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SOLIDARITY AND FRAGMENTATION:
WORKING PEOPLE AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS IN DETROIT,
1877-1895

By

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A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

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By

Richard Jules Oestreicher

American workers have generally displayed less class consciousness than workers in other modern industrial societies. Many scholars have argued that such factors as the wealth of American society, the structure of the American government, rates of social mobility, and patterns of immigration explain this exceptionalism. Usually, however, these explanations have been on such a broad level of generalization that they fail to analyze the mechanisms through which structural forces function in a specific context.

This study provides such an analysis for a representative industrial city, Detroit, during the intense period of industrialization of the late nineteenth century. The dissertation describes sources of class consciousness, barriers to it, and the resulting tensions between these opposing tendencies among Detroit workers between 1877 and 1895.

In 1880, Detroit was a rapidly growing medium sized industrial city. Differences in background, culture, occupation, skill level, stability in the

community, work experience, economic prospects, and social attitudes divided workers. While there were clear similarities among the life styles, problems, and prospects of many types of workers, they reacted differently to their situations. Yet widespread dissatisfaction with the imposition of new work disciplines, the unequal distribution of the benefits of industrialization, the declining status of many skilled trades, and deplorable working conditions provided a basis for class solidarity.

During the early 1880's, labor activists succeeded in creating the organizational infrastructure for a working class subculture of opposition. The Knights of Labor were the most important organizational expression of this subculture. Knights of Labor assemblies were complemented by a host of new working class institutions: labor newspapers, producer and consumer cooperatives, workers' social and cultural organizations, a workers' militia, and an independent labor party. By 1886 thousands of workers functioned within this subculture as the movement emerged as a major political and social force in the city.

Yet the very rise of this subculture, and the potential power it represented, further aggravated the internal tensions which divided workers. The movement broke up amidst bitter and emotional factionalism. The labor movement would not recapture the power and influence it had exercised in Detroit in the mid-1880's until the

1930's. At the same time, the spectacle of mass street demonstrations convinced liberal business and political elites like mayor Hazen Pingree to look for new ways to solve the system's worst abuses and reintegrate workers into the dominant culture. The legacy of the era was thus to discourage an independent and class conscious workers' movement and to encourage groups of both business and labor leaders to collaborate toward limited reforms within the system.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States is the only major industrialized nation in which class politics have played little role in political life. There is no Communist, Socialist, or Labor party worthy of consideration, and basic ideas that underlie the existence of such parties--desire to restructure society, conception of political parties as representatives of specific classes or social groups, a consistent ideology--are considered un-American.¹

This unique character of American development has been extensively discussed by scholars. Werner Sombart, in a famous essay published in 1906 attributing the weakness of American socialism to the wealth and prosperity of American society, mused that "All socialist utopias have come to grief on roast beef and apple pie." Louis Hartz, writing in the 1950's, argued that the absence of a feudal heritage produced a "natural liberalism" that obviated ideologies of the left. More recently, Seymour Martin Lipset has emphasized the structure of American government and the strength of individualistic values.²

The problem with such arguments is not only that they tend to be monocausal but, more importantly, that

they operate at such a broad level of generalization, collapsing centuries of historical experience, that they are essentially descriptive summaries of what has taken place rather than explanations. They assume what they should be seeking to prove. Exactly how has the general wealth of American society affected individual workers in various circumstances, and what are the relationships between economic position and social consciousness? Why have certain values prevailed and not others? Have class consciousness and class appeals been consistently absent from American society? If not, why has class not been expressed in political form? Recent monographs, such as the growing body of social mobility studies, have provided some of the data necessary to begin to answer these questions, but the answers await synthesis.³

A necessary step in such a synthesis must be a series of studies of communities representative of various types of towns and various stages in industrialization. In this way broad speculation can be subjected to careful analysis and testing. Basic questions can be posed within a more limited time frame and within the concrete context of a more limited body of evidence. We can ask questions about the validity of current macro-theories in a specific locale. If such theories are valid, what are the actual mechanisms through which the forces suggested in them become operative? What do the operations of such

mechanisms reveal about the nature of class, class consciousness, and class relations? What models of human behavior are most appropriate for understanding the social dynamics of the industrialization process?

The present study seeks answers to these questions in late nineteenth century Detroit. Specifically, I hope to describe sources of class consciousness, barriers to it, and the resulting tension between these opposing tendencies among Detroit workers between 1877 and 1895. I will examine the behavior, ideas, and organization (formal and informal) of workers and their relationships with the business class of the city.

Class will be defined as an historical relationship between one group of people and another group who identify common interests (usually economic and political) among themselves and see those interests in opposition to those of the other group. These perceptions of conflicting interest have their roots in objective disparities of wealth and power, but not all differences in wealth and power are class relationships. The recognition that these differences are reciprocally related, e.g., a belief that workers are poor because owners are wealthy, and vice versa, constitutes the essence of a class relationship. Thus a class cannot be defined without reference to its antagonist. By historical I mean that this relationship develops over time, and it is in the process of development

that members of each class accumulate the experiences, traditions, values, attitudes which lead to the perception and definition of conflicting interests. While members of a class probably will have similar income levels and, if they are class conscious, similar attitudes about their relative social status, if class is defined as the historical development of an antagonistic relationship, its definition can neither be reduced to objective categories such as income level, type of work, or relationship to the means of production, nor to subjective evaluations such as individual assessment of relative social position. All such categories are only indirect manifestations of the relationship which produces them.⁴

Class consciousness is the individual and group awareness of the existence of a class relationship. Since individuals even in similar class positions have different ideas and experiences, class consciousness is not fixed, not something which is either present or absent. It is variable, a range of attitudes, a continuum. Nor does class consciousness necessarily imply a particular strategic response (socialism, for example). Individuals may be class conscious in the sense that they are keenly aware of the class relationship, but their responses may be deferential or reformist as well as rebellious. Consciousness must be examined in the context of power in order to understand the relationships between thought and possible

actions.⁵

Late nineteenth century Detroit is a particularly appropriate site for studying the forces inhibiting and promoting class consciousness among American workers. The 1880's was a crucial decade in the establishment of later patterns of class relations, and Detroit was a rapidly growing and diversified industrial city by the 1880's. It was representative of other midwestern industrial cities in basic growth patterns and in key variables such as ethnicity. The city's labor movement included all of the major national organizations and the range of relevant intellectual and ideological viewpoints. Presence of nationally prominent leaders representing conflicting national viewpoints within the Knights of Labor provides important insights into the relationships between national events and debates and local organization.⁶

The analysis will proceed on three levels: statistical, behavioral, and ideological. The statistical information includes descriptive statistics of the composition of the workforce, wages, hours, working conditions, and personal consumption as well as analysis of the membership and growth patterns of the Knights of Labor. On a behavioral level, data about what people did will be used as a basis for making inferences about their relationships and beliefs. More direct ideological analysis

will come from private correspondence and extensive newspaper accounts including editorials and position papers by a wide range of key figures and a large volume of letters to the editors from more obscure participants.

The statistical data, as well as much other information, comes from state and federal censuses, State Bureau of Labor Statistics Reports, voting records, convention proceedings, surveys conducted by the Knights in the 1880's, and the Knights of Labor Data Bank supplied by the Inter-university Consortium for Political Research. Other major sources include the Labadie Papers, the personal papers of the most important labor leaders of the period; the Powderly Papers, the national records of the Knights of Labor; a complete reading of the weekly Detroit labor press from 1877 to 1895 (only a few copies of relevant publications exist from 1889-1895); and a scattered reading of daily Detroit newspapers.

The evidence presents several methodological problems. Most of the people who are the subject of this study, the ordinary working people of Detroit in the 1880's, left none of the traditional kinds of historical evidence. There are no diaries; there is some correspondence, but not enough; there are only a few firsthand interviews with people who were not leaders or at least active militants. Statistical information can sometimes provide substitutes for more traditional types of

evidence and make it possible to generalize about various aspects of group behavior and backgrounds, but answering subtler questions of individual belief and motivations is often impossible without direct evidence.

Underlying these gaps in the evidence is another fundamental problem: patterns of rebellious collective behavior were necessarily somewhat concealed even in their own times. A subculture of opposition is almost by definition clandestine, hidden from contemporaries who are not part of it, and to the extent that opposition is partially unconscious, unarticulated even to themselves by some of the participants. Deciding what Detroit workers thought about their work, their bosses, their lives, their place in the world is for the most part an indirect process dependent on inference and supposition, a puzzle with many pieces missing and no way to retrieve them. Even the indirect evidence such as wage statistics (although the total quantity of such data is surprisingly large) ignores certain types of people or is unavailable for important years.

I proceed then with caution. Gaps in the evidence make some conclusions no more than educated guesses. Some questions will be raised only to be left unanswered. Others will be answered with evidence that is not strictly appropriate from a methodological viewpoint. Where relevant statistics are not available for a given year, data

taken two or five or even ten years earlier or later will be used. In some cases, such temporal inconsistencies can be justified by evidence showing that the situation had not changed in the intervening years. In other cases, it is just all that is available.

But despite these problems a clear picture emerges. Many individual conclusions are tentative; the evidence for some arguments, taken by itself, is weak; but the cumulative pattern is striking. An important sequence of events took place: advocates of class solidarity struggled to overcome a complex network of fragmenting influences in order to create a working class movement. That movement seemed to be successful for a brief period in the mid-1880's, but its success was ephemeral. The movement failed in Detroit as it failed in the rest of the country. Its failure had enduring consequences; understanding that failure in Detroit is one way of approaching a deeper understanding of class in American history.

Introduction

NOTES

1. By class politics I mean electoral or parliamentary politics which reflect the divisions of rich vs. poor, worker vs. owner, landlord vs. peasant, etc. While the intensity of overt political conflict along these lines varies widely in industrial societies, I believe it is valid to characterize the United States as an extreme case. The issue is discussed in similar terms in Gabriel Kolko, Main Currents in Modern American History (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), pp. 89-90.

2. Werner Sombart, "Warum gibt es in den Vereinigten Staaten keinen Sozialismus" (1906) in Failure of a Dream, Essays in the History of American Socialism, edited by John H. M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset (Garden City, New York: Doubleday-Anchor, 1974), p. 599; Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955), p. 5-9; Seymour Martin Lipset in Failure of a Dream, pp. 33-36, 553-567.

3. Much of the recent literature on social mobility was inspired by Stephen Thernstrom's Poverty and Progress, Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City (New York: Atheneum, 1969). Articles by Thernstrom, Stuart Blumin and Peter R. Knights are included in Nineteenth Century Cities: Essays in the New Urban History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969) edited by Thernstrom and Richard Sennett. Thernstrom's study of social mobility in Boston, The Other Bostonians (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), includes discussion of most of the mobility studies produced up to that time.

4. This definition of class, as readers will recognize, follows E. P. Thompson in The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), pp. 9-11.

5. Thus it is not necessarily "false consciousness," i.e., misperception, when workers are not socialists, nor does the absence of a socialist movement necessarily indicate the absence of class consciousness.

6. See: Chapter 1, pp. 10-12 for a discussion of Detroit's representativeness.

Chapter 1

INDUSTRIALIZING DETROIT AND ITS WORKFORCE

I. Detroit as a Test Case

Between 1860 and 1900 Detroit was representative of the group of midwestern cities stretching along the Great Lakes and through the Ohio Valley from Buffalo and Pittsburgh in the east to St. Louis and Milwaukee in the west. While each city developed differently, they expanded in similar ways and for similar reasons. Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, for example, all grew dramatically; faster than the rest of the country, faster than the rest of the midwestern region, faster than other American cities of comparable size. In each case, rates of industrialization were even greater than the impressive rates of population increase. As a result, much larger proportions of the local population were engaged in manufacturing, each city's manufacturing represented a vastly greater proportion of national industrial output, and the cities themselves were transformed from medium sized regional marketing and transportation centers to industrial metropolises.¹

Expansion of iron and steel production (and its corollaries and derivatives) provided the initial stimulus of a major new industry. Urban-industrial development was also based on a variety of other factors which led to sustained and diversified growth: high rates of invention and innovation, comparatively high local wage levels which increased local markets, improvements in transportation, accessibility to population, capital, and information.²

Parallel patterns of urban industrial development also led to demographic similarities. In 1900 the percentages of foreign born and persons of foreign parentage in Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland were nearly identical. The relative proportions of various ethnic groups in each of these cities throughout the late nineteenth century were strikingly similar, as was the sequence of major shifts in immigration patterns.³

These were "shock cities," cities which exemplified their age and in which its central themes were most vividly displayed. Just as Manchester symbolized the English industrial revolution for Engels, and Los Angeles symbolized the suburbanized automobile culture of the 1940's and 1950's, Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh were prototypes of American industrial maturation in the late 1800's and early 1900's.⁴ If class conflict was to emerge from American industrialization, these should have

been the places. The 1877 railroad strike assumed near insurrectionary qualities in Chicago, St. Louis, and especially Pittsburgh. Socialists were elected to state and local offices in Chicago, St. Louis, Milwaukee, and Detroit between 1877 and 1880. The national eight hour strike of May, 1886, culminated in Chicago, where it had been most successful, in the Haymarket bombing. Workers battled Pinkertons and troops at Homestead, just outside of Pittsburgh in 1892, and the second great railroad strike was centered in Chicago once again in 1894. Yet by 1900 none of these cities had a socialist or other class conscious labor movement that commanded the allegiance of more than a small fraction of the city's workers. Why not?⁵ Detroit was smaller, less dynamic, and more stable politically than Chicago or Pittsburgh, but it was sufficiently representative of the other major midwestern industrial cities that an answer to this question for Detroit should provide some clues to what happened elsewhere.

II. Industrial Diversification and Demographic Change

In 1880, Detroit was a rapidly growing but still medium sized industrial city. Chicago and Cleveland, Detroit's chief lake port rivals, had superceded it in Great Lakes trade and transportation. Yet, spurred by

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II. Industrial Diversification and Demographic Change

In 1880, Detroit was a rapidly growing but still medium sized industrial city. Chicago and Cleveland, Detroit's chief lake port rivals, had superceded it in Great Lakes trade and transportation. Yet, spurred by

new industries, Detroit's population more than tripled between 1870 and 1900. Detroit climbed from eighteenth in population among the nation's cities to thirteenth (see Appendix 1, Table 1).⁶

Beginning immediately after the Civil War, a host of new manufacturing firms opened in Detroit. Pingree and Smith started a shoe factory with eight employees in 1866. By 1890, they employed 700 workers, and were the largest shoe manufacturers west of New York City. Parke Davis, one of the giants of today's pharmaceutical industry, began production in Detroit in 1867. The Detroit Safe Company was established in 1865, the Michigan Stove Company in 1871, the Russel Wheel Company in 1876, the Globe Tobacco Company in 1880, and the Peninsular Stove Company in 1882.⁷

The pace of industrialization in Detroit increased during the 1880's. The value of industrial production more than doubled between 1880 and 1885 as the total reached \$64.4 million. By 1890, the figure was \$77.4 million. Industrial production had risen 156.3 percent during the decade, more than twice as much as population (see Appendix 1, Table 2).⁸

Industrial growth was rapid and diversified. A wide range of extractive and processing industries like smelting, wood products, and leather remained as a heritage of the city's earlier role as marketer for the

Michigan wilderness. These processors were slowly being overtaken by newcomers in both consumer products and heavy manufacturing, but no single industry dominated the city's economy. Railroad car construction emerged as the largest single industry in the 1880's, but in 1890 it still only represented 13.3 percent of total industrial production. In the decade of the 1880's, manufacturing of tobacco products, stoves, and shoes also grew rapidly (see Appendix 1, Table 3).⁹

Industry was diversified not only in products but also in size of firms, type of organization, and level of mechanization. The railroad car shops were all giant enterprises. The largest, the Peninsular Car Company, employed 1350 people in 1890. It merged with the Michigan Car Company and Detroit Car Wheel Company in 1892 to form the Michigan-Peninsular Car Company under the management of the McMillan family, the millionaire kingpins of the state's Republican Party. The continued growth of the railroad car industry in the 1890's, with employment reaching 9000 by 1898, provided the economic base for automobile production in the next decade.¹⁰

In contrast to the overwhelming size of the car shops, foundry and machine shops ranged from the equally mammoth Michigan Stove Works employing 1500 in 1890 to a tiny cooperative foundry with 15 workers. Similarly, in tobacco processing, there were nationally recognized

corporations and small partnerships. Chewing tobacco, the most important product of the local industry, was manufactured by five large companies. Cigars were made by nearly 150 companies. The Detroit Cigar Company was the largest with 150 employees. Two-thirds of the other cigar factories were buckeye shops--small shops in which the owner, a skilled hand roller, worked along with a stripper and perhaps one or two others. In 1890, the boot and shoe industry included Pingree and Smith's highly mechanized operation as well as 119 custom boot and shoe shops which, together, employed only 216.¹¹

Despite industrialization, in the early 1880's the city still exhibited some of the characteristics of a smaller commercial town. The city's land area was only sixteen square miles.¹² From the commercial and industrial center along the Detroit River the walk up Woodward Avenue (the main thoroughfare) to the city limits was only 3.5 miles. As one moved northward on Woodward Avenue approaching the city limits, increasingly large areas were still vacant.¹³ Most of the city was made up of single family houses. The 1880 census recorded 23,290 families living in 20,493 dwellings. Census statistics indicate the absence of the excessive crowding of other American cities. The Detroit average of 5.68 persons per dwelling, one of the lowest rates for a major city in the country, contrasted with 9.11 per dwelling in Cincinnati,

11.5 in Hoboken, and 16.37 in New York City.¹⁴ A recently conducted study of land use patterns in the 1880's found a maximum population density of eighty people per acre compared to 900 people per acre in New York's Lower East Side in 1900.¹⁵ Extension of street car lines made it practical for workers to commute some distance and stimulated real estate promoters to undertake widespread housing development on the outskirts of the city. The dispersal of population helped to maintain the city's clean and attractive appearance.

But during the 1880's and 1890's industrialization steadily altered Detroit, physically and socially. In 1880 Detroit was already a city of immigrants and their children; it was becoming a city of industrial workers. As it did so, it increasingly exhibited problems associated with larger urban centers: poverty and mass unemployment, and class division. In 1890, census investigators found rates of infant mortality three times higher in the working class Third Ward than in the wealthier Second Ward. Widespread poverty forced the city to maintain an extensive welfare system. In 1877, 5000 people received public assistance. City welfare programs were augmented by private and religious institutions. The Detroit Association of Charities, formed to "repress street begging and to better the conditions of the honest and deserving poor," considered 2236 cases in 1883.¹⁶

Periods of mass unemployment completely overtaxed the resources of both public welfare and private charities. Unemployment was a continual problem for seasonal occupations like the building trades, but during economic recessions, nearly all workers faced the threat. In 1894, for example, when the railroad car shops laid off their entire workforce, the unemployment rate in the city probably reached at least thirty percent. Mayor Hazen Pingree's response to the 1894 unemployment crisis, a program of worker cultivated potato patches on vacant lots, added immensely to his political popularity but did not prove to be an adequate substitute for lost wages or exhausted welfare budgets.¹⁷

These changes in the city--its growth, industrialization, and social divisions--were reflected in changes in the size and composition of the workforce. Between 1880 and 1890 the size of the workforce doubled, and the number of people employed in industry more than tripled. The class composition of the workforce is one indicator of the demographic and social effects of industrialization. Detroit was already a predominantly working class city in 1880. This predominance continued in the 1880's as the percentage of workers had increased slightly by 1890 (see Appendix 1, Table 4).¹⁸ Employment of women and children increased even faster than the size of the workforce (see Appendix 1, Table 5), another indicator

of the character of social change.¹⁹ Between 1880 and 1890, the number of women employed increased 113.5 percent. Child labor increased at least as fast although inadequate methods of record keeping make it impossible to determine exactly how fast. The Director of the State Bureau of Labor Statistics, a generally cautious observer, estimated in 1885 that child labor in Detroit had increased 1000 percent in manufacturing since 1870 and more than 2000 percent in trade and transportation.²⁰

This increase in female and child labor was one indicator of growing social division. An overwhelming majority of the women and children worked in the most menial occupations at the lowest possible wage levels. In 1880, 83.4 percent of the female workforce was employed in working class (that is, manual labor of all kinds) occupations. Children were primarily employed as factory hands and domestics.²¹

The increasing rate at which women were hired meant not only that more women were working but also that an increasing proportion of the workforce was female. Women made up 20.4 percent of the workforce in 1880, 21.5 percent in 1890. Employment trends in this growing female labor force corresponded to those of the entire workforce. Working women were overwhelmingly working class, and although the percentage of women employed in working class occupations declined slightly during the

1880's, it still remained over 80 percent in 1890 (see Appendix 1, Table 6).²² The small decline (if it is not merely the result of methodological problems such as differences in the methods of reporting between the two censuses) was less significant than the decline in the independent and professional categories and growth of the white collar class. Both of these trends were even more marked among women than among men. While business and professional women comprised 11.0 percent of the working women in 1880, they made up only 6.4 percent in 1890. The decrease would have been even greater except for the sharp rise in the number of women school teachers: 95.6 percent of female professionals in 1880 and 100.0 percent in 1890. The five fold increase in the number of female white collar workers between 1880 and 1890 was the most dramatic change in employment patterns. While only 10.2 percent of the clerks, copyists, and salespeople were women in 1880, by 1890, 21.4 percent were women. Together, white and blue collar occupations increased while middle class occupations decreased for women.²³

Most working women were young and unmarried. About two-thirds of the Detroit women surveyed by the State Bureau of Labor Statistics (n=5511) in 1892 had begun work between the ages of 14 and 16 (see Appendix 1, Table 7). Over 87 percent of the women were 25 or under at the time of the survey (see Appendix 1, Table 8). The 1890 census

found a higher percentage of older working women: 37.0 percent of the workforce was then 25 or over. Ninety-five percent of the women workers interviewed in 1892 were single, while 92.5 percent of women workers interviewed by the Bureau had been single in 1886. Again the census results were slightly different: 85.2 percent of the female workforce in the 1890 census was single. Whether married women chose not to work outside the home or such work was unavailable is unclear, but these surveys probably underestimate the number of women who performed additional labor in the home besides their housework such as taking in laundry or sewing, gathering wood or paper off the streets for heating their homes in winter, or taking in boarders. Married women, and older women, certainly worked very hard, but most of the labor they performed did not earn wages.²⁴

III. Work, Wages, and Status

The social divisions in the city were most clearly reflected in the differences between the kinds of work people did and the resulting differences in life style and status which different occupations made possible. Work was the central fact of most people's lives. It consumed at least half the waking hours of most adults, and it set the structure of life for most of their non-working hours. The standard work week was six ten-hour

days, but many trades worked substantially longer hours. The kind of work a person did, more than anything else, determined what his life was like.²⁵

Business owners, professionals, or white collar wage earners worked more regularly, consumed more, and were more highly regarded by the rest of the community than almost any worker. There were exceptions, of course. The corner grocery or cigar store were often marginal businesses run by former workers who reentered their old trades when their businesses failed. The boarding house keeper may have been the wife or widow of a factory worker. The average store clerk made only three-quarters as much as a brick layer. Yet workers and non-workers both recognized a fundamental gap between manual and non-manual labor. Comparisons of the most well paid workers and lowest categories of business or white collar employment might make it appear that the gap was purely subjective. It was not.

Wage patterns are one indicator of this gap. There was some overlap between the lower paid white collar and managerial workers and the highest paid skilled manual laborers, but most workers earned substantially less than most people in other classes. In 1884, the lowest reported wage among managers, superintendents, and traveling salesmen was \$50 per month (n=81), equivalent to \$1.92 per day. Among more than 8000 Detroit workers

(n=8611) interviewed in the same year only 20.6 percent earned over \$1.95 per day; i.e., as much as the lowest paid manager or salesman. Sixty percent of the clerks (60.1 percent; n=691) earned \$50 a month or more; only 2.6 percent of the unskilled laborers (n=3268) made over \$1.90 per day.²⁶

Other indications of life style substantiate the impressions given by wage data. Only 6.7 percent of the workers canvassed in 1884 owned a musical instrument, but 39.5 percent of the commercial agents (30 of 76) did, and 18.1 percent of the clerks (133 of 734) did. Employment of domestic servants was an even better indication of relative status. Less than one percent of the working class families had a servant in 1884. In 1890, there were over 7000 servants in Detroit. The mean family size was 4.88. Given our earlier data on population and number of people in each class (Appendix 1, Tables 1 and 4), there must have been about 11,000 non-working class families in Detroit in 1890. Some wealthy families undoubtedly had several servants, but it would appear from the data that a majority, or close to it, of non-working class families had a domestic. In the 1884 survey, the two major non-working class occupations, agents and clerks, accounted for less than eight percent of the respondents but half of those who had servants.²⁷

The gap between skilled craftsmen and unskilled

laborers represented a division among workers that was nearly as significant as the separation between workers and other classes. Skilled workers were artisans; their trades bore some of the characteristics of a profession: limited numbers, years of training and experience, specialized knowledge common only to craft members, ability to perform necessary tasks that could not be done as easily or as well by someone else. Unskilled laborers were ditchdiggers or factory hands or servants. Anyone could learn to do their jobs in a few hours or at most a few days, perhaps not quite as well as someone with experience but well enough. Laborers averaged wages of \$1.33 a day in 1884. Many crafts averaged nearly twice as much: bricklayers earned an average of \$3.06; machinists, \$2.24; printers, \$2.23; iron puddlers, \$3.21; carpenters, \$1.97.²⁸

The meaning of these wage averages becomes clearer when they are compared to some estimates of basic budget requirements. Based on a study conducted in New York City in 1907 which estimated the minimum daily cost for an adequate diet for a typical working class family of five and allowing for changes in the cost of living between the 1880's and the early 1900's, the cost of a daily family subsistence diet in the 1880's can be estimated at about 59¢. At an average income of \$1.33 per day, a minimally healthy diet would consume 44 percent

of the laborer's earnings. The average monthly rent of Detroit workers interviewed in 1892 was \$8.91, 29.7¢ on a daily basis. The laborer's wage was clearly very close to a bare minimum for a normal size family and quite inadequate if it was the sole income for a large family.²⁹

Skilled workers' incomes were more comfortably above subsistence, but still without much surplus for savings. In the 1893 State Bureau of Labor Statistics survey of the building trades and car shops, a sample which included a disproportionately high percentage of highly paid occupations, only 24.9 percent of the workers reported savings or cash reserves of any kind, and the average amount reported by the minority with savings was only \$151.37. In a much larger 1884 survey of Wayne County workers, only 6.5 percent reported a savings account, while in 1886, the percentage of 5.2 percent.³⁰

The proportion of skilled to unskilled workers is difficult to assess accurately. The total of agricultural laborers, laborers, domestic servants, and factory operatives in the 1880 census was 8,697, or 33.7 percent of the total identified as working class (Appendix 1, Table 4). While some of the factory operatives and many of the domestics were certainly semi-skilled, they would not have been considered artisans; they served no apprenticeship and were easily replaced, even if with some loss in productivity or efficiency. Certainly some

of those listed under such industries as shoemaking, cigar making, iron and steel workers, or railroad employees were also people who, although they might possess considerable experience and proficiency at their tasks, had no trade. The number of legitimate artisans was probably much less than half of the total number in all working class occupations. Perhaps a third of the working class was unskilled, and another third represented the gray area of semi-skilled in between.³¹

The relative frequency of different wage rates within the working class (see Appendix 1, Table 9) confirms these impressions of the proportions of unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled. A majority (51.4 percent) earned \$1.50 per day or less. A percentage of 20.8 earned over \$2.00, and only 2.8 percent made more than \$3.00. The average daily wage for all workers was \$1.60 in 1885 and \$1.55 in 1897. The rough dividing line between skilled and both semi-skilled and unskilled was somewhere between \$1.75 and \$2.00 per day. Only seven categories of skilled workers, out of more than seventy in the 1884 survey, averaged less than \$1.75 per day.³²

As might be expected, women and children earned far less than these averages. That was why they were hired. The mean wage of all female workers in an 1892 Detroit survey was \$4.65 per week, and the highest reported wage among the more than 6000 women surveyed

was \$1.66 2/3 per day; i.e., \$10.00 per week. As pitifully low as it is, the average is deceiving because it was brought up by the few higher paid workers. An 1884 State Bureau of Labor Statistics survey of Detroit domestics (the largest female occupation, comprising 42.5 percent of the 1880 Detroit female workforce), found that 82.2 percent made \$3.00 per week or less. Women's wages in manufacturing were somewhat higher, an average of 82¢ per day in all Michigan factories in 1886, but many factories paid well below the average. The employees of one Detroit candy factory were paid between 59 and 69¢ per day in 1892, while the women working in a large box factory earned a yearly average of \$144.27, or less than \$3.00 per week. The 692 women working in the various cigar and tobacco factories reported higher than average wages: 95¢ per day. Skilled hand rollers working at piece rates averaged \$1.52 per day. The Bureau of Labor Statistics investigator attributed the relatively high wages of women tobacco workers and women shoe makers to the efforts of strong unions in those industries.³³

These wages were the sole source of support for most working women. In addition to the large proportion of single women, there were many who were widowed, divorced, or separated. Only 3.7 percent of the women in the 1892 survey of Detroit's women workers reported any source of income other than their own wages.³⁴

Children's wages were even lower than those of adult women: an average of \$3.30 per week for boys under seventeen and \$2.62 for girls in 1885. Most worked in factories as cheap substitutes for adult workers. A handful were clerks and 36.9 percent of the seven to fourteen year old girls employed worked as household servants, but 69.3 percent of the boys and 57.5 percent of the girls were employed as factory hands. The list of specific occupations they performed reads like a catalogue of Detroit industry. Apologists often claimed the children worked in factories to support their poor widowed mothers. The myth is dispelled by the statistics. Only 10.2 percent of the male children employed between the ages of ten and seventeen inclusive reported deceased fathers. Most simply came from poor families who needed extra income: 68.9 percent of the fathers were laborers.³⁵

All of the wage data must be examined with an awareness that annual income did not necessarily correspond to what would be expected from daily wage rates. Lost time resulting from illness, temporary layoffs, or unemployment drastically reduced many workers' incomes. The railroad car shop laborers, for example, were paid an average of \$7.16 per week in 1892, but the factories closed down for several months, and they only worked an average of 36.5 weeks. Their actual average weekly

income on an annual basis was almost thirty percent less than their weekly wage.³⁶

This was not an exceptional case. In 1890, a prosperous year for most local industries, 18.0 percent of the male working class was unemployed for one month or more while 58 percent of the nearly 4000 men interviewed in the Detroit metal trades industries reported some lost time. The average number of weeks worked during the year by the metal workers was 45.4. In 1896, a depression year, 81 percent of the workers questioned reported some lost time--an average of 58 days. Some occupations were seasonally laid off regardless of economic conditions. Carpenters, for example, averaged 54.22 days lost time in 1885.³⁷

Unemployment reduced incomes, and it introduced an element of uncertainty into workers' lives. Even the most highly paid artisan faced starvation after only a few weeks of illness or unemployment. Sick leave or government unemployment benefits were almost unknown. Unable to save money to get themselves through such unforeseen disasters, workers relied on union and fraternal insurance programs. Benefits were not really adequate--the printers' \$5 per week sick benefits were less than forty percent of the minimum union wage scale --but these programs were the only form of social insurance available to workers (other than municipal welfare/

relief). Typical payments included death benefits of \$100-\$300 and some provision for accident or sickness (average weekly benefits reported in 1890 were \$6.55). Unemployment benefits were more uncommon. In 1890, 29 percent of the workers surveyed by the State Bureau of Labor Statistics belonged to benefit societies. In 1897, one third (34.3 percent) belong to fraternal organizations, most of which had benefit programs.³⁸

A sense of the differences in the standards of living of various classes can be gathered from sample budgets prepared by families in 1892 upon the request of the State Bureau of Labor Statistics which showed a breakdown of their expenditures. A few dozen families participated; thus these examples may not be fully representative, but they do nevertheless provide some insight into what working class families bought and how much they could buy at various levels of income. The Director, Henry Robinson, summarized the findings in a table estimating the percentage of income spent on various categories at two income levels (see Appendix 1, Table 10). As income increased, the expenditures on clothing, rent, and sundries increased, while the relative percentage (not the actual amount) spent on food declined. We can understand the meaning of these trends by examining several sample budgets in detail.³⁹

Unfortunately, the data provides insufficient

opportunity to study the differences in life style between skilled and unskilled workers. The only unskilled Detroit laborer included earned \$9.00 per week from wages, about a dollar higher than the average laborer, and reported an unidentified additional source of income. Yet his totals of monthly earnings reveal a pattern of only intermittent employment: \$27.00 in November, 1891; \$44.60 in December, and \$15.25 in January, 1892. For the three months in which he kept records, he recorded a total excess of expenditures over earnings of \$10.59. After three months he abandoned the task, apologizing to the bureau and noting "the wage earner is little or nothing ahead of bare necessities of life...he cannot in many cases get comfortable clothing for himself and family."⁴⁰

His November budget confirms these remarks. While his family ate tolerably well, and was adequately housed judging from the \$11.00 monthly rent, there was practically no surplus for clothing, household goods, or amusements. Meat averaged ten cents a pound; the family consumed about a half pound of meat per day divided among three people and about half a loaf of bread per day. They spent 67¢ for milk in November, at 5¢ per quart. Expenditures for clothing, dry goods, and sundries totalled \$1.78 for the month. A pair of shoes, reportedly purchased sometime in the three month period, cost

\$3.00. The only sizeable expenses on non-necessities were 80¢ for tobacco, and \$4.40 for furniture. The family reported the net cost of all their household possessions, jewelry, etc., at \$440.90, a modestly high figure for a laborer.⁴¹

A Detroit carpenter who reported daily wages of \$2.10, when he worked a full day, seems to have been little better off. In July, 1892, when he was fully employed at highest wages, he was able to buy a new pair of boots and to spend \$2.75 on clothing and \$2.25 on amusements for his family of three. They bought \$1.82 worth of meat (probably about eighteen pounds) for the month, \$3.07 worth of fruits and vegetables, as well as ample quantities of bread, butter, sugar, tea, and coffee. But he had earned \$52.50 that month, nearly \$8.00 more than his average monthly earnings of \$44.53, with only 64¢ fuel and light costs compared to the \$4 or \$5 typical of other families for the winter months. His household effects were valued at only \$229.75.⁴²

The contrast between the standard of living of these working class families and that of an accountant in a Detroit bank graphically illustrates the social distance between workers and professionals or white collar workers. The accountant supported his wife and mother on his salary of \$800 per year and outside income of \$250. He was able to spend a monthly average of

\$79.49, or nearly double what the carpenter spent for the same size family, and still have \$24.80 left over after ten months. The family spent over \$5 on meat, poultry, and fish in a typical month, and although they bought more expensive cuts (fifteen cents a pound), they were able to afford more than a pound of meat per day. The accountant apparently ate his lunches in a restaurant, as he budgeted \$3.95 for that purpose, an unthinkable luxury for most workers. Likewise, a \$2.25 expenditure on carfare was substantially higher than that of any of the working class families. The list of household goods revealed a standard inventory of Victorian furnishings, including silver, jewelry, musical instruments (\$350), onyx, brass, clocks, and pictures with a total value of \$1,225.⁴³

We can gain some further appreciation of the differences in living standards between classes and occupations from statistics on dwelling size. The average number of rooms per family varied with occupation (see Appendix 1, Table 11). The families of white collar wage earners such as agents and clerks occupied an average of over six rooms, while the laborers averaged 3.24 rooms per family, or roughly half the space. The average for families of seven categories of artisans (blacksmiths, carpenters, machinists, molders, printers, shoemakers, and tailors) was 4.80 rooms, or about mid-way

between the laborers and white collar workers.⁴⁴

Death rates in various wards of the city also provide an indication of differences in living standards. While the character of most wards in the city was mixed, there was a clear contrast between the solidly working class Third Ward and the Second Ward which was dominated by the fashionable residential neighborhoods along Woodward Avenue. The death rate in the Third Ward (see Appendix 1, Table 12), the highest in the city, was nearly three times that of the Second, as was the mortality rate of children under five, an even clearer measure of relative deprivation. While the statistics reveal 2,162 deaths of children five or under in Detroit in 1890, if the infant mortality rate of the Second Ward had prevailed throughout the city, only 1,180 children would have died. The working class budgets in the Labor Bureau Survey allowed little for medical attention. If we can assume that, with proper nourishment and medical care, the same proportion of children would survive in any large sample of the population, then we must conclude that nearly one thousand children died unnecessarily in Detroit in 1890, the hidden toll of a class system.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, we have no Middletown or Homestead for nineteenth century Detroit, no contemporary sociological study which could really give the full flavor of the differences in living patterns between various levels

of society, but from the meagre samples we have presented the trends are clear. In good times, most people had enough to eat as long as employment was regular, but the laborer, who was always subject to irregular employment, could never be sure that he would be able to feed his family. Even when work was available, minimum subsistence was all that the unskilled worker could expect, and if the family was large, even that demanded that family income be supplemented by putting the children to work. Nearly 55 percent of the school age children in the working class Third Ward were not attending school in 1884. Although only 23.7 percent of them were actually reported as working, we can surmise, along with the Labor Bureau's investigators, that many of the rest not in school were also working.⁴⁶

The skilled artisan's family, in contrast to the laborer's, lived comfortably, with even a little bit of extra money beyond the bare necessities. But even the highly skilled had no job security, while major trades such as carpenters had to allow for routine winter layoffs. The unemployed artisan still had no extra resources to cope with long emergencies--the differences in consumption between the artisan and laborer evaporated in bad times.

The family of a professional or upper level white collar employee lived better than the artisan's family

did even at peak times. And although most had no familiarity with the vagaries of employment so common to all working class families, insurance and regular savings, routine items in middle class budgets, provided a firm cushion for unforeseen problems.

IV. Would Inequality Lead to Class Consciousness?

Intellectual observers and social commentators were troubled by the growing problems of the city, the coexistence of wealth and poverty, the increasing fear of social unrest, the failure of industrial progress to create genuine well being. After describing the "want, destitution, poverty, and squalidity" he had seen among many of the more than 10,000 Detroit workers who had been interviewed by his agency during preparation of his 1884 report, John W. McGrath, Director of the State Bureau of Labor Statistics, asked "Have we not mistaken the growth of and concentration of wealth in our cities and manufacturing centers for national prosperity?"⁴⁷

Great wealth had been created in Detroit, but it was concentrated in few hands. The city's tax roles were one indication of the unequal distribution of wealth. Many forms of wealth were not subject to local taxes: bank deposits, railroad properties, and all forms of property owned by city residents but not in

the city such as timber lands, mining stocks, and municipal bonds from other cities. The size of these untaxed forms of wealth was considerable. Bank deposits alone amounted to fifteen or twenty million dollars, according to McGrath. Working class spokesmen complained that the property of the wealthy was regularly under-assessed. Tax assessment thus greatly underestimates the actual concentration of wealth. Yet in 1883, 802 of Detroit's 125,000 residents owned 52.4 percent of the \$105 million of assessed property.⁴⁸ "What...is the cause of wretchedness...unrest...strikes...antagonism between laborers and capitalists?" McGrath had asked. His examination of Detroit's tax records provided part of the answer. "What is the remedy?" he continued.⁴⁹

Labor radicals of the 1880's argued that the remedy was united organization of workers as a class in order to change the industrial system. They often disagreed among themselves over exactly what changes were to be made or how exactly to go about getting people to make changes, but they agreed that collective action of workers for themselves was essential. But unity could only come from a sense of common position, common plight; i.e., class consciousness.

As the evidence shows, Detroit workers had some things in common with one another, and clear differences between their own lifestyles and those of the business

and white collar classes. A typical Detroit worker of the 1880's worked a sixty hour week at manual labor for about \$10. The work was tiring and left little time or energy for much else except on days off. Regular wages were usually sufficient for basic physical needs for an average family of five--food, clothing, shelter--in a minimum style, but typical wages left little surplus for amusement or savings. Without savings, there was little to fall back on if someone became seriously ill or the primary wage earner was laid off. Layoffs and unemployment were common enough that most working class families faced poverty periodically. In bad times the differences between skilled and unskilled could evaporate quickly. The worker's family lived in a small frame house, probably near their church. These homes contained basic utilitarian furniture; about half the homes had sewing machines, hardly any had musical instruments. About two-fifths of the working class families were buying their homes, and slightly more than three-fifths rented.⁵⁰

These things most workers had in common with each other. But in many other crucial respects, workers were different from each other: background, nationality, experience with an urban-industrial environment, skill, attitudes, ambitions, religion. While they faced certain common problems, outgrowths of the transformation process the city was undergoing, their perceptions of

the meaning and importance of these problems were filtered through these different cultural and social visions. Different perceptions could mean very different responses.

Chapter 1

NOTES

1. JoEllen Vinyard, The Irish on the Urban Frontier, Nineteenth Century Detroit, 1850-1880 (New York: Arno Press, 1976), pp. 124-5; Allan R. Pred, The Spatial Dynamics of U.S. Urban-Industrial Growth, 1800-1914 (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1966). Chapter 2, "American Metropolitan Growth: 1860-1914. Industrialization, Initial Advantage," provides a model of the determinants of urban industrial growth as well as comparative statistics on Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit and other cities.

2. Vinyard, p. 125; Pred discusses these factors in Chapters 2 and 3. Particularly noteworthy is his emphasis on the positive impact of high wages which provide a large enough local market to establish minimal effective thresholds for local businesses. By invention, Pred means "technical advances" (p. 88) while innovation refers to commercial introduction of the invention (p. 89). Rates of patents granted per 10,000 population in 1880 were more than three times the national average in Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit (p. 107), one indication of relative concentration of invention.

3. Pred, p. 133. Kathleen Neils Conzen's Immigrant Milwaukee (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) illustrates the close ethnic proximity of Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit in 1860, p. 8.

4. Asa Briggs, Victorian Cities (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 51-2, introduces the concept of the "shock city."

5. The best discussion of the 1877 railroad strike is Robert Bruce, 1877: Year of Violence (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970). Other sources on socialist and radical activities in these cities include: Friedrich A. Sorge, Labor Movement in the United States: A History of the American Working Class from Colonial Times to 1890, ed. by Philip S. Foner and Brewster Chamberlin (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1977) in which the electoral campaigns of the late 1870's are discussed on pp. 170-1; John R. Commons, et al., History of Labour in the United States (New York: MacMillan, 1918), Part VI (by Selig Perlman); Henry David, The History of the Haymarket Affair (New York: Russell and Russell, 1958); Philip S. Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States,

Volumes 1 and 2 (New York: International, 1947, 1955).

6. Melvin G. Holli, "The Impact of Automobile Manufacturing upon Detroit," Detroit in Perspective, Volume 2, Number 3, Spring 1976, p. 177. Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 370. (All federal census reports hereafter cited by number and year of census and appropriate volume numbers.) Twelfth Census, 1900, Vol. 1, p. lxix. Professor Holli emphasizes the greater growth of Chicago and Cleveland and Detroit's greater rate of growth between 1900 and 1920. I think that he overstates the case when he calls Detroit's growth in the late nineteenth century "unspectacular...slow." Contemporary cities which more than triple in a generation are usually described as booming, thriving, mushrooming, etc.

7. Silas Farmer, History of Detroit and Wayne County and Early Michigan (Detroit: 1890), pp. 804, 806, 808-9, 813, 818, 827, 831; George N. Fuller, ed., Michigan: A Centennial History of the State and its People (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1939), p. 540; Melvin G. Holli, Reform in Detroit (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 6.

8. Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 2, pp. 399-400; Detroit Tribune, January 10, 1886; Eleventh Census, 1890, Compendium, Part 2, pp. 803-5.

9. Ibid.

10. Eleventh Census, 1890, Compendium, Part 2, pp. 802-5; Farmer, History of Detroit and Wayne County and Early Michigan, p. 806; Fuller, A Centennial History, p. 536.

11. "Among the Molders," an unidentified clipping from a Detroit newspaper dated June 16, 1889, in "Detroit Labor Leaders" file, Labadie Collection, University of Michigan. (Labadie Collection hereafter cited as LC); Eleventh Census, 1890, Compendium, Part 2, pp. 102-5; "Men Who Make Your Cigars," clipping dated July 28, 1889, "Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC; Farmer, History of Detroit, p. 831. Chewing tobacco accounted for 70 percent of the total value of tobacco products produced in Detroit in 1889.

12. Vinyard, p. 124.

13. Olivier Zunz, "The Organization of the American City in the Late Nineteenth Century: Ethnic Structure and Spatial Arrangement," Journal of Urban History, August, 1977, pp. 446-7. Further descriptions of Detroit can be found in Olivier Zunz, Detroit en 1880: Essai D'Histoire Urbane (Special Working Paper of the Center on Social Organization of the University of Michigan, January, 1977), 2 Vols.; Holli, Reform in Detroit, and David M. Katzman, Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973).

14. Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 670.

15. Zunz, "The Organization...", p. 451.

16. Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 4, Part 2, Map of the City of Detroit Showing the Relative Death Rates, no page number; Farmer, History of Detroit, pp. 645, 666.

17. Holli, Reform in Detroit, pp. 63-4, 70-3.

18. Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876; Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 664. Methodological problems with census data dictate some caution in the use of Table 4, however. The census fails to differentiate between owners and employees in some categories. In such cases, the entire number of individuals in the occupational category have been assigned to the class which would be expected to represent the majority. Sometimes the choice is clear: the great majority of railroad employees were certainly working class, an assumption corroborated by studies of railroad employees in other contemporary sources. The category "hotel and restaurant keepers and employees" is more difficult to assign. I have included it with the business class because the census listed it along with other entrepreneurial categories, but there is no way of knowing exactly how many of them really were entrepreneurs. A complete list of occupational classifications is given in Appendix 1, Table 4. Errors in both directions probably balance somewhat, but the results should still be taken as only orders of magnitude.

The term workforce refers to all persons employed or self-employed as defined by the census. Workers, used above, refers to people who work primarily with their hands. White collar, business, and professional people will be referred to with other labels or with additional adjectives, e.g., white collar workers. The working class included workers and their families. Whether Detroit workers actually constituted a class in a more meaningful

sense will be discussed in later chapters.

Some of the white collar workers had a great deal in common with the manual workers: dependency on wages for survival, decreasing control over their own labor, similar wages and hours. Despite these similarities in status, there is considerable evidence that white collar workers viewed themselves differently from manual workers and were viewed differently by other people. It is for this reason that they are included as a separate category. At one point, local store clerks received assistance from the Knights of Labor in a dispute with storeowners over hours. They won their demands for shorter hours, but much to the disgust of the editor of the local labor paper, they refused to join the Knights, apparently believing labor unions were beneath them. Detroit Advance and Labor Leaf, June 1, 1887.

19. Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876; Vol. 2, pp. 399-400. Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 664; Compendium, Part 3, pp. 393; Part 2, pp. 802-5. Twelfth Census, 1900, Vol. 1, p. lxix.

20. Second Annual Report of the State Bureau of Labor Statistics (Lansing: 1885), p. 90. State Bureau of Labor Statistics will hereafter be cited as SBLs and the year of publication. All mentions of surveys of Detroit workers throughout the text are of those carried out by the SBLs unless otherwise noted.

The State Bureau of Labor Statistics was established in late 1883, partially in response to pressure from the Knights of Labor. The agency published book length annual reports which are rich sociological documents on wages, working conditions, demography, and a host of other questions. Each report varied in both content and methodology. While most reports do not give a detailed enough description of the data gathering methods to adequately evaluate the methodology, the reports were uniformly detailed, carefully organized, and based on very large samples (often upwards of 10,000 respondents). While the choice of respondents must have been at least in part self-selecting (i.e., those who were willing to cooperate), the size of the samples, the general care taken in production of the reports, and the cautious manner in which questions were phrased and conclusions drawn all suggest that the Reports may be considered reliable. The 1886 Report is particularly useful as a source of verbatim testimony on a wide range of issues.

21. Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876. SCLS, 1885, pp. 63-75.

22. Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876. Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 664.

23. Ibid.

24. SCLS, 1892, pp. 132, 139, 144; SCLS, 1886, pp. 230-1. Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 664-5. SCLS, 1884, p. 181. The differences between SCLS and census results are probably the result of the differences in the samples. The census included all women of all classes, the entire female workforce; the SCLS surveys tended to include only workers, although there are some clerks, supervisory personnel, etc. The precise number of non-workers in the SCLS samples is often difficult to determine, but I would guess that well over 90 percent of all of the SCLS samples were working class.

25. SCLS, 1886, p. 230. The mean work day for Detroit manufacturing employees in 1886 was 9 hours, 57 minutes.

26. SCLS, 1885, pp. 84-8, 155-6.

27. Ibid., pp. 140-1. Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 664, cxci.

28. SCLS, 1884, pp. 86-7.

29. Study cited in Margaret F. Byington, Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town (Pittsburgh: University Center for International Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 1974), pp. 69-71; Historical Statistics of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1975), Part 1, p. 212; SCLS, 1893, p. 789. Estimating changes in cost of living over time from historical data is tricky. The index of inflation chosen here was constructed on the basis of ten food staples, so it probably is appropriate as a measure of changing food costs, although not nearly as precise as the three figure accuracy here suggests. Use of other indexes would give different results. A Bureau of Labor Statistics index of cost of living for all items indicates an increase in cost of living from the mid-1880's to 1907 of less than four percent. In this case the cost of the subsistence diet would be nearly 70¢ in the mid-1880's. It is possible that family incomes were higher than these wages where several family members worked. Thernstrom notes this as

the primary means of maintaining adequate living standards despite low wages in Newburyport. Poverty and Progress (New York: Atheneum, 1969), p. 136-7. Some Newburyport workers managed to save money despite incredibly low wages. Apparently in Detroit, however, relatively few married women worked (see above, p.19-20). The impact of child labor on family income is difficult to gauge, but very few Detroit workers had any savings (p. 24).

30. SBLS, 1893, p. 781; SBLS, 1884, p. 142; SBLS, 1886, pp. 230-1.

31. Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876.

32. SBLS, 1884, pp. 84-7; SBLS, 1885, p. 352; SBLS, 1897, p. 170.

33. SBLS, 1892, pp. 17-8, 20, 23, 178; SBLS, 1884, p. 98; SBLS, 1886, p. 274; Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876.

34. SBLS, 1892, p. 160. Thus few married women contributed wages to family income.

35. SBLS, 1885, pp. 63, 64, 71, 72, 74, 75, 80, 81. Included among the defenders of child labor was Ben Butler, Anti-Monopoly, Greenback and supposedly pro-labor candidate for president in 1884. Butler advocated child labor in John Swinton's Paper (February 10, 1884) because "Their work may be the only support of a crippled father or mother..."

36. SBLS, 1893, p. 780.

37. Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 664-5; SBLS, 1897, p. 171; SBLS, 1885, p. 252; SBLS, 1891, p. 153.

38. Detroit Labor Day Review, 1892, LC, pp. 11-17; SBLS, 1897, pp. 177-8; SBLS, 1891, p. 155. Some fraternal insurance programs operated like commercial insurance and allowed higher benefits with higher payments. Union death benefits were usually designed only to pay funeral costs. In the 1893 Report, the SBLS reported that 73 percent of the members of Detroit trade unions had some form of relief for illness or disability through their unions. In no instance did employers contribute anything to the benefit funds, although 56 percent of 133 employers interviewed claimed to provide some relief for sick employees, apparently at their discretion, depending on their judgment of the merits of the case. Employers who provided

benefits emphasized that they did so out of a spirit of charity, not out of any legal or moral obligation. A Detroit carpentering firm expressed what seems to have been the dominant spirit. Any relief "is entirely out of sympathy in proportion as they have been faithful employees...."

39. SBLs, 1893, p. 117.

40. Ibid., p. 1043. Perhaps the absence of reports from the unskilled is itself a testimonial to their position.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., pp. 1045-6.

43. Ibid., pp. 1046-7.

44. SBLs, 1885, p. 197.

45. Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 4, Part 2, maps following p. 226, p. 738.

46. Robert and Helen Lynd, Middletown (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World,, 1956); Byington, Homestead; SBLs, 1885, pp. 63,65.

47. SBLs, 1884, p. 182.

48. SBLs, 1884, pp. 182, 185-6, 197.

49. Ibid., p. 198.

50. SBLs, 1884, p. 142; SBLs, 1886, pp. 153, 231. In 1883, the percentage owning as opposed to renting was 43 percent; in 1885, it was 39 percent. Among a small sample of workers more intensively questioned in 1885 (n=229), about half of the homeowners said their homes were mortgaged.

Chapter 2

BARRIERS TO CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS: CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC FRAGMENTATION

I. Class Consciousness and Perception

Potentially there was an objective basis for class division in Detroit in the 1880's: inequality in income distribution and property ownership, corresponding differences in life styles and life possibilities. But class consciousness is a subjective phenomenon. Differences in status and experience do not make people class conscious until they perceive the differences and act on them, and such perception is not automatic.¹

Perception begins with personal experiences which are specific and individual: a particular job, a particular boss, a particular problem. No matter how much they have in common, each individual's experiences vary slightly from the next; no job is exactly like another; each boss has a unique personality. Class consciousness, however, is an abstraction from experience which assumes that most individual differences are less important than the patterns of relationships among them. Workers and

bosses, for example, are viewed as categories of experience so that conflicts between them are based primarily on the antagonism between the categories and not on clashes of personality or interest between the particular individuals involved. Abstraction involves a jump from immediate perception, a series of judgments which ultimately transcend personal experience: a category includes people you have never met but whom you assume to be like others you have encountered. This transcendent quality is what makes the abstraction most useful; it provides a basis for predicting the probable consequences of a wide variety of actions. But it also explains why class consciousness is such an elusive phenomenon. In order for a group of people to become class conscious, they must reach collective agreement although each individual's personal experience is both slightly different from everyone else's and not completely adequate for the final conclusion.

Under what circumstances might this collective agreement have taken place in Detroit? Clearly the more alike workers' experiences, the more likely minor variations would seem irrelevant, but even common experiences might not produce identical reactions. People often draw different conclusions from the same evidence. Moreover, thought processes are learned. People from the same culture tend to approach problems from a common perspective --people from different cultures do not. If Detroit

workers were to reach the same conclusions about their situations, two conditions were necessary: both the evidence on which they based conclusions and the way they thought about the evidence had to be similar. Neither condition was met in Detroit in the 1880's: the disparities between different groups of workers were considerable and people in similar positions came from varied backgrounds which gave different meanings to their experiences.²

II. Geographic and Occupational Mobility

In order to recognize the differences among Detroit's workers, to understand what kinds of people they were and how and why they reacted differently, it is first necessary to see who they had been. Where did they come from? What was their previous experience with industrial life? Were they grandchildren of factory workers, or were they peasants who had migrated not only from another country but from another century? What kind of culture did they bring with them to the city? How much of that culture did they try to maintain? How similar and how different were various newcomers from each other and from those who were already there?

Most workers came from somewhere outside of Detroit. In 1880, 39.2 percent of the population was foreign born, a proportion which held steady during the rapid growth of the 1880's. But even more striking was the fact that by

1890, 77.2 percent of the population came from families in which one or both parents were foreign born. More than three-quarters of Detroit's people were immigrants or the children of immigrants.³ Yet even these statistics actually understate the role of immigration in the formation of the workforce or a potential working class. Over half the workforce and nearly 60 percent of the manual workers were immigrants (see Appendix 1, Tables 13 and 14).⁴

Native born workers also came from outside Detroit. About two-fifths of the native born in the 1884 State Bureau of Labor Statistics survey of Detroit workers were born outside Michigan. No data was given on the birth-place of those born in Michigan, but if the Detroit pattern follows that of other cities, a large percentage were born in cities, towns, and rural areas outside Detroit. Biographical information on local labor leaders confirms this expectation in individual cases.⁵

Not only had most workers been born outside of Detroit, but more importantly, a sizeable proportion had arrived only recently. About one-fifth of those born outside Michigan (native and foreign combined, n=8843; see Appendix 1, Table 15) had been in Michigan less than two years in 1884; 41.9 percent had been in the state less than ten years.⁶ A substantial number of workers were also transients. In a recent mobility study of Irish, German, and native males between 20 and 60 years

of age living in Detroit in 1880, only 57 percent of the sample could be located in the city ten years later.⁷

Thus the city's workforce had a fluid and rotating character. People were constantly coming and going in large numbers. This movement must have had a continual destabilizing effect on working class neighborhoods. Even if other conditions had been favorable to the development of class consciousness, this instability would have interfered. Each new face would necessitate a renewal of the process of collective judgment which would be firmly established in a more fixed community. Solidarity and collective action are based on mutual trust and group pressure, both of which must depend on time and closeness of association for part of their force. Moreover, although we cannot determine exactly why people move about, the very motion lends itself to speculation about the mentality of transients--must not such people have viewed strong personal commitments as unnecessary or even undesirable?

This sense of rootlessness is further substantiated by evidence of frequent job switching. More than one-quarter of the Detroit workers questioned by the State Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1884 (n=7509; see Appendix 1, Table 16) had been working at their current occupations for two years or less. Only 37.1 percent had been working at their occupations for more than ten years. In a

similar survey conducted in Detroit and several other Michigan cities two years later, one-third of those responding (n=508) had been working for their present employer less than a year. Nearly two-thirds (63.8 percent) had engaged in more than "one branch or class of work since 21 years of age," and those who had switched occupations had done so an average of 3.3 times.⁸

III. Ethnicity

The impact of a rotating workforce with high geographic and occupational mobility on attitudes towards class was increased by the city's cultural diversity. Not only were workers meeting new people, adjusting to new jobs, but they were also encountering new languages, religious beliefs, customs, social attitudes different from their own. Conversely, many urban historians have argued the tensions and frictions of this process of mutual adjustment increased the desire to maintain one's own culture and values. Thus, mobility and ethnicity reinforced each other.⁹

It is probably for this reason that ethnicity became such a major force in cities like Detroit. The patterns of ethnic organization indicate the role ethnic identification and solidarity played in individual adjustments as well as the strong attachment to ethnic cultural

values. Formal and informal modes of assistance to newcomers were organized along ethnic lines. The degree of culture shock and the need for assimilation were reduced when one worked in a factory run by countrymen who did not expect workers to learn a new language, when one lived in an ethnic neighborhood, went to church which held services in the native language, or sent one's children to a school staffed by people of one's own culture. If jobs were hard to find, the ethnic loyalty of a countryman might help give a worker an edge. Ethnic solidarity also provided a means of access to political power that was otherwise denied to workers and poor people.

At the same time, intense ethnicity served as a strong barrier to class consciousness. If one identified with other people primarily on the basis of language, religion, and culture rather than common socio-economic status then the very differences which a class structured model of society assumed to be irrelevant were in fact the most important emotional symbols, the very basis for determining whom to trust and whom to avoid. Ethnic consciousness could lead to the very opposite conclusion of class consciousness, if the Polishness of a Polish employer, for example, seemed more important to a Polish laborer than the owner's property or the Irishness of an Irish worker seemed more obvious than the fact that they were both workers.

Ethnicity prevented the development of class consciousness in another way, by providing an alternative basis for group action by those who were discontented. It took the place of class and in effect, served as a proxy for it. Ethnic consciousness involved the same sort of "we-they" abstraction, the conceptualization of social reality in categories, as class consciousness, but the "they," the oppressor, was in this case other ethnic groups rather than employers, the rich, or the bourgeoisie. Ethnic institutions served many of the same social functions as class institutions--they substituted for class and thereby made class practically and psychologically unnecessary. In some cases, especially where an ethnic group was overwhelmingly working class and had cultural traditions which included class consciousness in the old country, the non-class character of ethnic political consciousness was partially obscured. The Germans in Detroit were the best example. Detroit German communities were sympathetic to unions and often to radical social ideas as well, but German socialists and trade unionists, despite professions of class solidarity, rarely intermingled with non-German comrades. Non-German labor activists viewed the Germans as exasperatingly self-centered and uncooperative.

More than anything else, the variety, strength, and importance of ethnicity is central to understanding the

barriers to class among Detroit workers. In 1880, 63 percent of London's population had been born in London; most of the rest had at least some common cultural heritage. Ninety-four percent had been born in England and Wales, 98 percent in Great Britain and Ireland. The contrast with Detroit could hardly be more striking nor could its importance be overstated.¹⁰

The most important ethnic groups in Detroit in 1880 (in order of size) were native whites, Germans, Canadians, Irish, British (including Welsh and Scottish), Poles, and native Blacks. The relative proportions of each nationality in the total population changed during the 1880's, but not the basic ethnic groups. By 1890, the Poles had become the second largest immigrant group, and the British and Irish had switched places in the rankings. Although other nationalities were present in large enough numbers to maintain their own neighborhoods, churches, and clubs (Bohemians, Belgians, Scandinavians, Jews, and Italians among others), no other nationality made up more than 1 or 2 percent of the total population before the mid-1890's (see Appendix 1, Table 17).¹¹

There were important differences in culture and experiences among Detroit's ethnic groups, and each nationality was itself far from homogeneous. Nevertheless, it is possible, at least in broad statistical terms, to recognize similarities in how each nationality fared in

Detroit. Most importantly, all of the immigrants and the native blacks did decidedly worse in economic terms than the native stock white Americans (i.e., native born with native born parents). This is revealed, for example, by comparing the class composition of each nationality with that of the natives (see Appendix 1, Table 18). Less than half (41.4 percent) the native whites in the workforce in 1890 had working class occupations. In contrast, more than 70 percent of every immigrant group were workers; the proportion of workers in each nationality varied from 70.1 percent of the British to 91.1 of the southern and eastern Europeans and 93.9 percent of the blacks. Thus, the differences between the various nationalities were smaller than the differences between all of them and the native whites. This pattern continued into the second generation. More than two-thirds (68.6 percent) of the children of immigrants, regardless of nationality, were employed as workers--they were still closer to their parents than to the native Americans. Those natives who did become workers were also far more unlikely to be unskilled laborers. While 22.5 percent of the immigrants were laborers, only 6.7 percent of the native whites were.¹²

While native born workers also had problems adjusting to urban-industrial life, they possessed a set of cultural symbols, a language and an identification with

the dominant culture. They were able to switch jobs more easily than immigrants (see Appendix 1, Table 19),¹³ and they participated in basic institutions like party politics to a higher degree than immigrants. In 1884, 84.4 percent of the American born workers in the State Bureau of Labor Statistics survey were voters, compared to 38.3 percent of the Polish born and 68.8 percent of the English born workers.¹⁴ A minority in an immigrant city, native stock workers had a definite tendency to think of themselves as embattled and beleaguered by immigrant hordes. "The country is swarming with foreigners taking my labor away from me," one man complained to the Labor Bureau investigator in 1886. A woodworker expressed similar sentiments the same year when he accused Germans and Canadians who were "just over" and "speak no English" of working for "at least 50 cents per day less" than Americans.¹⁵ Such sentiments increased in the following decade as the nativist and anticatholic American Protective Association flourished in Detroit in the early 1890's and became a force in local politics. The Michigan Catholic echoed some of the APA rhetoric as it joined the Detroit Trades Council in its insistence that laws against alien non-resident labor be more strictly enforced. An American born brakeman expressed the idea more succinctly, if not diplomatically, in 1894 when he urged that we "chase the Dagos back to Italy."¹⁶

This hostility from native Americans, as well as the positive functions of ethnic institutions, helps to explain ethnic residential patterns. The city was composed of a patchwork of dozens of ethnic enclaves. Some of the older and more well known ethnic neighborhoods had distinctive names: Corktown, Dutchtown, Pollocktown, Little Berlin. Other neighborhoods were less clearly ethnically identified but displayed a significant concentration of a particular nationality. A study conducted by Olivier Zunz which includes careful mapping of residences of more than two thousand Detroit families in 1880 reveals the extent of ethnic concentration. More than two-thirds of the Polish families (70 percent) lived in the Polish section of the East side; half (52 percent) of the German families lived in the German east side corridor which ran along Gratiot Avenue. The Irish were somewhat less concentrated in a single area but 40 percent of the Irish families lived in Corktown on the west side of the city. This pattern of ethnic clustering among Germans, Irish, and Poles held true at the block level as well.¹⁷

The character of ethnic neighborhoods varied somewhat in size and composition. Some German and Polish neighborhoods displayed class-occupational clustering as well as ethnic concentration--neighborhoods of German craftsmen or Polish laborers, for example--but generally, ethnic neighborhoods included people of all social classes.

Ethnic communities were capable of functioning as self-contained units for recent immigrants or those who spoke no English. Nearly half of Detroit's immigrants had been in the United States less than three years in 1890 (46.4 percent), and more than a third (34.4 percent) spoke no English. The Germans, for example, not only had their own churches, saloons, businesses, and factories, but also eight newspapers including three dailies, their own labor unions, and their own city-wide labor federation, the Central Labor Union.¹⁸

The ethnic community often started around a church. The first Polish neighborhood in Detroit grew around St. Albertus, the Polish Catholic church established in 1871 at East Canfield and St. Aubin on the city's east side. The rapidly increasing Polish population in the 1880's expanded around it as new areas on the east side were vacated by natives and other immigrants. By 1890, the northern part of all the east side wards contained large Polish neighborhoods.¹⁹

Nearly all of the city's Catholic churches served a particular nationality and pressure for creation of new ethnic parishes was a major source of discord within the Catholic church. Detroit had sixteen Catholic churches in 1880, of which seven were identified as Irish or primarily Irish, four as German, two as Polish, and two as French. These ethnic churches provided social

cohesion for their neighborhoods and helped to maintain ethnic solidarity where residential patterns were more mixed. Our Lady of Sorrows, for example, was established by Belgian Catholics in 1884 in a neighborhood which was primarily Black and Jewish but was equidistant from several small concentrations of Belgians.²⁰

Catholic parochial schools were also organized on an ethnic basis with different orders of priests and sisters and instruction in native languages as well as in English. The Polish churches, St. Albert and St. Cassimer, were served by Franciscans who taught in both Polish and English. Two German parishes maintained girls' schools with sisters from Milwaukee who spoke both German and English. St. Anne's, the French parish, likewise maintained its own school.²¹

Voluntary associations complemented ethnic churches and schools. The most important were the fraternal organizations such as the Sons of Poland or the Ancient Order of Hibernians. Fraternal societies had active social programs including dinners, dances, dramatic and musical presentations, and celebrations of national holidays. Most also provided many other services: neighborhood information centers, advice and assistance in finding jobs or in dealing with city agencies, insurance, and care for the sick or unfortunate. Occasionally they functioned as the nucleus of political organization or as a substitute for

trade unions. By 1889, there were more than twenty ethnic fraternal societies in Detroit.²²

By the late 1880's and early 1890's the ethnic neighborhoods also became an informal political unit with community leaders acting as intermediaries between citizens and city bureaucracies and political elites. Ethnic political leaders delivered votes in exchange for patronage and for favors that could be used to strengthen support within the neighborhood. Much of Detroit's complex and often corrupt ward politics revolved around the manipulation and interplay of three active immigrant groups: Germans, Irish, and Poles.²³

Intense political rivalry between ethnic groups is one indication of the strength of ethnic consciousness and the desire to resist assimilation. This rivalry carried over into job competition in a way which clearly inhibited class consciousness. In the early 1890's, Poles clashed bitterly with Italians who were beginning to replace them as the bottom rung on the immigrant ladder. At a meeting at Zoltowski's Hall in 1893, a Polish worker accused Italians of undercutting the Poles in tones ironically similar to nativist denunciations of the Poles. "They get work all over the city....," the Polish worker complained. "An Italian can live on black bread and onions, whereas a Pole must have good food," asserted another man at the meeting. In 1894, Poles clashed with city work crews and

other groups of job seekers in disputes over apportionment of jobs.²⁴

In the face of such intense ethnic conflicts very real inclinations toward class consciousness were submerged. The Polish immigrants had brought a well developed sense of social solidarity as part of their peasant culture, and they were hardly as docile in their relations with employees as nativist workers argued. A socialist oriented newspaper, the Gazeta Narodowa, appeared in Polish in Detroit in the mid-1880's, and Polish workers displayed considerable militance and loyalty to fellow workers in car shop strikes in 1886 and 1891. But for the Polish worker whose primary goal was to save money to bring over family members and relatives still in Poland, strikes represented lost wages and probable postponement of family reunification. The native worker who sought immigration restriction was a threat to family survival. Solidarity became ethnic solidarity because there were immediate needs more important than higher wages or changing the industrial system.²⁵

Ethnic differences were also maintained through resistance to intermarriage and where intermarriage did take place, marriage preferences suggest the impact of long standing ethnic rivalries. Among Irish-born males in Detroit in 1880, for example, 85 percent had married women of Irish descent. Among the second generation,

only half of the men married women of Irish descent, but hardly any married Germans. Those men who did not marry Irish women preferred Americans or Canadians. German men intermarried less frequently than Irish men: 91 percent of the immigrants and 67 percent of the second generation married women of German descent, but when they did marry non-Germans, they too preferred native stock Americans.²⁶

Part of the basis for ethnic rivalries lay in the differences in their experiences. Not only did members of different nationalities arrive with different cultural values and compete for the same jobs, but they also had markedly different prospects for success. For example, the class composition of the Canadian and British immigrant workforces (nearly identical to each other) more nearly resembled that of the native born of foreign parents (see Appendix 1, Table 18) than any of the other immigrant groups with about 70 percent working class in each case. They also showed a much more significant professional class than the other immigrants and a large (about one-sixth) white collar category.²⁷

The English workers came from the world's leading industrial society. They brought with them not only the same language that Americans spoke, but a positive outlook on development, economic progress, and modernization. They came with marketable skills and a little bit of money and encountered less hostility from native Americans than the

Irish, Germans, or Poles. The percentage of unskilled British workers (7.1 percent) in the 1890 Census was only very slightly above that of unskilled among native stock white Americans (6.7 percent). Fewer English workers changed occupations than any other nationality (including Americans), perhaps one indication of success in their initial endeavors. English workers surveyed by the State Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1890 reported that they had had an average of \$177.09 on their arrival in the United States, more than five times the average of Poles (\$30.66), Germans (\$28.99), or the Irish (\$27.02).²⁸

Relatively easy success and smooth transition led to much lower ethnic consciousness. Although British workers (especially Welsh and Scottish) did organize benefit societies and other national institutions, they did not organize politically in Detroit on an ethnic basis and they did not maintain any degree of cohesiveness in their choice of residence. There were no distinctively English neighborhoods. Indeed, in Zunz's study, the English families were more generally dispersed throughout the city and intermingled with other nationalities than the native stock Americans.²⁹

The Canadians, except for the small group of French Canadians (only 11.2 percent of Canadian born workers in 1890), were comparable in many ways to the English. The profile of the Canadian workforce (see Appendix 1,

Table 18) in terms of class is almost identical to that of the British. Canadian immigrants were also English speaking and more skilled than most other immigrants. Many had come from Windsor, across the river from Detroit, or from other communities or farms in the Ontario hinterlands of Detroit. Their process of relocation had not been much more difficult than that of someone coming from Saginaw or Toledo. Like the English, they scattered throughout the city forming no cohesive neighborhood ethnic communities.³⁰

The Irish pattern represented an intermediary case between the British and Canadians on the one hand and the non-English speaking Germans and Poles on the other. The Irish had arrived in far worse shape than most English or Canadian immigrants, and a far higher proportion of them were still workers in 1890, even unskilled laborers. But they had been the earliest arrivals of the major immigrant groups, and this relative longevity provided advantages. Irish workers surveyed in Detroit metal trades factories in 1890 had been in the United States an average of twenty years, compared to twelve years for Germans in the same factories and eight for Poles. Although most Irishmen were workers, some were moderately prosperous. The average net worth claimed by Irish workers in the 1890 metal trades survey was \$1303.18, nearly double that of native born Americans who had been interviewed. Yet,

despite this modest success, the Irish still maintained vestiges of a peasant past--large families, for example. Families of Irish immigrants averaged 3.2 children per family in 1880 compared to an average of 2.7 for German immigrants and 2.0 for native stock Americans. The stereotype of the drunken Irishman was also born out by city arrest statistics. In 1891, 30.3 percent of the total arrests in the city were people of Irish descent (12.2 percent Irish born, 18.1 percent children of Irish immigrants), about three times the proportion of Irish in the city.³¹

Ethnic cohesiveness among the Irish was very strong politically, but less strong than the Germans in terms of residence or intermarriage. Until the late 1880's, the Irish exercised a preponderant influence in the local Democratic party and controlled a disproportionate share of the patronage jobs. In 1880, they made up 7.6 percent of the workforce, but 13.6 percent of the city government employees were natives of Ireland.³²

The Germans outnumbered the Irish nearly three to one in the workforce by 1880 and nearly five to one by 1890. They were the largest, and except for the Poles, the most overwhelmingly working class of the major ethnic groups. The Germans were really many separate groups with some common cultural heritage but decisive differences in background. Many came from the German industrial areas.

These urban workers, like the English workers, had prior experience with an industrial society. They were politically sophisticated, already strongly influenced by the German Social Democratic Party that had been growing rapidly since the 1860's. Others came from village societies with peasant cultures in many ways similar to those of the Irish and Poles. No precise data is available on the relative proportion of urban and rural German immigrants.

Germans were also split along religious lines between Catholics and Lutherans (although there was far less hostility between Catholics and Protestants than among the Irish) and between a number of provincial sub-cultures. Cultural and linguistic differences between Germans from different provinces were quite large--some dialects were mutually unintelligible--and were reflected in organizations representing specific regions like the Plattdeutscher Benevolent Society, the Bavarian National Society, the Baderscher Benevolent Society, the Schwaber Benevolent Society, and the Westphalian Shooting Company.³³

Yet despite differences in background, demographic and residential patterns suggest a high degree of unity. Detroit's Germans displayed a well developed sense of cultural pride with a broad range of well attended community events; Germans lived together and married each other to a much higher degree than other immigrant groups

(except perhaps Poles). In the late 1880's, the German-American politicians exploited this ethnic unity to contest Irish control of the Democratic Party machine. By 1889, Alderman Jacob, a German saloonkeeper, gained the presidency of Detroit's Common Council, and in 1891, German-Americans held fourteen of the thirty-two council seats.³⁴

The Poles were the latest arrivals of the ethnic groups. Polish migration began as a trickle in the 1870's, but increased rapidly after the mid-1880's as relatives and friends followed the earlier emigrants. Most had been peasants. In Detroit, they worked first as unskilled laborers in street paving, excavation, and construction. By the late 1880's, probably because employers believed they were indifferent to unions, several factories (notably the Peninsular Car Company) adopted a concerted policy of hiring Polish laborers. By 1896, nearly all the 3000 employees at the Peninsular Car Works were Polish. Because both the census and the State Labor Bureau failed to adequately differentiate Poles demographic evidence is less adequate than for the other ethnic groups, but Zunz found a high degree of ethnic clustering in Polish residence patterns. Polish workers were considered religious, hard working, but sometimes unpredictable by employers or American fellow workers. Secondary works based primarily on literary sources accept this characterization of Detroit's Polish population, but it is not clear how much

of the image is based on traditional stereotypes. Certainly the evidence does suggest, for example, that non-Polish observers misunderstood Polish attitudes towards labor organization. Like Slavic steelworkers in the Ohio Valley steel towns after 1900, they were initially slow to join unions, but this slowness was certainly as much the result of the unions' hostility to them as to their hostility to unions. In the 1886 car shop strikes in Detroit, for example, they displayed militance and solidarity once organized. The Polish influx was the beginning of a major change in immigration patterns. Prior to 1880, nearly all immigrants had been northern European. After 1890, an increasing proportion were southern and eastern European peasants, first Poles, then Italians, Hungarians, and various Slavic nationalities.³⁵

The experiences and background of Detroit's black population form a special case quite different from that of most European immigrants. Blacks made up a small and declining proportion of the city's population (see Appendix 1, Table 20). The southern blacks who migrated to Detroit in large numbers after 1910 came from a fairly backward rural culture, but in 1870, a majority of Detroit blacks came from Michigan, adjoining parts of Ontario, or nearby states such as Ohio and Indiana. They were the descendants of antebellum refugees from slavery who had already spent several generations in the North.³⁶

Racism was their problem, not acculturation. Blacks were almost entirely working class (see Appendix, Table 18), but they were systematically excluded from most industrial occupations. The successes of upwardly mobile immigrants forced blacks out of the few trades they had entered prior to 1880. In 1890, there were no blacks at all in such industries as brass working, brewing, and shipbuilding, while manufacturing of tobacco products, stoves, and machinery included only seven black workers out of a total workforce of 3521. Although there were a handful of black artisans, in only two artisan categories listed in the 1890 census did black workers comprise as much as one percent of the total number employed.³⁷

Most blacks worked as domestics, service workers, or unskilled laborers. Servants and laundresses made up 74.9 percent of the black females employed in 1890, while 60.7 percent of the black males were servants, laborers, or barbers. Barbering was one of the few trades in which it was possible for a black man to gain some measure of independence by owning his own shop. Significantly, this is the one characteristically black occupation which showed the sharpest decline in black employment. While 55 percent of Detroit barbers were black in 1870, only 7.3 percent were black in 1910, and while one-quarter of the barber shops were black owned in 1884, by 1908, less

than one in fifty were owned by blacks. In contrast, there was an increasing proportion of blacks among restaurant waiters, whose job carried low status and no possibility of independence. Waiters comprised 13 percent of the black male workforce in 1870 and 17 percent in 1910. Nearly half of Detroit's waiters (48 percent) were black in 1910.³⁸

A large number of black workers worked on the docks on an occasional basis. Perhaps as many as 30 percent of all black males did so, and they made up about a fifth of the longshoremen, refuelers, and other dock workers. Refuelers, in particular, were usually black. Characteristically, refueling was the dirtiest and least desirable dockside job. Refuelers were on call twenty-four hours a day; when called, they worked without rest until the job was done, and then were unemployed until the next ship came in.³⁹

A relatively large black subculture, ten percent of the adult males by one estimate, spurned these menial occupations to earn a living providing illicit forms of entertainment to predominantly white patrons in illegal saloons, gambling halls, and houses of prostitution.⁴⁰ Between 1870 and 1910, while the position of various ethnic groups improved, the already dismal position of the blacks continued to deteriorate. Whether longshoremen, ditchdiggers, servants, or pimps, the majority of

the black workforce formed a permanent undercaste, a sort of sub-proletariat, always just slightly worse off than the lowest status white immigrant.⁴¹

The plight of Detroit's black population illustrates the underlying weakness of ethnic consciousness and the fragmented social structure growing out of it. People with objectively similar problems fought each other in pursuit of their shares of the American Dream. Some could succeed, in effect by displacing those who were weaker, but this very process simply enhanced the tensions and increased the differences between people which kept most of them weak, poor, and relatively powerless. These differences among native stock white Americans, English speaking immigrants like the British and Canadians, Irish, Germans, Poles, blacks, and other smaller ethnic groups were far reaching. Basic living patterns reinforced the differences. A German printer might do the same work, receive similar pay, work the same number of hours, face the same threat of mechanization as an American born printer. But if the German lived in Little Berlin off Gratiot Avenue, worked for the Staats Zeitung, belonged to the German Printers' Union, and drank beer at the German beer garden, he might not really have a lot in common with his Yankee compatriot who accused him of being willing to work for "cabbage stumps and bologna."⁴²

IV. Economic Diversity: Skill, Craft, and Work Experience

How might differences in background be overcome? Certainly the objective problems of Detroit workers were serious. The very strength of ethnic solidarity which so seriously divided workers attests to their perception of the need for collective responses to the problems they faced. The ideas of solidarity, loyalty, group commitment were certainly present. What was needed was a "we're all in the same boat" feeling which transcended ethnic, religious, racial, and occupational differences. If workers saw that the same conditions prevailed everywhere and that they had little hope of escaping their problems individually, that might lead them to believe that there was something wrong with the system as a whole. The rapid turnover of population might have helped to overcome ethnic solidarity, narrow-mindedness, or provincialism. This appeared to be the case with the migratory workers who formed the base of the IWW twenty-five years later.⁴³

But in Detroit in the 1880's, conditions were not the same everywhere. One factory was very different from another. In a highly diverse and rapidly changing economy, a whole range of work methods, levels of mechanization, types of firms, and patterns of employer-employee relationships existed side by side in different industries and sometimes in the same industry. If patterns of

industrial development, rates of introduction of new machinery, and evolution of social relationships within the workshop had proceeded in more or less the same way and at more or less the same rate in each craft and each industry, the industrialization process might have simply overwhelmed all of the fragmentary loyalties and varied attitudes of workers. This had been the basic assumption in the Marxist theory of the creation of the proletariat: industrialization would eliminate gradations of status and conflicting interests among workers. The actual process of industrialization in Detroit turned out to be far more complex than a simple theory of proletarianization. Industrialization created new differences in status and consciousness as well as wiping out some of the old.⁴⁴

These differences between industries and within industries are crucial to understanding the consciousness of workers in Detroit. Broad classifications like skilled and unskilled, although useful in describing some aspects of the workers' relative positions, conceal the fact that the prospects and problems of various types of skilled and unskilled workers were very different. Even within the same occupation there were decisive differences in work patterns and rhythms between types of factories and between independent artisans and wage laborers. While mechanization and mass production could mean disaster for the artisan whose craft thereby became obsolete, it could

mean new jobs for the unskilled. The conscious tendency of many large firms to hire unskilled immigrants further aggravated the social tensions that job competition and prejudice had fostered.

An examination of the differences between workers in the same industry illustrates the wide range of experience that occurred within apparently similar job categories. In 1890, the State Bureau of Labor Statistics interviewed more than four thousand workers in Detroit's metal trades industries on a broad range of topics including questions about both current and past economic status and working conditions. This survey revealed major differences in salaries, lost time, and economic status among workers in various factories and even among workers with the same occupation and working for the same company. Workers in the Cooperative Foundry worked fifty-two weeks a year in a small shop they controlled themselves. Only three of the ten workers questioned had lost time during the year, two for illness and one who took a week's vacation. Wage rates were relatively uniform for similar work. A laborer, a coremaker, and two apprentice molders (judging from their ages, 22 and 21) earned \$9.00, \$9.60, \$9.00, and \$8.25 per week respectively. A melter earned \$13.50, and the skilled molders earned between \$15.00 and \$18.00. A small German firm, F. Huetteman and Co., which hired a variety of German and German-American artisans

(and two native stock Americans), had a similar record of regular employment and standardized wages. These small firms had a reputation for amiable relations within the shop.⁴⁵

In the large stove companies such policies were not the case. The stove works had been the scene of repeated and bitter strikes during the previous decade, but the internal organization of the factories was designed to inhibit this bitterness from developing into effective group solidarity. Many craftsmen worked on piece rates or, in effect, as subcontractors under what was called the Bucks System. Artisans hired helpers out of their wages to do the "drudge work requiring no skill." The bucks were usually children or Polish or Italian men who "work for a pittance, three or four of them often getting less than one skilled molder." There were tremendous variations in the positions of the craftsmen themselves. The Michigan Stove Company had employed one German born molder who had arrived in the United States nine years before with \$2.00 in his pocket. Now he was laid off, and he listed his net worth as 0. A German stovemounter in the same shop who had arrived with only \$1.00, twenty-two years later listed his net worth at \$2,000, including a \$2,000 home that was half paid off, a \$150 savings account, and a \$4,500 life insurance policy. The company paid a thirty-six year old German molder \$8 a week--when

he worked. He had been laid off for twenty-six weeks that year. A Danish born molder of the same age earned \$18 per week and only missed four weeks. His property was worth \$3,000. An American born patternmaker had property worth \$9,000. A German metal polisher with five children earned \$7.50 per week and claimed \$200 in possessions. All of these workers were skilled, yet the tremendous differences in their salaries, experiences, and wealth were certainly great enough to raise questions about how they conceived of themselves and each other.⁴⁶

They probably had certain attitudes common to most artisans--notions of skill, pride in craftsmanship, and status in the community. The widespread feelings that craftsmanship was being perverted in the interests of profit, and that status was being destroyed by the onrush of mechanization, were the primary source of the sense of class solidarity that was beginning to emerge against the coexistent countervailing forces of fragmentation. But there was a darker side to this artisan consciousness which emphasized the differences in status rather than common attitudes. Desire to preserve craft privilege could be a barrier to a sense of solidarity between workers, even for craftsmen who recognized that their objective position was hardly better than that of the unskilled. After all, it was the yawning chasm of the laboring mass that was the artisan's nightmare; his

threatened skill, like Jonathan Edward's sinner's single thread, the only thing which separated him from a life of poverty and degradation. Even labor organizers who advocated solidarity with the unskilled often did so in patronizing tones which suggested that feelings of moral superiority were very close to the surface. Knights of Labor Master Workman Charles Barnes, for example, spoke against limitation of the organization's membership in 1887 because the order should admit men of "low morality to improve them." These attitudes, and basic ethnic differences, were mutually reinforced by marked differences in ethnicity between many trades and the unskilled. While 77.9 percent of the male laborers in Detroit were foreign born in 1890, only 33.9 percent of the printers were foreign born, and only 35.2 percent of the plumbers and steam fitters were foreign born.⁴⁷

Differences between trades were as serious as differences between the skilled and unskilled. Some artisans found their jobs mechanized out of existence. Others found declining opportunities as they tried to compete against machines, but different industries had very different rates of skill dilution, while rapid expansion of some industries meant that demand for some skills expanded faster than supply. In 1892, the Detroit Typographical Union, despite an impending threat of typesetting machines and other changes in printing technology,

was able to report a 12 percent increase in average wages over the last five years. Skilled handroll cigarmakers did not fare so well, however. The State Bureau of Labor Statistics had reported average wages of \$1.76 per day, or over \$10 per week, for Detroit cigarmakers in late 1883. But, by 1889, despite a rapid expansion of the industry (total employment in cigar and cigarette manufacturing in Detroit increased from 899 to 1562 between 1880 and 1890), average wages for handrollers were down to \$8-\$9 per week as competition from machines and from unskilled women and children increased. Thus, technological change destroyed opportunities, but it also created new ones. Electrical workers were too insignificant numerically to even be listed in the 1890 Census breakdown of occupations, but by 1892, there were enough electrical workers to form a union of one hundred members. Industrialization must have looked very different to an electrician in Detroit in the early 1890's than it did to a cigarmaker.⁴⁸ Since the starting point of political consciousness for the average worker was his own personal experiences or those of immediate associates, these differences in timing and degree could be decisive in the receptivity of various groups of workers to conflicting types of ideological appeals--personal mobility versus group action, class versus craft organization.

The frequency with which even the most radical

labor agitators used the plurals like working classes in reference to workers and their interests reflects their realization of the seriousness of this process of fragmentation. Advocates of class struggle believed that the interests of all workers were the same, but they recognized that in 1880 this was wish more than reality. Particularly for those workers whose skill status was not in danger, the differences between laborers and artisans often seemed so great that they had little in common. It would be wrong to presume that privileged status necessarily meant indifference to labor organization. Such highly paid skills as machine molding, brass finishing, and stone cutting were among the most thoroughly organized trades in the city. Conscious of the value of their skills to the manufacturer and their importance in the production process, these workers jealously guarded their prerogatives and were difficult enough to replace that many otherwise hysterically anti-union employers dealt with their organizations. But organization does not mean solidarity with others. Craft conservatives wanted ties with other stable crafts, but they were not particularly anxious to associate with the masses of unskilled or semiskilled laborers. As James Collins, the conservative editor of the widely read Alpena Labor Journal argued in 1886, "For skilled and unskilled labor to unite in one organization is one of labor's great mistakes..."⁴⁹

V. Ambition

Differences in background and status were barriers to class consciousness. Pro-capitalist ideology was as well. A class conscious strategy for workers envisioned mutual improvement through a collective assault on the basic terms of the wage relationship. The status of workers in general would be changed. Yet many workers accepted the opposite doctrine of personal advancement--the Horatio Alger myth of opportunity and accumulation. Such would-be capitalists had no antagonism to wealth as such. "Capital justly earned and honestly invested is entitled to a reasonable reward" argued a Michigan labor editor, "...riches are no sin when acquired by industry and good management." Labor and Capital should "be allies not enemies." Acquisition of wealth was beneficial to mankind. "Society would relapse into barbarism if we should remove the stimulus and incentive to acquisition...Every man has a right to be as rich as the rest of mankind will let him be."⁵⁰

While an individual employer might use "the advantages which his enormous capital would give him over his men," many workers felt that their employers were "just and fair." In 1886, a boilermaker who described himself as content with his condition hoped that "Providence may deal as kindly with...the small and large manufacturer...as his employer has with me..." A woodsman admired the

"honor, manliness, humanity, and love of fair play which pervades the character of my employer..." A woman laundry worker, interviewed six years later, said her "employers are very kind..." although the State Bureau of Labor Statistics investigator remarked that the work seemed very hard and "the rooms are usually very warm." A furniture worker argued in 1886 that he was underpaid, given his twenty-five years of experience, but still believed that "labor is a commodity, and...any law interfering with the free market...would strike a blow at personal liberty...I am in favor of anything that will bring about a better understanding between labor and capital..."⁵¹

A Detroit printer elaborated the same theme in a letter to a Detroit labor paper in 1881:

...Capital employed in manufactures, building of all kinds, production of raw materials, commerce, or indeed in any of the thousand and one ways that it may be used to furnish work to the laborer must of necessity be A BENEFIT TO THE WORKINGMAN.

"Working men should not feel enmity toward such a one simply because he is rich," he went on. After all, capital was nothing more than the product of "the man who has the wisdom to save his dimes until they become dollars, and the ability to direct enterprises so that these dollars shall grow into capital." The legitimate manufacturer was a laborer just as much as the artisan.⁵²

The printer's argument was not unusual. Two weeks earlier, another correspondent to the same paper, B. J., presented an almost identical argument. "If we admit the right of a workman to a reasonable wage," he concluded, "we must allow an employer the same right."⁵³

Both workers agreed that there was no real conflict between capital and labor, only misunderstanding. Both capital and labor were indispensable to the productive process. "There can be no capital without labor," the printer argued, "and it is the proper service of capital in return that it should be so used as to reward labor... there is a community of interests between labor and employed capital..."⁵⁴

But B. J. recognized that many workers did not agree. "Unfortunately the interests of employer and employed are usually thought to be opposed." Mutual understanding and free exchange of information between workers and employers was necessary. Then the workingman would not blame "...the active and brainy manufacturer or businessman..." for the problems caused by "...that kind of Shylock" who demands "such a rate of usance" that the employer is compelled to do "injustice against his employees in order to yield the pound of flesh."⁵⁵

Such workers admired the "active and brainy manufacturer" and hoped to be like him some day, even if only on a small scale. Most workers could not hope to become

magnates or millionaires. Rags-to-riches was transparent enough for all but the most gullible to see through (even if they still harbored secret daydreams), but apprentice-to-foreman served the same psychological function. Foreman in a large shop or owner of a small workshop were realistic goals for the diligent artisan. In a recent mobility study of Detroit, among 240 skilled workers present in 1880 who could still be counted in the city in 1890, 18 percent had experienced upward mobility--that is, they were employed in white collar, professional, or business categories. Even unskilled workers had some chance of making it into the middle class--11 percent of those in the same study who were unskilled workers in 1880 (n=108) had entered the non-working class occupations by 1890. The doctrine of mobility thus had plausibility based on actual experience. Those who succeeded in escaping the working class were a minority, but a large enough minority that the possibility of duplicating their efforts cannot have seemed hopeless to those who remained. An even larger number could expect at least some improvement in their status. Nearly half of the unskilled workers (47 percent) had moved up at least into semi-skilled occupations in the course of the decade.⁵⁶

Workers looked up to craftsmen who had moved up the social ladder. The labor columns of the daily papers ran articles in the late 1880's about various industries

which always reserved a section for shining examples entitled "Leading Molders," or "Men Who Make Your Cigars." Jerry Dwyer, president of the Michigan Stove Company which employed 1500 people, had started out as an ordinary iron molder. Isa Cohen of Weithoff and Cohen Cigars employed 65 people in 1889, but only five years before he had still been at the workbench himself.⁵⁷

The implications were clear--you, too, can make good. The suggestion behind the ideology of success was that ambitious workers who hoped to get ahead must emulate the successful and accept the propertied values of sobriety, simplicity, hard work, and frugality that were constantly reiterated in pulpit and school room, by editors and politicians. Whether they fully accepted the ideology or not, workers recognized that compliance with expected behavior could earn rewards. "My employer is a gentleman who seems to appreciate sobriety and steadiness," a tinner noted. "By strict attention to business I have come to the front..."⁵⁸

Some of the workers interviewed by the State Labor Bureau had gone beyond compliance. They preached to the interviewers about the relationship between good habits and success. A machinist argued in 1886 "those that started in life with a full determination to accomplish themselves in their trade and have let liquor alone, are to-day either in positions that give them fair remuneration

for their time and energies, or have a small business for themselves. The masses should be taught practical business methods." A laborer agreed with him that "beer and rum are the main cause of suffering in our ranks."⁵⁹

Workers who accepted the ideology of mobility argued that poverty was generally the worker's own fault. "Although I do not doubt that labor is in many instances underpaid," granted a frugal paper make, "I think in most cases it is the employee's fault that he does not get along better. I have no taste for beer and tobacco, and I am not inclined to loaf around saloons when off duty... The first eighteen months after marriage my wife and I both worked, saving some \$400, since then have saved and made enough to figure up to near \$2,000."⁶⁰

Employers recognized that moral attitudes conducive to the work ethic were in their interests. The parsimonious papermaker had exactly the kind of time-is-money philosophy ("I work 11-1/4 hours for my employer and from four to five for myself.") that was the essence of good business practice. Many companies used coercion in the form of fines in order to insure punctuality, regularity, and consistency. Others created employee programs designed to provide a positive stimulus to habits the employer desired. Frugality, for example, was viewed as a useful attribute by many businessmen. People who saved money and hoped for a business of their own might not be so

insistent about higher wages. The paper maker noted "those who work for smallest wages are disposed to be economical...others who get larger wages...do not figure so close in regard to expenditures."⁶¹

In 1890, one Detroit employer, in an effort to stimulate workers to save money, offered to match anything his employees deposited in a savings account with one half the amount deposited (Figure 1). The program revealed a combination of paternalism, solicitous concern for the employee's old age, and careful planning. Everything was spelled out in order to allay any suspicions of the employer's motives, to convince workers of the value of saving money, and to explain how this worthwhile goal might be accomplished. The creator of the program clearly believed that his employees were not fully capable of initiating a savings program of their own, and that even those who might be convinced of the need for saving could not be trusted, at least at first, to handle the money responsibly. The company's contributions would only become the worker's property after five years and only if the worker had not withdrawn his own deposits in the five year period. The worker was thus provided with a monetary incentive against wasting the savings on personal consumption. The employer's underlying assumption was probably that after five years the good habits learned as a result of participation in the savings program would be

Figure 1

SAVE YOUR MONEY!

To our employees:

For the purpose of inducing you to save as much of your wages as possible, we make the following proposition: If you will deposit in any one of the following banks which you may select, any one of which will pay you four percent interest, viz:

THE DIME SAVINGS BANK,

THE PEOPLE'S SAVINGS BANK, or

THE STATE SAVINGS BANK,

such part of your wages as you can save, we will deposit to your credit on the first days of January, April, July, and October in each year, one-half the amount which you have deposited during the three preceding months, up to five percent of your wages. That is, if a man earns \$100.00 every three months and deposits \$10.00 in the bank, we will deposit \$5.00, which is five percent of his wages. If such a man should only deposit \$7.00, we would deposit \$3.50.

The money which you deposit you have full control of, and you can draw the whole or any part of it out of the bank at any time. The money which we deposit for you will become yours at the end of five years from the time you begin making deposits, provided you do not draw

Figure 1 (cont'd.)

out your own deposits before the end of five years. If you should leave our employ before the end of five years, the money put in by us while you worked in our factory will still become yours at the end of five years, if you leave your own money on deposit until that time.

If you should die before the end of five years leaving your own money on deposit, the money we have deposited for you will be paid to your legal representative at once.

In case you draw out your deposit before the end of five years, then you will forfeit all right to the money which we have deposited for you, and all such moneys we will use as a "sick fund" to help such of our employees as need it, when they are sick or disabled.

Supposing a man who earns \$450.00 a year

saves of his own money \$ 45.00

Our deposit would be \$ 22.50

Making a total of \$ 67.50

Multiplying this by 5

Makes a total savings in five years of . . \$337.50

Add to this 4 percent interest paid by

the bank, which would be about \$ 40.00

Figure 1 (cont'd.)

Would give him at the end of five years \$377.50

If all of our employees avail themselves of this offer to its full limit, it will require \$25,000 to make our share of the deposits during the next five years. We hope you will take advantage of it to provide your families in case of your death, and your own old age in case you live.

Take this circular to the bank when you open your account.

Detroit, April 1890

Source: SBLS, 1893, p. 1285.

permanently adopted by the worker. At the same time, it was undoubtedly not lost on the employer that the savings program had potential as a means of social control as well as a didactic device: the funds held in escrow for five years would function as a bond for good behavior (even though rights to the money might go with the worker who left after the elapsed five year time period). Moreover, if the program resulted in any decline in employee turnover, the advantages of an experienced workforce and the savings of not having to train new employees would defray a good deal of the costs.⁶²

Certainly few workers saved much money; only a minority accomplished significant upward occupational mobility; very few duplicated the Horatio Alger story. But the actual rates of mobility may not be as important as what people believed. Enough people showed some improvement, with a few who did become wealthy, for the doctrine of success to be believable. If people believed that mobility was possible, the ideology had served its function. The ideology of mobility and success was grounded in the fundamental propertied values of the employers. Acceptance of these values significantly decreased the likelihood of conflict. Workers who admired their employers and believed in Horatio Alger were not class conscious revolutionaries or even militant trade unionists. Even a minority of conservative craftsmen in

a shop could destroy the potential for any effective action. The Detroit Times, a labor newspaper, complained in 1881 that "skilled workmen who do not belong to trade unions are always used by their employers as edged tools to mutilate the efforts of their organized fellow workers." It was symbolic of the pervasiveness of the values upon which this anti-unionism was based that Judson Grenell, one of the socialist editors of the Times, admitted in his memoirs that a few years before, when he had owned his own print shop in New Haven, Connecticut, he had marched around town every day in a silk hat, kid gloves, and a fancy cane.⁶³

VI. Power and Fear

Underlying all of these barriers to class consciousness--a fluid social environment, cultural differences, ethnic rivalries, differences in economic status, differential rates of skill dilution, the possibility of individual achievement and the ideology of success--lay the reality of fundamental inequalities of power and wealth. People moved about in search of work because those who controlled jobs had none for them. Workers of different backgrounds came to Detroit because employers consciously recruited them. Poles were specifically hired because employers believed them to be less inclined to labor

organization than other nationalities. Nativist workers were not motivated only out of bigotry. Mobile labor served as a surplus labor pool for employers who wanted to cut wages. Employment agencies specialized in the importation of foreign labor under contract for this purpose. Tom Barry, an East Saginaw axemaker and national Knights of Labor leader, (who had himself been forced to move repeatedly because of employer blacklists) denounced this practice before a Congressional Committee in 1884:

In the lumber regions of Michigan there are 1000 men working for their board. Agents go to Canada and bring men under false pretenses, telling them that they will receive \$35 per month, and advertise for men in large numbers in the Canada papers, to be paid the ruling rates, about \$35 per month. When the lumber camps are filled they offer them \$16 per month.

The lobbying effort of the Knights did result in passage of a federal law prohibiting importation of alien labor under contract, but the law was rarely enforced. Detroit labor organizations made repeated attempts to secure enforcement but met with little success.⁶⁴

Ethnic rivalry was not an inevitable outcome of cultural difference. Ethnic groups fought one another because they were competing for scarce jobs and resources. The doctrine of success did not miraculously spring into people's minds. It was repeated over and over again by employers, newspaper editors, politicians, clergymen.

The basis of this power was the employers' control

of the means of survival. Perhaps not all employers recognized their power consciously, but many workers complained that their employers behaved as if they did--their bosses expected to be treated in a manner befitting someone of stature and success. The tinner who catered to his employer's demands for "sobriety and steadiness" complained that employers treated working men with a kind of social "ostracism" as if they "were of a lower order of intelligence." Fear of unemployment and poverty produced submissiveness to these employer expectations of deference.⁶⁵

It is difficult to fully document fear, deference, or obedience. Nineteenth century celebrants of industry denied the existence of so European a phenomenon; the victims rarely acknowledged their fears, even to themselves. But appeals to manliness and courage are such a common theme of the nineteenth century labor agitator that they must suggest widespread existence of timidity and acceptance. We might like to find evidence of rebellious thousands singing the Internationale (or Solidarity Forever). Social reality was often much more bleak.⁶⁶

A few examples are suggestive. In 1885, the Director of the State Bureau of Labor Statistics noted that 50 to 100 men showed up every day at the front steps of Detroit's City Hall on the chance that there might be work. There were no protests or demonstrations; the men stood around for a while and went home. A compassionate

manufacturer explained to the Labor Bureau that five to fifteen men applied for work every day at his factory although he had not advertised for help. Those already employed, seeing the numbers who were desperate enough to work for almost any amount, "really overworked themselves fearing that otherwise they would be discharged."⁶⁷

In December, 1883, the Detroit House of Corrections recorded 85 voluntary commitments in one month. A few were habitual criminals or drunks; most were simply unemployed workers with nowhere else to go. Only 25 of the 85 had ever been in jail before including ten arrested for drunkenness; two men explained they had "no work, no money, were sick" or "hungry," and just "...wanted to get some place to stay out of the cold." Nearly half (36) had been out of work more than a month. Here they would work for their keep eight and one-half hours a day in winter, eleven and one-half in summer for various manufacturers to whom the state sold their labor. In return, these voluntary industrial slaves received subsistence but not even the proverbial new suit of clothes upon discharge.⁶⁸

These people certainly had grievances against the industrial system. Their deference indicates a certain consciousness of class, but people who begged for work or voluntarily turned themselves into a prison where they would be sold by the day to the highest bidder were not

likely to become soldiers of the class war.

There was a hidden dimension of fear that may have been even more decisive than these obvious kinds of submissiveness. We can find many examples of courageous workers who refused to be bullied, who demanded that employers respect long-standing work rules that gave the worker some control over the pace of work. How much were they, even the courageous, inhibited by an employer's display of power? When a trade unionist was fired and left town in search of work what happened to the spirit of rebellion in the friends he left behind? In 1886, painter John Goldring was driven out of town after defending the Haymarket anarchists and the right of workers to use force to defend themselves from police attack. He was unable to get work, the daily newspapers attacked him by name from their editorial columns, and his partner asked him to leave. The Detroit Labor Leaf defended Goldring and bitterly denounced his critics, but Goldring left town. What did other revolutionaries in the city conclude about speaking out in public?⁶⁹

Such questions are inherently unanswerable. Even the participants could not really know exactly how much of their behavior was dictated by the almost instinctive caution that such experiences produce. But if we are to understand the tensions underlying working class behavior in Detroit we must recognize the existence of fear, the

process of self-restraint that takes place when people say to themselves: "What will happen to me if I do this?"

Consciousness exists in a concrete reality of power.

People do not develop their ideas, their political consciousness out of pure reflection. When the propertyless defend property rights, or the oppressed seem to meekly submit, we cannot assume that such belief or such action represents freely given consent in any meaningful sense. What seems possible always limits a sense of what is just.

Chapter 2

NOTES

1. See: Chapter 1, pp. 20-25 for discussion of inequality and differences in lifestyle. The nature and meaning of class consciousness is widely debated by sociologists and historians. For a brief summary of sociological opinions, see: Melvin M. Tumin, Social Stratification (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1967). E. P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Vintage, 1963) has had a major influence in redirecting labor and social historians, especially Marxists, toward the cultural and subjective nature of class consciousness. For a discussion of the relationship between subjective perception and class consciousness similar to that presented here, see: Clyde Griffen, "Workers Divided: The Effect of Craft and Ethnic Differences in Poughkeepsie, New York, 1850-1880," in Thernstrom and Sennett, Nineteenth Century Cities (New Haven: Yale, 1970).

2. These suggestions for conditions necessary to produce class consciousness are merely preliminary speculations. Any theoretical or structural answer is clearly beyond the scope of a case study. Despite the volume of literature on class, class consciousness, workers, etc., there is remarkably little theoretical discussion among historians of a general nature in response to this basic question, e.g., under what structural conditions is (working) class consciousness most likely to occur? Works of a number of sociologists and anthropologists are at least indirectly relevant: Ted Robert Gurr, Why Men Rebel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); Barrington Moore, Jr., Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (Boston: Beacon, 1968); Eric R. Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

3. Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 471; Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 1, pp. cxxix and clxii.

4. Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 664.

5. SBLS, 1884, pp. 112-13, 128-30. "About two fifths" is as accurate as this conclusion can be. A large number of the survey's participants did not respond to this question.

6. SBLs, 1884, pp. 112-13, 128-30.

7. JoEllen Vinyard, The Irish on the Urban Frontier, Nineteenth Century Detroit, 1850-1880 (New York: Arno Press, 1976), p. 137. The population of the city may have been even more fluid than these statistics suggest. Stephen Thernstrom's mobility study of Boston revealed that nearly three times as many families lived in Boston at some time during the 1880's as the number living there at any one time. Stephen Thernstrom, The Other Bostonians (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 16. The entire question of population turnover is discussed in detail, pp. 15-28.

8. SBLs, 1884, pp. 112-13, 128-30; SBLs, 1886, pp. 142-3.

9. Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1951) is the classic study of immigrant adjustment problems. Handlin's picture is bleak but recognizes the needs fulfilled by the ethnic community. See especially Chapter VII. More recent scholarship is critical of Handlin, especially his arguments about individual and family breakdown. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1890 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) emphasizes the role of kin and family in adjustment and places less stress on community, but also has a far more positive image of the ethnic ghetto. See especially: pp. 60, 77-8.

10. Herbert Gutman, Work Culture and Society in Industrializing America (New York: Vintage, 1977), p. 40.

11. Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876; Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 664-5 and Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 672. The census returns contain a major inaccuracy. Since Poland was divided between Germany, Austria, and Russia, most Poles were not recorded as Polish in the census. The census reported a Polish population in Detroit of 5351 in 1890, but one authority has estimated that the actual number of Poles in the city in 1890 was five times as large as the census figure. Detroit's Polish population is estimated at 22,000 in 1885 and 35,000 in 1892. Assuming that roughly the same percentage of Poles were employed as the rest of the population, these estimates would indicate a Polish workforce of about 13,000 in 1890, or about 16 percent of the workforce. Melvin G. Holli, Reform in Detroit (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 10-12; Sister Mary Remigia Napolska, The Polish Immigrant in Detroit to 1914

(Chicago: Annals of the Polish Catholic Union, 1946), p. 30.

12. Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 664-5.

13. SCLS, 1884, pp. 112, 129; see: Appendix 1, Table 19.

14. SCLS, 1884, p. 148.

15. SCLS, 1886, pp. 158, 163.

16. Holli, Reform in Detroit, pp. 65-68.

17. S. B. Stefan, "Polonia and its American Contribution" in Poles in Michigan (n.p.: 1973), p. 15; David M. Katzman, Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), pp. 55-59; Olivier Zunz, "The Organization of the American City in the Late Nineteenth Century: Ethnic Structure and Spatial Arrangement in Detroit," Journal of Urban History, August, 1977, pp. 453, 463. See also: Olivier Zunz, Detroit en 1880: Essai D'Histoire Urbaine, Working Paper of the Center for Research on Social Organization of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, January, 1977, especially Chapter 4.

18. Zunz, "The Organization of the American City," p. 457; Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. lxxi, lxxii; Holli, Reform in Detroit, p. 11.

19. Katzman, Before the Ghetto, p. 58; George P. Groff, The People of Michigan (Lansing: Michigan Department of Education, 1974), p. 83; Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 4, Part 2, pp. 219-27.

20. Vinyard, The Irish on the Urban Frontier, pp. 182-3.

21. Ibid., pp. 190-1.

22. Benjamin Stanczyk, "The Rise of the Polish National Alliance in Detroit" in Poles in Michigan; Detroit City Directory, 1889 (Detroit: R. L. Polk and Co., 1889). The city directory lists over 100 fraternal societies and lodges. Only about two dozen are ethnically identified in the directory or have names (Polish National Alliance) which make the nationality clear, but judging from the names of officers, many of the others were ethnically organized.

23. Holli, Reform in Detroit, pp. 8-20.

24. Ibid., pp. 64-66. Ethnic particularism and rivalry could occasionally carry down to the level of provincial as well as national origins. In the mid-1870's, for example, Irishmen in the Eighth Ward organized according to Irish county of origin with separate political caucuses for those from Limerick, Kerry, Clare, and Tipperary. Vinyard, The Irish on the Urban Frontier, p. 270.

25. R. Jarzabkowska, "History of the Polish Press in Detroit" in Poles in Michigan, pp. 78-9; Detroit Tribune, May 6, 1886; SBLS, 1892, p. 33. Sister Mary Remigia Napska, The Polish Immigrant in Detroit, discusses immigrant attitudes toward unions and strikes, especially pp. 39-41. David Brody, Steelworkers in America, The Non-union Era (New York: Harper and Row, 1969) discusses the relationship between peasant origins and labor solidarity among Eastern European immigrants in the steel industry, pp. 139-40.

26. Vinyard, The Irish on the Urban Frontier, pp. 191-2, 416-7. Ms. Vinyard notes that ethnic intermarriage rates were related to class with workers less likely to intermarry than other classes. Among Irish laborers (first and second generations combined), 91 percent married women of Irish descent, while among Irish businessmen, the rate of ethnic marriages was only 62 percent, and among Irish clerks, 57 percent. P. 418.

27. Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 664-5.

28. Ibid.; SBLS, 1884, pp. 112, 129; SBLS, 1891, p. 431.

29. Zunz, "The Organization of the American City," pp. 453-4, 463; Zunz, Detroit en 1880, p. 126. Rowland Berthoff, British Immigrants in Industrial America (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953) discusses this pattern of relative ease of assimilation despite some efforts to maintain ethnic heritage. Berthoff argues, in particular, that the children of British immigrants were almost totally assimilated in contrast to other nationalities: "...the British-Americans had no 'second generation'...their children were simply Americans...They seldom thought of themselves as anything but Americans." P. 210.

30. Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 664-5; Zunz, "The Organization of the American City," pp. 454-463; Zunz, Detroit en 1880, p. 126.

31. Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876; Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 664-5; SCLS, 1891, pp. 430-1; Vinyard, The Irish on the Urban Frontier, p. 409; SCLS, 1892, p. 389.

32. Holli, Reform in Detroit, p. 10. Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876.

33. Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876; Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 665; Detroit City Directory, 1889; Detroit Advance and Labor Leaf, May 26, 1887. The SCLS apparently recognized these provincial differences and a few of its reports tabulate responses of Germans separately by province. Nearly all of Detroit's German-American labor leaders for whom biographical data is available came from the industrial parts of Germany.

34. Holli, Reform in Detroit, pp. 10-11. Data on residence is given on p. 57, on intermarriage, see p. 61-2.

35. Napoliska, The Polish Immigrant in Detroit, pp. 25, 34-9; David Brody, Steelworkers in America; Zunz, "The Organization of American Cities," pp. 453-5, 463. See fn. 11 above for a discussion of inadequacy of demographic data on the Poles.

36. Katzman, Before the Ghetto, pp. 62-3.

37. Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 664. The exceptions were bakers (1.3 percent, 5 of 379) and plasterers (8.6 percent, 26 of 301).

38. Ibid.; Katzman, Before the Ghetto, pp. 107-8, 110-11, 115-17.

39. Katzman, Before the Ghetto, pp. 117-20.

40. Ibid., p. 171.

41. Ibid., pp. 121-24.

42. SCLS, 1886, p. 158.

43. The IWW and the culture of migratory agricultural workers have been discussed by many authors ranging from the highly impressionistic Hard Travellin': The

Hobo and his Story by Kenneth Allsop (New York: New American Library, 1970), esp. pp. 301-45, to the personal reminiscences of Len DeCaux (Labor Radical, Boston: Beacon, 1970, pp. 38-89) and Philip Taft ("Portrait of the Labor Historian as Boy and Young Man," Labor History, Winter, 1978, pp. 39-71) and the scholarly account of Melvyn Dubofsky (We Shall Be All: A History of the IWW, New York: Quadrangle, 1973). The success of the IWW in the multi-cultural environment of eastern textile centers like Lawrence also suggests that different ethnic backgrounds were not an insurmountable barrier where other conditions were conducive to organization and/or class consciousness.

44. Clyde Griffen, "Workers Divided," pp. 49-97, is an excellent study of the nature and effects of these divisions. His use of the concept of skill dilution has stimulated my search for similar evidence in Detroit. Harry Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974) and Barbara and John Ehrenreich, "The Professional-Managerial Class," Radical America, March-April, 1977, discuss the expansion of new job categories as a result of capitalist development in the twentieth century.

45. SBLS, 1891, p. 134; "Among the Molders," clipping dated June 16, 1889, in Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC.

46. "Among the Molders," LC; Detroit Evening News, June 5, 6, 9, 1887; SBLS, 1891, pp. 2-25.

47. Alpena Labor Journal, August 12, 1887; Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 664-5.

48. Labor Day Review, 1892, p. 11, LC; SBLS, 1884, p. 86; "Men Who Make Your Cigars," July 28, 1889, clipping, Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC; Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. , pp. 399-400; Eleventh Census, 1890, Compendium, pp. 802-5; Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 664-5; "Labor Day Review," 1892, p. 35, LC.

49. Use of the plural was standard practice in almost all documents of the period. For organization of crafts, see: Labor Day Review, 1897, LC; Alpena Labor Journal, March 19, 1886.

50. Alpena Labor Journal, June 6, 1885. The Labor Journal circulated in Detroit as well as in northern Michigan. See also: September 27, 1884; March 11, 1887; June 14, 1884; April 9, 1886. Conflicting attitudes toward capital debated among Michigan labor leaders of

the 1880's are discussed in Richard Oestreicher, The Knights of Labor in Michigan: Sources of Growth and Decline (Michigan State University: unpublished M.A. thesis, 1973), esp. Chapter 3.

51. SBLs, 1886, pp. 157, 163, 165; SBLs, 1892, p. 179.

52. Detroit Times, April 24, 1881.

53. Ibid., April 10, 1881.

54. Ibid., April 10, 1881; April 24, 1881.

55. Ibid.

56. Vinyard, The Irish on the Urban Frontier, pp. 320-23, 404-8. The question of mobility is both methodologically and conceptually more complex. The results of the basic method of computing mobility, tracing individuals over time, is particularly susceptible to assumptions of the researcher, especially which occupations constitute improvements in status. Simply by defining the basic categories (skilled, semi-skilled, etc.) differently or changing the classification of particular occupations from one category to another, the results can change dramatically. While Ms. Vinyard (and most other researchers) show sensitivity to these problems and have attempted to develop uniform and/or objective schemes of classification, it is very difficult to surmount this difficulty without more detailed information (rates of pay, for example) than is usually available. Mobility calculations are also biased upward because they only include those who were stable enough (or rich enough) to be listed in census or city directory at either end of a ten year period. In most American cities studied during this period, this method leaves out from one-third to as much as two-thirds of the population--the part of the population less likely to be upwardly mobile in the judgment of most researchers. Equally as important as these methodological problems is the conceptual bias in mobility study--it assumes something we do not know, namely that most people sought success as a primary goal, and that they defined success in essentially the same way as the researcher. There is abundant evidence that such assumptions are not universally valid--many individuals and ethnic groups stressed very different values: security, dignity, family unity, cultural integrity. For an excellent discussion of these conceptual problems, see: James A. Henretta, "The Study of Social Mobility: Ideological Assumptions and Conceptual Bias," Labor History, Spring, 1977.

57. Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC.
58. SBLs, 1886, p. 158.
59. SBLs, 1886, p. 160.
60. SBLs, 1886, p. 161.
61. Ibid.; Thompson's essay "Time, Work-discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," Past and Present, 38 (1967), explores the relationship between conceptions of time and acceptance of work rhythms.
62. SBLs, 1893, p. 1285.
63. Detroit Times, May 8, 1881; Judson Grenell, "Autobiography" (Clearwater, Florida: unpublished manuscript, 1930).
64. House of Representatives Report No. 444, 48th Congress, Serial 2254, p. 11.
65. SBLs, 1886, p. 158.
66. See the Preamble of the Constitution of Detroit Bricklayers and Masons' Union No. 2 in SBLs, 1884, pp. 62-63, for an example of the appeal to manhood.
67. SBLs, 1885, p. 116.
68. SBLs, 1884, pp. 190-1, 56-7.
69. Detroit Labor Leaf, June 30, 1886; July 7, 1886. For a discussion of workers' struggles to maintain work rules, and the sense of courage artisans displayed, see: David Montgomery, "Workers Control of Machine Production in the Nineteenth Century," Labor History, Fall, 1976.

Chapter 3

SOURCES OF CLASS SOLIDARITY

I. "revolution's in the air"

The forces of fragmentation operating against the formation of working class consciousness formed a consistent backdrop to Detroit's industrialization and urbanization--they were products of the growth process itself. But industrialization also produced a series of strong countervailing trends which led to a sense of common bond among many workers. The result was an inner tension, certainly within the city, but also within most workers' organizations, and within the psyche of individuals as well. Success and solidarity were coexistent but contradictory goals.¹ There were compelling reasons for trying to bridge the contradiction or to overcome it. The labor movement, for example, depended on solidarity for survival but faced the recognition that its members were not immune to the appeals of personal ambition. Since both solidarity and fragmentation were products of industrialization, as the pace of industrialization increased, so did the intensity of the contradiction between them.

In the early and mid-1880's in Detroit, the elan of a rising labor movement temporarily submerged the contradiction as the potential for success within the movement seemed great. As a result, some observers saw growing class solidarity. Appeals "to the working man" became standard election time rhetoric. Dentists and hat shops advertised in the local labor paper as "the working man's dentist" or "friend of the working man." In 1879, Joseph Labadie, a Knights of Labor organizer, had emphasized Detroit's backwardness in a letter to Grand Master Workman Terence Powderly, but when Powderly visited Detroit in 1884, Labadie advised him not to worry. "You can be pretty radical with our boys in Detroit...." Two years later the Detroit Labor Leaf spoke of the rapidly accelerating pace of working class protest as the beginning of "The Revolution," and even some of the local radicals were concerned that the Knights of Labor was growing so fast that educational efforts were missing most of the new membership.² Between 1884 and late 1886, Knights of Labor membership in Detroit grew nearly 1,000 percent.³ Such growth was not unique to Detroit in 1886. Nationally the Knights membership increased by more than 500 percent in one year.⁴ Middle class magazines ran fearful articles with titles like "Will there Be a Revolution in America?"⁵

There was not. In retrospect, the fears seem almost groundless, but hindsight may be deceiving. The

specter that haunted the propertied class in 1886 was real: a working class presence based on deep seated grievances, ideologically unsophisticated but quite genuinely aroused. The specter dissipated, and, from the perspective of nearly one hundred years, left little enduring legacy. But this is the problem.⁶ We know what happened. That makes it difficult for us to understand how real the specter must have seemed to people in September, 1886, when ten to twelve thousand workers paraded down Woodward Avenue in a show of strength and defiance. Six years before there had been only a few hundred cautious and conservative craft unionists in the city. If things could change so much in so short a time, how could one tell--maybe the labor agitator's predictions of coming revolution were serious. The Knights of Labor claimed one million members at the end of 1886, and hysterical and exaggerated newspaper accounts credited them with millions more.⁷

Within another six years the Knights had vanished from Detroit. The severe depression of the mid-1890's, despite widespread distress, produced only modest disturbances in Detroit. It is tempting to conclude that people who talked of revolution in 1886 were dreamers or psychotics, but this is the danger of hindsight and present-mindedness. Today, less than ten years after tanks rolled down the streets of American cities and students occupied

hundreds of university buildings, commentators and political pundits celebrate the demise of Black rebellion and the New Left. The absence of protest today likewise makes it easy to minimize the extent of protest ten years ago. We will, no doubt, have a school of revisionist historians in another twenty or thirty years who will explain after careful examination of membership statistics and census rolls that it never really happened.

To understand the reality of a working class presence it is necessary to examine the events in the context of their own time, and look at the reactions of the participants with the understanding that they did not know how it was going to come out. Strategies that proved to be ephemeral seemed to be genuine alternatives at the time.

Workers did not come to a sense of opposition quickly or easily, but once they did, the potential implications were far reaching. A shoemaker in a shoe factory almost apologized in 1885: "I am no crank; I am no tramp; I am no agitator; I am no lazy fellow who wants to be fed from others' earnings. I am willing to work as most men are...." But he saw poverty and increasing discontent, "men in despair...and now it is time something was done...if a change is not soon devised, trouble must arise...." A laborer who blamed "monopolists who rule the country and employ foreign labor" argued that "war and strikes will be the consequence, until the people rise in

their might and assert their rights. In the language of Patrick Henry I repeat, 'Let it come.' " His understanding of revolution may not have been very deep--the reference to "foreign labor" suggests a certain insensitivity at the very least--but he certainly would have applauded the local poet who wrote:

...first we'll have to fight
And by force take our right...

So we had better prepare,
(For revolution's in the air)
To get our rights at the polls if
we can;
But if they beat us there
Let oppressors beware,
We'll have our rights, if we take
them man to man.⁸

II. There are Ninety and Nine

There are ninety and nine that live and die
In want and hunger and cold,
That one may revel in luxury
And be lapped in its silken fold;
The ninety and nine in their hovels bare,
The one in a palace with riches rare.

They toil in the fields, the ninety and nine,
For the fruits of our Mother earth;
They dig and delve in the dusty mine
And bring her hidden treasures forth;
And the wealth released by their sturdy
blows
To the hands of one forever flows.

A popular Knights of Labor song⁹

Probably the most important source of discontent among workers was the belief that industrialization was

creating a tremendous potential for wealth, but that wealth was going only to a privileged few. We create the wealth, workers reasoned, why don't we receive a fair share? The full ramifications of the argument were rarely explored, nor did this reasoning preclude at least some profit for the employer, or clearly define what was fair. When workers had to formulate specific programs and demands, conflicting conceptions of fairness provoked internal dissension. But even though workers had difficulty agreeing on what was needed to make things fairer, most could agree that what they saw in Detroit in the early 1880's was unfair.

"The wealth I help to create is unfairly distributed," a hostler explained to a Labor Bureau investigator in 1885. "I experience every day that my employer, who works neither so hard nor so long as I do, lives in luxury while I am reduced to a bare living, and that must be wrong, as I know that our Creator certainly entitled me to the same enjoyment of life's blessings as him." The investigator had asked a group of workers if they "could be more fairly paid than now?" Not surprisingly, nearly eighty percent of those who replied answered yes, but their responses were based not simply on greed, but on the keen sense of equity the hostler displayed.¹⁰

The interviewers asked "In what way...could you be more fairly paid than now?" "By receiving a larger share

of the profits I produce," answered a fireman. "By receiving just proportion of the profits that accumulate from my labor"--a woodsman; "By giving me back the labor that has been taken from me"--a laborer; "By a just distribution of the wealth we create"--a carpenter; perhaps most realistically of all of them: "By establishing labor organizations and compelling employers to pay the full value of labor"--a millwright. Workers did not need a familiarity with Marxist theory to come to something close to a labor theory of value. It came from experience. A machinist observed, "My employer pays me \$1.75 and charges his customers from \$5.00 to \$15.00 for the same."¹¹

The outrage of these workers was based on the conditions of their work and lives. They worked long and hard and received little in return, although there was evidence of wealth all around them. But poverty or even clear inequality of wealth was not the only source of anger. Workers felt used, abused in a qualitative sense as well. Employers' actions were an implicit denial of their humanity. A woodsman explained "such disaffection as gives rise to strikes would be unknown...if there was more sympathy on the part of employers for their employees." But instead of kindness or concern he found "a disposition to hold themselves aloof--to isolate himself from us--to regard us as in a manner created for no other purpose than his own aggrandizement."¹² The key, to the

woodsman, to a tinner whose words mirrored the woodsman's, to dozens of workers who wrote letters to the Labor Leaf complaining about their conditions, was the way their employers treated them without any sense of dignity, without recognition of their feelings and pride as human beings. Employers, according to the tinner, treated workers "like any other piece of machinery, to be made to do the maximum amount of work with the minimum expenditure of fuel...." The woodsman agreed that they were used just like any other piece of machinery, "...to be speculated on and worked to our utmost capacity when in good condition, but to be cast aside as worthless when out of repair."¹³

The woodsman's indictment of employers was widely accepted. Sympathetic investigators were appalled, struck almost with disbelief, by some of the working conditions they found. The Director of the State Bureau of Labor Statistics visited the brickyards at Springwells, on the outskirts of Detroit, during preparation of his 1884 report. The men, about two to three hundred, began work at 4:00 a.m. and finished at four in the afternoon with a long break in the late morning. As the men produced the bricks "with the aid of machinery," women and children "are now set to work 'hacking' or piling the bricks in rows, to the height of about five feet...Some of the children employed are...not over seven...children of 10 and upwards are frequently employed from sunrise to

sundown..." At Greusel and Co., another yard, the men worked eleven or twelve hours a day, while yardmen, "whose business it is to load wagons, plaster kilns, watch and tend fires...", worked "from 4 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday and Saturday alike." In winter most of the workers were laid off. A "lucky" few got to work as teamsters hauling loads of wood into the city for the next year's supply. "As teamsters they receive \$1.00 per day, commencing work at 3:30 a.m....and returning to the stables about 8 at night."¹⁴

Commissioner McGrath was most shocked by the company housing:

The destitution and wretchedness of life is rendered much more apparent at the brick-yards, by reason of the filthy, dilapidated, little hovels into which the laborer is crowded. These usually consist of one room and a shed...making a room eight feet high by about ten feet square. As their families will average about six persons, this gives...hardly more space than would be allotted to a family in the saloon of an ocean steamer...they are...dimly lighted...approachable only through mud during a great part of the year...never painted...and perfect sieves for the chilling blasts of winter...That such dwellings should be erected, and that people are permitted to reside in them, are matters equally astonishing.¹⁵

This was not an isolated case, McGrath assured his readers.

We find the same conditions at Wyandotte, a suburb of Detroit, in Detroit, in the Saginaw Valley, and elsewhere.

In our cities they send their wives and children into our streets and alleys and backyards, gathering paper, fuel, and garbage. At the tearing down of an old building, or the tearing up of an old pavement, they appear in swarms, as if by magic, and carry away the rubbish, which they use for firewood and for building additions to their tenements.¹⁶

Other investigators found similar examples of poverty and exploitation. Women in a candy factory told the reporter from the Labor Leaf in 1884 that they had to carry heavy boxes of candy up as many as five flights of steps although the firm had an elevator. An interview with the company's owner confirmed that use of the elevator was restricted to supervisory and managerial personnel. Even more indicative of the company's attitude toward its employees were its security procedures. Each woman was subjected to a complete search at the end of the day to prevent her from taking candy home in her clothing. The company's suspicions may have been justified. Some of the women were almost starving. Women wrote the Labor Leaf describing that, in order to stretch their pay of \$2 or \$3 per week, several moved in together into one room to share expenses. A former employee reported, "Some of the girls have told me they live on 60 cents worth of food a week."¹⁷

While the reporter was shocked at the candy factory, he found the complaints of a group of bakers hard to believe. "What! You don't mean that you work through

the whole night and part of the day too," exclaimed the Labor Leaf's reporter. The bakers assured him that they did mean just that. "We go on duty at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, and usually get through about 8 or 9 o'clock next morning; sometimes 10 or 11 o'clock, and on Saturdays not till 12 or even 1 o'clock." In between labors they slept in an unheated barn provided by their employer. It was "good enough in summer," the men explained, but "it is as cold as Iceland in the winter." The bakers assured the earnest reporter they had plenty to eat, "this is the only redeeming feature about our life," but they were ashamed to tell how much they were paid. "Afterward," the reporter noted, "I learned from one of them that they receive \$3.50 a week with board."¹⁸

But the bakers at least could rest while they waited for the dough to rise. Machine workers followed a pace set by the machines. Carpenters in the seed box factory "are compelled to keep up with machines," a carpenter reported. Three nights a week the factory ran three extra hours. Men who refused mandatory overtime were fired. The extra pay was little consolation. "At night when they quit work, and come out into the fresh air, the men can be seen hawking and spitting, and they blow great quantities of black walnut dust from their nostrils. If they look up from their work or stop to blow their nose, the machine gets ahead of them, and

they lose caste with the foreman, and are liable to be discharged." In summer, when other carpenters made \$2 or \$2.50 per day, the factory's employees still earned only the \$1.25 winter wage, but they kept on in order to avoid the forced winter lay off of other carpenters. Men who could not keep up with the machines were discharged, as was anyone who complained. "It is the policy of the firm not to have any discontented workmen in their employ." Older workers could not stand the pace but were still "turned out like old horses, to search for a living..." The carpenter had himself been forced to quit. "I do as much work as any average man," but "I could not stand the extra night work. Every evening I was choked up with walnut dust."¹⁹

Lumber mill workers were also tied to a pace set by machines. The lumber mill hands "stand in the dust and heat of these summer days...the perspiration running down their breasts and faces..." reported Bay City Prosecuting Attorney Emerick. They must "work at those machines from the time they commence to run until they stop. The men are a part of the machinery. They cannot stop even for a drink of water, but must keep up that labor just as fast as the inanimate machinery...I only wonder," he added, "that there are not more strikes than there are."²⁰

There were few. Fear of unemployment and rigid systems of work rules combined to insure adherence to the

pace set by the employers. At Newcomb, Endicott, and Co., workers suffered \$1.00 fines for tardiness, even if only one minute late. Metcalf's fined its workers for talking on the job five cents per offense. At Pingree and Smith, shoemakers were docked for an entire case of shoes if even one was not up to quality standards, although the company packed and sold the supposedly inferior shoes along with the rest. One shoe only "showed a little wrinkle on the toe; drawn like, you know," the laster explained. He was docked for the whole case. The Ferry Seed Company insured promptness by locking the door at seven a.m., preventing women who were late from entering. They were allowed in at noon with the loss of a half day's pay. A similar practice at Gay, Toynton, and Fox candy factory was reported to have been the cause of death of three women who were unable to get out the locked door when the building caught fire.²¹

A street car driver on the Fort Wayne and Elmwood Avenue line complained of the uncertainty and insecurity that disciplinary practices produced. "We don't know at night whether we will go to work in the morning...They discharge a man and never tell him why; they never let him know he is discharged until he comes down in the morning ready to go to work, and finds his name is not on the slate." He drove fifteen hours a day without breaks for meals.

At the end of every trip we have twelve minutes to turn the car around, take the horse out...and hitch him to the car when we are ready to start; this leaves us about eight minutes out of the twelve to eat our meals if it is meal time. When I first came on the road, I used to take two sessions at my meals, but now I can eat a pailful in five minutes. A fellow needs some whiskey on top, though, to force it through.

On Saturday, he added, "whenever the shows are late," some drivers are forced to work past quitting time without extra pay. "A man's a slave that drives a car, sir."²²

Few such slaves even dared to report on their conditions. Frank Pingree was so angry after an article appeared in the Labor Leaf describing Pingree and Smith's work rules, that he threatened to discharge the entire shop unless he was told who had talked to the Leaf. The foreman at Ferry's, Mr. Ward, threatened any employee seen with a copy of the Labor Leaf would be fired. When an article appeared accusing him of forcing his employees to contribute to a Christmas gift for him, a common practice in a number of companies, he forced seventy-two of the women under him to sign a declaration under threat of discharge denying the truthfulness of the article. Anyone seen buying the Labor Leaf was subject to immediate dismissal. Many of those who signed the denial admitted they had not even read it. Another Ferry employee, Susie Kahl, came to the Leaf office to report on the treatment of the little children, "oldest not over twelve...", who tore open packages of seeds. A small child, Kittie Fuchs,

reportedly an asthmatic, fainted shortly after the forewoman had refused her a break to get a drink of water.

Miss Kahl bitterly described the scene:

when she came to, she said "Please, Aggie (the forewoman's name) let me rest for five minutes?" And in a mean, cross way, Aggie said to her, "If you don't go to work right away, I will tell Mr. Davidson to get another girl in your place!" The poor little child was so sick and frightened that she did not know what to do. I tell you, sir, sometimes, it seems as though God ought to destroy the persons who have charge of the rooms in that warehouse.²³

The language of the account might strike some modern readers as overly dramatic, but the realities described were serious. A week later, the Leaf reported, both Susie Kahl and Kittie Fuchs had been discharged. A spotter stationed outside the Labor Leaf office by the general foreman saw Miss Kahl enter and reported it. Three weeks later the Labor Leaf itself was forced out of its offices when the owner of the building and an adjoining print shop that printed the paper decided that a description of the lack of ventilation in an anonymous Detroit print shop had been based on his establishment.²⁴

State laws and local ordinances regulating working conditions simply were not enforced. In June, 1887, the Advance and Labor Leaf reported the death of John P. Lowry, the seventh printer to die of consumption in Detroit that year. Burning gas lamps fouled the air of most print shops where night workers worked in cramped quarters with

poor ventilation. A city Health Officer had been appointed under the provisions of an 1881 sanitary inspection ordinance, but in 1885, the Labor Leaf noted, "to the knowledge of the oldest printer he has not visited a single printing office, except one on especial complaint, and that is as bad now as it was two or three months ago, when the health officer ordered it ventilated." When the Detroit Trades Council complained to the State Labor Department about violations of child labor and fire safety laws, the director of factory inspection argued, contrary to law, that children should be allowed to work when the head of a family is laid off. "It seems a necessity that a child should be allowed to contribute to family support...It seems to me this is only common humanity..." In a confidential communication to the factory inspectors, the director advised the use of "discretion" and "good judgment...for while the law seeks to provide for the safety and health of all employees of manufacturing establishments, it is not the intention to demand anything unreasonable or impossible of owners or operators of such establishments."²⁵

Such refinements as blowers, safety guards, and fire escapes apparently fell under the rubric of "unreasonable or impossible" demands. In a column entitled "Labor's Risks," the Labor Leaf recounted gruesome details of the frequent accidents:

John Troy, a car washer for the Detroit City Railway Company, had his left leg broken last night by getting caught between a car and post at the Baker Street Barn...Thomas W. Byrne of Robinson and Byrne, pressmen, had his arm caught in the cogs of a printing press Saturday night...Charles Bowlsby, M. W. of Eureka Assembly, had the end of two fingers on his right hand badly crushed by a tire up-setter at Girardin's carriage factory...Oscar Jefferson a boy in Pingree and Smith's shoe factory, was killed yesterday by an elevator crushing his head.

The Brassworkers' Union reported in 1892 that there were few old men in the union; the trade was "injurious to health."²⁶

The most oppressed segment of the factory workforce was the small children. Ten, eleven, twelve year olds routinely performed some of the heaviest and most demanding menial tasks, as well as simple and repetitive jobs. The story of the small girl at the Ferry Seed Company was not an isolated example. In fact, it had been an account of a similar case at the Michigan Malleable Iron Works that had prompted Susie Kahl to come forward with her story about Kittie Fuchs. An unidentified boy of thirteen had collapsed after being ordered to shift weights four times in one day. "What do you mean by the term, 'shifting weights'?" asked the Labor Leaf editor.

We have a mold, the informant explained, and before we pour hot iron into it, a heavy weight is put on to hold it down; when it is poured the weight is taken off and put on another mold and so on. There are five or six weights weighing about fifty pounds

apiece. The boy had to shift these weights as fast as possible for thirty minutes; as he would handle each one about twenty times, he thus handled nearly five thousand pounds of iron in half an hour.

The company was trying to cut costs, the man added, by having children do what had formerly been a man's job.²⁷

III. "Each for himself is the bosses plea
Union for all will make you free."

Parade banner of Detroit
Coopers' Union, 1880²⁸

The Detroit Coopers' banner summarized how they viewed workers' alternatives. The creed of individual success, according to coopers, was a mirage advocated by the bosses. If workers really hoped to escape oppressive conditions they must look to each other for support. Increasing numbers of workers did. The fines, searches, the long hours, and callous treatment inspired a new ethic of rebellion and mutual support which competed with the opposing values of individual gain. The result was the beginning of a working class subculture based on the coopers' second alternative: solidarity.

It was only a beginning. This subculture of opposition was not universally accepted by Detroit workers by any means nor was it strong enough to completely take the place of native middleclass culture or ethnic subcultures for those who did identify with it. Workers' allegiances

were divided. But it was strong enough to produce and maintain a whole network of new institutions which transcended ethnicity and particularism to recruit workers on a class basis: unions, Knights of Labor Assemblies, Workingmen's Club Rooms, cooperative stores and factories, labor newspapers, singing societies, social clubs, political organizations, and a workers' militia. Together, these organizations along with a variety of informal institutions and practices could satisfy as broad a range of needs as the ethnic subcultures with which they competed. They drew occasional support from a much larger community than their actual members.

The ideological content of the subculture was largely negative: a reaction against prevailing conditions. Implicitly, its growth represented a questioning of the ideology of individual success. A columnist in the Advance and Labor Leaf summarized the ethical and practical fallacy of the doctrine of mobility:

We are often told that the millionaires of today were working for wages thirty or forty years ago, and the millionaires of thirty or forty years hence, will be the men who are now working for a dollar or two per day. These delusive statements are intended to reconcile the toiler to the condition to which monopoly is disposed to consign him. No wage worker ever has or ever can become a millionaire by honest labor. The first step towards the accumulation of a million is to cease to earn a living, and go into the business of skinning others.²⁹

But doubts about the Horatio Alger myth were hardly a sufficient basis for overcoming the forces of fragmentation. Underlying the beginnings of this counterculture were changes in the character of industrial life. The growth of large firms in Detroit, the expansion of factories, and technological changes within the factory which changed the character of work shattered the sense of personal bond with employers which had interfered with class solidarity. Most of the city's key employers had begun manufacturing in the late 1860's or the 1870's, many as essentially handicraft establishments. Some had started on a modest scale, but in the 1880's a number of very large, technologically advanced factories began to emerge. By 1890, about a third of Detroit's industrial workforce worked in factories of more than two hundred people and six firms together employed over seven thousand people, or nearly a fifth of the industrial workforce. Despite the proliferation of small manufacturing firms in the 1880's (the total number of industrial establishments in Detroit increased from 919 to 1746 in the decade), the mean number of employees per industrial establishment increased from 13.6 in 1880 to 21.9 in 1890. Thus, the growth of large firms had not destroyed the viability of small companies, but the relative importance of the larger factory was increasing. Strike activity was concentrated in the large firms and in the industries subject to technological change. Of the

99 strikes recorded in Detroit by the U.S. Commissioner of Labor between 1881 and 1894, 29 were in the tobacco industry and 21 were in the metal trades, both leading examples of industries in which the skill status and established work rules of craftsmen were threatened by technological change; in the metal trades, large firms also predominated--the city's largest factories were all in the metal trades. Nearly half the strikes (45), involving the overwhelming majority of all strikers, involved more than 100 individuals each. In the many small companies with only a handful of employees a family-like atmosphere may have still prevailed. The continuing expansion of this small business sector of the economy is one more example of the way in which industrial growth fostered new fragmentary influences, but for the increasing numbers of workers employed by large and impersonal corporations, or facing major changes in the role of their crafts in industry, the myth of an idyllic relationship between master and journeyman was becoming obsolete.³⁰

Instead workers faced a new work discipline which drove them beyond normal endurance and a set of work rules which robbed them of any basic dignity. Complaint was tantamount to rebellion. New machines magnified the level of production, but while employers grew rich, they used the labor surplus created by displaced workers to drive down the wage levels. As one worker argued, his employer

was "conspiring with his fellow employers to bring about a lower rate of wages...."³¹

So, formally or informally, workers combined, too, to raise wages, change work rules, and exert some control over the productive process. On the simplest level, they cooperated with one another to find ways to make work easier or less boring. In the big cigar factories the cigarmakers took daily turn reading to the other workers. At the end of the day, each cigarmaker gave the day's reader some of the cigars he had made so that the reader received as many as he would have made in a day. Charles Erb, one of Detroit's Socialist stalwarts, mused in later years that this system had been the source of his political conversion. A new man had chosen an excerpt from Marx as the day's reading, and Erb was so fascinated that he immediately went out and got a copy of Das Kapital to read for himself.³²

Such cooperation depended on mutual trust and rigid attention to an ethic of equality. Employers and foremen fought against it and tried to use favoritism to pit workers against one another. The Labor Leaf reported how unscrupulous supervisors used their positions to squeeze extra income for themselves out of their workers by such devices as forced Christmas gifts or outright kickbacks in exchange for work. On the docks, job contractors who took out contracts from shipowners to load and unload

maintained high incomes by this system of kickbacks. One of the primary benefits of organization for the longshoremen was the elimination of this system. The job scalpers were driven from the docks. The union took out the contracts itself and distributed work equally to its members without any cut.³³

The printers faced a similar problem. Employers paid for typesetting on a piece rate basis per one thousand ems. An em is a unit of measure, the space normally occupied by the letter m. Obviously headlines, display ads, other areas with white space, would be much less time consuming to set than normal copy. The union members in each print shop formed a "chapel" and elected a "father of the chapel" who was responsible for seeing that the "fat" was evenly distributed. The Labor Leaf advised printers to "elect a 'father' who has moral courage enough to stand up for what is right."³⁴

Informal self-organization of work and rewards led to a rigid moral code which governed behavior in the workshop but extended beyond the workplace as well. Violation of the workers' own commonly understood rules or working for less than the union wage scale (unless granted special dispensation by the local union) constituted ratting. A "rat" or "scab" suffered social ostracism if not direct physical attack. During the Pingree and Smith strike in 1885, John Lambert, who had helped organize the shoemakers

into the Knights of Labor prior to the strike, deserted his fellow workers to return to work. "His former acquaintances refuse to recognize or associate with him in any way," the Labor Leaf reported. The names of scabs were published in banner headlines in the labor papers, and the unmarried strikebreakers slept in the factory rather than face the danger of crossing picket lines.³⁵

Workers who had unwittingly been recruited as strikebreakers during a strike were expected to leave once they realized the true situation. Those who were legitimate artisans, and not professional strikebreakers, usually did so without coercion. As a lumber mill worker, William Freer, who had been imported into Muskegon during the 1882 strike there, explained after he and 82 others went over to the strikers,

we were not molested by the strikers in any way...we joined them of our own free will. We had fully decided that if we should find a strike here in progress we should do nothing to work against the interests of the workingman...We fully understand what this strike is for.

In return for honoring the code of solidarity, a worker could expect temporary support and a ticket home or to the nearest likely source of work.³⁶

Such assistance to unemployed artisans was standard practice most of the time, not just during a strike. A union traveling card guaranteed a workingman a roof overhead, a meal, and either help finding a local job, or the

cost of transportation to the next stop. Most unions maintained a tramp fund for this purpose. The system benefitted both sides: the tramping artisan and the stably employed worker. The tramp could travel in search of work, even if he was penniless, and not be forced by fear of starvation into begging or degrading or underpaid labor. The employed man could maintain existing wage levels without fear that the unemployed would be used against him to drive down wages. A clear etiquette prevailed for both parties. The recipient of aid considered it a right, not a gift or a handout; in better times he would do the same for someone else. In turn, however, the wanderer could not overstay his welcome (not more than a few days if there were no prospects for work) or waste money on liquor or gambling. Cases of abuse were reported in the labor papers, and the names of the offenders widely circulated. A Louisville printer warned the Labor Leaf's readers about one Oliver Davis who "hails from London, Ont. He came here in very bad shape and received two week's board at the expense of my purse...tried to burst a faro bank and got broke."³⁷

The doctrine of mutual assistance extended to the sick, injured, and to families left without support by the death of the wage earner. For example, when the doctor told one of the members of the Brassworkers' Local Assembly 2312, who had been sick for five months, that he

could not return to work until spring, the assembly organized a raffle to support the man's family. Prizes, including a "finely executed bronze statue of Napoleon crossing the Alps," were contributed by members who made them in their spare time.³⁸

These core values of cooperation, mutual trust, equality, and mutual assistance constituted the beginnings of the emerging working class subculture. They conflicted with the surrounding dominant culture's emphasis on competition, individualism, and personal success. As will be shown in succeeding chapters, the unions and the Knights of Labor assemblies formed the functional hubs of this moral code, and as much of their time was spent in administering it as in more commonly recognized union functions such as wage negotiations. Labor organizations were fighting to nurture this ethic, to enforce their code of conduct. Union debates over strategy and policy reflected this desire, but they also reflected uncertainty. There were no obvious answers to the questions raised by industrialization, no easily agreed upon set of tactics which would insure successful resolution of the crisis. For that reason, for the entire decade prior to 1886, workers' organizations were torn by internal debates over ideals and strategies. The union or Knights of Labor official feared action that might destroy the organization. It served as a means of livelihood and a tremendous commitment

of energy, risk and emotion had gone into building it. The would-be labor politician, even one with honesty and integrity, faced personal conflicts between ambition and loyalty. Yet, at least until 1886, the whole drift of events served to reinforce the ideals of cooperation and equality, and the search for a better way of organizing the industrial system.

The realities of more and more trades contradicted even modest dreams of status and mobility as whole categories of skills were mechanized out of existence. A resolution at the Socialist-sponsored July 4th celebration in Detroit in 1879 blamed the threatening character of industrial progress on the capitalistic arrangement of society under which "mechanical science...tends to degrade rather than elevate the laboring classes; destroying the comparatively independent position which their skill or handicraft afforded." The very threat, however, seemed to make some skilled workers even more conscious of the need to set themselves off from the mass, to salvage crumbling realities with homage to respectability.³⁹

Such games could have gone on forever had not the pressure of wage cuts, speed ups, unemployment, and poverty continued unrelenting. Kicking and screaming, perhaps, squabbling with one another, backsliding and sidestepping, dragged forward by their more farsighted compatriots, by the mid-1880's many Detroit workers

seemed to have realized that they faced a personal and group crisis. Each trade faced different threats: for the shoemaker it was the McKay pegging machine; for the cigarmaker, the mold; for the printer, the typesetting machines; and even for the lordly molder, the bucks system. The differences were important, but the similarities were also great, great enough to form a strong countervailing force to the tendencies to insularity, and imagined superiority.⁴⁰

Because the constraints imposed by simple problems of survival were a decisive limitation on the speculative potential of most workers, the evolution of their social thinking was a slow and painful process. Yet such a process did take place. If we are to understand it we must recreate the tensions which existed between cooperative ideas emerging from workers' experiences and ideology imposed from above, between the hope of individual escape and the possibility of group action. In the mid-1880's, Detroit's workers were groping towards a new group consciousness--attempting to resolve the contradiction between solidarity and success. To understand why that resolution never actually happened, we must begin by examining the development and internal conflicts of the organizations local workers created to fulfill their needs for group action.

Chapter 3

NOTES

1. By success we mean individual success; if success for a worker is defined as escape from the working class, the contradiction is clear.

2. Joseph Labadie to Terence V. Powderly, December 7, 1879, Terence V. Powderly Papers, Catholic University of America, hereafter cited as TVP; Labadie to Powderly, February 23, 1884, TVP; Detroit Labor Leaf, May 12, 1886.

3. Detroit K of L membership in 1884 was 709. Knights of Labor Data Bank. (Data supplied by Inter University Consortium for Political Research. The data were originally collected by Jonathan Garlock and N. C. Builder. Neither the original source nor collectors of the data nor the Consortium bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here. Additions and corrections to the original data have been made by this author. All references to the Knights of Labor Data Bank for Michigan are based on this revised and corrected version. This citation will hereafter be abbreviated KLDB.) Detroit District Assembly 50 paid per capita tax for 4679 members July 1, 1886 (Knights of Labor General Assembly Proceedings, 1886, pp. 326-28), but local newspapers and DA 50 claimed 8000 Knights of Labor members in Detroit in late 1886 and early 1887. (Detroit Evening News, September 3, 1886; Detroit Advance and Labor Leaf, March 19, 1887.) The higher figure may be an exaggeration.

4. Norman J. Ware, The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895 (New York: Vintage Books Edition, original copyright 1929), p. 66, cites the membership figures from the Knights Proceedings: July 1, 1885--111,395; July 1, 1886--729,677.

5. J. L. Spalding, "Are We in Danger of Revolution?" in Irwin Yellowitz, The Position of the Worker in American Society, 1865-1896 (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1969), originally appearing in The Forum, I (July, 1886). Mr. Spalding answered the question in the negative, but the nature of his answer is less important than that he thought it necessary to pose the question.

6. The term "Working-class presence" is the title of Part Three of Edward Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class. Richard Sennett's article,

"Middle-Class Families and Urban Violence: The Experience of a Chicago Community in the Nineteenth Century," in Thernstrom and Sennett, Nineteenth Century Cities, discusses the hysterical reactions of the middle class residents of a prosperous Chicago community, Union Park, to this working class presence, specifically, to Haymarket and to local crimes which residents perceived as stemming from the same alien-radical sources. He characterizes their perceptions as a "disease," implying that they were wholly delusional. To illustrate their delusional nature he describes the Haymarket rally in terms which echo the prevailing historiography since Henry David's The History of the Haymarket Affair (New York: Russell and Russell, 1936, 1958). The rally organizers had planned the affair as a prelude to mass uprising; the actual turnout was appallingly small, only 1000 or so; the crowd was unenthusiastic and dwindled steadily; clearly the accused anarchists were a handful as out of touch with reality as their middle class accusers. Sennett, as well as David and most other historians, fails to put these facts in proper context. Shocked by the railroading the anarchists received, historians have sought to minimize their influence in order to show that the legal assault against them was totally unjustified. The rally at Haymarket Square was small, but it followed on several weeks of continuous political activity in which the Haymarket defendants had played leading roles. Other meetings were taking place at the same time that night. The crowds dwindled because it started to rain. Just ten days before, an estimated 25,000 people participated in a public eight hour demonstration on the lake front. At the time of the bombing, 30,000 workers were on strike in Chicago for the eight hour day. A few months later, the United Labor Party received thirty percent of the votes cast in the city; the following year, the Democrats and Republicans fused to prevent the United Labor Party from electing its mayoral candidate Robert Nelson, Master Workman of Knights of Labor Chicago District Assembly 24. While the association of all foreigners with crime and radicalism was hysterical, the perception of a threat to propertied institutions was not completely irrational. The prosecution and the judge at the Haymarket Trial were quite straightforward about their intentions and much more to the point than much of the newspaper coverage--the defendants should be hung not because they had committed any specific act of violent crime, but because they represented the leadership of a movement which was a threat to property and society. In retrospect, many quite conservative people felt that the trial and the police campaign of terror against other leftists were over-reactions, but

there was sufficient evidence in 1886 and 1887 for people who were quite sane to believe that the defendants represented a real threat to property.

7. Estimates of the size of the 1886 demonstration vary from 8,000 to 12,000, with 11,000 the most frequent figure. Detroit Evening News, September 7, 1886; Detroit Tribune, September 7, 1886; Columbian Labor Day Souvenir, 1893, p. 25; Labor Day, 1900, p. 29, LC. Estimated membership of the Detroit Trades Council at its founding in 1880 was 432: Detroit Trades Council File, LC. For the more grandiose Knights of Labor membership claims, see: Ware, The Labor Movement, p. 68. The Detroit Advance and Labor Leaf reported on February 19, 1887, that Knights General Secretary Treasurer had visited the Advance office the previous week and claimed a national membership of 1.2 million.

8. SBLs, 1886, pp. 165, 158; The Spectator, November 10, 1883, "The Rights of Man," by Gnomon.

9. "There are Ninety and Nine" in Philip S. Foner, American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), pp. 142-4. Philip Foner gives a detailed history of the song. It was written in 1876 by Mrs. S. M. Smith, the wife of an Illinois farmer. It was widely used during the 1878 Greenback-Labor Party's congressional campaign and in 1880 was read into the Congressional Record by an Iowa congressman. It was adopted by the Knights of Labor and published in their Labor Reform Songster and likewise included in a songbook published by the Farmers' Alliance.

10. SBLs, 1886, pp. 149-50.

11. Ibid., pp. 149-51.

12. Ibid., p. 158.

13. Ibid.

14. SBLs, 1884, pp. 179-80. This was the first of the many SBLs Annual Reports.

15. Ibid., pp. 180-1.

16. Ibid., p. 181.

17. Labor Leaf, December 10, 1884; December 17, 1884. The Detroit Labor Leaf was established in November, 1884, with financial support from Detroit Typographical Union

No. 18. Its first editor was Charles Bell, who, more than other labor editors, dug into local factory life with the style and zeal of Progressive Era muckrackers. When he resigned the editorship in February, 1885, the newspaper lost a good deal of its flair.

18. Ibid., December 17, 1884.

19. Ibid., December 3, 1884.

20. Ibid., July 22, 1885.

21. Ibid., March 4, 1885; January 28, 1885; December 24, 1884; December 31, 1884; December 10, 1884; December 17, 1884.

22. Ibid., January 14, 1885.

23. Labor Leaf, January 7, 1885; December 31, 1884; January 7, 1885; January 14, 1885; January 21, 1885. Three separate incidents of foremen extorting Christmas gifts from employees are described.

24. Ibid., January 28, 1885; February 25, 1885.

25. Labor Leaf, June 11, 1887; December 3, 1884; February 15, 1885; undated correspondence, Executive Office Reports, B 182, F9, Michigan State Historical Commission, Lansing, Michigan. These letters probably date from 1891 or 1892 when one correspondent, P. A. Loersch, was secretary of the Detroit Trades Council.

26. Labor Leaf, March 26, 1887; November 17, 1886; August 6, 1887; September 10, 1887; Labor Day Review, 1892, pp. 19, 25. Detroit legislators elected by the Labor Party repeatedly introduced bills for various types of safety legislation and were responsible for the passage of several such acts.

27. Labor Leaf, January 15, 1885.

28. Labor Review, October 23, 1880.

29. Advance and Labor Leaf, August 24, 1889.

30. Holli, Reform in Detroit, pp. 5-7; George N. Fuller, ed., Michigan-A Centennial History of the State and its People (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1939), pp. 536-40; Silas Farmer, History of Detroit and Wayne County and Early Michigan (Detroit: 1890), pp. 802-36;

Detroit Evening News, May 4, 1886; Detroit Tribune, May 8, 1886; clipping "Among the Molders," June 16, 1889, LC; Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 2, p. 399-400; Eleventh Census, 1890, Compendium, pp. 802-5; Third Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor: Strikes and Lockouts, 1887 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1888), pp. 256-275; Tenth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor: Strikes and Lockouts, 1894 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), pp. 474-87.

31. SBLS, 1886, p. 150.

32. "Rubbing Elbows with People Worth While--XXVI--Charles Erb," undated clipping in Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC.

33. Labor Leaf, December 31, 1884; clipping from Detroit Sunday News, September 6, 1891, Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC.

34. Labor Leaf, November 18, 1885. Unequal distribution of the "fat" was an issue for many trades, one of the primary means used to divide workers, and the cause of several strikes. See: the Labor Review, May, 1880, for example, where the question was cited as one of the key issues in an iron molders' strike.

35. Labor Leaf, June 10, 1885; June 17, 1885. The terms "rat" and "scab" were often used interchangeably, although the usage seems to have varied slightly. A "scab" was a strikebreaker; the term was also applied to goods made in a struck shop. "Rat" could be used in the same way, but appears to have been used as an adjective to describe the shops in violation of accepted work standards or any of a variety of other violations as well as goods made in such places.

36. Muskegon Daily Chronicle, May 6, 1882, cited in Daniel James Yakes, Ten Hours or No Sawdust: A Study of Strikes in the Michigan Lumber Industry, 1881-85 (Western Michigan University: unpublished M.S. thesis, 1971), p. 62. When several men who had been paid subsistence and traveling expenses by striking Detroit shipcarpenters took the money and then worked as strikebreakers anyway, the shipcarpenters attempted to sue in civil court for damages. They seem to have been genuinely surprised when the court failed to grant redress for what they considered a clear breach of accepted practice. The judge ruled that the attempt to persuade the strikebreakers not to work was a violation of conspiracy laws.

37. Labor Leaf, February 25, 1885. The practice of tramping was widespread even among the highest paid trades. Among Detroit leaders for whom detailed biographical information is available, nearly all had gone tramping at some time in their careers. For young men, tramping seems to have involved a bit of wanderlust and adventure as well as search for work. The tales of some Detroit labor leaders read like cheap adventure yarns. Such embellishments for the purposes of fireside tales should not lead modern readers to romanticize the tramp experience. While tramping may have been an adventure for a young, unmarried journeyman in a good year, the armies of tramps that arose during depressions were motivated by economic necessity.

38. Labor Leaf, January 28, 1885.

39. The Socialist (Chicago), July 12, 1879.

40. John Laslett, Labor and the Left: A Study of Socialist and Radical Influences in the American Labor Movement, 1881-1924 (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pursues the theme of mechanization as a source of radicalization for several late nineteenth century trades. The case of the cigarmakers and their reaction to the mold, a simple mechanical device which eliminated some of the hand labor in cigarmaking, is discussed in Irwin Yellowitz, Industrialization and the American Labor Movement, 1850-1900 (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1977), pp. 64-71.

Chapter 4

CRAFT UNIONS, SOCIALISTS, AND KNIGHTS OF LABOR: ORGANIZING A CULTURE OF OPPOSITION

I. Craft Unions in the Late 1870's

A subculture of opposition began to emerge in part as a series of informal responses to immediate conditions and problems, but confronted with the fragmentary influences of the diverse economic and cultural environment in Detroit, such spontaneity needed more formal organization and group commitment to develop and sustain itself. Organization provides courage, resources, and support. As people begin to look to an organization as a focus for activity and group loyalty, the organization also becomes a unifying symbol which strengthens commitment and provides a kind of group myth, an elaboration of the abstractions on which class consciousness is based.¹ But while the local labor movement had a generation of activity behind it by the late 1870's, the city's unions were incapable of playing this type of unifying role. They lacked the strength, and in some cases the inclination as well, to represent anyone beyond their own small membership.²

In the late 1870's, Detroit trade unions were pitifully weak and often mutually uncooperative. Union membership fluctuated wildly from year to year; locals lapsed and reorganized frequently; it is difficult even to estimate the extent of organization in most industries. Only six local unions appear to have had an uninterrupted existence throughout the 1870's. Joseph Labadie, founder of the Detroit Knights of Labor and a key labor organizer, certainly was not exaggerating when he wrote Terence Powderly, the Knights' national leader, in 1879, "The labor movement generally in this city is comparatively insignificant." When the Detroit Trades Council was organized the following spring, its constituent unions reported a total membership of only 432, a startling revelation of the lack of organization in a city of over 100,000 people.³

The inability of the trade unions in the late 1870's to serve as the unifying symbol for the city's workers was based, however, on more than their weakness. Many of the unions failed to honor even the most minimal concepts of solidarity with each other. Detroit Local No. 2 of the Machinists and Blacksmiths' Union refused, for example, to aid a striking Scranton, Pennsylvania local despite moral and legal obligations to do so. Terence Powderly, the secretary of the Scranton Machinists' union, had written asking for assistance for his striking local. The Detroit local justified evading responsibility for

their fellow unionists, although the union's national constitution specified that such requests should be honored, by using a legal technicality in the organization's by-laws. James McFeely, Secretary of the Detroit machinists, explained that the Detroit union declined aid on the grounds that the Scranton local had not followed proper constitutional procedure in issuing its strike call. Such unions reflected, rather than superceded, the spirit of fragmentation and competition. While union activists, and some union locals as a whole, did attempt to maintain a spirit of mutual cooperation and support, they often found their efforts frustrated by their more recalcitrant associates.⁴

Judson Grenell, a member of Typographical Union No. 18 and one of the leaders of the English branch of the local Socialist Labor Party, lamented in 1878 that the printers were "almost fossilized," they were so conservative. The printers had recently received an ultimatum from local employers threatening them with a lockout unless they voluntarily accepted a six and one-quarter percent pay reduction. Grenell hoped the threat might finally bring the printers to life. It did not. The union meekly complied with the wage cuts, and a month later rejected the proposed Constitution of the Detroit Labor League. The Constitution included provisions for a mutual defense system for situations like that which the printers had just

faced, but the printers wanted no part of it. Some denounced the threat of Communism; others, as Grenell put it, were simply too "high tone" to associate with the likes of carpenters, shoemakers, or cigarmakers.⁵

Much of this caution and conservatism may have been induced by the experiences of the previous decade. Union membership had declined drastically in Detroit since the late 1860's and few unions, locally or nationally, had survived the depression of the mid-1870's with more than a token membership intact.⁶ Unions began to revive in Detroit in 1877. Between 1877 and 1879, seven unions were chartered or reorganized. The non-unionized majority of the city's workers began to display far greater interest in labor organization and social reform, but many unionists who had been active in the 1860's and 1870's seem to have been unable to overcome the spirit of caution and insularity they had learned in earlier years. This new energy changed the character of the city's trade union movement by the early 1880's, but only after an overwhelming influx of less cautious new members.⁷

The source of the new energy was pressure from discontented unionists and other activists who had formed local branches of the Socialist Labor Party and the Knights of Labor. Young activists in the Socialist Labor Party tried hard to convince trade unionists of the need for an aggressive program of "trade amalgamation" and organization

of the "unorganized laborers." The socialists converted many, but even when union representatives agreed in principle, their organizations did not comply when the time came for action. In 1878, union delegates to the Detroit Labor League, a loose city union federation, voted in favor of the socialist proposal for mutual aid which the printers rejected. The league had "authority to levy an assessment not exceeding five dollars per week for each organization applying for aid...upon each subordinate organization for every twenty-five members...." Constituent unions had ratified a constitution including the aid clause, but many refused to forward funds when asked. The organization split over the question of emergency assessments and collapsed. When the Detroit Trades Council was formed in 1880, the treasurer of the defunct Labor League turned over the League's entire assets: \$4.07.⁸

The Trades Council, like the Labor League, was a product of agitation by activists in the Knights of Labor and Socialist Labor Party. It proved to be more resilient than the Labor League but faced similar bickering and shortsightedness. Several unions refused to support the Councils' programs. The question of mutual assistance was still a critical problem. The plasterers, for example, refused to support striking iron molders because the Council had not provided aid for them during their seasonal lay-offs. The plasterers had missed the point. It was

beyond the scope of an organization as weak as the Trades Council to provide regular unemployment relief, but mutual aid against employer attack was central to the survival both of the Trades Council and of individual unions. The plasterers were not alone. Several other unions maintained only token affiliation, rarely participating in Trades Council activities. The editors of the local labor paper complained that Council delegates were failing to attend meetings.⁹

Yet by 1880, there was a clear sense of ferment among Detroit workers. That fall the Trades Council held a public demonstration in which fifteen hundred local workers marched. In fall elections, the socialist president of the carpenters' union was elected alderman. Persistent agitation by the socialists and the Knights of Labor was beginning to pay off.¹⁰

It is not clear whether they had convinced many veteran trade unionists. A systematic comparison of names of individuals known to be members of the Knights of Labor or the Socialist Labor Party with a similar listing of known union leaders active prior to 1875 reveals that only two union leaders had joined either the Knights or the SLP. There seems to have been little direct leadership carryover from the pre-1875 unions to the more active organizations after 1880.¹¹

The activists had convinced enough people, however,

to promote a vigorous ideological and strategic debate within the labor movement and among workers in general. At union meetings, public forums, and in the columns of the labor press, advocates of various points of view increasingly went beyond practical programs and immediate actions to discuss fundamental questions about the nature of industrial progress, the roles of labor and capital, or alternative economic and political systems.

A process had begun which would transform not only the labor movement but also the most basic attitudes of a broad section of the city's workers. Throughout the early 1880's a continually ascending level of activity among Detroit workers produced new organizations and stimulated old ones. The conservative craft unions of the 1870's were carried along in the process, sometimes reluctantly, but with a growing enthusiasm as well. Some crafts, under pressure of mechanization, responded to the growing sense of solidarity with a move away from earlier craft conservatism. The keys to this unity were the Socialists and the Knights of Labor.

II. Labadie, Grenell, and American Socialism

In the fall of 1879, Joseph Labadie wrote to Terence Powderly, the Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor.

I believe that by force alone can be removed the societary wrongs which have fastened themselves upon the people. But first must come agitation, organization, intelligence, and then the demand!¹²

These were not the ravings of a maniac or an isolated anarchist. Labadie was then Master Workman of the Detroit Knights of Labor which he had helped to found the previous year. In the following decade he was the most important labor leader in Detroit. He held nearly every major elective office within the local labor movement, as well as important statewide and national offices. He served on the National Executive Board of the Socialist Labor Party, the State Executive Board of the Knights of Labor, and was elected first president of the AFL in Michigan. Another long-time Detroit labor leader summarized Labadie's contribution in 1896.

To relate in detail Mr. Labadie's connection with trade and reform associations for the benefit of the masses would be simply telling the story of the labor movement in Detroit for the past quarter of a century.¹³

Labadie is an important figure to analyze, not only because of his many activities, but because his career illustrates the interconnections between trade unionism, socialism, and the Knights of Labor. His network of offices in all three movements formed a bewildering array of interlocking directorates, a pattern duplicated by other Detroit labor radicals like Judson Grenell and by similar figures in other cities. This merging of personnel

indicates the extent to which the activists in all of the organizations were part of a single movement. Scholars have tended to place great emphasis on the disputes between various factions of the labor movement. The history of the Knights of Labor and the AFL is written around a central theme of their conflict, while the socialists have often been viewed as a disruptive influence in both. But in Detroit in the early 1880's, the most serious ideological debates were all more clearly reproduced within organizations rather than between them. Socialists played crucial roles as organizers of the Knights of Labor and the trade unions; activists combined forces quite readily despite ideological differences. In Detroit, trade unionism, socialism, and the Knights of Labor had common roots --they emerged together out of the subculture of opposition.¹⁴

Labadie was born in Paw Paw, Michigan, in 1850. His father was half-Indian and worked as an interpreter. At age 14, Labadie's family put him to work in his uncle's jewelry store as an apprentice watchmaker, but apparently he did not like the trade, and he went on the tramp. He learned printing in a newspaper office in South Bend, Indiana, and then began more extensive wanderings: Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, Saginaw, Cleveland, Rochester, Syracuse, New York City, and Detroit in 1872. He had joined the printers' union in 1868 or 1869, but only

became active in union activities in 1876. Once he did, he was immediately prominent in the Detroit Typographical Union, but decided nearly as quickly that the trade union was not a permanent solution to the labor problem. In 1877, Labadie joined the socialists.¹⁵

Socialism had come to Detroit in 1874, three years before Labadie's conversion. A local cigar manufacturer had unwittingly helped to introduce it to Detroit's workers. He had wanted to begin production of a new line of the most expensive hand-rolled cigars and had not trusted the skills of any of the local cigarmakers. Instead he recruited two top quality German cigarmakers in New York and paid their fare to Detroit. Gustav Herzig and Henry Kummerfeldt proved to be all he had hoped for and more. They were indeed superb craftsmen, but their employer had opened a Pandora's box which he and other Detroit employers must have regretted in the following years. Herzig and Kummerfeldt were also veteran union organizers and experienced socialist agitators.¹⁶

They began proselytizing in Detroit's German community almost immediately. They had arrived in the midst of a depression; many of the German workers they met had also had prior experience with unions in Germany, and German working class culture already included a tradition of political radicalism. Working conditions and relations with employers in Detroit substantiated the prior

convictions of German-born artisans who expected to find class struggle. Herzig and Kummerfeldt found their fellow workers and neighbors receptive to their appeals. They gathered together their sympathizers and formed a local socialist group. Sometime in 1876 or 1877, the local group affiliated with the Workingmen's Party of the United States, an amalgamation of various socialist groups and local socialist clubs like the one in Detroit.¹⁷

By 1877 the Workingmen's Party appeared to be thriving in Detroit's German neighborhoods. While party membership was still small, the Party's public forums were neighborhood social events which drew crowds of several hundred. The organization tapped a wide base of potential converts for whom socialism was a fraternal and cultural affair as well as a political movement. A network of subsidiary and related groups, such as the Socialist Mannerchoir, provided contact with people who considered themselves part of the movement but did not necessarily pay Party dues or participate regularly in the Party's political activities.

But despite this apparent success, Party leaders recognized that cultural events, largely confined to the German community, were not the path to success. For practical as well as ideological reasons, they began to look for ways to attract English speaking, especially native born, workers. Many of their meetings had drawn

two or three hundred people, and the Party was beginning to attract enough attention to merit some coverage in the daily newspapers, but the socialists had no funds or other resources with which to mount an effective city wide propaganda campaign. They decided to expand their program of public meetings to include agitation meetings in various parts of the city. Labadie and Judson Grenell, another young printer, were the first native born converts.¹⁸

Grenell later described his introduction to socialism in some detail. He was already disillusioned with pure and simple trade unionism: "while the trade union was needed in order that employers and employees might be placed on an equal footing in bargaining...it was...just a palliative." Labadie was "also interested in the broad economic phases of the labor movement, rather than being a union man just to increase printers' wages." Grenell had already had considerable experience as a union official in New Haven, Connecticut, as well as in Detroit.¹⁹

One evening, as he was walking along a downtown street, he saw a building draped with large red banners. "SOCIAL DEMOCRATS MEET HERE," the signs said. "Walk In-- Admission Free." Well, why not?²⁰

The slogans at the front of the room read, "To everyone according to his deeds," and "He who will not work, neither shall he eat." Grenell took a seat at the back of the room. As the speaker began, Grenell relates

that he was fascinated--for the first time, "Here I saw... an effort to explain the cause of poverty in the midst of plenty...

Wage workers, these Social Democrats insisted, were continually creating surplus wealth which became the property of the employing class...the workers not receiving as much as they were creating, gluts in the market occurred, when work slackened and willing workers were idle until this surplus wealth had been absorbed by consumers--the workingman who had created the surplus...The way to avoid this...was to create a cooperative commonwealth, with workingmen their own employers, and in which the compensation to each worker would be in proportion to individual production. Society collectively would be the only employer, and the employing class...would melt into the mass, with their compensation measured by their ability to create wealth. Profit in business would be eliminated. The cost of production would govern prices.²¹

Labadie and Grenell had much in common: both were printers, both were disillusioned with existing trade union practices, both reacted emotionally to the poverty and degradation of labor. Together they instigated a variety of new programs to spread socialism beyond the German community. In late 1877 they started The Socialist, a weekly newspaper which served both as the city's labor newspaper and as a forum for English speaking socialists in other cities. It was one of the few socialist newspapers in English in the United States. Grenell was editor, Labadie chief columnist. They worked without pay in the evenings and on Sundays after sixty hours a

week on their regular jobs. Along with a few other comrades, they wrote it, printed it, and distributed it themselves. "After working all day," Grenell wrote, "it requires considerable grit and determination to take the only time we can call our own and hie to a dusty garret and set type by the light of a kerosene lamp."²²

Their determination paid off. In December, The Socialist reported to its readers that it was doing well financially. The newspaper was received enthusiastically by sympathizers in many parts of the country and soon reported regular distributions in Chicago, Boston, Brooklyn, Cincinnati, Evansville, Indiana, Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, and Grand Rapids, Michigan. By the summer of 1878, national Party leaders moved the paper to Chicago where the growing socialist movement could provide wider circulation. Grenell was offered the editorship, but decided to stay in Detroit.²³

Grenell and Labadie turned their efforts to pamphleteering. Grenell's father and brother were Baptist preachers. He had a bit of the preacher in himself as well, but "my missionary activities have ever been in the direction of political economy, rather than religion, though with not a few political economy is religion." They started a Socialist Tract Society modeled after the Christian counterparts of Grenell's Baptist relatives.²⁴

The idea was to produce simple cheap pamphlets

which explained socialism and which comrades and local branches could afford to buy and distribute free to fellow workers, sympathizers, or passers-by on street corners. With all labor donated free by Party comrades, the Tract Society was able to sell their pamphlets to socialist organizers at \$1.12 per thousand. Labadie and Grenell personally handed out thousands of them on Detroit street corners, and shipped thousands more all over the country. In April of 1880, Grenell reported that they had sold over 140,000 pamphlets since the previous July.²⁵

The pamphlets were designed to attract "those curious to know something about the 'left' or 'radical' side of the labor movement." Grenell's approach to propaganda was pragmatic. He and Labadie tried many ways to attract members and "learned by 'trial and error' especially error." They came into conflict with the Party's German leaders who argued they must circulate "pure Socialistic literature." Their German critics argued that, "New recruits" were not "homogeneous" or "properly drilled and disciplined...the virus of the present social system must be eliminated from their minds."²⁶

Grenell ridiculed such critics as unnecessarily rigid. They "walked so straight they they leaned backward." His propaganda efforts were successful, he pointed out. Despite strong competition from "the greenback

hobby-riders" who offer "the workingman...immediate relief through cheap money," Labadie and Grenell had attracted enough English speaking members to form an American Branch of the Detroit Section of the Party. By the fall of 1877, there were three branches: German, American, and Bohemian. The American Branch included several important local union officials besides Labadie and Grenell including Thomas Dolan of the cigarmakers, E. W. Simpson, president of the Carpenters' Union, and Charles Bell, another printer.²⁷

That fall the socialists staged their first electoral campaign. A report of their nominating convention gives some idea of the character of the group. Approximately one hundred members were present at Lafayette Hall on Gratiot Avenue, a predominantly German neighborhood. The meeting's chairman, Charles Stuermer (probably the brother of Adam Stuermer, secretary of the Cigarmakers' Union and of the Labor League) was a German, but the choice of candidates indicates the Party's desire to broaden its appeal. Simpson was nominated for Mayor, Dolan for City Clerk, and Charles Erb, a Dutch cigarmaker, for Director of the Poor.²⁸

The socialists entered the campaign enthusiastically, but they faced tremendous handicaps. Part of their constituency could not vote. Some immigrants who could have qualified did not speak English and did not understand the political system. In 1884, only 38 percent of

Polish workers surveyed by the Michigan State Bureau of Labor Statistics were voters. The Party did not have enough money to mount an effective campaign, or the type of ward organization to bring voters to the polls, help them deal with the election officials, and make sure that their votes were counted.²⁹

Their lack of financial resources and precinct level organization was compounded by the hostility of the electoral bureaucracy. The socialists, as well as other labor candidates during the 1880's, complained about corruption and false counts. Even in precincts where they were well organized, their poll watchers were denied entrance to polling places, socialist voters were harassed, and ballot boxes were stuffed. Polling places opened late or closed early in strong socialist precincts in order to prevent workers from voting before or after work. Legal challenges to such practices were not only expensive, but faced a bench controlled by members of the local political machines.³⁰

Election officials initially credited Simpson with 825 votes for Mayor, then threw out 47 socialist votes after a supposed recount in one precinct. Simpson's initial count represented six percent of the total vote, a fair showing considering the Party's lack of organization, but Party members were convinced that the actual vote had been much higher. Grenell claimed to have witnessed

wholesale ballot stuffing, and Labadie, describing the next year's campaign, charged "in one precinct where we are certain we polled at least 15 or 20 votes, they graciously gave us 2."³¹

When Simpson ran for Eleventh Ward Alderman in 1880, the evidence of corruption was even clearer. The votes were counted, Simpson was declared the winner by a narrow margin of nineteen votes, and the sealed ballot boxes were delivered to the City Clerk. The defeated Democrat, recognizing that the city clerk was also a good Democrat, contested the election, and a recount produced a Democratic majority of eighty votes. Simpson protested, and, after an investigating committee found that the ballot box seals had all been altered, removed, or destroyed, refused to surrender his seat on the Detroit Common Council.³²

Such experiences disillusioned some socialists with politics, but the 1877 campaign did help the Socialist Labor Party attract attention in Detroit. Local machine politicians recognized that socialist votes were concentrated enough in the working class precincts that the Party might determine the outcome of future elections for several legislative and city council seats. The Democratic and Republican machines were closely enough matched in Detroit that the socialists might hold the balance of power, and some machine politicians were sufficiently antagonized with their major party opponents to consider

endorsing socialist or other independent labor candidates in wards controlled by the opposing party. In succeeding elections, the socialists and the Labor Party were able to take advantage of this situation. Machine support had the added advantage of insuring that SLP votes would be counted. E. W. Simpson's successful election in 1880 in the normally Democratic Eleventh Ward was partially the result of a tacit Republican endorsement (he refused outright nomination but the Republicans did not nominate another candidate and notified supporters of their approval of Simpson).

As a result of the socialist electoral campaign, the daily newspapers began to expand their previous token coverage of socialist rallies to include more thorough reports of Party activities. Party speakers, apparently aware of this wider scrutiny, tried to assuage public fears. At a meeting of about two hundred people in May, 1878, Simpson strongly emphasized that the Party was not a secret organization but a political party like any other, "the main object of which was to conserve the interests of the industrial class without making war on any other class."

Socialists deprecate war because the working man has learned that he must foot war's bills ...the present system under which society is organized is imperfect...the industrial class must be emancipated from the thralldom of capital.

He went on to list the specific planks in the Party's platform which included nationalization of the telegraph,

canals, railroads, and other similar enterprises, prohibition of prison contract labor, prohibition of child labor, regulation of sanitary conditions, equal pay for equal work for both sexes, employer liability for injuries, repeal of conspiracy laws applied to labor unions, graduated income tax, no abridgement of suffrage, immediate recall of public officials, nationalization of banking and insurance, and prohibition of importation of coolies.³³

An interview with socialist leader Frank Hirth appeared in the Detroit News about the same time. The account must have pleased Party leaders with its fairness since they reprinted it in their own newspaper. The interview illustrates both the newspaper reporter's prejudice against socialism and the Party's attempt to deal with those fears. Although Hirth was forthright and direct about socialist intentions, he made a concerted effort to convince readers of the Party's rationality and moderation.³⁴

The reporter's description of his meeting with Hirth began with a confession of his preconceptions of a "leader of the Commune." He had expected a "big, blood-thirsty sort of an individual, with an appearance which suggests the chopping off of innocent people's heads, and with a mind devoid of logical or connected argument." Instead, he was surprised to find a "plain, pleasant looking man...all smiles and good nature, and with a beam

of good will in his eyes."³⁵

"What is the object of Socialism?" the reporter asked.

"The complete and absolute overthrow of the present social system. All means of production, such as capital, lands, machinery, railroads, telegraphs should be held for the benefit of all." But after this opening shocker, Hirth went on in a display of the Party's reasonableness. He assured the reporter that, although there would be no compensation for nationalized lands which were the property of the people, a socialist government would pay for other forms of capital which were nationalized.

Hirth denied rumors of the Party's insurrectionary intentions: "we do not want to make trouble unless attacked ourselves...we don't believe in riots. It is only the unthinking workingmen who riot. Men who fully understand their condition never resort to force."³⁶

Frank Hirth thus presented an image of a Party with far-reaching and very radical goals, but peaceful strategy and tactics. Socialists were arming in many cities, but they insisted that they were doing so for purely defensive purposes. The Socialist carried an interview with Albert Parsons, the Chicago leader of the Party's militant wing, on armed self-defense. "Whenever an attempt is made by force to prevent workingmen from meeting," Parsons explained, "They propose to take their arms with them...Our

battery will be for amusement so long as the capitalists use theirs for amusement."

"And for business when they use theirs for that purpose?" the interviewer asked.

"That's it in a nutshell," Parsons answered.³⁷

Exactly what Parsons meant by "for business" was never spelled out. Similarly Joseph Labadie's letter to Powderly suggested that electoral corruption left workers with no alternative to force, but he failed to specify how force was to be employed, or to what end. Apparently such questions could be answered more explicitly after the agitation and organization Labadie claimed had to precede the (also unspecified) demand.³⁸

Officially the Party steadfastly attempted to retain a public posture of peacefulness and even quite bourgeois respectability. "The Socialist Labor Party is a peace party, a law-abiding party," The Socialist declared. "Socialism is not a destructive and plundering outbreak of the poor against the rich...but is merely a scheme for a better and more equitable social system than that which now prevails." In 1881, the Detroit Labor Review, one of several local successors to The Socialist, asserted its loyalty to private property: "we believe in private property. What a man produces by his own labor is his own property, and we are opposed to the system that robs him of it." In the same year, in the ultimate

gesture to respectability, Philip Van Patten, the Party's national secretary, urged all sections to meet publicly and express their regrets at President Garfield's assassination and death.³⁹

J. F. Bray, the widely respected elderly Pontiac socialist, summarized the Party's radical goals but moderate tactics. Bray denounced attempts to alter hours and wages without altering "the relations between labor and capital...Labor can accomplish nothing until it has achieved its independence from the control of capital," he argued. "Absolute liberty is the thing to be contended for...Labor must control capital." The path to success was "political victory...The capture of Federal, State, and municipal governments by votes is the only way for a final settlement of the Labor question."⁴⁰

III. Socialist Activities

Socialists recognized that in order to succeed they had to educate and organize the majority of American workers. In addition to their newspapers, pamphlets, and leaflets, the Detroit Section sponsored an active program of agitation meetings, public rallies, and social gatherings. Ward clubs, organized during the 1877 elections, continued to hold regular educational meetings in members' homes. The Eighth Ward Club W.P.U.S., for example, announced an agitation meeting for Monday, February 11,

1878, at "J. Johnson's, 3311 Grand River Ave., between 4th and 5th streets." "Workingmen!" The Socialist admonished, "It is to your own interest to attend these meetings, for it is high time for you to take consideration of your condition."⁴¹

Social events combined agitation with fund raising. Tickets for the Party's Grand Ball on Christmas Evening, 1877, cost twenty-five cents, "admitting gentleman and lady." The Socialist reported that the Section cleared nearly \$75 from the ball. Another ball was given a month later to raise money to support striking New York City cigarmakers, while proceeds of a similar affair in March, 1878, went for "Agitation purposes." The Singing Section of the SLP gave a "Comic Concert" later that month. These concerts and balls usually charged twenty-five cents admission, although advertisements for the balls added "Ladies Admitted Free." (Membership of the Party appears to have been overwhelmingly male.)⁴²

In September, 1878, a formal Agitation Fund was established, and proceeds from such social events were channeled into it. Although this fundraising system did produce regular revenues, it was inadequate to support an active educational program. In May, 1879, for example, the German Branch of the Detroit Section reported receipts for the Agitation Fund of \$11.66, but Grenell reported a month later that the Party would have liked to hold

agitation meetings every night of the week but did not have enough funds to do so.⁴³

On national holidays such as July 4th, the Party staged major gatherings which included both speechmaking and socializing. The Trades, the semi-official national organ of the Knights of Labor, described the July 4th, 1879, eight hour demonstration sponsored by the Socialist Labor Party in Detroit as a "complete success," while The Socialist argued that the large crowds, over two thousand workers and their families, were evidence of the movement's growth. Afternoon speakers read the Declaration of Independence and compared it to the SLP Platform. J. F. Bray addressed the crowds in English, and Gustav Herzig spoke in German. Bray argued that under socialism "it would not be necessary to work more than six hours a day. As more machines were invented the hours would be reduced perhaps to five or even four." A public resolution, adopted by vote of the gathering, summarized Bray's arguments.

Resolved, that we condemn not the use, but the abuse of forces which ought to conserve; that "labor saving" machinery, to be truly such should save--not starve--the producing classes; then machinery would redound to the benefit of society by reducing the hours of toil and lightening the burden of those who are now compelled to produce wealth for other's enjoyment.

The day's celebration ended with an evening ball attended by six hundred couples.⁴⁴

Participation in socialist-sponsored activities became a regular part of community life. Concerts, balls, public debates, and educational lectures were primary forms of entertainment and self-improvement, as well as political events. This cultural life promoted a vision of solidarity and class unity. Activists constantly sought ways to increase social contact and a sense of community among workers, to expand upon existing tendencies toward informal cooperation and mutual support. In 1880, various labor groups rented several rooms on the third floor of a building in Hilsendengen's Block, corner of Monroe Avenue and Farrar Street, to serve as a Workingman's Club Room, "all workingmen having a few hours of spare time either in day time or in the evening, can go and amuse themselves in reading, games, or conversation."⁴⁵

The Workingman's Club Room had a kitchen and a dining and reading room. Workers could have a good meal for a dime or a cup of coffee or tea for three cents. Labor papers were free. Typical events included a solidarity meeting for J. P. McDonnell, the Socialist editor of the Paterson, New Jersey, Labor Standard, jailed for publishing a letter denouncing conditions in a local brickyard, and a "Bread and Water Beecher Banquet," a reference to Rev. Henry Ward Beecher's alleged assertion that "a man who cannot live on bread and water is not fit to live."⁴⁶

As the labor movement grew in scope and significance, the number of meetings, debates, dances, dinners, recitals, and dramatic presentations grew correspondingly. Wider and wider circles of people looked to these events for amusement and fellowship. But socialists recognized that work was still the central fact of working class life. Organization around the issues growing directly out of work, that is trade union activity, would have to be central to any effort to reach large numbers of workers with their message.

Socialists were ambivalent towards the existing trade unions. On the one hand, a writer in The Socialist agreed that "Trade Unionists comprise the intelligent element of the laboring classes." A columnist in the Detroit Times (another of the successors of The Socialist started by Grenell, Labadie, and others), argued even more positively that "the trade union is the school of the mechanic in the sciences of government fitting him for leadership in the army of unskilled labor...Out of the trade unions of America the party of the future i.e., the SLP is being nursed and fostered, preparatory to the coming conflict between the many poor and the rich few." But despite their value, unions had limited potential. Only "SOCIALISM strikes at the very root of the labor troubles, while trade unions are merely designed to be ameliorative in their character...When the truths of Socialism have

once permeated our trade union organizations, then--and not till then--will labor be able to enforce its demands."⁴⁷

The socialists' solution to the limitations of trade unions was what they called "Trade Amalgamation... the combining of all trades into one gigantic union." In this way isolated crafts would begin to recognize the interdependence of all trades. The spirit of class solidarity would be strengthened as workers developed greater loyalty to each other, and participated in common struggles, sympathetic strikes, or united political activity. One big union would be like a single army-- first a training ground, then the basis for united action.⁴⁸

Their first venture in trade amalgamation was the International Labor Union, an alliance of Marxist socialists and other labor radicals. The International Labor Union was designed to be a mass organization uniting skilled and unskilled workers around a program of immediate demands and an ultimate goal of abolition of the wage system. The organization stressed shorter hours and universal organization. Socialists hoped that workers would come to understand the need for socialism as a result of the International Labor Union's trade union struggles. The Central Committee included two members from Detroit, and The Socialist devoted considerable space to the Union's program and organizing appeals.⁴⁹

The International Labor Union failed to attract large numbers of workers except in a few eastern textile centers. It was not mentioned in the Detroit labor press after 1878. But the one big union concept did appeal, not only to socialists but to a wide variety of reform oriented workers and trade unionists who found their craft unions too weak to stand alone against employers. Where the International Labor Union failed, the Knights of Labor succeeded, ultimately so well that they dwarfed the socialists and caused many Detroit activists to conclude that the SLP was no longer relevant.⁵⁰

IV. Beyond the SLP: The Knights of Labor

The Knights of Labor began in Philadelphia in 1869 as a secret society of local garment cutters who sought a new form of organization to supercede the failing Philadelphia Garment Cutters Association. The idea for a new type of labor movement came from Uriah S. Stephens, a veteran garment cutter and trade unionist. Stephens was convinced that the old style craft union was obsolete; the isolated craft union was weak and unstable; a wider basis of solidarity was needed. Stephens stressed the "benefits of amalgamation" in a "great brotherhood." Only in this way could "the complete emancipation of the wealth producers from the thralldom and loss of wage slavery..." be realized.⁵¹

The arguments were remarkably similar to socialist justifications for the International Labor Union, but the roots of Stephens' beliefs were in evangelical religion and Masonic fraternalism. He had trained to be a Baptist minister, but his family went broke in the panic of 1837, and he was apprenticed to a tailor. His belief in Christian brotherhood led him to the anti-slavery movement, and he campaigned for both Fremont and Lincoln. Stephens was a Mason, Odd Fellow, and a Knight of Pythias. He was impressed with the stability of fraternal organizations compared with most labor unions, and the capacity of Masonic ritual to command the respect and even awe of its followers. A working class fraternity, based on the spirit of Christian brotherhood, united by strict secrecy, bound by oath to a secret ritual, could perform all of the functions of unions, but also educate its members, and inculcate the kind of loyalty and comradeship which was necessary for solidarity.⁵²

It is possible that some Detroit socialists were already aware of the existence of the Knights of Labor when Charles Litchman, Grand Scribe of the Knights of St. Crispin (shoemakers) and Grand Secretary of the Knights of Labor, came to Detroit in October or November, 1878, to campaign for the Greenback-Labor ticket and organize the local Crispins into the Knights of Labor. Grenell was impressed with Litchman's speech on "Labor

and Finance." It sounded "socialistic" and Litchman advocated a system of universal cooperation to do away with the wage system. Grenell argued that Litchman had failed to show how Greenbacks would produce cooperation, but he took Litchman's plea for cooperation as a de facto endorsement of socialism. The speech was very successful and would help the SLP's recruiting.⁵³

Litchman's meeting with the shoemakers apparently fell through. According to Labadie's reminiscences, many shoemakers arrived but the meeting did not take place. He was instead invited to meet Litchman at the house of Otis C. Hodgson, a shoemaker. He must have been impressed. Here was the labor army the socialists were seeking: a secret brotherhood based on the slogans "An injury to one is the concern of all" and "Abolition of the wage system." Hodgson, Litchman, Labadie and another shoemaker named Miller organized Knights of Labor Assembly 901 with Labadie as Master Workman and Organizer.⁵⁴

By December, 1878, Local Assembly 901 was meeting regularly. Meeting rooms were rented and meeting dates announced under the name Washington Literary Society. The name Knights of Labor was not written or spoken. When Labadie and Grenell started another labor paper in January, 1880, to replace The Socialist, they carried the policy of secrecy into the newspaper's title--in its masthead appeared only ***. Secrecy provided some

measure of safety from the very real danger of dismissal. Hodgson, for example, was fired for union activities in 1880 when he was nominated on the Greenback-Labor ticket for County Clerk. Secrecy also allowed the organizers and activists of the local movement to move at a measured pace. Premature action would be dangerous. An army must be recruited, trained, disciplined.⁵⁵

The Knights' program and ritual were impressive to other socialists and activists as well. The shoemaker named Miller who had helped to found the local assembly was probably the same Charles Miller who was a member of the Central Committee of the International Labor Union. Within weeks, more than a dozen prominent socialists were initiated, particularly those from the American Branch. The religious and quasi-masonic character of the ritual was not so distant from the spirit of many socialists. Labadie had insisted in a letter to The Socialist only a month before that the basis of Communism was simply the desire to "help one another...it is that soul and mind destroying selfishness that keeps us from that ideal system." The image of Christ as one of the first agitators was common in socialist and other labor literature. "Not a Section or a trade union," wrote the editor of the Detroit Labor Review, "but has among the members true followers of the meek and lowly Galileean who went about doing good. They read his word reverently; they follow

his teaching conscientiously."⁵⁶

The Knights appealed to the same spirit of noble self-sacrifice. Universal organization was an ultimate goal, but until the influx of members in the mid-eighties, the Detroit Knights functioned somewhat like an elite, the leadership of labor's army who would educate the masses through agitation and example. The initiation ceremony in the Adelphon Kruptos combined themes of Christian service, solidarity, and elevation of labor. The prospective candidate was escorted into a dimly lit room, and standing before the Order's secret symbols, was asked a series of questions.

Q. Do you believe, and approve of united effort for the improvement of mankind?

I do.

Q. Do you desire to engage in such united effort?

I do.

Q. Do you earn your bread by labor?

I do.

Q. Are you willing to bind yourself with a pledge of honor to secrecy, obedience and mutual assistance?

I do.

The candidate then promised never to disclose the "signs, mysteries, arts, privileges or benefits" revealed to him. The symbols were then explained.

The symbol of the Outer Veil is the Globe symbolizing the field of our operations and signifies "universal organization"... The symbol of the Inner Veil--LANCE OF DEFENSE.

Finally the Master Workman explained to the new member the honor and responsibility that membership entailed.

Labor is noble and holy. To defend it from degradation is a work worthy of the noblest and best of our race. You have been selected from among your associates for the exalted purpose.⁵⁶

The men admitted to the Washington Literary Society took this charge, and their pledge to fulfill it, with total seriousness. Labadie, normally extremely confident, wrote Powderly a detailed letter explaining what he had done after his first trip to organize another local assembly. "This being the first work I have done in organizing, I'll tell you how I did it and see if I did it all right or not."⁵⁸

They approached their task in a systematic manner; they would build the Knights as a cadre of "the most reliable material" out of the general labor movement. At the same time, they organized mass organizations to serve as a recruiting ground for the Knights and a preliminary level of organization for the masses of workers. One pioneer Knight related how they organized the Detroit Trades Council for those reasons.

some scheme had to be devised by which... recruits to the K of L...could be got...

a central body, composed of delegates from the several trade unions, should be formed. It was thought in this way the members of the K of L would come in contact with representative trade unionists and use the trades council as a feeder to the K of L by picking out the most desirable ones for membership in the order.⁵⁹

The influence of the socialists in the early activities of the Knights in Detroit was decisive. Of the thirty-eight men known to have been initiated into the Washington Literary Society in its first few months, seventeen are identified as SLP members in the socialist press or other sources. Included in the list of Party members in addition to Master Workman Labadie were Grenell and all three of the Party's 1877 electoral candidates: Simpson, Dolan, and Erb. The composition of both organizations was very similar. Frank Hirth described the SLP's membership as "principally cigarmakers, shoemakers, molders, and musicians--no lawyers or ministers." The thirty-eight Knights included eleven cigarmakers and nine shoemakers. All but one was a skilled worker.⁶⁰

The pattern of relationship between members of the two organizations is clearly evident in the portions of the minutebooks of the Washington Literary Society which have been preserved. The Knights had decided to read and discuss an educational paper at each meeting. At the January 6, 1879, meeting Master Workman Labadie, a prominent SLP member and member of the SLP National Executive

the following year, appointed Charles Bell, another prominent Party member to deliver the next paper. Two weeks later, when Charles Erb, 1877 SLP electoral candidate was appointed to give the next paper, Adam Stirmer, secretary of the Cigarmakers' Union and a frequent reporter of socialist activities in The Socialist, nominated A. Poder, secretary of the Bohemian Branch of the SLP for membership in the Knights; A. Reinke, secretary of the German Branch, was nominated by Stuermer (same fellow, spelling was haphazard in the minutes). Erb's paper at the next meeting was titled with the slogan that had introduced Judson Grenell to socialism, "He who will not work shall not eat." The next paper reader was Brother Corville, secretary of the socialists' Eighth Ward Club.⁶¹

The relationship between the Knights and the SLP, nationally as well as locally, became even clearer in 1880, when the National Executive Board of the SLP was moved to Detroit. The members of the SLP National Executive Board formed interlocking directorates with both Local Assembly 901 and with the General (i.e., national) Executive Board of the Knights of Labor. Philip Van Patten of LA 901 was national secretary of both the SLP and the Knights General Executive Board. E. A. Stevens of LA 901 was an SLP organizer who traveled extensively around the country for the Party and a member of the Knights of Labor General Executive Board. Labadie was a member of the SLP National

Executive Board, Master Workman of 901, and President of the Detroit Trades Council. Grenell, also a member of the SLP National Executive Board, was an officer both in LA 901 and the Trades Council. Finally, on the national level, Powderly, Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, was a Party member.⁶²

Not all the Knights of Labor were socialists. A few were philosophically conservative, but nearly all the Knights' future Detroit leaders were closely associated with leading socialists in Local Assembly 901 for several years. When Lyman Brant or Hugh McClelland later became candidates of the Labor Party, they had not been converted to socialism, but they had spent four years addressing men like Labadie and Grenell, Dolan, Simpson, and Erb as "Brother Knight." They had been intimately exposed to socialist arguments and had adopted concepts like the labor theory of value or the producer cooperative even if they had not accepted socialist theory as a whole.⁶³

The SLP thus exercised an influence within the Knights of Labor, both locally and nationally, far out of proportion to their numbers. This was not the result of any conspiracy to take over the organization, as Powderly charged later after he had repudiated radicalism. The Knights and the SLP drew on the same constituency. Activists were attracted to both organizations because both addressed themselves to the fundamental issues that had

aroused them in the first place. Labor reformers who followed the populist strategy of the producer class bore no particular malice toward socialists in the early 1880's (as some did later on). They respected socialists as honest, courageous and sincere labor reformers whose major error was a bit too much idealism. As one Detroit advocate of cooperation (as an alternative reform) explained, "the ulterior objectives" of the SLP would be "a work of time." He supported the Party's platform but "the efforts of the party should be directed to some more practical object than seems at present to be aimed at." Socialists saw the Knights of Labor as the embodiment of their vision of labor solidarity. Many, particularly among the American Branch, had come to socialism through the kind of religious humanitarianism that was the basis of the Knights. Their orientation was moral and practical, not ideological.⁶⁴

Indeed, as the Knights prospered, many of the key socialist agitators in Detroit began to wonder whether the Knights more closely reflected their socialist vision than the SLP did. By 1881, just as the Knights of Labor were really taking off in Michigan (K.L. membership in Michigan increased from 73 in 1881 to 1,023 in 1882), many Party members were questioning the future of the SLP. A correspondent to the Labor Review feared that socialism was dead in America. The Labor Review admitted that the "Party may have spent its force" and that it was "an

insignificant minority as yet."⁶⁵

The problem, according to Labor Review correspondents critical of the Party, was that it had become impractical, so absorbed in internal debates over political economy and strategy that it ignored the masses of workers who faced immediate problems and sought effective solutions. The blame, according to critics, lay with the Germans who treated politics more as a matter of theology than a process of practical change.

"The Socialist Labor Party must become practical in its methods," the Labor Review said. "It needs body and strength as well as purity."

Principles cannot be spread effectively unless the members quit dreaming and disputing among themselves, and go actively to work in making converts...We are in danger of becoming a mutual admiration society. Let us pay some attention to the outside majority.

A letter from a rural Michigan woman to the Party's Executive symbolized how the concentration of the Party's efforts among its German sympathizers separated it from "the outside majority." The woman wanted to learn about socialism: "there is a profound ignorance in this section of the subject...I do not understand any language but the English and have looked almost in vain for help...a seeker after truth." It is certainly ironic testimony to the Party's image that such a seeker felt the need to apologize for speaking English in an English speaking country.⁶⁶

"The movement was too purely German," wrote a Cincinnati correspondent. "It must be Americanized." One way to do this, according to the editor of the Labor Review (Labadie or Grenell) was to address the immediate demands of Detroit workers.

Let us be practical. Let present conditions engage our attention. The "Ameliorative Measures" some of our comrades denounce are directly in the line of progress from barbarism to socialism. It is natural that these subjects should engage the attention of workingmen, they are wrongs easily discernable and their solution is not difficult. State Prison Convict Contract Labor has no such bad effect on the labor market as many imagine; but that it does effect wages to the detriment of free labor is undeniable. Eight hours is no panacea for all our ills; but it will be an excellent thing to obtain. The same may be said of the inspection of workshops, food and dwelling--all will do good.⁶⁷

But whenever these issues were raised, German stalwarts denounced them as reformist palliatives and accused their advocates of weakness and desertion of principle. Labadie and Grenell had already encountered this attitude when some of the pamphlets published by their Socialist Tract Society were criticized for ideological wavering. The issue surfaced again in 1880 when the Party's American Branch enthusiastically supported the Greenback ticket of Weaver and Chambers. The supporters of the alliance saw it as a means of winning over potential sympathizers, but local "kickers," as the critics were called, denounced

socialists who worked in the Greenback campaign.⁶⁸

Advocates of the policy of endorsing Weaver pointed out that the Greenbackers contained working class elements whose support of labor and denunciation of monopoly was almost word-for-word identical with the socialist platform. The working class Greenbackers would eventually come in conflict with the middle class elements in the Greenback Party. As Van Patten, one of the instigators of the alliance, explained to Powderly, "The Greenback Party is rapidly approaching its own crisis when the middle class conservatives will object to the ascendancy of the Labor Movement in general." Until then, they must support the Greenbackers.⁶⁹

Van Patten campaigned for the Weaver ticket in Detroit; Labadie and Grenell expanded the Labor Review from a monthly to a weekly during the campaign. When a rally of one thousand Weaver supporters was broken up by police and the speakers arrested, Van Patten led a protest meeting of fifteen hundred on the same spot and dared city authorities to arrest him as well. Henry Poole and John Goldring, SLP members, were placed on the local Greenback slate. Mass support for the Greenback ticket and the close working alliance seemed to confirm the wisdom of Greenback-Socialist cooperation.⁷⁰

Yet the kickers went so far in their opposition to the alliance that Van Patten feared a split in the SLP and

threatened to resign as National Secretary of the Party, if it came to that. The Germans opposed the alliance Van Patten told Powderly, but "the English speaking Socialists are enthusiastic to support Weaver and Chambers."

I fear we will have a split--and I shall feel strongly inclined to resign. Certainly I cannot as a consistent Socialist oppose the Greenback Party when their Platform enunciates the foundation principles of Social Democracy--"That it is the duty of government to guarantee to the man of labor the full result of his toil."⁷¹

Who exactly was doing the kicking and why they were kicking is not completely clear--evidence is scanty. Van Patten wrote Powderly that the kickers were Germans who "were afraid that the Greenback Party is managed by men who care more for political success than for the Labor Movement." But the dissension seems to have been more than just tactical. Van Patten also reported that the Germans were suspicious of the Knights. Emotions clearly ran high on both sides.⁷²

In September, 1880, the Detroit kickers started a rival labor paper, the Bulletin, in competition with the Labor Review because of the Labor Review's support for Greenbackism. The Labor Review bitterly denounced the kickers:

There is a class in the Social Labor Party so pure (?) immaculate (?) and perfect (?) that if a person deviates in the least particular from the path they have laid out as the only true, correct and regular one

...he is at once denounced as a traitor and one who has "sold out."⁷³

The experiences of the 1880 campaign reinforced convictions that the German kickers were hopelessly impractical--more concerned with doctrinal purity than results. Labadie, Grenell, and the other socialists who went into the Knights of Labor were far removed from the talmudic spirit they found in SLP ideologues. Grenell felt such "stiff-backed socialists...have closed their eyes to all the experiences of the world. Only step by step has the human race made advances." While the "stiff backs" argued that reform would diminish class consciousness, Grenell believed that just the opposite was the case.

The ignorant and down-trodden are far less liable to demand their rights than the intelligent and more prosperous. Every law and custom that will tend to a more equitable division of the joint products of labor and capital will help to create a desire for still greater justice, until finally...profits can be entirely eliminated.⁷⁴

Gradually the Knights of Labor socialists, like Labadie and Grenell, began to reduce their participation in Party activities. They continued socialist agitation, but within the Knights. The Party lost its most energetic and capable organizers. In 1883, the Party's national leaders repeatedly addressed inquiries to the Detroit Section, but apparently received no replies. The National

Executive wanted to know what was wrong.

Not having received any official communication yet from Section Detroit...asking the comrades in Detroit why they remain in a constant silence, though Detroit has hitherto been considered one of our best standing sections...We therefore hope that the Detroit comrades will not stand back in the struggle for our cause.⁷⁵

They were not standing back, but the men who had made Detroit one of the Party's most active sections were now devoting their energies to the Knights of Labor. The Party may be dead, the Labor Review speculated, "but socialism is a living idea, and can never die!"⁷⁶

The SLP survived, maintaining some influence in the German neighborhoods, but it never regained the dynamism or following it had had in the late 1870's. In 1887, the Party reportedly had eighty to one hundred members. By 1883, in contrast, Detroit had sixteen functioning Knights of Labor Assemblies with 797 members, and in July, 1886, Knights of Labor Detroit District Assembly reported 4,679 members. The Knights of Labor had produced the Labor army the socialists had hoped for, but in the process the SLP was reduced to a peripheral role. The Knights of Labor Assemblies, growing in both size and number, took over most of the educational and cultural activities the SLP had directed in earlier days. But although the SLP suffered, the socialist ideal of class solidarity did not. Labadie, Grenell, and the other SLP activists who left

the Party helped to transmit its beliefs to a far wider audience. For a time the Knights of Labor looked as though it might make socialist dreams become reality.⁷⁷

Chapter 4

NOTES

1. Recent works such as Jeremy Brecher's Strike (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1974) have once again raised the question of the relationship between spontaneity and organization. Brecher argues that organization, even specifically left organization, inhibits the development of mass spontaneity and protest: "in the past fifty years...the official left organizations--whether liberal, socialist, or Communist--have consistently blocked the efforts of workers to take direct power over production." The contrast between the European model of socialist politics and the American model is deceiving, according to Brecher, because "when European workers acted in a revolutionary manner, they did so against these organizations." (p. 384) E. J. Hobsbawm ("Should the Poor Organize?" New York Review of Books, March, 1978) argues that the recent resurgence of this theory of anti-organization is part of the secular crisis of western society in which both socialists and capitalists "are at a loss...to understand their future, and...puzzled by the failure of their theorists and prophets." While Hobsbawm concedes part of the criticism of organization (organizations may inhibit protest at certain times, and leaders of organizations may substitute themselves for the masses they represent), he demonstrates that such criticism does not obviate the need for organization: "organizations of the left may at such times be blamed for recommending the wrong policies, but right or wrong, they are the only bodies which can formulate policies for the poor, and with luck, make them effective. They are essential for those who want to improve society, because for them the problem is not to get more or less of the same, but something different." Thus, the relationship between spontaneity and organization is dialectical. Organization can stifle mass activity, but it is only where spontaneity does lead to effective organization that protest transcends the level of spontaneous reaction.

2. Detroit's first union, Typographical Union No. 18, was organized as a local body in 1848 and joined the International in 1852. By the mid-1860's, there were more than a dozen trade unions and a Trades Assembly with a reported membership of 5,000 which intervened successfully in local politics. The movement declined rapidly in the late 1860's and the Trades Assembly disbanded around 1870. Supporters were unable to reorganize it

and several attempts to replace it with similar city labor federations also failed. See: SBSL, 1884, p. 74; Labor Day Gazette, 1891, LC; Thomas M. Dolan to David Boyd, July 9, 1900, LC; Detroit Labor Leaders File, "Looking Backward," by John Drew, LC; Labor Day Review, 1892, LC.

3. Detroit Trades Council File, LC; Joseph Labadie to T. V. Powderly, December 7, 1879, TVP.

4. James B. McFeely to Terence V. Powderly, November (?) (illegible), 1876, TVP.

5. The Socialist (Chicago), December 7, 1878; January 11, 1879.

6. The effects of the 1870's depression on national union membership are discussed in Foster Rhea Dulles, Labor in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1968), p. 112 and Philip S. Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume I (New York: International, 1972), pp. 439-440.

7. Michigan Federation of Labor 1915 Yearbook; Labor Day Review, 1892, LC; Detroit Trades Council File, LC.

8. The Socialist, December 8, 1877; January 5, 1878; January 12, 1878; January 19, 1878; December 7, 1878; January 11, 1879; "Constitution of the Detroit Labor League," LC; Detroit Evening News, September 5, 1887.

9. Detroit Trades Council File, LC; Knights of Labor-Michigan File, LC.

10. Labor Review, October 23, 1880.

11. Detroit Labor Leaders Data Bank (an amalgamation of all available biographical information compiled by the author). Major sources for the 1860's and 1870's include: Minutes of the Washington Literary Society, The Socialist, Thomas Dolan to David Boyd, July 9, 1900, LC.

12. Joseph Labadie to T. V. Powderly, December 7, 1879, TVP.

13. Michigan Federation of Labor Yearbook, 1896, pp. 16-7; "The Labor Champions," newspaper clipping, c. 1886, Ross Scrapbooks, Volume 1, p. 17-20, Burton Historical Collections, Detroit Public Library; undated clipping c. 1889 in AFL-History File, LC; clipping from Detroit Evening News, September 6, 1891, in Detroit Trades

Council File, LC; clipping from Detroit Post and Tribune, October 17, 1880, in Detroit Trades Council File, LC.

Labadie's influence rested as much with his informal stature as unofficial exponent, spokesman, and movement intellectual as with his formal positions. In addition to editorial duties on various labor papers, he wrote a weekly column entitled "Cranky Notes" from the late 1870's through 1889 which discussed his own evolving theories of society as well as news and practical advice. He often spoke several nights a week to educational forums, agitation meetings, and political gatherings. Various national figures from Powderly to Richard T. Ely, University of Wisconsin professor of political economy who authored several widely read books on the labor movement and related problems, consulted him for opinions and information. See: Sidney Fine, "The Ely-Labadie Letters," Michigan History, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 1-32. For a discussion of a similar figure, Joseph P. McDonnell, see: Herbert Gutman, "Class, Status, and the Gilded Age Radical: A Reconsideration" in Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America (New York: 1977), pp. 260-292.

14. Conflict between the Knights of Labor and the AFL was the central theme of the Wisconsin School of labor historians (followers of John R. Commons), notably Selig Perlman, author of the section in Commons' History of Labor in the United States (New York: MacMillan, 1918) on the Knights and the origins of the AFL. Works by such historians as Gerald Grob (Workers and Utopia, Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969) and Philip Taft (Taft's work is summarized in Labor History, Winter, 1978, an entire issue devoted to him) follow closely the Commons-Perlman perspective. Norman Ware (The Labor Movement in the United States, New York: Vintage, copyright 1929) does not accept Perlman's prejudice in favor of the AFL but also structures his discussion of the period around the conflict between the Knights and the trade unions. Ware generally concurs in the negative assessment of the socialists placing central blame for Knights of Labor policies he feels were incorrect on a group of socialists in the Home Club centered in New York. Philip Foner (History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vols. 1 and 2, New York: International, 1947, 1955) gives a much fuller and more sympathetic description of the socialists, but despite criticisms of Gompers and craft conservatism, generally accepts the most important part of the Commons-Perlman thesis, e.g., that trade unionism was more progressive than the Knights of Labor. Perhaps the best indication of the kind of emphasis which has prevailed is the fact that there is no book length organizational history of the Knights of Labor.

15. Labadie to Judson Grenell, undated c. 1920's, LC; Michigan Federation of Labor Yearbook, 1896, pp. 16-7; "The Labor Champions," op. cit. Labadie in later years enjoyed embellishing his past. In a letter to a well wisher in 1923, he described himself as "an unschooled man" raised among the Indians. Labadie to Mrs. H. E. Beadle, January 16, 1923, LC.

16. Detroit Evening News, September 5, 1887.

17. Ibid.; Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC.

18. Judson Grenell, Autobiography, unpublished manuscript (Clearwater, Florida, 1930), Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections, pp. 30-1. "Rubbing Elbows with People Worthwhile--XXVI--Charles Erb," by Grenell, undated clipping, c. 1905, in Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC; Detroit Evening News, September 5, 1887.

19. Grenell, pp. 23, 28-9, 31.

20. "Rubbing Elbows with People Worthwhile," op. cit.

21. Grenell, p. 30.

22. Grenell, p. 32; The Socialist, June 14, 1879.

23. The Socialist, December 8, 1877; March 23, 1878; Grenell, p. 34; "Men Who Make Your Cigars," clipping in Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC.

24. Grenell, pp. 1, 32.

25. The Socialist, June 14, 1879; Socialist Labor Party of America Records (microfilm edition), State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1970: outgoing correspondence, September 19, 1883 and October 10, 1883; flyer c. 1880 advertising Socialist Tract Society; The Trades, April 10, 1880.

26. Grenell, p. 32; The Socialist, April 20, 1878.

27. Grenell, p. 32; The Socialist, September 28, 1878; December 8, 1877.

28. Detroit Free Press, September 28, 1877. Erb was born in Detroit of foreign parents. The newspaper described him as Dutch, but this was probably slang for German.

29. SBS, 1884, p. 143. Stephen Thernstrom estimates that 25 percent of Boston's workers could not vote in this period because they had not been in the city long enough to meet residency requirements. "Socialism and Social Mobility" in Laslett and Lipset, Failure of a Dream? (Garden City, New York: Doubleday-Anchor, 1974), p. 516.

30. Grenell, p. 33; The Socialist, April 5 and 12, 1879, gives detailed and convincing accounts of these practices in one Chicago election.

31. Detroit Free Press, November 7, 8, 1877; Grenell, p. 33; Labadie to T. V. Powderly, December 7, 1879, TVP.

32. Bulletin of the Social Labor Movement, Vol. 1, No. 14, December and January, 1881.

33. Detroit Free Press, May 23, 1878. The SLP program called for nationalization of all means of production, transportation, and communication, not just telegraphs, canals, and railroads. As the reference to coolies reveals, the SLP supported Chinese exclusion. A few party members wrote letters to The Socialist arguing that the Chinese should have as much right to immigrate as anyone else. Capitalists, critics of exclusion argued, not Chinese laborers, should be blamed for falling wages. Despite these notable exceptions, The Socialist usually exhibited a racist attitude toward Chinese workers, even to the extent of carrying rather crudely racist anti-Chinese jokes.

34. The Socialist, May 18, 1878.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., May 11, 1878.

38. Labadie to Powderly, December 7, 1879, TVP.

39. The Socialist, May 11, 1879; June 8, 1878; Labor Review, August, 1881; September, 1881.

40. The Socialist, February 16, 1878.

41. Ibid., February 9, 1878.

42. Ibid., December 8, 1877; January 12, 1878; February 16, 1878; March 23, 1878. The only reference

to female SLP members in Detroit is a report of a Christmas Ball in the January 12, 1878 issue of The Socialist. The tone suggests that this Women's Section was an unofficial women's auxiliary of "wives, sisters, and sweethearts."

43. The Socialist, September 28, 1878; May 3, 1879; June 14, 1879.

44. The Trades, July 12, 1879; The Socialist, July 12, 1879.

45. Three Stars, January, 1880; February, 1880.

46. Labor Review, March 1880. David Montgomery, Beyond Equality (New York: Vintage, 1972), p. 230. In the mid-eighties, the Detroit Labor Leaf office served the same functions as the Workingmen's Club Room of 1880. People gathered around the clock to talk and tramping workers used the office for emergency shelter.

47. The Socialist, March 16, 1878; Detroit Times, April 10, 1881; The Socialist, January 12, 1878.

48. The Socialist, January 12, 1878; January 19, 1878; Detroit Times, May 8, 1881.

49. Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol. 1, pp. 500-2; The National Socialist, June 15, 1878; The Socialist, February 16, 1878; January 19, 1878.

50. Foner, op. cit., pp. 503-4.

51. Ware, The Labor Movement in the United States, pp. 22-3, 28, 74.

52. Ware, op. cit., pp. 26-9; Foner, op. cit., pp. 435-37. A number of socialist sources from around the turn of the century claimed Stephens met members of the First International on travels to Europe in the 1860's, and he was given a copy of the works of Marx by Eccarius. Commons accepted this view; Ware disputed it. The evidence is flimsy, but of course, that does not prove the legend false.

53. The Socialist, October 19, 1878; Knights of Labor-Michigan File, LC, especially 1926 typewritten account of Joseph Labadie. There is some confusion about when Litchman came to Detroit and the details of his visit. Grenell described the October, 1878 speech but said nothing about the Knights of Labor. This is not surprising since

the Knights were secret, and Grenell may not yet have been initiated. Labadie's 1926 account (he was 76) puts the meeting with the Crispins in November, 1879, a lapse of memory clearly contradicted by other evidence. An account published in 1887 puts Litchman's meeting and the founding of the K. of L. LA 901 in November, 1878. Anne Inglis, curator of the Labadie Collection in the 1920's, believed that Litchman came to Detroit several times and that Labadie had combined the visits in his memory.

54. Knights of Labor-Michigan File, LC.

55. Minutes of the Washington Literary Society, LC; ***, LC; Labor Review, October 2, 1880; October 9, 1880.

56. The National Socialist, June 15, 1878; Minutes of the Washington Literary Society, LC; The Socialist, October 19, 1878; Labor Review, March, 1882. Grenell's Baptist heritage should be recalled. He came to Detroit to work on the Michigan Christian Herald, which his minister brother had helped organize and was employed there from 1876 to 1879. See also: Herbert Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age," in Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America, pp. 79-117.

57. Adelphon Kruptos (n.d.), LC.

58. Joseph Labadie to T. V. Powderly, February 24, 1880, TVP.

59. Reminiscence of George W. Duncan, Knights of Labor-Michigan File, LC. Labadie argued that Duncan exaggerated the feeder role of the Trades Council. It had other functions as well.

60. The Socialist, May 18, 1878. Data on backgrounds of early SLP and K of L members was collated from all available sources and included in the data bank on Detroit labor leaders. Sources include Minutes of Washington Literary Society, the various Detroit labor papers, city directories, and the many accounts and reminiscences of the period in later sources.

61. Minutes of the Washington Literary Society, LC.

62. Knights of Labor General Assembly Proceedings, 1879; Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC; Detroit Trades Council File, LC; Minutes of the Washington Literary Society, LC. Powderly was given an SLP red card by Van Patten at the 1880 Weaver convention at which a formal

alliance between the SLP and the Greenbackers was arranged. By 1887, Powderly had repudiated socialism and labor radicalism. After Haymarket, he redbaited radicals within the Knights, hoping thereby to maintain the Knights' image of respectability. Labadie and other radicals recalled Powderly's earlier socialist membership. Powderly claimed that he had accepted the card simply as a gift out of personal courtesy to Van Patten, and he had never really been a socialist. Ware and others have accepted Powderly's story, but he was clearly lying. A number of Detroit SLP members testified to Powderly's active participation between 1880 and 1882. The evidence is clear: Van Patten to Powderly, August 13, 1880: "From your letter I judge that you wish to remain a member of the SLP." Detroit Evening News, September 16, 1887: Henry Kummerfeld, who was treasurer of the SLP National Executive when it was in Detroit, ridiculed Powderly's story. He personally remembered opening Powderly's letters with \$1 dues. Powderly was a member from 1880 to 1882. Herzig, Labadie, Grenell, and P. C. Christiansen, all SLP officers at the time, corroborated Kummerfeld's account. The exact nature of Powderly's socialism is unclear, but his participation is not. The kind of utopian socialism accepted by many labor leaders would be quite consistent with Powderly's reform agitation.

63. Lyman Brant was the president of Detroit Typographical Union 18, a leader in the International Typographical Union, and one of the founders of the 1881 Federation of Trades that became the AFL. He was elected to the Michigan legislature in 1882 and 1884. McClelland was a cigarmaker and was also elected to the state legislature in 1884. Both joined LA 901 in January, 1879.

64. Labor Review, August, 1881.

65. Ibid., August, 1881; November, 1881; KLDB.

66. Labor Review, November, 1881; Socialist Labor Party of America Records, letter from Adelia Marger, December 5, 1880. A number of contemporary and modern scholars have emphasized the Germanness of the SLP as a major source of weakness, among them Friedrich Sorge, Labor Movement in the United States, ed. Philip S. Foner (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1977). Sorge notes that the anti-socialist laws in Germany produced an influx of German socialists after 1878 who were more interested in Germany and factional disputes within the German SPD than events in the U.S. One indicator of German dominance in the SLP is the SLP's policy, although habitually short of funds itself, of collecting funds in the U.S. for the

SPD. Sorge's argument is confirmed for Detroit by a note in the Bulletin of the Social Labor Movement, December-January, 1881, "Comrades Koennecke and Keitel, two exiles from Germany, are with us, and addressed mass meetings which were largely attended."

67. Labor Review, August, 1881; March, 1882.

68. Grenell, Autobiography, p. 32.

69. Philip Van Patten to T. V. Powderly, July 15, 1880, TVP.

70. Labor Review, October 2 and 9, 1880.

71. Van Patten to Powderly, July 15, 1880, TVP.

72. Ibid.

73. Labor Review, September 3, 11, 1880. I have, unfortunately, only been able to locate one issue of the Bulletin, published after the Weaver campaign, which casts little light on the identity of the kickers.

74. Judson Grenell, Economic Tangles, pp. 132-5, LC.

75. Emil Kreis to Section Detroit, June 21, 1883 (2?, illegible); also, July 27, 1883; October 10, 1883; December 5, 1883; SLP Records, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

76. Labor Review, August, 1881.

77. Detroit Evening News, September 5, 1887; KLDB, Knights of Labor 1886 General Assembly Proceedings, pp. 326-28. The SLP was further weakened by defection of members to the IWPA created by the Chicago anarchists. It is not clear exactly when this began in Detroit, but Detroit had two IWPA sections in 1885. This split is described in Henry David, The History of the Haymarket Affair (New York: Russell and Russell, 1958). It probably postdated the withdrawal of Labadie, Grenell, et al, which does not seem to be directly related to the IWPA defection. Labadie described himself as an anarchist by the mid-1880's, but his anarchism was philosophical, based on arguments gleaned from Benjamin Tucker's Liberty. Labadie carefully disassociated himself from "Most, Schwab, 'The Alarm,' and that class of people" in a letter to Prof. Ely in 1885 (Fine, "The Ely-Labadie Letters").

Chapter 5
THE GROWTH OF WORKING CLASS INSTITUTIONS
IN DETROIT, 1880-1886

I. Unions

The SLP's political campaigns and social events, the Party's recruitment of English speaking individuals, the founding of Knights of Labor Assembly 901, and the organization of the Trades Council were the first stages in the creation of the infrastructure of a revitalized labor movement based on values of solidarity and opposition to the existing industrial system. The scope, complexity, and range of workers' organizations increased throughout the early 1880's, so that by 1885 or 1886 there was a network of interrelated institutions which recruited workers on a class basis and provided for a wide enough variety of workers' needs that activists and supporters could function much like participants in a counterculture--working, agitating, learning, socializing, shopping, and relaxing within a cultural milieu that was consistent with their convictions. This pattern of broad concurrent participation in a variety of organizations

whose functions went far beyond those of collective bargaining is the best evidence for the existence of what I have called the subculture of opposition. While the number of active participants was never more than a fraction of the city's wage workers, that proportion grew steadily in the early 1880's, and the increasing numbers of participants exercised wider and wider influence beyond their own ranks, and thus laying the basis for the explosive expansion of the movement in 1886.

The unions formed the initial base of this network of subsidiary organizations. The Labor Party, the workingmen's militia, the labor press, the cooperatives depended upon union support for their survival. As union membership expanded and the unions were increasingly influenced by the growing spirit of reform, they were increasingly willing and able to provide such support. At the same time union participation in a broader range of activities accelerated the process of internal change within the unions. Unions became more willing to assist each other, more aggressive in organizing their own trades, more interested in organizing other crafts, and more willing to expend time and energy on member education.

The Detroit Trades Council, for example, started small in March, 1880, amidst some of the same kinds of bickering which had destroyed the Labor League,¹ but when iron molders at the Detroit Stove Works went out on strike

in May, the Trades Council endorsed the strike and was able to raise \$88.70 in strike support from the other unions within the first week of the strike. Two weeks later, the Council's contributions to the striking molders had reached \$152.80. By the end of June, the Typographical Union, which had refused to endorse the Labor League Constitution a year and a half earlier because of opposition to the principle of strike support for other unions, voted \$25 for the ironmolders. A benefit picnic held by the Trades Council at the beginning of July netted another \$60 for the Ironmolders' Union. A few days later, the Ironmolders returned to work victorious with a 5 percent wage increase.² The Trades Council's ability to mobilize widespread support for the Ironmolders contrasted sharply with the failure of the Labor League.³ Membership in the Ironmolders' Union tripled from 50 to 150 as a result of the success and reached 250 by October.⁴

Other unions reported similar increases in 1880: the Cigarmakers from 15 in February to 250 in October; the Painters from 85 in April to 150 in October; the Cabinetmakers, organized in February, 170 in October. The Trades Council had thirteen affiliated unions (out of sixteen in the city) in October--up from six in April --and by January, 1881, Philip Van Patten and Thomas Dolan of the SLP had organized seven more new unions and the Trades Council had twenty-four member unions. By

April, 1881, Francis Egan of the Printers, new President of the Trades Council, reported thirty-one member unions and claimed a membership of four thousand.⁵

Local socialists were the most energetic advocates of the Trades Council and helped to organize many of the constituent unions. Officers rotated frequently, but about half of the officers elected during the Council's first year were SLP members. E. W. Simpson became the first recording secretary, Labadie served as both corresponding secretary and president at various times, Philip Van Patten also occupied the position of corresponding secretary, and Adam Stuermer was treasurer. The organization was not, however, simply a Party front. The first president, Francis Egan, was a Republican. Egan was replaced by Labadie in October, 1880, but was reelected the following spring. The Council expressed its independence of the Party when it denied the Party's request to march in the Council's public demonstration in October, 1880, although it encouraged individual Party members to march with their unions. A number of socialists supported the decision against the Party agreeing that the Trades Council could not be too closely identified with any party if it hoped to appeal to all of Detroit's workers. The Council thus sought to be a broad based representative of all the city's organized workers.⁶

By the fall of 1880, the Trades Council was strong

enough to make a public show of strength. Their demonstration, held on the evening of October 19, 1880, drew fifteen hundred participants.⁷ The Detroit Post and Tribune, one of the city's more conservative daily newspapers, found the display of union power disconcerting. "To the outsider there is something mysterious in the movement."⁸ Perhaps as a gesture of defiance, leading the parade as Grand Marshall was William Kydd who had been fired from Fales Brothers, paper dealers, for union activities three weeks before.⁹ Each of the Trades Council's member unions joined the parade along with four marching bands, a contingent of Detroit Stove Works laborers expressing gratitude for the Council's support in their recent strike, and another contingent of unorganized laborers and tradesmen. Banners and transparencies carried by various unions indicated the range of social reforms the unions sought. The Knights of St. Crispin (shoemakers) declared "Children Belong in Schools Not in the Factories" and suggested an anticapitalist perspective with the slogan "Stop the Robbery. Labor Must Have All Its Products!" The Machinery Molders urged "Bread and Water for Idle Speculation, Not for Mechanics," a reference to Henry Ward Beecher's sermon. The Ironmolders expressed opposition to contract labor by prisoners with a banner reading "Free Labor, No Convict Labor." Several unions argued that higher wages would benefit society in general, not just the

workers receiving the higher pay. The Machinery Molders, for example, linked general prosperity with workers' wages: "Prosperity Means Fair Wages." The Iron Molders thought that improvements in the workers' conditions were the measure of progress: "Human Progress Requires the Elevation of Labor." The Painters argued the converse, that "Low Wages Mean Degradation and Crime." The Typographical Union indicated its acceptance of the doctrine of solidarity: "The Trades Council is the Workingman's Legislature," "Mutual Aid," "Amalgamate." The Cigarmakers defended the eight hour day: "8 Hours A Day Means An Increase in Pay."¹⁰

The Typographical Union's description of the Trades Council as a workers' legislature is suggestive of the scope of the Council's activities. The Council was supported by dues from its constituent unions based on their membership, one cent per member per month. Each union was allowed to send six delegates to the meetings which were held every other week.¹¹ The meetings typically involved reports of activities and the state of the trade by each union, some practical questions of immediate concern to the Council as a whole, issues of a more theoretical nature or educational presentations on various topics. In 1880, in addition to writing and ratifying its Constitution, expanding its organizing efforts, aiding the Iron-molders, and staging the Fall demonstration, the Council

passed a resolution of support for California Workingmen's Party leader Denis Kearney, made plans to welcome Charles Litchman who was passing through Detroit on another speaking tour, discussed the importation of Canadian workers by local employers, and heard presentations on the topic of cooperation (i.e., formation of producers' cooperatives).¹² The following year the organization formed an arbitration committee to settle disputes with local employers, invited local labor orator Richard Trevellick to speak on the mission of the labor movement, endorsed the Detroit Times (another of Labadie and Grenell's weeklies) as its official paper, heard a temperance presentation by Andrew Forbes, the President of the Seamen's Union, received word of renewed difficulties at the Detroit Stove Works and a strike at the Pullman Car Works, and helped to found a local labor party.¹³ The Council's activities thus represented all of the types of problems and ideas which were of concern to union activists. Particularly striking was the continued emphasis on educational lectures--meetings were not simply bureaucratic affairs. By 1884, formal lectures or group discussions on ideological topics had become an accepted part of every meeting. An article in the Labor Leaf in December, 1884, listed recent discussion questions which had included the "Malthusian Theory of population, tariff, hours of labor, employment of children in workshops, and prison management."¹⁴

The character and quality of the Trades Council was reflective of the temperaments of the individuals chosen as delegates. With six delegates per union, Council meetings were large affairs including a cross section of the labor movement and almost all possible ideological viewpoints, but the more militant and committed activists were present to a disproportionate degree. There is very little evidence of intense competition within unions for the office of Council Delegate. Indeed, elections for Council delegates are rarely mentioned in the labor press, union publications, or daily newspapers, although election contests for most other union offices were widely discussed and often hotly contested. It seems likely, then, although there is not enough evidence to say for sure, that some union leaders viewed the prospect of regular attendance at the Council as an obligation, not an honor, and many delegates were volunteers who were enthusiastic about the ideas of trade amalgamation and solidarity.

The attitudes of individual unions towards the concept of trade amalgamation or the kinds of programs pursued by the Trades Council varied from extremely conservative unions who rejected the whole concept of solidarity and refused to affiliate in any way with other unions, to revolutionary unions who considered the Trades Council far too cautious and conciliatory in its tone

and perspective. While the overall ideological balance within the trade unions was clearly shifting to the left during the early 1880's, it is important to recognize the continuation of this ideological spectrum.

At one extreme was the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, who rejected not only Trades Council affiliation but almost all alliances with other organizations, practiced exclusionary membership policies, and campaigned in favor of political candidates opposed by the other unions. The Brotherhood described its goals in lofty moral tones, but membership rules explicitly emphasized the desire for exclusiveness. The objects of the organization were "to combine the interests of locomotive engineers, to elevate their standing...and to elevate their character as men." Membership was limited to white men, over twenty-one years of age, who could read and write and were "of good moral character" and "temperate habits." Members had to be employed as engineers at the time of application and have at least one year's experience as an engineer.¹⁵

The membership requirements were designed to preserve locomotive engineers as an elite craft. The limitations of race, sex, and age are obvious, while the exclusionary intent of such euphemisms as "good moral character" are only slightly less clear. The employment and experience requirements are more subtle. When the

Brotherhood was able to gain union shop agreements from management, these requirements gave them effective control over entrance into the craft. Only union members could be hired under a union shop agreement, but one could not join the union unless currently employed as an engineer. Together the union shop and the employment requirement for union membership could be used to limit access to the craft and prevent companies from promoting firemen, switchmen, or other railroad workers to engineer. Any hiring would have to come out of the existing pool of union engineers.¹⁶

The conservative character of the Detroit BLE was perhaps best illustrated by its conduct during the 1884 elections. Detroit Typographical Union 18 had undertaken a vigorous campaign against Gen. Alger, the Republican candidate for governor, because Alger, as owner of the Detroit Post and Tribune, refused to hire union printers and forbade any printers in his employ from joining the union. The Typo's action was endorsed by the Trades Council, and the Labor Leaf received numerous pledges to help defeat Alger from various Detroit unions and unions around the state, but the BLE actively campaigned in favor of Alger. His opponent, incumbent governor Josiah Begole, had been a Greenbacker and was considered to be more sympathetic to unions than any previous Michigan governor, but Begole had angered the engineers when he

failed to seek the Brotherhood's endorsement for an appointment to the state's railroad commission.¹⁷

The Progressive Cigarmakers Union No. 21 was representative of the other end of the ideological spectrum. A spokesman for the organization explained to the Labor Leaf in 1885 that, as a matter of principle, the union had no president. Leadership duties were rotated with a new chairman elected at every meeting. "The organization is very democratic believing that the will of the majority, unrestricted, is the sole power to govern."¹⁸ The only regular officer, Secretary Henry Schulte, was active in the revolutionary anarchist International Working People's Association (which had two sections and about one hundred active members in Detroit.)¹⁹ Schulte and the Progressive Cigarmakers were also instrumental in the formation of the Central Labor Union in 1886, a primarily German city labor federation with a forthrightly anticapitalist perspective. Schulte was elected English Recording Secretary of the CLU and chaired the CLU's first agitation meeting at which the topic of discussion was "the brutal acts of the capitalistic class against labor organizations."²⁰

This revolutionary perspective did not, however, distract the Progressive Cigarmakers from immediate practical programs. The union charged weekly dues of fifteen cents out of which they financed a comprehensive benefit program. Strikes had to be approved by a two-thirds

vote of the entire membership of the International Union. If approved, striking members received strike pay of five dollars per week. Sick workers got four dollars per week from the local for the first eight weeks out of work and two dollars per week for an additional eight weeks. The union paid a death benefit of thirty dollars to widows of members to assist with funeral expenses, and it loaned money out of its treasury to unemployed members. The union also provided a security guarantee to merchants who extended credit to unemployed members. A union spokesman noted that the default on such loans and credits to unemployed members was less than 10 percent, an indication of member loyalty. The radical posture of the Progressives did not isolate them from other unions. Schulte, who had occupied all of the offices from Corresponding Secretary to President in Cigarmakers Union No. 22 prior to the formation of the Progressives, was subsequently elected Recording Secretary, Financial Secretary, and President of the Trades Council, Master Workman of the Knights of Labor Local Assembly 2348, and Recording Secretary of Knights of Labor District Assembly 50.²¹

Schulte's acceptance by the Trades Council was one indication of the radicalization of the union movement in Detroit. By 1885, the Trades Council seated him as a delegate of the IWPA, a reversal of the earlier policy forbidding representation or independent participation for

socialist political organizations. In the same year the Trades Council staged another demonstration and allowed SLP members to march under the Party's banner rather than just as union members. The Labor Leaf felt that this change in the Council's attitude was "an indicator of the growth of a healthy labor sentiment."²²

The 1885 march indicated the movement's progress. Estimates of the number of marchers ranged from 1,700 (by the most antiunion of the daily papers) to 6,000, with 3,000 as the most widely accepted figure. Organizers of the demonstration viewed it as a symbol of the movement's development. Although there were widespread rumors (which later proved to be true) that employers had hired spotters to record names of union supporters, the parade had drawn twice as many participants as the 1880 demonstration. The unions, the socialists, and the Knights of Labor had combined forces in an impressive display of unity. Leading the parade were large portraits of Henry George, Tom Barry (a radical Saginaw Knights of Labor leader who had led a recent Saginaw Valley lumber mill strike and been elected to the Knights of Labor General Executive Board), Terence Powderly, and Richard Trevellick. The slogans on banners denounced child labor, applauded Henry George's land theories, and heralded the rise of "The Coming Knights of Labor."²³

By 1884 and 1885, both the unions and the Knights

of Labor were making more serious attempts to counteract the fragmenting effects of ethnic and craft differences and differences in individual opportunities. As early as 1883, the English language labor press (The Unionist) began publishing regular sections in German. The Labor Leaf duplicated the Unionist's efforts at a multi-ethnic approach, in particular printing major strike and boycott announcements in German as well as English. It also printed occasional articles in Polish. Editorials in the labor press reiterated a consistent refrain of collective unity. Workers would progress together; they must resist opportunities for individual gain offered by employers which were at the expense of fellow workers. Otherwise competition among the workers would eventually drive down wages to the detriment of all. The Labor Leaf attributed the demise of the Horsecollar Makers' Union to this competition among workers. Some horsecollar makers were taking extra work home at night while many other horsecollar makers were unemployed. They would regret such temporary gains, the Labor Leaf argued. Work should be shared in times of scarcity, and there would be less downward pressure on wages as a result.²⁴

Some of the most highly paid crafts in the city accepted the logic of the Labor Leaf's argument. The Bricklayers' Union, for example, took the initiative in organizing other building trades workers--first the

carpenters and then the primarily Polish laborers and hod carriers. The Labor Leaf commended the Bricklayers:

"Detroit Bricklayers and Masons Union No. 2 deserves great credit." By April, 1885, the Laborers Union organized by the Bricklayers reported 557 members. The Bricklayers also aided workers in other cities. In December, 1884, they sent \$100 to striking Hocking Valley (Ohio) coal miners. The Trades Council, the Upholsterers Union, the Iron Molders, and the Typographical Union also contributed to the Hocking Valley miners, while Cigarmakers' Union No. 22 raised an incredible \$4,651.75 over a nine month period to help fellow cigarmakers locked out in Cincinnati. "Brave, self-sacrificing fellows," commented the Labor Leaf.²⁵

Yet despite all of these efforts, the local labor movement did not grow dramatically between 1881 and 1885. By 1885, the movement was more sophisticated, more radical, performed a wider range of functions, included more auxiliary and supportive institutions, and was more able to mobilize its followers effectively, but total union membership had not increased by much more than a thousand over the 1881 figure of 4,000. In December of 1885, Judson Grenell estimated union membership in Detroit at 5,000 and the total number of wage workers in the city at 30,000. The labor movement had thus organized only one worker in six according to Grenell's estimate.²⁶

To advocates of universal organization and of a class conscious movement these results were inadequate. Union organizers often attributed disappointing union membership figures to worker apathy. One of the more frequent contributors to the Labor Leaf wrote in January, 1885, that the "stumbling block in the way of progress is the apathy of...those who ought to be most interested... If workingmen generally could only be taught to comprehend the wealth inherent in their labor...To remove this apathy is the hardest task..."²⁷ But what the organizer called apathy may have been something else. Some workers consciously rejected the doctrine of collective action in favor of the ethic of individual achievement. Many others, as the rapid influx of members the following year suggests, were interested but afraid.

Except for a few of the interviews conducted by the State Bureau of Labor Statistics, we have very little first hand testimony from antiunion workers about their motivations and psychology. We can, however, gain some insight indirectly from the pages of the Detroit labor press. One of the most frequently used forms of editorial commentary in the Unionist and the Labor Leaf was the fictionalized conversation between typical workers. Tom or Dick or Ned would be crying about his fate or criticizing union policies. Another worker would respond with answers he had heard from a friend at his factory or the fellow down the

block. The hapless critic would inevitably recognize the superior logic of these answers. The labor press was essentially the collective product of a group of union activists, so the antiunion arguments presented in these stories are probably a good indication of the questions organizers faced from hostile workers.

In one version, repeated over and over again in various forms, one of the characters would question the value of unions altogether and suggest that union dues were a waste of hard earned money. A story published in the Unionist in 1882 tried to give a businesslike answer. A printer who had joined the union complains that "I have been a member of the union ten years, and I never received a cent benefit from it...I have not got a cent from its Treasury." His antagonist leaps to the union's defense. The union, its defender claims, has raised the minimum weekly wage by \$2.50. While it may be true that the printer never collected anything directly from the union, he had received \$2.50 a week more in wages every week for ten years because of the union. Therefore, "for the past ten years the union has been a direct cash benefit to you of \$1,200 less about \$50 costs. Net profit on the transaction \$1,150." But the skeptical printer did not give in so easily. He was a good worker, much better than average, and his employers always recognized this. "I always got above the scale." The union wage scale was

irrelevant if his employer was willing to pay him more anyway for his superior skill. In the story, the printer is finally won over when the union's supporter convinces him that the wages of all workers in the industry, even more highly paid workers, fluctuate in proportion to the union scale. While the printer might still receive a premium from employers anxious for his services, if the base rate were \$2.50 lower, his wages would also be \$2.50 lower. The editors of the Unionist and the Labor Leaf always won these arguments in their own columns, but the evidence on union membership suggests that their logic was not always so compelling in practice.²⁸

The successes of individuals who had superior opportunities, whether because of better skills, native birth, or luck, must have raised considerable doubts about the practical value of unionism. Why pay union dues if you can do just as well without paying them? There is no way of estimating what proportion of non-unionized workers consciously followed this line of reasoning, but the constant recurrence of arguments against it in the labor press indicates that labor organizers believed the number was significant. Such workers were not apathetic about their condition or about unions; they had other alternatives in mind for changing their situation.

But a substantial proportion of the non-unionized workers were neither opposed to unionism nor indifferent

to it. They were unable or afraid to organize stable unions, but they were sympathetic to union doctrines. Again it is impossible to measure the number of such unorganized supporters precisely, but two types of evidence suggest that prior to 1886 the number was at least as large as the number of union members. First there is the extraordinary growth in membership in mid-1886. In December, 1885, Grenell estimated the total organized strength of the local labor movement at 5,000.²⁹ Just nine months later, one of the daily newspapers estimated the combined membership of the unions and the Knights of Labor at 13,000. Most of this growth took place between April and July, 1886.³⁰ Unless we assume over night conversions for some five or six thousand people, we must believe that many of them had been sympathetic before but had hesitated to join a labor organization until a period of unprecedented union power. This interpretation gains further credibility when we examine union activities which depended on non-union support for success, especially boycotts. Few boycotts could have been successful if they had only been observed by the four or five thousand union members present in Detroit before 1886. There are no systematic records of boycott activity to measure the success rates of boycott actions, but various reports in the labor press suggest much more substantial declines in the sales of boycotted firms than could have been accomplished by

union members alone. In 1881, for example, the Trades Council reported a drop of one-third in the circulation of the Sunday edition of the Detroit Free Press as a result of a boycott called by the Typographical Union.³¹

Thus, union membership was not the only indication of union support. The effects of boycotts, successful political activities, strikes by non-unionized workers, and the growth of a wider range of working class social, cultural, and educational institutions all indicate that sympathy with the movement's objectives and at least a low level of class consciousness were increasing between 1881 and 1886 more rapidly than union membership statistics would suggest. The relatively slow growth rate in union membership must be considered an indication of the success of employer opposition.

The labor press regularly reported firings of union activists throughout the period of this study, but beginning about 1881 employer anti-unionism started to become more systematic and organized. In 1881, for example, vessel owners organized (unsuccessfully) to destroy the Seamen's Union. The owners' association taxed each vessel owner at the rate of five cents per ton of cargo in order to accumulate a contingency fund with which to fight the union.³² In the same year, the Michigan Stove Company succeeded in nearly destroying the Iron Molders' union that had won the previous year's strike.

At the end of March, the company closed temporarily, ostensibly because of a shortage of coke. When the company reopened a few days later, it announced that all previous agreements with the workers' shop committee were void, that such workers' shop committees would not be permitted in the future, and that the factory was now a "new shop." Each former employee must apply for work as if the factory were opening for the first time. To soften the blow of this attack on the union, the company announced a pay increase of ten percent for molders who would comply with the new regime. Sixty union molders who would not were discharged. The workers again received extensive financial support from other unions as they had the year before, but this time the company was determined to have its way, and its power was greater. Pro-business priests recruited scabs for the company in their Sunday sermons. Union molders who found work at other companies in the area were discharged from their new jobs as the Michigan Stove Company circulated a blacklist of union members and other supporters. Once the union was driven out, workers complained that the wage increase was not honored and the company even refused to publish a price list indicating the piece rate it would pay. Employees would not know the rate of pay until they received their pay envelopes. Other companies followed the Michigan Stove Works' example. Baugh's Steam Forge fired its union molders and

stood firm against the union despite apparent efforts by sympathizers still employed to sabotage production (contractors reportedly returned six hundred axles sold by the firm because of poor workmanship and at one point, the Unionist reported "over 50 percent of all the work done at this forge has to be thrown back in the furnace since the union left.")). The Peninsular Stove Company followed suit in October of 1882. Local manufacturers sought assistance from the National Stove Founders Defense Association formed in 1882. By the mid-1880's, membership in the Iron Molders' Union was reduced to "a mere handful."³³

The experience of the iron molders was duplicated in many other trades. Against such stiff opposition many unions found it nearly impossible to survive. After the broom makers union was destroyed in 1884 when the workers were starved into submission during a long strike, the Labor Leaf advised that workers must learn to "prepare for war in time of peace." Workers should agree to high union dues, even if this entailed sacrifice, in order to accumulate large enough strike funds to last through protracted strikes.³⁴ Although many unions and Knights of Labor assemblies resorted to secrecy in order to protect their members from reprisal, employers were able to hire spies to report the names of union supporters. In 1885, in preparation for the Trades Council demonstration, employers

hired thirteen Pinkerton agents to infiltrate local unions and Knights of Labor assemblies. Once accepted as members, the agents were free to march in the parade and record names of marchers for their employers. A number of workers were fired as a result of their participation in the demonstration, including five shoemakers at Pingree and Smith's.³⁵

Union membership trends must be evaluated with the background of this level of employer opposition in mind. In the face of concerted efforts to suppress unionism entirely, even the moderate rate of membership increase between 1881 and 1885 has to be viewed as a relative success. Unions had survived tough opposition, established stable organizations, grown slightly, increased their political influence and community stature dramatically. Even where antiunion drives were successful, as in the case of the iron molders, widespread support for organization remained. Following their defeats in the early 1880's, a core of iron molders, resorting to the secrecy of the Knights of Labor, formed a molders' assembly within the Knights. By the late 1880's, the result, Garland Assembly 619, had organized skilled and unskilled iron workers on an industrial basis into the city's largest Knights of Labor assembly with a reported membership of eight hundred. Unionism had become a component in the mass culture of workers that transcended the fortunes of a

particular union local.³⁶

But trade union consciousness is not class consciousness. The spirit and practice of the city's unions in the early 1880's reflected the complex and conflicting trends in workers' attitudes. While the growing radicalization of unions, the expansion of union functions, the increased support for political and educational activities reflected the tendency towards class, the structure and some of the practices of unions perpetuated craft and ethnic differences among workers. Many unions recruited membership on the basis of narrow craft specialization, ethnicity, or both. Technological changes within industry produced new sub-crafts which increasingly demanded autonomous organization. Thus, at the same time that radical activists were preaching the doctrine of trade amalgamation, many crafts were subdividing and disamalgamating. Printers, for example, had three separate unions: Typographical Union No. 18, the German Printers Union, and the Pressman's Union. Molders, although the defeats of the early 1880's might have suggested a need for unity, divided into three unions in addition to the Knights of Labor assembly: Iron Molders' Union No. 31, Machine Molders No. 244, and the Brotherhood of Brass Molders (which affiliated with the Knights of Labor in 1882 and disaffiliated again in 1891). Stove company workers formed a wide array of craft unions in the early 1880's, in addition to the molders' unions, for

nearly every step in the production process from stove-mounting to metal polishing. Even such self-consciously socialist unions as the Progressive Cigarmakers depended as much on ethnicity as ideology for support. All of its spokesmen were Germans. The Central Labor Union organized with a good deal of revolutionary fanfare and Marxist rhetoric, but its raison d'etre was the desire for a German union federation--for German unionists, a certain amount of socialist phraseology was accepted cultural practice.³⁷

The implications of union growth were thus contradictory. Union success was possible in part because of class consciousness, yet unions defined themselves in ways which reflected the very forces which prevented the development of class consciousness. Advocates of class conscious organization were divided on how to respond. Some, like the Progressive Cigarmakers, seemed to feel that forthright allegiance to socialism qualitatively changed the character of unionism. Some of the SLP stalwarts, following the Lasallean tradition in German Social Democracy, were openly hostile to trade unionism, arguing for the supremacy of politics and the Party. Men like Joseph Labadie and Judson Grenell tried to strike a middle ground. On the one hand they energetically supported trade union organization on the grounds that any organization was better than none at all. At the same time,

they tried to convince unionists of the need for a broader more social definition of goals and a more comprehensive form of organization. Eventually, they hoped, all of the unions could be convinced to join the Knights of Labor.

II. Knights of Labor

The initial progress of the Knights of Labor in Detroit hardly justified the central role that its organizers envisioned. After the rapid initiation of about three dozen men into Local Assembly 901 in its first four months, growth ceased completely. The pattern of nomination of candidates shows that members had proposed their close friends. Apparently this little circle of acquaintances reached its limits rather quickly. The assembly stagnated for the next two years, some members lost interest, and the membership dropped to twenty-three.³⁸

The Assembly functioned primarily as a bi-monthly study group and collective strategy session for a group of organizers and active reformers. The sessions brought together socialists, single taxers, cooperators, Green-backers for a necessary form of ideological debate. As a group, they were among the city's most important union organizers and working class political activists. They needed to talk out their differences in an atmosphere which was private and which maintained a spirit of amicability. Despite differences, they still had to work

together. The minutes of the Washington Literary Society, although quite sketchy, suggest a friendly atmosphere which contrasted sharply with the factional strife within the SLP. The meetings were valuable as a source of strategy: the idea for the Trades Council, for example, came out of one of them. But the Knights did not grow. Labadie and Van Patten wrote Powderly glowing letters about future prospects, but Local Assembly 901 remained a cadre, not a mass organization.³⁹

Perhaps they were too busy with the Weaver campaign, the Trades Council and SLP business. Labadie organized a small group of coal miners near Jackson, Michigan, at the end of 1879, but when new assemblies finally began to appear in Detroit at the beginning of 1882, the reports mention the name of a new organizer, David Barry. Secrecy also interfered with organizing efforts. Since even the name of the Order could not be spoken or written, not to mention its program or goals, there was no way to publicize the Knights. Prospective members could not even be approached directly on a personal basis since the organization's existence could not be revealed to non-members. Thus, candidates who had previously been approved (without their knowledge) for membership had to be recruited without being told exactly what it was they were joining until after they were initiated.⁴⁰

By 1879, both locally and nationally, some elements

within the Knights recognized that such extreme secrecy made organizing nearly impossible. In deference to opponents of secrecy, the St. Louis General Assembly in 1879 voted a slight relaxation of the rules. Assemblies and districts, if two-thirds of the members agreed, could reveal the name of the Order providing that the revelation was restricted to the immediate locality, that no members' names were revealed, and that the meeting place was not revealed. In 1880, LA 901 decided to publicize its existence and issued a resolution of support for the striking union molders. But the Detroit Knights provided no public explanation of who or what the Knights of Labor were. They seem to have understood that they needed publicity, yet balked at full disclosure. This ambivalence was quite representative of the spirit of the Knights' national leaders in 1880. Several weeks before LA 901 declared its solidarity with the iron molders, the editor of The Trades, the Knights' semi-official national paper, responded to a circular issued by the Detroit Knights of St. Crispin calling for a national shoemakers convention by advising them that:

If Detroit shoemakers will only open their eyes wide enough they will discover that the shoemakers of the United States are already compactly knit in a mightier organization than that to which they invite attention...Get into the right one, men of Detroit...Seek the solid foundation that has been laid from Marblehead to Sacramento by members of your own craft...

Such Aesopean advice did not work. Detroit Crispins joined the Knights two years later, only after the Knights had abandoned enough of their secrecy to allow organizers to explain the Order's goals.⁴¹

This change in policy took place at the General Assembly held in Detroit in September, 1881. The G. A. ordered Powderly to "issue an address to the world on January 1, 1882, proclaiming that there was such an organization as the Order of the Knights of Labor." The words noble and holy were dropped as well as the practice of substituting five stars for the Order's name in print. Parts of the secret ritual were also changed to satisfy objections of Catholic clergymen who had previously opposed the Order.⁴²

After the January first proclamation the fortunes of the Detroit Knights changed dramatically. More than one hundred new members were initiated by Local Assembly 901 in the first six months of 1882. As sufficient numbers of various crafts joined, they created their own assemblies. LA 901 thus spawned a host of craft unions within the structure of the Knights. In recognition of its role, 901 was given the name Pioneer Assembly by Detroit Knights. By March 1, two craft assemblies had been organized, a trunkmakers' assembly and Peninsular Assembly 1733, the remnants of the old Crispins lodge. By late April, assemblies of painters (mostly for the

railroad car shops), bootmakers, and forgers had been added, and in June, five assemblies applied for a District charter. Other assemblies followed in quick succession: tailors, shipcarpenters and caulkers, telegraphers, plasterers, brass workers, and one mixed assembly--a total of twelve by the end of the year with a membership of 397.⁴³

DA 50 was still a small body in comparison with the Trades Council, but for the first time, the Knights potential as a mass organization was clear. Although the membership was still relatively small, the new District Assembly, with its vision of class solidarity, had attracted some of the city's trade unions and had organized several previously unorganized crafts. A brochure published by DA 50 explained its purpose.

The alarming development and aggressiveness of great capitalists and corporations, unless checked, will inevitably lead to the pauperization and hopeless degradation of the toiling masses.

It is imperative, if we desire to enjoy the full blessings of life, that a check be put upon unjust accumulation, and the powers of evil of aggregated wealth.

This much desired object can be accomplished only by the united efforts of those who obey the divine injunction, "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread."

Therefore, we have formed the Order of the Knights of Labor, for the purpose of organizing and directing the power of the industrial masses...⁴⁴

By the end of the year, the District Assembly was prosperous enough to pay its Master Workman a salary so that he could devote more time to the Order's business.

Joseph Labadie, recently elected District Recording Secretary and re-elected along with David Barry as District Organizer, devoted himself to the Knights with new enthusiasm. He began a campaign to convince the Typographical Union, both nationally and locally, to affiliate as a body with the Knights of Labor. Local unions would become local assemblies of the Knights and the International would become an autonomous national trade district (with a representational status essentially equal to a regional district assembly but with national jurisdiction over craft matters). While he failed to convince the printers, Labadie anticipated a major trend in the Knights' evolution as a number of crafts (including coal miners, brewers, and shoemakers) did exactly as he proposed in the years after 1885.⁴⁵

Expansion of the Knights continued throughout 1883 in Detroit as membership in the city reached 797, and even more dramatically in the rest of the state through the end of 1884. When organizing efforts lagged somewhat in Detroit in 1884, with several assemblies disbanding and others in financial distress, organizers were too busy in the rest of the state to be concerned about the organization's future in the city. They literally rushed from one speaking engagement to the next all across the state, leaving trails of new assemblies behind them. In July, 1882, the Unionist reported that "The Saginaw Valley is being honeycombed with Assemblies of Knights of Labor.

Muskegon and Grand Haven are getting down to business. Calls from all over the state are pouring in for organizers to come and organize them." Richard Trevellick wrote Powderly that month describing "8 or 10" recent speaking engagements and reporting on David Barry's activities as well. Barry had established four new assemblies in one week.⁴⁶

Yet organizers could not keep up. A Flint mason, W. H. Barrett, wrote Powderly in 1882 for the address of Detroit organizers. He had been initiated in Topeka, Kansas, before coming to Michigan, had twenty local wage-workers ready to join, but could not find an organizer. Four months later, Barrett wrote Powderly again. His friends had formed an assembly. They were convinced that many local towns were ready to be organized. They decided to commission him as an organizer, against his own wishes, rather than wait for the Detroit men. Barrett did not need the money (organizers worked on a commission basis) since he earned "wages at three dollars per day," but he felt "duty bound" to accept the responsibility. "I am a laboring man...my whole heart is in the work (of organizing) and I am willing to do all I can to advance the order..."⁴⁷ Another organizer, D. C. Blinn of Bay City, wrote Powderly in November of 1882 asking for an organizer's commission since he had already started several local assemblies.⁴⁸

By the end of the year (1882), membership in Michigan topped one thousand, by the middle of 1883 the General Assembly Proceedings recorded 2,787 Michigan members, and by the end of 1883, Michigan membership reached 3,297. In 1884, the pace was even greater as state membership more than doubled again. Joseph Labadie and John Devlin (another prominent Detroit Knight elected to the state legislature in 1882), working in Lansing for the State Bureau of Labor Statistics, spoke to new assemblies in the Lansing area almost daily. "Brother Devlin and I have got a fair A. in Eaton Rapids," Labadie informed Powderly, "and organized one in Williamston the other night. He is going to Kalamazoo to organize another. I am going to North Lansing Thursday to form a preliminary organization and to Charlotte Friday night." By the end of 1884, there were over 150 local assemblies in Michigan with a total membership of 6,806. District Assemblies had been organized in Muskegon, Saginaw, Grand Rapids, and Manistee in addition to Detroit. Knights had elected local officials and state legislators in Detroit, Saginaw, Muskegon, and Grand Rapids and had nearly dominated the 1884 elections in Bay City.⁴⁹

In January of 1884, the Knights first State Assembly met in Detroit in response to a convention call by the Detroit Knights. Joseph Labadie presided as fifty delegates from all over the state passed resolutions demanding a Federal law prohibiting the importation of

foreign contract labor, pledging solidarity to other labor organizations, asking members and sympathizers to boycott the Detroit Free Press and the Detroit Post and Tribune because both papers refused to hire union men or Knights of Labor, and urging local assemblies to establish programs for "educating members in the principles necessary to the success of our cause." The delegates approved a Constitution for the State Assembly, although such action had no constitutional basis under the Knights national constitution, and elected John Devlin State Master Workman and Labadie Chairman of the State Executive Board.⁵⁰

Detroit Knights were thus able to see themselves as leaders of a burgeoning statewide movement that was beginning to engage in local and state politics with some success. Membership increases in the city failed to keep pace with many other areas in the state, and membership actually declined slightly in Detroit in 1884 as a recession threw many members out of work for three or four months, but Detroit Master Workman, J. D. Long, proudly reported to the Journal of United Labor that three Knights had been elected to the Board of Aldermen the previous fall and "They are looking faithfully after the interests of their fellow workingmen."⁵¹

While the unions had formed the initial mass base for most workers' independent cultural, educational, and political activities in Detroit, by 1883 or 1884, these

functions were more and more being carried out by the Knights of Labor. Despite a relatively smaller membership than the trade unions, the Knights dominated the activities of the Labor Party, the pages of the labor press, and the various educational forums and social events. In 1882, for example, of the nine men nominated by the Labor Party, six were definitely members of the Knights. Three aldermen elected by the Labor Party in 1883 belonged to the Knights, while six of the seven state representative candidates in 1884 were Knights. After 1882, all of the editors and regular columnists in the labor press were Knights. The Knights had an equally important aura of growing power; they were closely linked to a dynamic national movement while national trade union ties were weak, and the national trade union federation, The Federation of Trades and Labor Unions, was practically nonexistent.⁵²

It was for these reasons, as well as the Knights' abstract doctrines, that Detroit activists had such high hopes for the future of the Order in the city. Finally in 1886, their dreams seemed to come true. A tidal wave of previously unorganized workers joined by the thousands. Organizers who had complained of apathy recognized that far more people had been listening to their arguments than they had realized. Many more of the trade unions, caught up in the excitement, left the Trades Council to become Knights of Labor Assemblies. Trades Council

delegates reported glumly at one 1886 meeting that delegates from only seven unions remained. D. A. 50 paid per capita tax on 4,679 members on July 1, 1886, and claimed eight thousand members in fifty-one local assemblies by that fall. The possibilities seemed limitless.⁵³

The Knights' sudden success was based on the organization's ability to draw together the widely diverse trends within the labor movement and the groundswell of popular protest. Its ideology was inspiring but vague, perhaps purposely so. Slogans like "An injury to one is the concern of all" could be interpreted as a euphemism for socialism by radicals and as a very much more limited observation by craft conservatives. In an environment like Detroit, characterized by the tensions of ethnic and economic diversity, any movement which attempted a broad unity had to find a way of creating common bonds that ignored the very real differences and antagonisms. The Knights of Labor had this capacity to mean many things to many different people and at the same time provide a vehicle for tying them all together. The Knights millenarian and reformist rhetoric could appeal to a wide variety of workers: radicals who saw it as the embodiment of class solidarity, reformers who saw it as a vehicle for their political goals, unionists in isolated or tactically weak crafts who saw it as a source of mutual assistance, moralists who saw the emphasis on Christian brotherhood as

an expression of the Christian duty for uplifting mankind, feminists who saw its broad universalism as a vindication of their own ideas, demoralized and proletarianized artisans who sought the escape from the wage system the Knights promised.⁵⁴

In some ways, this unity of diverse elements gave the organization an artificial character. It had not overcome the underlying fragmentation either in its own ranks or in the majority of the city's workers, but had provided a rhetoric and a form of organization that could partially supercede it. But merely enrolling a large number of people in an organization pledged to an ideal of solidarity did not mean that all of them were willing or able to act on that ideal. Some of Joseph Labadie's writings suggest that he understood this and viewed the Order as a means of bringing about the ideal, as a way of teaching workers about class consciousness, not as an indication that such consciousness was already fully developed. The Order was a means of education, not an end in itself. "The K. of L. is the Labor University," he wrote in January, 1886. "Its object is to teach sound social-economic principles and to accustom working people to association and self-help...." The influx of 1886 demonstrated that there were tendencies in the mass culture of the city's workers responsive to the class appeal, but in their enthusiasm and excitement, most of the

Knights' leaders overestimated how widespread a change had taken place. As the struggles of the next few years would reveal, there was a complexity of conflicting forces pulling in other directions.⁵⁵

It is easy to understand this overenthusiasm. The Knights seemed to be able to accomplish some of the very things the trade unions could not. They could provide effective support for crafts with weak or nonexistent national unions. Antiunion employers seemed to buckle under pressure from the Knights. Knights of Labor organizers pointed to such successes around the state and around the country. In 1885, Saginaw, Michigan Cigarmakers' Local 130 had been unable to settle several grievances in a number of local shops. The union appealed to the District Master Workman of the Knights of Labor for assistance, and the District Executive Board paid a series of visits to the businessmen in question. At the next meeting, the union's leadership reported that employers had accepted all of the union's demands, and enthusiastically suggested that union members join the Knights of Labor. The union submitted an article to the Cigarmakers' national journal urging closer cooperation with the Knights of Labor.⁵⁶

Detroit trunkmakers had similar experiences. They organized Trunkmakers' Assembly 1767 in 1882. When a local trunk manufacturer fired Knights of Labor trunkmakers for membership in the Order, all the firm's

trunkmakers went out on strike. The District Assembly assessed all of its members ten cents per week to support the strikers. Representatives of the District Executive Board negotiated with the manufacturer for them. The owner capitulated; the Knights were rehired; disputed apprenticeships were restricted as demanded by the Knights, and a Knight was appointed shop foreman.⁵⁷

In part, the Knights' power flowed from their national structure. With support from the Knights, weak craft unions were no longer dependent only on local assistance in struggles against employers with national markets. For example, when the Knights of Labor shoemakers struck Pingree and Smith in April, 1885, they apparently faced the same hopeless situation that had destroyed shoemakers' unions across the country for more than a decade. Within the memory of middle-aged shoemakers, shoemaking had been a highly respected hand craft, but modern firms like Pingree and Smith were mechanized and most machine workers were easy to replace. Pingree and Smith refused to bargain, hired scabs, and continued their operations without interruption.⁵⁸

The shoemakers appealed to Detroit District Assembly 50; the DA issued a national boycott order. Announcements went out to labor papers in the region and to the Knights national Journal of United Labor. By 1885, the Knights had penetrated nearly every city or town with over

a few thousand people in the entire country. This was the significance of national organization. Activists in hundreds of other cities could immediately be recruited to spread the boycott order. Few unions were effectively organized on a national scale to function this way. In the meantime, the District Assembly helped unemployed shoemakers organize their own Cooperative Shoe Company with capital raised through a stock subscription system. Local unions bought stock; at the Michigan State Assembly in June, local assemblies around the state were urged to support the boycott and to buy stock in the Cooperative Shoe Company. The Board of Directors included representatives of the shoemakers and prominent leaders of the District Assembly. Profits, after deductions for depreciation, a contingency fund, and five percent for labor education, were to be equally divided between the workers and stock subscribers. In June and July, the Labor Leaf began to report cases of scabs who were giving up after systematic harassment by local unionists. The Local Assembly in Filer City, Michigan, reported that two merchants who normally carried Pingree and Smith's shoes had agreed not to reorder when their current stocks ran out. A Muskegon local assembly told Labor Leaf readers that all shoe dealers in the city were honoring the boycott. By August, the boycott appeared to be having the desired effects; Pingree and Smith were faltering and they announced a 25 percent wage

reduction. In December, the Boot and Shoe Cooperative Association reported on its second quarter of operation. Finally, in March, 1886, District Master Workman J. D. Long announced victory over Pingree and Smith in the Journal of United Labor.⁵⁹

Such impressive local results combined with widespread publicity of national victories by the Knights, most notably the victory over Jay Gould's Southwestern railroad system in 1885, produced a public image of strength and power. Activists were quick to suggest that this success vindicated their conception of trade amalgamation. Power followed organization. At a Knights of Labor social in Windsor in 1885 (across the Detroit River from Detroit--several Canadian assemblies in the immediate vicinity were affiliated with DA 50), the crowd enthusiastically responded to a speaker who argued that it was "the power of concentrated capital" that allowed businessmen to "coerce labor." If employers could combine in trade associations, monopolies, pools, and mergers, then "only by combination could labor protect itself."⁶⁰

The Knights of Labor were designed to be such a combination both in order to win immediate demands like those of the Saginaw cigarmakers or Detroit trunkmakers and shoemakers, and to educate workers toward more long range goals and inculcate the spirit of class solidarity. The rituals, structure, and rhetoric of the Order were all

geared to producing a spirit that could overcome craft, ethnic, regional and other divisions. The passwords, secret signs, symbols, ceremonies have struck many modern scholars as so much mumbo jumbo , and indeed, some of the activists of the 1880's frequently lost patience with the amount of time consumed by rituals at the beginning of every meeting. District and State Assemblies, that is leadership bodies, often passed resolutions to simplify or eliminate observations of ritual. But men (and scholars) who lost patience with ceremony really misunderstood something about the role of ritual as group affirmation and as a social glue. The Knights produced an impressive array of regalia in vast quantities: buttons, banners, badges, ribbons, drinking mugs, flags, trivets, cigar boxes, all with appropriate symbolism. The rituals and the physical accouterments that went with them all stressed themes of universal brotherhood--globes suggested universality, shaking hands meant solidarity. Transient workers could move almost interchangeably from one to any of thousands of other assemblies by 1886, and be readily accepted among people who spoke of common themes and used identical phrases. Fraternalism was a far more prevalent American phenomenon during most of the 1880's and 1890's than unionism. It has been little studied, but clearly the Knights had drawn on something in popular culture that people understood and liked. Their ritual was not

egregious, but quite functional in promoting loyalty and identification with the Order.⁶¹

The organizational structure promoted the same themes as the ritual. While things rarely functioned in practice according to strict constitutional forms, in theory the organization was a pyramid running from the local assembly, to the district, then to the General Assembly, and finally to the Executive Board and the Grand (later General) Master Workman. Each Knight theoretically acknowledged the supremacy of the same central leadership. Local assemblies in Detroit were organized largely on a craft basis that was not fundamentally different from the trade unions (many assemblies had started as trade unions). Ten of the first eleven local assemblies organized in Detroit were craft locals (the sole exception was Pioneer Assembly 901), and 51 of 70 assemblies organized in Detroit and vicinity between 1878 and 1888 had some occupational concentration (including industrial unions which included multiple crafts). There were also seven German assemblies and one assembly which may have been Polish, judging by the officers' names. Yet each assembly recognized the central authority of the District Executive Board in far more fundamental ways than the trade unions accepted direction from the Trades Council. Trade Unions stressed craft autonomy; if they obeyed any outside authority, it was their national or international craft union. Knights of

Labor Assemblies regularly received orders and advice not only from the District but also from Powderly, including assessments, rulings on internal disputes, special dispensations on a wide variety of matters. Assemblies needed permission from the District Executive to strike. In practice, the Knights operated far more flexibly than this centralized authority structure suggests. Locals frequently acted and then sought endorsement after the fact; officers usually felt compelled to approve in order to maintain the public appearance of unity even when they would have liked to disapprove. But the psychological significance of acknowledging common leaders who had nominal authority cutting across craft and ethnic lines should not be overlooked, nor can the pressure of group conformity be underestimated as a force for bringing together locals of different crafts. Unions frequently supported members of other crafts financially and through boycotts and sympathetic strikes, but such support was always voluntary, and therefore, even minimal contributions could be viewed as magnanimous acts. Knights of Labor assemblies, in contrast, were under moral and constitutional compulsion to support actions of fellow Knights if their officers had endorsed the action. The Knights, as a consequence, demanded far more skill and judgment in their leaders, a major source of problems when, as we shall see, many of them were not really capable of using the responsibility

wisely.⁶²

Both the spirit and the structure of the Knights also made it possible to create industrial unions designed to organize whole factories or even entire industries. It is not coincidental that the two most prominent industrial unions in the AFL, the miners and the brewery workers, were both closely associated with the Knights of Labor and maintained dual affiliation with the Knights into the mid-1890's. In Detroit, industrial or semi-industrial unions formed the largest local assemblies. George Washington Assembly 8775 organized street car employees in all job categories and had 307 members in 1888; Garland Assembly 619 reportedly included 800 metal workers at the Michigan Stove Works, while Devlin Assembly 3954 organized a similar number of metal workers in the railroad car shops.⁶³

The common ritual, centralized structure, spirit of solidarity, and industrial character of some assemblies all lent themselves to the broader definitions of union functions sought by radical activists. With the rise of the Knights came a flourishing of political, social, educational, and cultural activities. The labor movement had transcended the framework of an economic bargaining agent into wider realms that involved all facets of workers' lives.

III. Political Action

One of the first manifestations of this broader outlook was the politicization of the labor movement. Indeed, the Socialist and Greenback electoral campaigns of the late 1870's had preceded the growth of the unions and had stimulated both union expansion and radicalization. Activists were attracted to politics because they recognized that any far reaching modifications in the industrial system necessarily involved legal and political changes which could not be won through negotiations with individual employers. Even unionists who sought no long range goals could be readily convinced of the practical value of a variety of ameliorative legislation: repeal of conspiracy laws against unions, safety legislation, maximum hours laws, child labor legislation, incorporation procedures for unions. While political activists faced a great many barriers and had limited resources for overcoming them, they also had a potential political base among discontented workers both inside and out of the labor movement. There was also an obvious consistency between fighting employers and fighting crooked ward bosses, real estate developers, and conservative anti-labor politicians through political means. The editors of the Unionist advised workers in 1882:

When you strike, strike politically for labor measures...Agitation on the labor question is good and wholesome, but what is the use of talking labor reform 364 days in a year, and then on the 365th, election day, going and voting against the very objects for which you are contending...the working classes will never protect themselves until they do it through the ballot box...⁶⁴

Nearly all of the city's labor agitators accepted this argument, but to their intense frustration, only a minority of the city's workers did. Moreover, although almost all labor leaders advocated some form of electoral activity, they were seriously divided, both tactically and ideologically, about what the objectives of such activity should be and how to go about realizing those objectives. Thus, labor politics, like almost all other aspects of the developing labor movement in Detroit in the early 1880's, had dual effects. As a form of activity which both transcended the workplace and cut across craft and ethnic lines, it was a powerful practical and symbolic force towards class unity. Growing support for independent labor tickets in each successive campaign from 1877 through 1886 reflected the growth of class consciousness. Yet at the same time, labor politics became an internal battleground of factional maneuvering, rival personal ambitions, and bitter emotional hostilities which eventually helped to destroy not only the Labor Party, but also the Knights of Labor and the spirit of class they represented.

The sources of these difficulties were practical as well as conceptual. On a practical level all labor politics faced the same obstacles that had limited the effectiveness of the socialists in their campaigns of the late 1870's: lack of effective citywide political network, lack of financial resources, inexperience in the mechanics of electoral organization, hostility from established authorities, outright corruption and fraud. Labor politicians were never able to fully overcome these deficiencies, although they did put together a moderately effective party apparatus in a few neighborhoods where they were particularly strong. But ultimately the success of labor politics did not depend on beating machine politicians at their own game. Poorly financed, without powerful backers, and with few activists capable of devoting full time to political activities, they would always lose unless they could mobilize voters on some basis other than those employed by the major party machines.⁶⁵

Political activists were confident that this was both possible and practical because they viewed both major parties as virtually indistinguishable capitalist parties inherently incapable of responding to workers' real needs. "The emancipation of the working classes must be achieved by the working classes themselves," argued the Unionist's editors. While they understood that only a minority of workers recognized this at present, the ranks of labor

agitators were growing. The precedent of abolitionism in the previous generation lent credibility to this belief in the power of a dedicated minority. "Wage slavery," Labadie wrote in 1885, "may be wiped out as was chattel slavery. I am in hopes the influence of the earnest, intelligent minority will be strong enough to bring changed conditions through sheer moral force." But if not, change would come nonetheless as demonstrated by "The historical facts of previous social movements, including the anti-slavery movement and its ultimate success...." Politics as practiced by the major parties was "mere scheming for place," but the masses would recognize that "Our industrial interests are the ones on which all others are based...Politics is our public business...to be attended to by ourselves, and no longer left to a few unscrupulous schemers."⁶⁶

Although most labor candidates were unsuccessful, the long term trend in labor politics provided some basis for such optimism about future success. The format and labels of the various labor tickets varied from election to election, but involved in each case essentially the same organizers, many of the same candidates, and, judging by the geographic distribution of votes, many of the same voters. Between 1877 and 1880, these campaigns were organized by the Socialist Labor Party with E. W. Simpson, Thomas Dolan, Charles Erb, and Labadie the perennial

candidates. In 1880, with the Greenback-Socialist fusion, the Socialists combined with non-socialist labor agitators to dominate the Greenback proceedings in the city. Labadie served as chairman of the city Greenback-Labor Convention, Van Patten was the most prominent orator, Otis Hodgson was nominated for County Clerk, socialist Henry Poole for Justice of the Peace. Trades Council President Egan was nominated for the state legislature along with two prominent Knights of Labor, John Goldring, a painter who also belonged to the SLP, and John Strigel, a leader of the shoemakers.⁶⁷ Finally in 1882, the Trades Council, Knights of Labor, and SLP joined forces in an Independent Labor Party which continued to function through 1886. The votes received by independent labor candidates running under these various labels increased from Simpson's 825 votes in the 1877 mayoral campaign (6 percent) to an average of 2,106 for four state legislative candidates in 1882. By 1886, the total for the state legislative ticket was probably one to two thousand votes higher than 1882 (somewhere between 13 and 20 percent of the vote), but disputes over the returns make it impossible to determine the exact results. The totals were significant enough to be important in close local races, and the trend was upward, although at no time was any independent candidate able to poll over 15 to 20 percent on a citywide basis.⁶⁸

Still such results represented a qualified success.

The Labor Party proved its capacity to survive and increase its strength from one election to the next. Labor candidates characteristically combined a formal written platform of specific legislative reforms with a broad, although vague, ideological appeal to the rights of labor or labor's cause. The 1882 platform included eight planks: reservation of public land "for actual settlers, not...railroads or speculators," factory and mine safety inspection, abolition of convict contract labor, abolition of the contract system for municipal work, prohibition of child labor to age 14, eight hour day, establishment of a state bureau of labor statistics, and compulsory education for children under 14.⁶⁹ This issue oriented ideological appeal did not break party identification and ethnocultural voting patterns among the majority of the city's workers,⁷⁰ but by the mid-1880's, it did establish the labor movement as a recognizable political force capable of mobilizing at least a tenth of the city's voters in almost any campaign and able to do much better in some races at the ward level.⁷¹

On several occasions the labor movement demonstrated its capacity to defeat candidates it considered particularly odious. In 1882, for example, the ILP did not nominate a congressional candidate but directed its followers to vote against incumbent Congressman Lord because of his vote against Chinese exclusion. The first issue of the

Unionist after the fall election gleefully appeared with a full page cover engraving of a gravestone with a skull and crossbones and the inscription:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY
of
Hon. H. W. Lord
who dug his own
POLITICAL GRAVE
by voting for
CHINESE CHEAP LABOR
Buried November 7, 1882.

Underneath a poem warned:

Aspiring man, beware his fate;
To Labor's Cause be true;
Or you will find when 'tis too late,
You've dug your p.g., too.⁷²

Given a relatively close balance and very intense rivalry between Republicans and Democrats both in the city and in the state legislature, the Independent Labor Party had a balance of power position in local politics. Both parties had large and dependable constitutencies; the outcome of elections hinged on the minority of swing votes who might be induced to shift parties from one election to the next. The machines sought to accomplish such shifts by varying their ethnic coalitions through intricate ticket balancing schemes. The Labor Party had found a new basis for motivating a swing vote. If Labor Party leaders were willing to cooperate with the major parties on some levels, they might exact significant concessions: major party endorsements for labor candidates, support for

key labor reform legislation, nominations of labor leaders to patronage appointments. In some cases, the machines were anxious enough to secure labor cooperation that they might demand very little in return for labor support. This was particularly true in the state legislative races because United States senators were chosen by the state legislature. The senatorial races were one of the obsessions of machine politics not only because of the prestige of the Senate and its role as stepping stone to the Presidency, but also because Senators controlled the federal patronage which helped to hold the machine together. The senatorial votes in the state legislature were extremely close in the 1880's. If a Republican endorsement might elect a labor leader in a normally Democratic district, the Democrats would be denied one vote towards the U.S. Senator even if the successful Labor candidate did not acknowledge any further obligation to the Republicans.⁷³

Yet such cooperation with capitalist parties involved moral and ideological contradictions for many labor leaders. How could a socialist in good conscience accept a nomination from Republican bondholders and monopolists? Many could not. In 1880, for example, E. W. Simpson refused a Republican endorsement in his campaign for alderman. The Republicans decided to support him anyway by not nominating a candidate and directing their campaign workers to instruct Republicans to vote for Simpson. In 1886, Judson Grenell

accepted Republican endorsements for state legislator and for deputy oil inspector, a patronage appointment, on the grounds that he could devote the resulting free time to the movement, but only after he had been assured that he could vote as he pleased in the state legislature. Charles Erb refused a similar offer from the Democrats in 1884. Ultimately the Independent Labor Party devised a means of maintaining the semblance of independence and still using its balance of power position to advantage. It would nominate its slate prior to Republican and Democratic conventions. If either major party chose to endorse some of the labor nominees, they could still be claimed as labor candidates first. This method resulted in victories for two of the party's seven state representative candidates in 1882, and five of seven in 1884. The swing character of the labor vote was particularly evident in the 1884 campaign. All seven of Detroit's state representatives were chosen on a citywide at-large basis. Each party could nominate seven candidates and each voter submitted a list of seven choices. The ILP nominated a full slate including Grenell, Egan, Charles Erb, K. of L. District Master Workman J. D. Long, Lyman Brant (prominent in both the ITU and the Knights) and two other important Knights. Two of them were endorsed by the Republicans and three by the Democrats. All of the endorsed labor candidates were elected and all placed ahead of all other candidates.

Thus, any labor nominee with a regular party endorsement could beat any candidate of either party without the labor nomination. Five of Detroit's seven state representatives were labor activists, and in the next two years, both major parties seemed to scramble frantically in pursuit of any labor leader who would talk to them.⁷⁴

The emergence of the Independent Labor Party in this balance of power role suggested that analysts like Labadie, who predicted rising working class power, were correct. Sending a Knights of Labor leader or even a prominent socialist (Grenell) to the state legislature had tremendous symbolic impact. But at the same time, qualified success seriously aggravated the struggle over different conceptions of labor politics. The ILP was too weak to win anything more than an occasional alderman's seat strictly on its own, but it could win elections, secure the passage of needed legislation, and provide labor politicians with a path to power if it would cooperate with the major parties. Was it more important to maintain independence and ideological consistency or to compromise in order to achieve immediate practical gains? Would incremental successes finally lead to a larger goal or postpone achievement of long range goals by brunting popular dissatisfaction without fundamentally altering social power relations? Was reform legislation inherently justifiable because it alleviated specific types of suffering or did

reform simply distract people from more fundamental issues? Could short range and long range goals be reconciled in some way? Labor politicians faced a classic dilemma of left wing politics: purity vs. immediate results. The problem inevitably provoked ideological debate, even though all factions recognized the importance of maintaining internal unity, because the question of priorities could not be answered without resolving the fundamental conceptual questions of ultimate goals.

Ironically such debate might have been avoided if the ILP had been substantially weaker or dramatically stronger. As a splinter group with only a few hundred votes at most, compromise and immediate demands would have been irrelevant since they would have been beyond the party's influence. Labor politicians could have concentrated on utopian visions much like most modern leftist sects, confident that anything they might do would have little impact anyway. If the Labor Party had been capable of approaching majority status, immediate and ultimate objectives might have been reconciled since the party might have secured passage of legislation without making deals with ideological opponents. But the in-between status of a balancing minority aggravated the dilemma by forcing a difficult choice. The opportunity for immediate gains was present, but only at the cost of uncomfortable alliances that not only contradicted moral principles but

also raised the specter of reabsorption into the dominant political framework and consequent destruction of even limited power.

Underlying the divergent reactions to this dilemma were three separate justifications for labor politics: electoral activity as an alternative to strikes, confrontation, violence, or revolution; legislation as a means of correcting specific abuses; politics as a form of mass education toward ultimate objectives. The arguments were not necessarily mutually exclusive and particular individuals might make various combinations of them, but the implications of the first two concepts of politics were far more reformist, and therefore compromise oriented, than the third. The concept of politics as an alternative to revolutionary violence was particularly widespread, even among radicals like Labadie and Grenell as well as among conservatives. Labor leaders feared violence--the experiences of the entire generation from Tompkins Square, to the Mollie Maguires, to Haymarket suggested that violence might be more effectively turned against labor than used by it. The editors of the Unionist resolved the question "By Bullet or Ballot?" by arguing that the ballot was a more effective weapon. "A peaceful revolution at the ballot box will accomplish more for the elevation of the downtrodden than the bloody revolution of the sword." A Detroit correspondent to John Swinton's Paper agreed.

"The ballot is the thing. A little piece of paper, with the proper principles will shoot further and with more force than a Redman's [illegible] gun."⁷⁵

The ballots-not-bullets argument also reflected a belief in American exceptionalism. The principal of a German-American Detroit school, addressing a meeting of three thousand people in 1881 who had gathered to hear reports from recent German emigres on the condition of German workers under Bismark's repressive anti-socialist campaign, favorably compared American political freedoms with European repression:

Our broad land, which has thrown off the shackles of a medieval civilization more effectively than any other...has been the star of hope of the oppressed of all climes ...as an American citizen...deeply sensible of the responsibilities this privilege implies, I am here to listen to the grievances of a great nation...This is...a gathering... of American men and women who love their own freedom enough to sympathize...with the oppressed wherever despotism may raise his poisonous head.⁷⁶

American workers, Richard Trevellick argued in the same year,

...did not come with the knife of the assassin or the torch of the incendiary...to intimidate or offer threats, nor with drums or bayonets...but...in the name and authority of law to strengthen themselves against their oppressors.⁷⁷

This faith in the sanctity of law was one of the hallmarks of the psychological watershed between radicals and conservative reformers within the movement.

Conservatives defined workers' rights only within the law. A Greenback spokesman declared in the Unionist "Under no circumstances can workingmen be justified in violating the law by interfering with the rights of others in attempts to maintain their own rights." Employers had an unequivocal legal right "to discharge or employ such workingmen as suit them." Under law, confrontation could be avoided. "If it can be shown that they [the workers] cannot, under the law, maintain their rights and successfully resist oppression, the fault is in the law and the corrective is in the ballot box." In contrast, Judson Grenell had a negative view of law. "What are our so-called laws? They are generally cunningly devised schemes to enable the few to rob the many." Laws rarely had beneficial effects because "when laws are passed in harmony with natural rights they are generally unnecessary. When enacted in opposition to natural rights, they are infamous and should never be obeyed. For 'above the law is the right.'"78

Labadie complained that insistence on legality "is simply doing the work of capitalism..."

We will try all peaceable means [but]...our demands are just...if we can't succeed that way [then we must]...resort to revolutionary methods. The whining and making faces at the revolutionists is beneath the dignity of any one who is honestly and earnestly in this movement.

Yet in a letter to Richard Ely written only a few months before this editorial, Labadie confessed an abhorrence

for violence. "The destruction of wealth in itself is an evil, and I am in hopes that a better social system will be established without the destruction of life and wealth."⁷⁹

For Labadie, then, politics might be a means of avoiding violence, but only if political action emphasized ideological education rather than short range objectives. Judson Grenell agreed: "Amelioration is possible, but complete emancipation will come only when cooperation shall succeed competition...when landlordism and capitalism shall have been swept out of existence." Labadie was even more direct. "I notice that 'practical questions' almost always lead us to the support of some political mountebank who has no word of condemnation for the legalised methods of robbing the laborer of his earnings." Elections of such men were hollow victories. "Almost every time a 'labor' man gets a government position the labor movement loses an agitator...mere political action 'to get our man in' was useless. "Our men are no better than anybody else's men when they are placed in trying circumstances. What is necessary is a change of system and not necessarily a change of men."⁸⁰

Grenell and Labadie had no objection (as some of the more rigid SLP regulars did) to what were called ameliorative measures, but their perspective implied that principle was more important than short range practicality.

While safety regulations, child labor laws, factory inspections, and other reforms were all to be applauded, they should not be sought in any way which involved sacrificing control of the movement. Agitators could not afford to isolate themselves in a mutual admiration society of fellow believers, but if they compromised their principles in order to make themselves more appealing to Republican or Democratic overtures, they destroyed the movement they were trying to build. "Workingmen of this country [cannot] ...gain anything from either party by supporting or keeping in power either one or the other of the parties."

Labadie argued that machine politicians who had scorned the movement a few years before were trying to seduce labor leaders because "the K. of L. is a power that must be either controlled or broken up if the political barnacles are to hang on to the 'ship of state.'"81

This suspicion of politicians and politics in general was a consistent theme not only of men like Labadie and Grenell, but of a broad spectrum of the labor movement. A correspondent to the Unionist advised workers to "stick to your unions and leave politics...alone. Somebody only wants to get a living off workingmen." In 1885, Shipcarpenters' and Caulkers' Local Assembly 2124 passed a resolution "That LA 2124 deems it unwise...to appoint as organizer in the K. of L. any person holding an office in the gift of any political party." The records of some of

the labor politicians only aggravated these suspicions. In January, 1885, Francis Egan, elected to the state legislature in 1884 as a labor candidate with Republican endorsement, voted for the Republican candidate for House Speaker rather than the labor caucus' candidate, Lyman Brant. Hugh McClelland, another Labor-Republican, voted with Egan. The Labor Leaf denounced them as selfish and ambitious and declared that this announcement would constitute their political obituary. Two weeks later, however, the Labor Leaf was forced to sadly admit that most of the labor legislators were dividing along party lines based on their major party endorsements. Egan's political career was far from over. In August, he was appointed Deputy Labor Commissioner and resigned his legislative seat. Labor commentators were convinced that the appointment to this lucrative post was his political payoff by the Republicans for his legislative votes.⁸²

These experiences enhanced the position of those who sought to emphasize the Labor Party's independence. Nevertheless, the attraction of coalition victories was nearly irresistible after the legislative wins of 1882. Despite disappointments with men like Egan, labor legislators were instrumental in the passage of a variety of important legislation from the bill creating the State Bureau of Labor Statistics to a ten hour law passed in 1884 and some important safety legislation. Yet with

each campaign there were renewed proposals to forego such coalitions. After the 1882 election, the Unionist declared "The lesson of last Tuesday ought to teach workingmen that if they ever hope to reap any benefits by political action, they must have a party of their own and stick to it until the majority see the justice of their demands." The following year, the Spectator (the successor to the Unionist) "decided to endorse no man for office who is not a member of our organizations" (The Trades Council and DA 50). In December, 1884, the ILP tried to prevent any possible disloyalty by labor representatives in the coming legislative session by forcing them to pledge not to participate in Democratic or Republican caucuses. The resolution passed the ILP's executive committee by a 6-3 vote, but the futility of the action was revealed when Egan, who had voted against it, refused to comply. By November, 1885, feelings on the issue were strong enough that a socialist correspondent to the Labor Leaf began campaigning for a fully independent labor ticket in 1886, a full year in advance. When the ILP convention refused to support the demand for a completely independent ticket in September, 1886, some thirty delegates (about one-fifth of the total) walked out.⁸³

Yet despite all of these internal difficulties, the Labor Party held together through the early 1880's and involved increasing numbers of union members in campaign

activities and ideological debate. While debates provoked discord, they also introduced the broad range of participants to a theoretical dimension that was largely absent from day-to-day union affairs. For weeks before each election, hundreds of rank and file union members and Knights of Labor would attend rallies, mass meetings, conventions, and demonstrations. The campaigns thus had exactly the kind of community character which stimulated class feeling. A reporter from the Evening News who attended an 1882 election eve rally for "the workingmen" was impressed with the Party's vitality and enthusiasm. Arbeiter Hall was packed as the labor candidates addressed the audience in English and German, denouncing Congressman Lord and confidently predicting victory for the labor ticket. By 1886, Labor Party activities were front page news. The final election rally the night before the election had drawn 2,500 people. The following morning, one thousand Knights of Labor poll workers, each wearing a red badge for identification, appeared at the polls to direct their supporters, supervise the activities of election officials, and try to prevent the ballot stuffing of previous campaigns.⁸⁴

"So long as the idlers and rulers and robbers can keep the laborers contending with each other," Joseph Labadie had written in January, 1886, "just so long will they feel safe with their privileges and plunder." By

the summer and fall of that year, the growth of the Labor Party looked like just one more example of an emerging class consciousness that would threaten the "privileges and plunder" Labadie denounced.⁸⁵

IV. The Subculture of Opposition

The objectives of the unions, the Knights of Labor, and the Labor Party were outer-directed: to change the terms of employment, alter the relationships between employees and employers, produce political changes, reform society as a whole. But it was the inner life of the movement which made it into something more than a group of discrete organizations, a movement with a broad and distinctive cultural dimension. Psychologically this produced a millenarian quality like a religious crusade. "A mere trade union, with no other aim than to get a few cents a day more wages than the workers would get without organization, is a poor flabby institution that really is a hindrance to the best interests of the working people....," Labadie declared in his "Cranky Notions" column. "Organization is only a means to an end, and if we have no higher aim in view than a puny two-by-four benefit we had better throw in the sponge."⁸⁶

Labor activism was a cause and a way of life. Its roots were in the neighborhood and workplace: the units

of daily life. While union and K. of L. assembly meetings were usually monthly, bi-monthly, or at most weekly, a range of subsidiary institutions made it possible to integrate basic daily routines with the movement. Supporters were urged to do their regular shopping with a growing list of sympathetic tradesmen who advertised in the Labor Leaf and refused to sell scab (non-union made) goods. "Help those who help you," the Labor Leaf said. Children were told to "Boycott scab goods," and make sure there were union labels on the things their parents bought. Workers were encouraged to boycott saloons which sold non-union cigars; four saloon keepers took the threat seriously enough to appeal to the Trades Council after their names were printed in the Unionist as offenders. A growing list of producers' cooperatives including a shoe factory, a cooperage, and an iron foundry appealed for workers to invest their savings as well as to buy cooperative goods. By 1886, the movement included a weekly labor press in both English and German, a workers' militia, the Detroit Rifles, regular debates in the Dialectical Union, a theatre group, singing societies, and almost nightly social or educational events.⁸⁷

Many of these subsidiary activities drew on a wider network of participants than regular union business. Turn-out at union sponsored neighborhood picnics, dances, concerts, or dinners regularly numbered in the hundreds, and

some of the most prominent public labor lecturers filled large halls with overflow crowds of three thousand or more. When the women of Florence Nightingale Assembly 3102 gave a strawberry and ice cream festival on a Wednesday evening in July, 1885, people had to stand in long lines just to get in the door of the building, and so many people had to be turned away that the women apologetically assured readers in the Labor Leaf that another ice cream festival would be scheduled again soon. A Knights of Labor social in Windsor entertained a full house of Knights and their friends with speeches by Andrew Forbes, president of the Sailors' Union and DA 50 Recording Secretary, and Thomas Bourke, a local orator and a full program of piano solos, poetic recitations, and vocal renditions. Thomas McAuley was asked for an encore after singing "The Grave of Napoleon." Master Workman Harry Aikman told an allegorical temperance story about a bird who "pawned his tail feathers for a drink." Further political speeches urged the boycott of Pingree and Smith shoes and described how women shoe workers in Florence Nightingale Assembly had been discharged for supporting the strike. The chairs were cleared and dancing continued "until the small hours." Unions sponsoring group excursions hired entire trains or steamships for the purpose. The Detroit Sailors' Union chartered the steamship J. W. Steinhoff for its Grand Excursion to Toledo. The all-day affair cost fifty cents

per person and promised that guests would be under the personal supervision of union president Andrew Forbes.⁸⁸

More informal social life also centered around a number of saloons operated by pro-labor saloonkeepers. The larger saloons owned halls or meeting rooms above the main floor so that the establishment could double as meeting hall and social gathering spot. Sympathetic bar keepers allowed free use of meeting halls to labor organizations. On Christmas Eve, 1884, five Knights of Labor assemblies expressed their gratitude to one "jolly saloonkeeper," Hiram Jackson, by presenting him and his wife "a handsome silver pitcher and goblets." The Labor Leaf explained that Mr. Jackson, who "has a very fine hall over the saloon which he gives rent free to labor societies," supported "the cause of labor, having been a union iron molder."⁸⁹

The labor press provided the vital communication link which informed workers and their families of coming social events, advised them of which products to boycott and which stores to patronize, and published full reports of major local events for those who had not been able to attend. The labor papers performed many other functions as well. Unions reported on current problems, informed members of special or emergency meetings, and explained reasons for organizing to unorganized readers they hoped to recruit. Craftsmen were advised on the state of their

trades in other cities, whether work was available there or that workers should stay away. The prevailing wage rates in other cities were published so that workers could better understand the state of their industry and use that information in negotiations with employers. Complex concepts in political economy were explained in straightforward language, often through the medium of anecdotes or folk tales. Relatives of wandering workers sought lost sons. An announcement in October, 1885, asked readers to be on the lookout for William Timms, a blacksmith, "Last heard of in Laporte, Ind. His parents are sick." Major radical thinkers such as Marx, Kropotkin, and Henry George were regularly featured with short biographies of their careers and expositions of their ideas. Feature pages included songs, poetry, recipes, jokes, local gossip, and short stories.⁹⁰

The offices of the paper functioned as an informal nerve center, discussion group, and flop house for itinerant workers. David Boyd described the Labor Leaf as a "meeting place for the enthusiasts and unemployed Knights." Out of town speakers and organizers would head for the Leaf office as they arrived in town, and the paper was able to present a running commentary on national events within the Knights of Labor from the information they provided. Labadie, in particular, knew most of the Knights' national leaders from the early days of the movement, and

men like Tom Barry, Frederick Turner, or Charles Litchman made a point of stopping by every time they were in the region.⁹¹

When the Labor Leaf began publishing in late 1884, it was the end product of a succession of labor and radical papers, most of them founded by Labadie and Grenell, which had appeared in Detroit since 1877. The Socialist, their first effort, was transferred to Chicago by SLP leaders in 1878. It was followed by the Truthteller, a nameless paper with three stars on its masthead (a carry-over from Knights of Labor secrecy policies), the Labor Review, the Bulletin of the Social Labor Movement, the Times, the Unionist, the Spectator, and finally the Labor Leaf, which added Advance to its title in 1887. Grenell, describing the progression of journalist efforts, said simply that "the war on capitalism never stopped." As the names changed, the editing improved, the layout became more professional, the publication schedule became more regular, the size increased, and the circulation grew. In 1881, the Times reported a circulation of 1,500; by 1882, the Unionist claimed 30,000 in eleven issues, or over 2,700 per issue; and by 1885, the Labor Leaf set its goal at "10,000 subscribers by next year." It is not clear whether they reached that figure, but by early 1887, the paper appeared as a full size eight page weekly. It drew praise from a wide spectrum of Michigan and national labor

leaders. Charles Hasse, State Worthy Foreman (i.e., vice president) of the Knights wrote the Labor Leaf in August, 1885, to praise their efforts: "What the workingmen need is more Labor Leafs."⁹²

The Labor Leaf, the Labor Party, the cooperatives, the various cultural events, the public demonstrations had grown together with the unions and the Knights of Labor to impressive dimensions by 1885 and 1886. This integrated and combined pattern of growth, fulfilling a full range of social, economic, political, and cultural needs both for union members and the larger workers' community, is the visible indicator of the subculture of opposition. It was a subculture both because it was a minority culture even among its own potential consistency and because it existed in competition with a larger and more powerful dominant culture. Few people were able to function exclusively within this subculture. Even the most enthusiastic, except for a few dozen cooperative workers and self-employed craftsmen, worked for capitalist firms. More importantly, even the most dedicated were still drawn by some of the values of the dominant culture. Many labor leaders pursued personal mobility and individual success along with group solidarity: Grenell, for example, used his ties to the labor movement to launch a successful journalistic career with various daily newspapers.

Yet the subculture permanently affected the lives

of its participants and the character of the entire city. The tone of the city's daily newspapers, the content of public political rhetoric, even the newspaper advertisements had all changed by the mid-1880's. The correspondence files that Joseph Labadie saved and later donated to the University of Michigan reveal how profound the impact was on Labadie and his friends. Letters from old comrades in their seventies and eighties, some still writing into the 1930's, continued to express the same values they had championed in the 1880's and pride and nostalgia for the experiences of that period.⁹³

The active participants of the subculture were a minority of the city's workers, but many more people must have participated occasionally in workers' institutions. That minority itself was both numerically impressive and psychologically important, including among its most active members an imposing array of working class orators, political organizers, writers, and philosophers. How many people actually saw themselves as part of this cultural minority? We cannot say for sure, but recapitulation of the statistical evidence already presented suggests clear correlations between rates of participation in each type of institution: union membership increased (including Knights of Labor) from 1,000 in 1880 to 5,000 in 1885; labor press circulation went from 1,500 in early 1881 to 2,700 in late 1882; the independent labor vote grew from

825 in 1877 to 2,106 in 1882 and between 3,000 and 4,500 in 1886; labor parade marchers increased from 1,500 in 1880 to 3,000 in 1885. We cannot determine that these were the same people in each case, but the figures are certainly suggestive, and at the leadership level they were the same. The identical cadre of fifty to a hundred names shows up over and over again as union officers, stump speakers, parade marshals, political candidates, cooperative treasurers, newspaper correspondents, public spokespersons. Probably then, by 1885, there were some two to three thousand workers who participated in some ways in this subculture on a regular, almost daily basis. With their families, a conservative estimate of the total number of participants must be at least ten thousand. As the incredible expansion of 1886 would indicate, a much larger number must have been involved or influenced on an occasional basis.⁹⁴

The subculture defined itself by its opposition to employers, to great wealth, and to existing industrial conditions. At the level of formal ideology, its participants were divided into at least three different orientations: liberal-pluralist, populist, and socialist. These differences stimulated internal debates and eventually became one of the contributing factors in the movement's partial dissolution, but internal ideological differences should not lead us to analyze the dynamics of

the subculture purely in terms of ideological categories. Many labor leaders really had no formal ideology in the sense of a carefully formulated philosophy that was internally consistent, and even those who did think in ideological terms displayed a high degree of eclecticism. In the early '80's especially, the spirit of the movement was experimental--people considered a great variety of ideas and practical proposals to see which would work. "Any ism which conscientiously tries to improve the condition of the people," the Labor Leaf wrote in 1885, "should be considered fairly on its merits."⁹⁵

This exploratory and somewhat speculative approach reflected the social realities of a city undergoing rapid industrial change. In 1880, the system of class relations in Detroit had not yet been fully worked out. This sense of conflicting possibilities was what made the decade exciting. Workers were still debating the most fundamental definitions of their social perspectives, and several possible alternative strategies all seemed plausible to different groups of workers: individual mobility, craft elitism, anti-monopoly political reform, ethnic solidarity, mass action, class solidarity, and socialism.

Employers were also divided. While many saw recognition of any type of labor organization as an invasion of their property rights, others came to recognize the possibility that a quid pro quo with some workers might

ultimately strengthen the stability of property in general. When reporters from one of the daily newspapers interviewed "Leading manufacturers and businessmen" on the "Eight Hour Plan" in 1884, most were opposed to the idea. Mr. Bond of Pingree and Smith declared "it would be injurious (to business)...we would have to raise prices or reduce wages." Mr. Bond saw no reason for a change. "Ten hours is about right for a day's work. The larger number of workmen would spend the other two hours in saloons anyhow, and would be worse off than they now are." An executive of the Globe Tobacco Company echoed Mr. Bond's comments, claiming that workers were happy and the question was only being "stirred up by labor agitators." Yet, two years later, after the massive upheavals of 1886, the Globe Company signed a profit sharing plan with DA 50 which both sides heralded as a model of industrial reform. Many small workshops and store owners were similarly ambivalent. Often they had begun their own careers as skilled workers. They had long-standing personal ties within the working class community, and in some cases (where small artisan-run firms were being squeezed out by mechanization and large corporations, for example), common economic interests as well. Small businessmen were often sympathetic to workers' problems. Store owners often extended credit during strikes or even made contributions to strike funds.⁹⁶

The overall confusion and division of opinion was

reflected in the propaganda of the labor movement. Detroit shoemakers, in their 1880 declaration to fellow craftsmen, referred to the "wage class," implying the unity of interest of all wage earners. The Knights of Labor used a similar concept, and their primary slogan was "Abolition of the Wage System." Yet the Knights were ambiguous, purposely so at times, about what that meant, and they admitted a small number of non-wage earners to membership. Thus, consciousness of the primacy of the wage relationship did not necessarily imply a conception of workers as a class separate from small businessmen, professionals, and farmers. Agitators frequently talked about "working classes," the plural usage an implicit acceptance of a pluralist model. The 1880 constitution of the Detroit Trades Council, for example, referred to "working classes." Even the socialists, despite their rhetoric of class solidarity, sometimes referred to skilled and unskilled workers as separate classes, although they added that their interests were the same.⁹⁷

The definitions of laborer or worker were also subject to disagreement. A correspondent to the Detroit Times in 1881, while discussing his views on political economy, made a special point of adding, "and I mean laborer to apply to the working man who directs large enterprises and employs labor as well as to the laborers employed..." The Detroit National, the local organ of the Greenback

Labor Party, had published a similar definition of workingmen three years earlier:

by "workingmen" our organization means every man, who by his own legitimate and honest industry, provides for himself and his family. We care not in what field of labor he toils; whether his work be intellectual or physical; believing that there is no work worth the doing that does not, when completed bear the evidence that the head, the heart, and the hand have been united to produce it.⁹⁸

The socialists ridiculed this all inclusive definition. "Now why do the Nationals rave so about the 'bloated bondholders and bankers? Do they not work? Are they not engaged in legal industry, and providing for their families by honest labor?" Although the socialists were willing to grant that work may "be mental, physical, or both combined...", they denounced "all attempts to make the word 'workingman' include those who live by insidious scheming, and call it work." According to the socialists, "A workingman proper is a person whose means of existence is his own labor."⁹⁹

These conflicting definitions reflected the three different models of American class structure advocated by various factions within the labor movement: a pluralistic interest group model without explicit class lines, the "bloated bondholders" model of the Nationals, and a Marxist or quasi-marxist two class model of employers versus workers. Each model implied fundamentally different social

and political alliances, and consequently, each implied a somewhat different strategy. The pluralistic model denied the existence of class lines, emphasized individual or small group solutions, and acknowledged the supremacy of property. Organization and alliance were for limited short range objectives. The use of plural terminology like "working classes" is reflective of this thinking. Personal mobility, craft organization, and ethnic politics were all compatible with it. The operative concept of the "bloated bondholders" model was the "producer class." The term implied a unity of interests among all groups engaged in productive activity--workers, farmers, manufacturers, and small businessmen--against a small class of exploitative bankers and speculators. It was not capital, but unproductive capital, that was the source of oppression and exploitation.

The political expression of this sentiment in the 1870's and 1880's was the Greenback-Labor or National Party, and in the 1890's, the Populists. The Greenbackers were quite successful in Michigan, drawing 26 percent of the vote in the 1878 gubernatorial election and electing Greenbacker Josiah W. Begole in 1882 as governor on a fusion ticket with the Democrats. They elected eighteen state legislators in 1878 and a host of local officials in the late '70's and early '80's. Their political base corresponded quite well to the producer class ideology.

The party drew widespread support from farmers in the northern and western parts of the lower peninsula, from workers in Grand Rapids, Bay City, Jackson, Alpena, and several other cities, as well as financial support from sympathetic businessmen including two of the largest furniture manufacturers in Grand Rapids, William A. Berkey and Charles C. Comstock.¹⁰⁰

Middle class proponents of the producer class usually sought to blur distinctions between employers and employed in the interest of unity around the populist political program. For this reason, some workers and labor leaders saw the idea as an attempt to manipulate workers for the benefit of employers and office seekers. Although Labadie supported the SLP-Greenback alliance during the Weaver campaign of 1880, he mistrusted middle class Greenback politicians. "Some of the so-called leaders of the Greenbackers have always professed to be labor reformers," he wrote in December, 1879, but they "give the labor question a secondary consideration."¹⁰¹

He may have been right, but the idea of a producer class including both workers and manufacturers had credibility for workers with real ties to small workshop owners with backgrounds like those of their employees. In small workshops, owners worked along side the journeymen they employed. As late as 1892, the Journeyman Horseshoers' Union of Detroit described why there was "good feeling

existing between employer and employee. Working together, perhaps as boys, they grow up, one to become a prosperous owner, the other a workman under him." But despite his success, "no tone of superiority is heard from the employer." The small employers' living and consumption patterns were close enough to those of wage earners that their claims of credit and marketing problems seemed credible. The career patterns of various Detroit labor leaders reveal easy movement into and out of the small proprietor class during their lifetimes.¹⁰²

But idyllic village smithies were hardly representative of most employers. Initially, some Detroit socialists were quite attracted to the monetarist arguments of the Greenbackers as a valid short run reform. They saw the party as a way of mobilizing political support for other reform legislation sought by workers. But Greenback practice was often disillusioning. There was a good deal of cant in the pious sermons about the rights of labor coming from its business spokesmen. In 1878, the Detroit National, for example, was paying its printers 25 to 33 percent below union rates. In 1882, John Rairden, one of the leaders of the ILP, had to sue Moses Field, a wealthy Detroit businessman and the most important Greenback leader in the city, in order to get Field to pay him for two days work as a clerk at a soldiers' reunion organized by Field. Rairden had worked two days, twelve hours the

first and fourteen the second, taking tickets and writing down names. He asked to be paid several times and was put off each time. Finally, Field offered \$1.50. Rairden demanded six dollars and hired an attorney to collect it. Ten months later, after extensive litigation, Field finally conceded. The Unionist recounted the details of the affair in a story ironically titled "A Workingman's Friend."¹⁰³

Incidents like this help to explain the decline of urban Greenbackism and the rise of the Independent Labor Party in its stead. While Greenback ideology used a language of class, its fundamental assumptions denied the reality of differences in the lives, prospects, and basic interests of workers and employers. With the growth of large corporations, the institution of degrading and inflexible work rules, the rise of militant employer anti-unionism, and the declining status of many categories of artisans, it became increasingly difficult for many people to believe that workers prospered when their employers prospered. Rather, the discontented more and more expressed an ethic of class conflict like the woodsman who told a State Bureau of Labor Statistics investigator in 1885 that his employer was "compelling me...to cut short the necessities of life that he may enjoy the luxuries."¹⁰⁴

This type of class feeling led to the third image of American society--a class society; as Grenell put it, "our monarchical industrial system" in which "wage-workers

disinherited by machine production for profit, [are]... ultimately forced to fight for collectivism or starve. Not 50 years have passed since this prophecy was written [by Marx] and we find it fulfilled almost to the letter." Perhaps only a fraction of their followers fully accepted Labadie and Grenell's socialist solution to this prophecy, but the direction of the dominant developments within the movement in the early 1880's all reflected a spirit which recognized class division and did not expect to avoid confrontation with class enemies. Labor leaders who hoped to maintain social harmony were beginning to doubt the good faith of other classes. The structure of the institutions in Detroit's working class subculture emphasized this growing polarization with a clear we-they kind of psychology. The pressure for an independent political movement, uncontaminated by businessmen or outside affiliations, reflected this feeling. The use of secret rituals, passwords, and signs helped to maintain the common bond of an in-group devoid of unknowing outsiders.¹⁰⁵

The subculture of opposition included advocates of all these strategies but the class conflict model influenced even those who rejected it. The subculture was predicated on the assumption that there were differences between employers and employed. The gaps in wage levels and living patterns between workers and other classes substantiated this assumption. Labor agitators moved in a milieu in

which the rhetoric of class was accepted and expected. Those labor leaders who sought to deny the existence of class conflict may have been expressing widely held beliefs in the dominant culture, but in 1885, they were going against the current of their own subculture. As craft unions began to switch affiliation to the Knights of Labor, as the Labor Party seemed on the verge of permanent acceptance into the city's political system, many labor leaders who had earlier opposed the arguments of labor radicals, submerged (if temporarily) their doubts.

Craft militance increased in the mid-1880's, and the subtle shadings of emphasis in the speeches of Greenback reformers in 1885 and 1886 suggested a more restrictive definition of producer which reduced the ideological distance between the Greenback-Populist ideology and a Marxist one. Moreover, at an individual level, these different ideologies were never mutually exclusive. Most labor leaders rode more than one horse at the same time. Almost every important craft union leader was involved in reform politics. Socialists served as union negotiators in their positions as union officers and supported social reforms in the Labor Party program. Socialist militants Gustav Herzig and Henry Kummerfeldt saw nothing inconsistent with advocating class struggle on Detroit street corners in the evening and acting as employers in their small cigar factory during the daytime.¹⁰⁶

There was also a logical basis for cooperation among labor leaders of various ideological persuasions. Even when they argued about exactly who should be considered a worker, who was productive, and what was needed to rid society of the unproductive, men like Labadie, Greenbacker Henry Robinson, or ITU leader Lyman Brant could easily agree that something was drastically wrong with industrial society as they experienced it. All recognized that the natural law arguments of ideological conservatives justified social misery without offering any viable alternative. Liberal craft unionists reacted by denying that labor was a commodity, Greenbackers and Populists sought to limit the effects of capitalism by regulating competition and outlawing some of the most glaring abuses, socialists wanted to do away with the competitive system entirely, but in a growing movement with an increasingly radical spirit, these philosophical differences might not involve serious tactical disagreements. If all could support the demands for higher wages and better working conditions, if all campaigned for the same legislative reforms, if they trusted each other's sincerity, and viewed each other's activities as part of the same whole, then the cultural unity of the movement would seem far more immediate than the philosophical differences.¹⁰⁷

In the period between 1880 and 1886, these preconditions were met; labor agitators of all philosophical

persuasions combined forces and applauded the growing radicalization of the movement and the city's workers. When even the most cautious and conciliatory labor unionists were attacked by anti-union employers and newspaper editors, there was strong pressure for labor unity. Nor was this simply a matter of convenience. The circle of Labor activists developed a genuine spirit of community and comradeship. When Joseph Hockaday, a leader of the shipcarpenters was unemployed in 1887, other labor leaders kept him going by hiring him to fix their homes. Joseph Labadie was one of those who hired him (to build a new house) although they were on opposite sides of the (by this time fairly bitter) factional division within the Knights. When the Detroit Tribune attacked John Devlin and J. D. Long in 1886, Labadie defended the integrity of "my friends and comrades" although he admitted he had some serious philosophical differences with them. In his autobiography, Grenell expressed nothing but warm feelings for some of the more conservative labor leaders who had been his ideological opponents in the 1880's. When a reader attacked the Labor Leaf for allowing a "rabid anarchist" (Labadie) in its columns, John Burton, the editor, defended Labadie (although he was far more conservative and disagreed with many of his ideas) with a vehemence that might have been reserved for some personal insult against himself.¹⁰⁸

The radicalization of the movement can be seen in many ways: the prominence of Labadie, Grenell, IWPA leader Henry Schulte, and many other socialists; the emergence of two IWPA sections in Detroit; the creation of a workers' militia (Detroit Rifles). David Boyd, who became a Debsian socialist and MFL leader after 1900, had been a rank and file member of the Knights as a teenager in Detroit in the mid-'80's. He described the radicalism of the period in a series of letters about his experiences written in the 1930's. "Charlie Bell [a leader of the printers, an IWPA member, and editor of the Labor Leaf from November, 1884, to February, 1885] used to get up and make the most incendiary speeches which could easily be understood as inciting to riot."¹⁰⁹

Bell was not unique. In 1885, debaters at the Dialectical Union argued in favor of the proposition that "the use of dynamite was an effective and justifiable means of agitation and political warfare." The editors of some of the daily newspapers nearly had apoplexy over the results of a final vote on the proposition--it was defeated, but only by the narrow margin of 100 to 95. Even J. R. Burton was surprised that ninety-five people had been willing to publicly endorse the use of dynamite. Burton answered his more hysterical associates in the daily press by arguing that the gathering was not fully representative of Detroit workingmen. Perhaps he was

right, but interestingly enough, his essential argument against dynamite was simply that it would not work: "we believe there is great need for reform in many directions, but the use of dynamite by individuals will not bring the needed reforms."¹¹⁰

The ninety-five would-be dynamiters were not the only ones considering the possibility of violence. Throughout 1885 and 1886, the Labor Leaf carried an advertisement for the Detroit Rifles. Potential members had to be members of either a trade union or the Knights of Labor. The ads were signed XYZ, and recruits were advised to apply at the Labor Leaf office. Periodic letters from members of the group explained its functions as a workers' militia. A reader responded enthusiastically in August, 1885, shortly after the ads began to appear:

I saw in THE LABOR LEAF an advertisement for recruits for the Detroit Rifles. I would like to join...I think it is about time men woke up...The State, which ought to protect us, when we ask for good wages and treatment allows us to be shot, because the government of the State is in the hands of employers of labor, not the laborers...

This sort of thing has existed long enough, and only one way of preventing it seems possible. That is force. They force us by starvation and threats of violence to take their terms, but if we attempt violence, or even if we don't, the power of the State is used against us.

With union men well armed and accustomed to military tactics, we could keep Pinkerton's men at a distance...Employers would think twice, too, before they attempted to use troops against us. The men who fought for the union can fight just as well now, and will do

it rather than be shot in detail.

Every union ought to have its company of sharp-shooters...learn to preserve your rights in the same way that your forefathers did.

UNION

An anarchist correspondent from Chicago agreed that "working people should be armed with something better than mud balls, sticks, and stones when the powerful machinery of government is turned upon them at the bid of capital."¹¹¹

In December, 1885, the Labor Leaf reported that the Detroit Rifles had received its first shipment of guns: .44 caliber, sixteen shot repeater Winchesters. They drilled indoors "or at the outskirts of the city under cover of darkness." Their object was "to preserve peace in time of serious trouble...if workingmen were generally well armed and trained their rights would not be so frequently encroached upon by the privileged classes." The Labor Leaf supported the idea in its editorial column. "When there are robbers about it is a good thing to have a rifle handy. When you have a gun and know how to use it, and the robber knows you know how to use it, you are not so likely to have trouble...should trouble come, the capitalists will use the regular army and militia to shoot down those who are not satisfied. It won't be so if the people are equally ready, like their forefathers of 1776."¹¹²

In retrospect, there is an air of unreality about

this sort of revolutionary talk. Certainly not much came of it. Yet, as I read through the pages of the Labor Leaf in the early months of 1886, it is striking how often how many different writers resorted to a revolutionary image or threatened revolution if all sorts of demands were not met. An iron molder, writing in March of 1886, declared "What the molders want is a pricelist and wages sufficient to save us from the poorhouse when old age comes. They ask for these peaceably; and they demand these in the name of justice. And if they are not shortly forthcoming, then let there be a revolution that will compel fair treatment...." In the same issue, Captain McGregor threatened in the same tone that "whatever stands in the way...is an enemy to progress." A week later another correspondent declared ominously "Machinery or the wage system must go." That same month, the Labor Leaf celebrated victories over Pingree and Smith and the Detroit Free Press, which had been the city's last major holdout as a non-union printer. "A union shop after twenty years a rat office." Local brewers gained a reduction in their work day from fourteen to ten-and-one-half hours without any reduction in pay after a half day strike. The following month the pace quickened even more. One Knights of Labor assembly initiated 135 new members in one night. The influx was just beginning.¹¹³

Chapter 5

NOTES

1. The beginnings of the Trades Council are described in a number of sources including clippings in the Detroit Trades Council File, LC; Michigan Truthteller, April 2, 1880; Labor Review, March, 1880. Various reminiscences are also valuable, including George Duncan's in the Knights of Labor-Michigan File, LC.

2. Michigan Truthteller, May 21, 1880; May 28, 1880; June 12, 1880; July 2, 1880; Labor Review, May, 1880; June, 1880.

3. See: Chapter 4, p. 143.

4. Labor Review, June 1880; Detroit Post and Tribune, October 17, 1880, clipping in Detroit Trades Council File, LC.

5. Detroit Trades Council File, LC; Bulletin of the Social Labor Movement, December, 1880-January, 1881; Detroit Times, April 10, 1880; there are slight discrepancies among these sources about the numbers of affiliated unions. The 4,000 figure for April, 1881, may include a bit of public relations. There are no records of per capita tax paid by individual unions to substantiate this or other membership claims.

6. Detroit Trades Council File, LC; Labor Review, October 9, 1880; September 11, 1880; Detroit Times, April 10, 1881.

7. Labor Review, October 23, 1880; unidentified clipping, Detroit Trades Council File, LC.

8. Detroit Post and Tribune, October 17, 1880; clipping, Detroit Trades Council File, LC.

9. Detroit Trades Council File, LC; Labor Review, October 2, 1880.

10. Ibid.; Ibid., October 23, 1880.

11. Detroit Trades Council File, LC.

12. Ibid.; Michigan Truthteller, April 2, 1880; May 21, 1880; May 28, 1880; June 12, 1880; July 2, 1880.

13. Detroit Times, April 10, 1881; April 17, 1881; May 8, 1881; Detroit Unionist, April 7, 1882; October 23, 1882; Labor Review, August, 1881.

14. Labor Leaf, December 24, 1884.

15. SBLs, 1884, pp. 63-64.

16. Ibid.

17. Labor Leaf, November 1, 1884; November 8, 1884.

18. Ibid., January 14, 1885.

19. Ibid., April 22, 1885; Detroit Evening Journal, clipping, September 1, 1885, in Knights of Labor Scrapbook, LC. Many local sources seem to have confused the International Working People's Association (IWPA) with the International Workingmen's Association (IWA). The IWPA was the organization which included the Chicago anarchists, Johann Most, and other revolutionary elements which had seceded from the SLP. The IWA was founded by Burnette Haskett and was active in the Far West. Although the two Internationals discussed merger in 1883 (see: Chester McArthur Destler, "Shall Red and Black Unite?" in American Radicalism, 1865-1901, Chicago: Quadrangle, 1966), the merger never took place. Detroit had two sections of the IWPA in 1885, and the IWPA was quite active in the city, but a variety of local sources refer to the International Workingmen's Association when context seems to indicate that it was the IWPA.

20. Labor Leaf, June 23, 1886; July 21, 1886.

21. Ibid., January 14, 1885; April 22, 1885.

22. Ibid., April 22, 1885; October 7, 1885.

23. Ibid., October 7, 1885.

24. Detroit Unionist, April 30, 1883; Labor Leaf, April 8, 1885; March 11, 1885.

25. Labor Leaf, November 15, 1884; December 10, 1884; December 17, 1884; April 1, 1885.

26. Labor Leaf, December 29, 1885. While Grenell's estimate of 30,000 wageworkers is somewhat lower than my calculations of the number of workers in the city (38,000 in 1885) based on aggregate census figures, these aggregates included supervisory personnel in some cases and

also included many occupations (such as domestic servants) which should be considered working class but would not be amenable to union organization.

27. Labor Leaf, January 28, 1885.

28. Detroit Unionist, July 24, 1882. Another reflection of the organizers' sensitivities toward the better paid workers was the frequent explanation that the movement's demands for equality were designed to "level up not down," that is, to raise the wages of all to a level equal to the highest paid.

29. Labor Leaf, December 29, 1885.

30. Detroit Evening News, September 3, 1886. See Chapter 6 for a more detailed discussion of this growth.

31. Detroit Times, April 10, 1881.

32. Ibid.

33. Detroit Times, April 17, 1881; April 17, 1881; May 8, 1881; Detroit Unionist, September 4, 1882; October 30, 1882; Labor Leaf, January 6, 1886; Labor Day Review, 1892, p. 13. The National Stove Founders' Defense Association and the iron molders' ongoing struggle with it is discussed in David Montgomery, "Workers Control of Machine Production in the Nineteenth Century," Labor History, Fall, 1976, pp. 503-4.

34. Labor Leaf, December 24, 1884.

35. Ibid., October 28, 1885; Columbian Labor Day Review, 1893, p. 26.

36. "Among the Molders," clipping, Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC; Labor Day Review, 1892, p. 13.

37. SBLS, 1884, pp. 73-74; "Among the Molders" clipping, LC; Trades Directory, Detroit Times, April 10, 1881; KLDB; Labor Leaf, November 26, 1884; Labor Day Review, 1892, p. 37, LC; First Industrial History and Official Year Book of the Michigan Federation of Labor, 1915, p. 29.

38. Minutes of the Washington Literary Society, LC; KLDB; Knights of Labor General Assembly Proceedings, 1882, p. 389. Between October, 1879, and October, 1880, LA 901 did not initiate a single new member (KL General Assembly Proceedings, 1880, p. 213). No report was filed for 1881.

39. Minutes of the Washington Literary Society, LC; Knights of Labor-Michigan File, LC; Joseph Labadie to Powderly, December 7, 1879, TVP; Van Patten to Powderly, August 13, 1880, TVP.

40. Labadie to Powderly, February 24, 1880, TVP; Journal of United Labor, p. 281; KL General Assembly Proceedings, 1881, p. 266; The Unionist, August 7, 1882. David Barry was an iron molder; practically no background information on him is available. It may be coincidence, but the fortunes of the Knights of Labor in Detroit in the early 1880's seemed to correlate with his presence in the city. He is first mentioned in late 1881, when LA 901 was still the only LA in Detroit with only twenty-three members. In 1882, with David Barry as organizer, eleven new LA's were organized. Barry left Detroit for Port Huron at the end of November, 1882. Only five assemblies were organized in 1883. The membership of Port Huron Assembly 2038 increased from seventy-two in 1882 to 186 in 1884. David Barry had moved to Saginaw by 1885, and coincidentally, the membership of LA 2038 declined to sixty-six in 1884. David Barry remains an intriguing mystery. Joseph Labadie's relative lack of activity in 1882 may have been caused by personal financial problems. He wrote Powderly in September, 1882, that he had been out of work for weeks (Labadie to Powderly, September 28, 1882, TVP).

41. Norman Ware, The Labor Movement in the United States (New York: Vintage edition, copyright 1929), pp. 76-80. Michigan Truthteller, May 21, 1880; The Trades, April 17, 1880; a copy of the Crispins circular is in the Powderly Papers. An article by James Wright, one of the founders of the Knights of Labor, appeared in the Labor Review, August 28, 1880, describing the Knights in rather vague terms and claiming 80-85,000 members in the state of Pennsylvania alone, a completely fanciful claim.

42. T. V. Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor (Columbus, Ohio: Excelsior Publishing House, 1889), p. 631. The Detroit GA also formally admitted women for the first time.

43. KLDB; KL General Assembly Proceedings, 1882, p. 389; Knights of Labor-Manual of Facts, n.d., Burton Historical Collections, Detroit Public Library.

44. Knights of Labor-Manual of Facts, (n.d., but probably 1885), p. 7. Note the overwhelmingly craft character of the Knights in these years. This was true of the Detroit Knights throughout their existence. There is no evidence to substantiate the claims of Commons,

Perlman, Grob, et al., that the Knights were anti-trade union, that mixed assemblies predominated, or that they recruited primarily among the unskilled. The trunkmakers, shoemakers, shipcarpenters, and brass workers all had organized first as trade unions before affiliating with the Knights. Unions had also existed previously among the tailors and plasterers, but it is not clear if these unions had any connection with the Knights of Labor assemblies in these trades.

45. Detroit Unionist, January 22, 1883; January 8, 1883; Labadie to "Comrade Powderly," September 18, 1882, TVP. Labadie to Powderly, August 27, 1884, TVP; Knights of Labor-Manual of Facts, p. 7. The salary for Detroit MW was \$15 a month. When J. D. Long was elected in 1884, he refused to accept the salary arguing "that the work should be largely a 'labor of love.'" Labadie managed to recruit August Donath, editor of the Craftsman, the ITU's journal, to his National Trade District plan, but Donath reported disappointedly that he had received many angry letters against the idea of supporting it in the pages of the journal. Donath to Labadie, February 21, 1884 and April 8, 1884, LC.

46. KLDB; Journal of United Labor, p. 705; Detroit Unionist, July 24, 1882; Trevellick to Powderly, July 26, 1882, TVP.

47. W. H. Barrett to Powderly, July 3, 1882, TVP; LA 2063, Flint, to Powderly, October 6, 1882, TVP; W. H. Barrett to Powderly, October 24, 1882, TVP.

48. D. C. Blinn to Powderly, November 27, 1882, TVP.

49. KLDB; KL General Assembly Proceedings, 1882, p. 389; Labadie to Powderly, August 5, 1884, TVP; Detroit Unionist, December 4, 1882; Journal of United Labor, pp. 692, 969, 982; John Swinton's Paper, July 26, 1885; Richard Oestreicher, Knights of Labor in Michigan: Sources of Growth and Decline (unpublished M.A. thesis: Michigan State University), pp. 6, 15-16. Although further research has forced me to revise many of the conclusions of my M.A. thesis, the first chapter does provide additional useful information on the growth of the Knights of Michigan outside Detroit. The Knights prospered especially in lumber mill towns which were scenes of mass strikes for shorter work days, most notably the Saginaw Valley strike of 1885 which brought its leader, Tom Barry, national attention. Growth in many mill towns, where class lines were sharply drawn, was often explosive, although high levels of membership were rarely maintained over long periods of time.

Some examples of lumber mill town assemblies and fluctuations of membership follow:

| <u>LA</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>1882 Members</u> | <u>1883 Members</u> | <u>1884 Members</u> | <u>1885 Members</u> |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2032 | Muskegon | 31 | 145 | 71 | 50 |
| 2060 | Bay City | 30 | 156 | 310 | 194 |
| 2073 | Muskegon | 13 | 118 | 37 | 15 |
| 2120 | Alpena | 18 | 267 | 246 | 14 |
| 2363 | Ludington | 37 | 81 | 156 | 56 |

50. Record of the Proceedings of the First Regular Session of the Michigan State Assembly of the Knights of Labor; Journal of United Labor, pp. 723-4. The idea of state assemblies had been discussed since 1879, but was repeatedly defeated in the GA. Van Patten had been the sponsor of one of these resolutions. The motivation for state assemblies was primarily to facilitate state wide political action, and this was also the primary argument against the SA by those who opposed involving the Knights in politics. The SA concept was finally ratified at the 1885 GA after Michigan and several other states had already formed them. See: Ware, The Labor Movement, pp. 386-7.

51. Journal of United Labor, p. 705; KLDB; membership in Detroit declined from 797 to 709 (KLDB) in 1884, although part of the loss was offset by a new assembly organized in Windsor in 1884.

52. Detroit Unionist, October 23, 1882; The Spectator, November 3, 1883; Labor Leaf, November 8, 1884. It is not possible to determine whether any of the three remaining 1882 candidates belonged to the Knights. The seventh candidate, SLP member Charles Erb, joined the Knights in 1879, but withdrew to devote all his time to the SLP. Editors of the labor press included Labadie, Grenell, Charles Bell, J. R. Burton, Capt. J. M. McGregor, W. A. Taylor, T. M. Sheriff, and I. P. Granger, all Knights.

53. Labor Leaf, January 27, 1886; KL General Assembly Proceedings, 1886, pp. 326-28; Detroit Evening News, September 7, 1886; Reports of the Officers of DA 50, January 10, 1888, p. 3. The claim of 8,000 members, although cited in a variety of places, is probably an exaggeration of the number of members in good standing. The affiliations of local union in 1886-7 are bewildering; there were four citywide bodies to choose from: The Trades Council, the Central Labor Union, the Building

Trades Council, and DA 50. Some unions belonged to more than one, some to none at all, and many switched back and forth.

54. For an example of a feminist perspective, see Rachel J. Davidson, M.D., Gynaecologist, and President of Flint Equal Suffrage Association, to Powderly, February 26, 1884, TVP. Both Labadie and Grenell were strong advocates of women's rights and the Labor Leaf frequently reprinted articles from various feminist journals (although it also featured, on occasion, some decidedly non-feminist humor). Grenell described his meeting with Susan B. Anthony at the 1880 Weaver convention as one of the high points of his career (Grenell: Autobiography, p. 38).

55. Labor Leaf, January 6, 1886; Labadie to Powderly, August 5, 1884, TVP, also stresses the need for member education.

56. Minutes, Cigarmakers' Union 130, Saginaw City, Wayne State University Labor Archives.

57. Detroit Unionist, April 16, 1883; April 30, 1883.

58. Labor Leaf, May 6, 1885; May 13, 1885.

59. Ibid., June 10, 1885; July 22, 1885; August 12, 1885; July 8, 1885; December 30, 1885; March 24, 1886; Journal of United Labor, p. 2041; Report of Proceedings, Michigan State Assembly Knights of Labor, 1885. David Boyd disputes this account of the Pingree and Smith strike, calling it "ill advised" and suggesting that the DA settled on unfavorable terms after the strike had collapsed. While some of the Knights' leaders were devious enough to call a capitulation a victory, Boyd's reminiscences were written over fifty years after the events, he worked for Pingree in the 1890's and was personally close to him. David Boyd to A. Inglis, September 5, and September 25, 1938, LC. Boyd's papers include a letter of recommendation signed by Pingree about ten years after the strike. Boyd was a machinist and rank and file member of the Knights in the 1880's. He became prominent as a union organizer and Michigan Federation of Labor leader after 1900.

60. Ware, The Labor Movement, pp. 139-40; Donald L. Kemmerer and Edward D. Wickersham, "Reasons for the Growth of the Knights of Labor in 1885-1886," Industrial and Labor Relations Review, Vol. 3, No. 2, January 1950, pp. 213-20, dispute the influence of the Gould strikes; Labor Leaf, July 8, 1885.

61. For an example of suspension of ritual by leaders, see: Knights of Labor 1885 State Assembly Proceedings, motion by Tom Barry to drop all "forms and ceremonies" for the duration of the convention, p. 6, which carried. E. J. Hobsbawm discusses the role and importance of ritual in Primitive Rebels (New York: Norton, 1965), Chapter IX, "Ritual in Social Movements." Discussion of the Knights' paraphernalia is based on jobbers' advertisements in the labor press and a number of examples of these objects in the author's possession.

62. KLDB; Detroit City Directory, 1887. For a discussion of the constitutional structure of the Knights, see Ware, The Labor Movement, Appendix II, pp. 381-89. Professor Ware demonstrates that much of the constitutional theory was erratically enforced, and the constitution was often changed in order to ratify, ex post facto, actions already taken by powerful districts. Not all of the LA's which I classify as having an occupational designation were craft unions. Wayne Assembly 7749, of car workers, for example, was officially designated a mixed assembly, indicating a multi-craft character. Historians have generally misunderstood the nature of the mixed assembly. It was not necessarily anti-trade union. Some mixed assemblies were neighborhood social clubs (LA 2430). Some were essentially industrial unions or trade unions of several related crafts. LA 2697, Henry George Assembly, was essentially an ideological forum which took over some of the leadership cadre functions performed earlier by LA 901 as Labadie, Grenell, and several other prominent Knights transferred from 901. The nature and functions of mixed assemblies varied widely.

63. KLDB; "Among the Molders," LC. The membership of LA 8775 is an official figure from the 1889 State Assembly Proceedings. The membership of LA's 619 and 3954 are newspaper estimates, possibly unreliable. The Advance and Labor Leaf reported a membership of 249 for LA 619 (May 11, 1889), still a large figure but much less than 800.

64. Detroit Unionist, April 7, 1882.

65. The Labor Party decided in 1882, for example, to put up only a partial ticket because of "lack of organization" (Detroit Unionist, November 6, 1882). Charges of corruption and false counts were made at every election, and examination of the returns lends credibility to the charges. Labor candidates would often be credited only one or two votes, or even none, in some precincts, hardly likely when the candidates did quite well in neighboring precincts.

66. Detroit Unionist, November 6, 1882; Labor Leaf, October 21, 1885; Detroit Unionist, October 30, 1882.

67. Labor Review, October 2, 1880; October 9, 1880. For an overview of Greenback activities in Michigan, see: Richard M. Doolen, "The National Greenback Party in Michigan Politics, 1876-88," Michigan History, Vol. 47, No. 2, June, 1963, pp. 161-83. The 1880 alliance between the Greenbackers, socialists, and other labor reformers in Detroit was short lived. The party had polled 16 percent in Wayne County in 1878, but Weaver received only 2 percent in 1880 and all of the labor nominees on the Greenback ticket in 1880 were defeated. Labor politicians did better on their own after organizing the Independent Labor Party in 1882.

Stability of voting patterns can be seen by comparing the mean vote for unendorsed labor candidates by ward in 1882 and 1884:

| <u>Ward</u> | <u>1882</u> | <u>1884</u> |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1 | 92 | 90 |
| 2 | 87 | 79 |
| 3 | 222 | 291 |
| 4 | 129 | 86 |
| 5 | 225 | 280 |
| 6 | 156 | 122 |
| 7 | 146 | 182 |
| 8 | 153 | 148 |
| 9 | 258 | 257 |
| 10 | 154 | 144 |
| 11 | 273 | 289 |
| 12 | 145 | 132 |
| 13 | 67 | 78 |

Similarities are also striking at the precinct level:

| <u>Ward</u> | <u>Precinct</u> | <u>1882</u> | <u>1884</u> |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1 | 3 | 11 | 14 |
| 2 | 1 | 6 | 8 |
| 4 | 2 | 45 | 40 |
| 5 | 2 | 78 | 72 |
| 6 | 3 | 56 | 58 |
| 7 | 1 | 13 | 14 |
| 7 | 3 | 52 | 48 |
| 13 | 1 | 35 | 34 |

68. Detroit Unionist, October 23, 1882; Detroit Free Press, November 7, 1877; Detroit Unionist, November 20, 1882; Detroit Evening News, November 3, 1886;

Detroit Advance and Labor Leaf, March 19, 1887. Incomplete returns, discrepancies in the returns, and the method of voting for state legislature all make it impossible to compute either exact totals for the labor candidates or percentages. Each voter was eligible to vote for seven state legislative candidates, but there is no way of determining how many voters cast a full slate. Totals of a wide variety of minor candidates (in addition to the labor candidates) including Prohibitionists, Free Traders, Greenbackers, and independents were often not recorded. Thus, the total votes cast for each major party candidate are usually known, but there is no way to determine from these totals exactly how many people voted. In 1882, the average total of the unendorsed labor candidates was 19 percent of the average for the two successful labor candidates. Presumably, the two victorious Labor-Democrats received over 50 percent of the total possible vote; hence, the unendorsed candidates had about a tenth. In 1886, the Evening News reported an average of 2,946 votes for four unendorsed labor candidates based on preliminary returns. After the release of official returns the following winter, the Advance and Labor Leaf claimed an average of 4,543 for the same four candidates. The AALL calculated its total by crediting the labor candidates with estimated totals recorded by poll workers in precincts where few or no votes were officially recorded for the labor candidates and by crediting the labor candidates with additional votes in precincts where the endorsed labor candidates ran much farther ahead of regular party nominees than the totals given to the independent labor candidates.

While the AALL was hardly an impartial source, reasonably accurate calculations should have been possible because voting was not by secret ballot, and the Labor Party had stationed poll watchers at every polling place to count the number of labor tickets deposited in anticipation of exactly this sort of dispute. If we take the News' totals for all the candidates and divide by seven, the result is just under 22,500, a rough estimate of the number of possible voters. Using this figure as a base, the unendorsed labor candidates received about 13 percent based on the News' returns and 20 percent on the AALL returns. Given the alacrity with which both parties pursued labor leaders by 1886 (half of all the legislative candidates on the ballot, including regular party and ILP nominees, had some connection with the labor movement by 1886), it seems that machine politicians tacitly agreed that the Labor Party actually controlled more votes than those recorded in official returns.

69. Detroit Unionist, September 4, 1882; November 6, 1882.

70. Analysis carried out at the precinct level might identify which workers were voting for the Labor Party, which were not, and what variables (ethnicity, religion, occupation, income, etc.) were most important in determining voter behavior, but the time and effort involved in such an analysis puts it far beyond the capabilities of the present study. Paul Kleppner, The Cross of Culture (New York: The Free Press, 1970), pp. 20-3, 204-14, has analyzed Detroit voting returns in the elections of 1888-1894 and concludes that ethnocultural factors were decisive determinants of voting behavior and class or occupation were less important. Melvin Holli, Reform in Detroit, also characterizes voting in the late 1880's and early 1890's as essentially ethnic. The inability of the Labor Party to draw more than 10 to 15 percent in the 1882-86 period suggests that ethnocultural factors were decisive for the rest of the voters in these elections as well. Even a superficial examination of citywide voting returns confirms the importance of ethnicity. Candidates with obviously Irish and German surnames consistently ran slightly ahead of those on the same ticket whose ethnicity could not be surmised. Ethnicity probably was a factor even for the minority of workers who did support the Labor Party. Its vote was disproportionately greater in the East Side wards with large German populations, proportionately less in West Side Irish wards, and weakest in the center city wards which had a higher proportion of natives.

71. Charles Erb received about 18 percent in the Third Precinct of the Fifth Ward in 1884, for example, about double his citywide proportion.

72. Detroit Unionist, November 20, 1882.

73. Holli, Reform in Detroit, pp. 10-21; Grenell, Autobiography, p. 44.

74. Grenell, Autobiography, pp. 44-46. Detroit Unionist, November 20, 1882. Detroit Evening News, November 6, 1884. Labor Leaf, November 8, 1884. David Boyd to A. Inglis, November 29, 1938. Boyd said Erb refused the offered endorsement in 1886, but he was on the ticket in 1884, not 1886.

75. Detroit Unionist, October 2, 1882. John Swinton's Paper, April 20, 1884. A large labor demonstration against unemployment held in New York City on January 13, 1874, was attacked by police with several hundred injuries resulting. The Mollie Maguires were a secret Irish organization (probably part of the Ancient Order of Hibernians) prominent in the coalfields of eastern Pennsylvania in the 1870's.

Historians have disagreed not only about the character of the organization, but even about its existence. Nineteen Irish coalminers were executed between 1877 and 1879 for alleged terrorist activities committed by the Molly Maguires. Supporters at the time and defenders since have been convinced the men were victimized for their labor activities. In 1887, four anarchists were executed for their alleged role in inspiring unnamed persons to throw a bomb at Chicago police during a demonstration in Haymarket Square the year before.

76. Detroit Times, April 10, 1881.

77. Ibid.

78. Detroit Unionist, May 5, 1882. Labor Leaf, August 5, 1885.

79. Labor Leaf, December 30, 1885. Labadie to Richard T. Ely, July 4, 1885. Fine, "Ely-Labadie Letters."

80. Labor Leaf, February 10, 1886; January 6, 1886; November 4, 1885.

81. Labor Leaf, August 5, 1885; January 6, 1886.

82. Detroit Unionist, April 16, 1883. Labor Leaf, January 14, 1885; January 28, 1885; August 5, 1885; November 18, 1885. The Labor Leaf was not alone in doubting Egan's motives. The Alpena Labor Journal charged he had "sold his position in the legislature to the Republicans for appointment as Deputy Commissioner of Labor" (July 2, 1886).

83. Detroit Unionist, November 20, 1882. The Spectator, November 3, 1883. Labor Leaf, December 17, 1884; November 18, 1885. Detroit Evening News, September 3, 1886. Labor Leaf, September 29, 1886.

84. Detroit Evening News, November 2, 1882; November 2, 1886.

85. Labor Leaf, January 27, 1886.

86. Ibid., August 5, 1885.

87. Ibid., May 27, 1885; July 8, 1885; October 7, 1885. Detroit Unionist, December 4, 1882. The Trades Council determined that the four saloonkeepers were guilty.

88. Labor Leaf, June 24, 1885; July 1, 1885; July 8, 1885. Detroit Unionist, August 7, 1882.

89. Labor Leaf, December 31, 1884.

90. Ibid., October 7, 1885.

91. David Boyd to A. Inglis, September 5, 1938, LC. Barry was especially close to Labadie.

92. Grenell, Autobiography, p. 32. Detroit Times, April 24, 1881. Detroit Unionist, August 7, 1882. Labor Leaf, September 9, 1885. Advance and Labor Leaf, February 19, 1887. Labor Leaf, August 19, 1885. Copies of all these publications except the Bulletin of the Social Labor Movement are available in the Labadie Collection, University of Michigan. The Detroit labor press has been the subject of an M.A. thesis: Siegfried B. Rolland, The Detroit English Language Labor Press, 1839-1889 (Wayne State University, 1946).

93. Correspondence Files, LC. Boyd stresses the role of the orator, in particular.

94. See: Appendix III for background studies on local labor leaders.

95. Labor Leaf, September 30, 1885.

96. Detroit Evening News, November 4, 1884. Reports of the Officers of DA 50, January 10, 1888, pp. 4-5. Advance and Labor Leaf, April 23, 1887. Herbert Gutman has discussed the subtle and flexible character of class relations in smaller industrial towns and the ambivalence of small businessmen. See his "Class, Status, and Community Power in Nineteenth Century Industrial Cities; Paterson, New Jersey: A Case Study" in Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America (New York: Vintage, 1977). Also, "The Worker's Search for Power, Labor in the Gilded Age" in H. Wayne Morgan (ed.), The Gilded Age, A Reappraisal (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1963).

97. Circular dated February 10, 1880, TVP. "Constitution of the Council of Trades and Labor Unions of Detroit, Michigan," Michigan Truthteller, April 2, 1880. The Socialist, July 19, 1878. The 1878 constitution of the Knights of Labor provided that up to one-quarter of an assembly's membership could be non-wage earners (usually farmers or artisans gone into business). Lawyers, bankers, liquor sellers, gamblers, and stock brokers were prohibited. The proportion and significance of non-workers in the Knights has been greatly exaggerated. In an 1888 survey of the Michigan SA, 4.4 percent of the respondents were farmers, and 4.3 percent were merchants and professionals

(including small tradesmen), but this data was drawn from an overwhelmingly rural and small town sample. There is no comparable data for Detroit. There were a few ex-wage earners turned politician or small businessman in the leadership in Detroit, but they were atypical. The Knights defended their choice of such men as public spokesmen on the grounds that their economic independence made them the only members not subject to employer reprisal. Only one of thirty-five early members of LA 901, for whom occupations are known, was not a worker. He was an ex-cigarmaker who operated a cigar and news stand.

98. Detroit Times, April 24, 1881. Detroit National cited in The Socialist, April 20, 1878.

99. The Socialist, April 20, 1878.

100. Richard M. Doolen, "The National Greenback Party in Michigan Politics, 1876-1888," Michigan History, June, 1963.

101. Joseph Labadie to T. V. Powderly, December 7, 1879, TVP.

102. Labor Day Review, 1892, p. 19, LC. Local leaders with earlier business careers included cigarmaker and Trades Council President Sam Goldwater, who had once owned a store in Chicago; John Devlin, painter and K. of L. leader, a former grocer; Francis Fildew, carpenter, Trades Council President, a former building contractor. Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC. David Montgomery, Beyond Equality (New York: Vintage, 1972), p. 464.

103. The Socialist, May 11, 1878. Labor Review, July, 1880; September 11, 1880. Detroit Unionist, April 16, 1883.

104. SBLs, 1886, p. 150.

105. Labor Leaf, February 10, 1886.

106. Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC.

107. For example, see: Labor Leaf, June 24, 1885, 'Cranky Notes:' "they (followers of various -isms) are fighting the same enemy, the same unyielding power that all labor reformers are fighting, and it is unreasonable to expect that all will use the same means of warfare."

108. Grenell, Autobiography, pp. 54-9. Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC. Labor Leaf, February 3, 1886; March 17, 1886.

109. Boyd to Inglis, November 29, 1938, LC.
110. Labor Leaf, February 25, 1885.
111. Ibid., July 29, 1885; August 5, 1885; August 26, 1885.
112. Ibid., December 20, 1885. Detroit Evening News, September 5, 1887. Labor Leaf, February 17, 1886.
113. Labor Leaf, March 3, 1886; March 10, 1886; March 24, 1886; April 21, 1886.

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SOLIDARITY AND FRAGMENTATION:
WORKING PEOPLE AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS IN DETROIT,
1877-1895

By

Richard Jules Oestreicher

A DISSERTATION

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Chapter 6

1886: MAY TO SEPTEMBER

The cry from every capitalistic quarter is now "Go slow!"

But the cry comes too late.

For years a few hated and despised agitators have warned people of breakers ahead, but they were looked upon with scorn and their warnings were unheeded.

No power on earth can now avert a violent revolution....the privileged classes have invited a revolution and it will come down upon them with a relentless fury.

The downfall of Capitalism is inevitable. ...When the revolution comes--and it isn't far off--he [a notoriously antiunion Wyandotte iron foundry owner] and the likes of him will pay the penalties of their brutal dominations, and I fear they may pay with their heads.

Joseph Labadie, "Cranky Notions,"
March 24, 1886¹

One wonders what Mr. Muir (the foundry owner) and other Detroit manufacturers thought about Labadie's threat in the weeks that followed. If any of them had a nervous disposition, the events of that spring must have been disconcerting. Workers were on the march both locally and nationally. A series of dramatic strikes had been capturing national attention since the previous summer. The Saginaw Valley strike had shut down the state's most important lumber mills in July and August, 1885. Two successful

strikes conducted by the Knights of Labor against Jay Gould's Southwestern railroad system established the Knights' national reputation. Jay Gould, one of the era's most prominent symbols of Wall Street and Monopoly, had been forced to sign a written agreement with the Knights in September, 1885. That winter, as workers began to flock into the Knights of Labor in unprecedented numbers, local labor agitators launched a vigorous campaign to support a national general strike for the eight hour day beginning, May 1, 1886. As the deadline approached, the Detroit Evening News warned its readers that "The Greatest American Strikes [were] Impending." When a third great railroad strike broke out over the entire Gould system in March, 1886, the Labor Leaf's headlines expressed its belief that revolution was imminent. "THE REVOLUTION. Its Forerunner, the Great Railroad Strike."²

The 1886 eight hour day movement had been initiated by the nearly moribund national trade union federation, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, at its 1884 convention. Although the Federation was so weak that its own survival was in doubt, it had audaciously declared "that eight hours shall constitute a legal day's work from and after May 1, 1886." The Federation had no funds, few followers, and had not specified how the eight hour day was to be brought about, but scattered individuals and local unions seized on the idea as a way of mobilizing

broad groups of workers around a common demand. The Knights had nothing to do with starting the idea of an eight hour deadline, but the notion fit perfectly into their vision of universal agitation and social reform. As the national strike fever spread through 1885, labor radicals, in particular, began to advocate a general strike for May 1, 1886. The Chicago leaders of the IWPA were especially prominent in the general strike movement, and not coincidentally, when the strike actually began it was strongest in Chicago.³

The idea of an eight hour movement was first discussed in Detroit early in 1885. Charles Bell, one of the leaders of the IWPA and of the Knights in Detroit, published "Pointers for Eight-Hour Agitation" in the Labor Leaf in February, 1885. "The rate of wages does not depend upon the amount wage-workers produce," Bell argued, "but the amount they will consent to live upon and raise a family and perform labor." In a competitive economy, he reasoned, since the employer cannot fix prices, if workers demanded higher wages, employers would be forced to accept lower profits. Thus, although "The reduction of the hours of labor would necessarily result in a reduction of the amount of wealth produced...this decrease in production would be a loss to employers...The hours of labor can be reduced until the production is just sufficient to replace the capital and sustain the wageworkers in their standard

of living." If workers would simply refuse to work longer hours, the average standard of living would increase. In contrast, if workers accepted the advice of employers and moralists to live frugally, they were competing with each other and driving down the general living standard. The eight hour movement would produce not only leisure and time for self-improvement, but a basic social advance. Higher wages would stimulate technological improvement and increase the general welfare. In the long run, reduction in hours would mean an increase in pay.⁴

Advocates of the strike believed that by demanding the universal introduction of the eight hour system on a single day, workers could instigate this general increase in the accepted standard of living. Thus, the demand for immediate introduction had clear reformist implications beyond its immediate benefits. Moreover, it was an open ended reform, a first step toward a general transformation of the industrial system, not a cooptive reform designed to forestall more general change. It would be an impressive demonstration of labor's power. As workers recognized their power, organizers hoped, further demands would follow.⁵

Plans for the eight hour agitation in Detroit slowly began to take on more definite form throughout 1885. Bell had only provided some broad ideological guidelines in February. In April, 1885, the Labor Leaf announced the

May 1, 1886, deadline for introduction of the "eight hour system." In July, the paper urged readers to begin to make plans for putting the system into effect on May 1, and in August, Labadie suggested a more specific mechanism--the formation of eight hour leagues pledged to strike on May 1. Labadie and Henry Schulte kept up the demand for the May first strike into early 1886.⁶

As the general tempo of labor agitation increased in early 1886, the eight hour idea began to catch on along with the Knights of Labor as a vehicle for its realization. Powderly opposed the idea of a general strike (as well as the rapid expansion of the Order), but the Knights most prominent leaders in Detroit were in the forefront of the agitation for the strike. In March, 1886, a special session of the Knights' Michigan State Assembly urged support for the eight hour day. The State Assembly held a public mass meeting in which Labadie, the session's chairman, called for the May 1 general strike and Grenell threatened that "the present monarchical system of industry must be overturned, peaceably, if possible, forcibly if necessary."⁷

Formal mass meetings agitating for the May 1 strike in Detroit began in early February under the auspices of a broad united front including labor organizations ranging from the Trades Council to the SLP, the Knights, and the IWPA. The Detroit Tribune reported briefly on one of the first meetings in early February--a German eight hour

meeting at which about one hundred workers had been present. By mid-February, meetings were being held nightly in different parts of the city. Labadie spoke three times in one week, twice for the Trades Council and once for the SLP. Other speakers that week included Charles Erb and Gustav Herzig of the SLP, Captain McGregor, Henry Robinson, Labor representatives Brant and Walthew, and August Spies, one of the Chicago leaders of the IWPA, as a guest speaker for the local IWPA.⁸

When the Detroit Dry Dock Company decided in the midst of this agitation to increase its shipcarpenters' hours from nine to ten, the shipcarpenters jumped the gun on the May 1 deadline by countering with a demand for eight hours. The Company had paid its shipcarpenters \$2.50 for ten hours the previous year. The mass enthusiasm for shorter hours had already been revealed when the men had agreed earlier in the year to accept a wage decrease to \$2.00 in exchange for a reduction of the work day to nine hours. The Knights of Labor Shipcarpenters' Assembly 2124 held a meeting at Springwells (the suburban site of the dry dock) the first evening of the strike. Two hundred shipcarpenters attended, endorsing demands for the old rate of pay at 25¢ per hour, the eight hour day (i.e., \$2.00 for eight hours), double pay for overtime, weekly pay, no pay held back (the company, like many local companies, held back part of the pay for the entire season as

a bond to prevent quitting), reinstatement for all strikers, and preference for Knights of Labor in new hires. Forty new members were signed up for the KL assembly at the meeting.⁹

The same evening, 350 people met at Germania Hall to express their solidarity with the shipcarpenters and their support for the eight hour day. Henry Schulte presided, as Charles Erb spoke, denouncing the company and arguing that workers were getting poorer. They had to "demand what their labor is worth." He suggested that local workers boycott all companies who used any of the Dry Dock Company's ships. Labadie and Herzig also spoke proclaiming their support and announcing a Knights membership drive.¹⁰

By the next day, the newspapers reported that even the night watchmen and the errand boys had joined the strike in solidarity with the shipcarpenters. Workers had organized committees to patrol the docks for strikebreakers. If the employers tried to import Canadian strikebreakers as they had in the past, the workers would arrest the employer themselves for violating the previously unenforced anti-alien contract labor law. The workers' committee appealed to the Knights DA to support their patrols, their agitation against imported strikebreakers, and to boycott all firms using non-union made barges. A mass meeting sponsored by the DA three days later pledged

the Knights' support for the duration of the strike. The Knights of Labor Shipcarpenters' Assembly had enrolled so many new members that the organization was difficult to manage, and they were considering dividing into two assemblies. Local shipyard workers who had never before considered joining a union were now solidly with the Knights of Labor for the eight hour day. An old man spoke at the meeting with new-found fervor:

I have been told I am doing wrong in joining this strike. If I am, God forgive, but I don't know it. If any person will show me where it is wrong to ask pay for an extra hour's hard work I will go to the bosses, beg their forgiveness and begin work. But until this is explained to me I shall stand out, although I have a wife and seven children, to the bitter end.¹¹

But the end was not bitter. After five weeks, the Dry Dock Company capitulated to all of the shipcarpenters' demands. Over 300 shipcarpenters had won the eight hour day, and the Knights emerged not only as victors over the Dry Dock Company, but also as the symbol of imminent change. The May 1 strike took on even greater significance. On the day the shipcarpenters had settled with the Dry Dock Company, twenty-one brewery workers walked out of the Lion Brewing Company with demands similar to those of the Dry Dock workers.¹²

The shipcarpenters' strike demonstrated the underlying strength of the movement and the appeal of the eight hour day. The Knights Shipcarpenters' Assembly 2124 had

been agitating for years and could report only forty-five members by 1885, but it had led more than 300 men in the eight hour struggle. The strike also revealed how the growing spirit of expectancy gave what was initially a straightforward union struggle a transcendent quality. Workers had begun the strike only to resist an hour's increase, but they had quickly shifted to the demand for an hour's reduction and then to the whole list of additional grievances. As they began to patrol the docks with the assistance of the DA to enforce the anti-alien contract labor law, the Knights were starting, in effect, to assume limited police functions. Objectively, all of the demands might still be classified as essentially bread-and-butter economic demands, but the movement behind them had assumed a millenarian quality. Solidarity meetings drew crowds much larger than the shipcarpenters' own meetings, and workers from other trades assisted in the boycott of firms using the Company's barges. Grenell complained in early April that he and other speakers had been asked to speak at so many meetings that all the movement's leaders were approaching total exhaustion, but the results were gratifying. The eight hour agitation with its meetings of several hundred every night of the week was raising the specter of a class conscious working class which gave all demands a symbolic significance far beyond the proposals themselves.¹³

The movement was generating the kind of excitement

which disrupted the normal patterns of daily life and led people in directions that might have been unthinkable a few months before. In stable periods, the struggle for survival breeds an inner caution. Social relations appear to be permanent, natural, rather than transitory human creations since no viable alternatives present themselves. In this reified social reality, thoughts and actions which run contrary to the existing structure not only seem hopelessly utopian but personally dangerous; they threaten the individual's capacity to survive in the seemingly permanent existing institutions. Once the existing social structure assumes this permanent character in the individual's mind, even the most minimal demands are difficult to justify rationally. The rational becomes irrational and unthinkable. Shorter hours might be a fine utopian idea, but from the inner rationality of social stability, if it is necessary to strike to shorten the workday, the risks of losing the job which is the means of survival must outweigh the possible gains of an extra hour or two of leisure. Thus, the eight hour movement could not justify itself by the normal calculus of risks and benefits. The willingness of large numbers of people to undertake dangerous actions (i.e., striking) in behalf of shorter hours implicitly indicates a consciousness of social alternatives beyond the demand itself.¹⁴

In the very process of taking normally unthinkable

actions for limited demands, people's capacity to envision further alternatives expanded. When workers responded to Grenell's eight hour speeches by telling him that they had asked their bosses for eight hours, and the employers had claimed they could not afford to operate on shorter hours, Grenell answered that they should "Demand an accounting! Make every employer show his balance sheet! Let him not hide behind the phrase: This is my business." Grenell was suggesting a rejection of property rights in a specific case, but he hoped that the example of this case would lead people to more general conclusions about the whole concept of property rights. This was never completely spelled out, but followed from the rest of his argument. If the employer did not have uncontestable property rights over his business, then this implied a definition of property as social. Society could, therefore, justifiably specify how the property was to be used. Once the justice of the shorter work day was assumed a priori, alternative models of institutional structure followed. The normal order of priorities, of practicality over utopianism, were reversed. If examination of the employer's records revealed he could function under a shorter workday, then refusal to do so undermined his integrity and claims to social responsibility. He was either greedy or a liar. If he could not in fact survive, then that in itself raised the possibility of systemic criticisms: what was

wrong with a system which could not provide a minimal amount of leisure for its workers, and what changes were necessary to make that possible? Thus, once eight hours became a non-negotiable demand, the door was opened for the most fundamental leap in mass consciousness: the concept of social alternatives.¹⁵

The editors of the Detroit Evening News recognized the extraordinary character of the times. In an editorial in early March, 1886, they declared that "These are not normal times." The people's opportunities to work were "restricted." The editors contrasted this with an idyllic golden past when "the mechanic had but to shoulder his ax and march to where he could hew for himself a home in the virgin forest." That this romanticized vision may never have actually existed is less important than the editors' acknowledgment of the atmosphere of impending social crisis. Some of the city's employers must have had the same feeling. At the end of March, one of the cigar factories, Brown Bros., suggested to its workers that they join the Knights of Labor. Pingree and Smith and the Detroit Free Press, both long standing holdouts against the Knights of Labor and the Typographical Union, settled about the same time as the Dry Dock Company. Six small brewery owners accepted the eight hour demand in April without a fight.¹⁶

By April, as workers reacted to the news of these victories, the escalating eight hour meetings, and the

continuing reports of the Southwestern strike, the tone of the Labor Leaf grew increasingly aggressive. In mid-April, Labadie declared that "Gould and Hoxie Must Go. What a streak of good fortune it would be to this country if some foolhardy fellows would take it in their heads to kill Jay Gould and Hoxie and carry the thing out." A reader, responding to the tenor of Labadie's remarks, suggested the next week that workers should sabotage the telegraph system which was also owned and operated by Gould.

Keep cutting the wires
Between each station
Till Jay Gould consents
To arbitration.

Were they to do so it would be difficult
for Gould to run his trains, and would play
sheol with stock gamblers throughout the
continent.

CANUCK

By the last two weeks in April, new members were streaming into the Knights of Labor at the rate of several dozen per day. Seven hundred were initiated in two weeks--as many new members in two weeks as the total membership of DA 50 only six months before. District Master Workman J. D. Long wrote the Journal of United Labor: "The only trouble we have now is to keep men out of the Order."¹⁷

May 1 came on a Saturday. The banner headlines on the front page of the Evening News reminded readers that this was "THE FATEFUL DAY, Looked For With Anxiety by Employers and Employed," but judging from the accompanying story, local employers did not need to be reminded.

Managers of the city's most important factories had shown "a keen appreciation of the signs of the times," according to the News reporter, and the stove companies had granted 10 percent wage increases in the hopes of deflating the movement. The immediate impact of the general strike was difficult to gauge since Saturday was a short day for many firms anyway. The shipcarpenters and employees of six breweries had already been granted eight hours. The carpenters had reached a compromise with many of the city's building contractors--nine hours per day beginning one year from the present date. Strikes were expected in the rest of the city's breweries. Reports from other industries were very limited, but the situation was much quieter than many people had expected. Ministers devoted their Sunday sermons to the strikes. The Reverend H. C. Northrup of the Methodist Episcopal Church in a mildly pro-eight hour speech claimed that May 1, 1886, "would ever be a memorable day in this country," but he was a bit vague on how it would be remembered.¹⁸

By Monday morning it seemed that the whole affair might be anticlimatic. One more brewery owner had conceded, but the other brewery workers had struck. Sixty cracker bakers had struck for eight and one-half hours per day with five and one-half on Saturdays. The painters were demanding a nine hour day instead of eight. Four hundred of them had agreed to go to work on Monday but to

stop working after nine hours regardless of what employers demanded. Sixty lumber yard workers had struck in Springwells. School janitors were scheduled to meet that night to discuss strike plans. But the strike was hardly a general strike. The prevailing calm contrasted with reports of disturbances in other cities. In Grand Rapids there had been a "riot" at Fuller and Rice's Planing Mill. Editors of the News concluded that the lack of disturbance was "calculated to encourage the hope that the present difficulties may be adjusted, confidence restored and the wheels of industry started again, without that disastrous and widespread disturbance that a few days ago was predicted...."19

Their optimism was premature. The Michigan Car Works, which had laid off 125 men on Saturday, fired P. J. Clair Monday morning. Clair, a carpenter, had been the Knights of Labor organizer in the factory. The Knights had been organizing secretly in the Car Works for several weeks, but they had only a small nucleus and the organizers had considered a May 1 strike premature. Perhaps the company's management wanted to force the Knights' hand before the workers were ready. Certainly the mass lay offs on the first day of the projected eight hour strike were provocative, and firing Clair left absolutely no doubt that company owners were ready to fight. The editors of the News contrasted the Car Works' managers' "lack of spirit

and conciliation" with those of the stove companies who had prepared for the strike by granting modest wage increases.²⁰

On receiving word of his firing, Clair and a handful of friends went from department to department informing workers what had happened and urging them to strike. A growing crowd followed him as he forced his way into the plant manager's office. Clair's supporters demanded reinstatement of Clair, a reduction in hours, and an increase in pay. With the expected refusal, the workers marched out of the factory shortly after noon. Early reports placed the initial number of strikers at eight hundred, but by 1:00, as more workers left the factory to join them, the crowd had swelled to an estimated fifteen hundred. People milled around in front of the Car Works, filling the adjoining streets. The Labor Leaf conceded that the men had been "unorganized..." and initially "the strike was little less than a mob." Various people shouted suggestions to march on other railroad car factories to shut them down. One group, allegedly armed with clubs, marched to the Spring Works, a nearby subsidiary of the Car Works. Others tried to shut down the Michigan Car Works foundry.²¹

The McMillans, owners of the Car Company, had hastily called the sheriff who arrived with two deputies, but after surveying the situation, he just stood back and

watched. His statements to the press suggested possible sympathies with the strikers. "I dread these strikes, but I will do all the law requires of me to protect property... What can I do against 2,000 men?" Forty city police arrived shortly thereafter with paddy wagons. Recognizing that their forces were still inadequate to control the crowd, they stationed themselves between the Car Works and the Spring Works to break the workers' line of march, but the three hundred employees of the Spring Works had apparently seen the crowd coming before the police arrived, and the Spring Works was already shut down before the police set up their lines. By 2:15, Charles Erb, recently elected president of the Trades Council, and Gustav Herzig arrived on the scene and began to address what was left of the crowd in front of the Car Works. Herzig advised no drinking until the strike was over, when the workers could "celebrate a victory with a half dozen beers." In the meantime, the workers had to set up a negotiating committee and organize themselves.²²

The crowd began to march systematically from one factory to the next, calling on other workers to join them. The way in which the car workers moved in a step by step pattern suggests a higher degree of coordination and advanced planning than was apparent to reporters and other observers. At the very least, the possibility of joining the May 1 strikes must have been widely discussed before

the Car Works firings triggered the Monday afternoon walk-outs. As the crowd marched from factory to factory, the plants emptied almost spontaneously, sometimes in advance of the arrival of the marchers. Little explanation was necessary, so that if there had not actually been some advance planning, there had at least been enough prior discussion to make many workers in the other factories psychologically ready to join a strike as soon as it presented itself. In only a couple of cases did there appear to be any coercion involved. At the Michigan Car Works' foundry, a foreman had refused to shut off the steam and had tried to stop the strikers by shooting steam at them. The crowd grabbed pieces of coal and pelted him until he was knocked unconscious. They shut off the steam engines themselves before moving on. At D. W. Dwights' planing mill, a handful of workers refused to join the majority as they walked out and were apparently driven out by the rest of the crowd. Newspaper reports asserted that workers in many of the factories had been driven out against their will, but the newspapers' own accounts of the successive shutdowns, as well as the willingness of workers in all of these factories to remain on strike on following days after the crowd was gone, imply exactly the opposite conclusion. At the Michigan Central Railroad's car shops, the company's superintendent blew the factory whistle as he saw the crowd coming, and all the men poured out of

the factory intermingling with arriving strikers and joining them as they moved on.²³

By late afternoon, the number of strikers had swelled to three thousand, and a committee had been set up to establish demands. The symbolic emotional character of the strike is perhaps best revealed by this tendency to formulate strike goals only after decisive action had been taken. The workers had shut down one factory after another as a display of power, a gesture of defiance. Where plant managers were willing to defer to this spirit, workers remained at work and those who had struck seemed to feel that to do so was no breach of solidarity. The stove works, who had made a gesture to the workers' power in the pre-strike wage increase, continued at work throughout the strikes at other factories. At the Griffin Car Wheel Works the plant superintendent agreed to meet with the marching strikers when they arrived and offered his employees a reduction from ten hours to nine and a 15¢ per day wage increase. Both the Car Wheel employees and the strikers seemed satisfied as the factory resumed work. It was as if the city's workers had collectively decided to establish the principle of negotiation; any concession was sufficient because it established the workers' right to set terms and therefore opened the door to future gains. Perhaps for this reason the Griffin Car Wheel settlement was almost immediately seized upon by the car workers' committee. By Monday

evening their demands were reinstatement of Clair and nine hours with a fifteen cent per day wage increase for all car workers.²⁴

The car workers' action had provided the catalyst that had been missing over the weekend; the display of mass marchers shutting down a succession of factories stimulated further militance in other trades which had hesitated to take action. By that evening the number of painters pledged to nine hours had tripled to 1,200. Brewery workers, who had already shut down all of the breweries that had not accepted eight hours, escalated with actions against saloon owners who were selling beer made by the struck companies. Already over the weekend, the News had noted the sudden emergence of "union beer only on tap" signs all over the city. On Monday evening, workers began entering saloons, ordering "drinks for the house" in saloons selling non-union beer, and then refusing to drink it and walking out without paying. By Tuesday most of the brewery owners had capitulated. Hostile actions by some employers further swelled the ranks of strikers. The Diamond Match Company, for example, locked out 235 workers.²⁵

The tone of Tuesday's newspapers, which included reports of "A RIOT IN CHICAGO" and "Serious Trouble Anticipated in Milwaukee" as well as "General Discontent...In All Quarters" of Detroit, reflected the suddenly changed

situation. While previous accounts had been moderately calm and objective, the newspapers began to adapt an increasingly pejorative attitude toward the strikers. The editorials in the News had been sympathetic to the eight hour movement all spring despite some apprehension about the strike, but the paper's editorial position shifted dramatically after Monday's events. As the strike continued to escalate each day, the editorials criticized and ridiculed the workers. At the same time, they tried to calm middle and upper class readers. "KEEP COOL," the newspaper pleaded on Wednesday as the editor warned "The average conservative citizen--that is the citizen who has accumulated property and is tolerably satisfied with his prospects--will read his paper with mingled feelings of fear and indignation...." The workers for whom the editors had expressed sympathy a few days before were now in their eyes nothing more than "mobs of foreigners," but that in itself was comforting because "mobs cannot live without food, and food can be had only by work."

There isn't an average of two day's supplies in the houses of any of these disorderly foreigners who are now inebriating themselves with cheap beer and the cheaper socialist fustian of their orators...the humility and weakness begotten of hunger and necessity will succeed the flamboyancy engendered by beer. The desire to overturn and regenerate society will give way to the urgent necessity of satisfying the demands of that most potent of tyrants, the human stomach...²⁶

Stories were also designed to dampen the enthusiasm of strikers. A recapitulation of strike events in Tuesday's News led off with headlines suggesting that prominent local leaders, including Joseph Labadie, were unenthusiastic about the strikes. Yet the accompanying story revealed that it was a minor disturbance at Springwells that a few labor leaders had criticized, not the car works and other major factory strikes. Stories repeatedly implied that the strike wave was collapsing, that the men were returning to work, "The End Approaching," only to report two or three days later that the strike continued unabated. It is not clear whether major employers were pressuring the newspapers or editors were acting on their own conceptions of civic duty. Perhaps in a conflict atmosphere, class loyalties were strengthened on both sides.²⁷

The polarization of the community was also manifested in the way local authorities mobilized against the strike. All policemen had been ordered to serve double duty Monday night, and the city's superintendent of police had issued orders to precinct captains to ignore routine business. Except for extreme emergencies, police were to remain in station houses for massing at strategic points. The police superintendent claimed the city's entire police force could be concentrated at any point in the city within twenty-five minutes. Some of the business owners threatened to take action on their own. Harry Newberry,

Secretary and Treasurer of the Steel and Spring Works, was quoted by one reporter as he confronted some of the workers who had just shut down his factory: "I've got a right to defend my property from any mob, and tomorrow I'll be on hand prepared to shoot the first man who tries to stop the engine."²⁸

Strike leaders, in comparison, exercised restraint. When 2,000 men, including several hundred sympathizers, arrived at the Michigan Car Works by 6:30 Tuesday morning to prevent any strikebreakers from entering the factory, P. J. Clair urged them to remain peaceful. The strike was spreading on its own accord, and the men had to organize themselves and avoid provocative actions. Clair's admonition was hardly necessary. The only people who attempted to enter the Car Works were a group of about thirty skilled pieceworkers at the foundry who argued they were quite satisfied with their pay and wanted to work. They were scared off by the crowd.²⁹

The men remained in the streets in front of the factory discussing the strike. Speeches were given in English, German, and Polish. Erb and Herzig arrived again, urging organization, solidarity, and the need to "hold out." A group of workers urged a repeat of Monday's marches to shut down the Peninsular Car Company, still operating on the other side of town, but the idea was squelched for the time being. Knights of Labor leaders

assured the workers that the Knights were supporting the movement contrary to published reports. By evening, an effective strike committee had been created, and the beginnings of organization were established. To demonstrate their discipline and organization, as they left, the men formed into military style ranks and marched in formation down Russell Avenue to Gratiot and up Michigan Avenue before breaking ranks to return home.³⁰

They returned Tuesday evening to "one of the largest gatherings of workingmen ever held in this city," a solidarity meeting which overflowed into the streets because it was too large for any hall in the city. Three thousand people heard speeches by Frank Reichlin (a leader of the shipcarpenters' LA and a DA 50 executive board member), A. M. Dewey (of the Typographical Union and the DA), Clair, George Vornberger (chairman of the German Central Labor Union), and Erb. Erb contrasted the "McMillan's palaces" with the workers' homes. "Machinery was introduced for the welfare of humanity and not to oppress labor and benefit a class..." As he compared the car shops to prisons, declaring "the men want one hour less imprisonment," the audience broke into cheers. "Stand firm," Erb advised them.³¹

On Wednesday, the number of strikers topped 5,000. The Peninsular Car Company's employees remained at work Monday and Tuesday because the Company's pay day was on

Wednesday. The workers had decided to continue work until they had been paid since most had no savings or other resources to carry them through even a short strike. They would join the strike around noon Wednesday.³²

Strike leaders carefully planned a dramatic series of marches to emphasize this addition to the strikers' ranks, enlist community support, and demonstrate the movement's growing power. Workers were to gather at the Michigan Car Company Wednesday morning. They would march across town through various working class neighborhoods and arrive at the Peninsular Car Company as the Peninsular's workers left the plant. A second march that evening was to return back to the large square in front of the Michigan Car Works where workers from both car companies would be joined by striking workers from other industries in a massive rally.³³

A Tribune reporter received permission from strike leader Clair to march at his side and witness the day's events. The reporter's descriptions, both of the marching strikers and enthusiastic observers, revealed the awe that seems to have pervaded much of the city's middle class--a mixture of fear and grudging admiration for the workers' discipline and determination. Two thousand marchers arrived at the Michigan Works, according to the reporter's estimate. If his guess is accurate, the march included a substantial proportion of sympathizers--the number of

Michigan Car Company strikers had been estimated at only 1,200 the day before. Clair and a group of strike marshals organized the marchers into military formation, dividing them into "troops by trade" or squads of forty. The quickness with which this was accomplished and the orderliness of the march impressed the reporter who had probably expected the mobs of unruly foreigners his editors had been describing.³⁴

The march proceeded quietly until it entered residential neighborhoods described by the reporter as "working class districts." The journalist was apprehensive but was fascinated with the way in which the entire community responded to the marchers. His imagery suggested an almost insurrectionary community character of the strike. The car workers were viewed as a symbol of the entire community's grievances. They acted not just for themselves but for the working class subculture as a whole. The reporter stuck close to Clair at the head of the march apparently convinced that it was only Clair's presence which protected him from hostile onlookers. People shouted from windows and rooftops, waved, and gestured their approval. "Good Luck!" "Give it to 'em." "That's the stuff for the laboring man." As they arrived at the Peninsular Works, they were joined by the Peninsular workers, and the combined crowd heard speeches by strike leaders in English, German, and Polish.³⁵

The march stimulated further walkouts. At a chair factory along the line of march, the workers responded to appeals from the marchers and struck in protest of child labor in the plant. The Pullman Car Works suspended operations for the day. A minor scuffle occurred between 75 striking Polish laborers and a group of teamsters at a downtown construction site before the construction workers agreed to join the strike. Most other building sites in the city were empty, a spectacle the Tribune described as "eerie."³⁶

That evening the workers marched a second time down two of the city's main thoroughfares, Gratiot and Michigan Avenues. As the estimated 2,500 marchers arrived in the large square in front of the Michigan Car Works, they merged with a crowd of more than 1,000 already there. The police maintained a low profile as a corporal's guard of only 20 men watched from across the street. Speakers pursued the same theme of class division that Erb had emphasized the night before. Vornberger, speaking in German, argued that workers built Pullman's cars but could not afford to ride in them. A. M. Dewey followed him in English with a similar argument. The strike was part of the larger struggle of contemporary society. Workers deserved a share of the profits of industry. Strike leaders warned the workers about police infiltrators in the Knights of Labor and business threats of vigilante violence. Henry

Robinson described conversations with business leaders the past two days. "I don't fancy this strike business at all," one employer had told Robinson. "We will organize an armed league and shoot those fellows all down if this thing keeps on." Robinson ridiculed such threats of violence, but a speech by an old Irish worker employed at the Peninsular Car Works implied that workers were ready to meet force with force. James Barney said "he had been an old soldier and had enlisted for another war."³⁷

The system of daily marches and mass meetings developed during the first few days established a pattern which continued throughout the strikes. The meetings and marches fulfilled several practical and psychological functions. Workers kept busy and remained directly and immediately involved in the movement. In some ways, the lack of formal organization helped to maintain this involvement. There was no official bureaucracy to organize picket lines, establish demands, arrange publicity, and maintain communication--the workers had to do these things themselves. While a small group of informal leaders still assumed fundamental decision making roles, these decisions had to be validated daily by the strike meetings. There were no means of applying sanctions on individuals who failed to meet the obligations of solidarity except through informal group pressure. Mass picketing at plant gates bolstered spirits as well as intimidating those who might

have otherwise considered returning to work. Continual reaffirmation of solidarity was essential. If the strike started to break and any sizable number of strikers returned to work, the position of the remainder would be untenable. The car workers had no union or contractual protection, no seniority rights. The companies could hire anyone they wished. Those who remained on strike once the companies began hiring again could easily be refused employment. The strike meetings were thus a ritual of reaffirmation--each striker publicly presented himself daily and reasserted his solidarity with the group. The meetings were also the primary means of communication, essential both because of the hostility and inaccuracy of newspaper coverage and because of the multilingual character of the strikers. At strike meetings, strikers could be informed in their own languages of the progress of negotiations and assured that newspaper reports of back-to-work movements were false. Newspaper descriptions of nearly all major strike meetings noted the presence of speakers in three languages: English, German, and Polish. Meetings also provided an opportunity to arrange emergency assistance for families who needed it. On Friday, May 7, for example, thirty-five loaves of bread and fourteen pounds of cheese were distributed to needy workers during a meeting of 500 Peninsular Car Company employees.³⁸

The marches served many of the same functions as

strike meetings and mass picketing, but they also established solidarity beyond the plant level and visibly demonstrated the overall strength of the shorter hours movement. Except for a few of the largest and most important meetings, meetings were for the workers of a particular plant. Michigan Car Company workers congregated at the Michigan Works, Pullman Company workers at the Pullman factory, Peninsular workers at the Peninsular Works, painters held painters' meetings, brewery workers held brewers' meetings. Mass marches were designed to bring everyone together from all of the striking factories. They were a gesture of class power and as such also served a crucial purpose in the negotiating process. The Tribune's editors expressed upper class reaction to the marches in an editorial on Thursday, May 6. "Bloodshed in other cities and the unsettled state of labor in Detroit contribute to the feeling of uneasiness among the citizens generally yesterday ...The sight of hundreds of men marching through the streets to the music of their heel taps was not an inspiring sight."

A surprising number of companies began to offer concessions to the strikers almost immediately after the marches began. The master painters refused the striking painters' demand of nine hours but offered a half day on Saturday or a fifty-five hour week. Most of the brewery companies accepted the eight hour day by Wednesday. One

brewery owner who hired scabs and held out until Saturday finally settled and agreed to pay the union a \$780 indemnity for his intransigence: \$50 for each day he had refused to sign, \$35 for each union member he had fired, and \$50 to cover the union's expense of printing boycott circulars against him. The Globe Tobacco Company offered its workers a choice between eight hours six days per week, or longer hours Monday through Friday with only half days on Saturdays (the workers chose the latter). The stove companies who had already granted a 10 percent wage increase on May 1, offered two hours off every Saturday if their men would stay at work. Even the Michigan Car Company agreed to negotiate and offered to accept the reduction from ten to nine hours per day if the men would accept a corresponding wage decrease instead of an increase. These concessions must be viewed as a direct response to the spectacle of mass marches. The strikes had not been underway long enough to represent any serious economic pressure on firms. Some employers may have offered concessions because they had sympathy with the movement, but even if that was the case, the marches and the strikes had been essential prods. The eight hour system had been actively discussed for months before the strikes began, but few employers had been willing to make any concessions at all until the eve of the strikes, and the extent of such concessions expanded tremendously as the mass marches

dramatized the strike.³⁹

The strike wave reached its peak by the weekend of May 8 and 9. Wednesday's suspension at the Pullman Car Works had turned into a strike; the large Murphy chair factory locked out 250 employees; 700 painters had struck; and a variety of smaller manufacturing companies had also been added to the list of struck firms. On Saturday, May 8, the Tribune estimated the number on strike at 5,146. The strikers were a broad cross section of Detroit's industries. In addition to 3,400 employees of four railroad car manufacturers, there were painters, cracker bakers, lumber mill workers, sewer construction laborers, chair and match factory employees, steam forge workers, foundry workers, tannery workers, sailors, lumber yard workers, coopers, and a variety of other metal trades. Yet even this list greatly underestimates both the number and range of participants in the shorter hour movement. Three hundred shipcarpenters had won the eight hour day in March. Employees of six breweries had also won eight hours before May 1, and another 175 brewery workers had struck but had settled before Saturday. Carpenters had arranged a nine hours compromise before May 1, and most of the city's cigarmakers had achieved eight hours through negotiation. Both of these settlements involved several hundred participants. A number of smaller painting contractors accepted the nine hour demand during the first few days of the

strike so that the 700 painters listed in the Tribune's estimate on Saturday had been joined by 400 or 500 more earlier in the week. The Tribune's list also omits employees of a variety of small firms described as on strike in its reports or those of the News or Labor Leaf, including bricklayers, construction workers, and workers at the Detroit Safe Works and Detroit Lubricating Company. Thus the total number of workers who had struck for shorter hours since March or had arranged shorter hours through negotiations was probably nearly double the Tribune's estimates.⁴⁰

But the significance of the shorter hours movement lay not only in its numbers. For the first time the labor movement seemed to have superceded the multiplicity of fragmentary forces to tap the broad constituency of workers outside its ranks. The shorter hours campaign cut across the competing loyalties of ethnicity, craft, neighborhood, and status. Polish, German, and English speaking workers pledged their solidarity to each other. Skilled tradesmen who had reached satisfactory agreements with their own employers engaged in widespread sympathetic boycott actions for workers still on strike. Bricklayers, masons, and carpenters refused to work on buildings employing painters while the contractors and master painters had not settled with the painters.⁴¹

More than half of the shorter hour movement's

participants had not belonged to any labor organization prior to the strikes. Thousands of them now joined the Knights of Labor and various trade unions. When Wendell Phillips Local Assembly 4293, Clair's assembly and the group that had provided the initial nucleus of the car works' organizers, met during the first week of the strike, the hall was filled to capacity with members standing in the street outside. Clair went inside with a long list of names to be considered for membership, and a mass initiation quickly followed.⁴² The painters' local assembly (1820) claimed 400 members by the second week of the strike and had made plans for a cooperative paint company. The Coopers' Union enrolled its entire membership in the Knights and became a new local assembly. The Tailors' Union followed suit.⁴³

Regardless of the outcome of negotiations over particular demands the strike had decisive impact on organization and the overall pattern of class relations. The will of the strikers to continue striking began to weaken during the second week, but the growth of organization accelerated. Even employers who steadfastly refused to accept the workers' strike demands were consiliatory. When the Michigan Car Company workers refused the company's offer of nine hours with nine hours' pay, the company's manager offered to allow representatives of the workers to examine the company's books in order to convince

them that a wage increase or even the old rate of pay for nine hours (i.e., ten hours' pay for nine hours) was impossible.⁴⁴

Daily strike marches did continue into the second week. The newspaper reports began to give the impression that these marches were smaller and smaller; they suggested that the strike was on the verge of collapsing. A Tribune reporter was surprised when he was barred from a strike meeting on Saturday as a strike leader told him that the workers were "going to boycott the papers because they don't give us a fair shake." Monday's Tribune carried alleged advice to the strikers from Powderly to go back to work: "Men who own capital are not our enemies," and the Tribune apparently expected a massive return to work the next day. Yet an article on the back page noted that a meeting of 1,500 Michigan Car workers had vowed to stay out another three weeks.⁴⁵

Apparently scattered individuals did attempt to enter the car shops and other struck factories on Monday, May 10, and Tuesday. A clerk drew a pistol on the Michigan Car workers as he walked into the factory on Monday morning, and the workers allowed him in, but when a second man tried the same thing, he was attacked by a group of Polish workers. About twenty-five ironmolders reportedly entered the factory at 7:00 a.m. Monday morning as well. Fifty workers had gone into the Peninsular Works but had

been told to go home by the management because they were too few to run the plant. Yet these were primarily supervisory personnel or highly paid artisans unrepresentative of most of the strikers. The Tribune's back-to-work movement failed to materialize, and the paper reported on Tuesday, as if it were surprising news, that the workers "DID NOT GO TO WORK." Four thousand workers were still out on Tuesday, May 11, according to the paper. Much of the decline from Saturday's estimate of over 5,000 was the result of settlements in various small factories, not breaking of the strike movement.⁴⁶

Each day the newspapers reported men going back to work in their lead headlines on the strikes, yet on Friday, May 14, the News reported that the car works strikers were still determined to stay out. They had begun to organize a Car Workers' Union--464 workers had paid \$1 each as an initiation fee, and nearly twice that number had been at the Union's first meeting. The car companies were adamant, however. The superintendent of the Michigan Car Works, apparently retracted earlier offers of conciliation, vowed to keep the factory closed all summer if necessary. Final pay checks had kept the workers going up to this point, but many families were beginning to face real distress. When Clair declared on Friday that no one would go hungry, the implication was unclear. Perhaps he had hopes that the rest of the community would feed the strikers, but with

more than 3,000 still on strike, plus their families, that hope was hardly realistic. Capitulation must have entered his mind.⁴⁷

On Tuesday, May 18, the Pullman workers, upon receiving word of the collapse of the strike at the main Pullman factory in Pullman, Illinois, voted to return to work, but the Michigan and Peninsular car workers decided to continue the strike and to prevent scabs from entering the factories by force, if necessary. On Monday, they had ringed the Michigan Car Works with a mass picket line. When a supervisor, Engineer Metzenfeldt, pulled his revolver on the pickets, he was stoned. The company had recruited scabs from out of town, but apparently the car workers had received information about this and had prepared themselves. A group of strikers had hidden behind coal cars in a railroad siding near the factory entrance. When the police began to escort the strikebreakers into the factory, at a pre-arranged signal the hidden strikers climbed on top of the railroad cars and began pelting the scabs. The factory remained closed for the day.⁴⁸

But the following day, both the police and the strikebreakers were better prepared. Seventy police ringed the Michigan Works early Tuesday morning to prevent strikers from getting close to the factory. The "Cleveland scabs" arrived heavily armed and entered the factory at gunpoint. While some strikers had reportedly also

been seen with revolvers, they were not prepared to undertake a gun battle in order to keep the strikebreakers out.⁴⁹

By the end of the third week of the strike, the car workers' position was growing desperate. A benefit ball held in midweek raised \$900 for their support, but that would not go far for some 2,000 car workers and their families. On Wednesday, May 19, shots were reportedly fired at strikebreakers at the Michigan Works, and a group of Polish strikers told strikebreakers "you are going to be killed," but the strikebreakers avoided confrontation on Thursday by arriving at the factory at 2:00 a.m. On Thursday, Clair went to visit James McMillan to convince him to change his position. McMillan refused, and although the car works strikers were still solid, the end was clear.⁵⁰

By Saturday, May 22, most of the factories in the city, other than the car works, had resumed operations. The car workers were becoming increasingly isolated. As reports began to circulate that the car companies were advertising widely in Cleveland and other cities for new workers, a trickle of car workers began to reapply for work. Many applications were refused while other workers were told to come back next week. The car works strike was becoming a lockout. Clair was not to be rehired under any circumstances. The Polish laborers at the Michigan

Car Company pledged to stick with Clair. "One go, all go" a group had reportedly declared in pidgin English at a weekend strike meeting, but by the middle of the next week, it was clear this was a futile gesture. Clair formally absolved them of any obligations to him. Some workers stayed out with him, nonetheless, while the company refused to rehire about half of those who applied. When the Michigan Car Company officially resumed operations on Wednesday, May 26, there were still about 1,000 workers on strike in the city according to the Tribune, but by June 1, the only group of workers still reported out on strike were 150 painters.⁵¹

Yet the car workers' defeat and the collapse of the eight hour strike movement did not have the discouraging consequences that might have been expected. Evaluated from the immediate point of view of the eight hour demand, the movement had been at best a mixed success. It had not produced a general strike--even at the movement's peak less than a fifth of the city's industrial workers were on strike.⁵² For the more than 3,000 car workers, the strike resulted in no tangible improvements. But most of the other strikers had received some concessions. Grenell estimated at the end of May that 5,000 workers had gained some reduction in hours since May 1, with an average decrease of eight hours per week. Twenty-four hundred stove company employees had received a

10 percent wage increase as a direct result of the movement. These results were impressive. The city's labor movement had had no more than 5,000 members at the end of 1885. "In spite of what the capitalistic press say, the short hour movement has been more successful than its most optimistic friends dared to anticipate."⁵³

But the movement's greatest importance according to Grenell, was not the immediate gains.

If all the organized trades in Detroit had failed in shortening the workday, even then the attempt would not have resulted in complete defeat.

"'Twas better far to strike and lose
Than never to have struck at all."
to slightly change the old song...The struggle by the masses...to be successful requires discipline, and this discipline can be best obtained by trials of strength...You may drill soldiers until doomsday, and yet they will be "raw" until after having been in a battle or two. So with labor's army. Labor will never have the confidence and discipline that comes from strikes until having passed through one of the educational skirmishes...Employers will never acknowledge the strength or rights of labor until labor stands up for its rights and gives proof of its strength.⁵⁴

In these terms, emotionally and culturally, the movement had been an overwhelming success. Dozens of employers who had never previously recognized labor organizations or the concept of collective bargaining were forced to negotiate with their workers. The potential power of concerted action had been demonstrated. Class relations in Detroit had been permanently changed in a way which no amount of writing, speechmaking, or

exhortation could ever have accomplished. Grenell used a religious analogy to explain what had happened. "Some people...can be converted by telling them of the love of Jesus...others...only glowing pictures of the tortures of hell will bring in repentance to their knees. So it is in the labor world." The scenes of thousands of angry workers, marching and striking, had given the city's employers and middle class "a glowing picture" which must have suggested the potential consequences of continuing overly repressive labor policies. Containment of potential mass unrest, they learned, required concession and cooptation as well as the regimentation and work discipline they had tried to apply thus far.⁵⁵

For the workers the lesson was that ordinary people can make history. While they had been beaten this time, as Grenell argued, the experience had taught that there could be a next time, perhaps more successful. The growth curve of labor organization supports this inference. While membership, especially in the Knights, had turned sharply upward just before the strike, it climbed even more sharply in the months immediately following the strike.⁵⁶ At the first meeting of the Car Workers' Union held after the end of the strike, P. J. Clair submitted a list of nearly 2,000 names of workers who wished to join the organization.⁵⁷

The Car Workers' Union was only one example of the dynamic growth of membership. "Organization is proceeding

at a lively rate," the Labor Leaf noted, "and there does not seem to be any danger of Detroit relapsing to its old position." New Knights of Labor assemblies were established for carriage workers, cracker bakers, teamsters, shoemakers, wire weavers, tailors, barbers, woodworking machine hands, patternmakers, bookbinders, machinists, tanners, candy makers, cigarmakers, file cutters, cabinet makers, street car employees, shoe lasters, shoe cutters, engineers, metal polishers, as well as several mixed assemblies. LA 2348, which had had only 14 members in 1885, reported over 700 by July, 1886. DA 50 had 43 local assemblies, and the Labor Leaf reported cheerily "less than 100,000 members," Membership was increasing so rapidly that official totals were already out of date by the time they were reported to national headquarters. By the end of the summer, the Evening News estimated Knights of Labor membership in the Detroit area at 8,000, and although this figure is nearly twice that reported to the General Secretary-Treasurer on July 1, the growth rate during the summer was so rapid that the figure is plausible. By September, 1886, the News estimated total union and Knights of Labor membership at over 13,000, compared to only 5,000 just eight months before.⁵⁸

This pattern of growth and the millenarian atmosphere that went with it has been characteristic of a variety of social movements. While the Gould strikes and

the eight hour movement provide an immediate explanation for growth and enthusiasm, a behavioral model which assumes a purely stimulus-reponse type of causation not only ignores the psychological subtleties of human behavior but also fails to correspond to the sequence of events. Why do large numbers of people in periods of social unrest suddenly change their behavior? The cataclysmic character of social movements cannot be explained by a psychological model which assumes changed opinions based simply on rational reflection. Why should people change their minds suddenly? Yet we also cannot assume that such behavior is irrational as the mob psychology arguments of conservative theorists suggest. The Detroit carmakers' actions show, as do many other studies of crowd behavior, that crowd activity involves planning and is clearly goal directed. Any adequate theory of popular consciousness in Detroit in 1886 must deal with these issues and explain not only why workers responded dramatically to the eight hour movement and the earlier strikes, but also why growth continued, both quantitatively and qualitatively for several months after the eight hour movement collapsed and then subsided quickly the following year. Cooperatives, the labor press, workers' cultural organizations, the Labor Party, all of the institutions of the subculture of opposition flourished as never before or again in the summer of 1886. What had produced this sudden shift in

mass behavior which led thousands of workers who had never before participated in the labor movement to join the May strikes and then to continue their involvement in a broad range of activities in the following months even where their strike efforts had been unsuccessful? And why, after sustaining these unusually high levels of involvement for several months, did the movement then begin to collapse suddenly?⁵⁹

Sociologist Richard Flacks has confronted the same sort of questions about popular discontent in the late 1960's. Although the anti-war, student, and civil rights movements involved very different kinds of people and issues from the labor movement of the 1880's, the life cycles of the movements are similar enough to suggest similarities in the dynamics of each. Each movement briefly involved large numbers of people at extraordinarily intense levels of activity and commitment, people who for the most part normally participated in political activities to a minimal degree. Each movement, at its most frenetic peak, used revolutionary rhetoric and envisioned ambitious far-reaching social changes which participants and observers took seriously at the time, but which seemed hopelessly unrealistic upon retrospective reflection.⁶⁰

Flacks argues that such periods of intense pursuit of social change are quite atypical. Normally there is a clear "separation between two modes of human activity:

'making history' and 'everyday life.' 'Making history' means taking actions that affect the shape of society or the direction of social change." Everyday life "is...a collection of private activities that are largely taken for granted. Some of these activities are for survival. Others are obligatory and fulfill commitments made to specific people (family, for example)...." For most people, most of what they do every day is "set by external demands and...not freely chosen." They cannot make history, i.e., "change those demands and the institutions that make them--without abandoning, disrupting, or threatening the patterns of their daily life." Since most people are struggling to avoid exactly those disruptions and threats to survival and patterns of life, they learn to also avoid activities that have the potential for getting them into trouble, particularly when experience teaches the prospects for changing history, i.e., changing the fundamental quality of daily life, are very limited. Making history and everyday life are normally in opposition to each other for all but the very powerful.⁶¹

Given an inability to make history, a basic powerlessness, people learn to internalize the values they have been forced to accept. Thus, in periods of social stability in which most of people's expectations for everyday life are met, they will express satisfaction with things as they are, even hostility against those who seek to

change them. Those who question the quality of daily life are questioning something most people have been forced to accept, but given the values of individualism and self-reliance in American culture, would like to believe they had chosen freely.⁶²

Yet on a deeper level, perhaps partially unconscious, there are still resentments about powerlessness, about the nature of everyday life. If people are presented with an opportunity to express those resentments, a way of making history, or forced into it by external circumstances, these resentments have an explosive potential. People act, according to Flacks, when their lives are disrupted and two other preconditions are present:

First, people whose lives are disrupted must see that their fate is shared with others ...popular movements most typically occur when people who share a common fate are in close proximity to each other...Second, a movement seems to require the invention of specific tactics that appear effective as means of making history. The history of popular movements is filled with examples of previously passive groups of people being ignited by small, typically spontaneous actions taken by a small number of individuals. All such triggering acts seem to have one characteristic in common: they make it plausible that joining or emulating the initiators might literally enable people to do something--to "make history."⁶³

Flacks sees the student and anti-war movements as products of these conditions: students' lives were disrupted by the war, they were in close proximity in university communities, and the direct action tactics developed

by the civil rights movement provided a means, a way of acting. The mainstream of the American population, although also troubled by the war, could not or would not act because these conditions were not met for them. Students faced less of a contradiction between everyday life and making history because they had fewer commitments and more immediate personal freedom.⁶⁴

Working people of the 1880's faced a similar antithesis between survival and control of their destinies. As long as the labor movement was not strong enough to provide protection for its participants, and it was never very strong in most industries, any attempt to make history threatened everyday survival. Simple membership in the Knights of Labor, or even buying a labor paper (as many of the incidents already described demonstrated), could be grounds for dismissal, and others more cowed by hunger were waiting to take their place; risks seemed to outweigh possible benefits.

In many ways, this was at the heart of the tension between solidarity and fragmentation at the individual level. For the worker with marketable skills, some sort of bargaining process with employers, whether through business unionism or more informal means, might be consistent with every day life and a plausible way of improving it somewhat, even if not changing any of the basic parameters. For those who possessed no such advantage, the

alternatives boiled down to remaking society, i.e., making history, or submission. If the employing class had been willing or able to bargain with skilled workers and to give workers a minimum level of security, dignity, and personal freedom in their private lives, that is to provide what Americans conceived of as the rights of an American citizen, there is every indication that most workers would have chosen submission.

But the employers did not. Nearly every dramatic national episode of apparently spontaneous activity from the bottom, from the 1877 Railroad Strike to the Gould Southwest strikes, Homestead, and Pullman in 1894, began as a resistance movement to actions initiated by employers: wage cuts, firing union organizers, union busting, speed-ups, and changes in work rules. The extent of the eight hour strikes in Detroit in 1886 was the result of the Michigan Car Company's decision to lay off workers on May 1, and fire Clair on May 3.

The emergence of large factories in Detroit in the 1870's and 1880's with unsatisfactory working conditions satisfied Flacks' first condition--common fate and close proximity. The eight hour movement and the rise of the Knights of Labor provided the second--the tactics or means of acting. Workers, however, in contrast to students in the 1960's, could not ignore personal commitments and economic necessity for long. When the brief outburst of 1886

failed to change the structure of their lives, most workers were forced to return quickly to the concerns of everyday life. Flacks' model, thus, satisfactorily answers the basic questions I have posed. It explains why most workers held back from the labor movement before 1886, why the growth of the movement was explosive once people had the opportunity and means of making history, and why the movement faltered almost as quickly as it began. We can also explain the sequence of events after the May strikes. The simultaneous rise of the Knights of Labor and the eight hour movement provided two avenues for people once they were aroused. When the first tactic, striking for eight hours, failed (at least partially), people shifted readily to joining the Knights, participating in the educational, cultural, cooperative and political ventures the Knights directed. Workers could still make history, even after the eight hour strike collapsed, by joining a workers' organization that had set out to change the industrial world. It took several more months before it became readily apparent that the Knights' power had been overestimated and that making history would be a difficult task.

The mood in Detroit during the summer of 1886 reflected the continuing belief in history in the making. The newspapers for the first time treated normal business of the labor organizations as major news. Biographical studies of local labor leaders became regular fare in the

feature pages.⁶⁵ National conventions of the Horseshoers' Union and the National Executive Council of the Knights of Labor Shoe and Leather Workers met in the city in May and June, and although neither organization had very many members and much importance, the meetings were treated as auspicious events.⁶⁶ Actions by employers also suggested a belief in the rapidly growing power of labor. Some employers displayed an almost hysterical belligerence--firing anyone even associating with the Knights of Labor and locking out their employees at the first sign of any demands. Others were conciliatory, almost obsequious, fawning over the Knights' DA Executive Board, and offering all manner of free gifts to be given away at the scheduled Labor Day celebration. Both reactions suggest uncertainty, a sense that employers also believed that power relations were changing, and they would either have to fight or accomodate themselves to a new power.⁶⁷ The Labor Party, confident that fall elections would validate this belief in the movement's new strength, began organizing for the fall campaign in early summer. A massive convention was planned for the first week in September with more than 150 delegates elected from all of the city's labor organizations.⁶⁸

In the meantime, the Knights concentrated on raising money for a new Labor Headquarters and producing a play, Monopoly, which opened at the Detroit Opera House, one of

the city's largest theatres, in August. The Labor Headquarters, which opened in May, had meeting rooms for unions, Knights of Labor assemblies, and other workers' organizations. Sixty meetings were held in the first month after opening. Free reading rooms stocked a full selection of labor papers and gave workers a place to relax. Various labor organizations and individuals had contributed \$157 to pay the initial rent and buy furnishings. Businesses also contributed free merchandise. Mabley and Co., one of Detroit's largest clothing and dry goods dealers, contributed \$16.25 worth of merchandise.⁶⁹

Educational programs also flourished, reflecting the desire of the large numbers of new members to learn more about the movement's philosophy as well as the fundamentals of political economy. LA 901 reported in late June that it had distributed 10,000 eight hour tracts since the beginning of the eight hour campaign and sold 300 copies of Grenell's booklet "Robbers of the Nineteenth Century." LA 2348 ordered 100 subscriptions to the Labor Leaf for use by its members, and the Machinists and Blacksmiths' LA (7750) ordered another fifty. The Labor Leaf offered for sale a wide variety of books on political economy and political theory including works by Henry George, Proudhon, Josiah Warren, Lawrence Gronlund, and Richard Ely.⁷⁰

The culmination of the summer and the high point

in popular participation was the Labor Day Parade held on September 6. The previous year the fall march had been held at night, like most movement activities, so as not to conflict with work schedules. Perhaps the best indication that workers believed in August, 1886, that they could make history, that they had seized at least some power over their own destinies, was the decision to hold the march and celebration on a Monday at mid-day. Labor Day was not a legal holiday. Unlike all other holidays, the idea did not come from a legislature, or city council or mayor, or corporation executive, but from the workers' own organizations. The first Monday in September would be a workers' holiday not because some outside authority gave them permission, but because enough workers decided it would be a holiday by going to the march instead of going to work. Employers would be forced to recognize the workers' decision because too few people came to work to run the factories. Thus, although those who promoted the idea scrupulously avoided the use of the term, in effect the first Monday in September was to be made a general holiday through a general strike.⁷¹

The evening demonstration the year before had drawn 3,000 marchers. Some workers had been scared away from that march by rumors that employers had hired Pinkerton agents as spotters to record names of participants for reports to employers. Subsequent firings had confirmed

the rumors. Firings for union and Knights of Labor membership had not ceased in the year following the October, 1885, march. The planned September 6, public holiday was an audacious undertaking. Despite all of the events of the spring and summer, and in light of the failure of some of the May strikes, some workers must still have been aware of the potential danger of publicly identifying themselves with the labor movement. Pre-demonstration publicity treated the day as a light-hearted affair--a parade followed by a massive family-style picnic--but if only 3,000 workers had shown up, the consequences might not have been so light hearted. Typographical Union parade chairman, Robert Ogg, alluded to this in a personal appeal to all printers in the last issue of the Labor Leaf published before the demonstration: "It behooves us at this particular time to show our strength."⁷²

The response was tremendous. Workers began arriving at Grand Circus Park, the staging area, more than two hours before the scheduled starting time. Marchers had been assigned to one of eleven divisions according to trade, industry, and organizational affiliation. Each Division had a Marshal who organized the marchers into ranks. Although "the sidewalks and every available space was occupied by sight-seers," many trades had been drilling in anticipation of the march, and they sorted themselves out with a minimum of confusion. When Chief Marshal Judson Grenell gave the

order to march, there were, according to the Labor Leaf, "Ten Thousand Men in Line." Marching four abreast with banners, floats, and carriages for speakers and the members of Florence Nightingale Assembly, the procession was three miles long, "the first division entering the gardens (Miller's Gardens, the destination) about the time the last division started from Grand Circus Park."⁷³

It was a workers' march and a workers' holiday. Although thousands of friends, family, and curiosity seekers lined the parade route or waited at the gardens, except for a few small visiting delegations from other cities, the marchers were all affiliated with various Detroit labor organizations. The class character of the holiday was clear in the responses of home owners along the parade route. While many homes were decorated with banners, and residents along the way greeted thirsty marchers with ice water, the Labor Leaf noted that "The only private residence on Jefferson Avenue [a well-to-do neighborhood] which was decorated was that of Moses W. Field, who himself stood in front and received a tribute of cheers to signify his courtesy was understood."⁷⁴

Floats and banners depicted the activities of the various trades. The printers float included a working press printing facsimile copies of the Labor Leaf. The cigarmakers' float represented "a scab cigar factory decorated with a 'golden pheasant'" [an allusion to a brand

name of one of the local non-union shops] and with union leader Sam Goldwater, as a tyrannical owner, threatening "the scabs" with his whip. The Carworkers' Union turned out 1,500 men behind a miniature freight car. Slogans included the usual range of reform proposals, but some reflected the tone of new militancy. "One significant motto," the Labor Leaf noted, "read 'Divided we can beg; united we can demand,' and thousands of the spectators appreciated its meaning."⁷⁵

At the gardens, speech makers kept things short, but Henry Robinson's closing speech evoked a great response. Robinson spoke with his small daughter at his side.

...I do not represent any large interests. I certainly do not represent bags of dollars nor piles of bricks nor any of those things wrung from the workingman. I have with me today my daughter. She is a bigger interest than all the millions of dollars represented in the big interests. Gentlemen, I wish to bring about such a condition as will give my daughter and your daughters and your sons a chance to get a fair shake in life after we have gone...history shows that the aristocracy has not been satisfied with robbing the workers of their earnings, but they have also striven to despoil them of their virtue. We all know that our aristocracy is the same as that which history has painted for us. It is my object to change the system which permits such things...⁷⁶

As the finale of the greatest "uprising of labor" in Detroit's history, Robinson's speech was optimistic. But on reflection, the Labor Leaf observed two days later:

"That the masses of the people are awakening was shown by the bodies of organized wage workers who paraded...", but that was just a beginning. "It requires brains to map out a plan of action...and...difficulties...are sure to crop up." In retrospect, it is clear that those difficulties had been there all along. Amidst glowing reports of labor's progress all spring and summer, there had also been increasing evidence of internal dissension, conflicts between unions and Knights of Labor Assemblies, between skilled and unskilled workers, between radicals and conservatives within the movement. Such divisions had always existed, but when the movement was weak, most organizers recognized the need to minimize differences. But now the stakes were quite different. If the movement was on the verge of real power, how was that power to be used and for what ends? In that summer, perhaps dazzled by how far they had come in such a short time, the belief that in some general sort of way they were making history still seemed a sufficient basis for unity. All warring factions joined triumphantly in the Labor Day celebration. But within weeks afterward this atmosphere of solidarity was shattered, and with its loss eventually went much of the potential power that the movement had seemed to have that summer.⁷⁷

Chapter 6

NOTES

1. Labor Leaf, March 24, 1886.
2. Norman J. Ware, The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895 (New York: Vintage edition, copyright 1929), pp. 139-150. Detroit Evening News, March 7, 1886. Labor Leaf, March 31, 1886.
3. Ware, pp. 252-3. Philip S. Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume 2 (New York: International, 1955), pp. 98-103.
4. Labor Leaf, February 4, 1885. Bell's arguments closely resemble those of Ira Steward discussed in David Montgomery, Beyond Equality (New York: Vintage, 1972), pp. 249-60. As Montgomery points out, Bell and Steward were arguing that the shorter hour movement would "raise the supply function of labor" (p. 254). Bell was probably familiar with Steward's work since Richard Trevellick and Thomas Dolan had both been active in the Eight Hour Leagues to which Steward devoted himself. Bell was also familiar with Marx, and his arguments about the workday suggest the influence of Marxist conceptions of wages as socially necessary, i.e., dictated by standards of culture and expectation not just productivity.
5. Labor Leaf, February 4, 1885; March 24, 1886.
6. Ibid., April 22, 1885; July 8, 1885; August 26, 1885; January 27, 1886.
7. Ware, p. 152. Labor Leaf, March 17, 1886. Powderly issued secret circulars in March, 1886, ordering suspension of recruiting and advising Knights not to participate in the May 1 strikes. Reaction to the suspension order in Detroit was mixed. A number of local leaders saw it as a way of consolidating gains. Limitation of membership was generally advocated by the more conservative faction within the leadership, but even Labadie seems to have supported the idea of slowing down growth to some degree in order to educate new members as they were recruited. Implicit in the different reactions to Powderly's circulars were the seeds of the factional strife that emerged the following year.
8. Detroit Tribune, February 12, 1886. Labor Leaf, February 17, 1886.

9. Labor Leaf, February 17, 1886. Detroit Tribune, February 15, 1886; February 16, 1886. Journal of United Labor, p. 2041.

10. Detroit Tribune, February 15, 1886.

11. Ibid., February 16, 1886; February 19, 1886.

12. Journal of United Labor, p. 2041. Labor Leaf, March 17, 1886. Detroit Tribune, March 17, 1886.

13. KLDB. Labor Leaf, April 7, 1886.

14. Bruce Brown, Marx, Freud and the Critique of Everyday Life (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), pp. 12-3.

15. Labor Leaf, March 31, 1886.

16. Detroit Evening News, March 8, 1886; March 28, 1886; May 1, 1886. Journal of United Labor, p. 2041. Labor Leaf, March 24, 1886; May 5, 1886. Detroit Tribune, March 15, 1886. The Cigarmakers' Union later claimed that Brown Bros. sought Knights of Labor membership to get the Knights' label after being denied the Union's label. The Cigarmakers also accused the Knights leaders of collusion with the manufacturer, a charge not warranted by the evidence. The DA withdrew the KL label shortly after the Cigarmakers complained. In any event, the company's desire to get some sort of union label indicates its judgment of the labor movement's influence on buying habits.

17. Labor Leaf, April 14, 1886; April 21, 1886. Journal of United Labor, p. 2041. Detroit Evening News, June 3, 1886. The Labor Leaf's editors rejected Canuck's suggestion. "Certainly this would prevent any trains running, but unfortunately the public would be the losers, and not the stock gamblers." H. M. Hoxie was general manager of the Missouri Pacific Railroad.

18. Detroit Evening News, May 1, 1886; May 2, 1886.

19. Ibid., May 3, 1886.

20. Ibid. Detroit Tribune, May 4, 1886.

21. Detroit Evening News, May 3 and 4, 1886. Detroit Tribune, May 4, 1886. Labor Leaf, May 5, 1886. Newspaper accounts are confused, but the confusion may have been more in the minds of the reporters than the workers. See further discussion in text.

22. Detroit Tribune, May 4, 1886. Detroit Evening News, May 4, 1886. The McMillan clan was the most important business and political family in Detroit. They owned or managed a variety of factories including the telephone company and a variety of metal products firms. In the 1890's they arranged the merger of the Michigan and Peninsular Car Companies and a number of smaller firms. James McMillan was U.S. Senator and leader of one of the state Republican Party's most important factions.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid. Labor Leaf, May 5, 1886.

26. Detroit Evening News, May 4, 1886; May 5, 1886. Detroit Tribune, May 4, 1886.

27. Detroit Evening News, May 4, 1886; May 8, 1886; May 11, 1886.

28. Detroit Evening News, May 4, 1886. Detroit Tribune, May 4, 1886.

29. Detroit Evening News, May 4, 1886. Detroit Tribune, May 5, 1886.

30. Detroit Evening News, May 5, 1886. Detroit Tribune, May 5, 1886.

31. Ibid.

32. Detroit Evening News, May 5, 1886. Detroit Tribune, May 6, 1886.

33. Ibid. Labor Leaf, May 5, 1886.

34. Detroit Tribune, May 6, 1886.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid. Detroit Evening News, May 6, 1886. Labor Leaf, May 5, 1886.

37. Detroit Tribune, May 6, 1886. Detroit Evening News, May 6, 1886.

38. Detroit Tribune, May 7, 1886.

39. Detroit Tribune, May 6, 1886; May 7, 1886. Detroit Evening News, May 4, 1886; May 7, 1886; May 8,

1886; May 9, 1886.

40. Detroit Tribune, May 6, 1886; May 7, 1886; May 8, 1886. Detroit Evening News, May 4, 1886; May 8, 1886. Labor Leaf, May 5, 1886; May 12, 1886.

41. Detroit Evening News, May 7, 1886. Detroit Tribune, May 8, 1886.

42. Detroit Tribune, May 7, 1886.

43. Detroit News, May 9, 1886; May 10, 1886; May 11, 1886; May 13, 1886.

44. Detroit Evening News, May 9, 1886.

45. Detroit Tribune, May 8, 1886; May 10, 1886.

46. Detroit Evening News, May 10, 1886. Detroit Tribune, May 11, 1886.

47. Detroit Evening News, May 13, 1886; May 14, 1886; May 11, 1886. Detroit Tribune, May 13, 1886; May 14, 1886.

48. Detroit Tribune, May 18, 1886; May 19, 1886. Detroit Evening News, May 17, 1886; May 18, 1886.

49. Detroit Evening News, May 18, 1886. Detroit Tribune, May 19, 1886.

50. Detroit Tribune, May 19, 1886; May 21, 1886. Detroit Evening News, May 20, 1886.

51. Detroit Evening News, May 22, 1886; May 24, 1886; May 26, 1886; June 1, 1886. Detroit Tribune, May 26, 1886; May 27, 1886.

52. Based on all newspaper reports and estimates, the total number of strikers in Detroit in May, 1886, was about 5,600 to 5,800 (U.S. Commissioner of Labor 1887 Report lists 4,483). The total number of industrial workers in Detroit in January, 1886 according to statistics in the Tribune, January 10, 1886, was 32,217. Even allowing for perhaps three thousand more who had arranged negotiated compromises or struck before May 1, the total number of participants in the shorter hours movement had been under 30 percent of the industrial work force.

53. Detroit Labor Leaf, May 26, 1886.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. The exact shape of the growth curve of union and Knights of Labor membership is difficult to determine because there are no official running totals or per capita tax records. Total membership had been estimated by Grenell at 5,000 in December, 1885, with perhaps 1,000 of that total in the Knights of Labor. By September, 1886, the Evening News estimated a total of 13,000, with 8,000 in the Knights. Newspapers reported increases in KL membership of 700 in the last two weeks in April, and 538 between May 1 and May 12. Official KL membership was 4,679 on July 1, 1886, although the figure may have already been out of date. Increases in KL membership between January and April, 1886, reported in the local press totaled only a few hundred (mainly the shipcarpenters). Assuming perhaps 1,500 KL members on April 15, membership increased by about 1,250 between April 15 and May 15, by another 1,900 between May 15 and July 1, and, if the News estimate is correct, an additional 3,000+ between July 1 and September 1, 1886. Union membership also increased more than these estimates might suggest (4,000 in December, 1885; 5,000 in September, 1886). Some of the increase in KL membership was the result of unions becoming KL LA's. Thus the number of new union members was greater than the one thousand difference between the two estimates. Judging from scattered reports of individual locals, the five thousand figure for September, 1886 trade union membership may be an underestimate, while the eight thousand KL membership is probably an overestimate.

57. Detroit Evening News, June 4, 1886.

58. Labor Leaf, May 26, 1886. KLDB. Labor Leaf, July 7, 1886. Detroit Evening News, September 3, 1886. Knights of Labor General Assembly Proceedings, 1886, pp. 326-28.

59. George Rude's The Crowd in History, 1730-1848 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966) is a pathbreaking reassessment of crowd behavior.

60. Richard Flacks, "Making History vs. Making Life," Working Papers, Summer 1974, pp. 56-71.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Detroit Evening News, March 7, 1886; May 6, 1886; June 18, 1886.

66. Ibid., May 18, 1886. Labor Leaf, May 19, 1886; June 9, 1886.

67. Labor Leaf, June 23, 1886; June 30, 1886; August 4, 1886; September 1, 1886.

68. Labor Leaf, July 7, 1886; July 28, 1886; September 1, 1886. Detroit Evening News, September 3, 1886.

69. Labor Leaf, June 9, 1886; August 4, 1886; August 18, 1886. The play seems to be modeled on Martin Foran's novel The Other Side which is analyzed in David Montgomery's Beyond Equality, pp. 220-1. Its vague anti-monopolism was too conservative for the editors of the Labor Leaf who wrote a critical review in the Labor Leaf, August 18, 1886.

70. Labor Leaf, June 23, 1886; September 1, 1886; September 15, 1886.

71. The idea of the particular date had been started by the New York City Central Labor Union in 1882.

72. Labor Leaf, October 7, 1886; October 28, 1886; September 1, 1886. Ogg's statement may also reflect the emerging rivalry between the trade unions and the Knights of Labor and a desire to prove the strength of the unions relative to the Knights. The Pinkerton incident in the 1885 demonstration is described in the 1893 Columbian Labor Day Review, LC.

73. Labor Leaf, September 1, 1886; September 8, 1886. Detroit Sunday News, September 5, 1886. The Labor Leaf's estimate of the number of marchers was corroborated by the daily newspapers. The News estimated 9,000 and the Tribune, 8,000-12,000.

74. Labor Leaf, September 8, 1886. Field, a prominent businessman, was chairman of the Greenback-Labor State Central Committee.

75. Ibid. Detroit Evening News, September 7, 1886.

76. Labor Leaf, September 8, 1886.

77. Labor Leaf, September 1, 1886; September 8, 1886.

Chapter 7

THE DECLINE OF THE SUBCULTURE OF OPPOSITION

I. The Collapse of the Independent Labor Party

The potential for serious ideological conflict within the local labor movement had been present for some time. While radicals and socialists applauded their own predictions of imminent revolution, more conservative labor leaders were trying to project a moderate and non-revolutionary image. They hoped to generate public support and lessen employer resistance by demonstrating that labor was reasonable, respectable, and did not seek to overturn basic property rights or social relationships. To the radicals, this concern with public relations, and the eagerness to compromise that went with it, amounted to selling out to the opposition. To non-radicals, radical rhetoric was unnecessarily provocative, irresponsible, and counterproductive.

Both sides had exercised some restraint before 1886. They were convinced that they needed each other and, therefore, were willing to view ideological opponents as misguided comrades, but comrades nonetheless. The

events of 1886, however, not only magnified the movement's size and significance, but also catapulted the labor question into central prominence, polarized Detroit, and forced the movement to make decisions which would be totally unacceptable to one side or the other. At the same time, the sudden influx of members, the strike victories over long standing opponents of labor, and the mass demonstrations convinced both sides that they were on the verge of real power. They were so close. If they responded correctly to this crisis, they might realize the dreams they had fought and sacrificed for. If only they maintained militance and principle, radicals argued, revolutionary changes would follow. No! the others answered. Now was the time for caution and moderation.

Both sides of this debate were convinced that they represented the true interests of workers, and more importantly, both sides believed that large numbers of on-lookers were observing them to see if they would make the right decision. The wrong choice might alienate this following. Increasingly, therefore, in the summer of 1886, both sides were becoming more harshly critical of factional opponents who they believed were advocating exactly the wrong things, exactly what would alienate this potential constituency. Letters began to appear in the summer of 1886 in the Labor Leaf criticizing its "socialistic tone." "There's too much of this socialism

and anarchism," wrote one reader. At the same time, radicals renewed their criticism of conservative labor politicians like Francis Egan, suggesting that labor politicians were using the workers to get soft jobs for themselves, even questioning the whole concept of politics. A number of radical union leaders began organizing for the September ILP convention by insisting that delegates elected to represent unions at the convention be pledged to a full third party ticket with no endorsements from "the old corrupt political parties." The ILP Campaign Committee was to be empowered to remove any candidate accepting such an endorsement and substitute someone else.¹

In June, 1886, Judson Grenell, reporting on the special session of the Knights of Labor General Assembly which he had just attended, noted an internal polarization at the national level comparable to what was emerging in Detroit: Tom Barry and Powderly were enemies; the Home Club, a group of New York radicals, was trying to take over the Knights; relations with the trade unions were strained; and a group of "rabid Knights of Labor" opposed conciliation. Although Grenell was sympathetic to the radical position, he argued for continued unity and approved of the GA's actions. "Both these extremists--the extreme right and left of the labor army--have been ignored, and a middle course taken." But by the fall, neither side was willing any longer to take "a middle

course."²

Open conflict emerged at the ILP Convention held in Detroit on September 2, 1886. The Convention opened with a fight over election of the meeting's chairman, normally a pro forma decision for a position that was essentially a moderator. The socialists nominated Sam Goldwater, a radical cigarmaker, against Andrew Forbes, president of the Seamen's Union. Goldwater received only thirty votes from the more than one hundred fifty delegates, but Forbes was a highly respected veteran organizer, and Goldwater a newcomer to Detroit. On a series of credential fights for various delegations, the vote was much closer. The socialists challenged the Greenback delegates who counter-challenged the SLP. The convention compromised by seating both. The most controversial delegate was Francis Egan, former Trades Council President, ILP legislator, and deputy State Commissioner of Labor. Critics charged that Egan had sold out to the Republicans in order to receive his political appointment. By a vote of only 75-68, with about a dozen delegates abstaining, Egan remained.³

Nine delegations, including those of the Cigarmakers' Union and the Carl (sic) Marx and LaSalle Knights of Labor Assemblies, had been elected with orders to withdraw from the convention if it turned down the non-endorsement resolution. The Resolutions Committee

submitted the proposal for the "strictly independent labor party" without recommendation. As the debate grew bitter, the delegates became disorderly. James Murtagh of the Typographical Union denounced the sponsors of the resolution as socialists and disrupters. Charles Erb, totally incensed according to one newspaper account, bordered on hysteria. As the final vote revealed a three to one margin against, Gustav Herzig called on "all truly independent labor delegates" to follow him. The nine pledged delegations and a few other individuals, about thirty delegates in all, followed him from the hall.⁴

The remaining delegates nominated only a partial ticket (candidates for Congress, the state legislature, and justice of the peace) with the question of major party endorsements left to the discretion of the candidates. After approving a platform of immediate reforms, the convention chose a Campaign Committee including three prominent Knights of Labor officials and the conservative president of the Trades Council. Finally, candidates were nominated for the offices which the convention had decided to contest.⁵

With the withdrawal of the radical strict independence faction, the balance of power within the convention shifted to the right. Delegates who sought a close working relationship with politicians in the major parties were able to dominate the proceedings. The list of

candidates reflected their control. Although some of the prominent labor politicians most objectionable to the anti-collaborationists were not chosen, notably Egan, the slate demonstrated exactly the kind of ticket-balancing philosophy which the bolters opposed. Most of the candidates had connections with powerful groups within the Democratic or Republican parties, several were chosen primarily to represent ethnic constituencies, and a number of them had only a tenuous relationship to the labor movement. Bernard O'Reilly, for instance, was a shipcarpenter and Secretary of the Shipcarpenters' Assembly of the Knights of Labor, but more importantly, he was an incumbent Democratic alderman and part of the inner circle of local Irish Democrats. Thomas O'Donnell, an iron worker, was reportedly nominated for State Representative because he claimed support among both iron workers and Irish Americans. - He also had never been mentioned in the labor press prior to the convention. After receiving a Democratic endorsement in October, he proceeded to denounce all of the non-Democratic Labor nominees and publicly pledged his support to the straight Democratic ticket. He was removed from the Labor ticket a week before the election. Other State Representative nominees included George Walthew, a lawyer and incumbent Labor-Democrat; Conrad Bettinger, a German Republican elected to the legislature in 1882 and narrowly defeated for re-election

in 1884. Some candidates had very tenuous credentials as labor spokesmen. John Rairden, one of the State Senatorial nominees, ran a night school which catered to a working class clientele. He had been a consistent advertiser and supporter of the Labor Leaf, but he was neither a worker nor a labor leader. Colonel O. T. Beard, the second State Senate nominee, had never been mentioned previously in the labor press. Only two of the twelve nominees could have been considered left of center within the labor movement: Judson Grenell and August Wettlaufer (owner of a small cigar factory), both moderate socialists.⁶

The choice of nominees provoked bitter criticism, not only from the seceding faction of radicals who made plans for another convention to nominate a fully independent Workingmen's Ticket, but also from John Burton, the liberal editor of the Labor Leaf. Burton had consistently tried to steer a middle course in his editorial policies. In his columns he criticized non-union workers and narrow trade unionists for failing to understand the need for broader reform at the same time that he opposed the class conflict position and opposition to property rights of fellow columnists Labadie and Grenell. Yet Burton had also always been one of the staunchest advocates of internal unity, defending Labadie's right to express his opinions, and reserving his harshest criticism for individuals who engaged in personal attacks or pointless

"kicking." But the Labor Ticket deeply troubled Burton. His closest associates on the newspaper were in the forefront of the emerging factional struggle, and he recognized the destructive potential of the bitterness these disagreements provoked. Although the paper had only a semi-official status (it was endorsed by the Trades Council and DA 50 but privately owned and operated until taken over by a cooperative publishing company the following year), it was the only real organ of the local labor movement. Anything he might say in print would have widespread repercussions. Yet his commitment to a vision of journalistic honesty compelled him to speak out.

Burton tried to write as diplomatically as was consistent with his convictions, and simply implied criticism in a number of cases by omitting the usual ecstatic praise. Thus, Colonel Beard was described as "safe," A. M. Dewey was "well known" and "a fluent speaker," and Bettinger's legislative experience was mentioned without additional comment. But in at least two cases, Burton could not restrain himself. O'Donnell's nomination, according to Burton, was purely an opportunistic attempt to capitalize on personal ties that had nothing to do with the movement's principles. There was not even any solid evidence that O'Donnell really had the backing he claimed. O'Reilly's nomination raised even more serious issues. As alderman, O'Reilly had been implicated in a number of bribery and

graft schemes. A year before, Burton had denounced him as a disgrace to the labor movement, and now he reprinted his earlier article describing O'Reilly's alleged role in municipal corruption.⁷

O'Reilly, O'Donnell, and some of the other nominees reacted bitterly to Burton's articles. They began organizing a boycott of the Labor Leaf, supported by the ILP Campaign Committee. Burton pledged that he would stick to his guns. Even within the paper's normally congenial staff, emotions flared. Labadie, who had recently opposed political action as a disruption of the economic struggle, defended Burton's personal integrity. The boycotters, he suggested, would hurt themselves by destroying labor's only reliable publicist and news gatherer. At the same time, he was organizing a debate at the Dialectical Union on the topic "Resolved; The the wageworker has nothing to gain by political action." Grenell found himself caught in the middle between Burton's suggestions of corruption, Labadie's denunciation of politics in general, and other close associates within the seceding group who supported politics but opposed collaboration with the "old parties." As a candidate and a leading advocate of the ILP's fusion policy, he felt compelled to defend the Labor Party. Burton, Labadie, and the Goldwater group all struck Grenell as unrealistic, utopian, and impractical. To publicly denounce the Labor Party in mid-campaign

could only diminish the movement's effectiveness without accomplishing anything positive. Grenell's initial replies to the ILP's critics were phrased in the tone of a disappointed friend, but as criticism grew more vitriolic, particularly with the radical left's charges of selling out to capitalist parties, his articles and speeches displayed obvious tension. Perhaps he felt particularly vulnerable to the sell out charge because he had accepted a post as Deputy Oil Inspector from the Republicans in 1885, a position which carried a salary of \$1,200 (double a printer's normal annual income) with few duties. By mid-October, Grenell repudiated his former SLP associates in the "Goldwater gang" and denounced them all as liars.⁸

The "Goldwater gang" proceeded with its plans for a rival ticket convinced that they were the true voice of the city's organized workers. A manifesto, signed by Goldwater and six prominent SLP members, announcing their convention stated that the previous convention had been "manipulated by office holders of the old parties against the interests of the working people...it is a demonstrated fact that the Democratic and Republican parties are the common enemy of the working people, and in the interests of monopolies...." Workers could do better. "The ten thousand men in line in the demonstration of Monday, September 6, proved that they are enough to act independently." Their confidence was clear in the delegate

selection rules for their Workingmen's Convention. The convention would not be limited to individuals or organizations who agreed with their position. Each labor organization in the city was encouraged to elect three delegates for the first one hundred members and one more delegate for each additional one hundred members. Why they believed these delegates would vote differently than those chosen for the first (ILP) convention is unclear. The only change in procedure was the additional representation for larger membership. The first convention had allocated three delegates per organization regardless of size, a procedure which had benefitted the left more than the rules for their own convention since SLP members controlled quite a number of unions but only one of any size, the Cigarmakers.⁹

When the Workingmen's Convention finally met, the factional alignment of delegates remained essentially the same as it had been earlier. The majority once again repudiated the strictly independent position and then quickly voted to adjourn. The dissenters, who remained behind, agreed they could not field a ticket of their own, but vowed to work for the defeat of candidates they considered to be in collusion with capitalist politicians. Labadie attended the convention as an observer and was horrified at the "bitter feeling" on both sides. Men who had worked closely together for years were denouncing each other in

the harshest possible terms. Such bitterness could set back the movement for years. The experience strengthened his conviction that labor organizations should avoid politics.¹⁰

Labor candidates, who had confidently expected to carry Detroit only a few weeks before, found themselves on the defensive. They devoted a great deal of time in their speeches to personal justification, hoping to demonstrate that their relationships with major party politicians did not invalidate them as representatives of workers' interests. Testimonial letters to the Labor Leaf from friends and neighbors defended their honesty and integrity. Yet despite campaign rallies of over 2,000 people, a small army of campaign workers, and much hoopla, on the verge of the election, the ILP looked like a sinking ship. When O'Donnell abandoned the labor ticket less than two weeks before the election, Grenell pleaded in the Labor Leaf with labor voters: do not abandon the whole ticket because of the deficiencies of a few of the candidates.¹¹

The results were not as disheartening as they might have been. Three of the seven state representative candidates, all endorsed by the Republicans, and two of the state senatorial candidates (one endorsed by the Republicans; the other, O'Reilly, by the Democrats) were elected, and the unendorsed candidates had unofficially averaged

about 900 votes more than in 1884. But the effects of the internal dissension were evident. Henry Robinson, the Labor-Republican candidate for Congress, had been heavily favored early in the campaign but lost by a narrow margin to the Democrat. His defeat was blamed on the combined opposition of upper class Republicans and left wing labor supporters who cut him from their respective tickets. Robinson ran exceptionally well among Polish voters in the Ninth Ward, but he ran well behind other Republicans in the well-to-do Second Ward and also did poorly in a number of strong east side labor precincts.¹²

The totals for the unendorsed candidates, despite the increase over 1884, were also disappointing. The increase was about 40 percent over the previous election, but labor membership had nearly tripled in the same interval. The Labor Leaf charged that a substantial proportion of ILP votes for unendorsed candidates had not been counted. The actual labor vote, according to the Labor Leaf, was at least 1,000 higher than the official total, but even if the paper's largest estimate of the labor vote was correct, the ILP vote had still only doubled. The number of supporters was substantially smaller than the number of participants in the shorter hour movement of the spring of 1886, although striking for shorter hours involved far greater risks than voting. The labor movement claimed 13,000 members, and over 10,000 had actually marched on

September 6. Even allowing for the possibility that a substantial proportion of workers were ineligible to vote because of age, sex, and short residency, the ILP had received votes from much less than half of the organized workers, not to speak of the unorganized majority. The ILP had failed to establish itself as a major contender for local office: no unendorsed candidate was even close to being elected. The strongest of the unendorsed state legislative candidates received less than half as many votes as the weakest major party nominee and less than one-third of the winning candidate's total.¹³

Labadie, in a campaign retrospective, urged his comrades to refrain from political action in the future in order to avoid "bitter feeling...Let us close up the breach once more and turn our faces toward the common enemy--capitalism." Yet the close of the campaign did not end the furor over political strategies as Labadie hoped. Underlying the debate over politics were a number of basic issues: Was the labor movement going to be a class movement representing the interests of workers as a class, a political reform movement cutting across class lines, or a loose confederation of occupational groups? Should the movement pursue a strategy of confrontation or conciliation? Was its image to be radical or respectable? When radicals, such as the Haymarket defendants, were attacked for their political beliefs, should labor defend them as

comrades in arms or join the condemnation to prove its patriotism and loyalty? Should labor leaders seek influence in the established institutions of society or continue to develop independent counter-institutions?

Labadie's solution of no politics within labor organizations was no solution at all--it would not answer these fundamental questions about the direction of the labor movement. Indeed, it was almost as if the intense debate over politics had temporarily diverted attention from all of the other issues. With the close of the campaign, conflict emerged on an even wider scale along several lines. A clear left and right were developing within the Knights of Labor which split bitterly over the Haymarket issue; pro-trade union elements in the unions and within the Knights began to clash with the Knights' leadership over the issues of trade and craft rights; and key decisions by national and local Knights of Labor leaders raised serious debates over internal democracy within the Knights.

Meanwhile, the conduct of important Knights of Labor leaders in the following months seemed to vindicate the anti-political stance of people like Labadie and Goldwater. The ILP had been largely a Knights of Labor creation all along. In early 1887, the pro-Powderly faction in DA 50 moved toward a close alliance with the local Democratic machine. District Master Workman J. D. Long

had already advocated such a course at the end of the 1886 campaign. He was appointed city assessor. John Haire of the DA Executive Board became sidewalk inspector and then assistant assessor. John Devlin, a DA Executive Board member and former Democratic state representative, had been appointed U.S. Consul at Windsor in charge of customs at the end of 1885. By 1887, he had filled the customs house with Knights of Labor appointees, twenty-three in all, including Andrew Forbes, John Strigel (1886 ILP campaign committee, DA Executive Board), former Democratic legislator Lyman Brant, and Thomas O'Donnell. By the fall of 1887, the Evening News was accusing the Democrats of trying to bribe labor leaders for influence in terms that might have come from the "Goldwater gang."¹⁵

The ILP voted in September, 1887, to run a full ticket under the terms of strict independence demanded by the left the previous year, but the acceptance of the non-collaboration policy was a hollow victory. Leading labor politicians ignored the order and campaigned openly for the major parties. Long, Haire, Brant, and at least three local assembly master workmen were on the floor of the Democratic County Convention proclaiming they were not ULP men (the party had changed its name; see f.n. 16). A week after the election, the Advance and Labor Leaf claimed "John Strigel boasts that he voted a straight Democratic ticket." Two prominent ULP pollworkers had

been seen distributing Democratic tickets in the Sixth Ward.¹⁶

In the opinion of much of the movement, labor politics had been discredited as a self-seeking and corrupt enterprise. Perhaps John Devlin, who had been instrumental in the patronage appointments of so many Democratic Knights of Labor leaders, reached the heights of cynicism when he proclaimed his opposition to independent labor politics during the campaign on the grounds that labor politics led to a "scramble for office." By election time, apparently most labor supporters had reached Labadie's conclusion--the whole mess should be avoided. When ULP supporters tried to introduce a pro-ULP resolution at the Trades Council the week before the election, Trades Council President Fildew ruled the question out of order, and his ruling was sustained by a nearly three-to-one majority.¹⁷

Not surprisingly the campaign was a disaster. Henry Robinson, the mayoral candidate, polled only 1,653 votes while most of the rest of the ticket ran far behind him in vote totals. By 1888, the Labor Party had given up. Labor leaders who wanted to enter politics sought major party nominations. The Trades Council expressed opposition to a few candidates who were particularly objectionable, but otherwise refrained from political activity. DA 50's position was similar. It circulated a political catechism, or list of questions for candidates, and the

Advance published the answers. A handful of labor leaders were elected as major party candidates, but independent labor politics was dead. The subculture of opposition ceased to have an independent political voice.¹⁸

II. The Knights, the Cigarmakers, and the Trade Unions: Widening the Breach

Throughout the spring and summer of 1886, readers of the Labor Leaf received periodic reports of growing disputes between the national leaders of the Knights of Labor and a group of key trade union leaders. Trade union leaders complained that the Knights had violated fundamental union precepts: Knights of Labor assemblies had initiated scabs, individuals who had been expelled from unions for misconduct, or workers who were violating union work rules; the Knights had collaborated with employers against unions, offering Knights of Labor labels to companies that had been denied union labels, signing contracts at below union rates, even taking the jobs of striking union members; Knights of Labor officials in various localities had pressured union locals to dissolve and enter the Knights of Labor. The Labor Leaf consistently urged national leaders on both sides to settle these disputes "for it is in the interest of both K of L and the unions to work harmoniously, and present an unbroken front to the encroachments of corporations."¹⁹

Both local union leaders and Knights of Labor officials generally concurred in the Labor Leaf's editorial policy. A few union leaders expressed some doubts about the long term potential of the Knights, but until late in 1886, most did so without any belligerence. Charles Erb, Trades Council President in early 1886, had been a charter member of Pioneer Assembly 901 but had left the Knights to devote more time to the SLP. Although he had held every possible office in the Cigarmakers' Union, he was convinced that neither the Knights nor the trade unions could provide long term solutions to labor problems. "Socialism was the 'ultimate truth' of humanity, the only way of permanently benefitting the toiling masses..."²⁰

Frank Ellis, who replaced Erb as Trades Council President in the summer of 1886, was also a former member of LA 901. Ellis, an official in the Typographical Union, described himself as a conservative and expressed reluctance at working with the Knights of Labor. Yet he served together with prominent Knights on the ILP Campaign Committee in 1886 and replaced O'Donnell as legislative candidate after O'Donnell defected to the regular Democrats. As Trades Council President he criticized the exclusionary membership policies of union locals in terms very similar to the Knights' criticisms of craft union policies.²¹ Relations between the Trades Council and DA 50 were quite

amicable. They collaborated in the political campaigns of the ILP from 1882 through 1886, combined efforts for the marches of 1880, 1885, and Labor Day, 1886, worked together in the eight hour campaign, and both supported the subsidiary labor institutions such as the labor press, clubs, cooperatives, club rooms, etc.

Given the origins and history of the Knights in Detroit from 1878 to 1885, this close working relationship was quite natural. The first Knights of Labor assemblies in Detroit had been created by socialist and other reform-minded trade unionists who hoped to broaden the scope of union policies and activities, but they remained active in their unions and continued to support trade unionism. The Knights of Labor in Detroit was primarily a trade body throughout its history, as well. Of seventy local assemblies known to have existed in Wayne County between 1878 and 1892, only nineteen were true mixed assemblies and seven of those were in small out-county towns. In the early 1880's, the Trades Council and the DA shared officers so that the distinction between them broke down at the leadership level. There was little competition between them for members before 1886, either. The Knights organized trade bodies in crafts with weak or non-existent national unions. Although the DA absorbed a few locals from the Trades Council before 1885, none of these were in the industries which formed the mainstays of the Council.

The bulk of Trades Council membership came from the printers, cigarmakers, and the building trades. The metal trades also included a number of locals, but all were small and ineffectual and only the Iron Molders' Union No. 31 had ties to an important national union. The Knights absorbed some of these metal trades unions as well as a variety of other small unions, but not until late 1885 did DA 50 charter any assembly which was in direct competition with a member of the Trades Council.²²

In 1885, car shop molders formed the Devlin Assembly 3954. Theoretically, Devlin Assembly competed with the Iron Molders' local, but the Iron Molders had been mainly concerned with stove shops, and by this time, the concerted opposition of the stove companies had reduced the union to a handful. If the Molders' Union was disturbed about the organization of Devlin Assembly, they did not say so publicly. There is no evidence of conflict between the Knights and the IMU or other local metal trades unions until more than a year later. Brass molders had been organized in the Knights of Labor LA 2312 since 1882. LA's 3954 and 2312 were joined in the Knights by the Boilermakers (LA 4620), Machinists (7750), and Metal Polishers (8879) in 1886.²³

Thus, while there were occasional local disagreements between unions and the Knights of Labor, they were nothing beyond the normal course of minor interorganizational

disputes, no more serious than similar occasional squabbles between various trade unions. The most important cleavages within the local labor movement were ideological, not organizational. Roughly the same debates took place within both the DA and the Trades Council and both were divided along right-left lines. The most serious organizational rivalry was between locals of two trade unions: The Progressive and the International Cigarmakers.

This fight between the two cigarmakers' unions was part of a national struggle that eventually also became the focus of the national dispute between the unions and the Knights of Labor. Ultimately the three-cornered national cigarmakers' fight provided the trigger for serious divisions between the Knights and the unions in Detroit. The Progressive-International fight dated back to a split in the Cigarmakers' International Union in 1881 in New York City. For more than a decade, skilled cigarmakers had been confronted with competition from tenement house workers and from lower paid factory workers who used the mold, a device for making the bunch which formed the filler of the cigar. The union's leadership, particularly Adolph Strasser and Samuel Gompers, had reluctantly accepted the mold based on a division of labor between unskilled filler breakers and skilled hand rollers. This compromise temporarily increased cigar production and therefore the demand for skilled hand

rollers but it weakened their bargaining position by limiting skilled labor to one step in the production process. Given these parameters, the International's strategy was to try to control the rolling. Control could be secured by insisting on three things: a closed shop for rollers--no cigar manufacturer could hire anyone except union members to roll cigars; second, a union scale--no cigars were to be produced at less than the piece rate established by the union; third, a union label which would be placed on all cigars manufactured according to the union's terms and would make it easy to identify and boycott those that were not. Only skilled hand rollers would be allowed in the union. Any cigar without the union label and any worker making such a cigar was considered a scab by the union, morally equivalent to a strikebreaker. Strasser and Gompers reorganized the union, centralizing authority, and allowing the officers at their discretion to transfer strike funds from one local to another in order to win strikes called to enforce union rules. They also introduced an elaborate benefit system to attract members and to increase the disadvantages of failing to keep up with union dues. Their policies and a more favorable economic situation combined to produce a membership increase from 1,016 in 1877 to 12,709 in 1881.²⁴

The weak link in this strategy was the inability to

control competition from tenement house workers, the poorly paid workers who worked in their homes under a putting out system. The International's officers tried to control the tenement house system by hiring a lawyer and appealing to sympathetic major party politicians to outlaw tenement house production as a health hazard. This is the issue that provoked the split in the union and the organization of the rival Progressive Cigarmakers' Union. The socialists, who apparently formed a majority in the large New York City local 144, objected to the hiring of a "shyster" lawyer and collaboration with major party politicians. They ran a slate of candidates in a union election against Gompers, the local president, and his associates. When the insurgents won, Strasser voided the election on rather dubious grounds and refused to allow another election as recommended by the International's executive board. The Progressives seceded and established a rival national union which outnumbered the Internationals in New York and included locals in many other cities.²⁵

While the split seems in part to have been based on a mutual overreaction to this tactical disagreement, the later behavior of both sides suggested deeper underlying conflict over the implications of the Strasser-Gompers policies. Strasser and Gompers were moving rapidly in two directions which others in the union found objectionable on ideological grounds. First, their

reorganization of the union involved a process of bureaucratization and centralization of authority. While these policies may have been largely responsible for the union's growth in the late 1870's and early 1880's, opponents viewed centralization of authority as undemocratic and dictatorial. Locals who had not been involved in any way in the New York dispute joined the Progressives on these grounds, while other locals who remained with the International refused to obey Strasser's orders. His conduct in the disputed election as well as later policies of both Strasser and Gompers lent great credibility to fears of autocratic leadership. In 1885, Strasser responded to union critics by declaring that any local making charges against International officers which they could not substantiate would have its charter revoked.²⁶

Secondly, the union leaders' responses to the technological changes in the industry, the evolving set of work rules, and the either-with-us-or-against-us definition of scab all implied a kind of craft elitism which ran contrary to the spirit of the German Socialist traditions of a larger proportion of the cigarmakers. As worked out by Gompers and Strasser, the International was becoming a craft monopoly for a skilled minority in an industry that was increasingly based on a large proportion of unskilled and superexploited workers. The tenement house workers, bunchers, and packers--the most poorly paid

workers, and those most in need of some form of union protection--were not only denied access to the union but were accused of being scabs for working at less than union scale. When Gompers, during the disputes of the succeeding years, accused both the Progressives and the Knights of Labor of initiating scabs, in the vast majority of cases he was not speaking of workers who had engaged in strike-breaking or who had been expelled from the union for breaking union rules, but simply of workers employed in non-union shops or working at less than union scale. Opponents of the International repeatedly pointed out the logical fallacy in this position. If anyone not in the union was a scab, and scabs could not legitimately be initiated into a labor organization, then organization was impossible. Every time the International added a new member, it would be guilty of exactly the same offense it charged against the Progressives and the Knights of Labor. The Progressive Cigarmakers, stressing a doctrine of class rather than craft, moved in exactly the opposite direction from the International, organizing all types of tobacco workers including even tenement house workers.²⁷

Both sides turned to the Knights of Labor for support. Both the International and Progressives had Knights of Labor assemblies of their own in New York, but the Progressives received the active support of the leadership of New York City's DA 49, the largest and most powerful

district in the Order. Ultimately the entire Progressive Union joined DA 49 as a body. The Knights had been organizing cigarmakers' assemblies of their own since the 1870's, had their own cigar label, and by 1886, probably had organized at least as many cigarmakers nationally as either the International or the Progressives. Competition between the cigar labels had been an issue at several GA's, but it was the Progressive-DA 49 connection which led to an open rupture between the International and the Knights of Labor. In the increasingly bitter struggle in New York City, both sides raided each other's shops, scabbed on their opponents during strikes, and entered into collusive agreements with manufacturers against their rivals. The International blamed DA 49 for continuation of the dispute, and appealed to the Knights' national leadership against it. The final blow occurred during a lockout in New York in 1886, when the Progressives settled separately from the Internationals who continued to hold out. The remaining manufacturers reached a settlement with DA 49 which gave the owners the Knights of Labor label and the right to use a disputed bunching machine in exchange for a promise to abolish tenement work and to set up a union shop for the DA. The International protested that the DA was not only making a separate peace, but also accepting for membership the workers in the disputed shops that had taken union members' places during the lockout. The

International then declared a national boycott on all cigars without their own label, specifically those with the Knights of Labor label.²⁸

Negotiations between the Internationals and the Knights' General Executive Board over the next few months merely increased bitterness on both sides without satisfying anyone. Powderly and the other national leaders saw the International's boycott of Knights of Labor cigars as an unwarranted attack on a fraternal organization which had heretofore used its influence for the International's benefit. The Knights reportedly proposed mutual acceptance of labels by all three parties (KL, Internationals, Progressives), free interchange of union cards, and cessation of hostilities, but the International claimed that the offer had never actually been made and had only been announced ex post facto by the Knights after the breakdown of negotiations in order to justify their actions.

By the fall of 1886, the break was complete. At the Richmond General Assembly, the Knights ordered all Knights of Labor cigarmakers to withdraw from the International or lose their Knights of Labor membership. Gompers and a group of like-minded union leaders from other unions with similar grievances against the Knights met at Columbus, Ohio, in December, 1886, to form the American Federation of Labor as a trade union federation against the Knights. The AFL declared its open hostility

to the Knights by refusing seats to the Knights of Labor Window-glass Workers, a national trade union within the Knights, and passing resolutions condemning the Knights, urging all trades to join the AFL, and refusing unanimously to patronize goods with the Knights of Labor label.

By 1886, Detroit had locals of both the International and Progressive Cigarmakers as well as two Knights of Labor assemblies in the tobacco industry: Andrew Forbes Assembly 7992 (Tobacco Workers) and Tom Paine Assembly 8086 (Cigarmakers). The bargaining and membership policies of the two local cigarmakers' unions, despite the more radical rhetoric of the Progressives, appear to have been essentially the same. Both unions had predominantly socialist leadership, both maintained elaborate benefit systems, both were politically active, both were involved in assisting organization of other trades, both repeatedly responded generously to a wide variety of assistance appeals. There is not enough data available to determine if the split locally was based on some clear ideological or ethnic difference, but activities of key leaders suggest two possibilities. While both unions must have been heavily German, the Progressives were more self-consciously ethnically based. The International local, Cigarmakers' Union No. 22, was affiliated with the English speaking Trades Council, its officers were also prominent officers of Trades Council, and all of the well known non-German cigarmakers in Detroit

belonged to the International. The Progressives were affiliated with and prominent in the German Central Labor Union and included no non-Germans among their leaders. Clearly the International was attempting to integrate itself in the non-German world in ways the Progressives were not. There may also have been differences at the leadership level based on socialist factionalism. Important leaders of the International were SLP members, while at least some of the Progressive's leaders belonged to the rival IWPA.²⁹

The two Knights of Labor assemblies organized all kinds of tobacco workers including cigar packers, filler breakers, chewing tobacco workers, and hand rollers who maintained dual membership in the Knights and the unions. The DA had a union shop agreement with one of the large manufacturers of chewing tobacco, Globe Tobacco Company, which included a profit sharing scheme that some of the DA leadership saw as a model of industrial cooperation. After a short rivalry in the spring of 1886, following the International boycott of the Knights of Labor label, the DA essentially withdrew the Knights of Labor cigar label in the Detroit area. Knights of Labor leaders saw themselves as peacemakers in the cigarmakers' struggle and hoped to use Tom Paine Assembly as an intermediary between the various factions of cigarmakers.³⁰

Although the Progressives and Internationals in

Detroit maintained a running verbal battle, they avoided the mutual raiding and strikebreaking that had taken place in New York. Gompers arrived in Detroit in May and gave a speech entitled "Scabs, Knights of Labor, and Unions" in which he argued that all tobacco workers except International members were scabs, but disgruntled union members were not yet bitter enough to accept Gompers' position on the Knights.³¹

A few weeks later, the DA executive board unveiled its peace plan. The Knights' Cigarmakers' Assembly was to be composed of members from both the International and the Progressives. All three would function according to the following set of rules, and the Knights of Labor cigar label was to be used only as specified in the agreement. The program included eight points:

1. Knights of Labor labor labels would be used only if the manufacturer did not discriminate against any labor organization. This would prevent the kind of collusive agreements between unions and manufacturers against rival unions that had occurred in New York.
2. All employees had to be KL and "straight with the union..."
3. The wage scale must be equal to the highest adopted by either cigarmakers' union.

4. Money borrowed or appropriated from any union was to be returned, probably a reference to International-Progressive disputes over disposition of union funds during the split.
5. No machine made cigars would be endorsed.
6. Non-English speaking workers would not be required to join the KL until rituals were provided in their native languages.
7. All labels were to be issued to and administered by shop committees.
8. All committees' shops were to be union shops-- new employees need not be union or Knights of Labor, but must apply on hiring.

The agreement also defined "straight" in less narrow terms than those employed by Gompers and leaders of the International. To be considered "straight," a worker could not be an expelled or suspended union member, but workers could not be considered scabs merely because they did not belong to the International Union. In late June, 1886, the Labor Leaf reported the dispute to be settled in Detroit on this basis, and announced in September that the Internationals and Progressives had settled their differences nationally. The cigarmakers' fight appeared to be over and union-Knights of Labor cooperation would be maintained.³²

In the late summer and early fall of 1886, frictions between the Knights and the Cigarmakers' Union relaxed in

Detroit, and relations between the DA and other unions still seemed congenial. Continued reports of national trade union actions against the Knights were of great concern but were not directly relevant to conditions in Detroit. Nevertheless, occasional incidents did suggest a reservoir of minor dissatisfactions which would form the basis for serious conflict later on. A shoemaker, for example, complained that the DA was readmitting workers at Pingree and Smith who had scabbed against the Knights during the long strike. He had "suffered physically" because "I stood by the decisions of the K of L," and now DA officers were "whitewashing renegades" who had caused that suffering. Skilled workers at the Globe Tobacco Company protested the DA's policy of distributing equally the royalties the company paid the DA for use of the KL label. They wanted royalties distributed in proportion to weekly salaries.³³

Editorial columnists and letter writers to the Labor Leaf feared that serious trouble between the unions and the Knights would break out if trade union grievances were not resolved, and especially, if the Knights did not restrain "Mr. Powderly's...arbitrary disposition with which he has run things." In November, 1886, editor Burton commented at length on the reasons for the approaching Trades Congress in Columbus which would create the AFL. The Congress, Burton argued, "is a protest against the

centralizing policy lately pursued by the Knights of Labor."

The Knights had been built up by trade union members.

To ignore this, and to attempt to abolish the local autonomy which is part of every well-regulated union is simply suicidal.

While trade unions were in many respects narrow in their views and objects, judicious handling would have brought them up to the mark...

The K. of L. is susceptible of wider influence than a trades union, but the trade union, with the discipline of its members, can concentrate its power in any particular locality...The sentiment is very powerful in the direction of home rule, the sovereignty of the individual--not to delegate everything to a small minority of well-paid officials.³⁴

The trouble that Burton and others feared came only three months later. In February, 1887, Powderly ordered immediate enforcement of the decision of the Richmond GA on dual membership in the Knights of Labor and the International Cigarmakers. All Knights of Labor cigar workers had to leave the International or leave the Order at once. In effect, all union cigarmakers were summarily expelled from the Knights of Labor.³⁵

The expulsion order produced an immediate crisis in Detroit. Although the number of affected individuals in Detroit was extremely small (according to the Advance and Labor Leaf, there were only twelve or thirteen dual members faced with the prospect of expulsion), the order necessitated an immediate and unequivocal decision on an issue with overwhelming symbolic importance in terms of the emerging factional disagreements in the local labor

movement. Was Powderly's decision legally binding on the DA? Could Powderly summarily expel members without proper cause? If so, what did that say about democracy in the Knights of Labor? Would the DA honor the order or fight it? Did this signal a declaration of war on the unions?³⁶

A number of local labor leaders argued the expulsion order was unconstitutional. The constitution, they insisted, provided only one mechanism for expulsion of members--trial by local assembly court. Even if Powderly was only administering a GA decision, the order was unconstitutional. Although the GA was the highest ruling body of the Knights of Labor, it did not have the power to change the constitution. Constitutional amendments had to be submitted to a vote of the local assemblies for ratification. The Richmond decision amounted to a constitutional change and therefore could not be enforced until after ratification by a majority of local assemblies. This had not been done. Therefore, they should ignore the expulsion order. Joseph Labadie, in characteristic fashion, carried the argument several steps further when he pointed out that not only was the cigarmakers' expulsion unconstitutional, but so were a whole host of other decisions based on constitutional amendments over the last five years since none of the amendments (of which there had been many) had been properly submitted for local ratification. The expulsion order was a "usurpation" of

authority. The DA must resist because submission to unjust authority is "slavish."³⁷

Those facing expulsion included pioneer Detroit Knights Hugh McClelland and Thomas Dolan, both charter members of LA 901. "I am a Knight of Labor," Dolan explained, "was a charter member of 901, and have never done anything to offend the order, but will be compelled to go with my trade union. My living is there...." McClelland, also a cigarmaker and a former Labor legislator, agreed. An impressive array of local labor leaders expressed their horror at the expulsion order, and the issue dominated the pages of the Advance and Labor Leaf for the entire month of February. Even Andrew Forbes, who had hitherto been closely identified with what was rapidly emerging as the "Administration" faction in the DA, came out for the opposition. "I should stand by my union in preference to the Knights of Labor if such an order was issued to my trade."³⁸

Captain McGregor, who had replaced Burton as editor at the Advance and Labor Leaf, gave the Administration viewpoint. The International Cigarmakers had ordered a boycott of the Knights of Labor cigar label, arrogantly demanding the Knights surrender their label when the Knights actually represented more cigarmakers than the International. The Knights could not stand idly by and see their rights infringed upon. In Detroit, so far, the

DA had taken no action to defend itself, and, as a result, the International's label had almost totally replaced the Knights' label. The expulsion order was an act of self-defense totally justified by the events of the past year. District Master Workman J. D. Long agreed and dismissed the constitutional arguments out of hand. DA Treasurer and Executive Board member John Devlin concurred.³⁹

Grenell, still trying to play the role of mediator between the left and right, proposed a compromise solution. The DA should support the order but suspend it temporarily. In effect, Grenell was proposing that the DA proclaim formal allegiance to the national leadership but ignore the expulsion order in practice. Grenell's proposal was adopted. Dolan, McClelland, and others affected remained with the Knights, but the compromise did not really satisfy partisans of either side.⁴⁰

McGregor also made a feeble effort to patch things up. Despite what had happened, the Knights and the unions could coexist, he declared. Disagreements had been based on fear and emotion, but "Both have the same object in view: the elevation of labor..." and both had a common enemy, "our present industrial system which deprives us of access to natural resources...the two can, if they wish, get along without fighting each other...."⁴¹

Yet despite his verbal olive branch, McGregor's other remarks in the same issue of the newspaper suggest

he did not wish to "get along." The union, he could not resist pointing out, "relies on ameliorative [measures]," but the Knights "on curative measures." Labadie's constitutional arguments and call to resistance particularly aroused McGregor's ire. Labadie was "impractical...a wrecker...There is an apparent opportunity in the Knights of Labor just now to tear down, consequently Labadie... is trying to tear down. However, the Advance will go on trying to build up."⁴²

Two weeks later, in an article entitled "An explanation from the Unadulterated Knights of Labor Standpoint," Devlin was no more diplomatic. He repeated McGregor's main points, by now standard fare. The International had unjustifiably boycotted the Knights. The International's officers did not really represent the cigarmakers; they were guilty of the very collusion with employers they charged against the Knights. But Devlin did not stop there. The International's officers were a bunch of irrational drunkards, "men who indulge to excess in the use of intoxicants...the General Executive has never had the pleasure of meeting with Mr. Gompers when he was sober."⁴³

Things went down hill from there. McGregor began running almost weekly articles in the Advance critical of trade union actions inside and out of Detroit. His editorial exchanges with Labadie, who still wrote his weekly column for the paper, became an on-going catfight.

Readers joined in pro and con. One wonders what staff meetings or work sessions must have been like.⁴⁴

Even more disastrously, the invective spilled over from normal channels of debate into public forums and mass meetings called for very different purposes: to discuss trade union policies, for example, or to inform prospective members of the advantages of organization. It became literally impossible to hold any kind of labor gathering in Detroit with more than a handful of people without engaging in factional debate. At a meeting of brewery workers in March, 1887, Thomas Dolan spoke at length on the differences between the Knights and the trade unions and the superiority of the unions. He criticized various other labor leaders for anti-union remarks. Other speakers pursued the same theme. In April, rivalries between the Iron Molders' Union and the rapidly growing Knights of Labor molders broke out into the open again. The Union refused to honor Knights of Labor cards in shops where it predominated, and the Knights retaliated by threatening to cross union picket lines in the event of a strike. A similar situation emerged on Great Lakes ships docking in Detroit. Knights of Labor sailors complained of difficulty in finding work because of union opposition.⁴⁵

The consequences of such hostilities were particularly damaging in industries where the allegiance of the workforce was divided. Renewed hostilities between the

Cigarmakers' Union and the DA dramatically reduced membership in the two Knights of Labor tobacco workers' assemblies. Tom Paine Assembly survived only because a small group of International Union members continued to pay dues. The assembly functioned as a front for the International within the Knights, allowing them representation on the DA for debating purposes and the right to use the KL label in addition to their own where the second label might boost sales. Andrew Forbes Assembly, which had reportedly contained several hundred tobacco workers in 1886, lost all of its members in 1887 except the hundred or so tied to the Knights through the DA's union shop agreement with the Globe Tobacco Company. Other assembly members quit after the DA refused to surrender administrative control of the KL label to shop committees as the 1886 peace agreement had specified. Globe employees could not quit the Knights because the terms of the company's contract with the DA included Knights of Labor membership as a requirement for continued employment. The DA considered the Globe agreement as its model of the virtues of arbitration. Royalties paid by the company to the DA for the use of the KL label were described by the DA's officers as an example of "profit-sharing" and an exercise in labor-management cooperation. "Such training removes the antagonistic spirit too common between employer and employed." But disgruntled company employees disputed

these grandiose claims and argued that the company paid lower than average wages. The so-called shared profits were a ruse which did not even make up the wage differential between Globe and other companies.⁴⁶

While the rivalries in Detroit's tobacco industry were settled with the virtual disappearance of the Knights except at Globe, the union and the Knights were more closely balanced in the iron foundries. By 1887, the union had bounced back from its near destruction by the stove companies in the early 1880's. A majority of the workers in several small shops had rejoined the union, and important nuclei of union members in the large stove companies were advocating representation by the IMU. Yet the Knights, whose membership policies were less restrictive than the unions, were also growing rapidly. Devlin Assembly 3954 had branched out from the carshops to the Peninsular Stove Works, and a second molders' assembly, Garland Assembly 619, would organize several hundred more at the Michigan Stove Company in 1888.⁴⁷

At the same time, local metal manufacturers had escalated their attack on established pay scales and long standing work rules. In early 1887, the three major stove companies, the Detroit, Michigan, and Peninsular Stove Companies, all joined a national stove manufacturers' alliance designed to break the resistance of the Iron Molders' Union to the Berkshire or bucks system. Union

spokesmen argued that the real purpose of the employers' pact was to destroy unionism in the metal trades. Employers consciously exploited the KL-union rivalry in their attempts to win acceptance of new work rules and pay scales.⁴⁸

Some leaders on both sides recognized the costs of interunion rivalry and attempted to combine efforts. Among working iron molders, there seemed to be a basis for cooperation. The union had encountered rough going in Detroit throughout the 1880's. It was for this reason that union molders had established Knights of Labor assemblies in order to draw support from the larger organization. Union leaders admitted in a public debate in June, 1887, that "the Knights of Labor have done for labor in Detroit what the union never could have done...." But involvement of the DA 50's Executive Board in the negotiating process had disastrous consequences.⁴⁹

Under the Knights of Labor rules, the District Board had great power over the negotiations of local assemblies. Locals needed DA approval to engage in strike or boycott actions. Equally important, except for very large locals, local assemblies were almost totally dependent on the District for organizing the community support and assistance that was essential to strike victories. Leaders of many assemblies were also recent converts, inexperienced in the mechanics of negotiations.

For all of these reasons the District Executive Board was able to exert great leverage over locals to name it as the negotiating agent. Locals often did so with some reluctance. The Advance admitted, for example, that strikers at the Wilson Bros. Carriage Works in March, 1887, had "at first refused to submit their affairs to the executive board of DA 50" and had finally done so under duress. DA officers reported the negotiations with Wilson Bros. had produced a satisfactory settlement, but apparently the workers did not agree. In August, the Carriage Workers' Assembly (LA 6182) threatened to withdraw from the Knights of Labor if the proposed Carriage Makers' National Trade District, which would have taken them out of DA 50's control, was not approved.⁵⁰

Negotiating efforts by the DA 50 Executive Board with the Hart Manufacturing Company in February and the stove companies in May and June of 1887 produced similarly unsatisfactory results. At Hart Manufacturing Company, ironworkers had been locked out by the company following a series of disputes over work methods and piece rates on several items. The company had introduced a new device for making hinges which was more efficient than the old machine and had cut the piece rate on the hinges accordingly. Apparently the company's management had decided that this might be an opportunity to institute cuts in the rates for a number of other items as well, the most

important of which was school seats.⁵¹

Iron Molders' Local No. 31 and Knights of Labor LA 3954 had been competing with each other in their efforts to organize the shop for some time, but when the new disputes arose they joined forces to fight the changes. The union wanted to turn the lockout into a strike and boycott the company's products, but the Knights, upon the suggestion of the District leadership, proposed binding arbitration instead. The union, with some hesitation, agreed. The DA approached the Hart management with the idea, and it was agreed that the company would name one representative, the DA another, and then these two would agree on a neutral third representative. The DA's representative was Advance editor Captain McGregor.⁵²

The employees argued that all pay cuts were totally unjustified. While the company claimed that the greater efficiency of the new hinge-making machinery would allow molders to maintain their wages despite the lower piece rate by making more hinges in the same length of time, workers pointed out that there was no evidence that this was the case. Even if the machine was more efficient, why should the entire benefit go to the company? Moreover, no improvements had been made in the manufacturing of the school seats, but piece rates had been cut there, too. Hart workers had already been making substantially less per week than comparable workers at other Detroit companies.

With the technical improvements in the hinge machinery, they should be receiving a pay increase, not a pay cut.⁵³

McGregor reported on the arbitration committee's decision in the Advance. Company spokesmen had prepared an elaborate statistical presentation on production methods and relative costs, while the workers had rested their case primarily on abstract notions of equity. According to McGregor, they did not have the facts and figures to substantiate their claim. The arbitrators had been convinced of the validity of the company's position on the hinges but saw no basis for a change in rates for the school seats. By a unanimous vote, they accepted the lower piece rate for the hinges and ordered a return to the old rates for school seats. McGregor viewed the settlement as a worthwhile compromise and "another victory for arbitration...."⁵⁴

To McGregor, the importance of the case had been the willingness of the company to accept a negotiated settlement. The pattern of arbitration, he hoped, would set a precedent for other industrial disputes. His reaction is revealing and suggestive of the problems arising from District negotiations of local disputes. Although McGregor had been appointed as the labor representative to the arbitration committee, he apparently conceived of his role not as the advocate of the iron workers, but as a representative of the Knights' abstract doctrines of

arbitration and industrial good will. As such, the desire to portray the Knights as a respectable body which accepted its responsibilities to the public welfare carried at least as much weight in his thinking as the grievances of the locked out workers. He was an outsider to the industry but apparently took no steps to provide himself with documentation independent of the company statistics. When the workers failed to provide hard data for their side, a job which might reasonably have been considered McGregor's as their negotiator, he essentially voted for the company position. From the workers' point of view, the "victory" amounted to DA approval for the company-sponsored cut on the rate with no corresponding gains.⁵⁵

The DA Executive Board played a similar role in the final showdown with the stove companies. In April, 1887, Henry Cribben, President of the Stove Manufacturers' Defense Association, arrived in Detroit to confer with local employers. Union leaders were aware that the employers' association had recently sponsored lockouts in St. Louis in opposition to wage demands and to enforce the bucks system. As part of the Manufacturers' Association agreement, member firms agreed to accept patterns from other association firms engaged in labor disputes. Cribben had brought St. Louis patterns to Chicago, and molders there had struck in solidarity with fellow iron workers in St. Louis. He brought the same patterns to

Detroit hoping to force the Detroit firms to take up the slack from the struck firms in St. Louis and Chicago. The union wanted to strike, but Knights of Labor leaders once again urged caution and negotiation. A strike would throw more than 3,000 stove employees out of work, causing distress to their families, and equally important, would depress the city's entire economy. It was in the public interest to avoid a strike by submitting disputes to arbitration.⁵⁶

The stove companies did not agree--they locked out their employees in mid-May, declaring they would not reopen until the workers would accept the bucks system and the disputed patterns. Belatedly, the Knights of Labor called their own strike. Molders opposed the bucks system on both moral and practical grounds. The whole idea of putting skilled craftsmen "in the position of subcontractors ...(who) enrich themselves at the expense of the men who do their work...(was) repugnant to our ideas..." one molder explained to a Detroit News reporter. Equally important, the practice could be used to bypass the trade's apprenticeship rules. Bucks could be trained to do a single task. While they would not have the skills of a real molder, they could learn their one job adequately in far less time than it took to become a molder. Such semi-skilled workers could then be substituted at much lower wages for more highly paid union molders. The semi-skilled

workers would undercut the position of the union molders, but would have no bargaining power of their own since their training had been confined to a single task, and they could not switch to another employer who used slightly different methods.⁵⁷

Spokesmen for the manufacturers claimed that they had the molders' best interests at heart. Some old men could not get along without assistance. If the Knights and the union had their way, such experienced employees would have to be fired. What the labor organizations demanded was "tyranny," a denial of the individual molder's right to choose. The leaders of DA 50, according to Peninsular Stove Company President Moran, were "juveniles ...sucking at the pap of public office...stirring up discontent and trouble among the workingmen simply to prolong their power."⁵⁸

Moran's remarks hit too close to home for comfort. Knights of Labor leaders pointed out that Moran himself was City Controller and had placed his own relatives on the city payroll. Certainly for him to criticize the DA's leadership for their political appointments was a case of the pot calling the kettle black. Yet Moran's remarks, as he must have known, merely echoed the growing criticism Knights of Labor leaders were receiving from their own ranks. Moreover, public sentiment seemed to be turning against the strike. Although the editors of

the News recognized that the shutdown of the stove companies was a result of the manufacturers' desire to "test" the Knights, they blamed the Knights for the continuation of the strike. If the dispute was really between molders who wanted to use bucks and those who opposed the use of bucks, a strike against the company was "ill conceived," according to the editors. This strike was an example of the problem with the Knights--too many strikes.⁵⁹

Two days after Moran's outburst, the DA leadership settled with the stove companies. A "treaty" was signed which seemed to grant victory to both sides. Old men who needed assistance would be allowed to hire bucks, but the bucks system would be officially done away with. The bucks system was thus outlawed but kept intact at the same time. The arrangement would be carried out according to rules worked out by employees and employers in each shop. Once again public image was apparently the primary concern of DA negotiators. Put in the position of blame by the newspapers for prolonging the strike in disregard of public welfare, the DA leadership quickly retreated. Perhaps Moran's charges of political opportunism, despite his obviously self-interested motivations, were justified. Maybe they did fear that unpopular strikes could lose votes. After a rather lame denial of the charges, in which DA spokesmen admitted that five of twelve board members held appointive political office, DA officials

were strangely silent.⁶⁰

Dissatisfied molders, however, did not keep quiet. In the days and weeks following the signing of the agreement, it replaced the cigarmakers' issue as the focus of factional controversy within the local labor movement. Predictably, the vagueness of the agreement allowed countless opportunities for abuse. Union molders complained about a month later that union militants were being systematically discriminated against by the stove companies. Molders were paid on a piece rate basis with deductions from it for various imperfections in workmanship or outright rejection of inferior work. The companies, critics insisted, victimized union supporters, while appearing to stay within the agreement, by discounting or refusing perfectly acceptable work. As expected, the DA's investigating committee denied the charges, claiming that the inspectors who had rejected the work included Knights of Labor members, and the "Kickers" were IMU members who were just trying to stir up trouble in order to break up the Knights. Both molders disputed the DA's findings.

The Advance reported that

Several molders have already left the assembly and joined Union 31, because, they say, the Knights of Labor do not take enough interest in technical trade matters, and this puts them at a very great disadvantage. They also object that men who are not practical molders cannot know all the schemes to which the bosses resort to beat the men, and therefore cannot guard against these abuses by contract.⁶¹

A molders' public meeting sponsored by IMU No. 31 during the closing days of the stove company's lockout demonstrated how the struggle had increased bitterness between rival factions rather than drawing the molders closer together. The meeting, which drew more than 400 molders, included speeches by leaders of both IMU No. 31 and the Knights molders' assemblies, a representative from the IMU International Executive Board, and a variety of leaders from both the DA and the Trades Council. Sam Goldwater, representing the Trades Council, obliquely attacked the Knights when he suggested that iron molders could avoid future difficulties by organizing. John Bauer, Master Workman of LA 3954, leapt to his feet to point out that the molders were already organized in the Knights of Labor. Gustav Herzig continued the attack more directly when he pointed out that their national leader was paid \$5,000 per year. Bauer was once again on his feet to respond to this "gratuitous insult," although the remark was true. McGregor, Long, and Strigel spoke in defense of the Knights urging all workers and union locals to join the Knights. IMU No. 31 representatives expressed criticisms of the Knights negotiating tactics in the stove-works disputes, but interestingly, the tone of their attack on the Knights was less vitriolic than those of outside union representatives like Goldwater and Herzig who were not really involved. The IMU International representative

expressed some astonishment at the character of the meeting--in a couple of hours of speech making by all sides, nothing specific had been said about the current difficulties.⁶²

The alignment of forces within the spectrum of local labor leaders presented at the molders' meeting reveals how successive disputes over the previous few months had hardened factional lines. The men were more preoccupied with attacking each other than with settling the practical problems at hand. While the debate looked organizational, the Knights versus the unions, the alliances between leaders with quite different aims and ideological assumptions suggests that the factionalism was based on something more complex and more important than simple organizational rivalry. The Knights were attacked by both conservative craft unionists in the leadership of IMU No. 31 and radical trade unionists like Goldwater and Herzig. They were defended by spokesmen representing the dominant faction in the DA leadership. Knights of Labor radicals like Labadie, Dolan, Grenell, and J. F. Duncan (District Financial Secretary and another administration critic) were not present at the meeting, but judging from their remarks elsewhere, would have sided with the other critics of the DA.

Thus, what appeared by the summer of 1887 to be a struggle between two organizations, the Knights of Labor

and the Trades Council, actually involved four separate factions in the leadership of the Detroit labor movement. Contemporary observers and later scholars have avoided these subtleties. Yet to characterize the factional disputes as the KL versus the unions ignores the internal disputes within each organization which consistently provoked divisions just as serious as those between organizations, and also misses the ways in which groups in both the KL and the Trades Council cooperated with each other against factional opponents in their own organizations. On almost every major issue on which serious differences of opinion emerged, these complex factional alignments also developed. Strict political independence, fusion politics, or no politics at all had advocates in both the DA and Trades Council. When the ILP opted for fusion politics in 1886, the campaign committee included both DA and Trade Council representatives, and the "Goldwater gang" which opposed them likewise included both union and Knights of Labor members. When the issue of clemency for the Haymarket defendants arose in 1887, the DA and the Trades Council each split right down the middle. Even on matters of trade policy such as the question of craft autonomy there was no neat division between the DA and the Trades Council--the DA had its trade faction while the Trades Council included numerous spokesmen who agreed with Knights of Labor that narrow craft unionism was

obsolete.⁶³

Any attempt to understand not only the decline of the Knights and the rise of the AFL, but also the underlying changes in working class consciousness must go beyond a dichotomization of the issues in terms of organizations or even in terms of philosophical orientation (reformism versus business unionism, for example). Instead, the analysis must proceed from an examination of the origins and relationships between the four emerging tendencies: craft conservatism, doctrinaire socialism, independent radicalism, and artisan reformism.

Underlying craft conservatism were the higher wages, greater status, and better bargaining position of secure craftsmen. Craft conservatives were unionists because they recognized the potential leverage of their bargaining position and wanted to protect it. Where manufacturers could not threaten them with imminent technological obsolescence, they had no real need for alliances with other crafts or other groups of workers. Their power was based on their ability to maintain a craft monopoly, and in that endeavor, actions of other groups of workers, even in their own locale, had far less direct impact than those of fellow craftsmen in other cities--hence their preoccupation with their craft. Their unions remained relatively aloof from all supra-union bodies, whether the Trades Council, the DA, the Labor Party, or any of the other cultural and

cooperative bodies established during the 1880's. Extreme examples like the local lodges of the railroad brotherhoods avoided all contact with other labor organizations. Others, like the printers and the building trades, participated actively in the Council but refused all commitments which might limit craft autonomy in any way. While they might be interested in politics in order to secure specific legislation correcting health and safety abuses, they were disinterested in long range proposals for social change. They worked with fellow craftsmen in small shops or for small contractors so that they had relatively few immediate work experiences with other workers who had a different perspective. Where they seemed to depart from the principle of craft autonomy, for example when the iron molders allied with the Knights, they did so in order to get added muscle against better organized and more powerful employers and not to pursue the Knights reformist objectives. Craft conservatives were often militant; they adhered rigidly to their own codes of solidarity, and often contributed generously to other striking unions. But narrow self-interest was still at the heart of their motivations; mutual self-help was a practical as much as an idealistic doctrine.⁶⁴

Yet, as the radicalization of the Trades Council in the early 1880's demonstrated, many craftsmen did not fit this craft profile. The labor movement's left, as

well as its right, was primarily craft based. Some, like the cigarmakers or shoemakers, found themselves in trades with very different prospects. Others, like the Germans, lived in an ethnic culture which included left-ist values. Still others, like Labadie and Grenell, became radicals through an intellectual process. But this left was itself divided.

One group was what Grenell called the straight-backed socialists--at the leadership level primarily SLP members and predominantly (although not exclusively) Germans. Although the SLP had dwindled in numbers and significance since the late 1870's, its most prominent members commanded great respect, had considerable organization skill and experience, and were recognized as incorruptible even by their bitterest opponents. Their personal influence was far greater than the actual strength of the Party. They were also well-disciplined and remarkably consistent. In both philosophy and practice, they anticipated the conceptions of elite organization and theoretical purity developed by De Leon in the 1890's and Leninists in the twentieth century. Their reactions to developments in the 1880's were dictated by their desire to win support for the Party and for socialism. The Knights had had some promise in their eyes because of the Order's initial emphasis on trade amalgamation and class organization, but the doctrinaires had quickly turned

against the Knights when it became clear that the Order was moving in a reformist rather than a revolutionary direction. Thereafter, the SLP directed its energies to the Trades Council. While they universally failed in efforts to commit the Council to socialist policies, they elected many of their members to Council office and exercised considerable influence in Council proceedings. They supported the Labor Party as a possible transition to a genuine socialist party, but they were more interested in the party's potential to bring workers closer to socialism than its capacity to win elections or secure legislation; therefore, strict independence, even if that meant sure defeat, was to be preferred to coalition victories.⁶⁵

It was in response to this doctrinaire left that a left independent of the SLP had emerged. Men like Labadie, Grenell, Dolan, and Simpson became convinced that the socialist critique of capitalism was valid, but they considered the SLP aggravating and ineffective. They moved from the Party into the Knights. Primarily American-born or Anglo-Irish, they were radicals, but less concerned with socialist theory and more with immediate results. While they accepted a vague conception of socialism, in contrast to doctrinaires, they also reacted positively to the other reformist notions of the 1880's: the Single Tax, cooperation, reform politics, and anarchism. Intensely democratic, militant unionists, capable labor veterans,

their long-term strategy depended on the capacity of the Knights of Labor to combine a radical class perspective with practical results.

While the independent leftists like Labadie who had founded the Knights in Detroit remained prominent throughout the 1880's, the DA began to slip from their control just as the Knights were beginning to realize their expectations in the mid-'80's. The leaders of the Detroit District Executive Board in 1887, whose conduct had provoked such controversy over the previous year, represented a distinct group separate from the radicals who had established the Knights in Detroit. This new group of leaders were reformist but not radical; most of them had gained prominence only in the previous two to four years. Most were skilled workers, artisans, but artisans with a very different background and social perspective than the other three groups. By 1887, none of the leaders of the left who had been important remained on the Board.

Instead the leadership of the DA came almost exclusively from these artisan-reformers. Altogether, seventeen individuals served on the District Executive Board in 1887, but two of these were expelled during the course of the year; one for absconding with assembly funds, and another for returning to work during a strike. Of the remaining fifteen, only five had been prominent in

the local labor movement before 1884: District officers Long, Strigel, Devlin, and Forbes, and Executive Board member Henry Robinson. Eight of the fifteen were not actually workers during the time they served on the board. Six held appointive political office (five Democrats, one Greenback-Republican), one was a clerk in a hardware store, and the eighth, Captain McGregor, was a ship's captain and Advance editor for part of the year.⁶⁶

More importantly, only one of the entire group is known to have worked in a trade in which there was a strong craft union.⁶⁷ Thus, in contrast to nearly all of the labor leaders in the other three factions, most of these reformers came to prominence in the labor movement through District political and cultural activities, and not via prior activity in a trade union. They had little experience with trade unionism, only three holding major union offices outside of the Knights of Labor.⁶⁸ Some scholars have suggested that such men were not really workers, they were middle class reformers, political hacks, quacks. This argument is invalid, while half of them were not working at their trades during their tenure in office, all came from working class backgrounds and several resumed work after short periods in official positions. They tended, however, to be particular kinds of workers. Hardly any were industrial workers; among them were three shoemakers, a painter, a cracker baker, a hatter, two

sailors, and a drayman. Only the three shoemakers and three metal workers came from trades which had experienced serious struggles with employers in recent years, but the shoemakers had witnessed the destruction of the Crispins and the stove workers had seen repeated victories of the stove companies over the molders' union.⁶⁹ Thus, as a group, they either had little experience with unionism or experiences which would lead them to doubt the effectiveness of trade unionism. In contrast, their political efforts had been moderately successful. Their political orientation, their belief that the DA should avoid alienating voters, made sense based on this personal background.⁷⁰

They were workers, and they were sincere reformers. There is no evidence that they were personally or politically corrupt, that they used their offices to line their own pockets. Strigel died penniless "in the poorhouse" according to David Boyd. Long found himself unemployed and nearly unemployable after retiring from DA office. Devlin, who appeared to be the most opportunist of the group in the mid-'80's, must also have been motivated by principle as he abandoned a successful career as a Democratic politician to join the pitifully weak Populist Party in Michigan. When radicals accused them of selling out for the spoils of office, they reacted indignantly. And if they could hear the modern scholarly descriptions of themselves as middle class hacks, they would be equally

shocked.⁷¹

Their desire for respectability, for a sense of dignity, came as much from their background as workers as did their reformism. They were reformers because they saw the industrial system destroying the rights and status of the artisan-citizen, but this same notion of status, of a solid citizen, prevented them from becoming radical reformers. They were against capitalism because it degraded the artisan, but not against individual capitalists as long as employers honored artisan rights.⁷²

Each of these four groups represented a major constituency. The leaders of each were genuinely popular with their following. Thus, while the factional struggle certainly included elements of personal rivalry and petty ambition, ultimately the existence of such factions was based on the heterogeneity of Detroit's workers--the variations in their backgrounds and experiences. All four of the factions existed throughout the 1880's, but their alliances shifted. These shifts were the decisive factor in the changing fortunes of the Knights and the unions.

The rise of the Knights was possible because both factions of the left and the reformers saw the Knights as a vehicle for changing the industrial system. Craft conservatives might be disinterested or even hostile to the ideal of such an organization, but they found themselves isolated by the loose concurrence of the other factions

in the 1880's. When the Knights became a major force in the city, even craft conservatives may have started to rethink their assumptions. If they could use the Knights' power against employers without sacrificing craft autonomy, perhaps the organization would be valuable. But as the DA demonstrated its unwillingness to respect that autonomy, craft conservatives renewed their attack on the Knights in the series of disputes we have just examined. Their opposition, however, had been long standing. It was not decisive.

The decisive change was the shift of the two left factions to the craft camp. The resulting realignment of forces escalated the factional struggle which ultimately destroyed the Knights in Detroit. The sequence of events was crucial. While craft unionists had expressed grievances against the DA leadership for some time, it was only at the end of 1886 and the beginning of 1887, that is, after the left began to challenge the DA leadership, that the issue of craft rights began to be seriously argued in the Labor Leaf and that radicals came out unequivocally on the side of craft autonomy and craft rights. The timing suggests that the left took up the cause of craft rights not so much out of a deep seated concern with craft grievances but as a weapon against the reformers in the DA whom they were opposing for other reasons.

Politics and the public posture of the Knights were

their real concern. The group that walked out of the ILP convention over the issue of collaborationist politics, the "Goldwater gang," suddenly recognized the miseries of the International Cigarmakers or the Iron Molders after the election. Leftists who had denounced craft narrow mindedness for years suddenly became the champions of craft rights. Of course, the doctrinaire left had been less than enthusiastic about the Knights for some time. They had opposed reformism all along. The more critical and dramatic shift was the new hostility of the independent left to the leadership of the Knights. They had been the Order's founders in Detroit and its early leaders. Now they saw the organization moving away from the path they had charted for it. Labadie lamented early in 1886, well before the really bitter factionalism, that the influx of new members did not understand the Order's true purposes, its real principles.⁷³

The independent left joined the attack on the DA leadership because the problems of the craft unions, in their opinion, were symptomatic of even more fundamental problems with the organization's direction. The working class army was courting respectability more than social change. "Are we sailing, drifting, or stuck in the mud?" J. F. Bray asked of the Knights in June, 1887.⁷⁴ Powderly was hobnobbing with corporation executives and sabotaging the struggles of his own members. He was cavalierly

violating the organization's constitution with increasing frequency, making a mockery of internal democracy. Most importantly, he had joined the "cowardly attack" on the men unjustly accused of the bombing at Haymarket Square in Chicago in 1886.⁷⁵

III. Powderly, Haymarket, and the Destruction of the Knights of Labor

"there has been much dissatisfaction expressed with the results of the last year ...and much of it has been with Mr. Powderly..."

Detroit Labor Leaf, December 29, 1886⁷⁶

Local reaction to Powderly followed the same lines and same sequence as the response to the DA 50 leadership. In the eyes of critics, the leadership of the DA and the national leadership were the same type of people making the same kinds of mistakes with similarly disastrous consequences. DA leaders sprang to Powderly's defense. As a result, internal debate within the Detroit Knights of Labor had polarized by mid-1887 into self-consciously pro- and anti-Powderly factions.

There had been indications of local dissatisfaction with Powderly as early as the beginning of 1886. In March, 1886, the Labor Leaf had noted, but not supported, "reports denouncing" Powderly's leadership in the 1886 railroad strikes and his suspension of further recruiting.⁷⁷ Such

indirect criticism appeared in the newspaper with increasing frequency during the year as national friction with the trade unions grew more serious and as Powderly continued to advocate what critics considered to be an over-cautious posture toward capital and an uncompromising attitude toward the trade unions. By December, 1886, as the Leaf's year-end editorial summary indicated, criticism had become more open and direct, but it was still polite and diplomatic.⁷⁸

While opponents later admitted that they had had fundamental doubts about Powderly for quite some time, initially there was great reluctance to express these feelings openly. The Knights were under attack in the press, from corporations, from some of the unions. Powderly was the symbol of the Knights in the public mind. To attack him might give comfort to the enemy, might hurt the organization. Men like Labadie, Grenell, John Burton, and Dolan, the radicals in the Knights, did not want to bring about the downfall of the organization they had worked so hard to build up. Their criticisms both of Powderly, and of the DA 50 leadership, were based on exactly that fear--that inept leadership was destroying the Order, but "kicking," unnecessary or unjustified complaining or non-constructive criticism of leaders, was among the harshest epithets of the labor culture. Rivalries, jealousies, rumors had been consistent problems

over the years. Labadie had written Powderly several years earlier to warn him of rumors circulating against him and to pledge his support. "I never will believe you have proved recreant to the trusts that have been placed in your hands...No, no, brother Powderly, we who have led in this great movement must have more faith in one another than this...and courage to withstand temptation...God knows, we have enough to contend with besides bringing discord among ourselves."⁷⁹

As he began to change his mind about Powderly, Labadie moved cautiously. He suggested obliquely that Powderly could be removed from office without harming the labor movement. "The existence of the [labor] organizations does not depend upon the few men who have been honored by their fellows with prominent positions....," he wrote in December, 1886. "When the men who are now prominent in the movement fail to carry out the objects of the organizations they will be cast aside and others will take their places." Even Labadie's angry diatribes against the cigarmakers' expulsion order stopped short of any personal denunciation of Powderly. The critical issue which finally turned Labadie and all of the other radicals in Detroit implacably against Powderly was Haymarket.⁸⁰

Labadie had not hesitated to defend the anarchists accused of throwing the bomb, and he had been joined in

this position by Burton, Grenell, and the rest of the Labor Leaf staff. Only a day after the bombing, the Labor Leaf blamed the incident on the Chicago police who "didn't mind their own business" and attacked a peaceful demonstration of workingmen.⁸¹ Labadie was shocked, as he read the various labor papers they received regularly at the Labor Leaf offices, to discover that most other labor papers had reacted quite differently. "I do wish the labor papers would stop distributing the nasty puke the capitalist papers have seen fit to cover their dirty sheets with about the Chicago and Milwaukee troubles. Don't be fools because your enemies want you to be." "The Beastly police," Labadie argued, got what they deserved. They had come to crack heads but "instead of cracking heads they got cracked." Sentiment for the dead policemen was "a good deal of mush." If a "body of men goes to break up any kind of meeting they should go at the peril of their lives.

If it is necessary to use dynamite to protect the rights of free meeting, free press and free speech, then the sooner we learn its manufacture and use and power the better it will be for the toilers of the world. Anything is better than beastly submission to wrong and injustice.⁸²

Labadie's defense of the Haymarket defendants earned him a warm letter of thanks from August Spies written from Cook County jail shortly after the trial:

Friend Labadie,

If you would send us one or two copies of "Labor Leaf" regularly, we should consider it quite a favor...It is most gratifying to us to see that in the general stampede of cowardly retreat there are at least some voices who boldly and fearlessly proclaim the Truth.⁸³

But some of Labadie's associates were not as sure as he about what the truth was. In particular, they objected to his support of the use of dynamite, even in self-defense. Henry Robinson challenged Labadie to a debate at the Dialectical Union on the question of the justifiability of throwing the bomb. The public vote at this meeting was divided exactly equally, twenty-three to twenty-three, but more important than the vote was the hysteria the debate provoked. Many of those present had refused to vote for fear of being publicly identified with the issue, and one who did was hounded out of town. John Goldring, a free lance house painter, had declared publicly that he would have thrown a bomb, too, under similar circumstances, and his business partners and neighbors were so outraged that he decided to leave Detroit.⁸⁴

But as news of the trial of the Haymarket defendants began to circulate, the balance of working class opinion shifted more in Labadie's direction. Regardless of the question of the rightness of the bomb throwing, the men were not getting a fair trial. The prosecution had presented no evidence tying any of the defendants directly

either to the planning or the execution of the act. Instead, they were being tried for their ideas, the prosecution asserting that their violent ideas provoked whoever had actually thrown the bomb. When news of the guilty verdict reached Detroit, the Labor Leaf labelled the decision a "legal outrage" and began to assist in the solicitation of funds for an appeal. Henry George Assembly 2697 explained why it had decided to contribute to the defense:

while this assembly does not believe that violent or revolutionary methods, in the sense of killing people and destroying property, are the true way to bring about social-economic changes, yet we do believe that even revolutionists have rights that should be respected, and we are willing to aid them in maintaining those rights.⁸⁵

When Lucy Parsons arrived in Detroit in January, 1887, to speak in her husband's behalf, the city's Police Superintendent tried to pressure hall owners into refusing to rent to her and absolutely forbade a political meeting on Sunday. But Mrs. Parsons spoke to a packed house at Germania Hall on Saturday night, explaining the details of the case, and the audience responded warmly. A support resolution by Joseph Labadie was unanimously endorsed, and over \$80 was collected for the defense. She remained in Detroit for nearly a week, speaking at other public meetings and at Knights of Labor meetings. For Burton, Labadie, Sam Goldwater, and the others who had supported the defendants from the beginning, it was an intensely

emotional experience. Parsons, a brother Knight, was being railroaded, they believed, by Chicago millionaires as revenge for the eight hour movement. A red scare atmosphere was being created. Labor Leaf correspondents noted that newspapers all across the country, including movement papers, were refusing letters and articles sympathetic to the condemned men. If Parsons could be convicted on such flimsy evidence, who might be next?⁸⁶

Yet Powderly was responding to the red scare tactics of the opposition by joining in with red-baiting of his own. In April, 1887, according to Labadie, during a speech at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, he had dramatically pulled an American flag out of his pocket and waved it while he denounced all those who supported the red flag.⁸⁷ At the Richmond GA in October, 1886, he had opposed a clemency resolution arguing that "Under no circumstances should we do anything that can, even by implication, be interpreted as identification with the Anarchist element. Their blind, unlawful act has cast a stain upon the name of labor which will take years to wipe out." Thus, Powderly not only refused to question the guilt of the Haymarket defendants, but he also blamed them for all of the Order's problems. "Instead of owing them sympathy we owe them a debt of hatred for their unwarrantable interference at a time when labor had all it could do to weather the storm...." While he finally voted for a compromise

resolution which asked for mercy but emphasized the Knights' disapproval of "infractions of the law," his confession of hatred probably came closer to his real feelings. Although he had voted for the resolution, he used his influence against all actions by the Knights in favor of the clemency campaign.⁸⁸

His supporters at the state and local level emulated him, trying to brand administration critics as anarchists and revolutionaries. In August, the Michigan State Assembly passed an anti-anarchy and revolution resolution after intense debate, but refused resolutions censuring administration conduct.⁸⁹

Anti-administration leaders both in Michigan and nationally began to line up support for their side as well. At the national level the General Executive Board itself was split. Tom Barry, a local hero to many Michigan Knights, had been drifting further and further from Powderly almost from the day of his re-election to the Board in the fall of 1885. By June, 1886, he was publicly at odds with Powderly at the Cleveland GA. In November, when Barry was sent to direct the Chicago packing house workers' strike, Powderly betrayed him by calling off the strike in the midst of the negotiations. Barry insisted that they had been on the verge of victory. The break with Powderly was complete as Barry toured the country denouncing him. Barry was joined in opposition by

W. H. Bailey, a leader of the Knights Coalminers' National Trade Assembly 135. Powerful districts in New York and Chicago, antagonized by Powderly's position on the Haymarket case, sympathized with Barry. Both sides began looking toward the upcoming Minneapolis GA for a showdown, not only on the Haymarket issue, but on Powderly's conduct as Master Workman. Barry, who was in close contact with many of Powderly's opponents, kept Labadie informed of developments in the internal struggle. "Kicking in Labor circles seems to be the order of the day all over the country," Barry wrote him in June, 1887. "...if we would kick against Capitalistic oppression we would have kicking enough." In July, he wrote Labadie to ask "how Detroit is fighting."⁹⁰

They were fighting, indeed. In July, a Cooperative Publishing Company took over ownership of the Advance and appointed Labadie as editor in chief. With McGregor demoted to business manager, the tone of the paper shifted once again. Criticisms of both local and national leadership received greater prominence, while union activities were treated more favorably. After a few weeks, McGregor gave up and went sailing again. In August, Labadie decided to run for GA representative in open opposition to Powderly's policies. GA candidates were being clearly identified as pro- or anti-Powderly, both by the press and by their supporters, as battle lines were drawn.

The State Assembly had elected a pro-Powderly slate, so that the Detroit election had even greater significance. Despite the dominance of pro-Powderly elements on the DA Executive Board, the influence of Labadie, Grenell, Burton, Dolan, and others had made DA 50 a maverick district for some time. They had refused to enforce the cigarmakers' expulsion order, decreed their unwillingness to accept all constitutional changes made since 1885 because they had not been properly ratified, and even sponsored a movement for a new constitution designed to decentralize authority in the organization. Labadie's candidacy had tremendous political importance, as well. He was a pioneer Knight and founder of the Order in Michigan, and his strong advocacy of consistently radical views made him, in symbolic terms, the most anti anti-Powderly candidate possible. His election as GA delegate would express the strongest possible condemnation of the existing leadership and would have widespread repercussions outside Detroit.⁹¹

Labadie campaigned unequivocally against Powderly. Summarizing Powderly's deficiencies in an Advance editorial, he argued that Powderly was "not a bad man," but he had demonstrated he was a "poor leader." He had condemned the eight hours movement only weeks before the May 1, 1886 deadline, thereby weakening the campaign. His cigarmakers' expulsion order was arbitrary and unconstitutional. His leadership of the Southwestern strike had been "half-

hearted" and had interfered with the workers' efforts. Instead of opposing the attack on the Chicago Communists as an attack on the whole labor movement, he had joined in the criticism of them. His acceptance of re-election for a two year term (with a salary increase) at Richmond instead of the customary one year term was a move away from democracy within the Order. His advocacy of temperance demonstrated his lack of socio-economic analysis--intemperance was a product of poverty and to treat it as a separate moral issue diverted the movement from real reforms. And most importantly, power had gone to his head, he had become susceptible to "capitalist flattery" and the desire for public approval from those who should be his enemies. Obviously, Labadie had much of the local leadership of the DA in mind when he made these criticisms as well, for he concluded that "new blood infused into the general offices, from the highest to the lowest, would be a benefit to the order."⁹²

Labadie's election, by a two-thirds majority, indicated how deep disaffection with the current leadership had gone. As critics had hoped, the local newspapers took his victory as evidence that DA 50 "sets itself squarely against the present administration." A proposal by the pro-Powderly faction to limit Labadie's prerogatives by specifying how the District wanted him to vote on key issues also lost overwhelmingly, reinforcing this

impression.⁹³

The GA opened in Minneapolis on October 4, 1887, amid a series of credential fights in which the Powderly forces attempted to use their control of the administrative machinery to prevent seating radical delegates on various technicalities. The real fight, as everyone knew, would be over the clemency campaign for the condemned Haymarket men. With the execution only a month away, the emotions on both sides of the issue had almost reached hysteria. Supporters of clemency were convinced that an unequivocal resolution by the country's most powerful labor organization would influence political leaders who would make the final decision on the appeals for commutation. The convention's decision might make the difference between life and death. Powderly was equally resolute in his determination to dissociate the Order completely, not only from anarchism, but even from any clemency campaign.⁹⁴

The climax came on October 10 on a resolution by James Quinn of New York DA 49. Avoiding any reference to ideology or the nature of the trial, Quinn tried to commit the GA to commutation on the basis of opposition to capital punishment. Despite the moderate tone of the proposal, pro-Powderly delegates tried to shout him down, and Powderly tried to dispose of the matter by ruling the motion out of order. After some parliamentary wrangling, an

anti-Powderly delegate appealed the ruling of the chair. Defeated 121-53, the anti-Powderly forces moved to reconsider forcing the debate that Powderly obviously wanted to avoid.⁹⁵

Powderly monopolized the floor and pulled out all the stops. He invented anarchists' attempts to assassinate him, alluded to sinister plots by the International to dominate the Knights for evil purposes, and threatened the delegates with responsibility for destroying the Order if they allowed it to become associated with anarchy. It was an "illogical, cowardly, brutal, and violent" performance Labadie charged later, but the majority of the delegates were cowed.⁹⁶

The opposition was furious, and the convention degenerated into a shouting free-for-all of charges and counter charges. Powderly, now sure of his ability to control the majority, tried to have his opponents on the GEB, Barry and Bailey, removed by calling for new elections of officers and board members. Elections were not scheduled for another year, but Powderly and his associates engineered a scheme whereby they would all submit their resignations, call for new elections, and all would be re-elected except Barry and Bailey. But the plot was too transparent, and Barry and Bailey refused to resign. Barry responded with a tirade including a veritable inventory of administrative abuses, and Labadie presented

evidence of Powderly's own socialist past in order to show the hypocrisy of the Master Workman's pious anti-radicalism.⁹⁷

Finally a group of opposition delegates, including Labadie and a large group of Chicago delegates, walked out of the Assembly and met in another hall to discuss strategy. They decided to hold a rump convention in Chicago on the way home from the GA. Thirty-five delegates attended forming a tentative organization under the name of the Provisional Committee, designed to either take over the Knights or establish a rival. The Committee issued a manifesto outlining the long series of abuses committed by Powderly and urging locals and districts to pledge their support to the Provisional Committee.⁹⁸

A veritable war within the Knights of Labor ensued. Powderly returned home and immediately began drafting letters to anyone and everyone on the anarchist plot to take over the Knights of Labor. "I have a favor to ask" began the standardized attack.

Traitors to the cause of Labor have gained entrance to our Order and would tear down the edifice which it has taken years to build...I have for eight years as GMW striven...to build an organization...but profane hands have been laid upon it and the men who gathered in Chicago and gave out that hostile declaration to the world, did so, only because Anarchy could not rule our Order.⁹⁹

As one of Labadie's associates on the Provisional

Committee, John Ehmann, noted, Powderly's strategy was "simply dub the kickers who protested against the manner which things were conducted in Minneapolis as Anarchists, and under the prejudice which that word excites, prevent any further discussion of the question."¹⁰⁰ The Provisionals were actively organizing, nonetheless, in New York and Chicago. They had organized a DA of their own in Chicago, another DA in Brooklyn was ready to join, and so were several Philadelphia locals.¹⁰¹ Litchman admitted to Powderly that the outcome of the power struggle was impossible to predict. "Since the Order started no crisis so grave has been upon it." The officers had admitted at Minneapolis a drop in membership of more than 200,000 since July, 1886, but Litchman confessed three weeks after the GA that the decline was really even more serious than that. "The per capita tax for October 1, 1887, has been paid on but little over 350,000 members...a falling off of 150,000 since July 1, 1887 (the basis for the officers' claim of 485,000 at Minneapolis). It will be impossible to keep this fact secret...." Their apparent victory at Minneapolis, Litchman thought, should not blind Powderly to the weakness of their position: "It would need but little to turn against us many who were on our side at Minneapolis...many who voted with us were only lukewarm in their fidelity."¹⁰²

In the weeks immediately following the GA, Litchman's

fears that the administration's position was weak were substantiated in Detroit. Labadie returned determined to arouse the Detroit Knights against Powderly and drive the Powderly forces from local office in the DA. In an informal report to the Advance on the GA and the rump convention in Chicago, Labadie predicted that the Provisional Committee would draw at least 100,000 members away from the Order. On the advice of Seib, the Chicago leader of the Provisional Committee, Labadie decided to try and recapture the DA rather than join the secessionist movement immediately, but he did formally announce that "I have declared open warfare upon those who use this order or the labor movement for immediate gain at the expension of its future development.

The present general officers of the Knights of Labor must go before the Order can proceed on its rightful mission towards a just settlement of social and industrial evils. Large salaries and large powers have unfitted them to lead a labor movement successfully.¹⁰³

Powderly and his Detroit supporters were afraid that Labadie might carry out his goal. Powderly wrote A. M. Dewey, a Detroit associate, just after the GA asking him to rouse opposition against Labadie. "Labadie," Powderly declared, was "a man who is known to oppose the true principles of Knighthood...I have been told that Labadie did not represent the true sentiments of DA 50, if that is true I want those who do not approve of Labadie's

actions to demonstrate their power during the coming year." But while Powderly assured Dewey that "there are good men in the Order in Detroit...", he admitted that "I am acquainted with no one there in whom I have confidence outside of Devlin and yourself."¹⁰⁴

Dewey and Devlin did what they could. Dewey denounced Labadie's Advance article on the Provisional Committee, and tried to refute Labadie's charges at the DA meetings, but although he claimed that "hundreds of people, in the order and out of it, have congratulated me...", he did not seem to be having much success. He complained to Powderly that "my defence of the officers of the Order from attacks of that element within our own ranks which would wreck the movement upon the shoals of anarchy, has made it necessary for me to seek employment elsewhere... The Labadie gang in Detroit have determined to make it 'hot' for me here, and I don't propose to give them the chance any longer." Dewey had left Detroit and begged Powderly to hire him as editor for a proposed expanded version of the Knight's national Journal.¹⁰⁵

Devlin did not panic as easily as Dewey, but he had doubts as well about whether he could hold DA 50 for the Administration. Labadie's charges were "most unfair and unjust," but Devlin admitted that the Executive Board had made serious "errors...in its disposition of the funds and sometimes in its action upon matters referred

[sic] to it." Labadie was "devious" and "we had quite a time in the D.A. last Evening." The situation had gone too far for the DA officers to handle themselves. "Something must be done and that Soon to counteract the influence of Bro Labadie and those who are as I believe trying to ruin the Order in this District. I believe and Bro Long DMW & others who do not take stock in anarchy, that it is absolutely necessary that you should come to Detroit and set yourself and the GA right before our Brothers."106

Labadie had hoped to be elected as District Master Workman. But the tension of the last minute struggle to save the Haymarket defendants seemed to sap his energy. Although at one time he had distrusted the Chicago anarchists himself, he reacted now with intense emotion and personal identification to the prospect of their execution. He had been scheduled to present his formal report on the Minneapolis Convention, which the DA intended to print and circulate to other Districts, early in November, but at the last minute he was ill and could not attend the meeting. He resigned as editor of the Advance and Labor Leaf, and he was not featured among the keynote speakers at a final Chicago sympathy rally of 2,000 supporters a week before the November 11 execution. He finally presented his report three days after the execution. Powderly was "as much responsible for the murder committed in Chicago last Friday as anyone connected with that most

unfortunate affair."¹⁰⁷

Labadie vowed to continue his war against Powderly, but in the weeks that followed he seemed to retire from labor affairs. He took a new job with the Detroit Sun as Grenell took over the editorship of the Advance. No private correspondence from him in the months after the execution has been preserved, but his actions suggest a deep depression over the outcome of events. He was sick much of the time, his "Cranky Notes" column appeared irregularly, there were fewer reports of public speeches than in previous years, he decided not to run for DA office, and threatened to quit entirely the organization to which he had devoted nine years of his life.¹⁰⁸

He was not alone in this sense of depression. August Donath, an old friend and former editor of the printers' national journal, wrote him in January, 1888.

Yes, I heard of your report...and I share your disgust thoroughly. Powderly is weak, if not a great deal worse. Litchman is a vulgar thief, the Executive Board, excepting Barry and Bailey, a lot of pimps and sycophants...the greatest organization which every espoused the cause of Labor is fast being frittered away. I am sorry from my heart. I still stick to my Assembly, but I hope against hope for a return of the days of promise of a few years ago.

Ehmann wrote him the next month with further bleak news.

"My position as a kicker is approved by not as a seceder. I could not get any assembly to attach itself wholly to the Prov. Com."¹⁰⁹

With Labadie's decision not to run for District Master Workman, the opposition fixed its hopes on Thomas Dolan. Dolan was a popular candidate. He had been a labor activist in Detroit since the early 1860's, a pioneer Knight, and a prominent union cigarmaker, but by the time of the election in January, 1888, the balance was shifting once again away from the opposition.¹¹⁰

The Powderly faction brought in a new face to replace DMW Long. A. W. Vicars had been on the DA Executive Board in 1887, but he was far less well known than men like Long, Devlin, or Strigel. Devlin nominated Vicars; Labadie nominated Dolan. No one could be confused about the meaning of the election. On the first ballot the vote stood Vicars: forty, Dolan: forty-one, three scattered with several not voting. Dolan led by one, but on the second ballot, the doubtful votes swung to Vicars. He was elected by a margin of forty-five to forty-three. From then on, the Administration faction swept all offices. "Labadie and Company were completely routed," Devlin gloated. As a token peace gesture, Labadie was appointed District Statistician, but as the Advance admitted, it had been "a complete victory for the administrationists."¹¹¹

But it was a Pyrrhic victory. At the installation of new officers on January 24, Vicars and Worthy Foreman Joseph Hockaday tried to smooth the ruffled feathers of the opposition--Vicars with a collection of platitudes

that combined generous doses of Labor Day rhetoric with a bit of radical jargon, Hockaday with a speech reminiscent of Jefferson's Inaugural Address ("I know no administrationists or anti-administrationists. I know them only as Knights of Labor."). But the image of the Knights had been permanently tarnished, and most of those who had grown dissatisfied were now convinced that the organization was beyond repair.¹¹²

Tom Barry maintained an active correspondence with Labadie describing his efforts to rouse discontented Districts into a coherent national opposition for the next GA, but by summer he confessed that the outlook was dim. "I have learned of A Dark plot being worked by Powderly, Hayes, and Layton to keep me from the next general assembly." Like Labadie, he suffered from chronic illness during the year, but he vowed to continue. "I have made up my mind to fight the gang and I shall do so regardless of consequences."¹¹³

Discontented Knights in Detroit were convinced that Barry was deceiving himself. He was finally expelled by Powderly in the fall of 1888. He then attempted to start a rival Brotherhood of United Labor, but the organization never really took hold. Barry repeatedly urged Labadie to start a BUL branch in Detroit, but by this time Labadie had already decided to commit himself to the AFL. By December, 1888, Robert Ogg wrote Labadie from the AFL

Convention that people who had seen Barry recently described him as a forlorn figure. "'Poor Tom,' is about what you hear here among the delegates in speaking of him."¹¹⁴

The real instigator for the AFL in Detroit was Sam Goldwater. Goldwater had been the Trades Council delegate to the AFL Convention at the end of 1887, and he was impressed with Gompers and the AFL. The Knights had always accused the trade unions of being too conservative, but Goldwater pointed out that Gompers and the AFL had appealed for clemency for the Chicago anarchists while the Knights had not. The Knights were not a "legitimate labor organization" at all, he decided, and he began making public speeches to that effect. Apparently other trade unionists began to agree with him. In late July, they elected him Trades Council President, and six weeks later a number of unions refused to march with the Knights on Labor Day. By October, he and Labadie had begun to make plans for a Michigan Federation of Labor as a statewide AFL affiliate. When the MFL finally met in February, 1889, Labadie was elected its first president.¹¹⁵

In some ways the Trades Council and the MFL were no more congenial to disgruntled radicals than the Knights had been. In February, 1888, the Trades Council voted down a proposal for strictly independent political action by a two to one margin, and in August, they defeated a

similar motion again. A motion to prohibit any Trades Council officer or delegate from holding appointive political office was also defeated, as was a Central Labor Union proposal in October to sponsor a mass meeting in commemoration of the Chicago martyrs.¹¹⁶

But as John Burton argued in a front page editorial in a new labor journal he had started late in 1888, the "Knights of Labor" had "No Hope for the Future." National membership in the Knights had fallen to around 200,000, and many of those were in self-governing national trade assemblies whose ties to the Knights were weak. Labor activists had little choice in where to turn, according to Burton. "The Knights of Labor have been rendered useless as a strong, aggressive body...yet the Federation of Trades [i.e., AFL] is in existence and absorbing the vitality which used to characterize the Knights of Labor."¹¹⁷

There were problems with the Federation, Burton admitted. "The principal strength of the Knights of Labor lay in their system of organization and federation for mutual support. The unskilled labor was admitted as freely as the skilled labor...But all that is gone." Still Burton argued "It is no use crying over spilt milk. What has been done before may be done again...." What activists and former (or soon to be former) Knights should do was join the Federation and pressure it to adopt a

"comprehensive...plan of organization..." and provide better "means of federation for mutual support."¹¹⁸

The Knights of Labor did not fade away as easily or as quickly as Burton predicted. Already by the beginning of 1888, Knights of Labor membership in Detroit had fallen by more than half from the 1886 peak,¹¹⁹ but the Knights were still as large as the Trades Council.¹²⁰ DA 50 lost members steadily during 1888, dropping from 2,620 just before the October 1887 GA to 1,277 by August, 1888.¹²¹ Most of the drop, however, could be accounted for by the transfer of some of the city's largest assemblies out of DA 50 and into National Trade Districts. While many of the trades within the Detroit Knights were dissatisfied with the DA 50 leadership, they were quite reluctant to leave the Knights entirely. By 1889, only about half the LA's in the city belonged to the DA. Even after such assemblies as the barbers (7439), longshoremen (10413), and Florence Nightingale Assembly (3102) joined the Trades Council, they maintained dual membership in the Knights of Labor.¹²²

As late as 1890, there were still thirty-six Knights of Labor assemblies in Detroit, but by the end of the year, key assemblies were rapidly transferring to the Trades Council. Five shoeworkers' assemblies switched late in the year; the large streetcar workers' assembly lapsed, and a street railway union was formed; the Brass

Finishers National Trade District, which had its headquarters in Detroit, was reorganizing as a national union; and the carworkers' assemblies were folding. By 1891, there were only eleven assemblies. The following year, as Globe Tobacco Company cancelled its long-standing agreement with the DA and Florence Nightingale Association dropped its KL affiliation, the DA ceased to exist.¹²³

There is no record of any Knights of Labor assembly in Detroit after 1892, although the Knights may have maintained a vestigial existence. A Knights of Labor Hall was still listed in the 1894 City Directory, and a handful of railroad workers questioned by State Bureau of Labor Statistics investigators still claimed Knights of Labor membership in that year. As a meaningful organization, however, the Knights did not function in Detroit after about 1891.¹²⁴

By 1892, local labor leaders were already writing post mortems on the Knights. Captain McGregor, who had been identified as much with the pro-Administration faction as with the opposition, attributed the death of the Knights to corruption and inefficiency in its leaders. Labadie, writing many years later, still saw the Knights' destruction in more personal terms. The "crushing blow" had been Powderly's refusal to allow passage of the clemency resolution at the 1887 Minneapolis GA.

The destruction of the Knights of Labor had serious

repercussions for the subculture they had represented. The Knights had provided the only organizational cohesion for the subculture of opposition. Not only was their demise intensely discouraging for all those who had placed such high hopes on the Order's success, but their failure also removed the broad base of support for the other institutions that had made up the subculture. Few of these institutions could survive without it.

IV. "Will the butter come?"

The trouble with the whole army of the discontented is that they are tired of churning so long and seeing no signs of butter. Agitation, education, organization, is all very fine at the first go off, but what is the prospect? When will these dreams of ours materialize? It matters but little whether the "administration" be justified or not. The point of contest is will the butter come? Can it be we are churning skim milk? Is the virtue gone out of our membership? Has personal ambition and jealousy come in to frustrate our purposes?

Advance and Labor Leaf, December 8, 1888¹²⁶

The discouragement of activists like Labadie was not confined to the leadership of the movement. Mid-1886 was one of those brief rare moments when people believed almost anything was possible. Joining the Knights of Labor, striking for eight hours in May, marching as a public declaration of commitment on Labor Day had all involved serious risks of reprisal. Yet thousands had

done so apparently oblivious to those risks. They were making history, and in the new cooperative commonwealth, workers would no longer be subject to arbitrary firing.

But the demands of everyday life have a way of intruding upon those who are making history. People cannot suspend consideration of immediate needs and risks indefinitely without seeing some results for their efforts. How long could they expect to churn and "see no signs of butter?" Workers were being fired for union and Knights of Labor membership: two painters fired at Dean and Godfrey in September, 1886; bricklayers locked out by master builders that same month; scabs taking the places of Knights of Labor candymakers in October; a shirt manufacturer discharging all union members two weeks later; shipyards breaking their short hour contracts with shipcarpenters' assembly in December; lockout at De Man's planing mill in March, 1887; workers at another mill discharged for posting a notice of a Knights of Labor meeting; six Knights discharged at Detroit Steel and Spring Works; lockout at Hart Manufacturing Company. "An injury to one is the concern of all" had little meaning if the Knights could not, or--as in the case of the Chicago anarchists--would not, defend those who had joined the cause.¹²⁷

When workers demanded action in response to employer reprisals, the DA leadership urged patience and caution.

Perhaps that was wise counsel. The long term strike record of most labor organizations had not been encouraging, and even the most radical labor veterans urged emotional restraint and careful planning before calling a strike. But the DA's leaders' pompous way of combining advice with preaching and moralizing was extraordinarily objectionable to many workers. Maybe when an employer fired a worker for Knights of Labor membership, the DA could not get the job back, but it was insulting when District Master Workman Vicars announced that "the ordinary wage slave cannot grasp the money, land, and other vexatious questions...in his present mentally crippled condition." And if that "mentally crippled" wage slave had the audacity to suggest a strike or boycott as a remedy, Vicars argued that such "intimidation and coercion only result in pitting class against class."¹²⁸

Class was already against class. Turn the other cheek was not a popular message. Nor were the temperance proclivities of the DA's officers much better. When John Devlin blamed the KL-AFL strife on the drunkenness of the AFL leaders not only was he making an absurd claim, but he was also echoing the arguments of employers who blamed workers for drinking themselves into poverty. J. F. Bray reacted indignantly to Devlin's temperance speeches. These prohibitionists "belong to the 'goody-goody' class and have no affinity for the wage workers. They are the

same breed of fanatics that have persecuted reformers in all ages for the assumed good of their souls." A great many workers agreed with him, and when the new Knights of Labor Constitution in 1887 had a temperance clause, several local assemblies withdrew en masse. The Germans, in particular, were incensed at the temperance campaign, and by the spring of 1888, there was only one German local assembly left in Detroit.¹²⁹

If they could not drink, could not strike, and could not boycott, what could they do when employers fired them for joining the labor movement? "Education the Pre-eminent Principle of the Knights of Labor," Master Workman Vicars declared in his inaugural address. "Would you answer an old K. of L. a question or two?" wrote one veteran to the Advance in 1888. "Education is the cry of our general officers. How long are we to be before we get graduated in this labor movement?"¹³⁰

There is no way to sample the opinions of a representative group of Detroit workers to see what they felt about the pious pronouncements of Vicars and Devlin or how many identified with the criticisms of the opposition. However, the membership trends of Detroit's labor movement, as well as the fortunes of the subsidiary labor organizations, suggest that a substantial proportion, perhaps a majority of those who had participated in the upheaval of 1886, were not only disappointed with the Knights but

disillusioned about the possibility of any kind of successful action. The labor movement claimed 13,000 members in Detroit in 1886: 8,000 Knights and 5,000 trade unionists. Even if that figure exaggerated the number of dues paying members, nearly that many actually participated in strikes or demonstrations in mid-1886. Within a year, the combined total membership of the Knights of Labor and the trade unions was no more than 8,000: about 3,000 in the Knights and 5,000 in the unions. Total estimated union membership in 1892 was 7,100 (see Appendix 1, Figure 2). A number of trades which had been organized by neither the Knights nor the Trades Council in 1887 had organized between 1887 and 1892, but the close correlation between the Knights' membership in late 1887 and the growth in union membership between 1887 and 1892 suggests that a majority of those who remained in the Knights in the late 1880's shifted to the Trades Council in the early 1890's. We know this was true for quite a number of local assemblies.¹³¹

But what of the thousands of others who had participated in the mid-1880's? Despite the intervening population growth and industrialization of more than a decade, Detroit union membership still hovered at a little under 8,000 in 1901. Thousands of Knights of Labor had left the movement completely and permanently.¹³²

Even more important, however, is what else went

with the disillusioned Knights. The Labor Party had collapsed by 1888.¹³³ The Cooperative Boot and Shoe Company announced its closing in April, 1888. Most of the other cooperatives followed in the next year or two. The Detroit Rifles were never mentioned after 1887. The Advance and Labor Leaf, after more than five years of uninterrupted weekly publishing, closed in late 1889, no longer able to meet its costs. When John Burton's monthly Onward ceased operations the following year, Detroit was without a regular labor press for the first time in more than a decade. One by one, the organizations that had made up the infrastructure of an active subculture had gone. The movement that remained was quite different. It did a fair job of protesting its members' wages. Wage levels for unionized trades in the early 1890's generally went up. But it was a movement which ceased to speak for workers as a whole, which no longer addressed itself to the continuing patterns of rapid change in the city, a movement which no longer made serious efforts to expand, a movement without a vision.¹³⁴

Chapter 7

NOTES

1. Labor Leaf, June 23, 1886; August 11, 1886; September 1, 1886.

2. Ibid., June 2, 1886; June 9, 1886.

3. Detroit Evening News, September 3, 1886. Labor Leaf, September 8, 1886. According to the News, there were 155 delegates; the total vote on Egan was only 143, leaving 11 abstentions, assuming Egan could not vote himself.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Labor Leaf, September 8, 1886; September 15, 1886. Background information on the candidates comes from my own data bank on Detroit labor leaders, a collation of available biographical information. O'Reilly's unsavory political associations were discussed in the Labor Leaf in 1885, and a key article was reprinted in the September 22, 1886, issue. A short biography of O'Reilly can be found in Chronology of Notable Events (Wayne County Historical and Pioneer Society, Detroit, 1890), p. 419.

7. Labor Leaf, September 15, 1886; September 22, 1886.

8. Labor Leaf, September 22, 1886; September 29, 1886; October 6, 1886; October 13, 1886. "The Labor Champions," newspaper clipping in Ross Scrapbook (Vol. 1, p. 19), Burton Historical Collections, Detroit Public Library. Grenell excused the appointed in his Autobiography by arguing it gave him time to devote to the movement. He was chosen on Egan's suggestion as a neutral candidate in order to settle differences between two rival Republican factions who wanted the job. The mean daily wage of 126 Wayne County printers in the 1884 SBLs Report was \$2.23 (p. 87), equal to \$13.38 for a six day week, or a little over \$600 a year.

9. Labor Leaf, September 29, 1886. The Workingman's Convention was viewed by Labadie and Grenell as an SLP front. SLP members were the leaders (except Goldwater,

who was described as an anarchist and had been associated with the IWPA in Chicago earlier in the year), but its base of support was certainly wider than the SLP. The SLP had less than 100 members, while the Cigarmakers' Union, which had endorsed the original strict independence resolution, had over 300 members alone. The Labor Leaf had estimated on September 1 that seven organizations pledged to strict independence had about 800 members, but that figure did not include two additional unions who voted for strict independence as well as scattered delegates from other unions.

10. Labor Leaf, October 15, 1886.

11. Ibid., September 1, 1886; September 22, 1886; September 18, 1886; October 20, 1886. Detroit Evening News, November 2, 1886. O'Donnell took a management position with the Peninsular Stove Company in 1887 until his appointment later that year as a customs official.

12. Detroit Evening News, November 2, 1886; November 3, 1886. Vote totals in Evening News, November 3, 1886.

13. The average given by the Evening News for four unendorsed state representative candidates was 2,972 compared to 2,119 in 1884. The Advance and Labor Leaf disputed the Evening News' figure and released its own average for the four candidates of 4,543 (March 19, 1887). For a discussion of these electoral discrepancies, see Chapter 5, p. 290. Thernstrom has noted the effects of residency requirements on eligibility for voting (Lipset and Laslett, Failure of a Dream, p. 516). At any time in this period, approximately 25 percent of Boston residents had been in the city less than one year. In Michigan the residency requirement was six months. Vinyard found a lower persistence rate (i.e., higher proportion of transients in Detroit than Thernstrom did in Boston) so that residency may have disqualified as much as 10-15 percent of the potential electorate. Relatively few union or Knights of Labor members were women. In a survey of the Knights of Labor State Assembly in 1888, 7.4 percent of 3,219 members surveyed were women. No breakdowns of union membership by age are available. See: Knights of Labor Michigan State Assembly Proceedings, 1889. Vinyard, p. 137.

14. Labor Leaf, November 3, 1886.

15. Ibid., October 27, 1886; Detroit Evening News, June 8, 1887.

16. Detroit Evening News, September 10, 1887. Advance and Labor Leaf, November 5, 1887; November 12, 1887. Between September and November, the Labor Party had changed its name from Independent to United.

17. Advance and Labor Leaf, November 12, 1887; November 5, 1887.

18. Ibid.

19. Labor Leaf, May 3, 1886; May 26, 1886; June 9, 1886; August 4, 1886; November 17, 1886.

20. "The Labor Champions," clipping in Ross Scrapbook, Burton Historical Collections, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan, Vol. 1, p. 18.

21. Labor Leaf, September 8, 1886; October 27, 1886; March 5, 1887.

22. KLDB. Two additional mixed assemblies were predominantly made up of employees in a single factory. Some other assemblies officially designated as mixed have been classified as trade because they were industrial unions made up of related trades in a particular industry or factory. LA's 7749 and 8104, for example, both carworkers' assemblies, were officially designated mixed, but they have been considered trade here because they included several crafts in a single factory. See Chapters 4 and 5 for more detailed descriptions of the trade origins of the Knights and relations between the Knights and the unions.

23. KLDB. David Boyd papers, letter dated September 5, 1938; "Among the Molders," clipping, Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC.

24. Irwin Yellowitz, Industrialization and the American Labor Movement 1890-1900 (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1977), pp. 64-71 describes changes in the industry and the cigarmakers' response. The International-Progressive dispute is standard fare of most labor histories, described (with different treatments) among other places in Foner, Volume 2, pp. 133-36; Commons, Vol. 2, pp. 399-403; Ware, Chapter XI, pp. 258-279.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid. As this brief account suggests the Cigarmakers' dispute grew increasingly complex as wider and wider circles of participants became involved, mutual recriminations obscured the original differences, and the whole issue assumed extraordinary symbolic importance both in the disputes between the Knights' national leaders and the trade union leaders and in the internal factional politics of the Knights of Labor. Despite the volume of writing on the dispute (the sources cited here are a fraction of the possible references), in my opinion no one has yet adequately sorted out either the facts or their full implications. Foner, Commons, and Ware disagree or contradict each other repeatedly on significant details. My treatment is an attempt to combine all three, but it suffers from a lack of familiarity with some of the primary sources. Because of the decisive role of the Cigarmakers' issue in the formation of the AFL and subsequent decline of the Knights, the case has assumed major ideological importance. Thus, both Commons and Foner, although from different ideological perspectives, write what almost amount to briefs for the International position, while Ware's treatment is essentially the reverse. About the only thing all three agree on is that the DA 49 leadership was the villain of the piece--for Foner and Commons because they were "anti-trade union," for Ware because they were the mysterious Home Club which ultimately scuttled the Order. Of the three, Ware's argument is most convincing, yet one is left wondering in all accounts exactly what DA 49's anti-unionism was based on, or what their own perspective was. Important factual errors on these questions, such as attribution of anti-union Home Club sentiments to GEB member Tom Barry, one of the chief negotiators, makes Ware's account suspect as well. All parties in the case ultimately acted dishonorably, but it is not clear to me that DA 49 was more guilty than the rest. Indeed, the emphasis of their policy seems to have been on organizing the unskilled filler breakers, often women and children, and tenement house workers--a commendable objective. This sympathy for the unskilled was probably the initial basis of the Progressive-DA 49 alliance. If that is the case, they deserve fairer treatment than they have received. DA 49 leaders may have indeed been manipulative powerbrokers, as most labor historians have argued, but if this was the case, they would then still have been no worse than most of the other key figures. In any event, the issue still deserves further study.

29. KLDB. Labor Leaf, January 14, 1885; June 23, 1886. "Men Who Make Your Cigars," clipping in Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC. Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876. In the 1880 Census, 62.2 percent of the foreign born "cigarmakers and tobacco workers" in Detroit had been born in Germany. The ethnic backgrounds of native born cigarmakers are not given, but presumably a similar proportion of them had German ancestry. Judging from the backgrounds of the cigarmakers described in the above clipping, the proportion of Germans among skilled cigarmakers, as opposed to other categories of tobacco workers, was even higher than census figures would suggest. Both unions must have had predominantly German membership. Foner and Commons argue that in New York City the Progressive-International split followed the lines of the LaSallean-Marxist (or ex-Marixist in the case of Strasser and Gompers) division in socialist ranks. In Detroit the most prominent LaSalleans remained with the International.

30. KLDB. "Men Who Make Your Cigars," clipping in Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC. Labor Leaf, June 23, 1886. Advance and Labor Leaf, April 23, 1887. Reports of the Officers of DA 50 for the Term Ending December 31, 1887 (Detroit, 1888), pp. 4-5. Advance and Labor Leaf, February 19, 1887.

31. Labor Leaf, April 14, 1886; May 26, 1886.

32. Ibid., June 23, 1886; June 30, 1886; September 15, 1886.

33. Ibid., July 7, 1886; August 18, 1886.

34. Ibid., November 17, 1886.

35. Ibid., February 9, 1887.

36. Ibid. Advance and Labor Leaf, February 19, 1887.

37. Ibid.

38. Advance and Labor Leaf, February 19, 1887.

39. Ibid. Clear and convincing reasons for the change in editorship were not given; the timing of the change coincided precisely with the beginning of the expulsion controversy, and the change represented a dramatic reversal of editorial policy. The change was apparently part of a power play on the part of the Administration faction in the DA; this assumption is substantiated by later remarks by both Labadie and Burton. The editorship

changed hands several more times over the next two years as contending factions continued to struggle for control.

40. Advance and Labor Leaf, February 26, 1887.
41. Ibid., February 19, 1887.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., March 5, 1887.
44. Ibid., March 5, 1887; March 19, 1887; March 26, 1887; April 9, 1887; April 23, 1887; April 30, 1887.
45. Ibid., March 5, 1887; April 23, 1887; April 30, 1887.
46. Ibid., February 26, 1887; March 12, 1887; April 23, 1887; July 16, 1887. Reports of the Officers of DA 50 for the Term Ending December 31, 1887 (Detroit, 1888), pp. 4-5. "Men Who Make Your Cigars," clipping in Detroit Labor Leaders File, LC.
47. KLDB. "Among the Molders," clipping, LC.
48. Detroit Advance and Labor Leaf, April 16, 1887; April 23, 1887; April 30, 1887; May 6, 1887.
49. Ibid., February 26, 1887; June 11, 1887. David Boyd to A. Inglis, September 5, 1938. Detroit Evening News, June 6, 1887.
50. Advance and Labor Leaf, March 19, 1887; August 27, 1887.
51. Ibid., February 26, 1887.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., April 30, 1887; May 6, 1887; June 11, 1887.
57. Ibid., May 14, 1887. Detroit Evening News, June 3, 1887.

58. Detroit Evening News, June 7, 1887; June 8, 1887.

59. Advance and Labor Leaf, June 11, 1887; June 18, 1887. Detroit Evening News, June 3, 1887; June 4, 1887.

60. Detroit Evening News, June 8, 1887; June 9, 1887.

61. Ibid., July 14, 1887; July 21, 1887. Advance and Labor Leaf, July 16, 1887.

62. Detroit Evening News, June 6, 1887. Advance and Labor Leaf, June 11, 1887.

63. Almost all of the standard labor histories are preoccupied with the organizational conflict between the Knights and the AFL, but especially those following in the Commons-Perlman tradition. Perhaps the most influential recent example is Gerald Grob's Workers and Utopia (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969) which attempts to derive arguments about workers' attitudes and behavior from the polemics of Powderly, Gompers, and associates.

64. See pp. 140-42; 216-17 for background on craft union attitudes.

65. See Chapter 4, especially pp. 178-81, for a discussion of socialist attitudes toward the Knights and the separation of the doctrinaire and independent left.

66. Reports of the Officers of DA 50 for the Term Ending December 31, 1887 (Detroit, 1888). Detroit Evening News, June 8, 1887. Advance and Labor Leaf, September 24, 1887. Detroit Labor Leaders Data Bank. Unionist, June 3, 1887. While union leaders made quite a point of the non-worker status of key Knights' spokesmen, it should be noted that many of the union leaders were also professional labor leaders who had also not worked at their trades for several years. The Trades Council did, however, make more of an effort than the DA to avoid creating permanent sinecures by rotating officers every six months.

67. Ibid. Bauer, an iron molder. Forbes was president of the Detroit Sailors' Union, a regional organization which does not really conform to the craft mold. Both Strigel and Long had been active in the Crispins, but the Crispins were defunct by the later 1870's. Robinson had been a carpenter in the early 1870's, but had not worked at his trade for fifteen years.

68. Ibid. Forbes, Strigel, and Long. Long had been a local president and state and international delegate of the Crispins in Massachusetts, but by the time he arrived in Detroit (1878), the Crispins had been largely destroyed in Massachusetts. Thus, only Forbes and Strigel had significant union experience in Detroit.

69. Ibid.

70. For a summary of Knights of Labor political successes see Detroit Evening News, September 5, 1887.

71. David Boyd to A. Ingles, July 22, 1938, LC. Detroit Evening News, March 9, 1890.

72. Artisan consciousness in Lynn, Massachusetts has been explored by Alan Dawley in Class and Community (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976). Dawley argues that this artisan consciousness had significant impact on the character of the Knights in Massachusetts in the 1880's.

73. Labor Leaf, March 31, 1886.

74. Advance and Labor Leaf, June 4, 1887.

75. "Powderly Belabored," clipping in Knights of Labor-History File, LC.

76. Labor Leaf, December 29, 1886.

77. Ibid., March 24, 1886.

78. Ibid., November 17, 1886; November 24, 1886; December 8, 1886; December 15, 1886; December 29, 1886.

79. Labadie to Powderly, November 11, 1882, TVP.

80. Labor Leaf, December 29, 1886.

81. Ibid., May 5, 1886.

82. Ibid., May 19, 1886; June 2, 1886; June 16, 1886.

83. August Spies to Labadie, September 7, 1886, LC.

84. Labor Leaf, June 30, 1886; July 7, 1886. Labadie reminiscences in Knights of Labor-Michigan File, LC.

85. Labor Leaf, August 29, 1886; September 8, 1886; September 15, 1886; December 29, 1886.

86. Ibid., January 26, 1887.

87. Advance and Labor Leaf, April 23, 1887.

88. T. V. Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor (Columbus, Ohio: Excelsior Publishing House, 1889), pp. 544-5. Ware, op. cit., pp. 317-8.

89. Proceedings of the Michigan State Assembly of the Knights of Labor, 1887, pp. 37-40. Advance and Labor Leaf, August 6, 1887. Detroit Evening News, August 4, 1887. The State Assembly defeated resolutions denouncing the "usurpation" of power by the GEB, and criticizing Powderly's salary increase, but passed a resolution endorsing Powderly.

90. Barry to Labadie, June 14, 1887; July 24, 1887, LC. Powderly to John Devlin (date illegible, c. January, 1887), TVP.

91. Advance and Labor Leaf, July 16, 1887; August 6, 1887; August 13, 1887. For a discussion of pro- and anti-Powderly factions at the state level in the Michigan Knights see my M.A. thesis, The Knights of Labor in Michigan: Sources of Growth and Decline (Michigan State University, 1973), pp. 51-71.

92. Advance and Labor Leaf, August 6, 1887.

93. Ibid., August 13, 1887; September 10, 1887. Detroit Evening News, August 10, 1887; September 22, 1887.

94. The Minneapolis GA is described in Ware, op. cit., pp. 318-9; Foner, Volume 2, pp. 162-4; Henry David, The History of the Haymarket Affair (New York: Russell and Russell, 1958), pp. 413-8. Labadie's account of the convention is found in clippings in the Knights of Labor-History File, LC, and his official Report of the GA published by DA 50, LC.

95. Ibid. Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor, 1887, pp. 1723-25.

96. Knights of Labor - History File, LC. David, op. cit., pp. 416-8. Notes on Executive Board Meeting, December 12, 1887, TVP. Barry and Bailey complained of difficulty of getting the floor to speak.

97. Labadie's Report, LC. Knights of Labor - History File, LC. Evidence of Powderly's socialist past had already been discussed both in the Advance and the Detroit Evening News in September. See Chapter 4, fn. 62.

98. David, p. 417-8. Advance and Labor Leaf, October 29, 1887. The Manifesto of the Provisional Committee appeared in a wide variety of newspapers including the Detroit Evening News, October 24, 1887.

99. Powderly to Edwin F. Gould, Esq., November 18, 1887; Powderly to P. J. St. Clair, Esq., November 19, 1887, TVP.

100. Knights of Labor - History File, clipping from the Ohio Valley Budget, November 3, 1887 (Ehmann was editor), LC.

101. Charles F. Seib to Labadie, November 23, 1887, LC; Seib to Labadie, December 30, 1887, LC. Manifesto from the Office of the Provisional Committee of New York and Vicinity, January 14, 1888, TVP.

102. Charles H. Litchman to Powderly, November 12, 1887, TVP. Ultimately per capita tax was paid for 437,000.

103. Advance and Labor Leaf, October 29, 1887. "Powderly Belabored," Knights of Labor - History File, LC. Seib to Labadie, December 30, 1887, LC.

104. Powderly to A. M. Dewey, October 23, 1887, TVP.

105. Advance and Labor Leaf, October 29, 1887; November 5, 1887. A. M. Dewey to Powderly, October 24, 1887, TVP; Dewey to Powderly, November 25, 1887, TVP.

106. John Devlin to Powderly, November 16, 1887, TVP.

107. Dewey to Powderly, November 3, 1887. Advance and Labor Leaf, November 5, 1887. "Powderly Belabored," op. cit., LC. Copies of the Report can be found in the Labadie Collection. For Labadie's earlier estimate of the Chicago Anarchists, see his letters to Richard Ely cited in Sidney Fine, "The Ely-Labadie Letters," Michigan History, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 1-32.

108. "Powderly Belabored," op. cit., LC. Advance and Labor Leaf, November 19, 1887; December 3, 1887. Dewey to Powderly, November 3, 1887, TVP. Devlin to Powderly, January 20, 1888, TVP.

109. August Donath to Labadie, January 25, 1888, LC.
John Ehmann to Labadie, February 13, 1888, LC.

110. Advance and Labor Leaf, December 17, 1887;
January 14, 1888. Devlin to Powderly, November 26, 1887,
TVP. Devlin to Powderly, January 20, 1888, TVP. Detroit
Labor Leaders Data Bank.

111. Advance and Labor Leaf, January 14, 1888;
January 21, 1888. Devlin to Powderly, January 20, 1888.
Vicars' election temporarily seemed in doubt because of
a legal technicality. He was ineligible because his local
assembly had just withdrawn from DA 50 to join a national
trade assembly. Powderly was more than willing to grant
a special dispensation allowing Vicars to serve.

112. Advance and Labor Leaf, January 28, 1888.

113. Barry to Labadie, April 2, 1888; June 29, 1888;
September 9, 1888; October 5, 1888, LC.

114. Robert Ogg to Labadie, December 11, 1888, LC.
Barry to Labadie, February 25, 1889, LC. "Explanatory
Circular to the Working People of America," LC. "To the
Workingmen and Women of America," LC. "Organic Laws of
the Brotherhood of United Labor," LC.

115. Robert A. Rockaway, "The Laboring Man's Champion:
Samuel Goldwater of Detroit," Detroit Historical Society
Bulletin, November, 1970, pp. 4-9. Advance and Labor Leaf,
December 31, 1887; May 19, 1888; July 21, 1888; Septem-
ber 1, 1888; October 13, 1888. Report of Proceedings,
First Annual Convention of the Michigan Federation of
Labor, 1889.

116. Advance and Labor Leaf, February 11, 1888;
August 18, 1888; September 29, 1888; October 6, 1888;
October 13, 1888.

117. Onward, December 1, 1888.

118. Ibid.

119. Official membership in good standing on July 1,
1886, was 4,679 (1886 GA Proceedings, pp. 326-8). In
March, 1887, DA 50 claimed 8,000 (Advance and Labor Leaf,
March 19, 1887), but Grenell argued in December, 1887,
that less than 70 percent had been in good standing
(Advance, December 10, 1887). However, Grenell was trying
to demonstrate that the Knights were not declining, rais-
ing doubts about his credibility. DMW Long claimed 3,200

in the officers' Reports in January, 1888, but the Financial Secretary reported only 2,467 in good standing based on October, 1887 per capita tax. It is not clear whether the latter figure includes LA's in the process of transferring to National Trade Districts or not. Thus, taking verifiable per capita tax figures, the decline was 4,679 to 2,467, taking unverified claims 8,000 to 3,200.

120. The Trades Council claimed 2,960 members in January, 1888 (Advance and Labor Leaf, January 14, 1888). Total trade union membership however, including 400-500 more in the Central Labor Union, lodges of the railroad brotherhoods, and other unaffiliated unions, was probably between 4,000-5,000.

121. Knights of Labor GA Proceedings, 1887, 1888. The 1887 Proceedings gave DA 50 2,620 on October 1, 1887, while the 1888 Proceedings credited only 2,527 on the same date.

122. Onward, December 1, 1888. Advance and Labor Leaf, December 24, 1887; July 27, 1889; August 10, 1889. KLDB. Labor Day Review, 1891, 1892. DA 50 claimed twenty LA's in August, 1889, but there were still thirty-six LA's in Detroit (including suburbs) in 1890. LA 8775, which joined NTD 226, had 307 members in July, 1888 (1889 SA Proceedings). Other trades joining NTD's included shoe-workers, book binders, brass workers, machinists, and ship carpenters.

123. KLDB. Foner, op. cit., Volume 2, p. 165. Detroit Evening News, August 31, 1890. Journal of the Knights of Labor, January 7, 1892.

124. KLDB. Detroit City Directory, 1894. SBLS, 1894, p. 383.

125. McGregor Scrapbook, LC. Typewritten account of the Knights of Labor by J. Labadie, 1926, LC.

126. Advance and Labor Leaf, December 8, 1888.

127. Labor Leaf, September 15, 1886; September 22, 1886; September 29, 1886; October 13, 1886; December 29, 1886. Advance and Labor Leaf, March 5, 1887; March 12, 1887; April 23, 1887.

128. Advance and Labor Leaf, January 28, 1888.

129. Ibid., April 23, 1887; August 20, 1887; April 7, 1888.

130. Ibid., January 28, 1888; November 24, 1888.

131. Detroit Evening News, September 3, 1886.
Advance and Labor Leaf, March 19, 1887; January 14, 1888.
Reports of the Officers of DA 50 (Detroit, 1888). GA Pro-
ceedings, 1887. Labor Day Review, 1892. See f.n.'s 119-
 120 for discussion of membership statistics; 1892 esti-
 mates based on estimates of locals in the Labor Day Review.
 Some locals may have been omitted.

132. SBLS, 1903, p. 334.

133. See Chapter 7, Section I.

134. Advance and Labor Leaf, April 7, 1888; April
 21, 1888; July 7, 1888; November 2, 1889.

Chapter 8

LOST OPPORTUNITIES?

I. After the Knights--The Decline of Solidarity

The principle of class solidarity had never been firmly established in Detroit. While a subculture of opposition based on class solidarity did emerge in the mid-1880's, as the ideological conflicts, bickering, and mutual recriminations of the late 1880's demonstrated, the commitment to a culture of solidarity was never deep. There was no transcendent loyalty strong enough to hold people together in the face of conflicting economic, craft, and ethnic interests, different ideologies, and varied strategies. The labor movement survived, but the institutional structure of a separate subculture was largely gone less than half a decade after the collapse of the Knights.¹ The rhetoric of solidarity endured--most unionists still referred to one another as brother and sister, and the doctrinaires talked as though nothing had changed--but such language was form without substance.

The changing nature of the labor movement was indicated in the turnover of leadership. While some of the

labor leaders of the 1880's continued to hold offices in local unions, especially the smaller craft unions, few of them held significant leadership positions in either the Trades Council or the larger and more important unions. Among the sixteen officers, executive committee members, and trustees of the Trades Council in 1897, only one, John Strigel, had been a major labor leader in the 1880's. Another, Rose McBrearty, Trades Council Librarian in 1897, had been an officer in Florence Nightingale Assembly in the 1880's. None of the other fourteen had been prominent enough in the 1880's to be mentioned in the labor press or any other contemporary sources. Of the more than two hundred local delegates to the Trades Council in 1897, only six are known to have held any union office prior to 1890.²

The later careers of both Labadie and Grenell illustrate the process of change. Labadie remained active in the Typographical Union, but not prominent. He wrote articles and letters to local and national labor periodicals such as an open letter to fellow printers in 1906 warning them that "Your interests are irrevocably bound up in the interests of your class--the wage receiving class--and yours must go up and down as theirs go up and down."³ But the local movement treated him like a crank, an old-timer (although he was only in his forties in the 1890's) to be trotted out on ceremonial occasions to tell

amusing stories, but not someone to be taken seriously. When the Michigan Federation of Labor held its annual convention in Detroit in 1894, Labadie, its first president and one of its creators, was reduced to the role of toast-master at a banquet for ex-delegates.⁴

Labadie still considered himself a radical and an activist in the 1890's, but his thinking had undergone profound changes. He had become pessimistic and cynical. "I know how you feel on the subject, Joe," Joseph Buchanan wrote him in December, 1893. "I am not going to argue with you...(but) I dream dreams of a future for mankind which contrasts wonderfully with the present." Labadie had been drifting away from his earlier belief in socialism since the mid-1880's and towards a brand of individualist anarchism modeled after Benjamin Tucker's Liberty. He called himself a philosophical anarchist but confessed to another anarchist that he had become an "opportunist" willing to join with "anybody" on reformist endeavors. He had developed, however, a particular distaste for the "state socialists," as he called his former SLP associates. Socialism "is the philosophy of the mentally indolent," he wrote in 1894. Labor leaders who advocated socialism were "parrots" who copied the phrases of the state socialists because the socialists were "the most active men in the movement...aggressive, intelligent, earnest even to fanaticism." Society needed incentive to prosper,

Labadie argued. When he briefly recreated his weekly "Cranky Notes" column in 1894-5 for a short-lived revival of the labor press, the Industrial Gazette, many of his editorials were anti-socialist diatribes. When an SLP spokesman replied with a detailed point-by-point response to one of Labadie's editorials, his final emotional counter-attack expressed an extreme individualism that almost repudiated the entire concept of organization and group action: "If every person attended strictly to his own affairs as they should be attended to he would have his hands full and the world would be as good as it could be." He sounded like an employer telling a union negotiating committee why he was refusing to deal with workers except individually. The Labadie of the early 1880's would have denounced the Labadie of the mid-'90's as a hopeless reactionary.⁵

By the early 1900's, his behavior grew more eccentric. He spent much of his time at an isolated lakeside cabin about sixty miles out of Detroit at a place he called Bubbling Waters. There he wrote, printed, and bound little books of poetry with titles like The Red Flag and Other Stories or Doggerel for the Underdog which he mailed off to a few upper class female admirers.⁶

Grenell's later career was less idiosyncratic but also a departure from his earlier activities. He had worked occasionally for the Detroit News as a labor

reporter and editorial writer beginning in 1884. By the end of the decade, this part time activity had blossomed into a full-fledged journalistic career, first as a labor news editor, then managing editor of the paper's Sunday edition. He went from the News to a variety of other editorial posts including editor of Boyce's Weekly and of Ann Arbor's daily newspaper. He remained an active reformer, serving on Detroit Mayor Hazen Pingree's personal staff, campaigning for the single tax, fighting for municipal ownership of streetcars, and working closely with various reform-minded legislators, but he did not participate directly in the labor movement after 1891.⁷

Like Labadie, Grenell grew cynical about workers' capacity for perception and action. "The people know how to produce wealth, but the mass are still babes when approaching the subject of its scientific and equitable distribution. Yet on every hand are to be seen examples of bad economic conditions resulting from ignorantly imposed customs and laws." The average worker was not class conscious and had no conception of equity.

In equity what a man or woman receives... for his or her exertion should exchange for products requiring an equal amount of exertion. But law and custom--and with these laws and customs most wage workers are satisfied--demand another rule of division, to-wit: the cost of living.

Demands for higher wages are almost invariably based on the increased cost of living. So long as the average wage worker can purchase with his daily wage the things to which

he is accustomed, and which as a rule satisfy those who live in his class, he does not ask his employer to increase the amount to be found in his pay envelope on pay day.⁸

Grenell cultivated an image of middle class respectability which contrasted with Labadie's, but he also dabbled in such things as theosophy, spiritualism, and cypher analysis of Shakespeare's plays to determine if they were written by Francis Bacon. Other former activists of the 1880's followed similar pursuits. John Burton moved to the Pacific Northwest but maintained an active correspondence with Labadie into the 1920's in which he described activities including spiritualism, seances, communicating with spirits, mental healing, magnetism, and membership in various utopian colonies. Captain McGregor, Burton reported to Labadie, had gone off to the Klondyke.⁹

The labor movement which held less and less interest for these men maintained a stable membership level through the 1890's, despite the impact of the severe mid-decade depression, but failed to expand in proportion to the growing industrial population. Total union membership in 1901 was nearly identical to what it had been in 1887-8. As a result, a smaller and smaller percentage of the workforce was organized (see Appendix 1, Figures 2 and 3). By 1901, only 6.2 percent of Detroit's workforce was organized, less than a third of the percentage in the peak

year of 1886 (see Appendix 1, Figure 3). Membership expanded after 1901, but the rate of expansion was slower than the growth of industrial production as Detroit underwent the auto boom.¹⁰

Already in 1900, writers in the Labor Day Review looked back nostalgically to the 1886 Labor Day demonstration as the largest in the city's history. The labor movement, they recognized, was isolated from much of the city's workforce and exercised a decreasing influence in the political and cultural life of Detroit. In August, 1898, the Trades Council complained that all of the local press was completely ignoring the upcoming Labor Day parade. In the late 1880's, advance reports of Labor Day events had run as full page stories in most of the daily newspapers. The Trades Council authorized the printing of 25,000 circulars to compensate for lack of newspaper coverage. Yet after 1900, the relative importance of the movement declined even further. As Henry Ford and other automobile manufacturers maintained a rigid policy of anti-unionism, Detroit became a center of the open shop movement and the least unionized major city in the country. Detroit Federation of Labor President Frank X. Martel contrasted the years "Before the turn of the century" when "Detroit was regarded as a good union town" to the teens and twenties. In 1920, Martel claimed, there were less than fifty functioning unions in the city.¹¹

Union policies after the decline of the Knights of Labor also reflected less emphasis on class solidarity and working class unity. The unions generally avoided participation in activities unrelated to their bargaining functions. While out-state unions urged independent political action and supported the People's Party at MFL conventions in the mid-'90's, delegates from Detroit unions were nearly all opposed.¹² The Detroit labor movement placed less emphasis on organizing women, racial and ethnic minorities, and unskilled workers than it had under the prodding of the Knights in the '80's. Most of the union locals with significant numbers of women were hold-overs from the Knights of Labor.¹³ Unions were almost gone from factories with a preponderance of unskilled workers like the railroad car shops. The Knights had established large locals there in the late 1880's, but when the State Bureau of Labor Statistics interviewed car shop workers in 1893, only twenty-two of 1,066 workers belonged to a labor organization.¹⁴

The failure to maintain organization among unskilled factory workers was one of the primary reasons for the movement's isolation from the growing numbers of eastern and southern European workers who were filling unskilled jobs. Union racial policies in the 1890's were also less progressive than they had been in the 1880's. The Knights emphasized racial equality in membership policies,

employment, and political action. Local leaders criticized the Order's national leadership for its failure to adequately defend black workers in the South, and the Knights actively recruited black workers in Detroit. But when Knights of Labor assemblies, such as the longshoremen's assembly 10413, which had a large black membership in the late 1880's, switched to the Trades Council, they formed separate white and colored locals.¹⁵

Even the movement's left wing had moved towards a greater emphasis on immediate union business by the 1890's. While socialist theory still occupied considerable space in the Industrial Gazette in 1894-5, some of the socialist union leaders admitted that socialism had little to do with daily union affairs. W. D. Mahon, president of a street railway employees' union with more than 1,000 members and one of the most prominent socialists in Detroit, explained that he had voted against the socialist Plank Ten of the proposed AFL program in 1894. Although his union had instructed him to vote in favor of the plank, Mahon feared that debate over socialism would disrupt the union, and he did not want his union "Torn up for the next two years by a useless discussion."¹⁶

The changes in union attitudes and policies reflected the narrower objectives of the movement and its isolation from non-unionized segments of the workforce. While the labor movement had conceived of itself as representing

the interests of all workers in the 1880's, and had viewed its own activities within a context of general public policy, the unions of the 1890's, even those led by left-ists, concerned themselves almost exclusively with the immediate problems of their members. While the movement of the 1880's had consistently been able to mobilize an entire subculture which went beyond the ranks of dues paying union membership for boycotts, public demonstrations, political and cultural activities, in the 1890's just the opposite was the case: turnout for occasions like Labor Day parades was smaller than official union membership totals.¹⁷ As the unions came to represent a smaller and smaller proportion of the city's workers, unorganized workers began to look for alternative forms of organization, and began to look to middle class political reformers for political change.

It is ironic that historians have viewed the Knights of Labor as an expression of middle class values and have treated the rise of the AFL as the manifestation of a more genuinely working class perspective. In Detroit, just the opposite was the case. The Knights at their peak in Detroit represented an independent working class subculture. The AFL endured after the Knights were gone, but in relative terms it never rose; it fell in importance. The largely unorganized workforce was far more ethnically and economically fragmented than it had been

before. The AFL included only a small and unrepresentative segment of the fragmented working population. Later attempts at working class political action were far less successful than they had been in the 1880's. Even at its height, the Socialist Party of Eugene Debs did not do as well in Detroit as the SLP and ILP had done in the 1870's and 1880's. Debs' percentage of the vote in Wayne County in 1912 (4.1 percent), the peak year of socialist strength, was lower than the percentage the SLP's mayoral candidate had received in 1877. Not until the 1930's would there again be a strong labor movement or a working class political presence.¹⁸

II. Why Did Solidarity Decline?

The subculture of opposition collapsed amidst bitter internal conflict. The movement which replaced it dealt with a much narrower range of issues for a much smaller proportion of the population. Why did the apparently vibrant subculture of 1886 fall apart so quickly? What were people really fighting about? Why did the forces of fragmentation overwhelm the tendencies towards solidarity?

Certainly the basic socioeconomic structure of Detroit, the economic, ethnic, and cultural diversity proved a hostile ground for a movement which assumed that the most fundamental interests of a wide variety of

people were the same. I can think of no example where a culture of solidarity was sustained for a long period of time among an ethnoculturally diverse population. But the structural background cannot explain the unique cycle of rapidly rising and declining solidarity during the 1880's. The time span during which the subculture of opposition rose and fell was very brief--the most dramatic developments all occurred within half a decade. The great expansion of the movement took less than a year, from late 1885 to fall, 1886, while the internal struggle which destroyed it reached its decisive point by 1888. Within that period the basic socioeconomic and demographic trends did not vary in any important way. There was no major upturn or downturn of the economy.¹⁹ The processes of industrialization,²⁰ urban growth,²¹ growth in factory size,²² and demographic changes in the composition of the workforce were all long term tendencies proceeding at more or less steady rates throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century. While there was an increasing shift in immigration patterns towards southern and eastern Europeans beginning in the 1880's, this shift was not quick enough to serve as the independent variable for the events of the 1880's. The shift reinforced the patterns set in motion by the decline of solidarity in the late 1880's but was not fast enough to be the primary cause.²³

What did change in a very volatile fashion was the

cultural and psychological atmosphere. This rapidly changing psychological and cultural atmosphere does explain the up and down cycle of class solidarity in the mid-1880's. The national successes of the Knights of Labor and the emotional impact of the 1886 eight hour campaign convinced people temporarily that they were making history; hence, the explosive growth of the movement. But the belief that far reaching changes were impending produced tensions and created high expectations for the movement's followers. When these expectations were not fulfilled, people reacted bitterly. As things started to go wrong, both sides in the various debates adopted a scapegoat mentality. Substantive criticisms were combined with the crudest and most irrelevant kinds of personal attacks. When Tom Barry listed the sins and errors of his opponents in the Knights' national leadership, such actions as contributing to the martyrdom of the Haymarket anarchists, serious mishandling of major strikes, and violation of internal democracy were interspersed with charges that Powderly had ordered his picture to be printed in the Order's journal because of his personal vanity and Hayes had submitted a personal laundry bill to be paid by the Order. Administration supporters pointed out that Barry had requested more money in travel funds than most of the other board members, and his important criticisms of organizational policy were lost amid claims and counter

claims about who was actually wasting the Order's money.²⁴

This is not to argue that there were not fundamental errors, even moral outrages, in some leadership actions and decisions. Powderly's conduct in the Haymarket affair was deceitful, cowardly, and contrary to the Order's most basic conceptions of mutual defense. But to hold him personally responsible for the hanging, or to blame the entire destruction of the Knights of Labor on his conduct of the case, as Labadie did, was hyperbole which may have made good factional debate rhetoric but hardly helped to stem the internecine warfare that was destroying the movement. In 1886, Labadie, J. F. Bray, and other local radicals had seriously expected revolution by the end of the decade. They were not prepared to deal with the possibility of a long term struggle of an indecisive character.²⁵

Their disappointment and disillusionment had a permanent effect on the local movement. What might have been an experienced and disciplined cadre of radical labor agitators during the 1890's instead drifted away from agitation. The masses of participants from the 1880's were disillusioned as well. They had joined the Knights amid promises of the millenium; when there were no tangible gains, they felt they had been used. An MFL organizer in 1894 complained that he constantly faced cynicism growing out of workers' earlier experiences with the

Knights of Labor. Workers say "There is no good in it [the labor movement]. I once belonged to the Knights of Labor...I paid my dues regularly, and yet I never reaped any benefit...I don't see any use of joining and trying again--I know it will be the same as before."²⁶

At the same time, the explosive potential that had been revealed in 1886 prompted a variety of employers and political leaders to address themselves more directly to the problems emerging from urban and industrial change. Alternatives, they felt, had to be found to street demonstrations and working class insurgency. In 1887, the editors of the Detroit News predicted the emergence of a new liberal reform party based on an aroused working class electorate. Instead maverick shoe manufacturer Hazen Pingree accomplished the same thing within the confines of the Republican Party.²⁷

Pingree had been the primary antagonist of the Detroit Knights of Labor in 1885 and early 1886. But the boycott of his own factory as well as the other strikes and demonstrations had an effect on him. He came from a poor family; his father had been an itinerant cobbler. Pingree had worked as a cotton mill hand and shoe cutter before starting his own small shop. His own success gave him confidence in the ultimate fairness of the system, but his background and early experiences also made him sympathetic to the problems of workers and the poor. He

had opposed the Knights because he considered the demand for a union shop an invasion of his property rights, but he had never been militantly anti-union. In the late 1880's, he began reading Richard Ely's books on the labor movement. Ely argued that trade unionism per se was a necessary and justified response of the worker and a barrier to more destructive radicalism. By the time Pingree accepted the Republican nomination for mayor in 1889, he had become convinced that at least some working class grievances were justified and that intelligent employers should reach an accomodation with trade unionism. He also recognized, far more clearly than most labor leaders, the ethnic identifications of large proportions of the city's working populations. By tapping ethnic grievances, Pingree won an overwhelming victory in the 1889 mayoral race.²⁸

Pingree had been drafted by a coalition of business leaders who sought a new face to overturn the Democratic machine and institute a mild program of conservative reforms. Yet, as he moved into the Mayor's office, Pingree encountered first hand the problems of municipal corruption, unfair tax assessments favoring the rich, and upper class resistance to administrative changes which Pingree recognized were in the public interest. His thinking shifted gradually to the left. In 1891, he supported striking street car workers and refused to call in troops

or to use the city police to break the strike. As he took on the street car companies, tax assessors, toll companies operating on city streets, and the utilities, his business support fell away but was replaced by a working class and liberal reformist constituency. Judson Grenell served on Pingree's staff; Labadie became a water inspector; and by 1893, both the People's Party and the SLP endorsed him in his second re-election bid.²⁹

Pingree's career demonstrated the qualitative change in the attitudes of a segment of Detroit's economic and political elite. Many employers still steadfastly refused to deal with unions, and much of the entrenched economic and political power of the city opposed any reforms, but a minority, like Pingree, had come to accept trade unionism and to accept the concept of liberal cooperation--the need to respond in some positive ways to lower class grievances in order to preserve the system and prevent the emergence of a working class movement hostile to the system as a whole.

Labor leaders who were willing to accept a position as a junior member in such a political alliance now had a viable strategy for limited reform. Some elements of the labor movement, as the rise of local branches of both the Socialist Party and the IWW after 1900 demonstrates, were unwilling to pursue such a strategy, but enough were to prevent the left wing alternatives from gaining a

significant following. With the declining relative strength of the labor movement, the increasing ethnic diversity, and the growing power of large anti-union employers like the automobile manufacturers after 1900, the potential for an independent class conscious workers' movement became even smaller. In contrast, the possibility of limited support from sympathetic business leaders like Pingree seemed far more realistic. Perhaps this is what much of the reformist leadership of the Knights had had in mind all along, but such a reformist alternative had not really been available before the upheavals of the 1880's. Without the events of the mid-'80's, it seems unlikely that men like Pingree would have moved in the direction of liberal reform when they did.

Thus, the failures of the 1880's disillusioned both workers and labor leaders. A tradition developed within the labor movement that mass unionism, like the Knights, could not work. At the same time, the specter of upheaval that the events had created stimulated enough of Detroit's economic and political elite to offer a possible alternative: limited trade unionism seeking accomodation with reasonable employers and political alliance with liberal reformers.

III. The Significance of the Detroit Case

What happened in Detroit in the 1880's was representative of other major industrial centers. We will need more intensive local studies before the full impact of the decade on working class consciousness can be assessed, but enough facts stand out already to demonstrate that Detroit was not atypical. Nationally, Knights of Labor membership expanded slowly but steadily in most parts of the country during the early 1880's from 19,000 in 1881 to 104,000 in July, 1885.²⁹ The explosive expansion of both membership and activity which took place in Detroit in 1886 paralleled in kind and degree the national pattern. Knights of Labor membership increased to 703,000 in July, 1886, a rate of increase nearly identical to Detroit's.³⁰ At least 340,000 workers participated nationally in the May eight hour movement according to a contemporary estimate.³¹

As in Detroit, the labor movement developed adjunct institutions and expanded its political influence in many parts of the country. The independent labor press flourished in the mid-1880's with labor papers in almost every major city and an incredible number even in smaller industrial towns. In Michigan, for example, there were labor papers outside Detroit in Muskegon, Alpena, Flint, Jackson, Bay City, Grand Rapids, Manistee, Menominee, Iron

Mountain, and Fremont. A national organization of labor newspapers, the Associated Labor Press, was formed in 1885.³² Political organizations like Detroit's Independent Labor Party were also common and often quite successful; the most notable examples were the United Labor Parties of New York City and Chicago. Henry George, the labor candidate in New York City, received 68,000 votes (31.2 percent) in the 1886 mayoral campaign. Many observers had expected him to win, and his supporters were convinced that Tammany had counted him out. Robert Nelson, running for mayor of Chicago the following year on the ULP ticket, did nearly as well as George with 27.2 percent of the vote.³³

The relative decline of the movement and the abandonment of many subsidiary labor activities which took place in Detroit was also found elsewhere in the 1890's. Nationally, unions were hard hit by the mid-1890's depression, and membership probably fell below 400,000 in 1895 or 1896 in contrast to at least 1,000,000 union and Knights of Labor membership in 1886. National union membership bounced back after the depression more rapidly than in Detroit with membership exceeding 1,000,000 in 1901 (see Appendix 1, Table 21), but as in Detroit, the bulk of national union membership was found in a few industries. The building trades, transportation, and mining together comprised 54.4 percent of total national

union membership in 1900. Despite continued growth of union membership to 2,000,000 in 1904 and 2,700,000 in 1914 (see Appendix 1, Table 21), the distribution of union membership did not change appreciably: building trades, transportation, and mining still totaled 54.7 percent. Basic production industries such as steel, automobiles, chemicals, textiles (coal mining was the major exception) were never unionized to any significant degree before the 1930's. The decline of unionism in Detroit's railroad car shops in the 1890's and its absence in automobile factories in the 1900's was quite representative. Unions could not force recognition from major national corporations. Except for the railroad brotherhoods, the major national unions functioned in industries that were still characterized by large numbers of smaller employers.³⁴

The relative decline of the labor movement in Detroit after 1890 was more drastic than in other major cities, but the basic pattern was similar elsewhere. Rising national union membership figures after 1897 have generally blinded scholars to the fact that industrial employment was also increasing very rapidly. If we examine the trends in the relative impact of the labor movement instead of aggregate membership--that is, the percentage of non-agricultural wage earners which are unionized--it is clear that Detroit's labor movement was not as exceptional as it might seem. In 1900, the national percentage

of unionized workers was 8.6, only half of the 1886 peak (see Appendix 1, Figure 4). By 1903, the percentage had risen to almost 15 percent, about equal to 1886, but thereafter, growth in union membership barely kept pace with growth in the workforce as the percentage fluctuated between 13 and 15 percent. Only in 1918 did the percentage of union members rise above 15 percent. In the following year, the percentage finally surpassed the highest estimate of the 1886 level, reaching a maximum of nearly 24 percent in 1921. But thereafter, until the late 1930's, the percentage of unionization fell steadily. In 1929, the figure was 12.5 percent, once again well below 1886. In the entire fifty year period after 1886, the percentage of union organization exceeded the 1886 high for only five years, 1918-1922.³⁵

The impact of these trends was felt in some major industrial cities like Detroit, and in smaller industrial towns, as well. The decline of the labor movement described by Robert and Helen Lynd in Middletown between the 1890's and 1924 was even more striking than in Detroit. In 1897, there were 3,766 union members in Middletown, a city of 20,000 in 1900. By 1924, although the population had doubled, union membership had fallen to 815, and many of those were "aging workers who keep up old union affiliations for the sake of insurance benefits." When Samuel Gompers visited town in 1897, he had breakfast with the

mayor before addressing a large public meeting. Middletown had a Workingman's Library and Reading Room and an active labor social life in the 1890's. Labor Day was celebrated by the whole town. In 1924, there were no Labor Day ceremonies, no social functions, and unions maintained attendance only by fining absentees. A national union leader, assessing the influence of the labor movement in 1924 compared to the 1890's, argued that the "labor movement does not compare with that of 1890 as one to one hundred." Middletown may have been an extreme case, but the Lynds picked it because they thought it was typical.³⁶

Even where the labor movement did not face a drastic decline as in Detroit or Middletown, there were other similarities in long term trends. Nearly everywhere unions narrowed their objectives over time and concentrated on bargaining functions as in Detroit in the 1890's. The alliance of the movement with Pingree in Detroit had parallels elsewhere as well. The AFL's political policy of "reward your friends--punish your enemies," although officially non-partisan, was not a policy of non-involvement. The concept of a labor-liberal business alliance became formalized after 1900 in the National Civic Federation. Yet, as in Detroit, the long run benefits of such an alliance were debatable. Business leaders of the National Civic Federation, such as Judge Gary of U.S. Steel, preached class collaboration but refused to recognize unions in

their own factories. Nor is it clear that liberal business support strengthened the position of urban political reformers on the local level. In Detroit, Pingree lost most of his business support as soon as he began to move against local elites. A recent study of George Lunn, Socialist and later Democratic mayor of Schenectady in 1911-13 and 1919-23, concluded that Lunn's political base was almost entirely working class. Lunn shifted to the Democrats because of factional strife within the Socialist Party but later concluded that the switch had been a mistake and that his optimistic estimate of liberal reform had been naive.³⁷

In 1929, Norman Ware characterized the era after the Knights of Labor as "a strategic retreat of a few craft unions disturbed for their own safety...one may not speak too glibly about the failure of the Knights in this or that...They put the labor movement on the map...The great mechanized industries which the Knights once held have since been lost."³⁸ Labor historians have ignored or resisted his insight, largely, I believe, for ideological reasons.

Labor history is a remarkably ideological field. It has appealed to those with strong ideological convictions and many interpretive questions have become polemical battlegrounds. Nevertheless, despite this tradition of vigorous debate, there has been fundamental agreement between right and left on the extent and inevitability of the labor movement's progress. For the right, the success

of the movement is a vindication of American society and America's exceptionalism: social justice without social conflict. From Commons to Gerald Grob, histories of the developing labor movement have treated the Knights (or any other movement that questioned the structure of American society) harshly and lauded those who accepted the unique character of American institutions. Yet despite their attacks on the Commons School, the Marxist left has had its own March of Progress based on the belief that rising class consciousness is historical law and harbinger of socialism.³⁹

Unfortunately, the facts in Detroit and elsewhere do not fit the March of Progress theory in either of its versions. In its overall influence, impact, and level of popular participation, the labor movement peaked in Detroit in 1886 and did not reach a corresponding level of importance for another fifty years. The national pattern was not markedly different. In 1935, John L. Lewis described the AFL's organizing efforts of the previous quarter century as "twenty-five years of unbroken failure." He was exaggerating only slightly. Only in the late 1930's, under the impact of the new movement of mass and millenarian unionism, the CIO, did the labor movement once again become important in Detroit. Nationally, as well, it is to the organizing drives of the late 1930's and early 1940's, not to the AFL of Gompers, that we must look for

the origins of contemporary unionism in basic industries.⁴⁰

The AFL of the 1890's faced a difficult period--a hostile economic and social environment, a disillusioned constituency--and responded tactically to survive the difficulties and maximize the bargaining power which was its primary weapon. Unfortunately, with time, these tactics were elevated to the level of dogma. The majority of American workers waited fifty years for minimal union protection. Historians have compounded the dogmatic narrowness of the later AFL by making that error into a virtue.

Equally important, historians have overemphasized the significance of organizational conflict between the Knights and the AFL. While the broad outlines of the 1886 upheavals and subsequent decline of class consciousness have been noted, when the discussion is confined to an institutional framework of the development of labor organization, much more fundamental questions are ignored. What do these events tell us about the response to industrialization, the class structure of the industrial metropolis, or the sources of class consciousness? Certainly the events of the 1880's in Detroit suggest that American workers were not inherently incapable of class conscious organization and action. A significant class conscious labor movement emerged supported by a broad cultural network. It declined, certainly in part because of structural

factors common to much of American society, but in the most immediate sense the collapse of the Knights of Labor and decline of the subculture of opposition was precipitated by conflicts internal to the movement. How much of the later inability to create a class conscious labor movement or a socialist political movement was based on the heritage of these events?

For decades, AFL leaders like Gompers defended their actions after 1890 largely on the basis of these earlier experiences. In 1935, Teamsters' President Daniel J. Tobin invoked the spirit of Gompers and other early AFL leaders who "had salvaged the crafts from the Knights of Labor" against the CIO insurgency.⁴¹ How much of the weakness of American unionism before the 1930's was based on these attitudes? Have historians been looking at the wrong era when they have tried to explain the weakness of American socialism by looking at the policies of the Socialist and Communist Parties in the twentieth century? Can the failure of the proposed farmer-labor alliance of the 1890's (and later) be explained by what happened in the 1880's? If something more of the 1880's subculture of opposition had survived the decade, would America's industrial development have been different, more humane? Such speculative questions can never be decisively answered, but considering them would provide a better starting point for analyzing what is unique about American industrial

development than vague, metaphysical references to the American character, American values, or the liberal tradition.⁴²

Chapter 8

NOTES

1. For example, there was no independent labor politics in the 1890's, only a very irregular labor press, and far fewer social and cultural activities than the decade before.

2. Labor Day Review, 1897. Detroit Labor Leaders Data Bank. Some additional 1897 Trades Council officers and delegates may have been local union officers or Trades Council delegates in the 1880's--there are no complete lists of Council delegates from the 1880's. Information on officers of all but the largest unions is scanty unless they participated in other city wide labor activities. Major leadership is defined as having held one or more of the following positions: officer of DA 50, officer of the Trades Council, candidate or member of campaign committee of the ILP, editor or regular columnist in the labor press, frequent featured speaker at public rallies and mass meetings.

3. The Union Printer, May 30, 1906.

4. Industrial Gazette, December 14, 1894.

5. Joseph Buchanan to Labadie, December 30, 1893, LC. William Holmes to Labadie, June 14, 1896. Industrial Gazette, December 14, 1894. Buchanan had worked closely with Labadie on the Provisional Committee. He was one of the most important radical labor leaders of the 1880's. Labadie's political evolution was, in some respects, analogous to that of Georgia Populist Tom Watson. Labadie was never a racist or a xenophobe, and some of his contemporaries viewed his shift to anarchism as a shift to the left not the right, but the process of disillusionment was similar. Anarchist automatically brought bomb throwing and free love to mind for most of Labadie's associates, but the political content of his later writing was closer to modern conservative libertarianism. To some degree he recognized the contradiction between his extreme individualism and his self-image as a class conscious labor radical. There are remarkable inconsistencies in his post-1890 writings.

6. Labadie to Mrs. H. E. Beadle, January 16, 1923, LC; undated correspondence with Judson Grenell, probably 1920's, LC; correspondence with Mrs. Marion Todd, LC.

7. Judson Grenell, Autobiography, pp. 38-44, 51-55, 74.

8. Grenell to Labadie, undated, LC. SBLS, 1908, pp. 349-50.

9. Grenell, op. cit. Burton to Labadie, correspondence 1912-1921, LC. The similarity with post-New Left seventies mysticism is striking.

10. See Figures 2 and 3, Appendix 1. No union membership statistics are available after 1903, but estimates by Martel (f.n. 11) and others suggest that the slight rise between 1901 and 1903 (Figure 3) was temporary.

11. Labor Day Review, 1900, p. 29; 1905, p. 58. The People (Detroit), August 19, 1898. Martin Marger, The Force of Ethnicity: A Study of Urban Elites (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973), p. 27. Allen Nevins, Ford: Expansion and Challenge, 1915-33 (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1937) cited by Marger. Frank X. Martel, "Progress in Detroit," American Federationist, May 1955, p. 18.

12. Industrial Gazette, December 14, 1894.

13. KLDB. Labor Day Review, 1892, 1893, 1897.

14. SBLS, 1893, pp. 736, 780.

15. Detroit Labor Leaf, March 31, 1886; April 21, 1886; April 28, 1886; December 22, 1886; July 23, 1887. KLDB. Detroit Evening News, September 6, 1887. Labor Day Review, 1897, pp. 38, 45.

16. Industrial Gazette, December 21, 1894.

17. Detroit Evening News, August 31, 1890; September 2, 1890. Columbian Labor Day Souvenir, 1893, pp. 25-6. Labor Day, 1900, p. 29.

18. Michigan Manual, 1913, p. 673. Simpson, the SLP 1877 mayoral candidate, received 6.0 percent.

19. There was a national recession in 1884-5 with improvement in 1886-7, and some contemporaries described 1885 as a depression year. But the downturn hardly seems severe enough to have much explanatory value nor does the timing correspond to the sequence of events. Industrial production fell 6 percent in 1884 and remained stable at the 1884 level in 1885. National unemployment was between

6 and 8 percent in 1885 compared to an average of 4 percent for the decade. By 1886, industrial production was back well above the 1883 level. Real wages continued to rise through the brief recession, up approximately 4 percent in 1884 and 3 percent in 1885. There are no separate statistics for Detroit, but local sources did occasionally mention hard times or slack work in 1884-5. See: Stanley Lebergott, Manpower in Economic Growth (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), pp. 42, 154, 179-80, 189, 528.

20. See Appendix 1, Table 2.

21. See Appendix 1, Table 1.

22. See pp. 124-25.

23. See Appendix 1, Tables 17 and 18, pp. 54, 68 and f.n. 11, p. 98. The proportion of the workforce from eastern and southern Europe can be inferred from the "Other" category in the census tables. With rare exceptions, these would be eastern and southern Europeans. The percentages between 1880 and 1900 were as follows:

| | |
|-------|--|
| 1880: | 5.2 percent |
| 1890: | 6.4 percent |
| 1900: | 6.9 percent of total population; percent of workforce not reported. |

As noted, some Poles were classed as Germans. Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876; Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 664-5; Twelfth Census, Abstract, pp. 106-7.

24. Clippings in McGregor Scrapbook, LC. Clippings in Barry Scrapbooks, originals in possession of Barry Family, microfilm copy at Michigan Historical Collection, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Advance and Labor Leaf, January 7, 1888; October 20, 1888. Organic Law of the Brotherhood of United Labor.

25. See Labadie in Labor Leaf, March 24, 1886, for one of many revolutionary predictions.

26. Industrial Gazette, December 14, 1894. Labor Day Review, 1892, p. 43. For a more favorable retrospective on the Knights, however, see J. D. Flanigan in SBLIS, 1896, pp. 235-6.

27. Evening News, September 5, 1887; November 3, 1886.

28. Labor Leaf, December 31, 1884; May 6, 1885; May 13, 1885; June 10, 1885; June 24, 1885; July 4, 1885. Melvin G. Holli, Reform in Detroit (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 3-4, 7, 17-21, 43. Richard T. Ely, The Labor Movement in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1890), esp. chapters 4 and 5. For a discussion of Pingree's labor problems in 1885-6, see pp. 231-33.

29. Holli, pp. 8, 16-7, 24-32, 38-41, 54, 58-62, 138-41. Grenell, Autobiography, pp. 53-55, 59. Industrial Gazette, December 14, 1894; December 21, 1894. By 1897, the local SLP shifted policy and denounced both Pingree and Labadie. The People (New York), April 17, 1897; November 14, 1897. Charles Erb received 561 votes for mayor on the SLP ticket in 1897.

30. Norman Ware, The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895 (New York: Vintage edition, original copyright 1929), p. 66. Knights membership statistics should not be considered more accurate than orders of magnitude because of poor record keeping, rapid fluctuations, and high turnover rates.

31. Ibid. Bradstreet's, a New York financial journal, cited in Commons, et al., History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol. 2 (New York: MacMillan, 1918), pp. 384-5. Bradstreet's estimated 190,000 strikers and 150,000 securing gains without striking. These are undoubtedly extremely conservative estimates. The number of strikers in Detroit was 3,000 according to Bradstreet's, about half the actual number. If estimates for other cities were similarly low, half to three quarters of a million participants might be a closer total.

32. Official Directory and Legislative Manual of the State of Michigan, 1883, 1885, 1887, 1889. John Swinton's Paper, March 8, 1885. Constitution and Bylaws of the Menominee River Laboring Men's Protective and Benevolent Union.

33. Commons, et al, pp. 446-54. Ware, p. 362. Perlman, author of this section in Commons, concluded "There is sufficient ground for the belief that George was counted out of thousands of votes."

34. See Appendix 1, Table 21. Leo Wolman, The Growth of American Trade Unions, 1880-1923 (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1924), pp. 21, 31, 32-3, 62, 82-96. See note after Table 21 for a discussion of the difficulties of estimating union membership prior to 1897.

35. See Appendix 1, Figure 4. Historical Statistics of the United States (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960), p. 98.

36. Robert and Helen Lynd, Middletown (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1956), pp. 76-79.

37. Commons, et al, pp. 531-2. James Weinstein, The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900-1918 (Boston: Beacon, 1969), pp. 3-39, esp. 38-39. Gabriel Kolko, The Triumph of Conservatism (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1967) emphasizes the failure of NCF business leaders to honor the spirit of alliance in their own corporations (pp. 118-9, for example). Chad Gaffield, "Big Business: The Working-Class and Socialism in Schenectady, 1911-1916," Labor History, Vol. 19, No. 3, Summer 1978.

38. Ware, pp. xii-xviii.

39. Commons, et al. Gerald N. Grob, Workers and Utopia (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969). There are few genuine conservatives in the field. The group of historians I have characterized as right are overwhelmingly politically liberal and right only in the relative sense. The most prominent example of the orthodox Marxist left is Philip Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States, 4 Vols. (New York: International Publishers), who characterizes the AFL as an advance over the Knights despite his many criticisms of AFL policies.

40. Edward Levinson, Labor on the March (New York: Harper, 1938), pp. 111.

41. Ibid., p. 115. Gompers' autobiography, Seventy Years of Life and Labor (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1925) deals extensively with how the experiences of the 1880's convinced him of the necessity for his later policies.

42. Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955). Seymour Martin Lipset in Laslett and Lipset, Failure of a Dream? (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1974), p. 553.

APPENDIX 1

TABLE 1

GROWTH OF DETROIT POPULATION: 1870-1900

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Population</u> | <u>% Increase Over Previous Decade</u> |
|-------------|-------------------|--|
| 1870 | 79,577 | |
| 1880 | 116,340 | 46.2 |
| 1890 | 205,876 | 77.0 |
| 1900 | 285,704 | 38.8 |

Source: Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 370.
Twelfth Census, 1900, Vol. 1, p. lxix.

TABLE 2

GROWTH OF INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION IN DETROIT: 1880-1890

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Number of Establishments</u> | <u>Capital Investment^a</u> | <u>Number of Workers</u> | <u>Value of Production^a</u> |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|---|------------------------------|--|
| 1880 | 919 | \$15.6 | 12,477 | \$30.2 |
| 1885 | NA ^b | NA ^b | 32,217 | \$64.6 |
| 1890 | 1,746 | \$45.0 | 38,178 | \$77.4 |

^a \$ in millions

^b NA: not available

Source: Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 2, pp. 399-400.

Eleventh Census, 1890, Compendium, Part 2, pp. 802-05.

Detroit Tribune, January 10, 1886.

TABLE 3

LEADING INDUSTRIES DETROIT: 1880-1890

| | 1880 | | 1890 | |
|--|---|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| | <u>Value of Product^a</u> | <u>Number of Employees</u> | <u>Value of Product^a</u> | <u>Number of Employees</u> |
| Iron and Steel | \$ 2.5 | 1,095 | \$ 2.4 | 699 |
| Tobacco and Cigars | 2.4 | 1,242 | 6.6 | 2,914 |
| Clothing | 2.1 | 1,084 | 3.0 | 1,514 |
| Foundry and Machine Shops | 1.8 | 1,024 | 7.6 | 4,823 |
| Slaughtering and Meat Packing | 1.7 | 147 | 3.4 | 358 |
| Flour and Grist Mills | 1.6 | 123 | 1.6 | 110 |
| Boots and Shoes | 1.1 | 648 | 1.8 | 1,257 |
| Liquors, Malt | 1.1 | 304 | 1.5 | 409 |
| Printing and Publishing | 1.0 | 812 | 2.7 | 1,488 |
| Carpentering | 1.0 | 672 | 1.7 | 972 |
| Lumber Planing Mills, incl. sash, doors, blinds, woodenware | .8 | 581 | 2.3 | 1,227 |

TABLE 3 (cont'd.)

| | 1880 | | 1890 | |
|---------------|---|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| | <u>Value of Product^a</u> | <u>Number of Employees</u> | <u>Value of Product^a</u> | <u>Number of Employees</u> |
| Railroad Cars | NA ^b | NA ^b | \$10.3 | 3,615 |
| Chemicals | NA ^b | NA ^b | 3.0 | 1,381 |

^a \$ in millions

^b NA: not available

Source: Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 2, pp. 399-400.

Eleventh Census, 1890, Compendium, Part 2, pp. 802-05.

TABLE 4
CLASS COMPOSITION OF DETROIT WORKFORCE
1880-1890

| <u>Class</u> | <u>1880</u> | | <u>1890</u> | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|----------|---------------|----------|
| | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
| Business people and entrepreneurs | 5,055 | 13.8 | 6,930 | 9.5 |
| Professionals | 1,089 | 3.0 | 2,055 | 2.8 |
| White collar wage earners | 4,798 | 13.1 | 10,783 | 14.8 |
| Working class | 25,810 | 70.2 | 53,191 | 72.9 |
| Total Numbers | 36,752 | | 72,959 | |

Sources: Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876.

1880:

Businessmen and entrepreneurs: farmers and planters, gardeners, nurserymen, and vine growers; boarding and lodging house keepers, hotel and restaurant keepers and employees; livery stable keepers, and hostlers; saloon keepers and bartenders; traders and dealers; banking and brokerage, insurance; manufacturers and officials of manufacturing companies.

Professionals: clergymen, dentists, lawyers, physicians and surgeons, teachers.

White collar wage earners: clerks; journalists; music teachers and musicians; government employees; clerks, salesmen, and accountants in stores; commercial travelers; hucksters and peddlers; clerks and bookkeepers in manufacturing establishments.

Working class: agricultural laborers; stock raisers, drovers, and herders; barbers and hairdressers; domestic servants; launderers and laundresses; laborers; draymen, hackmen, teamsters, etc.; officials and employees of express, railroad, street railroad, and telegraph companies; sailors, steamboatmen, stewardesses, coachmen,

TABLE 4 (cont'd.)

pilots and watermen; all categories of manufacturing, mechanical and mining industries except clerks, bookkeepers, and officials of manufacturing companies.

Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 664.

1890:

Businessmen and entrepreneurs: gardeners, florists, nurserymen and vine growers; restaurant and saloon keepers; bankers, brokers and officials of banks; livery stable keepers and hostlers; merchants, dealers, and peddlers; manufacturers; publishers; hotel and boarding house keepers.

Professionals: clergymen, engineers (civil, mechanical, electrical, and mining) and surveyors, physicians and surgeons, professors and teachers.

White collar wage earners: officials (government), agents (claim, commission, real estate, insurance, etc.) and collectors, bookkeepers, clerks, commercial travelers, salesmen, musicians and music teachers, accountants, clerks and copyists, stenographers and typewriters, saleswomen.

Working class: barbers, bartenders, engineers and firemen, laborers, watchmen, policemen, detectives, boatmen, coachmen, pilots, sailors, draymen, hackmen, teamsters, messengers, packers and porters, steam railroad employees, street railway employees, apprentices, bakers, blacksmiths and wheelwrights, boot and shoemakers and repairers, brassworkers, brewers and malsters, cabinet makers and upholsterers, carpenters and joiners, harness, saddle and trunk makers, iron and steel workers, machinists, marble and stone cutters and masons, painters, glaziers, and varnishers, plasterers, plumbers, printers, engravers, and bookbinders, steam and boat builders, stove, furnace and grate makers, tailors, tanners and tinware makers, tobacco and cigar factory operatives, wood workers, housekeepers and stewardesses, laundresses, nurses and midwives, servants, telegraph and telephone operators.

TABLE 5
GROWTH OF DETROIT WORKFORCE
1880-1890

| | <u>1880</u> | <u>1890</u> | <u>% Increase 1880-1890</u> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|
| Population | 116,340 | 205,876 | 77.0 |
| Total number employed | 39,245 | 79,692 | 103.1 |
| Employed in industry | 12,417 | 38,178 | 207.5 |
| % of total population employed | 33.73 | 38.71 | |
| Males employed | 31,220 | 62,556 | 100.4 |
| Females employed | 8,025 | 17,136 | 113.5 |
| Children employed (ages 10-15) | 1,153 | See note | |

Sources: Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876; Vol. 2, pp. 399-400.

Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 664;
Compendium, Part 2, pp. 802-05; Compendium,
Part 3, p. 393.

Twelfth Census, 1900, Vol. 1, p. lxix.

Note:

Children not given in 1890 Census. Figure for child employment for 1890 includes only those employed between 10 and 15 years of age inclusive. The State Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 2,065 children (4.6% of workforce) at work in Detroit in 1884 including 43 under the age of 10 (1885 Report, p. 62), but the investigator cautioned that this probably underestimates the number of children employed. "The parents conceal, in many cases, the fact of employment. While the number between 10 and 14 years of age (both inclusive) who do not attend any school is given at 2,203, the number at work is but 989." (p. 65)

TABLE 6

CLASS COMPOSITION OF FEMALE WORKFORCE
DETROIT: 1880-1890

| <u>Class</u> | <u>1880</u> | | <u>1890</u> | |
|---------------------------|---------------|----------|---------------|----------|
| | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
| Business and entrepreneur | 603 | 6.6 | 415 | 2.6 |
| Professional | 341 | 4.4 | 613 | 3.8 |
| White collar wage earners | 427 | 5.6 | 2,085 | 12.9 |
| Working class | 6,414 | 83.4 | 13,088 | 80.8 |
| Total Numbers | 7,687 | | 16,201 | |

Sources: Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876.

1880:

Business and entrepreneur: farmers and planters, gardeners, nurserymen and vine growers; boarding and lodging house keepers, hotel and restaurant keepers and employees; insurance company; saloon keepers and bartenders; traders and dealers; manufacturers and officials of manufacturing companies.

Professionals: dentists, physicians and surgeons, teachers.

White collar wage earners: clerks and copyists, musicians and teachers of music, officials and employees of government, clerks, saleswomen and accountants in stores, commercial travelers, hucksters and peddlers.

Working class: agricultural laborers, barbers and hairdressers, domestic servants, laborers, laundresses, railroad employees, telegraph employees, boot and shoe makers, cabinet makers and upholsterers, cigar makers and tobacco workers, cotton, woolen, and silk mill operatives, employees in manufacturing establishments, gold and silver workers, harness, saddle and tackmakers, mill and factory operatives, painters and varnishers,

TABLE 6 (cont'd.)

printers, tailors, dressmakers, and milliners, tinner.

Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 664-65.

1890:

Business and entrepreneurs: hotel and boarding
house keepers, merchants, dealers, and peddlers.

Professionals: professors and teachers.

White collar wage earners: musicians and teachers
of music, bookkeepers and accountants, clerks and copy-
ists, saleswomen, stenographers, and typewriters.

Working class: housekeepers and stewardesses,
laborers, laundresses, nurses and midwives, servants,
messengers, packers and porters, telegraph and telephone
operators, boot and shoe makers and repairers, box
makers, chemical works employees, confectioners, cotton,
wool, and other textile mill operatives, dressmakers,
milliners, seamstresses, printers, engravers, bookbind-
ers, tailoresses, tobacco and cigar operatives, wood
workers.

TABLE 7

AGE AT WHICH THEY BEGAN WORK
DETROIT WOMEN WAGE WORKERS: 1892

| | <u>10 or less</u> | <u>11-13</u> | <u>14-16</u> | <u>17-19</u> | <u>20-25</u> | <u>Over 25</u> |
|---------|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Number | 34 | 850 | 3,776 | 722 | 152 | 37 |
| Percent | 0.6 | 15.3 | 67.8 | 13.0 | 2.7 | 0.7 |

Source: SBLS Annual Report, 1892, p. 144.

TABLE 8

AGE OF WOMEN WORKERS IN DETROIT: 1892

| | <u>Under 16</u> | <u>16-20</u> | <u>21-25</u> | <u>26-30</u> | <u>31-35</u> | <u>Over 35</u> |
|---------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Number | 481 | 3,285 | 1,508 | 508 | 113 | 126 |
| Percent | 8.0 | 54.6 | 25.0 | 8.4 | 1.9 | 2.1 |

Source: SBLS Annual Report, 1892, p. 139.

TABLE 9

DAILY WAGES OF DETROIT WORKERS: 1884

| <u>Wage Rate</u> | <u>Number of Workers</u> | <u>Percent Total Workers</u> |
|------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| \$1.00 or less | 566 | 6.57 |
| \$1.05 - 1.50 | 3,863 | 44.86 |
| \$1.55 - 2.00 | 2,391 | 27.77 |
| \$2.05 - 2.50 | 1,108 | 12.87 |
| \$2.55 - 3.00 | 439 | 5.10 |
| \$3.10 - 3.50 | 144 | 1.67 |
| \$3.75 - 4.00 | 64 | .74 |
| Over \$4.00 | 36 | .42 |

Source: SBLS Annual Report, 1884, pp. 84-7.

TABLE 10

EXPENDITURES OF WORKING CLASS FAMILIES IN MICHIGAN: 1892

| | Annual Income | |
|----------|------------------|------------------|
| | <u>\$400-600</u> | <u>\$600-900</u> |
| Food | 41% | 30% |
| Clothing | 14 | 18 |
| Rent | 15 | 20 |
| Fuel | 8 | 8 |
| Sundry | 22 | 24 |

Source: SBLS Annual Report, 1892, p. 1117.

TABLE 11

AVERAGE NUMBER OF ROOMS PER FAMILY BY OCCUPATION
DETROIT: 1885

| <u>Occupation</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>Average Number of Rooms</u> |
|-------------------|---------------|--|
| Agents | 65 | 6.87 |
| Barbers | 17 | 3.94 |
| Blacksmiths | 192 | 4.31 |
| Carpenters | 960 | 4.43 |
| Clerks | 432 | 6.04 |
| Laborers | 2,825 | 3.24 |
| Machinists | 227 | 5.31 |
| Molders | 226 | 4.52 |
| Printers | 72 | 5.94 |
| Shoemakers | 188 | 4.53 |
| Tailors | 147 | 4.53 |
| Teamsters | 226 | 4.30 |

Source: SBLS Annual Report, 1885, p. 197.

TABLE 12

DEATH RATES BY WARD IN DETROIT: 1890

| <u>Ward</u> | <u>Death rate per 1000 population</u> | <u>Death rate under 5 years of age per 1000 population</u> |
|-------------|---|--|
| 1 | 20.29 | 52.30 |
| 2 | 11.33 | 45.91 |
| 3 | 29.72 | 136.74 |
| 4 | 15.01 | 37.87 |
| 5 | 17.77 | 71.20 |
| 6 | 15.82 | 65.08 |
| 7 | 21.89 | 71.04 |
| 8 | 17.63 | 73.24 |
| 9 | 20.54 | 75.36 |
| 10 | 15.74 | 56.93 |
| 11 | 17.25 | 57.55 |
| 12 | 18.25 | 69.41 |
| 13 | 18.73 | 49.53 |
| 14 | 20.50 | 83.59 |
| 15 | 16.89 | 68.18 |
| 16 | 18.56 | 70.38 |

Source: Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 4, Part 2.

TABLE 13

NATIVITY OF DETROIT WORKFORCE: 1880-1890

| | <u>1880</u> | <u>1890</u> |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| % Foreign born in population | 39.2 | 39.7 |
| % Foreign born in workforce | 54.3 | 53.6 |

Sources: Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, pp. 471, 876.

Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2,
pp. 664-5; Vol. 1, Part 1, xcii.

TABLE 14

NATIVITY OF DETROIT WORKFORCE BY CLASS: 1890

| <u>Class</u> | <u>Native born</u> | | <u>Foreign born</u> | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|----------|---------------------|----------|
| | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>%</u> |
| Business and entrepreneur | 3,410 | 49.4 | 3,492 | 50.6 |
| Professional | 1,382 | 68.0 | 649 | 32.0 |
| White collar wage earners | 7,580 | 70.6 | 3,162 | 29.4 |
| Working class | 20,514 | 40.1 | 30,647 | 59.9 |
| Total | 32,886 | 46.4 | 37,950 | 53.6 |

Source: Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 664.

Note: Nativity of colored workers not given; information on various occupations was omitted in census tables but included in census totals. Discrepancies with previous tables are based on these omissions.

TABLE 15

LENGTH OF TIME IN MICHIGAN
OF WORKERS BORN OUTSIDE OF MICHIGAN: 1884

| | <u>Less than 1 year</u> | <u>1-2 years</u> | <u>3-5 years</u> | <u>6-10 years</u> | <u>10-20 years</u> | <u>Over 20 years</u> |
|---------|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Number | 281 | 1,465 | 1,347 | 613 | 3,198 | 1,939 |
| Percent | 3.2 | 16.6 | 15.2 | 6.9 | 36.2 | 21.8 |

Source: SBLS Annual Report, 1884, pp. 112-13, 128-30.

TABLE 16

LENGTH OF TIME ENGAGED IN CURRENT OCCUPATION
DETROIT WORKERS: 1884

| | <u>2 years or less</u> | <u>3-5 years</u> | <u>6-10 years</u> | <u>10-20 years</u> | <u>Over 20 years</u> |
|---------|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Number | 1,885 | 1,461 | 847 | 2,353 | 963 |
| Percent | 28.3 | 21.9 | 12.7 | 22.6 | 14.5 |

Source: SBLS Annual Report, 1884, pp. 112-13, 128-30.

TABLE 17

NATIVITY OF DETROIT WORKFORCE: 1880-1890

| | <u>U.S.</u> | <u>Germany</u> | <u>Ireland</u> | <u>Gt. Brit.</u> | <u>Canada</u> | <u>Other</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|------|-------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1880 | 45.7% | 21.8% | 7.6% | 7.1% | 12.5% | 5.4% | 39,245 |
| 1890 | 46.4% | 23.1% | 4.8% | 6.9% | 12.1% | 6.8% | 79,156 |

Sources: Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876.

Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 664-5.

TABLE 18

CLASS COMPOSITION OF DETROIT WORKFORCE BY NATIONALITY: 1890 (Percent)

| <u>Class</u> | <u>Native white native parents</u> | <u>Native white foreign parents</u> | <u>Colored^a</u> | <u>German</u> | <u>Irish</u> | <u>Canadian</u> | <u>British</u> | <u>Other immi- grants^b</u> |
|---------------------------|--|---|----------------------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|----------------|---|
| Business and entrepreneur | 15.9 | 7.9 | 1.8 | 9.0 | 10.2 | 8.0 | 11.6 | 4.4 |
| Professional | 7.0 | 2.9 | 1.6 | 0.8 | 1.6 | 3.3 | 2.9 | 1.3 |
| White collar wage earners | 29.7 | 20.7 | 2.7 | 3.9 | 9.2 | 17.0 | 15.3 | 3.2 |
| Working class | 47.4 | 68.5 | 93.9 | 86.2 | 79.1 | 71.7 | 70.1 | 91.1 |
| N | 11,721 | 19,748 | 1,529 | 16,474 | 3,464 | 7,769 | 4,750 | 4,909 |

^a Persons of negro descent, Chinese, Japanese, and civilized Indians.

^b Primarily southern and eastern Europeans.

Source: Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 664-5.

TABLE 19

LENGTH OF TIME EMPLOYED IN CURRENT OCCUPATION
BY NATIONALITY: 1884^a (Percent)

| | <u>U.S.</u> | <u>German & Prussian</u> | <u>Canadian</u> | <u>English</u> | <u>Irish</u> |
|------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| 2 years or less | 30.4 | 27.2 | 21.0 | 21.5 | 21.0 |
| 3-5 years | 24.6 | 18.2 | 20.5 | 16.4 | 17.6 |
| 6-10 years | 14.6 | 12.0 | 11.6 | 8.2 | 9.2 |
| 10 years or less | 69.6 | 57.4 | 53.1 | 46.1 | 47.8 |
| 10-20 years | 21.6 | 23.5 | 27.6 | 27.8 | 26.6 |
| Over 20 years | 8.9 | 19.1 | 19.4 | 26.2 | 25.6 |
| N | 2,342 | 1,587 | 733 | 317 | 391 |

^a Males only

Source: SBLS Annual Report, 1884, pp. 112, 129.

TABLE 20

BLACK POPULATION OF DETROIT: 1860-1900

| | <u>Number</u> | <u>Percent of total population</u> |
|------|---------------|--|
| 1860 | 1,402 | 3.1 |
| 1870 | 2,235 | 2.8 |
| 1880 | 2,821 | 2.4 |
| 1890 | 3,431 | 1.7 |
| 1900 | 4,111 | 1.4 |

Source: Katzman, David, Before the Ghetto
(Urbana: University of Illinois
Press, 1973), p. 62.

TABLE 21

NATIONAL UNION MEMBERSHIP, 1886-1933¹

| | |
|------|--------------------------------------|
| 1886 | 1,000,000- 1,300,000 ² |
| 1888 | 550,000 |
| 1893 | 450,000 |
| 1896 | 400,000 |
| 1897 | 447,000 |
| 1900 | 868,000 |
| 1903 | 1,824,000 |
| 1905 | 2,022,000 |
| 1910 | 2,140,000 |
| 1914 | 2,687,000 |
| 1918 | 3,467,000 |
| 1920 | 5,048,000 |
| 1923 | 3,622,000 |
| 1929 | 3,461,000 |
| 1933 | 3,048,000 |

Sources:

1886: Leo Wolman, The Growth of American Trade Unions (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1924), pp. 21, 31. Commons, et al., History of Labor in the United States (New York: MacMillan, 1918), p. 396.
 George E. McNeil, The Labor Movement: The Problem of Today (New York: M. W. Hazen Co., 1891), Chapters 12-14.
 1888-1896: Wolman, McNeil. Knights of Labor General Assembly Proceedings.
 1897-1933: Historical Statistics of the United States (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960), pp. 97-98, D. 736.

1. Includes Canadian members of U.S. organizations. In 1930, Canadian members comprised 6.4% of the total.

2. There are no statistics for years prior to 1897 which are accepted as reliable. Wolman estimated peak 1880's membership at one million (erroneously placing the peak in 1887 rather than 1886), but his treatment tends to follow that of the Wisconsin School, minimizing the extent of organization prior to the AFL. Attempts to reconstruct an 1886 total from contemporary sources are difficult and subject to scholarly disagreement. The generally

TABLE 21 (cont'd.)

quoted figure for the Knights, slightly over 700,000, is probably on the right order of magnitude. Commons notes that unionists claimed 600,000 trade union members in 1886 but dismisses the figure with little explanation. Part of the basis for skepticism is a 1912 AFL publication which revised earlier AFL membership claims for the 1880's and 1890's downward by about one half. Union officials had reasons to exaggerate membership in 1886 because of the rivalry of the Knights, but they also had reason to minimize earlier membership in 1912 in order to demonstrate long term progress. Part of the problem may rest in the definitions of membership. Membership in good standing could often be quite different from the number of people who acknowledged allegiance to the union. McNeil's description of various unions, based on data supplied by union leaders, suggests that 1886 union claims may not have been as inflated as Wolman and Commons assumed. There is no reliable method of determining the proportion of dual members. Thus, the total of KL membership and claimed union membership would be a maximum possible figure (1.3 million), while Wolman's estimate (essentially the same as Commons') should be treated as a minimum--probably the correct figure would fall somewhere in between. For 1888-1896, totals are based on totals of the following: KL, AFL, the railroad brotherhoods and the bricklayers (independent of the AFL). Some unaffiliated local unions are thus omitted. Knights of Labor membership is computed from percapita tax figures in GA Proceedings. The widely accepted figures presented in Commons are unsubstantiated and unreliable.

FIGURE 2
UNION MEMBERSHIP IN DETROIT: 1880-1903

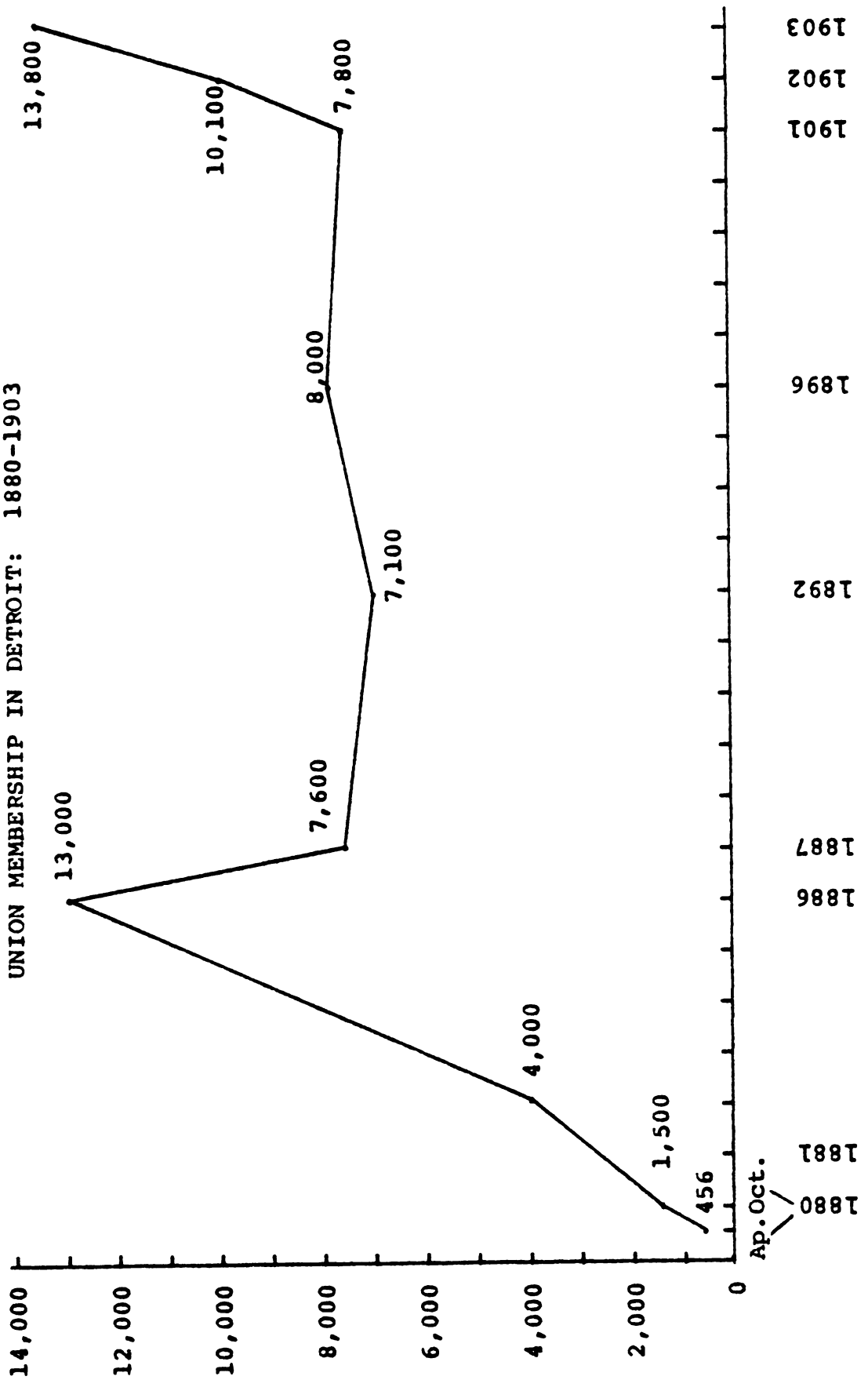
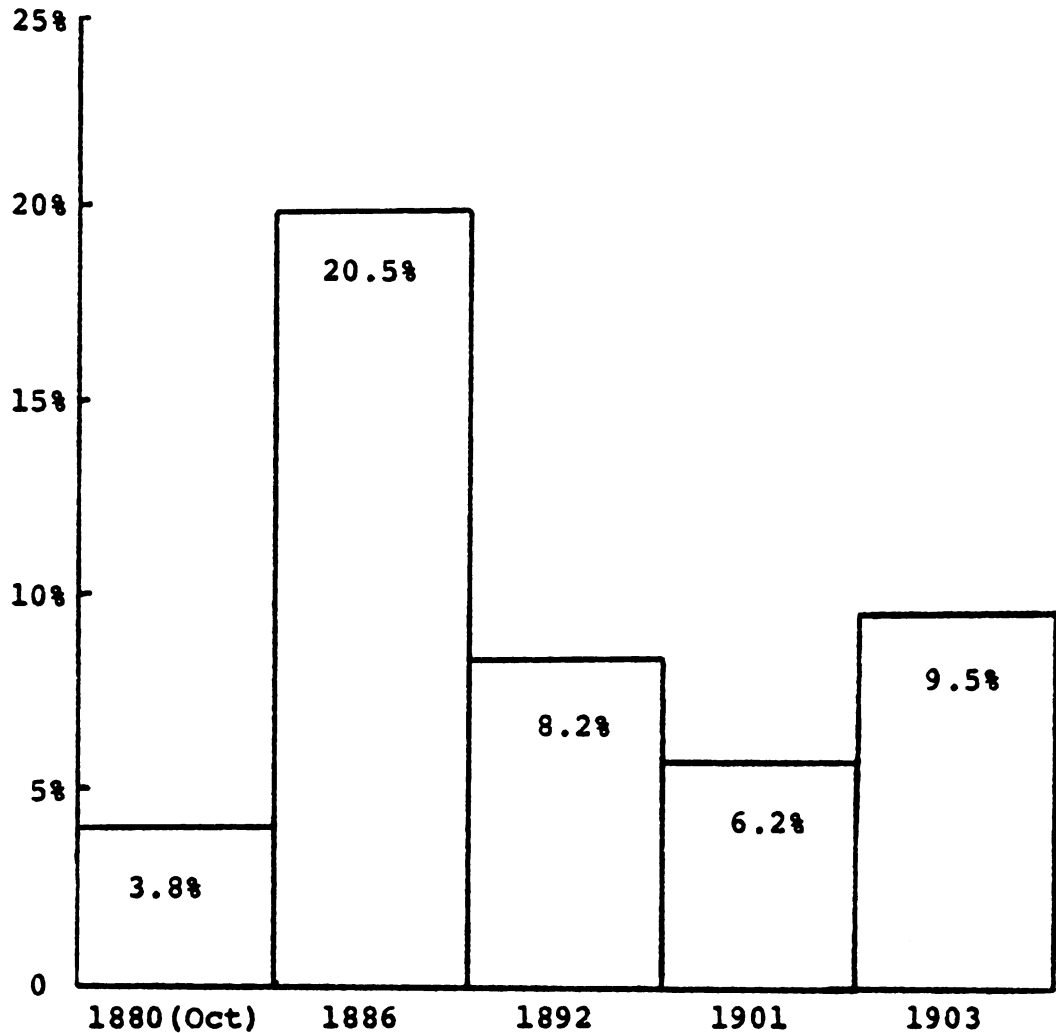


FIGURE 2 (cont'd.)

Sources: Detroit Trades Council File, LC. Detroit Evening News, September 3, 1886; September 5, 1886. Detroit Post and Tribune, October 17, 1880. Labor Day Review, 1892. Detroit Times, April 10, 1881. KLDB. KLGA, 1888. SBS, 1896, p. 245; 1903, p. 334; 1904, p. 168.

Note: Totals for 1886 and 1887 are combined totals of Knights of Labor and trade unions. They may include a small number of dual members thus counted twice. The 1886 figure is a newspaper estimate, substantiated by contemporary Knights of Labor officials, but not verifiable by more objective sources. It is consistent with other data on levels of participation such as the size of the 1886 Labor Day demonstration, but using the July, 1886, per capita tax figures on DA 50 would yield a total about 3,000 lower. Local Knights of Labor officials based the higher figure on further growth after July 1, 1886.

FIGURE 3
UNION MEMBERSHIP AS PERCENTAGE OF WORKFORCE
DETROIT, 1880-1903

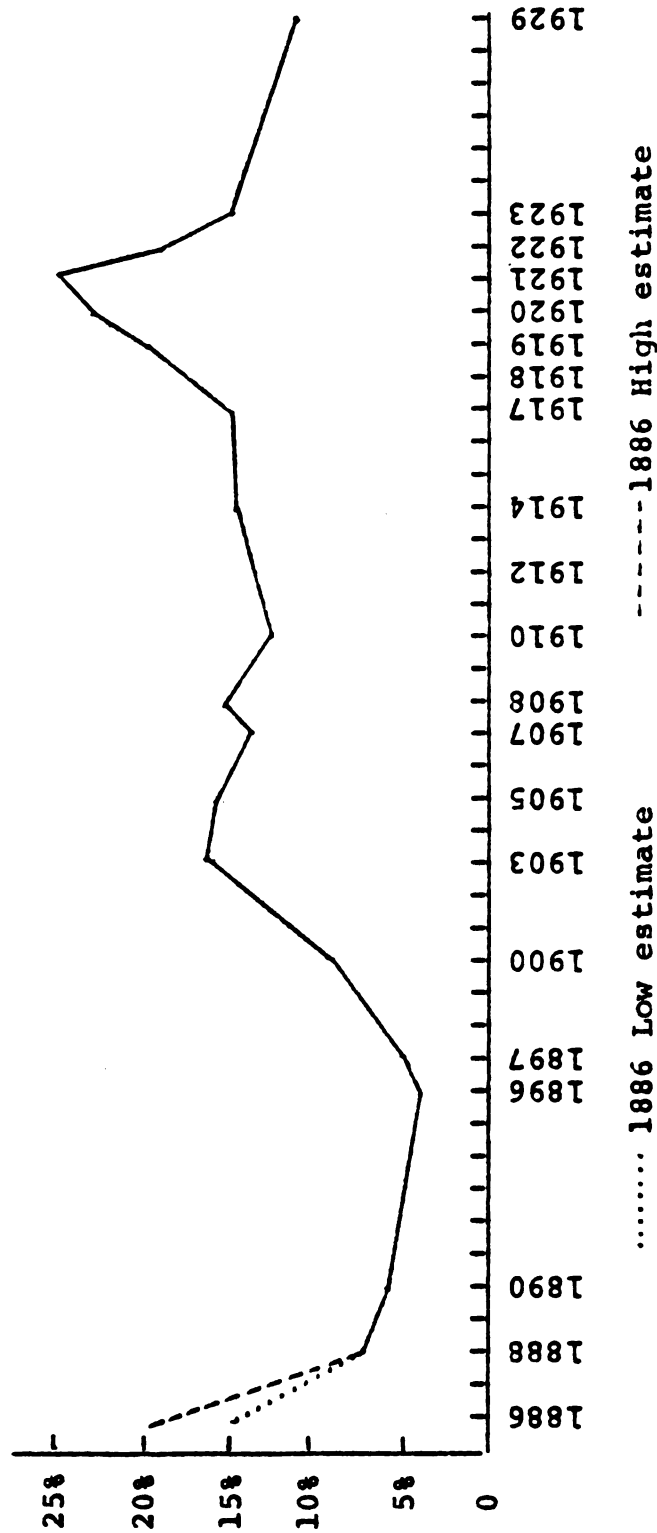


Sources: Union membership: Figure 2.
Workforce: Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. 1, p. 876;
Eleventh Census, 1890, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 664;
Twelfth Census, 1900, Abstract, p. 124; Thir-
teenth Census, 1910, Vol. 4, p. 166.

Note: The size of the workforce was estimated by extra-
polation from census figures.

FIGURE 4

PERCENTAGE OF UNIONIZATION OF NON-AGRICULTURAL WAGE EARNERS, 1886-1929¹



Sources: Union Membership: Table 21.

Workforce: 2, 3 1886-1899: Historical Statistics of the United States (Washington D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960), "Gainful Workers: 1820-1940," total of columns D 60, 61, 62, 63: mining, manufacturing, construction, transportation, and utilities, p. 74.

1900-1929: Stanley Lebergott, Manpower in Economic Growth (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 513, non-farm employees.

FIGURE 4 (cont'd.)

1. Union membership totals include Canadian totals. Thus percentages presented here will all be a point or two too high, but should be comparable over time.

2. Excludes domestic servants.

3. Size of workforce before 1900 determined by extrapolation from census years. Definitions of gainful workers used before 1900 and non-farm employees after 1900 are different but results should be roughly comparable. Using the first method, the workforce in 1900 would be 10,860 while Lebergott estimates 10,086.

APPENDIX 2

| Assembly No. | Location | Assembly Name | First date ¹ | Last date ² | Occupation(s) ³ | Membership '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 | Later (year in parenthesis) | Other Information |
|--------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 509 | Detroit | Staff of Life | 1888 | 1859 | bread bakers | | | |
| 619 | Detroit | Garland | 1889 (87) | 1891 | molders | | | |
| 901 | Detroit | Pioneer | 1878 | 1891 | mixed | 39 24 23 | 97 108 81 40 | Michigan Stove Co. Employees |
| 1752 | Detroit | | 1888 | 1898 | cooks | | | 249 (1899) |
| 1733 | Detroit | Peninsular | 1882 | 1890 | shoemakers | | | 56 (1888) |
| 1767 | Detroit | Trunkmakers | 1882 | 1890 | trunkmakers | | | |
| 1820 | Detroit | Friendship | 1882 | 1839 | carriage painters painters | | | |
| 1832 | Detroit | City of the Straights | 1882 | 1890 | bootmakers | | | |
| 1847 | Detroit | | 1882 | 1885 | forgemen | | | |
| 1850 | Detroit | | 1882 | 1884 | tailors | | | |
| 2124 | Springwells- Detroit | Shipcarpenters and Caulkers | 1882 | 1890 | shipcarpenters and caulkers | | | |
| 2221 | Detroit | | 1882 | 1884 | telegraphers | | | |
| 2258 | Detroit | | 1882 | 1833 | plasterers | | | |
| 2312 | Detroit | | 1882 | 1891 | brass molders and finishers | | | |
| 2348 | Detroit | Detroit | 1882 | 1891 | mixed | | | |
| 2420 | Detroit | | 1883 | 1884 | mixed | | | |
| 2531 | Detroit | | 1883 | 1885 | shoemakers- mixed | | | |
| 2697 | Detroit | Henry George | 1883 | 1891 | mixed | | | |
| 2745 | Detroit | Unity | 1883 | 1890 | coopers | | | |
| 2834 | Detroit | | 1883 | 1885 | shoes; uppers and stock cutters | | | |
| 3102 | Detroit | Florence | 1884 | 1892 | mixed | | | |
| 3212 | Detroit | Nightingale | 1884 | 1885 | horse collar makers | | | |
| 3954 | Detroit | John Devil In | 1885 | 1890 | iron molders | | | |
| 4293 | Detroit | Wendell Phil- lips | 1885 | 1889 | mixed | | | |
| 4568 | Livonia Center | | 1885 | | mixed | | | |
| 4620 | Detroit | Boilermakers | 1885 | 1890 | boiler makers | | | |
| 5357 | Hankin | | 1886 | | mixed | | | |
| 5355 | Plymouth | | 1886 | 1889 | mixed | | | |
| 5925 | Redford | | 1886 | | mixed | | | |
| 6056 | Wyandotte | Eureka | 1886 | 1833 | mixed-many iron workers | | | |
| 6147 | Northville | | 1886 | 1889 | mixed | | | |
| 6122 | Detroit | Carriage Workers | 1886 | 1838 | carriage makers | | | |
| 6232 | Delray | U.S. Stephens | 1886 | 1891 | mixed | | | |
| 6248 | Detroit | Weyne | 1886 | 1837 | mixed | | | |
| 6237 | Detroit | True Workers | 1886 | 1889 | cracker bakers | | | |
| 6369 | Detroit | Protective | 1886 | 1889 | teamsters | | | |
| 6381 | Trenton | Monguagon | 1886 | 1892 | mixed-mostly shipcarpenters | | | |
| 6440 | Detroit | Wolverine | 1886 | 1887 | custom shoe- makers and leather workers | | | |
| 6796 | Detroit | La Salle | 1886 | 1887 | mixed | | | |

Became Local No. 2, Brotherhood of
Brassworkers, 1830

West side mixed assembly

German assembly

Organized producers' cooperative

Woman's assembly---cont. as F.N.
Assoc. in Trades CouncilPrimarily car shop molders---nearly
1000 members according to 1859
clipping, LC

13 (1886); 35 (1888) includes woman

23 (1886); 142 (1888) includes woman

German assembly
Possibly German

Possibly German

| | | | | | | |
|-------|---------|----------------------------|------|------|--------------------------------|--|
| 6258 | Detroit | H. A. Robinson | 1886 | 1890 | public carriers | |
| 6259 | Detroit | Upholsterers | 1886 | 1890 | upholsterers | Became Upholsterers Union No. 31 German |
| 6263 | Detroit | Harmony | 1886 | 1887 | mixed | |
| 7057 | Detroit | Karl Mark | 1886 | 1887 | mixed | |
| 7149 | Detroit | Wire Weavers | 1886 | 1890 | wire weavers | German |
| 7151 | Detroit | Brethren | 1886 | 1887 | tailors | |
| 7339 | Detroit | Maple Leaf | 1886 | 1889 | wood working machine hands | 126 (1886) |
| 7435 | Detroit | Victory | 1886 | 1890 | barbers | |
| 7465 | Detroit | Liberty | 1886 | 1889 | shoe operatives | Women's assembly German |
| 7529 | Detroit | German Printers | 1886 | 1890 | printers | |
| 7536 | Detroit | Powderly | 1886 | 1890 | pattern makers | |
| 7701 | Detroit | Michigan | 1886 | 1891 | mixed | |
| 7743 | Detroit | Book Binders and Rulers | 1886 | 1891 | book binders and rulers | Formed Bookbinders' Union No. 20 |
| 7749 | Detroit | Wayne | 1886 | 1890 | railroad car workers | |
| 7750 | Detroit | Peter Cooper | 1886 | 1890 | machinists and blacksmiths | |
| 7760 | Detroit | Tanners | 1886 | 1890 | tanners | Includes women Includes women |
| 7732 | Detroit | Andrew Forbes | 1886 | 1890 | tobacco workers | |
| 8022 | Detroit | Victor Hugo | 1886 | 1890 | candy makers | |
| 8026 | Detroit | Thomas Paine | 1886 | 1892 | clgarmakers | |
| 8104 | Detroit | Purity | 1886 | 1888 | mixed (probably carworkers) | Probably the same assembly as above-- listed in city directories as above-- in 1887; 8108 in 1889-90. ⁴ |
| 8108 | Detroit | Purity | 1889 | 1890 | carworkers | German, includes women (7) ⁴ |
| 8148 | Detroit | Rising Sun | 1886 | 1890 | file cutters | |
| 8168 | Detroit | Schiller | 1886 | 1888 | cabinetmakers | |
| 8375 | Detroit | P. J. Clair | 1886 | 1887 | mixed | |
| 8775 | Detroit | George Washington | 1886 | 1890 | street car employees | 25 ('96); 317 (1888) |
| 8879 | Detroit | Thomas Jefferson | 1886 | 1891 | metal polishers | Probably a misprint for 8956 |
| 8950 | Detroit | Unity | 1886 | 1889 | shoe lasters | |
| 8956 | Detroit | Equity | 1886 | 1889 | shoe cutters | |
| 9228 | Detroit | Robert Fulton | 1886 | 1889 | engineers | |
| 9263 | Detroit | Energetic | 1886 | 1891 | long shoremun | Includes black males |
| 10413 | Ecorse | | 1886 | 1889 | mixed | Includes 20 women, 1889, has Kl. store |
| 10619 | Detroit | Musicians | 1887 | 1889 | musicians | Musicians' union joined Kl, 1888 |

Notes:

1. First date assembly is mentioned in sources or date of organization surmised from assembly number.
2. Last date assembly is mentioned. In some cases, this is a city directory listing which may have been several months out of date when it appeared.
3. Some assemblies officially classified as mixed were primarily a single occupation, or a variety of occupations but in a single factory or industry (7749, for example.)
4. Described as a women's assembly in Garlock and Bullder--no verification in local sources, and secretary was male.

Sources:

Based on Garlock and Bullder, Knights of Labor Data Bank, data supplied by Inter-University Consortium on Political Research, with additions and corrections by author.

APPENDIX 3

DETROIT LABOR LEADERS OF THE 1880's*

Charles Bell: b. Moline, Ill., 1852 (3?); printer; member ITU; charter member KL LA 901; Pres. ITU local 18; member IWPA; DA 50 R.S.; editor Labor Leaf, 1884-5; left Detroit 1885.

Lyman Brant: b. 1848, Pa; printer; went to Detroit, '68; Pres. ITU local 18, Int. Del; C.S. ITU; Chmn. 1881 convention which est. Fed. of Trade and Labor Unions (later AFL); ILP cand., st. leg., 1882, elected; re-elected, 1884; Pres. TC.

J. F. Bray: b. 1809, U.S.; went to England, 1822; printer; wrote labor and Chartist tracts in England; returned to U.S., 1842; alternated between farming and printing in Detroit and Pontiac, 1840's and 1850's; ran photo. gallery; retired to farm near Pontiac, 1866; socialist; one of the most frequent editorial columnists to state and national labor periodicals, 1870's and 1880's; frequent speaker at labor meetings and demonstrations in E. Mich.

J. R. Burton: printer; publisher and editor, Labor Leaf, 1885-87; single taxer; published Onward, 1888-90; critic of Powderly; R.S. LA 901, 1891; went west, c. 1912-21, participant in utopian communes, seances, spiritualism.

John Devlin: b. Pa., 1846; grocery store owner - failed; painter; came to Detroit in 1879; helped org. KL painters' A.; elected st. leg., 1882 as Labor-Dem.; State MW KL 1885; appointed U.S. Consul at Windsor, 1885; Treas. DA 50, 1887; KL GEB, 1882-1892; active in KL until late 1890's; active in People's Party, 1890's.

A. M. Dewey: b. N.Y., 1857; printer; Pres. ITU local 18; Pres. TC; M.W. LA 901; W.F. DA 50, 1885, Chmn. DA 50 Exec. Bd.; St. Lecturer, KL, 1887; created expanded version of Knights' national paper, 1887. Active prohibitionist; leading defender of Powderly.

Thomas Dolan: b. England; cigarmaker; member Liverpool Cigarmakers U.; organized and Pres. Cincinnati Cigm. U., 1860; org. Det. Cigm. U., 1863; R.S. Detroit Trades Assn., 1864; del. to Baltimore Labor Congress, 1866; V.P. Int. Cig. U.; various offices Det. Cigm. U. joined SLP c. 1877; active National Labor Union, 1860's; SLP cand. City Clerk, 1877; charter member KL 901, 1878;

DA 50 del.; MW LA 901; opposition cand. DA 50 M.W., 1888; still active in Cgm. U. and TC after 1900.

Frank Ellis: b. Tenn.; printer; Pres. and V.P. ITU local 18; TC Pres., 1886; early member KL but withdrew; Chmn. campaign comm., ILP, 1886; ILP st. leg. cand., 1886; described as conservative.

Andrew Forbes: org. and Pres., Detroit Seamen's U.; DA 50 Exec. B., 1885-7; KL St. W.F., 1886; Chmn. ILP, 1886; R.S. DA 50, 1887; died 1887.

George W. Duncan: b. N.Y., 1857; printer; came to Detroit, 1879; joined KL, 1881; C.S. ITU local 18, 1886; F.S. KL LA 901, 1885; S. ILP, 1886; Sec.-Treas., MFL, 1889-90; TC Pres., 1891; Pres., ITU local 18, 1892.

J. F. Duncan: salesman; DA del., ILP del. LA 2697, 1886; DA 50 Statistician, 1887; F.S. DA 50, 1887; frequent contributor to Labor Leaf; critic of Powderly and Administration faction, DA; single taxer.

Francis Egan: b. Newfoundland, 1846; printer; came to Detroit, 1877; active Republican; Treas. ITU; Pres. TC, 1880-81; DA 50 MW, 1882-3; Grand Statistician (national), KL, 1882-4; elected, st. leg., 1884; appointed Dep. Comm. of Labor, 1885.

Charles Erb: b. 1850, Detroit; cigarmaker; joined Cigm. U., 1869; held every local office in Cigm. U., incl. Pres. and International Del; SLP member; charter member, KL LA 901; withdrew from KL to devote full time to socialism; SLP cand. for various local offices; ILP st. leg. cand. 1884; Pres., TC, 1886; organizer for TC, 1892; TC del. to AFL, 1892; joined Soc. Party after 1900; d. 1920.

Sam Goldwater: b. Poland, 1849(50?); Jewish; came to U.S., 1859; cigarmaker; tramped, 1865-69; joined socialist movement, 1875; helped org. Chicago Trades Assembly; unsuccessful cand., SLP local offices; failed in several small businesses; left Chicago, 1886, after Haymarket because of fear of arrest, came to Detroit; member, KL LA 8086; leader of Workingmen's Ticket, split from ILP, 1886; Pres., TC, 1888; leading opponent of KL, late 1880's; Pres., Cigm. U.; org. MFL; V.P. Int. Cigm. U.; Twelfth Ward Alderman, 1894; unsuccessful Dem. cand. for Mayor, 1895; d. 1898.

Judson Grenell: b. N.Y., 1847; Baptist; printer; joined ITU, 1868; came to Detroit, 1876; joined SLP,

c. 1877; charter member, KL LA 901; member Nat. Exec. B., SLP, 1880; Pres., Sec., TC; R.S., DA 50, 1886; M.W. LA 2697; founder and frequent contributor to Detroit labor newspapers; ILP st. leg. cand., 1884; appointed State Deputy Oil Inspector, 1885; org. 1886 Labor Day demonstration; elected st. leg., ILP-Rep., 1886; editor of Labor Leaf, 1888; editorial writer and labor editor, Detroit News; editor for Boyce's Weekly and Ann Arbor newspapers; retired to Fla., c. 1925; still corresponding with Labadie early 1930's.

John Haire: b. Ireland, 1847; came to U.S., 1863; hatter; joined KL, 1883; DA 50 Exec. Bd., 1887; Chmn., DA 50 Exec. Bd., 1888; DA 50 M.W., 1889; City Sidewalk Inspector, Asst. City Assessor.

Gustav Herzig: b. Leipzig, Germany, 1845; cigarmaker; tramped in Germany; active in German socialist movement; disciple of LaSalle; came to Detroit, 1874 with Kummerfeldt; org. Socialist Club; active in Cigm. U.; frequent public speaker; SLP Nat. Exec. Comm., 1880; ran small cigar factory with Kummerfeldt; one of leaders of May, 1886, eight hour movement; leader of Workingmen's Ticket split; opposes KL, 1887.

Henry Kummerfeldt: b. Hamburg, Germany; cigarmaker; org. with Herzig first socialist club in Detroit; org. for SLP and Cigm. U.; partner with Herzig in small cigar factory; frequent public speaker, esp. at German labor meetings.

Joseph Labadie: b. 1850, Paw Paw, Mich.; joined ITU, 1868; came to Detroit, 1872; founder, KL in Detroit, 1878; Workingmen's Mayoral cand., 1879; org. Trades Council, 1880; Pres., TC, 1880; Nat. Exec. Comm., SLP, 1880; R.S. DA 50; labor journalist, 1878-88; leader of anti-Powderly faction among Detroit Knights; prominent in Provisional Committee, 1887-88; helped org. MFL; Pres., MFL, 1889-90; d. 1933.

J. D. Long: b. Ireland, 1850(49?); shoemaker; Pres. West Boylston, Mass., lodge of Knights of St. Crispin; came to Detroit, 1878; org. Bootmakers' U., Pres.; M.W. DA 50, 1884-88; ILP st. leg. cand., 1882; elected, 1884; St. Treas., KL, 1885; active Democrat; City Assessor, 1886.

Hugh McClelland: cigarmaker; charter member, KL LA 901; elected st. leg., ILP-Rep., 1884; critic of cigarmakers expulsion order, 1887; DA 50 Exec. Bd., 1888.

Captain J. M. McGregor: active in ILP and KL starting ca. 1884; frequent public speaker; opposes national banks, favors eight hours; Exec. Bd., DA 50, 1886; editor, Labor Leaf, 1887; sailor and ship captain; black listed by ship owners for KL activities; active in Mich. People's Party, 1890's; Populist Cong. cand. 1894; went to Klondyke.

Robert Ogg: b. Canada, 1860; printer; came to Detroit, 1878; Pres. ITU, local 18, 1885; TC Pres.; M.W. LA 901, 1885; elected ILP, st. leg., 1886; re-elected in late 1890's; close friend to Grenell; still active after 1900.

Bernard O'Reilly: b. Ireland, 1832; came to U.S., 1848; Great Lakes sailor for ten years, became shipcarpenter; settled in Detroit, 1855; helped org. and Sec. of KL Shipcarpenters' LA; active in Dem. politics; a "ring" alderman, and criticized for alleged corruption by labor leaders; elected St. Sen., ILP-Dem., 1886; TC refused to endorse him, 1888; DA 50 Exec. Bd., 1888.

Henry Robinson: b. New Brunswick, 1842; high school graduate; came to Detroit, 1865; carpenter; started own contracting firm; active in Greenback Party, 1870's; clerk to Mayor Thompson, 1880; elected Justice of Peace, ILP, 1884; prominent labor orator; DA 50 Exec. Bd., 1886-7; ILP Cong. cand. 1886; ULP Mayor cand., 1887; St. Comm. of Labor, 1892-3.

Henry Schulte: b. Mich., 1851; cigarmaker; C.S., Cigm. U., 1880, later V.P. and Pres.; R.S., F.S., and Pres., TC; joined KL, 1881; org. LA 2348; org. Cigm. Progressive U., C.S.; DA 50 R.S., 1884-6; leader of local branch of Int. Workingmen's Assn.; Chmn., DA 50 Exec. Bd., 1886; Sec., Central Labor U., 1886.

E. W. Simpson: b. England; Pres., Carpenters' U., 1877; SLP Mayor cand., 1877; elected Alderman, SLP, 1880; M.W. LA 901, 1880; TC Pres.; City Building Inspector, most of 1880's; DA 50 R.S., 1890-1.

John Strigel: b. 1850, Germany; came to U.S., 1852; shoemaker; came to Detroit, 1874; Treas. of Detroit Labor League, late 1870's; charter member, KL LA 901; helped org. LA 1733; DA W.F.; DA 50 Exec. Bd., 1884-8; Chmn., 1887; Chmn., KL St. Exec. Bd., 1886; Pres., TC; Deputy Sheriff, 1885-6; Exec. Bd. KL National Shoe and Leather Workers; V.P. TC, 1891; active in TC after 1900.

Richard Trevellick: b. 1830, England; came to U.S., 1835; shipcarpenter; joined union, 1850; travelled and tramped around U.S., sailed Pacific into Orient; union president in Australia and New Zealand; president of New Orleans shipcarpenters' union; Pres., Detroit Shipcarpenters' Union, 1863; Pres., Det. Trades Assembly, 1864; Pres., Int. Shipcarpenters' Union, 1864; Pres., National Labor Union, 1869; leader of national eight hour leagues, 1860's; active in national Greenback Party, 1870's; KL national lecturer and organizer, 1870's-'90's; d. 1895.

A. W. Vicars: came to Detroit in 1886; led cracker bakers in successful eight hour strike, 1886; Exec. Bd. DA 50, 1887; DA 50 M.W., 1888; leader Cracker Bakers National Trade District, 1888; fired from job for KL activities, 1888.

George W. Walthew: b. Canada, 1860; came to Detroit, 1862; scenic artist; joined KL, 1882; lawyer; represented labor activists in their problems; elected ILP st. leg. cand., 1884; St. Sec., KL, 1885; defeated st. leg., 1886.

***Abbreviations:**

ITU: International Typographical Union
 KL: Knights of Labor
 LA: Local Assembly
 IWPA: International Working People's Association
 DA: District Assembly
 R.S.: Recording Secretary
 C.S.: Corresponding Secretary
 ILP: Independent Labor Party
 TC: Trades Council
 M.W.: Master Workman
 W.F.: Worthy Foreman
 GEB: General Executive Board
 SLP: Socialist Labor Party
 F.S.: Financial Secretary
 MFL: Michigan Federation of Labor

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