Richard Jules Oestreicher — *Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1875-1900.* Urbana and Chicago: Univetsity of Illinois Press, 1986. Pp. xix, 263.

This well-crafted and thoroughly researched book is an important addition both to the large body of North American labor community studies and to the rapidly growing number of works on the Knights of Labor. Like other recent books, most notably Leon Fink's *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urjana, IL, 1983) and *Dreaming of What Might Be? The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1800-1900* (Cambridge, 1982); by Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Solidarity and Fragmentation* demonstrates that far from the "middle-class" organization of earlier accounts, the Knights represented both an outpouring of working-class resentment at the inequities of industrial capitalism and a mutualistic alternative to the middle-class ideology of possessive individualism. .

Yet as the reference to "fragmentation" in the title indicates, this book is not a celebration of working-class struggle and resistance. In fact, Oestreicher begins by showing that although late nineteenth-century industrialization in Detroit resulted in a widening of the gulf between the social classes, various groups *within* the working class continued to experience vastly different working and living conditions. Even more striking were differences in the ways Detroit's working people *interpreted* their experiences: skill level, ethnicity, religion and political traditions, all affected the way workers looked at the social world. Native white artisans viewing society through the prism of the republican tradition, for example, shared few values in common with socialist or anti-clerical German immigrants or Catholic laborers from Ireland or Poland.

After developing this picture of economic and cultural fragmentation, however, Oestreicher describes the building of what he calls a "working-class subculture of opposition" that, to some extent, overcame divisions within the working class. Beginning in the late 1870s, a small group of Detroit's workers struggled to build a labor movement "based on values of solidarity and opposition to the existing industrial system" (103). Though the movement remained small through 1885, a network of interrelated institutions revolving primarily around the Knights of Labor gradually emerged. According to Oestreicher, these institutions "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" (103).

In what Oestreicher calls "a summer of possibilities" in 1886, this small subculture suddenly became a mass movement. Strikes rocked Detroit, thousands of workers rushed headlong into the Knights of Labor, and for the first time in their history, Detroit's middle and upper classes were forced to come to terms with a working-class presence. This fleeting moment of class polarization soon passed, however, and in discussing the conflicts that overtook the labor movement after 1886, Oestreicher makes his most important contribution. He decisively refutes earlier interpretations of the Knights' decline that emphasized workers' rejection of reformism in favor of pure-and-simple unionism. Closely examining conflict around three issues — politics, trade unionism and the Haymarket incident —, Oestreicher shows the existence of shifting alliances among four occupational/cultural groups: craft conservatives, German socialists, independent radicals and artisan reformers. Though differences among these groups had been present since the 1870s, they now began to have a disastrous effect on the labor movement. Internal conflict thus reflected the

continuing salience of the diverse working-class experiences and traditions that Oestreicher had discussed at the outset. For all its power, the summer of possibilities had never overcome these.

In a final chapter, Oestreicher examines the legacy of the Knights, arguing that although some oppositional values entered the larger working-class culture in Detroit, except for the small minority of active trade unionists, "these values were not sustained by a reinforcing network of associations transcending neighborhood and workplace" (222). Here, the author might have shown a bit more caution in generalizing from his evidence, for by the early twentieth century, Detroit had one of the weakest labor movements in America. Nevertheless, his general point about the importance of *institutions* in the making of class consciousness is an essential one given the anti-institutional flavor of much of the "new labor history". Neither "class" nor "ethnic" consciousness, Oestreicher argues, simply float in space, nor are they "abstract proposition to which people can indicate their agreement or disagreement as if they were participating in an opinion survey" (252). Rather, consciousness is embodied in institutions — trade unions, Knights assemblies, ethnic organizations — which must be studied if oppositional subcultures are to be understood. Oestreicher's systematic attention to local labor activists — Detroit's "militant minority", to use David Montgomery's term — is related to this ojective.

His focus on institutions and activists leads Oestreicher to reject the view of Craig Calhoun and others that anti-capitalist working-class struggles are usually conservative efforts to defend tradition against modernity. "The people who marched and struck in 1886 were demanding a different version of modernity as much as they were protesting violations of customary rights", Oestreicher notes. "The sense of solidarity that moved them was based on recently learned ideas as well as traditional habits" (252).

Unfortunately, however, Oestreicher does not provide a thorough analysis of these ideas and, in general, neglects the whole area of working-class intellectual history. For example, to equate a belief in producer co-operation or the view that "labor must have all its products" with socialism, as Oestreicher seems to do, is to paint working-class thought in overly broad strokes (92, 105). The ideas that led the Knights to include non-workers in their ranks are not well explained, nor are — at the opposite end of the spectrum — the ideas of Detroit's numerous working-class anarchists. It may be true, as he notes, that "many labor leaders really had no formal ideology in the sense of a carefully formulated philosophy that was internally consistent" (132), but this should not preclude an analysis of the body of ideas available to such individuals. The problem, of course, is not Oestreicher's alone. It simply demonstrates the neglect of ideas and intellectual history characteristic of much of the labor history.

The book is effective in highlighting the role of German immigrants in Detroit. Though the German contribution to labor radicalism has long been noted, only recently have historians like Oestreicher looked closely at the complex German-American relationship to the mainstream labor movement. Oestreicher's treatment of the Irish, however, is much thinner. This is unfortunate given their importance in the Knights of Labor. A similar point can be made about Detroit's working-class women, whose participation in the Knights, though noted, goes largely unexplored.

None of these criticisms should take away from the value of Oestreicher's book. This is a fine and persuasive analysis that throws much new light on the working-class

movement of the 1880s. Taken with other new research, it will begin to reshape our understanding of this key moment in North American history.

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Hilton L. Root — *Peasants and King in Burgundy: Agrarian Foundations of French Absolutism.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987. Pp. xi, 277.

Based on extensive research in the Archives Départementales at Dijon, Hilton Root's study of the relationship between eighteenth-century villages in northeastern Burgundy and the state challenges standard interpretations concerning the impact of royal centralization on rural France during the Old Regime. De Tocqueville postulated that early modern state formation was accomplished at the expense of the seigneur and traditional communal institutions. The village assembly, for example, was rendered powerless in the eighteenth century. Subsequent historians included capitalism in their discussion of the peasant-state relationship. Their agent of modernization, the French state, collaborated with capitalists by attacking the precapitalist organization and communal traditions of the village, provoking peasant protests that culminated in revolution. Root suggests a very different view of the Old Regime:

> The documents from Burgundian villages do not support the theory that precapitalist villages were destroyed by the forces of state building and capitalism. In Burgundy, the corporate structure of the village was more developed in the eighteenth century than it had ever been. Loyal administrators had promoted collective ownership of property and collective responsibility for debts in order to extract goods and services from the peasantry. As a result of this state policy, the corporate village became a vital component of the centralized state structure (10).

Preservation of communal traditions encouraged by the crown delayed technological advance, but did not shield villages from the market economy. Indeed, maintenance of village institutions and practices increased inequality and social stratification while commercialization of common lands gave villages the wherewithal to test the legality of fuedal dues. Root argues that "the growth of the state gave the peasantry both the capacity to protest and new reasons to do so" (21).

Root presents his case in seven well-documented chapters beginning with a discussion of how Louis XIV assured investors needed to finance an ambitious foreign policy that royal revenue was reliable. To increase fiscal efficiency, Louis turned intendants into permanent royal agents stationed in each *généralité* to supervise tax collection. Since a large part of revenue came from peasant villages, protection of that source involved intendants in communal affairs. Limited resources forced intendants to emphasize collective responsibility and reinforce corporate institutions guaranteeing communal solvency. Because alienation of communal lands reduced village income as well as the royal tax base, the crown acted to recover lands lost and verify communal debts. Thus, Louis became the guardian of communal property. Root concludes that "survival of the village was a result of Louis' policies...to protect his share of what the peasantry produced.... Inadvertently, Louis linked the fate of the