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McKINLEY POLITICS AND THE CHANGING
ATTITUDES TOWARD AMERICAN LABOR
1870-1900

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

John Waks mundski, B.S., M.S.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1972

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several individuals and institutions aided me in the preparation and writing of this dissertation. I take great pleasure in thanking them for their invaluable assistance.

To Professor K. Austin Kerr, I am grateful for the supervision and direction he has provided in the research and writing of this dissertation. To Professor Robert H. Bremner, I owe a major debt for without his friendly and professional advice my graduate training period would have been a far more difficult experience. Professors Kerr and Bremner have contributed greatly to my understanding of American social, political, economic, and intellectual history in general and of the period between 1865 and 1920 in particular. To Professor Warren Van Tine, I am grateful for his perceptive insights into labor history, and for his suggestions and criticisms regarding this study. He has always been more than willing to help me.

A number of libraries have assisted me in the collection of data so important to my study. I benefitted much from my experiences in Washington, D.C. at the National Archives and the Department of Archives and Manuscripts in the Catholic University of America, and in Columbus, Ohio
at the Ohio Historical Society and The Ohio State University Library. Many librarians and archivists have been cooperative in disclosing information and leading me to pertinent sources.

Anthony Libertella, now Professor of History at Iona College, has shown an unusual interest in the ideas contained in this dissertation. For his friendship and willingness to listen to and share problems, I will be always grateful.

The enduring patience and encouragement of my wife, Sue Waksmundski, and my sons, Michael and David have sustained me not only in completing this study but in my overall quest for higher education. Without their help, this dissertation might not be a reality, and for that reason it is as much theirs as mine.
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BUYERS AND SELLERS

What is a man worth?
What can he do?
What is his value?
On the one hand those who buy labor,
On the other hand those who have nothing
to sell but their labor.
And when the buyers of labor tell the
sellers, "Nothing doing today, not a
change!" - then what?

Carl Sandburg

Honey and Salt
PREFACE

This dissertation proceeds along two lines, each related to the emergence, in the 1890's, of a pragmatic-capitalist oriented way of looking at American society and organized labor's position in that society. It seeks, first, to examine the underlying assumptions and beliefs regarding labor during a critical era by exploring the responses of leading unionists, intellectuals, politicians and businessmen to the immense challenge of socio-economic change sparked by intense industrial growth. Of particular importance here is the challenge of "the labor question," perhaps the single most important issue facing Americans during the 1890's and early twentieth century. In an effort to shed light upon these issues this study addresses itself to such questions as these: how was labor accepted into the emerging capitalist order? What were the sources within organized labor and the business and political communities which helped shape labor policy? And finally, what new conditions forced people to deal with the labor problem and how did labor fare as a result of this new focus?

The second objective of this study is to associate this focus on the labor problem, and what it meant for the progress of trade unions, with the career of William McKinley.
Unlike the theoretical approach involved in understanding an ideology emerging from men's responses to labor issues, this objective dictates a more narrative approach. Its goal is to describe the attitudes and policies of William McKinley, and his friend Mark Hanna, toward the laboring classes, especially during the height of their power. For example, two significant pieces of legislation relating to labor were passed during the McKinley presidency. In 1898 Congress enacted the Erdman Act, providing "a means for mediation and arbitration of controversies affecting railways and their employees."\(^1\) A second measure, passed in the same year, established an Industrial Commission to investigate, among other things, the problems of labor and management and furnish suggestions which may "harmonize conflicting interests."\(^2\) These legislative measures, because they address themselves to settling the issue of labor's position in the capitalist framework, are closely associated to the development of those attitudes and ideas inherent in the new employer outlook toward organized workers.

The time base for this study is the late 1890's, and to a lesser extent, the early twentieth century. This


\(^2\) U.S., Statutes at Large, XXX, pp. 476-77.
period has been chosen because it represents both a climax and take-off point in American intellectual and economic history. From the Civil War onward the United States had been subjected to a phenomenal amount of social and economic change— the rise of powerful monopolies and "Robber Barons," the rise of the industrial city, the continuing waves of immigrants, industry's triumph over agriculture, the spectacular growth of labor unions—with which traditional American ideas could not keep pace. As America entered the eighteen-nineties, however, many important leaders in academia, labor, business, and politics began to perceive the dawn of a new era and offered ideas and programs to readjust the American political economy to the new realities.

The 1890's are also important in that, except for the New Deal era, it is generally recognized as the most important period in American labor history. During the nineties Samuel Gomper's "pure and simple unionism," the guiding philosophy of the labor movement for decades to come, asserted itself over idealism, socialism, and the ideological and political challenges of strong minorities within the movement. Youthful unions such as the American Federation of Labor and the United Mine Workers showed remarkable endurance by weathering massive unemployment resulting from the severe depression of 1893-97. Various groups of workers, moreover, fought and survived a number...
of violent wars with capital, most notably the furious upheavals at Coeur d'Alene, Homestead, and Pullman.

Although the nineties serve as a focal point, I have not assumed that all important ideas and developments related to the labor problem are confined to this decade. Earlier periods have also been surveyed to demonstrate the impact of the changing economic scene and the pattern of responses to it. Moreover, when certain situations in the nineties lead to obvious conclusions, or when ideas born in the nineties later matured into policy, there has been no reluctance to extend the study into subsequent decades.

The hypothesis of this study is that labor advanced during the age of McKinley largely because significant numbers of influential men, William McKinley and Mark Hanna among them, realized the severity of the labor question and adopted positions conducive to incorporating the working class into the capitalist society. What is meant here by labor advancing is, on the one hand, simply unions increasing their membership and taking strides toward becoming a permanent part of the American economic scene. On the other hand, and more importantly, it means that a substantial number of prominent individuals came to accept trade unions as proper agencies for securing the advance of worker interests.
To be sure, this does not imply that at the end of the nineteenth century labor found its millennium. On the contrary, in 1897 organized labor comprised only about 4 per cent of the nonagricultural work force. In addition, there were persistent problems of unemployment, low wages, long hours, and child labor. What this study theorizes is not the end to labor's problems, but rather that, at the turn of the century, a group of prominent thinkers and policy makers, responding to their perceptions of the part labor should play in the changing economy, formulated a new outlook toward trade unions. This view, which can be loosely defined as the "new corporate labor policy," emphasized cooperation with conservative unions in order to insure a harmonious society based on sound capitalist principles.

This study will begin, first, with an introductory statement on the nature and importance of the new labor policy emerging in the 1890's. Second, it will examine the magnitude of social and economic change in post Civil War America, the subsequent emergence of the labor question, and certain individual's responses to it. Third, it will turn to the career and policies of William McKinley and show how he, along with Mark Hanna, exhibited a progressive attitude toward labor and assisted in creating an atmosphere susceptible to a new outlook toward labor.
unions. Fourth, it will discuss the Erdman Act and how it was, to some extent, exemplary of the new policy of recognizing unions as valid bargaining agents for their members. Finally, it will conclude with a summation of the general trends covered in the study, relating them to the broader perspective of American industrial society, and to a lesser extent, some of the historical interpretations of the labor's role in that society.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the process of trying to understand anew the emergence of urban-industrial society from village-agrarian society in America, historians in recent years have directed their attention less than in the past on individual "great men" and events and more on understanding historical processes and the emergence of new social systems from old.\(^1\) Reflecting the recent concern with understanding American institutions and their values, scholars are more frequently expanding the boundaries of their studies in an effort to bring social, economic, and political systems into sharper focus. Following this trend, it seems important in our thinking regarding the American past to relate, more directly, the real human experiences of changing social systems, and the subsequent general

\(^1\)Compare, for example, Robert Wiebe's *The Search For Order 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), which endeavors to better understand a period of history by describing the shift from provincial agrarian to bureaucratic middle class values, and its affect on the urban-industrial society with Harold U. Faulkner's *Politics, Reform and Expansion 1890-1900* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957) which utilizes a more topical approach to understanding the 1890's.
ideological responses of the people experiencing changing conditions, to actual national political policy and socio-economic development.

The politics and policies of William McKinley and Mark Hanna, and their relationship to the institutionalization of conservative labor unions in the 1890's provide a rich opportunity for explaining the actual process of how growing perceptions of changing social systems had specific ramifications in public policies. Throughout their public careers McKinley and Hanna felt the impact of the industrial revolution; and this compelled them to fashion certain perceptions and viewpoints regarding the nature of the changing capitalist economy.

For McKinley and Hanna, as well as most other observers of their era, the most persistent "problem" revolving around intense industrial expansion was how to assimilate the rising American proletariat into a socio-economic environment so dominated by classical economic theories and pro-capitalist values. In the decades spanning from the Civil War to the turn of the twentieth century America's industrial expansion was grounded in the factory system operated by a rising class of blue-collar workers. This group, continuously gaining in size from succeeding waves of immigration, and absorbing the hardships of an impersonal production oriented economy, posed
a most crucial question: What role, considering the nature of late nineteenth century urban industrial growth, would American labor play in the modern political-economic system?

Faced with the rigidity of the inherited laissez-faire ideology, and a value system which viewed the worker merely as a commodity, this "labor question," as it was called, persistently begged for an answer. Initially the greatest obstacle to dealing with the question proved to be the complete lack of status, or even identity, of labor unions. During much of the Gilded Age political and economic observers adhered to the view of labor depicted by Henry Wood in Natural Law in the Business World published in 1884. Wood, a proper Bostonian who spent much of his life commenting on economic questions, believed that the fate of individual workers was inevitably fixed by those natural laws, among them the law of supply and demand, postulated by the classical economists. For unions to seek higher wages, thus tampering with these natural laws, was tantamount to heresy. Wood asserted, moreover, that trade unions were guilty of a multitude of economic and moral blunders detrimental to the fabric of American society. Among these were an antagonism toward capital, the worker's very own saviour; a tendency to reward men for being members of trade unions rather than for honest, productive labor; a penchant to petition for increased
wages with no concern for commensurate rises in prices; and finally the inclination of unions to be either violent or socialist, or both.\(^2\)

There is little question that Wood's ideas enjoyed considerable influence, particularly among traditionalist-minded businessmen who sought to rationalize the status quo. However, at the very moment that Wood was expounding his treatise a number of reformers and political economists had emerged to criticize and challenge laissez-faire economics. One element in this group was the "new school" of American political economy dominated by the noted economists Richard Ely, Simon Patten, and John Bates Clark. Rejecting the immutability of economic laws, and calling for a closer relationship between ethics and economics, these thinkers and their associates in the newly organized American Economic Association saw much hope for the laboring classes.

At the same time, sincere reformers like Henry George and Edward Bellamy sought to deal with the "labor question" by proposing their panaceas for social and economic salvation. They, however, like the prophets of the

"Social Gospel" and "New Economics" could only take the initial step of attacking traditionalism while, at the same time, appealing for an ideological and practical re-orientation. Radicalism in the west, legitimatized under the banner of the People's Party, likewise sought to solve labor's dilemma; however its agricultural orientation simply deflected any genuine concern for the labor problem.

Perhaps only Marxian socialism, combining class consciousness with its formula for collective ownership of the means of production, truly addressed itself to the issue of labor's status and identity in the new economic system. Despite the uncertainties regarding the exact strength of socialism in Gilded Age America, it is evident that, from time to time, the socialists manifested considerable prestige, both politically and in organized labor, particularly in times of severe economic crisis. Far more frequently though the socialist's "reform and complaint" ideology was diluted by "good times" and the promises of America's burgeoning industrial revolution. Furthermore, the socialists, blinded by their utopian formulas, tended to play down many important social and political problems of the day. In 1900, Eugene V. Debs, head of the American Socialist Party, ignored things American by asking: "What but meaningless phrases are 'imperialism,' 'expansion,' 'free silver,' 'gold standard,' etc., to the wage worker?"
After all, claimed Debs, the worker stood outside of American society and consequently found these "issues" to be irrelevant. Of course, Debs thinking proved erroneous, for as many politicians, business leaders, and union officials had demonstrated, these issues actually made up the substance of the American political economy; and they received due attention from the increasingly conscious American working class.

Socialism and the other panaceas, then, may have forced more conservative Americans to be mindful of the conditions and status of the American proletariat. But, faced with the relative lack of class consciousness on the part of the great majority of American workers, the standard of living offered by flourishing capitalism, and the overwhelming onslaught of emerging middle class values, socialism as well as other rival ideologies frequently found themselves relegated to the role of eggs never fully hatched.

How, then, was the problem of the social and economic position of the new blue collar class finally resolved? As the nineteenth century moved into its last decade, the answer appeared to take shape in the form of a middle class, industrially oriented ideology developed through

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pragmatic responses to the human experience of intense economic change. In the late eighteen-eighties organized labor, resolutely involved in determining the future possibilities for America's toilers, played a decisive role in promoting a cooperative economic framework in which all sectors of the industrial economy could work together in peace and harmony. Permitting the reformist unionism espoused by the National Labor Union in the 1870's and the Knights of Labor in the 1880's to burn itself out, a minority of organized workers, led by the American Federation of Labor, began to embrace the "pure-and-simple unionism" of Samuel Gompers, the AFL's chief executive who waged a relentless war upon idealism, radicalism, and political involvement. Gompers believed that success for the labor movement depended on establishing a mature business-like organization similar to that of organized capital. "The organization and concentration of the one-capitalists," said Gompers in 1896, "pre-supposes the organization and concentration of the other-workers."\(^4\)

For the most influential man in American labor, the essence of the American system rested not with some panacea or socialist theory, but with "constitutionalism" in industrial relations, where two organized groups could

negotiate their differences within the framework of a corporate value system. It was this balance of power ideology which Gompers and numerous other business union leaders cultivated during the 1890's; and it was the one which, by adopting the most acceptable methodological and ideological approach, offered one solution to the problem of the position of the American working-class in industrial America.

Assisting Gompers and his fellow "bread-and-butter" unionists in their pursuit of a cooperative capitalist order were several business leaders who had come to believe that recognition of unions was a wise policy. These men by no means represented the majority of American business leadership, but nonetheless, as the 1890's progressed it became increasingly clear that more and more industrialists favored an enlightened course toward organized labor. Typical of this group was Charles J. Hurrah, President of the Midvale Steel and Ordnance Company in Philadelphia. Testifying before the United States Industrial Commission in 1900 Hurrah commented that his company "found that trade unions and labor organizations of all kinds are decidedly beneficial to the employer." Harrah viewed organized labor as a stabilizing influence, enabling employers to avoid the confusion and bitterness which usually attended negotiations with hundreds of individual
workers. Hurrah advised against recognition or dealings with radical union leaders; he argued, however, that "when a labor organization has at its head a thinking man, a student like Mr. Gompers, for instance . . . it is decidedly of benefit to the manufacturer."5

Of all the forward-thinking industrialists of this period few had more influence on the American political economy than Marcus Alonzo Hanna. Although often portrayed as an enemy of labor, Hanna's actions and record as an employer tell of a man both compassionate and far-sighted in his dealings with the worker population. He displayed a particular readiness for hearing the worker's side of the story. And he detested employers who failed to adopt a common sense approach to settling labor disputes. In 1894 he berated George Mortimer Pullman, lord and master of the Palace Car Company, for failing to arbitrate the differences between himself and his employees during the famous Chicago railroad strike.6 Later, when a strike


6 In expressing his anger Hanna spewed forth the well publicized phrase: "A man who won't meet his men halfway is a God-damn fool." See Thomas Beer Hanna (New York:
broke out in one of Hanna's own interests in Buffalo he was called upon to act according to his principles. Following the advice of Samuel Gompers, he patiently listened to the workers expose attempts by superintendents and foremen to force "men seeking employment to pay them extortionate fees" and promptly discharged all of the guilty officials.  

More important than these isolated attempts to stay on good terms with labor was Hanna's leadership as an exponent of the progressive-pragmatic approach to the labor question. Evoking the use of collective bargaining and arbitration, Hanna pursued his most cherished goals—economic expansion and industrial peace—through a more equal distribution of power between employers and employees.  

6 (Cont'd)  


ethics, Hanna accepted the growth of trusts as a natural phenomenon. But he also recognized that the expanded growth of monopolies could have adverse effects on the working class and make them more receptive to radical solutions. To avoid this catastrophe he advised employers to ally themselves with conservative, responsible union officials and welcome the laboring class as a copartner in America's corporate expansion. In developing this policy Hanna surmised that any radical solutions to the labor problem could be diluted. In other words, Hanna's conduct was, to a large extent, directed at counteracting the socialist and communist influence among the laboring classes.9 In the latter instance, Hanna, like many Americans of his day, was reacting to his own particular perceptions of the dangers accompanying the rapid economic changes occurring in his country.

Hanna is also important because through his political partnership with William McKinley he helped create a social and political environment in which employers could readily develop a more progressive viewpoint concerning the incorporation of organized labor into the capitalist economy. Ideologically speaking, William McKinley and

Mark Hanna held remarkably similar views, particularly regarding politics and business. Each possessed a deep faith in organization for the purpose of insuring stability; and because they actively supported this line of thinking, they fostered a flexible attitude toward the labor problem: an attitude not dissimilar to that of the pure-and-simple labor leaders and their allies in the business community who were drifting toward adoption of a new employer attitude based upon a harmonious relationship between organizations of workers and organizations of employers. To be sure, this was the attitude refined and promoted by the National Civic Federation which Hanna helped organize and served as its first president.

It seems apparent, then, that in the 1890's there emerged, largely from the perceptions of men deeply concerned with the labor question, certain points of view which fused into an ideology encompassing all the values necessary for secure industrial progress.

Initially this ideology meant different things to different groups of people. For pragmatic unionists, it held out hopes for union recognition and acceptance into the capitalist order. For employers and politicians it served as a convenient device for promoting social and economic stability as well as counterbalancing any radical alternatives to the corporate value system which
they held in the highest esteem. As time passed, however, these ideological responses, sustained by the efforts of the National Civic Federation, coalesced into what has been loosely defined as the "corporate ideology," a set of attitudes and manners associated with conduct which aimed to maintain power relationships and value systems guaranteed to insure continued corporate growth. Furthermore, it is this ideology, this socio-economic system with its reverence for security, stability, and the rationalization of business which has pervaded American thinking throughout the twentieth century.
CHAPTER II

THE CHANGING VIEWS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD ORGANIZED LABOR IN THE INDUSTRIALIZING ECONOMY, 1865-1900

This chapter makes an attempt to relate the changing views and attitudes toward the American workingman and his efforts toward organization in post-Civil War America. These prevailing views and attitudes, so critical to labor's acceptance into industrial society, underwent significant change as Gilded Age America experienced the impact of advancing industrial capitalism. Throughout most of the period the predominate attitude toward labor was hostile, primarily because of the workingman's seeming habitualness toward violence and the reformist philosophies of the early national labor unions. However, by the 1890's, much of the labor movement came under the leadership of "conservative business unionists"; and their pragmatic efforts combined with the "progressive" views of certain influential business leaders and politicians helped organized labor advance toward respectability in the capitalist economy. Finally, under the aegis of the National Civic Federation, an organization of business and labor leaders seeking to promote collective bargaining between equally balanced
groups, "conservative" labor unions won acceptance into the highest circles of industrial capitalism.

***

Between 1865 and the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States experienced a devastating economic revolution culminating in the clear-cut victory of industry over agriculture.¹ Five transcontinental railroads came into existence, and competitive builders laid enough tracks to convert America into one gigantic market place. Increasing numbers of steel and textile mills, oil wells, slaughterhouses, and other facets of production attested to the country's growing affection for the machine and mass production. Industrial cities, fed by dreaming immigrants and hopeful country folk, blossomed along every waterway, changing America from a provincial small-town society into an expanding urban-industrial society. Huge impersonal corporations, unrestrained, and supervised by ambitious and ruthless magnates brought untold prosperity to America, making her, by 1900, "the greatest industrial power in the world."²

¹In 1900 U.S. manufactured products valued $13,010,000,000 compared to approximately $4,717,000,000 for agriculture. See Abstract of the Twelfth Census, 1900 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), pp. 219-300.

But accompanying this rapid post-Civil War expansion were a variety of serious economic and social problems. Among them were currency and banking problems, the crisis in agriculture, the problems of growing urbanization, and the question of government regulation of monopolies. However, of all the problems facing late nineteenth century America none had the enduring impact of the labor problem. It was the labor problem which brought violence to the American scene. It was the labor problem, and its close association with mass immigration that posed the ominous "threat" of a foreign socialist conspiracy. It was this same problem, moreover, which so dominated late nineteenth century America that it is chiefly responsible for historians employing such labels as "the turbulent eighties" and "heartbreaking nineties" to describe the two most significant decades of the period.3

It was immediately after the Civil War that trade unionism began emerging as an important facet of American economic life. In August, 1866 seventy-seven delegates, representing a variety of labor organizations and eight-hour leagues, met in Baltimore to discuss the possibilities for acquiring an eight-hour work day in order to "make-

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work" for those unemployed due to the post-1864 return of soldiers and cutbacks in war industries. In the process they founded the National Labor Union, the country's first "permanent" national labor organization. Selig Perlman, the famous University of Wisconsin labor economist, has described the N.L.U. as "a loosely built federation of national trade unions, city trades' assemblies, local trade unions, and reform organizations of various descriptions, from philosophical anarchists to socialists and woman suffragists."4

In its early congresses the National Labor Union set forth a number of general aims which apparently posed little if any threat to the powers that be in American society. Its trade policy was rigid and conservative, placing heavy stress on trade organizations and calling for close policing of apprenticeship laws. Furthermore, at the opening meeting the various committees strongly condemned the use of strikes, recommending arbitration or political action as probable substitutes for promoting worker interests. On the reform side of the ledger, the N.L.U.'s prime goals were the establishment of the uniform eight hour workday throughout the country, and the formation of both consumers' and producers' cooperatives. Finally, women's rights; the abolition of convict

labor; immigration restriction to protect native workers; the opening of the public domain only to bonafide settlers; the creation in Washington of a Department of Labor; and the repeal of the Convict Labor Act of 1864 were additional objectives of the early N.L.U.5

The formation of a national organization with distinct goals failed to help the N.L.U. acquire new members. However, a major step toward solving this problem was taken at the union's third congress in 1868 when William H. Sylvis, skilled head of the successful Iron Molders' International Union and one of the great labor leaders of that era, was elected president. Only forty years old, Sylvis was a man of extraordinary zeal and dedication to trade unionism. Speaking of his love for labor's cause, he once declared: "I hold it more dear than I do my family or my life. I am willing to devote to it all that I am or have or hope for in this world."6 True to his word, Sylvis immediately embarked on a three-month recruiting


6Quoted in Dulles, Labor in America, p. 102.
tour through the south bringing several locals into the ranks of the N.L.U.

Although Sylvis' enthusiasm and inspired leadership worked miracles for the N.L.U. in an organizational sense, it did little to solidify the union ideologically or help it focus on economic issues. More and more the Union became a reform and political organization seeking to escape the wage system rather than work within it as a job-and-wage-conscious body. Sylvis himself—before his untimely death in July, 1869—had perceptibly moved in this direction. Richard F. Travellick, skilled organizer and head of the International Union of Ship Carpenters and Caulkers, succeeded Sylvis as president; but he, too, followed the trend away from trade unionism and into political action. By 1870 the National Labor Union had become what the informed labor historian Norman Ware described as "a typical American politico-reform organization, led by leaders without organizations, politicians without parties, women without husbands, and cranks, visionaries, and agitators without jobs." The end came two years later

7 During the 1860's Sylvis had become increasingly disgruntled over workers throwing their votes to supposedly pro-labor politicians who eventually broke their promises to the workingman. He finally concluded that "if labor has its own political party workingmen can vote for men of them and with them ... We should then know for whom and for what we voted." See Grossman, William Sylvis, p. 234.

when the N.L.U. transformed itself into the National Labor Reform Party and sought its future in the presidential campaign of 1872. Meeting in Columbus, Ohio the party hammered out a platform emphasizing monetary reform together with the other reforms it had been preaching since the N.L.U.'s inception. In addition, they nominated Supreme Court Justice David Davis of Illinois for president and Governor John Parker of New Jersey for vice-president. Davis withdrew his candidacy, however, when the Liberal Republicans nominated the famous editor and political activist Horace Greely for president. Davis' declination dealt the final blow to the already bitterly divided Labor Reform Party, and when it collapsed so did the National Labor Union.

Despite the N.L.U.'s conspicuous success after 1868, it seemed to elicit little reaction from the monied aristocracy. Because it abhorred strikes and preferred to seek its goals in the political arena it simply proposed no real challenge to traditional American values. Moreover, the period from 1868 to 1873 was one of relative prosperity for America and this fostered the growth of a substantial number of national unions, including the large shoemakers union, the Knights of St. Crispin, numbering approximately 50,000 in 1873. All trade unions during

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1870-1872 had a total membership of approximately 300,000 representing a relatively high 9.1 per cent of the Industrial wage earning class. Thus the National Labor Union constituted merely one union among many, and since the nation was experiencing "good times," it presented no challenge to the goals and values of the emerging capitalist class. In short, the National Labor Union brought little attention to the labor problem, and was part of it only through the beneficial ideas it may have passed on to future labor movements.

The disintegration of the N.L.U. immediately preceded one of the most confusing yet telling periods in American labor history, the depression years of 1873-1878. Victimized by constant wage cuts, severe unemployment and general hard times, workers in the 1870's reacted with demonstrations of protest and strikes which often led to violence and insurrection. In addition, although organized labor remained basically conservative, a number of immigrants entering the country during this time brought along a radical perspective which they tried to fasten onto the labor movement. Thus the two ingredients which tended to spark anti-union sentiment, that is labor strife and the

threat of foreign conspiracy, came upon the American scene in the 1870's. And despite organized labor's repudiation of radical ideas, employers generally hostile to unionization conveniently played on the public's fear of socialism and anarchism to weaken or suppress all of organized labor.

Several examples of labor unrest in the seventies provide evidence of management's rigid view toward labor. In January, 1874 a group of unemployed New Yorkers planned to meet in Tompkin's Square to call upon city officials to relieve their economic burden. However, when it became known that radical members of the socialist International Workingmen's Association were going to participate, the workers' police permit as well as the mayor's pledge to speak were canceled. When the meeting went on as scheduled the police dispersed the crowd with an overt show of force. Many of the demonstrators were trampled and clubbed, but the local press, seemingly ignorant of the plight of the unemployed, blamed the situation on foreign elements. The prestigious New York Times stated that


"the persons arrested yesterday seem all to have been foreigners—chiefly German or Irishmen. Communism is not a weed of native growth."\(^{13}\)

More fuel was added to this anti-labor attitude during the upheavals permeating the coal industry in the mid-seventies. In late 1874 America's anthracite coal miners, angered by oppressive wage cuts, ceased work and begun what is referred to as "the long strike of 1875."

Immediately the miners ran up against the implacable foe of labor Franklin B. Gowen, dictator of the Pennsylvania coal operators. Gowen, by simultaneously holding the presidency of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad and the Anthracite Board of Trade, easily manipulated the labor policies of a great number of mine owners. Spending nearly four million dollars to break the 1875 strike, and convincing the operators that the miners were being led by "advocates of the Commune and emissaries of the International" Gowen literally smashed the organization of anthracite labor, the Miners' and Laborers' Benevolent Association. The miners only received sympathy from the public and friends in the labor movement; no enlightened attitudes toward labor came from the moneyed elements.\(^{14}\)

\(^{13}\) Quoted in Dulles, Labor in America, p. 116.

This bitter anti-union feeling intensified during the famous railway strikes which swept the country in 1877. Like the miners, railroad workers felt the wrath of the depression, and in similar fashion responded with strikes and violence. The most serious disturbances occurred in Martinsburg, West Virginia and Pittsburgh. In each case the railway workers manifested considerable support from public opinion, other unionists, the unemployed, and even small businessmen. But this proved too little, for employers presented a united front; and since the law was on their side they could call on the authorities to crush the strikers.  

14 (Cont'd)

was the scourge of the so-called Molly Maguires, consisting of murder and various acts of violence and terror carried out by a "secret society" operating in the anthracite rich Schuylkill County in Pennsylvania. Here too, Gowen, with the aid of Pinkerton spy James McPhalan, took the initiative in overthrowing the Molly Maguire Order. Several "mollies" were brought to trial, and despite the ensuing mockery of justice, the labor movement suffered another serious setback. See J. Walter Coleman, The Molly Maguire Riots: Industrial Conflict in the Pennsylvania Coal Region (Richmond, Va.: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1936); Wayne G. Broehl, Jr., The Molly Maguires (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964).

More important, however, was the damage employers and their supporters did to the concept of unionism by characterizing the strikers as revolutionary and anti-American. The distinguished labor historian Foster Rhea Dulles aptly described this effort by outlining the venomous response of leading newspapers to the strikes of seventy-seven:

Headlines and editorials declared that communism was at the bottom of the strike and responsible for its violence in Baltimore, Pittsburgh and other parts of the country. It was described as "an insurrection, a revolution, an attempt of communists and vagabonds to coerce society, an endeavour to undermine American institutions." The New York Tribune stated only force could subdue this "ignorant rabble with hungry mouths"; the Times characterized the strikers as "hoodlums, rabble, bummers, looters, blacklegs, thieves, tramps, ruffians, incendiaries, enemies of society, brigands, rapscallions, riffraff, fellows and idiots," and the Herald declared that the mob was "a wild beast and needs to be shot down." Reading such headlines as "Pittsburgh Sacked—the City Completely in the Power of a Howling Mob," and "Chicago in the Possession of Communists," an alarmed public was swept by hysterical fears.  

These attitudes typified the views of those in authority who believed that workers had no rights and must bend to existing economic conditions.

It seems obvious, then, that the prevailing attitude of those in positions of economic and political power

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16Dulles, Labor in America, p. 121. For similar reactions from differing sources see Yellon, American Labor Struggles, pp. 21-22, 28, 34-38.
toward labor during the 1870's was negative. Industrialists, aided by their friends in power, fought labor on all fronts. They refused to tolerate even docile and fraternal organizations. Fearful of impending violence coupled with the spread of socialism and anarchism, the powerful and well-organized enemies of unionism directed their energies to discrediting organized workers. When more conservative unions openly denied any association or sympathy with radicalism their opponents merely turned a deaf ear and proceeded to stigmatize all labor organizations as revolutionary and un-American. As Louis Adamic writes of this period: "The Capitalists as a class were thoroughly agreed upon one thing only - their opposition to the proletariat's strivings to improve its status." Labor's only allies came from the public and

17 The restlessness of the workers in the 1870's did heighten their sense of class consciousness, giving some hope to the socialists. In 1876, two socialists groups formed the Workingmen's Party which changed its name to the Socialists Labor Party in 1877. Operating within these organizations the socialists made political gains in Milwaukee, Chicago, and other cities. By 1879 the S.L.P. "claimed a membership of 10,000 in 100 locals in twenty-five states." Undoubtedly employers were aware of this new threat to their value system. See Daniel Bell "The Background and Development of Marxian Socialism in the United States," in Donald Drew Egbert and Stew Persons, ed., Socialism and American Life, I (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1952), pp. 235-36.

its own ranks, not from employers or federal officials.

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The anti-labor attitudes pervading the 1870's, combined with the depression of 1873, had a very adverse effect on the stability of trade unionism in America. Trade-union membership dipped dramatically from 300,000 to 50,000 through the seventies, and several nationals, including the once prosperous Knights of St. Crispin, virtually disappeared. However, one union, the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor, managed to weather the destructive seventies. Founded by the Philadelphia tailor Uriah P. Stephens in 1869, the K. of L. evolved slowly along three levels. "At the bottom were the local assemblies composed of individual members. Locals, in turn, were grouped geographically into district assemblies. Each district assembly elected delegates to the annual convention or General Assembly, which elected the officers and the General Executive Board."19 Membership was open to all wage earners, excluding lawyers, doctors, bankers, stockbrokers, liquor salesmen, and professional gamblers. By 1878, when the General Assembly was formed, the Knights had over eleven district assemblies, and a membership slightly

exceeding twenty thousand. This gradual advance of the Knights kept alive, in the critical depression years of the mid-seventies, the ideal of a national labor union, an ideal crucial to the anticipated elevation of the laboring classes.

Like the National Labor Union, the Knights of Labor was reformist and somewhat radical in desired ends, but conservative and patient in implementing means to attain those ends. The union demonstrated particular concern over the unchecked accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few anti-labor capitalists; it warned in the preamble to its constitution that if this trend continued it would surely lead "to the pauperization and hopeless degradation of the toiling masses." To escape this calamity the leadership called for, among other things, the unification and education of all labor, the establishment of cooperatives, government ownership of railroads and telegraph lines, and a number of measures aimed at equalizing income.


21 Quoted in Dulles, Labor in America, p. 131.

22 Ibid., p. 132.
These idealistic and reformist principles were unquestionably difficult, if not impossible to execute. Nonetheless, the Knights, at least ideologically, renounced the use of strikes to achieve their humanitarian goals. Although eager to encourage and support boycotts, the K. of L. generally looked to arbitration rather than industrial strikes as the proper means for winning concessions from employers. As the constitution of 1884 affirmed: " Strikes at best afford only temporary relief and members should be educated to depend upon thorough education, cooperation and political action, and through these the abolition of the wage system." This philosophy was perhaps best exemplified in the thinking of Terence Vincent Powderly, the Knights' Grand Master Worman from 1879 to 1893. Powderly, an Irish Catholic with a strong humanitarian strain, eluded issues related to wage-consciousness, and persistently stressed that strikes solved few of the basic problems facing workers. "The tendency of the times is to do away with strikes," he wrote in the early 1880's, "That remedy has been proved by experience to be a very

23 Quoted in Harry A. Millis and Royal E. Montgomery, Organized Labor (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1945) p. 67. To eliminate the wage system, declared a top official in the Knights, would require more than mere struggles for "increased wages and a reduction in the hours of Labor." See Grob, Workers and Utopia, p. 38.
costly one for employer and employee." One of Powderly's greatest sources of pride was that during his fourteen year tenure as President of the Knights of Labor he never once ordered a strike.

His own solution to labor problems was strictly Jeffersonian, particularly in its appeal for a more independent workingman. He believed the wage system could be circumvented, not through violence, but "by opening to the worker an escape into self-employment through cooperation," in short, through the "establishment of producer cooperatives." Cooperatives, for Powderly, were the essential mechanism for bringing freedom and equality to all men. Throughout his life he maintained his faith in this principle; "my belief that cooperation shall one day take the place of the wage system," he proclaimed later in his autobiographical The Path I Trod, "remains unbroken."

24 Quoted in Dulles, Labor in America, p. 137.


26 Perlman, History of Trade Unionism, p. 71.

27 Rayback, History of American Labor, p. 147.

Although not all members of the K. of L. followed Powderly's advice, the union enjoyed tremendous success under his leadership. This was especially true during the first half of the eighties when, despite increasing industrial unrest, the Knights grew from approximately 28,000 members in 1881 to an incredible 700,000 in mid-1886. Even more significant, however, was the interest the Knights generated in the labor movement, and in the labor question in general.

This became evident in 1882 when the United States Senate authorized the Committee on Education and Labor to conduct an investigation into the whole subject of relations between labor and capital. Originally, the investigation was induced by politicians trying to influence the views of industrial workers regarding the tariff. But thanks to the efforts of committee chairman Henry W. Blair of New Hampshire, the investigation proved to be an impartial and worthwhile probe into such issues as the conditions

29 In 1883 the Knights engaged in its first widespread strike, and in that same year Powderly himself "was obliged to acknowledge that the strikes, and not co-operation, were responsible for the growth of the order." See Commons and Associates, History of Labour, II, p. 351.

and status of laboring classes, the causes of industrial turmoil, and the possibilities for legislating better relations between capitalists and workers. The investigation, by inviting a broad spectrum of people to comment on the labor questions, marked a sort of turning point in American economic history. "For the first time in American history a broad sample of opinion on industrial problems was collected and recorded."31

Another example of the deepening interest in the labor problem during the rise of the Knights of Labor was the establishment, in the summer of 1884, of a federal Bureau of Labor in the Interior Department. As already indicated, labor unions for years had advocated the creation of such a bureau. Apparently their efforts, combined with the impact of renewed labor unrest and the depression of 1883 finally brought the issue before Congress. There, after some debate, those arguing that a federal Bureau of Labor would help Congress solve industrial problems as well as show the legislator's concern for the welfare of workers carried the day. Following the creation of the Bureau several people, including Terence Powderly applied for the

office of commissioner. The job went to Carroll Davison Wright, a humanitarian labor reformer and statistician, who for ten years had served as chief of the innovative Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics and Labor. It was Wright, through his indefatigable dedication to investigating labor problems, who forced Americans to contemplate the impact of labor on the American economy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

To be sure, such landmark developments as the creation of a Senate Committee and a Bureau of Labor to study issues concerning both labor and capital represented valuable progress to those committed to the advance of unions. However, these gains should not obscure the fact that many, if not most industrialists remained negative toward labor throughout the 1880's. Despite the remarkable growth of the Knights, most employers remained determined to ignore unions, and exercise personal control over their workers. Typical of those embracing this attitude was John Roach, a prominent and controversial shipbuilder, who mouthed sympathies toward workers but chose to snub unions and "deal with" worker complaints on an individual basis. Other anti-union managers were even more discreet, often combining their

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power to discharge with blacklisting to remove labor leaders or agitators. 33

If these methods proved ineffective in thwarting the power of the Knights of Labor, there always existed the more reliable technique of labeling the union as subversive. This became all too evident in 1886 when the Knights were associated with the anarchist inspired Haymarket bombing. Because of the misfortune imposed on workers in the depression of the mid-eighties the Knights, largely through the efforts of the rank and file, began participating in strikes. Surprisingly, the K. of L., unlike its contemporaries in the labor movement, enjoyed incredible success through industrial action. Their most important victories came against the railroads in 1884-85, particularly the Jay Gould lines located in the Southwest. With these successes the membership and prestige of the K. of L. skyrocketed; in the year following the summer of 1885 the Knights mushroomed from a mere 104,000 to 703,000. 34

But no sooner had the Knights become the darling of the workingman, than its influence started to dwindle. The first distressing sign came in March, 1886 when the


union again struck Gould's Southwestern Railway system. This time the powerful and unscrupulous financier was ready, and after two months of intermittent violence, the strike dissipated in a critical defeat for the Knights of Labor. At about the same time, the rank and file, acting in violation of the orders of Powderly, involved itself in the popular eight-hour movement. The decision proved disastrous, for on the nights of May 4, 1886 the Chicago police, believing that a group of protesting strikers in Haymarket Square were being influenced by an "evil" group of anarcho-syndicalists, decided to disperse the assembly. As the police "debated" their orders with the protesters a bomb exploded, and by the time the shooting stopped at least ten people were killed and over fifty injured. 35

The Haymarket bombing was a tremendous setback for American labor, meaning primarily the Knights of Labor. 36


36 It should be understood that engaging in "expensive sympathetic strikes" was not the only reason for the decline of the Knights. Internal disension over organization, leadership, and philosophy also contributed to the union's demise. See George Gorham Groat, An Introduction to the Study of Organized Labor in America (New York: Macmillan Co., 1917), p. 81.
A wave of hysteria swept the country, and the anti-labor press took full advantage. Furthermore, a majority of people chose to blame the K. of L., or at least its radical elements, for the "incident" in Chicago. Even though the Knights had initially opposed the eight-hours strikes, and denounced the anarchists as "cowardly, murderers, cut-throats, and robbers," they still absorbed the brunt of anti-labor sentiment. For the moment, public opinion identified labor with violence and the Knights suffered accordingly. After 1886 its membership and influence steadily decreased, until 1893 when the once powerful Knights of Labor had become inept.

In summation, it can be said that the history of labor in the 1880's was marked by both achievements and frustrations. On the one hand, the return of prosperity following the depression of the seventies worked well for labor. Aside from the portentous rise of the Knights, at least "sixty-two international unions were established between 1880 and 1889." In addition, the federal government finally acknowledged the importance of the labor question and created a Bureau of Labor, and authorized a

37 Kirkland, Industry Comes of Age, p. 380.
congressional investigation into the existing state of affairs between capital and labor. On the other hand, these gains failed to change most industrialist's basic view of organized workers. The vast majority of businessmen continued to express barbaric attitudes toward unions, and this, combined with the hostility of the law wrecked unionization. Furthermore, the business manager's persistence in associating the labor movement with European radicalism and violence, as illustrated in the reactions to the Haymarket Riot, also proved detrimental to the success of unionism. In short, labor progressed markedly during the 1880's; but steadfast employer opposition to the idea of effective labor unions prohibited organized workers from realizing their most cherished goal: active participation in the power politics of modern economic relations.

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39 Although divided the socialists remained active in the 1880's. In 1886 the Socialist Labor party backed Henry George of the Union Labor party for mayor of New York City. One of George's supporters, Daniel DeLeon, a brilliant Marxist who later challenged the American Federation of Labor, also began his rise during this period. See Harry W. Laidler, History of Socialism: A Comparative Survey of Socialism, Communism, Trade Unionism, Cooperation, Utopianism, and Other Systems of Reform and Reconstruction (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1968), pp. 579-82.
While the Knights of Labor withered, the American Federation of Labor rose to assume leadership of the American labor movement. The A.F.L. grew out of the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions established by a group of discontented labor leaders meeting in Pittsburgh in 1881. These men tended to be members of a national or international union of a trade whose members increasingly resented the controls imposed by the heterogeneous Knights. Moreover, they opposed the reformist philosophy of the K. of L., offering in its stead a "new unionism" primarily concerned with working for short-run economic gains within the existing capitalist framework. Initially the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions had little difficulty in cooperating with the Knights. However, as the 1889's progressed the K. of L. aggravated the growing split in American labor by becoming more aggressive in curbing national unions. To cope with this situation, the dissatisfied trade unionists called a conference in Philadelphia in May, 1886. At that meeting the delegates appointed a committee to draw up a treaty aimed at ameliorating the differences between trade unions and the Knights. The principal terms of the treaty were directed toward preventing local or district assemblies from organizing any trade having a national organization, or from interfering with the affairs or policies of trade unions. Although the treaty
was not a declaration of war, it clearly signified the growing rivalry between the K. of L. and the trade unions.  

The trade-union committee presented its treaty to the Knights but with no success. Consequently another meeting, aimed primarily at forming an independent "American Federation or Alliance of all National and International Trades Unions" was scheduled for Columbus, Ohio in December, 1886. At this historic conference, a committee of Knights made one last futile attempt at negotiating differences only to discover that the rift between their organization and the trade unions had reached an impasse. The belligerency of the leaders on each side, the persistent jurisdictional squabbles, and, most important, the growing ideological separation simply drove a wedge between the two groups. While attempts at conciliation floundered the Columbus assembly of forty-two delegates representing twenty-five craft organizations proceeded to form the American Federation of Labor and elected Samuel Gompers, the chief advocate of craft separation from the Knights, its first president.

40 Grob, Workers and Utopia, pp. 111-12.
Thus by the end of 1886 the K. of L. and several of its national and international trade unions had taken radically different paths. In the span of but one year their rivalry would become tantamount to a declaration of war; so bitter that Gompers would declare the Knights of Labor "just as great enemies of Trade Unions as any employers can be, only much more vindictive. I tell you that they will give us no quarter and I would give them their own medicine in return. It is no use trying to placate them or even be friendly."  

Samuel Gompers was the principal architect and driving force behind the A.F.L. Born in the London tenements in 1850, Gompers came to the United States in 1863 and immediately took up the trade of his father: cigar making. Before long he became involved in union and radical activities and, along with Adolph Strasser and Ferdinand Laurrell, began reorganizing the Cigar Maker's Union.  


43 Quoted in Grob, Workers and Utopia, p. 119.  

44 Adolph Strasser, an early convert from socialism to pure and simple trade unionism, was active in organizing the Cigar Makers International Union and served as its president in 1877. Ferdinand Laurrell was a Swedish socialist who eventually migrated to New York. There he met Gompers and introduced him to German socialist literature. Laurrell, too, drifted from socialism to pure and simple unionism and influenced Gompers in the same direction.
In this endeavor he exhibited many of the important skills necessary for successful union leadership. A man of boundless energy and ambition, Gompers proved himself to be an adequate speaker, aggressive organizer, and excellent administrator. Most important, he kept in close contact with the workers and projected the image of a man who had come up through the ranks. It was these talents which Gompers utilized to rebuild the Cigarmakers International, and then the A.F.L., into an organization capable of dominating the opening fifty-odd years of contemporary labor history.

In addition to being the administrative head of the A.F.L., Gompers also served as the leading spokesman for the "new unionism" associated with craft unionism. Unlike the reformist ideologies preached by Sylvis and Powderly, the basic principles of Gompers' "new unionism" concentrated solely on economic opportunism. For Sam Gompers, labor's salvation rested not with such panaceas as currency reform or cooperation, but in extracting immediate economic benefits from the existing capitalist system. Although a student of Marx and Engels, Gompers accepted industrialism, the rise of corporations, and the wage system as historically "correct" phenomena. The job of organized labor was to

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squeeze the "possible"—shorter hours, better wages, and improved working conditions—from the existing capitalist order. Gompers wisely perceived, moreover, that the industrialization of America constituted a phase when "groups replaced individual effort." This trend revealed itself in such industrial organizations as the trust. However, Gompers cautioned labor, warning that it was not the unions duty to curtail this "normal development but to find the principles and technique for utilizing group action and group production in furtherance of general welfare." "Economic justice," Gompers asserted, "will come through the organization of economic agencies"; therefore labor should organize and act in such a way as to acquire enough power to force the cooperation of various groups in equalizing the benefits obtained from expanding industrial capitalism.

In structuring and managing the A.F.L. Gompers sought to establish a powerful and effective economic pressure group, capable of pursuing its goals over an extended period

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of time. He hoped that the federation would assume a position equal to other powerful groups, and become worthy of acceptance with stature into the industrial order. Professor Gerald Stearn skillfully described Gompers' effort:

The "new unionism" of Gompers parodied the emerging corporate structure of big business... Skilled workers were gathered by craft into geographic, or shop, locals. The locals in turn were strongly bound to a national union of the craft led by an elected, full time and well paid administration which exercised firm control over member locals. Strike funds, centrally controlled, were accumulated and work stoppages were called with national approval not local initiative. Benefits were paid members and their families for sickness, loss of income during periods of unemployment, and death. An equalization process was devised so that the more-monied locals transferred funds to less prosperous ones. Trade agreements—contracts—were negotiated and signed between unions and employers on a craft basis. Special "union labels" were placed on approved products while non-union goods were boycotted. Regular journals, filled with economic, social, and political as well as union news, were encouraged. Paid organizers were sent out to unionize workers by craft. Members with political, ideological, or reformist tendencies were tolerated though not encouraged. Finally, a high and compulsory per capita tax was assessed to finance the operation. "Trade unions," Gompers once remarked, "are the business organizations of the workers."49

By creating a closely knit federation of trade unions composed of men loyally committed to his pragmatic philosophy Gompers hoped to insure, first, the survival of his union both in prosperity and depression, and secondly, to elevate

organized labor to a position where its voice carried weight in the economic system.

Although the A.F.L. clearly conformed to "the trend toward economic organization and business politics" emerging in the late 19th century, its early existence provided slim hope for achieving Gompers' goal of equality in industrial relations. In the decade following 1886, the A.F.L. faced "struggles with the Knights, with 'recaIcitrant' trades, with socialism, with strike failures, and with a depression." In addition, the federation had to withstand the inherited hostility to unionism in American business, which was aggravated in the early nineties by strikes in Homestead, Pennsylvania in 1892 and Pullman, Illinois in 1894.

But through it all the American Federation of Labor survived, and in doing so it had escaped the one problem which destroyed earlier labor movements: "the problem of staying organized." By abandoning "anti-monopoly"

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51 Rayback, History of American Labor, p. 194.

52 For a discussion of "opposition to labor in the 1890's" see Taft, Organized Labor in American History, pp. 136-58.

crusading in favor of sound job-conscious trade unionism; and by creating a centralized organization capable of holding the dedication of its members, the A.F.L., in the eighteen-nineties, was able to withstand those shocks which defeated preceding labor organizations, and emerge as a viable force in America's industrial environment. The only remaining question was just how well would the rest of America receive organized labor as a prominent force in guiding the future industrialization of the United States.

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Because of the impact of the A.F.L., or perhaps because of the need for adjusting to the newly experienced institutional and socio-economic realities of a maturing urban industrial society, no issue, no overarching socio-economic problem, received more attention during the nineties and early twentieth century, than the relationship between business management and industrial labor. From various walks of life, academics, journalists, reformers, politicians and labor officials all poured forth their opinions regarding prospects for capital and labor, the two principal elements of American production. As one astute employer put it: "The conflict . . . between united labor and united capital constitutes to the industrial world
"The Labor Question." 

This preoccupation with "the labor question" involved a developing process of social thinking in which two major themes, or focal points, intertwined yet stood out. There was, first, a growing awareness of the condition of the working class, especially in the milieu of the nation's first industrial depression crisis, and equal concern for improving the lot of the country's blue-collar industrial work force. Closely related to this consciousness, was a growing stress in public rhetoric that the key to any industrial progress depended on the ability of labor and capital to work together in a spirit of cooperation and harmony.

Some observers, like onetime Marxist and prominent Massachusetts labor leader Frank Keyes Foster, felt that the conditions of manual laborers in the 1890's showed constant progress, primarily because the workers themselves were taking action. Increasingly aware of the world around them, workers more readily expressed discontent with their environment. A new "social consciousness," combined with

"increased freedom and enlarged opportunities" raised America's workers to a new social status. Moreover, this sudden advance of labor with its emphasis on education and organization, represented not the anarchy of a socially irresponsible class, but rather acute dismay over unjust conditions voiced by those whose aspirations had developed simultaneously with industrial progress.55

Foster's perceptions, it is important to note, had developed during a fifteen year labor career spanning the 1880's and most of the nineties. Although he had his youthful affair with radicalism, by the time he joined the American Federation of Labor he had rejected Marxian collectivism and aligned his thinking with the more pragmatic union chiefs, Samuel Gompers and Adolph Strasser.56 Labor's problem, Foster came to believe, was a direct consequence of the velocity of change emanating from America's industrial revolution. To solve the problem the worker had to learn to deal with the variety of crises attending large


scale industrialism. The laborer had to abandon his dreams of the old "New England shoe shop" where "the man was more that a tender to the machine and the military rule of our present industrial system did not pose a perpetual menace to the individuality of the operator." In place of this sentimentality, the laboring-class should develop a more realistic approach to the new factory system; an approach which would enable workers to come to grips with the complexities of the industrial situation which was denying them the full measure of their rights and needs.

Foster's opinions and beliefs are particularly significant because as a pioneer member of the A.F.L. his intellectual creed reflected the thinking of the highest councils of the union. He was, in a sense, the party ideologue expressing not revolutionary ideas but the official position of the American Federation of Labor. Like Gompers, he uncompromisingly opposed those radical labor spokesmen who resorted to high-sounding rhetoric and empty theories. In 1894, when the Socialist threat to the A.F.L. was very real, he scorned the union's "radical friends"


for their ignorance of "American history," and their failure to realize that any political program proposed by laborers could only be successful if it adhered to traditional American principles.59 Foster's own ideological stand, or union ideal, was more middle-of-the-road, more in tune with the pragmatic ideology which was beginning to dominate the American scene. Its emphasis, contrary to any rival socialist ideology, was on the gradual uplifting of the working class through the application of organizational pressure to equalize the relationship between worker and businessman.60

In sum, then, by alluding to the new social consciousness of workers and their ability to gain some semblance of control over their individual lives Foster was calling attention to his own remedy, and that of the A.F.L., for treating the complicated industrial problems of the late 19th century. The cardinal point of this remedy was effective organization directed at elevating workers to their


rightful status in the unified economic society. Since "the aggregation of capital in corporations has largely destroyed the mobility of labor and dwarfed the economic influence of the individual laborer," Foster proclaimed, "it is only by associative effort that the laborer can make his voice heard in the counting-room; and it is only by associative effort that he is enabled to secure consideration from an economic standpoint." 61

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Interest in the changing status of the workingman, and concern for his plight received an additional boost from public opinion. Contrary to a common generalization, industrial capitalism experienced significant difficulty in imposing its ideology and way of life on many of the nation's workers. This was especially true in smaller industrial towns, where workers utilized favorable local conditions to blunt the impositions of the industrialists. In the smaller communities businessmen had to wrestle with the problems inherent in any close-knit society. Frequently employers of factory labor could not find strikebreakers because the small town social structure and ideology was predominately anti-industrial. In addition, the geographic

impediments, combined with the embittered resistance generated by locals sympathizing with strikers made it unwise and sometimes dangerous for industrial managers to import strikebreakers.

During the great railroad uprisings of 1877 local authorities attempting to repress disorderly strikers often found themselves confronted with an angry public whose sympathies were clearly on the side of the strikers. When the mayor of Martinsburg, West Virginia arrested a number of strike leaders, he soon found them released thanks to the efforts of a large crowd of sympathizers. Later, when Governor Matthews ordered, and even led state militia against the strikers the effort proved futile either due to the soldier's fraternizing with strikers or the hostile public's intervening to stop the troops. Eventually President Hayes ordered in federal troops to quell the West Virginia disturbance.62

When the strike spread to Pittsburgh and railroad management again requested the use of force they received much the same treatment accorded their counterparts in Martinsburg. The mayor of Pittsburgh, aware "that practically all the inhabitants of Pittsburgh believed that city was being discriminated against by the Pennsylvania road in the matter

of freight rates and were clearly on the side of the strikers" largely ignored the appeal for help. Ultimately Governor John F. Hartranft ordered in troops, but only those from Philadelphia were effective as the Pittsburgh militia could not be relied upon to uphold the property rights of the railroad owners. It should be noted, moreover, that the more duty-conscious Philadelphia militia soon engaged in a bloody battle with an armed and enraged mob ending with the soldiers' retreat from the city.63

Professor Herbert C. Gutman further alludes to the public's concern for labor by asserting that during the 1870's workers in Ohio, particularly those in small industrial towns, reinforced their advantage over industrialists through active participation in local politics. This penchant for political activism, and the threat it carried at the polls frequently enabled workers to receive the support of local officials and the press. It was this "sense of community," moreover, which often helped workers emerge victorious in industrial disputes as well as enhance their efforts in holding back repressive industrial capitalism.64


As America progressed through the Gilded Age, it became increasingly evident that the majority of American workers were demonstrating a marked independence in their attitude toward the emerging industrial society. In the process they continued to receive popular support and by the 1890's many people clearly sympathized with the burden-bearer and recognized that his voice must be heard.  

"They [the workers]," wrote Day Allen Willey "are being elevated in the eyes of the people and labor is acquiring the dignity so often ascribed to it by the orator, forcing a national recognition of its position, partly by its own efforts, partly by the broad and deep interest which is being manifested in the army of toilers."  

In light of this situation the principal issue facing both the industrialist and labor leader was control. America had reached the point in her history where responsible people were compelled to recognize a strong labor class. The question was how to build a society in which labor received substantial benefits, but the ideology of industrial capitalism


would still predominate. The answer, of course, was provided by the likes of Frank K. Foster along with other pragmatic labor elites who joined with like-minded industrialists and politicians in fashioning a social and economic environment in which labor's development, both structurally and ideologically, would parallel that of industry, and each would seek profit and welfare within the confines of traditional capitalist values.

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The emphasis placed on "The Labor Question," the concern over the position of the working-class, and the quest for a pragmatic and rationalistic approach to industrial progress also stemmed from the need for change in the face of severe labor unrest. Most scholars are familiar with such significant labor disputes as the great railroad uprisings of 1877, the Haymarket Riot of 1886, the Homestead Steel Strike of 1892, and the Pullman strike of 1894. What is frequently overlooked, however, is the overall picture; the phenomenal amount of industrial labor disputes which pervaded the late 1880's and 1890's. Indicative of the prevalence and intensity of industrial warfare were two extensively detailed reports of the Commissioner of Labor, dated 1894 and 1901, devoted entirely to strikes and lockouts. His Sixteenth Annual Report showed that from 1881 through
1900 there were 22,793 strikes throwing over six million men out of work. More important, in 1886 the number of strikes more than doubled, and in the ensuing decade of the 1890's there was an average of over 1,000 work stoppages per year. These alarming statistics and their real life overtones forced people to evaluate the wage system and the state of affairs between labor and capital.

In 1890 Lyman Abbott, Social Gospel leader and influential editor of the *Christian Union*, touched on the seriousness of unrest in the industrial community:

> That we are approaching an industrial revolution may not be true; that one is promised or threatened cannot be doubted. The discontent with the existing social order is deep, widespread, and extraordinary. It characterizes in different degrees nearly all classes, all faiths, and all commercial and industrial communities. Anarchic movements, strikes, labor unions, socialistic conventions are by no means the only indications of the industrial discontent and unrest. These are serious in their proportions, and in some instances almost revolutionary in their results.

Abbott claimed that American laborers had indicted the wage system and had initiated demands "which nothing less than

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revolution will satisfy." At the turn of the century, John Swinton, famous journalist and champion of labor, echoed Abbott's sentiments by warning that strikes would become increasingly ominous unless industry was reorganized with more power and profits going to workers.

Of course, no major social or economic revolution took place; least not one which would drastically redistribute power and wealth. However, a strong movement did develop, aimed at getting labor and capital to cooperate with one another. For many harmony between the hirer and the hired seemed to be the best solution to the labor problem.

A number of the people advocating reconciliation between the trade-unionist and capitalist stressed the interdependency of the two. "These two great factors of production," said one writer, "are thoroughly dependent on the one on the other, being indispensable auxiliaries. Labor is inert and helpless without an advance from capital to sustain life during the period of production, and

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70 John Swinton, "Two Brief Articles on Labor Strikes," Independent, LII (May 24, 1900), 1240.
capital not only owes its existence to the savings of labor, but also depends for its perpetuation on the continuance of the harmony of relationship. It seemed as though two arch rivals suddenly had similar interests and even common enemies.

That labor and capital appeared to be taking similar paths, that is placing their faith in "organization," also served as justification for increased harmony. Society, some maintained, is organic, with each class contributing to the welfare of the entire community. Consequently, labor should be given certain rights in order to pull its load and function on an equal basis with capital. "We can secure no organic completeness in society till every part ministers to every other part in reciprocal advantages. It is on this claim that the rights of labor rest." Labor should no longer be merely a commodity but


a recognized part of industrial society equal to and sharing all the advantages of capital.75

This concept of harmony, or at least that aspect of it which pertains to cooperation between labor and capital carried over into the early Progressive Era. With it went the belief that organized labor could profit most by adopting a conservative philosophy. Unions referred to as beneficial organizations were those who had wise leadership, rejected violence, and encouraged arbitration. In short, for unions to accomplish such important goals as recognition and the right to collective bargaining they themselves were expected to adjust to changing conditions in the industrial society.76

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The National Civic Federation, created in Chicago in the mid-nineties and operating on a nationwide basis by 1900,77 constituted the heart of the movement to secure harmony by welcoming conservative labor into the industrial


sector. James Weinstein, in his controversial study on the NCF, points out that its most prominent leaders, "viewed the problem of the relationship between capital and labor as central to the political and economic stability of the emerging system of large corporations." The Federation, Weinstein continues, concentrated most of its early efforts toward mediating labor disputes. 78

In order to play the role of "Tribunal of Peace" effectively NCF leaders had to abandon many of the traditional attitudes toward organized labor. Unlike the staunchly anti-labor industrialists of the 1870's and 1880's, the business leaders controlling the NCF encouraged recognition of labor unions so long as they were "guided by proper rules and governed by judicious and conservative leaders." 79 Of course NCF policymakers had the same perspective as earlier business leaders. They too harbored a deep fear of industrial violence and socialism. However, they felt that a new trade union strategy, aimed at incorporating conservative unionists into the arena of industrial relations, could help end labor unrest and advancing socialism.

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79 This quote is part of a letter from Ralph Easley, NCF secretary, to Samuel Gompers cited in Philip Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States, III, p. 71.
In an expression of confidence, Mark Hanna, the NCF's first president declared that the federation held out the possibility "for the total abolition of strikes in the United States."\(^{80}\) Ralph M. Easley, Chairman of the NCF's Executive Council, was convinced that the craft unions "were the real bulwarks against socialism" and he used the threat of the growing menace of radicalism to campaign for acceptance of conservative union.\(^{81}\) In pursuance of this new labor policy the NCF invited the prominent "pure and simple" labor leaders—Samuel Gompers, John Mitchell, and Daniel J. Keefe—to be active members. And some NCF business leaders, particularly Easley, willingly defended organized labor against its critics.\(^{82}\)

In a sense, members of the NCF possessed a missionary zeal, considering themselves engaged in the great work of promoting industrial peace. The Federation's industrial department, responsible for bringing organized labor and organizations of employers together to resolve their differences, pursued their goal by way of conferences and joint agreements. "The Civic Federation," reported Oscar S. Straus, a public representative of the Industrial Department and

\(^{80}\)Ibid., p. 62.

\(^{81}\)Ibid., p. 72.

\(^{82}\)Ralph M. Easley, "A View of the Labor Question," *Harpers Weekly*, XLVII (November 5, 1904), 1694. It was Easley who conceived and organized the NCF.
Theodore Roosevelt's secretary of Commerce and Labor, "believed that if it organized a machinery which contained within itself the representatives of both laborers and employers, and associated with these two the representatives of the general public, it would have the true basis for the solution of the labor question." Bringing together representatives of the three parties to every industrial dispute—capitalists, workers, and the general public—and relying on their sense of fair play and desire for harmony, the NCF strategists hoped to avoid conflict and create a brotherhood of business and labor.

Apparently this policy was successful, for American labor, at least as it existed at that time, seemed to advance substantially in the 1890's and early 1900's.

Ralph Easley, writing in 1902, noted that "the advance of organized labor in the United States as one of the most remarkable developments of the last decade." One year hence, Gunton's Magazine reiterated Easley's message:

There has never been a time in this country when the unions were so strong, asserted their demands with such vigor, and commanded such tremendous resources as now.

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83 Oscar S. Straus, "Results Accomplished by the Industrial Department, National Civic Federation," Annals, XX (July, 1902), 37-38.


85 "The Union Versus the Open Shop," Gunton's Magazine, XXV (August, 1903), 102.
With the establishment of the National Civic Federation the prevailing views and attitudes toward organized labor had shifted from general hostility to acceptance. Of course, in a large sense, most workingmen had been betrayed, for the conservative craft unionists who collaborated with the NCF only helped to deprive the workers of their militancy, and in the case of unskilled industrial workers, their basic right to organize. But, for all intents and purposes, craft unionism was American labor in 1900, and given the nature of its leadership it is not surprising that it welcomed acceptance into the NCF. The NCF's union policy adapted perfectly to Gompers's thinking. Growing more conservative as the nineties progressed, Gompers soon became primarily concerned with security and recognition. Conveniently, he came to regard "the National Civic Federation as a principal agency in bringing together individuals committed to recognizing organized labor and arranging conferences between employers and labor representatives."\(^86\) By labor representatives Gompers undoubtedly meant himself and fellow labor leaders of similar thinking. Still it would be unfair to blame Gompers for his eagerness to compromise and cooperate with the NCF, for not only was he in tune with the contemporary quest for industrial peace

\(^86\) Mandel, Samuel Gompers, p. 224.
and harmony but his typically pragmatic response to NCF obviously helped "elevate" labor. Until the late 1890's labor and capital had been at each others throats, resulting only in disaster for the worker. Now a group of conservative employers and politicians were offering a different approach to social change, an approach very much in agreement with the conservative pragmatic union leaders' desire for cooperation between "equally" balanced groups in the capitalist economy.\footnote{Approximately one year after joining the NCF Gompers expressed a belief that "combinations of employers" and organized workers were showing a "growing tendency toward mutual agreements." See Samuel Gompers, "Organized Labor, Its Struggles, Its Enemies and Fool Friends," American Federationist, XIII (November, 1901), 481.}

To those possessing the expedient gift of hindsight, labor's collaboration with NCF officialdom might be termed heresy, or, at the least, making the best of a bad situation. However, if one compares labor's position at the time of the NCF with the worker's struggles of the previous 30 years it becomes clear that within NCF guidelines organized labor made its greatest strides to date toward the permanent acceptance of union-management bargaining in the industrial society.
CHAPTER III

WILLIAM MCKINLEY AND THE WORKINGMAN

It is of historical significance that the National Civic Federation's idea of accepting organized labor as a recognized American institution enjoyed its greatest vogue during the presidency of William McKinley. Actually when McKinley assumed the nation's highest office in 1896, labor was suffering through one of its most discouraging moments. The depression of 1893-97 had severely reduced or wiped out many a worker's earnings, thus precipitating a drastic reduction in union membership. Equally disheartening was the fact that labor could find no allies. Up to this time little progress had been made in labor legislation; and the power structure's attitude toward unions was clearly revealed when the Sherman Act and court injunctions were employed to suppress strikes and boycotts. By the time McKinley involuntarily left office, however, many of the problems labor inherited from the depression had been alleviated. For example, the return to prosperity, due in part to America's foreign expansion in the latter part of the century, significantly raised annual earnings; and trade unions once again were attracting a mass of workers into their protective folds. Alexander Dana Noyes
in his book *Forty Years of American Finance* reports that although the country's financial plight persisted into 1897, the period immediately thereafter saw U.S. prosperity "become the wonder of the outside world."¹ Union membership increased substantially during the McKinley presidency moving from 447,000 in 1897 to 1,124,700 in 1901.²

These "victories" for labor and McKinley's association with them were no doubt largely the result of the times, particularly the post-1897 return to prosperity. However, this should not obscure the fact that McKinley's character and background suited him well for establishing good rapport with the working-class. Perhaps his greatest virtue, and the one which guided his thinking regarding American labor, was his flexibility. During the 1890's the majority of industrial and political leaders took rather rigid stands concerning the role labor should


play in the economy. Facing such opposition, organized labor could only respond favorably to a man with McKinley's willingness to listen and accept different views. H. Wayne Morgan, the noted McKinley biographer, reinforces this point:

Some Republicans, and many Democrats, represented only business interests, but McKinley's background, personality, and constituency opened his mind to change and moderation. As a Congressman, he favored civil service reform, federal protection of voting rights, and workable business regulation, reflecting the needs and aspirations of an expanding middle and working class. Like Mark Hanna, he had many friends in organized labor, and protection heightened his appeals in shops and factories.3

Furthermore, throughout most of his political career, and particularly during the nineties McKinley enjoyed good relations with labor and frequently received worker support at the polls. In turn, the popular Ohioan and his friend, Mark Hanna, served the progress of labor by accepting a forward looking view regarding labor's admission into the industrial community. Unlike many of their political and business counterparts, McKinley and Hanna believed unions were here to stay. Consequently, they deemed it profitable to cultivate conservative unionism in an effort to assure that an identity of interests between labor and capital could prevail over industrial violence and the rising evil of socialism.

Since McKinley spent much of his life seeking to stay on good terms with labor, it seems worthwhile to examine his career in order to gain further insight into late nineteenth century views and attitudes toward organized labor. It is the goal of this chapter to do just that. The discussion is based on a topical approach, with emphasis on McKinley's successful campaigns for and elections to the Ohio governorship and the presidency, and his handling of certain labor problems while holding those offices. Perhaps by exploring these historical phenomena more light will be shed on the conspicuous parallel between the triumph of the McKinley-Hanna wing of the Republican party and the general "advance" of organized labor toward recognition and acceptance into the American political economy.

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In the turbulent first half of the 1890's, Ohio seemed to typify the American scene. Many of the country's most crucial issues and problems were clearly evident within the state. Advancing industrialism, boom to bust Populism, the Anti-Saloon League, bossism, lynchings, and Coxey's "Commonweal of Christ" were all making themselves felt. Most of all, the Buckeye State, like the rest of the country, suddenly encountered an unusually high degree of labor strife. Shortly after the election of President Cleveland the
economy spiraled downward causing severe shortages in the money market, increased unemployment, and unexpected cuts in wages. Accordingly Ohio workers expressed their discontent. In 1892 the state experienced a total of seventy-seven work stoppages, each lasting on the average nearly three weeks. One year later, the number of strikes increased by eighteen and lasted an average of 20.7 days. Even more serious, the 1893 strikes involved 25,309 workers compared to 6,592 the previous year. And finally, "in 1894 the number of strikes reached one hundred, an average length of 47.5 days, and involved 45,580 workers."^4

Under these chaotic and often violent conditions the game of politics became a delicate and uncertain business. A responsive party found itself being forced to cope not only with the traditional ethno-cultural divisions among voters, but with groups of citizens whose consciousness of their economic position in the society was aroused by the despair of the depression. To build support, well-devised strategies and careful compromises would have to be perfected and carried through. Vincent P. De Santis relates that the Republicans, one of three parties attempting to meet this problem, found it necessary to hold "together the various elements that made up the party--businessmen, businessmen, businessmen."^4

^4 Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics 1850-1900* (New York: The Free Press, 1970), p. 192. Although surprisingly numerous these work stoppages did not have full impact until the winter of 1893 when the depression really set in.
farmers, Negroes, federal officeholders, Union war veterans, and labor." In short, the G.O.P. came to realize that winning elections depended upon two essentials: formulating and maintaining a broad working coalition and antagonizing as few interest groups as possible.

In Ohio the crucial nature of this "coalition-nonalienation" politics was best understood, and most adeptly put to use by the McKinley-Hanna wing of the Republican Party. After losing his congressional seat in 1890, William McKinley rebounded by winning the Statehouse by 21,000 votes over Governor James E. Campbell in 1891. It was an important victory. The Ohio governorship, a frequent steppingstone to national office, projected the popular Canton native into the Republican presidential picture. All this meant nothing, however, if McKinley failed as Ohio's chief executive and as the state's party chieftain.


6Secretary of State, Ohio Statistics, 1891, p. 233. For the story of and reaction to McKinley's victory see Stark County Democrat, November 5, 1891, and Cleveland Leader, November 4, 1891.

Weak leadership would inevitably prove politically calamitous.

But McKinley planned to avoid such catastrophe by moving the Republican Party in a new direction. To insure success he settled on a two-fold strategy. First of all, he would utilize his personal appeal and integrity to form and keep a strong Republican coalition. Secondly, he would, unlike earlier party leaders, attempt to align himself and his party with the workingman. This courting of labor eventually brought rewards in a variety of ways. Besides delivering worker votes, it resulted in a number of positive labor reforms. The Governor's attitude toward workingmen, moreover, reflected some of the ideas which Hanna and many conservative "reformers" put forth through the National Civic Federation in the opening decade of the twentieth century.9

Few if any historians have ever challenged McKinley's integrity. In May, 1893 the Governor discovered that W. Z. McDonald, the chief inspector of workshops and factories was misusing public funds. He promptly ordered a "full and broad and searching" investigation. One month later, convinced of the inspector's guilt, McKinley dismissed him. In an era of rampant political corruption this act could only have impressed the working class. See McKinley to E. W. Poe, May 16, 1893, and McKinley to W. Z. McDonald, June 13, 1893. McKinley Letter Book, Ohio Historical Society.

For an authoritative study of the ideas and actions of these "conservative Progressives" see Weinstein, The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State: 1900-1918.
In light of the conventional view of McKinley, as a staunchly conservative Republican only concerned with the tariff, his pro-labor leanings appear surprising. However, after examining his early career one tends to arrive at a different view. As a young lawyer he ably defended a group of Massillon miners "indicted for riot at the Warmington coal mine." His effort gained him little popularity, but the youthful attorney did manage to get all but one of the defenders acquitted. In addition he refused to accept any fee, being amply rewarded with the loyal friendship of labor in Stark county. Shortly thereafter these people helped McKinley gain a seat in Congress, where he quickly acquired a reputation as an enemy of free trade. However, he persisted in associating his tariff ideas with the interests of the working class. "The chief ground upon which we can justify a protective tariff today," he argued in 1885, "is that it is in the interest of American labor—American black labor as well as American white labor—and the protective tariff we want is a tax sufficient to make up the difference between the

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10 Stark County Democrat, June 29, 1876; see also Andrew Roy, A History of the Coal Miners of the United States from the Development of the Mines to the Close of the Anthracite Strike in 1902 Including a Brief Sketch of Early British Miners (Columbus, Ohio: J. L. Trauger, 1907), pp. 170-73; Beer, Hanna, pp. 79-80.

prices paid labor in Europe and the prices paid labor in
America."

Apparently as McKinley progressed down the political
trail he came to perceive something of which few nineteenth
century politicians were: that the working class, as a
class identified apart from ethnic differences, constituted
a potent economic and political force. During the 1880's
and 1890's many American workers began demonstrating this
by combining economic coercion with political power. More
and more they turned to the use of the strike as a weapon
against capitalism and special privilege. The late eighties
saw the concept of a "mutuality of interest between working-
man and employers with strong opposition to strikes . . .
rapidly lose its support within organized labor." And by
the 1890's labor itself affirmed that everyone had come to
accept and fear by declaring that the nineties symbolized
"an epoch of strikes.""McKinley had witnessed firsthand the ever increasing
power of labor. In his native Stark county, workers encoun-

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13Irwin Yellowitz, The Position of the Worker in American Society, 1865-1896 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-

14John Swinton, Striking for Life: Labor's Side of the Labor Question; The Right of Workingmen to a Fair Living
tered little trouble in establishing a foothold in industrially expanding Alliance, Canton, and Massillon. The decades following the Civil War found workers in these small cities receiving higher wages than their fellow toilers in Chicago and Akron. Such benefits were directly related to the ability of Stark county workers to organize. Beginning with the Massillon Miner's Association in 1863 and the Iron Moulders Union Beneficial Association No. 5 in 1874 the Canton area quickly became a center for several labor groups. By 1886-1887 the Canton City Directory listed at least nine "prominent" unions.\textsuperscript{15}

McKinley, through political necessity, worked hard to gain the support of these men. It was no easy task, for their natural inclination was to vote Democratic.\textsuperscript{16} Despite this tendency, it surprised few political observers when, in 1891, the Major launched his first campaign for governor "in Niles, his birthplace, and seat of the steel industry."\textsuperscript{17}

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\textsuperscript{16}In McKinley's first race for Governor, Stark county gave his opponent, James E. Campbell, a plurality of 162 votes. See Stark County Democrat, November 12, 1891.

\textsuperscript{17}Morgan, \textit{William McKinley}, p. 155.
After winning the state's highest office, McKinley quickly called on the Republican majority in the General Assembly to transform his pro-labor views into action. The legislators responded favorably, enacting measures dealing with worker safety, recognition of unions, and the settlement of labor disputes by arbitration. These laws did not make Ohio progressive and are prone to appear insignificant unless viewed in relation to the times. Politicians in the nineties were inclined to treat labor severely; self help and laissez-faire doctrines still prevailed, and the smallest effort to help the working class could almost be termed "reform."

McKinley can hardly be classified a reformer in the traditional sense, but he did take an interest in worker problems. In his inaugural address he departed from applauding the progress of Ohio to call the audience's attention to the lack of safety provided for the states 80,000 railroad employees. He cited an Interstate Commerce Commission report stating that in Ohio in 1891, "2,451 railroad employees were killed and 22,391 others were injured." He further indicated that with "proper legislation" the number of such tragedies could be substantially reduced.  

Some two months later the 70th General Assembly acted in regard to the Governor's recommendations. Senate Bill

18 The Inaugural Address was printed in Cleveland Plain Dealer, January 11, 1892, and Canton Repository, January 14, 1892.
No. 326 ordered railroad corporations to install power brakes on their engines and equip all cars "with air-brakes and automatic couplers . . . which can be coupled without the necessity of men going between the ends of the cars." Another law, enacted earlier, prevented railroad companies from requiring their employees to work over fifteen hours in succession without at least eight hours rest. Ten hours on duty, moreover, came to be considered a day's work and any additional service called for a reward in pay beyond the normal per diem.

These statutes had a remarkable effect. In his annual message in 1893, McKinley pointed out that "the number of employees killed and disabled" had been reduced to 1,738. However, he still refused to express complete satisfaction, and called for supplementary safeguards on railroads within the state. He also focused new attention on the increasing number of injuries and hardships endured by workers on the electric and cable street railways. He urged the Assembly to ease their burden by furnishing the electric and cable street cars "with vestibules, so as to protect motormen and conductors from severe weather."

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20. Ibid., 1892, pp. 311-12.

The latter proposal eventually found its way into the law books.

McKinley's actions in behalf of railroad workers undoubtedly stemmed from the fact that he wanted them in the Republican coalition. He felt genuinely concerned over the "attitude of railroad men" toward him believing there existed no "good reason" for their rejecting him.22 Interestingly enough, the railroad employees seemed fully aware of the Governor's political sensitivity. In late 1893 five West Virginia railroad worker groups requested that he intervene in their wage dispute with a company operating out of Cleveland. In the process they hoped to "fully establish the fact to the workingmen" of America that Ohio's Governor was truly "the champion of labor." At the same time they reminded him that railroad employees numbered 821,000 men determined to cast their votes for the politician who showed that he was their friend.23

Meanwhile the whole of organized labor was intensely engaged in a battle for recognition and the right to recruit new members. The McKinley administration proved quite cooperative on this issue, and passed legislation declaring it a misdemeanor for any person or company "to prevent


23 S. W. Murphy to McKinley, November 22, 1893. McKinley Governor's Papers, Ohio Historical Society.
employees from, joining, and belonging to any lawful labor organization." This law mirrored the McKinley-Hanna philosophy. Unions were inevitable; better to accept them and mold them into a conservative part of the capitalistic system.

House Bill No. 1069, enacted by the General Assembly in March 1893, reflected another element of the McKinley-Hanna doctrine. This law created a State Board of Arbitration to settle peaceably differences between labor and management. Both the Governor and his kingmaker had high hopes for the future and understood that prolonged industrial strife could disintegrate the projected Republican coalition. Both men hoped that by applying the concept of arbitration to labor disputes they could insure business progress and avoid possible political suicide.

The technique of arbitration had become popular in 1886 when the first permanent arbitration boards were established in Massachusetts and New York. The impetus for their creation came from economic and religious reformers as well as concerned politicians. Each of these groups expressed alarm over the potential danger inherent in the drastic increase of violent strikes. McKinley had been

24 Laws of Ohio, 1892, p. 269.

one of the concerned politicians, and while serving in the House of Representatives he enunciated his faith in arbitration:

I believe it [Arbitration] is the true way of settling differences between labor and capital; I believe it will bring both to a better understanding, unifying them closer in interest, and promoting better relations, avoiding force, avoiding unjust exactions and oppression, avoiding the loss of earnings to labor; avoiding disturbances to trade and transportation; and if this House can contribute in the smallest measure, by legislative expression or otherwise, to these ends, it will deserve and receive the gratitude of all men who love peace, good order, justice, and fair play.  

The Ohio Board of Arbitration, although conscientiously administered, never fulfilled McKinley's expectations. A business-oriented society simply refused to meet labor halfway. Continually the board members found worker representatives more receptive to arbitration than employers. Consequently, in the first two and a half years of the Board's existence it dealt with only twenty-eight work stoppages, only fifteen of which it managed to settle. Nonetheless, when McKinley left office he praised the Board's efforts and requested that its powers be expanded.  

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26 U.S., Congressional Record, 49th Cong., 1st sess., XVII, 3038; Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley, pp. 198-99.

27 Reports of the State Board of Arbitration of Ohio for the Years 1893, 1894, 1895, and 1896. Together with a Copy of the Arbitration Act and The Rules Adopted in Pursuance Thereof (Norwalk, O., 1897), pp. 81, 167.

28 The Board was seriously handicapped in that it could not act on cases involving firms operating in several counties. See Executive Documents, 1895, I, p. 19.
Perhaps the Board provided its best services as a mouthpiece for McKinley's Republicanism. Its practical goals, like those of the McKinley-Hanna wing of the party, were to bring capital and labor closer together as well as gain full "recognition" of unions. These objectives, in tune with the new party strategy, clearly sought to add labor votes to the Republican ledger.

The latter was verified when McKinley stood for reelection in November 1893. In virtually all counties with a substantial worker voting bloc he improved over the Republican showings of 1891 and 1892. Two excellent examples of this voting pattern were industrial Stark and Tuscarawas counties. The Major lost both of these areas in 1891 but reversed the results two years later. In his native Stark county, with its heavy miner population, he showed a plurality of over 800 votes. Two years earlier he had lost there by approximately 150 votes. The toilers remembered his legislative achievements; "coalition-non-alienation" politics was succeeding.

McKinley's successes near his home base were perhaps only exceeded by his showing in the state's southern counties. This area had long been considered Foraker country, and the Governor had offended the prominent Cincinnati

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Republican by supporting John Sherman for the Senate in 1892. One Republican newspaper, moreover, proclaimed that the G.O.P. could expect little support from the traditionally Democratic southern miners: "Once a Democrat, always a Democrat." Accentuating these problems, this same newspaper ridiculed those who boasted that McKinley would carry Ohio by 40,000 votes. Ironically, this was very close to his exact plurality over Democratic challenger Lawrence Neal.31

Despite the importance of the 1893 verdict the McKinley-Hanna strategists saw little reason for rejoicing. Their sights were on 1896, and the prospect of keeping newly acquired constituents in the Republican ranks did not appear easy. By late 1893 the depression began to bear down on Ohio's working class. McKinley himself informed the Assembly that the state was "suffering from a prolonged industrial depression."32 How he handled this impending economic crisis, and labor's reaction to it would have much to say about his chances of reaching the White House.

The economic burden accompanying the depression


fell on Ohio late in the summer of 1893. Hardest hit was the state's coal industry. In August, "owing to the stringency of the money markets," miners in the Hocking and Sunday Creek Valleys received negotiable notes instead of checks in their pay envelopes. The operators promised the workers that in sixty days the company would redeem the notes "with interest of 6 percent per annum after thirty days from the date thereof." The miners reacted with bitterness. Within a day all area mines shut down, and the union called for a mass meeting. John Nugent, President of the Ohio UMWA, who favored the negotiable notes, rushed to the meeting in an attempt to pacify the dissident elements. Vehemently voicing their anger, the men jeered Nugent until he was "finally compelled to withdraw." Further asserting their indignation, the miners passed resolutions calling for the expulsion of all state and national officers who agreed with the operators. They concluded by pledging to remain idle until the operators officially avowed to pay the miners in full every two weeks.

Similar episodes occurred throughout the state as more operators resorted to reducing wage rates. Although the reductions appeared justified, they violated the existing contract and placed enormous hardships on the miners. And because of the latter, a growing animosity pervaded

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33 Reports on the miners' reactions to the notes are in the Cincinnati Enquirer, August 11, 12, 1893.
relations between the union and operators throughout the winter months. The situation grew even more tense when the mine owners declared that uniform wage cuts would have to go into effect by mid-January 1894. In rebuttal the United Mine Workers announced at a state convention in February that it favored "the maintaining of the present scale until our contract expires, on April 30, 1894."\(^{34}\) This declaration coincided with the UMW's determination to stabilize "wage rates during downward cyclical fluctuations";\(^{35}\) however it also hardened the battle lines.

In the ensuing days, despite attempts at reconciliation, neither side relented, and wage rates failed to stabilize. Finally, seeing no other way out, the UMW leadership announced at the national convention held in Columbus that work would be suspended on April 21 for the purpose of restoring the scale stipulated in the existing contract. With this announcement the great coal strike of 1894 became a reality.

\(^{34}\)On May 1, 1893 the operators agreed to pay the existing wage scale for another year. This scale was based on 70 cents for the Hocking Valley. At a miners' convention in January 1894, however, the owners explained that the May agreement would have to be shelved and wage cuts implemented in order to compete with the Western Pennsylvania district. Details of these and other events leading up to the strike in April are taken from the report compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in Executive Documents, 1894, III, pp. 121-24.

The decision to strike could not have been an easy one. At the time the United Mine Workers of America was only four years old, and the work stoppage threatened the organization's very survival. Added to the fear of a dissolved union was the specter of human misery. Most miners had worked little the past winter, and their families faced inevitable suffering. Perhaps their only consolation was the outpouring of "sympathy and support nationally," which included an offer of cooperation from Samuel Gompers on behalf of the American Federation of Labor.

Furthermore, the ominous consequences of a nationwide strike in such a key industry proved instantaneous and painful. At the beginning of the shutdown there were nearly 125,000 miners without income and the figure steadily grew to 180,000. In Ohio the figure stood at 29,000. Moreover the railroad industry became seriously threatened. Referring to the menacing situation in the Hocking Valley, one conductor commented: "It looks as if four-fifths of the

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36 Ibid., p. 52.

37 Ohio State Journal, April 22, 1894. It should be noted that the Ohio miners did not have a monopoly on suffering. Unemployment reigned supreme in 1894, reaching as high as 67,250 in New York City and 100,000 in Chicago. See Samuel Resnick, "Unemployment, Unrest, and Relief in the United States During the Depression of 1893-97," Journal of Political Economy, LXI (August, 1953), 328.

38 Ware, Labor Movement in U.S., p. 221; Cincinnati Enquirer, April 22, 1894.
freight crews would have to be laid off."39 Steamers in Ohio ports also were crippled by the work stoppage. Within a week after the miners laid down their tools the Lake Erie ports complained of critically low coal reserves. Actually, the coal famine, combined with the sheer magnitude of the strike worried some operators and gave the miners hope for victory.40

In spite of the imminent coal crisis McKinley did little in the early weeks of the strike. Instead, he chose to deal with another potential threat to his political alliance with labor. On April 27, in Mt. Sterling, Ohio, a group referred to as Galvin's regiment of Coxey's "army of peace" boarded a B & O freight train and adamantly refused to leave. Gradually tension mounted until the sheriff telegraphed the Statehouse informing that the "tramps" had defied his authority, and unless McKinley objected he would "attack at daylight." Aware of the political consequences which might result from bloodshed the Governor decided to send in troops under Adjutant General Howe, while at the same time ordering the sheriff "not to make any move."41

39 Ohio State Journal, April 22, 1894.
40 Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 28 and May 1, 1894; see also Roy, Coal Miners, p. 326.
41 See the series of telegrams related to this incident in McKinley Letter Book, Ohio Historical Society.
McKinley's delaying tactics turned out to be an extremely wise move. Once in charge, Howe's men managed the affair sensibly. When they ejected the "hobos" from the train the mood became almost comical, and the only mishap occurred when a young soldier accidentally fired his weapon injuring no one. The press praised both the Governor and Howe; the latter being commended for "bringing peace and goodwill out of threatened bloodshed."42 The Commonwealers should have fared so well in other states.

What few realized during the events at Mt. Sterling was the political genius behind McKinley's actions. Had a serious confrontation transpired at the sight of the freight train he would have lost immense political capital. Nearly all of the Mt. Sterling citizenry had supported the Coxeyites. It was they who had fed the "industrial army" for over a month and eventually paid their way on to Columbus. If Howe had bungled, several Mt. Sterling votes plus those of numerous pro-Republican laborers most likely would have been forfeited. Considering the political consequences involved it is not surprising that when Howe reported to McKinley's apartments, long after midnight of the 28th, he found the Governor awake and eagerly awaiting his report.

Nor is it startling to hear that the Chief Executive was ever grateful "for the peaceful manner in which the trouble

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42 Cincinnati Enquirer, April 29, 1894; Ohio State Journal, April 29, 1894.
The favorable outcome of the crisis at Mt. Sterling, like the political victory of 1893, was not to be celebrated. By late April an emergency situation had materialized in the coal trade. Although the coal strike was officially only ten days old the UMW, lacking in funds, suddenly realized that victory must come soon or the families of its members would face starvation. To further complicate matters the goal behind the suspension—the depletion of bituminous coal reserves—had been subverted by vast shipments of anthracite coal from active fields in Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

The everyday reality of their dependent's lack of food, combined with the thought of their own "brothers" betraying them riled Ohio's striking miners. Talk of violent action to prevent importation of anthracite coal swept through the idle coal fields. The miner's obligatory contractual agreement "to voluntarily assist in the work of protecting life and property wherever threatened" disintegrated as the inflamed workers entertained thoughts of dynamiting bridges.

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43 Cincinnati Enquirer, April 29, 1894.

44 For a discussion of the crisis revolving around these two problems see Roy, Coal Miners, pp. 326-30.
Gauging the emotional state of his men, President McBride hurriedly issued a bulletin arranging for a joint convention of miners and operators to be convened in Cleveland on May 15, 1894. McBride hoped to use the meeting to work out a settlement and reopen the mines. On the appointed day the convention opened with the owners of 300 mines represented. Almost instantly the miner's representatives and the operators clashed. The intensely stubborn Pittsburgh producers asserted that they would reject any agreement; the miners countered by having them "figuratively kicked out of the meeting." Four days later the ejected operators left for home vowing to break the strike. Meanwhile, the miners reiterated their old demands for 70 cents a ton in Ohio and 79 cents a ton in Pennsylvania. The operators who had remained at the convention promptly spurned these requests. With no agreement in sight the meeting adjourned an utter failure. McBride's hopes for a compromise vanished and dark clouds once again hung over the unproductive coal fields.

The expected violence erupted on May 30 when a group of miners attacked three trains "laden with West Virginia

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46 Cincinnati Enquirer, May 15, 16, 19, 1894. Paul Kleppner states that the Pittsburgh operators held the key to the May 15 meeting. Had they been willing to make a settlement the Ohio operators would have followed. See Kleppner, Cross of Culture, p. 241.
coal" at Sherrodsville, Ohio. More serious, however, at least from a political standpoint, was the damage done to freight trains and railroad equipment in Athens County. Here, with Glouster serving as a sort of agitation center, embittered miners purportedly burned railroad bridges, broke into company tool sheds, sidetracked a coal train, and destroyed couplings and brake rods. Sheriff M. M. Riley, overwhelmed and alarmed, persuaded McKinley to send troops. Such a hasty plea for assistance quickly evolved into an obvious blunder. The miners had the entire community behind them. Despite McKinley's calling in the militia, the Republican Party managed to escape recriminations as Riley accepted full blame for the episode. After all, it was Riley's "unwarranted assumption that anarchy was prevailing that misled Governor McKinley to order out troops." When the sheriff's panicky telegrams were published, the somewhat calmer miners took it upon themselves to exonerate the Governor. McKinley's popularity with the workers had

48 Riley to McKinley, June 2, 1894. McKinley Governor's Papers, Ohio Historical Society.
49 Cincinnati Enquirer, June 1, 1894; Kleppner, Cross of Culture, p. 244. In fairness to Sheriff Riley it should be pointed out that on June 1, the Enquirer reported the situation near Glouster to be so critical that "a single overt act" could "precipitate endless scenes of bloodshed and pillage." Also see Riley's side of the story in the Enquirer, June 3, 1894.
weathered another politically dangerous crisis.

The continued violence of the first two weeks of June, 1894 offered additional challenges to McKinley's alliance with labor. More than once disruptions in or near mining towns required ordering up the militia. Still, in reading the contemporary accounts of these crises one is amazed at McKinley's prudent handling of explosive situations. Often he seemed to side with the miners and delay in dispatching the National Guard even when there existed clear evidence of property damage. When troops had to be used he maintained an extra close watch over their operations.

The Governor's rather cautious attitude toward striking workers became clear on June 3 when four hundred miners began holding up trains near Bellaire. One newspaper related that although a "bloody encounter" appeared imminent the Governor seemed undisturbed:

The miners are thoroughly ugly, and will not listen to reason. The Governor has refused to call out the troops unless there should be actual violence committed.50

Two days later, Sheriff James Mason of Guernsey county appealed for aid in handling a "mob of 500" miners who had captured a "train of cars belonging to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company." Joining Mason were the company

50Cincinnati Enquirer, June 4, 1894.
officials who requested protection for their property because the miners threatened to destroy the trains by fire. McKinley refused to be convinced of the severity of the situation, and did not order up troops until a second appeal came nearly a day later. And after sending the men, he made certain that he be fully "advised on developments."

This reluctance to use force undoubtedly was politically motivated, for conditions in Guernsey county had long been ripe for a bloody encounter. Also, to prevent the Governor from acquiring the image of a suppressor, careful steps were taken to see to it that all the guardsmen received implicit warnings not to over-react in carrying out their assignments. Colonel Coit, commander of the fourteenth regiment out of Columbus lectured his troops:

You are soldiers and great responsibility rests upon you and we want no foolishness. Do nothing without the consent of your commanding officer and pay strict attention to orders. If you are brought to face trouble and are jeered at or insulted do not answer, as your commanding officers will take the responsibility and protect you.51

Undoubtedly the emphasis on delay and caution helped prevent McKinley from acquiring an image as the politician who suppressed the miners.

On June 7 McKinley again answered a plea for help and dispatched 1,500 guardsmen to embattled Cambridge. This

51 A detailed account of the Guernsey county incident can be found in the Ohio State Journal, June 7, 1894.
time he "personally superintended the arrangements," and within twenty-four hours he restored peace without any spilling of blood. His actions received the plaudits of the journalists who credited him with a "brilliant piece of military tact" in sending in a large and efficient force. Coincidentally, only a day later a mob in Canal Dover had surrounded and captured a regiment of the Ohio National Guard! This time, however, the Major once more elected not to retaliate until he had been fully advised on the situation.52

What motivated McKinley's resistance to use troops was that many of the guardsmen belonged to the working class, and they had no appetite for confrontations with the miners. Perhaps the close relationship between the state's soldiers and miners can be best illustrated by a series of events at Wheeling Creek. In this Belmont county community the miners were particularly incensed and on June 9 one of their bolder numbers fired into General Howe's camp narrowly missing a sentinal. Howe's men

52 Cincinnati Enquirer, June 7 and 8, 1894. There were numerous "minor" instances of violence or threatened violence which McKinley chose to ignore. For instance, on June 6 in Salineville the railroad brought in a group of Italians to load trains. Hearing of this the miners "sent courier throughout the village" and before long 250 persons gathered; and when they came "in sight of the work train, the Dagos, terror stricken, dropped their shovels and sought safety in flight." These aggressors were certainly not "pawns" of any political party. See Ohio State Journal, June 7, 1894.
returned fire and for the first time the Guard had fired upon the miners. Although no one was injured, Harry C. Sherrard, McKinley's aide-de-camp, rushed to the scene expecting more trouble the next day. To nearly everyone's surprise the following day, Sunday, brought only calm. Although the majority of people aligned themselves with the workers there seemed to be a special understanding between soldier and miner. They attended Sunday services together, and a bit later "two beautiful miner lassies ... sweetly sang duets for the boys." Such fraternizing virtually eliminated hostilities and surely did not hinder Republican efforts to appease the miners.

McKinley's hesitant responses to the labor strife of 1894 appear even more satisfactory when matched against reactions in other states. Not only was it not unusual to call up troops to suppress labor riots, but as often as not bloodshed did occur. On the Sunday that the Ohio Guardsmen and Wheeling Creek miners "sung and danced"

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53 *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 10 and 11, 1894.

54 From 1886 to 1895 governors called on the National Guard 328 times for riot duty. McKinley called the Guard up 13 times in 1894, about half the time to quell labor riots. He withdrew all troops used in the miners' strike by June 21, 1894. See Robert W. Coakley, "Federal Use of Militia and the National Guard in Civil Disturbances: The Whiskey Rebellion to Little Rock," in Robin Higham, ed., *Bayonets in the Street: The Use of Troops in Civil Disturbances* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press, 1969), p. 27; and Winthrop Alexander, "Ten Years of Riot Duty," *Journal of Military Service Institute*, XIX (July, 1896), 7.
together "two strikers were shot by deputies in Uniontown, Pennsylvania."\(^{(55)}\) Approximately two weeks later a Grand Jury in Brazil, Indiana charged nine miners with first degree murder in connection with the death of a railroad engineer on June 6.\(^{(56)}\) And, of course, this was the same year when the events of that fatal thirteenth day of the Great Pullman Strike culminated with a volley of bullets being fired into a mob of men, women, boys and girls.\(^{(57)}\)

Obviously McKinley, unlike many chief executives, feared the political repercussions emanating from the deployment of the militia to quell labor riots. The reasoning behind this cautious attitude is found in his particular brand of politics. From the very beginning he had campaigned for miner's votes. He considered them his friends; and in 1892 he addressed them at their organization's third annual convention in Columbus by stating: "There is nothing too good for you in Ohio."\(^{(58)}\) To anger the miners in their moment of need would be to surrender hard won political capital. Of course, balancing his political strategy with his executive duties often proved

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\(^{(55)}\) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 11, 1895.

\(^{(56)}\) *Ohio State Journal*, June 22, 1894.


\(^{(58)}\) Quoted in Roy, *Coal Miners*, p. 320.
difficult. As Professor Paul Kleppner points out: "To McKinley, the events of the coal strike, and especially the requests for troops, were something of a traumatic experience."59 Attaining a reputation as the man who used troops against the workers deeply concerned McKinley as well as threatened to destroy the Republican image which he and Hanna were building.

While McKinley maneuvered to keep his support amongst the miners, the leaders of the United Mine Workers Union moved to end the crippling coal strike. On June 9, 1894, the opposing sides agreed to assemble in Columbus and a day later they hammered out a compromise. The Union officers accepted a 10 cent increase over what the miners received when the strike began. Although this represented 10 cents less than their constituents had been demanding the national officers, believing that a continuance of the struggle might destroy the UMW, eagerly signed the agreement. President McBride, who led the signing, explained the leadership's position in an official bulletin announcing the end of the work stoppage:

We assure you that we did not enter into this agreement because it was pleasing or even satisfactory to us, but because we seriously believed that better could not be gotten, no matter how long the struggle continued ... We are so confident of the correctness of our position in signing and advising the acceptance

59 Kleppner, Cross of Culture, p. 246.
of this contract, that on its acceptance or rejection by you we stake our reputation as your servants and our further continuance in official position.  

This sacrificial gesture on the part of the National officers drew little sympathy from the Ohio rank and file. A. A. Adams, President of the Ohio District, denounced the compromise and refused to give his signature. His declination coincided with the sentiments of the men he represented as was indicated at the convention of Ohio miners held a week later. At this "bitter and heated" meeting the miners vindicated Adams, accepted the 60 cent rate under protest, and went on record as officially condemning the compromise agreement. In addition, they passed by two-thirds vote a resolution repudiating the actions of McBride and the other national officers. Indeed, the Ohio miners were so antagonized that one newspaper reported that there existed little doubt that many would refuse to pay their dues in an attempt to starve out the national leadership. This observation apparently proved correct for one historian has affirmed that "at the end of the strike there was a return to district agreements and the national union disappeared."  

60 Ohio Executive Documents, 1894, III, p. 128.  
61 Cincinnati Enquirer, June 11, 1894.  
62 Cleveland Leader, June 21, 1894.  
63 Yellowitz, Workers in American Society, p. 221.
In contrast to the UMW officialdom, McKinley and the Republicans emerged from the strike in fine shape. Although the Governor could not escape all criticism for his use of the militia he did manage to keep the worker constituency his party had acquired in 1893. This development was crucial for throughout 1893 and 1894 the Democrats continued to lose supporters who came to associate their party with "hard times." After the strike many disgruntled Democratic miners joined the Populist crusade, but a few Catholic miners went Republican, thus adding slightly to the party's 1893 gains. This welcoming of Catholic voters, moreover, reflected the Hanna-McKinley desire to steer the party away from its traditional pietism and enlist the support of non-pietist voter groups.

Returning briefly to McKinley's role in the miners' strike one is struck by a small incident which reveals another method employed by the Governor to maintain worker support. Near the end of the strike the particularly embittered miners of Stark County returned to McKinley ten dollars he had previously donated to the Massillon Miner's Relief Committee. Surprisingly, their declination failed to deter the Canton native from pursuing his political goals. In the months following the strike the Hanna-McKinley

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64 Kleppner, Cross of Culture, p. 249.

65 Canton Repository, June 14, 1894.
faction of the party persisted in viewing the workers as a necessary and vital part of the Republican social base.

The latter fact became even more visible in the winter and spring of 1894–1895. During this period the miners of Hocking, Athens, and Perry counties, known in the coal trade as the Hocking Valley, fell victim to an unexpected set of circumstances. Due to the increase in machine mining, the shutdown of several key mines, and the areas unfavorable position in relation to markets, hundreds of miners were forced off the job. Impoverished and without the aid of any relief agency these men decided to appeal directly to the Governor for assistance. McKinley answered their plea with a statewide campaign aimed at bringing relief to the destitute miners and their families. He sent numerous letters requesting "certain cities and villages to make donations of supplies and money to relieve their needs."

Moreover, the Governor applied his personal influence and that of his office to persuade the Pennsylvania

66 During 1895 each of the three counties in the Hocking Valley had 669 or more miners unemployed. The nearest number of unemployed recorded by another mining county was 217. Few counties suffered over 100 unemployed and at least 10 out of 30 counties reporting showed a gain in employment. See Executive Documents, 1895, III, pp. 1147–55.

67 Ibid., I, p. 25; see also McKinley to Honorable Guy Major, Mayor of Toledo, January 14, 1895. McKinley Letter Book, Ohio Historical Society.
Railroad Company to transport donated supplies "wherever they may be needed free of charge." Largely as a result of this sort of campaigning, donations came from a variety of sources including the Standard Oil Company, the Toledo Blade, and numerous churches and lodges.

It should be further noted that McKinley's rescue efforts were not temporary. He maintained his deep concern for the helpless miners until he left office in January, 1896, and beyond. In March 1895 before embarking on a two-week trip to Georgia, he invited S. J. Coultrap who supervised the relief project to stop by his office for a briefing on the current situation in the Hocking Valley. "I want," McKinley informed Coultrap, "to make ample provision before going away for supplies during my absence." Nine months later, in his farewell message to the Ohio Assembly, McKinley gave the totals of his relief effort. Money raised amounted to $4,948.87 of which $1,011.90 was passed on to his successor to be used for the same purpose. The total value of all supplies reached $31,785.05. Most important, according to the future president, "there were 2,722 families assisted."

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68 McKinley to W. W. Medary, January 24, 1895 in ibid.
69 See correspondence January-March 1895 in ibid.
70 McKinley to Coultrap, March 4, 1895 in ibid.
71 Executive Documents, 1895, I, p. 25.
It seems interesting that McKinley who had been pictured by contemporary cartoonists, his Populist opponents, and many later historians as a cold business politician could have been so deeply concerned about the welfare of a few thousand miners. But these observers tended to overlook one all important item, and that is the high value the Hanna-McKinley faction of the Republican party placed on worker votes. This, of course, does not infer that political gain was the sole motive behind the relief project. On the contrary, reliable evidence shows that McKinley always possessed a personal feel for working people. However, as the 1896 election results will show, the relief drive did deliver handsome political dividends.

Before considering this "critical election" another object of note should be emphasized. As 1895 progressed, the economic situation of the Ohio miner steadily improved. As Robert Hazeltine, Inspector of Mines, then reported, coal production for 1895 totaled 13,683,879 tons, an increase over strike marred 1894 of 1,773,600 tons.\(^7\)\(^2\) Ironcally, three of the seven counties which benefitted most from this upsurge in production were Stark, Guernsey and Tuscarawus, areas which had experienced labor strife in 1894. Even more significant on a statewide basis was the

\(^7\)\(^2\) Ibid., III, p. 1144.
increase in miners wages. For the year 1895 the average coal worker's take home pay came to $221.75, an increase of nearly $40, or $3.28 a month over 1894.73

Thus it appears that McKinley gained in popularity on two counts. One the one hand, he could assume credit for the economic betterment of most of the state's miners and in turn associate his party with "prosperity." Not a difficult task since after two-and-one half years of depression the Democrats had been indelibly marked as the party of "hard times." On the other hand, because of his positive role in the relief project he was able to maintain Republican strength in the only area of the state suffering economically—the poverty-stricken Hocking Valley. By a combination of good luck, Democratic failure, and delicate maneuvering the Hanna-McKinley strategy had endured.

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McKinley's "progressive" attitude toward labor continued to be in evidence during his race for the White House in 1896. Throughout the presidential campaign the McKinley forces engaged in a concerted effort to secure the friendship of workingmen. To capture valuable labor votes, the Republicans impressed upon workers the ominous threat posed

by the Democrats' free silver policy. G.O.P. spokesmen predicted that free silver would destroy business confidence and plunge the country into depression. Free silver, they further argued, only helped the agrarians of the West and South at the expense of urban workers. As an alternative the Republicans offered the protective tariff. Cleveland's free trade policies had brought disaster to America's workers; but McKinley, following the policies of sound money and protectionism would restore economic growth and end unemployment.74

Furthermore, the Republican National Committee made judicious use of the politically conscious Terence V. Powderly, who had decided to play an active role in McKinley's campaign.75 During the campaign Powderly was called on to deliver political speeches;76 and at least once Hanna requested that he write a letter on "The Effects of Free Silver on Labor" for publication in a number of leading


newspapers. Some of Powderly’s labor “friends” failed to appreciate his backing McKinley. But the Republican National Committee took an opposite view. After the election victory W. M. Hahn, Chairman of the Committee’s Speaker’s Bureau thanked Powderly for his assistance: “Your active interest, your faithful work, your intelligent discharge of every duty and your zeal, greatly commended you; and the several committees in the states where you addressed your countrymen have advised us of your faithful work.”

On Election Day, 1896 the Republican appeals to the laboring classes reaped its harvest. Realizing a popular vote victory of 7,035,638 to Bryan’s 6,467,946, McKinley

77 Mark A. Hanna to T. V. Powderly, September 16, 1896, Powderly Letter Books. Hanna’s request was part of a project “to publish a number of letters from prominent Republican leaders” assigning each a “special subject.” The purpose of the project was to portray the Republican side of a given issue in the campaign.

78 W. M. Hahn to T. V. Powderly, November 25, 1896, Powderly Letter Books. After the election Powderly applied for the position of Commissioner-General of Immigration. His candidacy was strongly challenged by several labor officials and politicians, including members of the Executive Council of the AFL who visited President McKinley to personally lodge a protest. These protesters tended to stress Powderly’s lack of popularity in labor circles; however an examination of his letter books leads to the conclusion that those voicing opposition simply favored another may for the post. Nonetheless, Powderly was appointed and confirmed to the position. See Powderly Letter Books; and Powderly, The Path I Trod, pp. 298-99.

79 For a complete numerical breakdown of both the popular and electoral vote see Paul W. Glad, McKinley, Bryan, and the People (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1964), pp. 200-01.
McKinley's solicitations it was also apparent he had done well among the nation's laborers. 80

McKinley's successes sparked a barrage of complaints charging that employers had coerced workers into voting the Republican ticket. Though this cannot be entirely refuted it is doubtful that brow-beating carried the election. Moreover, this line of reasoning only distorts the workers true response to the candidates. "Few workers," writes H. Wayne Morgan, "believed that businessmen would actually close their plants if Bryan won, but they could readily believe his victory would bring a crash, with unpredictable results . . . Labor simply had little in common with Bryan's agrarian interests." 81 Paul W. Glad concurs.

80 My conclusions on the East and Middle West are based on evidence presented in two authoritative studies: McSeveney's "The Politics of Depression: Voting Behavior in Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey"; and Kleppner, The Cross of Culture. Both McSeveney and Kleppner agree that McKinley outdid Bryan in appealing to workers. And though both assert that cultural factors—nationality, religion, race, and "moral" issues—are the prime determinants of voter behavior, by the mid-1890's the depression had enabled the Republicans, using the tariff as a propaganda weapon, to secure the votes of prosperity minded workers. Also, McSeveney and Kleppner concur that the shift in voting patterns during the depression years 1893-1895, topped off by McKinley victory in 1896 forged a voter realignment which enabled the "party of McKinley" to dominate American politics for years to come.

explaining that Bryan "sympathized with industrial workers, and he developed his arguments with them in mind, but he never really penetrated to a deep understanding of their needs."  

Late in October McKinley himself dismissed rumors of political intimidation. Assailing those who would prefer to believe that employers and workers could not cooperate and join in the persuance of identical goals, the G.O.P. candidate declared that "the only coercion that is going on is the coercion of reason, of conscience and experience."  

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Once in office the "McKinley-Hanna team" continued to support labor and the latter reaped the benefits from such a policy. A classic example was the progress enjoyed by the United Mine Workers after 1897. Formed on January 25, 1890, when the National District Assembly 135 of the Knights of Labor merged with the National Progressive Union, the U.M.W.A. struggled through an early period of

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82 Glad, McKinley, Bryan, and the People, p. 50.


abortive strikes, unstable membership, and feeble finances. Then, in response to a wage crisis in the mining industry the executive board of the UMW, led by President Ratchford, voted to strike on July 4, 1897. The severity of the economic situation which produced the strike was partially evident in the union's statement regarding what occasioned the walkout:

Our suspension is not a choice, but an alternative. It is the voice of an enslaved class urged to action by cruel and unbearable conditions; the protest of overworked underpaid people against longer continuing a semi-starved existence. The limit of endurance was reached when honest labor could no longer sustain itself... On one side, we were confronted by a heartless array of employers, whose combined wisdom and wealth suggested no remedy other than continued submission to avarice and greed; on the other side, we were met by the cries of nearly one million men, women, and children appealing for their rights to the opportunities of life and wages to sustain them compatible with economy, civilization, and present industrial conditions.

Although the UMW was only 11,000 strong when the suspension commenced, more than 150,000 miners eventually laid down their tools in a massive effort aimed primarily at attaining higher wages.


87 Angle, Bloody Williamson, p. 94.
The strike lasted through autumn, carrying with it extreme poverty and degradation for miners' families. Fortunately, their grief was eased somewhat by an unprecedented response of sympathy and aid from the public. Governor Asa Bushnell led a welfare drive on behalf of the Ohio miners. And substantial offerings came from different locals of the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor. 88

A settlement "by joint conference and conciliation" was finally reached in Chicago on January 28, 1898. The union won an 18 per cent wage increase and a reduction in the hours of labor from 10 to 8 hours in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Western Pennsylvania. 89 The victory marked a turning point for the United Mine Workers of America. For the first time the union had survived a strike remaining financially sound and keeping its membership intact. In addition, the Interstate Joint Conference which settled the strike "laid the foundations of an institution for collective bargaining in the bituminous field" which operated from the time of the settlement on through the mid-1920's. 90 John Mitchell, writing later as President

88 George, "The Coal Miners' Strike of 1897," pp. 200-06.
of the U.M.W.A., expressed pleasure over these developments:

Both operators and miners concede that the adoption of this humane and business-like method of adjusting all differences affecting conditions of employment is preferable to the method of strikes and lockouts, with the consequent bitter suffering and loss of profits.  

This triumph did not immediately end the successes of the U.M.W.A. during the McKinley presidency. On the eve of the election of 1900 the miners in the poorly organized anthracite coal regions of Pennsylvania went out on strike. Almost immediately Mark Hanna intervened in behalf of John Mitchell and his union. Seeking out J. P. Morgan and certain other Wall Street interests, the Ohio Senator let it be known that a prolonged strike posed the danger of a Bryan victory. Before long, the implementation of pressure tactics convinced a number of operators that the miner's demands were justified; and a shaky, though politically beneficial agreement was secured just before the election. 

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Three significant revelations emerged from the strategy deployed during the strike. One was Mitchell's keen interest in preserving the fortunes of the McKinley administration. Writing to Daniel Keefe, President of the International Longshoremen's Association and friend of Hanna, Mitchell expressed regret that the strike provided an "avenue through which designing politicians can attack the administration" and "dissipate the prosperity arguments which are made by those favoring the administration."\(^{93}\)

A second revelation was the interest the National Civic Federation had exhibited toward settling the strike. The NCF's Board of Conciliation and Arbitration considered the miners strike to be its first important item of business. And as Marguerite Green reports:

> The services of the NCF had contributed much to the concessions which allowed the union to continue work in the anthracite fields. The negotiations had also helped the leaders of the Federation to clarify their ideas concerning the aims and methods of their organization. As the most important issue confronting the American people, the labor problem should be dealt with by a body of experts who were trained to do what the American businessman had no time to do for himself.\(^{94}\)

\(^{93}\)Mitchell to Daniel Keefe, October 4, 1900, John Mitchell Papers, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. Hereinafter cited as Mitchell Papers.

Finally, the strike revealed Hanna's continued interest, even after the election victory, in sustaining industrial peace. When the pre-election settlement expired on April 1, 1901 and the miners again threatened to strike, Mitchell asked Hanna to seek concessions from the obstinate coal-carriers. The Ohio industrialist worked tenaciously throughout March, finally persuading several companies to meet with UMW representatives to adjust grievances. These efforts, temporarily averting another strike once again demonstrated that McKinley-Hanna Republicanism was dedicated to promoting harmony between the employer and employee.95

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After looking at McKinley's political career and his dealings with labor, one must be impressed by his willingness to consider the workingman's problems. Because of the intensity of labor strife which accompanied the eighteen-nineties, labor often found itself winning more enemies than friends. Throughout this period, moreover, the Democratic party, once the hope of workingman, came under the influence of agrarians. In light of these developments, McKinley's humane views, along with the Republican party's

95This discussion is based on Mitchell to Mark Hanna, March 20, 1901; Mitchell to W. D. Ryan, March 21, 1901; Mitchell to W. B. Wilson, March 25, 1901, Mitchell to W. B. Wilson, March 26, 1901, and Mitchell to W. B. Wilson, March 28, 1901, all in the Mitchell Papers.
catering to worker interests could only have served labor well in its quest for recognition in the face of intolerance.

In a sense, McKinley and his party's courting of labor was no different than the actions of other elites who, by following a "response and adaptation" approach, often found it beneficial to listen to organized labor. Actually McKinley and the Republicans merely reacted to what political scientist Everett Ladd calls the "effective environment," the complex and changing "social system" in which political parties are forced to operate. 96 For example, in the election of 1896, Republican strategy was partially reversed because its traditional rural Protestant voting base had been usurped by the Democrats when they nominated the fundamentalist William Jennings Bryan. Responding pragmatically to this new alignment, the Republicans decided to seek the support of the Catholic immigrants in the urban areas. As Ladd concludes: "As long as it was McKinley vs. Bryan, with McKinley standing for the industrial society against Bryan's agrarianism and fundamental Protestant style and concerns, the new immigrant, like other urban dwellers could be persuaded to give substantial support to the Republicans." 97 The party of McKinley, then, by

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97 Ibid., p. 161.
adjusting to altercations in the social system or "effective environment" found itself cast not only as the party of business but, to a large extent, the party of America workers. Thus one should not be astonished that after 1896, with industrial capitalism and McKinley Republicanism firmly entrenched, labor made significant advances; and that within the National Civic Federation, an organization dominated and controlled by Republican businessmen, organized labor found its best hope for acceptance into the capitalist economy.
CHAPTER IV

THE ERDMAN ACT, AND THE CHANGING ATTITUDE TOWARD RAILWAY LABOR IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA

On February 26, 1895 Constantine Jacob Erdman, a little known businessman and politician, declared on the floor of the United States House of Representatives that "it is believed that after the first blow has been struck, the settlement of labor questions is very difficult, and that if mediation and conciliation be early resorted to, it will probably avoid in many cases the necessity of arbitration." Erdman was explaining the famous railroad labor bill which eventually bore his name. Recently the country had been shocked by the violence and economic damage perpetrated during the Pullman railroad strike of 1894. Now it seemed both necessary and wise to devise some means for the peaceable settlement of railroad disputes. Accordingly, Attorney General Olney, a leading actor in the events of 1894, presented to the House Committee on Labor the bill

being interpreted by Erdman, its House sponsor.

Although not enacted until 1898, during the administration of William McKinley, the Erdman Law was highly significant, not because it worked, or was even implemented; but because it stood as evidence of a changed attitude toward settling railroad labor disputes. No longer would the federal government be so anxious to utilize naked force to suppress striking railway workers. From here on it was assumed that in the event of a strike, railroad managers and union representatives would be brought together to make every effort at mediating or arbitrating their differences. And since, under the Erdman Act, either party could call for mediatory assistance in its squabbling with the opponent, railroad labor had reached a new pinnacle: it was now recognized as a valid member of the industrial community capable of and deserving the license to bargain for the rights of the workers it represented. In effect the Act was the first federal recognition of the legal right of a trade union to exist and exercise collective bargaining power.

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To be sure, the hopes for railroad labor and peace in the railroad industry offered, at least in theory, by the Erdman Law stood in marked contrast to the events which had dominated the railway economy over the previous twenty years. From the strikes of 1877 to the Pullman fiasco of 1894 labor troubles persistently plagued America's railways. Furthermore,
the federal government had intervened in these disputes, not with a workable or fair method for settlement, but with a show of force to protect property and suppress strikers.\(^2\)

But the truly vengeful enemy of railroad labor unions during this period was not the politician or even the often times reactionary press. Rather, it was the railroad managers who adamantly resisted any interference by unions in company affairs. During the epidemic of railroad disputes in 1877 the vast majority of employers rode roughshod over railroad workers, implementing any policies they desired irregardless of the consequences. The events surrounding the sudden wage cuts of 1877 typified this attitude. When disgruntled trainmen threatened to demonstrate against the Erie Railroad's 10 per cent wage cut a company official, no doubt bolstered by the support of the New York militia, confidently proclaimed that "any demonstration would be speedily put down, even if it should be found necessary to sacrifice life."\(^3\) Fortunately the latter proved unnecessary as the proposed strike threat miscarried. Nonetheless Hugh J. Jewett, the rancorous and dictatorial president of the Erie line saw little reason for ending the fight. Seeing


his opponents vanquished, he promptly ordered the firing of all the leading strikers including their spokesman Barney J. Donahue.\(^4\)

Of course, not all employers were as vindictive as Jewett, and a few even sympathized with the plight of their men. However, for the most part, there remained near unanimity on two issues. First, labor unions, if allowed to exist at all, must not interfere in railroad business; and secondly if a policy decision presents the dilemma of choosing between the workers or the company, the nod must always go to the latter.

One of the clearest indicators of the railroad leaders' attitudes toward unions in the eighteen-seventies was the various methods and devices used to curtail or suppress energetic unions and striking workers. From a practical viewpoint, the most devastating of the anti-strike tactics, at least in a humanitarian sense, was the use of strike-breakers to replace striking workers followed by the dismissal of these same workers, and particularly their leaders. This action, moreover, was frequently succeeded by the creation of a blacklist or sheet containing the names of specified troublemakers. Once the names on the list became known to the various railroad officials, these men found it

\(^4\) Ibid., pp. 53-55. Donahue, a brakeman, worked on the Erie Line nearly twenty-five years receiving enough injuries to leave him a near cripple.
extremely difficult, if not impossible to gain employment. One can only speculate regarding the psychological impact imposed on these men and their families because of their inability to acquire work, even after years of dedicated training and service, in their chosen profession.

If the managers failed to destroy the unions with these tactics, there always existed a last resort; the calling in of federal troops to repress the strikers. Throughout American labor history armed force has always come in on the side of business and property, and the 1870's proved no exception. As a matter of fact, deploying the federal military during the Great Strike of 1877, although not an innovation, set a precedent for the use of government troops in future disturbances. Of course, it is not surprising that railroad officials readily received the support of politicians. In the seventies, as Professor Gerald C. Eggert affirms, the railroads wielded awesome political power:

In some states they seemed to control the political machinery completely and their rapport with high officials was impressive. Railroad promoters and lobbyists swarmed in the halls of Congress, seeking charters, franchises, subsidies, and land grants while fighting against investigations, regulation, and new taxes. When not at war with the farmers and small town merchants who were trying to bring them under control, they struggled with one

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5 For examples of the implementation of these anti-strike techniques see Bruce, 1877, pp. 35, 54, 57, 60, 62, 75.
another for legislative favors. The inducements they offered were the free pass, the political contribution, influence, and on occasion the outright bribe. They also held out such considerations as legal fees to be paid, construction contracts to be let, and a wide variety of positions to be filled. 6

Some railroad officials, such as Erie's president Jewett, once served in public office. Others moved freely in and out of the business and political bureaucracies. Still others simply resorted to arm twisting or gift giving to gain political favors. During the 1877 uprising in Martinsburg, West Virginia president John Garrett of the Baltimore and Ohio made his demand for federal troops by presenting Governor Matthews with a choice: either ask President Hayes for the troops or prepare to leave politics. 7 Thomas A. Scott, scion of the powerful Pennsylvania railroad did his persuading with a bit more subtlety. He offered his luxurious private rail car to Pennsylvania Governor Hartranft and his family in order that they might partake of a six week tour of the country in plutocratic style. 8

Considering the influence of railroad chieftains over government officials, their similar backgrounds and shared values, and combining this with the lack of previous


7Bruce, 1877, p. 80.

8Ibid., p. 73.
precedent it seems hardly remarkable that during the upheavals of the seventies the federal government had no policy or machinery for dealing with major railroad strikes. But even more important as an obstacle to the creation of any viable policy for settling railroad disputes was the weak and conservative nature of the early railroad unions. With little pressure from organized railway workers the federal government merely fell back upon the contemporary principles of Social Darwinism and the inherited premium on property rights.

In a large sense, the railroad officials' requests, and the governments "policy" of using troops to suppress striking workers was not as malicious or bias as it might appear. Their actions merely upheld "the system" as they, the men of authority, perceived it. Neil W. Chamberlain, professor of economics at Yale university, refers to this situation when he speaks of "the spirit of the management view prevailing in the nineteenth century":

[The] vigorous assertion of management right is obviously linked to the notion of business as private property. Property rights are an essential ingredient of a competitive society, and a union effort to infringe on such rights is an attack on the system itself. For workers to combine to bring pressure or power to bear on management, to force it to concede certain of its rights of property, could readily be construed not only as unlawful but immoral. Thus property rights, managerial authority, and the competitive system could all be linked together as a kind of holy trinity, and the unions could be cast in the role of Beelzebubs who would attack the kingdom
of economic righteousness for personal power and enrichment.\(^9\)

Without question, Chamberlain's observation characterizes the attitude of most railroad leaders and government officials between 1877 to 1894. During this period railroading was an extremely competitive business. More than a few railroad leaders held their positions because they had mastered the art of economic and political survival. Until the railway unions became equally adept in that art they could expect little sympathy either from their bosses or the federal establishment.

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The most predominant of the organizations of railroad employees in the 1870's and 1880's were the "Big Four Brotherhoods," the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers founded in 1863, the Order of Railway Conductors in 1868, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen in 1873, and the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen a decade later. Initially these organizations joined together primarily as mutual insurance associations. Because of the high risk involved in railroad employment, and the companies' reluctance to cover on-the-job injuries, the workers banded together to provide benefits

to injured colleagues and their families. 

Between 1867 and 1888 the Mutual Insurance Association of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers paid out nearly $327,000 to widows, orphans, and disabled union members.

On an industry-wide basis such insurance and benefit features as those of the BLE constituted a mere pittance, for the Engineers along with the other brotherhoods represented only a small fraction of those employed in railroading. Indeed, the exclusive brotherhoods, organized along craft lines, symbolized, along with the AFL, the most aristocratic and conservative forces in late nineteenth century unionism. Their interests were pragmatic, emphasizing insurance protection and job security. As a consequence they stressed loyalty to the industry and arbitration as a means of settling differences, while at the same time scrupulously avoiding costly strikes. 

"The wise course . . . for

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employers and employed," asserted the *Locomotive Engineers Monthly Journal* in 1873, "is to settle differences about wages, working hours, and all other matters growing out of the relations of capital and labor, by intelligent discussion, friendly consultation, and mutual concession, each side having regard to the rights of the other. The fatal course is for one partner to organize opposition to another. Strikes are as disastrous in practice as they are in theory."

This "philosophy" or pragmatic ideal prevailed during the strikes of 1877. Although the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers did participate briefly in the strikes, it soon found the companies too formidable, and, like the other brotherhoods, steered clear of any conflict. Ray Ginger, in his eloquent biography of Eugene V. Debs, reports that during the 1877 riots in Pittsburgh "the Locomotive Engineers and the Order of Railway Conductors furnished strikebreakers to the railroads." Only the Trainmen's Union, founded in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania on June 2, 1877 offered any hope

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for united resistance against the industry; however, without the aid of the brotherhoods it, too, succumbed to the railroads.\(^{15}\)

In the light of these circumstances, it is apparent that throughout the 1870's railroad labor had made few gains excluding the right to struggle for its existence. The exclusive and conservative nature of the brotherhoods, combined with the seemingly limitless power and influence of railroad officials permitted the latter to maintain a stranglehold on their employees. If the most obvious lesson of the 1870's was not the absolute supremacy of the harsh principles mouthed by tyrannical railroad magnates, it was the exceedingly urgent need for railroad workers to become more aggressive if they hoped to secure any semblance of status or bargaining power in their industry.

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During much of the 1880's the more aggressive elements among railroad workers rejected the conservatism of the brotherhoods and worked through the expanding Knights of Labor. In reality, the Knights, with their aversion to

\(^{15}\)The Trainmen's Union, formed largely through the efforts of the energetic young brakeman Robert A. Ammon, sought to establish an organization which would protect the workers "more vigorously than the Brotherhoods did." See Samuel Yellon, *American Labor Struggles* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1936), pp. 9, 16, 28; Bruce, *1877*, pp. 61-63; Eggert, *Railroad Labor Disputes*, p. 7.
strikes, gave these assertive laborers little moral or financial support. But the Knights did provide capable leadership through the bold agitator Joseph Buchanan. Buchanan, never one to avoid a fight, directed his activities against Jay Gould's Southwestern System, a 4,115 mile ribbon of track located primarily in Missouri, Texas, and Kansas.

Jason "Jay" Gould belonged to that group of railroad officers Thomas C. Cochran calls the "general entrepreneur." An influential financier whose investments controlled several businesses, Gould seldom served as a full-time executive in any one organization. Unlike the professional manager, the general entrepreneur operated outside the company and tended to have a broadened economic view. He focused on the total financial picture, the long-run possibilities for security and investment. Whereas the professional manager may have been concerned primarily with the expansion of his own particular department, the general entrepreneur concerned himself with stock manipulation and the future of his securities. This external focus often found the general


entrepreneur preoccupied with financial maneuvering, while the professional managers concentrated on bureaucratic and supervisory activities. 18

Of course, in all systems of categorization there exists factors which lead to deviation from the norm. From time to time a general entrepreneur would become uneasy over the goings-on in his company and immerse himself in the company's everyday business, if not directly then emotionally. 19 Apparently the staunchly competitive Gould felt compelled to involve himself in the disturbances permeating his rail lines between 1883 and 1886. That he should is not surprising. A frail but ambitious man, Gould had built a fortune, as well as a despicable reputation, in corporate finance by being ruthlessly daring, cold-blooded, and downright dishonest. 20 Disdainful toward both his fellow financiers and government officials, Gould cared even less for striking employees. "Strikes," he claimed before a Senate Committee in the mid-eighties, "... generally come from a class of dissatisfied men—

18 Thomas C. Cochran, Railroad Leaders, pp. 9-10.

19 Ibid., pp. 10-11.

the poorest part of your labor generally are at the bottom of a strike."21

Irate telegraph workers initiated the strikes against Gould in 1883. They sought an eight-hour workday, a six-day week, and a 15 per cent increase in wages. The telegraphers received sympathy from the Knights, the public, and the press, but they failed to muster enough economic backing to bend the unyielding Mr. Gould. After the strike collapsed, Gould counterattacked, blacklisting numerous strikers and forcing those retained to pledge that they would shun unionization.22

Gould's triumph proved shortlived. Early in 1884 Buchanan-led railroaders successfully struck the Denver and Rio Grande; and on May 4th the shopmen, encouraged by the railroaders' triumph, went out against the Gould-dominated


Union Pacific. Gould relented, but within three months resorted to old habits by dismissing certain shopmen and cutting the wages of a small group of machinists. This provoked another brief strike, which again ended in victory for Buchanan and his followers. Gould, in an announcement that must have shocked Satan himself, promised to negotiate future differences.23

Before long Gould regained his senses and over a five-month period ordered 10 per cent wage cuts on the Missouri, Kansas and Texas line as well as the Wabash. A bitter fight ensued, and between February and September, 1885, Gould, ignoring his earlier commitment to negotiation, did all he could to break the strike. Moved by the seriousness of Gould's challenge the Knights, including Powderly himself, decided finally to assist the Buchanan-led forces. This action overwhelmed the railroads. "Their traffic," wrote economist F. W. Taussig in 1887, "was annihilated, public opinion and the State Governments were against them." Gould deemed it wise to restore old wage rates and give amnesty to those who had participated in the strike.24


Gould regained the upper hand in 1886. This time a long anticipated showdown erupted when the company discharged shop foreman C. A. Hall, an employee of the Texas Pacific at Marshall, Texas. Immediately Martin Irons, Chairman of the Executive Board of District Assembly No. 101, sent a telegram to the various locals asking whether they would back their "executive board in demanding the reinstatement of Bro. C. A. Hall?" The workers voted in the affirmative, or at least it appeared that they did. It is said that when some confusion evolved regarding whether the local assembly at Moberly, Missouri had voted to strike or not, the issues was settled when Mr. Irons, then visiting Moberly, was forced at gunpoint to sign the strike order. By March 10, 1886 the majority of workers on Gould's Southwest System were once again on strike.\(^{25}\)

As the strike progressed, attempts were made, both by the governors of Missouri and Kansas and Powderly, to get the contending parties to resort to arbitration. But the deep differences and misunderstandings between the warring parties, combined with Gould's desire for a showdown rendered the effort futile. With hopes for a negotiated settlement virtually ruined, the combatants turned to traditional methods of adjusting grievances. The workers perpetrated various acts of violence, and Gould countered with strikebreakers, Pinkerton detectives, state militiamen, 

\(^{25}\)Allen, *Southwest Strike*, 50-62.
and federal marshalls. The final settlement was worked out not across a bargaining table but in the streets and trainyards of various southwestern cities; it was written not in ink but in blood. Capitulation came on May 4 when the Knights, acting on the advice of the Congressional committee investigating the strike, ordered its members back to work. Gould, acting true to form, promptly blacklisted numerous employees; and Martin Irons experienced such difficulty in attaining employment "that he was once put on the rock pile as a vagrant, fastened to a ball and chain."26

Despite the expectations generated by the victories of 1884 and 1885, the Knight's surrender in 1886 made it clear that the situation for railroad workers had changed little since 1877. Gould and his lieutenants, carriers of the 19th century's oppressive capitalist ethic, had won the final victory. In the process they had either flaunted or violated all agreements while making a face of collective bargaining. The Unions, for their part, still lacked the strength which can only come through unity. As for the

federal government, it again sided with the capitalists and failed to advance any policy for ending labor-management disputes other than the conventional use of force.

Toward the end of the 1886 strike, the federal government did consider legislation relating to the railroad problem, and conducted a long investigation into the strike; however these efforts proved of little value. In 1886 Congress considered an arbitration bill sponsored by Representative John Joseph O'Neill, a Democrat from Missouri.27 The O'Neill bill proposed that in the event of a railroad labor dispute an "impartial and disinterested" board of three would be set up to arbitrate differences. According to the statute, each disputant was to name a member to the board and these two would then select the third. The only shortcoming in the law was the lack of provisions for enforcing the judgement of the arbitrators.28

Speaking in behalf of the bill, and the need for some "peaceful method" for adjusting disputes Congressman O'Neill referred to the disastrous situation in the southwest:

... we can not have a continuance of the condition of affairs that prevail today through five States in this Union--practically a revolution, all business suspended, the people of great cities suffering from the increase in the price


28 U.S., Congressional Record, 49th Cong., 1st sess., XVII, 2959.
of food and fuel, from inability to obtain supplies, also resulting in thousands of men being thrown out of employment from the same cause.  

Among several other Congressmen speaking in behalf of the bill was Republican William McKinley of Ohio who stated that passage of the bill would, through "legislative suggestion," advise the principle of arbitration "to both capital and labor as the best and most economic way of composing differences and settling disagreements which experience has uniformly shown, in the absence of an amicable adjustment, results in loss to all classes of the community, and to none more than the workingmen themselves."  

Although the O'Neill law received a favorable hearing in the House and was promptly passed 199 to 30, it was delayed in the Senate nearly a year. The upper house finally passed the law in February, 1887, but it was killed by President Cleveland who devised a program of his own. 

The committee established by the House to "investigate into the underlying causes of the differences existing

29 Ibid., 2959.

30 Ibid., 3038.

between employers and employees of railway companies"32 was headed up by Democrat Andrew Gregg Curtin, a Representative from Pennsylvania and friend of Terence Powderly.33 The committee went about its work diligently, traveling 4880 miles to interview all the major leaders in the strike as well as 576 other people implicated either directly or indirectly in the strike. However, the committee did not complete its assignment, for it failed, as Congress specified, to "report what legislation in their opinion is necessary to bring these troubles and differences to satisfactory conclusion."34

At the conclusion of its majority report the committee admitted there existed "grievances of which the laborers and workingmen of the roads had just reason to complain." The report further noted the discovery of "a black list," and declared that "by no combination of capital or no extent of incorporated power can the listing of an American citizen being unworthy of employment be justified." But despite these verbal admissions and reprimands the committee avoided the issue of dealing with future strikes. Rejecting arbitration as non-enforceable, the committee concluded that

32U.S., Congressional Record, 49th Cong., 1st sess., XVII, 3391.


34U.S., Congressional Record, 49th Cong., 1st sess., XVII, 3391.
under the commerce provisions in the Constitution, Congress already possessed "ample power to control and regulate, so far as interstate commerce is involved . . . the rights and duties of the employers" and employees in the railroad industry. Apparently, as far as the committee was concerned, Congress' commerce powers served as an adequate mechanism for treating future disturbances. Before long another railroad strike would prove them wrong, and once more direct attention to the need for some means to ease labor-capital conflict.

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It was the eruption of the Burlington strike on February 27, 1888 which served once again to focus attention on the adjustment of disputes effecting the transportation industry. The chief adversaries in the 1888 strike were both highly conservative. Representing capitalism was the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy railroad presided over by Charles Elliott Perkins and his subordinates, George W. Holdredge and Harry B. Stone. These men were essentially

35 U.S., Congress, House, Select Committee, Investigation of Labor Troubles, pp. xxiv-xxv; Eggert, Railroad Labor Problem, pp. 78-80. One committee member, New Jersey Republican James Buchanan, presented a minority report blaming the companies for the strike and criticizing the committee for its inaction. He expressed particular disappointment in the committee's failure to examine more closely the problem of industrial violence. See Ibid., pp. xxii-xxx.
social Darwinists. They viewed strikers as disloyal, selfish and totally underserving of the right to collective bargaining. Contending the Perkins group were two powerful and respected railroad brotherhoods, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE) and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen (BLF). The Engineers were led by the pacifistic P. M. Arthur, who "emphasized the mutual dependence of capital and labor and the necessity of settling disputes between them by amicable discussion." The BLF's leadership consisted of Grand Master Frank P. Sargent and to a lesser degree the Grand Secretary and Treasurer Eugene V. Debs. In 1888 these two unions, composed largely of men with very similar job orientations, decided to work together against their common enemy, the CB&Q.

The major grievances provoking the strike were wage rates and the Burlington practice of paying men by the trip with no compensation for delays caused by layovers in various towns. The brotherhoods demanded that the company abandon its policy of paying engineers and firemen according to a scale based on time in service and pay every qualified man full scale. In addition, the company was asked

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37 McMurry, Burlington Strike, pp. 28-30; Eggert, Railroad Labor Disputes, pp. 81-82.
to replace the trip classification system with a standard pay rate of 3-1/2 cents a mile for passenger trains and 4 cents a mile for freight trains.

Perkins and his managers rejected all the demands. They believed that the company and not the workers had the final say on wage policies, and since the Burlington was engaged in a rate war, wages should, if anything, be reduced. The brotherhood chiefs, P. M. Arthur and Frank Sargent, tried to soften management's attitude and avert a strike through negotiation. Their efforts, however, proved fruitless and the majority of union members responded with an affirmative strike vote.

For the most part, the Burlington strike was over before it got off the ground. The company, taking advantage of a lack of union solidarity, hired several Pinkerton detectives to recruit unemployed or willing engineers to act as strike breakers. The Pinkertons procured numerous engineers from the Knights of Labor who had been suffering from the restrictive policies of the brotherhoods and were eager for revenge. Within three weeks after the opening of the strike, Perkins had a sufficient number of engineers to keep operative. The brotherhoods remained off the job until January 8, 1889 but defeat was inevitable. After his victory, Perkins rehired only a fraction of the strikers; he had never once considered nor consented to arbitration.
or any other form of collective bargaining.  

Although the Burlington strike reaffirmed the supremacy of capital over labor, it at least had one redeeming feature. The 50th Congress, in session during the strike, reintroduced the O'Neill bill aimed at arbitrating railway labor disputes. Voluntary arbitration conducted before three commissioners, one each chosen by the railroads and labor, and the third by these two, still constituted the heart of the bill. However, a provision was added authorizing the President to investigate strikes by establishing an investigatory board composed of two commissioners plus the commissioner of labor. This "temporary commission" was set up "for the purpose of examining the causes of" a strike and determining "the best means for adjusting it."  

Congressional debate over the bill took place in an atmosphere favorable to its passage. However, some House

38 Factual information on the Burlington strike was gleaned from McMurray, Burlington Strike, pp. 4-5, 28-33, 38-52, 103, 106-09, 130-31, 138-53, 295-300, 209-10; Shannon, Centennial Years, pp. 230-32; Eggert, Railroad Labor Disputes, pp. 81-84.

members voiced disapproval over the inadequacies in the bill. Congressman Parker of New York called the measure "mere temporary make-shift, leaving all the great questions that are disturbing the labor, the transportation, and the business of the country precisely where they have been, while congress makes a pretense of having done something." Congressman Buchanan of Iowa, while alluding to the weaknesses of the bill, pointed out that Congress, in pursuit of its duty to settle labor problems should "establish and originate . . . courts . . . to hear and determine all controversies between railroad managers and the employees of railroad companies." Finally, George D. Tillman of South Carolina went so far as to interpret the bill as a "fraud . . . void of any practical utility" to the parties concerned and serving only to waste away "big fees" to arbitrators and witnesses.  

Nonetheless, the legislators, undoubtedly influenced by the slow progress of the Burlington strike and the fact that 1888 was an election year, passed the bill. Many probably followed the thinking of Congressman Parker who in spite of reservations stated that he would "vote for this bill, if it is the best that can be obtained." Others, also believing that some bill was better than one, probably took note of Congressman Buchanan's observations that the

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40 U.S., Congressional Record, 50th Cong., 1st sess., XIX, 3097, 3099, 3100, 3101, 3197.
bill's supporters never pretended that it was "anything more than a mere voluntary arbitration bill." 41

The Senate kept the bill in committee for fourteen weeks before finally reporting it to the floor. The delay, however, represented mere formality, for the upper chamber wasted little time debating the bill. Within a month it passed the measure and on October 1, 1888 President Cleveland's signature made it law. 42

The Arbitration Act of 1888 was the first federal law designed to settle labor disputes peaceably. However, that was its only claim to relevance, for during the ten years of its existence its arbitration provisions were never implemented, and its investigatory features applied only once, by President Cleveland to investigate the Pullman strike of 1894. 43

Ironically, it was the Pullman, or Chicago railway boycott and strike of 1894 which revealed, in glaring detail, the inadequacies of the Arbitration Act of 1888. The Pullman

41 Ibid., 3099, 3101.
42 Eggert, Railroad Labor Disputes, 104-05.
strike, perhaps the most famous labor controversy in American history, has received extensive historical coverage and many of its details are common knowledge. What is most important about the strike, however, is that it contained all the ingredients of late-nineteenth century railroad labor disputes and represented the climax, for decades to come, of such confrontations.

The beginnings of the Pullman strike are analogous to the sources of rift which sparked earlier railroad upheavals. In the late spring of 1894 George Pullman, the dictatorial ruler of the Pullman Palace Sleeping Car Company, began suffering the economic repercussions of the panic of 1893. To cut expenditures, he decided to slash worker wages and stagger work schedules. At the same time, in Pullman, Illinois, the company town which operated much like a feudal manor, rents and other costs remained the same as before the wage cuts. Before long hardships devastated the Pullman employees, and their only recourse was to take action.

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45 Ginger, Bending Cross, 108-112.
Nearing desperation, a group of Pullman employees chose to place their hopes in the American Railway Union (ARU), the year-old heterogeneous railway labor organization headed by the competent and dedicated Eugene V. Debs. Acting as an ARU affiliate, these disenchanted workers carried their case to the company requesting negotiations on the issues of wages and rents. The proposals were refused outright and on May 10 Pullman laid off three members of the union's negotiating committee, an action which the commission investigating the strike acknowledged as "not an unusual proceeding." Embittered and desperate, Pullman's employees voted to go out on strike.46

Approximately one month after the strike vote, the American Railway Union dealt directly with the Pullman issue at its regular convention meeting in Chicago from June 9 through June 26. After much discussion, the delegates voted to boycott any company handling Pullman cars. This action brought the ARU into direct conflict with the "voluntary, unincorporated" General Managers Association (GMA) made up of the general managers of twenty-four leading railroad companies "centering or terminating" in Chicago. From then on, the principal combatants in the Chicago Strike were not

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46 U.S. Strike Commission, Report on the Chicago Strike, pp. xxxvii-xxxix. The Commission noted that "the Pullman Company is hostile to the idea of conferring with organized labor in the settlement of differences arising between it and its employees." See Ibid., p. xxv.
Pullman and his workers, but the ARU and GMA. 47

Both the ARU and GMA were unique. The ARU represented the first "serious," and most successful attempt at uniting all railroad workers into one camp. The GMA, on the other hand, instituted an extraordinary union of potentially competitive railroad executives. However, despite their uniqueness these organizations resembled, in a critical way, the antagonists of earlier railroad disputes. Each stood for competing ideologies; the ARU for change in private property relations and the GMA for the status quo and maintenance of business interests. Like the railroad executives of years past, the members of the GMA preferred to deal only with conservative unions. Testifying before the strike commission, Everett St. John, general manager of the Rock Island railway and chairman of the GMA, remarked that he saw "no necessity for an organization" such as the ARU. "We have always gotten along comfortably well—in fact, in a very satisfactory manner—with the old orders as they exist." 48 The "old orders," for the most part, were sitting out the Chicago strike.


48 Ibid., p. 227. When queried as to what he might suggest to avoid future railroad strikes St. John was evasive, stating he was "unable to offer any suggestions ... likely to solve the problem ..." See Ibid., p. 253.
Another important way in which the Chicago strike followed the pattern set by earlier uprisings is reflected in the actions of the federal government. Once more Washington played the crucial role in a strike, not as a peacemaker but as the defender and protector of traditional union-management relations. When the GMA sought help in crushing the ARU's vicelike grip on railroad transportation it found a compliant ally in the Attorney General Olney. Professor Gerald Eggert notes that "Olney from the first was willing to throw the full weight of the federal government into crushing the boycott."^9

After some deliberation, Olney chose to use the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to issue an injunction against the strikers' interference with interstate commerce and the movement of the mails. Bolstered by a conservative judiciary, Olney and his associates convinced President Cleveland to send the U.S. Army to Chicago.\(^50\) The troops arrived on Independence Day, and as is often the case, the level of violence escalated. For nearly three months the strike had been relatively peaceful, but within three days after state and federal troops arrived numerous skirmishes erupted, one of which resulted in nine dead and twenty injured.\(^51\)

\(^49\) Eggert, *Railroad Labor Disputes*, p. 158.

\(^50\) Ibid., pp. 158-71

\(^51\) Lindsey, *Pullman Strike*, pp. 205-09.
Nonetheless, by July 17 the government had helped conclude another transportation strike; the leaders of the GMA, like Jay Could and the other defenders of the capitalist ethic who had gone before them, carried the day. Eugene V. Debs, the idealistic leader of the American Railway Union, was in custody.

But the weathering of another industrial upheaval and the continued oppression of labor did not end the Pullman affair. There still existed one last issue worthy of consideration. One more burning question had to be resolved: was the country periodically to endure severe and bloodletting railroad strikes or would the federal government assume the initiative in seeking a just method for reconciling future disputes? This issue was of primary interest to the United States Strike Commission investigating the Chicago strike.

Manned by Commissioner of Labor Carroll D. Wright, former New York Railroad Commissioner John D. Kernan, and lawyer-politician Nicholas E. Worthington, the strike commission sought less to determine the heroes or villains of the Chicago affair than to penetrate beyond the strike and into the overall problem of industrial warfare. The commission report praised neither the ARU, GMA, or the federal government for their role in the strike. "The great trouble with the Chicago strike," concluded Commissioner
Wright, "was that it was a pig-headed affair all around."\(^{52}\)

In its conclusions and recommendations the commission took two positions indicative of a brighter future for American labor. Reflecting on emerging trend of the nineties, the commission defended the right of labor to organize and emphasized that responsible unions were vital to a strong industrial society. Noting that unions are probably inevitable, the commissioners asked if it was not wise "to fully recognize them by law; to admit their necessity as labor guides and protectors, to conserve their usefulness, increase their responsibilities, and to prevent their follies and aggressions by conferring upon them the privileges enjoyed by corporations with like proper restrictions and regulations?" The corporations had enjoyed a half-century of healthy growth, exclaimed the commission; it was now time for unions to benefit from a similar experience.\(^{53}\)

The commission's advocacy of stronger unions was further revealed in its suggestions for adjusting future disputes. Its report called for the establishment of a permanent three-man United States strike commission to investigate and offer solutions during railway labor disputes. In the advent of a strike the commissioners, joined by a

\(^{52}\)Quoted in Eggert, Railroad Labor Disputes, p. 214.

representative from the contesting companies and unions were to hear, adjust, and determine their particular controversy. In addition, the report requested that state governments adopt methods whereby employers and employees could arbitrate their differences. Also, the States should enact statutes outlawing "contracts requiring men to agree not to join labor organizations ... as conditions of employment." Finally, as a proper step toward alleviating industrial conflict, the report urged employer recognition of labor unions. "If employers will consider employees as thoroughly essential to industrial success as capital, and thus take labor into consultation at proper times, much of the severity of strikes can be tempered and their number reduced." Thus, the strike commission offered a mandate for change commensurate with the times: recognize labor organizations and deal with their representatives in an effort to conciliate and arbitrate differences.

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In the year following the strike investigation two of the commissioners, Kernan and Wright, joined with members of the House Labor Committee to devise an arbitration law aimed at supplanting the one passed in 1888. In the process, they enlisted the ideas of Attorney General Olney, whose

\[54\] Ibid., pp. lii-liv.
experience in the Pullman strike apparently made him a staunch advocate of arbitration. Olney welcomed the challenge and contributed more than anyone to the final draft presented to Congress. In addition, he supported Kernan and Wright, along with the secretary of the ICC Edward Moseley and chairman of the House Labor Committee Lawrence E. McGann in their efforts to persuade congress to enact the new bill. 55

Debate on the bill opened in the House on February 26, 1895. Although some legislators expressed skepticism over various parts of the bill, much of the debate concerned itself with whether labor or management favored the new law. When queried as to who in labor supported the measure, Congressman Erdman, the bill's sponsor, mentioned signed statements of support from the leadership of five railway brotherhoods. 56 On the other hand, the "evidence" presented as indicative of railroad support for the bill was mostly circumstantial. "Sockless" Jerry Simpson, the famous Kansas Populist, responded to one congressman's


56 Erdman cited "E. E. Clark, of the Order of Railway Conductors; Frank P. Sargeant and P. M. Arnold, of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Fireman; P. M. Arthur, of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers; D. L. Cease and W. G. Edens, of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen; and W. V. Powell, of the Order of Railroad Telegraphers" as requesting passage of the arbitration measure. See U.S., Congressional Record, 53rd Cong., 1st sess., XXVII, 2793.
request for proof of railroad's support of the measure by noting that Attorney General Olney favored the bill and since "he is the attorney and director of a great many railroads ... that ought to be satisfactory to the gentleman." Simpson's insight failed to satisfy the congressman, but it did add laughter to the proceedings. Congressman Grosvenor alluded to the failure of railroad managers to make their views known on the bill; an action which, considering their past behavior regarding railway legislation, indicated their consent to an arbitration measure.57

As the debate progressed, these issues seemed to fade in light of the legislators urgent desire to pass some sort of arbitration law. The explosiveness marking the past twenty years of railway labor disputes, combined with the fresh memory of the Pullman fiasco weighed heavily on the legislators. "We are to-day," declared Congressman Dunn, "... on the very brink of what may be an industrial revolution." Representative Ryan of New York noted that "conditions can scarcely be worse than at present, when the only remedy for every slight misunderstanding seems to be the calling out of troops with all the deplorable attendant consequences." Gradually, congressional consensus seemed to be embodied in a statement by Congressman Lacey of Iowa: "Arbitrations sometimes do not accord full justice

57 Ibid., pp. 2794, 2796.
but they are much better than war."  

It appears that this sense of urgency carried the day, for the House passed the law on the very day of the debate. The Senate, however, failed to act on the measure before it closed its session on March 4. Nonetheless, the bill was reintroduced in every subsequent session until it passed the Fifty-sixth Congress. It was approved and signed into law by President McKinley on June 1, 1898.

The so-called Erdman Act, unlike the Act of 1888, initiated, for the first time, the concept of government mediation and conciliation of railroad labor disputes. The chief responsibility for administering the act fell to the United States Commissioner of Labor and the chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission. Section two of the act stated "that whenever a controversy concerning wages, hours of labor, or conditions of employment shall arise between a carrier . . . and the employees . . . seriously interrupting or threatening to interrupt" interstate commerce "the chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission and the Commissioner of Labor shall, upon the request of either

58 Ibid., pp. 2795-96, 2803.
party to the controversy . . . put themselves in communic-
tion with the parties to such controversy, and shall use
their best efforts, by mediation and conciliation, to
amicably settle the same." 60

The new law eliminated the investigation features
of the 1888 law, but did retain and strengthen its arbitra-
tion features. For instance, if the commissioners failed
in their efforts to mediate or conciliate differences, they
then endeavored to settle the controversy through arbitra-
tion. A board of three, composed of the contesting parties
and a neutral chairman were to determine the settlement.
Awards made by the arbitration board would be binding and
conclusive, and in force for at least one year. 61

During the first eight years following its enactment
the Erdman Act was invoked but once. In September, 1898 a
group of conductors and brakemen working in the Pittsburgh
switching district petitioned eight roads using their

60 See Appendix in Harry Edwin Jones, Inquiry of the
Attorney General's Committee on Administrative Procedure
Relating to the National Railroad Adjustment Board - His-
torical Background and Growth of Machinery Set Up for the
Handling of Railroad Labor Disputes, 1885-1940 (Washington,
D.C.: Department of Justice, 1941); U.S. Statutes at Large,
XXX, p. 424.

61 Lecht, Railroad Labor Legislation, pp. 17-18. In
addition to providing machinery for the settlement of
strikes the Erdman Act forbade yellow-dog contracts and the
use of blacklists, making such violations punishable by
fines ranging from $100 to $1000.
switching service requesting higher wages and improved working conditions. They asked that the present rates of:

Day conductors ........................................ 24 cents per hour
Day breakmen ............................................ 18 cents per hour
Night conductors ......................................... 25 cents per hour
Night breakmen ........................................... 19 cents per hour

be replaced by new rates as follows:

Day conductors ......................................... $2.75 per day
Day breakmen ............................................ 2.50 per day
Night conductors ......................................... 2.90 per day
Night breakmen ........................................... 2.70 per day

Furthermore, the trainmen appealed for a 10-hour workday with overtime pay for duty beyond the normal 10 hours.62

In the ensuing months various committees of employees presented their demands to the various roads. Most of the smaller roads hedged, while the more powerful ones ignored the requests. Since most of the switchmen belonged to the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen the leaders of that

union chose to involve themselves in the Pittsburgh squabble. Following the brotherhood's fourth biennial convention in May, 1899, P.M. Morrissey, Grand Master of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, decided to deal with the matter by testing the efficiency of the Erdman Act. In a letter to E. A. Moseley, Secretary of the ICC, Morrissey expressed his "desire to take advantage of the arbitration act, and enlist the offices of the chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission and the Commissioner of Labor in the hope of settling" the Pittsburgh affair amicably.63

Approximately three weeks later, Morrissey, in a comprehensive five-page letter to ICC Commissioner Knapp and Commissioner of Labor Wright, made formal application for government mediation. In the letter he presented the historical background to the dispute, warned of the danger of a strike, and "concluded that the controversy is sufficiently serious to warrant asking . . . intervention, as permitted by section 2 of the Act of Congress, approved June 1, 1898, entitled 'An Act Concerning Carriers engaged in Interstate Commerce and their Employees.'"64


64 P. H. Morrissey to Martin A. Knapp and Carroll D. Wright, June 21, 1899, National Archives, Record Group No. 13, Erdman Act Case Files, 1899, 1907-1913.
Knapp and Wright, concluding that they had jurisdiction in the case, addressed a joint letter to the managers of the various railroads involved enclosing a copy of Morrissey's formal request for mediation. On August 4th the commissioners summarized the company responses in a letter to Grand Master Morrissey.

You will see from the answers of the companies that our offer of mediation has been declined. The friendly offices tendered by us in the manner and for the purposes contemplated by law have not been accepted. While our proffer of service has been treated with respect and courtesy, the answers and attitude of the roads are a declination of our official assistance in settling the difficulty which admittedly exists.

There was plainly no occasion for us to make further effort to induce the companies to submit the matter to arbitration, for their answers have anticipated that effort by an explicit and positive refusal to arbitrate the controversy. We believe that refusal is final, and are convinced that no influence on our part can change their determination in that regard.

In a final expression of futility the commissioners admitted that the workers had sought redress through proper channels. "It is not their fault, and we believe not ours," confessed the commissioners, "that nothing has been

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accomplished." There was no opinion regarding the railroad's refusal to mediate.

Though the Erdman Act failed them, the employees of the Pittsburgh district continued in their struggle for higher wages. In the succeeding months the trainmen's union engaged in direct negotiation with the heads of the principal roads. Once this failed, the workers voted to strike, an action which convinced the companies to grant pay increases, thus terminating the controversy.

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At first glance it would appear that the inability of the Erdman Act to deal with its first case, and the attitude displayed by the railroads during the case indicated that, in the late nineties, little had changed regarding railroad labor disputes. But such a conclusion is inaccurate, for in reality, the Erdman Law signaled a meaningful change in attitude toward unions, collective bargaining, and the settlement of strikes. As Professor Eggert effectively postulates: "Increasing numbers of thoughtful men both in and out of government no longer accepted force as the ultimate answer to railway labor disputes, and the

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66 Knapp and Wright to Morrissey, August 4, 1899, Ibid.

Erdman Act, weak though it was, stood as evidence of that changed attitude."68

Although the Erdman Act failed its initial test, evidence shows that both its principles and its machinery were the wave of the future. In the years immediately following 1898 there occurred a "revival in railway unionism" with certain advances in collective bargaining. Between 1906 and 1913 the Erdman Act gained a sudden respectability and sixty-one cases were brought under it. Of these, forty were settled through the machinery in the Act, while the other twenty-one were settled peacefully. Indeed, for nearly a quarter-century after 1898 no major upheaval occurred in the railroad industry, and when such a strike did threaten the Erdman law served as a guidepost for new legislation generally favorable to railway labor.69

In a very real sense, then, the disastrous Pullman strike of 1894 proved to be the high point in an ongoing educative process making the powers that be in America aware of a new "effective environment"—marked by more

68 Eggert, Railroad Labor Disputes, p. 225.

assertive unions. In the sociopolitical period extending from the 1870's to 1900 railway labor unions had developed at a pace far behind the corporations. If they had not gained power so slowly, much civil strife and the eventual need for drastic change might have been avoided. However, this was not the case and during the administration of William McKinley it became increasingly clear that a new method, divorced from the use of federal troops, would be needed to settle the railway labor problem. The Erdman Act, the embodiment of a new conciliatory attitude, took a giant step toward providing that method.

Thus, when Constantine Erdman spoke in the House of Representatives in defense of mediation, conciliation and arbitration of railway labor disputes he was not merely voicing the doctrines contained in the bill which would eventually bear his name. Included in the substance of his message was the culmination of an educative process of response and adaptation to over twenty years of railroad upheaval, and the signal for changes in future attitudes and approaches to railway labor and the resolution of transportation problems.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The trends described in this study are essential to and reflective of the nature of the modern American industrial economy. One trend, the evolution of the trade union as a functioning part of industrial society in a way deemed "responsible" by a significant sector of the political, intellectual, and business establishment created a tripartite economic context in which three principle groups—business, labor, and government—interacted. The other trend, that of the career of William McKinley corresponding with the early success of unions is demonstrative of how the impact of change accompanying the industrial revolution affected certain influential men. McKinley, and his businessman friend Mark Hanna, clearly possessed nineteenth century minds. Yet both of them became absorbed, whether willingly or not, in the worker's struggle for acceptance and survival. It was the new sociopolitical environment created by labor's struggle which led McKinley to defend striking miners, to actively aid destitute workers during his governorship, and to eagerly seek labor votes in his quest for executive positions. It was this new environment, moreover, which resulted in the Erdman Act, a law.
legalizing railroad unions and their right to collectible bargaining, being enacted during the McKinley Presidency. In short, the sociopolitical environment emanating from labor's quest for equal rights forced many businessmen and politicians, irregardless of personal philosophy, to adopt ideas, policies, and attitudes which both reflected and shaped that environment.

The American worker's struggle for industrial equality corresponded with the rise of modern industry in the post-Civil War era. During this period the United States was controlled by wealthy finance capitalists. They dominated political affairs, controlled private enterprise, and literally imposed their value system on the rest of the nation. This value system placed a high premium on individualism, free enterprise, and an uncontrolled, unregulated laissez faire economy, while at the same time, largely ignoring human needs and values.

Under these conditions the average American laborer could have little hope; however, he was saved by the crucial phenomenon of change. In all likelihood the period between 1870 and 1900 experienced greater and more chaotic social, economic, and technological changes than any comparable period in American history. Such occurrences as the vast influx of non-English speaking peoples, rapid urbanization, and the sharp fluctuations in the economy had a peculiar effect on America. These changes showed another side of
the American dream, a side accentuated not by the promise of wealth but by the reality of teeming slums, class stratification, and great disparity between the wealthy and the poor.

It was primarily because of the inevitable problems of social and economic adjustment to the darker side of American society that American labor began to unite and struggle, often in a very violent nature. In the 1870's and 1880's American workingmen, lacking unity in either goals or philosophy, tried several ways to alleviate industrial abuses. The first prominent national unions, the National Labor Union and the Knights of Labor, sought to escape the wage system by forming cooperatives in which profits could be distributed more equally among the producers of the goods. The more craft oriented railroad brotherhoods chose a more conservative route, working within the wage system and seeking the right to collective bargaining. Then, too, there were the more radical elements, whether they be socialists, anarchists, or merely disgruntled workers, who opted for violent action. They added American color to Western industrial violence: Tompkins Square, Molly Maguires, Hocking Valley, Haymarket and Homestead.

But, from a practical standpoint, it mattered little in the seventies and eighties whether William Sylvis' NLU or Terence Powderly's Knights experimented with cooperation,
or whether P. M. Arthur and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers tried working within "the system," or even whether the Trainmen's Union or various socio-anarchists attempted insurrection. In the two-and-one-half decades following the Civil War the financial capitalists and business managers maintained their pre-eminence. Railroad executives stubbornly opposed any infringement on their decision-making by brash unions or rowdy strikers. And with the power of the courts and the federal government behind them, business leaders suppressed strikes, dismissed and blacklisted workers, and made a mockery of the concept of collective bargaining. The only reward for the strikers of the seventies and eighties was the setting of precedents for future altercations.

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Despite these early setbacks American labor continued to struggle for a place in the industrial community. Just when the labor movement seemed at its nadir, following the defeat at the hands of Jay Gould in 1885-86 and the Haymarket disaster of that same period, it gained new momentum.

Several factors contributed to the post-1885 resurgence of organized labor, including the creation of the Bureau of Labor Statistics by the federal government, and the interest in labor problems shown by the investigatory work done in the mid-eighties by the Senate Committee on
Labor and Education. However, probably the most important factor in this new resurgence of labor was the founding of the American Federation of Labor by Samuel Gompers. Gompers brought a new and lasting philosophy and character to the American labor movement. This philosophy, commonly referred to as "business unionism," was grounded in ideological conservatism with a strong emphasis on worker self-interest rather than social reconstruction. Unlike social or socialist unionism, "business unionism" rejected class-consciousness and militancy in favor of a value system oriented toward improving the status of trade unions vis-à-vis other interest groups in society.

More important, however, is the fact that the AFL's value system reflected the basic values of the larger society. By conforming to the American value system the AFL not only found it easier to adjust to changing conditions, but it also discovered that certain influential politicians and business leaders were receptive to the concept of responsible, conservative unionism. Thus, relatively, conservative unions, such as the AFL, the United Mine Workers, and the Railroad Brotherhoods, made considerable progress after 1886 because conservative men of prominence, responsive to these unions' acceptance of American capitalist values, saw them as possible promoters of harmony in a potentially explosive industrial setting.
As a matter of fact, a second important factor stabilizing the labor movement after 1886 was the willingness of a number of individuals to recognize labor unions as vital to a secure industrial economy. This study has focused primarily on the career and thinking of but one of these men, William McKinley of Ohio. McKinley was born into a growing industrial area of Ohio, and his political career paralleled the American industrial revolution and the rise of the worker. As a man caught up in a changing society he responded and adapted to that society. As a young lawyer he defended striking miners, as a congressman he spoke up in favor of arbitration and authored the famous tariff which he felt would maintain worker wages. As a governor he sponsored progressive labor legislation, concerned himself with the safety of striking miners, and provided social welfare for destitute workers. During his campaign for the presidency his party openly courted and won urban labor votes. And finally, during McKinley's presidential years, such legislation as the Erdman Act and the creation of an Industrial Commission to investigate the problems of labor and capital served as evidence of a new ideological outlook more positive toward American labor.

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The work of the United States Industrial Commission, 1898-1902, a topic not discussed in the text of this study,
provides further evidence of the growing feeling in the late nineties that capital and labor could work together in peace and harmony. An act of Congress, dated June 18, 1898 created the commission "for the purpose of studying problems relating to industry with a view to formulating remedial legislation." The act further stated that the commission would consist of five members each from the Senate and House, as well as nine other members appointed by President McKinley. Among those serving on the commission were its chairman, Senator James H. Kyle who also chaired the Senate Committee on Education and Labor; Representative John H. Gardner, head of the House Committee on Labor; Michael Ratchford, President of the United Mine Workers' Union; and at least three others who had been associated with organized labor.1

The commission operated out of its headquarters in the Bliss Building in Washington, D.C. aided by a corps of expert agents and assistants. It was divided into five sub-commissions, two of which pertained to conditions of labor. The commission conducted studies, collected data, and heard testimony all with the purpose of examining industrial conditions in America and, if needed, making recommendations for improving those conditions. Among the

various economic elements examined by the commission were agriculture, trusts, and transportation. This study, however, is primarily concerned with the commission's work in the field of labor.

In conducting its investigation into the conditions of labor and capital the commission obtained testimony from numerous witnesses—many of whom occupied high positions in industry and labor—while at the same time surveying tremendous amounts of documentary and statistical evidence. So extensive was its work that its final report on labor alone ran a total of 232 pages.²

A cursory glance at volumes 7, 12, and 14 of the nineteen thick volumes compiled by the commission indicate that the status of labor unions, and attitudes toward them had improved during the McKinley Administration. Samp­lings of the testimony given before the commission serves to reinforce this observation. For example, John McMackin, Commissioner of Labor Statistics for the state of New York, alluded to the growth of unions during the McKinley Admin­istration, when he noted that in his State, between the

years 1897 and 1900, unions increased by 500 and membership by nearly 100,000. Mr. D. P. Kennedy, an organizer for the Indiana AFL remarked that in his district conditions of organized labor were much stronger than 5 years earlier, though not quite as strong as 10 years earlier.

Although the witnesses representing the business community held divergent views regarding labor organizations, several showed a new receptiveness toward unions. Though his principal reason for cooperating with union labor was to prevent friction, President Henry Clay Fry of the National Glass Company stated that after 25 years of using non-union labor his company now recognized and dealt with only union labor. Hamilton Carhartt, a Detroit clothing manufacturer, testified that his company sought out organized labor and that their communications with them had always been cordial. President Hurrah of the Midvale Steel Company, though not himself a dealer with unions, declared that he believed "trade unions and labor


4Ibid., p. 739.

5Ibid., p. 898.

6Ibid., pp. 658-62.
organizations of all kinds are decidedly beneficial to the employer." His plant had not unionized because most of his men were on piecework, dictating great diversity in wages based on bonuses for different levels of production. He further contended that he and his men always lived up to wage agreements. Despite the "uniqueness" of the Midvale situation, Hurrah felt that in other cases, particularly where labor was paid on a day rate, unions would have the positive effect of stabilizing wages in competing plants.7

In its final report the commission further reflected current trends by recognizing the necessity for strong labor organizations.

It is generally recognized that the growth of great aggregations of capital under the control of single groups of men, which is so prominent a feature of the economic development of recent years, necessitates a corresponding aggregation of workingmen into unions, which may be able also to act as units.8

Acknowledging that "in the operations of the market, the workingman is almost always under grave disadvantages" the Commission Report granted that only:

By organization of labor, and by no other means, it is possible to introduce an element of democracy into the government of industry. By this means only the workers can effectively take part in determining the conditions under

7Ibid., XIV, pp. 349-50.
8Ibid., XIX, p. 800.
which they work. This becomes true in the fullest and best sense only when employers frankly meet the representatives of the workmen, and deal with them as parties equally interested in the conduct of affairs.\(^9\)

The report went on to say that things were improving; the United Mine Workers and mine operators already practiced industrial democracy based on friendly negotiations. And, as testimony before the commission disclosed, more employers were beginning to "view the organization of labor with increasing tolerance, even where they do not view it with marked favor."\(^10\)

Collective bargaining, another issue critical to the acceptance of organized labor, also received extensive coverage in the commission's final report. It was noted that progress in this area occurred only recently, but by 1898 at least ten leading trades had adopted some system of collective bargaining or arbitration. Furthermore, the report commented that for collective bargaining to succeed labor organizations must be strong enough to command the respect of employers.\(^11\)

It seems clear, then, that the creation and work of the Industrial Commission serves as additional evidence of the increased significance of organized labor in the late

\(^{9}\)Ibid., pp. 801-805.

\(^{10}\)Ibid., p. 885.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., pp. 839, 844.
1890's. It is for this reason that a brief description of its effort is provided here. Interestingly enough, the Industrial Commission, representing the first attempt by the federal government to ascertain labor and other social problems and recommend reform legislation, was jointly appointed by Congress and President McKinley, giving credence, if only by implication, to the latter's awareness of American labor.

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Following up on the earlier discussion, it must be noted that William McKinley was not the only man of influence in the late nineteenth century who manifested some sympathy for the cause of labor. Men like Congressman O'Neill and Constantine Erdman and their supporters of the Arbitration Bill of 1888 and the Erdman Act also demonstrated much concern over labor-management relations, and the position of workers in American industry. Numerous intellectuals, writers, and critics who focused on the "labor question," the plight of American workers, and the need for greater equality between employer and employee also gave labor a boost in the nineties. Even as staunch a defendant of law and order as Attorney General Richard Olney worked for a better break for unions by writing and backing legislation which would enable the government to solve labor disputes without resorting to the use of
force. And, of course, there were those "farsighted" businessmen, such as Mark Hanna, Ralph Easley, and Oscar Straus, who established and operated the National Civic Federation with the idea of promoting industrial harmony through greater cooperation with conservative unions.

It should be further noted that it is not the purpose of this study to make these men appear as social reformers. There is little doubt that most of them were among the most conservative thinkers in the 19th century America; and much of labor suffered well into the nineties and after despite their efforts. However, this does not alter the fact that most of these men were attuned to the "labor problem" and believers in the inevitability of unions. It also does not alter the fact that during the McKinley administration, a period in which men responsive to unionism dominated, organized labor made great strides. Between 1897 and 1900 union membership skyrocketed, the United Mine Workers and AFL solidified themselves, and the rail and coal industries established frameworks for collective bargaining which prevailed for decades onward. These gains, to be sure, failed to alleviate the plight of many struggling workers; however, they did help to elevate organized labor, as it then existed, into a permanent participating institution in the capitalist framework.

In its long quest for survival and recognition why did organized labor find many of its allies among
conservative politicians and businessmen, and why did it enjoy such great success during a Republican administration dominated by men who have traditionally been depicted as conservative business politicians? This is a question which goes to the heart of the nature of the American capitalist society and various historical interpretations of labor's progress in that society. It could be speculated that organized labor progressed during the McKinley presidency simply because America had just emerged from the darkness of depression into an era of prosperity. But this would not involve adequate historical analysis, nor would it shed any light on how industrial America adapts to a changing environment.

Actually, the free enterprise system is vitally dependent on both workers and capitalists. Each group must work, struggle, and cooperate in a similar industrial setting. In the early years of industrialization, however, the capitalists had the upper hand. They had the law, traditional economic thought, money, and puppet governments on their side. As time progressed, however, and industrialization brought traumatic changes, workers attempted to unite and change the balance of economic power. In the process they threatened to upset the harmony upon which the free enterprise system is so dependent. Initially the ruthless capitalists could adamantly resist, but as
costly strikes and worker power escalated so did the need for accommodation.

It was in this context, this changing social, political, and economic environment that many discerning politicians and employers chose to recognize and cultivate conservative unions. It is not that these men, whether they be McKinley, Hanna, or the members of the National Civic Federation, were reformist oriented. Rather, they wisely perceived the temperament of the times and reacted and adapted to the changing industrial surroundings. Organized labor made substantial gains in the late nineties and early twentieth century not because these men necessarily desired it. Those who accepted or even supported the institutionalization of organized labor most likely could have lived with things as they were in the 1870's and 1880's. However, these men abhored violence and any semblance of socialism or anarchism; and labor's struggle was often attended by severe conflict, and tarnished with "foreign" ideas. This threatened the security and stability of a capitalist order already menaced by intense economic competition. The plausible solution was to reward labor, to accept union-management negotiation, and to create a brotherhood of business and labor which promoted social stability and economic profit while counterbalancing any radical alternatives to the emerging corporate order.

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over the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin workers, combined with a series of defeats by AFL affiliates in 1903 also proved harmful to labor's cause.13

Perhaps the most devastating of all the post-1903 obstacles to continued labor advances was a host of anti-union court decisions. The invalidation by Supreme Court of section 10 of the Erdman Act is a classic example of these damaging judicial pronouncements. Section 10 had outlawed so-called "yellow-dog" contracts by declaring "that any employer subject to the provisions of this act, . . . who shall require any employee, or any person seeking employment, as a condition of such employment, to enter into an agreement, either written or verbal, not to become or remain a member of any labor corporation, association, or organization; . . . is hereby declared to be guilty of a misdemeanor . . . "14

Five years after the enactment of the Erdman Act employers began violating section 10 by requiring their employees to sign iron-clad oaths agreeing not to join any union. Then in 1908, William Adair, an agent of a railroad

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employer, discharged O. B. Coppage because he belonged to a union. The immediate question was whether Adair "did unjustly discriminate against an employee . . . contrary to the forms" or the Erdman Law. However, by the time the case reached the High Court the principal issue was the constitutionality of section 10.15

The government lawyers argued that in the Erdman Act Congress wrote legislation outlawing discrimination against union members with the idea of eliminating a major cause of strikes as well as protecting interstate commerce. The Court failed to be persuaded, however, and ruled Section 10 unconstitutional on the basis that to punish an employer simply for dismissing an employee who was a union member constituted "an invasion of personal liberty, as well as of the right of property, guaranteed" under the Fifth Amendment. The Justices, by a ruling of six to two, also upheld the right to freedom of contract by affirming that:

An employer has the same right to prescribe terms on which he will employ one to labor as an employee has to prescribe those on which he will sell his labor, and any legislation which disturbs this equality is an arbitrary and unjustifiable interference with liberty of contract.16

The Adair case was succeeded by a number of other decisions injurious to organized labor. In the Danbury Hatters' case (Loewe v. Lawlor, 208 U.S. 274 (1908)), the Supreme Court set a precedent by holding the Sherman Act applicable to labor unions. In the Bucks' Stove and Range Case, Samuel Gompers and John Mitchell were sentenced to prison for violating an injunction against promoting an "unlawful" boycott. Finally, in Coppage v. Kansas, the Court once again ruled against section 10 of the Erdman Act by holding unconstitutional a state law prohibiting "yellow-dog" contracts.

It seems clear, then, that the post-1900 counter-offensive against unions left the promise of 1898 unfulfilled, and spearheaded a return to a more reactionary outlook toward unionization. These developments are mentioned here merely to place the enthusiasm shown unions in the 1890's in proper perspective. It would be fallacious to lead the reader to assume that such positive reforms as section 10 of the Erdman Act signaled a permanent revolution in attitudes toward organized labor. The concept of

19Coppage v. Kansas, 236 U.S. 1 (1915).
unionization received wide support in the nineties, but its acceptance was all too brief, and the anti-union campaign of the early twentieth century erased many previous gains.

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Some of the labor and economic historians interpreting the period and issues under discussion have stressed the themes of conflict and consensus. For example, Philip Taft and Philip Ross, in their article "American Labor Violence: Its Causes, Character, and Outcome" briefly discuss most of the major upheavals mentioned here and conclude that "the United States has experienced more frequent and bloody labor violence than any other nation." Noting that labor violence has "sharply reduced in the last quarter of a century," Taft and Ross, nonetheless maintain that, until the National Labor Relations Act eliminated the "conditions that gave rise to past labor violence," conflict was the fundamental underlying feature in American labor history. 20

In contrast to Taft and Ross, Edward Kirkland and Selig Perlman argue that throughout American history only a minority of unionists favored radicalism, and consensus

has been the fundamental theme of the American labor movement. Kirland, in his authoritative *Industry Comes of Age*, asserts "that the philosophy of labor frequently resembled that of managers and employers." He further argues that it is "misleading" for historians analyzing the era between 1860 and 1900 to concern themselves merely with labor upheaval. He points out that after every major strike at least one major capitalist or politician spoke positively about unions. More attention, Kirkland concludes, should be paid to the "foresight and flexibility of both labor and capital."21

Perlman, though he is more theoretical, is in agreement with Kirland. In his seminal work entitled *A Theory of the Labor Movement*, Perlman emphasizes the lack of "class-consciousness" in American labor, while directing attention to labor's cognizance of "the virtually inalterable conservatism of the American community as regards private property and private initiative in economic life." Faced with this conservatism, the labor movement, Perlman maintains, "arrayed itself on the same side," requesting only that it have control over jobs.22

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There is no question that these interpretations, offered in the conflict and consensus framework, are important historiographical contributions. Each approach, though contradictory to the other goes far in determining whether sharp and bitter conflict dominated American labor history, or whether employers and employees adhered to a basic set of values based largely on the capitalist framework.

But one wonders whether the themes of conflict and consensus are too restrictive as approaches to interpreting the American labor movement. Does it necessarily follow that if the majority of American workers are not radical they have sold out to the capitalists? By the same token, if a business manager compromises with striking employers has he jeopardized capitalist values? It would seem that perhaps there is something in between, something like a mutual accommodation whereby neither labor or management totally capitulate. Few would deny that in most instances labor joined in a harmony of beliefs with the capitalists. But does that mean the capitalists made no concessions to the unions? Obviously not, and an important question might be what was the nature of the capitalists and their supporters accommodation with organized labor? In a sense, this study has sought to address itself to that question.

* * * *
In both a precise and conclusive statement, then, this study contends that in the late 1890's, after nearly twenty years of struggle, organized labor was well on its way to being a bonafide member of the American industrial economy. Much of organized labor's success at that time was due to its participation in various violent upheavals. However, equally important was the emergence, during the late 1880's and 1890's, of a new attitude toward unions. During this period certain influential men in business and politics responded to a chaotic and changing industrial environment and altered their thinking toward accommodating organized labor. One such individual was William McKinley, and it is interesting that during his presidency organized workers made some of their greatest strides toward improving relations with management, toward participating in collective bargaining, and toward acceptance as a permanent American institution.

To be sure, this new approach to labor problems failed to solve all of the workingman's problems. In the 1890's and after child labor, low wages, long hours and unsanitary working conditions remained very much a part of American industry. Furthermore, the belligerent posture exhibited toward unions between 1904 and 1914, accented by the decisions of a repressive judiciary, largely shattered the promise of the late nineties. Nevertheless, the new
importance accorded unions during the McKinley administration deserves historical attention for it signified the best organized labor had done to date; and the best it would do, comparatively speaking, until the New Deal era of the 1930's.
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