

Primary Source: The Loray Mill Strike Begins ^[1]

Starting on April 1, 1929, 1,800 textile workers formed a labor strike at the Loray Textile Mill in Gastonia, NC. The workers sought to improve working conditions, hours, and pay and were met with violence from local authorities. The following passage is excerpted from The Gastonia Daily Gazette, a newspaper in Gaston County, NC and recounts the event of the strike.

Call Out Militia: Gastonia & Shelby Units are Ordered Out to Quell Loray Strike

Shelby & Gastonia National Guard troops Ordered Out to Take Charge of Threatening Situation at Loray Mills—Violence Threatened When Deputies Attempt to Stretch Ropes in Front of Entrance to the Mill.

Following disturbances at the Loray Mill today shortly before noon, Mayor W. T. Rankin, Sheriff E. P. Lineberger and Chief of Police O. F. Adderholt asked the Governor of North Carolina to call out the National Guard to aid in quelling the strike which has been in progress this week at the Loray branch of the Manville Jenckes Company.

Governor Gardner and General J. Van B. Metts immediately authorized the calling out of the Howitzer Company, the local National Guard troop, and the Shelby Company. It is thought that the Charlotte and Concord Companies will be called out too, if the two above troops are not able to control the situation.

Mayor Rankin talked direct with Governor Gardner and told him the situation was beyond the control of the sheriff and city policemen.

The disturbance that led to the action of the sheriff and chief of police came about when the sheriff's deputies and city policemen attempted to stretch a cable or rope across the street in front of the entrance to the mill office to prevent strikers from crowding in and intimidating those who wished to enter the mill to go to work. The crowds of strikers, some 300 to 400 strong, immediately rushed the deputies and swept them off their feet; one policeman was knocked to the ground in the [melee](#) ^[2]. The strikers, with great crowds of hangers-on, seized the ropes and cables and dragged them several hundred yards from the office. Immediately the temper of the crowd changed. From a happy, laughing, joking crowd, the demonstration became a belligerent, threatening mob, which threatened violence. Jeers, cat cries and howls of derision greeted the deputies as they entered their cars for the trip back to town. Fists were shaken and sticks and clubs waved in the air.

Immediately on arrival at the city hall, the mayor and sheriff got in touch with the governor's office in Raleigh and told him the situation.

"The situation is beyond our control," the mayor said to the governor, "and we are asking you to send troops here to take charge of the situation."

[Battalion](#) ^[3] Commander Stephen B. Dolley, and Captain Arthur Fuller will be in command of the troops. Headquarters will be set up at city hall.

Prior to the outbreak before noon, it had been hoped that the difficulties at the Loray would be peaceably settled. At a conference this morning of the leading textile officials of the county and the city, an appeal was made through the advertising columns of the Gazette to the strikers to disregard the appeal of the organizer, [Beal](#). An effort was made to expose him and his tactics, by showing that he was a Red, a [Bolshevik](#) ^[4], and employed by the communist organization.

Beal and his assistant, one [Pershing](#), claim that Gastonia is the starting point of an effort to be made to organize the 300,000 textile workers of the South. Headquarters are to be established in Gastonia and Gaston County.

"This is the first strike of our national union and we intend to make this a big success," declared Beal. "We feel confident that this Loray strike will be the beginning of a tremendous south-wide movement to organize thoroughly in every state. We are receiving aid in our strike here from George Pershing, representing the Daily Worker, the official organ of the Communist Party of America. Our union, however, is not connected with the communist party, but after our union is granted its demands, the Communist group will come in with its political-education program."

Pershing arrived here last Friday with Beal and has taken a leading part in the strike activities, participating in every meeting and making several impassioned speeches to urge the workers to rally to the union cause.

The demands to be made to the Loray mill, announced by Beal after the strike committee gathering, follow:

1. Elimination of all [piece work, hank or cloth systems](#), and substitution of a standard wage scale.
2. A minimum standard weekly wage of \$20.
3. Forty hour, five day week.
4. Abolition of all speeding and [doubling up of work](#).
5. Equal pay for equal work for [women and youth](#).
6. Decent and sanitary working and housing conditions.
 1. Immediate installation of baths without extra charge to workers.
 2. Screening of all homes without extra charge to workers.
 3. Repair of toilets in mill.
7. Reduction by 50 per cent of rent and light charges.
8. Recognition of the union.

The controversy started some two weeks ago when Beal began work among the mill employees.

Saturday, Beal returned to the Loray mill section, resumed activities and called a mass meeting for Saturday afternoon. At the meeting, it was announced that the executive committee of the secret union has agreed to call a strike if any employee of the mill was fired for being a member of the organization or for attending the meeting.

Five workers, it is claimed, were immediately dismissed from the mill and the strike followed.

"I think they did it to see if we would really strike," Beal asserted today.

Mr. Baugh expressed no anxiety over the situation last night, saying the mill was operating with about 75 per cent of the usual day force of 1,200 workers and about half of the usual night force of 800 workers.

Beal, corroborated by strikers, on the other hand steadfastly maintained that fully 95 per cent of the mill employees had walked out. Beal claimed that only 75 mill workers of the night shift, out of approximately 400 checked in for work last night and that three of this number soon joined the strikers.

In discussing the situation last night, Mr. Baugh said: "Our attitude will be that we will not pay any attention to the strike whatsoever. We will continue to operate, and if necessary, we will get workers immediately to replace those who have walked out. We are asking the strikers to vacate our houses.

"No demand has been presented to us as yet. I will listen to our employees, but under no conditions will I discuss the situation with the union organizers. I understand he claims a pretty good membership in the union. From the best information I have, the union is an [I. W. W. bunch](#). Our people seem to be having a good time but most of the demonstrations around the mill are among the picketeers. We asked the police, as a precautionary measure, to give us protection.

"I think the situation will be over in a few days. Our home office at Pawtucket, R. I., is not worried at all. There has been no trouble and we do not anticipate any."

Beal speaking for the union said:

"The union was organized here about six months ago with a few members and has shown a constant growth. We decided to come out in the open and not hide but to tell the world that we belong to the union and believe in it. We believe in this country that we have a right to organize a union and we will fight for that right."

Beal claimed that he represents a national organization which was formed in September 1928 by the consolidation of several other textile workers' organizations and that is in no way affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. Headquarters for the National Textile Union are located at 104 Fifth Avenue, New York, Beal says.

Miss. L. M. Dawson has assisted him in the work of organizing the Gastonia workers, Beal says.

Local headquarters of the union have been established at 1242 West Franklin Avenue from which numerous circulars have been distributed throughout the section and among workers.

Beal says that he is experienced in organizing and strike leadership as he was the leader of the movement in New Bedford, Mass., when textile workers were on strike from March until September 1928. He was also affiliated with the strike in Lawrence, Mass., as a leader when workers left their mills in 1922. In 1923, Beal says he led the strike at Dover, N.H.

When the strike was called, the union headquarters distributed the circulars as follows:

"To all workers of the Manville Jencks mills: Now is the time for action! Today union members were fired who have slaved for years in this mill, making profits for the bosses, for no other reason than belonging to a union. Hundreds have already joined the union and the bosses want to fire them one by one and bring in workers from other states whom they have fooled into thinking that they pay high wages, to take our places. All night workers, all day workers STRIKE.

"Form picket lines in front of the mill gates at once. Workers who have not joined the union, do so at once. Office 1242 West Franklin Street. Every worker out. Clear the mill tonight. Victory will be ours."

The mill retaliated by distributing 11 different kinds of circulars, 2,000 of each kind.

Banners were displayed among strikers, calling to workers. Among them were, "Don't be a [Scab](#)," "Who has the money in the Bank? Only the Bosses," "No Union Man Will Starve," and "Be a Man,

Not a Scab."

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