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MIGRATORY WHEAT HARVESTERS IN THE GREAT PLAINS, 1900-1930

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I. THE MIGRATORY WHEAT HARVESTER

Every summer, as the relentless Midwestern sun transformed the waving green wheat into a golden treasure, streams of thousands of migratory wheat harvesters began flowing from their winter lodgings in city flophouses, college dormitories, and small rocky farms through the railroad arteries to the harvest. From 100,000 to 250,000 men were needed annually during the first three decades of the twentieth century to harvest the immense crops. There were few movements in the world like the wheat harvest in the central plains, and, with the possible exception of the hegira of migratory workers in California, none like it in the United States. The wheat harvest "created in Kansas the most outstanding transient labor problem known in the world," said E. L. Rhoades, a Kansas State Agricultural College professor. "There is in no other state, nation or industry a comparable demand for so great a number of men to be used for such a short period and to be so accurately scheduled in the time of their arrival and the time of their departure."¹

Yet, despite the social tensions inherent in vast movements of transient labor and the corresponding economic impact, the migratory wheat harvest labor phenomenon has received little scholarly attention. Four decades ago Josiah C. Folsom lamented: "Too little is known concerning the migratory classes of farm workers, their number, their

cycles of agricultural employment, their nonagricultural occupations, their working and living conditions, the amounts and sufficiency of their earnings, their relation to many public health and delinquency problems."² Except for post-World War II investigations of California migrant labor and the 1930s exodus of the farmers themselves, little has been done to repair this breach. Several studies³ discuss the efforts of the Industrial Workers of the World to organize the wheat harvesters; but these studies vary widely in quality and are marred by lifting an unusual, albeit dramatic, situation from the overall context of the harvest.

In an effort to widen understanding of the migratory agricultural laborer, and to place IWW activities in perspective, this paper proposes (a) to study the fluctuating patterns of harvest labor⁴ and working conditions of the harvesters and the interaction between transients and permanent residents, and (b) within the overall context of the harvest, to examine the social dynamics and economic impact of a radical union, the IWW, in a rural society. The paper will focus on the critical years 1914-1921 and, while taking account of the wheat harvest throughout the central wheat states, from Texas through North Dakota, western Minnesota, and eastern Montana, will emphasize the harvest in Kansas, which was usually the leading wheat-producing state, and (to a lesser extent) North Dakota, Kansas' rival. Within Kansas the crucial area for consideration are the "header counties," the counties in the western two-thirds of the state where most farmers used headers for harvesting. Since many of the itinerant harvesters were members of the 3,000,000-member contingent of unemployed or casual urban laborers,⁵ a study of their summer activities may also

illuminate an important aspect of this equally neglected group.

Although wheat harvesters had migrated to the central wheat belt since the close of the Civil War, the migration grew to substantial proportions only after 1900. The upsurge may be attributed to the convergence of several factors: an upward trend in farm prices; a decline in farm-ownership turnover; larger farms, which meant the labor available in a farmer's immediate family and in nearby towns was no longer sufficient to handle the harvest; greater specialization in wheat; and the eventual dominance of hard wheat over soft and the introduction of other improved strains.⁶ From 1860 to 1915 the amount of wheat produced in the United States soared from about 170,000 bushels to more than 1,000,000,000 bushels.⁷ In Kansas acres of wheat harvested climbed to 5,316,482 in 1901, increased nearly 20 percent to 6,301,040 in 1902, and reached a prewar high of 9,116,183 in 1914; the state recorded its first 90,000,000-bushel crop in 1901, registered a then-record 180,924,885-bushel crop in 1914, and its harvest fell below 90,000,000 bushels only three times between 1914 and the dust-bowl 1930s.⁸ In North Dakota, meanwhile, a similar expansion took place. Acreage planted to wheat more than doubled between 1898 and 1915, from 4,300,000 acres to 9,400,000; production rose from 69,000,000 bushels to 159,000,000.⁹

In 1900 the five-million-acre stand was still harvested mainly by Kansas residents. By 1903, however, Charles M. Harger, the nationally known Abilene journalist, estimated that 20,000 out-of-state hands were required; two years later the state free employment bureau, which, among its other duties, took an active role in placing harvest

hands, called for 22,500 harvesters. Thereafter, the Kansas harvest usually required 30,000 to 35,000 out-of-state men, but exceptional years, such as 1914 and 1919, demanded as many as 100,000.¹⁰ From 1903 until the mid-1920s, when technological advances once again rendered the farmer largely self-sufficient, the arrival of the waves of harvest hands was an annual occurrence, to be anticipated with mixed dread and relief.

A large corps of outside help was essential to the wheat harvest for a variety of reasons. Unlike some farm crops, wheat must be reaped in a short time or the crop will be lost. If a farmer were lucky he might have a month in which to harvest his wheat; but the maximum safe harvest period was not more than two weeks. The demand for outside harvest help was especially acute in the big wheat country of Kansas and northwest Oklahoma. There hard winter wheat was planted in the fall, and the farmer needed little but his own labor to nurse the crop through to the harvest; since an estimated 85 percent of the acres farmed in this area was devoted to wheat, there was little reason to hire outside help until the harvest. The larger farms here necessitated the use of headers, harvest machines that required five to seven men for efficient utilization. When harvest dawned entire counties turned their efforts to the crop. Skeletal crews, often composed largely of women, tended stores; terms of court were adjourned; wedding dates sometimes had to be postponed until ministers could be retrieved from the fields. Despite the best efforts of town and country, however, the wheat belt counties were too sparsely populated to provide enough manpower. It was not surprising, therefore, that an estimated 56 percent of the harvest force in this region was made up of hands paid by the day, most of them

from out of county. In the leading wheat counties of Kansas, the working male population was more than doubled during harvest.¹¹

In the states north of Kansas the demand for nonresident help, while still significant, was less severe. Wheat was a secondary crop in both Nebraska and South Dakota. Even in North Dakota, which alternated with Kansas in the bid for first place in total wheat production, wheat farmers put 30 to 50 percent of their land into crops other than wheat. Because of the severe winters, northern farmers planted wheat in the spring, usually with the help of a hand paid by the month. Having other crops that needed work, the farmer could keep his month hand busy until he could be employed in harvest. The binder was used for harvest instead of the header in all but southwestern Nebraska and a few farms in northern North Dakota, which made the demand for labor more elastic. A binder could be operated efficiently by two or three men, or even by the farmer himself if the farm were small; moreover, cutting could begin before the grain had completely ripened, thus prolonging the safe harvest period. As a result in Nebraska only about 20 percent of the harvesters were day hands, and in the Dakotas, about 40 percent.¹²

The harvest lent itself to romantic imagery. An editorial writer for the far-off New York Globe wrote fondly of the harvesters' "annual outing." "They were a hardy lot," he said, "accustomed to adventuring, and if they had not the fare to ride to the harvest they swung to the brake-rods beneath." Another editorialist's memory drifted back "to a depot platform where a half hundred cigarets glow in the semi-darkness of a harvest night . . .; to the bivouac out back

of the stock yards where a tin can is a plate and a pile of straw a bed; to grumbling, toiling, laughing, sweating, man-killing days in the field; . . . the thrumming sound of the wheels of the train on to another job, the same thing over again -- a dreary, happy cycle!" In 1927 former Kansas Governor Henry J. Allen noted sadly that "these care-free knights of the box-car rods . . . have now gone to join the buffalo hunters, the hard-riding cowboys, . . . the herds of wild horses." And a Topeka Daily Capital reporter said wistfully: "But harvest wouldn't be harvest without this picturesque array of tramps, down and outers, dry goods store clerks, college students, men out of work, floaters, and what have you."¹³

These romantic pastorals contained an element of truth. Harry Kemp, the tramp poet of Kansas, who sometimes took a turn in the harvest fields, waxed lyrical about the virtues of tramp life. The transient had no trunks to carry, visited no hotels studded with tip-hungry bellboys, bothered with "no trousers to keep creased." He savored the improvised stews and "strong, scalding hot coffee" of the hobo jungles, and the stimulating conversation of men who experienced "real life where it is rubbed raw" instead of the "inane and affected chatter of summer boarders at meat." Kemp even detected an advantage in being ditched from a freight train; "this is no worse an experience," he asserted, "than having to wait for a train which is several hours late -- and that, too, when one has paid one's fare."¹⁴

These sentimental visions of carefree transient life were reminiscent of the "singing slaves" legends of the Old South. They contained the same rationalizations that transformed harsh labor and

deprivation into the picturesque. Though some men might, like Kemp, choose the life of a hobo or a tramp, or follow the harvest for adventure, the majority found the life of a transient casual laborer thrust upon them. They rode freights, slept on piles of straw, and used tin cans for plates not from a desire for freedom, but because they were unemployed.

The transient harvesters represented a relatively disadvantaged element of society. Contrary to legend, few college students made the harvest. Don D. Lescohier, professor of economics at the University of Wisconsin, the most thorough student of harvest labor, found only 1.8 percent were students. In fact harvesters were characterized by a relatively low level of education, only about one-fourth having advanced beyond the eighth grade. The harvest force also generally traveled long distances to the grain fields. Fifteen percent of the men resided in the states in which they harvested, 70.1 percent had permanent residences in other states (generally the Mississippi Valley states east to Michigan and Ohio), and 14.9 percent had no permanent residence. More than three-fourths were single.¹⁵

Rural poverty was a primary motivation for transient harvesters. Lescohier found that 29.2 percent of the harvest force could be classified as agricultural workers. Many of these were hired men who followed the harvest each summer in an attempt to supplement their otherwise meager earnings; few hired hands earned enough on their regular job to support a family. Another large component of the farm-labor sector were themselves farmers, generally from the poor Ozark hill country, who found it necessary to reinforce their incomes.

When the wheat crops in eastern Colorado and Montana fared badly, farmers from those states also journeyed to the Kansas and North Dakota harvests. Lescohier and Rhoades considered the "sturdy, clean and competent farmer boys" the "backbone of the Kansas harvest force,"¹⁶ and many wheat farmers seconded that appraisal. The reasons were apparent. Besides being experienced, they thought of themselves more as entrepreneurs than temporary hired help. Identifying with the interests of their harvest employers, they submitted willingly to farm discipline, usually eschewed strikes for higher wages, and more readily stayed for the entire harvest. Often returning to the same farmers year after year, they were the first hired.¹⁷

Urban unemployment impelled the remaining 70.8 percent nonfarm harvesters to descend on the wheat country. Nearly half of this group described themselves as unskilled, about one-fourth were employed in mechanical and building trades, and the remaining quarter were distributed among miscellaneous skilled occupations. Harvest was but part of a yearly transient cycle for nearly half these nonfarm laborers, who regularly sought employment in from three to eight industries. The jobs they found were erratic; 61 percent said they had lost more than two months of employment per year, and 44.5 percent were out of work more than three months in the year. Although one of the primary goals of these harvesters was to amass a "winter stake" that would sustain them through a cold winter's unemployment, Lescohier found their earnings to be minimal. Of 1,022 hands he interviewed in 1921, 287 had earned nothing in the harvest and 146 had reaped less than \$25. The 735 men who enjoyed some earnings in

that season found that their harvest earnings exceeded expenses by \$36.27.¹⁸ Since the previously described farm laborers probably garnered more, longer, and better-paying harvest jobs, these findings understate what a slender reed the harvest offered nonfarm hands. The high percentage of nonfarm harvesters meant that "the wages, hours, and conditions of employment in urban occupations largely determine the amount of labor available for farm work in any given season and the price which the farmer must pay for it."¹⁹

One reason for the harvester's meager earnings, and for the farmer's frequent anxiety about the supply of harvesters, lay in the chaotic means of distributing hands. "The present system of distributing the workers . . . is no system at all," declared Harvey Osborne, assistant federal labor commissioner in Kansas City, in 1914.²⁰ A harvester's travail from home to harvest typically involved some or all of the following activities. He probably was lured to the wheat country by tales told by friends or through stories in eastern newspapers. Although state employment agencies and, in the 1920s, the United States Employment Service tried to provide accurate information on the demand and supply for labor in various communities, their data was only as accurate as the farmers' willingness to keep their requests and reports up-to-date. Openings, conditions, and wages were often willfully misrepresented, especially by private employment agencies, which collected a fee from every man they told of a job. Most hiring of outside hands took place on street corners and in city parks once the men had actually arrived.²¹

Reaching the harvest was itself a problem. From three-fifths

to three-fourths of the hands stole rides on freight. Railroads often let harvesters ride free, figuring they would collect their fares from the grain they later hauled to market. Most transient harvesters simply lacked money for the fare, but for many hands who could have paid, it became "almost like a custom or a passion to steal rides on the railways, to beat railway companies."²² Freights were more accessible to transients than passenger trains. Harvesters swung aboard the open cars in the sprawling freight yards, always keeping one eye cocked for club-wielding railroad police, or clambered aboard as the trains lumbered out of town or up a grade. Some train crews delighted in forcing transients off the cars; others let them ride if they paid the crew twenty-five cents to a dollar, or sometimes on presentation of a union card. Sometimes a hundred or more travelers might take over a freight, leaving railroad crews and police virtually powerless to stop them. More daring or more hurried hands chose passenger runs. On the limited the transients clung to the brake rods beneath passenger cars or ensconced themselves on the "blind baggage," the perilously narrow vestibule of the baggage car behind the locomotive tender. Travel under these conditions, while agreeable enough in pleasant weather, became an ordeal when it rained, and it was always dangerous. Wheat-belt newspapers carried numerous stories each season of harvesters maimed or killed when they fell from the rods or the blind baggage, when they jumped from the trains, or when freights derailed.²³ Armed robbers preyed on the men, relieving them of their harvest earnings, sometimes killing them, and often forcing them to jump from the moving trains. There was seldom a hint of legal action to find

the parties responsible.²⁴

Freights were slow, uncertain means of reaching a job. In a typical harvest almost all hands could find jobs within a week of the harvest's opening, but to be on the ground in time for that variable date, transients had to arrive well in advance of the probable date. They often found the wages were as much as 50 percent lower than they had been told, whether because of deliberate misrepresentation or a heavy influx of hands, which could have been either natural or artificially stimulated in an effort to drive down wages. Once at work the men were "buffeted around on false rumors which come from every source," promising higher wages or better conditions elsewhere. The harvesters often left before the job was finished, leaving the farmer desperate for other men to finish the work, and often losing time and money for themselves. But if the hands waited until the harvest had ended in one area, he would find himself isolated in an interior town with minimal outside communication and slow transportation, and encounter great difficulty in landing another position. As a result the average hand worked barely half the time he stayed in the wheat belt.²⁵

Although it was often thought that harvesters "made the run" from Texas to the Dakotas, the harvest essentially divided between two distinct but related episodes, the winter-wheat and spring-wheat harvests. The winter harvest reached its peak in Kansas in early July, then tapered away to virtually nothing in south-eastern Nebraska before the end of the month. The spring harvest began in north-eastern Nebraska in the last two weeks of July where a very few men were needed,

gradually expanded as the crop ripened across South Dakota, and reached its climax in mid-August in North Dakota. If all the hands who made the Kansas harvest wanted to "make the run" northward, fully half of them would have had to lie idle for two weeks to a month from the end of the southern harvest to the beginning of the North Dakota boom. Moreover, in North Dakota they would face stiff competition from men arriving from Minnesota and the East and Montana and the West. Experienced harvest hands either left the Kansas harvest early and went directly to South Dakota, or finished the southern harvest and left the wheat belt entirely.²⁶

The vicissitudes of harvest-labor distribution are illustrated by the experiences of Norman B. Daniel, a fairly typical hand, who was interviewed by a field investigator for the Commission on Industrial Relations in Colby, Kansas, in July 1914. Daniel, 34 years old, was the son of a railroader; he went to work at age sixteen as a common laborer, which he remained. About June 15 he began working in the harvest near McAlester, Oklahoma. Then he freighted to Alva, where he signed on with a German farmer at \$2.50 per day and worked until the job was finished four-and-a-half days later. He hopped a freight to Wellington, Kansas, but refused to work for the two-dollar-a-day wages, and freighted on to Wichita and then La Crosse. There he got a job with a farmer for four dollars, but quit when the farmer cut the wage to three dollars. Moving on to Hays, he worked for two hours, until the farmer cut his wages. After three different jobs out of Hays at four dollars per day, he visited Ellis, Oakley, and finally Colby, where he lingered without work as the harvest ended.²⁷

Attitudes towards the harvesters varied. Harvest-belt newspapers occasionally conceded, as did the Topeka Daily Capital, that most hands were "honest, sincere seekers of work." The Great Bend Tribune reported the case of six men who paid back the cost of their free meals once they got a job, and remarked: "A lot of the men here are that style." On one occasion harvest hands formed a bucket brigade to fight a fire at the Roman Catholic church in Colwich, Kansas, and two were badly burned in the process.²⁸

But the annual migrations reminded Hamlin Garland of a "flight of alien, unclean birds,"²⁹ and the influx of masses of strangers into tightly knit rural communities aroused frequent distaste if not outright alarm. "Central Kansas is overrun with strangers just now," a xenophobic reporter wrote in 1913. Even though farmers needed help badly, they often refused to "take the strangers as they were afraid they would not get good men." The Nebraska Farmer summed up the attitude of many wheat-belt citizens when it declared: "To have too many of this class gives a decidedly unhealthy tone to society." A transient's appearance was symbolic. Men "much in need of a shave" or "sallow and bloated from dissipation" were viewed with suspicion, while a "clean-cut appearance shows that they are ready to get to work immediately."³⁰ Garland described the vast changes in social relations that stemmed from an unkempt appearance, when he and his brother ran out of money on a hiking tour. "We looked less and less like college boys and more and more like tramps. and the house-holders began to treat us with hostile contempt," he recounted. One night they slept on the floor of a schoolhouse, another in a farmer's granary. On a third they

concealed themselves in an oat shock; throughout the night a family of skunks rustled about them. "Each day the world grew blacker, and the men . . . more cruel and relentless," he wrote. "We both came to understand (not to the full, but in a large measure) the bitter rebellion of the tramp. To plod on and on into the dusk, rejected of comfortable folk, to crouch at last with pole-cats in a shock of grain is a liberal education in sociology."³¹

Crime, ranging from chickens plucked for hobo stews to robbery and rape, was attributed to the aliens. Topeka police observed "large numbers of sneak thieves" filtering through the city with the harvest troops. In Belleville, Kansas, a harvester rewarded his employer by stealing the farmer's son's wallet; small robberies in Clay Center were traced to men who were "loafing around town under the claim that they are hunting work in the harvest fields." A farmer living alone in Saline County was beaten up and robbed by a harvester. "Offenses against women by unknown men were reported" in the 1916 season, and the Topeka chief of police issued special instructions to "farm wives, alone in their houses while the men of the family are some distance away working in the fields." Disease, too, was said to travel with the harvesters, and Dr. S. J. Crumbine, secretary of the Kansas State Board of Health, suggested a program of vaccination for harvest hands.³²

The popular images of the transient laborers were similar to the stereotyping characteristic of group conflict in many situations. For example Bruno Bettelheim and Morris Janowitz found that whites often characterized blacks (in order) as sloppy, dirty, filthy; lazy, slackers

in work; ignorant, having low intelligence; and of low character, immoral and dishonest.³³ Many of these attributes were applied to the alien harvesters, and they served as important justifications for rock piles, vagrancy convictions, and deportations.

Once in the harvest centers transient harvesters often did experience life where it was "rubbed raw." Many cities and towns warned that "no mooching will be tolerated." Transients caught begging or without money were frequently arrested on vagrancy convictions and sentenced to work off their fines on the city rock pile or the county roads. Some cities made it standard practice to arrest new arrivals at once and put them to work with their \$1.50 daily wage applied to their fines. Herington, Kansas, a town of less than three thousand souls, located at the junction of the Rock Island and Missouri Pacific mainlines, found such a system "very satisfactory," and transients soon gave the town a wide berth. During the harvest season police routinely rounded up idle transients and gave them a choice of going to work in the harvest at prevailing wages or catching the next freight out of town.³⁴ If the tide of transients rose too near the townspeople's threshold of equilibrium, police or sheriff's officers would run scores out of town, being sure to shoot the jungle pots and pans full of holes to discourage future campers. The Huron, South Dakota, chief of police said that initially he was "polite and firm against the undesirables, but when they want a rough handling, he gives them it. They know this and therefore they usually obey him."³⁵

The always delicate relations between transients and townspeople were further strained when a late harvest left hundreds of

hungry men milling about town without work. In 1915, for example, the southern Kansas wheat harvest was delayed seven to ten days by rain. Many men had already come to the harvest country and became "a real problem in some communities." Many of the men were broke, reported Z. G. Hopkins, Kansas labor commissioner, "and unless handled with care the situation has possibilities of danger in it."³⁶ An IWW member reported: "The rains have caused much suffering among the slaves; they are literally eating each other's shoes, watching and waiting, hoping and fearing, always chasing that ever-elusive job." Some communities offered free meals. McPherson fed 250 hands an emergency ration of bread and canned pork and beans; Great Bend citizens contributed a meal of mulligan stew and French drip coffee for 400 hands, in addition to the 1500 meal tickets the city gave out daily for two weeks. In Salina the Methodist church women served a hot breakfast to 650 hands on the church yard, "the first hot meal many of them had had in weeks;" Methodists in Genesco served meals to transients who crushed rocks for the foundation of their new church building.³⁷

Other towns were less charitable. When 350 men in Caldwell threatened to break into stores unless they got something to eat, the mayor organized a posse of more than two dozen armed residents who marched the men to the depot and made them board a southbound freight. Like channeling streams to rush flood water out of town only to dump it on communities downstream, exporting idle hands solved a problem in one place but recreated it another. Enid, Oklahoma, merchants refused to contribute to the hands' upkeep, a riot ensued, and the governor called out the state militia to quell the disturbance. The troops escorted several hundred men to the railroad station, placed them

on a freight train, and refused to let the one hundred men arriving on the freight disembark.³⁸ The 1915 harvest highlighted the dilemma migratory hands faced. If they arrived in the fields too late, they missed the best jobs, or perhaps found no work at all; if they appeared too soon, they risked half a month or more of hunger and perhaps official harassment.

Some communities tried to give hands an alternative to jungles and begging. Many towns maintained temporary public-works projects for a few weeks before the harvest to keep the harvesters employed. Hutchinson set up a harvest-hand billet in the Convention Hall where men could secure sanitary sleeping quarters, baths, and other amenities for 25¢; the Ellis YMCA and community club offered hands free baths, writing and reading material, and cars to haul hands to the farms. Yet for the most part the Rev. P. L. Mawdsley, Kansas director of health welfare services, was correct when he said: "Our attitude has forced them to live along the railroad tracks, in the jungle and like places, like bums, and then we think they are, just because we forced them to live similarly."³⁹

Finally on the farms, conditions did improve. Although the description of the harvest tables as "one of the best commissaries the world ever saw" was an overstatement, harvesters made relatively few complaints about the board on the farm. They generally ate at the same table with the farmer and his family, and, if many of them slept out-of-doors, the summer weather was not too unpleasant.⁴⁰ But little could soften the grueling toil of the harvest itself. Hours were long, usually at least ten per day, and the heat was debilitating.

Temperatures that often rose over one hundred degrees caused as many as twenty-five percent of the men to drop out of the harvest. At times farmers worked two shifts, the first beginning as soon as the dew was dry in the morning and continuing until about noon, the second beginning in early evening and continuing with the aid of auto lights. Nonetheless, reports of men and animals collapsing from the heat were common, and the death of five laborers from the heat was reported on a single day.⁴¹

An indication of what harvesters conceived of as the good life may be gleaned from the proposal C. W. Barto, a transient harvester, sent to the Department of Labor in 1918. Painstakingly outlined with a lead pencil in a school composition tablet, Barto's plan called for the establishment of one central field labor club house, plus one in each state. The houses would provide "a resort for rest and recreation for members at the ends of journeys, when they are at leisure or unemployed, where they can get information in regard to the city, have a library, reading and writing rooms, decent games and amusements, sutch [sic] as Checkers, Chess, Dominoes and so fourth [sic]." A harvester could become a member by contributing 5 percent of his earnings in one year to a fund set up by the Department of Labor and a life membership when he had contributed \$40; men over 55 could retire with full privileges without dues. Barto calculated that 1,000,000 men could contribute \$40,000,000 in three years. Another function of the houses would be to insure even distribution of workers. Barto proposed a sort of Michelin guide to farms, complete with its own elaborate symbol system. A first-class farm would be "a place where the house is neat and clean,

board good, beds good, foot tub and warm water furnished, barn and arrangement [sic] for chore work handy and convenient, where there is [sic] good horses, harness and machinery, where regular hours are kept, regular wages paid without complaint." A first-class-extra farm would have "something extra," such as a shady lawn where men could rest at noon or "a clean outside shanty with a stove in it where a man can heat up water and take a bath in chilly weather." Second and third classes had fewer amenities. But fourth class was rated solely on the farmer himself. If he was "an enemy to labor, trys [sic] to coerce men to work long days without extra pay, complains about working men frequently, complains about wages and makes trouble setteling [sic] wages," the farm would get the lowest rating regardless of its other condition.⁴²

This field hand's visionary scheme to scatter chunks of the Big Rock Candy Mountain throughout the harvest fields reveals how basic were the deprivations of the transient's life and how elemental his desires. More than anything else Barto was asking for recognition of the value of his labor and for the respect essential to individual dignity.

II. TOIL AND TROUBLE, 1913-1916

Despite the ad hoc nature of the harvest-labor distribution system, the supply and demand of harvesters achieved a rough equilibrium in normal years. Yet a few forces could easily disrupt the fragile web. Among the most common problems were inaccurate estimates of the probable crop and the consequent number of men needed, uneven ripening of grain

which interfered with the smooth northward flow of harvesters, and high employment and good wages in industry. The 1913 harvest illustrated the problems resulting from an underestimate of the crop. The state employment bureau called for only 25,000 men, but when the western Kansas crop turned out "several hundred percent" better than expected, the farmers were "in a frenzy to secure help to save the crop." Barton county farmers met every train, including the 4:30 a.m. local, and some counties sent delegations to Wichita in an attempt to round up more help. The Topeka Daily Capital advised through passengers to "strap themselves into their seats to prevent bold farmers from dragging them through the windows and putting them to manual labor in the harvest fields." Farmers used many inducements, most notably a wage of \$3.50 per day in some cases (\$1 above the estimated high at the opening of the season), to drag hands into the fields; and eventually the crop was harvested with minimal loss.¹

The shortage was even worse in 1914, this time because of a record crop. More than 9,000,000 acres were harvested, 50 percent above the previous year; and the 180,000,000-bushel yield almost doubled the previous record of 94,041,902 bushels in 1903.² It became clear quite early that the employment bureau's estimate of 42,5000 hands was too low; northwest Kansas alone was believed to require 36,000 harvesters. The shortage grew more serious when northern wheat ripened rapidly, before the lagging southern harvest was finished. On June 20 Hopkins issued an emergency call for 3,000 to 4,000 men for the northwest harvest at once, and communities resorted to extraordinary measures to induce men to their areas. The boards of county commissioners of both

Pawnee and Barton counties voted to use county funds to import and distribute hands, at an estimated cost of \$4,000 to \$5,000 in each county. Farmers along the Santa Fe Railway from Hutchinson to Dodge City met every train, only to find that all the hands had gotten off farther east. The Plainville-Lincoln Center region found it "almost impossible to get men," and representatives were sent to Salina for men, but without success. Several special trains were chartered. A Rock Island train carried laborers from St. Louis to the northwest, and the farmers and merchants of Ashland in the southwest chartered a Santa Fe special for 300 hands. Fearing that farmers in other towns along the route would kidnap their expensive hands, the Ashland organizers wanted the train run "at top speed and without stops." Tabor College in Hillsboro closed its summer session three weeks early to release students for the battle, and fifteen model prisoners in the Kansas City jail were made available.³

Heeding the desperate cries of many communities, thousands of unemployed men flocked to Kansas late in the harvest of that recession year. Once in the pipeline it was nearly impossible to shut off the flood, and Kansas overflowed with men at the close of harvest, many of whom could not find work. Although farmers in some isolated communities were forced to pay \$3 for help, the prevailing wage was \$2.50.⁴

The 1914 harvest awakened the Industrial Workers of the World to the possibility of organizing the transient harvesters. Wobblies, as IWW members were popularly known, had drifted through the harvest or worked as railroad laborers in the wheat states occasionally since the union's founding in 1905; and IWW orators had been sporadically active

in city parks and on street corners. Preaching the syndicalist doctrines of class warfare, worker control of industry, direct action, and sabotage, as well as representing the transient element towards whom middle-class citizens were already antagonistic, the IWW had stirred fear in the hearts of many Midwestern citizens. The most dramatic IWW encounter in the wheat states was its "free speech fight" in Minot, North Dakota, in 1913, when hundreds of Wobblies were arrested and eventually run out of town for violating city public-speaking ordinances.⁵ In Minot, as elsewhere through the harvest country, IWW agitation had accomplished little but jail terms or deportations for its sympathizers; the union's impact on harvesters' wages and conditions had been virtually nonexistent.

The 1914 harvest demonstrated how vulnerable farmers were to shortages of transient harvesters, whether natural or induced by strikes. Moreover, the IWW held before it the example of its boycott of the California hop fields, which was estimated to have cost the growers \$10,000,000 to \$20,000,000 in lost revenue in 1914. Therefore, in April 1915 at a special meeting in Kansas City the IWW chartered a subsidiary body, the Agricultural Workers Organizations, and numbered it 400, in deliberate satire of that elite body of New York society. The AWO recommended abandoning the street-corner soap boxes in favor of agitation on the job. Job delegates were instructed to get harvest jobs at the going rates, enlist as many members of their crews as possible, then threaten a strike if wages or conditions were unsatisfactory. As a closing shot the AWO issued a manifesto to the farmers demanding a minimum wage of \$3.50 per day, 50 cents an hour for

each hour worked above ten per day, decent board and sleeping quarters, and no discrimination against Wobblies. If the demands were granted, the IWW pledged to do satisfactory work.⁶

In climbing down off the soap box and striving for organization on the job, the AWO was admitting the failure of past harvest efforts and adopting the tactics of unorganized harvest hands. Strikes were nothing new in the wheat harvest. There is ample evidence that harvesters, individually or in small groups, had staged strikes and slowdowns on the farm when farmers had cut wages or when they thought they could win better wages or conditions.⁷ What was new was the IWW's effort to organize harvesters throughout the entire wheat belt and to establish what it liked to call the "800-mile picket line."

In 1915 the harvest returned to more normal proportions; slightly more than 95,000,000 bushels were harvested from more than 7,000,000 acres in Kansas. The state employment bureau estimated that 35,000 out-of-state hands were needed and would be paid an average of \$2.50 per ten-hour day. But railroad officials estimated that more than 50,000 men had passed through Topeka alone en route to the harvest. The demand for labor was complicated by wet spots that delayed the harvest and by burned-out areas in which there was little harvest at all. As a result Kansas was "flooded with men; almost every town is trying to chase the workers out of town," said the IWW newspaper Solidarity. By July 1 the railroads reported as many men riding east as riding west. The IWW made some cautious claims to having raised wages. W. T. Nef, AWO secretary, contended that some places were paying \$3 -- "yes, and many places have paid \$3.50 for the last week, and there will be a lot

more before the harvest is finished up. In some places, the wobblies [sic] who know the harvest life, have things almost their own way, and are bringing good results for their organizations."⁸ By the end of the year the AWO had enrolled 2,208 members, mostly in Kansas and Oklahoma, and accumulated \$14,113 in its treasury, one of the best records of any IWW branch.⁹

If farmers were unwilling to meet IWW demands, some Wobblies turned to sabotage. A Wobbly working in North Dakota said farmers raised wages from \$2.50 to \$3 when they found some of their shocks upside down with cards in them bearing the inscriptions "heads down, \$2.50; heads up, \$3"; "Bum pay, bum work." Another organizer advised members to get on the job and then make their demands; "if they are not granted, turn the cat loose." The use of sabotage was a hotly debated tactic among IWWs. Some opposed it, others favored limited forms (such as slowing-down tactics or poor work), and some countenanced destruction of property. As Forrest Edwards, IWW treasurer, put it: "the only morality to be considered in the class war exists inside of the union."¹⁰

The place of sabotage was part of a larger debate over what tactics were appropriate to the harvest-organizing drives. Another aspect of the controversy concerned the tactics for winning converts. There could be little doubt that the often miserable conditions of the harvest left many transients receptive to any organization that promised to improve their lot. After sympathetically listing the grievances of harvesters, the Topeka Daily Capital pointed out that "they might reasonably complain that they had not been fairly dealt with. But they have no way of getting a hearing. Who is going to listen to the plaints

of a 'hobo'?"¹¹ Although IWW leaders and philosophers envisioned the "harvest stiff" as the vanguard of the class war, the bulk of the harvesters were interested mainly in immediate betterment of their situations, however it came about. John H. Crawford, Kansas labor commissioner, pointed out: "You will find a considerable number of fellows who paid 50¢ in Omaha, Kansas City and elsewhere, to join what they call a union to maintain wages. They parted with the half dollar, received a card, are termed I.W.W.'s, and really don't know anything about what they joined and care less, if the wage is what was promised." The President's Mediation Commission confirmed: "Membership in the I.W.W. by no means implies belief in or understanding of its philosophy. To a majority of the members it is a bond of groping friendship."¹² Many transients joined the IWW under duress. The migratory hands formed a captive audience for IWW propaganda on freight trains, and, if sufficient Wobblies were on board, they often took over the train and beat up or forced off anyone who refused to take out the red card. Many Wobblies deplored these tactics, reasoning that members gained under duress were unreliable; others considered the tactics analogous to enforcing a picket line.¹³

The 1916 harvest appeared to present the IWW with an opportunity. The European war had greatly stimulated American industry and Kansas employment officials feared the quota of 42,500 out-of-state harvesters would not be filled. The Topeka Daily Capital editorialized: "The Kansas harvest this summer is a call to Kansas young men from all the colleges and high schools to enlist and defend the wheat crop. The Kansas Plattsburg camp is the wheat harvest."¹⁴ The IWW had entered the

1916 campaign with demands similar to the previous year's, except that it now sought \$4 daily wages. About 500 job delegates, more than triple the previous year's figure, were at work. In terms of members the AWO's success was nothing short of phenomenal; more than 16,000 men were registered in 1916, giving the AWO a total of 18,000 since it had been organized. The harvest-worker branch contributed generously to IWW publications and the central office, and helped give the IWW as a whole a much needed impetus.¹⁵

The AWO's influence on wages and working conditions is, however, open to debate. The IWW claimed to have achieved its demands throughout much of the harvest belt, and historians have generally accepted this assessment. Melvyn Dubofsky appears to agree that the union had won "job control over many harvesting machines and farm districts, where wages and hours met AWO standards." Stuart Jamieson and Joyce Kornbluh believe the AWO was already successful "in many areas" in 1915; the AWO was, writes Kornbluh, "the first union to organize and negotiate successfully higher wage scales for harvest workers." Philip Foner quotes approvingly the 1945 judgment of the Industrial Worker that the union "had more than doubled the 'going wages' so that a harvest hand remaining in the field for the 'run' (from Texas to Montana) had some hope of leaving the harvest with a few nickels in the poke." Charles James Haug considers the AWO to have been "moderately successful" in North Dakota.¹⁶ Since both OBU sources and historians agree that 1916 represented the peak of IWW harvest influence, that harvest bears careful examination.

Dubofsky, Jamieson, and Kornbluh base their cases on IWW

sources, chiefly Solidarity and International Socialist Review. Like all evidence, these sources must be used with care. The pro-IWW sources are especially subject to overly optimistic claims for which little evidence was adduced and for reports not of actual influence exercised but of victories about to be won. Generalized claims of success often lacked supporting details that would have lent credibility; other times the evidence presented failed to sustain the conclusions offered. Early in the 1916 harvest, for example, Solidarity reported that Oklahoma workers "are in favor of the One Big Union all along the line. . . . To prove that we can say now, that about 75 men lined up since the Conference in Kansas City." Seventy-five members was not a bad showing early in the season; but when thousands of harvesters were on the ground, it scarcely proved that workers were "in favor of the One Big Union all along the line." Reports abounded of promised victories: "There should be no great obstacle to get the \$4.00 a day"; "Good chance for job control and \$4.00 a day."¹⁷ When these reports are subtracted from reports of actual successes, the roster of IWW achievements diminishes considerably.

The pro-union sources themselves describe the limitations of IWW appeal, yet these have generally gone unrecognized by historians. In denouncing the hard-to-organize "hoosiers," as the Wobblies called the farmers making the harvest, the union tactily recognized the limits of its appeal. "Independent" harvesters sometimes bitterly resented the IWW presence, even engaging in pitched battles with them.¹⁸ IWW sources, when followed over a period of years, also undermine the exuberant claims staked early in the campaigns. Throughout the 1919 harvest, for

example, IWW publications expressed considerable optimism (e.g., "The spirit of 1916 has come to life from the beginning in the Oklahoma fields"); but reports a year later indicated the 1919 campaign achieved very little in terms of raises in wages and conditions.¹⁹

Another weakness of these historians' accounts is their failure to place IWW activities in the overall geographical and economic context of the harvest. AWO efforts are treated as if they took place in a vacuum unaffected by external forces. Haug writes, for example, that although the IWW's \$4 wage "was never universally met in the North Dakota harvest, wages did vary from \$3.00 to \$3.50 for ten hours' work." These rates were better than the \$2.50 to \$3 paid in South Dakota, he continues, and they were higher than the \$2.50 to \$3 paid in North Dakota in 1915. "Thus, it does appear," Haug concludes, "That the AWO was influential in improving conditions in the North Dakota harvest fields."²⁰ It is probably that North Dakota wages ranged from \$3 to \$3.50, but it is doubtful that the IWW was responsible for very much of the increase. From 1900 to 1930 North Dakota harvest wages were almost always 50 cents to \$1 higher than its southern neighbor's, regardless of the level of IWW activity in either state.²¹

The basic reason for the 1916 wage level was the industrial boom. The decrease in industrial unemployment (from 15.5 percent in 1915 to 6.3 percent in 1916),²² combined with the rise in average hourly industrial earnings (from \$.319 in 1915 to \$.348 in 1916),²³ would adequately account for most of the harvest-wage increase. Both IWW and wheat-belt newspapers expected the industrial upturn to contribute to an upward trend in harvest wages.²⁴ The dramatic surge in harvest wages in

1918 and 1919, when the IWW was by its own admission impotent, confirms that forces other than the AWO had a very significant impact on wages. In view of the close relationship between industrial wages and agricultural wages, especially before World War I,²⁵ the most surprising development was that harvest wages remained as stable as they did, regardless of the IWW.

The most surprising, and telling, omission in previous accounts is the lack of confirmation for IWW claims from non-IWW sources. Foner quotes the Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader in 1916: "The help question has been a very serious problem in many sections of the state because members of the Industrial Workers of the World have demanded from \$4.50 to \$5 per day and board and lodging for their services, and the farmers have been compelled to grant these demands to get their grain harvested."²⁶ Since this is the one bit of evidence historians have introduced from non-IWW sources that substantiates an IWW impact on wages, it is important to examine the entire article. The Argus-Leader reporter did concede that "The help question has been a very serious problem in many sections of the state." However, he attributed this not to the IWW but to the hot weather's causing the wheat to ripen with a rush, thus creating a heavy demand for labor at once throughout the state. The Argus-Leader writer went on: "Members of the Industrial Workers of the World have demanded from \$4.50 to \$5 per day and board and lodging for their services, but harvest hands independent of this organization have been satisfied with \$2.50 and \$3 per day, and thousands of them are being employed in different sections of the state at these prices." The portion of the quotation italicized

above does not appear in the article. Indeed, it would have been surprising to see such demands granted when the AWO's stated goal was a \$4 wage. The only thing farmers were "compelled" to do, according to the Sioux Falls paper, was "work early and late in getting their small grain harvested."²⁷

A more thorough survey of non-IWW sources for the 1916 harvest is in order. Despite their limitations, the best local sources available are the county newspapers. These papers were, of course, prejudiced against the IWW. But they were not unaware of Wobblies; if anything, they exaggerated the IWW influence. In the country editor's typewriter a few Wobblies became a mob, a lightning-fired wheat stack the product of an IWW "kitten." Had the IWW registered a substantial impact on wages and labor supply, especially to the extent of controlling entire harvest districts, wheat-belt papers would have reported it, accompanied no doubt by cries of anguish.

Local newspapers were examined for the sixteen Kansas counties that each produced more than 2,000,000 bushels of wheat in 1916.²⁸ All these counties lay west of the 98th meridian, a long distance from population centers, and were subject to harvest-hand shortages that presumably would have offered the AWO an opportunity. Only in Trego County, the site of a major confrontation between Wobblies and townspeople, did the papers find much IWW influence. The union "interfered with the wages and securing of help to some extent," said the Trego County Reporter, "but most of the farmers succeeded in getting first class crews who were willing to do it right."²⁹ The other local newspapers were nearly unanimous in reporting an average county wage of

\$3.³⁰ Several papers explicitly stated that Wobblies walked away empty-handed. "So far as is known none of the I.W.W.'s got their \$4 per day," said the Plainville Times, "and [they] are still going west in search of it." The Larned Tiller and Toiler said that "none have been employed at that price [\$4]."³¹ There were numerous reports of Wobblies agitating for the \$4 wage being told to leave town, which suggests that agitation was being carried on not merely "on the job" but quite visibly in town.³²

When IWW sources are assessed, wage rates are compared with prevailing industrial and geographic patterns, and the testimony of local contemporary sources is weighed, it becomes highly unlikely that the AWO, in its best year, had a substantial influence on labor supply, wages, or conditions. The union doubtless won job control on some machines, and perhaps exerted some pressure on wages in isolated harvest districts. Throughout the big wheat belt harvest of 1916, however, the IWW was but a ripple in the stream of larger economic forces.

The impact of the IWW in the wheat belt was felt in widespread social conflict between Wobblies and townspeople. Perhaps because it was a staging ground for the North Dakota harvest with less work of its own, South Dakota experienced considerable unrest. Trouble first flared in Mitchell when five Wobblies were jailed on vagrancy charges. The One Big Union appealed to its members to flood Mitchell with IWWs. When several hundred Wobblies arrived in the town on a Milwaukee Road freight, they found that policemen with drawn revolvers had formed a cordon across the main street. After a conference between IWW leaders and police, the transients were allowed to buy their breakfast and

continue on their way. Later in the day the five Wobblies were released from jail. Less than ten days later, following the IWW seizure of a Milwaukee passenger train between Yankton and Mitchell, the mayor of Mitchell asked the governor to order a detachment of the state guard to the city. That night fighting broke out between independent harvesters and IWWs, with some shots exchanged. In response a hastily organized posse of 200 armed Mitchell citizens stood watch through the night, then rounded up, disarmed, and deported 250 Wobblies. A similar battle between independents and Wobblies broke out in Redfield when 200 independents descended on that town with the intention of "exterminating the I.W.W. men skulking in their midst." Three Wobblies were injured, one seriously. A posse of 250 armed local men restored order. A few days later 200 Mitchell citizens again responded to a riot call. They met an inbound freight decorated with 600 riders, whom they searched, disarmed, and deported. At the village of Letcher, 300 IWWs stormed the jail to force the release of two fellow workers who had been jailed for disorderly conduct. The conflict dissipated when the opening of the North Dakota harvest drained the workers from South Dakota.³³

As the state with the greatest demand for harvest labor, Kansas experienced much conflict with Wobblies in 1916. Early in the harvest two attempts by harvesters to rush the gates at Riverside Park in Hutchinson were turned back when guards fired over their heads; thirteen were arrested. When three OBU organizers were jailed in Salina, 250 IWWs marched on the Salina city hall to demand their release. The police ordered all Wobblies to leave the city; the workers responded with a telegram to the Chicago headquarters asking that 10,000

members converge on Salina within a few days. The next day sixty Wobblies again marched on city hall; in return for cancelling the message to Chicago, the jailed members were released. In little Bunker Hill trouble erupted when a Wobbly vigorously denounced the community to the city marshal, who took offense and arrested him. Sixty IWWs descended on the town and forced their member's release. They then apparently began making threats against the town, which induced the frightened residents to appeal for help. "In a short time autos loaded with irate farmers armed with shotguns, rifles and revolvers, began to come in from all directions." As the farmers patrolled the streets, "every stranger was eyed with suspicion, and the I.W.W. element, seeing that any hostile move on their part would meet with decided opposition, kept quiet while the farmers were in town."³⁴

Perhaps the most dramatic and instructive confrontation between Wobblies and townspeople occurred in early July in WaKeeney a town of less than 2,000 persons in northwest Kansas. Because the incident was thoroughly reported by two local newspapers, and because of the classic elements involved in the struggle, this encounter has been selected for extended analysis. The WaKeeney incident will be discussed within the useful framework formulated by Neil J. Smelser for study of the hostile outburst.³⁵ In Smelser's model several steps lead to the hostile outburst. First is a general condition of strain, often associated with a cleavage of values, which in turn may be related to class and political distinctions. Another factor often present is evidence of "an inadequate police or military control apparatus." The law, in turn, often assigns second-class status to a

particular group; this is often associated with the closing of a method of airing grievances. These last two elements may serve as the precipitating factors that transform a general situation of strain into a hostile outburst. Once the outburst is under way, communications among members of the group assume key importance, as does the ecology of the outburst.

All of these components were present in WaKeeney in July 1916. The community was undergoing considerable strain. The normal tensions of harvest, such as transient labor, mechanical problems, and long hours, were exacerbated by the presence of the IWW. Preaching a radical politico-economic doctrine that emphasized class division, the IWW usually had poor relations with farm towns. The IWW, too, faced important strains: the hardships of transient life, the feeling of oppression by society, the presence of unorganized harvesters who undermined the goals of the union. Added to these generalized conditions of strain was the obviously inadequate police force, plus the knowledge that the state guard had been shipped to Texas for duty on the Mexican border. When rumors spread that Wobblies outside the city had threatened harvesters who took jobs at less than \$4, the townspeople's generalized beliefs about the union appeared confirmed; and the residents personified the Wobblies as agents of evil. They thus became, to the local citizenry, legitimate objects for attack.

As a result of the rumor that Wobblies had threatened the independents, peace officers decided to search the IWWs for weapons. The one man found with a gun was sentenced to ten days in jail, plus costs, for carrying a concealed weapon. The judge also ordered the

convict's companions "escorted to the edge of town and shown the road leading west." The law had clearly assigned the union men second-class status; and, by ordering them to move on, the judge had closed any method of presenting grievances. The I.W.W.s then threatened "to return with reinforcements and release their companion."

About 200 Wobblies, some of them armed, returned to WaKeeney about 3 a.m. aboard a gravel train. The three officers who met the train realized they were poorly matched and believed they had little choice but to let the group march on the sheriff's office. When the IWWs neared the courthouse the deputies gave further evidence of the ineffective police control by taking flight. Inside the sheriff's office the group's leaders negotiated for a time with the sheriff; but, eventually growing tired of the delay, they "shoved about a dozen guns in [Sheriff] Allman's face and grabbed his hands at the same time. Then they took the jail keys, handcuffs and all guns around the office, proceeded to let their companion out of the cell and as a sober afterthought decided to lock up the sheriff."

The goings-on in the sheriff's office served as a precipitating factor for the local citizenry. A passerby rang the fire bell, and a number of residents "gathered near the drug store where they were sworn in as deputy sheriffs." Meanwhile "dozens of farmers" responded to telephone calls for help, "grabbed the nearest shooting iron and started for town to assist in quelling the disturbance." The communication via fire bell, gathering in the streets, and hurried telephone calls facilitated the formation of a countergroup. "The form of hostility . . . depends . . . very much on the location and

accessibility of objects of attack." In this case the IWW proved vulnerable to a mass roundup by the aroused residents, since they had grouped together at the town stockyards. The Wobblies were surrounded and searched, their leader was escorted to the jail, and the OBU members were then marched eastward. During a rest stop one of the posse's guns accidentally discharged and buckshot lodged in the chest of an IWW. This served as another precipitating factor for the transients, who "began to talk about rushing the deputies and taking the guns away from them." These threats alarmed the WaKeeney group, who appealed to town for reinforcements, "and every man who could get his hands on a gun got into an automobile and started for the scene of trouble." Bolstered by 100 additions, the local citizens had no more trouble in controlling the IWW group. The Wobblies decided they had enough money to buy train tickets out of the county for all their members, which they were allowed to do. As a parting gesture the IWWs "threatened to return in greater numbers and set fire to the town." The WaKeeney mayor held a special meeting at which "all men who could muster a gun and had not been previously deputized were sworn in as deputy sheriffs," and a patrol organized. Although farmers, fearing the IWWs might return and set fire to the wheat stacks, rushed to take out fire insurance, little unrest was reported. Social conflict had resolved the ambiguous power situation, "balancing and hence maintaining a society as a going concern."³⁶

Other communities were also subject to a general condition of strain when Wobblies were present, yet only in certain cases was the strained atmosphere transformed into a hostile outburst. Why did

hostile outbursts erupt in some communities but not in others? The precipitating factor in almost all cases appears to have been the closing of methods of expressing grievances after the jailing of an IWW member.

As in the WaKeeney incident, the sequence usually went like this. After a period of uneasiness one or more IWW members were arrested, usually for a trivial or trumped-up offense. The Wobblies often felt, usually with justification, that the arrest had been unfair; the real offense had been that the men were members of the IWW. They then sent a committee to negotiate with the county officers. Sometimes, as in Dodge City in 1916, a compromise was reached in which the sheriff released the prisoners in return for a pledge from the IWW contingent to leave town. But if this crucial process of negotiation broke down, by the county's either remaining adamant or even ordering the IWWs out of town, the collapse of the method of expressing the grievance could precipitate a hostile outburst. The outburst usually took the form of Wobblies, some of them armed, descending on the jail and attempting to force the release of their members. Their success depended largely on the adequacy of the local constabulary. In larger towns, with a few exceptions, the IWW did not secure the release of prisoners by overwhelming the sheriff or jailer and thus forcing the workers' release; instead in these towns, such as Dodge City, Salina, and Mitchell, the prisoners were released only after the community obtained a pledge from the IWW to leave town. Only in small towns and villages, such as WaKeeney, Bunker Hill, and Letcher, were Wobblies able to obtain members' releases without a quid pro quo. But in these smaller

towns the IWW's success was temporary. Although the power balance between Wobblies and townspeople might remain ambiguous for a time, the social conflict served as a unifying force. Social conflict submerged divisive elements and welded diverse groups within towns into one body, and forged a temporary alliance between town and country to preserve law and order and viability of the community.

By the close of the 1916 harvest, the Agricultural Workers Organization had made itself highly visible throughout the wheat belt. Although the AWO had enjoyed little success in raising wages, it had garnered a surprising number of members, and it had aroused widespread opposition from local communities. Whatever prospects of success the AWO may have had were soon radically altered, for the next harvest took place in the hostile atmosphere of World War I.

III. WAR AND DECLINE, 1917-1930

When the United States entered World I in April 1917, the wheat harvest assumed a new national importance. Agriculture was as vital to the war effort as industry, as demonstrated by the formation of Herbert Hoover's Food Administration and its crusades for food conservation through "meatless Mondays," "wheatless Wednesdays," and other measures. The national labor picture was chaotic in the early months of the war; labor grew scarce in key sectors, and wages were "jumping everywhere, with the sky apparently the only limit." Throughout the wheat belt fear spread that the harvest would be seriously hampered.¹

A deliverance of sorts appeared in the form of a short crop.

A severe drought succeeded a hard winter and reduced the Kansas harvest to 41,000,000 bushels, the poorest since 1896; the North Dakota crop totalled less than 60,000,000 bushels, well below that state's average of 100,000,000 bushels. In Kansas the state employment bureau reported that farmers asked the agency to supply only 7,500 harvesters, the second lowest figure since the office's founding; only ten counties requested outside help. Much of the help was provided by western Kansas farmers who journeyed to the central counties. Wages appear to have averaged about \$3 per day.²

One of the most unusual episodes in the history of the wheat harvest occurred in North Dakota in 1917 when the Non-Partisan League, representing thousands of farmers and holding some offices in the state government, negotiated a harvest-labor agreement with the IWW. Officials of the two organizations reached accord on a standard rate of \$4 per ten-hour day. But when the agreement was submitted to the NPL membership at several meetings, some conventions overwhelmingly approved it while others denounced it, and the League officials hastily dropped the proposal. The reasons for the League's seeking the agreement and for its eventual collapse are unclear. NPL officials may simply have considered it good business -- "a case," as one delegate said, "of the organized farmer making an agreement with the organized farm laborer for the benefit of both." The quasi-socialist League may also have wished to co-opt its opposition on one flank in order to press its main attack against the railroad, banking, and grain-elevator interests. Haug's suggestion that the agreement faltered "probably, because many of the farmers distrusted the IWW," is undoubtedly largely accurate. Elwyn

Robinson believes the proposal was abandoned because the price was too high, which is probably also largely correct, especially in view of the impending short harvest.³ In addition many League farmers may have begun to share the mushrooming sentiment that the IWW was disloyal, an organization not to be bargained with but suppressed.

Judicial suppression, initiated by the federal Department of Justice, grievously undermined the IWW's effectiveness during the war. In fall 1917 more than 200 Wobblies were arrested in Chicago, Sacramento, and Wichita on charges of conspiring to interfere with the war effort. As the One Big Union fought, and lost, myriad trial and appeal cases, the organization was transformed from a fighting union into a defense front.⁴ With its leaders imprisoned, and with federal, state, and local authorities opposing the IWW in seemingly every field and jungle, the once promising harvest campaign sputtered and all but died. Few transients decorated the car tops during the war, and wheat-belt newspapers marveled at the absence of agitators. An IWW influence on wages and conditions in harvest fields was virtually indiscernible, the OBU itself feeling lucky to survive "the most severe persecution."⁵ The few local references to IWW activity concerned suspected sabotage, mainly the wrecking of an occasional header or thresher and suspicious wheat fires that were immediately attributed to Wobblies, even when none had been observed in the area.⁶

The IWW's low profile scarcely eliminated all elements of danger and uncertainty from the 1918 harvest. That year the wheat belt faced its potentially most serious harvest-labor shortage up to that time, and at a critical juncture of the war. Both the Kansas and North

Dakota crops returned to average, Jayhawk farmers reaping 93,000,000 bushels from 6,800,000 acres, and their northern counterparts recording about 100,000,000. The labor situation was exacerbated by industrial demands and heavy draft calls. Industrial wage rates had risen by nearly 25 percent over the previous year, encouraging men to continue working in the cities; and the federal railroad administration had boosted passenger rates to three cents per mile, discouraging fare-paying harvesters.⁷

A novel proposal by a government consultant, Thorstein Veblen, would have utilized the OBU to combat the harvest shortage. Veblen stressed the IWW's appeal to transient laborers and emphasized that there was a "good deal of unofficial collusion" between the OBU and the Non-Partisan League. Both groups faced common antagonists: business interests, the country-town commercial clubs, and the temporary defense organizations whose charges of disloyalty and violence against Wobblies and Leaguers "it is similarly believed or presumed . . . are in very great measure a cloak to cover other and more sinister purposes than the National Defense." Believing that the IWW would perform good work if it were fairly treated, Veblen proposed organizing Wobblies into an elite corps of laborers who could be shifted from place to place as demand dictated. He also suggested that the IWWs under indictment be dealt with "as expeditiously and as leniently as the legal formalities will permit," that the post office quit obstructing the union's efforts to raise defense funds, that bail for the indicted men be cut to \$500 (it ranged as high as \$10,000 for some members), and "that measures be taken to discontinue the use of force by local authorities seeking to

hinder the free movement of workmen in these states."⁸

Veblen's intriguing proposal in effect would have extended the special wartime relationship between the federal government and the trade unions to the IWW as well. The Wobbly response is hard to assess. Many workers might have responded eagerly to the recognition of their special role in agricultural production; other might have feared the government would thereby co-opt the movement, and that, true to IWW doctrine, Wobblies had no place in a capitalist war. The proposal would certainly have stirred bitter opposition from the IWW's traditional enemies, and whether a special Wobbly cadre would have been welcomed even among a majority of NPL farmers is problematic. In any event a government that had seized the wartime emergency as a cloak for the long-sought goal of suppressing the IWW would extend no recognition beyond that of deviant.

The sweeping measures adopted at all levels of government in an attempt to insure an adequate labor supply were very different. The Department of Agriculture signed a memorandum with the Department of Labor under which USDA county agents and other officials agreed to canvas the labor supply in harvest localities, and Labor in turn promised to bend every effort to recruit men and direct them to the areas where they were needed. Farm-labor specialists were appointed to oversee the work in each state. The Kansas officer, E. E. Frizzell of Pawnee County, held meetings in 85 of the state's 105 counties. Kansas would be short 100,000 harvesters, he said, 80,000 who usually came from out-of-state (this was an exaggeration), and 20,000 Kansans who were in the army. The shortage would have to be made good largely by

shifting labor within the state. Frizzell urged all nonessential businesses to close during the harvest, and he practically demanded that building and construction work, which siphoned off much potential harvest labor, cease for ten to twelve days to enable men to harvest. He argued for a one-cent railroad fare, which the railroad administration turned down, and sought furloughs for all military men who were not being sent to Europe at once, which was also rejected. In order that competition between communities for hands would be reduced, he encouraged meetings across the state in which farmers tried to agree on minimum wages. These conferences reached divergent standards; a Topeka session thought the wage should range from 30 cents to 50 cents per hour, a Salina meeting adopted 45 cents per hour. When shortages became acute, however, farmers showed their willingness to evade these standards.⁹

One of the most publicized tactics of the harvest drive was the use of "twilight crews," businessmen and city laborers who left work about 4 p.m. to harvest until dark. Besides being touted as a harvest panacea, the twilight crews represented an effort to reaffirm the unity of country town and countryside in the face of often strained relations. Like many other cities, Topeka entered the campaign with high hopes and accepted a quota of 6,446 hands. Chamber of Commerce recruiters clad in overalls appealed to business men; organized labor agreed to provide 5,000; ministers blessed the drive from their pulpits, one divine professing he would be happy with a small Sunday morning congregation if the missing were toiling in the fields. Recruits were given membership cards in the "Harvest Army of Kansas," which read as

follows: "I hereby enlist in the Harvest Army of Kansas, and as a patriotic duty offer my services and agree, if needed, to perform farm labor as outlined on the reverse side of this card, subject to call on days indicated, for the preservation of farm crops which supply the food necessary to win the war." Evidently such inducements were not entirely adequate, as only 3,000 men joined the harvest army. The Atchison city council went further by adopting a new vagrancy ordinance that required all males between ages 16 and 65 to register with the city clerk and state their physical condition, employment, and whether they were willing to work on a farm, in a factory, or in government service. Anyone not usefully employed or failing to register was subject to a fine of \$10 to \$50. The law enjoyed a good response and city officials expected to glean 600 twilight harvesters with the procedure.¹⁰

Some officials proposed sterner measures. C. C. Jackson, deputy United States marshal in Topeka, asked the justice department for permission to send twelve enemy aliens into the harvest. He proposed to march the prisoners out of the city every morning as he rode "mounted on the best horse the city affords." Jackson outlined his proposal: "All I want to keep them shocking wheat is a Winchester rifle and a good vantage point. They would be afraid to break for liberty. I could pick them off one at a time, and before the last man was out of sight he would be in line to become a casualty." Although the Topeka Daily Capital found the plan "picturesque and scenario-like," there was no report of the justice department's agreeing to the idea.¹¹

Another proposal that failed to receive administration

sanction would have seen the harvest fields invaded by women. Mrs. D. W. Mulvane, head of the women's committee of the Kansas State Council of Defense, volunteered women's services; but Secretary of Agriculture David F. Houston suggested instead that they tend their gardens.¹²

Though they lacked official encouragement, thousands of women quickly left their gardens for the fields. One observer estimated that women and girls comprised five percent of the harvest force, but he conceded that was probably a low figure. Family labor was clearly important, perhaps decisive. With older youths in the fields of France, younger boys toiled beside their fathers and mothers. Longer hours for all harvesters increased production. Twilight crews participated actively, but their record was mixed. Some accounts praised the volunteers, while others complained the "silk-shirted gents" were "unable to cope with the task, and experienced hands are urgently needed." Some businesses closed for the harvest, and entire towns stood virtually deserted as the townspeople poured into the fields. An undetermined number of itinerant harvesters augmented the home forces, and farmers in some areas resorted to paying as much as \$5 per day for them. Through a combination of all these components, Kansas farmers harvested the crop with little loss.¹³

Nebraska and South Dakota farmers encountered less difficulty with their smaller crops. In Nebraska "the harvest fields were well supplied with extra help and no grain [was] lost for want of workers," labor department agents reported.¹⁴ In South Dakota federal agents supplied enough labor for all but three counties, which were

far from the district office and had poor railroad connections.

Forty-five cents per hour was adequate in half the counties, but in the others fifty cents, a South Dakota record, was required.¹⁵

The potential shortage that had been overcome in 1918 materialized in Kansas in 1919. Although the war had ended, millions of men remained under arms, and industry continued to operate at near its wartime peaks. The three-cent fare imposed by the railroad administration remained in force, and there was a widespread belief that the government railway operators were less lenient towards transients than the private corporations had been. These factors could have been overcome without great difficulty had it not been for the bumper crop. Kansas growers harvested 146,109,000 bushels of wheat, the second-highest total recorded up to that time. Of greater importance, the war had stimulated a vast expansion of wheat-growing; 11,640,000 acres were harvested, well above the 1914 record of 9,116,000 acres, and many of these newly planted acres were in areas of western Kansas where poor railroad connections made it harder to import help. Moreover, the southern Kansas harvest moved slowly while the northern cutting arrived early, creating a heavy demand throughout the wheat belt all at once. The state employment bureau estimated that 200,000 hands would be needed, half of them from out-of-state. The office said wages would average 50 cents per hour, but events were to make that estimate seem absurdly low.¹⁶

Another factor with a somewhat imponderable effect on the harvest was the fear of an IWW invasion that, according to several observers, frightened thousands of independent harvesters out of coming

to Kansas. The main prophet of an IWW flood was Fred Robertson, federal district attorney for Kansas, who had harbored an obsession about the Wobblies since he had arrested two score of them in 1917. Their trial date was approaching at last in summer 1919, and the prosecutor claimed that 1000 Wobbly delegates alone would try "to avenge their mates." Advising farmers to exercise great care in hiring harvesters "lest a reign of terror be spread among the harvest fields," Robertson tried to persuade the state legislature to enact special anti-IWW measures and to appropriate a \$20,000 contingency fund to be drawn on to counteract the menace. The district attorney also asked Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer to grant permission for federal agent Howe to travel throughout the state assisting local authorities and to give him several additional deputies. Palmer pointedly replied: "The duty primarily of protecting life and property is incumbent upon State authorities. . . . Agent Howe . . . is not authorized to travel over the State of Kansas except upon direct authority from this Department."¹⁷

Although the attorney general and the legislature proved disappointing, many other public and private agencies took precautionary steps. The newly formed American Legion and the aging Anti-Horse Thief Association volunteered to perform guard duty and to relay information about suspicious groups or activities. Rifle clubs were formed among local units of the National Guard, and Major P. B. Hamlin, commander of the ninth battalion intimated that "these rifles may be used to good effect in ridding the state of I.W.W." County attorneys and peace officers met "behind locked doors, with guards posted to prevent any spy of the I.W.W. getting information," to formulate plans for secret agents

and rapid relay of information. Police chiefs agreed that Wobblies "and other undesirable citizens" would "not be rushed out of one Kansas town . . . only to bother another town"; instead, "if possible the man will be made over into a useful citizen," or at least jailed until after the harvest. Finally insurance company representatives, railway police and secret-service agents meeting with State Fire Marshal L. T. Hussey and a Robertson deputy agreed to provide armed guards for the wheat fields and to place 70 "trained observers" throughout the state "on the mission of watching and warning."¹⁸

Yet despite the mountainous labors of Kansas peace officers, the IWW sabcats proved to be hardly more dangerous than mice in the fields. In McPherson, where the county attorney had declared "war to the knife" against the OBU and ordered officers to arrest suspects "upon the slightest provocation," eight Wobblies fled the town when told to depart or go to work or to jail; later an "old, torn I. W. W. card" was found on a transient. Several Wobblies were arrested in other parts of the state, but probably fewer than in previous years. A few cases of IWW sabotage were reported. In one incident Wobblies were said to have hidden rocks in wheat shocks, hoping to damage the threshing machinery, but the culprits proved to be two seventeen-year-old local boys. As labor commissioner Crawford said: "if the lightning struck a wheat shock it was charged to the I. W. W.s."¹⁹

In late June and early July, Crawford toured the wheat belt, talking with local harvest agents, and keeping his eyes to the ground for possible IWW cat tracks. His daily reports to the governor's secretary sounded a consistent theme: "I have interviewed the various

county agents or representatives here and all except Great Bend report no sign of I. W. W. and insist the newspaper talk has kept a large number of peaceful laborers from the state." "There was more I. W. W. talk in the papers than among the men." The IWW concurred. Under the headline "Robertson Is Locust in Kansas Wheat," Solidarity reported that Robertson's scare tactics had "succeeded in losing wheat instead of saving it." The Topeka Daily Capital concluded that "the I. W. W. scare, which, in the minds of many, loomed large two weeks ago, becomes a gigantic farce." The IWW itself, though claiming to have regained most the membership it had lost during the war conceded later that "no set demands were possible in 1919." A union official attributed the lack of success to "the poor crops and unsettled state of affairs in general."²⁰

As Robertson continued to agitate through the press, with Crawford offering well-informed refutation, the district attorney at last erupted with an unctuous and intemperate letter to Governor Henry J. Allen in which he demanded the labor commissioner's resignation. The Kansas State Federation of Labor and other backers rushed to Crawford's defense, and the governor ignored the prosecutor's request.²¹

Allen was more active than any other Kansas governor in trying to insure an adequate supply of harvest labor. He first asked the Department of War to discharge farm boys from the army regardless of when their units were scheduled for release. Citing the immense difficulties of drawing up priority lists and appraising thousands of cases, the war department refused. Major General Henry Jervey pointed out that he faced special requests from many states and did not feel he

could favor Kansas over others.²²

As the harvest came on with a rush in late June, Allen desperately wired Walker D. Hines, the former Santa Fe Railway executive who headed the railroad administration, to plead for special harvest-hand rates. The governor claimed that at least 25,000,000 bushels otherwise would be lost. Despite energetic pleading by Kansas Congressional delegation, Hine's refused. "Reduced rates would only result in greatly diminishing revenues of railroads," he said, "since similar privileges would have to be granted in connection with harvesting of whear [sic] crops in other states and with other groups in different parts of the county." Allen termed Hines's response "amazing," especially since the railroad administration had granted tourists excursion rates of less than two cents per mile. "I would most respectfully inquire on what basis of reasoning and public policy lower rates are given to pleasure seekers than to men needing work and whose work means more food stuff for the world and more tonnage for the railroads." But Hines remained unbending. He contended that the vacation rates stimulated travel, were in the public interest, and, "being open to all alike," were "in no sense discriminatory" but lower rates for harvesters would "involve a discrimination against all other classes [of] labor and against all other employers."²³ That three-cent fares, or fares of any sort, discriminated against transient laborers as a class seemed not to disturb Hines.

With the army and the railroad administration unyielding, Kansas farmers had no choice but to rely on traditional measures of their own devising. Farmers worked longer hours. Twilight crews were

assembled in some areas, but they were impractical in the far west where great expanses of wheat engulfed sparsely populated settlements. Wives and daughters relieved the men of chores and trips to town for supplies and repairs, and, as in 1918, thousands of women joined the men aboard the header barges and wheat stacks.²⁴

But finally farmers were thrown back on the most elemental measure: outbidding their neighbors. Industrial wages had been inflated nearly 15 percent over 1918 and now stood at an average of \$.558 per hour. Harvest rates started out near or slightly below that figure in the south, where men were plentiful. As northern wheat ripened rapidly, farmers drove as far as Wichita to load up harvesters. Growers met all the trains and passengers were "all but bodily dragged from the trains by farmers, who beg them for assistance." The Salina area employment office pleaded for 5,000 hands at once as farmers were "calling continuously from almost every county in this territory," Crawford found, "but few men [were] coming this way." At least three special trains carried more than 1,000 harvesters to west-central Kansas, the fares prepaid by county farmer representatives. Many areas remained short of hands, however, even midway through the harvest.²⁵

Wages skyrocketed. By early July farmers were offering \$5 bonuses to men who located help, and reports circulated of offers of \$10 per day wages plus transportation at Hutchinson, \$11 at Ellsworth, and \$15 at Hays. Finding money unavailing by itself, one farmer was said to have proffered \$14 a day, plus ice cream twice a day, "and if necessary a good looking girl to hold a parasol over their heads throughout the day. Nothing doing."²⁶

Such reports were, of course, exceptional. Yet prevailing harvest wages reached peaks never recorded before, and throughout the major wheat-growing regions of the state outstripped the average industrial wages. Of Kansas' 105 counties, only 27 paid average wages less than \$5 per day, and all but four of these counties²⁷ were in the eastern third of the state, which produced relatively little wheat and which relied on binders. Thirty-three counties, only a handful of them in the eastern third, paid average rates of \$5 to \$5.99. Twenty-four counties, all but one (McPherson) lying west of the 98th meridian, averaged \$6 to \$6.99. Eight counties²⁸ recorded averages of \$7 to \$7.99. These counties, generally tributary to Hays and Great Bend, reached their peaks through a convergence of several factors: long distance from urban centers of labor supply (more than 200 miles from Kansas City, for example), relatively small towns which could provide little local help, heavy wheat production, relatively limited railroad service (often only one line in the county), and (in 1919) early ripening while most harvesters were still toiling to the south. The highest average wage in any county of the Texas-Dakota wheat belt was registered in the midst of the \$7 averages when heavily German Ellis County peaked at \$8.21. Overall, then, 66 counties -- just under two-thirds of the state's subdivisions -- paid average wages of \$6 or above.²⁹

Workers were well advised to cash in on the Kansas harvest, for outside the Sunflower State wages were a good deal tamer. In Oklahoma, always characterized by erratic wage rates, pay had ranged from \$2 to \$7; in the northwest section, where much of the wheat was

grown and which competed to some extent with the Kansas labor supply, wages averaged \$5 to \$6, but did not exceed the latter figure. North of Kansas only one county (Hays, in southwest Nebraska), registered a \$7 wage. Only ten of Nebraska's 95 counties paid \$6 or more, and most of these lay in the southwest sector, where Kansas rates had some carryover effect.³⁰ The Dakotas were nearly barren. The acting director of the federal employment service noted: "the Dakotas have more men than they can possible handle."³¹ In South Dakota, except for one east-central county (tiny Hamlin) that recorded a \$6.66 average, and four others³² that reached a \$6 average, the statewide figure was about \$5. North Dakota, suffering with a poor crop of less than 60,000,000 bushels, recorded twin highs of \$5.60 (in northeasternmost Cavalier and Pembina counties); elsewhere wages sagged to about \$5 and, in some cases, even less.³³

Nineteen-nineteen was colored throughout by a Buddenbrooks effect; as the old patterns of harvest labor burned most brightly, they prepared the fields for new modes of harvest. The 1919 season produced the last great rush for harvest labor; after demobilization the wheat belt never again had to bid feverishly for harvesters. Most harvesters still came to the harvest in 1919 on the railroad, but some hands, mainly farmers, began arriving in their private automobiles. Most important, the growing use of the combine signalled a revolution in the harvest labor system. The combined harvester-thresher cut and threshed the grain in a single operation, and functioned with far fewer men than a header alone. In Pawnee County, where 14 combines had been employed in 1918, 316 were operated in 1919; the International Harvester Co.

delivered 40 combines to Reno County in 1918, 305 in 1919, and 640 in 1920.³⁴ The unprecedented prosperity stemming from the 1919 bonanza crop further encouraged farmers to invest in fleets of combines. These trends augured poorly for the IWW. Demoralized after wartime prosecution, weakened by the imprisonment of much of its leadership, riven by internal dissension, the IWW hoped to rebuild its fortunes partially through campaigns in the harvest fields. Yet in 1919 and after, the One Big Union faced, if anything, more determined opposition from local and state officials, and the IWW's efforts were undermined by the return of labor surpluses in the 1920s.

Some of these trends were obscured by the record wages paid in 1920. The 140,000,000-bushel crop approached the previous year's, but it was taken from almost 3,000,000 fewer acres. Despite early fears that the 50,000 out-of-state hands needed would not arrive, towards the end of the harvest some areas of the state began reporting labor surpluses. Some areas of northwest Kansas reported the largest supply of harvesters in several years, and some men were compelled to wait for jobs. Reports began to circulate that farmers were cutting the rates agreed on in preharvest area conferences. "If the farmers are going to go back on their promise . . . , " wrote one harvester, "they are worse than the I. W. W. they denounce."³⁵ Yet overall wage trimming appears to have been held to a minimum. Thirty-four Kansas counties, all in the western two-thirds, paid \$7 or more average per day, compared to nine the previous year. Four counties³⁶ broke the \$8 barrier, with Ellis County setting a wheat-belt record for the thirty-year period of \$8.80. Though these wage gains sound dramatic, their lustre is dimmed when they are compared with industrial wages.

Average hourly wages in all industry advanced by almost 25 percent from 1919 to 1920;³⁷ yet in Kansas only 23 counties recorded a harvest-wage gain of as much as 20 percent, and a number of those counties produced little wheat.³⁸ Thus it would appear that, as the supply of harvest labor increased in Kansas in 1920, the influx kept wages from advancing so rapidly as rates in industry.

Harvesters moving northward found wages somewhat higher than in 1919. Ten Nebraska counties registered \$7 rates in 1920, compared to one the year before. In South Dakota three counties reached \$7, and average state wages approximated \$5.50 to \$6. Enjoying a better, though still average crop, North Dakota farmers saw their harvest wages advance 20 to 30 percent in almost all cases, and in some counties by as much as 40 percent. Many growers who had paid \$4.50 to \$5 per day to harvest 1919's poor crop now were offering \$5.50 to \$6.50. Several central counties recorded the highest North Dakota average, \$6.50.³⁹

In a season of ample help the Wobblies made little headway. In Kansas perhaps as many as 40 Wobblies were arrested by state and federal authorities, some literature was seized, "but sabotage was not practiced to any noticeable extent." The Topeka Daily Capital concluded that "the harvest this year wasn't retarded a bit by the threatened invasion of I. W. W. and other agitators." In North Dakota the Grand Forks Herald, which was always singularly sensitive to IWW movements, concluded that the OBU "had very little effect on the workers" that year.⁴⁰

Union officials were unhappy with the organization's results. E. W. Latchem lamented that publicity among the harvesters, "the most

essential element to its success," had been neglected. "Most of the members in the harvest fields this year did not know that such a thing as a ten-hour demand had been passed," he said, "and were confused by the conflicting reports that were going round." The IWW did not bother to establish a minimum-wage demand. That fall the harvest-workers annual convention decided not to send donations to IWW newspapers and other causes. Before the war the agricultural branch had contributed heavily to Solidarity and the defense funds, but the faltering state of the harvest drive made the 1920 convention decide "that we could make use of the money for organization work." Latchem claimed that members had won "about an average of \$1.00 more than the farmer had intended to pay," and that "the ten-hour day was established wherever the workers had the moral courage to force the issue." Another organizer, Jack Gaveel, admonished members to "quit fighting over technicalities in our laws and by-laws And above all, . . . do not be card men, but be fighters."⁴¹ The repeated evidence of internal dissension, ineffective publicity and mobilization, and lack of grand claims of success, suggest that the harvest branch was losing the class war in the wheat belt.

In 1921, however, the IWW, though remaining quiet in Kansas, roused considerable attention in North Dakota. Following prewar fashion the precipitating factor was the jailing of IWW members. When 100 Wobblies protested the jailing of a comrade in Valley City, the Non-Partisan League governor, Lynn Frazier, responded: "I sometimes feel that they [the IWW] had not gotten fair treatment at the hands of public officials. . . . I feel that the working men are entitled to the

same protection of our public officials as anyone else." The chief executive later remarked tartly that "the bankers of the state have done and are doing more harm and damage to the state than all the I. W. W. together."⁴² To the Herald Frazier's attitude "amounted to an invitation to the wobblies to come to North Dakota, take possession, and make themselves at home." Whether encouraged by Frazier or not, 75 Wobblies soon hopped a freight for Langdon, where five fellow workers had been jailed. But 150 armed Langdon men stopped their train outside the town, marched the riders to the jail for the night, and sent them back to Larimore on the next day's freight. There they found the Wobblies who had stayed behind had purchased fifty pounds of beef to be turned into a mulligan stew homecoming. On another occasion IWW leaders called a general strike in the Bowbells district to protest the jailing of one of their members, but the scheme fizzled when only three harvest rigs were shut down.⁴³

The most significant development of the 1921 harvest was the decline of wages to their prewar levels. Kansas farmers called for 30,000 men, and pre-season regional conferences usually recommended wages of \$3. That low a wage left pockets of shortages, so throughout much of the wheat country wages settled at about \$5 per day. Only 21 counties paid \$5 or more, the highest (Hodgeman County) registering \$5.65; some subdivisions, especially on the eastern fringes of the wheat belt, even dropped below \$4. Wages deteriorated still more to the north. In Nebraska only six counties averaged \$4 or more per day, and most jobs evidently paid between \$3 and \$3.50. Only three South Dakota counties reached \$4 or more. Wages recovered somewhat in

North Dakota; but the high there of \$4.60, and the average of about \$4, still represented a serious decline from the year before.⁴⁴

Nineteen-twenty-one was, of course, a year of sharp recession in industry. An estimated 23.1 percent of the industrial labor force went jobless part of the year.⁴⁵ Industrial wages dropped as well, but only by 7 percent, average earnings standing at \$.640 per hour.⁴⁶ Making explicit the downtrend partially veiled in 1920, harvest-labor wages in 1920 dipped well under those of industry. Harvest labor mirrored the abrupt, but lasting, slide in the position of agriculture compared to industry.

Wages declined still further in the 1922 harvest. Some Kansas farmers resolved to hold to a \$3 rate, and they appear to have enjoyed better success than in previous years. The "going rate" was sometimes quoted as \$2 to \$3.50, but occasional reports revealed \$4 rates; \$5 was rare.⁴⁷ The North Dakota wage situation was unsettled. There was some concern that farmers had yielded to "transient agitators" because of the "necessity of completing bits of work without delay," but with the result of disorganized wages in a district. But overall there was no substantial reversal of the downward trend.⁴⁸

The focus of IWW conflict shifted in 1922 from North Dakota to Oklahoma and Kansas. Wobblies and independent harvesters had been at odds at Cherokee, Oklahoma, since early in the harvest, with violence erupting several times. When an independent who had refused to join the union killed a Wobbly, the IWW brotherhood rushed the harvest-hand mess hall where they believed him to be hidden. The community continued on edge for several days, with confrontation reaching a climax on June 26

when 200 Ku Klux Klan members carrying flaming crosses paraded up and down the streets of Cherokee for an hour as a warning to IWWs to stay away from Cherokee.⁴⁹

The Cherokee confrontation sent a quiver of fear through Kansans. American Legion posts announced their readiness to "go into the fields and weed out the disturbing element"; Hussey, the indefatigable state fire marshal, convened a conference of county attorneys and peace officers of fifteen wheat-belt counties to discuss how to combat the "concerted and well planned movement . . . to terrorize the wheat fields." Twenty-one alleged organizers were arrested, "nearly all" of whom, Hussey said, were carrying "kitties", phosphorus-filled bottles designed to erupt in the wheat stacks.⁵⁰ That the IWW should become a target when independent harvesters had killed a Wobbly and when Klansmen had indulged in their own extralegal sensations was not necessarily consistent; but it was not the first time, of course, that IWW members had borne the brunt of community anxieties.

The Kansas situation remained relatively calm. The night after the Cherokee "riot" the entire Salina police force patrolled the streets and railroad yards throughout the night to prevent Wobblies from proselytizing among the large force of inbound harvesters. More than a dozen IWWs were arrested on various charges around the state. One of the most unusual incidents was the IWW's takeover of the sole freight train plying the Missouri Pacific's Radium branch. The Wobblies turned the train into a sort of rolling jungle, riding it back and forth for three days and permitting none but IWW members on board. The train crew finally regained possession of the train when the captors let their

guard down, and the crew ditched the two box cars in which the Wobblies were riding on a siding and chugged off to Wichita.⁵¹ The Radium-branch train hijacking epitomized the ignominious end of the IWW's wheat-harvest movement: job control on two box cars on a deserted siding as the train steamed away across the horizon.

After 1922 the IWW all but disappeared from sight in the wheat belt. Sporadic strikes occurred, some Wobblies were arrested on vagrancy and criminal-syndicalism charges, contingents of IWW members were sometimes deported. But the days of confrontation between the OBU and wheat-belt towns had ended. By 1925 the IWW was hardly mentioned in the region's newspapers.⁵²

Wage rates and labor demand settled into routine patterns. As the demand for harvesters slackened throughout the twenties, the federal employment service reported only a handful of harvest-labor shortages. There may have been a slight upward trend in harvest wages, reflecting the rise in wages in industry; however, the wages of farm laborers as a whole dropped slightly in the late twenties. The wage rates of the 1930 harvest appear typical or slightly higher than those during the twenties: \$3 to \$3.50 in Texas, \$3.50 to \$4 in Oklahoma, \$3.50 to \$4.50 (and, occasionally, \$5) in Kansas, \$3 to \$4 in Nebraska and the Dakotas, and \$4 to \$5 in isolated, sparsely populated Montana.⁵³

The most significant trend from 1923 through 1930 was the vast decline in the number of harvest hands required. Although the decrease is usually attributed to the introduction of the combine, the reduction in the Dakotas, where most farmers continued to use binders, suggests other forces were also important. One factor was greater

cooperation among farmers and, simply, a desire to keep as much of the harvest work as possible in the family. Pooling of labor and other cooperative arrangements, first adopted in the press of wartime labor shortages, were continued through the twenties. Moreover, as Lescohier pointed out, "when money is scarce, debts pressing, wages high, prices low, the crop poor, or other difficulties drive them to it, farmers in binder country may do a much larger share of the harvest work than they would do if able to hire labor without serious inconvenience."⁵⁴ Most of the causes cited by Lescohier, particularly scarce money, pressing debts, and low prices, characterized Dakotas agriculture in the 1920s.

The automobile also altered harvest-labor patterns somewhat, particularly the IWW's effectiveness. Lacking the freight trains on which they proselytized and organized so effectively, the Wobblies found it harder to reach potential converts. On the whole, however, the use of the automobile to follow the harvest, while having certain advantages such as greater mobility, appears to have been small and probably limited to the farmers who followed the cutting. Few transients could afford that 1920s symbol of affluence. One North Dakota employment officer noted that the flivver had brought "a better class of harvest hands," by which he undoubtedly meant the farmer and hired hand as opposed to the urban itinerant.⁵⁵

The combines played the largest single role in virtually eliminating the demand for out-of-state harvesters in the southern harvest by 1930. Combines employed in Kansas reached 2,796 in 1923, 3,823 in 1925, 7,562 in 1927, and spurted to 11,203 in 1928. By 1931, 24,656 combines -- 40 percent of the national total -- hummed through the Kansas harvest. It was estimated that the combine became more

economical than the binder or header at somewhere between 75 and 100 acres.⁵⁶ Farmers continued to use binders in eastern Kansas, where farms were smaller, but these counties produced less wheat and did not require a very large addition of outside hands anyway. By 1927 the big wheat country, where farms ranged from 160 to 20,000 acres, had "gone over heart and soul to the combine." More than half the hard winter wheat was harvested with combines that year. Some growers kept their headers for a few years as insurance against a wet year when combines might sink in the mire, but threshing machines were quickly relegated to the back fences, where they sat "uncovered and exposed to the elements, belts hanging and paint washed off. . . . Wheat belt gossip is to the effect that you can buy a threshing outfit now almost for the price of a song, and not a tin-pan alley hit, either."⁵⁷

The reduction in labor requirements was one of the combine's biggest advantages. The combine cut the total labor needed for harvesting and threshing from 4.6 man-hours per acre for a binder and stationary thresher, and 3.8 man-hours per acre for a header and stationary thresher, to .75 man-hours per acre. W. E. Grimes, one of the most careful students of wheat-production economics, offered this graphic illustration of how combines changed the face of harvesting on a typical 640-acre farm. The header system had required two crews to cut the grain in the maximum safe harvest period of ten to twelve days. Each crew required as many as eight men, which, with the owner, brought the total manpower to seventeen. The extra help necessary for cooking raised the total to twenty. Threshing required an additional six to ten men, depending on the rapidity of the operation. With a combine,

by contrast, three to four men were sufficient: one on the tractor, one on the combine, and one or two on a truck. Three to four men now did the work of twenty-five. "This practically eliminated the outside harvest help," Grimes said, "as the local farmers can usually expand their forces enough to take care of the temporary increase, for most of them have sons or hired hands employed by the year, or men of the nearby village . . . work in harvest." As a result, as early as 1927 "the harvest army found itself all dressed up with no place to go." And Arthur Hagen, a native Kansan who had followed the Jayhawk harvest since 1912, said that by 1929 the state harvest was "no good at all because . . . they had a combine for every quarter-section and didn't need any men."⁵⁸

* * *

Thus ended a unique era in agricultural-labor history. Demand for transient wheat harvesters had grown from almost nothing in 1900 to 35,000 to 45,000 for Kansas alone in normal harvests, and 100,000 or more for the entire wheat belt. Bumper crops could require as many as 100,000 extra hands in Kansas and 250,000 throughout the wheat belt. In the 1920s the combine and altered patterns of labor usage reduced the flow of migratory harvesters in Kansas to a trickle by 1927. Relying on the binder instead of the header, the states north of Kansas continued to attract masses of transients, but in declining numbers. In normal seasons the demand for labor was readily filled or even oversubscribed; but, since the harvest depended on a large quota of industrial laborers, the convergence of an ample crop with an

industrial boom (as in 1919) forced farmers to resort to unusual methods and high wages. Daily pay, which in Kansas averaged \$2.50 to \$3 until 1916, spurted to \$8 in some counties and \$7 in many others in 1919 and 1920. Through 1919 harvest wages reflected the rising level of industrial wages fairly faithfully, but in 1920, and particularly in 1921, harvest pay sagged beneath the industrial rates. Emblematic of the hard times on which agriculture had fallen in the twenties, harvest wages scales remained well under industrial rates and only slightly above the prewar averages.

The harvest-labor force was surprisingly diverse throughout the thirty-year period. Farmers and hired men from states ringing the wheat belt provided the nucleus of the force; identifying with their harvest employers, these groups proved to be capable, docile workers. The balance of the force was filled mainly by transient laborers from large cities, who were less reliable though nonetheless essential. Despite the publicity attaching to college students and twilight crews, these groups played minor roles in the harvests. All groups of harvesters, particularly the urban transients, suffered from poor earnings -- the result of both the two-phase nature of the harvest that limited mobility and the erratic system of distribution. Uneasy relations between townspeople and transients characterized the era, especially when the IWW attempted to organize the harvesters. Whatever romantic images the harvest and its annual migrations may have inspired, the reality of hard work, uncertain earnings, and tense social relations made it doubtful that either farmer or laborer mourned the passage of the migratory wheat harvester.

FOOTNOTES

I

1. E. L. Rhoades, "Harvest Labor," Twenty-Second Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture (Topeka: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1921), p. 204.
2. Josiah G. Folson, "Farm Labour Research in the United States," International Labour Review, 25 (May 1932), p. 1.
3. The most useful is a state study, Charles James Haug, "The Industrial Workers of the World in North Dakota, 1913-1917," North Dakota Quarterly, 39 (Winter 1971), 85-102. Other treatments include Philip Taft, "The I. W. W. in the Grain Belt," Labor History, 1 (Winter 1960), 53-57; Philip Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States, 4, The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917 (New York: International Publishers, 1965), pp. 473-485; Stuart Jamieson, Labor Unionism in American Agriculture (Washington: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Bulletin No. 836), pp. 396-405; Joyce Kornbluh, Rebel Voices: An I. W. W. Anthology (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), pp. 227-250; Melvyn Dobofsky, We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), pp. 314-318; Paul F. Brissenden, The I. W. W.: A Study of American Syndicalism (New York: Columbia University, 2nd ed., 1920), pp. 337, 339, 341.

4. This paper will not deal with threshing, for the demand for men for threshing was usually readily met by men lingering after the harvest or by cooperative efforts by area farmers. For an evocative portrait of the threshing season see Reynold Wik, Steam Power on the American Farm (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), pp. 108-132.
5. Selig Perlman, "Plan of an Investigation of the IWW and Unskilled and Floating Labor," undated memorandum (ca. 1913), General Records of the Department of Labor, National Archives, RG 174, Box 6 (Commission on Industrial Relations).
6. James C. Malin, Winter Wheat in the Golden Belt of Kansas (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1944), pp. 131-137, 154; Elwyn B. Robinson, History of North Dakota (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp. 247-248; Carroll D. Clark and Roy L. Roberts, People of Kansas: A Demographic and Sociological Study (Topeka: Kansas State Planning Board, 1936), p. 161; Richard B. Sheridan, Economic Development in South Central Kansas: An Economic History, 1550-1900 (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1956), p. 243.
7. Ross M. Robertson, A History of the American Economy (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2nd ed., 1964), p. 255.
8. Twenty-Eighth Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of

- Agriculture (Topeka: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1933), p. 454.
9. Robinson, History of North Dakota, pp. 247-248.
10. Charles M. Harger, "The West's Harvest Money," Independent, 55 (July 23, 1903), 1741-1742; Topeka Daily Capital, June 1, 5, 1900, June 16, 1905; Harvesting in the "Big Wheat Belt" (Washington: Department of Labor, Bulletin of the U.S. Employment Service, Farm Labor Series, May 1924), p. 4.
11. Don D. Lescohier, Demand for Harvest Labor in the Wheat Belt (Washington: U. S. Department of Agriculture Bulletin 1230, 1924), pp. 5-19; Rhoades, "Harvest Labor," p. 205; Topeka Daily Capital, June 21, 25, 1914, June 10, July 5, 1919, June 26, 1921.
12. Lescohier, Demand for Harvest Labor in the Wheat Belt, pp. 5-19.
13. Globe quoted in Topeka Daily Capital, June 7, 1918; undated newspaper clipping (probably Wichita Beacon, ca. July 1927), Henry J. Allen Mss., Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Box C119; Allen, "The New Harvest Hand," Review of Reviews, 76 (September 1927), pp. 277-285; Topeka Daily Capital, June 26, 1927; cf. ibid., June 12, 1913, Grand Forks Herald, September 13, 1921.
14. Harry Kemp, "The Lure of the Tramp," Independent, 70 (June 8, 1911),

1270-1271, emphasis in original.

15. Lescohier, Sources of Supply and Conditions of Employment of Harvest Labor in the Wheat Belt (Washington: U.S. Department of Agriculture Bulletin No. 1211, May 23, 1924), pp. 1-2, 7; cf. Rhoades, "Harvest Labor," p. 209.
16. Lescohier, Sources of Supply, p. 6; Rhoades, "Harvest Labor," p. 208; John D. Black, Agricultural Reform in the United States (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1929), pp. 445-446.
17. For obvious reasons docility and submissiveness were among the traits farmers prized most in their help (R. L. Adams, "Farm Labor," Journal of Farm Economics, 19 (November 1937), pp. 915-917). IWW organizers frequently complained that the Ozark and Montana farmers were among the harvesters least receptive to the union's appeal; see, for example, Solidarity, August 16, 30, 1919, July 10, 1920.
18. Lescohier, Sources of Supply, pp. 5-6, 17.
19. Ibid., p. 3; George C. Haas, "Farm Labor Supply and Business," Journal of Farm Economics, 5 (July 1923), pp. 163-165.
20. Harvey Osborne to P. A. Speek, June 27, 1914, RG 174, Box 6.

21. Lescohier, Harvest Labor Problems in the Wheat Belt, pp. 24-28; Rhoades, "Harvest Labor," p. 210; Topeka Daily Capital, June 23, 24, 1914, July 22, 1915.
22. Speek, "Notes on the interview with the chief of police of the city of Huron, South Dakota, Mr. Geo. Kerr, July 15, 1914," RG 174, Box 6.
23. See, for example, Topeka Daily Capital, June 20, 1913, June 2, 12, 29, 1914, June 29, 1915; Bismarck Tribune, July 26, 1921; Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, July 31, 1915, July 24, August 16, 1916; Charles Ashleigh, The Rambling Kid (London: Faber & Faber, 1930), p. 122; Len De Caux, Labor Radical: From the Wobblies to C I O (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), pp. 68-69.
24. Topeka Daily Capital, August 17, 1913, June 13, 30, July 27, 28, 1915, July 22, 23, 1916, July 8, 17, 1919, July 15, 1922.
25. Speek, "Interview with Huron chief of Police"; Harger, "Journeying With Harvesters," Scribner's, 36 (July 1904), pp. 1-14; Lescohier, Sources of Supply, pp. 11-15; Solidarity, June 2, 1915.
26. Lescohier, Harvest Labor Problems in the Wheat Belt, p. 10.
27. Speek, "Life Histories [of Migratory-Casual Laborers]," RG 174, Box 6.

28. Topeka Daily Capital, June 22, 29, 1915; Tribune quoted ibid., July 1, 1914; cf. ibid., June 28, 1920.
29. Garland quoted in Clarke C. Spence, "Knights of the Tie and Rail -- Tramps and Hoboes in the West," Western Historical Quarterly, 2 (January 1971) 16.
30. Topeka Daily Capital, June 11, 25, 1913, May 27, June 20, 1920, May 29, 1921 (emphasis added); "Summary of Questionnaire sent to County Labor Agents, August 10, 1918," General Records of the War Labor Production Board, RG 2, National Archives, Box 3; Nebraska Farmer quoted in George K. Holmes, Supply of Farm Labor (Washington: U.S. Department of Agriculture Bulletin of Statistics No. 94); Solidarity, July 3, 1915, September 4, 1915.
31. Garland, A Son of the Middle Border (New York: 1941), pp. 287-288.
32. Topeka Daily Capital, June 18, 1919, June 21, 24, 1914, June 19, 1913, June 24, 1921, May 28, June 4, July 4, 1916, May 28, 1917; Bismarck Tribune, August 5, 1916.
33. Bruno Bettelheim and Morris Janowitz, "Ethnic Tolerance: A Function of Social and Personal Control," American Journal of Sociology, 55 (1949-1950), pp. 137-145.
34. Topeka Daily Capital, June 25, 1913, May 29, June 6, 1914, June 15, 1916, June 25, July 5, 1919.

35. Ibid., June 1, 1915; Speck, "Interview with Huron chief of police."
36. Topeka Daily Capital, June 2, 1915.
37. Solidarity, July 3, September 4, 1915; Topeka Daily Capital, June 11, 12, 24, 29, July 1, 1915.
38. Ibid., June 1, 8, 1915.
39. Kiowa County Signal, June 29, 1916; Topeka Daily Capital, June 13, 17, 1920, May 30, June 5, 1921.
40. Lescoghier said: "It was very noticable both in the 1920 and 1921 investigations that very few harvest hands or farm laborers complained of the wheat farmer as an employer. Even men who were severe critics of other kinds of employers generally said that the farmers 'treated them square'" (Demand for Harvest Labor, p. 21); Topeka Daily Capital, July 6, 1915.
41. "Supplemental Report," Farm Labor Division, December 31, 1919, RG 174, Box 1513 (United States Employment Service); Topeka Daily Capital, June 14, 20, 21, 23, 24, 1914, July 11, 1915, June 27, 1919.
42. C. W. Barto to Department of Labor, October 7, 1918, RG 174, File 20/716, Box 88.

II

1. Topeka Daily Capital, June 6, 20, 21, 22, 1923. Unless otherwise stated wage rates per day include board and lodging.
2. Twenty-Eighth Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture (Topeka: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1933), p. 454.
3. Topeka Daily Capital, May 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, June 14, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 1914.
4. Ibid., June 8, 11, 20, 21, 25, 1914.
5. Charles James Haug, "The Industrial Workers of the World in North Dakota," North Dakota Quarterly, 39 (Winter 1971), pp. 85-102; Solidarity, July 25, October 10, 1914.
6. Ibid., October 3, 1914, June 5, 26, 1916.
7. Charles M. Harger, "Journeying With Harvesters," Scribner's, 36 (July 1904), p. 10; Topeka Daily Capital, June 9, 11, 15, 18, 1914.
8. Ibid., June 3, 4, 7, 8, 18, 29, July 2, 1915; Solidarity, June 19, July 3, 31, 1915.
9. Ibid., March 18, 1916.

10. Ibid., July 10, August 28, September 4, 11, 1915, August 19, 1916, July 14, 1917.
11. Topeka Daily Capital, June 22, 1914, June 26, 1916.
12. Crawford to Clyde M. Reed, June 20, 1919, Henry J. Allen Gubernatorial Records, Archives, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, folder "Harvest-Special Work for Veterans"; Report of the President's Mediation Commission to the President of the United States (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1918), p. 14; cf. Don D. Lescohier, "With the I. W. W. in the Wheat Lands," Harpers's, 167 (August 1923), 371-380.
13. Ibid., p. 374; interview with novelist Jack Conroy, Kansas City, Missouri, November 30, 1972; Philip Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States, 4, The Industrial Workers of the World 1905-1917 (New York: International Publishers, 1965), p. 481; Melvyn Dobofsky, We Shall Be All: A History of the IWW (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), p. 317; Len De Caux, Labor Radical: From the Wobblies to the C I O (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), pp. 60-61; Topeka Daily Capital, July 12, 22, 1916; Sioux Falls Daily Argus Leader, July 22, 1916; Grand Forks Herald, August 6, 1921; Fargo Forum, July 30, 1929.
14. Topeka Daily Capital, May 26, June 6, 12, 1916.

15. Solidarity, May 27, June 3, October 28, 1916; Foner, The Industrial Workers of the World, p. 477; Dubofsky, We Shall Be All, p. 316.
16. Ibid., pp. 316, 317; Stuart Jamieson, Labor Unionism in American Agriculture (Washington: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Bulletin No. 836), p. 401; Joyce Kornbluh, Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), p. 230; Foner, The Industrial Workers of the World, p. 483; Haug, "The Industrial Workers of the World in North Dakota, 1913-1917," p. 100. Taft and Brissenden make no attempt to judge the success of the IWW in raising wages (Philip Taft, "The I.W.W. in the Grain Belt." Labor History, 1 Winter, 1960), 53-67; Paul F. Brissenden, The I.W.W.: A Study of American Syndicalism (New York: Columbia University, 2nd ed., 1920), 337, 339, 341.
17. Solidarity, June 10, 17, July 15, September 2, 9, 1916; June 30, 1917.
18. See, for example, Solidarity, October 7, 1916, August 16, 30, 1919, July 10, 1920.
19. Solidarity, May 31, July 12, 16, August 16, 1919; cf. E. W. Latchem, "The Agricultural Workers Convention," One Big Union Monthly, 2 (November 1920), 56.
20. Haug, "The Industrial Workers of the World in North Dakota, 1913-1917," pp. 98-100; cf. Solidarity, August 26, 1916.

21. Lescohier, "With the I.W.W. in the Wheat Lands," 377.
22. Paul H. Douglas and Aaron Director, The Problem of Unemployment (New York: Macmillan, 1931), p. 28.
23. Paul H. Douglas, Real Wages in the United States, 1890-1926 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), p. 205. Although questioning the level of money wages in the Douglas index, Albert Rees recognized that "the trend of our estimates of money wages is only very slightly steeper than that of Douglas's estimates" (Albert Rees with Donald P. Jacobs, Real Wages in Manufacturing, 1890-1914 (Princeton: Princeton University Press for National Bureau of Economic Research, 1961), p. 4, emphasis added).
24. Solidarity, June 17, 1916; Topeka Daily Capital, June 27, July 2, 1916.
25. Theodore W. Schultz, Agriculture in an Unstable Economy (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1945), pp. 102-105.
26. Foner, The Industrial Workers of the World, pp. 483-484.
27. Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, August 4, 1916.
28. The counties were in order: Barton, Pawnee, Ford, Trego, Ellis, Rooks, Thomas, Graham, Rush, Pratt, Kiowa, Stafford, Edwards,

Osborne, Russell, and Reno. Twenty-First Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture (Topeka: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1917), pp. 597-598.

29. Trego County Reporter, July 20, 1916.

30. Papers consulted for the June-July harvest season were Barton County Democrat, Great Bend Tribune, Larned Chronoscope, Larned Tiller and Toiler, Colby Tribune, Hays Free Press, Kinsley Graphic, St. John Weekly News, Plainville Times, Rooks County Record, Hill City Republican, Dodge City Globe, Pratt Republican, La Crosse Chieftain, Hutchinson News, Osborne County Farmer, and Kiowa County Signal. The only reports of men being employed for more than \$3 were when 21 were given jobs at \$3.50 near Plainville (Plainville Times, July 6, 1916) and when an unspecified number were hired at \$3.50 near Raymond (Hutchinson News, July 2, 1916). There were two reports of wages being \$2.50 (Kinsley Graphic, June 29, 1916; Hutchinson News, July 6, 1916).

31. Plainville Times, July 6, 1916; Larned Tiller and Toiler, June 30, 1916. There was one report of IWWs getting their price near Liberal "and then deserting the farmers after raising all the trouble they could" (Hutchinson News, July 13, 1916). In La Crosse, where most farmers were paying \$3, it was reported that some Wobblies had refused to work even at \$4 (La Crosse Chieftain, June 29, 1916).

32. See, for example, Dodge City Globe, July 6, 1919, Plainville Times, July 6, 1916, Kiowa County Signal, June 29, 1916.

33. Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, July 18, 27, 28, 29, 21, August 1, 2, 1916; Solidarity, August 19, 1916.

34. Hutchinson News, June 17, 1916; Topeka Daily Capital, June 18, 19, July 1, 13, 19, 1916; Solidarity, July 22, 1916.

35. Neil J. Smelser, Theory of Collective Behavior (New York: Free Press, 1962), pp. 222-269, esp. 235, 238, 240, 243, 266-269. Though differing in their interpretations of whether the sheriff or the mayor had played the leading role in quelling the disturbance, both weekly papers in the town agreed on the main events of the incident. (Trego County Reporter, July 13, 1916; Wa-Keeney Western Kansas World, July 15, 1916). Quotations are from the Reporter.

36. Lewis A. Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict (New York: Free Press, 1956), p. 137. The presence of the IWW may have performed a useful function in bringing about at last temporary solidarity between town commercial interests and farmers. Animosity between country-town business interests and the farmers is an oft-overlooked but important aspect of regional history. See, for example, Thorstein Veblen, Absentee Ownership and Business Enterprise in Recent Times (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1923),

chapter 7; Carl Frederick Kraenzel, The Great Plains in Transition (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), pp. 278-282; and Robert R. Dykstra, "Town-Country Conflict: A Hidden Dimension in American Social History," Agricultural History, 38 (October 1964), pp. 190-204. The willingness of farmers in WaKeeney and Bunker Hill to respond to the town's call for help casts doubt on the assertion sometimes made that IWW opposition in the grain belt stemmed from the commercial clubs. (Cf.: "We find that the opposition shown towards our members does not come from the farmers . . . but it comes from the daily press and the commercial clubs . . . and the local police" [Maurice C. Bresnan, secretary-treasurer, Agricultural Workers Industrial Union 400, to Veblen, April 8, 1918, attached to his memorandum, "Farm Labor and the I. W. W., " copy in RG 174, General Records of the Department of Labor, National Archives, Box 193, "Fragments of President's Mediation Commission File"]]).

III

1. Curtice N. Hitchcock to William Browne Hale, War Industries Board, Council of National Defense, November 21, 1917, General Records of the Department of Labor, RG 174, National Archives, Box 193 (Fragments of the President's Mediation Commission Files); George Soule, Prosperity Decade: From War to Depression, 1917-1929 (New York: Harper & Row, 1947), ch. 3; Topeka Daily Capital, May 22, 1917.

2. Twenty-Eighth Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture (Topeka: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1933), p. 454; Elwyn Robinson, History of North Dakota (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 368; Topeka Daily Capital, May 23, 26, 30, 31, June 25, 26, 28, 29, July 2, 1917; Solidarity, July 7, 21, 1917.
3. Charles James Haug, "The Industrial Workers of the World in North Dakota, 1913-1917," North Dakota Quarterly, 39 (Winter 1971), pp. 101-102; Robinson, History of North Dakota, pp. 368-369; Robert Morlan, Political Prairie Fire: The Nonpartisan League (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955).
4. On the IWW federal trials see especially Melvyn Dubofsky, We Shall Be All: A History of the IWW (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), ch. 15, 16; William Preston, Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppressor of Radicals (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 118-137; Philip Taft, "The Federal Trials of the I.W.W.," Labor History, 3 (Winter 1962), 57-91; and Clayton R. Koppes, "The Kansas Trial of the IWW, 1917-1919," Labor History, 16 (Summer 1975), pp. 338-358.
5. E. W. Latchem, "The Agricultural Workers Convention," One Big Union Monthly, 2 (November 1920), p. 56; Topeka Daily Capital, June 13, 17, 28, 1917; Grand Forks Herald, August 16, 1918.

6. Topeka Daily Capital, July 14, 18, 22, 27, 28, August 4, 1917; June 23, July 23, 1918. In 1914, before the IWW was active throughout the wheat belt, wheat-stack fires were common and were attributed to such causes as lightning, careless smoking, and especially railroad steam locomotives (cf. ibid., June 21, 23, 24, 28, 1914).
7. Twenty-Eighth Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, p. 454; Robinson, History of North Dakota, p. 368; Paul H. Douglas, Real Wages in the United States, 1890-1926 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), p. 205.
8. Thorstein Veblen, "Farm Labor and the I. W. W.," ca. March 1918, copy of memorandum in RG 174, Box 193 (Fragments of the President's Mediation Commission Files).
9. "Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Cooperation Between the United States Department of Labor and the United States Department of Agriculture in Securing Labor for Farm Work During the Crisis Arising From the Entrance of the United States in the European War," April 24, 1917, copy in War Labor Policies Board Records, RG 2, National Archives, Box 3; Johnson, Handling the 1918 Wheat Harvest in Kansas (Washington, 1919); Topeka Daily Capital, May 26, 28, 29, 1918.
10. Topeka Daily Capital, May 27, 30, June 4, 8, 10, 19, 24, 1918.

11. Ibid., June 15, 1918.
12. Ibid., June 2, 1918.
13. Ibid., June 2, 11, 27, 30, July 10, 1918.
14. "Farm Labor Conditions," weekly reports for weeks ending July 19, 26, 1918, RG 174, United States Employment Service, Box 7.
15. "Summary of Questionnaire sent to County Labor Agents, August 10, 1918," RG 2, Box 3.
16. Twenty-Eighth Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, p. 454; Topeka Daily Capital, June 4, 8, 1919.
17. Ibid., May, 24, June 16, 17, 1919; Wichita Eagle, June 17, 1919; Robertson to Attorney General, June 11, 1919, A. Mitchell Palmer to Robertson, June 12, 1919, General Records of the Department of Justice, RG 60, National Archives, File 186701-17-9.
18. Topeka Daily Capital, June 3, 4, 15, 20, 24, 25, July 1, 1919.
19. Ibid., May 30, June 12, 19, 26, 27, July 8, 10, 15, 1919; Crawford to Clyde M. Reed, July 1, 4, 1919, Henry J. Allen Gubernatorial Records, Archives, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, folder "Harvest-Special Work for Veterans."

20. Crawford to Reed, June 23, July 2, 1919, C. H. Danver to Crawford, June 22, 26, 27, 1919, ibid.; Solidarity, July 5, 1919; Topeka Daily Capital, June 26, 1919; Latchem, "The Agricultural Workers Convention," 56.
21. Robertson to Allen, June 25, 1919, W. E. Freeman to Allen, June 30, 1919, Crawford to Allen, June 30, 1919, Allen Gubernatorial Records, folder "Harvest-Special Work for Veterans"; Topeka Daily Capital, June 22, 26, 28, July 1, 1919.
22. Maj. Gen. Henry Jervey to Allen, June 19, 1919, Allen Gubernatorial Records, folder "Harvest-Special Work for Veterans."
23. Allen to Hines, June 28, 1919, Hines to Allen, June 30, 1919, Allen to Hines, June 30, 1919, Hays B. White to Allen, July 7, 1919, Hines to Allen, July 2, 1919, ibid.; Topeka Daily Capital, May 27, June 7 15, 1919.
24. Ibid., June 8, 11, 28, July 9, 1919.
25. Ibid., June 19, 26, 27, 28, 29, July 1, 3, 3, 1919; R. P. Schnacke to Allen, June 30, 1919, Allen to Bazine State Bank, July 7, 1919, F. A. Northrup to Allen, July 2, 1919, undated memorandum (ca. July 1, 1919), Allen Gubernatorial Records, folder "Harvest-Special Work for Veterans."
26. Crawford to Reed, July 2, 1919, ibid.; Topeka Daily Capital, July 5, 6, 1919.
27. Hamilton, Kearny, Wallace, and Stanton.
28. Rush, Barton, Ellsworth, Trego, Gove, Sheridan, Russell, and Ford.
29. Don D. Lescohier, Demand for Harvest Labor in the Wheat Belt (Washington: U.S. Department of Agriculture Bulletin 1230, 1924), pp. 42-43.
30. Ibid., pp. 42, 43, 44; United States Employment Service, Kansas City Office, Circular No. 5, "General Information Regarding Work in the Harvest Fields of the Central West," May 10, 1919, RG 174, USES, Box 7; acting federal director to Albert Mast, July 16, 1919, ibid., folder "Parties Inquiring"; same to G. A. Campbell, June 20, 1919, ibid., folder C; S. C. Crandall to C. H. Davis, July 8, 1919, ibid., folder "Parties Inquiring."
31. C. H. Davis to Walter S. Greevy, July 24, 1919, ibid.
32. Mellette, Sully, Tripp, and Hyde.
33. Lescohier, Demand for Harvest Labor, p. 44.
34. Topeka Daily Capital, June 23, July 7, 1919, June 23, July 15, 1920.

35. Twenty-Eighth Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, p. 454; Topeka Daily Capital, June 15, 16, 19, 20, 26, 27, July 13, 1920.
36. Ellsworth, Ellis, Pawnee, and Trego.
37. Douglas, Real Wages in the United States, p. 205. These upward trends in wages did not represent gains in real wages, of course; the average worker had little more purchasing power than before the inflationary spiral had begun.
38. Lescohier, Demand for Harvest Labor, pp. 42-43.
39. Ibid., pp. 43-44.
40. Topeka Daily Capital, June 15, 20, 24, 25, July 2, 4, 9, 16, 1920; Grand Forks Herald, July 30, August 20, 1920; Bismarck Tribune, August 3, 4, 1920.
41. Latchem, "The Agricultural Workers Convention," pp. 56-57; Jack Gaveel, "With '400' Through the Harvest Fields," One Big Union Monthly, 2 (October 1920), 20; Solidarity, October 16, 1920.
42. Bismarck Tribune, August 9, 1921; Grand Forks Herald, September 13, 1921; cf. ibid., August 19, 1922.

43. Ibid., August 25, September 1, 2, 1921. Perhaps forgetting the 1913 free-speech fight in Minot, the Bismarck Tribune later termed the threatened takeover of Langdon "the most thrilling incident in the history of I. W. W. activities in North Dakota" (Bismarck Tribune, August 29, 1925). Cf. Solidarity, September 3, 10, 1921.
44. Topeka Daily Capital, June 2, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24, 28, 30, July 3, 1921; Lescohier, Demand for Harvest Labor, pp. 42-43; Bismarck Tribune, August 4, 12, 1921.
45. Paul H. Douglas and Aaron Director, The Problem of Unemployment (New York: Macmillan, 1931), p. 26.
46. Douglas, Real Wages in the United States, p. 205.
47. Topeka Daily Capital, June 13, 27, 1922.
48. Grand Forks Herald, August 18, September 2, 1922.
49. Topeka Daily Capital, June 18, 27, 1922.
50. Ibid., June 19, 27, 1922.
51. Ibid., June 14, July 10, 15, 1922.
52. For some of the few references from 1922 to 1925, see Grand Forks

- Herald, August 5, 1923, August 18, 23, 1925; Bismarck Tribune, August 2, 25, 1925. Cf. Joyce Kornbluh, Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), p. 232.
53. United States Employment Service Bulletins, June-August, 1921-1929; "Harvesting in the Big Wheat Belt: Other Farm Work," U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Agricultural Statistics, undated memorandum (1930), Box 1513. Topeka Daily Capital, June 1, 5, 8, 1925; Grand Forks Herald, August 13, 1925; Bismarck Tribune August 9, 1924; Fargo Forum, July 23, August 7, 1929.
54. Lescohier, Demand for Harvest Labor, p. 19; Bismarck Tribune, August 11, 1924; Topeka Daily Capital, June 28, July 3, 1921.
55. Grand Forks Herald, August 22, 1925.
56. Biennial Reports of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture (Topeka: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1923-1933); Changes in Technology and Labor Requirements in Crop Production: Wheat and Oats (Washington: Works Progress Administration, National Research Project, 1939), p. 133.
57. R. S. Kifer, W. R. Humphries, and J. H. Martin, Harvesting Wheat With a Combined Harvester-Thresher in the Great Plains Region, 1926 (Washington: U.S. Department of Agriculture, April 1927), p. 25; W. E. Grimes, "The Effect of Improved Machinery and Production

- Methods on the Organization of Farms in the Hard Winter Wheat Belt," Journal of Farm Economics, 10 (April 1928), pp. 225-231; L. A. Reynoldson, R. S. Kifer, J. H. Martin, and W. R. Humphries, The Combined Harvester-Thresher in the Great Plains (Washington: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Technical Bulletin No. 70, February 1928), pp. 22, 23, 33.
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