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***“Des Arbeiters Stärke”*: German-American
Brewery Owner-Worker Relations, 1860-1920**

The study of the industrial development of the United States is in large part an examination of transition in the economic and social fabric of the nation. In the space of a relative few years, manufactured output across the country evolved from individual handicraft to mass production, from utilizing the personal skill of the craftsman to supervising the design, installation and yield of time- and labor-saving, cost-efficient machines. Beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, German immigrants and their offspring played a primary role in the growth of the industrial base; in no field of business was their presence so pronounced, and their contributions so essential to the evolution of an industry, than in the field of malt beverage manufacture. A century and a half after their initial contributions, the names of the brewer barons remain legendary both in German immigration and American business lore: firms such as Anheuser-Busch, Pabst, Schlitz, Schaefer, and Stroh, among many others, continue to evoke images of great personal success and material prosperity. Yet for all the success, their triumph would have been unthinkable without a deep and strong work force to carry out the vast scope of the founders' dreams. The interrelationship of German-American brewery magnates and their workers illustrates the complicated evolution process of the Industrial Revolution, from their initial standing as friendly colleagues of a common ethnic background to that of bitter adversaries, separated by a wide gulf of conflicting interests and their respective economic status as haves and have-nots, and finally to a state of relative harmony based on the successful development of trade unions and the need to negotiate on matters of mutual concern. By the time brewing had become big business in America during the 1880s, its German character was assured in both fact and legend, but its evolution into a model for development of organized labor and the role of collective bargaining had just begun.

From a German-American perspective, and in contrast to future developments, the distinguishing characteristic of the American brewing industry before 1840 was that there were few Germans to be found. True to colonial settlement patterns, the vast majority of early American brewers were of British stock, working with colleagues of the same background and manufacturing traditional top-fermenting styles such as ale, porter, and stout in established eastern brewing centers such as New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. By the 1840s, however, an increasing influx of German

immigrants brought considerable upheaval to the established order. First, the arrival of the Germans and their subsequent migration westward aided in opening up the frontiers of the nation generally, and in establishing both new markets and production centers for malt beverage specifically. Second, the swelling number of immigrants offered a new and sizable pool of willing labor, which in turn transformed the character of the brewery workplace. Third, and most importantly, the immigrants brought with them a taste for a new style of brewing and aging beer, one which would transform the landscape of the brewing industry for the next century and a half and give it its famous German heritage. The precise origins of lager beer are unknown and have been the subject of considerable debate; the most widely believed account holds that, after its initial development in the German-speaking area of Europe, the product first surfaced in America in Philadelphia in 1840, and was widely adopted by brewers across the nation over the next two decades, to the point that ale production was rapidly curtailed and became virtually extinct outside the east coast by the late 1860s.

Mid- to late-nineteenth-century statistical data provide definitive evidence that German immigrants had achieved dominance in the brewery setting. In 1870 a total of 488 persons were employed as brewers and maltsters in Cincinnati, of whom 330 were natives of Germany and only 119 native-born Americans. Throughout Ohio, the state with the second-highest number of brewery workers overall (1,744), a similar tendency was reflected in other communities with a large German population; in 1870 breweries and malt manufacturers there employed 1,342 workers,¹ 927 of whom were born in Germany compared with 261 native-born Americans.² National figures indicated the same trend: by 1870 German-born brewers outnumbered the American-born by almost three-to-one, at 6,780 to 2,715,³ a gap which narrowed only slightly by 1880 at 9,925 to 4,057.

Generally speaking, early relations between German-American brewery owners and their laborers were cordial, an extension of ethnic bonds forged through a shared immigrant experience. Through the middle of the nineteenth century brewing entrepreneurs and employees labored "so to speak, side by side, and the workmen felt a kind of kinship with the owners. This continued to be true (or perhaps was even more to the point) when the lager brewers from Germany began their operations in various parts of the country."⁴ Many owners and upper-level managers were known to spend evenings in the company of their workers in brewery-owned or leased saloons, discussing all manner of personal and professional business over more than a few products they had manufactured. The amicable nature of the relations was confirmed in a 1910 narrative, provided by owners in the United States Brewers Association:

Before the organization of labor unions the employing brewers in the smaller cities maintained a sort of patriarchal relation toward their workmen, eating with them at the same table and otherwise treating them as members of their household. In the larger cities the relation between employer and employed was not quite so close and intimate; but the friendly feeling between them was no less sincere.⁵

Ironically, one early factor which drove a wedge between German-American brewery owners and their workers was the notion of close personal space, specifically the issue of company-sponsored housing. The arrangement initially was well-received by the workers, especially by recent immigrants who were in need of a dwelling in an unfamiliar location and, once gainfully employed in the brewery setting, wanted to live close to other, familiar employees of the firm. Yet over time many came to see the move as a maneuver by management to control wages and thus limit the earning power of workers. Others noted that it placed labor at a personal disadvantage, in that it made them overly reliant upon their employers and thus allowed brewery owners a certain measure of control over the personal lives of their workers, as well as the unwelcome opportunity to monitor employees during their off hours.

A second, and more substantial, point of dispute between German-American brewery owners and their laborers concerned the notoriously long amount of time spent in the workplace and the harsh working conditions that often came with it. Into the 1870s brewery employees on a standard schedule commonly worked at least six days per week and at least twelve hours per day, frequently as many as fourteen or sixteen during the busy spring and summer season. According to a 1934 appraisal, in a typical 1870s brewery "work began at five o'clock in the morning, and with the exception of an hour for breakfast and for dinner, it lasted until six in the evening. At eight the men went to work again, in order to finish their floor and kiln work, which lasted until half past nine or ten o'clock."⁶ As late as 1908 the average brewery worker was committed to his labor a minimum of eight to nine hours per day, with watchmen and ice pullers averaging 10.6 and 11.7 hours respectively.⁷ In extreme cases the long hours were made worse by physical mistreatment: during the late 1870s accusations grew more frequent that foremen abused their workers, in a virtual peasant-and-serf relationship that brought an abrupt end to the personal relationship of years past between the laborers and their bosses. A 1910 account of the situation in a pro-labor publication painted a dramatic portrait of culpability on the part of ownership as well as factory management:

The condition of the brewery workmen in America before their organization was as bad as can be imagined. It was not only that the wages paid were the smallest possible and that the working time was confined only by the natural limits of human endurance, but besides this the treatment of the workmen was of such a kind that it seems impossible today to understand how they could submit to it. Cuffs and blows were everyday occurrences. When the brewery owner developed into a great capitalist, he transferred to his foremen the privilege of beating the men which he had formerly exercised in person, and the foremen continued to use it until the brewery workmen through their organization freed themselves from this remnant of the barbarism of the Middle Ages.⁸

An additional tactic allegedly employed by members of management to maintain control of their workers was to make available copious quantities of free beer, at regular

intervals throughout the day.⁹ Years later a brewery union publication echoed the charge in its own forum:

One thing the brewery owners were generous with, and that was beer. They urged the workers to drink unlimited quantities of that beverage, as the hard labor and unbearable conditions to which they were subjected would have caused a revolt of the workers much earlier if their minds were not kept in a continuous fog by the enormous consumption of the liquid. But even here the generosity of the employers was not exactly open-handed. Usually the amount of free beer furnished the workers was taken into consideration when fixing wages.¹⁰

Technological advancement also had a profound effect upon the brewery workplace and brewery labor, providing an additional source of contention between brewery workers and owners. The concept of the modern brewery began in earnest during the 1870s, when a host of inventions helped brewers to rapidly modernize and become more efficient. Innovations such as elevators, hoists, pumps, and mechanical keg scrubbers, not to mention the implementation of electric power and the use of artificial refrigeration, had a revolutionary impact upon the ability of a given brewery to expand and maximize profit potential in rapid order. The changes made brewery work more standardized, less tedious, and more cost effective, but there was also a significant disadvantage to the new developments: the need for workers to monitor and impact the brewing process was reduced, with the result that manpower could be redistributed or eliminated. Production costs dropped and profits rose, but friction between management and labor rose appreciably as workers perceived the obvious: machines began to replace many traditionally human functions in a modernized brewery. In subsequent years labor supporters cited evidence that the ratio of capital investment to labor costs in Cincinnati breweries had risen from 7.4-to-one in 1860 to 8.4-to-one in 1890,¹¹ though management sources countered with census figures showing that the number of brewery workers nationwide had risen significantly despite mechanization, from 2,347 in 1850 to 12,443 by 1870 and 26,220 a decade later.¹² The ensuing debate made further evident that German-American brewery workers felt increasingly detached from the employers with whom they had once been so close, due to markedly different wants and needs.

By the 1870s workers had become well aware of the substantial wealth earned by brewery owners, in stark contrast to their own situation. With increasing frequency, labor responded by demanding what it believed to be a more equitable share of the rewards of success, after having been compensated at a modest level in previous decades. In 1840, about the time when the German element began to dominate the landscape of American brewing, a typical brewery worker earned between four and six dollars per week without board and from four to twelve dollars per month with board and washing. A decade later the situation was virtually identical: in 1850 Cincinnati brewery employees earned a median wage of \$278.00 per year—a deceptively high level due to the inclusion of brewery officials and foremen, who were paid considerably more

money—and by the time board and other expenses were deducted from wages, many workers received less than twelve dollars, and as few as four, in their monthly pay packet.¹³ By 1860 the cost of Cincinnati brewery labor had risen to an average of \$388.93 per employee per year—forty dollars more than the statewide level¹⁴—and by 1870 area brewery worker wages had increased to \$543 per year, about \$1.80 per day based on a 300-day work year.¹⁵ In spite of that, the compensation was notably lower than that of many other laborers during the same period: brewery workers received less pay than did most other skilled workers and earned only marginally more than unskilled day laborers.¹⁶ In New York, “shortly before 1880,” the average monthly wage for brewery workers was \$40.00 to \$55.00—higher than the \$35.00 to \$40.00 figure typical in less densely populated areas of the country—before a standard \$5.00 per week deduction for board.¹⁷ In Milwaukee, Frederick Miller proudly wrote in 1879 that the men in his brewery were paid “\$700, \$650, \$480 [per year]; six drivers received between \$480 and \$540; and the maltsters \$600,” with benefits that included free meals for all workers and, excepting the foreman, subsidized bed and lodging at a minuscule rate of \$15 per year.¹⁸

Such generosity aside, and faced with what they increasingly regarded as a hostile working environment, brewery labor became increasingly tempted to form collective unions, in an effort to gain concessions from owners and management with regard to working hours, workplace conditions, and wage levels.¹⁹ The first rudimentary attempt by brewery workers to unionize took place in St. Louis on May 10, 1850, when a mass meeting of German workingmen sought consensus on the notion of establishing an “association” of trades represented within local breweries. Though the attempt failed to bear fruit, it did establish an important precedent that would be expanded upon in subsequent years. In 1852 primarily German brewery workers in Cincinnati formed a mutual aid society, designed to provide assistance in the event of sickness, death, or debilitating injury; the effort was followed by a similar organization in New York in 1860.²⁰ German brewery workers also banded together in Cleveland, forming the *Bierbrauer Unterstützungsverein* in 1872, although the organization appeared less interested in improving the lot of workers than in celebrating the flowering brewing trade in the city: in one noteworthy case, an 1873 parade featured brewery workers from throughout Ohio who, trailing a German marching band, made ample stops along the way to sample the wares of area beer gardens and make the occasional fiery speech against temperance fanatics.²¹ In many cases particular emphasis was given to the needs of immigrant labor, where often lonely and friendless workers were disproportionately affected and organizers obligingly stressed that “it is the duty of every father of a family to make provision for protecting those dependent upon him when he himself is not in a position to earn their daily bread.”²²

The Civil War brought cessation to most activities related to organizing brewery labor, as many workers took up arms during the conflict and those who remained behind or replaced them saw the impracticality of emphasizing personal and professional need in a time of national conflict. In August 1866 brewery labor reasserted its principles, when it piggybacked upon a general convention of workingmen in Baltimore, which held as its primary aim a reduction of the working day to eight

hours. Substantial nationwide pressure brought the demands to the attention of political leaders, who pushed the initiative through the United States Congress in 1868—a presidential election year with many Congressional seats also up for vote—although soon thereafter the measure was overturned in the courts. For the remainder of the 1860s and much of the next decade, brewery workplace conditions went virtually unchanged.²³

Bolstered by their persuasive powers in political circles, German laborers took the lead during the 1870s to establish a viable labor movement. In 1872 German workers in New York were instrumental in bringing about a walkout of over 100,000 men in the trades industry.²⁴ The measure did not go unnoticed in other centers of labor, nor did brewery workers fail to recognize the significance of the development. After a slack period of agitation, caused in large part by a severe nationwide economic downturn during the early- to mid-1870s, brewery labor refocused its efforts to band together, and following failed attempts in other brewing centers in 1877 and 1878, workers in Cincinnati established the *Brauer Gesellen Union*—the first organization in the United States dedicated exclusively to brewery labor concerns—in December 1879.²⁵ The extent to which workers were willing to risk alienating management and become active members stood to determine how successful the union would be in presenting a united front in negotiations and gaining concessions; given the increasing level of dissatisfaction with ownership felt by labor, membership drives enjoyed considerable success during the 1880s.

In what amounted to a test case for other fledgling brewery unions, in 1881 the *Brauer Gesellen Union* confronted Cincinnati brewery ownership for the first time, making four primary demands that subsequently would be echoed in other brewing centers across the nation: 1) a reduction of the workday from thirteen hours to ten-and-three-quarters; 2) a sixty-dollar-per-month minimum wage; 3) freedom for employees to obtain lodging on their own; and 4) a Sunday reduction in hours from eight to four, including a twenty-five cents per hour overtime bonus should the need for extra work arise.²⁶ In contrast, an organization representing management—the Cincinnati Brewers' Association—proposed a standard twelve-hour work day, the only concession owners were willing to make; wages were to be left to the discretion of the individual breweries and Sunday hours were deemed non-negotiable.²⁷ Further discussion failed to prompt a solution, and as a result the union called a strike and proclaimed a member boycott against non-union beer, defined as product from breweries with a union membership rate of less than fifty percent. In short order previously cordial relations among the German brewers and laborers suffered irreparable damage, each side feeling threatened and alienated by the other as employees attempted to improve their compensation and working conditions while owners tried to maintain the status quo.

In early negotiations between brewery labor and management, the law of supply and demand ultimately had much more to do with the relative success or failure experienced by the union and its workers. In spite of historically empathetic feelings many brewery owners had for their workers on a personal level, they made a point of addressing their business needs first, clearly showing how they had become successful

entrepreneurs in the first place: during an 1888 strike, Cincinnati brewer John Hauck openly expressed the widely held viewpoint that “the laborer is worthy of his hire” and no more.²⁸ Seven years earlier, in the midst of the 1881 strike, fellow Cincinnati brewery owner Christian Moerlein had made a similar break with his own longtime workers, stating to a local newspaper that the labor situation would be resolved quickly and clearly implying that those employees who failed to accept terms proposed by brewery management could—and would—be promptly replaced, all sentimentality aside:

“We sent for some brewers and they were to leave New York to-night.”

“To whom did you send?”

“The Brewers’ Association.”

“How many of them are there?”

“About sixty.”

“What do you pay them?”

“Ten dollars apiece.”

“But what wages?”

“Oh, the same that we paid the brewers who struck—the old wages.”

“Are they skilled workmen?”

“Of course. All good, competent men to do the difficult part of beer brewing.”

“Then there will be no further trouble about the strike?”

“Oh, no; they’ll go right to work. We shan’t take the old men back. We will have hands enough.”

“Then there will be no trouble about the supply of beer? No danger of a failure of crop, so to speak?”

“Not the slightest. We’ll make all the beer that’s wanted, and the public need not be afraid.”

“Do you anticipate any trouble?”

“Oh, no; I think not.”²⁹

The Moerlein perspective was hardly an isolated one. Fellow German brewer Conrad Windisch appeared equally indifferent both to the arrival of the New York workers and the fate of his own employees, stating to a reporter “I think they come too late. It makes no difference; I will get along all right. I guess if they strike I will get our old hands; some that will go to work.”³⁰ It soon became clear that brewers nationwide enjoyed considerable success in early skirmishes: in 1888 the Gambrinus Assembly of the Knights of Labor—the formal union into which the Cleveland *Bierbrauer Unterstützungsverein* had evolved by June 1886—received a report lamenting that “only on the Pacific Coast, in Cleveland, and in Syracuse was the condition of the union a good one.”³¹

The apparent indifference by brewers to the welfare of their workers was but one measure successfully employed in efforts to thwart walkouts. Striking employees frequently were blacklisted by brewery owners, ensuring that they would not be able to find employment elsewhere if they did not return on terms proposed by the brewers. Unsubtle pressure also was applied to saloonkeepers—whose own business

disagreements with brewery management often were no less vitriolic—to join in on the side of the brewers by shutting their doors to striking or blacklisted workers and lobbying accusations that union beers were of inferior quality. The measure provided at least a partial defense against the lone effective tactic utilized by the workmen, the boycott of nonunion beer at area drinking establishments—no small consideration given that many brewery employees reputedly were “in the habit of taking from 30 to 80 glasses of the amber fluid every day.”³²

Despite occasional small triumphs, primarily in slight reductions in the length of the workday and gaining minimum salary concessions, brewery labor continued to come out on the losing end of protracted battles with management as the 1880s came to a close. With a large migrant work force at their disposal, generally favorable media coverage, thousands of barrels of beer in reserve, and the grudging support of many saloons, the brewers consistently showed a greater capacity to withstand a lengthy work stoppage and made full use of their position of strength. In short order labor—invariably facing a lack of funds, dwindling morale, and an inability to resolve the problem of replacement workers—gave in to the brewers and returned to work on terms similar, if not identical, to those under which it had walked out in the first place. There were, however, exceptions to the rule. An 1886 brewery workers' strike in Chicago was settled quickly when local brewery owners, fearful of a repeat of a Milwaukee general strike in May that resulted in considerable violence, compromised on several long-held negotiating positions and forged an amicable agreement that reduced the workday to ten hours in length (four on Sunday) and increased brewery wages to between \$60.00 and \$85.00 per month for skilled laborers, with the side benefit that the brewery *Sternwirt* (hospitality room) would continue to serve workers with quart-sized glasses of beer five times per day, at 6, 9, and 11 a.m. as well as 2 and 4 p.m., although only three glasses of beer would be allowed per break period.³³

Generally speaking, during the 1880s negotiations between brewery management and labor were characterized by a lack of unity and organization on the part of the workers and their union representation, which made it easier for brewery management to gain favorable terms in times of dispute. Recognizing its primary source of weakness, the lack of a clear plan for dealing with brewery owners, labor grew in strength and resolve during the early 1890s and after it adopted a more unified approach to negotiations over wages and working conditions. In 1886 the organization later named the Brewery Workmen's National Union held its first convention and in September 1889 brought its annual meeting to Cincinnati. With only eleven delegates and twenty-three local unions represented, and just \$300 in the organizational treasury, optimism was limited even among its most ardent followers. But by the time the convention returned to the city in September 1896, the strength of the national union had grown appreciably: 104 local unions—including twenty-two new collectives during the previous year—featured a total of 8,072 paid members. Encouraged by their strengthened standing, labor leaders used the 1896 meeting to rail against the German brewer barons:

... the times for the laboring class in general grew worse, while on the other hand the boss brewers grew richer and indeed some of them became multiple-millionaires. ... The advantages accruing from the invention of more labor-saving machineries, instead of being shared by the whole human race, are tending to increase the army of unemployed and the wage-earners are being robbed of the products of their labor by trusts and monopolies.³⁴

Ongoing discord between management and workers contributed to an economic stagnation of the brewing industry in several key production centers during the 1890s, which in turn complicated recovery efforts that depended upon mutual cooperation. Relations between the two sides, still tense from conflict during the previous decade, reached a breaking point when more unified labor boycotts translated into gains for the union position. By the end of the decade an additional unwelcome complication arose through the fragmentation of the brewery workplace, in which individual craft workers received strike rights in matters of dispute. The need for brewery owners to negotiate on multiple fronts complicated bargaining work and made more difficult the possibility of arriving at a cordial agreement. As labor gradually began to gain an advantage in negotiations, management felt an acute economic impact and increasingly was obliged to deal with workers from a position of weakness. One key to future victories by organized labor was the ability of pro-union interests to purchase outright individual breweries and turn them into strategic outposts against collusion by other brewery owners. In one noteworthy example, in 1888 a conglomeration of roughly 150 local saloonkeepers—disgruntled with the tactics of the brewery owners and thus receptive to union overtures—raised \$80,000 and purchased the Banner Brewing Company in Cincinnati. Faced with threats by the Brewers Association to cut prices in order to weaken and close the brewery, Banner director Conrad Burkhauser promptly laid off nonunion employees and hired union workers.³⁵ When the Schaller Brewing Company joined Banner as a union shop in December 1891, labor activists intensified their efforts to win support among other, allied sectors; aware of an eroding base of support, by mid-1892 eight Cincinnati breweries had contracted with the union, while at least sixteen others reached agreement in principle on several provisions of a new contractual proposal. To a considerable extent the decision by owners to soften their anti-union stance was influenced by owner-labor relations in other important brewing centers. During the late 1880s and early 1890s Milwaukee brewery management and labor swiftly and amicably concluded negotiations when it became apparent that a strong union offered mutual benefits in an increasingly diverse work environment:

A primary necessity for such orderly bargaining was a strong union. Brewers ... were no more anxious to divide authority over labor conditions with a union than were other employers, but the Milwaukee firms were quicker than many in recognizing the advantage of having contented workers and a responsible union leadership that could handle intercraft disputes.³⁶

In subsequent years Chicago brewers also fell into line with the new order, concluding a contract with labor in 1904 that was considered liberal even by the changing standards of the time and featuring—in addition to now-standard concessions on wages and length of the workday—the establishment of a seven-man arbitration board which included three representatives from both the management and union sides along with a neutral seventh participant.³⁷

Labor quickly hailed the new agreements as *de facto* recognition of its importance to the industry, and noted with evident pride what it had accomplished across the nation and in a relatively short period of time. Many brewers now agreed to give hiring preference to union members, a measure that increased membership and minimized a significant source of friction: brewery use of nonunion replacement, “scab” workers. Laborers were given greater freedom to seek housing of their own choice, which lessened reliance upon the employer. Work forces were rotated in the event of layoffs. Workdays were shortened from fourteen to ten hours in length, with Sunday work not exceeding three hours and extra pay for weekend assignments. Progress was made regarding wage levels and job security, and arbitration boards were designated to hear grievances, including two arbiters from each side and a fifth, mutually agreeable neutral observer. The presence of women and children in the workplace, performing potentially hazardous labor for significantly less pay than their adult male colleagues, would decline in subsequent years, aided in part by new child-labor laws and their increasingly rigid enforcement. Additionally, labor managed to safeguard access to free beer on the job, a cherished right of the brewery workplace, earlier reports of product misuse notwithstanding.³⁸

As a result of such agreements, German-American brewery owners and their employees maintained favorable relations for the remainder of the pre-Prohibition period, even finding common ground on several potentially turbulent issues. Seeking a safe haven for business investments, British speculators made extensive efforts during the late 1880s and 1890s to purchase American breweries at exorbitant prices and incorporate them into a series of English-run syndicates. Fearful of a loss of independence at the executive level and employment within the breweries, owners and workers frequently fought against the proposal in unison, often expressing in no uncertain terms what they thought of the British financiers. Interestingly, some German-American brewery leaders were more thoughtful in their reactions, noting that certain benefits might be derived from English entry into the market. Prominent Cincinnati brewer Henry Muhlhauser—mindful of a growing prohibitionist sentiment and the harsh ethnic overtones against the German element that often came with it—declined to sell, but nevertheless expressed a sympathetic viewpoint on British investment, as a way to “divide the onus of the profession between two nationalities” and distance the German element slightly from its stereotypical association with beer brewing and consumption.³⁹ Christian Moerlein painted the rejection of a \$5,000,000 offer for his brewery in a patriotic light, telling a local newspaper that the business would not join an English syndicate “as long as any of the present owners, all of whom are in the Moerlein family, are alive, and no one else can get into it. This is an American brewery and shall never pass into the hands of the British.”⁴⁰

Despite some differences of opinion on the issue of British investment, brewery owners and workers unquestionably found common ground on the prohibition issue. As early as the 1850s German-American lager brewers, their workers, and their patrons felt the sting of an organized anti-immigrant program, put forth during the nativist ("Know Nothing") movement of the period and which motivated ethnic Germans to respond in kind, in order to safeguard the cherished concept of personal freedom and a significant source of cultural identity—not to mention a substantial wellspring of economic revenue.⁴¹ Over the next half century efforts to persuade ethnic Germans and other drinkers to distance themselves from alcohol on moral grounds proved fruitless; as a result anti-alcohol agitators turned toward legislation as the best means to bring about the drink reform they believed necessary. By the early 1910s, with public sentiment and political leadership increasingly leaning in favor of national prohibition, brewers and German-American societies nationwide joined forces to show the economic ramifications of dry laws upon ownership and labor, emphasizing that such a measure would disproportionately affect German-American interests. An October 1910 publication of the *Deutsche Schützen-Gesellschaft* of Covington, Kentucky indicated that the federal government collected some \$80,000,000 in taxes through beer sales during 1909. In a specific appeal for the support of laborers, the DSG reported that American brewery workers earned two to three times as much money per day as their counterparts in Germany, and that breweries employed more workers and salesmen, utilized more raw ingredients, supported more secondary industries, and possessed more real estate than other comparable industries. The clear inference was that a termination of such vital activity, involving over 1,500 breweries and 50,000 employees across the nation, would have devastating financial consequences for all involved.⁴²

In the course of occasional conflicts which continued to affect German-American brewery management-labor relations, workers' unions earned further concessions during the early twentieth century, most notably in connection with compensation and working hours: by 1910 an average brewery wash house worker earned \$17.00 per week, while brewers and cellar, kettle department, and fermenting room labor took home approximately \$18.00. Engineers were the highest-paid workers, at roughly \$20.00 each week, while less specialized employees earned between \$15.00 and \$17.50. Workdays had been lowered to between eight and nine hours, with time-and-a-half given for overtime in addition to increases in minimum weekly wages.⁴³ By 1920 the figures had grown still further, with the average brewer earning \$21.00 per week, multiskilled laborers making \$23.25, bottlers and drivers receiving \$25.50, and maltsters compensated at \$29.50 for the same period; for each position, the raise ranged from nearly a quarter of the previous salary to almost double that which was paid for the same work in 1912.⁴⁴ The improvement in brewery worker compensation compared favorably with that of other manufacturing sectors during the period. No less importantly to labor, pay gains registered from the 1880s into the 1910s lessened a wide earnings differential between upper management and the workers: while the average brewery worker could expect to earn roughly \$1,300 per year shortly before prohibition, an urban brewery officer typically was compensated at a rate of \$3,000-

\$5,000, depending on the level of the position and whether or not the individual held multiple offices (e.g., secretary and treasurer).⁴⁵

At the onset of national prohibition in 1920, it had become fully evident not only that unionization had served the best interests of German-American brewery workers from the 1880s onward, but also that it had earned them a substantial increase in both power and prestige in comparison with laborers in other fields. Skillful negotiation by union leaders and a united front earned victories and accomplished two significant goals. During the course of three decades brewery workers saw the average length of their work day reduced from between fourteen and sixteen hours per day to eight or nine, while improvements in wage levels and working conditions kept pace with, if not exceeded, those of other labor sectors across the country. Although brewery management grudgingly accepted the new order, it also demonstrated an increased level of respect for the employees and the single-mindedness of their purpose, credit for which in large part went to union leadership and its own not inconsiderable managerial skills. As early as 1903 an advertisement by the New Kentucky Brewery Company illustrated the change in attitude German-American brewery leadership had experienced, and the degree to which it considered its employees to be not only an asset, rather than a liability, in the overall well-being of the company, but also how the new perspective factored into a revised marketing plan:

Do you know the secret of our success in brewing? If not, you should inform yourself, because every barrel brewed and bottled is done under our personal supervision and with the assistance of union labor. . . .

The laboring man will always find a friend in the present management of the New Kentucky Brewery, and it has more opportunities for the betterment of the laboring man to offer from the fact that its plant has been remodeled and improved with an expenditure of at least \$50,000.00. The men working directly in the brewery have not only been benefitted, but all other building trades as well, and every business man in this territory has derived some benefit either directly or indirectly.

Remember, boys, our motto is "In union there is strength." So there is in "New Kentucky Brew."⁴⁶

The change was heralded at all levels of labor as a sign of final victory, as well as an opportunity for a lasting reconciliation, albeit one which would be cut short by external circumstances. In 1917, at the height of a prohibition debate that ultimately would lead to a fourteen-year downfall of legal brewing and—along with World War I—change forever the overtly German character of the industry, brewery union leaders offered their strongest gesture of solidarity toward their formerly bitter rivals, emphatically rejecting prohibitionist charges of exploitation in the brewery workplace with the statement that "what we claim, and truthfully say, is: that the conditions of the workers in the brewing industry are much better than in many other industries."⁴⁷ It was a claim which, on its surface, might have been made over half a century earlier, and as such clear evidence that though much had changed between German-American

brewers and their workers, through a remarkable series of circumstances, the relationship would wind up in some ways precisely where it had started.

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Notes

¹ 1880 U. S. Census Report: *Occupations at the Tenth Census* (Washington: Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, 1884), 427.

² 1870 U. S. Census Report: *Occupations at the Ninth Census* (Washington: Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, 1874) 752, 783. In contrast to the figures for the brewing industry, American-born workers outnumbered the German-born by more than a two-to-one ratio—29,519 to 12,660—in all manufacturing classes in Cincinnati during the 1880s.

³ 1870 U. S. Census Report, 847.

⁴ Stanley Baron, *Brewed in America: The History of Beer and Ale in the United States* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962), 274.

⁵ Cited in Baron, 274.

⁶ Cited in *Brewery Worker* 49,6 (10 Mar. 1934): 7.

⁷ Ohio Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Annual Report for 1908*, 130-31.

⁸ Schlüter, 89-90.

⁹ Schlüter, 148.

¹⁰ "Strike Lost Without Drivers' Aid," *Brewery Worker* 49,6 (10 Mar. 1934): 7. With regard to the copious consumption of beer in the workplace, a study published in 1902 found that the use of alcohol played a significant role neither in workplace injury nor in premature mortality among brewery workers. According to the *Wahl-Henius Handy Book of Brewing, Malting, and Auxiliary Trades*, over a five-year period there were only thirty-six deaths nationwide directly attributable to brewery employment, a decrease of forty percent from the level exhibited in 1880. A separate 1910 survey noted that brewery workers suffered a forty-three percent greater mortality rate than normal, but connected that to inherent conditions in the workplace, e.g., respiratory diseases brought on by extreme temperature variations and excessive dampness. Still, there is little doubt that brewery workers during the pre-prohibition era consumed beer at a rate far greater than in the modern era; according to the Wahl-Henius survey, the average consumption of malt liquor among brewery workers was 25.73 glasses—about ten pints—per person, per day. See Peter R. Guetig and Conrad D. Selle, *Louisville Breweries: A History of the Brewing Industry in Louisville, Kentucky, New Albany and Jeffersonville, Indiana* (n.p., Mark Skaggs Press, 1997), 24.

¹¹ Stephen J. Ross, *Workers On The Edge: Work, Leisure, and Politics in Industrializing Cincinnati, 1788-1890* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985), 119.

¹² United States Census figures 1850-1880, cited in "Strike Lost Without Drivers' Aid," *Brewery Worker* 49,6 (10 Mar. 1934): 6-7.

¹³ Schlüter, 90; "Strike Lost Without Drivers' Aid," *Brewery Worker* 49,6 (10 Mar. 1934): 6-7.

¹⁴ United States Department of the Interior, *Manufactures of the United States in 1860* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1865), 455, 486.

¹⁵ A more optimistic assessment of the situation was provided by the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce in its 1872 *Annual Report*, when it stated that 1,306 workers were employed in all aspects related to the production, packaging, and transport of Cincinnati beer, and were paid \$1,200,000 in wages—an average of \$918.84 per worker per year, or \$3.06 per day in a 300-day work year. The Chamber of Commerce figures include workers such as coopers, who were not paid directly as brewery employees and likely received a different compensation rate than standard brewery workers; and brewmasters, who received considerably higher pay for their work. See Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce, *Annual Report for 1872* 49.

¹⁶ Ross, *Workers On The Edge*, 213.

¹⁷ Baron, 278.

¹⁸ Baron, 277. The current source notes also that Miller provided some relative prices of the era in his letter, to provide a sense of perspective on the levels of wages paid to Milwaukee employees. Among the

commodities and prices cited by Miller are: eggs (eight cents per dozen); butter (seven to eight cents per pound); porterhouse steak (ten cents per pound); potatoes (sixty to eighty cents per one hundred pounds); and a "good man's suit" at fifteen to twenty dollars. A Cincinnati brewery employee of the era provided evidence of a similar pay structure there, noting that in 1887 two-horse beer delivery wagon drivers were paid \$11.54 per week and four-horse drivers earned \$13.87. See "John Hollerbach Is Speaking Now," *Brewery Worker* 49,8 (24 Mar. 1934): 5.

¹⁹ Apart from the efforts of brewery workers to unionize, during the mid- to late nineteenth century brewery ownership also sought to create an umbrella organization that would represent its collective interests. While labor was primarily concerned with improving working conditions within the brewery setting, management efforts to form an association had relatively little to do with points of contention with employees, concentrating instead upon a host of factors external to the industry that called for a united response. Foremost among factors cited in this regard was the problematic nature of relations with the federal government, particularly with regard to taxation issues. In an effort to generate needed money after the outbreak of the Civil War, a new revenue act was passed in July 1862 which taxed beer for the first time. Generally speaking, brewers favored enactment of the measure as a patriotic gesture but expressed concern over inequities in the structure of the law; under the leadership of Johann Katzenmayer, thirty-seven New York brewers came together in what eventually evolved into a national organization, the United States Brewers Association, and successfully lobbied Washington for changes in the legislation that would be favorable to the brewers. In subsequent years the growing organization would extend its membership and influence westward, to an established industrial base and emerging brewing centers such as Milwaukee and St. Louis, to combat other threats to the well-being of its membership, most notably unstable relations with saloonkeepers; the enactment of Sunday closing laws and local option legislation; and the work of the Anti-Saloon League and other groups in favor of enactment of national prohibition legislation. Comparatively little attention was paid to matters of brewer-labor negotiations, under the widely-held premise that such affairs were for local—rather than national—brewers' organizations to resolve, given the disparate needs and circumstances of individual markets. There was little question that the German element dominated both the membership and leadership of the USBA during its early years: its founding resolution and constitution were drafted in German, translated into English only afterward. In fact in its first three years the USBA was widely known as the Lager Beer Brewers Association, in deference to the heavy proportion of German members and their preferred brewing style; only later was it noted that the name and organizational structure discouraged active participation by primarily English-speaking ale brewers. Nevertheless, for years afterward German remained the official language of the USBA and its business meetings, and its annual convention was held exclusively in German until 1872 when, owing to an increasing number of non-German invited guests, a resolution was adopted to conduct future proceedings—albeit only every other year—in the English language. For an extensive account of the history and activities of the USBA, see "Commemorative Issue of the 100th Anniversary of the United States Brewers Association," *Modern Brewery Age* 65,1 (1962).

²⁰ While Cincinnati German brewery workers were instrumental in the foundation of the first brewers' mutual aid society, the collective bore no clear relation to subsequent brewery workers' unions, since local brewery owners also were members of the group and exerted considerable influence over the direction of all activities undertaken. See "Strike Lost Without Drivers' Aid," *The Brewery Worker* 49,6 (10 Mar. 1934): 7; and Schlüter, 96.

²¹ Carl H. Miller, *Breweries of Cleveland* (Cleveland: Schnitzelbank Press, 1998), 64.

²² Schlüter, 96-97.

²³ Schlüter, 97-98.

²⁴ Schlüter, 98. The tendency of German laborers to walk off the job in search of better working conditions during the 1870s was observed in markets across the nation, but there were also noteworthy exceptions. In July 1877 a series of labor strikes took place across the Midwest, the result of widespread economic downturn from a depression and in imitation of a nationwide rail strike. In one such demonstration in Chicago, a large group of protesters marched past the M. Gottfried brewery and called out workers there to join the parade. To their consternation, brewery workers not only refused to join them, but barricaded the entrances to the plant against an inevitable backlash. During the course of a vigorous attack on the front entrance to the brewery, an employee managed to sneak out the back and summon help from a nearby police station. During the course of the attack, thirteen of the demonstrators were subdued and arrested, while the brewery suffered only minor damage. See *The Western Brewer* (August 1877 issue); John J. Flinn,

History of the Chicago Police (Chicago: Under the Auspices of the Police Book Fund, 1887), 196; and Bob Skilnik, *The History of Beer and Brewing in Chicago, 1833-1978* (St. Paul: Pogo Press, 1999), 50.

²⁵ For a comprehensive discussion of Cincinnati brewer-worker relations, see William Downard, *The Cincinnati Brewing Industry: A Social and Economic History* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1973), 97-124; and Timothy J. Holian, *Over the Barrel: The Brewing History and Beer Culture of Cincinnati, Volume One, 1800-Prohibition* (St. Joseph, MO: Sudhaus Press, 2000), 180-190 and 258-267.

²⁶ Schlüter, 101. See also "Labor Troubles," *Cincinnati Enquirer* 11 Jul. 1881: 4.

²⁷ "The Beer Brewers' Association," *Cincinnati Enquirer* 14 Jul. 1881: 4.

²⁸ *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette* 20 Apr. 1888 (n.p.). For a more extensive discussion of the Chicago brewery union movement, and the concerns of its brewery labor and management at the time, see Bob Skilnik, "The Union Movement in Chicago's Early Breweries," *American Breweriana Journal* 83 (1996): 32-33.

²⁹ Cited in "At Lager-Heads," *Cincinnati Enquirer* 20 Jul. 1881: 4. See also "All Quiet Along the Lines of the Brewers," *Cincinnati Enquirer* 23 Jul. 1881: 8.

³⁰ Cited in "At Lager-Heads," *Cincinnati Enquirer* 20 Jul. 1881: 4.

³¹ Cited in Miller 64-65. While 1886 was not a successful year for labor in negotiating with ownership, it was in retrospect a turning point in the nature of brewery worker organization. In many of the foremost brewing centers—specifically Baltimore, Chicago, Milwaukee, Newark, St. Louis, Philadelphia, and Detroit—brewery employees organized and concurrently undertook to strike against their employers, a development which brewers nationwide came to describe as "the great struggle of 1886." The surge culminated in August with the establishment of the National Union of the Brewers of the United States, taking the concept of brewery worker representation from a local to a nationwide level. Its official publication, the *Brauer-Zeitung*, was published in German for the next three decades, by the 1910s in both English and German before the German language was phased out for good at the time of World War I. See Baron 280-281.

³² "50 Years Ago In Cincinnati," *Cincinnati Enquirer* 21 Apr. 1938: 4.

³³ Skilnik, *History of Beer and Brewing in Chicago*, 51. Despite the relatively cordial agreement reached by Chicago brewers and their workers in 1886, another, more acrimonious clash of interests occurred just two years later. Thirty-four brewery owners, clearly put off by the seemingly constant nature of labor agitation, took a hard line against union leaders, calling them "arrogant, intolerant and un-American" and, as frequently occurred in labor disputes of the era, describing the uprising as the result of a misguided socialist leaning among upper union directorship. A first-hand account of the 1888 conflict—provided by Alfred Kolb, a young German freelance writer posing as a brewery worker—noted that the main participants in the strike were German immigrants, primarily "unskilled, younger people, mainly of German origin. And German was the language spoken amongst us." See Skilnik, *History of Beer and Brewing in Chicago*, 53-55.

³⁴ "What Faced the Brewery Workers?," *The Brewery Worker* 49,10 (7 Apr. 1934): 6; "Forty Years Before 1935," *The Brewery Worker* 50,37 (14 Sep. 1935): 5. The rapid growth in brewery union local numbers and membership continued unabated into the early twentieth century, and played a role in the continued gains made by labor at the bargaining table. By the time the labor convention returned to Cincinnati in 1903, national brewery worker union membership had risen significantly, to 31,000, and included 317 locals and 121 branches. See *The Brewery Worker* 49,11 (14 Apr. 1934): 7-8.

³⁵ "The Union Brewery Matter," *Cincinnati Enquirer* 4 May 1888: 8; *Cincinnati Enquirer* 12 May 1888, *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette* 12 May 1888, as cited in Downard, 110-11.

³⁶ Thomas C. Cochran, *The Pabst Brewing Company: The History of an American Business* (New York: New York UP, 1948), 292-93. A thorough overview of the successful management-labor negotiations in Milwaukee during the period is available in this same source (279-83).

³⁷ Skilnik, 85.

³⁸ Downard, 112-13. According to the 1892 agreement between sixteen Cincinnati and northern Kentucky breweries and the local Brewers' Union, access to free beer during the work day was regulated according to type and location of work within the brewery setting: cellar men were entitled to eight glasses per day, wash house man received ten glasses during the same period, and pitching department employees could partake of up to twelve glasses per shift. See "Union Beer," *Kentucky Post* 19 Mar. 1892: 8.

³⁹ Cited in "The Secret Out," *Cincinnati Enquirer* 22 Feb. 1889: 8.

⁴⁰ Cited in *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette* 12 Oct. 1890 (n.p.).

⁴¹ For a detailed discussion of the "Know-Nothing" movement in Cincinnati and its impact on the German-American community there specifically, see Jed Dannenbaum, "Immigrants and Temperance: Ethnocultural Conflict in Cincinnati, 1845-1860," *Ohio History* 87,2 (1978): 125-39.

⁴² A copy of the *Deutsche Schützen-Gesellschaft* publication with relevant figures is present in the holdings of the Cincinnati Historical Society. Evidence that brewery owners and their workers worked together more closely in light of the prohibition threat can be inferred in part by the sharp decrease in the number of strikes within the industry during the 1910s. According to a 1913 United States Brewers' Association report, there were roughly 150 contracts renewed between management and labor in the previous year; no serious strikes took place during that time and only one of "particular importance"—in Salt Lake City—occurred, which in turn was settled relatively quickly and in favor of management. See "Report of the Labor Committee," *The Yearbook With Proceedings of the Fifty-Third Annual Convention* (New York: United States Brewers' Association, 1914), 68.

⁴³ Figures on the 1910 compensation rate and workday schedule are taken from contemporary figures gathered by the Brewers' Association of Massachusetts, and are available in the collections of the Cincinnati Historical Society.

⁴⁴ Information on weekly brewery employee wages in Cincinnati and selected other brewing centers may be found in the records of the International Union of United Brewery Workers, present in the collection of the Cincinnati Historical Society. Comparable figures were exhibited in Louisville and other markets of a similar size, where in 1917 a minimum wage was set at \$21.00 per week for skilled brewery workers in cellars, fermenting rooms, and brewhouses. See Guetig and Selle, *Louisville Breweries*, 25.

⁴⁵ Bruckmann Brewing Company records, at the Cincinnati Historical Society. An extensive overview of the weekly wages paid to Pabst and other Milwaukee brewery workers from 1905 to 1918, categorized according to contract years and classified by area of employment within the brewery, can be found in Cochran, 299.

⁴⁶ "Drink 'New Kentucky' Brew," advertisement, *The Commonwealth* [Covington, KY] (Sep. 1903): 23. The New Kentucky Brewery Company was formed around January 1903 after the previous management of the business, led by Fred Brenner under the name of the John Brenner Brewing Company, opted to dispose of its interests after a series of financial losses. President of the New Kentucky Brewery was Anton J. Lauer; Charles Fink served as vice president; and Charles F. Gerlach assumed the positions of secretary and treasurer. In the first nine months of its existence the company increased its bottled beer output by approximately 900 percent. Despite the apparent success of the firm, within two years the name of the business reverted back to the Brenner Brewing Company, under the management of Theodore von Hoene.

⁴⁷ "Very Important," *Brewery Workers' Journal* 32,38 (22 Sep. 1917): 1. With national prohibition rapidly becoming a realistic possibility, brewery owners nationwide stressed a position of harmony with organized labor, in an attempt to counteract prohibitionist reports of ongoing poor management-worker relations. As part of its national publicity campaign, the United States Brewers' Association cited a report by the central labor union of New England which claimed that "the employing brewers of this country, in sharp contrast to the attitude of many large employers ... pay a higher rate of wages and provide more decent working conditions than any other industry in the country." The USBA further stressed its satisfaction with labor union efforts to combat the dry menace, "for the intelligent and promising part they are taking in the struggle against Prohibition, its many shams and hypocrisies. That their interests no less than their employers' should compel them to take such part should not detract from the credit due them for the intelligence with which they are co-operating in this work." Additional reference was made to the fact that, at a nationwide conference, labor leaders agreed to levy a one dollar per year fee on all union members—some 50,000 in number—to help create and maintain a legislative bureau to campaign against the enactment of prohibition laws. See "Report of the Labor Committee," *The 1914 Yearbook of the United States Brewers' Association* (New York: United States Brewers' Association, 1914), 64-75.