

Presidential Address: Tillers and Toilers: The Rise and Fall of Populism in Canada in the 1890s

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Article abstract

As part of his on-going research upon religion and reform in late 19th century Canada, the author focuses on the efforts of the Patrons of Industry to ally with the labour movement. The author explores the attempts at cooperation between the two groups, and posits reasons for their failure to achieve a lasting and effective alliance. He examines the origins and policies of each group and outlines the grounds on which, participants believed, cooperation and alliance were both possible and desirable. The leader in this attempted farm-labour populist alliance was George W. Wrigley, from 1892 to 1896 the editor of the *Canada Farmers' Sun*, the Patron's weekly newspaper. He was the spokesman for a religiously based reformism which advocated the application of Christian principles to everyday life. Wrigley saw an identity of interests between farmers and labourers, both of whom were producers who were victimized by the abuse of the system. Against these forces, organization and cooperation were necessary to ensure that the public interest would triumph over the private. Labour spokesmen and agrarian reformers shared the ideology of agrarianism, "the conviction that man's most natural, healthy, even divinely inspired, activity was working on the land." Both agreed that the farmer and the industrial worker each received insufficient return for their efforts, because the unproductive classes dominated the economy. Only an alliance committed to economic freedom, cooperation and democracy could eradicate the forces of privilege, unbridled competition and monopoly.

While this alliance could point to some substantive achievements, ultimately it was a failure. The idea of cooperation received only modest support from the membership of both groups, while the leadership quickly became disillusioned by the slow pace of success. When the Patrons achieved a measure of political support in Ontario, they were unused to political power; they appeared indecisive and directionless as they debated tactics. Furthermore, the leadership often could not set aside their earlier attachments to either the Liberal or Conservative parties and wholeheartedly support the Patrons' political objectives. Hence internal divisions coupled with the return of prosperity late in the 1890s finally destroyed the country's first potentially successful protest party.

Tillers and Toilers: The Rise and Fall of Populism in Canada in the 1890s

RAMSAY COOK

Résumé

*As part of his on-going research upon religion and reform in late 19th century Canada, the author focuses on the efforts of the Patrons of Industry to ally with the labour movement. The author explores the attempts at cooperation between the two groups, and posits reasons for their failure to achieve a lasting and effective alliance. He examines the origins and policies of each group and outlines the grounds on which, participants believed, cooperation and alliance were both possible and desirable. The leader in this attempted farm-labour populist alliance was George W. Wrigley, from 1892 to 1896 the editor of the *Canada Farmers' Sun*, the Patron's weekly newspaper. He was the spokesman for a religiously based reformism which advocated the application of Christian principles to everyday life. Wrigley saw an identity of interests between farmers and labourers, both of whom were producers who were victimized by the abuse of the system. Against these forces, organization and cooperation were necessary to ensure that the public interest would triumph over the private. Labour spokesmen and agrarian reformers shared the ideology of agrarianism, "the conviction that man's most natural, healthy, even divinely inspired, activity was working on the land." Both agreed that the farmer and the industrial worker each received insufficient return for their efforts, because the unproductive classes dominated the economy. Only an alliance committed to economic freedom, cooperation and democracy could eradicate the forces of privilege, unbridled competition and monopoly.*

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*Dans le cadre de recherches continues sur la religion et la réforme à la fin du 19^e siècle, l'auteur porte son attention sur les efforts des **Patrons of Industry** en vue de s'allier aux mouvements des travailleurs. L'auteur analyse les tentatives de collaboration entre les deux groupes et avance les raisons de leur échec à réaliser une alliance réelle et durable. Il examine les origines et les politiques de chaque groupe et expose les bases qui, de l'avis des participants, devaient rendre souhaitable et possible la coopération et*

*l'alliance. Le chef de file de cette tentative d'alliance populiste entre les milieux agricoles et les travailleurs était George W. Wrigley qui, de 1892 à 1896, occupait le poste de rédacteur en chef du **Canada Farmer's Sun**, l'hebdomadaire des **Patrons**. Il était le porte-parole d'un mouvement réformiste à fondement religieux qui défendait l'application des principes chrétiens à la vie quotidienne. Wrigley percevait une communauté d'intérêts entre agriculteurs et travailleurs, puisque les deux groupes étaient des producteurs victimes des abus du système. Contre ces forces, l'organisation et la coopération étaient nécessaires pour assurer que l'intérêt public triompherait de l'intérêt privé. Les porte-paroles des travailleurs et les partisans de la réforme agraire partageaient l'idéologie de l'agrarianisme, "la conviction que, pour l'homme, l'activité la plus naturelle, la plus saine et même d'inspiration divine, était le travail de la terre". Les deux groupes croyaient que, le fermier autant que le travailleur industriel ne recevaient pas suffisamment pour leurs efforts, parce que les classes non-productives dominaient l'économie. Seule une alliance engagée au service de la démocratie, de la coopération et de la liberté économique pouvait éliminer les forces du privilège, de la concurrence débridée et du monopole.*

*Si cette alliance pouvait se vanter de quelques réalisations importantes, en dernière analyse elle fut un échec. L'idéal de la coopération ne reçut qu'un appui modeste des membres des deux groupes et les leaders perdirent rapidement leurs illusions, face à la lenteur du changement. Lorsque les **Patrons** obtinrent un certain appui politique en Ontario, ils n'étaient pas habitués au pouvoir politique; ils parurent indécis et sans chef dans leurs débats sur la stratégie à adopter. De plus, très souvent les leaders ne purent mettre de leur côté leurs liens antérieurs avec les partis Libéral et Conservateur, pour appuyer sans réserve les objectifs politiques des **Patrons**. Par conséquent, des conflits internes et le rerout à la prospérité vers la fin des années 1890 finirent par détruire ce qui, au pays, aurait pu être le premier parti protestataire ayant des chances de succès.*

In the mid-1960s two impatient young members of this association urged me to stand for the presidency. The time had come, they insisted, for a quiet revolution in the CHA. And who better than I to play René Lévesque? New leadership, new electoral procedures, new programme formats. Though flattered by the proposal, a little calm reflection convinced me that under my leadership the planned *coup d'état* would surely degenerate into a beer hall *putsch*. As a temperamental *étapist* I declined. One of my colonels has since served as president of the association and I, having patiently waited for the new electoral procedures to collapse under the weight of our membership's apathy, attained power by the traditional means: acclamation.

If nearly twenty year's patience brought its rewards, it also exacted its price. In the 1960s I would certainly have had one or more ready-made hortatory messages to present as my farewell address. But the eighties are not the sixties: the age of Pierre Trudeau passeth and the time of John Mulroney and Brian Turner is upon us. And I, alas, have reached the age of ambiguity: too old to issue a manifesto calling for a new birth of historical science and too young to lament the decline and fall of all that we hold dear. Like Lenin and Mavis Gallant, I am left with the puzzle: What is to be done?

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My predecessors, I am sure, agonized as much as I have while searching for a suitable, or at least passable, subject for a presidential address. Each recent president has sat in his or her lonely study, aware that some future, and doubtless lesser, Carl Berger or Serge Gagnon will one day seek to find the distilled essence of this historian's philosophy in the reflective and witty words pronounced from the presidential podium. So let me at once forewarn that future historiographer: after long contemplation, and an abandoned attempt at philosophical profundities, I have decided to abide by the eleventh commandment of the York history department: "Thou Shalt not Commit Historiography."

Initially the alternatives seemed obvious. This, after all, is 1984, a year replete with anniversaries. The four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Jacques Cartier's entirely accurate description of Canada as "la terre que Dieu donne à Cayn." Now there is a subject for an historian interested in Quebec-Ottawa relations. The two hundredth anniversary of the founding of New Brunswick, and the centenary of the Acadian flag, a genuine opportunity for an historian anxious to reclaim, after all of these years, his authorship of the phrase "limited identities." But then it occurred to me that what the profession really needs is a new cliché. The sesquicentennial of Toronto, alas, held no promise for an historian preoccupied with cultural and intellectual matters. And the fortieth anniversary of D-Day is obviously the preserve of historians with more — or less — military experience than nine boring months as a cadet in the University Naval Training Division. Finally there is the bicentenary that those so long in tranquil possession of the truth at Queen's Park have this year asked Ontarians to celebrate. The difficulty here, of course, is that a discussion of the arrival of the first Progressive Conservatives in Ontario would require greater objectivity, and solemnity, than anyone who has had the good fortune to last a year as president of this association could be expected to possess.

Canadian anniversaries, however, do not exhaust the possibilities. The year 1984 itself, as we have been repeatedly reminded over the past months, has its own portentous significance. Since the president of this association need never stand for reelection it struck me that it might be safe and entertaining to compare some recent historical writing to the work of George Orwell's historian, Winston Smith. You doubtless recall Winston's thoughts, having just inserted Comrade Ogilvie into the historical record. Ogilvie "unimagined an hour ago, was now a fact... Comrade Ogilvie, who had never existed in the present, now existed in the past, and when once the act of forgery was forgotten, he would exist just as authentically, and upon the same evidence, as Charlemagne or Julius Caesar." Reading Canadian biographies one sometimes wonders if such giants ever lived in the present. Surely there is at least one Winston Smith working at the DCB. Still, this enterprise is best left for a more appropriate occasion. Past presidential addresses reveal that harmonious, not discordant, notes are what I am expected to sing. Only a rare bird, a Donald Creighton, ever dares sing out-of-tune.

Rereading his and other presidential utterances reminded me that on many, perhaps most, such occasions my predecessors felt compelled to expatiate upon the eternal problems of our country: its size, its ways-of-life, its bilingual character, its anaemic liberalism, its cultural mosaic, its regionalism, its identity and above all, its historians'

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immeasurable contribution to its successes or, to return to Donald Creighton, its disasters. More than once during the sleepless nights of the past few months I have felt the apparently preternatural presidential urge to speak out on the great issues of our time: the American menace, the Quebec crisis, western alienation, Maritime disparities, the status of women, the failure of multiculturalism, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. But nearly all have been more than adequately dealt with.

Perhaps the time is ripe then for some urgent words about the plight of Canadian studies, interim thoughts on the impact of the Symons Commission report. The evidence is gradually becoming available. For example, the Department of External Affairs has discovered "cultural" diplomacy, a means of projecting a more sophisticated image of Canada abroad. One of the success stories was recently revealed by the Director of Canadian Studies at the University of Western Washington when he provided the *New York Times* with some news fit to print. Americans should study Canada, he remarked with engaging candour, because Canada "will be our major source of water and the mining capital of the Western Hemisphere." Our image abroad is changing evidently: drawers of water and providers of faculty enrichment grants. Or there is the recent announcement by the Secretary of State that over the next three years, \$11.7 million will be provided to assist in the preparation of Canadian studies including "the development of learning materials." A significant portion will doubtless go toward subsidizing the production of "une histoire pour tous les canadiens," to be made available at your neighbourhood supermarket, suitably and bilingually entitled *Dick and Yvette*. As funds for fundamental, independent research dry up, it is reassuring to know that the Department of External Affairs has devised new, improved methods of defending the national interest, and the Secretary of State's department continues to find ways to invade provincial jurisdiction.

The government's touching concern for our identity, our history, women and other strategic topics, is a theme best left to the satirist. His name is James McAuley, an Australian who, with that admirable economy which distinguishes poets from historians, said it all:

By the waters of Babylon
I heard a Public Works official say:
"A culture that is truly Babylonian
Has been ordered for delivery today."

By the waters of Babylon
There came a noise of subsidies in motion,
"To a bald or mangy surface we apply
Our sovereign art-provoking lotion."

By the waters of Babylon
They said that art was for the people,
But they meant that art should sweeten to the people's mouth
The droppings from the perch of government.

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Having rejected most of the possibilities offered to me by past performances, I have decided that my only recourse is to follow the example set by my distinguished colleague, friend and predecessor, Professor Wallot, and to speak about something on which I have actually done some research. As it happens, it is a subject which, perhaps somewhat surprisingly for a presidential address, actually fits into one of the themes of this year's meeting, namely agriculture. Where better than at Guelph, in the heart of rural Ontario, to speak about "Tillers and Toilers: the Rise and Fall of Populism in Canada in the 1890s," a subject which will form part of my study of religion and reform in late Victorian Canada.

i

"It is a hopeful sign of the times," one reader wrote to the *Canada Farmers' Sun* in 1894, "that producers everywhere, the Patrons, and the workers of the towns and cities, are coming to see that all their interests center upon the one point — justice to labor as the creator of wealth. With the workers united the political and industrial parasites shall be driven from the social body."¹ Whatever Edwin F. Moore's occupation, farmer, labourer or middle class radical, he was not alone in hoping that the day of the Canadian common people was dawning, that urban workers and farmers would soon unite to strike down the monopolists and combinesters who had led the country into the slough of economic despondency.

During that same summer of 1894, Phillips Thompson, one of Canada's earliest socialist agitators and journalists, lectured around the Ontario countryside on the topic of "Tillers and Toilers." Wherever he went to preach his message about the need for the ordinary people to unite in demanding "equal justice" in the same way that the monopolists had joined together "to fill their pockets," he was sponsored not by socialist, labour or urban reform clubs, but by the local branches of the Patrons Of Industry.² Thompson was one of a handful of Toronto radicals who had formed a group known as the Unity Association, which was an attempt to establish an organization that could act as a bridge between the Patrons and the labour movement.³ And for a time, at least, delegates from the Unity Association were admitted to the Toronto Trades and Labor Council.⁴ This grew out of discussions and negotiations which had been taking place between the Trades and Labor Congress and the Patrons of Industry in an effort to find common ground for political action. What the *Globe* described as a mass meeting of the two bodies had been held in the St. Lawrence Hall in Toronto in March of 1893, and that gathering had established a committee to discuss "combined action for the furthering of their common interests."⁵

1 Edwin F. Moore to the *Canada Farmers' Sun* (hereafter *CFS*), 27 June 1894.

2. *CFS*, 17 October 1894. Thomson's expenses were paid by the Patrons. See *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Grand Association of Ontario of the Patrons of Industry, 1894* (Toronto, 1895), p. 14. (Hereafter *Minutes*.)

3. *CFS*, 11 July 1894.

4. *Ibid.*, 7 November 1894; Canada. Public Archives (PAC), Toronto Trades and Labor Council, *Minutes*, 17 August 1894.

5. *CFS*, 7 March 1894.

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Nor was this nascent farmer-labour cooperation restricted to Toronto. At Cornwall, Ontario, for example, millworkers organized themselves under the Patrons' banner and one Cornwall delegate to the 1893 meeting of the Trades and Labor Congress described himself as "both a Patron and a Knight of Labor."⁶ That same year the TLC established a joint committee with the farmers which included the executive committee of the Patrons and the editor of the *Farmers' Sun* on the agrarian side, and seven TLC representatives: three from Ontario, T.W. Banton, D.A. Carey and R. Glocking, and four from Quebec, A.J. Rodier, William Darling, P.J. Jobin and E. Little. The resolution defining their mandate read: "That a standing Committee of this Congress be appointed to act with a like Committee of the Patrons of Industry, for the purpose of resisting domination of wealth, to establish justice among men irrespective of their circumstances of life, and to advance the interests of the whole of our citizens by checking and abolishing the extortions and frauds in industrial operations permitted and largely sanctioned by our laws."⁷

This early, and ultimately abortive, effort at cooperation between farmers and organized labour deserves more than passing attention since it is one of the persistent themes of agrarian and radical protest in Canada.⁸

ii

The rise and fall of the Patrons of Industry in Ontario, and for that matter in Quebec and Manitoba, was meteoric. Founded in 1889 at Sarnia, the Patrons of Industry almost completely replaced the more staid and conservative Patrons of Husbandry, or Grange. Like the Grange, the Patrons originated in the United States but — again following the Grange — quickly asserted their independence. The movement spread into Manitoba

6. *Ibid.*, 12 September 1893 and 6 February 1894.

7. *Ibid.*, 28 November 1893.

8. Brief accounts are found in Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan Palmer, *Dreaming of what might be. The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 387-91; Louis Aubrey Wood, *A History of the Farmers' Movements in Canada* (1924; 2nd ed. Toronto, 1975); John David Smart, "The Patrons of Industry in Ontario," M.A. diss., Carleton University, 1969; Russel Hann, *Some Historical Perspectives on Canadian Agrarian Movements* (Toronto, 1971); S.E.D. Shortt, "Social Change and Political Crisis in Ontario, 1889-1896," in *Oliver Mowat's Ontario*, D. Swainson, ed. (Toronto, 1972), pp. 211-35. An impressive analysis of the Manitoba Patrons is Brian Robert McCutcheon, "The Economic and Social Structure of Political Agrarianism in Manitoba, 1870-1900," Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1974. For the American parallels, John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt* (2nd ed., Omaha, 1961) and Norman Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962) remain useful but the most valuable revisionist work is Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Democratic Promise* (New York, 1976). There is a convincing critique of some aspects of this work in David Montgomery, "On Godwyn's Populists," *Marxist Perspectives*, Vol. 1 (Spring 1978), pp. 166-73. My argument, somewhat like that of Montgomery and of Kealey and Palmer, is that Godwyn's definition of legitimate Populism is too narrow. On the relationship between reform intellectuals and Populism, see John L. Thomas, *Alternative America* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 309 and 331.

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and Quebec where separate organizations were established in the early 1890s.⁹ Unlike the Grange, where politics and religion were prohibited subjects, the Patrons were political from the outset. At first the Patrons merely published a platform drawn up at London in 1891 hoping that it would make its impact upon the Liberals and Conservatives. But when this failed, and agricultural conditions worsened, the Patrons opted for direct political action in 1893. But since party itself was viewed by the organized farmers as one of the evils of modern society, they eschewed party, disclaimed any intention of wishing to take power, and declared themselves a group of independents who made up a people's movement hoping to win a balance of power. C.A. Mallory, the grand master of the Patrons, described his movement's platform with engaging naïveté in 1893. "Ours is a platform of the people," he declared. "Party platform is the expressed desire of the wearied toilers anxiously longing for freedom from the thralldom of monopoly and praying for the country's good."¹⁰

The platform itself was neither very radical nor very specific. Its first plank expressed loyalty to the British connection, and despite its American origin and free trade philosophy, the movement was always stalwartly opposed to annexation.¹¹ There followed a series of proposed political reforms: clean government and laws against conflicts of interest, civil service reform and decentralization, simplification of laws and the reduction of government machinery, municipal control of voters' lists, and abolition of the Senate. Its economic policy demanded retrenchment in government spending, land grants to legitimate settlers only, abolition of government bonusing of railways, and tariff for revenue leading to "reciprocal free trade on fair and equitable terms between Canada and the world." Perhaps the most innovative plank in the farmers' platform was the one which demanded "effectual legislation that will protect labor, and the results of labor, from those combinations and monopolies which unduly enhance the price of articles produced by such combinations and monopolies."¹²

Evidently, from the outset, the Patrons viewed themselves as an organization whose purpose it was to ensure the wellbeing of both tillers and toilers, though actual membership, at least theoretically, was restricted to bona fide farmers. Certainly the leadership believed that the movement's success depended upon broadening out to include labour. After the Patrons elected seventeen members to the Ontario legislature in 1894, Grand President Mallory declared that "the members of the labor organizations in the towns and cities did us good service in the provincial campaign and, by that course, have proven their willingness to co-operate with us for the relief of the masses. When such

9. *CFS*, 19 December 1894 reported a meeting at the Albion Hotel in Montreal which established a Quebec organization. J.M. Varville, a francophone from St. Phillippe, comté d'Argenteuil, was president but the other executive members were anglophones. French and English versions of the Patrons' constitution were printed.

10. C.A. Mallory to *CFS*, 3 October 1893.

11. Queen's University Archives (QUA), W.D. Gregory Papers, C.A. Mallory to T.M. White, 31 October 1892.

12. The platform, and other valuable information, may be found in C.A. Mallory, "The Patrons of Industry Order," in J.C. Hopkins, *Canada: An Encyclopedia of the Country* (Toronto, 1899) Vol. 5, pp. 100-05.

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organizations exist in any part of the constituencies, I would advise that they be invited to participate by sending delegates to our conventions.”¹³ Or as the editor of the *Sun* put it a few months later, “the tillers and the toilers are in perfect harmony. Let them march to the front together.”¹⁴

The chief architect of a farmer-labour populist alliance in Canada was a nattily dressed, elegantly mutton-chopped journalist named George W. Wrigley. Founder of the *Canada Farmers' Sun*, which became the Patrons' weekly, he edited the paper from May 1892 until July 1896. During the last year of his editorship he also put out, either separately or as a supplement to the *Sun*, a second paper called *The Brotherhood Era*, designed for an urban audience. That second paper perhaps permitted him to express more fully his reform philosophy, since the *Sun* was increasingly dependent on Patrons' patronage for its existence.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the difference between the two papers was largely one of emphasis; they often carried the same articles, though the *Sun* printed more rural news. Wrigley's ideas dominated both publications.

Biographical information about Wrigley, like that on most dissenters, is scarce but what there is offers some insight into nineteenth century radicalism. Born and raised on a farm near Galt, Ontario, Wrigley doubtlessly stepped on a ladder of social mobility chosen by many intellectually ambitious farm boys when he chose school teaching as his first career. Dissatisfied with the classroom he moved into journalism first as a country newspaper publisher and then as founder and editor of the *Canadian Labor Courier*, in the later 1880s at St. Thomas.¹⁶ He later confessed that this paper had been a speculative venture, for he was gambling on the future of the Knights of Labor whose members, he hoped, would support his paper. Apparently they read it, but they proved unable or unwilling to pay their subscriptions regularly and the paper failed after a falling out between Wrigley and the Knights' leadership in St. Thomas.¹⁷

Wrigley's association with the Knights of Labor was natural enough. That movement's combination of secret society ritualism, Christian meliorism and trade union activity doubtless appealed to his developing Christian social consciousness. He would certainly have agreed with A. W. Wright, a Knights of Labor leader, who contended that “the Labor question as the Knights of Labor see it, is a religious question....”¹⁸ Working with the Knights made a lasting impact on Wrigley. “My experience in St. Thomas,” he wrote in 1896, “was of some service to me, for it was there that I realized that the conditions of life were such that injustice was being done to many, while a few were able to secure for themselves enormous possessions of money, goods and lands. I was convinced that the toilers in the factories could gain little by organization for any other purpose but to take political action, and that this procedure on their part could not be successful unless they were joined in such a movement by the toilers in the fields,

13. “A Message from Grand President Mallory,” *CFS*, 15 August 1894.

14. *CFS*, 30 January 1894.

15. *Minutes*, 1894, p. 22.

16. *CFS*, 27 March 1894, reprinting from *Toronto Star* of unknown date.

17. Kealey and Palmer, pp. 250-1.

18. PAC, A. W. Wright Papers, Wright to Hugh, 24 January 1892.

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who are their natural allies everywhere.” Once the Patrons appeared on the scene, Wrigley concluded that they and the Knights of Labor were part of the same reformist impulse. “How to obtain higher wages had been the incentive which caused labor to organize, and how to purchase cheaper goods was the primary idea of farmers who first joined the Patrons’ order in Canada,” Wrigley explained, apparently without recognizing the possible conflict between “higher wages” and “cheaper goods.”¹⁹ In 1892 Wrigley decided to speculate once again on the future of a reform movement by establishing in London the *Canada Farmers’ Sun*, which was quickly adopted by the Patrons.²⁰

No subject occupied the attention of the new weekly’s editor more consistently than the project of promoting a farmer-labour political alliance. And as editor of the Patrons’ paper he was strategically placed to promote that cause for the simple reason that he was the only person whose whole time was devoted to Patron work. The order’s executive officers were all active farmers who attended to Patron business in their spare time, mainly in the off-season. Wrigley, especially after the *Sun* moved to Toronto in 1894, was constantly on the job gathering copy, writing editorials, arranging feature articles, and travelling around the province promoting his views before Patron audiences. Even before moving to the provincial capital, but much more so afterwards, Wrigley associated closely with spokesmen for an astonishing variety of reform causes. He made the *Sun* and the *Brotherhood Era* a vehicle for all the winds — and they were frequently very windy — of late nineteenth century reformist sentiment. The meetings of labour councils and congresses were reported in detail along with those of the Grange and the Patrons. Accounts of Single Tax clubs, Bellamyite groups, the Toronto Socialist League, the Women’s Enfranchisement Association, temperance activities and the regular sessions of the Toronto Conference on Social Problems were constant fare for *Sun* readers. Socialists like Phillips Thompson, hot-gospel monetary reformers like A. W. Wright, single tax missionaries like J. W. Bengough, as well as a host of lesser lights appeared in the pages of Wrigley’s newspapers and thus had their views presented to the probably 30,000 subscribers at the paper’s peak time between 1894 and 1895.²¹

Inside the Patrons’ organization, Wrigley used his influence to press his pet causes and his populist strategy. It was, for example, Brother Wrigley who moved the motion at the second annual meeting of the Grand Association of Patrons calling for direct political action, though leaving the final decision about nominating candidates to the local associations.²² The motion passed. He also pressed the Patrons to consider such reforms as proportional representation, and in 1894 he chaired the committee that framed the resolution declaring the Patrons’ complete independence from the Protestant Protective

19. George Wrigley, “Leaving the Sanctum,” *CFS*, 29 July 1896. On the Knights see Kealey and Palmer, *passim*, and Victor O. Chan, “The Canadian Knights of Labor with Special Reference to the 1880’s,” M.A. diss., McGill University, 1949.

20. *Minutes*, 1893, p. 22.

21. *CFS*, 1 May 1895. These figures, of course, are provided by the paper itself, not an independent source. They are probably not greatly inflated since the Patrons had a membership of some 35,000 in 1894. For membership see *Minutes*, 1895, p. 7.

22. *Minutes*, 1893, p. 23.

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Association.²³ And he was at the centre of every discussion of plans for cooperation with organized labour. Wrigley's active role in promoting a broad range of reform causes through the *Sun*, and on the floor of the Patrons' convention, should not be viewed simply as one man's effort to foist his ideas upon a popular movement. In fact his editorial position had the full approval of the Patrons' leaders. The 1893 annual convention passed a resolution indicating that its support for the *Sun* was based not merely on the paper's sympathetic reporting of Patron activities and editorial support of its platform, but also because the movement approved of Wrigley's effort "to keep our members thoroughly familiar with the expressions of men who are recognized as leaders of thought in the various branches of the social reform movement."²⁴ The farmers might not accept at face value every reform nostrum expounded in the *Sun's* pages but they at least wanted to be fully informed of the latest radical notions.

What, then, were the ideas that George Wrigley and his associates hoped to advance through a farmer-labour populist movement? The bedrock of Wrigley's reformist impulse, like that of a great number of other late nineteenth century social critics in Canada, to say nothing of the United States and Great Britain, was a particular interpretation of the Christian religion. As a practicing member of the Church of England, Wrigley took the view that social ethics, not the question of ultimate salvation, formed the essence of Christ's teachings, that man's relationship to his fellow man, not his relationship to God, was what counted. "The preacher, while sticking to pure doctrine as it is found in the 'standards' of his church, is either unable or unwilling to apply the religion which he preaches to every day life, he does not boldly assail present day evils, he preaches round about them," Wrigley contended. "The preacher who takes the opposite course has rarely to complain of inattention on the part of his hearers.... The divinest Sermon ever preached was the Sermon on the Mount."²⁵ One of Wrigley's friends, who wrote for the *Sun* under the pseudonym "Spokeshave," expressed the same view more succinctly in a criticism of Dwight L. Moody's Massey Hall revival meetings. True Christianity in contrast to Moody's opiate, which seemed to appeal to prosperous people like the Masseys and the Blakes, "was more a matter of political economy than of religion as we now understand it...." And he continued by outlining a position which found expression in different ways from a variety of writers in almost every issue of Wrigley's newspapers.

If Christianity is to be a living force ... it must take an active part in the movements for freeing the race from the shackles of class privilege. It must assist in the Patrons' movement and the labor movement, both of which alike aim to inaugurate a reign of justice by destroying all the economic iniquities, which, because they are hoary with age and sanctioned by law are tolerated and accepted. Once these hoary wrongs are destroyed and all men receive the full reward of their labor and enjoy it, there will be none among us that lack and for all practical purposes we will have all things common. We may then miss the halls of the Masseys, but the masses will be able to build halls of their own.²⁶

23. *Minutes*, 1894, p. 25.

24. *Minutes*, 1893, p. 23.

25. *CFS*, 15 November 1892.

26. "Spokeshave," and "The Moody revival," *CFS*, 21 November 1894. Wrigley makes the same point about the Patrons as applied Christian ethics in *CFS*, 31 October 1893.

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How did these high-flown expressions of the social gospel translate into practical proposals that farmers and workers could be urged to support? Wrigley used the *Sun* to expose his readers to a smorgasbord of reform dishes. First, and most obviously, the Patrons' programme was repeatedly featured. To that was added the 1892 Omaha Platform of the United States' Populist party, the platform of the Single Tax movement, and the Declaration of Principles of the Knights of Labor,²⁷ along with a stream of speeches and articles expounding these doctrines and others. At the root of all of these reform programmes, and explicit in the *Sun*'s editorial position, was a deep conviction that the growth of monopolies, economic and political, was the central social evil of the advancing capitalist society. Caleb Mallory, the Patrons' leader, reportedly told a meeting in Picton in 1893 that "the legalized tariff of the doctors and the lawyers prevented them from coming into competition with one another. He referred to the coffin combination and declared that from the hour of his birth until the day he was laid in the grave the farmer was confronted by combinations."²⁸ The following year he told the annual convention that "Capital has always claimed the right to combine. Manufacturers meet and determine prices in spite of the laws of supply and demand. Capitalists, by united effort, strive to control the legislature, the judiciary, and the executive.... Why should the monopolist and the combinester assume to control the destinies of the land?"²⁹

The response that Mallory and other Patron organizers wanted to this litany of evils of combination was countercombination in the form of organized farmers. But was this not merely another selfinterested flight from competition? Wrigley, writing in the *Sun*, replied with a vigorous if not entirely convincing negative. Distinctions had to be drawn. "The Order of Patrons is a combination formed to protect the interests of members without unfairly curtailing the privileges or profits of others," he explained. "The protection desired by its members is dissimilar to that expected by a manufacturers' combine. One organization aims to make greater profits at the expense of the people, while the other is an organization of people formed to curtail the amount paid to the manufacturers' combine."³⁰ Whatever the logic of such an explanation, it revealed clearly that Wrigley and other Patrons recognized that in an age of combination there was little room left for the stubborn individualist. Those who formed combinations to thwart the public interest managed to preserve their privileges through the exercise of influence within the political system. Canada lived under a government of the interests rather than a government of the people. "When the act of Confederation was adopted it was supposed that Canada was being furnished with a proper form of government; that is, a government of the people, by the people, for the people," the *Sun* observed in 1892. "Instead of this we have a government of the people, by the representatives, for the classes who can pull strings."³¹ And the wire pullers kept the tariff — a tax on the people — high, and direct taxes on monopolies low.³²

27. *CFS*, 1892, 28 June 1892 and 25 April 1893.

28. *CFS*, 7 February 1893.

29. *Minutes*, 1894, p. 2. See Michael Bliss, *A Living Profit* (Toronto, 1974), pp. 33-54.

30. *CFS*, 7 June 1892.

31. *Ibid.*, 8 November 1892.

32. *Ibid.*, 1 November 1892.

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The Patrons' official platform offered rather anemic proposals for dealing with such serious problems. Independent political action might break, or at least limit, the power of the interests over the government by replacing some of the lawyers in the legislature with honest farmers and workers.³³ But what policies would Patron legislators urge? Seemingly only free competition, free trade, the abolition of public subsidization of the businesses, and rigid economy in government. These mild reforms were far from satisfactory to Wrigley, or to many of his contributors and readers. The editor of the *Sun* was an ardent advocate of such reform bromides as the initiative, referendum, proportional representation and woman suffrage — in short more direct democracy “to take control of the law making power out of the hands of the few, who have used it to further their own personal and selfish interests, and place it in the hands of the whole people.”³⁴ He was sympathetic to the single tax, which he believed would help destroy land monopolies,³⁵ and he was certainly willing to allow others to advance more radical proposals. Socialism, he saw as the wave of the future, probably the only way to reform the modern state which was “a league of the rich and powerful to acquire and hold possession of the best things in life.”³⁶ Wrigley obviously had a good deal of sympathy for the views of the farmer from Parkhill, Ontario who denounced the trust and loan companies as “the vampire or devil fish that subsists and riots in luxury and wealth at the expense of the toiling masses.”³⁷ Therefore he published contributions from writers like L. A. Welch, the Patrons' grand secretary, Phillips Thompson and A. W. Wright, all of whom were advocates of a national, government-issued currency based not on gold but “only upon that nation's resources and wealth and upon the industry of its people.”³⁸ Inflation through monetary reform, Greenbackism or, as it was called in Canada, “Beaverbackism,” had been discussed in Canada at least since 1880 when A. W. Wright published *The Commonwealth* and ran for Parliament on the National Land, Labour and Currency Reform party ticket.³⁹ It was naturally a subject of some interest in the early 1890s when, as one historian has calculated, “the number of chattel mortgages taken out by farm families increased by one-third at a time when the total farm population decreased.”⁴⁰ So, too, Wrigley gave free rein to those who were anxious to promote the cause of Bellamyite socialism or “nationalism.” As one of them concluded, after attributing the depression to the usual cause — monopoly: “No government on earth could have a more important duty than that of regulating industrial matters. It is the province of government to restore order where now is chaos.” To achieve that would

33. *Brotherhood Era*, 1 April 1896.

34. *CFS*, 14 January 1893 and *Brotherhood Era*, 11 March 1893.

35. *CFS*, 7 February 1893.

36. *CFS*, 19 September 1893.

37. W. O. Marrin to the *Sun*, 25 April 1893.

38. “Spokeshave,” and “A National Problem,” *CFS*, 7 November 1894; see also L. A. Welch, “Money — Its Use and Mode of Issue,” *ibid.*, 9 May 1893; Phillips Thompson, “The Money Question,” *ibid.*, 17 October 1893, and A. W. Wright, “A History of Money,” *ibid.*, 24 October 1894.

39. *The Commonwealth* (Toronto), July 1880 to ? On Wright see Kealey and Palmer, pp. 177-87.

40. Smart, “The Patrons,” p. 30. On the general economic conditions of agriculture in the period, see C. C. James, “The Development of Agriculture in Ontario,” *Appendix to the Report of the Bureau of Industries for 1896* (Toronto, 1897).

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require a system which combined public ownership, cooperative ownership, and a national currency. Only then, he concluded, "will each receive the full product of his labor, and not be compelled to pay tribute to anyone."⁴¹ These, of course, were among the more radical proposals. The *Sun* also published more orthodox views such as those of the Rev. D. Galbraith, president of the Toronto Conference on Social Problems, who attributed poverty and hard times to national wickedness, idleness, drink and original sin.⁴²

If all of this appears to bear little relationship to the needs and aspirations of the embattled farmers who joined the Patrons and received the *Sun*, it is important to observe that virtually all of these writers shared some assumptions that were dear to the agricultural community. To a greater or lesser degree all of the *Sun*'s contributors accepted the ideology of agrarianism, the conviction that man's most natural, healthy, even divinely inspired, activity was working on the land. "Close contact with nature — the visible garment of God — should fill the members of our Order with a greatness of soul which can pass beyond mere distinctions of position or occupation,"⁴³ was the way Wrigley explained the superior morality of his fellow Patrons. Similar assumptions ran through the rhetoric of virtually all of the Patron spokesmen. Caleb Mallory informed a doubtlessly converted audience at the annual meeting in 1893 that "agriculture is the basis and source of all permanent wealth,"⁴⁴ while the preamble to the Patrons' statement on cooperative enterprise began, "believing that the farmer is the chief industrial factor in the world, producing, as he does, the two great essentials of life — food and raiment...."⁴⁵

It was this agrarian ideology which stimulated the farmer's sense of grievance. If he was so important, why was he so poor? "Wealth," wrote L.A. Welch, the Patrons' grand secretary,

or the accumulation of the necessaries of life, is, according to fact as well as orthodox precept, the result of labor. It is equally apparent that that wealth does and must come chiefly and primarily from the soil, and that the farmers and their co-laborers are, therefore, the great wealth producers of the world. Then, that this great and most essential class and primitive possessors (through their labors) of that wealth should become so certainly and stealthily dispossessed thereof, with their homes dear to their hearts fast gliding from them to satiate the avaricious grasp of monetary speculation, as is everywhere manifest not only in this country but every country, most assuredly and clearly demonstrates that there is something most materially wrong in the working and operation of the great business machinery of the world.⁴⁶

41. Carson Cook, "Industrialism," *CFS*, 25 April 1893 and 9 May 1894.

42. Rev. Dr. Galbraith, "Hard Times, Their Cause and Cure," *CFS*, 10 October 1893.

43. *CFS*, 10 October 1894.

44. *Minutes*, 1893, p. 1.

45. "Industrial Co-Operation," *CFS*, 7 February 1893.

46. L.A. Welch, "Money — Its Use and Mode of Issue," *CFS*, 23 May 1893.

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The point to be observed, because it helps to explain why this "agrarian" doctrine could be accepted by both urban and rural critics of industrial society, is the explicit acceptance of a labour theory of value. For the reform writers who contributed to the columns of the *Sun* labour, urban or rural, created value, though the full fruits of that labour were denied to both tillers and toilers by the unproductive classes who dominated the economy.⁴⁷ Moreover urban social critics, like rural dissenters, believed that there was much that was unnatural about modern industrial society. In arguing that farmers and industrial workers had common interests that went much deeper than common grievances against the domination of their lives by monopolies, Phillips Thompson wrote in 1894 that "the larger the city, under modern industrial conditions, the deeper and more helpless the poverty and degradation of the masses." The National Policy of forced, protected industrial development disturbed "the natural equilibrium between city and country" since, by overtaxing agriculture, it had drawn people from the farm to the city where they competed with city people for scarce jobs, thus driving down wages and increasing unemployment.⁴⁸ Toronto, Thompson believed, was an especially frightening example since it threatened to become a second New York or Chicago "with their millionaires and their brutalized millions, their heartless flaunting ostentation, and their hideous poverty, their octopus corporations and their slavish, degraded denizens of the slums." A. W. Wright drew on the biblical story of Cain and Abel to express a similar attitude. "What horrible mistakes cities are anyway," he told Terence Powderley. "It was quite fitting that the first one should have been builded by the first murderer."⁴⁹

Thompson and those who thought like him, advocated slow, planned growth under government ownership, control and direction. In that, he believed, "farmers and city workers have a common goal."⁵⁰ Though the Patrons never committed themselves to such a far-reaching programme, Thompson, who worked with them in the Ontario legislature, was convinced that the implementation of their programme was a first step towards the achievement of the goals he stood for. He certainly did not view farmers as backward-looking, conservative individualists for what he saw in their programme and their rhetoric was a genuine hostility to monopoly capitalism. It is true that the Patrons criticized government intervention in the economy, but what was the nature of that intervention? Basically, it was the subsidization of private business with public funds, either directly in the case of the railways, or indirectly in the case of manufacturers. Secondly, the Patrons' demand for economy in government was not so much a call for laissez-faire as it was an attack on the sorts of privilege that were paid for out of taxes on the general public. The Patrons were quite specific about the means of reducing government expenditures: end railway subsidies, abolish the Senate, cut out the pensions and annuities paid to the patronage appointments who filled the civil service, and limit severely the expensé accounts of officials like the governor general and the high

47. Phillips Thompson, *The Politics of Labor*, (1887, rep. Toronto, 1974).

48. Phillips Thompson, "Country and City Toilers," *CFS*, 29 August 1894.

49. Phillips Thompson, "Toronto's Growth," *CFS*, 6 March 1895; PAC, A.W. Wright Papers, Wright to Powderley, 10 March 1894; see also Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley, 1967), p. 320. On the pastoral theme in late 19th century American reform thought, see Thomas, *Alternative America*, p. 359.

50. Phillips Thompson, "Country and City Toilers," *CFS*, 29 August 1894.

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commissioner to Great Britain.⁵¹ These were cutbacks that all radicals could applaud. “The greatest portion of what the country pays in the way of official salaries goes not for work, but for style — for banquets, receptions, Windsor uniforms, silk gowns, champagne and equipages,” Thompson wrote in defence of the Patrons. “A government official should be paid the fair value of his work as nearly as it is ascertainable, — no more, no less. He has no more claim to be paid for keeping up his position than has the farmer, the mechanic or the tradesman.”⁵² In short, what united the Mallorys, the Thompsons, the Wrigleys and the Welches was a shared conviction that privilege reigned in the land, that it must be eradicated and the people allowed to rule. “The movement means that Canadians must be freed from the tyranny of protection, with its twin sisters, class legislation and monopoly; that luxuries must be taxed and necessities made free,” Caleb Mallory declared even as the Patrons were moving toward final collapse.⁵³

iii

That Thompson, Wright, Wrigley and other social critics saw in the Patrons more radicalism than was there is undoubtedly true. Nevertheless the response of farmers like Mallory and Welch, and many others, suggests that there was more to the Patrons' vision of a better society than the image of rugged individualism that their spare programme projects. One young farm boy, whose father was a Patron, and who himself would one day be a leader of the United Farmers of Ontario, caught the spirit of the Patrons' populism in a letter he wrote in the autumn of 1896. “What do you think of the Populist idea, co-operation instead of competition, union instead of antagonism in trade?” twenty-year old W.C. Good asked his uncle in the United States. “Don't you think the principle is sound, economic and Christian? I think industrial competition and private monopoly are terrible evils and that the converses, industrial co-operation and public monopoly, would help a great many of the social evils which are so bad now....”⁵⁴

The reform coalition of tillers and toilers which Wrigley, Mallory, Thompson, Wright and others so hoped to build never materialized in any effective way. But what was achieved reveals a good deal about the objects of such a coalition and the obstacles that stood in the path of its success. While there had been interest in a farmer-labour coalition for some years — the Grange and the Oshawa Trades Council had some discussions in 1886⁵⁵ — it was only in the midnineties that serious talks began. And it was no coincidence that these talks became concerted just at the time that the Patrons experienced an upsurge of militancy and membership and the Knights of Labor were entering their decline. The initial focus of the talks, not surprisingly, was the Toronto Trades and Labor Council.⁵⁶ By the autumn of 1893 the annual convention of the Trades

51. *Patron Platform as Adopted at London*, 22 September 1891, pp. 3-14 and *CFS*, 27 February 1895.

52. Phillips Thompson, “Official Extravagance,” *CFS*, 27 February 1895.

53. C.A. Mallory, “What Patronism Stands For,” *Weekly Sun*, 18 March 1897.

54. PAC, W.C. Good Papers, Good to Uncle John, 2 September 1896.

55. PAC, Toronto Trades and Labor Council, Minutes, 3 September 1886.

56. *Ibid.*, 3 March 1893.

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and Labor Council of Canada, led by the Toronto delegates, was drawn into the discussions. That year George T. Beales told the delegates in Montreal that “during the past year your Ontario Executive have been in consultation with the representatives of various Farmers’ organizations of the Province. The importance of this movement cannot, in my estimation, be overestimated. The interests of the farmer as relating to the encroachments of monopolistic tendencies in our commercial system are identical with the artisans of our cities.” A report of that meeting, which included representatives of the Patrons, the Grange, the TLC, the Toronto Trades and Labor Council, District Assembly 125 of the Knights of Labor and the Toronto Social Problems Conference, revealed that agreement had been reached on a platform that was, quite literally, the Patrons’ Platform. The TLC, on receipt of this report, appointed a committee representing Montreal, Quebec and Toronto to continue discussions with the Patrons. A proposal to amend the TLC constitution to admit representation from the Grange and the Single Tax Association was also passed and referred to local labour councils for approval.⁵⁷

By March of the following year representatives of the Patrons were attending meetings of the Toronto Trades and Labor Council regularly. Included among the Patrons who spoke at the Toronto labour meetings were Foster of Markham, Walens, Miller and Adams of Stormont, Ailsworth of Lennox and Addington, Anderson of East Simcoe, Dalton of Norfolk and Ewing of Northumberland — a representation which suggests that interest had expanded beyond the little band of intellectuals in Toronto. The Toronto council readily approved the proposal to admit Patrons, Grangers and Single Taxers to the TLC, though Daniel O’Donoghue opposed this move as he did all others that contradicted his Liberal-Labour sentiments.⁵⁸

The surprising strength that the Patron’s displayed in the 1894 Ontario election and the near-collapse of the Knights of Labor — Wright along with Powderley were expelled from the General Executive Board in 1894 — increased the attraction of the Patrons as a reform vehicle. Describing the condition of the Knights in Toronto, Wright reported that “Thompson, Glocking and most of the best heads among them have joined the Patrons of Industry and I have done the same. The new order is growing rapidly. At the June elections they elected enough to secure the balance of power in the Provincial legislature and I believe they will do fully as well in the Dominion elections next summer.”⁵⁹

Though Wright exaggerated both the existing strength and the future prospects of the Patrons, he was accurate about the growing association between some labour leaders

57. *Report of the Ninth Annual Session of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Montreal, September 5, 6, 7th, 1893* (Toronto, 1893), pp. 5 and 16. Those attending the Toronto meetings were: for the Patrons, C.A. Mallory and A. Gifford; for the Grange, Henry Glendenning and P. Heppinstall; representing the TLC, G.T. Beales and A.F. Jury; for D.A. 125, R. Glocking and D.A. Carey; and on behalf of the Toronto Trades and Labor Council, T.W. Banton and F.C. Cribben; T.E. Titus, a Single Tax evangelist represented the Toronto Social Problems Conference.

58. PAC, Toronto Trades and Labor Council, Minutes, 3 August 1894. On the persistent conflict between Wright and O’Donoghue see Kealey and Palmer, pp. 249-60.

59. PAC, A.W. Wright Papers, Wright to Tom, 4 September 1894.

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and the Patrons' leadership. Moreover the membership of urban labour leaders in the farm organization, and the willingness of farm leaders to attend labour council meetings, suggested that the hope for union of tillers and toilers was becoming a reality. Robert Glocking told the Toronto Trades and Labor Council in August 1894 that "the tendency of the whole industrial reform movement in England and other countries was for the workers in the cities to unite their interests with their fellow workers in the rural districts. . . . He believed the time had fully arrived when all those who were working on the lines of industrial and social reform should unite together for the common good of all."⁶⁰ And despite the continued opposition of O'Donaghue, who observed that only ten of 300 local councils had expressed a view, the TLC voted in September to admit Patrons to membership.⁶¹ In 1895 the leaders of "the toilers of the field," Mallory and Welch, were invited to the TLC Annual Meeting though they were unable to attend, apparently because the invitation arrived too late.⁶² At the same time George Wrigley was accepted as the Patrons' delegate to the Toronto Labor Council, and he was at once appointed to the education committee.⁶³ But the high point of farmer-labour cooperation had now been reached, and doubts about its value were beginning to be expressed.

That the alliance never developed much beyond a somewhat uneasy exchange of delegates suggests that the desire for union did not reach very far below the leadership level of either organization. Moreover, labour reformers like Wright, Thompson and Wrigley appear to be somewhat wishful in their assessment of the reform potential of the farmers' organization. Wright hoped that not only would the Patrons promote his currency reform nostrums,⁶⁴ but that even greater changes could be won by the movement. "You know that the platform of the order does not contain all that I would like," Wright told Wrigley early in 1895, "and that to some of its planks I cannot give a hearty and unqualified support, and it is only because I see them in the order, or rather in the movement which the order is leading in Canada and for which it stands, something more and greater than the platform, that I have felt it to be my duty to do what I may for its advancement."⁶⁵ Those high hopes were soon replaced by disillusionment.

Political success in Ontario and disputes over tactics within the movement began to undermine the alliance of farm and labour dissidents almost as soon as its first successes were achieved. Part of the difficulty was that the Patrons in the political arena lacked direction. Confused by their own electoral success, their experiences in the Ontario legislature were not happy ones. Not wishing to be a party, yet forced to be something more than a gaggle of independents, they were incapable of playing the parliamentary

60. PAC, Toronto Trades and Labour Council, Minutes, 17 August 1894.

61. *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Session of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Ottawa, September 4, 5, 6, 7th, 1894* (Toronto, 1894), pp. 19-20.

62. *Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Session of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, London, September 3, 4, 5, 6, 1895* (Ottawa, 1895), p. 19.

63. PAC, Toronto Trades and Labor Council, Minutes, 15 November 1895. In April of 1896 Wrigley successfully moved a motion calling upon the City of Toronto to regulate bicycle speeds; *ibid.*, Minutes, 23 April 1896.

64. PAC, Wright Papers, Wright to John Chambers, 27 November 1894.

65. *Ibid.*, Wright to Wrigley, 9 March 1895.

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game effectively. Inexperienced in parliamentary warfare, they stumbled badly under the leadership of their appropriately named leader Joe Haycock who, according to one observer, was "addicted to too much liquor."⁶⁶ But perhaps worst of all was the Patrons' failure to resolve the problem of their political identity. Old loyalties died hard and the tension within the movement between those who, like Mallory, leaned to the Liberals and others, like Welch, who favoured the Tories, was never really resolved.

This latter problem was most clearly revealed by A.W. Wright, once the most enthusiastic proponent of a Canadian populist movement. By the end of 1895 he was ready to profess his loss of faith. While more than a little of an opportunist, and always known to have Conservative sympathies, his expressed disenchantment with the Patrons is nevertheless important in understanding the movement's collapse. What worried Wright most was the Patrons' refusal to adopt a platform that would distinguish their movement sharply from the Liberals by declaring forthrightly for reform. "The platform," he wrote bitterly, "is the same colorless, meaningless, insipid, impotent thing. It advocates no single radical measure that would make for industrial reform; nor one whose enactment into law would appreciably improve the condition of the producing masses or even tend to change for the better the industrial system." Wright then proceeded to catalogue his suspicions about Patron-Liberal collaboration, his opposition to "partyism," his unhappiness about the Patrons' refusal to adopt a clear position on the Manitoba School Question, and finally his dissatisfaction with the Patrons' position on the tariff — he remained a protectionist. He had, he admitted, come to "doubt whether there is any good foundation for the hope that the cause of good government or Industrial reform is to be furthered by electing Patrons to parliament."⁶⁷ For a man who, less than a year earlier had held out such high expectations for the "movement," this confession of disillusionment is somewhat astonishing. Whatever the cause of Wright's reversal, his attitude forecast the fate of the Patrons' political experiment.

Despite signs of disintegration Wrigley and Mallory redoubled their efforts to strengthen the movement by opening its membership to all reformers and broadening out its programme. But their hopes, too, were disappointed. The 1896 annual meeting of the Patrons rejected these proposals. Wrigley came away depressed, even a bit angry. "The Patrons of Ontario," he wrote dispiritedly, "have the same old officers, the same old policy and the same old secret work. None of the reforms proposed have been agreed to; the Order may be said to be strongly conservative in its ideas. Yes, we feel disappointed. Prohibition, Women's Suffrage, Cumulative Voting, and the Initiative and Referendum — all shelved until a more convenient season — yet all these four are better than the entire thirteen that remain."⁶⁸

Despite his frustrations Wrigley continued to hope, as the federal general election approached, that a union of all reformers behind the Patron banner could be forged.⁶⁹ Again and again he urged his readers to keep their eyes focused on economic

66. QUA, Gregory Papers, Diary, 11 April 1897.

67. PAC, Wright Papers, Wright to W. Lennox, 12 October 1895.

68. CFS, 4 March 1896.

69. *Brotherhood Era*, 25 March 1896.

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issues, especially the tariff, and not to be distracted by such topics as the Manitoba Schools Question, which divided reformers. "Protection never yields without a struggle," he warned. "We know ... the powerful influence which protection wields in Canada, with its money wrung from the consumer, its subsidized newspapers, its well-paid speakers retailing the old sophistries, above all in being the accepted policy of a political party in a community where party worship is strong. But let us not be dismayed. Our cause is righteous, God is just and the times are ripe for change."⁷⁰

The changes were not long in coming, though they were not all the ones that were hoped for. The Conservatives were swept from power. "A modern Babylon has fallen," the *Sun* exulted, "and great is the rejoicing threat."⁷¹ But Patron candidates carried only three ridings, and the new Liberal government's reformist credentials, even on the tariff, were less than overwhelming. For Wrigley and his faithful little band of social critics, the 1896 election marked an even more immediate change, or rather defeat. Both the Patrons of Industry and the *Canada Farmers' Sun* were financially exhausted even before the federal election expenses were paid. And the *Sun's* paid-up subscriptions were falling off drastically. The choice faced by Mallory and Wrigley was either to allow the paper to face bankruptcy, or to find a new financial backer. One possibility, apparently, was D'Alton McCarthy.⁷² Another was Goldwin Smith, never happy without a place to pontificate, who was prepared to invest in the farmers' paper "under an arrangement which would secure to us the control."⁷³ No doubt he realized that only that way could he clean up the paper after all those years of single tax, soft money, feminism, and goodness knows what other fads and fancies. An agreement was struck late in April 1896 whereby Smith gained his majority interest.⁷⁴ Temporarily, Wrigley was left to run the paper until after the federal election, but then he was replaced by W.L. Smith, formerly of the *Orange Sentinel* and the *Toronto News*, though Joseph Atkinson was first approached.⁷⁵ Needless to say the character of the paper now underwent a fundamental change, for Goldwin Smith was determined to wean the farmers from their populist pap, and provide them with a safe diet of free trade, anti-imperialism, sound money, laissez faire, and right reasoning on the proper place of women. Wrigley moved over to the secretary-treasurership of the Patrons and acted as a reporter for the newly christened *Weekly Sun*. But he was very unhappy at the loss of his paper and at the new editorial course it was following. After some unpleasantness he was finally completely eased out,⁷⁶ later to resurface in the Canadian Socialist League as editor of the Christian socialist weekly, *Citizen and Country*. There he gathered many of his cohorts around him to continue the battles he had begun in the *Sun*. Internal divisions and the return of prosperity killed the Patrons by the end of the century. For a brief time during the depression of the nineties they had threatened to become Canada's first successful protest

70. *Ibid.*, 22 April 1896.

71. *CFS*, 24 June 1896.

72. *QUA*, Gregory Papers, Smith to Gregory, 5 March 1896.

73. *Ibid.*, Smith to Gregory, 22 March 1896.

74. *Ibid.*, Agreement on Sale, 24 April 1896.

75. *Ibid.*, Manuscript Autobiography.

76. *Ibid.*, Diary, 11 September 1896 and Smith to Gregory, 4 March 1898.

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party, successful in a sense of becoming part of the established political system. People like George Wrigley and Phillips Thompson apparently perceived that in a society changing from rural to urban and from farm to industrial dominance, a successful third party would have to combine both tillers and toilers. If they were among the first to make that discovery and to underestimate the difficulty of achieving that combination, they were certainly not the last. Nor were they the last Canadian radicals to dream the dream that one Patron poet set to verse — and song:

Oh, I thank God for the Patron cause,
I'm glad I have the wit —
To perceive its grand design and seize
The boon and benefit;
With its music I am satisfied, I do not
want with it
Any song of Tory, P.P.A., McCarthyite or Grit
For the farm and factory heart as one
To the Patron strain beats time —
It's the common people's triumph march
To the long-sought better time.⁷⁷

77. Jas. Bott, Lamaish, "A Patron All the Time," (Tune: "A Fine Old English Gentleman"), *CFS*, 27 February 1895.