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A Fragile Alliance:

Henry George and the Knights of Labor

By ROBERT E. WEIR*

ABSTRACT. Between 1885 and 1888, workers and reformers so thoroughly challenged the Gilded Age status quo that scholars have dubbed the period “The Great Upheaval.” Resurgent unionism coincided with expanded political consciousness, phenomena encapsulated in the growth of the Knights of Labor and in Henry George’s bid to become mayor of New York City. Academics would do well to exercise caution, however. Gilded Age political alliances could be fragile. Disputes over land policy, tariff protection, partisan politics, anarchism, and religion drove as many Knights of Labor away from Henry George as to his cause. The “Great Upheaval” was more the ideal than reality.

I

Introduction

THE YEARS 1885–1888 were heady days for American labor. In September 1885, the Knights of Labor defeated Jay Gould’s Southwest railway conglomerate. By the following June, the Knights of Labor had over 729,000 dues-paying members and perhaps a third as many informal members who proclaimed themselves Knights, despite the lack of a formal charter. The eight-hour agitation of May 1, 1886, went badly enough, but despite the arrest of eight Chicago anarchists, a renewed spirit of labor optimism and defiance prevailed. In November of the same year, Gilded Age elites were stung by third-party electoral victories in dozens of towns and cities across North America. That election saw Henry George outpoll Republican challenger Theodore Roosevelt for mayor of New York; thousands of workers believed George lost to Democrat Abram Hewitt because of fraud. The American Federation of Labor was born in December 1886, a symbol of the resurgence of trade unionism across America.

Labor kept up the pressure in 1887. According to Leon Fink, Knights of

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Labor candidates vied for office in 189 different locales in 1886–87, and they were active in 34 of the 38 states.¹ A Mulligan's stew of third parties—many flying the United Labor party of Henry George—challenged the stranglehold of Republican and Democratic elites. Strikes were numerous and often violent. Labor activity between 1885 and 1888 was so intense that historians have dubbed the period “The Great Upheaval.”

But promise faded as quickly as it appeared. George attracted considerably less enthusiasm when he ran for secretary of state in 1887, and he did not run for another office until he made a second bid for the mayoralty of New York City in 1897, the year he died. By 1888, local third-party movements were in decline, as was the Knights of Labor organization.

Why did the powerful labor vote of 1886–87 decline markedly after 1888? And why did Henry George fail to resonate with labor voters in 1887? Why too did the United Labor party never coalesce into a unified national party, as the People's party would do in the 1890s? Traditional explanations have focused on repression and division. Both arguments have considerable merit. The fate of strikes from 1887 through the end of the century indicates a crystallizing capitalist class consciousness far in advance of its working class opponents. Capitalists such as Gould in the second Southwest strike, William Vanderbilt during the 1890 New York Central strike, and Andrew Carnegie during the 1892 Homestead Steel lockout offered no quarter in dealing with unions. Nor was labor united; deep divisions of ideology, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and skill fragmented the working class.² Yet one is left with questions of why the numerically superior working class was able to be divided so easily. Why wasn't a potential hero like Henry George able to bridge the gaps that divided workers, at least so far as ballot box politics went? If anything, brutal post-1886 capitalist repression ought to have solidified the labor vote.

Part of the reason lies in the fact that the Great Upheaval was more ephemeral than is often appreciated. This article looks at the relationship between the Gilded Age's largest labor union, the Knights of Labor, and its most visible third-party candidate, Henry George. It explores disagreements over land and protectionism, varied conceptions of politics, differing responses to the Haymarket affair, and religious disputes to assert that the Great Upheaval was more suggestive of the possibility of working-class solidarity than the culmination of long-evolving trends. It also examines the clash between George and the only other reformer

with a higher public profile than his own during the 1880s, Terence V. Powderly.

II

Competing for Hearts and Minds

MANY KNIGHTS OF LABOR knew George's great work, *Progress and Poverty*, before Terence Powderly recommended it to them in 1883. Most KOL reading rooms—a standard assembly hall feature—stocked the book. Published in 1879, *Progress and Poverty* was an immediate sensation and its central tenet, the single tax, had passionate defenders and critics. It attracted enough positive attention from Knights of Labor that George joined a New York City local some time in late 1880.

George's ideas received renewed attention from Knights in the early 1880s, when he lent his voice to another cause near and dear to many members, Irish nationalism. In 1881, he published *The Irish Land Question* and that same year visited Ireland as a correspondent for the *Irish World and Industrial Liberator*, whose publishers, Mary and Patrick Ford, were old friends of Powderly's. The latter's parents were Irish emigrants. In addition, the bulk of KOL members were Irish and its leadership cadre was predominantly so throughout the nineteenth century. Powderly was deeply involved in the Irish Land League, a trans-Atlantic organization dedicated to resisting landlordism and Irish tenancy laws, and he personally initiated Irish nationalist Michael Davitt into the Knights of Labor in 1882. In that year, Henry George returned home to a hero's welcome and immersed himself in speeches on behalf of the Irish Land League. One George biographer places the first meeting between George and Powderly at a Baltimore Knights of Labor picnic in August of 1883.³ In 1883, Powderly served as a vice-president of the Irish Land League and the two met several times on the hustings. By the time George addressed a Burlington, Iowa, crowd in April 1885 on "The Crime of Poverty," he did so as a lecturer for the Knights of Labor.⁴

Despite George's devotion to Irish causes and the popularity of his single-tax idea, he did not command unwavering loyalty among Knights of Labor, even within his home base of New York City. *Progress and Poverty* was one of many works on the KOL's recommended reading list; another was Victor Drury's *The Polity of Labor*. Drury, a French-born radical, emi-

grated to the United States in 1867 to set up French-speaking sections of Karl Marx's First International. By the 1870s, however, Drury had drifted away from orthodox Marxism and toward anarchism tinged with Fourierist associationism.

New York City workers first encountered Drury's *The Polity on Labor* in 1876, as a series of articles in the *Socialist*, a Marxist journal. Drury's ideas were in accord with George's on the necessity of reserving land for settlers and removing it from the hands of speculators, but his plan was more radical than George's, and infinitely more complex. Whereas George saw the single tax on land as the vehicle that would separate idle land from speculators, Drury was more forceful. In *The Polity of Labor* he attacked the very notion of private property, upheld principles of collectivization, advocated that unions purchase land, and entertained the possibility that force might be necessary to liberate land.⁵ Some time before 1878, Drury joined the Knights of Labor. He, not Henry George, was destined to mold New York Knights.

At the time when George and Drury joined the Knights of Labor, the organization was weak in the New York area and did not have a district assembly. By 1880, orthodox Marxists controlled the KOL within the city, but anarchists, anti-trade unionist Lassalleans, and ritualists upset with the KOL's impending move to abandon secrecy were ascendant. When Marxist leaders engaged in an ill-advised boycott of a local starch company—a move for which they were suspended—new leaders came to the fore. By the time New York City District Assembly 49 was activated on July 1, 1882, Victor Drury was its acknowledged leader, though he held no official post.⁶

Henry George was in Ireland when most of these events occurred. When he returned and took to the Irish Land League podium, Drury busied himself educating District 49 members along ideological grounds. By 1883, Drury was a committed anarchist. He coauthored the "Pittsburgh Manifesto," a document advocating the use of force to overthrow capitalism. Within New York, he established "Spread the Light" clubs, a group of interlocking study cells devoted to indoctrinating area Knights. Drury's *Polity* was required reading. While Henry George was speaking abroad in 1884, Drury's Spread the Light clubs expanded beyond New York as part of an overall plan by conspirators, who called themselves the Home Club, to wrest control of the Knights of Labor and transform the group along radical

lines.⁷ As we will see, this translated into shallow support for George in the days following the 1886 election.

Henry George faced another challenge in capturing supporters within the Knights of Labor: his free trade beliefs. Although Knights were not unanimous on the issue, most were protectionists. Even as Powderly and George shared Land League platforms, the two men clashed over protectionism. The earliest surviving letter between the two, dated April 1883, raises the issue. Writing to congratulate Powderly on a speech about land reform, George gushed, "I believe that the promulgation by you of these views marks an epoch in the Labor movement." He went on, however, to acknowledge that he and Powderly disagreed over tariffs. He opined that espousing a protective tariff was "barking up the wrong tree." Although he had once been a protectionist himself, he wrote, he had come to believe tariffs did more harm than good. Workers, he insisted, needed "justice," not tariffs.⁸

Powderly's response was measured and polite. He insisted that if George fully understood his views he would find they were quite similar to his own, and then dropped the matter.⁹ In fact, the two held very different views. Powderly continued to support high protective tariffs, believing them necessary to support American industrial growth and to ensure steady employment. As many Knights saw it, cheap foreign goods jeopardized the American wage structure just as much as contract or prison labor, two labor systems opposed in the KOL's Statement of Principles.¹⁰ In March 1886, George wrote to advise of the impending publication of *Protection or Free Trade?* He explained that he wished to probe the question "why protection retains such popular strength in spite of all exposures of its fallacies." He went on to assert that the "full application of the free trade principle would secure the fairest distribution." Powderly disagreed and stamped the letter "No Answer Required."¹¹

Powderly stumped for George in 1886, but he never mentioned his free trade principles. The issue surfaced from time to time on the pages of the KOL's official newspaper, *Journal of United Labor*. In 1888, L. F. Wild wrote an editorial in support of protection in which he charged, "The supporters of free trade delude you with the idea that it will reduce the cost of living . . . So long as monopoly controls production and distribution the cost of living will only be reduced in proportion as the purchasing power of the people is reduced. Low prices always mean idle hands and low wages."

The most Wild would yield was that protectionists deluded themselves by thinking that high tariffs could counter the tyranny of monopolists.¹²

Powderly tried to avoid the issue, for he knew it to be divisive. In his opinion, the order was split fairly evenly between free traders and protectionists. This put him in a bind: "I am not free to advocate either party and have not done it by word, act, art, or intimation." As the issue arose again in the 1888 presidential election, Powderly admitted, "I am a protectionist . . . and I have never bought a single article that was made across the ocean." That said, he insisted he would remain neutral "until election day."¹³ Powderly remained a protectionist for the remainder of his days. Respect for Henry George blunted his criticisms of George's free trade policies, but it also cooled his ardor for supporting him. It is doubtful that Knights elsewhere were always so circumspect. Free trade advocacy undoubtedly cost Henry George support among Knights.

III

Reluctant Partisans

HENRY GEORGE already faced an uphill battle to win KOL hearts and minds, because he advocated partisan politics. He was not the first politician to be disappointed by the Knights' ambiguous political support, nor would he be the last. After coaxing Powderly into joining the Socialist Labor party in 1880, chairman Phillip Van Patten complained of Powderly's attacks on socialism throughout the decade. Greenback Labor leaders in the 1880s, Labor Populists in the 1890s, and Marxists in 1895 were similarly frustrated when the Knights of Labor endorsed their efforts but failed to transform the organization into a labor political action group.

The Knights of Labor was not an apolitical group, but it was very suspicious of partisanship. The order was founded in 1869 by Philadelphia tailors led by Uriah Stephens. Its structure and ritual was modeled after Freemasonry, whose admonition against discussing politics in the lodge made its way into KOL practice, even though Powderly held political office and Stephens himself made a bid for Congress. Leon Fink notes that KOL political behavior was mostly an extension of its "search for control at the workplace."¹⁴ Because political expression focused on immediate and parochial concerns, "local assemblies showed a marked disinclination to co-

ordinate their political activities with any larger political . . . strategy or third party movement beyond the local community."¹⁵

The willingness to use politics to achieve workplace justice was tempered by a deep distrust of the state and unmitigated contempt for career politicians. Powderly insisted that "the Order of the K of L is higher and grander than party." As he saw it, parties degenerated as leaders accrued personal power under the noses of an oblivious, uneducated electorate.¹⁶ Thorough organization of workplace and society were prerequisites to transforming politics. The *Journal of United Labor* (JUL) cautioned political parvenus, "Any man who joined the Order supposing that he could make it the stepping stone to political preferment had better take out a withdraw card at once, for . . . he is sure to learn that our Order places principles above parties."¹⁷ Another *JUL* writer noted simply, "The average officeholder is not fit to enter our Assemblies."¹⁸ When partisanship reared its head in 1884, Powderly issued a secret circular ordering Knights to avoid all public statements about politics until such time as they could "get all parties to adopt our principles." Until then, partisanship stood to harm laborers more than help them.¹⁹

Henry George initially shared Powderly's concerns. He opened an 1884 letter to Powderly by saying, "I hope you are no more disgusted with politics just now than I am." Rather than endorse candidates, George offered the opinion that more would be done for labor if Powderly were to be appointed Commissioner of Labor.²⁰ Until the Great Upheaval, the KOL avoided close association with any political party. As late as April 1886, the *Irish World and Industrial Liberator* admonished the Knights for "continually asserting that their organization will take no part in national politics."²¹ Several months after the Haymarket riot, Knights of Labor in Chicago were still leery of a labor party, even though local Knights were on the fall ballot. "The workingman in politics has been a dismal failure," the paper opined.²²

As November drew near, enthusiasm triumphed over caution. In October, the *Journal of United Labor* editorialized that labor issues such as immigration restriction, land reform, and taxation would not be settled "until the workmen send men of their own grade to make the laws." The same issue endorsed Henry George's run for mayor.²³ Within New York, zeal ran much higher. *John Swinton's Paper* predicted that George and his KOL backers would rid the city of "despotic rings . . . snobbery . . . the vulpine herd of Wall Street . . . money-power . . . counterfeit Democracy . . .

domineering capitalism, monopoly, and codfish aristocracy.”²⁴ A subsequent issue listed KOL candidates for local offices and noted that trade unions and KOL locals “held nightly meetings in which the ordinary transactions have been wholly ignored for political business.”²⁵ Not even Powderly could ignore the clamor for George. He spent election day with him, “going from one polling booth to the another,” and he made scores of impromptu speeches on George’s behalf.²⁶ He did not, however, take out membership in the United Labor party or allow his name to be associated with an official endorsement of it in any locale.

George’s loss in New York was ameliorated by the spectacular success achieved by independent candidates elsewhere. *John Swinton’s Paper* announced, “The Knights of Labor led the way, and it is largely to the action of that progressive organization that we owe [the recent] vote.”²⁷ The *Journal of United Labor* likewise praised “the magnificent discipline of the Knights of Labor of New York City” and crowed that the results nationwide “proved the falsity of the charge . . . that labor is not unified.”²⁸

Shortly after November, however, passions for third-party politics began to cool. In March 1887, Powderly admonished Chicago Local Assembly 400 for making a \$50 donation to the United Labor party.²⁹ News of KOL officeholders was sparse within official journals, and not much was said of politics overall until the eve of the 1887 elections. In October, the *Journal of United Labor* advised Knights to “abstain from miscellaneous political agitation” and concentrate on the “two great measures which shall have to do directly with the general interest of labor,” creating a cabinet-level labor post and nationalizing railroads and telegraphs.³⁰ Nothing was said of Henry George’s run for New York secretary of state. When the fall elections proved less sanguine than those of 1886, the *JUL* offered the vote as proof “that talk, bluster, and hurrah do not win on the battle-field.” It urged members to engage in “quiet, determined” organization building instead of the “mad haste and zeal” of political campaigns.³¹

The KOL’s support for third parties waned as the Great Upheaval fizzled. In 1888, Powderly announced bluntly, “I do not favor the turning of the K of L into a party, and will not have anything to do with parties.”³² The *JUL* offered little more than the predictable advice to elect “men who can realize the duty they owe the people and not fear to perform it.”³³ Powderly subsequently claimed that partisan actions during the presidential campaign cost the order 100,000 members.³⁴

Powderly's reductionist explanation for the KOL's decline nonetheless illustrates that the Knights' romance with the United Labor party was over. When Ralph Beaumont, the KOL's paid congressional lobbyist, argued for renewed independent political action and cited Henry George's campaign as a model, he was immediately countered by J. M. McSarrow, an Arkansas Knight. McSarrow echoed Powderly's remark that the KOL had "a higher mission," and he denounced third parties as a failure. He added that the Knights needed to "look forward, not backward."³⁵

Third-party advocates won out in the 1890s when the Knights of Labor got swept up in the People's party, though Powderly remained an adamant public nonpartisan (and an ardent behind-the-scenes Republican). While Powderly urged members not to become the labor wing of the Populist party, Daniel DeLeon—who cut his political teeth during George's 1886 mayoral bid—was busy trying to make the KOL into a reinvigorated Socialist Labor party. By 1895, both he and Powderly were out of the Knights. Henry George and the KOL cooperated one more time; both supported William Jennings Bryan's 1896 presidential bid. A few Knights stumped for George when he ran for mayor again in 1897, but there wasn't much life left in either. Henry George died before the 1897 ballots were cast; by the end of that year, New York had a mere handful of operating KOL locals.

IV

Anarchists and Martyrs

THE KOL'S RELUCTANCE to engage in partisanship was rooted in fraternal ideals that sought to dissolve political views within a framework of broader principles. Allowing politics to come to the fore ran the risk of allowing ideological differences to split the order. In Leon Fink's view, nineteenth-century political philosophies were torn between the competing pulls of "the state, the democratic state, the association, and the commune," the latter three being radical visions often viewed as European imports.³⁶ He notes, for instance, that Henry George's support just within New York City was undercut by disputes between single taxers and socialists.³⁷

The dangers of allowing politics to subsume deeper principles surfaced in another area where George alienated Knights of Labor: clemency for the men of Haymarket. For George, clemency was a humanitarian issue; for Powderly and his supporters, the Haymarket men were dangerous anar-

chists whose very mention in the same breath as the Knights of Labor threatened to damage the order. Although more Gilded Age workers sided with the clemency champions, Powderly was right about collateral damage. By mid-1887, George also realized this and adopted Powderly's position. His flip-flop cost him dearly in November.

Powderly's hatred of anarchism bordered on obsession, but he was consistent with the KOL's original principles. Founder Uriah Stephens spoke of revolutionary socialism—his term for anarchism—in alarmist terms. He warned Knights away from assemblies, as “they are simply disturbers, and only gain entrance to labor societies that they may be in a better position to break them up. You cannot fathom them, for they are crafty, cunning, and unscrupulous.” Powderly added, “There is no instance on record where they have ever done anything in the interest of labor.”³⁸ Powderly also had personal reasons for disliking anarchists: they made up the inner core of the Home Club, which opposed and/or controlled him throughout the 1880s. Victor Drury was a sworn Powderly opponent and so taxed the General Master Workman that, by the mid-1880s, Powderly tended to equate anarchism with all manner of radical thought.

Others followed Powderly's example in that regard. “Anarchism” replaced Molly Maguirism as the scare tactic term of choice for denouncing an opponent or idea. But radicals of all stripes were equally sloppy in their own appropriation of the term. Men such as Joseph Buchanan in Denver and Joseph Labadie in Detroit proudly declared themselves anarchists, though they despised Victor Drury with as much passion as they disagreed with Powderly.³⁹ The events of May 1886 and the subsequent arrest, trial, and condemnation of eight men accused of the bombing in Chicago's Haymarket Square proved trying for the Knights of Labor. The order's General Executive Board refused to endorse the May 1 general strike called by the Eight Hour Association, and Powderly personally ordered Knights to take no part in it. For the most part, they obeyed, except in Chicago, where local strikes and persuasive anarchist organizing swelled the crowds. Two of the eight anarchists arrested, Albert Parsons and August Spies, also held KOL membership. Albert Parsons was expelled from the KOL, but he made a public appeal through newspapers like the *Labor Leaf*.⁴⁰

For the next year and a half, debate raged over what to do about the Haymarket men. At the KOL's 1886 General Assembly, Powderly recoiled when a New York delegate introduced a clemency resolution. “The world

regards all labor societies in the same light since May 1," he told the convention, "and had it not been for the imbecile act which afforded the anarchists the opportunity to do an evil deed while the eyes of the world were upon the men of labor, we would not be regarded with suspicion by all who are beyond our sanctuaries."⁴¹ The resolution passed with an addendum stating the KOL's objection to anarchism.

Throughout 1887, local Knights lobbied for clemency advocates, signed petitions, and raised money to replenish legal coffers. At the 1887 convention, Powderly complained that his efforts "to create a healthy public opinion on the subject of labor" were thwarted when members defended individuals without regard for the public. He insisted that the KOL owed Albert Parsons nothing: "When men violate the laws and precepts of Knighthood, then no member is required to defend them."⁴²

Powderly's minority sentiment was not without influence. Those loyal to him saw support of anarchists as another reason to back away from Henry George. More significant was Powderly's accurate prediction that association with Haymarket would damage labor's cause. Steven Ross notes that Haymarket was a factor in the United Labor party's decline in Cincinnati, where the party split between radicals and conservatives. When the conservatives triumphed, they also cast off the call for George's single tax.⁴³ Leon Fink shows that business elites seized upon anarchism to rally opposition to the Knights and third-party movements in Kansas City, Kansas, and in Milwaukee.⁴⁴

Declining ULP support led George to reevaluate his views on Haymarket. He had long been uncomfortable around radicals, and he grew more so as he fell under the influence of cautious men. At the ULP convention in August 1887, control of the party's central machinery passed to conservatives such as John MacMackin, who promptly expelled all who held Socialist Labor party membership. Some of George's supporters feared he had abandoned laborers in hopes of attracting a middle-class base. MacMackin's blanket denunciations of anarchism, the Greenback cause, and Irish and German nationalism won the ULP few friends among Knights of Labor and likely cost them plenty, especially in New York City, where newly minted Marxist Daniel DeLeon was the KOL's rising star.⁴⁵

But George's biggest blunder came after the Illinois Supreme Court rejected appeals in September 1887. On October 8, George publicly reversed himself on the pages of the *Standard* and said that there was sufficient

evidence to convict the prisoners. He asserted that the violence each man espoused made him guilty of conspiracy under Illinois law, and implied that even if none of them threw the bomb, their fates were the logical outcome of their dangerous ideals.⁴⁶

Even before four men went to the gallows on November 11, radicals across the land denounced George as a class traitor. George had placed himself in a situation wherein virtually no New York City Knights trusted him. He had alienated moderates by supporting the Haymarket men in 1886, and now his reversal had cost him radical support as well. Just ten days before the November election, Denver's *Labor Enquirer* blasted George. In the end, he attracted only 4,000 more votes in a statewide run for secretary of state than he had won in his mayoral run the previous year.⁴⁷

V

Divinity and Division

DISPUTES OVER LAND, the single tax, politics, and Haymarket created a philosophical gap between Henry George and Terence Powderly; Edward McGlynn made the matter personal. Father McGlynn's story is well known. The Roman Catholic prelate was a zealous convert to the single-tax cause. His passionate speeches on behalf of George's mayoral campaign attracted the notice of his superior, Archbishop Michael Corrigan. When Corrigan ordered McGlynn to cease his political activities, McGlynn cast his lot with George instead, an act of defiance that led to his 1887 suspension and excommunication. McGlynn would not be restored to the priesthood until 1892. In the interim, he immersed himself in United Labor party politics and the Anti-Poverty Society. In these capacities, McGlynn approached the Knights of Labor for support at a time in which it could not have been less expedient for the KOL to offer it.

Powderly had battled Catholic prelates since he first joined a union in 1871. Upon taking over as head of the KOL, Catholic Church opposition to secret societies led Powderly to lobby for changes in the KOL's ritual and to make the Knights an open, public organization. The Church nonetheless considered the Knights derivative of Freemasonry and Molly Maguirism; Catholics were threatened with excommunication if they joined the KOL. Yet so many Catholics ignored the ban that wiser Church leaders

asked the Holy See to remove the prohibition lest it harm the American Church.

In 1886, the KOL acquired a champion in James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, who agreed to argue for papal approval of the Knights. Rumors that Powderly would also go to Rome angered Protestant and anticlerical Knights, who felt it a waste of the order's time and resources. The outrage scuttled any plans he might have had, and Powderly emphatically denied any intention of prostrating the KOL before the Pope. Nonetheless, matters were delicate. Gibbons was opposed by Montreal's powerful Archbishop Elzear Taschereau, a man fanatically opposed to fraternal and labor societies.

McGlynn's dismissal from the pulpit made him the darling of radical, anticlerical, and anti-Catholic Knights. Powderly was under great pressure to endorse McGlynn. This was something he could not do politically, even though he too was the subject of Archbishop Corrigan's wrath. Powderly's resolve was steeled by the fact that he disliked McGlynn, whom he found obsequious and obnoxious. Further, he agreed with Corrigan's ruling that priests and politics were a bad mix. But Powderly's opposition was complicated by McGlynn's popularity among Knights of District Assembly 49. McGlynn ingratiated himself among those New York Knights; unlike George, he remained steadfast in his call for clemency for the Haymarket men.

Powderly's tightrope act collapsed when McGlynn requested the *Journal of United Labor's* mailing list. In March 1887, McGlynn assumed the presidency of the newly founded Anti-Poverty Society. Its birth came soon after that of George's newspaper, the *Standard*, whose first issue hit the streets on January 8, 1887, with an editorial blasting Catholic Church hierarchy.⁴⁸ It was natural to create interlocking structures between the paper and the society. Neither endeavor was an immediate success, however, and that was why McGlynn asked Powderly for the *JUL's* mailing list.

Powderly tried to stall McGlynn, but the impetuous ex-priest persisted. As he often did in such a bind, Powderly appealed to constitutional minutiae to deny McGlynn's request. He informed McGlynn, "The [KOL] constitution prohibits the giving out of the mailing list. I have no right to give it out, I have no right to a copy myself. I have never seen a copy of it, and the only safe way for me is to refuse to allow it to go out. You will see from the constitution, a copy of which is inclosed [sic], that is not in my

charge; the General Secretary alone has control over it. Powderly offered to mail the *Standard* from the KOL's Philadelphia office, but he withheld the list, saying, "You will, I know, pardon me for refusing to do this for Mr. George."⁴⁹

But McGlynn did not pardon Powderly. Instead, he denounced him at an Anti-Poverty Society meeting and in a public gathering at Cooper Union. He repeated charges by Powderly's enemies that he misused KOL funds and was involved in secret negotiations with the Pope. When a newspaper printed the charges and Powderly began to feel heat from the nativist American Protectionist Association, he was livid.⁵⁰

The personal animus between McGlynn and Powderly consumed all of 1888, spilled into 1889, and soiled Powderly's relationship with Henry George. In February 1889, Powderly wrote to George after the latter complained of Powderly's statements to the *Baltimore Sun* on land reform. Insisting that George had misinterpreted him, he offered, "I can be magnanimous and forgive you." Powderly could not "understand why you should ever seem to oppose me as you did. I never wrote a line against you." Rather, his scorn was confined to "dishonest rascals, whom he identified as "anarchists" seeking to disrupt both the *Standard* and the Knights of Labor. The only reason he could fathom for George's unfriendliness was that "the mailing list of the General Office was not given to you when you asked for it."⁵¹

George's six-page response arrived several weeks later. He opened by saying, "I do not ask your magnanimity or forgiveness, for I am not conscious of anything that would require it." His remarks, he claimed, were designed to make Powderly expand upon his land reform ideas, and he abruptly dismissed the mailing list fiasco. But the tone of George's letter abruptly changed; he admitted criticizing Powderly when he "joined the forces of re-action, and, actively or passively, were using the influence of your high position to befog the labor movement," a reference to Powderly's involvement with the Home Club. He claimed great affection for Powderly and insisted that his own hatred of anarchism was equal to Powderly's own. He believed, though, that Powderly had "fallen short of what might reasonably be expected of you . . . in the most influential position of any man for the education of a great body of workingmen." George implied that the Knights under Powderly were moribund. In a stinging rebuke, he wrote, "You have too long suffered yourself merely to float with the cur-

rents and to act as though your main object was to hold your position . . . and that in doing this you have suffered yourself to be pulled and hauled by a lot of ignorant and . . . selfish men, whose whole idea of agitation is to derive from it a little personal profit and a little personal power." Even his closing attempt at reconciliation was peppered with veiled insults, including a plea to "help . . . lead the great movement forward" by casting off protectionism and other "quack remedies that have been the stock in trade of conventional leader."⁵² George sailed for Europe the next day, and Powderly stamped his letter "No Answer Required." The two men exchanged cordial, but stiff notes in December 1889 and again in January 1890. After that date, Powderly and George parted ways.⁵³

VI

Conclusion

ENCAPSULATED IN THE 1889 tiff lie many of the reasons why Henry George and the KOL were never quite *simpatico*. Differences over protectionism and Father McGlynn led to clashes between George and Terence Powderly. Nonetheless, George might have had lasting appeal within the KOL rank and file, especially those factions that opposed the General Master Workman. But despite widespread support for the single tax, George held other views that cost him support. Most serious was his dis-ease with radicals. This robbed him of support in New York, where his land reform views competed with those of Victor Drury. George's turnabout on Haymarket clemency cost him support elsewhere. The Knights were caught up in his 1886 mayoral campaign, but support often rested more on what he represented symbolically than on fact. The more the Knights saw and heard from George, the less they liked him.

The tenuous relationship between Henry George and the Knights of Labor illustrates the need for historians to reevaluate the Great Upheaval. It was indeed a great class moment, but its momentary solidarity could not long mask very real differences in ideology, tactics, and policy within the American working class. Both the United Labor party and the Knights of Labor attained their zenith in late 1886. From that point on, friction between the two movements led to drift, while fractures within led to wholesale desertions. Neither Henry George nor Terence Powderly could command

enough loyalty or large enough numbers to stave off the coming capitalist counterassault.

Notes

1. Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1983), p. 26.

2. For more on Gilded Age strikes and labor, see Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume II: From the Founding of the American Federation of Labor to the Emergence of American Imperialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1955); Bruce Laurie, *Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Noonday, 1989); Norman Ware, *The Labor Movement in the United States 1860–1895: A Study in Democracy* (New York: D. Appleton, 1929); Robert E. Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

3. Charles Barker, *Henry George* (New York: Oxford Press, 1955).

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 442–443. George was not an active lecturer for the Knights in 1884 because he spent much of the year lecturing abroad under the sponsorship of the Scottish Land Restoration League.

5. Robert E. Weir, "Here's to the Men Who Lose!": The Hidden Career of Victor Drury," *Labor History* 36:4 (Fall 1995): 530–556.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Robert E. Weir, "Powderly and the Home Club: The Knights of Labor Joust Among Themselves," *Labor History* 34:1 (Winter 1993): 84–122.

8. Henry George to Terence V. Powderly, April 19, 1883. Correspondence located in the Papers of Terence V. Powderly (University Microfilm edition housed at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst). This collection is hereafter cited as PP.

9. Powderly to George, May 3, 1883, PP.

10. The Knights of Labor's Preamble and Statement of Principles is printed in most issues of its official newspaper, the *Journal of United Labor*. That paper is available on microfilm.

11. George to Powderly, March 23, 1886, PP.

12. *Journal of United Labor*, September 27, 1888.

13. *Journal of United Labor*, November 1, 1888.

14. Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy*, p. 33.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

16. Terence V. Powderly, *The Autobiography of Terence V. Powderly*, Harry Carman, Henry David, and Paul Guthrie, eds. (New York: AMS, 1968 reprint of 1940 edition), p. 146.

17. *Journal of United Labor*, November 1880.

18. *Ibid.*, September 1882.

19. Secret circular issued in June 1884, PP.

20. George to Powderly, July 26, 1884, PP.

21. *Irish World and Industrial Liberator*, April 10, 1886.

22. Knights of Labor, August 14, 1886.
23. *Journal of United Labor*, October 6, 1886.
24. *John Swinton's Paper*, October 17, 1886.
25. *Ibid.*, October 31, 1886.
26. Powderly, *The Path I Trod*, p. 150.
27. *John Swinton's Paper*, November 7, 1886.
28. *Journal of United Labor*, November 25, 1886.
29. Knights of Labor, March 26, 1887.
30. *Journal of United Labor*, October 22, 1887.
31. *Ibid.*, November 19, 1887.
32. Quoted from Gerald Grob, *Workers and Utopia: A Study of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement 1865–1900* (New York: Quadrangle, 1976), p. 88.
33. *Journal of United Labor*, October 4, 1888.
34. Secret circular, PP.
35. *Journal of United Labor*, June 20, 1889.
36. Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy*, p. 21.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
38. Powderly, *The Path I Trod*, p. 275. For more on the varieties of Gilded Age radicals, see Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*.
39. In truth, Buchanan and Labadie were radical trade unionists. Both men read anarchist literature and attended anarchist rallies, but their actions betrayed pragmatic trade union perspectives. For more on these men, see Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil*. See also Joseph R. Buchanan, *The Story of a Labor Agitator* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries, 1971 reprint of 1903 original); Richard J. Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1875–1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1986).
40. *The Labor Leaf*, July 14, 1886.
41. Terence V. Powderly, *Thirty Years of Labor, 1859–1889* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1967 reprint of 1890 original), p. 280.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
43. Steven J. Ross, *Workers on the Edge: Work, Leisure, and Politics in Industrializing Cincinnati, 1788–1890* (New York: Columbia, 1985).
44. Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy*.
45. Barker, *Henry George*; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*.
46. Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1986), pp. 343–345.
47. Barker, *Henry George*.
48. Powderly, *The Path I Trod*.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 360.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 360–362.
51. Powderly to George, February 17, 1889.
52. George to Powderly, February 28, 1889, PP.
53. George to Powderly, December 26, 1889; January 9, 1890, PP.

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