Leftward Tilt on the Pacific Slope

Indigenous Unionism and the Struggle Against AFL Hegemony in the State of Washington

Carlos A. Schwantes

In perhaps no other part of the United States was the eventual establishment of American Federation of Labor (AFL) hegemony more difficult than in Washington. Since dual unionism, industrial unionism, and a close link between labor and socialism were all hallmarks of Pacific Northwest labor, it is clear that a significant portion of local labor was reluctant to embrace the conservative principles espoused by Samuel Gompers during his long tenure as leader of the federation.[1]

The 1880s and 1890s were the formative years for Pacific Northwest labor, and during that time AFL influence in Washington was at best insignificant. Historians have too often looked at the growing power of the AFL from 1900 to 1917 and forgotten that only two or three decades earlier the AFL was "a scared, uncertain, insecure infant." When the panic of 1893 and the ensuing depression almost destroyed organized labor in America, the struggling AFL was in no position to influence labor developments in the remote northwest corner of the nation.[2]

With the return of prosperity after 1897, the future of the AFL appeared more certain, but by that time an influential portion of the Washington labor movement had already formulated its own response to industrialism. As the AFL began to organize actively in the state, its leaders were confronted by a troublesome fact: many of the political, economic, and social forces that shaped the early labor movement in the region were quite unlike those that forged the policies and structure of the infant AFL in the East. Although many workingmen in Seattle, Tacoma, and other Washington communities had formed trade unions for largely the same reasons as they had in Pittsburgh and Peoria—to raise wages, improve working conditions, and protect their jobs—the endless prairie plains and the great barrier of the Rockies had separated workers in the Pacific Northwest from their brothers in the East and encouraged them to develop an indigenous labor movement.[3]

At a time when the ills of modern industrial society were becoming apparent in some parts of the Western world, the Pacific Northwest remained largely unscarred by the industrial revolution. The tremendous abundance of the land and sea and the almost profligate beauty of scenery that first attracted a mass of settlers to Washington in the 1880s seemed especially to draw those people who dreamed of implementing popular social reforms. Living in a society characterized by impatience with the present and optimism about the future, and having only the most rudimentary strictures of tradition to inhibit them, reformers established utopian colonies along the shores of Puget Sound, and they gained a respectful hearing for their ideas in the legislative chambers at Olympia. In 1899 a Socialist, surveying the bizarre succession of reform movements that had appeared in the state during the decade, accurately declared that Washington had "more 'isms' and 'osophies' than any other state in America." Society in the nation's far corner was unsettled, often tentative and experimental; the local labor movement reflected these characteristics when it embraced political reformism and worked for the eventual establishment of a cooperative commonwealth.[4]

Although in the 1880s some Pacific Northwest workers formed craft-union locals in response to working conditions, most Washington workers joined the Knights of Labor as a means of cop-

Carlos A. Schwantes is associate professor of history at Walla Walla College. His first book, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917*, will be published by the University of Washington Press in spring 1979; he is preparing a sequel study on reform and radicalism in the Pacific Northwest from 1917 to 1941

1. For an extended discussion of labor radicalism in the Pacific Northwest, see Carlos A. Schwantes, "Left-Wing Unionism in the Pacific Northwest: A Comparative History of Organized Labor and Socialist Politics in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Michigan, 1976).

2. Melvyn Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865-1920* (New York, 1975), 63-64.

3. For an account of early trade unionism in the Pacific Northwest, see Portland *Labor Press*, Sept. 1, 1913; Harry W. Stone, "Beginning of Labor Movement in the Pacific Northwest," *OHQ*, Vol. 47 (1946), 155-64; Paul A. Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1967), 4-5.

4. Schwantes, chap. 1; *The People* (New York), May 1, 1899 (quotation).

ing with the problems unique to a labor market that emphasized unskilled and semiskilled labor in large-scale extractive industries. The Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor drew workingmen because it espoused a number of popular reform schemes and sought to unite all branches of honorable toil.[5]

The first West Coast assembly of the Knights appeared in Sacramento in 1878, but not until 1883 did the order spread north along the shipping lanes linking San Francisco with the coal-mining towns of Vancouver Island and the Puget Sound. The order grew rapidly in Tacoma and Seattle after September 1885, capitalizing on the ugly mood created by the depression and unemployment that followed completion of the Northern Pacific and Canadian Pacific railroads. When these railroads were completed, the Chinese construction workers flooded the local labor market. Working whites regarded unemployed Chinese as a threat to their jobs, and jobless whites jealously eyed whatever menial employment the Chinese were able to hold. Caucasian laborers feared the steady, hardworking Chinese, who supposedly drank no liquor, ate little, and were often used as pawns by the new entrepreneurs to drive down wages and disrupt union organization.[6]

The competition from reduced wages was not the only threat felt by the whites. Racist publications pictured Chinese customs as "so dark and furtive that their tricks cannot be detected and unearthed," and anxious whites easily succumbed to notions of conspiracy. Rumors spread that the Chinese were planning to massacre whites in Washington. The anti-Chinese newspapers of Puget Sound strongly hinted at a remedy for the "problem," claiming that the Chinese were "here in defiance of our laws" and thus had "forfeited the protection of our laws."[7]

Sinophobia, a common characteristic of white laborers in the western U.S. and Canada, combined job consciousness and class consciousness under the banner of white solidarity. It was largely from the unsound timber of sinophobia that the Knights built their first local assemblies in the Puget Sound area. The Knights staged torchlight parades, held mass meetings, and published newspapers to agitate for the removal of the Chinese, and when no other remedy seemed available, the newly organized workers took matters into their own hands. In late 1885 and early 1886 mob action directed against the hapless Chinese in Tacoma and Seattle compelled the territorial governor to declare martial law.[8]

No doubt many white workingmen who moved to the Pacific Northwest in the late 1870s and 1880s hoped to find a new society in which opportunity, combined with personal determination, would lead to prosperity. At the very least, they did not intend to allow themselves to be degraded to the condition of factory labor in the East or in Europe. Outbursts against the Chinese and, later, other Asians were a manifestation of that resistance. Caucasian workers of the region were also inclined to protect themselves as a class through labor organization and labor politics.[9]

In December 1886, when the Knights were riding the crest of power in western Washington, representatives of American craft unions who were disturbed by the all-inclusive structure and philosophy of the Knights met in Columbus, Ohio, to form the AFL. Eventually the Knights receded to a few isolated areas, notably Spokane and its tributary territory, as the AFL struggled to establish its dominance over American and Canadian labor. In the Pacific Northwest, however, the Knights of Labor became an important part of the indigenous radicalism that frustrated an easy triumph for the AFL in the years before World War I.[10]

Many a pre–World War I labor leader in Washington had learned the basic principles of trade unionism from the Knights of Labor. Some leaders, notably those in the Spokane area, continued to regard the labor egalitarianism and reform politics of the mixed assembly as infallible principles; others vigorously promoted the craft unionism of the AFL because they were convinced by experience that the concepts of the Knights of Labor were unworkable. On the course of reform in the state the Knights had a profound influence. M. P. Bulger, for example, a self-proclaimed Socialist and a conspicuous anti-Chinese orator for the Knights in Tacoma and Seattle, was chairman of the state executive committee of the Populist party during its victorious 1896 election campaign. In an era of few free libraries, the order's reading rooms in Seattle, Tacoma, Spokane, and other communities helped to make available to workers reform literature such as Laurence Gronlund's *Cooperative Commonwealth* and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. The Knights' pioneer labor journals in the Pacific Northwest furthered the workers' basic education in reform and working-class consciousness, a process

5. Gerald N. Grob, *Workers and Utopia: A Study of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement, 1865-1900* (Chicago, 1969), 7, 39; *Palladium of Labor* (Hamilton, Ont.), Aug. 2, 1884; Norman J. Ware, *The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895* (New York, 1929), xiii-xiv.

6. Ira B. Cross, *A History of the Labor Movement in California* (Berkeley, 1935), 152-53; Schwantes, 49-50; Phillips, 9-10, 12-13. Robert E. Wynne, "Reaction to the Chinese in the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia, 1850 to 1910," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Washington, 1964), 42-43, 72-73; Dorothy O. Johansen and Charles M. Gates, *Empire of the Columbia: A History of the Pacific Northwest*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1967), 348-49; H. M. Hyndman, "Lights and Shades of American Politics," *Fortnightly Review*, n.s. Vol. 171 (1881), 349. Frederick E. Melder, "A Study of the Washington Coal Industry with Special Reference to the Industrial Relations Problem," M.A. thesis (University of Washington, 1931), 54-56.

7. Herbert Hunt, *Tacoma, Its History and Its Builders*, 3 vols. (Chicago, 1916), I, 358; Seattle *Daily Call*, Nov. 19, 1885 (quotations).

8. André Siegfried, *Canada*, trans. H. H. Hemming and Doris Hemming (New York, 1937), 327; Stone, 159; Wynne, 70-71.

9. For an extended discussion of the kind of society sought by workers immigrating to the Pacific Northwest, see Schwantes, 13-24.

10. Henry Pelling, *American Labor* (Chicago, 1960), 74; Schwantes, 239-43.

"Tacoma's Twenty-seven" were indicted for causing the Chinese expulsion of 1885. (Photography Collection, UW Library)

continued by the most prominent of the region's several pre–World War I labor publications.[11]

Although the Pacific Northwest was physically isolated, local labor and Socialist publications allowed Washington workers to observe world trade-union developments from a front row seat. These newspapers and journals directed workers' attention to the developing welfare state in New Zealand and encouraged them to emulate the political involvement of their brothers in the Antipodes. They also introduced the region's workers to the ideas and activities of J. Keir Hardie and David Lloyd George in the United Kingdom, the novels of the socially conscious authors Upton Sinclair, Frank Norris, and Jack London, the many aspects of municipal ownership, and the more subtle dialectic of Karl Marx. Most of these organs contained a "clubbing list" that offered readers reduced rates on combined purchases of an incredible melange of reform publications. By encouraging local workers to consider responses to industrialism other than those advocated by Gompers and the AFL, the labor and Socialist journals of the Pacific Northwest strengthened the concept of regional unionism.[12]

Complementing the efforts of the working-class publications were the central labor councils that first appeared in Washington in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Otto F. Wegener, a Knight and onetime Socialist and activist in the anti-Chinese campaigns, organized Seattle's Western Central Labor Union (WCLU) in 1888. The nascent central body united both craft locals and Knights of Labor assemblies, including those in the nearby coal camps of the Cascade foothills; each local, regardless of its size, had three representatives on the council. At first the Knights predominated, but their influence waned when a construction boom following the great Seattle fire in June 1889 strengthened the building trades. Although the Knights participated in Seattle's third Labor Day parade in 1890, jurisdictional friction the following winter caused delegates from the ascendant craft unions to expel the order from the council, which temporarily turned its back on reformist political schemes. By the early years of the 20th century, however, the WCLU had assumed the radical stance for which it became known.[13]

In Tacoma, on April 3, 1890, delegates from the cigarmakers, carpenters, bricklayers, ironmolders, cornice makers, stonecutters, and longshoremen, stevadores, and riggers unions joined with representatives from the local assembly of the Knights of Labor to establish the Tacoma Trades Council. Charles Drees, an organizer for the Socialist Labor party, presided over a body that was greatly concerned for reform. By September of that year, 60 of the 400 dues-paying members of the trades council represented either the Knights of Labor or the Bellamy Nationalist Club, and the meetings of the council were often attended by delegates from the Socialist Labor party and the Single Tax Club as well. Although Gompers addressed members of the Tacoma Trades Council in early 1891 and presented his ideas on craft

11. Spokane *Record*, Feb. 26, July 15, 1904; Portland *Labor Press*, Aug. 30, 1906; [Harry W. Call, comp.], *History of Washington State Federation of Labor, 1902-1954* ([Seattle], n.d.), 55. C. O. Young, for example, a prominent and dedicated AFL organizer in the Pacific Northwest, was originally an ardent member of the Knights of Labor. In 1886 he was jailed briefly in Seattle for his participation in the anti-Chinese outbursts. Denver *Labor Enquirer*, June 11, 1887; Seattle *Call*, Feb. 14, 1895; *Northern Light* (Tacoma, Seattle, Spokane), Oct. 11, 1890; Wynne, 178. Besides the *Northern Light*, the Knights produced such pioneer labor journals as *Puget Sound Weekly Co-Operator* (Seattle), *Daily Voice of the People* (Seattle), and *Turner's*—later *Laborer's*—*Emancipator* (Phinney and Ellensburg).

12. The Seattle *Union Record* is an important source for the historian attempting to write about almost any aspect of the Washington labor movement from 1900 to the mid-1920s. For the Inland Empire region, *Freemen's Labor Journal*, still published in Spokane as the *Labor World*, is an invaluable aid for the period prior to 1906. Unfortunately, there is a gap of some 10 years after 1906 in which all copies of the paper were apparently destroyed. A fairly complete list of the regional labor papers can be found in issues of the *American Newspaper Annual* and the *American Newspaper Directory*.

13. Melvin G. De Shazo, "Radical Tendencies in the Seattle Labor Movement as Reflected in the Proceedings of Its Central Body," M.A. thesis (University of Washington, 1925), 4-6; Tacoma *Daily Ledger*, May 20, 1887; Minutes of the Western Central Labor Union, July 11, 1894, Box 18, CLC Records, University of Washington Libraries (hereafter cited WCLU Minutes); James A. Halseth, "Social Disorganization and Discontent in Late Nineteenth Century Washington," Ph.D. dissertation (Texas Tech University, 1974), 148-50.

unionism, meetings were often laced with informal discussions of Nationalism, the single tax, or socialism.[14]

In Spokane, members of the Knights of Labor joined with representatives from the trade-union locals to organize a city central in late 1888. Led by William Galvani, a civil engineer and Knights of Labor organizer, the Spokane Trades Council was a hybrid body that united structurally diverse labor organizations and served as "a clearing house for [reformist] ideas" in the community. Although a few of the city's craft unions, especially those in the building trades, had affiliated with the AFL by 1893, the Knights of Labor remained dominant in Spokane until the opening years of the 20th century. The Spokane central for years nurtured the strongest opposition in Washington to the AFL because of the lingering influence of the Knights and the growing prominence of the radical Western Federation of Miners in the nearby Coeur d'Alene mining district of Idaho.[15]

Seattle's WCLU extended its organization to coal camps like this one in eastern King County. (Photography Collection, University of Washington Library)

The newly formed city centrals sustained the continuing, if sometimes tenuous community of interest among West Coast labor leaders. In 1886, when the AFL was formally launched, plans were already being formulated for a Representative Council of the Federated Trades and Labor Organizations of the Pacific Coast. Except for the affiliation of the Coast Seamen's Union and the United Brewery Workmen's Union of the Pacific Coast, the organization never amounted to anything more than a central labor council for San Francisco. In 1891, Alfred Fuhrman, president of the council, traveled to Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia to rekindle interest in the idea of a "grand centralization" of labor organizations from San Diego to Alaska. In Washington alone, at that time, there were central labor unions in Seattle, Tacoma, Spokane, Olympia, Port Townsend, Bellingham Bay, and New Whatcom (now a part of Bellingham).[16]

Delegates from the central labor unions in Portland and Seattle attended the first convention of the Pacific Coast Federation of Labor in San Francisco in 1891, and, until the demise of the organization in 1895, Washington labor leaders were active participants in the movement. W. G. Armstrong of Seattle's WCLU was elected vice-president at the San Francisco convention, and he was elected president two years later, at the Seattle convention. Delegates to the Seattle convention indicated their approval of the initiative and referendum and promised to work for the organization of unskilled labor. Although the federation stated that it had no intention of establishing a dual labor organization on the West Coast, and Armstrong later demonstrated his loyalty to the AFL by reorganizing the Tacoma Trades Council under an AFL charter in 1899 and by helping to organize the fishermen of British Columbia in 1900, Gompers worried about the potential threat to the AFL posed by the Pacific Coast Federation.[17]

At the 1891 AFL convention, Gompers complained that the Pacific Coast body

14. Halseth, 133-39; Minutes of the Tacoma Trades Council, April 3, 1890, to March 13, 1895, *passim*, Pierce County Central Labor Council, Tacoma (hereafter cited TTC Minutes).

15. Spokane *Morning Review*, Nov. 2, 1888 (quotation); James L. Hunt, "A History of the Central Labor Council in Spokane, Washington," M.A. thesis (State College of Washington, 1940), 3-4.

16. Cross, 204-205; WCLU Minutes, Aug. 26, 1891; May 31, 1893. *Coast Seamen's Journal*, June 17, 1891 (quotation).

17. Cross, 205-206; *Independent* (Vancouver, B.C.), March 31, 1900. *Coast Seamen's Journal*, June 17, Sept. 30, 1891; and May 31, 1893.

had "practically established a 'Federation' outside of the American Federation of Labor." By the time of the 1892 convention, however, he was able to report that the threat of dual unionism on the Pacific Coast had ended because the "previously isolated" unions of the Pacific slope had "entered into fraternal bonds with those in the East." Nonetheless, the potential for independent regional organization continued to exist in the Far West.[18]

Throughout the 1890s, West Coast labor continued to think of itself as a movement largely separate from the AFL. Reading the monthly reports issued by the Pacific Coast Federation of Labor was thus a regular part of WCLU and Tacoma Trades Council meetings; and even after the federation ceased to exist, Seattle and Tacoma trade unionists continued to maintain strong bonds of kinship with other western labor leaders in Vancouver, San Francisco, and Butte. A synopsis of the proceedings of the weekly meetings of the San Francisco labor council was generally read at sessions of the Seattle and Tacoma centrals, as were reports from the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council. More than once, the WCLU sent copies of Washington's proposed labor laws to counterparts in other states and provinces.[19]

In 1893, after more than a decade of rapid growth in Washington, adversity "stole in like a thief." The June financial panic that began on the East Coast so severely shook the state's vulnerable financial institutions that many collapsed. The failure of more than 800 banks in the U.S. between 1893 and 1897 compounded the anguish caused by rising unemployment. People with jobs often saw their wages reduced by 20 percent or more; prices dropped, but that was of little comfort to farmers. As the price of wheat fell to a new low, many Inland Empire farmers allegedly committed suicide when faced with collection demands from equipment dealers, who were themselves facing bankruptcy.[20]

Unemployment and the consequent collapse of several trade unions after the panic of 1893 decimated Washington's central labor bodies. Of all the building trades in Seattle, only the stonecutters and bricklayers preserved their organizations between 1894 and 1898. There were no festive Labor Day parades during those bleak years.[21]

As the trade unions languished, many jobless and desperate workers in the Puget Sound region formed themselves into industrial armies. After electing leaders, more than a thousand such men from Tacoma and Seattle rendezvoused in an unfinished and abandoned hotel in Puyallup, a town near Tacoma. There they also organized a ladies' auxiliary to provide a home for females left destitute by the economic disaster. Sympathizers from all over the Northwest sent in small donations of food that kept the grim brotherhood from starving.[22]

The Northwestern Industrial Army, which included regiments from the major cities in the state, was one of 17 industrial armies that set out for Washington, D.C., in 1894 to demand jobs for the unemployed. Ohioan Jacob Coxey led the most publicized contingent, although the western armies were larger than his. The threats of Washington's Governor John McGraw to call out the militia and the refusal of the Northern Pacific to grant free transportation frustrated the Northwestern Industrial Army's plan to join with Coxey's forces to "send a petition to Washington with boots on." Nonetheless, a carload of men attempted to leave Puyallup disguised as a load of hay; they were hauled several miles before the railroad discovered the true contents of the car.[23]

At Roslyn, a group of striking miners attempted to join the crusade by capturing an empty coal car at nearby Cle Elum and letting gravity take them the 25 miles down to Ellensburg. Soon, industrial army recruits were besieging Northern Pacific trains throughout the state. The railroad called in deputy marshals to cope with the ragtag force, and it attempted to move freights out of Puyallup only during daylight hours. Although harassed by law enforcement officers on several occasions, a few hundred determined members of the brotherhood continued their pilgrimage east of the Rocky Mountains. Meanwhile, Coxey and several associates had been arrested for attempting to speak on the Capitol steps. The rude treatment of the unemployed no doubt helped radicalize some members of the working class in Washington.[24]

Another new labor organization of a more conventional nature than the industrial armies was the American Railway Union (ARU), which Eugene Debs launched in Chicago in 1893 to bring all railway workers together in a single union. Interest in the organization spread westward along the trunk lines to the Pacific Northwest; in 1894, at the time of the Great Northern strike, the WCLU accepted the credentials of del-

18. *Report of the Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Convention of American Federation of Labor* (Washington, D.C., 1891), 18; *ibid.* (1892), 17.

19. Robert L. Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike* (Seattle, 1964), 29; WCLU Minutes, May 31, 1893; June 1, 1898; Jan. 4, 1899. TTC Minutes, June 5, 1890; March 17, 1892.

20. Spokane *Weekly Review*, June 7, 1893 (quotation); Colfax *Commoner*, June 9, 1893; Charles Hoffmann, "The Depression of the Nineties," *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 16 (1956), 138; A. H. Harris, "Palouse City and the Men and Women Who Built It," in Garret D. Kincaid, *Palouse in the Making* (Palouse, Wash., 1934), 6, 7.

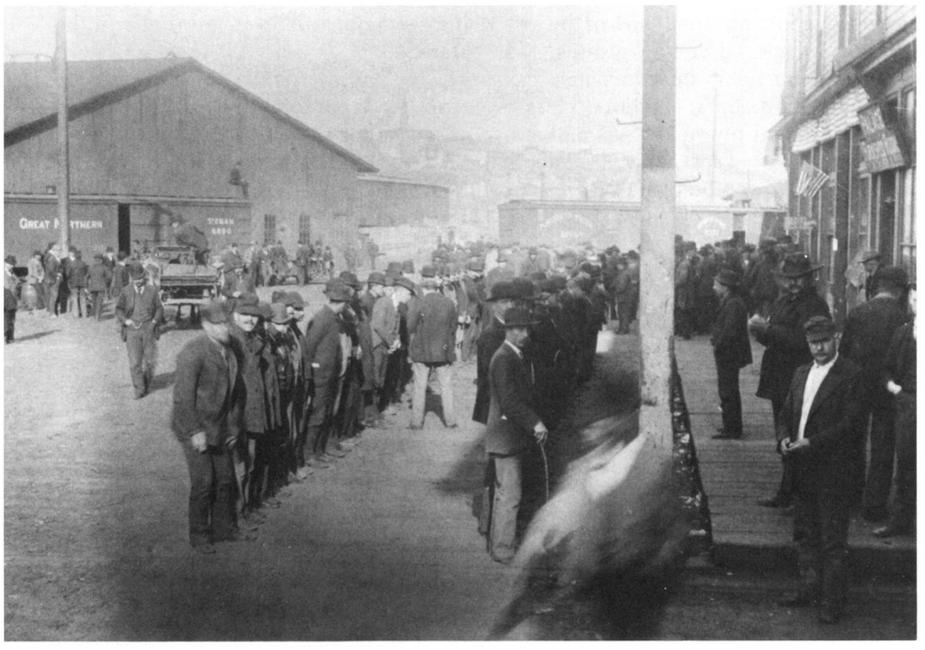
21. Margaret J. Thompson, "Development and Comparison of Industrial Relationships in Seattle," M.B.A. thesis (University of Washington, 1929), 2. On the eve of the depression of 1893, the Tacoma Trades Council claimed 796 members and the WCLU claimed 1,648: *Coast Seamen's Journal*, June 14, 1893.

22. *Industrial Army News*, April 20, 1894. Thomas W. Riddle, "The Old Radicalism in America: John R. Rogers and the Populist Movement in Washington, 1891-1900," Ph.D. dissertation (Washington State University, 1976), 168.

23. Harold U. Faulkner, *Politics, Reform and Expansion* (New York, 1959), 165-68 (quotation, 165); Herbert Hunt and Floyd C. Kaylor, *Washington, West of the Cascades*, 3 vols. (Chicago, 1917), I, 342-44.

24. Hunt and Kaylor, I, 343; Riddle, 172-73. See also Donald L. McMurry, *Coxey's Army: A Study of the Industrial Army Movement of 1894* (1929; rpt. Seattle, 1968), 216-23.

egate William Blackman, president of the ARU local in Seattle, and endorsed ARU strike action in the company town of Pullman, Illinois. But when local workers refused to haul Pullman's railway cars, the WCLU would not support them. The Seattle central refused to become embroiled in the Pullman fight, though not necessarily because of a commitment to the conservative trade-union philosophy of the AFL. Rather, in a period of economic hardship, the central sought to preserve its enfeebled existence, which it believed was threatened by the milling armies of unemployed.[25]



Across the nation, unemployed workers formed industrial armies like this one, shown drilling in Seattle in 1894. (Photography Collection, UW Library)

The loss of the Pullman strike and the arrest of Debs cost the ARU most of the 150,000 members it claimed at the peak of its power, but the union left a legacy in the Pacific Northwest far more important than the locals that had appeared. Henry Demarest Lloyd perhaps overstated the matter when he told Clarence Darrow that the "radicalism of the fanatics of wealth" during the Pullman strike would do for reformers "what the South did for the North in 1861," but Debs and many fellow members of the ARU became the vanguards of working-class socialism in the Pacific Northwest. The ARU was also a pillar of the Populist party in Washington, and several of its officials, including William Blackman, were appointed to significant state offices during the administration of the Populist governor, John R. Rogers.[26]

Despite its pretentious claims of national influence, the AFL was still very much an eastern organization in 1893 when Rocky Mountain metal miners launched a union destined to lead the western regional labor movement. The Western Federation of Miners (WFM), born out of the turmoil and confrontation that characterized labor management relations in the Coeur d'Alenes, at first sought only to help members earn a living "fully compatible with the dangers of our employment."[27]

The WFM affiliated with the AFL in 1896, but the leaders of the two federations began quarreling almost immediately over the alleged failure of the AFL to provide more than token support of striking miners in Leadville, Colorado. Additional conflicts over methods of organization and the idea of a regional labor movement caused a disappointed but ever more radical WFM to virtually withdraw from the AFL in December 1897. Six months later the WFM created the Western Labor Union (WLU) to organize the unskilled western workers ignored by the AFL. When the AFL took steps to destroy its western rival, the WLU retaliated in 1902 by reconstituting itself as the American Labor Union (ALU) and extended the scope of its organizational activities to include all of North America. In addition to advocating industrial unionism, both the ALU and the WFM endorsed the political program of the Socialist Party of America. In no part of the Pacific Northwest did these organizations pose a greater problem for the AFL than in Spokane and its tributary areas.[28]

Although Spokane was not a true mining town, like Butte, it was an important focal point for the international metalliferous mining industry. It was also a major distribution center for the wheat ranches of eastern Washington and northern Idaho. The Spokane labor movement thus included an inordinately large number of day laborers, migratory harvest workers, loggers, and hard-rock miners. These workingmen were the constant targets of the "employment leeches," the bogus or

25. *Railway Times*, Jan. 1, May 1, June 1, 1894. WCLU Minutes, June 27, July 11, 1894; Halseth, 154. See also Riddle, 174-76.

26. Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 4 vols. (New York, 1947-65), II, 254-58; Henry Demarest Lloyd to Clarence Darrow, Nov. 23, 1894, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Microfilm Reel 5, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

27. John H. M. Laslett, *Labor and the Left: A Study of Socialist and Radical Influences in the American Labor Movement, 1881-1924* (New York, 1970), 243. See also, *Constitution and By-Laws of the Western Federation of Miners*, May 19, 1893 (Butte, [1896]) (quotation).

28. Foner, III, 414-15, 418; Vernon Jensen, *Heritage of Conflict: Labor Relations in the Nonferrous Metals Industry up to 1930* (Ithaca, 1950), 81; Melvyn Dubofsky, "The Origins of Western Working Class Radicalism, 1890-1905," *Labor History*, Vol. 7 (1966), 147-52.

marginally legitimate employment agencies that flourished by fleecing the casual laborer who drifted into the city in search of a job.[29]

In the Inland Empire and the British Columbia Kootenays, the Knights of Labor and the WFM were mutually supportive. W. J. Walker, the influential editor of *Freemen's Labor Journal* in Spokane, and Ed Boyce, president of the WFM, embarked on a joint crusade in mid-1897 ostensibly to organize eastern Washington, Idaho, and Montana for the Knights of Labor, and they extended their activities into the Rossland, British Columbia, area. The close relationship between these two unions redounded to the benefit of the WFM after the demise of the Knights in the Pacific Northwest in the spring of 1900. A miner in British Columbia's Slocan district noted in 1902 that there were "thousands" of former Knights in the WFM.[30]

Because of the influence of the Knights, as well as a long-standing interest in ideological, middle-of-the-road Populism and labor reformism, many members of the Spokane labor movement welcomed the WFM and its progeny. In Spokane, the WLU and its successor soon attained power by organizing such diverse groups as brewers, teamsters, beer drivers, expressmen, butchers, retail clerks, steamfitters and plumbers, gas makers, and shingle weavers. The *Freemen's Labor Journal* promoted the WLU as an organization that could successfully cope with the working conditions peculiar to the Inland Empire.[31]

The growing strength of the WLU forced the AFL to confront the issue of regional unionism in the Pacific Northwest. In Puget Sound communities where the WFM could lend the WLU little support, the AFL won several easy victories. Shortly after the turn of the century, the AFL's organizer, W. G. Armstrong, overconfidently predicted that he would soon eliminate the WLU in both western Washington and Spokane. But the WLU, with its seemingly impregnable power base in the Inland Empire, continued for several years to play a major role in labor affairs in the state.[32]

Another labor organization originated shortly after the election of 1896, when William Blackman, ARU leader in Seattle, urged fellow trade unionists to form a temporary alliance to pressure the Populist-dominated legislature into enacting reform legislation. On January 25, 1897, representatives from nine

A WFM and ALU stronghold, Spokane offered prolonged resistance to AFL hegemony in Washington. By 1909, however, when this view was made, the city's central labor council had affiliated. (Photography Collection, UW Library)

trade unions and several farmers' organizations met in Olympia and created the Pacific Northwest Labor Congress. Like its predecessors, the Pacific Coast Federation of Labor and a short-lived state labor congress in 1893, the Pacific Northwest Labor Congress was a lobbying body. It also hoped to bring together all "urban and rural labor unions" in the northwestern part of the U.S. and British Columbia into one "grand central union."[33]

The new reform organization met in Spokane in 1898 under the more modest title of Washington State Labor Congress (WSLC) but retained its goal of promoting the interests of the producing class and securing legislative benefits for the nonunionized. Although the convention contained delegates from craft unions and city centrals, several unions that were either declining or defunct in other parts of the U.S. were well represented. Blackman, WSLC president, was one of several delegates from the ARU, and Secretary-Treasurer Walker was probably the best known of the many Knights of Labor representatives present.[34]

The eclecticism that characterized the WSLC frustrated AFL organizers until shortly after the turn of the century, when the state central organization was markedly transformed. The labor lobby in Olympia had not been very successful—aside from the creation of a labor bureau and the passage of an unsatisfactory lien law, almost none of the reforms endorsed by the labor congress had become law. When the fifth convention of the WSLC met in Tacoma in January 1902, a majority of the delegates voted to reorganize as the Washington State Federation of Labor (WSFL). Blackman remained president, but unlike the labor congress, which had been interested merely in the passage of legislation, the new federation proposed to organize workers in an active manner.[35]

When the debate on the question of affiliation began, delegates representing 75 local unions and central bodies in Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, New Whatcom, and Northport split into factions representing the AFL and the WLU and WFM (mainly members of the Mill and Smeltermen's Union at Northport). Supporters of affiliation with the AFL were at first in the minority, but after three days of rancorous debate they won a significant victory when the convention approved a plan to seek membership in the AFL pending a favorable vote by the member unions of the new state federation of labor.[36]

When the state federation's affiliation referendum was announced, the AFL and the WLU engaged in what the Seattle *Union Record* described as a "healthy rivalry." Since its inception in 1900 by WCLU members, the *Union Record* had been a frequent critic of AFL leadership. In December 1901, Gordon Rice had editorialized that Gompers and some of his ideas were "getting a little aged and must soon get out of the way of more progressive men and measures." Previous editorials had described Ed Boyce of the WFM and Dan McDonald, WLU president, as "humanitarians" and called upon them to send organizers to help resolve the chaos on Puget Sound that resulted from AFL neglect and a lack of recognized leadership in the local labor movement. During the referendum battle in 1902, the *Union Record* referred to the WLU as "that young giant of Western unionism." Contrasting the AFL and its "cumbersome red-tapeism and New England parsimoniousness" with the WLU, which "acts quickly and supplies funds when they are needed," the *Union Record* observed: "Sam Gompers travels toward organization along well-known roads at a stage coach gait; Dan McDonald cuts across country at automobile speed." Despite the anti-Gompers tone of his comments, the editor of the *Union Record* was not urging workers in western Washington to affiliate with the WLU but rather attempting vigorously to prod AFL leadership to awaken to the importance of the affiliation battle in Washington.[37]

McDonald and several lieutenants in the WLU actively campaigned in Washington to keep the state federation of labor from affiliating with the AFL. Because the structure of the referendum made it possible for several small unions to outvote one union with a large membership, WLU organizers hoped to control the outcome of the affiliation vote by organizing a large number of unions among miners and mill workers. The referendum campaign, however, ended in an AFL victory. Nonetheless, the contest between the AFL and WLU for "survival of the fittest" in the Pacific Northwest had not yet been finally resolved.[38]

The WSFL aroused only minimal interest in Spokane; as of 1903, only 14 of 47 local unions had joined. Many workers in the Inland Empire were convinced that the AFL was interested in organizing labor only in western

---

29. Jonathan Edwards, *An Illustrated History of Spokane County* (n.p., 1900), 38-40; John Fahey, *Inland Empire: D. C. Corbin and Spokane* (Seattle, 1965), 3. For a study of the economic influences in the Inland Empire, see William Hudson Kensel, "The Economic History of Spokane, Washington, 1881-1910," Ph.D. dissertation (Washington State University, 1962).

30. Spokane *Spokesman-Review*, July 15, 22, 1897; Nov. 22, 1899. *Freemen's Labor Journal*, Aug. 2, Nov. 5, 1897; *Miners' Magazine*, April 1902, pp. 30-31.

31. *American Labor Union Journal*, April 16, Sept. 3, 1903; *Freemen's Labor Journal*, March 31, 1899; March 2, May 4, Aug. 17, 1900.

32. WCLU Minutes, Nov. 15, 1899; *American Federationist*, Vol. 8 (February 1901), 62; Foner, III, 415-16.

33. "Addresses of State Labor Congress Delivered in Committee of the Whole House in the Hall of Representatives, February 9, 1893" ([Olympia?], [1893?]); *Directory of the Labor Unions of the State of Washington and Northern Idaho for 1898* (n.p., [1898?]), 17-21 (quotations).

34. *Freemen's Labor Journal*, Jan. 28, 1898; Hunt, "A History of the CLC in Spokane," 8-9.

35. *Union Record*, June 29, 1901; *Labor Clarion* (San Francisco), Feb. 28, 1902.

36. *Union Record*, Jan. 11, 18, 25, Oct. 25, Nov. 29, 1902; Thompson, 28-29.

37. *Union Record*, Nov. 10, 1900; Dec. 7, 1901 (second quotation); Feb. 22 (third quotation), March 1 (fourth quotation), April 15 (first quotation), Nov. 1 and 29, 1902.

38. *Ibid.*, Feb. 1, 15, 22, 1902.

Washington. On the other hand, the ALU, following the reorganization of the WLU, met with such success in Spokane that it even considered organizing two hitherto unorganizable groups, janitors and schoolteachers. Indeed, the city's largest union in 1904 was the ALU's Federal Labor Union No. 222.[39]

As a result of AFL pressure on affiliates to discourage locals from retaining membership in central bodies not chartered by the AFL, a number of trade unions began withdrawing from the Spokane Trades Council. The ALU fought back, but the growing prestige of the AFL in other parts of the state and nation and dissatisfaction with the ever more blatant socialist orientation of the ALU caused a majority of the members of the trades council in 1904 to consider affiliation with the state federation of labor and to apply for an AFL charter. Then, irritated by the continued lack of AFL activity in Spokane, the trades council reversed itself and requested that the AFL return its $5 charter fee.[40]

The AFL dispatched C. O. Young to Spokane. Young, who had been appointed an AFL organizer only shortly before his trip, was an inexperienced if tireless advocate of conservative, business unionism. His machinations to curb dual unionism soon resulted in Spokane's having three separate central bodies. Young and the AFL finally won an important victory in 1906 when out of the confusion emerged a single central body affiliated with the AFL. Dual unionism in the Inland Empire was by no means eliminated, however. A number of unions in Spokane remained unaffiliated with any central council, and considerable opposition to the AFL came unabated from ALU Federal Labor Union No. 222, which maintained the heritage of industrial unionism as an affiliate of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).[41]

Spokane was for a time the center of IWW strength in the Pacific Northwest. At the same time, Spokane's reconstituted central labor body grew increasingly conservative. The IWW and Spokane's central labor council, nonetheless, remained capable of joining forces to fight injustice to the working class, such as when they launched a joint crusade in 1908 to battle the city's corrupt employment agencies.[42]

Samuel Gompers: the "recognized spokesman and 'spiritual' fountainhead of American Labor." (Photography Collection, UW Library)

In contrast to the protracted struggle in Spokane, the AFL victory in western Washington was deceptively easy. Yet affiliation of Seattle's WCLU with the AFL in March 1902 did not necessarily mean full commitment to Gompers and his ideals. The Seattle central contained a growing coterie of trade-union Socialists. It also nurtured a strain of labor radicalism derived from the continuing desire of workers to protect their jobs from the encroachments of Asian labor and to defend themselves against the antiunion, wage-cutting activities of certain employer groups. Ominously, the *Union Record* warned the Eastern-oriented trade unionists in the AFL not to rely on past accomplishments as a guarantee of future success in western Washington.[43]

The WCLU passed into history in May 1905, having reconstituted itself as the Central Labor Council of Seattle and Vicinity (CLC). Although it remained a member of the AFL, the CLC adopted an organizational structure that helped sustain the intense localism that Robert L. Friedheim has described as "unique." Seattle craft-union locals belonged both to semiautonomous trade councils and to the CLC. A worker was thus conscious of being a member of a Seattle labor organization no matter to what union he belonged. Seattle's labor council was also a prime supporter of industrial unionism in the AFL.[44]

By any reasonable measure, the AFL had by 1905 scored several significant organizational victories over the forces that militated against the establishment of AFL hegemony in Washington. But the indigenous attitudes that shaped the early Washington labor movement did not disappear overnight; a continuing series of colorful, often sensational strikes and massacres attests to the tenacity of a radical heritage and to the persistence of the economic, social, and political conditions to which that heritage had originally addressed itself. Furthermore, support for industrial unionism, and to a lesser degree for socialism, remained a matter of contention between the conservative leadership of the AFL and reform-minded trade unionists in the Pacific Northwest. At AFL annual conventions, Pacific Northwest labor leaders could usually be counted on to sup-

39. *Union Record*, Feb. 28, 1903; Hunt, "A History of the CLC in Spokane," 14-15; *Freemen's Labor Journal*, Feb. 20, 1903.

40. *Spokesman-Review*, Jan. 12, 1902; Spokane *Record*, Jan. 22, June 10, 1904.

41. Spokane *Record*, July 15, 1904; Portland *Labor Press*, Aug. 31, 1906. Details of the affiliation struggle in Spokane can be found in Hunt, "A History of the CLC in Spokane," 14-25.

42. *Industrial Worker*, March 21, June 22, July 16, 1910. Robert C. Eckberg, "The Free Speech Fight of the Industrial Workers of the World, Spokane, Washington: 1909-1910," M.A. thesis (Washington State University, 1967), 9, 24-25, 65.

43. *American Federationist*, Vol. 9 (May 1902), 260; *Union Record*, Feb. 15, Nov. 1, 1902.

44. Thompson, 28; Friedheim, 26-27.

port the industrial-union resolutions that were regularly introduced between 1901 and World War I.[45]

Some trade unionists in the region had been proclaiming for years that industrial unionism was the "logical and next evolutionary stage" to be attained by organized labor, and beginning in 1910 they won more support for the idea than ever before. The British Columbia Federation of Labor endorsed industrial unionism at its founding convention in 1910, and the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, by a unanimous vote in August 1912, became the first city central in Canada to endorse it. Having then sent its views on industrial unionism to over 500 labor organizations in the U.S. and Canada, the Vancouver council won praise from the IWW, which declared it the "most revolutionary body" in the entire AFL. By the summer of 1913, industrial unionism had been approved by central bodies in Victoria, Seattle, Spokane, and Aberdeen, and by the WSFL.[46]

Socialism too acquired new endorsement. The British Columbia Federation of Labor and central labor councils in Vancouver and Victoria declared in favor of it, and in Washington, delegates to the 1914 WSFL convention voted to support "the collective ownership and democratic management of all the means of production and distribution." Hulet Wells, a prominent Socialist, was elected president of Seattle's CLC in 1915. A left-wing slant characterized the news and cartoons generated by the Western Labor Press Association that formed in Tacoma in 1914; three influential members, E. B. Ault of Seattle, H. L. Hughes of Spokane, and R. P. Pettipiece of Vancouver, B.C., were or had been Socialists in the recent past. Ault, who as editor of the *Young Socialist* in 1902 had endorsed the ALU because it had "no ties of tradition and fealty to leaders to bind it to the past," became secretary of the Seattle central in 1912 and editor of the *Union Record* a short time later.[47]

Complementing Ault's influence as an advocate of labor solidarity in the Pacific Northwest was James A. Duncan, who served as secretary of Seattle's CLC during the tumultuous years during and immediately following World War I. At the 1919 and 1920 AFL conventions, Duncan distinguished himself by casting the lone dissenting vote in the pro forma reelection of Gompers; he also formulated a plan for change within the AFL. A response to the growing number of industrially oriented local trade unions that advocated secession from the AFL, the "Duncan Plan" called for the reconstruction of the AFL along industrial lines through the close cooperation of allied trades in each major industry.[48]

Significant, perhaps, as examples of Washington labor's lingering and sometimes intense interest in labor solidarity and industrial unionism are the Seattle general strike and the One Big Union flirtation in early 1919. The OBU, a class-conscious Canadian industrial union that swept the western provinces in the aftermath of the Winnipeg general strike of May-June 1919, appeared to some labor leaders as an opportunity to reform the AFL from within; to others, it meant secession from the AFL. In any case, the protean OBU appealed especially to radical members of the Seattle labor council still reeling from the disastrous results of the general strike the previous February. When the 1919 WSFL convention referred to member unions the question of holding a special conference to consider membership in the OBU, the AFL response was predictable. Uncertain of the loyalty of its Washington affiliates and alarmed by misleading reports from some of the state's conservative rank-and-file unionists, the AFL leadership branded the action of the "radical" Bellingham convention "illegal," and threatened to revoke the charter of the state organization if it did not quash the OBU referendum.[49]

Angry members of Seattle's CLC urged defiance of the AFL and warned the state federation not to ignore the wishes of Washington's largest city central. Actually, the Seattle and Tacoma centrals stood alone in supporting continuation of the referendum; the WSFL soon yielded to the demands of the AFL leadership. James Duncan reminded diehard OBU supporters that "in no other part of the country has the agitation for one big union taken root even to the extent it has here," and he admonished local trade unionists to stand solid with their brothers around the nation until American workers were ready for OBU organization. By a vote of 95 to 57, the CLC thereupon endorsed the capitulation of the state federation.[50]

An IWW cadre continued to agitate for industrial unionism among Washington's unskilled and semiskilled workers. AFL affiliates in the state, despite an occasional flirtation with partisan politics in the early 1920s, would for the next 15 years march dutifully, if

---

45. Information on the voting patterns of delegates from the Pacific Northwest is derived from AFL convention proceedings between 1901 and 1917.

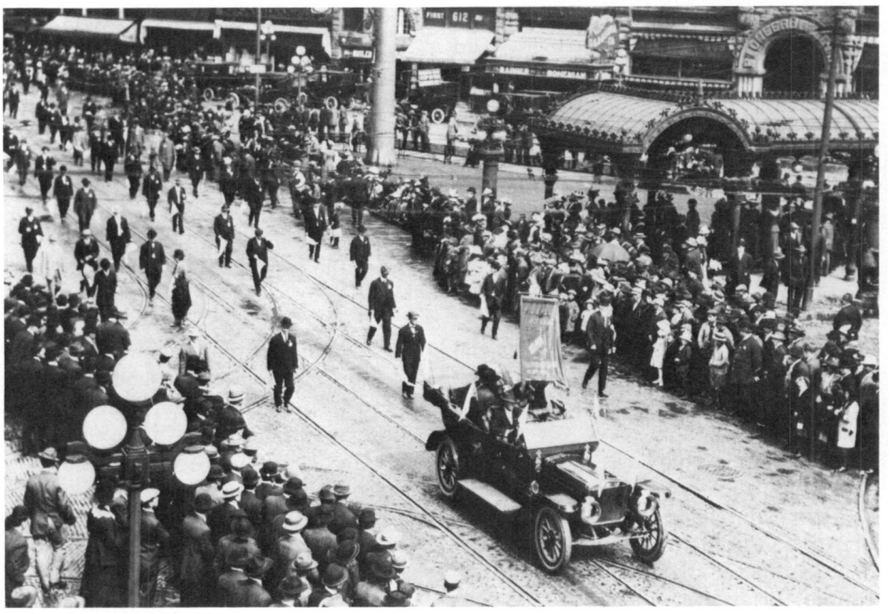
46. *Union Record*, Dec. 14, 1907 (first quotation); Aug. 16, 1913. A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto, 1977), 114-15; *Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1912* (Ottawa, 1913), 12-13; *Industrial Worker*, Aug. 29, 1912 (second quotation). *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the Washington State Federation of Labor*, 1914, p. 44 (hereafter cited as WSFL *Proceedings* with appropriate year).

47. *B.C. Federationist*, March 20, May 6, 1912; J. Castell Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs*, 1913 (Toronto, 1914), 680. WSFL *Proceedings*, 1914, p. 42 (first quotation); Minutes of the Regular Meetings of the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, March 21, 1912, Vancouver Trades and Labor Council Papers, Special Collections Division, University of British Columbia Library, Vancouver; Hulet M. Wells, "I Wanted to Work," 181-82, 192, Box 2, Hulet M. Wells Papers, University of Washington Libraries. *Union Record*, Jan. 31, 1914; *Young Socialist*, Vol. 3 (July 1902), 30 (second quotation).

48. *Union Record*, March 20, May 29, June 18, 1919; Jan. 24, 1920. See also Friedheim, 27, 48-49.

49. *Union Record*, June 23, Aug. 11, 1919; Kenneth McNaught and David J. Bercuson, *The Winnipeg Strike: 1919* (Don Mills, Ont., 1974), 24-39. For an extended discussion of the OBU in Washington, see David J. Bercuson, "The One Big Union in Washington," *PNQ*, Vol. 69 (1978), 127-34.

50. *Union Record*, Aug. 12, 14, 16, 21 (quotation), 1919; Tacoma *Labor Advocate*, July 11, 18, Aug. 22, Sept. 5, 1919.



Labor Day parade, 1912. Despite its AFL affiliation, Seattle's CLC maintained a sense of localism, an interest in reform, and an enthusiastic advocacy of industrial unionism. (Photography Coll., UW Library)

sometimes awkwardly, to the anthem of craft autonomy and business unionism.

Had late-19th-century physical and economic isolation prevailed in Washington during the 20 years preceding World War I, as did a tolerant, even innovative climate of political and judicial opinion, local labor might well have established industrial unionism decades before the rise of the Congress of Industrial Organizations in the 1930s. In fact, however, the population of the state was too small to support a viable indigenous union movement in the face of growing AFL strength in the nation's centers of population and trade. (Washington in 1900 contained a mere .68 percent of the nation's population.) In addition, Washington's extractive economy made local labor very dependent on organized labor outside the state. AFL unions, for example, could have refused to handle or fabricate the raw materials produced by an indigenous union. When radical members of Seattle's CLC came to the realization in 1919 that workers holding cards from industrial unions like the OBU would have difficulty finding employment outside the state, the AFL had won its 20-year fight with regional unionism in the Pacific Northwest.[51] □

51. *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1975), I, 8, 37; Friedheim, 33. An excellent study of the political and judicial climate of opinion in Washington during the progressive era is Joseph F. Tripp, "Progressive Labor Laws in Washington State (1900-1925)," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Washington, 1973).

Documentary History

The "Documentary History of the Supreme Court of the United States, 1789-1800," supported by the Supreme Court Historical Society and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, is a project to publish all documents which illuminate the development of the Supreme Court in its first decade. The editors are particularly interested in locating any correspondence of the following individuals:

Chief Justices
John Jay (1745-1829)
John Rutledge (1739-1800)
Oliver Ellsworth (1745-1807)

Associate Justices
John Blair (1732-1800)
Samuel Chase (1741-1811)
William Cushing (1732-1810)
James Iredell (1751-1799)
Thomas Johnson (1732-1819)
Alfred Moore (1755-1810)
William Paterson (1745-1806)
Bushrod Washington (1762-1829)
James Wilson (1742-1798)

Clerks of the Court
John Tucker
Samuel Bayard

Attorneys General
Edmund Randolph
William Bradford
Charles Lee

Unofficial Court Reporter
Alexander James Dallas

Please forward all information to Dr. Maeva Marcus, Supreme Court Historical Society, Suite 333, 1511 K Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.