

The Waterloo Strikes of 1919

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IMMEDIATELY AFTER WORLD WAR I, workers in many industries in the United States went on strike, stimulated by inflation, the end of federal controls over labor relations, and the readjustment to a postwar economic order. At the same time, a renewed vigor in the ranks of organized labor was countered by a determination among industrial leaders to secure complete control over the workplace. Conflicts over wages, work conditions, the eight-hour day, and collective bargaining divided labor and management. The most famous strike of 1919 was by steelworkers nationwide.¹ Readers of Waterloo's newspapers in 1919 also encountered striking rail workers around the country, the strike at the International Harvester plant in Chicago, gunfire and bombs during a strike in South Bartonville, Illinois, and strikes among meatpackers in Chicago, coal miners in Illinois, actors in New York City, and streetcar workers in Des Moines, Louisville, and Pittsburgh. The results of these mostly failed strikes helped shape a pattern of industrial relations that lasted until the economic dislocation of the 1930s. The strikes in Waterloo in 1919 illustrate the labor unrest of the era and the goals of management.²

1. See David Brody, *Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919* (Philadelphia, 1965).

2. For an overview of the era, see David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865–1925* (Cambridge, 1987). For a survey of Iowa's labor history in the twentieth century, see Shelton Stromquist, *Solidarity and Survival: An Oral History of Iowa Labor in the Twentieth Century* (Iowa City, 1993). For statistics about union membership and strikes nationally, see *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, part 1 (Washington, DC, 1975).

The Waterloo strikes were led by the recently organized International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local No. 314. Opposing the new union was an increasingly well-organized group of employers led by the Waterloo Gasoline Engine Company, recently purchased by Deere & Company, the Moline, Illinois, manufacturer of farm equipment. The strikes were characterized by picketing, speeches, parades, a lack of serious violence, and efforts on both sides to use local newspapers to sway public opinion. Labor leaders in Iowa made Waterloo the center of their fight for collective bargaining and union recognition. Collective bargaining was the main issue, but there was also a furor over the related question of "open shops" and "closed shops."³ The machinists attempted to rally other labor unions to their cause to produce a general strike, but they eventually failed. Deere & Company organized employers to oppose collective bargaining and apply pressure to those who seemed willing to submit to labor's demands.

IN 1914 Waterloo, Iowa, had an estimated population of 35,000. Its major employers were the William Galloway Company, Iowa Dairy Separator Company, and the Waterloo Gasoline Engine Company (WGE). Those three employed most of the factory workers in the city. Waterloo had become a center for the manufacture of dairy and agricultural equipment; at one time, one-fifth of the gasoline engines manufactured in the country were built there. WGE was the largest employer of factory workers and after 1918 was owned by Deere & Company.⁴

Labor organizations had existed in Waterloo since 1902, when electrical workers organized, and most trades were unionized by 1915, with about 5,000 union members in the city. The Central Labor Union, formed in 1903, comprised 32 labor bodies. The Central was affiliated with the Iowa State Federation of Labor and the American Federation of Labor. T. N. Stufflebeam was its

3. "Open shops" are those where labor unions are not recognized by employers as bargaining groups and union members are not employed. "Closed shops" are those where labor unions are bargaining agents and only union members are employed.

4. John C. Hartman, ed., *History of Black Hawk County and Its People*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1915), 1: 240, 262, 263, 399.



Waterloo Gasoline Engine Company, undated. Courtesy of John Deere.

president; its secretary-treasurer, Leon Link, was a member of the executive board of the state federation.⁵ At the beginning of 1919, machinists were the largest group of non-unionized workers.

Businessmen first created a formal organization in Waterloo in 1884 that evolved into the Board of Trade and Commercial Club. In 1907 another businessmen's association, the Waterloo Club, was founded. Both were formed to promote and foster civic and industrial growth. The Waterloo Manufacturers' Association, established in 1919, was made up of companies opposed to the strikers. It evolved in response to strike developments, expanding its membership and hiring a full-time secretary. By November it became the Waterloo Industrial Association. Its goal was to protect the open shop and oppose collective bargaining.⁶

5. Hartman, ed., *History of Black Hawk County*, 1:263; "We Demand Justice," flyer, 3/9/1920, document #11854, Deere & Company Archives, Moline, IL (hereafter cited as DA followed by the document number); *Waterloo Courier* (hereafter cited simply as *Courier*), 8/4/1919, 8/25/1919, 11/12/1919, 1/24/1993; John Marie Daly, "History of Unionization in Waterloo, Iowa" (M.A. thesis, Creighton University, 1962), 5, 6, 11, 12, 13.

6. Hartman, ed., *History of Black Hawk County*, 1:257, 258; Reports to Deere & Company, 7/31/1919, 8/19/1919, 8/20/1919, 11/15/1919, 11/20/1919, DA #11836; L. Clausen to J. Johnson, 9/19/1919, DA #11855. Initially, the WMA was made up of Armstrong Manufacturing Co., Blackhawk Manufacturing Co., Bovee Grinder & Furnace Works, Dart Truck and Tractor Corp., Headford Bros. & Hitchins, Iowa Dairy Separator Co., Model Laundry, Novelty Wire Works, Sibert's White Laundry, Waterloo Gasoline Engine Co., Waterloo Cement Machinery Corp., Waterloo Laundry Co., and Wm. Galloway Co. Others joined in late August: Chamberlain Machinery Works, Litchfield Manufacturing, Powers Manufacturing Co., Repass Automobile Co., and Swift Foundry Co.

Some employers in Iowa and elsewhere had launched an open shop drive in 1902 to preserve union-free workplaces.⁷ Although Waterloo employers did not join that movement, after World War I they did join the uncoordinated but almost simultaneous nationwide drive for the open shop. One of the first struggles that centered on the issue resulted in a celebrated, but failed, general strike in Seattle. The open shop became a major issue in the steel strike of 1919, and local strikes prompted the establishment of open shop associations around the country in 1919. By 1920, the demands of local employers led the National Association of Manufacturers to formally adopt the open shop as one of its policies. By that fall, the "American Plan of Employment" had been endorsed by almost 500 open shop associations in 240 cities across 44 states.⁸

AS 1919 BEGAN, the IAM's recent successes had instilled a sense of optimism. It had enjoyed a steady growth in membership since 1911, with a huge jump in 1918, when membership more than doubled. The National War Labor Board had approved the right of employees to bargain collectively. The IAM was in good shape financially, largely because there had been few strikes to drain its resources. Its leadership foresaw potential problems, however, from hostile employers who would not provoke a strike against a healthy union but who were ready to act at the first sign of weakness.⁹

7. See Ralph Scharnau, "The Labor Movement in Iowa, 1900-1910," *Journal of the West* 35 (1996), 19-28; William C. Pratt, "The Omaha Business Men's Association and the Open Shop, 1903-1909," *Nebraska History* 70 (1989), 172-83; William Millikan, *A Union Against Unions: The Minneapolis Citizens Alliance and Its Fight Against Organized Labor, 1903-1947* (St. Paul, 2001).

8. See Allen M. Wakstein, "The Origins of the Open-Shop Movement, 1919-1920," *Journal of American History* 51 (1964), 460-47; Rob Rosenthal, "Nothing Moved but the Tide: The Seattle General Strike of 1919," *Labor's Heritage* 4 (Fall 1992), 34-53; Colin J. Davis, *Power at Odds: The 1922 National Railroad Shopmen's Strike* (Urbana and Chicago, 1997); and Millikan, *Union Against Unions*, 176.

9. The IAM had reason to be positive but also had many unmet goals for 1919. One was to continue filling its coffers: leaders wanted to increase the union's reserve fund from \$1 million to \$5 million. The IAM anticipated problems for 1919 caused by the end of war-related production and the lack of any federal program to deal with economic readjustment. The influx of returning military

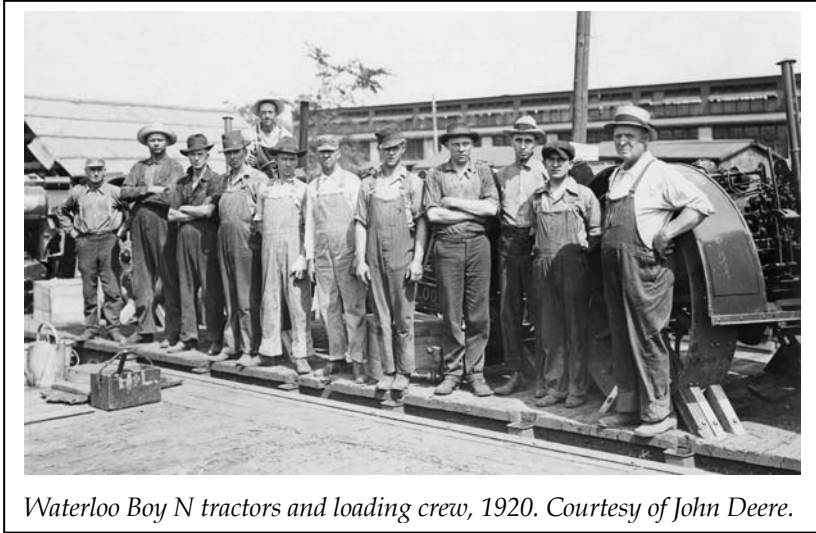
In 1919 management began its assault by reducing wages, increasing hours, and changing working conditions. The result was many strikes by local unions and other labor organizations. It was an era of "industrial warfare," according to the IAM. In August the International requested that there be no more strikes. By October the union reported that there were more strikes, and strikes threatened, than during any other period in the country's history. In November more than 30,000 workers were on strike. The impact on the IAM treasury was devastating. By November the strike fund was empty. As a result, the union encountered "considerable dissension, and some dissatisfaction, within our fold."¹⁰ All of this was crucial for the situation in Waterloo.

From management's point of view, labor conditions in Waterloo were quiet and workers seemed happy until the end of June 1919, when A. G. Abbey, a national organizer for the IAM, arrived in Waterloo after successfully organizing a machinists' strike at Clinton, Iowa. He began holding meetings in the streets and making noon-hour and evening speeches outside the factories. This, according to management, stirred a spirit of unrest among workers. Abbey displayed skill as a speaker, although some noted his tendency to exaggerate. A private detective noted that he was "smoothe tongued," a "strong personality," and a "very good hypnotist" (he was also an amateur magician who put on shows at the Waterloo Labor Temple). By July 31, about 2,000 of Waterloo's 3,000 machinists were in the union, Local No. 314 of the IAM.¹¹

personnel to the work force was another problem. *Machinists Monthly Journal*, January 1919, 61-62; *ibid.*, June 1919, 507-10.

10. *Machinists Monthly Journal*, January 1919, 35; *ibid.*, June 1919, 512; *ibid.*, August 1919, 728; *ibid.*, October 1919, 946; *ibid.*, November 1919, 998; *ibid.*, December 1919, 1135, 1136.

11. The manufacturers maintained that Abbey was the cause of the strikes. WGE officials began to monitor his activities early on, preparing written reports almost on a daily basis. See Reports to Deere & Company by L. A. Paradise, 7/8/1919-12/25/1919, DA #11836; J. E. Johnson to Walter Brown, 8/8/1919, DA #11855; L. R. Clausen, "The Right of Individual Contract," a speech to the annual convention of the National Founders Association, 11/19/1919, DA #11870; P. J. Doyle to L. R. Clausen, 8/16/1919, DA #11855; *Courier*, 7/31/1919, 8/8/1919; *Waterloo Times-Tribune* (hereafter cited simply as *Tribune*), 8/6/1919; *Machinists Monthly Journal*, April 1919.



Waterloo Boy N tractors and loading crew, 1920. Courtesy of John Deere.

Efforts to organize machine shop workers in Waterloo peaked in July. The workers demanded an eight-hour day, higher wages (usually the equivalent of 10 hours pay for 8 hours of work), time-and-a-half for overtime, changes in working conditions, recognition of the unions, and the right to bargain collectively. Management thought that the labor “agitators” were operating according to a typical, prearranged plan: organize a limited number of workers and “stampede the rest into a strike” with the objective of making Waterloo a “100% union community.”¹²

WATERLOO’S FIRST STRIKE began on July 29 with action against Iowa Dairy Separator Company, one of the largest employers of machinists in Waterloo and considered by Local 314 to be a leader in the effort to crush the unions.¹³ A strike followed at William Galloway Company the next day. The labor organizers planned to submit their demands to other shops, “continuing thru the smaller shops employing union machinists.”¹⁴

12. L. R. Clausen to E. H. Gary, 9/3/1919, DA #11855; *Courier*, 7/31/1919; Report to Deere & Company, 7/17/1919, DA #11836.

13. See “We Demand Justice,” DA #11854.

14. *Courier*, 7/31/1919.

Negotiations on July 31 at WGE, overseen by Deere & Company's Leon Clausen, also failed.¹⁵ The company released a statement to the *Waterloo Courier* that clearly rejected collective bargaining and emphasized the "constitutional" rights of workers and management to negotiate individual contracts.¹⁶

Management at the struck businesses, grouped as the Waterloo Manufacturers' Association (WMA), met daily, formed a united front, and presented their position to the public. They maintained that they were defending an important constitutional right, that of the individual contract. John E. Johnson, spokesman for both WGE and for the WMA, was, according to the *Oelwein Labor Journal*, "the monkey on the stick of the John Deere Corporation."¹⁷

15. For the WGE employees' demands, see DA #11863. The demands included an eight-hour day, a six-day work week, time-and-a-half for overtime, double time for Sundays and holidays, the right to join a union and bargain collectively, the elimination of piece work, equal pay for women, and the establishment of an arbitration procedure. Clausen stayed behind the scenes during the strike. He had joined Deere & Company in 1912, rose rapidly, and eventually (in March 1919) became vice president of manufacturing and a company director. In 1924 he left Deere & Company to become president of J. I. Case Company. Clausen was totally opposed to unions of any type. The individual contract, as far as he was concerned, was the backbone of labor-management relations. He was convinced that unions were the sole cause of strikes during the war and that the absence of strikes at Deere factories was a result of good management of labor relations. Labor agitators caused the strikes at Waterloo and around the nation in 1919, he believed. Clausen recognized employers' responsibility to treat workers fairly. Workplace justice needed to be provided to individuals in order for the individual employment contract to work as an industrial relations device. It was management's responsibility to see to it that workers' earnings went up each year, he believed; each man should "get ahead." *Cedar Rapids Tribune*, 1/16/1920; Factory Managers Meeting, 10/11-13/1920, DA #37741; *Case Eagle*, October 1965; L. R. Clausen to E. H. Gary, 9/3/1919, DA #11855; L. R. Clausen to A. H. Head, 11/25/1919, DA #11855; Clausen, "The Right of Individual Contract."

16. *Courier*, 7/31/1919, 9/16/1919; Report to Deere & Company, 7/31/1919, DA #11836.

17. *Oelwein Labor Journal*, 10/15/1919. The *Labor Journal* was started in 1919 and was published twice a month; its editor, Frank Sheeley, was an employee of WGE and chaired the machinists' strike committee. John Johnson moved to Waterloo in 1900 to become pastor of the First Methodist Episcopal Church but resigned after three years for health reasons and joined WGE as a bookkeeper. He rose rapidly and became secretary and treasurer. He also acquired a financial interest in the company in 1907. He eventually came to own 29 percent of the shares of common stock of WGE. (George B. Miller and Louis Witry

The manufacturers used the courts to their advantage. On July 31 Iowa Dairy sought and received an injunction from the district court against Local 314 of the IAM, its officers, and specific members. Provisions of the injunction specified that defendants were restrained from "molesting, injuring or damaging plaintiff's property; from assembling about the plant or factory in large numbers while interviewing or trying to peaceably induce any of the employes to leave their jobs; from compelling or attempting to compel by abusive language, threats, intimidation, force, coercion or violence any of the employes to leave the employ of the company." The request for the injunction included accounts of violence and threats to keep employees from entering the plant. On August 1 WGE received from the district court a temporary writ of injunction against the IAM (local and national) to prohibit members from entering company property, assembling in large numbers around the plant, or intimidating employees into breaking the written employment contract with the company. Attorneys for the IAM immediately began attempts to have the injunctions lifted.¹⁸

From the beginning, officials at WGE pointed to lawlessness at their plant and at the Iowa Dairy plant.¹⁹ Representatives of the WMA met with the police chief on August 1. Giving numerous examples of lawbreaking, they maintained that the city was in a state of anarchy. The chief was unsure whether he had enough deputies to handle the situation but agreed to try to enforce the law. Later that day the chief visited the WGE plant and told the strikers that if they violated any laws he would be forced to turn enforcement over to the county sheriff. The chief's actions did not satisfy company officials because he did nothing to secure the free passage of workers in and out of the plant.²⁰

owned the remaining stock. In March 1918 they sold all of their stock to Deere & Company for \$2 million.) Johnson became general manager when Deere & Company purchased the business in March 1918. Petition, 6/7/1926, *John E. Johnson v. the United States of America*, In the Court of Claims, DA #11832; *Courier*, 8/18/1919, 9/16/1919.

18. *Courier*, 8/1/1919, 8/4/1919; *Tribune*, 8/6/1919; Waterloo Gasoline Engine Co. Statement of Legal Proceedings, DA #11837.

19. Report to Deere & Company, 7/31/1919, DA #11863.

20. Reports to Deere & Company, 8/1/1919, 8/2/1919, 8/3/1919, DA #11836; *Courier*, 8/1/1919.

On Monday, August 4, WGE rejected demands from the International Brotherhood of Foundry Employees Union No. 113 and the International Molders' Union No. 459 and distributed a printed explanation to foundry employees.²¹ The company, unwilling to abandon its long-held policies, would not end the employee's right to individual contracts. It promised good wages (on an individual basis) and urged any employee with a grievance to take it up with management. The statement concluded, "Every man is entitled to and will receive a square deal."²² The molders did not walk out, indicating that they would seek permission from their international before striking. Management's response was to close the foundry, citing a surplus of castings. Three hundred more workers were put out of work.²³

After the mayor suggested that John Johnson, WGE's chief executive, meet with other businessmen and a committee of employees to try to reach a settlement, Johnson met with the mayor himself on August 4. At their meeting, Johnson rejected the mayor's proposal, insisting that outside arbitration was not appropriate. Johnson also spoke with Sheriff David B. Henderson, who indicated that he could do nothing to enforce the laws until the city refused to do so. The city's chief of police, on the other hand, said it was the sheriff's responsibility to enforce the injunctions.²⁴

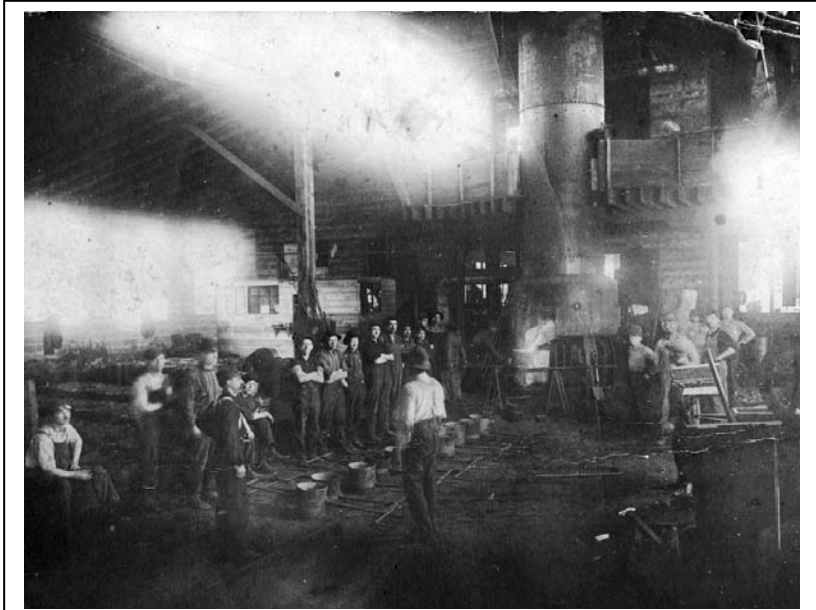
On August 5 WGE filed a suit in district court against 16 defendants, including the IAM, its national organizer (Abbey), Local No. 314, and its officers. The suit asked for a judgment of \$25,000 against each "as damages for the alleged failure to carry out written contracts of agreement between the company as employer and the men as employees." The company claimed that it would suffer serious financial losses because it would be

21. The unions wanted an eight-hour day, a flat increase in pay to \$6 per day, the acceptance of collective bargaining, the right of union membership, and the establishment of a process to arbitrate any disagreements between management and the unions' shop committees. Unions, like the molders, had existed within WGE, but there was no collective bargaining or closed shop.

22. Notices to Employees, 7/31/1919 and 8/4/1919, DA #11857; Agreements with Labor Unions, 1919, DA #11866.

23. *Courier*, 7/31/1919, 8/4/1919; *Tribune*, 8/7/1919.

24. Reports to Deere & Company, 8/2/1919, 8/4/1919, DA #11836.



Interior of the Waterloo Gasoline Engine plant. Courtesy of John Deere.

unable to fulfill contracts for tractors and engines and that the defendants “conspired and confederated” and were “unlawfully” trying to prevent employees who were under contract from entering the plant. The company claimed that it had the constitutional right to an unobstructed flow of labor into the factory and to contract with workers individually without interference from third parties. Labor leaders reportedly were unaware of what the suit meant. Abbey responded, when interviewed, that he “was much obliged for the compliment but didn’t have the \$25,000.”²⁵

THE PRESS became increasingly important as both sides tried to influence public opinion. WGE printed a sample employee contract in the *Courier* and the *Tribune*. On August 7 the striking machinists issued a statement of their own in the *Courier*. It said that WGE used a piece-work system, but employees could be com-

25. Petition at Law, *Waterloo Gasoline Engine Co. v. International Association of Machinists, et al*, 8/4/1919, DA #11841; *Courier*, 8/5/1919; *Tribune*, 8/6/1919.

pelled to do "day work" for periods of several weeks at a time; when a piece-work employee exceeded the limit set for his machine, the job would be retimed upwards even though employee contracts specified that piece rates were not to be changed during the life of a contract. The union statement claimed that management was unwilling to arbitrate or offer a counterproposal.²⁶

On the same day, the employers issued their own statement in the *Courier*. It said: (1) if the strike lasted for two more weeks the government would take over the plants and operate them; (2) granting the "closed shop" would "sound the death knell" of the plants in six months because none of their competitors in other areas operated with "closed shops"; (3) the continued prosperity of Waterloo depended on the cooperation of the major plants; (4) because of an ongoing slump in demand for agricultural equipment, only half of the workers would be recalled even if the strike ended immediately; and (5) there would be a "long siege" if labor continued to demand a closed shop.²⁷ The statement, which especially emphasized the issue of closed shops, was full of exaggerations and was an obvious attempt to influence public opinion.

After August 7 the employers assumed a lower public profile. In a letter to WMA, Deere & Company vice president Leon Clausen wrote, "It is my opinion that the manufacturers of Waterloo are in a very favorable position because they can and will win the strike if they sit tight and hold together." He added that manufacturers should be careful not to give union officials "a real cause for action" or anything "the union crowd" could use to gain public sympathy. "The matter of publicity is one that is important. Mr. Abbey should not be given anything which will enable him to break into print just at the present time." One of the keys to success, Clausen insisted, was to "hold all the manufacturers together, without a break."²⁸

From the outset, Deere & Company provided direction to the WMA. Clausen believed that the other employers were in-

26. Report to Deere & Company, 8/6/1919, DA #11836; *Courier*, 8/7/1919; *Tribune*, 8/6/1919.

27. *Courier*, 8/7/1919.

28. L. R. Clausen to WMA, 8/7/1919, DA #11855; L. R. Clausen to J. E. Johnson, 8/8/1919, DA #11855.

experienced in handling such matters and needed assistance. They wanted to stand together but were not sure what to do. Deere & Company could help, Clausen said, and the situation at Waterloo could be "cleaned up and put on a real basis of stability," resulting in "the greatest benefit to the individual and the community."²⁹

THE SUCCESSION OF STRIKES at manufacturing concerns came as no surprise, but few observers expected strikes at the city's laundries.³⁰ The primary issue was collective bargaining, which management, pressured by the WMA, would not accept. In response, Waterloo Steam Laundry workers struck on August 9; employees at Model Laundry followed on August 11. On August 16 painters at F. M. Michael Paint Company went on strike for higher pay, adding another group to the ranks of the strikers.³¹ Abbey's task was to unite them against an increasingly well-organized body of employers.

As one of their tactics, the manufacturers tried to discredit the labor leaders. They hired a private detective agency to investigate Abbey but were probably disappointed to uncover nothing scandalous about him. Management also received secret reports from union members regarding labor activities, although Local 314 publicly denied that such spies existed. Local attorneys representing WGE sought information for use in expected litigation. Abbey was of particular interest to them.³²

On August 13 labor organized a large parade with a reported 3,000 participants. The following day labor leaders, including the president of the State Federation of Labor, a member of the

29. L. R. Clausen to J. E. Johnson, 8/15/1919, DA #11855.

30. In addition to the strikes at WGE, Iowa Dairy Separator Co., and William Galloway Co., the employees at the Waterloo Cement Machinery Corp. went on strike on August 2; workers at Novelty Wire Works followed two days later. *Courier*, 8/4/1919.

31. *Courier*, 8/11/1919, 8/12/1919, 8/17/1919; *Tribune*, 8/12/1919, 8/17/1919; Report to Deere & Company, 8/7/1919, DA #11836.

32. Carleton Sias to J. E. Johnson, 8/4/1919, DA #11855; P. J. Doyle to L. R. Clausen, 8/16/1919, DA #11855. See also Reports on Meetings Held by A. G. Abbey, September 1919, DA #11844; Report on the Strike Situation, 8/24/1919, DA #11842; Flyers, Strike file, DA #11854.

carpenters' state council, Abbey, and many others who did not want to be identified, met for several hours at the Labor Temple. These leaders reportedly agreed to make Waterloo the focal point for the battle for union recognition and collective bargaining in Iowa. The federation feared that employers in Waterloo were determined to crush the strike and break up the unions. If they were to succeed, all organized labor in the state would suffer. If, on the other hand, the Waterloo strikers were successful in securing higher wages, a shorter work day, and the right to bargain collectively, other employers in the state, the federation maintained, would be less inclined to try to break up unions. As a result, all workers in Iowa were encouraged to raise money for the Waterloo strike fund.³³

The employers were also busy. By mid-August the WMA had finished a reorganization to include a broader cross-section of employers, hired a person full time to run day-to-day business, and prepared a public relations attack. The main point they wanted to emphasize was the importance of the individual employment contract; they did not want employees who did not see its merit. In addition, the manufacturers considered it important for the general public to understand and believe in individual contracts. The manufacturers planned a series of ads that, according to Clausen, would "leave no doubt in the mind of the average citizen, as to the viciousness of Union Policies, and to the correctness of our own policies."³⁴

At the same time, Deere & Company wanted its fellow employers to understand that employers had important responsibilities to their workers: ensuring that all employees received a proper income, helping them understand that the employers were interested in their "individual welfare and success in life," making promotions available, providing kindly assistance to newly hired people, and assuring workers that the company would remove any individual injustices from the workplace.

33. "Assist Your Brothers," 9/4/1919, DA #11854 [the date handwritten on this document after the fact is October 4, 1919, but it appears that the correct date is more likely to be September 4]; *Tribune*, 8/14/1919, 8/15/1919; *Courier*, 8/15/1919.

34. L. R. Clausen to J. E. Johnson, 8/15/1919, DA #11855; Reports to Deere & Company, 8/19/1919, 8/20/1919, DA #11836.

To make this work, it was pointed out, shop-floor foremen and managers had to understand and support these responsibilities.³⁵

That was the approach the WMA wanted to discuss at its meeting on Saturday afternoon, August 16, the most violent day of the strike. That morning strikers had recognized some WGE foremen and superintendents on a streetcar. The strikers surrounded the car, boarded it, and attempted to throw off the employees. A "general melee" followed, with some "personal encounters." In the afternoon, strikers removed four Galloway employees from a streetcar and tossed one into Blackhawk Creek. In the evening, another Galloway employee on his way home from work was stopped and beaten. The county attorney filed reports, and the sheriff made five arrests for assault and one for disturbing the "public quiet." Abbey insisted that "we do not countenance forcible methods in gaining our ends," but he admitted that "it is certain that among 2500 men now out of work because of employers' unwillingness to arbitrate that there will be a few hot heads who fail to think before they act."³⁶

The manufacturers decided that the time had come for action to protect workers. They and their attorneys met on Sunday, August 17, and decided to tell the county supervisors that the county would be held liable if they did not protect lives and property. John Johnson met with some of the supervisors at his home the following morning, and they agreed to call a special meeting of the board of supervisors for that afternoon.³⁷

About one hundred people attended the supervisors' meeting on August 18. The six or so who spoke "dwelt upon alleged law violations committed by strikers." In what must have been an inflammatory speech, Johnson said the local strikes were part of "a nationwide plan for labor to control all industry" and a local effort to unionize all of Waterloo. He denounced Abbey for having associates in Minneapolis who were "red socialists" and for secretly supporting labor violence while publicly renouncing it. Johnson claimed that there was increasing violence

35. J. E. Johnson to WMA, 8/14/1919, DA #11855; L. R. Clausen to J. E. Johnson, 8/15/1919, DA #11855.

36. *Courier*, 8/17/1919; *Tribune*, 8/17/1919.

37. Reports to Deere & Company, 8/16/1919, 8/17/1919, 8/18/1919, DA #11836.

in Waterloo. "If the county board does not grant protection," he warned, "I fear there will be loss of life." Many workers went on strike, he claimed, because they had been intimidated; the plants would be able to open soon if ample protection was provided for them. The board unanimously agreed to Johnson's request to authorize the sheriff to appoint 1,000 or more deputies to maintain order and protect life and property. Right after the meeting, Sheriff Henderson notified sheriffs around the state that deputies would be hired.³⁸

The next day, the Central Labor Union responded to the board's action with a statement printed in full in the *Courier*. It pointed out that there were two sides to the controversy: the strikers' and management's. The statement was issued to inform the third party involved: the public. It said that no agreement presented to manufacturers called for a "closed shop," but the manufacturers wanted the public to think so. Manufacturers were trying to gain public sympathy, the statement continued, but they knew that the appointment of the deputies might stir up trouble.³⁹

The *Tribune*, reporting that the supervisors' action was unexpected, made an important observation: responsibility for the strike situation had been taken from the city and placed in the hands of the county.⁴⁰ The manufacturers wanted law enforcement officials to help crush the strike, and the only way to achieve that (barring really serious violence) was to convince the more sympathetic county officials, including the sheriff, to become the main keepers of the peace. WGE "brought pressure" on the sheriff to "keep him in line." On August 9 management had met with him and "put the matter up squarely to the Sheriff that he must handle the situation . . . ; that it was his duty to preserve order and if he didn't do his duty, we would see that he did."⁴¹ As far as the unions were concerned, the sheriff was a tool of the companies. Company officials, in turn,

38. *Tribune*, 8/19/1919; *Courier*, 8/18/1919.

39. *Courier*, 8/19/1919.

40. *Tribune*, 8/19/1919.

41. Report to Deere & Company, 8/9/1919, DA #11836; Waterloo Gasoline Engine Co. Statement of Legal Proceedings, DA #11837.

were convinced that the Waterloo police were sympathetic to the strikers.⁴²

Violent incidents took place on August 19, perhaps precipitated by the supervisors' action the day before. About 8:00 a.m. some Iowa Dairy Separator Company employees were driving to work when they were attacked. One of the assailants jumped on the car's running board, struck the driver, and grabbed the steering wheel. The driver lost control of the car, which hit a team of horses pulling a wagon. Two or three pickets from WGE also allegedly beat an office employee of Hawkeye Oil Company.⁴³

In response, the companies placed a large ad in the *Courier* and *Tribune* on August 21 that read: "To the Public: In response to repeated inquiries, we will resume operations as soon as our public streets become safe for our workmen who desire to return to work. Under present arrangements this should soon be accomplished."⁴⁴ The employers ran yet another large ad in the *Tribune* on August 23, an obvious attempt to split the strikers. The ad gave the employers' version of the origins of the strike:

Local organizers, in accordance with a cold-blooded plan, requested an outside agency to send agitators to their assistance. They came. Business was stopped. Thousands of men were thrown out of their jobs. The rights of peaceful men were trampled upon. Force and violence were employed. Want and distress which always follows idleness made their appearance among our citizens. . . . If the responsibility for putting thousands of men out of work had been placed solely on your shoulders, would YOU have given the word to walk out? . . . Are the men responsible for this condition REALLY interested in YOUR welfare? . . . Is it FAIR to you and YOUR families?⁴⁵

On that same day management received a report from a paid investigator who painted a gloomy picture: the strikers were going to win because they had the support of the mayor, the police chief, and a growing number of citizens and small businessmen; they were successfully organizing all types of

42. Special Report, 8/24/1919, DA #11842; Special Report, 9/3/1919, DA #11834.

43. *Courier*, 8/16/1919, 9/3/1919.

44. *Courier*, 8/21/1919; *Tribune*, 8/21/1919.

45. *Tribune*, 8/23/1919.

workers; and they were promised money from the Iowa State Federation of Labor. The state federation's pledge of \$10,000 per week for the strike fund was followed by pledges from local labor organizations around the state.⁴⁶

The actual number of strikers was not officially reported, but on August 23 the unions estimated that about 2,755 workers were on strike. In addition, about 350 foundry workers were out of work even though they were not on strike, bringing the total to more than 3,100 people unemployed after August 2 because of the strikes.⁴⁷

DESPITE the large number of strikers and the seemingly unfavorable news, WGE leaders met to prepare for the workers' return to work. They also agreed that no union members would be reemployed. In the future all grievances would be handled without delay "to make it possible for an employee to get better representation thru his foreman than he could possibly get thru a walking delegate or any other third party." They agreed that all workers were entitled to an adequate wage, and piece rates were discussed. They established an elaborate interview process for returning employees to ensure that only those who realized that strikers had broken their contracts would be rehired; they had to promise not only not to do it again but to stand with the company to prevent a recurrence. If returning employees were able to pass this rigorous test, they would be given a new employment contract to sign, have pensions and benefits reinstated, and receive a physical. They would also be required to sign a form asking why they went on strike and who encouraged them to do so.⁴⁸

On August 24 and 25 the employers placed another ad in the *Tribune* and *Courier* offering to reinstate former employees without prejudice "if you talk the matter over with us personally." Management at WGE believed that workers at all of the plants

46. Special report, 8/24/1919, DA #11841.

47. Arbitration Petition, DA #11840. The unions cited 1,500 workers on strike at WGE, 485 at Iowa Dairy, 350 at Galloway, 75 at Armstrong, 75 at Waterloo Cement Construction Co., 20 at Novelty Wire, and 250 at various laundries.

48. Minutes, 8/22/1919, DA #11847.

were ready to return and would do so when they were no longer afraid of harm from the strikers.

A "fine spirit" pervaded the WMA's regular meeting on August 25. Sheriff Henderson was commended for his good work. He speculated that there would be no more violence, an opinion that was confirmed by reports from the manufacturers' "special men."⁴⁹

The manufacturers' public relations barrage continued on August 26, as they placed an ad in the *Courier* encouraging strikers to cut out a form that was included and return it to their former employers. The form asked whether the striker had personally voted to strike, whether promises made by strike leaders had been kept, whether, and how much, strike benefits had been received, and whether the striker expected to continue to receive benefits. The ad probably was less an attempt to gather data than it was an effort to get employees to think about their personal situations. The employers placed a second big ad in the *Tribune* and *Courier* (signed by an expanded list of employers) asking why many of Waterloo's industries were idle. It explained, "For over three weeks the earnest, industrious workers of Waterloo have been held out of employment and have been prevented from earning their pay by the actions of local and outside agitators. The great majority of these workers who have been forced out of employment are not in sympathy with the radical and unsound demands of the self-elected agitators. . . . Violence, threats, and force have temporarily taken the place of the rights of individuals. Waterloo faces a grave crisis."⁵⁰

On August 27 events seemed to point toward an end to the dissension. The strikers at Bovee Grinder and Furnace Works returned to work under previous conditions, but with an increase in wages. It was the first strike settled since they began on July 29, and the return reportedly had union approval. But Bovee's agreement to a wage increase brought open criticism from the WMA, which was doing its best to avoid concessions.⁵¹

49. Report to Deere & Company, 8/25/1919, DA # 11836.

50. *Courier*, 8/26/1919; *Tribune*, 8/26/1919.

51. The amount of the wage increase was not reported. *Courier*, 8/2/1919; Reports to Deere & Company, 8/27/1919, 8/28/1919, DA #11836.

By August 30, WGE was convinced that the strikers' morale was weakening and that many were ready to return to work.⁵² At that juncture some secret negotiations took place. J. E. Jordan and Harry M. Reed, attorneys for the strikers, met with J. W. Arbuckle, attorney for Litchfield Manufacturing Company. Because Litchfield had not been struck, Jordan and Reed thought that Arbuckle would be a good intermediary to use to approach the other manufacturers. Arbuckle then met with John Johnson, who responded for the employers: each employee would have to return individually under the previous terms of employment and sign a new contract; under no circumstances would there be any negotiations with a representative of the strikers. Johnson further told Arbuckle that if he or the strikers' attorneys wanted to help they should get Abbey to leave town. Johnson said workers had been content and well compensated before Abbey arrived and began agitating; the door was, and always had been, open to all individuals to negotiate; and the employers felt no ill will towards the vast majority of the strikers.⁵³

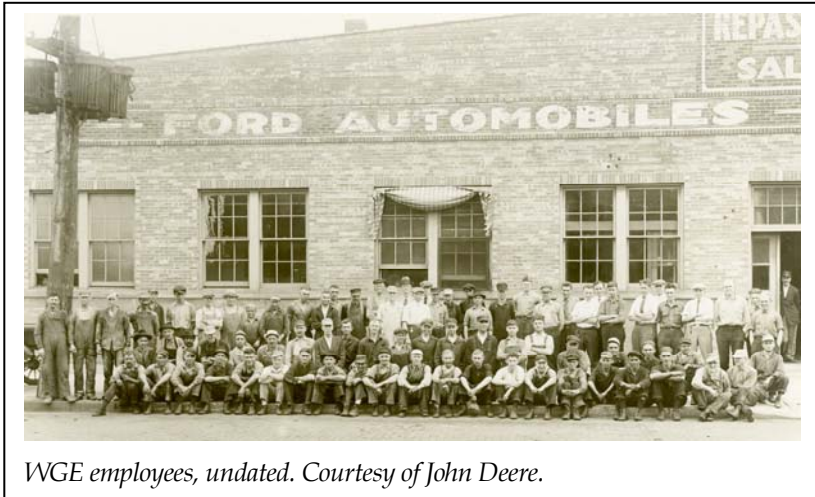
In the meetings with Arbuckle, Johnson insisted that the employers were united in their stand against collective bargaining. Arbuckle said that Jordan had indicated to him that the strikers were ready to return to work; some would even be willing to abandon their union membership. Johnson responded that *all* returning workers would be required to sign individual contracts containing a clause that they would not join a labor union during the life of the contract; future discussions would be fruitless if the workers did not agree.⁵⁴ The manufacturers were sensing victory and were standing united as August ended.

On September 5 the Sibert, Waterloo, and Model laundries all reopened with little turmoil. The WMA tried to force the laundry owners to make no concessions to the workers. Most former employees were on the job; the laundries hired replacements for the workers who remained on strike, which created some tension. More picketers appeared, so deputies were deployed around the laundries in case of trouble. Nothing hap-

52. Report to Deere & Company, 8/30/1919, DA #11836.

53. Reports to Deere & Company, 8/27/1919, 8/28/1919, 8/31/1919, DA #11836.

54. *Ibid.*



WGE employees, undated. Courtesy of John Deere.

pened, though. Teamsters from one coal company refused to deliver a load to the laundries, but those from another agreed to do so. The laundry owners had been willing to make some wage concessions, but they would not accept collective bargaining. In fact, once they were struck, they demanded that employees give up their union memberships as a condition of employment. Members of the WMA encouraged the laundry owners. One of the owners had been negotiating with Abbey to try to reach a settlement, but the other manufacturers convinced him that he needed to uphold the principles of the WMA because the strike was at a critical point and required the manufacturers to maintain a united front.⁵⁵

When laundries began reopening with non-union workers, it marked the beginning of the end of the strike. By September 12, work on a reduced scale was proceeding at struck factories, including WGE and Iowa Dairy.⁵⁶ All workers were former employees who had been required to drop their union member-

55. Reports to Deere & Company, 9/5/1919, 9/6/1919, 9/8/1919, 9/9/1919, 9/10/1919, 9/12/1919, DA #11836.

56. WGE began producing some tractors from parts on hand; 161 men were at work, up from 100 on August 29. Reports to Deere & Company, 9/8/1919, 9/11/1919, 9/12/1919, DA #11836.

ships and return under pre-strike conditions. There was no interference from pickets, who were reduced in number.⁵⁷

FROM THE BEGINNING, the strikes' leaders sought arbitration with the manufacturers, who rejected the process. Labor organized a movement to petition Governor W. L. Harding to appoint an arbitration board. On August 28 Harding, considering the welfare of the community to be at stake, ordered arbitration between the strikers and WGE. The company, however, refused to participate in, or be bound by, arbitration. The refusal, which the newspapers had predicted, came as no surprise.⁵⁸

The other struck companies followed WGE's lead and declined to be part of the arbitration process.⁵⁹ The manufacturers did consider the possibility of participating, but decided that "such action would involve them in at least a moral obligation to be bound by the conclusions of the Board and would set before the public the impression that the manufacturers had participated."⁶⁰

The arbitration committee met on September 16 and heard testimony from representatives of the striking WGE workers and their attorneys. The strikers made a variety of allegations. Witnesses stated that there had been no dissatisfaction at WGE until Deere & Company took over and installed the stopwatch system. In general, the witnesses claimed that their paychecks had been going down while the cost of living was going up.⁶¹ Deere & Company, from the strikers' point of view, was the cause of the problem.

57. *Courier*, 9/12/1919, 9/16/1919; *Tribune*, 9/12/1919.

58. Arbitration Notice, 8/29/1919, DA#11855; L. W. Witry to W. L. Harding, 9/3/1919, DA #11855; Report to Deere & Company, 8/30/1919, DA #11836; *Courier*, 8/23/1919, 8/25/1919, 8/29/1919, 9/2/1919; *Tribune*, 8/9/1919, 8/23/1919, 8/29/1919, 9/3/1919, 9/5/1919.

59. Arbitration Notice, 9/13/1919, DA #11855. The other companies were Iowa Dairy Separator Co., William Galloway Co., Armstrong Manufacturing Co., Blackhawk Manufacturing Co., Waterloo Cement Machinery Co., Headford Bros. & Hitchins, Novelty Wire Works, Dart Truck and Tractor Corp., Bovee Grinder and Furnace Works, Waterloo Foundry Co., Hawkeye Foundry, Sibert's White Laundry, and Model Laundry.

60. Reports to Deere & Company, 9/16/1919, 9/17/1919, DA #11836.

61. *Courier*, 9/16/1919.

Deere & Company had, in fact, realized early in 1919 that the labor situation at WGE was "ripe for some difficulty." Management thought that the situation would be corrected by relying on the individual contract, discontinuing the practice of cutting piece rates, and adding Deere & Company sick benefits, insurance, and death and disability benefits. But the company had experienced serious quality control problems prior to the strike, the plant did not have a good purchasing program, and recordkeeping was shoddy, resulting in disrupted production. Accumulation of an excessive inventory of tractors forced a reduction of the work force from about 1,600 to about 1,100 in March. Management had even considered closing the plant temporarily in April. Instead, production was cut. The way those drastic changes were handled created an environment in which "outside organizers" could influence the employees.⁶²

The arbitration board's report, completed on September 17, reflected some of these problems. It pointed out that the findings might have been different if the company had been willing to participate, but the evidence that was presented indicated that the company was at fault for the strike. Wages were inadequate, the company had broken contracts with workers, and it was indifferent to grievances. The issue of a closed shop had nothing to do with the strike, in the arbitrators' opinion. The report concluded, "The cause of this strike, from the evidence submitted, seems wholly due to grievances that should have had sympathetic consideration on the part of the employer." The board urged the factory to reopen, allow workers to "return on terms of self-respect," settle grievances, and establish easier "avenues of access to the business office." The board invited management to meet with the workers to discuss the issues.⁶³

WGE had known all along, as had everyone else, that the board's decision would not be binding, so there was no reason to participate. Although the arbitration board downplayed the issues of collective bargaining and closed shops, they were cru-

62. Waterloo Gasoline Engine Co. Report Year Ended October 31, 1918, DA #2658; Waterloo Gasoline Engine Co. Report Year Ended October 31, 1919, DA #2659; Deere & Company Blue Bulletin No. 301, 7/8/1919.

63. *Courier*, 9/16/1919, 9/18/1919; *Tribune*, 9/17/1919.

cial to the employers. In fact, the most important area of disagreement between labor and management was the question of collective bargaining. Management opposed it adamantly. The WGE statement released on July 31 clearly rejected it. The laundry owners were willing to make wage concessions, but would not accept collective bargaining. Once they were struck, they demanded that employees give up union memberships as a condition of employment.

The question of closed shops versus open shops was even more divisive. On August 7 the factories' position statement published in the *Courier* had claimed that to grant the closed shop would be to "sound the death knell" of the plants in six months. The Central Labor Union responded on August 19 with its own statement: no agreement presented to the manufacturers called for a closed shop, but the manufacturers wanted the public to think so.⁶⁴

The reactions to the arbitration board's report were predictable. The Central Labor Union formally endorsed it while John E. Johnson said there was nothing in the report that required a response from the company. He also pointed out that the factory was running and open to any employee who wanted to return to work under prevailing conditions. The WMA decided to support the decision to provide no rebuttal.⁶⁵

ONE OF THE NOTEWORTHY THINGS about the strikes was the relative lack of violence even though the possibility was real and each side had tried to use the threat of it to its advantage. Management, at least at WGE, expected it.⁶⁶ Incidents took place from the beginning. The streetcar brawls of August 16 caused real excitement as did additional physical encounters on August 19. Those events prompted big ads in the *Tribune* and *Courier* on August 21 and 26 in which the manufacturers claimed that the streets were unsafe for workers trying to get to their jobs. The violence and intimidation, they claimed, was caused

64. *Courier*, 8/8/1919, 8/19/1919; Special Report, 8/24/1919, DA #11842.

65. Report to Deere & Company, 9/18/1919, DA #11836; *Courier*, 9/18/1919.

66. J. E. Johnson to Leon Clausen, 8/9/1919, DA #11855; Johnson to Walter Brown, 8/8/1919, DA #11855.

by a few agitators, some from outside the community.⁶⁷ On September 19 the sheriff reported that men carrying suitcases, under Abbey's control, were to arrive the following week to get into the plants to blow them up; WGE officials, to their credit, did not believe that local labor leaders would use such tactics.⁶⁸ In reality, there was not much violence, but the criminal proceedings that resulted attracted considerable attention and were used by the machinists' union to try to mobilize public support.

There were several trials, some relating to alleged violations of the injunctions and others the result of arrests for violence. The significance to both sides was that the proceedings were of great interest to the public. An example was the trial of Clair Bloomfield in early September in municipal court. An Iowa Dairy Separator Company employee, he was charged with assault and battery on a foreman, who had been driving his car pool when attacked by a group of men. Bloomfield was accused of jumping on the running board of the car and attempting to drag the foreman from the car. Harry Reed, J. E. Jordan, and J. C. Murtagh, attorneys provided by the machinists' union, represented Bloomfield; Abbey, acting in an advisory capacity, was seated with the lawyers. Evidently Murtagh's speech to the jury was a fiery one, containing his opinions about organized labor and the strike situation, because when he finished, the spectators, mostly strikers, "broke into cheers, hand clapping, shrill whistles and cat calls, while the more excitable stamped their feet and threw their hats in the air." The case was turned over to the jury at 4:30 p.m., and the guilty verdict was returned at 7:05. When court reconvened the next day, Bloomfield was sentenced to the maximum: \$100 and costs or 30 days in jail.⁶⁹ He did not, by its make-up, have an unsympathetic jury; the testimony made it clear that he was guilty. The strike leaders used the trial as an opportunity for Murtagh to speak stirringly about the strike, and the trial was covered extensively in the newspapers.

Some of the same individuals were involved in legal proceedings resulting from violations of the injunctions that the

67. *Courier*, 8/1/1919, 8/5/1919; *Tribune*, 8/6/1919.

68. Report to Deere & Company, 9/19/1919, DA #11836.

69. *Tribune*, 9/3/1919, 9/4/1919, 9/5/1919; *Courier*, 9/4/1919.

manufacturers had secured. Three had been arrested for contempt of court as well as for assault after the August 16 streetcar incidents. The trials provided Murtagh and the union's other lawyers another forum to speak for labor's cause; they did not bother to dispute the fact that the injunction had been violated. The proceedings against these men began in mid-August and finally concluded at the end of September, when they pled guilty to contempt. An attorney representing WGE demanded a jail term for the offenders. When the judge imposed a \$50 fine as sentence, another attorney for the company demanded that the offenders go to jail until their fines were paid. F. H. Mulholland, a Toledo, Ohio, attorney, provided by the IAM, convinced the judge, however, to allow the men some time to raise the money, since, he pointed out, "As a rule men who have been on strike for over eight weeks do not carry \$50 about in their pockets."⁷⁰

It was October before the legal wrangling over the various assault, illegal assembly, and injunction violation charges ended. It was clear from the testimony that the strike really had been quite peaceful. It was also obvious that the newspaper coverage had kept the community well informed about what was going on in the courtrooms.

WORKERS began returning to work in increasing numbers after September 19 at all of the plants while others continued to try to reach a settlement with the employers. The WMA kept pressuring members to hold firm, pointing out that the workers who had remained loyal and on the job considered it unfair to negotiate with the strikers. The group also insisted that none of the returning workers be union members, and all were required to sign individual contracts. Although the WMA considered bringing in strikebreakers at that juncture, reports that they were receiving indicated that the strikers considered their cause lost and were ready to return to work on any terms.⁷¹

By late September, things were dismal for the strikers. The machinists' union advised them that there were no more funds

70. *Tribune*, 9/30/1919; *Courier*, 8/19/1919.

71. Reports to Deere & Company, 9/19/1919, 9/20/1919, 9/22/1919, 9/23/1919, 9/25/1919, DA #11836; Tally sheet, 10/21/1919, DA #11849.



Waterloo office force, undated. Seated, left to right: L. A. Paradise, Lou B. Witry, J. E. Johnson, Allen Head. Paradise was named superintendent of the John Deere Tractor Company in 1918. Courtesy of John Deere.

available for use in the court battles that were taking place. F. H. Mulholland, the IAM's attorney, reportedly said that the strike was lost and that he was leaving town. Foundries at Bovee Grinder and Furnace Works, Headford Foundry, Interstate Foundry, and WGE were all running on a limited basis. The WMA continued efforts to get employees, especially teamsters, to sign individual contracts.⁷²

Once it became clear that the strike was ending, Deere & Company, unhappy with the leadership provided by John Johnson and Lou Witry, announced management changes at WGE. Allen Head replaced Johnson as general manager on October 1, and Witry was relieved of his duties as manager of factory operations.⁷³

72. Reports to Deere & Company, 9/26/1919, 9/29/1919, 9/30/1919, 10/3/1919, 10/4/1919, 10/7/1919, 10/9/1919, 10/10/1919, 10/11/1919, 10/13/1919, 10/17/1919, 10/22/1919, DA #11836.

73. Waterloo Gasoline Engine Co. Report Year Ended October 31, 1919, DA #2659; *John Deere Magazine*, November 1919; Minutes, Waterloo Gasoline

By mid-October workers were returning to all of the plants as fast as they could be handled; union leaders reportedly were encouraging them to do so. Pickets appeared to be on duty only to qualify for strike benefits. The coal and ice companies were successful in forcing individual contracts on their teamsters. By October 20, when Abbey left to get some rest, the manufacturers were satisfied that the strike was over. They did not think Abbey would return. Pickets were almost completely absent by October 27; only a very few of the "radicals and old-timers" attended the morning strikers' meetings. WGE readjusted wage rates upward on November 3; by then, management had met individually with all employees.⁷⁴

By mid-November, the strikes were over and the reorganization of the WMA into the Waterloo Industrial Association was complete. Membership was open to any industrial or commercial business employing five or more people. Mayor R. C. Thompson resigned in mid-November in the wake of a furor involving women and a party. He was replaced by T. E. Leeper, an alderman who, from management's point of view, could "be depended upon to enforce the laws in a forcible and fair manner." The Central Labor Union sent a letter to other labor organizations in the state instructing them to cease mail contributions to the strike fund. By mid-December, all plants were operating with full work forces. Organized labor was beaten.⁷⁵

THE WATERLOO STRIKES of 1919 failed for several reasons. First, the strike fund was insufficient. Several non-striking unions made pledges: Illinois Central Railroad workers, Rath Packing Company employees, printers, barbers, city firemen, and teamsters. Money was also pledged from other sources: the Salvation Army, the Cedar Rapids Federation of Labor, and labor organi-

Engine Co., 10/3/1919, DA #1171; Deere & Company Blue Bulletin No. 314, 10/7/1919.

74. Reports to Deere & Company, 10/13/1919, 10/14/1919, 10/17/1919, 10/20/1919, 10/22/1919, 10/24/1919, 10/27/1919, 11/4/1919, 11/10/1919, 11/15/1919, DA #11836; Clausen, "The Right of Individual Contract."

75. Reports to Deere & Company, 11/15/1919, 11/18/1919, 11/19/1919, 11/20/1919, 11/22/1919, 12/4/1919, 12/10/1919, 12/14-25/1919, DA #11836; *Courier*, 12/28/1919, 4/7/1920; *Cedar Rapids Tribune*, 1/16/1920.

zations in Oelwein. But pledges were not always met. By mid-September, the strike fund was low, with demands for benefits exceeding revenues, and by the end of the month it was empty. By October, Local 314 and the Central Labor Union had split as the Central determined that the machinists' strike was lost. Local 314 remained officially on strike into the spring of 1920, with about 30 "old men" refusing to return, but the local was in debt and defeated.⁷⁶

The inability of Local 314 to mobilize a broader spectrum of Waterloo's workers also helps explain why the strike failed. The machinists instigated the strikes, but in order to succeed they needed the total support of the Waterloo Central Labor Union. That support was lukewarm at best. When the Central Labor Union, and then the Iowa State Federation of Labor, withdrew all financial support, the machinists were left standing alone, and their strike failed. The only glimmer of hope came when the laundry workers went on strike. Leon Clausen correctly believed that they went on strike as part of the attempt to institute a general strike.⁷⁷

One of the striking machinists' objectives, and ultimately their only real hope for victory, was to organize a general strike. On July 31 C. H. Milnes, business agent for Local 314, predicted that there would be "a general sympathetic strike affecting every concern in the city employing union labor," and Abbey thought Waterloo was "ripe" for a general strike. The success of a general strike depended on the support of the Central Labor Union. But on July 31 its president, T. N. Stufflebeam, doubted "that at this time a general strike would hasten the conciliation." By August 7 it was clear that the Central Labor Union would not call a general strike. According to Stufflebeam, "Should a general strike be called and the strikers fail to win, Waterloo would suffer the consequences. Every union man in the city probably would move where labor conditions are

76. *Tribune*, 8/5/1919, 8/7/1919, 8/9/1919, 8/13/1919, 8/14/1919; *Courier*, 8/5/1919, 8/15/1919, 8/16/1919, 8/20/1919, 8/25/1919; Special Report, 8/24/1919, DA #11842; *Oelwein Labor Journal*, 9/29/1919, 10/15/1919; *Cedar Rapids Tribune*, 1/16/1920; "We Demand Justice," DA #11854.

77. Clausen, "The Right of Individual Contract."

more equitable. And the town would be flooded with foreigners and hoodlums.”⁷⁸

The success of a general strike in Waterloo depended in large part on what the 1,200 workers at Illinois Central Railroad would do. But rail workers nationwide were involved in a labor dispute involving the federal government, and they needed the approval of their international union to strike, so they did not join the Waterloo strike. In August there had been unsuccessful attempts to organize retail store clerks, cooks and waiters, bakers and confectioners, and “servant girls.” Members of the local Typographical Union were not willing to strike. Auto mechanics had no interest in organizing or striking since they already had better conditions and wages than those demanded by the unions. The same was true of Rath Packing Company employees. A strike by motion picture machine operators was averted when owners of the six theaters agreed to increase wages. When teamsters went on strike in mid-September, they were immediately fired; thereafter all teamsters were required to sign individual contracts.⁷⁹

By August 29 Stufflebeam reportedly was ready to work to end the strike. He claimed that the Central Labor Union had opposed the strike from the start, blaming it on Abbey and the machinists’ local. On September 17 a resolution advocating a general strike came up again at a Central Labor Union meeting but was voted down almost unanimously. The Central Labor Union’s failure to endorse a general strike hurt the machinists’ cause: they had to stand alone against the city’s powerful employers.⁸⁰

While labor in Waterloo was unable to present a united front, the employers did, thanks largely to the leadership of Deere & Company’s WGE. After the workers struck on July 31, the company released a statement printed in the newspapers that re-

78. *Courier*, 7/31/1919, 8/4/1919, 8/7/1919, 8/8/1919.

79. *Courier*, 8/4/1919, 8/8/1919, 8/16/1919, 9/1/1919; *Tribune*, 8/5/1919, 8/20/1919. The Illinois Central Railroad workers eventually became embroiled in a major, nationwide strike in 1922; see Davis, *Power at Odds*.

80. Clausen, “The Right of Individual Contract”; Report to Deere & Company, 8/29/1919, DA #11836; *Courier*, 9/18/1919.

mained the foundation of the employers' position.⁸¹ It clearly rejected collective bargaining and emphasized the "constitutional" rights of workers and management to negotiate individual contracts. On August 4 Leon Clausen explained to John Johnson how Deere & Company wanted the strike situation handled. All efforts to ensure law and order should be supported aggressively, but otherwise the company should adopt a passive stance. The shops were to be kept open with those people who were willing to work; should no one report to work the doors would be locked and watchmen hired. No replacement workers were to be hired. The statement issued on July 31 was to remain the official, and only, position. The employers' business policies were not subject to arbitration by any third party. "We will stand for our rights as employers and citizens regardless of the length of time it takes to establish those rights — whether it is one month, six months, one year or five years, and it will do no harm to have everybody in Waterloo understand this."⁸²

Prior to the strike, WGE employees had been required to sign a contract. It defined what the company would do: pay a specified hourly wage or a price for piece work (and not reduce them during the life of the contract), furnish employment as steadily as conditions permitted, comply with principles and rules as posted in the shops, pay one-quarter of the cost of the Sick Benefit Fund, and pay compensation for any work-related injuries according to Iowa law. The employee, in turn, was expected to "faithfully serve" the company during the period of the contract (unless prevented by illness or quitting), not join any "concerted action" to change hours, wages, or working conditions, preserve and care for company property, comply with principles and rules as posted in the shops, and accept compensation for any work-related injuries according to Iowa law.⁸³

Once WGE employees went on strike, Deere & Company began considering changes to the contract. By the time workers

81. *Courier*, 7/31/1919.

82. L. R. Clausen to J. E. Johnson, 8/4/1919, DA #11855.

83. For a sample contract, see DA #11863.



WGE employee picnic, ca. 1920. Courtesy of John Deere.

began returning, it had the wording perfected. There were significant changes. The company agreed that it would pay all costs for employees under the Deere & Company Death, Disability and Pension Fund (in addition to the one-quarter of the Sick Benefit costs). The employee's commitments remained the same except for a major addition: "That he is not now and will not become a member of a labor union or similar organization while in the employ of the Company."⁸⁴

The unbending opposition of the manufacturers, led by Deere & Company, to collective bargaining was the ultimate cause of the failure of the strikes in Waterloo in the fall of 1919. There was no record of success in long strikes in Waterloo, and there was no union tradition of enduring short-term personal hardships in return for long-term gains. As long as the strike fund provided a livelihood, the strikers stayed off their jobs. Organized labor had a problem that the IAM and the manufacturers no doubt, recognized: if strikers did not succeed in reaching their goals within about four weeks, they had a tendency

84. Drafts and the final version of the contract are in DA #11863. Deere & Company was slow to give up using individual contracts as the basis of its labor relations. In fact, not until 1939 did it begin dropping the clause requiring employees to pledge to not join any "concerted action" to change wages or other conditions of their contracts. Not until the World War II era did collective bargaining replace individual contracts at most Deere factories, including the one in Waterloo. *Moline Dispatch*, 8/24/1939. For an overview of Deere & Company industrial relations, see Wayne G. Broehl, *John Deere's Company* (New York, 1984).

to give up.⁸⁵ Had the strikes' organizers been able to generate enough support to organize a general strike, they might have been able to break the united front presented by management.

As a result of the strike, employers realized that they needed to deal fairly with workplace complaints to prevent future demands for collective bargaining. Deere & Company saw that some managers were unwilling or unable to adapt, so they were replaced. The company formalized its industrial relations policies and procedures in 1920 based on two cornerstones: employees must be treated well, and the open shop had to be maintained.⁸⁶

A major depression devastated the farm equipment industry shortly after the strikes ended in Waterloo. Deere & Company and its factory at Waterloo survived, and later thrived, continuing to fight against collective bargaining. Not until 1942, when Deere & Company's Waterloo employees chose the United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Implements Workers (CIO) to represent them (with the first collective bargaining contract signed in 1943), did a new era of industrial relations begin in Waterloo.⁸⁷ By then the struggle of 1919 had been long forgotten.

85. *Machinists Monthly Journal*, August 1919, 729.

86. See Deere & Company Factory Managers Meeting, 10/11-13/1920, DA #37741.

87. *Moline Dispatch*, 3/26/1943; *Courier*, 4/17/1967.