
Employees campaign against Niagara Silver Co. for right to unionize, 1899

Timing

19 May

1899

to:

18 June

1899

Location and Goals

Country:

United States

Location City/State/Province:

Niagara Falls, N. Y.

Location Description:

Niagara Silver Company factory

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

That Niagara Silver Company concede the right for employees to join a union without being fired.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 013. Deputations

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

- 105. Establishment strike>Members of Local Union No. 115 refused to work until manager agreed to let them be members of the union and retain their employment

Methods in 5th segment:

- 105. Establishment strike>Members of Local Union No. 115 refused to work until manager agreed to let them be members of the union and retain their employment

Methods in 6th segment:

- 105. Establishment strike>Members of Local Union No. 115 refused to work until manager agreed to let them be members of the union and retain their employment

Notes on Methods:

The union members also filed a legal complaint, that the manager and superintendent of the factory were in violation of section 171-a of the Penal Code

Segment Length:

5 days

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Employees of the Niagara Silver Company

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

George Furniss, president of the union; Approximately 100 employees of Niagara Silver Co. who were also members of Local Union No. 115 (branch of 'The Metal Polishers, Buffers, Platers and Brassworkers' International Union of North America)

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Board of Mediation and Arbitration of the State of New York

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Union members

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

- Board of Mediation and Arbitration of the State of New York

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length:

5 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

W. A. Jameson, manager of Niagara Silver Company; S. B. Whistler, superintendent of the factory.

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Total points:

8 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

The efforts of this campaign were highly successful. The union members ultimately achieved their goals and stayed strong throughout the campaign, even when the president of the union was fired. The campaign did not grow very much overall, although it did gain the assistance of the Board of Mediation and Arbitration of the State of New York.

In April of 1899, employees of the Niagara Silver Company organized a new union branch: The Metal Polishers, Buffers, Platers, and Brassworkers' International Union of North America, Local No. 155. About 100 workers of the company were part of the union, with fellow employee George Furniss as President. W. A. Jameson, manager of the Niagara Steel Company, appeared before his employees on May 19 and advised against membership in the union. On the following day, every employee of the company received a letter from the foreman asking each employee to sign one of the two enclosed letters and return it on the following Monday.

The first letter stated that the employee in question agreed to withdraw membership from the union and would not become a member again while working for the Niagara Silver Company. The other letter stated that the employee refused to withdraw from the union and would proceed to seek employment elsewhere.

On May 22, a committee of union members met with Jameson, stating that they refused to respond to the letters they had received. The committee then asked Jameson to give a definite statement regarding his opinion on and feelings towards the union. The committee claimed that Jameson responded by saying, "that no man could remain in the company's employ for any length of time and continue his membership in the union," however, Jameson denied ever making such a statement.

On the following day, George Furniss - president of the union and the chairman of the committee that met with Jameson - was fired. Furniss was not the only union member to lose his job, and on June 6 approximately 100 employees went on strike. According the report by the Board of Mediation and Arbitration of the State of New York, members of the strike stated that they did so mostly out of fear of eventually losing their jobs due to their membership with the union. Members of the union also filed a legal complaint regarding the letters they had received, and warrants were issued for the arrest of Jameson and the superintendent of the factory, S. B.

Whistler, for a violation of section 171a of the Penal Code (it is unclear what this section regarded).

The Board of Mediation and Arbitration of the State of New York approached the situation on June 8, offering their services of mediation. The union members agreed, but Jameson refused, despite the warrant for his arrest.

The Board recommended that the Niagara Silver Company withdraw the letters and rehire all strikers without penalty or discrimination. In return, upon fulfillment of these conditions, the employees would end the strike and return to work. The union members agreed to these terms, adding the condition that the company would rehire those who had been fired due to their involvement in the union. The Niagara Silver Company eventually agreed to these terms, and the strike officially ended when workers returned to the factory on June 19, 1899.

Research Notes

Sources:

New York (State) Bureau of Mediation and Arbitration, and New York (State). Board of Mediation and Arbitration. Annual Report of the Board of Mediation and Arbitration of the State of New York, Issue 13. Board, 1900. PDF.

Snippet from a news article regarding the strike: <http://i38.tinypic.com/fd6r6b.jpg>

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

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[Back to top](#)

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