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## EARLY LABOR UNION ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORTS IN SOUTH CAROLINA COTTON MILLS, 1880-1905

MELTON A. McLAURIN \*

The role of organized labor in the Southern cotton textile industry during the late nineteenth century has received scant attention from historians of the South. Compared with the numerous writings on the industry's development and the conditions encountered by the early mill workers, this inattention is the more striking, and results primarily from the assumption that only inconsequential union activity occurred in the South until well into the twentieth century. A close study of the industry reveals that, contrary to this assumption, organized labor twice made serious, but unsuccessful, attempts to penetrate Southern cotton mills before 1900. Their failure revealed to labor and management the difficulties involved in seeking to organize unskilled, uneducated workers in a surplus labor market, and in doing so established a pattern of labor relations within the industry, vestiges of which are still apparent in some Southern textile firms even today. The development of this pattern is clearly discernible in the history of union activity in the mills of post-Reconstruction South Carolina.

Between 1880 and 1900, the rapid growth of the state's cotton textile industry earned South Carolina the title of "The Massachusetts of the South." During that period the state's textile firms increased from 14 to 80, capital invested in the industry soared from \$2,776,100 to \$39,258,946, spindles increased in number from 82,334 to 1,431,349, and looms from 1,676 to 42,663.<sup>1</sup> Mill presidents such as Henry P. Hammett of Piedmont Mills, Dexter E. Converse of Glendale and Clifton Mills, Ellison A. Smythe of Pelzer Mills, and John Montgomery of Spartan Mills replaced the planters as the economic, social, and political arbiters of the state.

Caught in the grinding despair and poverty of the crop-lien system, thousands of white tenant farmers and small farm owners flocked to the mills in search of a better life, providing a seemingly endless supply of native operatives. Those who fled from farm to factory often improved their material condition, but at appreciable cost to their social status and agrarian individualism. Mill village housing was often an improvement

\* Melton A. McLaurin is Assistant Professor of History at the University of South Alabama at Mobile.

<sup>1</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States: Special Reports on Selected Industries*, 56-57.

the winter of 1832-33 in which the President was pitted against his native state over the right of a state to declare null and void federal tariff laws. Hindsight revealed that support of South Carolinians for the President's veto of the bank's recharter bill in the summer of 1832 had been self-defeating. In the end South Carolinians had served neither their political nor their economic interests, for abolishing the tariffs had been their primary purpose, and Jackson was clearly unwilling to go that far—to do so would mean severing his following in Northern industrial centers, especially in vote-heavy Pennsylvania. The bank itself had never been in direct conflict with the economic interest of South Carolina, nor at first had it conflicted with political principles of the majority of South Carolinians. But by 1832 two of three elements of the American system were economically harmful to Carolina, and with the state's adoption of new political principles—strict constitutional construction and state rights—South Carolina rejected out of hand the entire program of economic nationalism, including the one segment which had proved beneficial to the Palmetto state, the second Bank of the United States. South Carolina's rejection of the bank, therefore, hardly less than the nullifying of the tariffs, dramatically demonstrated the extremism of the Palmetto State's about-face from nationalism at the time of the War of 1812 to state rights in the 1830's, a short span of less than two decades.

over farm dwellings, and regular wages enabled laborers to purchase more consumer goods than would have been obtainable with farm earnings, though such items were often purchased through company stores at high interest rates. Yet the operatives frequently found themselves isolated from the rest of the populace and viewed with scorn, even by their less prosperous former neighbors who remained on the farm.<sup>2</sup> Enmeshed in the paternalistic mill village system, they were dependent upon their employers for nearly all the physical necessities of life. Long hours and low wages were complemented by company stores, company housing, company schools, and company churches. In many villages even the social and political behavior of the operatives was rigorously observed and often influenced by the employer.<sup>3</sup> Numerous accounts of the operatives' hours, wages, and living conditions have amply shown that although conditions were often better than on the farm, the degree of improvement was small—life continued bleak and harsh. A less chronicled disadvantage of factory life was the rigid schedule it forced upon the operative. On the farm work could be avoided; it was never constant. But in the mill village life was paced by the factory whistle.<sup>4</sup>

Most of the operatives accepted mill village life without serious complaint, partially because of improved material conditions. Other factors, however, contributed to their apparent docility. Many hoped their sojourn in the mills would be temporary, that their wages would eventually finance their return to the farm. Their ignorance of the workings of an industrial society proved a serious handicap, as did their woeeful lack of formal education. On the farm the operative had worked as an individual. Solidarity with his fellow workers was an ideal completely beyond the new operative's frame of reference.<sup>5</sup> In short, the farmers who joined the industrial society retained a rural mind set.

Despite these handicaps, however, some operatives realized the permanence of their status as industrial laborers and sought to improve their lot. In groping for a means to accomplish this end, they turned to the possibilities of unionization. Their participation in organized labor was met by an immediate, vigorously hostile response from management.

<sup>2</sup> Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941), 201-02. Ben Robertson, *Red Hills and Cotton* (Columbia, S. C., 1960), 274-75.

<sup>3</sup> *Enquirer-Sun* (Columbus, Ga.), June 25, 1899; Leonora B. Ellis, "A Model Factory Town," *The Forum*, XXXII (September, 1901), 62; William E. Woodward, *The Gift of Life, an Autobiography* (New York, 1947), 36-41.

<sup>4</sup> Robertson, *Red Hills*, 274.

<sup>5</sup> Holland Thompson, *From the Cotton Field to the Cotton Mill* (New York, 1906), 195-96; Woodward; *Gift of Life*, 71-73; *N. C. Labor Report*, 1901, 412, 416, 419-21.

The first labor organization to appear in the cotton mills of the state was the Knights of Labor. The depression of 1883 and the temporarily successful 1885 strike against Jay Gould's southwest rail system had resulted in the rapid growth of the Knights throughout the South. Within the textile industry, by 1886 the Knights had established twenty local textile trade assemblies and several mixed assemblies which included individual operatives.<sup>6</sup> Mill hands in every Southern state from Mississippi to Virginia joined the Order. In South Carolina, the Knights appeared initially among the artisans of Florence and Columbia.<sup>7</sup> Spreading westward, by the spring of 1886 the Order was recruiting Piedmont operatives, especially those from larger mills who had seen their wages recently reduced.

The Knights' activity brought an instantaneous response from manufacturers, who saw the union as a direct threat to their control over the mill hands. Early in 1886 the Knights ran afoul of Graniteville Manufacturing Company when they attempted to organize operatives at the firm's Vaucluse mill. Vaucluse, situated like Graniteville just north of the border from Augusta, Georgia, was a part of the Horse Creek Valley textile complex. In April, Vaucluse operatives petitioned unsuccessfully for wage increases, indicating that the Knights had met with some success.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, Ellison A. Smythe informed Henry Hammett of signs of labor organization at his Pelzer factory. His operatives' favorable response to the Knights thoroughly alarmed Smythe, whose first reaction was to suggest a meeting of mill owners to form a manufacturer's organization to confront the union. Hammett dismissed as premature such a meeting until some "demonstration" occurred or the operatives were "demoralized" by events outside the state. Yet he was more concerned about the Knights than his reply to Smythe indicated. As early as March, he had written to Dexter E. Converse, asking "Do you apprehend trouble in the end from labor organizations or will they break down of their own weight—without a revolution?" In addition, he had already ordered his superintendents at Piedmont and Caperdown mills, both located a few miles from Greenville, to "nip in the bud" any "Yankee inspired" organizational activity by discharging operatives engaged in it.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Herbert F. Lahne, *The Cotton Mill Worker* (New York, 1944), 183; Robert R. Brooks "The United Textile Workers of America," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1935), 33-34.

<sup>7</sup> *Journal of United Labor*, January 10, 1886, 1192-93. Hereinafter cited as *JUL*.

<sup>8</sup> Minutes of the Graniteville Manufacturing Company, April 22, 1886 (In the William Gregg Foundation, Graniteville, S. C.).

<sup>9</sup> Hammett to Dexter Converse, March 30, 1886, Piedmont Letter Book, I, 252 (Manuscripts in the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina,

Hammett, easily the most militant anti-union owner in the state, possessed an almost psychotic contempt for organized labor that led him into a personal crusade against the Knights.<sup>10</sup> His growing concern over the Knights in South Carolina was nourished by their success just across the border in the mills of Augusta, Georgia. When mounting tension in Augusta resulted in what became the Knights' major Southern textile strike, Hammett immediately offered the Augusta mill presidents his support and throughout the strike acted as their self-appointed advisor. "Crush the Knights beyond resurrection," he advised; they presented a greater threat to the mills than "the depression of the last two or three years, or any threat in the last twenty years." He proposed that the Augusta owners accept an area wage scale and promised to urge its adoption by South Carolina firms.<sup>11</sup>

Although Hammett's fears of revolution were the product of an overactive imagination, his concern that a strong Augusta union might spread to South Carolina was well founded. The Reverend Mr. J. Simmons Meynardie, master workman of the Augusta local, had crossed into South Carolina and succeeded in organizing a number of operatives at both Vacluse and Graniteville.<sup>12</sup> No stranger to the area, Meynardie, the son of a Charleston Methodist divine and himself a Baptist minister, had previously preached in the South Carolina Piedmont and had evidently attempted to organize the area's operatives in addition to ministering to their spiritual needs. Hammett had characterized Meynardie's previous efforts as "black and disgraceful." The *Carolina Spartan* had embellished the portrait: Meynardie was a man "of anarchist tendencies, who never did a fair day's work—giving trouble wherever he goes."<sup>13</sup> The *Spartan* was correct about Meynardie's connection with trouble. It erupted among the Knights at Vacluse when their leader, Robert Butler, was discharged for interfering in the weaving department. When the company sought to fill the vacant position the Vacluse Knights, about one-half the labor force, displayed their resentment. Butler's replacement met with a barrage of taunts and threats, including a threat on his life, but no violence occurred.<sup>14</sup> Evidently the

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Columbia, S. C.). Hereinafter cited as PLB; Hammett to Ellison Smythe, April 23, 1886, PLB, I, 289.

<sup>10</sup> Hammett to P. A. Montgomery, June 17, 1886, PLB, I, 409.

<sup>11</sup> Hammett to William E. McCoy, June 1 and September 2, 1886, PLB, I, 415-16; II, 39.

<sup>12</sup> *Augusta (Ga.) Chronicle*, August 15, 1886.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, July 20, 1886; *Carolina Spartan* (Spartanburg, S. C.), August 4, 1886; Hammett to William E. McCoy, June 23, 1886, PLB, I, 420.

<sup>14</sup> David D. Wallace, "One Hundred Years of Gregg and Graniteville," (unpublished manuscript, William Gregg Foundation, Graniteville, S. C., 1954), 224.

Knights believed further resistance futile and rather than conduct an unsuccessful strike acquiesced in Butler's dismissal. But the local, though defeated on this issue, continued to exist.

Undaunted by their setback at Vaucluse, the Knights continued to organize in South Carolina mills, beginning in October, during the height of the Augusta strike. Although no evidence exists to link the Augusta Knights with this renewed organizational activity, such a connection is probable. The Knights began by attempting unsuccessfully to penetrate Hammett's carefully guarded Piedmont Mills. Hammett ordered his superintendent to discharge and refuse to re-hire all those connected with the Knights and to close the mill at any further signs of organizational activity.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, the Knights had been successful in organizing textile trade assemblies at Smythe's Pelzer Mills and Converse's Clifton Mills, two of the firms clustered within the general Greenville-Spartanburg textile complex. In addition, they had organized a mixed assembly at Greenville which included some textile operatives. Upon learning of the Pelzer and Clifton locals, Hammett encouraged both Smythe and Converse to resist the Knights. When Converse responded by discharging all members of the Clifton local, he received Hammett's hearty congratulations and an expression of hope that Smythe would follow his example. Smythe evidently went even further than did Converse, for the organizer at Pelzer "got frightened and ran away."<sup>16</sup> This policy of implacable resistance to the Knights was continued by other mill presidents into 1887. Early that year management discharged and refused reinstatement to members of a newly organized local at Fishing Creek.<sup>17</sup>

Yet despite management's staunch resistance, the Knights stubbornly persisted in their efforts to organize the state's mills. As late as June, 1887, Knights were still employed, probably unknowingly, in a Charleston mill.<sup>18</sup> In July, "walking delegates" (commissioned organizers) from various Southern assemblies were reported in Greenville, Pickens, Laurens, and other textile counties in the Piedmont sowing a "crop of organized labor, distrust, race antagonisms, menace." Recognizing a potential soft spot, the *Carolina Spartan* directed its heaviest criticism at the Knights' willingness to organize Negroes, although only in

<sup>15</sup> Hammett to James F. Iler, October 12, 1886, PLB, II, 118; Hammett to James A. Brice, October 14, 1886, PLB, II, 120.

<sup>16</sup> Hammett to Francis J. Pelzer, October 16, 1886, PLB, II, 126; Hammett to Converse, November 18, 1886, PLB, II, 214; *JUL*, November 10, 1886, 2201.

<sup>17</sup> Gustavus G. Williamson, Jr., "Cotton Manufacturing in South Carolina, 1865-1892," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1954), 198; George S. Mitchell, *Textile Unionism and the South* (Chapel Hill, 1931), 25.

<sup>18</sup> *JUL*, June 18, 1887, 2431.



separate assemblies. By organizing Negro artisans and farmers and appealing for co-operation among laborers of both races the Knights, said the *Spartan*, were "playing with fire."<sup>19</sup> Despite such criticism, white locals were revived or initiated at Rock Hill, Graniteville, and Vauluse. Although mixed rather than trade assemblies, these locals probably included textile operatives.<sup>20</sup>

The last textile assembly founded by the Knights in the state resulted from a second attempt to organize the Clifton operatives late in 1887. As before, management began to discharge its members. As they had made no demands concerning hours, wages, and working conditions, the Knights, who sought only the right to organize, struck the Clifton Plant in September. Proclaiming that they had done the operatives no injustice, and that therefore the operatives had no need for a union, management steadfastly refused to alter its position. Then what were to become management's dual ultimate weapons throughout the South were employed as the Clifton management moved to eradicate every remnant of organization. All Knights, real and suspected, were locked out of the mills and eviction proceedings were begun to remove the families of twenty-six Knights from company housing. To replace the locked out Knights, new hands were successfully recruited from the surrounding area.<sup>21</sup> Without money, jobs, or housing, the more than one hundred Clifton strikers dispatched a desperate appeals for aid to both the national executive board and other Southern locals.<sup>22</sup> These pleas were never answered, the local was defeated, and its members dispersed.

Already seriously weakened by their reverses of 1886, the Knights' defeat at Clifton hastened further the decline of the order in South Carolina's mills. In December, 1887, some thirty Spartanburg Knights formed an emigration colony and left the Piedmont to seek an area more hospitable to organized labor. Quite probably some of the Knights from Clifton, which is just outside Spartanburg, joined the colony, since their positions had been filled and several had expressed the desire to seek employment elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> The following year the Knights provoked an inconsequential disturbance at Greenville which proved to be the last gasp of the Knights in the South Carolina textile industry.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Carolina Spartan* (Spartanburg, S. C.), July 13, 1887.

<sup>20</sup> *JUL*, August 6, 1887, 2468; *JUL*, September 10, 1887, 2487; *JUL*, October 1, 1887, 2500.

<sup>21</sup> *JUL*, October 15, 1887, 2508; *Carolina Spartan* (Spartanburg, S. C.), September 14, 19, 20, 1887.

<sup>22</sup> *The Messenger* (Fayetteville, N. C.), November 18, December 2, 1887.

<sup>23</sup> *JUL*, October 15, 1887, 2508; *JUL*, December 3, 1887, 2536.

<sup>24</sup> Mitchell, *Textile Unionism*, 25; Freddie Ray Marshall, "History of Labor Organization in the South" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1955), 67.

The failure of the Knights in South Carolina forcefully demonstrated both the difficulties unionization attempts would encounter and the fact that some operatives would respond to such attempts. Fresh from the farm, ignorant of the methods and principles of organized labor, without adequate finances or experienced union leadership, the Knights proved unable to overcome management's determined resistance. Management's response to the Knights also revealed that they would resist any efforts by the operatives to organize or interfere with their absolute control over mill policies, a control they believed a fundamental right of property ownership. Yet the Knights had introduced the operatives to the concept of unionization and gained some support from their ranks. They had given hundreds of workers experience in union activity, including organizational methods and the strike. And, perhaps most significantly, they had cast doubt on management's oft repeated concept of the docile, loyal, native operative.

For several years following the defeat of the Knights the labor movement in South Carolina ignored the mill hand, although the conditions that caused them to turn to the Knights continued unabated. Hours remained long and wages low, and as the textile industry began to concentrate in urban areas such as Columbia and Greenville, relationships between operatives and management became even less personal. Many operatives who had hoped to return to the land found both themselves and their children members of a true industrial proletariat. Yet some still clung to the hope of unionization that the Knights had sparked, a hope rekindled in 1896 by a wildcat strike at Columbus, Georgia, to protest wage reductions.

Although management forced the Columbus strikers to accept the wage reductions, the unity engendered among the operatives by the strike continued. Under the leadership of Prince W. Greene, a weaver, the Columbus operatives formed several local, independent assemblies. Greene was aided in his organizational activities by Will H. Winn, a printer and organizer for the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Primarily because of Winn's influence the Columbus locals affiliated with the AFL's recently formed national textile union, the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW).<sup>25</sup> Centered largely around the Fall River, Massachusetts, area, the NUTW was a weak craft union with a leadership that exhibited strong socialistic tendencies.<sup>26</sup> So rapid was the growth of the NUTW in the Columbus area, however, that in 1897 Greene, with the support of AFL president Samuel Gompers, who distrusted the socialists, was chosen vice-president of the national union.

<sup>25</sup> *Enquirer-Sun* (Columbus, Ga.), March 28-April 1, 1896.

<sup>26</sup> Lahne, *Cotton Mill Worker*, 184-88; Mitchell, *Textile Unionism*, 26-31.

Gompers feared the socialists were planning to use the NUTW in a bid to disrupt the AFL. To prevent this eventuality, in the summer of 1897 he backed a *coup* which ousted the NUTW president and gave Greene and his supporters control of the union. Greene immediately transferred the union's headquarters to Columbus, but effective leadership of the NUTW was not so easily attained. The Southerners' *coup* so angered Northern locals that many withdrew from the national, taking with them the bulk of the union's treasury and experienced leadership.<sup>27</sup>

Although seriously handicapped by the loss of the older, better financed Northern locals, with aid from the AFL, the NUTW sent paid organizers into the field. G. R. Webb, an operative from Langley, South Carolina, was assigned to his state.<sup>28</sup> Aided by volunteer organizers, he worked continuously to recruit South Carolina operatives. Organizational meetings were held in many of the state's towns between 1898 and 1900, including Greenville, Spartanburg, Rock Hill, Bath, Graniteville, Columbia, Greenwood, Abbeville, Bamberg, Vaucluse, and Charleston.<sup>29</sup> Some meetings proved unsuccessful; others resulted in the formation of small locals. But in urban areas the NUTW's promotional activities proved effective, spawning some surprisingly large locals. One hundred and fifty charter members founded the Rock Hill local, and the Columbia union, with over five hundred members, was called by the Southern labor press "the largest textile union in the world."<sup>30</sup>

Once organized, the South Carolina locals began to make their presence felt. With AFL support, they plunged into the fight to obtain child labor laws, petitioning the state legislature and sending delegations to legislative hearings to support child labor bills.<sup>31</sup> But management's political power and fierce resistance to such legislation simply overwhelmed the efforts of the NUTW. The state legislature defeated child labor bills in 1899, 1900, 1901, and 1902. The NUTW, however, was able to exert pressure directly on management in specific disputes in other areas. This was especially true of conflicts over wages and working con-

<sup>27</sup> *The Herald* (Columbus, Ga.), April 3, 1899.

<sup>28</sup> International Union of Textile Workers (IUTW), *Convention Proceedings, 1900*, 33; American Federation of Labor, *Convention Proceedings, 1899*, 56. In 1900, the NUTW because of its textile workers in Canada, changed its name to the International Union of Textile Workers.

<sup>29</sup> *American Federationist*, VI (June, 1899), 89; *ibid.*, VI (May, 1899), 66-68; *ibid.*, VI (October, 1899), 119; *ibid.*, VI (November, 1899), 223-29; *The Herald*, (Rock Hill, S. C.), June 27, 1900.

<sup>30</sup> *The Herald* (Columbus, Ga.), May 28, 1899; Mitchell, *Textile Unionism*, 26.

<sup>31</sup> For a thorough discussion of the role of organized labor in the early fight for child labor laws in South Carolina, see Elizabeth H. Davidson, *Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States* (Chapel Hill, 1939).

ditions where locals were composed of the more skilled operatives, such as weavers and loom fixers, whom management found harder to replace than unskilled spinners. During the years 1899 and 1900, the skilled operatives at mills in Bath, Langley, and Warrenton were successful in obtaining small wage increases.<sup>32</sup>

Before 1900, management's opposition to the NUTW was constant, but does not seem to have had the total suppression of the union as its goal. Organizers were accused of being paid emissaries of jealous New England manufacturers who sought to disrupt the South's remarkable progress in the textile industry.<sup>33</sup> The press charged union proponents with advocating the employment of Negro mill hands. Though false, this charge played heavily on the whites' fear of direct economic competition with the Negro.<sup>34</sup> Greene and other organizers also encountered physical intimidation at Columbia, Greenville, and Bath.<sup>35</sup> In November, 1898, when a strike which had originated in Augusta over wage reductions spread to the mills of Bath and Langley, strikers were evicted from company housing and wholesale grocers were pressured into refusing credit to retailers who sold to strikers. Greene visited the Bath and Langley operatives who, without housing, food, or funds for a protracted strike, were forced to capitulate. But Greene prevailed upon management to re-hire union workers "so long as no effort is made to interfere with management or control of said mills, or with their employees."<sup>36</sup> Thus, although the strike was lost, Greene both kept the Horse Creek Valley locals in existence and gained explicit recognition for them.

As the NUTW continually increased its membership, management's toleration declined. By the spring of 1900, the union was faced with a fight for its continued existence. In April, sixty members of an Abbeville local were locked out simply because they were union members. The national's failure to answer the local's appeal for financial aid resulted in the defeat and demise of the local.<sup>37</sup> Within a matter of weeks, members of a newly organized Greenwood local were locked out. G. R. Webb's efforts to secure a compromise settlement failed and the

<sup>32</sup> *American Federationist*, VI (October, 1899), 119; IUTW, *Convention Proceedings, 1900*, 17-18, 30-32.

<sup>33</sup> *The State* (Columbia, S. C.), November 22, 1898.

<sup>34</sup> Williamson, "South Carolina Cotton Manufacturing," 204.

<sup>35</sup> *American Federationist*, VI (May, 1899), 61-63, 57-59.

<sup>36</sup> *Augusta (Ga.) Chronicle*, November 20, 1898-January 28, 1899.

<sup>37</sup> IUTW, *Convention Proceedings, 1900*, 8-9; *The State* (Columbia, S. C.), January 24, 1901.

Greenwood local, too, disbanded.<sup>38</sup> In the summer of 1900, W. B. Smith Whaley, president of Gramby Mills and a major shareholder in other Columbia mills, had threatened to discharge all his union employees. Only the opposition of the relatively moderate *State* newspaper, the surety of a strike of the large Columbia textile local and sympathetic non-union operatives, and, perhaps, the lack of firm support from other mill presidents, caused Whaley to reconsider such a policy.<sup>39</sup> Events in the fall, however, would persuade Whaley to return to his original decision.

On Labor Day, 1900, the South Carolina State Federation of Labor was formed in Columbia. The large Columbia textile local was instrumental in its founding. The State Federation immediately demanded from the legislature a child labor law, a state bureau of labor with inspection powers, and a reduction in the legal number of hours constituting a work day.<sup>40</sup> Any of the three demands would have angered mill management; the three combined prompted more determined policies of resistance to the NUTW.

Under Whaley's guidance, in March, 1901, the Columbia mills embarked upon an attempt to kill the union with kindness. The management of three of the city's larger mills voted to co-operate in providing for their operatives a public hall, a library, a school, and a contribution of \$2,550 and a half acre of land for the construction of a church. The option of increasing wages or reducing hours in lieu of providing social services was not considered.<sup>41</sup> Management's generosity failed to deter the growth of the Columbia local.

In August, management changed tactics, adopting a policy of directly intimidating the local. Knowing that their operatives planned to participate in the Labor Day parade, the management of Capitol City, Richland, and Olympia Mills ordered their hands to work overtime on the two Saturdays preceding Labor Day to make up the time they would lose by participating in that holiday. To stifle expected opposition, management threatened to suspend for a week all operatives who refused to comply with the overtime demand.<sup>42</sup> Several hundred operatives, union and non-union, ignored the order and refused to work on Satur-

<sup>38</sup> IUTW, *Convention Proceedings, 1900*, 30; *The State* (Columbia, S. C.), January 24, 1901.

<sup>39</sup> *The State* (Columbia, S. C.), August 30, 1901.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, September 4, 1900.

<sup>41</sup> Minutes of the Gramby Cotton Mills, March 1, 1901, Book I, May 30, 1895-November 13, 1903 (in the possession of the South Carolina Electric and Gas Company, Columbia, S. C.).

<sup>42</sup> *The State* (Columbia, S. C.), August 25-27, 1901.

day, August 24. They were denied admittance to the mills the following Monday. That afternoon the union held a rally which was also attended by non-union operatives. Although faced with an angered rank and file, union leaders advised caution. They agreed, however, to admit a hundred new members. This decision reflected the officials' inexperience, for the local's treasury hardly could have supported its old members, even in a short lock out. Meanwhile, management had dispatched a police force to the mills to quell expected disturbances which never occurred.<sup>43</sup>

At this juncture Whaley revealed the real reason for the overtime demand, and in so doing declared war on the union. Management, he said was "approachable" on the subject of the Labor Day parade. But, he continued,

this matter of unionism . . . that is another thing. We are the owners of our mills and we propose to run them . . . We do all we can for our help . . . We do not propose, however, to have any of this unionism business.<sup>44</sup>

Operatives who had refused to work overtime would be reemployed after signing pledges to leave the union. Those refusing to do so would find no positions in the state's mills, for the owners had an "ironclad agreement" not to hire union help. As much as he regretted the operatives' \$25,000 weekly loss in wages, Whaley maintained, he would close the mill rather than be dictated to by the union. Besides, he added, the mills could easily survive a month's layoff, or more.

Whaley's statement was a brilliant effort to simultaneously gain public sympathy, separate the issue of the overtime demand and unionization, and threaten union operatives with financial ruin. It was also a carefully worded exaggeration of fact. There was no "ironclad agreement" with other mill owners, although many probably supported him. The union had made no attempt to "dictate" to management, indeed, had made no demands concerning wages or hours. Quite obviously, he was forcing a confrontation with the Columbia local by making the very existence of the local the central issue.<sup>45</sup>

Led by its president, S. J. Thompson, a weaver, the Columbia local attempted to avoid a strike which it realized it was in no position to wage. In what amounted to a slightly qualified surrender, the operatives agreed to management's demands, with the simple exception of the

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, August 27, 1901.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, August 27-28, 1901; *The Herald* (Rock Hill, S. C.), August 31, 1901.

yellow dog contracts. Union officers explained to *The State* that no strike had been called, rather that union operatives had been locked out first for refusing to work overtime and then for refusing to leave the union. Meanwhile, management had refused all terms the operatives suggested.<sup>46</sup>

With no choice but to fight for its life, on August 28, the union called out its members and supporters who remained in the mills and again, mistakenly, admitted new members. Over 1,000 operatives were out, yet the city's larger mills managed to continue production and Whaley claimed the vast majority of the operatives had remained on the job. Actually, counts made by reporters from *The State* revealed that the mills' labor forces were reduced by three-fourths. Whaley vehemently resented press coverage and refused to talk to reporters, thus angering *The State* and *The Herald* of Rock Hill. Despite the criticism of these papers and a few mill owners outside Columbia, Whaley's policies and objectives remained the same.<sup>47</sup> Ignoring *The State's* pleas for a negotiated settlement, he increased the pressure on the operatives by serving them eviction notices.<sup>48</sup>

By the end of August it was apparent that the local's only hope lay in receiving substantial aid from the national union. At this time, however, the NUTW was both deeply involved in an attempt to merge with independent Northern locals to create a new national union and hampered by an empty treasury. It could give the Columbia strikers little aid. Faced with inevitable defeat, increasingly larger numbers of operatives left Columbia in search of employment. Others yielded to Whaley's demands, left the union, and returned to work.<sup>49</sup> By the end of September, the strike was broken and so was the local, once the largest textile local in the world. The completeness of Whaley's victory was dramatized by the operatives on Christmas Day, 1901, when they presented him with a gold watch and chain.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *The State* (Columbia, S. C.), August 27-29, 1901.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, August 28-September 2, 1901; *The Herald* (Rock Hill, S. C.), August 31, 1901.

<sup>48</sup> *The State* (Columbia, S. C.), August 29, September 2-4, 1901; Minutes of the meetings of the Stockholders and Board of Directors of Richland Mills, September 3, 1901 (private manuscript in the possession of the South Carolina Electric and Gas Company, Columbia, S. C.).

<sup>49</sup> *The State* (Columbia, S. C.), September 6, 1901; Fenelon De Vere Smith, "The Economic Development of the Textile Industry in the Columbia, South Carolina Area from 1790 through 1916" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1952), 191-92.

<sup>50</sup> *The State* (Columbia, S. C.), January 29, 1902.

Encouraged by Whaley's victory, owners throughout the state began to prepare for the complete suppression of the NUTW. Partially to achieve unity in this purpose, mill owners held a meeting in Greenville on September 10, 1901.<sup>51</sup> Thus the Columbia defeat dealt the NUTW in South Carolina a staggering blow by consolidating management behind Whaley's approach to labor problems. Remaining locals found their hopes and enthusiasm seriously dampened by the defeat of the Columbia strikers and the apparent unity of the State's mill owners against the threat of organized labor which it had engendered. Reduced to a few weak locals in the Horse Creek Valley area, the NUTW's forlorn condition was conclusively demonstrated in the spring of 1902 during a strike that had its origins in the previous year.

Late in the fall of 1901, the NUTW had merged with several Northern textile unions to form the United Textile Workers of America (UTWA). Although the UTWA remained within the AFL, the Southerners lost control of the national union and the UTWA's headquarters were moved to Massachusetts. The UTWA, however, did not immediately withdraw its support from Southern locals. Rather, in the following spring it backed Augusta operatives in their demand for a general ten per cent wage increase. Stung by the audacity of their operatives, Augusta mill owners sought and obtained the support of South Carolina owners in an attempt to break the union. On April 3, 1902, leading South Carolina mill men such as Ellison A. Smythe, James L. Orr, and W. B. Smith Whaley met in Augusta with owners from throughout Georgia to draw up battle plans for the coming struggle.<sup>52</sup> This meeting proved conclusively that South Carolina manufacturers had indeed decided to eradicate organized labor not only within the state, but in dangerously adjacent areas also.

Early in April, when several hundred Augusta operatives struck to enforce their demands, the Augusta mills locked out all but their most loyal employees, a total of some 7,000 operatives. Thus management prevented non-union operatives sympathetic with union demands from financially aiding the strikers. Caught in this economic vise, the locals appealed to the UTWA for aid. In response, the financially weak UTWA levied a weekly five cents per capita assessment on its member locals to aid the strikers and dispatched national secretary Albert Hibbert to Augusta in an unsuccessful attempt to obtain a negotiated settlement.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, September 5-6, 1901; *The Herald* (Rock Hill, S. C.), September 7, 1901.

<sup>52</sup> *Augusta (Ga.) Chronicle*, April 3-7, 1902.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, April 8-May 14, 1902.



Discouraged by Hibbert's failure and the meager aid received from the national union, some strikers left Augusta in search of work while others talked of deserting the union and returning to the mills.<sup>54</sup> Yet somehow the majority of the strikers held together throughout most of May. But on May 20, operatives from Horse Creek Valley dealt the cause of the Augusta workers a fatal blow, thus revealing the extent of the decline of union spirit in the Valley since the Columbia strike. After receiving permission to examine the record books of an Augusta mill to see if the strikers' demands were justified, a delegation of Valley operatives declared that the strikers had no legitimate grievance and advised them to return to work.<sup>55</sup> The next day management began accepting operatives who would disavow the union. Large numbers returned to work, their ranks swelled by strikebreakers imported from South Carolina. In less than a week all the Augusta mills had successfully re-opened.<sup>56</sup> Hard core union members who refused to acknowledge defeat were evicted from their homes, others left to seek employment elsewhere.<sup>57</sup> Finally, on August 6, 1902, the UTWA executive council officially ended the strike, admitting that the Augusta mills had been so successful in recruiting workers from South Carolina that the strike had become a farce.<sup>58</sup> The UTWA had spent \$10,000 in Augusta only to see one of its major Southern strongholds fall before the determined resistance of management and the willingness of South Carolina operatives to both condemn the strike and act as strikebreakers.<sup>59</sup>

The actions of Horse Creek Valley operatives during the 1902 Augusta strike signaled the near total collapse of the UTWA in South Carolina. In 1903, the UTWA and the AFL sponsored a tour of the South by organizer John Golden of Fall River. His report to the UTWA's annual convention revealed the extent of the union's defeat in South Carolina's cotton mills. In the Horse Creek Valley area, he found several struggling locals, each so weak that he advised them to attempt to merge into a single stronger unit. Organizational meetings held in the area, though well attended, produced no results. In Columbia he found the operatives completely disorganized. Despite the goad of recent wage reductions, his efforts to revive the old Columbia local failed. In Laurens he met S. J. Thompson, president of the Columbia local during

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, May 15, 1902.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, May 14-22, 1902.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, May 21-26, 1902.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas M. Young, *The American Cotton Industry*, (New York, 1903), 84-86.

<sup>58</sup> *New York Times*, August 7, 1902.

<sup>59</sup> Lahne, *Cotton Mill Worker*, 190.

the 1901 strike, whom management had forced to leave Columbia. Still hopeful, Thompson helped Golden in an attempt to organize the Laurens weavers. He and his wife were discharged for his efforts, and Golden sadly abandoned his endeavors.<sup>60</sup> More than a decade was to pass before the state's cotton mill workers would again attempt to organize.

Like the Knights, the NUTW-UTWA was defeated by a combination of its opposition's strength and its own weakness. Inexperienced leadership proved a serious flaw, a flaw most obvious in the Columbia local's admission of hundreds of members on the eve of a strike. Greene and others who led the movement, with the exception of a few former Knights had had little or no previous experience with organized labor. And the Knights had hardly survived long enough to school the operatives thoroughly in the practical operation of a union. Failure to build adequate financial resources was another serious error of the UTWA, at both the local and national levels. Since Southerners controlled the national after 1897, this failure can be attributed to lack of experience as well as to the operatives' low wages. Without finances, the UTWA proved helpless in the face of determined opposition, as had the Knights. Management's unyielding opposition denied both unions the luxury of time in which to obtain experience and build financial reserves. Possessed of overwhelming strength because of the operatives' complete economic dependence upon them, owners did not hesitate to use it. By closing the factory, management eliminated the union operatives' source of funds, even from sympathetic non-union workers. Company housing was turned into an extremely potent weapon. A financially destitute operative could ill afford to have his family evicted from its home; returning to work rather than moving into the streets was the better part of valor. The poverty of the area created a tremendous surplus labor pool which allowed management to replace union members and played a major role in the defeat of organized labor. Other factors involved in the failure of the unions were the "outside agitator" charge, exemplified by Hammett's reference to "Yankee inspired" organizational efforts, and charges that the unions would promote economic competition between Negroes and whites.

Yet despite their failures, the Knights and the NUTW-UTWA offered Southern mill management its first challenge and conclusively proved that operatives were neither inherently docile nor satisfied with their condition. Although a number of factors militated against their

<sup>60</sup> AFL, *Convention Proceedings, 1902*, 17, 218; UTWA, *Convention Proceedings, 1902*, 44-48.

success, Southern operatives had proven that they would respond to unionization efforts. But perhaps the most important result of the failure of the Knights and the NUTW was the effect it had on management. The relatively easy victories gained over organized labor in the nineteenth century convinced management that an adamant anti-union stand was highly effective, and thus led to the violent union-management clashes within the industry that came with the First World War and the Great Depression.

## REVIEWS

*"A Most Important Epocha": The Coming of the Revolution in South Carolina* by Robert M. Weir. Tricentennial Booklet Number 5. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970. Pp. 80. \$1.95.

The Tricentennial Commission's publications program deserves praise for the seriousness and sophistication of its projected series of popular booklets.

It is a difficult task to write about the pre-Revolutionary politics of a single colony. The author must master the complexities of resistance against British policy throughout America, the peculiarities of the political life of the colony itself, and, most difficult and elusive, the interaction between continental and provincial political currents.

Professor Weir has achieved just such a synthesis. South Carolina's resistance against the Stamp Act, abhorrence of intensified Customs enforcement, and experience with high-handed, inept governors who vainly tried to undermine the Commons House of Assembly all resembled the pattern of pre-Revolutionary politics in other colonies.

In many more ways, South Carolina's reaction to British policy was different. Customs officials were among the hated "placemen" who attached themselves parasitically to the South Carolina political system to an extent unmatched elsewhere. The merchant-planter elite attained a unity of interest and a political sophistication which contrasted with the factionalizing, quarrelsome tendencies of politics in several other colonies. The South Carolinians were at once euphoric about the virtues of their tightly knit, effective political system and profoundly anxious that British encroachments, or potential slave revolts, or their own moral laxity might destroy the very basis of their society.

The conflicting stresses generated by these sensations of happiness and anxiety induced South Carolina's leaders to embrace the "Country Ideology" of anti-Walpolean publicists in England—a set of ideas about the preservation of liberty which praised the moral independence of the individual and taught the supreme moral value of conforming in the support of agreed-upon community values. This curiously circular, almost touching, political faith—in the hands of men like Henry Laurens—made South Carolina's resistance against British policy unexpectedly radical and powerful. Mr. Weir has caught nicely the in-