

*The Bonds of Unity: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900**

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There has historically been no moment in the experience of North American labour that weighed so heavily on the collective mind of the working-class movement in the years 1900-30 as that of the Knights of Labor upsurge of the 1880s. Until the resurgence of labour in the 1930s, revealed most dramatically in the rise of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, workers recalled this past and drew upon its many and varied inspirations. Thus, when John L. Lewis consciously strove to create an image of himself as part of a long line of "tough people", "fighters", and class militants he recalled (or fabricated) the story of his father's early involvement in the Knights of Labor in Lucas, Iowa, where Tom Lewis helped lead a bitter strike in 1882, an action supposedly earning him a place on the company's blacklist and exile from the town.¹ Clinton S. Golden, labour intellectual and founder of the United Steel Workers of America, first drank from the fountain of labour solidarity with "Big John" Powderly, brother of the Order's central figure, Terence V. Powderly. "Big John", whom Clint tended drill for at the tender age of twelve, preached the gospel of the Noble and Holy Order long after the Knights had succumbed to employer resistance, the economic crisis of the 1890s, and internal divisions and trade-union opposition. But even in the face of the Knights' ultimate defeat, Powderly's brother remained true to the cause of an all-embracing organization of the American wage earners. He imparted his enthusiasm to his young helper, and Golden recalled of the Knights that:

Their ritualism, the secrecy with which their meetings were conducted, the signs and symbols that gave notice to their members as to when and where meetings were to be held, fired my interest and imagination and in my own mind I resolved that henceforth my lot was cast with that of the wage earners. I began to see class lines and distinctions. I discovered that there were people

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¹ See Saul ALINSKY, *John L. Lewis* (New York: Vintage, 1970), p. 15, and Melvyn DUBOFSKY and Warren VAN TINE, *John L. Lewis: A Biography* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1976), pp. 9-11.

in America besides those who lived their lives upon farms that were largely self-sufficient. People who worked long hours for low wages in hazardous employment, lived in miserable tenements and hovels, whose very life depended on having a job, earning money but rarely more than enough to provide for the bare necessities of life.²

John Peebles, a jeweller-watchmaker in Hamilton in the 1880s, and later mayor of that city in the difficult years 1930-33, remembered his early attachment to the Order, commenting in 1946:

I became a member of the Knights of Labor about sixty years ago, when I was quite a young chap. I thought its programme would revolutionize the world, not only because of its programme which included co-operation and State ownership of all public utilities ... and the purification of Politics and of all law and State Administration which also included the full belief in the honesty and sincerity of all members of the order. In short it was a crusade for purity in life generally.³

Gordon Bishop, active in the organization of steel workers in eastern Ontario, buttressed the assessments of Golden and Peebles, arguing that the ritualistic passwords and secrets of the Order insured large attendance at ordinary meetings, and riveted workers to a cause. Members of the Knights of Labor, he recalled, "did not forget their obligation easily".⁴

These individual statements were supplemented by a more general remembrance of the place and significance of the Knights of Labor. "Never since the palmiest days of the Knights of Labor", declared Toronto's *Citizen and Country* in the midst of the craft union boom of 1898-1904, "have trade unions taken such a firm hold of the toilers as today."⁵ As these turn-of-the-century organizational gains were consolidated, however, some workers could still tar the American Federation of Labor with a brush dipped into the resentments of the 1880s and 1890s. In 1903 a Western Federation of Miners member from Slocan, British Columbia wrote to the *Miners' Magazine*: "Now there are thousands of old-line K of L's in the WFM and the unsavoury acts of the AFL officials have not been altogether forgotten."⁶ Twenty years later many radicals and socialists saw this newly-arrived, and increasingly conservative, international craft unionism in terms even more antagonistic. When the One Big Union in Canada sought a glorious past to contrast with the dismal realities of AFL-TLC trade unionism in the 1920s, it was the fires of the Knights of Labor it chose to rekindle. "One of the great land-marks in the history of class struggle", the Knights were regarded as "a mass organization grouped in Geographical units" that prefigured the industrial unionism of the One Big

² Thomas R. BROOKS, *Clint: A Biography of a Labor Intellectual — Clinton S. Golden* (New York: Atheneum, 1978), pp. 17-18.

³ Hamilton Public Library, Hamilton Collection, "Recollections of John Peebles, mayor of Hamilton, 1930-1933", 7 February 1946.

⁴ Gordon BISHOP, "Recollections of the Amalgamated", unpublished typescript, Gananoque, in possession of authors.

⁵ *Citizen and Country* (Toronto), 4 May 1900.

⁶ Melvyn DUBOFSKY, "The Origins of Western Working Class Radicalism, 1890-1905", in *Workers in the Industrial Revolution: Recent Studies of Labor in the United States and Europe*, eds: Peter N. STEARNS and Daniel J. WALKOWITZ (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1974), p. 383.

Union. The Order, claimed these dissident workers, had been the very same "one big union" that they were trying to build and sustain.⁷ For their part, as David J. Bercuson has noted, the AFL pure and simple unionists linked the OBU with the Knights of Labor, the American Railway Union of Eugene Debs, and the American Labor Union. It was the latest "subtle and pernicious plea again resorted to for the purpose of severing the wage earners from their orderly and practical course of action".⁸ By 1929, the radical challenge of the post-war reconstruction years had been at least partially undermined, and in this context of "normalcy" the AFL met in Toronto in October. With southern textile workers urging the organization of their mill towns, observers at the convention reported "a pitch of enthusiasm not seen in labor gatherings since the spring tide of the Knights of Labor".⁹

For these, and many other, reasons, Norman J. Ware, perhaps the most perceptive student of the Knights of Labor, saw the Order as just that "sort of One Big Union of which Karl Marx would have approved, if — and this is a large 'if' — it could have been transformed into a political organization under socialist leadership". Given this kind of orientation, which rests on the argument that the Knights of Labor "more fully represented the wage-earners as a whole than any general labor organization either before or after its peak year, 1886",¹⁰ it is odd indeed that Gerald Grob's intellectual history of the Knights of Labor has gained such widespread acceptance, achieving something of an interpretive hegemony. Grob's focus is on the Knights' political activity, and he places them unambiguously in a late nineteenth-century utopian reform stream characterized by "a lack of mature class consciousness". Within this meandering current we find a confused swirl of politicians and professional reformers, inept leaders, and archaic thought, all drifting towards the *petit bourgeois* dream of re-establishing the relationships of an earlier era, "based on the dominance of the small producer". Only in the rare eddy does an actual worker rear his/her head, or a specific class action flow off into some small tributary: but they are all diverted, or sucked under by the visionaries and utopians who chart the course of the ultimate direction of the river.¹¹ It would not do to dismiss totally the Grob analysis, for there was much muddled thinking within the Order, and political activity was a realm highly charged with charlatanism; many less than admirable figures played out their roles, and not a few dealings and events were dirtied with the sordid business of self-interest or party serving. But the Ware interpretation will

⁷ University of Toronto, Kenny Papers, *The Knights of Labor, the American Federation of Labor and the One Big Union*, One Big Union Leaflet No. 2 (Winnipeg, n.d. [c. 1920]).

⁸ David J. BERCUSON, *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978), p. 120.

⁹ Irving BERNSTEIN, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. 34.

¹⁰ Norman J. WARE, *Labor in Modern Industrial Society* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1968), p. 258.

¹¹ Gerald N. GROB, *Workers and Utopia: A Study of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement, 1865-1900* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961), esp. pp. 34-59, 79-80.

not stand the test of close scrutiny, for as Leon Fink has argued, it tends to distance the Knights too readily from electoral politics and established institutions.¹² Collapsing the Knights' so-called struggle for democracy into a "popular movement" without necessary and organic connections to the politics of late nineteenth-century America, Ware comes perilously close to anticipating Grob by associating the Order with a broad-based reformism "engrafted upon the movement by the farmers or the radical fringe of socialists and communists of one stripe or another". Ware is at least sensitive to the appeal and potential of such a reform thrust, while Grob is clearly antagonistic and sceptical. But if Ware thus sees the Order as a working-class movement, he regards its class content as resting outside the sphere of political engagement, traditionally defined, directed by forces peripheral rather than central to the movement's history and experience. In the Ware framework, then, the Knights rush, leaderless, and without coherence, into the political fray in the highly charged atmosphere of 1886-87, then abdicate totally in 1890-94, as the Order's national leadership suffers paralysis and the agrarian or "western" section takes over, highlighting the populist content of the Knights' world-view. Again, it is not that this depiction of the Order lacks value, but that it neglects important realities and compresses too much into a rather small package.

The Knights of Labor were not this kind of small package, in either the Grob or Ware sense, and we propose to interpret the experience differently. By examining the structural situation of the Order, where and when it organized in Ontario, and how many (in rough terms) it drew to its ranks, we believe that we can establish the class character and importance of the Knights of Labor. We shall argue that the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor represented a dramatic shift away from past practices within the history of Ontario workers. Although the Knights built very much on the accumulated experience of the working class, they channelled that experience in new directions. In the words of Raymond Williams they took a whole series of residual aspects of the class experience, built upon them, and erected a structural and intellectual apparatus that was the beginning of emergent purpose. In short, the Knights of Labor in Ontario created, for the first time, what Lawrence Goodwyn has called a movement culture of alternative, opposition, and potential. In the breadth of their vision, the scope of their organization, and the unique refusal to collapse the cause of workers into this reform or that amelioration or restrict entry to the movement to this stratum or that group, the Knights of Labor hinted at the potential and possibility that are at the foundation of the making of a class. Politically, the Order's efforts in the federal, provincial and municipal fields testified to the movement's willingness and

¹² Leon R. FINK, "The Uses of Political Power: Towards a Theory of the Labor Movement in the Era of the Knights of Labor", Paper presented to the Knights of Labor Centennial Symposium, Chicago, 17-19 May 1979, and "Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor in Local Politics, 1886-1896" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1977). The Ware argument is stated most concisely in Norman J. WARE, *The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1890: A Study in Democracy* (New York: Vintage, 1964), pp. xi-xiii, 350-70.

ability to transcend the economic concerns of the workplace. At the same time, the Order's important place in the class struggles and confrontations of the last two decades of the nineteenth century points to problems inherent in viewing the Knights of Labor from the perspective of its leaders' anti-strike rhetoric. To be sure, both in the political sphere and at the workplace, the Knights found themselves caught in many ambiguities and contradictions, among the most important being their political relationship to the established Grit and Tory parties, and their capacity to defend the interests of their membership in the face of fierce employer resistance and a post-1886 trade-union opposition. Some, but not all, of these difficulties were of the Order's own making. But as the first expression of the social, cultural and political emergence of a class, the Knights of Labor understandably groped for answers more than they marched forcefully towards solutions. The Order was itself inhibited by the context of late nineteenth-century Ontario which, aside from its own peculiar "regional" divisions, stood poised between an economy of competitive capitalism, but recently arrived, and the monopoly capitalism which stood literally around the corner with the Laurier boom years of the twentieth century. The Knights, in many ways, straddled each epoch, looking simultaneously forward and backward, longing for the rights they knew to be justly theirs, attacking the monopolists they saw controlling the business, politics and culture of their society.¹³

Beyond this general interpretive thrust two final points need to be made, for they are as much a part of our purpose as any attempt to shift analysis of the Knights of Labor in new directions. First, we have attempted to work through the history of the Knights of Labor in ways which convey as adequately as is possible the human forces behind the doctrines, practices and campaigns of the 1880s and 1890s. In this abbreviated statement, which is a severe compression of a larger, book-length manuscript, something of this orientation may well be lost, but we are nevertheless in agreement with one principled member of the Order, whose reminiscences are prefaced by this general statement:

When there is so much warmth in the making of labor's history it is strange that there has been so little in the writing of it. As a rule, it has been written by

¹³ Previous Canadian work on the Knights of Labor in Ontario includes Victor Oscar CHAN, "The Canadian Knights of Labor with special reference to the 1880s" (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1949); Douglas KENNEDY, *The Knights of Labor in Canada* (London: University of Western Ontario, 1956); Eugene FORSEY, "The Telegraphers' Strike of 1883", *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, Series 4, 9 (1971): 245-59; Bernard OSTRY, "Conservatives, Liberals, and Labour in the 1880s", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 27 (May 1961): 141-61; F. W. WATT, "The National Policy, the Workingman and Proletarian Ideas in Victorian Canada", *Canadian Historical Review*, 40 (March 1959): 1-26. Cf., given the above, Fred LANDON, "The Knights of Labor: predecessors of the CIO", *Quarterly Review of Commerce*, 1 (Autumn 1937): 1-7. While all this work provides valuable empirical detail it has been dated by the availability of new sources and lacks a firm grounding in local contexts. Interpretatively, it presents us with few benchmarks in understanding the Knights of Labor. We have drawn upon Raymond WILLIAMS, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", *New Left Review*, 82 (November-December 1973): 1-16; Lawrence GOODWYN, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

dry-as-dust economists who treat it as if it were the record of the advance of an economic doctrine. As well write the history of the religious movement as if it were the record of the advance of theological doctrine. Labor doctrines have never advanced except as they have been lived and loved by individuals.¹⁴

Second, we want to insist that the experience of the Knights of Labor be considered, not as some minor episode in labour history, but as an integral part of the late nineteenth-century Canadian past, in all its complexities. The rise of the Order was intimately related to the economic and political developments of the period, it was an implicit component of that "manufacturing condition" that came into prominence in the late nineteenth century, but that is so often written about with only a cursory view of the labouring class.¹⁵ That historians of politics and business have been willing and able to do this is perhaps understandable, but it does not make for a history premised upon the need to comprehend totality and interrelationship. It is odd, for instance, that much of the political history of these years can be written with only a fleeting glance at the working-class constituency which was so consistently courted by John A. Macdonald, Edward Blake, and others. Even a source as unimpeachable as the *Journal of Commerce* noted in 1888 that "the future of the artizan fills the whole horizon of politics, and no other class is considered at all."¹⁶ The Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital in Canada (1889) was likely the impetus behind such a caustic comment, and revealed how seriously the established political structure regarded the pressing question of labour.¹⁷

One cannot, then, divorce the experience of the Ontario Knights of Labor from all that has been considered as central to the history of Canada in these years.¹⁸ Comprehension of the late nineteenth-century milieu demands a knowledge of the Order, and this in turn sheds new light on the history of economic, social and political life. We start our journey towards this understanding with a brief discussion of the economic and social context of late nineteenth-century Ontario. We then close with particular attention to the structural features of the Knights of Labor presence, the movement culture created and generated by the Knights, and the political and social confrontations at the polls and in the workplace.

¹⁴ Joseph R. BUCHANAN, *The Story of a Labor Agitator* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. vii.

¹⁵ H. V. NELLES, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines & Hydro-Electric Power in Ontario, 1849-1941* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 48-107.

¹⁶ *Journal of Commerce* (Toronto), 7 September 1888, cited in Michael BLISS, *A Living Profit: Studies in the Social History of Canadian Business, 1883-1911* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 120.

¹⁷ See Greg KEALEY, ed., *Canada Investigates Industrialism: The Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital 1889* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), esp. pp. ix-xxvii; Fernand HARVEY, *Révolution industrielle et travailleurs: Une enquête sur les rapports entre le capital et le travail au Québec à la fin du 19^e siècle* (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1978).

¹⁸ R. J. K., "The Dynamic Year of 1886", *One Big Union Monthly*, 23 September 1927, courtesy Allen Seager, is one good example of this.

I. — ECONOMIC BACKGROUND: LABOUR AND INDUSTRIAL CAPITALISM TO 1890

The nineteenth century was the crucible from which Canada would emerge as a capitalist economy and society. Regardless of whether one looks towards a tradition of dissenting scholarship that begins with Myers, consolidates around Pentland and Ryerson, and continues with much recent work, or in the direction of an economic history erected upon aggregate data and estimates of real manufacturing output, it is indisputable that the latter half of the nineteenth century saw the creation of a sophisticated transportation network, the articulation of a strategy of industrial development that pinned the hopes of Canada's rising capitalists on political consolidation, tariff protections and settlement, and the evolution of a diversified manufacturing sector.¹⁹ All this, to be sure, developed in the context of a social order wracked by major depressions and frequent recessionary downturns. Nevertheless, as early as the 1860s the transforming power of capital had become visible in the rise of the factory, the increasing use of steam-power, and the mechanization of important industries such as tailoring and boot and shoe production. For the *People's Journal* these were the hallmarks of momentous change, factors which had "set agoing an industrial revolution".²⁰

Between 1870 and 1890 the industrial sector tasted the fruits, both bitter and sweet, of this great transformation: establishments capitalized at \$50,000 and over increased by about fifty percent; employment in manufacturing rose by 76 percent and output in constant dollar terms by 138 percent; railway mileage from 3,000 in 1873 to over 16,000 in 1896; manufacturing's place, in terms of value-added, rose from 19 percent of the Gross National Product in 1870 to 23.5 percent in 1890; the rate of real manufacturing output climbed from 4.4 percent in the decade 1870-80 to 4.8 percent in the 1880-90 period, slipping to 3.2 percent in the 1890s, thus establishing the 1880s as an extremely significant moment in the historical rate of growth, surpassed only by the boom years 1900-10 and 1926-29. Indeed, it is the growth of manufacturing facilities in many industries during the cresting fortunes of the National Policy that is most striking.

¹⁹ Gustavus MYERS, *A History of Canadian Wealth* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1972); H. C. PENTLAND, "The Development of a Capitalistic Labour Market in Canada", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 25 (November 1959): 450-61, and "Labor and the Development of Industrial Capitalism in Canada" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1960); Stanley B. RYERSON, *Unequal Union: Roots of Crisis in the Canadas, 1815-1873* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1968); Gordon W. BERTRAM, "Historical Statistics on Growth and Structure of Manufacturing in Canada, 1870-1957", in *C.P.S.A. Conference on Statistics, 1962 and 1963*, eds: J. HENRIPIN and A. ASIMAKOPOULOS (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), pp. 93-146; Bryan D. PALMER, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario 1860-1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), pp. 3-31; Gregory S. KEALEY, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 1-34.

²⁰ *People's Journal* (Hamilton), 1 April 1871, cited in Steven LANGDON, *The Emergence of the Canadian Working Class Movement* (Toronto: New Hogton Press, 1975), p. 3; *Journal of the Board of Arts and Manufactures for Upper Canada*, 7 (1867): 220.

Between 1880 and 1890, for instance, the value of cotton cloth output rose by 125 percent, but even this dramatic increase understated the gains of the decade's first five years: the number of mills, spindles, looms, and capital investment tripled in that short period.²¹ Such developments took place, moreover, within the context of a general decline of prices which, using Michell's index, plummeted from roughly 100 in 1873 to a low of about 75 in 1886.²²

Ontario stood at the very centre of this process of capitalist development. Aggregate data begin to tell the story. Capital invested more than doubled in each decade between 1870 and 1890, while the number of hands employed increased ninety percent over the twenty-year period. These aggregate data can give us an imprecise measure of the character of social and productive relations, the setting within which the Knights of Labor operated, and one which they must have influenced (Table 1).

Table 1. — AGGREGATE ONTARIO DATA, 1871-1911.

Year	Capital Invested (\$)	Hands Employed	Yearly Wages (\$)
1871	37,874,010	87,281	21,415,710
1881	80,950,847	118,308	30,604,031
1891	175,972,021	166,326	49,733,359
1901	214,972,275	151,081	44,656,032
1911	595,394,608	216,362	95,674,743

Year	Value Raw Material (\$)	Value Product (\$)	Value Added (\$)
1871	65,114,804	114,706,799	49,591,995
1881	91,164,156	157,889,870	66,825,714
1891	128,142,371	231,781,926	111,639,555
1901	138,230,400	241,533,486	103,303,086
1911	297,580,125	579,810,225	282,230,100

Source: CANADA, *Census*, 1871-1891. Note that the 1901 and 1911 figures are unadjusted in light of the changing criterion employed by the census in enumerating manufacturing establishments. All firms were considered for 1871-91, while only those firms employing five or more hands were considered in 1901 and 1911. The capital invested figures for 1901 and 1911 are computed by adding together the figures for fixed and working capital. There had been no distinction between these realms in the earlier period.

²¹ BERTRAM, "Historical Statistics", pp. 93-146; Warren BLAND, "The Location of Manufacturing in Southern Ontario in 1881", *Ontario Geography*, 8 (1974): 8-39; T. W. ACHESON, "The Social Origins of the Canadian Industrial Elite, 1880-1885", in *Canadian Business History: Selected Studies, 1947-1971*, ed.: David S. MACMILLAN (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), p. 144; Peter WARRIAN, "The Challenge of the One Big Union Movement in Canada, 1919-1921" (M.A. thesis, University of Waterloo, 1971), p. 11.

²² BERTRAM, "Historical Statistics", p. 133. On the importance of this period of price deflation in the United States see Harold G. VATTER, *The Drive to Industrial Maturity: The U.S. Economy, 1860-1914* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1975), and on the twentieth century, Harry BRAVERMAN, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review, 1974).

Table 2 illuminates trends within the aggregate data for the years 1871-1911. However crude and unrefined the categories, they reveal important shifts and developments. If, for instance, we take capital invested as a percentage of value added, we note a steady increase over the years 1871-1901, with the decadal rate of that increase dropping precipitously in the opening years of the twentieth century. Wages, however, exhibit a different trend, and as a percentage of value added were relatively stable until they fell dramatically in the 1901-11 years. When we take capital invested and wages as a percentage of the total product value other trends emerge: capital as a percentage of product value rises steadily over the entire period, while wages as a percentage of value decline only in those years of most pronounced economic growth, the 1880s and 1900s.

Table 2. — TRENDS WITHIN THE AGGREGATE ONTARIO DATA, 1871-1911.

Year	Capital as % of Value Added	Wages as % of Value Added	Capital as % of Product Value	Wages as % of Product Value	Per Capita Yearly Wages (\$)	Capital Invested Yearly per Worker (\$)	Yearly National Growth Rates in Manufacturing Output (%)
1871	76	43	33	18	245	433	} 4.4
1881	121	45	51	19	257	684	
1891	157	44	73	18	287	1,057	} 4.8
1901	208	43	89	18	295	1,422	
1911	210	33	102	16	441	2,751	} 2.4
							} 6.0

Sources: Our calculations from census data. Same reservations as in source note to Table 1. Yearly national growth rates in manufacturing output are taken from Gordon W. BERTRAM, "Historical Statistics on Growth and Structure of Manufacturing Canada, 1870-1957", in *C.P.S.A. Conference on Statistics, 1962 and 1963*, eds: J. HENRIPIN and A. ASIMAKOPOULOS (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), pp. 93-146.

Such rough calculations gesture toward essential processes in the sphere of social and productive relations. First, we note that wages declined as a percentage of product value precisely in those years — 1881-91 and 1901-11 — that the growth rates in national manufacturing output soared. This suggests a growing intensification of labour; that these periods, then, saw increasing organization among Ontario workers — first, in the Knights of Labor, and second in the craft unions during the upheaval of 1898-1904 — should cause no surprise. But to study the character of exploitation we must probe the relationship of wages to value added, considering the capital input. This leads us to our second speculative hypothesis: it would appear that the social cost of labour was relatively high throughout the late nineteenth century, years which pre-dated Taylorism, broadly conceived. It is not until the turn of the century that wages as a percentage of value added plunged, even in the face of soaring per capita yearly wages (largely a consequence of inflation, for real wages

declined).²³ These turn-of-the-century years also witness a virtual doubling of the capital invested yearly per worker, and leave behind the more modest decadal increases in this relationship characteristic of the 1871-1901 years. And yet, even given this mammoth dose of capital in the years associated with the beginnings of Canada's century, capital as a percentage of value added makes only a marginal, clearly insignificant, gain. Thus, although both the 1880s and 1900s are years of economic growth and increasing intensification of labour, it is not until the 1901-11 years that one sees the actual rationalization of productive relations, a shift in the character of exploitation, and the probable degradation of labour. Before that the social costs of labour remained high.²⁴ What gains in output that did occur late in the century were probably more a consequence of capital input than of extraction of surplus from the hide of labour, although these spheres are ultimately impossible to separate analytically.

If this was indeed the trend then it becomes important to ask what forces kept the social cost of labour high in this period. The lack of a managerial strategy at the workplace, "scientifically" conceived, was no doubt one aspect, as was the technological foundation of production, weak in the 1880s compared to the post-1900 years. However, the mass character of the Knights of Labor, as a movement aimed at uniting all workers, probably played a considerable role in resisting capital's quest to increase output and reduce labour costs through wage reductions or increasing the pace of work. Looking at the yearly per capita wage figures confirms this picture. While yearly wages rose only \$12 in the 1870s and only \$8 throughout the 1890s, the increase for the 1881-91 years was at least two-and-one-half times as great, or \$30. Even granting all the ambiguities in this admittedly speculative and tentative argument, much of the data points towards the high social cost of labour in the late nineteenth century; labour seemed relatively better off in these years, in terms of its capacity to extract a larger portion of its product, than it would in later times, when capitalistic appropriation was undoubtedly more refined and effective. The social relations of production, in which worker stood counterposed to employer and in which the nature and extent of organization was of vital importance, must have contributed to this outcome.

There is no mistaking the tremendous expansion in the manufacturing sector. An analysis of county data shows impressive quantitative gains in workers employed in manufacturing between 1871 and 1891. This growth displayed tangible regional patterns — the dominance of Toronto-Hamilton, the underdeveloped but nevertheless significant economic activity along the St Lawrence and Ottawa Rivers, the manufacturing importance of

²³ See, for instance, Terry COPP, *The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1897-1929* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974); Michael J. PIVA, *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto, 1900-1921* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979); David MILLAR, "A Study of Real Wages: The Construction, Use and Accuracy Check of a Constant-Dollar Plotter", unpublished research paper, University of Winnipeg, 1980.

²⁴ Jacques FERLAND, "The Problem of Change in the Rate of Surplus Value Studied Through the Evolution of the 'Social Cost of Labour' in Canada, 1870-1910", unpublished M.A. thesis research paper, McGill University, 1980.

various small towns. More than fifty percent of the manufacturing of the 1880s was located in small Canadian communities, where the population never climbed above 10,000.²⁵ The regional economy of Ontario, then, was a far from homogenous entity, even as late as the 1880s. The closing years of the century were something of a struggle for industrial hegemony, in which the small manufacturing unit servicing a local market gave way to the larger productive concern, often contributing towards the decline of the small town and a shift in the location of industry to the population centre of a larger city. Thus the value added in all manufacturing activity in York County (Toronto) rose from 27.44 percent in 1870 to 32 percent in 1890. Toronto and Hamilton each accounted for 20 percent of industrial employment in southern Ontario in 1881, although they contained only 6.5 percent of the region's population. But even given this increasing specialization, localization and gross expansion in the manufacturing sector the 1880s were still a decade of contrasts: handicraft forms of production still co-existed with thoroughly mechanized processes; the large factory still occupied minority status given the number of small shops.²⁶

How did this process of advancing but uneven development stamp itself upon the character of specific Ontario locales, where the Knights of Labor would come to prominence in the later years of the nineteenth century? As we have already seen, the industrial cities of Toronto and Hamilton led the way. (We have commented briefly on the experience of these major centres in other works.²⁷) Beyond the boundaries of these reasonably well-studied industrial cities lies a virtual no man's land, where our knowledge of economic activity is severely restricted. Yet it is clear that in countless Ontario communities capitalist development touched the lives of many workers and employers. Linked closely to this process was the importance of railways, which served as a connecting link, integrating a developing home market. This revolution in transportation was perhaps the key element in the shifting location and expansion of manufacturing in these years from 1870-90.²⁸

Most of the railways built in southern Ontario after 1881 radiated out from Toronto, further contributing to that city's metropolitan dominance. Of great significance was the increasing importance of the old established lines in western Ontario — the Grand Trunk, Great Western

²⁵ ACHESON, "Social Origins of Elite", p. 162; see maps on "Manufacturing Employment by County", in *Economic Atlas of Ontario*, ed.: W. G. DEAN (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969).

²⁶ Jacob SPELT, *Urban Development in South-Central Ontario* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), pp. 101-86; Edward J. CHAMBERS and Gordon BERTRAM, "Urbanization and Manufacturing in Central Canada, 1870-1890", in *C.P.S.A. Conference on Statistics, 1966*, ed.: Sylvia OSTRY (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), pp. 225-55; BLAND, "Location of Manufacturing", pp. 8-39. See the important statement in Raphael SAMUEL, "The Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in Mid-Victorian Britain", *History Workshop Journal*, 3 (Spring 1977): 6-72.

²⁷ On Hamilton see PALMER, *A Culture in Conflict*, pp. 3-31, and on Toronto KEALEY, *Toronto Workers*, pp. 1-34.

²⁸ Note V. I. LENIN, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (Moscow: Progress, 1964), p. 551.

and Canada Southern — which received great stimulus as the CPR and GTR battled for control of the country's rail lines. In this struggle for hegemony local traffic was actively sought, mileage was expanded, and efforts were made to capture a greater share of the American through traffic. Centres such as St Thomas and Stratford became links in a chain of economic development, and their wage-earning class was often tied directly to the shops that served the railways or the rail systems themselves. St Thomas, for instance, grew rapidly in the 1870s, being transformed from a modest pre-industrial service town to a dynamic railway centre linked to the major Ontario metropolitan markets. Major shops of the American-owned Canada Southern Railway located there, employing about 700 men by the mid-1880s, and the Great Western established a repair shop in the city. By 1885 the New York Central had also commenced similar operations. Because of this rapid growth the city's class boundaries were rigid and geographically specific.²⁹

The railways, through declining freight rates and economies of scale, helped to concentrate economic activity in a number of diversified manufacturing centres, whose growth took place at the expense of the smaller towns where factories were insufficiently developed to capitalize on transport costs compared to their larger, better situated rivals. London was just such a place. Its strength seemed to reside disproportionately in the food-processing sector, with concentrations of capital in bakeries, breweries, and tobacco-related works. But this city also gained prominence as a marketing and distributing centre for the dairy belt of western Ontario's Middlesex, Oxford, Elgin, Lambton, Perth and Huron counties. In the textile sphere, the city's garment industry grew on the basis of its proximity to the Niagara Peninsula's cotton mills. Finally, in the wood-processing sector concerns like the London Furniture Company employed fifty men, while in metal fabricating the city's McClary Manufacturing Company, Ontario Car Works, and E. Leonard & Sons produced stoves, engines and other goods. These latter firms employed between 80 and 450 hands throughout the decade of the 1880s.³⁰

Other western Ontario towns also exhibited indications of the importance of industrial activity. Brantford's economic place in late nineteenth-century Ontario was dominated by the Harris, Wisner, and Cockshutt agricultural implements companies, and a hosiery factory. Harris & Son, taken together with the Massey works of Toronto (and with which it would merge in 1891), accounted for sixty percent of all agricultural implements sales in the Dominion by the mid-1880s. Guelph, Galt, Berlin,

²⁹ G. P. de T. GLAZEBROOK, *A History of Transportation in Canada*, 2 vols (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), II: 91-118; Kenneth Lloyd CLARK, "Social Relations and Urban Change in a Late Nineteenth Century Southwestern Ontario Railroad City: St. Thomas, 1868-1890" (M.A. thesis, York University, 1976).

³⁰ Richard A. TRUMPER, "The History of E. Leonard & Sons, Boilermakers and Ironfounders, London, Ontario" (M.A. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1937); Benjamin S. SCOTT, "The Economic and Industrial History of the City of London, Canada from the Building of the First Railway, 1855 to the Present, 1930" (M.A. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1930), pp. 56-65, 169-70; Carrol J. GRIMWOOD, "The Cigar Manufacturing Industry in London, Ontario" (M.A. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1934), p. 3.

Hespeler and even Collingwood to the north all housed similar, if much smaller, manufacturing concerns, producing for local, even regional, markets. In Guelph a hosiery factory employing over one hundred workers, the Raymond Sewing Machine Company, the Guelph Sewing Machine Company, and the Crowe Iron Works dominated the industrial landscape.

Further to the north and to the east industrial production was less well established, particularly in the area of secondary manufacturing. By the 1880s the Ottawa-Hull and Muskoka regions had established hegemony over the production of wood products, and a number of mills engaged in the preparation of sawn lumber, shingles, and matches. The dominance of lumber was even more pronounced in the Ottawa Valley, where the five largest producers in Canada had congregated by 1874. Over 2,500 men were employed in the production of lumber in 1891 in the city of Ottawa alone, and the industry found market outlets in both Britain and the United States.

East of Toronto, along the St Lawrence River and Lake Ontario, small-scale processing industries and metal-fabricating plants attempted to capture a share of a largely local market. In the larger regional towns, however, there was room for some consolidation. Gananoque, Brockville, Cobourg, Belleville, Smiths Falls, Oshawa and Kingston all had the ubiquitous foundries, machine shops, and agricultural implements works of the period. G. M. Cossitt & Brothers and Frost & Wood Company established significant agricultural factories in Smiths Falls, the latter company employing over 150 skilled hands, producing goods valued at \$150,000 destined for the farms of Canada, Australia and South Africa. Kingston's large engine works employed over 350 workers in the early 1880s, and a cotton mill with approximately 200 hands opened in 1882. In the southern section of Ontario County, Oshawa-Cedardale was dominated by the Joseph Hall Works. Concentrating on the production of threshing machines, mowers and ploughs for the Canadian market the works employed 250 men as early as 1867. By the 1880s other important shops had long-established histories: the McLaughlin carriage works, Masson's seed-drill plant, A. S. Whiting Agricultural Implements, Oshawa Stove Company, W. E. Dingle's Fanning Mills and Seeders and the Robson & Lauchland Tanneries.³¹

But the most dramatic expression of industrial growth in eastern Ontario was Cornwall's cotton mills. Here was one city where the National Policy tariff of thirty to thirty-five percent was never challenged. In 1876 Cornwall's Canada Company cotton mills were the largest in the nation, the value of the plant hovering near the half-million dollar mark, the annual product valued at \$400,000. Approximately 350 workers (100 males and 250 females) toiled over 20,000 spindles to earn yearly wages of \$75,000. Five years later, protected by the newly-revised tariff and stimulated by

³¹ Leo A. JOHNSON, *History of the County of Ontario, 1615-1875* (Whitby: Corporation of Whitby, 1973), pp. 250-52; "The Canadian Locomotive Company Limited: History of the Works at Kingston", *Queen's Quarterly*, 10 (April 1903): 455-65; information on Smiths Falls courtesy Peter de Lottinville.

the return to prosperity, Cornwall's three cotton mills — one was a relatively small firm — employed 133 men, 277 women, 186 boys and 190 girls. Their yearly wages totalled \$179,900 and \$456,000 worth of material was used to produce cotton goods and cloth valued at \$833,000. By the time another half-decade had passed, Cornwall's two major textile producers — the Canada Company and the Stormont — had made impressive expansionary strides.³²

Across the province, then, in spite of the increasing dominance of Toronto and Hamilton, of underdevelopment, uneven growth, and reliance upon primary production of the old timber staple in some areas, capitalist production was a force to reckon with by the 1880s. It transformed social and productive relations in the large cities as well as in the tiny rural hamlets. In this changed context class came to the fore as a clearly perceived reality; a culture premised upon this historic relationship of antagonism emerged more forcefully than it had in the past, and old distinctions appeared to fade in the face of a common experience and a recognition of the unity of life and work within a generalized system of appropriation. Railroads began the process of integrating a large regional unit, and linked the province to national if not international markets. Town and country increasingly found themselves enmeshed in a setting in which their pronounced differences began to pale before significant similarities. Social costs were many and varied, from the growing impersonalization of the wage relationship to the sooty environment of iron-and-steel-dominated Hamilton to the stark landscape of the milltown. Workers, of course, did not passively accept such developments, which had necessarily been part of a protracted process, and years well before the 1880s witnessed the first stirrings of Ontario's working-class movement. In that decade, however, came the essential changes, as class arrived on the scene, forcefully and unambiguously, for the first time. This class, which had been more than fifty years in the making, and had at its back a culture of ambiguity and diversity, became unmistakably entwined with the rise of the Knights of Labor, a body which took the ambivalence of the past cultural context of working-class life and forged it into a movement culture of opposition. In the expanding economic context of the 1880s Ontario workers made strides towards unifying their lives as productive men and women and their lives as citizens, family members, neighbours and advocates of change. A whole series of cultural expressions thus linked up with a class content, and the fragmented and sectional concerns of the past gave way to a broader demand that encompassed fundamental challenges to the established order of capitalist society. In whatever area one wants to consider — economic, social, political, cultural — the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor voiced the need to go beyond the social relations of production as then constituted. An alternative hegemony was finally on the agenda, finally in the process of formation. The signif-

³² *Report of the Select Committee on the Causes of the Present Depression of the Manufacturing, Mining, Commercial, Shipping, Lumber and Fishing Interests* (Ottawa, 1876), pp. 142-48; KEALEY, *Canada Investigates Industrialism*, pp. 179-92; CHAMBERS and BERTRAM, "Urbanization and Manufacturing", pp. 242-55.

icance of the 1880s, as this moment of reaching out, was further confirmed by the gains in organization among workers not necessarily affiliated with the Knights. But this growth, however significant, paled in comparison, quantitatively and qualitatively, to the upsurge of the Knights of Labor.

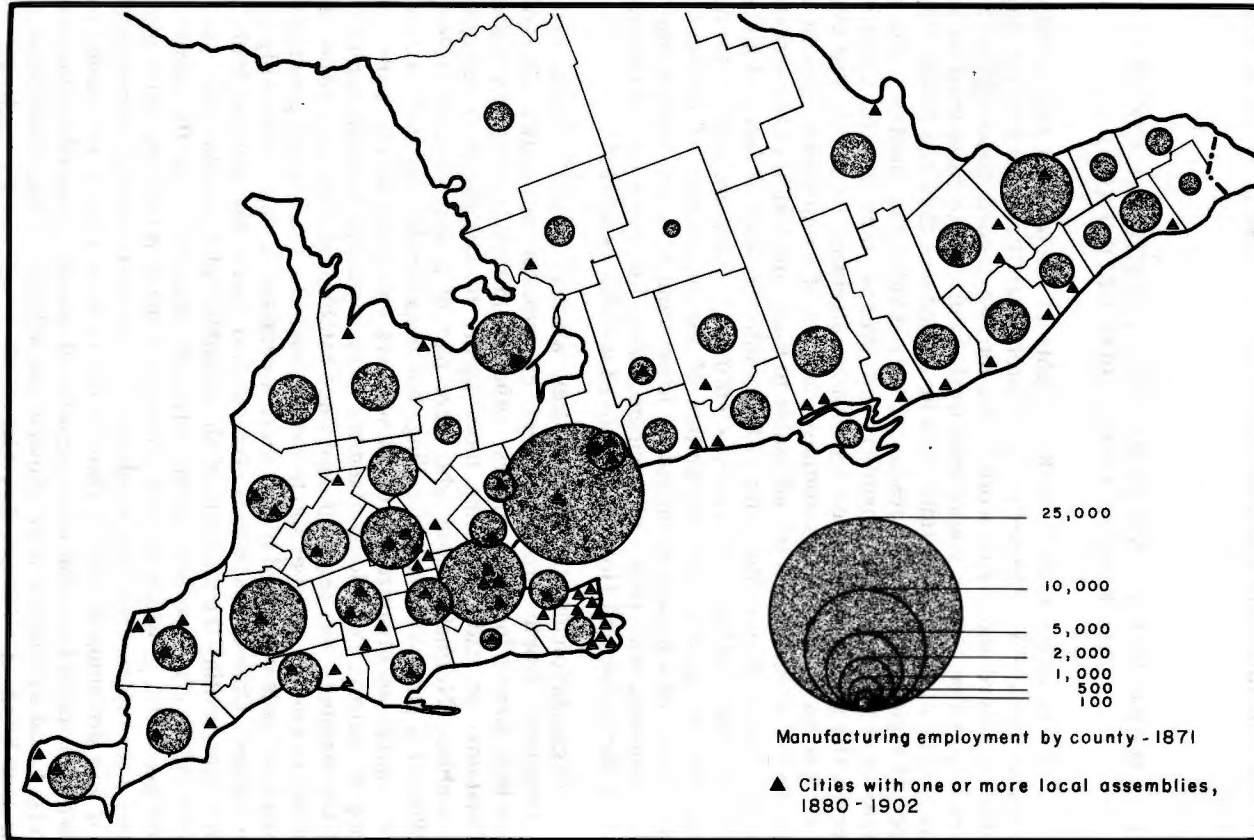
II. — WARP, WOOF AND WEB: THE STRUCTURAL CONTEXT OF THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR IN ONTARIO

“To write the history of the Knights of Labor is an impossibility”, warned Terence V. Powderly. “Its history was the history of the day in which it moved and did its work.” The much-maligned leader of the Order was aware that “some young men fresh from college have tried to write the history of the organization”, but he argued that they had failed: “They applied logic and scientific research; they divided the emotions, the passions, and feelings of the members into groups, they dissected and vivisectioned the groups; they used logarithms, algebraic formulas, and everything known to the young ambitious graduate of a university.” Given this, Powderly felt that it was not advisable to take “the historian too seriously; at best he but weaves the warp of fancy into the woof of fact and gives us the web called history”. Powderly’s words of warning are worth remembering. Yet, in spite of our recognition of the importance of his sceptical assessment of a history premised on impersonal data and mere quantities, we commence with plenty of numbers. They, too, were part of the day in which the Noble and Holy Order moved and did its work.³³

Organizationally, the Knights drew workers into their ranks through a relatively simple procedure and institutional apparatus. Individual members joined local assemblies, either in mixed (diverse occupational affiliations) or trade (adhering more rigidly to specific craft categories) assemblies. Normally those who were part of a specific trade assembly followed a particular skilled calling, but occasionally the trade assembly was merely an organization of all workers employed in the same plant, shop or factory. For a local assembly to be organized formally a minimum of ten members was required, and once established local assemblies were known to swell in membership to over a thousand. If a specific geographical region or trade contained five or more assemblies a district assembly could be formed. District assemblies were of two types: the national trade district, representing the interests of all assemblies of a specific craft, such as the window glass workers or the telegraph operatives; or the mixed district assembly, in which diverse interests of many mixed and trade assemblies were represented. In Canada it was this latter mixed district assembly that was pre-eminent, and in Ontario the various district assemblies were always mixed in form and representative of specific geographical/territorial units. Local assemblies were allowed one delegate in the district assembly for each hundred members they had enrolled, and one for each additional

³³ Terence V. POWDERLY, *The Path I Trod: The Autobiography of Terence V. Powderly* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), pp. 3-4, 102.

Map 1. — DISTRIBUTION OF KNIGHTS OF LABOR LOCAL ASSEMBLIES IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO.



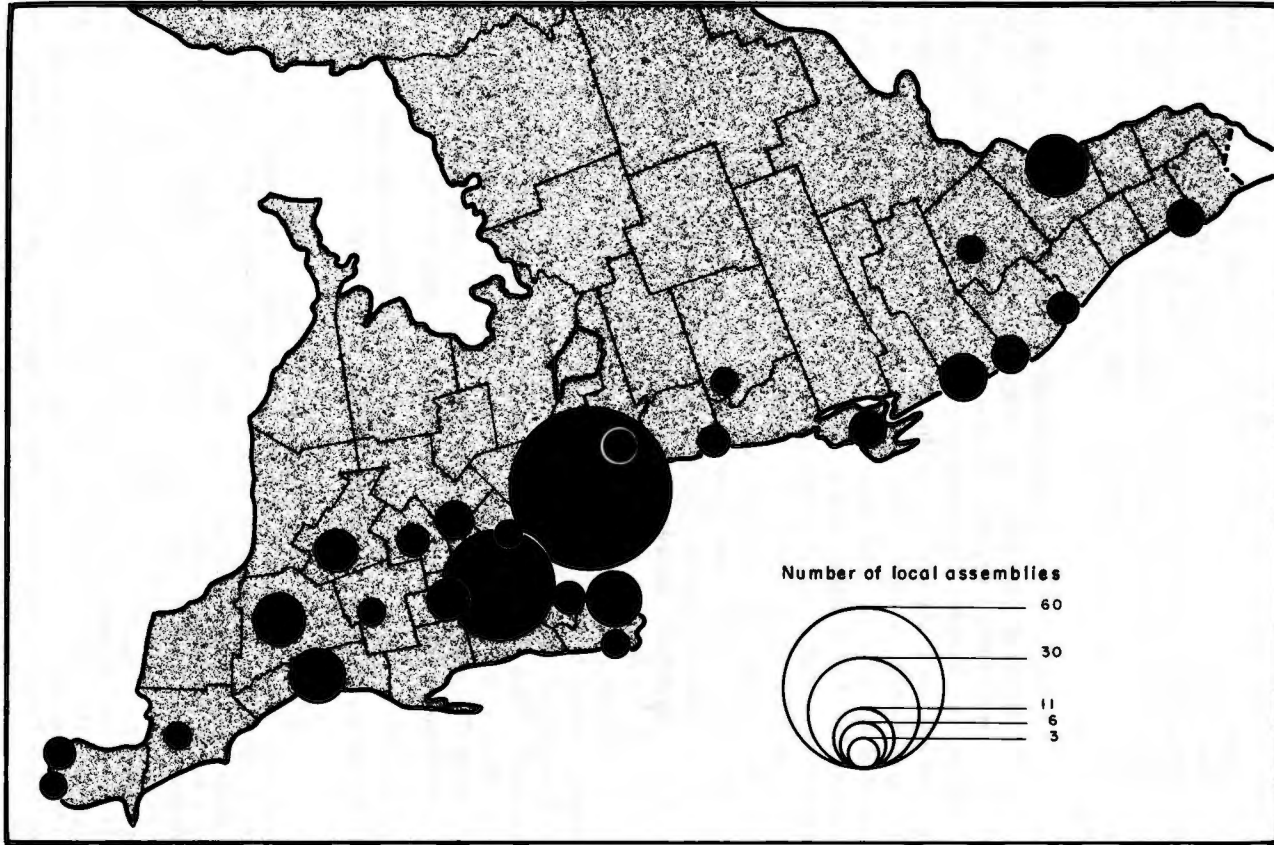
hundred or fraction thereof. Presiding over all these bodies were a series of leading elected officials: the master workman of the local assembly; the district master workman; and many lesser figures. Each district elected delegates to the annual convention of the Order, the general assembly, and at this gathering, in turn, were elected the national officers and the general executive board. The Order, then, was a highly centralized body, with a well-defined hierarchy and structure; yet it was also egalitarian, and the local assemblies had a large measure of autonomy, with their own courts to prosecute those who transgressed the discipline and regulations of knighthood.

How many of these local assemblies were there, where were they, and what type of assembly prevailed in specific places?³⁴ Although strongest in Ontario's rapidly expanding industrial cities like Toronto and Hamilton, the Knights also penetrated the province's towns, villages and tiny hamlets. In its approximately thirty-year lifespan (1875-1907), the Order organized locals in eighty-two towns from Amherstburg in the west to Cornwall in the east, and from Port Colborne in the south to Sudbury in the north. These eighty-two towns contained a total of at least 249 local assemblies, which in turn formed ten district assemblies. Toronto, Hamilton and Ottawa led the way with fifty-eight, thirty and twelve local assemblies respectively, but the Knights were also active in eight communities of less than 1,000 people, and there were thirty-one local assemblies in places with populations of under 3,000. Ontario's five largest cities in the 1880s (Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, London and Kingston) contained forty-six percent of all Knights of Labor assemblies, but it was the range and dispersal of the Order that was perhaps most significant: of the forty-seven Ontario towns with a population of at least 3,000 in the 1880s, fully thirty-eight, or eighty-one percent, witnessed the formation of a local assembly. Maps 1 and 2 detail this impressive organizational achievement, with Map 1 indicating those centres where the Knights were present and Map 2 portraying graphically the relative strength of the Order in specific locales which contained two or more local assemblies.

In Ontario there was an almost even division between trade and mixed locals, but if we consider the size of the town where the assembly

³⁴ All organizational data throughout are based on our own calculations. We should note, however, a debt of gratitude to two pieces of pioneering research on the Knights which were of inestimable value to us. Eugene Forsey's massive compilation of materials on organized labour in Canada before 1902 includes much on the Knights and a helpful attempt at a local-by-local reconstruction. See Eugene FORSEY, *History of Canadian Trade Unionism*, forthcoming University of Toronto Press. Jonathan GARLOCK, *Knights of Labor Data Bank* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Inter University Consortium, 1973), and "A Structural Analysis of the Knights of Labor" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1974) have been of considerable help. For a description of the data bank, see Jonathan GARLOCK, "The Knights of Labor Data Bank", *Historical Methods Newsletter*, 6 (1973): 149-60. Our corrections to the data bank will be incorporated into the computer file at Ann Arbor. These corrections are based on the labour and local press of Ontario, on the ONTARIO BUREAU OF INDUSTRY, *Annual Reports*, on various trade-union minutes and proceedings, and on the extensive Ontario correspondence scattered throughout the Powderly Papers, recently indexed at the PAC by Russell Hann. The population data are from the 1881 and 1891 censuses.

Map 2. — NUMBER OF KNIGHTS OF LABOR LOCAL ASSEMBLIES IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO, 1880-1902.



was located a discernible pattern emerges. Mixed assemblies were far more popular in smaller places while trade assemblies were most often found in the cities. As always there were exceptions to this general pattern. St Thomas and London, for example, although large and important Knights' centres, possessed almost no trade assemblies. But on the whole the large manufacturing cities contained sufficient numbers of skilled workers to form trade assemblies, while in the smaller towns the mixed local assembly proved a more flexible organizing device. Since many of these less populous centres were not large enough to support sufficiently numerous groups of tradesmen to give rise to craft unions, the mixed assembly fit their needs well. Thus in towns under 5,000 the mixed assembly was dominant with fifty-eight percent of all local assemblies, while trade assemblies and locals of unknown character each provided twenty-one percent of all local assemblies. Cities with a population in excess of 30,000, however, were the more likely home of the trade assembly; fifty-seven percent of all local assemblies were of this type and thirty percent were mixed, with thirteen percent of unknown character.

How many members were drawn into the ranks of the Knights of Labor? This is a difficult question. In the United States, at their peak, the Knights were said to have enrolled between 700,000 and 1,000,000 members, but this is a static count taken in the spring months of 1886. The data are questionable and tend to underestimate the membership. Moreover, the central problem is the timing of influx into the Order, for the Knights peaked at different moments in different regions. Thus, Jonathan Garlock has estimated that if one looks beyond peak membership the American Order may well have enrolled over 3,000,000 workers in its assemblies over the course of its history. We are plagued with problems of comparable, if not greater, magnitude in the case of Ontario, for membership data after 1885 are shaky at best, and official estimates seldom reliable. As in the United States, the Ontario Knights did not peak until 1886, a year which saw the founding of ninety-nine local assemblies, and even then the dating of the upsurge varied from region to region within Ontario. Thus, across south-central Ontario the Knights of Labor climbed to their highest membership point in 1886 and then deteriorated, rapidly in some places, more slowly in others. Towns close to the American border (Brockville and Hamilton, for instance) experienced the Order's impact earliest. But in the northwest, in the timber country of the Muskoka region, the Order achieved prominence later, as it did in some eastern Ontario towns like Kingston, where the Knights had 1,500 supporters in 1887. In Ottawa the Order's successes came, not in the 1880s, but in 1891. All this is further complicated by the fact that even *within* industrial cities like Toronto and Hamilton, which followed the classic pattern of cresting in 1886, there were some working-class sectors — letter carriers, longshoremen and labourers — who joined the ranks of the Knights after the Order was in obvious retreat. Thus, any attempt to address the numerical significance of the Order will founder if it is reduced to a count of peak membership at any given point.

We can, nevertheless, start with peak official membership at single points in time for some specific locales. Toronto DA 125's forty-one

local assemblies had 5,000 members in 1886, while Hamilton DA 61's 2,200 workers were organized in thirty local assemblies. District Assembly 6, of Ottawa, had 2,000 affiliated in 1892. The London-St Thomas DA 138 reported a membership of 4,435 in 1886-87, enrolled in thirty-six assemblies in western Ontario towns like Aylmer, Ingersoll, Listowell and Wyoming. St Catharines DA 207 encompassed some 2,000 advocates in twenty-two local assemblies. Other district assembly peaks were Windsor DA 174's 616, Belleville DA 235's 1,548, Uxbridge DA 236's 523, and Berlin DA 241's 348. Perhaps more striking still are some of the individual town reports: Brockville's Franklin LA 2311 with 430 members in November 1883; Gananoque's 700-800 members in 1887; Gravenhurst LA 10669's 300 lumber workers in June 1888; the 500 cotton workers in Merritton's Maple Leaf LA 5933 in 1886; Petrolia's Reliable LA 4570 with 500 members in 1886; LA 6722's 200 workers at the Frost and Woods agricultural implements works in Smiths Falls in August 1887; and the 500 workers of Woodstock's Unity and Concord LA's 3151 and 4922 in 1886. If we recall our earlier discussion of the localized nature of manufacturing activity in various Ontario cities and towns, in fact, we see that the Knights were strong wherever a particular industrial activity predominated: among Cornwall's cotton workers, Hamilton's iron and steel workers, or St Thomas's railway workers the Order had many advocates.

Available data do not allow us to make any firm calculations on the percentage of the workforce organized by the Order, nor would the official membership figures necessarily reveal the true impact: the tendency is always to under-represent the strength, and the volatility of the rank and file further compounds this problem of undercounting. Thus in five selected Toronto local assemblies the membership fluctuated greatly between the date of their initial report and 1 July 1885. In these assemblies ninety-six members were enrolled on the books at the time of the first membership report to Philadelphia. Between 1882 and 1885 these assemblies added 666 members but they also deleted 573, and so on 1 July 1885 reported a total membership of only 189. Their peak strength, then, would hardly address the question of the masses of workers who passed through specific assembly halls. The case is made strongly in the instance of Toronto's LA 2305, which reported a mere twenty-nine members in July 1885, swelled to 550 in the following months, and then fell back to forty-five within a year. To appreciate fully the numerical significance of the Order we need to understand, not a static cross-sectional profile, but a process and flow, determined, in part, by the movement's vitality and particular events, developments in the economic realm, and social relations. But the figures do not readily allow this, and we are forced to consider the Knights in the context of peak membership figures that defy all this, a problem further exacerbated by the problems of reliance on census data that correspond only to decadal points and that mask local situations in larger county calculations.

We can begin with the larger picture. If we take the total peak memberships (at specific points in time with no account taken of volatility) across the province and add them together we see that over the course of

their history the Knights organized a minimum of 21,800 members. (A figure double this might not overstate the numbers actually enrolled.) This represented 18.4 percent of the hands employed in manufacturing in 1881 and 13.1 percent of those so employed in 1891. If we add to these figures the percentages of workers enrolled in trade unions but not members of the Knights of Labor (and we have no accurate statistics on this phenomenon, although it is estimated that in the United States approximately one-half of the Knights' members were trade unionists) it is apparent that at a very minimum the 1880s saw twenty to twenty-five percent of the total non-agricultural work-force drawn to the ranks of organized labour. This, we need remember, is a higher percentage than any period prior to the post-World War II upsurge, and it is only with the increasing unionization of the public sector in recent decades that we have seen the figure climb to thirty-five percent and over. For much of the early twentieth century, especially prior to World War I, no more than ten percent of the work-force was organized.³⁵

Table 3. — KNIGHTS OF LABOR MEMBERSHIP AS PERCENTAGE OF HANDS EMPLOYED, 1881 AND 1891.

<i>City or County</i>	<i>1881</i>	<i>1891</i>
Essex (Windsor)	30.0	22.2
London	29.3	22.5
Elgin East (St Thomas)	80.0	58.6
Hamilton	33.8	22.8
Toronto	39.3	20.4
Brockville	44.9	31.9
Kingston	101.8	56.0
Cornwall	32.3	14.8
Lanark South (Perth, Smiths Falls, Carleton Place)	21.1	18.1
Ottawa	—	31.7
Lincoln, Niagara and Welland (St Catharines, Welland, Merriton, Thorold)	—	50.5
Perth North (Stratford, Listowell)	36.0	30.5

Sources: CANADA, *Census*, 1881 and 1891; KNIGHTS OF LABOR, GENERAL ASSEMBLY, *Proceedings*; ONTARIO BUREAU OF INDUSTRY, *Annual Reports*.

These aggregate data, of course, distort the facts dramatically, for they include all workers with no regard for region, sex, or age. Some, but not all this distortion can be eliminated by looking at particular places, presented in Table 3. The limitations of the census impose themselves here, for in attempting to focus on the percentage of the total work-force organized we are handcuffed to the 1881 and 1891 figures: the former are problematic because the Knights were not even on the scene at that early

³⁵ J. SMUCKER, *Industrialization in Canada* (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1980), p. 209; H. C. PENTLAND, "A Study of the Changing Social, Economic, and Political Background of the Canadian System of Industrial Relations", draft study for the Task Force on Labour Relations, Ottawa, 1968, pp. 70-71.

date, while the latter are equally flawed because the Order was, by that time, in the throes of decline. Moreover, such data are often available only on a county basis. Locales like St Thomas get buried in the total county employment figures. Nevertheless, the figures are an indication of the impressive numbers of workers drawn to the Order, and in places like St Thomas, Kingston and the Lincoln, Niagara and Welland region there is no doubt that the Knights of Labor organized an absolute majority of the people employed in manufacturing.

The census, moreover, did not report on the hands employed in such small towns as Merritton, Chatham or Gananoque. Yet we know from many sources that the Order was actively engaged in such places. To attempt a crude estimate of the percentage of the work-force organized we have taken our figures on membership and compared them to a rough calculation of the number of hands employed. This latter figure was obtained by taking the total population for 1881. In no case would the work-force have been more than forty percent of the population, and it is unlikely that it would have even reached twenty percent in these years, but we have taken these poles as our gauge. (Note that if we took twenty percent of the populations of Toronto, Hamilton and Kingston for 1881, we would expect workforces of 17,283, 7,192 and 2,818. The census recorded 1881 workforces of 12,708, 6,493 and 1,473, so in no case have we underrepresented the work-force. Our method, then, can only understate the impact of the Order. Since the small towns considered here did not expand greatly in the 1880s, using the 1881 population figures does not pose a great problem.) Table 4 reveals how thoroughly the Order penetrated these small Ontario manufacturing towns, organizing an extremely high percentage of the work-force.

Table 4. — KNIGHTS OF LABOR MEMBERSHIP AS PERCENTAGE OF WORK-FORCE (ESTIMATED AT BETWEEN TWENTY AND FORTY PERCENT OF 1881 POPULATION).

<i>Town</i>	<i>20% of 1881 Population</i>	<i>40% of 1881 Population</i>
Chatham	25.4	12.7
Woodstock	46.5	23.2
Petrolia	72.0	36.0
Merritton	139.0	69.5
St Catharines	51.8	25.9
Guelph	17.6	8.8
Hespeler	71.4	35.7
Oshawa	52.0	26.0
Gananoque	87.0	43.5
Smiths Falls	47.9	23.9

Sources: Same as in Table 3.

What all this means, we would argue, is that the Knights of Labor represented the most important moment in the history of Ontario labour until the coming of the Congress of Industrial Organizations in the late

1930s. More workers were drawn to the cause of the Order in more Ontario communities and in greater numbers than most of us can actually believe. Across the province between ten and eighty percent of all workers in particular cities, and we stress once more that these are minimum estimates, became Knights of Labor. That structural context was a large part of the warp, woof and web of the history of the 1880s. We have, against Powderly's advice, divided this out from the passions, emotions and feelings of the membership, and it is now time to turn to another aspect of the history of the Order. For if the Knights of Labor represented a quantitative breakthrough for Ontario's workers, they also represented a crucial qualitative shift in the orientation of the working class. The Order took the raw material of a class culture — ambiguous, fragmented and unfocused — and moulded it into a movement culture of opposition and alternative.

III. — SPREADING THE LIGHT: THE EMERGENCE OF A MOVEMENT CULTURE

There is no such historical phenomenon as an alternative hegemony attained. At the moment that it is realized, an alternative hegemony passes into hegemony and assumes its place as arbitrator of social, economic, political and cultural values, expressed through the control of state power, the majesty of the law and a wide range of formal institutions and informal sanctions. A subordinate class can thus only reach towards an alternative hegemony but it cannot "dominate the ethos of a society".³⁶ Alternative hegemonies can, historically, pass into new hegemonic cultures, although this necessarily involves the rise to power of new classes and the dissolution of old ways of life. The revolutions of 1789 and 1917 were just such epoch-shaking moments of transformation, although it is questionable if North America has ever witnessed upheavals of such magnitude: certainly Canada has not.

In the Ontario of the 1880s, however, there was an alternative hegemony in formation. It did not win the day, although it raised a series of challenges and oppositions that remain with us yet; its lifespan was indeed short, although the issues it addressed seem timeless. We refer to this creative moment as a movement culture, a recognition that the Knights of Labor built upon a culture of class experience that had little direction and unity to consolidate a class effort that sought to transform the very nature of the society in which workers found themselves.

The movement culture was formed in the process of daily life, both on and off the job, and it was tempered in the political and workplace struggles that we will examine shortly. It began with the worker's initiation into the Knights of Labor assembly, where a whole series of symbolic and ritualistic practices rooted the member in the movement, reinforcing

³⁶ E. P. THOMPSON, "The Peculiarities of the English", in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), p. 74.

traditions of collectivity and solidarity in an age of hostile, individualistic pieties. Each new initiate vowed to defend the interest and reputation of all true members of the order, be they employed or unemployed, fortunate or distressed, and was instructed that "Labor is noble and holy." To defend it from degradation, to divest it of the evils to body, mind, and estate, which ignorance and greed have imposed; to rescue the toiler from the grasp of the selfish is a work worthy of the noblest and best of our race." Upon admission to the Order, the recently christened Knight was informed that "open and public associations have failed, after a struggle of centuries, to protect or advance the interest of labor", and that the Knights of Labor merely imitated "the example of capital", endeavouring "to secure the just rewards of our toil". "In all of the multifarious branches of trade", the convert was told, "capital has its combinations, and whether intended or not, it crushes the manly hopes of labor and tramples poor humanity in the dust." To counteract this distressing tendency of the modern age, the Order asserted: "We mean to uphold the dignity of labor, to affirm the nobility of all who earn their bread by the sweat of their brow." In these ritualized incantations, which resounded in local assembly halls across south-central Canada, lay much of the promise and potential of the Knights of Labor.³⁷

That promise and potential reared its head in many cultural events: in the many picnics, parades, demonstrations, dances, hops and balls that the Knights organized across the province in the heady days of the upheaval of the 1880s. These occasions were no doubt moments of recreation, diversions which moved people away from the everyday concerns of the next day's work, the next week's groceries and the next month's rent — the range of insecurities the next year could bring. But they were also exhilarating reminders of self-worth and class strength. They were prominent in Toronto and Hamilton, as we would expect, but places like London, Woodstock, Ingersoll, Chatham, Thorold, Gananoque and Belleville were also the sites of such cultural activities, and the Order was capable of drawing anywhere from 1,000 to 5,000 people to these "monster" gatherings. After an 1887 Gananoque Knights of Labor picnic, the local newspaper commented: "Probably no gathering anywhere near the size ever took place here, where there was such good order ... They have shown that they are a power in the community, able to command respect."³⁸

In all this, from the pounding footsteps of workers marching by the thousands in Toronto, Hamilton or Ottawa, through a day of sports and frolicking in Ingersoll, Belleville or Kingston, to a mammoth picnic and long-winded speeches on an island in the St Lawrence near Gananoque,

³⁷ Ezra COOK, ed., *Knights of Labor Illustrated: Adelphon Kruptos: The Full Illustrated Ritual Including the 'Unwritten Work' and an Historical Sketch of the Order* (Chicago, 1886); Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., Powderly Papers (hereafter PP), "The Great Seal of Knighthood" and "Secret Circular: Explanation of the Signs and Symbols of the Order"; Carrol D. WRIGHT, "An Historical Sketch of the Knights of Labor", *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, I (January 1887): 142-43; POWDERLY, *Path I Trod*, pp. 434-35.

³⁸ *Gananoque Reporter*, 25 August 1887.

we catch mere glimpses of a self-generating culture of collectivity, mutuality and solidarity. An understanding of class place and pride stood at the core of this culture, as well as individual longing for a better world. Forging a multitude of diverse, often contradictory, ideals into a collective assertion was the movement itself. As a strikingly creative effort, the Knights of Labor was the very embodiment of human striving that evolved out of residual components of a class culture, nudged towards new, or emergent, purpose by those who embraced the causes of labour's rights, men and women who, in advocating reform, did much to create a culture of "democratic promise". The difficulty we ourselves experience in comprehending their vision and their striving is a measure of significant failures — theirs and ours.³⁹

But in the 1880s that failure was not a settled fact, embedded in the historical record in indisputable concreteness; the sharp clarity of defeat was not yet there for all to see. Thousands of Ontario workers took Richard Trevellick's words to heart when he promised that the Knights of Labor would "make Labor respectable by having men and women respect themselves, and while courteous and kind, refuse to bow and cringe to others because they possess wealth and social position". Certainly Thomas J. O'Neill, of Napanee's Courage Assembly (LA 9216), regarded such proclamations with appropriate seriousness, writing to Powderly that, "this section of the country is sadly in need of organization, but fear of the money kings [The Rathbuns] keep the working class in slavery." Railroad men, organized in Headlight Assembly (LA 4069) of St Thomas, acted upon Trevellick's words in 1885. They conducted their own statistical survey of their town of 11,000 with the intention of using "all lawful means of obtaining their rights, also to educate those of our members who heretofore have permitted others to do their thinking, thereby allowing themselves to be used as mere machines in the hands of unscrupulous men". The *Labor Union* proclaimed its mission in mid-January 1883: "To Spread the Light; to expose the inequalities of distribution by which the few are enriched at the expense of the many. To call things by their right names, and to point out to workingmen how these inequities could be redressed and the workingman secure the full reward of his toil." Employers found much to dislike in the words of Trevellick, O'Neill, LA 4069 and the *Labor Union*. Their actions throughout the 1880s spoke loudly of their fears and antagonisms. They regarded the increasing consciousness of class, and threat of active opposition, as a dangerous development. By 1891 the business community was convinced that "the spirit of trades unionism is strangling honest endeavour, and the hard-working, fearless thorough artisan of ten years ago is degenerating into the shiftless, lazy, half-hearted fellow who, with unconscious irony, styles himself a knight of labor." The culture had, as well as advocates, staunch opponents.⁴⁰

³⁹ Note the comments in Russell HANN, "Brainworkers and the Knights of Labor: E. E. Sheppard, Phillips Thompson, and the Toronto News, 1883-1887"; in *Essays in Canadian Working Class History*, eds: Gregory S. KEALEY and Peter WARRIAN (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), p. 57; GOODWYN, *Democratic Promise*, pp. 540-43.

⁴⁰ *Palladium of Labor* (Hamilton), 5 September 1885; PP, O'Neill to Powderly, 13 January 1885; *Statistics as Collected by Headlight Assembly No. 4069, K. of L., for Its*

It was in the midst of a virtual war between these contending forces (in which battles were both practical and intellectual) that the labour reform cause gained hard-won adherents. And it was in this context that the "educational" thrust so prominent in the Order's own priorities consolidated. Local assemblies became, in the parlance of the 1880s, "schools of instruction" in which the lessons learned turned on the principles of labour reform, reaching a mass audience in literally hundreds of reading rooms, Knights of Labor libraries, and assembly halls. In the words of Trelvelick, it was in the "schoolroom" of the local assembly where members first learned "their duties and their rights".⁴¹

Providing much of the text of instruction was a handful of committed publishers/editors. Often themselves practical printers, these men struggled through the 1880s and 1890s, working into the early morning hours to put out their weekly journals, devoted, as in the case of the *Palladium of Labor*, "to the Interests of the Workingmen and Workingwomen". Always on the brink of financial ruin, such newspapers kept afloat during these years only by dint of extraordinary effort, personal perseverance and occasional support from a long-established trade union. Smothered by their dependence on advertising revenue, limited by their subscribers' inability to contribute financially, with circulation often hovering around the 1,000 mark, seldom over 5,000, these papers occupied an unenviable position in the often gloomy world of the nineteenth-century press. Small wonder that the men who kept them going were often ill-tempered, and indiscriminately combative, as with Hamilton's William H. Rowe or St Thomas' George Wrigley, or constantly manoeuvring to attain economic ends, like the notorious but resourceful A. W. Wright. But whatever their personal idiosyncracies these men attempted to move the class beyond economism, striving "to take a broader and more comprehensive view of the entire subject of Labor Reform than is embodied in mere unionism, and to grasp and apply those great underlying principles of equity and justice between men which alone can permanently and satisfactorily solve the issues between Labor and Capital". This was an important component of what Frank Watt has referred to as the "freely germinating" radicalism of the 1880s, a phenomenon spawned by the presence of the Knights of Labor.⁴²

This radicalism was popularized by a group of brainworkers and local advocates: men like Toronto's Phillips Thompson, as well as more obscure, but highly talented and committed local figures. Among these were Joseph Marks of London, who began as a Knight, organized the Industrial Brotherhood in the 1890s, and edited the *Industrial Banner* well into the twentieth century; Galt's J. L. Blain, a lecturer who described himself to Powderly as a well-educated "rat from the sinking ship of aristocracy"; a

Exclusive Use (St Thomas, 1885), p. 3; *Journal of Commerce*, 13 March 1891, as cited in BLISS, *A Living Profit*, p. 78; *Labor Union* (Hamilton), 13 January 1883.

⁴¹ ONTARIO BUREAU OF INDUSTRY, *Annual Report* (Toronto, 1888), Part IV, p. 18; *Palladium of Labor*, 21 February 1885; *St. Thomas Times*, 21 April 1886; *Journal of United Labor* (Philadelphia), March 1883, quoted in FINK, "Workingmen's Democracy", p. 399.

⁴² G. Weston WRIGLEY, "Socialism in Canada", *International Socialist Review*, I (1 May 1901): 686; WATT, "The National Policy, the Workingman and Proletarian Ideas".

Hamilton coppersmith, George Collis, who boomed the Order under the nickname "Sandy the Tinker", travelling to Oshawa, London and other southern Ontario towns; poets like the carpenter Thomas Towers and Listowell's blind and deaf Walter A. Ratcliffe; or anonymous supporters — St Thomas' "Knight of the Brush" and "True Reformer"; Brantford's "Drawbar"; or "Pete Rolea" from the oil-producing community of western Ontario. Individuals like these helped the Order to establish itself in countless communities, and made the cause of reform a popular and lasting one. "Lignum Vitae" reported to the *Journal of United Labor* on the progress of Guelph LAs 2980 and 4703: "The masses are beginning to believe us when we tell them this endless toil for a miserable existence was never intended by an all wise creator. I wish I had only more time that I could go out to these people and invite them into an Order whose object is the complete emancipation of all mankind, and lift from off their necks the yoke of subjection, and often tyranny of a few." From virtually every corner of the province anonymous correspondents informed labour newspapers of the local state of reform agitation.⁴³

This agitation contributed much to the attainment of class cohesion, strengthening the bonds of unity. The old sectarian quarrels between Orange and Green were, for the most part, left behind; the Order itself assumed the place and role of a religion of reform, labour sermons being preached in local assembly halls; the Irish, once despised by all respectable workers, were at the centre of the Knights of Labor activity. Education became, not the responsibility of the schools, the press and the élite, but the duty of all. "L.C.S." of Gananoque argued that the Knights were "engaged in solving the greatest problem of the age", urging all wage labourers to drink at the fountain of labour reform, rather than from the cesspool of the "capitalistic press", which consistently suppressed facts, failed to consider just causes, and aligned itself with "upper anarchy", money and monopoly. "Educate yourself and you will be in a position to enlighten others", he wrote. That accomplished, working people had only to "obey the laws of knighthood, be loyal to self and manhood, defend the interest of the Order, and labor for the new era until it dawns upon the toilers of our country, until the weary men and women chained by the wage-system can see justice enthroned, and this, the land of the free". As Albert V. Cross reported to Powderly from Hamilton's LA 2481 in 1887:

When we entered the Order we were taught that in the home of labor there would be no distinctions of Country, Creed & Color because all were of the Earth and with equal rights to Earth, when we understood this great truth that all men are brothers we rejoiced, and we solomly [*sic*] resolved that we would do all in our power to strengthen the bonds of unity between the workers of the world.⁴⁴

Perhaps the most significant aspect of this strengthening of the bonds of unity was the Order's role in overcoming past deficiencies of workers'

⁴³ *Journal of United Labor*, 25 March 1886.

⁴⁴ PP, Cross to Powderly and G.E.B., 9 June 1887; *Gananoque Reporter*, 3 December 1887.

organizations. Nowhere was this more visible than in the Knights of Labor effort to draw *all* workers into one large movement. Across the province skilled and unskilled workers, craftsmen, factory operatives and labourers, united in local assemblies to oppose a common enemy and to cultivate common ties. Unlike virtually every previous chapter in the history of Ontario workers' rebellion, the Knights of Labor stamped these pages of the 1880s with concern for those whose status in the working-class community ill-suited them to wear the badge of respectability, a consensual cultural norm that the Order recast to express class antagonisms. Premised on the fundamental rejection of exclusion (tarnished only by the Order's stand on the Chinese), the Knights of Labor, most often led by skilled workers, offered their ideals and their strengths as a force protecting and speaking for all of those "below" them. As Leon Fink has argued in the case of the United States, masses of workers who had never experienced the fruits of full citizenship joined the skilled leadership sector of the Order, forging an alliance of the "privileged" working class and a younger thoroughly proletarianized group, composed of male and female factory operatives and unskilled labourers.⁴⁵

Indeed, the introduction of women into the mass struggles of the 1880s shattered decades of complacency and effected a fundamental shift in attitude. To be sure, the Knights acted out of chivalrous intent, and did not abandon age-old conceptions of hearth and home, domesticity and place. But they could turn all this to new purpose, and strike out at forces which they felt to be undermining all that was good and proper in such traditional practices. Thus, at a London speech by the popular and well-travelled Knight, Richard Trevellick, members of the Order raised "their hands to heaven and pledged themselves that wherever women were employed, they would demand equal pay for equal work without regard to sex whatsoever". It is difficult to see in such action only a retrogressive glance over one's shoulder to a pre-industrial arcadia: the language is unmistakably that of an industrial society, and the problem has yet to be resolved. Finally, the Knights did not stop and settle comfortably in this economic niche, but attacked those who would define women's rights in some circumscribed way. In Knights of Labor centres like Belleville, Brantford, London, Stratford, St Thomas, Thorold, Hamilton and Toronto, where "the ladies" joined the Order in assemblies named "Advance" and "Hope", and attended musical and literary entertainments as "Goddesses of Liberty", the possibility forged in the 1880s was on many women workers' lips. With the passing of the Knights of Labor those lips were sealed for a time, but the possibility itself could not be written out of the past.⁴⁶

It is this notion of possibility, this movement towards alternative hegemony, that is central to an understanding of the Knights of Labor in

⁴⁵ See, especially, FINK, "Workingmen's Democracy".

⁴⁶ *Brantford Expositor*, 16 July 1886; *London Advertiser*, 29-30 October 1886; Susan LEVINE, "The Best Men in the Order: Women in the Knights of Labor", unpublished paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, London, 1978, and "The Knights of Labor and Romantic Ideology", paper presented to the Centennial Conference, Newberry Library, Chicago, 17-19 May 1979.

the 1880s. To rescue that moment, and to realize that its insights and social practice were achievements of considerable stature is part of our purpose in presenting this analysis of the Knights of Labor. With the vision of a more humane social order always before it, the culture forged by the Knights of Labor is worth knowing today. In the words of Phillips Thompson, member of Toronto's Victor Hugo LA 7814, that culture taught men and women to "dream of what might be". By doing their part in "spreading the light", Thompson argued, labour reformers were bringing close to realization the "beautiful ideal of universal democracy and co-operation". Far from a utopian fantasy, the promise of a better society was merely "a faint presentation of what might be — what cannot be at present solely because of the blindness, ignorance, and want of union among workingmen — but what I trust yet will be when the scales of error, of misleading education and of temporary self-interest have fallen from their eyes — so they can see the light".⁴⁷ To explore both the strengths and weaknesses of this reform crusade we now turn to the political and workplace struggles in which the Knights of Labor both thrived and foundered.

IV. — THE KNIGHTS IN POLITICS

The Knights articulated this new "movement culture" in the realm of Ontario politics. On all levels, municipal, provincial and federal, the Order expressed the class interests of Ontario workers in new ways. This unprecedented upsurge of labour involvement menaced both old-line parties' control over their respective electorates. In Ontario this represented a significant danger to Macdonald and the Tory party, while Blake regarded it as the key to potential political success, especially given Oliver Mowat's Ontario record.⁴⁸

To those of us familiar with the older Canadian political history, the role of the Order in the politics of the 1880s may come as a considerable surprise. Yet it was no secret to the political partisans of the day. Not only in Toronto and Hamilton but throughout the south-western Ontario manufacturing belt and even penetrating into eastern Ontario, the Knights created a political movement that demanded attention. Macdonald in assessing the political climate in the summer of 1886 worried that the Conservative party was "not in a flourishing state". The "rocks ahead" which threatened the Tory "ship" were "Riel, Home Rule, the Knights of Labor and the Scott Act".⁴⁹ The Knights thus specifically merited "the old chieftain's" close attention and two of the three other threatening reefs were move-

⁴⁷ *Palladium of Labor*, 26 December 1885.

⁴⁸ On Mowat and Labour see Margaret EVANS, "Oliver Mowat and Ontario: a Study in Political Success" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1967), especially ch. 3.

⁴⁹ Sir John A. Macdonald to Sir Charles Tupper, 21 June 1886, in Sir Joseph POPE, ed., *The Correspondence of Sir John A. Macdonald* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 382.

ments intimately tied to the Order and its ideals, namely the Irish question and temperance.⁵⁰

From the moment of their entrance into Canada the Knights actively engaged in politics. December 1882 saw the first stirrings of these activities when in Hamilton labour helped elect two aldermen⁵¹ and meanwhile in Toronto the Labour Council played a prominent role in defeating a candidate identified as particularly anti-labour.⁵² Those initial successes propelled labour reformers in both cities into independent campaigns in the 1883 provincial election. In Hamilton locomotive engineer and prominent Knight Ed Williams, an English immigrant and the epitome of the respectable working man, ran and won a solid 23.4 percent of the vote in a three-way race.⁵³ In Toronto, where partisan politics had flared during the nominating process, the campaign results were more mixed. Painter John Carter, a labour leader of the 1870s and a member of Toronto's Excelsior LA 2305, ran in Toronto West and won forty-eight percent of the vote. His candidacy, however, had gained the unstated support of the Reform Party which ran no candidate against him. In Toronto East, carpenter Samuel R. Heakes faced nominees from both old-line parties and finished a distant third with only seven percent of the vote.⁵⁴

Despite the relative success of these campaigns, partisan recriminations followed and were to re-emerge in subsequent campaigns. In both cities disgruntled Tory workingmen accused the Grits of double-dealing.⁵⁵ In Hamilton these charges died down, however, and labour reformers created the Hamilton Labor Political Association to continue the thrust for an independent working-class party. In subsequent municipal elections in 1883 and 1884, the association under the leadership of Knights' activist Robert Coulter enjoyed some success in electing Knights as aldermen. The best-known of these figures was Irish carter Thomas Brick who provided Hamilton workers with a colourful and bombastic leader.⁵⁶

In Toronto Excelsior LA 2305's leadership core of old labour reformers, led by Daniel J. O'Donoghue with the able support of Charles March and Alfred Jury, consolidated the position of the Knights of Labor first in the newly-created Trades and Labor Congress of Canada (which first met in 1883) and subsequently in the Toronto Trades and Labour

⁵⁰ On the Knights and the Irish see Eric FONER, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism in the Gilded Age: The Land League and Irish America", *Marxist Perspectives*, 1 (Summer 1978): 6-55; on Home Rule see KEALEY, *Toronto Workers*, ch. 14.

⁵¹ PP, George Havens to Powderly, 4 January 1883.

⁵² KEALEY, *Toronto Workers*, ch. 11.

⁵³ *Labor Union*, 3, 10 February, 3 March 1883; PP, Gibson to Powderly, 7 February 1883, and Powderly to Gibson, 9 February 1883.

⁵⁴ *Trade Union Advocate* (Toronto), 11, 18, 25 January, 1, 8, 15 February 1883; Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC), Toronto Trades and Labor Council, Minutes, 19 January, 2 February 1883; *Globe* (Toronto), 5, 8 February 1883.

⁵⁵ PP, D. B. Skelly to Powderly, 15 December 1884; PAC, Macdonald Papers, Small to Macdonald, 10 April 1883.

⁵⁶ *Palladium of Labor*, 25 August, 28 September, 13, 20 October, 24 November 1883; 12 January, 31 May, 5 December 1884; 8, 15 May, 4 July, 28 November, 5 December 1885.

Council (TTLC). Once entrenched there they proceeded to make good use of both bodies as effective lobbying agencies, especially against the federal Tory government.⁵⁷ Their success in attracting political attention was evident on T. V. Powderly's 1884 Toronto visit. The stage at his major address was graced by the presence of Edward Blake, Timothy Anglin, Toronto Tory Mayor Boswell and numerous Tory aldermen.⁵⁸ In the ensuing 1884 municipal election Toronto workers threw a considerable scare into the Tory machine although it held the mayoralty by a slim margin.⁵⁹ In 1885, however, this hold was broken with the sweeping victory of W. H. Howland who enjoyed the united support of the Toronto reform community, including the extremely active support of both the Knights of Labor and TTLC.⁶⁰ His victory led to considerable soul-searching on the part of the Tories both in Toronto and in Ottawa. The results of this re-evaluation manifested themselves in a remarkable labour settlement at the *Mail* newspaper, where an iron-clad had caused many former Tory workmen to defect,⁶¹ and later in the equally striking creation of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital.⁶²

These quite considerable concessions to the political strength of the working-class movement did not prevent it from contesting the December 1886 Ontario provincial election and the February 1887 federal election. In December seven labour candidates took the field. One could be described as Lib-Lab, two as Tory-Labour and the other four were independents who faced candidates from the other two parties. St Thomas brakeman and leading Knight Andy Ingram won West Elgin,⁶³ while in Lincoln Lib-Lab candidate William Garson succeeded.⁶⁴ In Lambton A. W. Wright, running as a Conservative-Labour candidate, caused considerable controversy when many of the Knights repudiated him. Not surprisingly he did not run strongly.⁶⁵ In London, however, cabinet maker and Knight Samuel Peddle, running with temperance support, gave Tory Opposition Leader W. R. Meredith a considerable scare before going down to a

⁵⁷ KEALEY, *Toronto Workers*, ch. 11.

⁵⁸ *Globe*, 14 October 1884.

⁵⁹ PAC, Macdonald Papers, Boulton to Macdonald, 12 September, 29, 30 December 1884; Macpherson to Macdonald, 27 December 1884.

⁶⁰ PAC, Toronto Trades and Labor Council, Minutes, 4, 14, 18, 29 December 1885; *News* (Toronto), 4 January 1886; *Palladium of Labor*, 5 December 1885; PP, O'Donoghue to Powderly, 7 January 1886.

⁶¹ PAC, Macdonald Papers, Piper to Macdonald, 2, 3 February 1886; *Toronto World*, 13, 16 March 1886; KEALEY, *Toronto Workers*, chs 6, 11; PP, O'Donoghue to Powderly, 29 March 1886.

⁶² KEALEY, *Canada Investigates Industrialism*, pp. ix-xxvii, and HARVEY, *Révolution industrielle et travailleurs*.

⁶³ *St. Thomas Daily Times*, February-December 1886; *Canada Labor Courier* (St Thomas), 29 July, 30 December 1886. See also Barbara A. McKenna, "The Decline of the Liberal Party in Elgin County", unpublished paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, London, 1978.

⁶⁴ PP, William Garson to Powderly, 21 March 1884 and 22 October 1885.

⁶⁵ *London Advertiser*, 21 December 1886; *Sarnia Observer*, 10 September 1886, 7 January 1887; *Canadian Labor Reformer* (Toronto), 18 December 1886; *Toronto World*, 2 December 1886; *Globe*, 8 December 1886; *News*, 22 December 1886.

narrow defeat. In the previous election Meredith had gained his seat by acclamation.⁶⁶

Toronto witnessed a confused race owing to the extraordinary gerrymandering of Oliver Mowat. Toronto had gained a third seat in a redistribution, but the three MPPs were to be elected at large for a city-wide riding, and each voter would be allowed to vote for only two candidates. The logic of this tactic was, of course, to ensure that at least one Grit would be returned from Tory Toronto. The strategy eventually paid off, but the race saw two Tory, one Grit and two Labour candidates. Knights' organizer Charles March finished fourth overall, while his Knight running mate, temperance advocate and evangelical Christian John Roney finished fifth. Statistical calculations in this anomalous electoral situation are complex but March did win over 4,000 votes and Roney some 3,400. (Tory E. F. Clarke, an Orange printer, topped the poll with 7,000.)⁶⁷

In Hamilton complications also arose when the Tories nominated a leading moulder John Burns as their candidate and then called on Labour to endorse him. The Labour convention refused, however, roundly condemning Burns and the Tories. Instead they nominated Grand Trunk machinist and Knight Hamilton Racey. In the bitter three-way race that followed Racey finished third with 17.2 percent of the vote, a total which fell short of Ed Williams' 1883 vote.⁶⁸ This result did not prevent Hamilton workers from trying again in the federal election in which moulder Fred Walters ran as a Lib-Lab candidate in the two-seat constituency. He outpolled his Liberal running-mate but nevertheless trailed the two victorious Tories, although his 48.8 percent was a respectable showing.⁶⁹

In Toronto E. E. Sheppard, the controversial editor of the *News*, campaigned in West Toronto for labour, while in East Toronto Knights' leader Alfred Jury ran. Neither was opposed by a Liberal although Sheppard's previous ties were Tory, if anything. Sheppard won forty-seven percent and Jury thirty-five percent, but expectations of victory had been so high that this was viewed as a significant set-back.⁷⁰ Fierce factional fighting ensued which pitted D. J. O'Donoghue and his *Labor Record* against A. W. Wright and the *Canadian Labor Reformer*. The charges back and forth only confirmed for many the growing fear that independent labour politics was a diversion from the Knights' major tasks.⁷¹

Workers had entered politics with considerable scepticism and their failure to make a quick and decisive breakthrough led to much discouragement, especially since it appeared that their leaders were still intriguing

⁶⁶ *London Advertiser*, 24 November, 7, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 29, 30 December 1886, 7, 11 January 1887; *Palladium of Labor*, 27 November, 11 December 1886; *Canada Labor Courier*, 30 December 1886; PP, Hewit to Powderly, 13 December 1886.

⁶⁷ KEALEY, *Toronto Workers*, ch. 12.

⁶⁸ PP, Freed to Powderly, 2 December 1886; *Palladium of Labor*, 4, 7, 11, 18 December 1886; *Hamilton Spectator*, 4, 7, 8, 14, 22 December 1886.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 13 January, 24 February 1887.

⁷⁰ KEALEY, *Toronto Workers*, ch. 12.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, chs 12-13.

in partisan politics. Nevertheless throughout the late 1880s municipal politics continued to gain much attention from the Order and victories were recorded which ranged from Brantford and Chatham to Brockville and Ottawa.⁷² In Cornwall, for example, the Knights helped defeat a municipal railroad bonus in the 1888 municipal election and two years later were reported to have elected nine of thirteen aldermen and the mayor and reeve.⁷³ Moreover the Order was particularly prominent in lobbying activities in Ottawa after the creation of a Canadian Knights of Labor Legislative Committee.⁷⁴

The Knights then made significant political efforts and enjoyed some success, but they certainly did not overcome all the tensions in the working-class world. Partisan politics had established a deep hold on Canadian workers and the battle to create an independent working-class party was sharp and difficult. Yet on the local level tangible gains were made — early closing, union wages and jobs in corporation work, just assessment rates, more responsible public transit. Nevertheless the Knights had never regarded the political arena as their major battlefield. It was only one campaign in a war on many fronts. This war was perhaps sharpest at the workplace.

V. — THE PEOPLE'S STRIKE

Much of the previous literature on the Knights of Labor has focused on their dislike of strikes. Frequent citation of major Knights' leaders such as T. V. Powderly and lengthy consideration of splits within the Order, such as the expulsion of the general executive board member T. B. Barry in 1888, lead to the image of an organization committed to class co-operation through the vehicle of arbitration. Like most long-propounded views, these arguments contain a kernel of truth but they also disguise much that is central to an understanding of the Knights of Labor. In Ontario the Knights either led or were involved in almost all the major strikes of the 1880s and early 1890s. This should not surprise us since, as we have already argued, the Order should not be viewed as one contending force within the working-class world, but rather as the embodiment of that class in these years. Thus in the period of the Order's growth in Ontario from 1882 to 1886, the Order came to represent a solid working-class presence united behind its eclectic but critical aims.

⁷² *Courier* (Brantford), 4 January, 15 April, 28 December 1886; *Brantford Expositor*, 16 April, 20 August, 24 September, 17, 31 December 1886; *Canada Labor Courier*, 30 December 1886, 13 January 1887; *Brockville Recorder*, 1887-88; *Ottawa Citizen*, 1890-91.

⁷³ *Brockville Recorder*, 4 January 1888, *Cornwall Freeholder*, 3, 10 January, 7 February 1890. These newspaper discussions are somewhat confusing as various candidates denied formal connections with the Order. Yet in the aftermath the *Cornwall Freeholder*, 7 February 1890, argued that one loser "had arranged against him the workingmen, which is no mean factor in election contests in Cornwall these days".

⁷⁴ KEALEY, *Toronto Workers*, ch. 12.

In the Order's earliest years in Canada it grew owing to its willingness to organize the larger class forces on behalf of localized trade or industrial struggles. Thus in Toronto the Order emerged from the coalition of forces knit together by experienced trade-union militants to support the striking female boot and shoe operatives in the spring of 1882.⁷⁵ This was apparent again the following summer when DA 45 (Brotherhood of Telegraphers) engaged in a continent-wide strike against the monopolistic telegraph companies. Although DA 45 had done little preparatory work within the Order before their epic struggle, as a bitter Powderly would argue again and again, it did appear to have established sufficient local contacts so that organized labour, and especially the Knights, rallied to its cause.⁷⁶ In Hamilton and Toronto, for example, support came from union contributions to the strike fund, benefit concerts, lectures and theatricals.⁷⁷ Meanwhile the first wave of massive Labour Day demonstrations organized by the Knights, but involving all organized labour, took place in Toronto, Hamilton and Oshawa.⁷⁸ In each case, support for the telegraphers played a prominent role in the speeches and provided a compelling symbol for the necessity of labour solidarity. The ultimate failure of the telegraphers' strike and its bitter aftermath, which saw DA 45 withdraw from the Knights of Labor, appear to have been less important than the solidarity expressed in its course. As the *Palladium of Labor* declared: "The telegraphers' strike is over. The People's Strike is now in order."⁷⁹

"The People's Strike" took many forms in the following few years. At its most dramatic it involved mass strikes which crippled whole industries or communities. Examples of struggles of this magnitude included the two Toronto Street Railway strikes of the spring and summer of 1886, a Chatham town-wide strike of December 1886, the cotton strikes in Merriton (1886 and 1889) and Cornwall (1887, 1888 and 1889), and the massive lumber strikes in Gravenhurst in 1888 and in Ottawa-Hull in 1891.⁸⁰ Each of these struggles rocked their communities with previously unmatched levels of class conflict and involved workers previously untouched by trade-union organization. Yet the Knights of Labor also led or took part in conflicts far less riveting. In the early 1880s this often meant coming to the support of striking craftsmen as with Toronto female shoe operatives in 1882 and their Hamilton sisters in 1884, or Toronto printers in 1884.⁸¹ In these cases and in countless others, the Order proved its mettle by practising what it preached and aiding all workers' struggles. It was this type of activity which initially helped to break down entrenched conservative craft suspicions of the Order. Then, as craft unionists and craft

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, chs 3 and 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, ch. 10; PALMER, *A Culture in Conflict*, ch. 6; and FORSEY, "The Telegraphers' Strike of 1883".

⁷⁷ KEALEY, *Toronto Workers*, ch. 10; PALMER, *A Culture in Conflict*, ch. 6.

⁷⁸ *Iron Molders Journal* (Cincinnati) (hereafter *IMJ*), 31 August 1883; *Palladium of Labor*, 18 August 1883.

⁷⁹ *Palladium of Labor*, 25 August 1883.

⁸⁰ For Toronto see KEALEY, *Toronto Workers*, ch. 10; for Chatham see *Canada Labor Courier*, 30 December 1886, 13 January 1887; for cotton and lumber see below.

⁸¹ KEALEY, *Toronto Workers*, ch. 10; PALMER, *A Culture in Conflict*, ch. 6.

unions flooded into the Order in 1885-86, the Order continued to fight their battles. These struggles, often involving issues of control, represent the second major type of Knights' strike activity.

It would be impossible to chronicle all these strikes here. Toronto Knights alone, for example, fought nineteen strikes between 1883 and 1889, and this number does not include the large number of strikes which they actively supported or in which some Knights were involved. Let us turn instead first to a perusal of strike activity among one important group of craft workers, the moulders, and then turn to an analysis of a few of the mass strikes.

Moulders had their own international craft union which dated from the late 1850s in Ontario. The Iron Molders International Union (IMIU) had very strong locals in Hamilton (No. 26) and Toronto (No. 28) and after 1887 had an Ontario-wide district organization.⁸² The relationship between the IMIU and the Knights cannot be plotted with mathematical certainty but in Brantford (Standard LA 3811), Hamilton (Library LA 1864), Kingston (Frontenac LA 10539) and Oshawa (Tylers LA 4279) there existed trade assemblies identified as moulders. In addition, however, we know from scattered sources that Toronto (Maple Leaf LA 2622), Brockville (Franklin LA 2311), Smiths Falls (LA 6772), Lindsay (LA 5402) and Oshawa (Aetna LA 2355 and LA 4428) all contained moulders and other metal workers as well. Finally we have considerable reason to suspect that Cobourg (LA 2598), Toronto (LAs 5254 and 5650), Woodstock (LAs 3151 and 4992), Galt (LA 6112) and Peterborough (LA 6952) might also have had moulder members.⁸³ The lines between the craft unions and the Knights were never drawn as sharply in reality as they have been by historians subsequently.

Organized throughout Ontario in stove foundries and in the agricultural implements industry, the moulders played a significant role in one of Ontario's most successful industries. This prominence and their skill, which resisted mechanical innovation throughout this period, gave them a high degree of workplace control which they fought vigorously to maintain.⁸⁴ These issues led to at least twenty-five strikes between 1880 and 1893.⁸⁵ The major strikes in 1887, 1890 and 1892 in Toronto and Hamilton

⁸² For background on the Iron Moulders see C. B. WILLIAMS, "Canadian-American Trade Union Relations: A Case Study of the Development of Bi-National Unionism" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1964); PALMER, *A Culture in Conflict, passim*; and KEALEY, *Toronto Workers*, ch. 5. The following is also based on the IMJ and the International's convention proceedings.

⁸³ Organizational data are drawn from Garlock data bank; FORSEY, *History of Canadian Trade Unionism*; and KEALEY and PALMER, "Dreaming of What Might Be", ch. 1 (forthcoming).

⁸⁴ David MONTGOMERY, *Workers' Control in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), ch. 1 and *passim*; KEALEY, *Toronto Workers*, ch. 5; PALMER, *A Culture in Conflict*, ch. 3; Wayne ROBERTS, "Studies in the Toronto Labour Movement, 1896-1914" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1978), ch. 3.

⁸⁵ Strike data are drawn from IMJ; IRON MOLDERS INTERNATIONAL UNION (hereafter IMIU), *Proceedings, 1860-1895*; and ONTARIO BUREAU OF INDUSTRY, *Annual Reports*.

have already received historical attention,⁸⁶ but much smaller Ontario centres such as Brockville, Oshawa and London also saw frequent struggles in their foundries throughout the 1880s. These smaller centres demonstrate well the interrelationship of IMIU members and Knights.

Brockville, a railroad and manufacturing centre on the St Lawrence in eastern Ontario, illustrates these themes. The James Smart Manufacturing Co. (est. 1854) dominated the local economy of the 1880s and employed by 1890 two hundred workers in the production of stoves and lawn mowers.⁸⁷ The IMIU first organized in Brockville in 1868 or 1869 and had a spasmodic existence there throughout the 1870s, which included work stoppages in 1875, 1879, 1880 and 1881 — the last three of which appear to have resulted in union victories.⁸⁸ The last two struggles took place after Robert Gill replaced James Smart as the manager of the works and tried to break the union by demanding the workers abandon it. After this failed, there was a single year of peace at the foundry — a year in which the Knights strongly established themselves in Brockville. In August 1882, Ogdensburg Knights' leader Archer Baker organized Franklin LA 2311 which grew rapidly. By the following summer the assembly numbered in the hundreds and contained many of the most prominent moulders' leaders in town including Samuel Miller, a former IMIU international convention delegate and a perennial member of the moulders' local executive.⁸⁹ The year of peace ended in June 1883 when Gill refused the moulders' demand for a wage increase. The ensuing eleven-week strike was eventually lost but the polarization of the community continued to increase. During the strike Brockville's working class demonstrated its solidarity when the corpse of twenty-eight year old moulder William Hutcheson, murdered by a scab in a strike in Troy, New York, was returned to his native town for burial.⁹⁰ The delegation of Troy Knights and moulders which accompanied the body joined with the Brockville Knights in commemorating his death with "one of the largest funerals" ever seen in Brockville.⁹¹ Building on this solidarity, the Knights grew rapidly that summer enrolling over one hundred members in one week shortly after Hutcheson's funeral. The town also had a telegraphers' LA 2335 with about forty members which struck solidly and with "manifest public sympathy" during the continent-wide strike.⁹² In the early fall Franklin Assembly held a picnic which attracted 500 to 800 and by November the assembly reported a membership of 430.⁹³

The stage was set for the next bitter conflict between Gill and his moulders which began in January 1884. Seven months later in late July the

⁸⁶ KEALEY, *Toronto Workers*, ch. 5; PALMER, *A Culture in Conflict*, ch. 3.

⁸⁷ Dale CHISAMORE et al., *Brockville: A Social History* (Brockville: Waterway Press, 1975), ch. 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, ch. 5; *IMJ*, 1868-92; *IMIU, Proceedings*.

⁸⁹ CHISAMORE, *Brockville*, ch. 5.

⁹⁰ Daniel WALKOWITZ, *Worker, City, Company Town* (Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1978), pp. 211, 213, 239-40; and a review of Walkowitz by Bryan PALMER, *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 4 (1979): 261-67.

⁹¹ *Brockville Recorder*, 12, 13, 14 June 1883.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 25 July 1883.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 17 November 1883.

moulders returned to work, their union crushed and their vestiges of craft control destroyed, at least for the moment. This time the Gills ignored community sentiment and engaged in active union-smashing. They recruited scabs from Connecticut, housed them in the foundry and ignored the public discontent which labelled the company managers, "the enemies of Brockville". When forced to defend his position, Gill explained simply:

The question at issue is simply one of 'control.' It is a fact, however humiliating the acknowledgement, that during the past three years of the company's existence, the business has been practically controlled by the Moulder's Union. ... If the conditions are such that 'control' cannot be gained by the proprietors, then Brockville will lose the industry which we are trying to carry on.⁹⁴

In Brockville the owners won back their control but only after a long history of struggle in which the Knights helped to provide the opposition. The intimacy of Knights and moulders in Brockville was evident in the latter stages of the 1884 strike when Franklin Assembly selected moulders' leader Sam Miller as its general assembly delegate and when John S. McClelland of the general executive board arrived in Brockville to investigate the strike. McClelland's visit resulted in a \$500 grant from the Order's assistance fund.⁹⁵

Oshawa, west of Brockville on Lake Ontario, witnessed an analogous set of struggles in the 1880s and a very similar organic relationship between IMIU Local No. 136 and the Knights. The IMIU which dated from 1866 was joined in Oshawa by the Knights on 12 August 1882 when Aetna LA 2355 was organized by a Buffalo Knight.⁹⁶ This large assembly with nearly 300 members in 1883 was entrenched in the local iron and agricultural implements industry. Co-operating closely with the IMIU, the Oshawa Knights hosted nearly 2,000 workers at their August 1883 labour demonstration. IMIU Local 136 marched in a uniform of "gray shirts, black hats and black neckties" and were joined by their brother moulders from Toronto (Nos 28 and 140) and Cobourg (No. 189) and over 1,500 Knights of Labor. Local 136 provided the "main feature of our procession", "the moulding, melting, and casting of iron in the line of march", reported LA 2355 and IMIU No. 36 Recording Secretary Joseph Brockman. The commemorative coins that they struck during the procession were distributed to the participants.⁹⁷ Two months later the labourers at the Malleable Iron Works, members of Aetna LA 2355, struck against a wage reduction. The moulders, out in support of the labourers and facing a similar wage cut, were warned that if they did not return, the shop would "be permanently closed against them". Six weeks into the strike the Oshawa Stove Works and the Masson Agricultural Implements Works locked out their moulders to create a solid employer block against the workers. Even then it was only

⁹⁴ Ibid., 5, 6, 10 March 1884.

⁹⁵ KNIGHTS OF LABOR, GENERAL ASSEMBLY, *Proceedings*, 1884, p. 652.

⁹⁶ PP, James R. Brown to Powderly, 29 September 1882; JOHNSON, *History of the County of Ontario*.

⁹⁷ *Palladium of Labor*, 18, 25 August 1883; *IMJ*, 31 August 1883; Nancy STUNDEN, "Oshawa Knights of Labor Demonstration Medal", *Canadian Labour History, Newsletter of the Committee on Canadian Labour History*, 4 (1974): 1-2.

after the Oshawa moulders' sister unions in Hamilton (No. 26) and Toronto (No. 28) accepted ten-percent wage cuts in December without striking, that Oshawa No. 136 felt compelled to concede defeat. Earlier in December the labourers had returned on the advice of the LA 2355 executive which argued that "it would have broke Jay Gould with his seventy-three millions of stolen money to have kept labourers and immigrants away from here."⁹⁸

By the next fall, however, the union had reasserted itself and another of its leaders (and a charter member of LA 2355), Lewis Allchin, wrote Powderly seeking his support for a profit-sharing plan at the Oshawa Stove Works. He also mentioned that they had "affected every Reform obtained in the shop, one for instance, piece workers used to work almost all noonhour, and not later than last spring, we managed to institute a rigid observance of noonhour, we also limited the wages to \$2.50 per day".⁹⁹ The new success of the moulders probably made another struggle almost inevitable and it came two years later in late January 1886 when the Malleable Iron Works again tried to force the union out of its foundry. This time the issue was simply the question of a closed shop. John Cowan, the manager of the works, insisted on continuing to employ two non-union moulders; IMIU No. 36 and Tylers LA 4279 (Moulders) refused to work with them. After a bitter two-month strike in the depths of a severe winter which witnessed alleged incendiarism, a "surprise party" (charivari?), a widespread sending to Coventry of the non-union moulders, and considerable public support for the men, the company finally caved in and recognized the closed shop. The concession came at the end of March when the union and LA 4279 began to call for a total boycott of the foundry's goods.¹⁰⁰

Similar events involving moulders and Knights occurred in Lindsay in 1886,¹⁰¹ in Kingston in 1887,¹⁰² in London in 1882 and 1886,¹⁰³ and in Ayr, Galt and Smiths Falls later in the decade.¹⁰⁴ Success varied dramatically, but in all these cases the principles of the Knights, of craft control and of labour reform were carried on. Lewis Allchin, Oshawa moulder-Knight and the author of "Sketches of our Organization" (a serialized history of the IMIU from its founding to 1890 published in the *Iron Molders Journal*), summed up the close intertwining of these themes: "The object, in brief, is the *complete emancipation of labor*, and the inauguration of a higher and nobler industrial system than this of the present, under which one human being is dependent upon another for the means of living." Denying at the outset later historians' views of the Knights, he emphasized:

⁹⁸ *Palladium of Labor*, 20 October, 8, 15, 22 December 1883; *IMJ*, 31 August 1890.

⁹⁹ PP, Lewis Allchin to Powderly, 20, 25 October 1884.

¹⁰⁰ *News*, 23 February, 6, 9, 15 March 1886; *IMJ*, 30 September 1890.

¹⁰¹ *Labor Record* (Toronto), 14 May 1886; Trent University Archives, Gainey Collection, I.M.I.U. Local 191, Minutes, 1886.

¹⁰² *British Daily Whig* (Kingston), 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 23 May 1887; *Gananoque Reporter*, 21 May 1887; and ONTARIO BUREAU OF INDUSTRY, *Annual Report* (Toronto, 1887), p. 42.

¹⁰³ IMIU, *Proceedings*, 1882 and 1886; *IMJ*, 31 May 1890.

¹⁰⁴ IMIU, *Proceedings*, 1890 and 1895; *IMJ*, August 1889.

"We cannot turn back if we would; we cannot return to a primitive system of working, however much we might desire it." Trusts and syndicates, he viewed as "an inevitable phase" of "an excessive and pernicious competitive system", but they would not "be the *finale* of the whole question". They "contained within themselves the germs of their own dissolution", since "selfishness and greed were but foundations of sand to build upon". The future he would not predict, but he hazarded one final conclusion:

That no system which does not recognize the right of labor to a first and just share of its products, which refuses each and every toiler a voice in the business transactions of the enterprise, that does not establish a just and relative measure or standard of value for all services rendered, labor performed, products manufactured, and commodities exchanged, will ever be a just or permanent one.¹⁰⁵

Here, quite clearly, we can see that the values and ideas of the late nineteenth-century working-class world were shared by its articulate leadership, be they Knights or craft unionists, and, as was so often the case, the very personnel overlapped. For our chosen group of skilled workers, the moulders, this unity demonstrated itself most clearly in the streets of London in the late summer of 1886 when the IMIU held its seventeenth convention. The city's first labour demonstration "of 4000 unionists in line" was held to honour the assembled moulders and was witnessed by crowds estimated at between 8,000 and 10,000.¹⁰⁶ Addressed by Captain Richard Trevellick, the Knights' chief itinerant lecturer, the convention also considered at length a motion to amalgamate the IMIU with the Knights of Labor. After a full day of debate the resolution was soundly defeated but it did win support from militant moulders' strongholds such as Albany and Troy, New York. In registering his opposition, the IMIU president made clear his support "for always remaining on the most friendly terms with the Knights of Labor, and rendering them all the assistance that our organization can possibly give them in all legitimate undertakings in the interest of labour."¹⁰⁷ This solidarity began to disintegrate the following year during the vicious war between the Founders Association and the moulders in the Bridge and Beach strike.¹⁰⁸

The solidarity so evident in the London streets in July 1886 had also spread far beyond the moulders and their other skilled worker brethren. The Knights also successfully organized the unskilled — women factory workers, male operatives and large numbers of labourers both in Ontario's cities and towns, and in her resource hinterland. These workers, organized for the first time under the banners of the Knights of Labor, also engaged in militant struggles in the 1880s and early 1890s. Strikes to gain either

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 31 January 1891.

¹⁰⁶ Bryan PALMER, "'Give us the road and we will run it': The Social and Cultural Matrix of an Emerging Labour Movement", in *Essays in Canadian Working Class History*, eds: KEALEY and WARRIAN, pp. 106-24; *IMJ*, 31 October 1890, 31 July 1886.

¹⁰⁷ IMIU, *Proceedings*, 1886; *IMJ*, 31 October 1890.

¹⁰⁸ IMIU, *Proceedings*, 1888; Richard OESTREICHER, "Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1877-1895" (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1979), ch. 7.

the right to organize or to win modest economic advances occurred in these sectors as opposed to the control struggles of the skilled workers. Ranging in size from minor affairs to massive, almost general, strikes which polarized single-industry communities, these struggles were most prominent in the mill towns of eastern and western Ontario.

Cotton mill struggles hit Merritton in 1886 and 1889 and Cornwall in three successive years, 1887, 1888 and 1889. The Merritton mill, which remained totally organized as late as 1892, witnessed numerous work stoppages led by the Knights in 1886.¹⁰⁹ Three years later a week-long strike over a wage reduction won a compromise settlement.¹¹⁰ None of these represented major victories but in an industry known for its exploitation and anti-unionism Maple Leaf LA 5933's 500 workers were more successful than most. Their achievement may well have been one of the factors that led Canadian Coloured Cottons to shut down the plant after the merger of 1892.¹¹¹

Cornwall's cotton workers joined the Knights of Labor in 1886 in LAs 6582 and 6583. The first test of the Order came in the summer of 1887 when eighteen dyers demanded that their hours be reduced from ten to nine. Although the Order provided \$400 in financial assistance to its striking members, they still lost the strike.¹¹² In February 1888 wage reductions at both the Canada and Stormont mills precipitated strikes involving from 1,300 to 1,500 employees. After a few weeks the workers returned with a compromise settlement. The wages were still cut but by an estimated ten percent instead of the alleged twenty to twenty-three percent originally imposed. This settlement held at the Stormont mill, but the Canada mill was struck again when workers accused the company of not living up to the agreement. After another month these workers again returned.¹¹³ One year later in the spring of 1889 the Stormont mill workers struck once again. After five weeks the 600 operatives returned when the company agreed to honour the weavers' demands.¹¹⁴

The lumber industry, another long hold-out against trade unionism, also experienced two major strikes led by the Knights of Labor. Gravenhurst LA 10669 was organized in 1887 under the leadership of Uxbridge DA 236 after a short lumber strike in which the hours of work in the mills on Muskoka Bay had been reduced from eleven to ten-and-a-half with a promise that in 1888 they would be further shortened to ten. In 1888,

¹⁰⁹ ONTARIO BUREAU OF INDUSTRY, *Annual Reports* (Toronto, 1886, 1889 and 1890).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Peter de Lottinville, "The St. Croix Manufacturing Company and its influence on the St. Croix Community, 1880-1892" (M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1979).

¹¹² ONTARIO BUREAU OF INDUSTRY, *Annual Report* (Toronto, 1887); *Brockville Recorder*, 12 July 1887.

¹¹³ ONTARIO BUREAU OF INDUSTRY, *Annual Report* (Toronto, 1888); *Cornwall Standard*, 28 January, 2 February 1888; *Montreal Gazette*, 14 February 1888. Our thanks to Peter de Lottinville for these newspaper references. See also *Gananoque Reporter*, 4, 11, 18 February 1888.

¹¹⁴ ONTARIO BUREAU OF INDUSTRY, *Annual Report* (Toronto, 1889); *Gananoque Reporter*, 16 March 1889.

however, a province-wide agreement was signed by the Muskoka, Georgian Bay and Ottawa River lumber barons which prevented a further reduction of hours under pain of forfeiting a bond. The angry workers of LA 10669 consulted the DA 236 leadership which counselled caution and urged the assembly to strengthen its ranks. By June 300 of the 375 workers had joined the Order and they then appointed a committee to meet with the mill owners. This met with a blanket refusal from the employers and the workers again sought aid from DA 236. Although reluctant, the district assembly had no choice but to sanction a strike which began on 3 July 1888. A few mills acceded but the majority held out. Aylesworth of the Knights' general executive board responded to an emergency call from DA 236, but his efforts were unsuccessful and by September the men had returned to work with no gains.¹¹⁵

In the Chaudière region of the Ottawa-Hull area, another lumber workers' strike erupted in September 1891.¹¹⁶ As in Muskoka, the Ottawa Valley was ruled by a closely-knit group of entrepreneurs which had made fortunes and consolidated power on profits from sawn lumber and lumber by-products. Nine firms were involved in the 1891 strike and they were headed by a distinguished group of Canadian capitalists, notably J. R. Booth, E. H. Bronson and E. B. Eddy. While they prospered, their mill-hands eked out a marginal existence on wages of \$7.00 to \$9.50 for a sixty-hour week. The Knights' success in the Ottawa Valley came late and it was only in the fall of 1890 that they had gained a foothold in the mills with the creation of Chaudière LA 2966.

As three years earlier in Gravenhurst, a particularly harsh winter created the situation which would lead to that fall's huge mill strike. Already late returning to work because of the weather, the workers were informed of a fifty-cents-a-week wage cut. In return for the reduction, the owners offered the ten-hour day but soon violated their own concession. With hours again extended to eleven and twelve the workers sought the aid of the Knights of Labor in May. When informed that the Order would not sanction a strike until they had been in the organization for at least six months, the workers remained on the job. By fall, however, their tempers had worn thin and on Saturday, 12 September 1891 the outside workers at Perley and Pattee demanded that their wages be reinstated to the 1890 rate. Denied this on Saturday, the workers met on the Sunday and agreed to repeat their demand the next day. Again rebuffed, they proceeded to march from mill to mill pulling all the workers out. Over 2,400 workers left their jobs and the Knights quickly took over the strike leadership. The mill

¹¹⁵ This draws on: PP, R. R. Elliot to Powderly, 12, 19 July 1888; William Hogan to Powderly, 21 September, 5 November 1888; Archy Sloan to Powderly, 3 September 1888; Powderly to William Sloan, 10 September 1888. *Journal of United Labor*, 12 July 1888. See also PP, D. J. O'Donoghue to Powderly, 9 August 1888; *Globe*, 25 July, 10 August 1888.

¹¹⁶ The following draws on: Edward McKenna, "Unorganized Labour versus Management: The Strike at the Chaudière Lumber Mills, 1891", *Histoire sociale — Social History*, 10 (1972): 186-211; FORSEY, *History of Canadian Trade Unionism*, ch. 7; Peter Gillis, "E. H. Bronson and Corporate Capitalism" (M.A. thesis, Queen's University, 1975), esp. pp. 72-81; ONTARIO BUREAU OF INDUSTRY, *Annual Report* (Toronto, 1892); and *Ottawa Citizen* and *Ottawa Journal*, September-October 1891.

workers were subsequently enrolled in Chaudière LA 2966 and Hull's Canadienne LA 2676.

Over the next few weeks some of the smaller mills conceded to the workers' demands of the previous year's rate and a ten-hour day, but the larger mills stood firm. As community support for the workers stiffened, massive meetings of 3,000 to 10,000 people were held. Meanwhile incidents of violence occurred, the militia was mobilized, and workers responded with a charivari and with their own security force. Over \$1,500 was raised by the Order and an extensive relief system was established. By the end of September, however, strike leaders urged their followers to seek employment elsewhere and by early October the relief system began to break down. By 12 October the workers were back with their 1890 wage but with the same long hours of work. Two hundred of Bronson's workers promptly struck again on 14 October when they claimed he had reneged on his agreement. By the end of the month, however, work was back to normal. Although not an unmitigated success, the Order had won a limited victory and the millmen stayed with the Knights. The next year Ottawa DA 6 was created with an impressive 2,000 workers, largely from the lumber industry. These workers finally won the ten-hour day in 1895.

Turbulence, strikes and class conflict thus played an important role in the history of the Knights of Labor in Ontario. The oft-invoked image of an organization interested in avoiding strikes at all cost and the implicit projection of a class-co-operative, if not collaborationist, body begins to dissipate under more careful scrutiny.

VI. — CONCLUSION

The 1880s were a critical decade in Canadian history — a decade which witnessed the fulfillment of the National Policy industrial strategy with a rapid expansion in Canadian manufacturing, especially in textiles. Yet these years also saw the breakdown of the previous consensus on industrial development, as Canadian workers, especially in the country's industrial heartland, began to raise their voices in an unfamiliar, concerted fashion to join the growing debate about the nation's future. Ontario's mainly British and Canadian workers, many with previous trade-union and industrial experience, provided leadership to the emerging working-class movement which found its most articulate expression in the Knights of Labor. The challenge which this movement mounted in all realms of Ontario society — the cultural, intellectual and political as well as the economic — engendered in turn a class response from employers and from the state. The employers engaged in a virulent, open warfare with their worker-Knights, especially in the period of economic decline after 1886. In the 1890s they began as well to turn to the ever-increasing concentration and centralization of capital and later to the modern management devices of a rampant Taylorism in their battle with labour. Meanwhile the state and the political parties responded in a more conciliatory fashion. Mowat and, to a lesser degree, Macdonald interceded to provide workers with many of the

protections they demanded — factory acts, bureaux of labour statistics, arbitration measures, suffrage extension, employers' liability acts and improved mechanics' lien acts. The political parties proved even more flexible and managed through patronage and promises to contain much of the oppositional sentiment which flared in the 1880s. Thus the Canadian political system functioned effectively to mediate the fiery class conflict of the 1880s.

In the following decade, with the exception of eastern Ontario, the Knights were moribund. Their precipitous decline was halted by a slight resurgence in the late 1890s, but the 1902 Berlin decision delivered the final *coup de grâce*. Yet as we suggested earlier, the heritage of the Order lived on. Its major contributions to working-class memory centred on its oppositional success as a movement which for the first time provided all workers with an organizational vehicle and, further, which, for a moment at least, overcame the splintering forces which so often divided the working class.

RÉSUMÉ.

L'Ordre des Chevaliers du travail a joué un rôle déterminant dans l'organisation du monde du travail à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle. Mouvement social davantage que syndicat, l'ordre s'est adressé à tous les travailleurs sans considération de sexe, d'origine ethnique ou raciale, et de qualification de métier. Il lança ainsi au capitalisme industriel le plus important défi que celui-ci eut à relever en Amérique du Nord. En Ontario, ce défi se déploya aussi bien sur le plan politique et culturel qu'en matière économique. Nous présentons ici l'histoire de l'Ordre des Chevaliers du travail en Ontario de 1880 à 1902; dans le cadre du développement industriel de la province, se dégagent les structures internes de ce mouvement et les actions qu'il a exercées dans les domaines économique, politique et culturel.