

RACISM, RECONSTRUCTION,  
AND THE LABOR PRESS:  
THE RISE AND FALL OF THE  
ST. LOUIS DAILY PRESS, 1864–1866

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THROUGHOUT MUCH OF 1865 as many as 20,000 St. Louisans got their news from a daily paper owned and operated by its printers and other trade unionists. That paper, the *Daily Press*, proclaimed itself to be “devoted to the interests of all mechanics and workingmen” and espoused a philosophy which did indeed attempt to unite all white workers. The *Daily Press* spearheaded the founding of a labor party in St. Louis—a party which won more than 35% of the votes in the 1865 mayoral elections. Working class leaders of the national stature of John Hinchcliffe and Joseph Weydemeyer actively supported the paper at a local level, and important figures in the National Typographical Union helped to set its type.<sup>1</sup> Its circulation and accomplishments place the *Daily Press* alongside *Fincher’s Trade Review* (Philadelphia), the *Chicago Workingman’s Advocate*, and the *Boston Daily Evening Voice*<sup>2</sup> as a major labor newspaper of the period, but the *Daily Press* has been largely forgotten as a primary source in American labor history.<sup>3</sup> This article details

1 See below pp. 160–61 for information on Hinchcliffe and Weydemeyer. I am indebted to Philip Foner for his example and his advice in preparing this paper.

2 John R. Commons and associates, *History of Labour in the United States*, 4v. (New York, 1966), Vol. II, pp. 15–7; Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 4v. (New York, 1947–65), Vol I, pp. 349–52.

3 No article comparable to Foner’s ground-breaking “A Labor Voice for Black Equality: The *Boston Daily Evening Voice*, 1864–1867,” *Science & Society*, XXXVIII (1974), 304–25, treats the *Daily Press*. A local study, Russell Nolen, “The Labor Movement in St.

the circumstances surrounding the founding and growth of the *Daily Press*. It outlines the perspectives and activities which enabled the *Press* to attain a leading position among labor periodicals. Equally important, it analyzes the fragmentation, growing weakness, and quick demise of the *Daily Press*. That demise, so inextricably tied with the *Press*'s racism and its internal divisions over Reconstruction politics, forms an interesting and tragic chapter in the relations between labor and Radical Republicanism.

*Formation: "Thrice Armeth Is He Who Has His Quarrel Just"*

The origins of the *Daily Press* lie in a period of mounting class conflict during the latter part of the Civil War. St. Louis's labor organizations, like those of American labor generally, had not sufficiently deep roots to survive the Panic of 1857 and the chaos and heavy labor enlistments which accompanied the outbreak of the early Civil War.<sup>4</sup> As the war progressed, however, and wartime inflation far outstripped wage increases, trade unionism was revitalized. By 1863 St. Louis joined the growing number of cities in which several trade unions united in a city-wide trades' assembly. This agency, the Trades' Union League, met frequently to coordinate strike support, built demonstrations for the eight-hour working day, and sponsored lectures on labor education. Its member organizations ultimately provided the financial support which made publication of a labor paper possible.<sup>5</sup>

A series of bitter labor disputes tested St. Louis's budding trade union movement in 1864. During this period St. Louis

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Louis from 1860-1890," *Missouri Historical Review* [hereafter *MHR*], XXXIV (1940), 157-8, and a state study, Lee Meriwether, "A Century of Labor in Missouri," *MHR*, XV (1920), 170, ignore the *Daily Press*. The omission is serious since St. Louis ranked as America's third largest manufacturing city during the time it was served by the *Press*. Iron molding, wire and machine tool production, metalworking, needle trades, shipping, boots and shoes, and sugar refining were the leading industries. German workers tended to dominate the most skilled positions. See John Scharf, *History of St. Louis*, 2v. (Philadelphia, 1883), Vol 11, pp. 1330-50; David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans* (New York, 1967), pp. 6, 37.

<sup>4</sup> Foner, *Labor Movement*, Vol I, pp. 348-54; Meriwether, "Century of Labor," 170; Nolen, "Labor Movement in St. Louis," 157-8.

<sup>5</sup> Foner, *Labor Movement*, Vol. I, p. 355; *St. Louis Daily Press* [hereafter *DP*], December 17, 1864.

workers found themselves increasingly arrayed not only against their employers, but against the government as well. A large ironmolders' strike ended in defeat when British strikebreakers were imported by the American Emigrant Company. Operating under the Contract Labor Law of 1864, the American Emigrant Company received not only the legal right to contract with foreign workers and import them to America, but also the guarantee that such workers would not be drafted. The Company was thus ideal for the mobilization of strikebreakers, a role it regularly performed until the repeal of the Contract Labor Law in 1868.<sup>6</sup>

The government's role in breaking the April, 1864 strikes of the tailors and the machinists in St. Louis was far more direct. Responding to appeals from Missouri employers, Major-General William Rosecrans issued General Order No. 65 from his St. Louis headquarters. The order placed the Union army squarely behind the employers. Organization of men involved in war production was outlawed, as was picketing. Military protection of strikebreakers and blacklisting of labor organizers provided the means for enforcing the order. The strikes of the tailors and machinists ended, literally, at the point of a bayonet.<sup>7</sup>

General Order No. 65 proved unable to enforce labor peace in St. Louis. In December, 1864, 100 printers began a work stoppage against St. Louis's three major newspapers. The printers, stressing their loyalty to the Union cause, forcefully pointed out that they were not striking for higher wages and thus disrupting the war effort. They had, in fact, agreed to accept a 70 cents per day wage cut, but the employers insisted on a decrease of \$1.05.<sup>8</sup> Rosecrans, characteristically, moved to end the strike by having Union soldiers man the presses. An appeal from the Typographer's Union to President Lincoln, however, resulted in the countermanding of Rosecrans' order by a presidential statement that "servants of the federal government should not interfere with the legitimate demands of labor."<sup>9</sup> The printers could continue their job action.

6 Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, pp. 21-4.

7 Foner, *Labor Movement*, Vol. I, pp. 328-9.

8 *DP*, December 17 and 24, 1864.

9 Carl Sandburg, *Lincoln: The War Years*, 2v. (New York, 1939), Vol. II, p. 621; Foner, *Labor Movement*, Vol. I, p. 332.

On December 17, 1864 the striking printers published a four-page newspaper whose masthead bore the title "Daily St. Louis Press" and the motto, "THRICE ARMETH IS HE WHO HAS HIS QUARREL JUST." Whether the printers initially hoped to sustain a major labor paper or merely viewed the *Daily Press* as a vehicle in winning their strike is unclear. Early issues encouraged workers to cancel their subscriptions to the major newspapers and to support the strike because "it is the same issue that has been so often made against you . . . their wealth vs. our muscles." The printers solicited public support by contrasting their own refusal to use violence and their willingness to bargain, with the employers' stated determination to "whip out" all labor organizations. Appeals went to small shopkeepers (who allegedly stood to lose if workers' wages were cut) and to the German-language press, which drew praise as having "sustained the mechanics . . . in the difficulties between the mechanics and the military."<sup>10</sup>

Within a week after the first issue appeared the calls for support bore fruit and arrangements to put the *Daily Press* on a solid financial footing began. A meeting of trade unions held at the Workingman's Assembly Room voted to support the paper. Among the first to contribute and express solidarity were the Chairmakers', Tailors', Printers', Carpenters', Bricklayers', Gas Fitters', Shoemakers', Ship Carpenters', and the Machinists' and Blacksmiths' Unions. By December 23 the editors had begun to issue capital stock at \$5 per share with confidence that "sufficient capital will be raised to establish a first-class newspaper in the interests of the workingmen." A permanent office and press were set up where shares and subscriptions could be purchased and small printing orders placed. The price of the paper was \$8 per year by subscription. Issues regularly appeared six days per week (with Monday skipped because of the workers' decision to take Sundays off).<sup>11</sup> Circulation appears to have grown dramatically. In the first week 7500 readers were claimed by the *Daily Press's* own estimates. One week later the figure reached 11,000 and soon it had levelled off at 20,000 readers per day.<sup>12</sup> The

<sup>10</sup> *DP*, December 17 and 23, 1864.

<sup>11</sup> *DP*, December 18, 22, 23 and 27, 1864.

<sup>12</sup> *DP*, December 23 and 29, 1864; February 6, 1865. None of these numbers is verifiable.

number of advertisements also grew apace, so much so that the paper was twice enlarged in width by another full column. Notices of union meetings filled a good deal of space, with up to twenty-two separate locals announcing their weekly meetings through the *Press*.<sup>13</sup>

However, within three weeks the strike of the St. Louis Typographical Union ended in defeat and union printers scrambled to return to their old jobs. Nat Griffin, secretary of the printers and an instrumental figure in the founding of the *Daily Press*, soon resumed work for the hated *Missouri Democrat*,<sup>14</sup> as did an early leader, Thomas Fleming. Despite such losses, the *Press* remained firmly established. Under the capable editorial guidance of David Orr and the energetic business management of Samuel Slawson it continued to publish and grow. If there were questions about the *Press's* ability to sustain itself or about the continued support of the St. Louis labor movement, such doubts probably evaporated at the January 11, 1865 meeting of the Trades' Union League when John Hinchcliffe, editor of the *Weekly Miner*, appealed for support for the *Daily Press*. On that one evening \$1,000 was collected.<sup>15</sup>

*Principles: "Always Advocate and Defend the Cause of the Oppressed"*

Shortly after the meeting addressed by Hinchcliffe, the *Daily Press* published a "Prospectus" announcing that it would remain solvent, would expand, and would "always advocate and defend the cause of the oppressed."<sup>16</sup> On issues other than race and Reconstruction, the paper's success in accomplishing the last of these goals was impressive. The breadth of vision displayed by the *Daily Press* encompassed the cause of oppressed (white) labor everywhere. Craft lines were not recognized as barriers to the

13 *DP*, January 17 and November 25, 1865.

14 *DP*, January 7, 1865; Dix and Edwards, *St. Louis Directory, 1866* (St. Louis, 1866), pp. 413, 310.

15 *DP*, January 12, 1865; Hinchcliffe, later a National Labor Union and Greenback-Labor Party leader, represented the American Miners Association; see Foner, *Labor Movement*, Vol. I, pp. 349, 563. On the high quality of the *Press's* leadership, note the presence of National Typographical Union past-president William Cuddy and 1865 president, Robert Craig, on the strike committee which founded the paper. See *DP*, January 7, 1865 and John McVicar, *Origin and Progress of the Typographical Union* (Lansing, 1891), pp. 21, 23.

16 *DP*, January 17, 1865.

unity of laborers as the *Daily Press* foresaw the day when "... the framer of the keel of commerce joins hands with he who delves the earth below." And the proletarian metaphors of a frequent correspondent to the paper expressed the same need for unity with more force. The correspondent who signed himself L.V.P. called on workers to

... help build the bridge ... over the river of adversity and attack capital in its stronghold. ... the rusty tools are being brightened and ground; advertisements are abroad for all who labor to come and work on this stupendous structure. ... Let the bridge be built.<sup>17</sup>

Geographical barriers, like those of craft exclusiveness, disappeared in the *Daily Press's* vision of the cause of the oppressed. National and international labor news filled its pages. Reprinted articles came from such major American labor papers as *Fincher's Trade Review*, the *Boston Daily Evening Voice*, the *Chicago Workingman's Advocate*, and the *Detroit Mechanic*.<sup>18</sup> Other articles discussed European labor struggles in a spirit of solidarity and hope. "The strike amongst the workwomen of Paris," argued one editorial, "may be the first link in the great chain destined to bring about a great social reformation."<sup>19</sup>

The international interests of the *Daily Press* drew further strength from close relations with Joseph Weydemeyer, Karl Marx's chief correspondent in America and a brigadier general in the Union army. Weydemeyer presented a copy of the "Address and Provisional Rules of the Workingmen's International Association" to the *Press's* editors. Lengthy excerpts, including the ringing challenge "To conquer political power has therefore become the great duty of the working classes,"<sup>20</sup> appeared in the *Daily Press* along with an introduction lamenting that lack of space prevented publication of the whole text. Marx received a copy of the clipping and a short time later the *Daily Press* proudly printed a report from the proceedings of the First International in which "Citizen Marx read an extract from the *St. Louis Daily*

17 *DP*, February 5 and 15, 1865.

18 *DP*, January 23 and March 14, 1865.

19 *DP*, February 11 and July 16, 1865.

20 *DP*, January 10, 1865; see "Marx to Weydemeyer," November 29, 1864 in Marx and Engels, *Letters to Americans, 1848-1895, A Selection*. Translated and edited by Leonard Mins (New York, 1953), p. 65.

*Press* (America) approving the address and rules of the International."<sup>21</sup>

The cosmopolitan spirit of the *Daily Press* was probably of value in bridging the ethnic divisions among St. Louis workers. Marx once advised two American socialist organizers that "A coalition of the German workers with the Irish . . . is the most important job you could start at the present time."<sup>22</sup> In few cities was the forging of such a coalition as vital as in St. Louis. The 1866 census put the city's population at 204,327, of which 49,791 were German and 26,136 were Irish. Together the two groups may have accounted for a majority of St. Louis's working class.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately antagonisms between the two groups surfaced, especially in connection with the political issues of Reconstruction, but in the short run the *Daily Press* seems to have had success in attracting both Irish and German readership. Since those most active in founding the paper appear to have been Anglo-Saxon workers,<sup>24</sup> this was no mean accomplishment.

That the *Daily Press* sought and attracted Irish subscribers is indicated by the extensive, continued and positive coverage given to the Fenian movement's activities in both America and Ireland. One editorial on the Irish nationalist movement thundered, "This is just . . .," and described Fenianism as "a moral bulwark for the encouragement of Irish patriots." Large monetary contributions to the Fenian cause drew special praise and notices of social events and demonstrations held by the nationalists were prominent.<sup>25</sup>

Several studies argue that the growth of Irish nationalism, in opposition to the disapproval of the Catholic Church hierarchy, constituted a dynamic by which Irish immigrants broke from the Church's dominance. David Montgomery, in a remarkably perceptive passage, links this dynamic to the rise of Irish participation in labor reform politics. Montgomery writes that Fenianism

21 *DP*, April 1, 1865.

22 "Marx to Meyer and Vogt," April 9, 1870, in Marx and Engels, *Letters to Americans*, pp. 77-80.

23 Catherine V. Soraghan, *History of St. Louis, 1865-1876* (Unpublished master's thesis, Washington University, 1936), pp. 2-4.

24 *DP*, December 20, 1864 and January 7, 1865 contain the most complete list of those active in establishing the paper.

25 *DP*, February 19, April 23, August 8, 29 and September 8, 1865; December 24, 1864.

... roused the ardor of America's immigrants from Eiren as ... no other issue, bringing them into conflict with their Church and party leaders here, and making them henceforth contributors ... to the Radical and labor-reform trends.<sup>26</sup>

The *Daily Press* became involved in a Church-Fenian imbroglio which illustrates both the potential and the limitation of Fenianism in reducing Catholic hegemony.

At the death of Head Centre Henry O'Clarence McCarthy, the highest official of the St. Louis Fenian Brotherhood, Archbishop Peter Richard Kenrick reaffirmed the Church's opposition to Feniansim by denying McCarthy a Catholic burial. A letter from Kenrick to the *Press* forcefully restated the Church's determination to deny all sacraments to members of the movement. Despite the hierarchy's disapproval, St. Louis's Irish demonstrated their love for McCarthy by turning out for his funeral in full force—the *Daily Press* estimated the crowd at 10,000.

The editors of the *Press* sided with the Fenians in the controversy. The entire text of the oration at McCarthy's funeral appeared, as did a report that the issue was being discussed nationally and "in several instances his grace [Kenrick] has been handled without gloves." The newspaper became more thoroughly embroiled in the conflict, however, when it printed a letter by Fenian State Centre McGrath which challenged the archbishop's position. Long-time *Press* staff member J. L. Clements resigned in protest and the editors felt compelled to justify their printing of the letter on the grounds that "thousands of our readers were interested."<sup>27</sup> The issue raged for some time but its long-term impact on Catholic hegemony among the St. Louis Irish is problematic. The substance of McGrath's controversial letter was, after all, that Fenians were good Catholics. Ultimately the *Daily Press* deemphasized tensions between the movement and the Church.<sup>28</sup>

No issue comparable to Fenianism existed around which the *Daily Press* could attract German readers. Indeed it seems likely that the German language press, particularly the *Westliche*

26 Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, pp. 126-34; Thomas Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism, 1870-1890* (New York, 1966), pp. 36-7, 56-7.

27 *DP*, September 5, 6 and 12, 1865.

28 *DP*, September 29, 1865.



*Post*,<sup>29</sup> consistently commanded a larger German readership than the *Daily Press*. There is, nonetheless, evidence that the labor paper cultivated good relations with German workers with some success. Announcements of labor and social events scheduled at the Turner Hall, the German-American's social and athletic club, appeared often in the *Daily Press*,<sup>30</sup> as did translations of articles from distant German-language newspapers. Evidence of German support for the eight-hour day repeatedly excited favorable editorial comment. On one occasion the *Daily Press* went so far as to reprint its entire editorial page in German.<sup>31</sup> Ultimately the more radical Germans were to clash with other supporters of the *Daily Press* over political issues, but this should not obscure the earlier promise of ethnic unity held out in the pages of that paper.

The *Daily Press's* concept of the unity of labor attempted to transcend not only the barriers of craft, geography, and ethnicity, but also those of sex. The female proletariat of St. Louis loomed quite large during this period—as many as one in three wage workers were women.<sup>32</sup> The *Daily Press* generally showed a good deal of sensitivity and sophistication in discussing the special oppression of women workers. The issue surfaced in sharp relief in the earliest editions of the *Press* because the publishers of the major St. Louis newspapers had hired women printers as strikebreakers. The initial reaction of the striking printers was to reprint an article from the *Missouri Radical* which heaped scorn on the abilities of women compositors. A letter to the editor lamented that the paper had chosen to divide workers along sexual lines and contrasted such division with the unity of capital. The letter, signed "Justice," expressed regret "that you [the editors] occasionally fling at 'black rats' and 'female compositors.'" Justice went on to ask, "By what legerdemain . . . is it that capital holds sway?" The answer, according to Justice, was clear: ". . . by combination. Capital is united . . . all over the world."<sup>33</sup>

29 See Carl Wittke, *The German Language Press in America* (Lexington, 1957), p. 77.

30 *DP*, February 25 and April 27, 1865.

31 *DP*, March 23, April 3 and July 25, 1865.

32 Soraghan, *History of St. Louis*, p. 125.

33 December 22 and 24, 1864. The style, force and argument of the letter raise the possibility that Justice was Joseph Weydemeyer. As a Union army officer during this period, Weydemeyer contributed several military edicts to the *Press*. See *DP*, Febru-

While the editors appear to have ignored Justice's criticisms regarding racism, they responded constructively to his (or her) comments on women workers. An extended editorial entitled "Female Printers" disavowed any opposition to females learning the trade and called for equal work, equal apprenticeship, and, most important, the upgrading of women's pay scales to parity with those of men. This advanced position was not to be adopted by the National Typographical Union for six more years.<sup>34</sup> After the strike, the *Daily Press* continued to address the problems of women workers. One article proclaims, "Not for us, not for our brothers or our sons is the most wretched suffering of oppression, but for our sisters and our daughters. . . ." Other columns detailed the horrendous sufferings of unorganized women in the needle trades and called on St. Louis labor to organize a women's needle trades union.<sup>35</sup>

The record of the *Daily Press* regarding working women's rights is not completely positive. The paper did not advocate women's suffrage and occasionally it printed cloying Victorian paens to women whose "temper [is] as sweet and balmy as the breath of evening." However, on the important issues of equal pay for equal work and of the necessity for organization of women workers, the *Daily Press* did stand out and did "defend the cause of the oppressed."<sup>36</sup>

*Labor Press and Labor Party: "Bread and Butter are Not to be Overlooked"*

If not thrice-armed, the *Daily Press* possessed at least two valuable weapons: a solid foundation of labor support and a philosophy which attempted to unite various important working class groups. How then are we to explain the fragmentation and quick demise of the paper? The dominant trend in American labor historiography, which sees the pre-Gompers labor movement as a Janus-faced amalgam debilitated by clashes between narrowly class-conscious trade unionists and reform-minded

ary 23, 1865, and Karl Obermann, *Joseph Weydemeyer* (New York, 1947), pp. 124-40.

<sup>34</sup> *DP*, December 28, 1864; McVicar, *Typographical Union*, pp. 39-56; Foner, *Labor Movement*, Vol. I, pp. 383-4.

<sup>35</sup> *DP*, February 26, March 14 and September 6, 1865.

<sup>36</sup> *DP*, June 24, 1865. But see Foner, "Labor Voice," pp. 308-9, for a labor paper with even more advanced views on women's rights.

politicos,<sup>37</sup> is of little help. Since much of the impetus for the founding of the *Daily Press* lay in agitation against the use of government troops as strikebreakers, it is hardly surprising that the trade unionists who published the paper perceived the importance of political activity. The ballot and the strike were inextricably intertwined for the striking printers. They wanted to know where public men stood "in the difficulties between the mechanics and the military" and, as early as the paper's fourth issue, began to advise readers that "workingmen control at least 5000 votes [in St. Louis]."<sup>38</sup>

In the early months of its existence the *Daily Press* worked feverishly to forge a unified political movement among St. Louis's workers. Articles continuously advised laborers to vote not just according to party but according to class. "What," asked the *Press*, "are the puny ties of party [compared] to the common link that binds us hand to hand and heart to heart in labor?" The printers' strike provided a clear example of capital's ability to unite regardless of party positions. The *Missouri Democrat* and the *Republican* were perennially at odds over party politics but found cohesion against the strikers. As the *Press* perceived it, "The Almighty Dollar unites them."<sup>39</sup> The *Daily Press* sought to create similar unity among laborers on the basis of the worker's economic interests. The eight-hour day commanded attention as a worthy political goal, but, above all, the right to strike was stressed. "Policemen can never again be employed . . . to harass mechanics in their . . . meetings," warned the *Press*, "nor the military in attempts to degrade free labor." Politics was vital to the union men who published the *Daily Press*—politics, however, in which "Bread and butter are not to be overlooked."<sup>40</sup>

Results of the 1864 census further buoyed the *Daily Press's* hopes regarding labor's political strength. No longer speaking of only 5,000 labor votes, an article entitled "The Workingmen of St. Louis—Their Strength," laid claim to upwards of 25,000. Of the 76,495 white males enumerated in the St. Louis census, there were, according to the *Press*, 13,351 laborers, 11,531 mechanics,

37 See, e.g., Gerald Grob, *Workers and Utopia* (Evanston, 1961) and Commons, et al., *Labour in the United States*, esp. Vol. II, pp. 3-191.

38 *DP*, December 21, 1864.

39 *DP*, January 5, February 23 and March 2, 1865; December 20, 1864.

40 *DP*, December 28 and February 23, 1865.

and 2,252 rivermen. The labor vote was no longer viewed as a small bloc which might influence a close election but as a large independent force which could lead to "the discarding of mere political parties." The St. Louis April mayoral elections became the focus of an attempt to mobilize labor's political potential. If no party adequately expressed the goals of labor in that election, the *Press* urged laborers to field their own ticket.<sup>41</sup>

One week before the election, such a party, the Independent Workingmen's Ticket, emerged belatedly to challenge the incumbent Republican, Mayor Thomas. The *Daily Press's* support for the new labor party was immediate, unequivocal, and overwhelming. For the next week virtually the entire paper, except for war news and advertisements, was devoted to denunciation of Thomas. Claiming that 8,000 of St. Louis's workers belonged to trade unions, the *Press* charged that under Thomas, "The police has been used to harass them and the military arm has been used to crush them." The *Press* avowed staunch loyalty to the Union cause and sought to dismiss questions of national policy as election issues. The single issue, according to the labor paper, was "Thomas and anti-Thomas," and the vital question was "Will Any Workingmen Support Him?"<sup>42</sup> A pre-election rally for the Independent Workingmen's Ticket claimed an attendance of 10,000, but when the returns were all in, it became apparent that some workingmen and a great many other voters did support Thomas. The labor ticket lost, winning about 4000 of the 11,000 votes cast. A spirited attempt to unify St. Louis's workers around the "bread and butter" issue of the right to strike ended and the *Daily Press* wrote, "We have lost everything but our honor."<sup>43</sup>

*Race and Reconstruction: "But How Can the Same Party . . . Abuse the Workingman?"*

Although winning 35% of the vote was an impressive achievement for a labor party which had run only a week-long campaign, the defeat of the Independent Workingmen's ticket both reflected and accelerated serious divisions within the St.

41 *DP*, February 23 and March 2, 1865.

42 *DP*, March 28, 29 and April 3, 1865.

43 *DP*, April 2 and 4, 1865.

Louis labor movement in general and the *Daily Press* in particular. The single issue campaign of the labor party had tried to sidestep the questions of race and Reconstruction but had been unsuccessful in doing so. Pro-Thomas forces were able to portray the Workingmen's Party as an ultra-conservative, virtually Copperhead ticket. When the conservative press in St. Louis paid favorable attention to the labor party, the charge that it was a mere tool of anti-Radicals gained force. In analyzing the election defeat, the *Press* complained that, "Bare mention of the workingmen's ticket in the [conservative] *Republican* cost us 2000 votes." Equally damaging was the opposition of the *Westliche Post* to the labor candidates. The *Post*, which the *Daily Press* had earlier praised as "true to labor,"<sup>44</sup> spoke for many German workers who saw loyalty and commitment to egalitarian republican principles as the central campaign issues. These Germans, who had been instrumental both in saving Missouri for the Union and in the radical, pro-Fremont campaign of 1864,<sup>45</sup> were unlikely to leave the Republican ranks to support a party which took no positions on emancipation, civil rights, and Reconstruction.

The *Daily Press's* treatment of black rights in the three months prior to the election could have provided scant reassurance to the more radical Germans. The first issue of the *Press* did give favorable mention to the *Radical Democratic Monthly* (to which Fremont regularly contributed), but by the second day virulent race-baiting appeared. An editorial entitled "The Negro and the Strike" charged that:

Yesterday . . . a negro was engaged and set to work alongside of a white man . . . As an apology for the white man, we may state that the negro keeps his person clean and works not hard enough to cause perspiration, so that no offensive smell is emitted. . . .

Justice's letter condemning racial and sexual divisions in the labor movement brought a change in the *Press's* attitude to female printers, but only a reiteration of the newspaper's contempt for "nigger" workers.<sup>46</sup>

44 *DP*, December 17, 1864; April 2 and 4, 1865. The *Press* was printed in German to appeal to voters in response to the *Post's* endorsement of Thomas.

45 Obermann, *Weydemeyer*, pp. 124-40; William Parrish, *Turbulent Partnership: Missouri and the Union, 1861-1865* (Columbia, Mo., 1963), p. 184.

46 *DP*, December 17, 18, 24 and 28, 1864.

Such racism sometimes combined with a narrow class consciousness to form an indictment of egalitarian Republicanism—a movement said to be “. . . running over with a sentimental sympathy for . . . an inferior race away down in Georgia [but] allowing white women . . . to starve.”<sup>47</sup> In essence, the *Press* quickly perceived that, as David Montgomery has put it, Radical Republicanism was slow to move “beyond equality” to commit itself on questions of class. The *Press* might applaud a Radical army officer when he encouraged an Emancipation Day rally to gird itself for a new battle “for the rights of the workingman,” but neither it nor the Republicans were ready to make the cause of blacks and labor one. Soon the labor paper would berate the Illinois legislature because it “. . . found time to repeal the law refusing colored people a home in that state but could not . . . repeal the infamous [anti-labor] Lasalle Black Law.”<sup>48</sup>

Despite these outbursts of racism and anti-radicalism, the *Daily Press* did not consistently oppose Radical Republicanism until after Mayor Thomas's reelection. In the wake of its electoral defeat, the *Press* steadily drifted from a policy of generally ignoring those issues not directly related to labor to a policy of active anti-Radicalism. Initially the attack on Radical Republicanism was tentative: “The policy of elevating the black man . . . as a matter of moral and political economy may be unquestionable; but how can the same party . . . attempt to abase the workingman?” After the Lincoln assassination, however, the *Press* increasingly put aside independent pro-labor politics in favor of anti-radicalism, pro-Johnson ones. Editorials repeatedly urged that the question of Negro suffrage be left to the states, that the requirement that ex-Confederates take an oath before voting be stricken from the Missouri Constitution, and that labor support pro-Johnson candidates in the fall elections.<sup>50</sup> Commenting on the “nigger question” in an article entitled “The Darkey,” the *Press* expressed the opinion that one or two generations would pass before “the darkey may be improved until if not the equal of the white, he may at least claim equal privileges.” This desire

47 *DP*, March 14, 1865.

48 Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, *passim* and esp. p. 98 for a discussion of the Lasalle Black Laws, which prohibited strikes and labor organizing, especially in the mining industry. See also *DP*, January 15, February 14 and March 4, 1865.

49 *DP*, April 7, 1865.

50 *DP*, May 26, August 17 and September 12–17, 1865.

to uplift the Negro soon ebbed, and the *Press* maintained that "for the present we have done enough for the negro." Above all, the paper cautioned against Radical influences over the ex-slaves, who as a group were "ignorant, docile, and easily to be led by designing men."<sup>51</sup>

The late summer and early fall of 1865 brought surges of activity among St. Louis's workers—black and white. A July mass meeting seeking black suffrage drew 10,000 to hear Frederick Douglass's address.<sup>52</sup> Shortly thereafter white workers walked off their jobs at the city gas works. When black workers were hired as replacements the whites appealed for solidarity and a large number of black workers joined the strike. In September came the huge Fenian demonstrations at McCarthy's funeral, and a victorious strike by 1,000 ship carpenters. The eight-hour movement grew so dramatically during the fall that when Richard Trevellick came to address an eight-hour rally in November, the *Press* estimated the crowd at 10,000. The German press wholeheartedly supported the eight-hour campaign.<sup>53</sup> Despite this rising labor combativeness, the *Daily Press* remained pro-Johnson and did not attempt to encourage independent labor political activity around the eight-hour issue.<sup>54</sup>

*Decline: "His Soul Inspired by Winkelmeier's Lager"*

As the flurry of St. Louis working class activity at the close of 1865 subsided with the onset of the 1866 winter, the *Daily Press* ceased to identify itself with the cause of labor. Not only did the paper ignore the possibility of independent political activity by labor, but it also increasingly ignored economic struggles of working people. The reprinting of labor news from other parts of the United States and Europe virtually stopped and even the

51 *DP*, August 6 and October 11, 1865.

52 *Missouri Democrat*, July 11, 1865.

53 *DP*, September 5, 14, 19 and November 5, 1865. Black solidarity in the gas strike impressed the *Press* correspondent: "All honor to these men. . . they are black and have not had the opportunities of learning right from wrong, particularly in the matter of labor." *DP*, August 2, 1865.

54 During this period, the *Press* showed interest in the currency reform schemes of Alexander Campbell, printing his articles long before other labor papers. This interest in Campbell's doctrines of class harmony interestingly parallels the *Press's* turn from labor politics to support for Johnsonian Democracy. See *DP*, June 28, July 8 and 11, 1865, and Irwin Unger, *The Greenback Era* (Princeton, 1964), pp. 69, 101-3.

strikes of St. Louis workers drew no attention. The *Press* no longer identified itself as a "labor" paper but as a "people's" or even a "western" paper.<sup>55</sup> Editorials favored "equal justice between the laborer and the capitalist" and stressed that their interests most often coincided. Prior to the April, 1866 state elections, the *Press* urged that "every businessman and every workingman" should vote for the anti-Radical ticket. Only after the election did the paper pay perfunctory homage to its origins in the labor movement, headlining its story on the Radical's defeat, "Workingmen Come to the Rescue."<sup>56</sup>

It is likely that this turn away from labor in the content of the paper paralleled a shift in the control of the paper. The *Press* itself does not make clear if and when control passed from the Printers' Union and Trades' Union League to other groups, but circumstantial evidence indicates that by early 1866 many of the unionists had moved on. David Orr, the printer-editor of the early *Daily Press*, would soon begin to manage the *Industrial Advocate*, a St. Louis labor paper which was endorsed by the 1866 convention of the National Labor Union, and Samuel Slawson, the *Press*'s able business agent, also departed, giving way to H.F. Driller, a "steamboat and general agent" in the company, Driller and Volmer.<sup>57</sup> Such shifts in personnel may have been part of a general displacement of trade union elements within the *Daily Press*. In any case, by the elections of 1866 the paper's editors no longer felt any need to conform to the policies of the Trades' Union League. The *Press* issued a blanket endorsement of the anti-Radicals while the League endorsed individual candidates on the basis of their labor records.<sup>58</sup>

If the decline of labor coverage created a void in the *Daily Press*, an ever-increasing emphasis on pro-Johnson politics and support for Fenianism more than filled that void. Basing itself on the "constitutional statesmanship of Andrew Johnson," the *Press* opposed all Radical measures at both the national and state levels. Negro suffrage drew special fire, with its supporters casti-

55 *DP*, January 5, February 2 and May 15, 1866.

56 *DP*, February 15, April 2 and 4, 1866.

57 Edwards, *St. Louis Directory, 1867* (St. Louis, 1867), pp. 305, 621, 727; *DP*, March 27, 1866. Robert Craig, a national Typographical Union leader, did remain in the leadership of the *Press*; see *DP*, November 26, 1865.

58 *DP*, April 2 and 3, 1866.



gated as "extremists . . . exclusively preoccupied with the negro." Praise greeted Johnson's veto of the Freedmen's Bureau Bill and his veto message was reprinted twice. The *Press* publicized and endorsed two pro-Johnson "Reconstruction Mass Meetings" and sought to build up the National Johnson Club in St. Louis.<sup>59</sup>

Only Fenianism rivaled anti-Radicalism as a *cause célèbre* for the *Daily Press* in early 1866. Although not uncritical of the movement's tendency to splinter into impotent factions, the *Press* supported Irish nationalism in many ways. There were pro-Fenian letters, editorials and poems. The *Press* publicized the Ball of the Fenian Sisterhood, a Fenian war bond drive and even a Fenian lottery. By June, when the Fenians mounted their short-lived invasion of Canada, the *Press's* readers had been well-organized in support of the nationalists.<sup>60</sup>

The exclusive advocacy of anti-Radicalism and of Fenianism moved the *Daily Press* far afield from its founding principles of working class unity. Not only did anti-Radicalism derive much of its impetus from racism among St. Louis workers, but it also worked to exacerbate other ethnic divisions. The *Press* walked a thin line between opposition to Radical policies and a rabid, generalized opposition to the Germans who supported Radicalism. Sometimes, as in an attack on a writer for the *Westliche Post*, the line was crossed. "We can faintly imagine him in his sanctum," wrote the *Press*,

. . . his soul with Winkelmeier's lager . . .; his being lights up with the grand problem solved at last: "We are the revolution. . . Viva German Progress! Viva lager and Switzer kase and the . . . stimulating pretzels. Up with the Red Republicanism and damn everybody else."<sup>61</sup>

However much it ignored the labor movement and however much it reflected ethnic divisions, the *Press* flourished well into 1866. In March, it was still able to claim the largest subscription list among St. Louis papers; the trade unions even continued to submit notices of meetings at the rate of more than 20 per week. There was apparently a place in St. Louis for a newspaper combining Fenianism, anti-Radicalism and a heritage of labor mili-

59 *DP*, January 5, February 15-25 and April 9, 1866.

60 *DP*, January 3, 6, 14, 28, March 12-25 and April 3, 1866.

61 *DP*, March 4, 1866.

tancy.<sup>62</sup> The Fenian invasion of Canada cut the ground from under the enterprise with surprising speed.

The *Press* and President Johnson responded to the Fenian invasion in diametrically opposed ways. The *Press* embraced the action as a glorious crusade which promised to free Ireland; Johnson moved to arrest the Fenian soldiers as criminals whose insurrection had embarrassed the United States. The *Press* had to admit that the twin principles of Irish nationalism and pro-Johnson politics could no longer coexist, charging that

... Johnson has caused the arrest of seven or eight hundred men ... for the crime of desiring to free Ireland. ...

During the last six or eight months he has pardoned several hundred rebels to enable them to fulfill the positions of Governors [and] members of State Conventions ...<sup>63</sup>

The conclusion was inescapable: Rebels ruled while liberty-loving (and loyal) Fenians were incarcerated. Bloody shirts waved in the pages of the *Press* and the stage was set for a final twist in the paper's rapidly ending career.

After a year of opposition to all things Radical and after six months of ignoring labor issues, the *Daily Press* unblushingly informed its readers that "The patrons of the *Press* will this morning notice a change in its general politics. That change has been determined upon because radicalism has always sustained labor in its contests with capital." Radicals gained recognition as labor's best friends for their advocacy of homesteads and public education. The *Press* admitted it had been lax in covering the labor movement, vowing it would no longer "neglect the interests of workingmen ..." Finally, the editors endorsed Radical race policy, declaring support for "absolute equality of all men before the law." Charles Moss, a lawyer, quickly replaced H.F. Driller as business manager, indicating that the 180° turn in the *Press's* politics brought internal changes as well.<sup>64</sup>

While the *Press* did address labor questions seriously during its Radical phase, it did so almost exclusively within the

62 *DP*, March 4, 1866. On the affinity of Irish workers and the Democracy, see Bernard Mandel, *Labor: Free and Slave* (New York, 1976), pp. 68-9.

63 *DP*, June 10, 1866.

64 *DP*, June 10, July 8 and August 7, 1866. *St. Louis Directory, 1867*, p. 590.

framework of support for the Republican Party. The editors urged that "equality" be maintained between labor and capital. The *Press* deprecated strikes and offered only very muted support for a unionist who was fired from his printing job on the *Republican*.<sup>65</sup> Like some trade union leaders of the period, the editors sought to concentrate labor's energy on political struggles, especially the passing of eight-hour laws. The *Press's* position differed from that of the working class leaders, however, insofar as many of the latter called for independent political action by labor or, at least, support of pro-labor candidates regardless of party. For the *Press*, the only candidates who were acceptable were those who professed "Radicalism of the ultra-stripe."<sup>66</sup> No possibility of labor-Radical tension was admitted. The stormy past of the *Press* itself belied such a sanguine view.

The *Press* was also poorly equipped to deal with ethnic and racial differences within St. Louis's working class. Ostensibly, the paper returned in its last weeks to its earlier philosophy of appealing to both German and Irish workers. The traditionally Radical German community drew high praise at the same time that ringing pro-Fenian editorials appeared. In time, however, as the Fenians lost Canada, the emphasis on Irish nationalism abated and the *Press* drifted toward a slurring ethnic explanation for Fenianism's defeat, reporting that "desertions are the rule. . . . Drunkenness prevails to an alarming extent." By July the *Press* oriented itself overwhelmingly to German workers and labor remained ethnically divided over Reconstruction policies. In the 1867 St. Louis elections, the anti-Radical slate was known as the "Irish ticket."<sup>67</sup>

Even in racial matters the *Press* failed to advance strong arguments for labor unity. The theories of race advanced by the *Press* undercut its egalitarianism. Following the "American school" of anthropology, the paper maintained that "the negro is of separate and distinct origin from the Caucasian. . . . the white race has proved itself to be the superior race. . . . [The whites] are larger-brained." Having accepted white supremacy as a scien-

65 *DP*, June 17, August 2 and 3, 1866.

66 *DP*, July 1 and 8, 1866; Cf. Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, pp. 135-334 and, especially, 447.

67 *DP*, June 10-27, 1866. Soraghan, *History of St. Louis*, pp. 34-5. See also Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, p. 150, for charges by trade unionists that German workers in St. Louis failed to support unionism.

tific fact, the *Press* nonetheless continued to support Radical race policies, doggedly hoping that "the slaves, the root-eaters and dwellers in caves of one generation [would] become the philosophers . . . of the next."<sup>68</sup> The combination of racist anthropology and an egalitarian, even visionary, stance on racial issues could not have strengthened the *Press's* efforts to combat racism among white workers.

Had the *Press* survived it might have developed a more convincing platform to unite labor behind a Radical program. But in the cholera epidemic and the economic downturn of St. Louis in 1866, only an immediate and clear appeal could insure the success of the paper. Although the editors denied that the paper suffered financial losses after its abrupt shift to Radicalism, a loss in readership must have resulted. The increasing inability of the *Press* to gain access to wire service news compounded that loss. Cloying poetry, advertisements for fortune tellers and reprints from other St. Louis papers filled the *Press's* pages. Highlighting the often lackluster reprints was a series of four articles translating Weydemeyer's *Westliche Post* columns on "The Eight-Hour Movement." In the final article, Weydemeyer quoted Marx to the effect that "the political education of the masses in the school of life is the only school."<sup>70</sup> On August 19, 1866, as Weydemeyer lay dying of cholera and as the National Labor Union prepared to convene its first convention in Baltimore,<sup>71</sup> St. Louis's *Daily Press* ceased publication. Since emerging from the "school of life" nineteen months before, the *Press* had repeatedly attempted to influence the political education of St. Louis's masses. Some of its attempts drew inspiration from the highest ideals of labor, other from narrow party loyalties. Unable to overcome racism and the divisive political atmosphere of Reconstruction, the *Press* expended its original working class impetus in partisan squabbling. It left St. Louis workers as ethnically and racially divided as it

68 *DP*, August 7, 1866. The combination of egalitarian racial *policies* and reactionary racial *theories* was not uncommon among Radicals; see George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind* (Evanston, 1972), pp. 164-97.

69 Soraghan, *History of St. Louis*, p. 109; *DP*, June 12-16, 1866. To add to the *Press's* troubles, on August 4, 1866, Orr's St. Louis-based *Industrial Advocate* began publication. The *Advocate* won NLU backing and a labor readership but the *Press* ignored its new rival.

70 *DP*, August 11, 16, 18 and 19, 1866.

71 Obermann, *Weydemeyer*, p. 139; Foner, *Labor Movement*, I, 371.

found them, but it also left the rich record of its frustrated attempt at workers' control.

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The record of the *Press* raises questions which, while beyond the scope of this paper, deserve brief comment. Foner's seminal work on the Boston *Voice* suggests several comparisons. Foner demonstrates that the *Voice* was a labor paper willing to stand up for black-white unity in both politics and unionism. He recognizes nonetheless that division and racism in the Boston labor movement constrained the *Voice* so that at one point the paper "had gone as far as it could in pushing for a radical program . . . without losing . . . labor support." The vacillation, racism and opportunism of the *Daily Press* illuminates by contrast the achievement of the *Voice* in holding to principle in the face of opposition. On the other hand, the *Press* presents at least indirect evidence that German workers in St. Louis evinced a strong egalitarian commitment.

A comparison between the *Voice* and the *Press* is further suggestive in accounting for the sources of racism among white workers during Reconstruction. Job competition, real or imagined, appears to have fueled racial tension in Boston, where white fears caused the *Voice* to wage a protracted campaign to quell mounting hysteria over a rumored exodus of black labor from the South. No such fears of massive job displacement surfaced in the *Press*. The absence of such fears is especially striking in view of the large freed slave population in Missouri. Moreover the *Press* did often express concern over the activities of the American Emigrant Company and over the in-migration of *white* Southerners. If the *Press* accurately represented the thought of St. Louis workers, racism may not have been intimately linked with job fears there.<sup>72</sup>

In St. Louis, a city with low black population and a large influx of white labor, other factors may have superseded job competition in determining the intensity of post-bellum racism. Among these factors are the relative absence of black military

<sup>72</sup> Foner, "Labor Voice," 314; *DP*, May 5 and 21, 1865. Strikebreaking by black workers was, of course, a factor in the printers' and gas workers' strikes described above. The point here is that no evidence in the *Press* indicates fear of a general exodus of black labor to St. Louis.

activity,<sup>73</sup> the numerical strength of Irish, anti-Radical voters and the ties of local trade unionists with the South. In the case of the *Press*, this last factor may have exerted an especially strong influence on the printers who founded the paper. As members of the National Typographical Union they belonged to a body with important Southern locals. Even before the war's end the printers sought to renew their Southern ties "on the most liberal terms." St. Louis printers, tied to Memphis and New Orleans in the river printing trade, could well have hesitated before alienating Southern printers with a call to Radicalism. The implication is that complex local considerations shaped working class racial attitudes.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, and most generally, this case study of the *Daily Press* suggests the possibility that the destructive effects of racism in the American workers' movement were much broader than the simple undermining of black-white trade union unity. The failure to unite on anti-racist principles did more than open the St. Louis labor movement to the possibility of black strikebreaking. It also eroded the unity of labor to such an extent that independent labor political action became submerged in partisan battles. During a period of intense working class activity, the focus of politics shifted from class versus class to race versus race and even to ethnic group versus ethnic group as labor proved unable to unite on egalitarian principles. It is true, as Montgomery argues, that a part of labor's reluctance to embrace radical race policy stemmed from a class-conscious suspicion of reformers who refused to look "beyond equality"; another part stemmed from racism. By failing to fight for an end to such racism—by stopping "before equality"—the *Daily Press* helped to assure division and weakness in both its paper and the ranks of St. Louis labor.

#### *Northwestern University*

73 John Blassingame, "The Recruitment of Negro Troops in Missouri During the Civil War," *MHR*, LVIII (1964), *passim*. On the relative paucity of black immigrants compared to whites, see Galusha Anderson, *A Border City During the Civil War* (Newton Centre, Mass., 1908), pp. 261-2.

74 McVicar, *Typographical Union*, pp. 31-6. The national union warmly supported Johnson. Again a comparison with the Boston case is valuable. There the egalitarian attitudes of the *Voice* are traceable in part to the editors' roots in Boston's vital abolitionist movement. See Foner, "Labor Voice," p. 314.