewed negotiations and settlement of the walkout. President Truman cautioned however, that the government was utilizing all of the provisions available under Taft-Hartley in the coal dispute and was prepared to do the same in the meat strike.

At about the same time President Truman was receiving the report and deciding to hold up on any further legal action under Taft-Hartley to end the strike, workers at the St. Paul Union Stockyards in South St. Paul authorized their union to strike if negotiations toward a higher wage agreement failed to progress. The stock yards had offered the nearly 300 workers there a two and a half cent increase which brought about the strike vote just as limited trade was resuming in the yards. The union, which had been out of work anyway since the strike began, was seeking a 29-cent increase. A state conciliator was brought in and the union modified its demand to 19-cents. The company replied that it had made other concession in the form of sick leave, paid holidays and vacation. Clearly everyone was urgently attempting to stave off another strike – and with good reason. Marketing had resumed at the yards, albeit on a very limited basis.

While some 40 truck loads entered the yards after consignors had obtained permits from their selling agencies, farmers were warned yet again not to ship live stock there without getting permission in advance. The South St. Paul hog market reopened for the first time since the strike began and reported about 150 head on sale.

Meanwhile UPWA President Helstein reported that the picket lines were holding all across the country at the struck plants despite an announcement by Armour that they had resumed operations at 21 of its plants.

In South St. Paul a striking member of the UPWA was arrested on a warrant and held in the Dakota County jail on $1,000 bail for allegedly assaulting a Swift & Company non-striking employee who attempted to cross the picket line the afternoon before. The complaining worker said he was stopped at the line near Grand and Concord while trying to report for work as an oiler for the coolers. He said he was bodily carried into a nearby alley and confronted. He said the striker asked him if he loved his wife. The man replied that he did and was then told to go back home.

In Chicago one of the more bizarre episodes of the entire strike was taking place. The *Chicago Tribune* in a front-page editorial demanded the impeachment of Minnesota Gov. Luther Youndahl.

"When he was asked to do his sworn duty and stop a wholly illegal CIO blockade of a packing house, which the union had extended without rhyme or reason to nearby municipal and federal facilities, Governor Youngdahl of Minnesota retorted that he didn't mind 'pushing a few scabs around.'" The editorial stated. It then turned its guns on other local officials. "Mayor Henry Gackstetter of South St. Paul, scene of the lawlessness, boasted 'this is a union town.' Norman Dieter, sheriff in that county, cravenly failed to enforce an injunction against the lawbreakers."

Gov. Youndahl issued a reply to Col. Robert McCormick, publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*. Youndahl said that if there was going to be any impeaching done in Minnesota if would be done by the people in Minnesota, not by Col. McCormick.

Hope appeared for the first time since the strike began that talks could be resumed between the parties. In Judge Schultz' courtroom Swift General Superintendent John E. Wilson expressed a willingness to resume talks over the wage dispute with Helstein. Judge Schultz continued the hearings on the injunction requests as a result of the offer to reopen talks. Reports

out of Chicago also indicated that Armour ad Swift had both agreed to resume negotiations with the UPWA. President Truman ordered a federal mediator to arrange the new talks in light of the fact that the fact-finding board had found merit to the positions of both sides in the dispute.

In Nebraska, Republican Presidential candidates Harold E. Stassen of Minnesota and New York Gov. Thomas Dewey squared off in a primary being described as a "free-for-all." The day of the vote Stassen returned to his home on Stewart Lane in South St. Paul to celebrate his 41st birthday and receive the primary results. Stassen won.

The same day sheriff's deputies and local police successfully escorted two delivery trucks out of the Swift plant through the picket lines at Grand and Concord despite resistance.

On April 16 Cudahy officials in Newport announced they were resuming limited operations at the plant there using supervisory personnel in place of striking union members. The UPWA charged that the company's decision constituted a violation of their agreement to allow office and supervisory personnel back into the building. The company, the union said, in return had agreed not to try and resume operations. The company countered by saying the agreement could simply be terminated through notification.

The packing plants at South St. Paul employed people from many different racial and ethnic backgrounds. *Photo by St. Paul Dispatch, Pioneer Press, Minnesota Historical Society.*

One day later South St. Paul Armour & Company Superintendent Sheehy announced that his company had reviewed the fact-finding report, conferred with UPWA representatives and the regional director of the federal mediation service, and concluded that any further talks would be futile. Therefore, he said, negotiations were over and Armour "shall now restore operations in our plants as rapidly as we can obtain personnel." Where there had been just the barest glimmer of hope for reaching a settlement there was now only a renewed call to economic warfare.

Even though the other three members of the "Big Four" packinghouses – Swift, Wilson and Cudahy – continued to negotiate, the tenor of the Armour announcement was ominous and unyielding. Sheehy said, "We have evidence that our wage rates are attractive in getting new employees. Four of our struck plants are already producing on a normal basis and fair progress toward that goal is being made in all others where the legal right of men to work if they want to has been upheld. Naturally we are giving and will continue to give preference to the striking employees who want to return."

The Armour statement was nothing less than a clarion call to union strikers and non-union workers looking for a job to defy the UPWA and cross the picket lines. As if heralding the beginning of a more explosive and potentially violent phase of the strike, four strikers were arrested in Chicago shortly after the Armour announcement and charged with assaulting a worker trying to cross the line.

On Monday April 19 Judge Schultz told a packed courtroom that he was willing to withdraw from the case should counsel for either side request he do so. The jurist explained that he had personally visited the picket lines in South St. Paul and came away convinced that the number of pickets should be limited to two. His

The National Guardsmen who were called in to break up the strike were considerably younger than the strikers themselves. *Photo by St. Paul Dispatch, Pioneer Press, Minnesota Historical Society.*

remarks came as he reconvened the hearing into the Swift and Armour requests for injunctions against the UPWA and continued the growing list of contempt actions against union officials until completion of the injunction cases. Judge Schultz opened the proceeding by reading the state and federal statutes on contempt of court and remarked, "I'm beginning to wonder if some people believe we should have courts or do away with them."

His remarks this day could not have been a source of hope for the defendants. At one point Judge Schultz said, "After what I saw I would be very glad to have an affidavit of prejudice filed against me in the contempt action and let another judge take my place."

He asked UPWA counsel Douglas Hall if he thought it was " time for the courts to abdicate and let the unions take over the law."

"Certainly not," Hall replied. In a studied understatement he added, "But I think there are times in labor disputes when corporations try to make use of the courts. I still don't see where calling a scab a scab is a threat."

Milton Siegel had been arrested the day before on his second set of contempt charges for allegedly threatening a worker who tried to cross the picket line. Siegel maintained that he had merely called the man a "scab."

The mood in court had grown testy as evidenced by the following exchange. Judge Schultz asked Hall whether we desired Siegel's bail on the new charge to be reduced from $1,000 to $250 like the last one.

Hall said, "No, because we're going to win these contempt actions and then we're going to sue the stuffing out of Swift for damages."

Things were more than testy on the national scene. In Chicago the union tightened its lines around the Armour plant in the face of the company's announced plans to resume operations and the Chicago police department responded by positioning 1,000 officers nearby. In Moultrie, GA a bomb blast shattered the home of a union worker who had crossed the line to return to work at the Swift plant there.

The action then shifted to the South St. Paul City Council where Aldermen Andrew Lehmann and Mike Jerhoff protested the use of the council chambers by the CIO Welfare Committee as a location for screening members who had applied for union relief funds. The aldermen claimed that a request for use of the chambers had not been made to the council and certainly no authorization had been forthcoming allowing the union to install a private phone line for its use. Mayor Gackstetter replied that he had given permission for use of the space but was not aware of the telephone installation. He added that the union would be paying for the phone in any event.

Alderman Lehmann said using a public building for

a private business was no more justified than would be his own use of the city recorder's office to carry on real estate business. Alderman Mike Verderosa countered Lehmann's contention saying that the use of the chambers by the union was simply a matter of public interest. Alderman Jerhoff pointed out that the union had not filed a written request to use the space as required. So Verderosa, in his capacity as a union official, hastily drew one up on the spot and offered it as a remedy to the technicality. City Attorney Paul Thuet then advised Alderman Verderosa that his actions had disqualified him from voting on whether the request should be accepted. The vote was a 3-3 tie with Aldermen Joe Moser, Donald Swanson and Frank Pessek voting to accept, and Aldermen Lehmann, Jerhoff and Wilber Fisk voting not to accept the request. Mayor Gackstetter declined to break the tie and declared that the motion had lost.

Meanwhile the Dakota County Welfare Board reported that claims for relief by striking workers' families continued to rise.

The next day Judge Schultz took another stab at mediating a settlement to the strike in South St. Paul. He met for an hour and half with Helstein and Swift official John Wilson, only to emerge from the meeting to announce that his efforts had been futile but that the two men had agreed to meet the following week in Chicago. Meanwhile the judge's offer to be replaced in the contempt proceedings against the union men was not accepted by either party.

The second day of the Armour back to work effort brought the first death. A striking picketer was killed in Chicago outside the Armour plant when he fell under the wheels of a truck being driven through the picket lines. The union charged that the Chicago police were complicit in the man's death.

In St. Paul four men said to be striking packinghouse workers beat a Cudahy division superintendent from the Newport plant while the man was visiting bars along South Robert Street trying to talk striking workers into coming back to work.

Reports of violence in cities and town across the nation where packinghouses were being struck began finding their way into the newspapers. A man's house was fire bombed in Omaha, a trucker trying to deliver cattle to a Morrell plant in Ottumwa, IA was beaten, and a man's wife in Ottumwa fired shots into the air to scare off several men who were threatening her husband, a Morrell foreman.

And it all seemed to reach an inevitable head April 23 when more than 100 club swinging policemen charged and overran the union picket line outside of the Cudahy plant in Kansas City, KS. Police then chased the picketers across the street into the union headquarters where, within 10 minutes, the facility was reduced to a "bloody shambles." The union charged police with brutality and the police said they were enforcing a lawful order and that the union had been amassing a stockpile of weapons inside of the union hall. The fighting resulted in six people being hospitalized, one with a fractured skull. Helstein termed the police actions in Kansas City, "police terrorism."

As April drew to a close and the strike dragged on into forty-plus days, each side sought to up the ante and increase the pressure on the other side while the Truman administration continued pressing for a solution. Violence in the striking communities escalated and no where was there even a glimmer of hope that a breakthrough in the deadlock was near. On April 28 CIO President Phillip Murray asked the six million CIO members to boycott the products of the meatpacking companies being struck. Wilson & Company threatened to replace striking employees with newly hired workers if they chose not to promptly return to their jobs, and the UPWA matched with a threat to extend the strike to independent packinghouses.

The companies were apparently experiencing some success in their drive to renew operations at the struck plants. On April 29 the companies announced that fully one third of the striking workers nationwide had returned to their jobs. While there was some evidence of progress in renewing production in the steadily increasing purchases of live stock from week to week, it was generally conceded that company claims were exaggerated. In the face of company actions Local 167 UPWA at Swift in South St. Paul met in the CIO hall on West Seventh Street in St. Paul and voted overwhelmingly to stay out on strike until the wage dispute was settled. And while the administration had forced the companies back to the bargaining table mediators held out little hope for settlement.

The month of May brought a ruling from Judge Schultz on the Swift and Armour requests for injunctions against the UPWA. He denied the company requests, citing a union pledge not to engage in illegal picketing at either plant in South St. Paul and replying on the Minnesota Labor Relations Act, which the judge said, required proof of illegal acts being committed and that they will be continued unless restrained.

"This court cannot conscientiously find that unlawful acts will be continued unless restrained," he said.

The ruling came a day after Swift and Armour notified striking workers that if they did not return to their jobs by May 10 those jobs would be open for replacement by other workers and that the strikers would then forfeit all rights. The packers maintained that they had bargained with the union as recently as April 28 without success thereby necessitating the ultimatum. The move

brought a quick reaction from Glen Chinander, UPWA field representative. He issued the following statement: "The letters sent by the packers to their employees are for the purpose of trying to intimidate and coerce union members to return to work and break the strike. This is a legal strike. Our contracts are open on wages only, and no purpose can be served by these threats . . . The packers can end this strike by bargaining in good faith with the union. Until then the strike will continue."

The following day at a Chicago news conference UPWA President Helstein said the union would consider settling the nationwide walkout if the companies would agree to a cut in meat prices across the board. He said the union might be willing to accept the nine-cents offer under such an agreement but that the meat price cut would have to be for the long term. His statement drew attention because it was the first indication that the UPWA might be willing to come off its demand for a 29-cent raise.

Helstein also announced that the union had authorized strikes against independent packers in light of, what he claimed, were independent packinghouses' attempts to aid the Big Four companies by slaughtering and processing animals on their behalf. Locally UPWA's Glen Chinander announced that the 4,000 union members in Local 9 at the Hormel plant in Austin, Minnesota were preparing to go on strike. "This action is in line with our policy to extend the strike in the meat industry," he said. Similar notices were sent on behalf of union members to the management at the Bartusch Packing Company and Superior Packing Company, both located in St. Paul. Both plants' workers had returned to work earlier on the grounds that negotiations for a wage increase continued and a 12-cent increase was granted in the interim. The union claimed the talks had broken down.

The events locally mirrored what the UPWA was attempting on a national level. The union sought to widen the strike to independent packinghouses across the country as well as against the Big Four plants in their other operations, which employed members of other unions. In addition there was the threat of a strike by stockhandlers and yard employees in the gigantic Chicago stockyards which would cripple marketing operations there.

In South St. Paul, Swift and Armour lawyers struck back by filing for a new round of hearings on requests for injunctions against the union restraining them from "illegal picketing." The cases were back before Judge Schultz who had assured the companies when he denied their requests for injunctions a week before that they would received reconsideration should the union fail to limit its picketing accordingly.

Meanwhile William Brust, 118-2nd Avenue South, South St. Paul, appeared in Municipal Court in that city and pleaded not guilty to a charge of third degree assault. He was charged with assaulting a Swift employee as the man tried to cross the picket line. Brust maintained he was bumped by the other man's car when it was crossing the line and that an altercation followed.

Douglas Hall, UPWA counsel announced Thursday May 6 that he was going to ask Judge Schultz to issue a temporary injunction against Swift and Armour restraining the companies from engaging in conduct aimed at "intimidation of workers." The injunction proceedings followed on the heels of the restraining order obtained by Hall preventing the two packing companies from mailing any further notices to striking workers threatening them with the loss of their jobs if they refused to report for work by May 10. Hall argued that the letters to the workers was an unfair labor practice under state law. He also accused the companies of failing to forward union dues paid under a check off system and for failing to pay sick benefits due some union workers. The unions were also back under a pending restraining order centering on the mass picketing which had been renewed.

The next day the UPWA announced that a union legal counter-offensive was being launched at the national level as well with suits being filed in U. S. District Court against Swift, Armour and Wilson, alleging essentially what Hall had described in his action against the companies filed in Hastings.

Parties to the local actions gathered Friday May 7 in the Hastings courtroom before Judge Schultz. At this time a non-striking Swift employee, who had apparently witnessed the alleged assault by William Brust on a man trying to cross the picket line, testified that the judge who heard the Brust matter was prejudiced against the companies. The day before South St. Paul Municipal Judge Lewis C. Shepley dismissed charges of third degree assault against Brust. Emil Peters, a Swift safety department employee testified that he saw Brust leap onto the running board of a car of an employee who was trying to cross the line and enter the plant for work. Peters said he saw Brust reach through the window attempting to strike the worker. He admitted however, that he did not actually see Brust strike the other man.

"Are you saying that you believe the judge was prejudiced in dismissing charges against Brust?" Judge Schultz asked.

"Yes," Peters replied.

A Hungarian immigrant, life-long socialist, one time Trotskyist and member of the Young Communist League and Socialist Workers Party, Brust would in later years teach modern languages at Carlton College in Northfield, Minnesota and would run for governor of Minnesota on the Workers League ticket.[24]

Meanwhile the contemplated action by the 4,000 union members at the Hormel plant in Austin did not

materialize as the UPWA had threatened earlier. Local 9 President Frank W. Schultz announced that rather than strike, union members there had voted to curtail production and contribute $12,500 per week to the UPWA strike fund. The production slow down was the result of negotiations with Hormel management.

"Numerous legal obstacles remain to be explored because of the Hormel contract and also because of existing statutes," a union statement said.

Another blow to the UPWA was delivered May 10 when stock handlers at the Sioux City yards, members of the UPWA local 176 voted not to strike at this time. On May 11 the stock handlers in the Chicago yards settled at the last minute before a scheduled 12:01 a.m. walkout. Strikes by the stock handlers, while arguably not technically sympathy strikes prohibited by Taft-Hartley, would have added much needed leverage to the UPWA efforts against the meatpackers. While the South St. Paul stock handlers were still threatening to strike, their situation grew murkier after the larger union in Chicago settled.

In Hastings Judge Schultz took under advisement the Swift request for reinstating the restraining order against the union prohibiting mass picketing. He said he would hold the record open for a week and make an additional study of the situation at Grand and Concord. He told attorneys that he had gone to the plant for a look and now felt that matters were under control.

UPWA counsel Hall argued that the picketers were making no efforts to physically stop people from entering and leaving the plant, but he did not deny company charges of name-calling.

"After all, you can't stop people from wanting to see who is taking their jobs," Hall said.

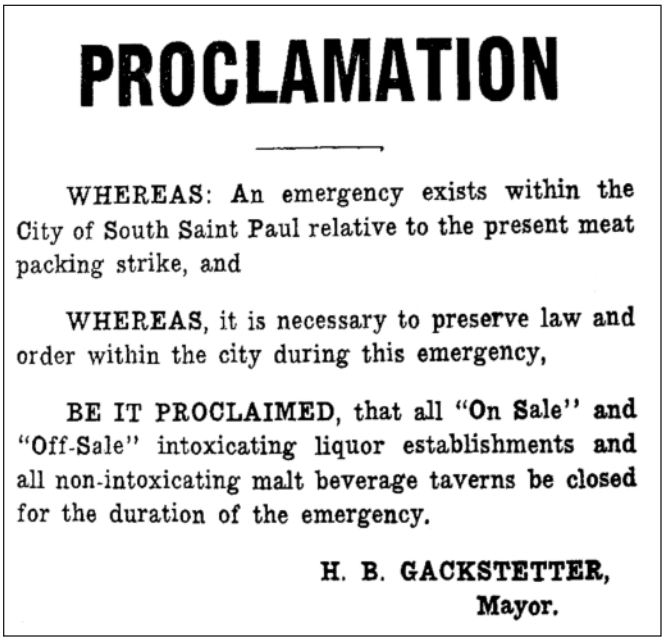
Tensions along the picket lines at Grand and Concord and Armour Avenue and Concord were clearly on the rise. The companies claimed that their back to work efforts were having a sizable impact with more and more striking workers crossing the line. The union, on the other hand, said the companies' tactics were a "flop." One clue as to the truth as well as to the rising tensions emerged when Tony Rechtzigel, owner of the South St. Paul Transit Company bus line – known locally as the jitney – stated that he had been asked to resume service to the plants themselves. Since the strike the bus line had been making a stop at Grand and Concord instead of heading through the gates to the Swift plant.

Tensions were on the rise across the board. In Albert Lea at the Wilson plant there it was described by local officials as "very tense" as non-striking employees were turned back by strikers. In Winona, 25 police were dispatched to quell outbreaks at the Swift & Co. gates and the assistant plant manager was beaten near his home and required hospitalization. And in South St. Paul the May 10 deadline for returning to their jobs or face loss of those jobs and seniority passed for the striking workers of the Armour plant.

At the same time a committee headed by Minneapolis Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey and St. Paul Mayor John J. McDonough was formed to seek funds to buy food and emergency clothing for striking UPWA workers. The committee issued a statement affirming that no strike "should be settled by starvation." The statement went on to conclude that the committee did not wish to judge the merits of the dispute, "But we do not want the packinghouse workers forced to submit to agreements because their families are sick and hungry." At the Capitol, State Welfare Director Jarle Leirfallom defended relief grants by the state to striking workers saying the grants were based on need and could not be withheld to break a strike.

On Wednesday, May 12 the UPWA played what had always been its trump card. Without announcement the union resumed mass picketing on the streets leading to the Swift and Armour plants in South St. Paul. They gathered before dawn at Grand and Concord as well as further south on Concord at Armour Avenue and it was not long before tensions reached the boiling point. The live stock market and any ongoing packinghouse operations were immediately shut down. Non-striking workers trying to report for their shifts on this morning were not only turned back, they were punished for trying to cross the picket lines.

Hundreds of strikers blocked the entrances to the plant, a solid phalanx a block deep in front of the Swift



PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS: An emergency exists within the City of South Saint Paul relative to the present meat packing strike, and

WHEREAS, it is necessary to preserve law and order within the city during this emergency,

BE IT PROCLAIMED, that all "On Sale" and "Off-Sale" intoxicating liquor establishments and all non-intoxicating malt beverage taverns be closed for the duration of the emergency.

H. B. GACKSTETTER,
Mayor.

Mayor Henry Gackstetter closed the bars in South St. Paul for the duration of the strike. *South St. Paul Daily Reporter May 13, 1948.*

gates, shouting, jeering and cursing those trying to pass through the lines. They tipped over cars, punches were thrown, and when a small number of city police and sheriff's deputies tried to stop the fighting, they were defied by the strikers and brushed aside. At one point a car driven by Oscar Malm of South St. Paul was tipped over and as police attempted to get between the strikers and the occupants of the car, one of the officers fired a pistol in the air to disperse the mob. The car was then righted and allowed to drive away from the scene.

Judge Schultz went to Grand and Concord to see for himself and immediately issued a temporary injunction against the UPWA. His order limited the number of pickets at the Swift plant to 10. Almost simultaneously Sheriff Dieter and a delegation of city officials rushed to the Capital seeking help from Gov. Youngdahl to quell the disturbance

Mayor Gackstetter ordered all of the bars in town closed for the duration of the strike.

On the streets, matters calmed somewhat by mid-morning and pickets, other strikers, non-strikers and spectators milled about uneasily. The police stayed on the scene in case of another outburst.

"Rumblings keep running through the crowd from time to time," one officer said. "But they have quieted down at least for the time being."

The Federal Bureau of Investigation reportedly sent agents to the scene of the fighting and State Labor Conciliator Leonard Johnson also was there for a first hand view of the unfolding events.

Milt Siegel, UPWA field representative, said, "The fighting this morning was a spontaneous movement on the part of pickets. It was caused by the packers' attempts to smash the strike by sending out threatening letters and trying to hire scabs all over the state by setting up employment agencies."

Some reports indicated that the mass picketing was resorted to when it was learned that the packinghouses were buying up increasing numbers of live stock, indicating plans to step up operations. Swift issued, in part, the following statement:

"A large mob of CIO strikers and imported goons are again employing lawless tactics, including mass picketing in South St. Paul. Swift employees were denied their rights under Minnesota law to enter our plant and offices this morning."

The statement also detailed the temporary injunction which ordered the UPWA to restrict their picketing activity at Grand and Concord to 10 pickets from curb to curb with four allowed on each adjacent sidewalk.

An angry Gov. Youngdahl refused to intervene but challenged Sheriff Dieter to do something to control the situation or step aside and let some one else try.

"I think it is very unfortunate that this happened in South St. Paul today. We cannot countenance violations of the law or further disturbances of this kind. I suggested also that the sheriff and the county attorney should call the county board into session to deputize more men if they are needed," the governor said, adding that he told Dieter that "if because of local circumstances and atmosphere he is handicapped in enforcing the law, he should step down and let me appoint another sheriff who is not so circumscribed."

Sheriff Dieter had no comment.

The next day the mass picketing continued and the UPWA announced that they would try to comply with the injunction issued by Judge Schultz the day before. The union also attempted a last ditch effort to convince Gov. Youngdahl to intervene as an arbitrator.

"The people want the strike settled and the union wants it settled," UPWA field representative Glen Chinander said. "It's up to the packers. If they would accept the proposal to arbitrate, the strike would end."

The packers did not accept nor did the governor saying that he could not intervene as an arbiter at the state level in an attempt to settle a national strike. Before the day was over however, events would overhaul the governor and he would face a decision to intervene in the strike – but not at the bargaining table.

On Thursday May 13 Sheriff Dieter, accompanied by 16 city police officers and four of his deputies, tried to break the mass picketing at the foot of Grand Avenue, now described as being made up of thousands of men and women. The surging crowd, swinging clubs and fists, quickly overwhelmed the law enforcement officers. At one point all of the officers were knocked to the ground and at least one injured policeman was carried from the scene.

The day began with Sheriff Dieter issuing an ultimatum to the pickets from a loudspeaker mounted on a sound truck. The crowd he was addressing was in fact a wall of men and women packed together curb to curb from Concord and Grand back to the Chicago Great Western tracks in front of the Swift gates and the stockyards.

"I will give you 15 minutes. If you have not dispersed by 10:25 a.m. we will come over and see that you do it," he said.

The policemen and deputies stood with grim faces waiting for a signal from the sheriff. At 10:25 a.m. exactly Dieter started across the street with his men. They approached the first line of strikers where there was a short discussion. Finally Dieter said, "Well, let's go in there, boys."

The officers reached for the nearest picketers to arrest them but were immediately set upon by the other strikers. The strikers used their fists and what were described as small clubs, and after knocking all of the

War veterans confronted National Guardsmen on the corner of Grand and Concord. Photo by St. Paul Dispatch, Pioneer Press, Minnesota Historical Society.

officers to the ground, drove them to the other side of the street where Dieter attempted to regroup. South St. Paul patrolman Art Giguere was injured in the melee and carried from the scene by two other officers. His injuries turned out to be not serious. As the officers walked away in torn and soiled uniforms the crowd cheered and clapped. An empty shoe remained in the middle of the street.

It was Siegel's turn to use a loudspeaker. The UPWA field representative told the strikers to "hold tight." Amazingly he charged that the police had beaten one of the picketers.

A few blocks away on Concord Street three non-striking Swift employees were beaten at a gas station. One of the men was hospitalized.

Later the same day Siegel issued a statement arguing that the strikers were "fighting for their jobs and for their families with the only means available."

He went on to say, "The profit swollen packers have abandoned all pretense of bargaining and have resorted to threats, intimidation, bribes and misrepresentation. They now use the police and the sheriff to cover up their provocations. Any disturbance is the direct result of this brazen campaign to smash the CIO union in the packing industry."

The violence spread across the river when early the next day an estimated 200 men reportedly smashed their way into the Cudahy plant in Newport and abducted 30 non-strikers working there and wrecked plant machinery. The UPWA disavowed any connection with this latest incident and the men breaking into the plant were gone by the time police arrived. Most of the workers allegedly taken from the plant were released shortly afterward.

Maybe the violence at the Cudahy plant was the last straw or maybe it was what happened the day before in South St. Paul. Maybe it was the caravan of non-striking workers to the Capital demanding they be protected going to and coming from their jobs in the packing plants or the fact that the Sheriffs of both Dakota and Washington County signed petitions attesting to being unable to protect life and property, but on May 14 Gov. Youngdahl ordered the Minnesota National Guard mobilized.

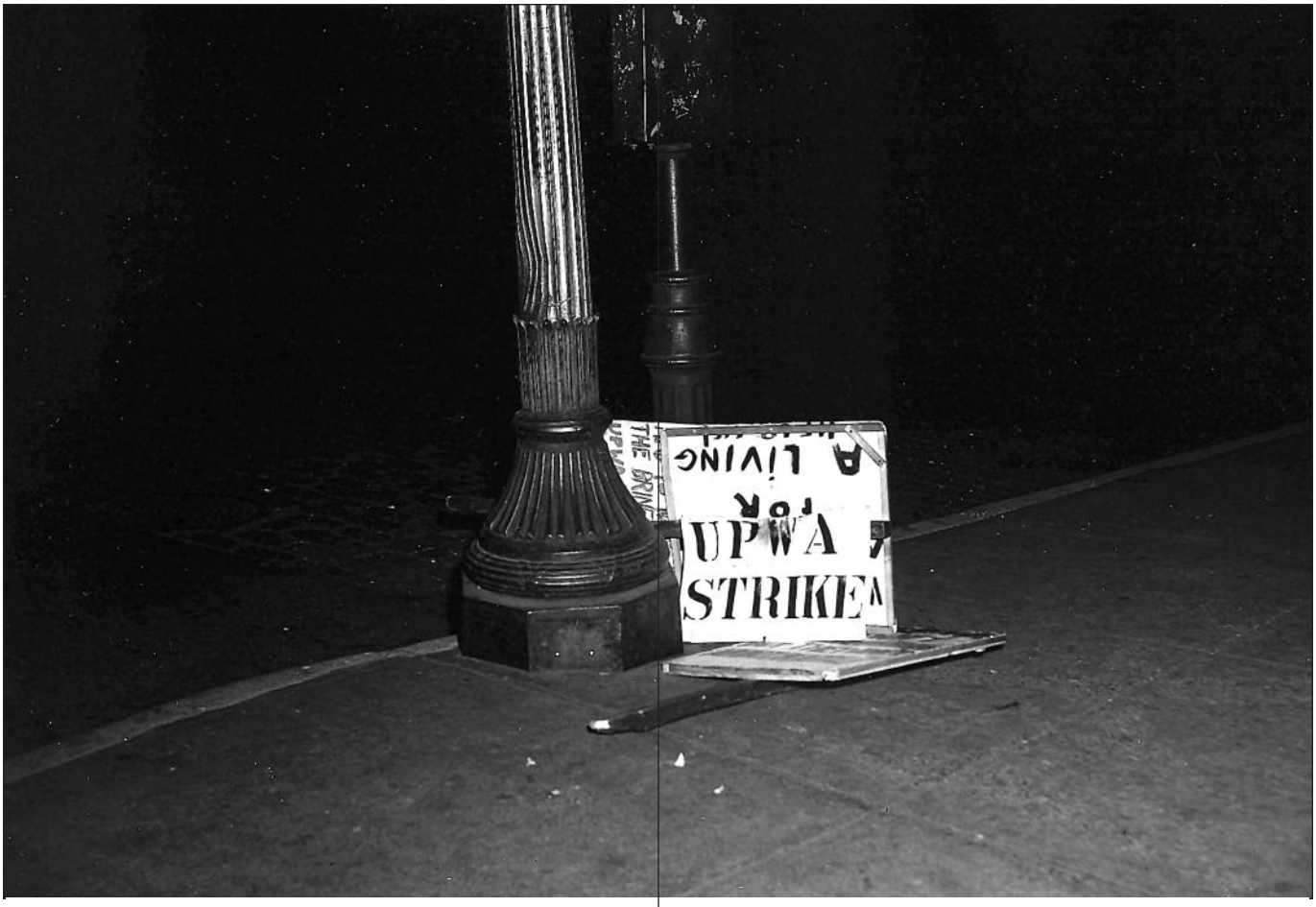
When word of the mobilization reached the strikers on the picket line the first thought was to question how the guard would be used. One picket was heard to say, "They'd just better not try to use the guard as a strike breaker."

A police officer said, "If they're going to close up the plant and order everyone off the street, then everything will be calm. But if they use the guard to open up the picket lines, there may be trouble."

Soon veterans began showing up on the picket lines wearing their service uniforms. One veteran with a long row of service ribbons on his chest carried a sign reading, "Do vets have to fight for higher wages too?"

The next day, Saturday May 15, the Minnesota National Guard cleared the streets of downtown South St. Paul. It was the second time in the city's history that they had done so. They began arriving about midnight in convoys from armories across the state and set up operations inside the Swift plant in South St. Paul and across the river in Newport at the Cudahy plant. They were young and many would, under normal conditions, have been taking high school graduation exams. Some were war veterans as well. They came from Bemidji, Fergus Falls, Moorhead, St. Cloud, Sauk Centre, Princeton, Minneapolis, Milaca, St. Paul, Park Rapids, Litchfield[25] and Benson. And by 7 a.m. they were on duty outside of the plants facing angry strikers.

Skirmishing between guardsmen and strikers was reported in the early morning hours outside of the Swift plant and three men were arrested. The crowd continued to build near the Swift gates overflowing in and all around the Grand and Concord intersection. Strikers and strike sympathizers jeered the guardsmen as the soldiers took up their positions. By mid-morning an estimated



After the strike, abandoned picket signs leaned against a lamppost.
Photo by St. Paul Dispatch, Pioneer Press, Minnesota Historical Society.

1,000 people jammed the intersection and Grand Avenue approach to the plant and the yards as the guard commander Col. Lester Hancock stepped to the loudspeaker. He told the crowd that Sheriff Dieter had issued a proclamation forbidding groups of more than four people from gathering within the designated emergency area.

A few minutes later about 400 guardsmen with rifles and fixed bayonets emerged from the Swift staging area. They were shoulder to shoulder in a V-formation at the front and stretched across the street and along the curb lines. At a signal they slowly began moving up Grand and into the Concord Avenue intersection. The crowd jeered and many strikers and sympathizers shouted at the guardsmen asking them not to go against fellow veterans. Howard Seiple, an 18-year-old guardsman and high school senior from Fergus Falls, was placed in the point of the wedge – the spear tip. He recalled many across the line from him yelled that they were war veterans and that the guardsmen should not be doing this to them. Over half a century later Seiple believes the fact that so many of the strikers were war veterans may have kept the violence to a minimum. "They had respect for the flag," he explained.

Slowly the crowd gave way and the guard channeled them out of the intersection and down Concord to the north and south clearing completely the approach to Swift and the stockyards. In their wake they left the legal number of pickets in place outside of the Swift gate. A short time later armed soldiers began escorting non-striking workers through the gates and into the plant. There was a brief flare up, but an armed half-track quickly broke any resistance to the entrance of the non-strikers.

At the Armour gate the legal number of pickets were present when the soldiers arrived. No violence was reported and eventually non-strikers crossed the picket lines with the assistance of the guard.

For all intents and purposes the strike had been broken. Almost immediately word reached South St. Paul that new talks were being scheduled between the parties and federal conciliators. Gov. Youngdahl announced that he would fly to Chicago to participate in the talks.

In Hastings UPWA counsel Douglas Hall removed Judge Schultz from hearing the contempt cases against the union and some of its members by filing an affidavit of prejudice. Judge Charles Hall was named to take his place. Across the river the County Attorney's office was

making plans to issue warrants charging inciting to riot against more than 30 men charged with invading the Cudahy plant.

On Monday, May 17 the South St. Paul City Council in its regular meeting managed to pass a resolution urging President Truman to bring about an end to the strike. The resolution made no mention of the fact that troops were now patrolling the streets of the downtown section of the city. It asked the President to "call upon the proper authorities to energetically pursue a wise course of arbitration or mediation or any other steps he deems advisable to be urged upon the contending factions."

In Hastings a jury was being selected to hear the contempt case against Milt Siegel and subpoenas were served by the U.S. Marshall's office on Siegel and Sheriff Dieter to appear before a section of the House Committee on Expenditures examining the application of Taft-Hartley law in the packinghouse dispute particularly its provisions on violence, destruction of property and the denial of the right to work.

On May 18 the union rejected a company proposal but indicated a willingness to accept the nine-cent wage increase. The dispute now centered on how striking workers were to be returned to work. The formula presented by the Big Four packers was as follows:

- Acceptance of the nine-cent wage increase retroactive to May 3.
- The union to order strikers back to work as directed by plant superintendents.
- Employees discharged for illegal acts during the strike to have a right to present their grievances in accordance with existing contract provisions.

Union President Ralph Helstein termed the third point in the proposal "vindictive and callous," an attempt to engage in indiscriminate firing of strikers and union officials.

While they talked in Chicago the strike continued to take a toll. In South St. Paul Municipal Court three women entered pleas of not guilty to charges of assault arising out of the days of violence in front of the Swift plant. The Dakota County Welfare Board announced that cases for April and half of May totaled 179. Total monies given to families were more than $10,000 as compared to a non-strike average of about $3,000. Hugo Johnson, executive director of the board, said fewer applications were being received compared to the beginning of the strike.

On May 20 the union locals in South St. Paul and across the nation began taking a vote on ending the strike. And in Waterloo, Iowa a striking picket was killed when he was shot in the head by a frightened non-striker attempting to cross the picket line. The killing came as national guardsmen in that town attempted to regain control of the streets near the Rath plant there.

Mary Gebhart Kaliszewski

Looking back over more than half century since the strike Mary Kaliszewski – then Mary Gebhart – recalls varied images of the labor conflict. She was student at St. Catherine's College in St. Paul at the time working summers as a secretary in the administration building at Swift & Company.

She remembers a certain proprietary interest in the plant because it was her grandfather Wallace Gebhart who supervised the construction of the sprawling facility in 1897, which added to the pain of the long and bitter strike. Her father, who worked in the electrical department of the plant, was one of those supervisory personnel who found themselves in permanent residency there after the pickets went up. She explained that he was needed inside the plant to insure that the basic electrical needs of such a large facility were met. It was three weeks, she said, before she saw him again.

It was frightening, she recalls, especially after the fighting broke out in earnest along the picket line at Grand and Concord. Once the National Guard came, she said, there was a standing order forbidding the gathering of more than four people in this part of the city. Mary remembers standing near the intersection watching the patrolling soldiers accompanied by a heavily armed half-track they brought to quell the disturbance. She and friends half joked that were more than four of them to meet near the intersection they might constitute a mob.

Following the strike and after the school year ended Mary resumed her work for Swift. She spent much of her time during those days typing statements and testimony that company lawyers used in the ongoing litigation against the UPWA. She recalled seeing surveillance photographs in the office, also part of the legal action, and heard talk of the union allegedly importing "goons from Chicago." Many of the photos were taken, she said, from the roof of the Swift administration building with a telescopic lens. There was talk of brass knuckles being used, and outside agitation by the union, and ongoing courtroom fights.

Mary also recalls the fear and bitterness that followed in the wake of the strike long after it was settled. Hard feelings became part of the social fabric of the town for some time, and while they ultimately slipped further and further beneath the surface, they never completely evaporated. Everyone knew who was on what side, she said.

The union balloting was to determine whether the rank and file would accept the latest offer from the packers. The offer included the original nine-cent wage increase. The rehiring issue was presumably settled by each side agreeing to arbitration according to normal grievance procedure – as contained in the companies' original proposal. The UPWA officials recommended to the members that they accept the offer for three of the Big Four. Wilson & Company had refused to agree to arbitration to settle disputes on rehiring striking workers. The 67-day walkout appeared to be on the verge of ending.

It took about 24 hours to tabulate the results of union voting at nearly 100 plants in 44 cities nationwide. On May 22 instructions were received in South St. Paul that picketing was to end at noon. Upon receipt of the news Gov. Youngdahl ordered the guard withdrawn. The strike was over.

Aftermath

After 67-days of bitter and sometimes bloody economic warfare there were loose ends to tie up, most of them legal. In Hastings contempt actions were still in progress. Siegel's defense lawyer Douglas Hall launched the UPWA field representative's defense by charging that Sheriff Dieter asked union officials to mass picket to prove to others that law enforcement did not have the numbers to breach the union lines. Mike Verderosa, a member of the Swift local, testified that Dieter approached him and asked for more pickets to be placed on the line. Dieter, called as a rebuttal witness, denied he had made any such request.

On Monday May 24 the packing plants in South St. Paul like those all across the nation resumed full operations. It was estimated that it would take about 10 days for production to return to normal levels. Livestock began flowing into the stockyards and prices were expected to fluctuate before finding a true level. And Milt Siegel took the stand in his own defense. He said he ordered the mass picketing at the request of Sheriff Dieter, accusing the sheriff of just putting on "a big show." Following his testimony, arguments by counsel and the judge's charge to the jury, they received the case and began deliberations. He was convicted that night of contempt and ultimately sentenced to six months in jail and fined $100. His lawyer said the conviction would be appealed.

The remaining trials proceeded in rapid-fire fashion. William Nolan of Local 167 was the second of ten cases to go before a jury and followed a pattern similar to Siegel's. In Stillwater the 39 men charged with raiding the Cudahy plant entered pleas of not guilty and each man demanded separate jury trials.

On May 29 the Nolan jury told the judge they were deadlocked and his trial ended in a mistrial. No date was set for a new trial.

In South St. Paul the price of cattle went up and the city made plans for Memorial Day observances. All time records were set in the stockyards for cow and bull sales. Everything appeared to be settling back into a normal routine but on the morning of May 31 – Memorial Day – the St. Paul Union Stockyards began to burn. The holiday was largely forgotten as residents gathered to watch the blaze from the bluffs and along Camber Avenue. Before long the blaze had consumed a large portion of the southwest portion of the yards as well as 40 cattle and 88 railroad cars. Damage was estimated at close to $2 million.[26]

The last truck of the three companies of firefighters from South St. Paul and seven from St. Paul left the scene the next morning after battling the inferno with flame and smoke reaching hundreds of feet into the air. A lack of wind was credited with being a major factor in there not being even more damage.

Fire officials said the cause of the fire was undetermined but later it was believed to have been the result of a carelessly discarded cigarette butt.[27]

On June 5 in Indianapolis, Daniel J. Tobin, president of the International Teamsters Union then with the CIO rival AFL, denounced nationwide strikes saying they served to paralyze industry and adversely affect other unions. Three days later two district directors of the UPWA resigned. Helstein said Meyer Stern of New York and Herbert March resigned when the union decided to end the strike. Another factor was believed to be the UPWA decision to sign non-communist affidavits as required by Taft-Hartley. The same day Stern and March resigned, Ray Wenz, a national delegate from Local 114 of the AFL Amalgamated Meat Cutters, spoke to a meeting of his local on the subject of organizing in the South St. Paul packinghouses. He asked each member to help in this task by providing names of men they knew currently working at the plants. Wenz had attended his union's national convention in Chicago during the last days of the strike and presumably carried back with him guidance as to the direction for his local in the rapidly escalating rivalry.[28]

Harry Urban, a UPWA picket captain at the Swift plant during the strike, was the second union official convicted of contempt and received a sentence identical to that of Siegel. And on June 11 the union itself was convicted of contempt. But on June 16 attorneys for Swift and the UPWA agreed to a settlement on all outstanding litigation. The union entered guilty pleas on the outstanding individual cases. As a result all civil actions against the union and its individual members was dismissed.

In another hearing local 167 of UPWA began deciding whether to impose sanctions against 183 union

members for crossing the picket line in South St. Paul during the strike. Sanctions included fines and possible expulsion from the union. On the other side hearings were being scheduled for July in front of a one man arbitration board to decide whether 30 Swift employees and 10 Armour workers would be terminated from their jobs. The workers were accused of actions in violation of the contract during the strike.

And as if to come full circle since the days before the strike, on June 18 it was reported in Chicago that the AFL Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen indeed assigned a staff of organizers to plants under contract to the CIO UPWA. But on June 30 in Chicago, Ralph Helstein was reelected as president of the UPWA in a vote seen as a validation by the rank and file of his leadership during the long strike.

Conclusion

Under any analysis the UPWA suffered a serious defeat in the strike. Frankly it is difficult to reach any other conclusion than it was devastating. The union settled what had been termed right from the beginning as a wage dispute pure and simple for the nine-cents an hour raise offered by the packers in the first place. On top of this they found themselves financially busted, targeted by Amalgamated Meat Cutters who openly challenged them at every turn, and the subject of much internecine bitterness and conflict. Yet the union not only survived, it reorganized and reconstituted itself fast enough to negotiate further raises for its members by the end of 1948 and again in 1949.

The Big Four obviously felt they had won the strike, but they paid a steep price losing millions in revenues and business. Cudahy and Wilson are no longer in business while Armour and Swift currently bear no resemblance to the national industrial powers they were in the late 1940s. Halpern in his book *Down on the Killing Floor,* quotes a Kansas City union leader as saying, "It taught the company a lesson. They lost millions of dollars out of that deal, and they knew we could do it again."[29] While it is certainly possible to argue with this statement, it is important to note that it never happened again on a nationwide scale and with the wide spread intensity as in 1948.

Perhaps the larger toll was in the lingering bitterness and hard feelings between loyal union strikers and those workers who crossed the picket lines. It seems to have been a legacy that survived the strike by years, and in some instances, never died until some of the principals to the dispute did. It was a divisive chapter of local history to be sure, and even though the plants are long gone and the UPWA no longer exits, the subject of the strike generates feelings across the spectrum of human emotion when discussed by those who took part. Inside the plants in the days following the strike the union conducted a "blue button" campaign. Those workers who had remained loyal to the union were given a blue button to wear. Those who crossed the picket lines were not and were instead given the silent treatment.

Still when the strike was over people went back to work. For the workers their pay increased, benefits became stronger and working conditions by-and-large improved through the 1950s and 60s. But a little over twenty years later Swift closed and Armour began scaling back operations eventually closing for good in 1979. The plants and their jobs were gone for keeps, but in the years since the strike people worked hard at the plants and in the yards for decent wages, raised families and sent their children to school.

There were other meatpacking strikes to be sure in the ensuing years and the strike against Swift and Wilson in 1959 left its mark. But for the most part, the packers and the union seem to have operated from that of mutual co-existence not unlike the antagonists in the film *Rocky.* When one of the men during a clench in the final round of the grueling bloody fight says there will be no rematch the other replies, "I don't want one."

Sources for 1948 Meatpacking Strike

In compiling the blow-by-blow account of the 1948 meatpacking strike great reliance was placed on the stories which appeared at the time nearly every day in a hometown newspaper. The *South St. Paul Daily Reporter*, then housed on Concord Street, very close to the location of the most dramatic events of the strike, is the primary source vehicle for much of the information appearing here.

In this account, unless otherwise footnoted or noted in the text itself, information was taken from the *Daily Reporter* between the dates of March 3, 1948 and June 30, 1948. The narrative is written in chronological order and should provide easy direction for those wishing to further examine the source material.

With these necessary requirements out of the way let me make a couple of observations about this primary source which may not be quite as obvious as the bare bones fact of its existence in the Dakota County Historical Society archives. The mere fact that it exists at all is testimony to its importance then and now. There were many things in 1948 which were part of life in South St. Paul, Minnesota as well as the rest of the country which no longer exist or which play a much diminished role in modern daily life. One is the daily hometown newspaper as opposed to the chain-owned large dailies we have become so familiar with. The primary source of information for this most dramatic historical event is itself now an historical item. But even as such it still performs what it was originally designed to do -- inform, educate and entertain.

At the time of the strike the *Daily Reporter* obviously sought to bring the story to its readers on each level -- national, regional, local -- upon which it was simultaneously taking place. Wire services such as United Press and Associated Press among others covered matters at the national and state levels which the *Daily Reporter* included in its coverage along with their own reports on the day's happenings such as in Hastings courtrooms, city council chambers, and on the picket lines right down the street from their offices.

It is interesting to note that none of the local strike coverage accounts carry by-lines identifying the reporter. Quite likely the information from all of the various corners of the city and county were funneled through a person responsible for writing the actual story which appeared in print -- a "rewrite" person. As such, the effort then was a team endeavor, which continues to pay dividends to us today. It is with these people in mind -- the person calling in from the courtroom, walking in off of Concord with a noteook full of quotes and observations, the rewrite person, the typesetters, printers and even the kids delivering the paper in the afternoon -- that I offer what is written here. We are richer for their efforts so long ago.

Endnotes

[1] Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994) p. 604
[2] Joseph Goulden, *The Best Years 1945-1950* (New York: Atheneum, 1976) p. 8
[3] Ibid p. 10
[4] Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (Boston: South End Press,1972) p. 221-222
[5] Ibid p.222
[6] Ibid p. 223
[7] Ibid
[8] Ibid p. 227
[9] Ibid p. 223-226
[10] Rick Halpern, *Down On The Killing Floor* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997) p. 218
[11] Ibid
[12] Ibid p. 218-219
[13] Halpern, ibid p. 220-221
[14] Brecher ibid p. 228
[15] Halpern, p. 221
[16] Ibid p. 224-225
[17] Ibid p. 226-227
[18] Ibid p. 227-228
[19] Ibid p. 228, note 65.
[20] Ibid p. 228
[21] William Millikan, *A Union Against Unions* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001) p. 348
[22] Ibid p. 349
[23] James Capeti interview with author April 2002.
[24] Brust bio information, www.mnhs.org/library/findaids/p2143
[25] Lois Glewwe, ed., *South Saint Paul Centennial 1887-1987* (South St. Paul: South Saint Paul Area Chapter of the Dakota County Historical Society) p. 50. Contains a description of the Litchfield unit's activities during thestrike. They were deployed both in South St. Paul and in Albert Lea at the Wilson & Co. plant.
[26] Ibid p. 205
[27] Thomas Kaliszewski interview with author March 2002.
[28] Minutes from regular meeting in St. Paul of Local 114 Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen, AFL, June 8, 1948.
[29] Halpern, p. 233