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THE BROTHERHOOD OF TIMBER WORKERS 1910-1913: A RADICAL RESPONSE TO INDUSTRIAL CAPITALISM IN THE SOUTHERN U.S.A.

THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN WORKING CLASS IS FILLED WITH instances of militant protest and bloody repression. One of the most interesting chapters in this violent story concerns the struggle between the Brotherhood of Timber Workers (BTW) and the lumber companies of Louisiana and Texas in 1911 and 1912. Several brief accounts of this conflict have been written by historians who were surprised to find that the most revolutionary labour union in American history, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), won significant support in an isolated rural region supposedly dominated by conservative politicians and powerful industrialists.¹ They were also surprised to discover that the Brotherhood, which joined the IWW in 1912, recruited thousands of black and white labourers in an era characterized by increasing social segregation and racial repression. These historians describe the BTW's achievements fully, but they do not explain them adequately.

This essay attempts to show how the radical leaders of the Brotherhood recruited workers of both races in a setting that seemed so unfavourable to interracial industrial unionism. It must, therefore, examine the setting itself in order to understand how black and white workers were introduced to the industry, how they adjusted to industrial discipline, and how other people in the region reacted to the coming of the new order. The essay is not simply a history of a union and a strike; it is a case study of industrial development, social dislocation and class conflict in the rural United States. In fact, it is an attempt at a new kind of labour history that places the actions of unions and employers within a larger context that will tell us something about the ways in which different kinds of American people responded to industrial capitalism.

¹ The most perceptive treatment of the BTW, despite its brevity, is Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the IWW* (Chicago, 1969), pp. 209-20. See also Vernon L. Jensen, *Lumber and Labor* (New York, 1944), pp. 71-89; Ruth A. Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers: An Economic and Social Picture, 1870-1950* (Austin, Texas, 1961), pp. 165-90; Philip S. Foner, *A History of the Labour Movement in the United States*, vol. iv, *The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (New York, 1965), pp. 233-57; and George T. Morgan, "No Compromise — No Recognition: John Henry Kirby, The Southern Lumber Operators' Association, and Unionism in the Piney Woods, 1906-1916", *Labor History*, x (1969), pp. 193-204.

Students of American labour history have often focused too exclusively on the actions of trade unions. This orientation has led some historians of the BTW to assign too much of the credit for the Union's success to its organizers and too much of the blame for its defeat to the outspoken agitators of the IWW known as the Wobblies. As a result, they have not examined important acts of resistance to industrialism launched by workers in the years before unions were organized. They have also failed to appreciate the significance of the support offered to the workers by farmers and townspeople.

Union movements in the United States cannot be studied outside of the social and communal context in which they struggled because, as the history of the BTW indicates, they could not survive in rural regions when they were isolated from other sources of resistance to industrial capitalism. The remarkable growth of the BTW in 1911 and 1912 must be seen as the culmination of a struggle that began when workers of both races first resisted employers' demands on the job and when farmers first opposed industrialists' extractive operations in the countryside. The leaders of the IWW were frequently attacked by leading citizens of the region for advocating anarchism, atheism and racial equality, but the Wobblies were still able to escalate the struggle because they consciously drew upon an established tradition of resistance.

The institutional emphasis in American labour history has also led to an exaggerated view of the industrialists' power. The lumber corporations of Louisiana and Texas succeeded in exploiting the natural and labour resources of the Sabine River region, but in order to make their profits, they had to overcome the resistance of their own workers and the opposition of many other people in the piney woods. If we assume that the operators easily imposed industrial discipline upon their workers, we cannot explain the rapid growth of the BTW. If we assume that these employers easily manipulated black workers by offering them cash wages and paternalistic protection from racist "poor whites", we cannot explain the degree of racial solidarity the Brotherhood achieved. Or if we assume that most people in the pine region accepted the values and practices of industrial capitalists, we cannot explain the influence of the IWW. All of these assumptions can be found in studies of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers and in more general histories of Southern labour as well.

These suppositions must be questioned if we are to understand conflicts like the one that spread through the Louisiana-Texas pine belt in 1911 and 1912. We must also look beyond the tactics of trade unionists and the policies of industrialists to "the workers

themselves, their communities, and the day-to-day activities which shaped their outlook".² In short, we have to explore the social history of industrialization in the region in order to explain why a radical response to industrial capitalism occurred.

* * * *

The Homestead Act of 1866 guarded the virginity of the great Southern pine forests for only a decade. When it was repealed, Northern speculators bought huge sections of timber in western Louisiana and East Texas for as little as \$1.25 an acre. "Entering along the railroads and joining with them in the profitable business, Northern lumber syndicates", wrote C. Vann Woodward, "sliced wide swaths through the Southern forests stripping them of timber". The "backbone grant" to the Texas and Pacific Railroad in Louisiana was the most notorious example of such an extractive combination.³ By 1920 the rich stands of yellow pine in the Sabine River area had been slashed to the ground by a handful of large corporations which, within two decades, had created one of the purest examples of monopoly capitalism in the New South.⁴

Industrialism had not come slowly to the Southern pine region; it erupted in the 1890s, destroyed the forests between 1900 and 1910, and prepared its departure in the next decade. After 1880 timber production doubled every ten years until 1909, when 12 billion board feet of pine rolled out of the Southern mills. At the peak of the lumber boom around the turn of the century, the value of lumber products increased by 70 per cent in Texas and by 100 per cent in Louisiana.⁵

Attracted by relatively high wages, hundreds of "hillbillies" and low country blacks poured into the hastily-constructed lumber towns. As a result, the number of wage earners increased by 202 per cent in Louisiana and by 89 per cent in Texas during the first decade of the

² Herbert G. Gutman, "The Worker's Search for Power: Labor in the Gilded Age", in H. W. Morgan (ed.), *The Gilded Age* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1963), pp. 38-9.

³ *The Public Domain*, House of Representatives Miscellaneous Document, no. 45, pt. iv (Washington, 1880); Paul Wallace Gates, "Federal Land Policy in the South, 1866-1888", *Jl. Southern Hist.*, vi (1940), pp. 318-28; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge, 1951), p. 118.

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Corporations, *The Lumber Industry*, pt. ii: *Concentration of Timber Ownership in Selected Regions* (Washington, 1914), pp. 132-53.

⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census . . . 1900*, vol. ix, *Manufacturers*, pt. iii (Washington, 1902), pp. 803-10; *Thirteenth Census . . . 1910*, vol. iv (Washington, 1909), pp. 416-17, 423, 1,198; and *Fourteenth Census . . . 1920*, vol. x (Washington, 1923), p. 439.

century.⁶ By 1910 over 63,000 men worked in the mills and camps of the pine region. A profile of the work force shown in Table I reveals two important characteristics: very few foreigners and a large number of black labourers; the latter represented a majority of the pine industry's wage earners.

TABLE I

THE ETHNIC AND RACIAL COMPOSITION OF THE WORK FORCE IN THE SOUTHERN PINE INDUSTRY, 1910⁷

	Native Born	Foreign Born	Mixed Parentage (native and foreign) Number	Black	Total
	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number
Louisiana	14,982 (36.5%)	1,339 (3.1%)	669 (1.3%)	23,829 (59.1%)	40,765 (100.0%)
Texas	10,828 (48.4%)	1,651 (8.6%)	376 (5.0%)	9,492 (38.0%)	22,347 (100.0%)

Although a small number of skilled workers migrated south from the Great Lake states with their employers in the 1880s, almost all of the white timber workers came from the surrounding countryside.⁸ The lumberjacks of western Louisiana were "redbones", a people of "fighting stock" with a violent history, who were part Negro, part Indian and part Caucasian; they were often of French ancestry like their Cajun brothers of the Bayous.⁹

The Southern timber workers toiled all year round and did not migrate as often as their counterparts in the North and West. The ratio of single to married workers in the Sabine Region was nearly even, but it was two to one among the transient loggers of the Pacific Northwest.¹⁰ Labour unionists found these Southern "homeguards" harder to organize than the rambling casual workers of the Pacific Northwest, but when the family men joined the Brotherhood, they showed amazing tenacity, especially during strikes and lockouts

⁶ *Thirteenth Census . . . 1910*, vol. iv, p. 491. See also B. L. Webb, "Company Town — Louisiana Style", *Louisiana History*, ix (1968), pp. 325-6.

⁷ *Thirteenth Census . . . 1910*, vol. iv, *Occupations*, pp. 384-5, 520-1.

⁸ Grace Ulmer, "Economic and Social Development of Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana 1840-1912", *Louisiana Hist. Quarterly*, xxxii (1949), p. 570.

⁹ D. J. Saposs interview with T. J. Pinchback, Fullerton, La., 26 Aug. 1914 and with Supt. Tuxworth of the Pickering Lumber Company, Cravens, La. 27 Aug. 1914; National Archives, Commission on Industrial Relations Papers, Department of Labor, Record Group 174 (cited hereafter as CIR Records).

¹⁰ Jensen, *Lumber and Labor*, p. 77.

when their families in the area sustained them.¹¹ White timber workers could move to the nearby farms of relatives and friends during strikes and layoffs,¹² but black workers, mostly newcomers to the pine region, lacked the sustaining power of an extended family. The Afro-Americans who migrated to the Sabine River area usually came from the cotton plantations in the Texas Brazos Valley and the Louisiana Delta, but some journeyed from as far as Mississippi and Alabama.

A few black timber workers knew the rigours of labour in the extractive industries. Back fieldhands who fled the plantations of the Louisiana Sugar Bowl and the primitive turpentine camps of Mississippi had experienced gang labour and factory discipline; they also learned about strikes when the Knights of Labor organized in their camps during the 1880s and 1890s. These workers escaped a "slave-like status", but others who came to the pine belt were not so fortunate; they were peons and convicts on lease who were forced to toil in the forests and mills to work off their "debts".¹³

The black workers who migrated from the Gulf Coast sugar plantations had an unusual heritage of militancy. Their ancestors were rebellious slaves brought to the Bayou Teche region of St. Mary's parish to be "broken". According to a Department of Labor study, the sugar workers were of "bad stock" — the "descendants of a particularly vicious lot".¹⁴ These "dangerous Negroes" added to their reputation for militancy in 1886 when they joined the Knights of Labor and struck during harvest time, provoking a violent response from planters.¹⁵

But most lumber workers, black and white, knew little of the

¹¹ Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers*, p. 187. On the Western Wobblies see Carleton Parker, *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays* (New York, 1920), and Robert L. Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods: The IWW in the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene, Oregon, 1967).

¹² Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, pp. 215-16. Allen points out, however, that once committed to the mill, the worker could not move easily between farm and factory, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

¹³ Sidney Kessler, "The Organization of Negroes in the Knights of Labor", *Jl. Negro History*, xxxvii (1952), pp. 248-76; Nollie Hickman, *Mississippi Harvest: Lumbering in the Longleaf Pine Belt, 1840-1915* (Oxford, Miss., 1962), p. 139; and Allen, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-4.

¹⁴ J. Bradford Laws, "Negroes of Cinclaire Central Factory and Calumet Plantation, Louisiana", U.S. Department of Labor, *Bulletin*, no. 38 (Washington, 1902), pp. 111-13. The author of this report was overtly racist, but the statistics he gathered about the work habits and family life of black sugar workers contradict many of the stereotypes of Afro-Americans as "lazy, shiftless" workers and "unstable" family men.

¹⁵ Sidney Kessler, "The Negro in Labor Strikes", *Midwest Jl.*, ii (1954), pp. 26-8.

extractive industries or of labour unions; they came to the pine region from their cotton farms unprepared for the changes life and labour in the industrial uplands would demand. In the face of painful dislocations caused by rapid industrialization,¹⁶ these men clung to older traditions: a leisurely, agrarian attitude towards work and production, a grudging insistence on "squatters' rights" to the land, and a "primitive" respect for nature. Industrial capitalism in the Southern pine region challenged all of these traditions; and while it violated old agrarian values, the new order demanded conformity to rigorous and alien standards of time, work discipline, and social behaviour.

Jobs in the lumber industry, especially in the sawmills, forced men who were used to the irregular pace of farm chores into a highly-disciplined work routine. Although the lumberjacks who actually felled the trees resembled "agricultural workers" more than factory operatives,¹⁷ the sawmill workers (who were largely black and accounted for 70 per cent of the work force) faced difficult, disciplined and very dangerous working conditions.

The lumber towns in the Sabine region resembled the Piedmont cotton textile villages, where a "rustic industrialism moved to a rural rhythm",¹⁸ but living conditions were more primitive in these backwoods settlements. Furthermore, the work pace was faster than it was in textile manufacturing, where more women and children were employed. In fact, lumber operators, unlike textile manufacturers, hired large numbers of black workers whose strength and endurance made them the most productive millhands.¹⁹

Employers found it difficult to discipline these rural workers who, like most new proletarians, were "only partially and temporarily 'committed' to the industrial way-of-life" and to its time-saving values of productivity and efficiency.²⁰ Black sharecroppers and white share tenants whose work day had been governed by the

¹⁶ For a general study of this phenomenon, see Mancure Olson, Jr., "Rapid Economic Growth As A Destablizing Force", *Jl. Econ. Hist.*, xxiii (1963), pp. 529-52.

¹⁷ F. Ray Marshall, *Labor in the South* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), p. 94.

¹⁸ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, p. 223.

¹⁹ See Abraham Berglund *et al.*, *Labor in the Industrial South* (Charlottesville, Va., 1930), pp. 19-20, and Paul B. Worthman and James R. Green, "Black Workers in the New South, 1865-1915", in Nathan I. Huggins, Martin Kilson, and Daniel M. Fox (eds.), *Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience* (New York, 1971), ii, pp. 51-2.

²⁰ For a general discussion of the problem of disciplining rural workers to an industrial time schedule, see E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism", *Past and Present*, no. 38 (Dec. 1967), pp. 92-3.

weather and the growing season were now forced to respond to the inevitability of the mill whistle and to the relentless demands of their new master — the machine.²¹ “Like all machine tenders, the sawmill worker is reduced to mere automation”, one union man wrote. “The pace is set by the machinery speeded up to the limit of human endurance. The day’s work consists of a continuous repetition of the same motions at top speed”.²²

The extreme danger involved in sawmill work made it especially difficult for workers to adjust to the machines. In 1919, even after state safety regulations had been passed, 125 deaths and 16,950 accidents were reported in the Southern lumber industry.²³ Four years earlier the Texas Commissioner of Labor declared that “a large percentage of accidents” in the sawmills were due “to absolute carelessness on the part of the employers”.²⁴

Sawmill workers, white as well as black, naturally resisted this demanding, dangerous work routine. Many labourers, especially the blacks who usually lacked family ties in the region, simply moved on when they were exhausted or maimed. These Southern millhands were not as transient as their fellow workers in the Northwest, but employers in the Sabine region who faced a chronic shortage of labour frequently complained about the “shiftlessness” of their black labourers.²⁵

Like many workers with pre-industrial backgrounds, millhands were very irregular in their work habits. Although Southern workers did not observe religious holy days and national holidays as frequently as immigrant workers, they did seek escape through alcohol and narcotics (mainly cocaine).²⁶ When they were “hung-over”, especially on “blue Monday”, the men simply refused to go

²¹ Lumber plants in the South operated on a more regular basis than those in other sections of the country. In 1915 the mills in Texas operated an average of 260 days. Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers*, pp. 98-9.

²² James Rowan, *The I.W.W. and the Lumber Industry* (Seattle, 1919), p. 8.

²³ F. L. Hoffman, “The Industrial Accident Problem in the Lumber Industry”, *Fourth Annual Report* (The Southern Pine Association, New Orleans, 1919), pp. 131-2.

²⁴ Texas Commissioner of Labor, *Biennial Report, 1913* (Austin, 1913), p. 153.

²⁵ Berglund *et al.*, *Labor in the Industrial South*, p. 54.

²⁶ After touring the Southern pine region, labour leader William Haywood reported that some companies “deliberately cultivated the narcotic drug habit among the workers”. “At every company store cocaine, morphine and heroine are sold”, he charged. “The workers, once addicted, cannot think of leaving their source of supply, even if they could scrape together enough money to pay for the journey”. *Bill Haywood’s Book* (New York, 1929), p. 243.

to work. One sheriff in a Louisiana lumber town said that he had instructions from the company superintendent to "be at the sawmill every day, and if enough men did not report to work go to the coloured quarters and 'drive' the required number out of their homes or even their beds if necessary". The sheriff explained that unless this was done the sawmills could not "operate at full capacity". The management also suppressed "vice elements" that threatened the order and discipline of their mill towns. In the early 1900s the corporations ordered sheriffs in many localities to "tighten up the wild lumber towns" by closing saloons and bawdy houses.²⁷

Because these Southern sawmill workers were recent migrants from the farm and because they frequently returned to the farm to pick cotton when exhausted or unemployed, they retained agrarian work habits longer than most new proletarians and they unconsciously drew upon these older ways as a source of resistance to industrial discipline. The persistence of pre-industrial attitudes was probably strongest among the whites, who usually had family farms in the area that offered an escape from the demands and dangers of the mill.

However, millhands who clung to the old ways could only cushion the shock of industrialization. The workers had to make compromises with the new order. For higher wages, they had to work harder and faster than they did on the farm. And so this partial proletariat of the piney woods lived in a state of tension between the new demands of industrialism and the heritage of an agrarian way of life and labour.

Unlike their fellow workers in the sawmills, the loggers were still close to nature. Occasionally work in the forests was suspended in rainy weather. These respites became less frequent, however, as tram-lines extended into the forests permitting extractive operations even in the wet season. But the lumberjacks were no longer agricultural workers. They still worked the soil and harvested its products, but now they were destroying, not creating. Mechanized logging was agriculture in reverse. And for the loggers who had been farmers, the mill may have "appeared as a symbol of the social energies which were destroying the very 'course of nature'" as it had to the English workers E. P. Thompson describes at an earlier time.²⁸ "The majority of the workers", wrote David Saposs, who investigated the pine region for the Commission on Industrial

²⁷ Quoted in David J. Saposs, "Self Government and Freedom of Action in Isolated Industrial Communities", Report no. 1,036, 20 Jan. 1915, CIR Records, pp. 35, 16-17.

²⁸ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), p. 189.

Relations, "were natives of this forest country . . ." and "had come to look upon the forests as their heritage". The native inhabitants were suspicious of "intruders" and, at first, they kept prospectors out "by sniping off a few". "These primitive forest people seem to have accepted the new scheme of things with misgivings", Saposs observed. "Deep in their hearts they nourished the grudge of the dispossessed and conquered".²⁹

The farmers of the Louisiana hill parishes began cutting pine on their homesteads after the Civil War in order to gain a little extra income from the new "cash crop". Although they only "eked out" a slightly "better livelihood by clearing their land", these "hillbillies" hated the Northern lumber syndicates that moved into the area during Reconstruction and quickly stole their market. When the corporations dispossessed the "squatters" and forced many yeomen to become tenants, they created a strong anti-capitalist sentiment in the region, which a powerful Populist movement mobilized in the early 'nineties. Agrarian hostility to the "timber barons" remained deep in the sandy soil of the piney woods after the passing of the People's Party.³⁰ After the turn of the century, the "redbone" farmers and their sons who worked in the sawmills and logging camps still nurtured an abiding hatred for the lumber corporations which "encroached" on what they felt was "their common heritage".³¹ In 1911 and 1912 organized resistance to industrial capitalism consciously drew upon this resentment.

Despite their hatred of the corporations and their fear of mill work, many poor farmers found the promise of a \$1.50 cash wage for a working day of eleven hours irresistible. A few workers, like the skilled saw filers, received as much as \$10 a day, but hundreds of sawmill labourers earned as little as 75 cents a day. Comparatively, the Southern labourer received less pay and worked longer hours than any lumber worker in the country.³² Union organizers did not focus their protests on the rate of pay, however; wages were still higher than those of turpentine and sugar-cane workers and greatly

²⁹ David J. Saposs, *Left Wing Unionism: A Study of Radical Politics and Tactics* (New York, 1926), p. 168. Saposs attended the University of Wisconsin, where he studied with Professor John R. Commons, the noted labour economist. When Commons was appointed to the Commission on Industrial Relations, he hired Saposs as a research assistant.

³⁰ Roger W. Shugg, *Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 1939), pp. 268-9.

³¹ Saposs interview with Supt. Tuxworth of the Pickering Co., Cravens, La., 27 Aug. 1914, CIR Records.

³² Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers*, pp. 73-80, and Berglund *et al.*, *Labor in the Industrial South*, pp. 41, 45, 51.

exceeded the income of tenants or croppers. The timber workers complained more frequently about the irregularity of their paydays and the numerous deductions employers made for dubious "benefits".³³ The "scrip system" also angered lumberjacks and millhands. Companies usually paid their workers with fake money (scrip) redeemable only at the company store, where merchants charged exorbitant prices and discounted pay-cheques from 15 to 30 per cent.³⁴ After surveying many commissaries, the Louisiana Commissioner of Labor reported that some "humane employers" were selling goods at a small margin of profit, but that "the average company store or leased commissary is operated as a money-making proposition and prices are fabulously high . . .".³⁵ Before violent conflict erupted in 1911, many workers could buy produce from independent growers and farmer-peddlers; but during and after the conflict most corporations ordered their workers to trade only at the company store and drove the peddlers off the streets of their company towns.³⁶ The scrip system had, of course, always limited the workers' freedom to trade.

An investigator for the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations found that the Kirby Lumber Company (the largest in Texas) paid over 90 per cent of its workers with scrip wages. Varieties of the "scrip system", like the time certificate and the merchandise cheque were, he reported, "the most reprehensible things in this country". Employers could use the merchandise cheque to control the town. It compelled "all the townspeople to buy the necessities of life in the commissary store . . . at whatever price the company determined".³⁷

As George Creel pointed out, Kirby's managers controlled nearly all aspects of life and labour in these "feudal towns" of East Texas.³⁸

³³ *Times Democrat* (New Orleans), 28 July 1912. On workers complaints see *Appeal to Reason* (Girard, Kan.), 26 July 1913; Covington Hall, "With the Southern Timber Workers", *International Socialist Rev.*, xiii (1912), p. 806; and the papers Hall published in 1912 and 1913, *The Voice of the People* (New Orleans) and *The Lumberjack* (Alexandria, La.).

³⁴ Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers*, pp. 115-16.

³⁵ *Ninth Biennial Report of Commissioner of Labor, 1915-1916* (Baton Rouge, 1916), pp. 13-15.

³⁶ Sapos interview with A. J. Latta, an itinerant peddler driven out of the "colored section" of Fullerton, 26 Aug. 1914, CIR Records. The same company ordered the black women of the community not to trade at a nearby independent grocery store. Interview with A. J. Davies, 27 Aug. 1914, CIR Records.

³⁷ P. A. Speak, "Report on Conditions in Texas Company Towns", Folder 299, *ibid.*, pp. 77-9.

³⁸ George Creel, "Feudal Towns in Texas", *Harper's Weekly*, lx (1915), p. 76.

One of Kirby's employees gave the following summary of a worker's fate in a company town of this sort:

He is born in a Company house; wrapped in Company swaddling clothes, rocked in a Company cradle. At sixteen he goes to work in the Company mill. At twenty-one he gets married in a Company Church. At forty, he sickens with Company malaria, lies down on a Company bed, is attended by a Company doctor who doses him with Company drugs, and then he loses his last Company breath, while the undertaker is paid by the widow in Company scrip for the Company coffin in which he is buried on Company ground.³⁹

A federal inquiry into the state of industrial relations in the U.S. repeated essentially the same charges when it concluded its survey of the East Texas pine region with these words: "We find that many communities exist under the arbitrary economic control of corporation officials; and . . . in such communities political liberty does not exist and its forms are hollow mockery . . .".⁴⁰

Employers like John Henry Kirby practised "mill village paternalism . . . cut from the same pattern of poverty and makeshift necessity that had served for plantation and crop lien paternalism".⁴¹ David Saposs, a federal investigator who visited many of these Texas company towns in 1914, reported that lumbermen like Kirby tried to practise "benevolent despotism", but their rule was "avowedly absolutistic".⁴²

When confronted with the charge that the scrip system, dangerous working conditions and deplorable housing contradicted their paternalistic concern for the workers' welfare, the lumber operators blamed their employees. As one large owner explained:

Owing to the temporary nature of sawmill operations . . . , there is usually a large labor turnover, and this is especially true among Negroes or common laborers. The sawmill Negro is rather shiftless and is not inclined to stay long in one location and consequently there is little incentive on the part of the owner or operator to carry on welfare work in any extensive manner.⁴³

Some historians have suggested that Southern workers did not find adjustment to mill town life "onerous", because paternalism and rural locations preserved country ways.⁴⁴ Pre-industrial ways of life

³⁹ *The Rebel* (Hallettsville, Tex.), 17 Feb. 1912. For further evidence of the totalitarian control operators exercised over their towns, see Saposs interview with Supt. Tuxworth of the Pickering Company, Cravens, La., 27 Aug. 1914, CIR Records.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers*, p. 156. For a more detailed evaluation, see Saposs, "Self Government and Freedom of Action in Isolated Industrial Communities", p. 50.

⁴¹ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, p. 223. On Kirby's paternalism see Morgan, "No Compromise — No Recognition", pp. 196-7.

⁴² Saposs, "Freedom of Action in Isolated Industrial Communities", p. 6.

⁴³ Quoted in Berglund *et al.*, *Labor in the Industrial South*, p. 54.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-68 and Marshall, *Labor in the South*, p. 87.

survived more easily in the cotton mill towns than they did in the makeshift villages created to serve the extractive industries, like timber, which continually pushed into remote areas to exploit new resources. Industrial capitalism created a kind of backwoods totalitarianism in the company towns, but it also altered social relations in older country communities where the corporations had less than total control.⁴⁵

The established churches lost much of their vitality and independence as towns became industrialized.⁴⁶ For example, in Fullerton, Louisiana, the corporation owned both the "colored and white churches" and paid the white preacher, who lived in a company house, a salary of \$10 a month. And in the older towns, preachers, like school teachers and other "non-submissive professionals", were harassed and intimidated by the lumber companies when the going got rough after 1910.⁴⁷ Under these conditions industrial village churches atrophied.⁴⁸ Interestingly, even the new "holiness sects" failed to take hold in the pine belt as they later did in the mill towns of the Piedmont.⁴⁹

The extended kinship network of the rural family also suffered from the shock of industrialization. According to E. Franklin Frazier, black workers experienced the greatest sense of loss, because when they migrated to the pine region from distant places, like the Alabama Black Belt, they were effectively torn from "customary familial attachments".⁵⁰ Single men could not find mates and family men found it difficult to give their home life proper attention. One black worker complained in 1904 that in the Texas "piney woods

⁴⁵ See Saposs, "Freedom of Action in Isolated Industrial Communities".

⁴⁶ See Edmund de S. Brunner, *Industrial Village Churches* (New York, 1931), p. 127.

⁴⁷ Saposs interview with Supt. Tuxworth, CIR Records.

⁴⁸ Brunner, *Industrial Village Churches*, *passim*. This study reported that church attendance in industrial communities throughout the country declined in the early twentieth century.

⁴⁹ Ulmer, "Economic and Social History of Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana", pp. 620-60 lists the churches extant in the heart of the pine region up to 1912. There were no Holiness or Primitive Methodist churches.

For an interesting study of Piedmont mill workers who responded to the shock of industrialization by embracing revivalist religion, see John B. Holt, "Holiness Religions: Cultural Shock and Social Disorganization", *Amer. Sociolog. Rev.*, v (1940), pp. 740-47. The absence of a strong revival movement in the pine region in the early twentieth century may explain, to some extent, the strength of the radical movement. For an excellent study of the inhibiting effects of chiliastic religious sects on class consciousness, see Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers* (New Haven, 1942), esp. pp. 117-86.

⁵⁰ E. Franklin Frazier, *Negro Family in the United States*, 2nd edn. (Chicago, 1966), p. 211.

now the married men . . . never see their wives and children as the hours of work are so long".⁵¹ Although life and labour in the lumber towns strained familial relations, industrialization did not destroy the black family.⁵² Domestic life was different and more difficult than it was on the farm, but there is no evidence to show that it was characterized by what Frazier called "free sex behaviour and spontaneous matings".⁵³

White lumber workers had stronger kinship ties in the pine region than black labourers, but these so-called "homeguards" also found that industrialization strained domestic relations. When William D. Haywood, the labour leader, toured the area in 1912, he learned that "the companies had women who lived in little shacks" with lumberjacks who passed through the camps. "The men moved from camp to camp, staying perhaps a few months, perhaps a couple of years", he wrote, "but women stayed and took the newcomers as husbands for the duration of their stay in that camp". However, in the settlements around the sawmills, where the workforce was less volatile, Haywood visited "many of the married workers' houses" and reported that they were "kept as neat as a woman's attention could make them", even though they were just "rough lumber shacks".⁵⁴

Social dislocations produced by transiency and long hours of labour weakened working class families, but men and women still made homes for themselves in a setting that had been anathema to stable domestic life in other lumber regions.⁵⁵ Some nuclear families lost touch with relatives but most of them maintained closer contact with kinfolk than comparable units in other industrial situations.⁵⁶ Because of the proximity of family farms and the strength of kinship ties, industrial workers in the Sabine pine region, especially whites,

⁵¹ Statement by P. Abner, a leader of the black sawmill workers in East Texas: *Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Convention of the Texas State Federation of Labor, 1904* (Austin, Tex., 1904), p. 32.

⁵² Recent research on the black family in the South shows that Frazier's emphasis on the crippling effects of the early moves to an urban, industrial environment is exaggerated. Statistical evidence, in fact, reveals that there were more two-parent households among black working class families in some areas than there were among whites. See Herbert G. Gutman, "Persistent Myths about the American Negro Family: A Critical Re-Examination of E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Family in the United States*", unpublished paper read at the 54th Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Birmingham, Ala., 10 Oct. 1969.

⁵³ Quotes from Frazier, *The Negro Family*, p. 211.

⁵⁴ Haywood, *Bill Haywood's Book*, p. 243.

⁵⁵ On the lack of family life among West Coast lumber workers, see Parker, *The Casual Laborer*, pp. 61-87.

⁵⁶ Dubofsky, *We shall Be All*, p. 215.

retained values and traditions of pre-industrial life that conflicted with capitalists' demands.

As Herbert Gutman shows, workers, farmers and townspeople in many American localities opposed the new industrial order, because they judged the actions of local capitalists by old, "agrarian" values.⁵⁷ The Populists in Louisiana and Texas articulated these values forcefully during the 1890s when they led an attack on the "lumber trust." Conservative Democrats, supported by planters, merchants and industrialists, had destroyed the People's Party in these two states by the turn of the century, but this powerful agrarian movement laid the groundwork for a more radical kind of opposition to the "timber barons" that encompassed farmers and workers of both races.⁵⁸

* * * *

Significantly, the first act of resistance to the industrialists' demands came from the most exploited workers in the Louisiana-Texas pine region, the black millhands. In 1902 Afro-American labourers struck successfully for a reduction of the working day against a sawmill company in Lutcher, Louisiana;⁵⁹ a year later these men founded one of the few "Negro locals" of the Socialist Party.⁶⁰ In 1904 black workers, assisted by radical organizers of the American Labor Union, engaged in a strike against a lumber company in Groveton, Texas.⁶¹ One of their leaders told a State Federation of Labor convention that the strikers were protesting against the "virtual chattel slavery conditions" that affected "labour in the piney woods of Texas". He concluded by asking the unionists to organize black workers "along parallel lines with white workers".⁶² The craft unions belonging to the American Federation of Labor

⁵⁷ Gutman, "Workers' Search for Power", p. 43.

⁵⁸ For studies of Populism in the region, see Roscoe Martin, *The People's Party in Texas* (Austin, Tex., 1933) and William I. Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics, 1877-1900* (Baton Rouge, La., 1969). For an excellent account of how blacks and whites worked together in the Populist movement, see Lawrence C. Goodwyn, "Populist Dreams and Negro Rights: East Texas as a Case Study", *Amer. Hist. Rev.*, lxxvi (1971), pp. 1,435-56.

⁵⁹ Jensen, *Lumber and Labor*, pp. 86-7.

⁶⁰ Eraste Vidrine, "Negro Locals", *International Socialist Rev.*, v (1905), p. 389.

⁶¹ Ruth A. Allen, *Chapters in the History of Organized Labor in Texas* (Austin, Tex., 1941), pp. 187-8 and *East Texas Lumber Workers*, p. 168.

⁶² *Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Convention of the Texas State Federation of Labor*, pp. 15-16.

ignored this plea, but the Brotherhood of Timber Workers did not; when its leaders began organizing in 1910 they knew that black workers held a majority of the jobs in the Southern lumber industry and they knew that these labourers had been the vanguard in the early protest strikes just after the turn of the century.

The timber workers' first collective action took place during the "panic" of 1907 when operators imposed a 20 per cent wage cut and a "stretch-out" of the working day.⁶³ Nearly all of the workers in the Sabine pine region walked out in a "spontaneous general strike" that shut down hundreds of mills. On top of the new demands made by the operators, the timber workers were protesting against long standing grievances: "poor wages and hours, 'gouging' in company stores, payment in scrip, excessive insurance and hospital fees, inadequate housing and sanitation, and irregularity of paydays".⁶⁴ Promised wage increases when prosperity returned, most of the workers went back to work immediately. But the workers around DeRidder, Louisiana (later a stronghold of radicalism), held out for several weeks. About this time, "Uncle Pat" O'Neill, a seventy-four year-old Arkansas coal miner who helped found the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905, came to western Louisiana and started publishing a paper called *The Toiler* in Leesville. His efforts to organize a union were unsuccessful however.⁶⁵

In December of 1910, Arthur Lee Emerson and Jay Smith, Southern-born lumberjacks, founded the Brotherhood of Timber Workers at a damp logging camp in Carson, Louisiana, and began recruiting workers. John Henry Kirby, leader of the Southern lumber operators, described the two BTW organizers:

A tin-horn gambler and sawmill loafer by the name of L. A. (*sic*) Emerson . . . who is a rank socialist and of some attainments as a scholar, is at the head of the business. He associated with him one Jay Smith, a desperate kind of fellow with a great deal of natural ability but little education. Smith has worked as a tree Sawyer in the mills of Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas and the Pacific Coast for the past 20 years. He, too, is a socialist and is by nature a criminal.

But Kirby did not ignore the BTW. "The Union", he noted in the summer of 1911, "is covering the country like a blanket".⁶⁶ Emerson

⁶³ *Times Democrat* (New Orleans), 1 Nov. 1907.

⁶⁴ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, pp. 235-6.

⁶⁵ Covington Hall, "Labor Struggles in the Deep South", undated typescript in Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, p. 125. See also O'Neill's remarks to the first Wobbly assembly in *Proceedings of the IWW Founding Convention, 1905* (New York, 1969), esp. pp. 590-1 and *Appeal to Reason*, 25 Dec. 1907.

⁶⁶ John H. Kirby to E. P. Ripley, 8 Aug. 1911 in John H. Kirby Papers, University of Houston Library, Houston, Texas. (Cited hereafter as Kirby Papers).

and Smith had been busy in the spring and early summer. Moving through the mills and camps disguised as insurance solicitors and card sharps they recruited hundreds of black and white workers in the first months of 1911.⁶⁷ And in June the union organizers felt strong enough to come into the open. They held a convention at Alexandria, Louisiana, where the Brotherhood endorsed a moderate constitution which extended membership to workers of all races, sexes and occupations.⁶⁸ The BTW borrowed its plan for industrial unionism (organizing across craft lines) and its ritualistic secrecy from the Knights of Labor. The older order, which had organized Mississippi lumberjacks and Louisiana sugar workers two decades earlier, left an important legacy of militant, interracial unionism to labourers of both races.⁶⁹

Shortly after the convention, the Southern Lumber Operators' Association (SLOA), organized after the general strike of 1907, initiated a lockout designed to destroy the BTW.⁷⁰ Employers also hired Burns detectives to ferret out union men, but the Brotherhood's umbrella of secrecy frustrated espionage activities.⁷¹ Covington Hall, a BTW leader who wrote an important account of the industrial conflict, recalled: "When the lumber barons began their crushing operation in 1911, they found the Brotherhood everywhere and nowhere. It entered the woods and mills as a semi-secret organization with the usual passwords and grips so dear to Southerners, regardless of race..."⁷² As the lockout continued into the summer of 1911, the lumber corporations began importing strikebreakers and demanding "yellow dog" contracts in which workers pledged not to join the Union. And on 19 July the SLOA closed eleven mills in the "infected area" around DeRidder, Louisiana, laying off 3,000 men.⁷³

⁶⁷ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, pp. 237-8.

⁶⁸ *Constitution and ByLaws of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers* (Alexandria, La., June 1911). The author would like to thank Deidse Johnson, Deputy Clerk of the Fourteenth Judicial District of Louisiana at Lake Charles for a copy of this document and other BTW materials.

⁶⁹ On ritual and secrecy, see *ibid.*, pp. 4, 8. See also Frederic L. Myers, "The Knights of Labor in the South", *Jl. Southern Hist.*, vi (1940), pp. 479-87.

⁷⁰ *Southwest: The Southern Industrial and Lumber Review* (Houston), Aug. 1911, p. 22. (Cited hereafter as *Southwest*). On the SLOA, see Morgan, "No Compromise — No Recognition", pp. 193-204.

⁷¹ On the employment of spies and *agents provocateurs*, see report of agent E 17 to John H. Kirby, 7 Aug. 1912, and J. H. Herndon to C. P. Mayer, 31 May 1912, Kirby Papers.

⁷² Covington Hall, "Labor Struggles in the Deep South", p. 128.

⁷³ *Times Democrat*, 20 July 1911. I. H. Fettey to J. H. Kirby, 3 Aug. 1911, and SLOA Executive Committee to Kirby, 5 Sept. 1911, Kirby Papers. Also see Morgan, "No Compromise — No Recognition", p. 200.

After a summer of vigilant anti-union activity, the Operators' Association frankly admitted that it had failed to "break the back" of the BTW. One operator told Kirby that the Union had so many organizers in the field (he estimated 500) and had "increased its membership so rapidly" that a more "efficient machine" would have to be designed to combat it. The leaders of the Operators' Association soon responded by hiring labour spies and by organizing the most efficient "black list" in Southern industry.⁷⁴

Union members who had been shut out and blacklisted managed to survive by picking cotton on the nearby farms of friends and relatives. Manufacturers who were distressed by the lockout's failure to increase demands for yellow pine also worried about the support the Brotherhood received from "lots of merchants, farmers, all kinds of landowners and some officers". They were even more distressed to learn that in September three "redneck" lumberjacks from the BTW attended the Sixth Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World in Chicago.⁷⁵

Late in 1911 many mills in western Louisiana reopened, minus hundreds of blacklisted union men. In the dismal winter months which followed the BTW went underground and nearly expired. A membership reduced to less than five thousand, a depleted treasury, and an exhausted cadre of organizers led the Brotherhood to affiliate with the IWW in May 1912.⁷⁶ "Big Bill" Haywood himself came south from Wobbly headquarters in Chicago to sell discouraged timber workers on the One Big Union. One of the most charismatic figures in the American labour movement, Haywood presented a strong case for affiliation by promising the Brotherhood financial aid, experienced organizers, a union newspaper, and a big injection of confidence and militancy. Covington Hall, a revolutionary propagandist from New Orleans, strongly supported Haywood's argument.⁷⁷

Hall was a well-born young man from Mississippi who came to the Crescent City around the turn of the century to write poetry. He was soon drawn into the struggles waged by the militant trade unions of the port city. During the turbulent interracial dock strike

⁷⁴ *Southwest*, Aug. 1911, p. 26, July 1912, p. 22, and Sept. 1911, p. 23; S. J. Carpenter to Kirby, 12 Sept. 1911, Kirby Papers.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, and B. H. Williams, "Sixth I.W.W. Convention", *International Socialist Rev.*, xiii (1911-1912), p. 302.

⁷⁶ Morgan, "No Compromise — No Recognition", p. 201.

⁷⁷ Haywood, *Bill Haywood's Book*, pp. 241-3 and Hall, "Labor Struggles", pp. 136-9.

of 1907, Hall wrote for a radical labour paper edited by Oscar Ameringer, a German socialist who became a well-known humourist and journalist. Ameringer recalled that "Cov" Hall was one of the best-dressed, best-looking young men in New Orleans; he also enjoyed the distinction of being Adjutant-General of the United Sons of Confederate Veterans. Hall lost this position when he began to write articles in Ameringer's paper advocating working class solidarity across racial lines. Moving rapidly to the left, he joined the Industrial Workers of the World shortly after it was founded in 1905. As a result, Hall split with Ameringer and the German social-democrats. When the timber workers launched their "general strike" in 1907, the young poet travelled north to the piney woods, where he began to preach the gospel of militant industrial unionism. Like A. L. Emerson and Jay Smith, Hall gave the Brotherhood of Timber Workers "daring and magnetic" leadership from start to finish. His union newspaper, *The Lumberjack*, expressed the IWW's revolutionary ideas in the folksy, populist idiom of the region.⁷⁸

In the spring of 1912, the Wobblies were on the crest of a rapidly breaking wave. Haywood had come to the South fresh from a sensational IWW victory over textile manufacturers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and the "Wobblies acted as if the industrial millennium was near at hand".⁷⁹ The militant tactics of the IWW actually seemed to be working and the voice of radicalism was being heard throughout the land. "When we entered the Louisiana Lumber War", wrote Covington Hall, the BTW's leading publicist, "the great majority of militants taking part were convinced that the United States was ripe for a mass upheaval; that 'The Revolution' was just around the corner; and we acted accordingly".⁸⁰

This "Revolution" had to take place in the factories; it could not win in polling places controlled by "capitalist parties". The IWW co-operated with the Socialist Party in Louisiana and a few other states because its members believed that political action played an important rôle in workers' struggles. All Wobblies, however, insisted on the primacy of "direct action" at the work place. Strikes, demonstrations, work stoppages and acts of sabotage would heighten the class struggle and precipitate an apocalyptic "general strike".

⁷⁸ On Covington Hall see Joyce Kornbluh (ed.), *Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1964), pp. 259-60; Oscar Ameringer, *If You Don't Weaken* (New York, 1940), p. 209; and Saposs, *Left Wing Unionism*, p. 169.

⁷⁹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, p. 260.

⁸⁰ Hall, "Labor Struggles", p. 122.

This crucible would determine the success of "The Revolution" and the effectiveness of "industrial democracy".⁸¹

"Direct action" appealed to "poor white" farmers who had seen their Populist candidates "counted out" by Democratic poll watchers in the 1890s. It was also attractive to transient lumberjacks who failed to meet local residency requirements and to black millhands who were disfranchised on account of their race. Voting was just another privilege of the white middle class, according to Jay Smith, a co-founder of the BTW. The Wobblies, he argued, took a more "direct approach" to the class struggle:

It is here on the job, in the union hall, that the working class begins to learn that the broadest interpretation of political power comes through industrial organization. It is here on the job, in the union hall, that the workers will learn that the I.W.W. places the ballot in the hands of every man and woman, every boy and girl who works. It is here that the workers will learn that the I.W.W. re-enfranchises the colored man.⁸²

The IWW's programme, according to Melyvn Dubofsky, was "a peculiar amalgam of Marxism and Darwinism, anarchism and syndicalism . . .", but "above all else, Wobblies derived their beliefs from their own experiences in America".⁸³ Not all of the Brotherhood's membership embraced the One Big Union's eclectic ideology, but an active propaganda campaign launched by BTW editor Covington Hall and supported by widely circulated socialist newspapers made thousands of labourers and farmers the enemies of capitalism.⁸⁴

The radicals couched their revolutionary appeals in a Southern agrarian idiom which drew effectively on the discontent of a poor, uneducated rural people without resorting to racism. The Brotherhood's leaders were conscious of the Sabine region's Populist legacy; they fully appreciated that many of the timber workers "were sons of the most rebellious farmers in the United States".⁸⁵

The Southern Wobblies had to go to the ideological barricades to defend their agrarian variant of revolutionary socialism against theorists in the national headquarters who maintained that the farmers "approach[ed] all things from the standpoint of a property

⁸¹ The best discussion of IWW ideology is Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, pp. 146-70. For the IWW's position on politics, see Vincent St. John's pamphlet, *Political Parties and the IWW* (Chicago, 1919).

⁸² *The Voice of the People* (New Orleans), 20 Nov. 1913.

⁸³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, p. 147.

⁸⁴ Grady McWhiney, "Louisiana Socialists in the Twentieth Century: A Study of Rustic Radicalism", *Jl. Southern Hist.*, xxx (1954), pp. 315-36. Three Socialist newspapers had a large circulation in the pine region: *Appeal to Reason* (Girard, Kan.), *National Ripsaw* (St. Louis), and *The Rebel* (Hallettsville, Tex.).

⁸⁵ Hall, "Labor Struggles", p. 130.

owner".⁸⁶ BTW leaders insisted that the landless farmers of the Southwest were rural proletarians and potential revolutionaries, even if they did not fit into a Marxian model.⁸⁷ This report from a New Orleans paper in the summer of 1912 seemed to confirm their theory:

the whole lumber country as far west as the Sabine River has been generally plastered with Socialist literature of every description. It has had a demoralizing effect among many of the natives. Some of them have become imbued with the idea that the only way to remedy the evils that exist in the sawmill industry is by armed revolution.⁸⁸

Four days after the Brotherhood voted to join the Wobblies, it presented a list of grievances to ten lumber companies in the DeRidder area of western Louisiana. The operators were "aghast" at these demands and they promptly responded with a lockout late in May 1912.⁸⁹ In a short time, employers began importing black strike-breakers so that they could reopen their mills with non-union labour. Since armed guards and stockades kept the union men from talking to the scabs, BTW leaders decided to hold rallies outside the mills. Women and children would accompany the male strikers in order to discourage violence.

On Sunday, 7th July, A. L. Emerson led a band of one hundred strikers and their families to Bon Ami, Louisiana, where the huge King-Ryder mill was operating with scab labour. When the group learned that an attempt had been made to assassinate a socialist agitator in that vicinity, the leaders changed direction and headed for a smaller mill town called Grabow. Arriving at a crossroads near the Galloway Lumber Company, Emerson mounted a wagon and began to speak to his followers and a few by-standers around the town. Almost immediately company gunmen opened fire on the group from concealed positions. As people ran for cover, several armed union men fired back at the gunmen in the Galloway Company office. In the ten-minute gun battle that followed three hundred rounds were fired (largely by the company guards) and four men were killed (two unionists, one by-stander and one hired gunman). In addition, forty people, including several women and children, were wounded. The guards' shotguns "did deadly work", *Southwest* reported, "and the brotherhood members went down in rows". That evening

⁸⁶ *Solidarity* (New Castle, Pa.), 27 Feb. 1913.

⁸⁷ For the response of Southern Wobblies to their orthodox critics, see *Voice of the People*, 31 July, 7 Aug. and 27 Nov. 1913.

⁸⁸ *Times Democrat* (New Orleans), 15 Aug. 1912.

⁸⁹ *Times Democrat* (New Orleans), 17 May 1912; *Southwest*, June 1912, p. 23; and Covington Hall, "The Louisiana Lumber War", *The Coming Nation* (Girard, Kansas), 22 June 1912.

hundreds of angry farmers and workers from Calcasieu Parish armed themselves and gathered at DeRidder; they wanted to avenge those who had been attacked at the Grabow "massacre". After a long night of angry talk, A. L. Emerson and other BTW leaders persuaded the people to disperse and "let the law take its course".⁹⁰

Soon after the gun battle at Grabow, lawmen arrested Emerson and sixty-four other union men and indicted them on charges of murdering a guard employed by the Galloway Company. The defendants remained in the cramped confines of the Lake Charles jail for two months awaiting trial; they took the opportunity to form a unique "branch local" of the Socialist Party. Meanwhile, experienced Wobbly agitators came into the region to help organize a defence movement. The IWW press, with Covington Hall's aid, began a national publicity campaign. *Southwest* denounced "this frantic effort . . . to make it appear as though it were (*sic*) a trial of the 'lumber barons' versus the 'workingmen', instead of a case of the State of Louisiana against a crowd of rioters". Nevertheless, a New Orleans paper reported that a "dangerous state of opinion" existed in the pine region because so many farmers and workers were outraged by the course the law had taken following the Grabow "massacre".⁹¹

On the first day of the trial at Lake Charles, forty workers in J. H. Kirby's biggest mill at Kirbyville, Texas, walked off their jobs to express their solidarity with Emerson and the other defendants; they were all fired and ejected from their houses on the same day. This act of defiance symbolized the importance of the Lake Charles trial to the workers of the Sabine region. Their sense of outrage increased when prosecution attorneys, led by Progressive Congressman A. J. Pujo, rejected all potential jurors who expressed sympathy for unionism. The jury finally selected included a businessman, a bill collector, three non-union workers from Lake Charles and seven farmers, none of them from the "infected area" around DeRidder.

Defence lawyers strengthened their case by revealing that the Operators' Association sent fake IWW propaganda to the jurors. Covington Hall's paper made the most of this revelation: "We may be nothing but a lot of 'damned Cajuns, lousy lumberjacks and hayseed farmers', as that combine of Northern industrial carpetbaggers and

⁹⁰ *Times Democrat* (New Orleans), 8 and 28 July 1912; *Southwest*, Aug. 1912; and *American Press* (Lake Charles), 12 July 1912.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 15 Aug. 1912; *Southwest*, Oct. 1912, p. 6; Hall "Labor Struggles", pp. 150-9; W. F. Dietz, "Putting One Over On the Sawmill Operators", Socialist Party Circular, Lake Charles, 16 Aug. 1912, Walter F. Dietz Papers, Louisiana State University Library, Baton Rouge, La.

Southern industrial scalawags . . . loves to call us, but we have not yet resorted to forgeries to save the lives of our brothers, the victims of the Grabow massacre”.

The prosecution's case collapsed when its star witness admitted that the gunmen at the Galloway mill had been drinking before the BTW marchers arrived at Grabow. At one point, the mill owner told his storekeeper to “pour” liquor into the guards until the union men came up. Under the circumstances, Congressman Pujo, who was famous for his investigation of the “trusts”, closed his case and hoped that his own clients would not be prosecuted.

It only took the jury a few minutes to find the Grabow defendants innocent. When the verdict was announced, the little courtroom erupted with cheers and the audience spilled into the streets of Lake Charles for a victory parade. That night a “jubilation meeting” took place at the Carpenters’ Hall that was attended by members of all the unions and by all seven of the farmers who served on the jury.⁹²

The Wobblies reached the peak of their influence in the pine region at this time, but the BTW's membership (about twenty thousand in the early summer) continued to decline as the lockout wore on and the blacklist lengthened. Ironically, the Socialist Party (which expelled the IWW for advocating sabotage in May 1912) benefited most directly from the discontent generated by the Lake Charles trial. On the day after the Grabow defendants were released, a presidential election was held in which Eugene Debs, running as a Socialist, polled over five thousand votes in Louisiana, twice the number he received in 1908.⁹³

⁹² The best account of the Lake Charles trial is Charles H. McCord, “A Brief History of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers” (University of Texas M.A. thesis, 1959), pp. 82-96. See also *Southwest*, 20 Oct. 1912; *Times Democrat* (New Orleans), 28 Oct. 1912; *International Socialist Review* (Chicago), xiii (Nov. 1912), p. 470; and Hall, “Labor Struggles”, pp. 163-72.

⁹³ Debs and the Socialists polled over 20 per cent of the votes in three Louisiana lumber parishes and more than 30 per cent in three others, including Winn Parish where they elected an entire slate of local officials at Winnfield, Huey Long's hometown. McWhiney points out that these percentages “represented only a small portion of the potential Socialist vote”, because thousands of lumber workers, including most of the blacks, were disfranchised. McWhiney, “Louisiana Socialists”, pp. 316-17, 333. Debs also polled over 20 per cent of the vote in four of the lumber counties in East Texas. James R. Green, “Socialism and the Southwestern Class Struggle” (Yale University Ph.D. thesis, 1972), pp. 229-30.

For an illuminating analysis of parallel developments in another Southern state, see Frederick A. Barkey, “The Socialist Party in West Virginia from 1898 to 1920: A Study in Working Class Radicalism” (University of Pittsburg Ph.D. thesis, 1971). Socialists appeared in both states just after the turn of the century when workers were launching their first collective rebellions against extractive industry owners. As a result, labour militants who “carried socialism in their toolboxes” imparted a new political consciousness to mass insurgencies in these industries.

The growth of industrial unionism in the pine region depended largely upon the support of black labourers who outnumbered whites in unskilled forest and sawmill jobs (see Table II). Employers tried to keep blacks out of the industry's higher-paid semi-skilled jobs because, as the *St. Louis Lumberman* put it, "Too much pay breeds discontent and idleness among the colored laborers".⁹⁴ Table II shows, however, that a few thousand Afro-Americans did work their way into the more skilled occupations. In any case, the vast majority of the region's timber workers, black and white, toiled side by side as unskilled labourers.

TABLE II*

RACIAL AND OCCUPATIONAL COMPOSITION OF THE WORK FORCE IN THE SOUTHERN PINE INDUSTRY, 1910

Occupation	Louisiana			Texas		
	White Number	Black Number	Total Number	White Number	Black Number	Total Number
Lumberman, raftsmen and woodchoppers (largely unskilled)	4,500 (50.1%)	4,373 (49.9%)	8,884 (100%)	3,629 (63.0%)	1,351 (27.0%)	4,980 (100.0%)
Sawmill labourers:						
Unskilled	9,176 (39.3%)	16,509 (60.7%)	25,685 (100%)	7,489 (50.7%)	7,216 (49.3%)	14,705 (100.0%)
Semi-skilled	2,336 (58.5%)	1,643 (41.5%)	3,979 (100%)	1,399 (70.5%)	587 (29.5%)	1,986 (100.0%)
Sawyers (skilled)	1,022 (71.4%)	400 (28.6%)	1,422 (100%)	563 (78.6%)	155 (21.4%)	718 (100.0%)

* Statistics in Table II compiled from the *Thirteenth Census of the U.S., 1910*, vol. iv, *Occupations*, pp. 384-5.

Whites dominated the skilled occupations, as they did throughout Southern industry, but they also mixed with blacks on fairly even terms in the unskilled occupations. This racial mixture in the work force inhibited some of the conflicts that divided black and white union men in the building trades and on railroad jobs. The possibilities for interracial unionism were greater in the pine region than they were in other sections of the South, where "industrial backwardness" made the use of black labor unnecessary and left the traditional relation between the races undisturbed". The rapid growth of the yellow pine industry created a large demand for unskilled labour that rural whites could not satisfy.⁹⁵ When lumber

⁹⁴ Quote from *St. Louis Lumberman*, 1 April 1910, p. 65.

⁹⁵ Quote from Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, *The Black Worker* (New York, 1931), pp. 147-8. Information on labour scarcity from D. J. Millet, "The Lumber Industry in Imperial Calcasieu Parish, 1865-1890", *Louisiana Hist.*, vii (1966), p. 64 and Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers*, p. 54.

operators hired thousands of Afro-Americans to meet this demand, they disturbed traditional race relations in the area considerably, because they paid a great number of blacks the same wages as whites and allowed them to move out of their "place" at the bottom of the Southern economy. The demand for black labour also forced the corporations to introduce an undisciplined element into the industrial proletariat and to reduce the size of an important "industrial reserve" of strike-breakers. All of these actions created pre-conditions for the development of class-conscious industrial unionism in the New South. Like the United Mine Workers in Alabama, the Brotherhood of Timber Workers in Louisiana took advantage of this situation by organizing all workers in the industry, regardless of race or skill, into "one big union".⁹⁶

The Brotherhood's attempt to organize black and white workers came at a time when demands for segregation divided the working class and made contacts between the races less frequent and more violent. The workers lived in separate "quarters" in most industrial towns. Social and religious activities were usually divided by race, especially in the years after Jim Crow laws were passed to prevent mixed assemblies. But in these primitive villages, churches, schools and clubs were weak and few in number. There is no evidence of segregation in places where workers frequently congregated — saloons, whore houses, grocery stores, and barber shops. Jim Crow laws were far more important in cities and county seat towns, where there were transportation facilities and public institutions to segregate and established patterns of residency to maintain.⁹⁷

Institutionalized racism did not prevent the mingling of the races in these chaotic, congested lumber towns. One Wobbly chided his fellow "rednecks" for their pretensions to racial supremacy and made it quite clear that contacts between the races took place on several levels:

Some *very poor* but aristocratic whites have given as a reason for not joining the ONE BIG UNION that they did not care to belong to an organization which takes the NEGRO. Yet many of these very blue-blooded do affiliate with the "niggers"; they chew the rag with them and visit some colored lady's house at the wee small hours of the morning. But there is no telling what a genuine

⁹⁶ See Harold M. Baron, "The Demand for Black Labor: Historical Notes on the Political Economy of Racism", *Radical America*, v (1971), p. 20. On the importance of industrial unionism, see Worthman and Green, "Black Workers in the New South, 1865-1915", pp. 62-8.

⁹⁷ George A. Stokes, "Lumbering in Southwestern Louisiana" (Louisiana State University Ph.D. thesis, 1954), p. 60. On segregation see also C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York, 1957), pp. 82-5, which points out that most segregation laws originated in the form of city ordinances. Also see Henry C. Dethloff and Robert R. Jones, "Race Relations in Louisiana, 1877-1898", *Louisiana Hist.*, ix (1968), pp. 301-23.

bonehead, damphool (*sic*) will do. They are very inconsistent when they refuse to "jine" the union because it takes NEGROES. The people who are doing the work *must* be members regardless of race.⁹⁸

The Wobblies knew that employers had the upper hand in dealing with the race question; if the BTW integrated, the operators could "nigger bait" and play on the blacks' distrust of "rednecks", but if the BTW stayed "lily white", they could use "black legs" with devastating effectiveness. *Southwest* seemed justified when it predicted the Brotherhood's failure. "Both black and white laborers are employed indiscriminately", the trade journal declared, "and men of wisdom recognize at a glance how impossible it would be to organize the territory under these circumstances". In the summer of 1911 however, *Southwest* reported that "700 or 800 men and women, a good per cent being negro", heard speeches by A. L. Emerson and Cajun firebrand W. D. Fussel. The Brotherhood recruited several thousand members in western Louisiana, the article added, "largely negroes" or white "tenant farmers and loafers about the sawmill places . . .".⁹⁹

Emerson and other union leaders realized from the start that they had to organize the black workers, but they could not ignore the obstacle racism presented. The original BTW constitution provided separate lodges for "negroes" and control of all dues by white locals.¹⁰⁰ The blacks were not satisfied with such arrangements and declared at the second convention that they eschewed "social equalities", but could not "suppress a feeling of taxation without representation". Accordingly, their delegates demanded a coloured executive board, elected by back union members and designed to work "in harmony with its white counterpart".¹⁰¹ But these discriminatory rules against which the blacks protested were later rescinded; and, in the end, they were overshadowed by the commitment the BTW made to interracial organizing in the Deep South at a time when any kind of racial co-operation tended to produce a violent reaction.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ H. M. Witt, "Nigger Lovers", *The Voice of the People*, 21 Aug. 1913. Another Wobbly J. H. Ezernack made similar remarks in *The Lumberjack* (Alexandria, La.), 3 April 1913.

⁹⁹ *Southwest*, Aug. 1911, pp. 22-5.

¹⁰⁰ *Constitution and By Laws of BTW*, p. 14.

¹⁰¹ *Minutes of the Second Annual Convention of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers* (Alexandria, La., 6-9 May 1912), pp. 16-17.

¹⁰² Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, p. 325. Mary White Ovington of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People declared, "The IWW has stood with the Negro. The Brotherhood of Timber Workers in Louisiana fraternized with black men and together the two races have battled against their exploiters. Only one familiar with the South can appreciate the courage of this position and the courage demanded of both races". Quoted in *Solidarity*, 20 Sept. 1913.

When the Brotherhood affiliated with the IWW in 1912 it added the rhetoric of militant equalitarianism to its official position on interracial recruitment. When Bill Haywood arrived at the Alexandria convention on 6th May, he immediately complained about the absence of "colored delegates". Covington Hall explained that the black unionists were meeting in a separate hall in accordance with state segregation laws. "Big Bill" boomed in response: "You cannot possibly do business this way. Bring the colored delegates in and hold the convention".¹⁰³

Haywood told the white delegates that since they worked with blacks they could just as well meet with them in convention. "Why not be sensible about this", he asked, "and call the Negroes into this convention? If it's against the law, this is one time when the law should be broken". The white workers responded favourably to this plea which was echoed effectively by "Cov" Hall. "The Negroes", Haywood wrote, "were called into the session without a murmur of protest from anyone. The mixed convention carried on its work in an orderly way and when it came to the election of delegates to the next IWW convention, black men as well as white were elected".¹⁰⁴ The black union men expressed enthusiasm for the Brotherhood's merger with the IWW and declared: "We have come this far with the Grand Old organization of the B. of T.W. with a true, sincere and loyal intention of going to the end. If she went down as the great ship Titanic did in the Atlantic waters . . . we are willing to go down with her". The blacks had some reasons to be encouraged. They elected a delegate to the IWW convention, D. R. Gordon of Lake Charles, and a black executive board. What is more, their protests led to the organization of mixed locals, which actually formed in many localities even though black and white union men went to jail for meeting together.¹⁰⁵

For its brief period of existence, the Union provided a new form of association for workers and a substitute for social institutions weakened or made irrelevant by rapid economic and demographic change. One account — by a hostile observer — tells us something about the social rôle the Brotherhood played for workers of both

¹⁰³ Hall, "Labor Struggles", pp. 241-2.

¹⁰⁴ Haywood, *Bill Haywood's Book*, p. 242. Hall added that "the white and colored delegates met in joint session on the second day despite the fact local . . . authorities threatened to get out an injunction prohibiting the convention from meeting at all . . .": Covington Hall, "The Revolt of the Southern Timber Workers", *International Socialist Rev.*, xiii (1912), p. 51.

¹⁰⁵ *Minutes of the Second Convention*, pp. 16-17; Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, p. 332; and *Solidarity* (Cleveland), 28 Sept. 1912, and 30 Sept. 1913.

racess. A traveller gave the following account of a BTW meeting he had seen at Merryville, Louisiana, in July of 1912:

I was informed that it was the celebration of Negro emancipation, and that the negroes had given a fine barbecue and that the whites had gone in with them to help out in the financial part and also to celebrate with them as the "Lumber Workers" Union. There were about 2000 or more people upon the ground — about three whites to every two negroes. There was a general mixture of races and sexes, especially when to the sound of the band they collected like a swarm of bees — white, black, male and female — around the speaker's stand.

Then, according to the observer, a black minister spoke and introduced A. L. Emerson who related the slaves' struggle for emancipation to the Brotherhood's battle against the lumber trust.¹⁰⁶

A chronic shortage of labour in the pine belt made it difficult for the employers to fight the Union by hiring blacks to replace white workers for lower wages. However, more subtle methods could be used to discourage racial solidarity. In some cases, operators treated the black workers better than the whites. A union man explained: "The scarcity of labor has compelled the boss to treat the negro with a semblance of fairness, in order to use him as a club to hold over rebellious white workers". John Henry Kirby, who owned Kirbyville and several other lumber towns in East Texas, had no master in the practice of this classical form of Southern paternalism. One of his employees complained: "He was mean to all of us, but he was better to the blacks than to the whites".¹⁰⁷

Kirby was one of the few Southern industrialists who took his paternalism seriously. He hired J. B. Rayner, an old, black Populist leader, to inculcate Booker T. Washington's self-help programme among his "colored" millhands. He contributed \$250 to a school in East Texas which Rayner re-designed to include a "Hall of Faithfulness".¹⁰⁸ In Silisbee, Texas, Kirby reinforced his economic and social control by using a leading member of the black community to turn workers against the BTW. "Tell the men of your race around Silisbee", Kirby wrote to A. J. Criner, the principal of a Negro school, "that the promoters of the Brotherhood have no concern for the colored citizenship except insofar as they can use the negro for their personal advantage". Kirby warned the black workers, "as their friend and employer", that after the BTW gained

¹⁰⁶ *Southwest*, July 1912, p. 33.

¹⁰⁷ Phineas Eastman, "The Southern Negro and One Big Union", *International Socialist Review*, xiii (1913), p. 891. Will Harper to the Editor, *The Rebel*, 21 December 1912.

¹⁰⁸ Jack Abromowitz, "John B. Rayner — A Grass Roots Leader", *Jl. Negro Hist.*, xxxvi (1951), p. 172.

control of the mills it would "drive the Negroes away and import roughnecks and redbones from Louisiana and Arkansas to take their places".¹⁰⁹

Most employers, less skilful than Kirby, resorted to more direct methods of promoting racial antagonism. During the lockout of 1912, company agents recruited thousands of Negro strike-breakers from Black Belt cotton fields and imported them by rail to work in the heavily-guarded mills. These "blacklegs" seriously threatened the racial solidarity the BTW had achieved. For, as Spero and Harris concluded, "Even where Negro unionists . . . struck side by side with white, the introduction of Negro strike-breakers . . . stirred up the same racial antipathies among whites . . ." that existed when they struck alone.¹¹⁰

The Wobblies made frantic efforts to recruit the "blacklegs". Strikers often ran up to the trains that came down the Kansas City Southern tracks and shouted strike slogans at the "outlandish" blacks. But in the end, armed guards, barbed wire and stockades frustrated their efforts. BTW leaders sometimes attempted to speak to the "scabs" by bringing along a large number of women and children hoping to discourage harassment by company guards. When this strategy failed, the results could be disastrous, as they were at the Grabow "massacre". At times, desperate strikers threatened their replacements. During the first lockout in 1911, one worried operator from Winn parish reported that "unionists who claim to be members of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers are telling our employees that unless they quit work they will be killed. On the negroes this has had a bad effect and we are having trouble keeping them".¹¹¹

Union leaders found it difficult to maintain racial harmony in the face of threats and attacks directed against black strike-breakers. But the Wobbly leaders tried desperately to rationalize their hatred of "scabs" regardless of race. As one speaker put it: "There are white *men*, there are Negro *men*, and there are Mexican *men*, but no 'niggers', 'greasers' or 'white trash'. All *men* are on the side of the Union, and all greasers, niggers, and white trash are on the side of the Lumber Trust".¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ A. J. Criner to Kirby, 10 Aug. 1911 and Kirby to Criner, 11 Aug. 1911, Kirby Papers.

¹¹⁰ Covington Hall, "Negroes Against Whites", *International Socialist Rev.*, xiii (1912), p. 349 and Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, p. 65.

¹¹¹ *Southwest*, Sept. 1911, p. 23.

¹¹² *Times Democrat* (New Orleans), 30 July 1912; *Southwest*, Aug. 1911, pp. 22-4; and Hall, "Labor Struggles", p. 189.

BTW agitators even lionized black Wobblies to make their case for racial solidarity. For one, BTW secretary Ed Lehman responded to a prejudiced white worker by praising Isaac Grimes, a Negro striker who had been grilled to the point of torture by detectives after he was accused of dynamiting a "scab" stockade. "He is a *man*", said Lehman of his black "fellow worker", "*a union man*, and IWW and he has proven it by his actions, and that is more than you have done in all your boss sucking life".¹¹³

The BTW faced enormous odds in its struggle against racism. Segregation laws inhibited demonstrations of solidarity and created constant tensions. Employers could easily exploit the mutual fears of "hillbillies" and "low country negroes", especially when, late in the struggle, corporations isolated the Wobblies and imported "black-legs". The IWW always risked losing white support because of its militant equalitarianism. The BTW originally accepted segregation, but after the Wobblies took over in 1912 protests by blacks and white radicals broke down separatism. The "redneck" rank and file reluctantly accepted demands for integration which violated law and custom. In spite of the whites' reservation and harassment by sheriffs who "frequently intimidated Negroes into organizing a separate branch", BTW leaders insisted on interracial action. But Covington Hall, the black Wobblies' most effective advocate, admitted that the Brotherhood never eliminated racism within its ranks. At most, he wrote later, "We did . . . prevent our opponents from using it against us".¹¹⁴

Several conditions prevented racism from destroying the union movement in the piney woods. First of all, the Wobblies could apply industrial unionism to an interracial work force that was not seriously divided by craft and wage distinctions. Therefore, white workers were not especially concerned with protecting their privileged job status, as they were in the railroad brotherhoods and the building trades. Secondly, the remoteness of extractive operations in the Sabine region initially created a labour shortage that forced employers to integrate blacks into the work force. Later, this situation hindered the importation of black strike-breakers to a certain extent.¹¹⁵ Finally, and most importantly, the militant industrial

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, Grimes was jailed and interrogated because "he refused to commit a perjury against his fellow white workers": *Solidarity*, 20 Sept. 1913.

¹¹⁴ Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, p. 332, and Hall, "Labor Struggles", pp. 190-1.

¹¹⁵ Millet, "Lumber Industry in Imperial Calcasieu", p. 64. During the first BTW strike of 1911 one SLOA leader reported that 3,000 union men had been discharged, but that workers could not be found to replace them: S. J. Carpenter to Kirby, 12 Sept, 1911, Kirby Papers.

unionism of the BTW checked the poisonous growth of race hatred within the ranks of the Southern lumber workers.¹¹⁶ The organizers of the Union, especially the outspoken Wobblies, effectively urged labourers of both races to join together in resisting the demands of the region's industrial capitalists.

* * * *

In addition to black support, the Brotherhood depended upon assistance from farmers and townspeople. The timber workers resisted corporate power as long as they enjoyed substantial community support. When the corporations polarized their company towns by coercing merchants, professionals and other union allies, the strikers were isolated and easily defeated.¹¹⁷

BTW leaders appreciated the importance of rural support. They knew that the Populist movement created a strong anti-capitalist sentiment among many yeoman farmers. They also knew that the lumber corporations forced many of these men and their sons into tenant farming. As one "redbone" tenant from Calcasieu Parish pointed out in the summer of 1912: "There is a great deal of feeling here against the sawmill companies on account of their land-holding policy". Like many tenants, he wanted to force the corporations to open their "cut-over lands" for purchase. "The families of these farmers and those of the forest workers are not only bound together by the social ties of intermarriage", Covington Hall wrote, "they also have the strongest economic reasons for making common cause with one another against the Lumber Kings on the one hand and the landlords on the other".¹¹⁸

In addition to this long-standing grievance over their "natural right" to the land, the hill country farmers reacted violently to the mill managers' attempts to prevent them from peddling their produce in the company towns. Near Fullerton, Louisiana, the "redbone" farmers forced the company to allow them access to the town by

¹¹⁶ Spero and Harris suggest that if other unions had been more determined to integrate, "it is not illogical to assume, judging from the success of the IWW among Negro and white lumber workers in Louisiana, that at least the seeds of working class solidarity would have been sown among the masses of Negroes and whites before the Northern hegira": *Black Worker*, p. 325.

¹¹⁷ Similar struggles took place during labour conflicts in the mining towns of the Rocky Mountain West: Melvyn Dubofsky, "The Origins of Western Working Class Radicalism, 1890-1905", *Labor Hist.*, vii (1966), pp. 137-9.

¹¹⁸ Interview in the New Orleans *Times Democrat*, 15 Aug. 1912. See also Covington Hall, "The Farmer Question", *Voice of the People*, 7 Aug. 1913.

sabotaging machinery and sniping at company guards. The superintendent of the Pickering Land and Lumber Company told Saposs that the "redbones" (who were a majority of the white workers at his plant in Cravens, Louisiana) were the "backbone of the 1912 strike", and that the farmers in the area, "who came from the same stock, sympathize with them".¹¹⁹

Wobbly agitators looked for inspiration to the Socialist Party's successful recruiting efforts among the landless farmers of Texas and Oklahoma.¹²⁰ *The Voice of the People*, Hall's militant IWW paper, persistently discussed the common grievances of workers and farmers:

Before the Farmers came the Forestrymen. The magnificent forests of the South are nearly destroyed. The way is open for the farmers to come in. And how are they coming in? Unless all signs fail, they are coming in as TENANTS to the Lumber Kings turned Landlords. The Forest Peon is giving way to the Land Peon.¹²¹

Hall's propaganda inflamed what one operator called the Populist farmers' "natural sympathy" for the workers. When class conflict first erupted in the summer of 1911, *Southwest* noticed "many farmers from the country" attending BTW meetings, "whose presence and enthusiasm showed their sympathy for the new order". In Texas the BTW actually recruited more tenants than workers because it could not penetrate the security of John Henry Kirby's mill towns.¹²²

The farmers remained allied with the Union longer than the townspeople, because they could escape the long arm of the corporation. Operators recognized the importance of the BTW's rural support, and so the manager of the SLOA organized an "educational campaign among the better class of farmers" and devised a scheme "to bring disruption between the farmers and the Union".¹²³ These tactics failed in the countryside but they often succeeded in the towns.

Townspeople as well as farmers supported the Brotherhood, especially in the early days of the conflict. Merchants and

¹¹⁹ Saposs interviews with T. J. Pinchbeck and Supt. Tuxworth, Cravens, La., 27 Aug. 1914, CIR Records.

¹²⁰ On the Socialist movement among Southwestern tenant farmers, see Green, thesis, *op. cit.* See also Thomas A. Hickey, "The Land Renters' Union in Texas", *International Socialist Review*, xiii (Oct. 1912), pp. 239-44.

¹²¹ *Voice of the People*, 14 May 1914.

¹²² SLOA Report to R. L. Weathersby, 13 Jan. 1912; J. H. Kirby to F. H. Waltz, 8 May 1912 and R. F. Bonner to Kirby, 12 Jan. 1912, Kirby Papers. Also see *Southwest*, Aug. 1911, p. 24.

¹²³ M. L. Alexander to M. L. Fleishel, 5 Aug. 1912; and Alexander to C. D. Johnson, 24 June 1912. Kirby Papers.

professionals depended on workers' patronage, but they also shared populist values hostile to corporate capitalism.¹²⁴ The BTW in Silisbee, Texas, an SLOA agent reported, included "farmers, merchants and small men of trade who *naturally sympathize* with working masses" (my italics). Community solidarity helped the merchants as well as the workers. In Merryville, Louisiana, shopkeepers "met and protested against a ten per cent discount on their checks turned in at the American Lumber Company's office". The Company refused to pay the vouchers at par. "The Union Lodge has backed the merchants", wrote one observer, "and claim they will shut the mill down before they will submit to any further discount". The lumber company backed down in the face of worker-merchant demands.¹²⁵

The workers received most of their middle class assistance in established towns not controlled by large corporations. In these older agricultural communities the merchants remained free agents, farmers peddled their vegetables in the streets, and professionals served the community rather than the corporation. The workers could preserve ties with their agrarian past and defend themselves against the dislocations caused by industrialization. In some of these towns the people elected officials openly hostile to the corporations. At DeRidder, Louisiana, in the centre of what operators called the "infected area", workers and townspeople elected E. F. Presley mayor on a BTW-Socialist ticket in 1912. He preserved civil liberties for radicals long after they were suspended in other towns.¹²⁶

Established agricultural villages along the main routes of transportation and communication (such as the Kansas City Southern road running parallel to the Sabine River in western Louisiana) sustained working class protest longer than the "feudal towns" which companies like Kirby's carved out of East Texas backwoods. An SLOA agent explained in 1912 that "owing to the strict surveillance exercised by Mr. Kirby and his managers they [the

¹²⁴ *Southwest*, Aug. 1911, p. 26, and Sept. 1911, p. 23. See also Gutman, "Workers Search for Power", pp. 42-3, and William D. Haywood, "Timber Workers and Timber Wolves", *International Socialist Rev.*, xiii (1912), p. 106.

¹²⁵ SLOA Report to R. L. Weatherby, 13 Jan. 1912, and M. L. Alexander to C. D. Johnson, 5 Aug. 1912, Kirby Papers.

¹²⁶ *Southwest*, March 1913, p. 36; Merl E. Reed, "The IWW and Individual Freedom in Western Louisiana, 1913", *Louisiana Hist.*, x (1969), pp. 61-9; and Report of national IWW organizer, George Speed, *Industrial Worker*, 22 Aug. 1912. Sappos suggested that many farmers and merchants joined the IWW because they thought of the corporations as "intruders": *Left Wing Unionism*, pp. 169-70.

Wobblies] have not been able to break into the Kirby mills . . .".¹²⁷ The Union received some support, however, from Company merchants in the early days. One manager informed Kirby during the first lockout that union men "are running up accounts with merchants in the proximity of the mill . . . which enable[s] them to hold out for what I consider an unreasonable demand". But merchants, doctors, teachers and even ministers often depended on the good graces of the employer, who could deal severely with disloyalty. The officers of the Kirby Lumber Company disposed quickly of a pro-union barber named J. E. Watson, of whom General Manager C. P. Myer wrote:

This man Watson is a B. of T.W., a violent agitator and has given us a great deal of trouble at Camp 8 and we are trying to eject him from the barber shop and it is very necessary that he not get permission to locate on the Lutchter & Moore Lumber Company's land and I hope that you will arrange to prevent it if possible, even though it is necessary to purchase this survey, which consists of about 160 acres¹²⁸

Community solidarity developed naturally in the established agricultural villages where merchants and professionals could express their opinions openly. But in company-owned villages an independent middle class did not evolve and corporation pressure usually prevented a small group of townspeople from allying with workers. These "lumber towns" consisted exclusively of managers, guards and clerks employed by the company, a few merchants and professionals, a tiny group of skilled craftsmen and hundreds of unskilled labourers.¹²⁹ In company towns, like Kirbyville, Texas, the owners' control was total and opposition was almost impossible.¹³⁰

As a result, the BTW was stronger in the more open towns of western Louisiana, like DeRidder and Alexandria, where one company did not have complete control. As industrial strife increased,

¹²⁷M. L. Alexander to M. L. Fleischel, 21 Sept. 1911, 10 and 15 Jan. 1912, Kirby Papers. Social scientists have observed that manual workers who toil in the most "isolated" industrial towns tend to strike and join radical movements more often. See S. M. Lipset, *Political Man* (Garden City, N.Y., 1963), p. 104, and Clark Kerr and Abraham Seigel "The Interindustry Propensity to Strike: An International Comparison", in A. Kornhauser (ed.), *Industrial Conflict* (New York, 1954), pp. 189-212. This hypothesis is not valid for the radical union movement in the Southern pine region.

¹²⁸P. A. Heisig to John H. Kirby, 11 Aug. 1911, and C. P. Myer to B. F. Bonner, 3 Aug. 1912, Kirby Papers.

¹²⁹Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers*, p. 157.

¹³⁰Kirby explained that although the BTW had organized some of the smaller mills in East Texas, it had failed in his company towns. "Our boys are vigilant and watchful", he explained, "and they hate Emerson". Kirby to A. J. Peavy, 9 Dec. 1911, Kirby Papers. Kirby was probably referring to his "boys" in the mills but he might just as well have been writing about his company guards.

however, the corporations in these older, more independent communities coerced various townspeople who were neutral or pro-union. During the height of the conflict in August of 1912, a New Orleans newspaper reporter described the way in which the timber companies had divided the citizens of Oakdale, Louisiana, along class lines. At the start of the lockout "even the most conservative citizens" thought that "concessions" should be granted to the workers in order to cut the ground from under the "socialists". Before long, however, these and other middle class citizens were forced to side with the corporations. When the reporter from New Orleans visited the town, he observed that most of these people armed themselves before walking the streets. The BTW maintained its support among "a certain class of farmers in the surrounding area [probably tenants] and among the laboring element in the town outside the sawmills", but during the first three months of the 1912 lockout, the Union lost its middle class allies.¹³¹

As the tension in towns like Oakdale increased, the corporations supplemented their anti-union tactics with campaigns to undermine the BTW's community support. Company guards and mill managers organized "law and order leagues" to fight the Union. These "homespun shutstaffels" soon recruited the "best citizens" in the town — doctors, lawyers, merchants and the like — and began to attack the BTW.¹³² For example, E. I. Kellie, a candidate for Congress and the leader of the citizens' league, wrote to Kirby from Jasper, Texas, that he and some of the "boys" had driven Wobbly speakers out of town. "We told them" he said, "this was our town" and that we "were the law and we would not allow no one (*sic*) to speak here that preached their doctrine. Kellie's 'Old Ku Klux Klan' are (*sic*) not dead, they were (*sic*) only sleeping and were thoroughly aroused the other night". Moved to eloquence by Kellie's deed, Kirby responded: "The American manhood which your act typified is the sole reliance of this Republic for its perpetuity". In DeRidder, a BTW stronghold, the lumber companies used economic pressure to change the pro-union editorials in the local paper late in 1912. Early in the next year socialist mayor Presley withstood the efforts made by the Good Citizens' League to oust him, but at about the same time this organization of merchants and

¹³¹ *Times Democrat* (New Orleans), 3 Aug. 1912.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 28 July 1912; McCord, "History of the BTW", p. 34; *Southwest*, Aug. 1911, p. 24; and Covington Hall, "With the Southern Timber Workers", *International Socialist Review*, xiii (1913), p. 806.

businessmen successfully drove BTW organizers out of the town.¹³³ The participation of the "best citizens" in the law and order leagues of the pine region, as well as in the Councils for Defense and the Ku Klux Klan which followed later, demonstrated that the middle classes of this region had a greater propensity for authoritarian activity than the workers.¹³⁴

* * * *

As pressure from the corporations and "law and order" leagues increased, the BTW's tactics became more militant, and the strikers began to accept the Wobblies' revolutionary ideology. Class conflict in the Southern forests created class ideology, as it did in the Western mining struggles.¹³⁵ The Brotherhood's original constitution, written in June 1911, promised employers an "absolutely square deal", discouraged "violence in all of its forms", and encouraged thrift and moderation, as well as respect for property rights. After a year of struggle with some of the biggest corporations in the South, the Brotherhood joined a radical movement with very different principles. The IWWs scorned "bourgeois" values like thrift and denied capitalists the right to own private property; they also advocated sabotage ("violence against property not people") as a valuable weapon in the class struggle. The Wobblies discouraged terrorism, however; they preached non-violent resistance, even under the most provocative circumstances. After the Grabow "massacre", Covington Hall and other Southern militants did call upon workers and farmers to arm themselves for "self-defense". Some union men and their supporters did attack scabs, company guards and corporation property, but, on the whole, BTW leaders successfully discouraged random violence throughout the struggle.¹³⁶

The conflict between the BTW and the SLOA reached its climax at Merryville, Louisiana, in the winter of 1913 during a strike which clearly revealed the dynamics of class conflict in the pine region. A

¹³³ E. I. Kellie to J. H. Kirby, 18 Aug. 1912 and Kirby to Kellie, 20 Aug. 1912, Kirby Papers; Morgan, "No Compromise — No Recognition", p. 199; *Southwest*, March 1913, p. 36.

¹³⁴ On "working class authoritarianism", see Lipset, *Political Man*, pp. 87-126. Other vigilante movements led by the middle class in the region are discussed in H. C. Peterson and Gilbert Fite, *Opponents of War, 1917-1918* (Madison, Wis., 1957), p. 40; Charles A. Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest* (Lexington, Ky., 1965); and Green, thesis, *op. cit.*, pp. 385-97.

¹³⁵ Dubofsky, "Origins of Western Working Class Radicalism", p. 139.

¹³⁶ *BTW Constitution and By-Laws*, pp. 1-2; Hall, "Labor Struggles", p. 199.

large corporation, the Santa Fe Railroad, moved into this pro-union town and drove a wedge between workers and the middle class.

The American Lumber Company dominated Merryville, but the workers did not live in a typical company town. Sam Park, the mill manager and part-owner, accepted the Brotherhood and most of its demands. He made his mill at Merryville into a model plant which attracted workers from all over the pine region. The *Times Democrat* estimated that 90 per cent of Park's 1,300 employees were members of the Brotherhood in 1912. It also reported that "public sympathy is decidedly with the B.T.W." and that "Many of the businessmen in Merryville are members of the Union and display B. of T.W. flags in their windows".¹³⁷

The SLOA denounced Park for "treachery" because he refused to follow Association orders to shut down his mill during the lockouts of 1911 and 1912 and because he "treated with the union". The Brotherhood was so successful at the American Lumber Company that the SLOA resolved to do away with Park. The Operators' Association kept applying pressure on the Santa Fe, which owned the controlling interest in the American Lumber Company, and in the autumn of 1912 the railroad corporation forced Sam Park out and assumed control of the Merryville complex.¹³⁸

On 10 November 1912, only a week after the celebrated Grabow trial, the new management fired fifteen union men who had appeared as witnesses for the defence in the Lake Charles court, hoping to precipitate a strike for which the Union was unprepared. Jay Smith assembled the Wobblies of Merryville on the tracks of the Kansas City Southern and told them that the Brotherhood could not sustain a long strike because of the losses it had suffered since the Grabow "massacre". Smith put the question to a vote and the most militant workers in the pine region moved to the left side of the tracks. The next morning 1,200 union men struck against the American Lumber Company and the BTW began the last battle.¹³⁹

Phineas Eastman, a Wobbly who helped to organize black workers, claimed that racial solidarity in the Brotherhood reached its strongest point at Merryville. "Although not one of the fifteen men fired by the company was a Negro", he wrote, "our colored fellow

¹³⁷ *Times Democrat* (New Orleans), 31 July and 15 Aug 1912.

¹³⁸ SLOA circular to C. B. Sweet, 10 Aug. 1911; I. H. Fetty to John H. Kirby, 13 July 1912; J. W. Terry to Kirby, 11 Nov. 1912; E. P. Ripley to Terry, telegram, 13 Nov. 1912; Kirby to C. D. Johnson, 19 Nov. 1912, and M. L. Fleischel to Kirby, telegram, 12 Nov. 1912, Kirby Papers.

¹³⁹ Hall, "Labor Struggles", p. 180, and Morgan, "No Compromise — No Recognition", pp. 203-4.

workers showed their solidarity by walking out with their white comrades and no amount of persuasion or injection of the old race prejudice could induce them to turn scab or traitor".¹⁴⁰

In the first months of the struggle at Merryville, the workers held their own; they even formed a communal organization (Hall called it the "first American Soviet") that attracted considerable attention in radical circles throughout the country. In the strike's third month, after the mill had reopened with "scab" labour, the corporation mobilized its community power to crush what was left of the Union. On 16 February 1913, the Merryville Good Citizens' League struck. Organized by the "leading citizens" in the town, led by the company doctor and staffed by Santa Fe gunmen, the League destroyed the Union headquarters, attacked and "deported" several Wobblies, and burned the soup kitchen staffed by female BTW members.¹⁴¹ *The Lumberjack* screamed "Class War at Merryville" and charged:

Men born and raised in Louisiana have been beaten, shot and hunted down as though they were wild beasts. Our fellow women workers were driven away from the soup kitchen, the only place where hungry children could be fed, at the point of guns. All of the houses of union men were searched without warrant by agents of the capitalist class.

Hall's paper explained later that "about 300 men had guns", paraded in the streets up and down the Santa Fe railroad tracks. "Some asked about the law in Louisiana." Dr. Knight, the leader of the League, "pounded his chest and said this is all the law we want". Knight and his League had indeed taken "the law in their own hands" as the Lake Charles *American Press* reported.¹⁴² And by mid-winter of 1913 the American Lumber Company had exerted enough pressure in Merryville to isolate completely the small number of Wobblies who were still on strike. Having stripped radical workers of their civil rights and separated them from their community supporters, employers easily crushed the timber workers' last revolt.

This struggle was, as Saposs wrote, "one of the most violent in the annals of the American Labour movement"; and clearly most of the violence was directed against the union.¹⁴³ The repressive tactics used by management's hired guns and citizen supporters at Merryville finally destroyed the BTW. But the union movement in the pine

¹⁴⁰ Eastman, "The Southern Negro and One Big Union", p. 891.

¹⁴¹ Hall, "Labor Struggles", p. 183; *American Press* (Lake Charles), 17 Feb. 1913; and see affidavits in Reed, "I.W.W. and Individual Freedom in Western Louisiana", pp. 61-9.

¹⁴² *Lumberjack*, 20 Feb. 1913; *American Press* (Lake Charles), 18 Feb. 1913.

¹⁴³ See Saposs, *Left Wing Unionism*, p. 168. See also Reed, "IWW and Individual Freedom in Western Louisiana", pp. 61-9.

region had already been seriously weakened by the financial drain of the Grabow trial and the SLOA's increasingly effective use of blacklists and "blacklegs" during the "long strike" of 1912.¹⁴⁴

In 1914, when open hostilities abated, Saposs interviewed scores of workers in the lumber towns of East Texas and western Louisiana. He found that nearly all of the Brotherhood's members had been fired and blacklisted, and that union leaders, like A. L. Emerson, who was severely beaten by Santa Fe guards at Singer in 1913, had been driven from the region.¹⁴⁵ The companies even harassed blacklisted union men who remained in the area and were "suspected" of being Socialists or IWW sympathizers.¹⁴⁶

More importantly, the operators succeeded in polarizing the lumber towns and isolating the workers from their community supporters. Peddlers (especially "redbone" farmers who were known to be very sympathetic to the radical movement) were shut out of the company towns and independent grocers were prevented from delivering goods.¹⁴⁷ The black workers, including a large number of strike-breakers, were put in guarded compounds within the mill towns. At Fullerton, Louisiana, where the "colored quarters" had been fenced in, a black cook told Saposs that, "The colored people know that if they talked unionism they would be fired on the spot".¹⁴⁸ Ultimately, the corporations' ability to polarize the lumber towns and isolate the workers (especially the blacks) from the surrounding community was more fatal to the union movement than the more direct and violent attacks their guards made on radical leaders.

Some historians have argued that the Brotherhood's affiliation with the IWW led to defeat, because the Wobblies' revolutionary ideology and interracial, direct-action tactics made it easier for the operators to mobilize public sentiment against the union.¹⁴⁹ But, as Philip Foner

¹⁴⁴ For evidence of blacklisting, see Saposs interviews at Fullerton and Cravens, La., 26-7 Aug. 1914, CIR Records, and F. P. O'Hare to CIR, St. Louis, 6 Nov. 1914 in a folder entitled "Exhibits of Alleged Blacklisting of S.L.O.A.", Bureau of Labor Statistics reports to CIR, Box 9, CIR Records. This is a blacklist document captured and later published by H. G. Creel, a reporter for the Socialist newspaper *National Ripsaw*.

¹⁴⁵ Saposs interviews with Thomas Wisby and W. S. Scott at Fullerton, La., 26 Aug. 1914, and with Louis LaCoz and W. P. Hogan at Pickens, La., 27 Aug. 1914, *ibid.*, and Hall, "Labor Struggles", pp. 184-5.

¹⁴⁶ Saposs interviews with T. J. Pinchback, W. A. Edwards, and J. F. Davis, Fullerton, La., 26-7 Aug. 1914, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Interviews with Pinchback, J. R. Struthers, J. J. Guess, and A. J. Latta, Fullerton, Cravens, and Pickens, La., 26-7 Aug. 1914, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Gus Sims, Fullerton, La., 26 Aug. 1914, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, p. 33, and McCord, "History of the B. of T.W.", pp. 22-3.

pointed out, "these arguments ignore the fact that even before the Brotherhood took so advanced a position on Negro and white unity and before it affiliated with the I.W.W., it was being attacked as a revolutionary, anarchistic organization".¹⁵⁰

In fact, the Wobblies helped the BTW grow in 1912 by providing funds, publicity and experienced organizers who made interracial, direct-action tactics effective. Indeed, the evidence shows that after the IWW arrived (especially in the months during and immediately after the Grabow trial in 1912) community support for the Brotherhood increased.¹⁵¹ Unlike Wobbly organizers in other parts of the country, Emerson, Smith, Hall, Lehman and the other BTW leaders used tactics designed to build a permanent union movement based on indigenous support from many sections of the population.¹⁵² The radicals, especially Covington Hall, the editor of the BTW paper, fought to open the Union to blacks and women (who offered a "splendid resistance" at Merryville),¹⁵³ and sought to win the support of farmers and townspeople (who frequently joined the Brotherhood as dues-paying members). Hall's revolutionary propaganda was always equalitarian and sometimes anti-clerical, but it did not alienate the Brotherhood's community supporters. A Southern radical with a fine sense of regional idiom, the Wobbly editor constantly drew upon the Reconstruction legacy of hatred for Northern "carpetbagger" capitalists, the anti-monopoly sentiment left by the Populists, and the millennial promise of the good

¹⁵⁰ Foner, *Industrial Workers of the World*, p. 256. For J. H. Kirby's red-baiting attack on the BTW in 1911, see *Times Democrat* (New Orleans), 30 July 1911.

¹⁵¹ "Affiliation with the I.W.W. undoubtedly breathed new life into this organization (the BTW)", an SLOA official told Kirby privately: M. L. Alexander to Kirby", 11 May 1912, Kirby Papers.

¹⁵² Dubofsky points out that the Wobblies' militant, direct-action tactics failed to build any permanent unions before 1916. The dilemma which resulted in these years from the IWW's inability to combine revolutionary goals with effective union-building tactics does not seem to have stymied the BTW. Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, pp. 287-318.

¹⁵³ The BTW recruited women as dues-paying members after its affiliation with the IWW in 1912; they played an active rôle in the Merryville strike. Fredonia Stevenson, the leader of the female brigade, continued to recruit women as late as the summer of 1913. "Women, get in line", she wrote. "Get your little red membership card that tells the world that you do your own thinking and don't depend on that bonehead husband to do it for you". *Voice of the People*, 24 July 1913. Women were also urged to solicit funds, agitate among their neighbours, teach their children the basics of the class struggle, and "stay out of the foolish suffergette (*sic*) movement": "Some Things Mothers and Sisters Can Do", *Lumberjack*, 12 June 1913.

society inherent in some strains of revivalist religion.¹⁵⁴

The workers and farmers of the Louisiana-Texas pine region hated the alien corporations that "encroached on their common heritage" more than they feared the Wobblies' revolutionary ideas. The radical union movement organized by the BTW and the IWW grew naturally out of earlier resistance efforts directed against the practices and policies of industrial capitalists. Historians concerned mainly with the violent conflict between the Union and the Operators' Association have failed to appreciate the importance of these initial forms of opposition. The black millhands who resisted industrial discipline and participated in spontaneous walkouts around the turn of the century generated the discontent which made the organization of the BTW possible. And the farmers and townspeople who opposed the new industrial order through the Populist movement in the 1890s provided the Brotherhood with critical political and economic support in 1911 and 1912. When the organizers of the BTW and the IWW brought these black millhands into a union with white workers and farmers, they helped to create a radical, collective response to industrial capitalism.

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¹⁵⁴ The Wobblies often attacked preachers or "sky pilots" who told the workers, in the words of Joe Hill's song, "You'll get a pie in the sky when you die". But, as Dubofsky shows, they also preached of the industrial millennium in the language of Protestant revivalism. Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, p. 219. Joe Hill's song, "The Preacher and the Slave", is reprinted in Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, p. 133.