

# *Terence V. Powderly, The Knights of Labor, 1889*

*Terence Powderly was born in Pennsylvania in 1849 where he worked for many years as a machinist for the railroads. In 1874 he joined the Knights of Labor, a secret fraternal order of workers. He became leader of the Knights ("Grand Master Workman") in 1879, and moved the organization away from secret rituals and toward militant reform. Under Powderly the Knights advocated an eight hour day, the abolition of child labor, a graduated income tax, and equal pay for equal work. Unlike other labor organizations of the day, the Knights organized their locals by industry rather than trade, accepting all skill levels and women as well. Powderly opposed strikes, emphasizing instead boycotts, arbitration, and political activism as the best way to improve the worker's lot.*

SOURCE: Terence V. Powderly, *Thirty Years of Labor* (1889).

The first committee on constitution of the order of the Knights of Labor, appointed by Mr. Stephens, consisted of representatives Robert Schilling, Chairman; Ralph Beaumont, Thomas King, T. V. Powderly, and George S. Boyle. Two members of this committee, Messrs. Schilling and Powderly, were members of the Industrial Brotherhood; and though neither one knew that the other would be present, both brought with them a sufficient supply of constitutions of the I. B. to supply the body. The adoption of the preamble was left to these two, and a glance at it will show what changes were made in the declaration of principles whose history has been traced down from year to year since it was first adopted by the National Labor Union of 1866.

The committee on constitution adopted the constitution of the Industrial Brotherhood so far as practicable. The constitution, when printed, bore the same legend on the title page as was adopted at the Rochester meeting in 1874. The following is the preamble adopted at Reading, January 3, 1878:

"When bad men combine, the good must associate, else they will fall, one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle."

## **PREAMBLE**

The recent alarming development and aggression of aggregated wealth, which, unless checked, will invariably lead to the pauperization and hopeless degradation of the toiling masses, render it imperative, if we desire to enjoy the blessings of life, that a check should be placed upon its power and upon unjust accumulation, and a system adopted which will secure to the laborer the fruits of his toil; and as this much-desired object can only be accomplished by the thorough unification of labor, and the united efforts of those who obey the divine injunction that "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread," we have formed the \* \* \* \* with a view of securing the organization and direction, by cooperative effort, of the power of the industrial classes; and we submit to the world the objects sought to be accomplished by our organization, calling upon all who believe in securing "the greatest good to the greatest number" to aid and assist us:—

I. To bring within the folds of organization every department

of productive industry, making knowledge a stand-point for action, and industrial and moral worth, not wealth, the true standard of individual and national greatness.

II. To secure to the toilers a proper share of the wealth that they create: more of the leisure that rightfully belongs to them; more societal advantages; more of the benefits, privileges, and emoluments of the world: in a word, all those rights and privileges necessary to make them capable of enjoying, appreciating, defending and perpetuating the blessings of good government.

III. To arrive at the true condition of the producing masses in their educational, moral, and financial condition, by demanding from the various governments the "establishment of bureaus of Labor statistics.

IV. The establishment of co-operative institutions, productive and distributive.

V. The reserving of the public lands—the heritage of the people—or the actual settler;—not another acre for railroads or speculators.

VI. The abrogation of all laws that do not bear equally upon capital and labor, the removal of unjust technicalities, delays, and discriminations in the administration of justice, and the adopting of measures providing for the health and safety of those engaged in mining, manufacturing, or building pursuits.

VII. The enactment of laws to compel chartered corporations to pay their employes weekly, in full, for labor performed during the preceding week, in the lawful money of the country.

VIII. The enactment of laws giving mechanics and laborers a first lien on their work for their full wages.

IX. The abolishment of the contract system on national, State, and municipal work.

X. The substitution of arbitration for strikes, whenever and wherever employers and employees are willing to meet on equitable grounds.

XI. The prohibition of the employment of children in workshops, mines and factories before attaining their fourteenth year.

XII. To abolish the system of letting out by contract the labor of convicts in our prisons and reformatory institutions.

XIII. To secure for both sexes equal pay for equal work.

XIV. The reduction of the hours of labor to eight per day, so that the laborers may have more time for social enjoyment and intellectual improvement, and be enabled to reap the advantages conferred by the labor-saving machinery which their brains have created.

XV. To prevail upon governments to establish a purely national circulating medium, based upon the faith and resources of the nation, and issued directly to the people, without the intervention of any system of banking corporations, which money shall be a legal tender in payment of all debts, public or private....

In accepting the preamble of the Industrial Brotherhood, the convention fully realized that for the most part the reforms which were asked for in that preamble must one day come through political agitation and action. The chief aim of those who presented the document to the convention was to place something on the front page of the constitution which, it was hoped, every workingman would in time read and ponder over. It was their hope that by keeping those measures, so fraught with interest to the people, constantly before the eye of the worker, he would become educated in the science of politics to that extent that he would know that those things that were wrong in our political system were wrong simply because he did not attend to his political duties in a proper man-

ner; that the righting of such things as were wrong would not be done by those who had the management of political affairs up to that time, but by himself....

...The belief was prevalent until a short time ago among working men, that only the man who was engaged in manual toil could be called a workingman. The man who labored at the bench or anvil; the man who held the throttle of the engine, or delved in the everlasting gloom of the coal mine, did not believe that the man who made the drawings from which he forged, turned, or dug could be classed as a worker. The draughtsman, the time-keeper, the clerk, the school teacher, the civil engineer, the editor, the reporter, or the worst paid, most abused and illy appreciated of all toilers—woman—could not be called a worker. It was essential that the mechanics of America should know who were workers. A more wide-spread knowledge of the true definition of the word labor must be arrived at, and the true relations existing between all men who labor must be more clearly defined. Narrow prejudice, born of the injustice and oppressions of the past, must be overcome, and all who interest themselves in producing for the world's good must be made to understand that their interests are identical. All the way down the centuries of time in which the man who worked was held in bondage or servitude, either wholly or partially, he was brought directly in contact with the overseer, the superintendent, or the boss. From these he seldom received a word of kindness; indeed it was the recognized rule to treat all men who toiled as if they were of inferior clay.

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It was necessary to teach the laborer that it was not essential for him to grovel in the dust at the feet of a master in order to win his title deed to everlasting bliss in the hereafter; and it can not be wondered at that many who strove to better the condition of the toiler lost all respect for religion when they saw that those who affected to be the most devout worshipers at the foot of the heavenly throne, were the most tyrannical of task masters when dealing with the poor and lowly, whose unfortunate lot was cast within the shadow of their heartless supervision....

...Knowledge for the workingman meant that he should be able to detect the difference between the real and the sham. Whenever a learned man said that which did not appear to be just to labor, he was to be questioned, publicly questioned, as to his base of actual facts. All through the centuries toilers have erected the brass and granite monuments of the world's greatness and have thrown up on hillside and plain the material for other homes than their own. The weary feet of toil have trodden the earth, and strong hands have formed the pillars of the bondage of old. All along the blood-stained march of the years that have flown, the struggling ones have given to earth more of richness in the sweat which fell to earth from their throbbing foreheads; the grain which lifted its head for long ages of time under the care of the toiler, has been enriched by the sweat, the blood, and the flesh of the poor, plodding men of toil. While the sun kissed to warmth and life the wheat and corn which their hands nurtured and cared for, they received the husks and stalks as their recompense for labor done. Their masters took the grain for themselves, but lifted no hand in its production....