

# What Was The Trade Union Movement Like In Washington, D.C., In The Year 1900?

(By Mel Stack)

It was organizing. It was alive with comradeship. It was concerned with the plight of unfortunate workers. In a word, a typical labor movement.

Local 101, Amalgamated Association of Street Railway Employees of America, organized in the Summer of 1900, and The Trades Unionist reported that "the street railway men of the District take kindly to the idea of being members of a labor organization."

But meanwhile, all was not well in America. The same issue of The Trades Unionist reported others as "slaves of corporations," of "human beings forced to accept 72 cents for ten hours work."

They wrote of the miners. And of the strike in the coal regions in utterly barbaric conditions.

Oyster roasts were advertised for 10 cents, day and night, at Driscoll's North Capitol and G Sts. Highballs too.

And later that month, the Typographical Union leader argued strongly in The Trades Unionist for "the formation among workingmen of a non-partisan organization for political purposes; an organization of voters who will vote as a body for the man or set of men who will do most for or do the bidding of workingmen."

"Such," said the Typos' delegate, "is a crude outline of a day dream. It is too much to hope it can ever be realized."

They knew of the union label in those days too. November 15, 1900: the Robert Portner Brewing Co. of Alexandria, Va., was "declared unfair" because the company refused to sign a contract or recognize the Brewery Workers in any manner.

And the Bricklayers won a strike. Quoting the Nov. 15, 1900, Trades Unionist: "The trouble which culminated several days ago in the refusal of the bricklayers employed on alterations and repairs at the Capitol building to continue work because of an alleged infraction of the eight hour rule of the Union by the foreman has, it is said, been adjusted and the men returned to work."

But what of Labor Day? In 1901 The Trades Unionist reported "Fully Twenty Thousand People at Glen Echo on Labors' Holiday" to hear the address by the CLUs' president Feeney.

The day was capped by numerous athletic events, including "fancy dancing," "cake walks," and a "wheelbarrow race" by the ladies.