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The San Jose branch of the Workingmen's Party of California, 1878-1880

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**THE SAN JOSE BRANCH OF THE
WORKINGMEN'S PARTY OF CALIFORNIA, 1878-1880**

A Thesis

Presented to

**The Faculty of the Department of History
San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts**

by

Carole Carter Mauss

December 1997

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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

Daniel Cornford

Dr. Daniel A. Cornford

David Eakins

Dr. David Eakins

Charles Keserich

Dr. Charles Keserich

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

William Fisk

ABSTRACT

THE SAN JOSE BRANCH OF THE WORKINGMEN'S PARTY OF CALIFORNIA, 1878-1880

by Carole Carter Mauss

This thesis proposes that the city of San Jose and its environs in the late 1870s typified the socio-economic problems that created the Workingmen's Party of California, the conflicts that destroyed it, and the party's subsequent impact around the state. Established as a remedy to severe unemployment, "cheap Chinese labor," unbridled corporate monopolies, and corrupt politicians, San Jose's WPC contributed to the 1879 state constitution. Burdened by internal conflicts, a lack of political expertise, and contradictory principles, the Workingmen's Party of California in San Jose squandered its one-year city council majority and failed to implement any of its reform platform. Its long-term success was to teach the working class the benefits of political activism and the business and political establishment the consequences of the betrayal to those workers.

The principal sources for this work were local and regional newspapers, voter registration lists, manuscript schedules of population, 1860-1880, and local histories.

Harlequins and knaves are common to
all political organizations.

Stephen DeLacy
April 10, 1880

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INTRODUCTION

In 1877, the United States was torn by one of the greatest labor upheavals in its history to that time. A severe national depression since 1873 had left over 18,000 business failures, extensive unemployment, and widespread poverty in its wake.¹ Abuse of workers was commonplace. Beginning on July 16, 1877, a spontaneous railway strike spread from the Baltimore and Ohio system to other eastern lines and throughout the West until about two-thirds of the nation's 75,000 miles of track were shut down.² The railroad strikers were soon joined by canalboatmen, canmakers, boxmakers, and sawyers.³ In some cities, walkouts deteriorated into riots, incendiarism, and looting. The extent of the spontaneous movement, and the overwhelming discontent of the workers, divided a fearful nation along class lines. Many asked whether America's wage workers really had sufficient cause for such bitterness and violence

¹Leon F. Litwack et al., eds., The United States, 6th ed., vol. 2, Becoming a World Power (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1987), 432.

²Ibid., 441.

³Page Smith, The Rise of Industrial America, vol. 6 A People's History of the Post-Reconstruction Era (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 164-92 (page references are to reprint edition).

and whether the capitalist system was itself inherently defective.

When local militias proved too sympathetic to be effective strike breakers, President Rutherford B. Hayes called out federal troops to put down what many feared was not a national strike, but very possibly a labor revolution.⁴ For many, the magnitude of the workers' discontent recalled the fear and paranoia the Paris Commune had created. Only seven years earlier, the Seine ran red with blood when street battles between the French army and the insurrectional Communards brought down the government of Napoleon III. A little more than a decade had passed since the bloodiest revolution this nation had ever known ended at Appomattox. The fear was real, the wounds still raw; the remotest similarity with communism and revolution at home was not taken lightly.

The similarities and profundities of the 1877 national railway strike attracted international attention. Writing to Frederick Engels from London, Karl Marx saw the strike not only as the "first outbreak since the Civil War against the associated oligarchy of capital," but also as "a point

⁴Litwack et al., 439-41.

of departure for the organization of a serious labor party."⁵

Nowhere was the political upheaval greater than in California. There the national depression and the railroad strike led directly to the formation of Marx' predicted "serious labor party," the Workingmen's Party of California (WPC). Although, it was not mere colorful imagery that the WPC should be called communistic, the Workingmen were not revolutionaries. The primary resemblance between followers of Marx and the WPC was their desire for social-economic change. It was the WPC's zealous promotion of capitalism and democracy that differentiated them from the followers of Marx.

With a significant immigrant membership, though paradoxically excluding Chinese workers, the WPC fervently believed in the democracy and capitalism of their adopted nation. Yet, many California workers felt betrayed by that system. The rampant capitalism of monopolies underwritten by government subsidies, an inequitable tax system, and competition in an unfair labor market became the focus of their rebellion. Their fundamental, almost passionate, belief in the ideals of democracy and capitalism prompted

⁵Karl Marx, The Karl Marx Library, vol. 2, On America and the Civil War, trans. and ed. Saul K. Padover (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), 42.

them to form the Workingmen's Party. They desired to redress issues within a system in which they still had faith. Elected as political outsiders, it was their political inexperience and simplicity that made achieving their goals difficult. Ultimately, the WPC not only gave the business establishment and politicians a new respect for labor, they taught the working class the possibilities of political activism.

Exemplifying those fundamental beliefs, the WPC played a crucial role in drafting California's second constitution. The party provided one-third of the 152 delegates assigned the task of writing the new document.⁶ The fusion Non-Partisan Party was created when the state's Republicans and Democrats feared that the suspected "Communards" would control the convention. The resulting convention was "a clash between the class-conscious groups of capital and labor."⁷

True to their working-class principles, the WPC was responsible, in part, for a constitutional recognition of

⁶Carl Brent Swisher, Motivation and Political Technique in the California Constitutional Convention, 1878-79 (Claremont, California: Pomona College, 1930; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 24 (page references are to reprint edition).

⁷Ibid., 21.

the eight-hour work day,⁸ state regulation of utilities and transportation companies,⁹ a state railroad commission,¹⁰ and the creation of a state board of equalization.¹¹ The party that espoused equal pay for the sexes was also instrumental in a constitutional prohibition on sexual discrimination in the pursuit of "any lawful business, avocation, or profession."¹² Meeting in Sacramento from September 28, 1878, to March 3, 1879, the convention was the pinnacle of the party's state influence.

The WPC was such a formidable power in San Francisco that all thirty of that city's constitutional delegates were WPCers. The remaining twenty-one WPC delegates came from other areas around the state.¹³ While most studies have focused on the WPC in San Francisco, it was a strong force

⁸James J. Rawls and Walton Bean, California: An Interpretive History, 6th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1993), 184.

⁹Neil Larry Shumsky, The Evolution of Political Protest and the Workingmen's Party of California (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 210.

¹⁰Rawls and Bean, 183.

¹¹Swisher, 80.

¹²Barbara Allen Babcock, "Clara Shortridge Foltz: Constitution Maker," Indiana Law Journal 66 (Fall 1991): 895.

¹³Swisher, 24-28.

in at least forty of California's fifty-two counties.¹⁴ The story of the San Francisco WPC is relevant for its statewide impact, yet San Francisco may not have been typical of the rest of California. A study of the WPC in San Jose may provide a better picture of the party's functioning statewide, outside San Francisco. In the state's fourth largest city at the time, the WPC of San Jose was a bridge between the mostly urban, industrial interests of San Francisco and the rural, agricultural environs of the balance of the state.

Between 1878 and 1880, the Workingmen's Party of California made a distinct impact on the politics of Santa Clara County and the city of San Jose. The histories of San Jose and Santa Clara County contain very little information on the local branch of the Workingmen's Party.¹⁵ The economic hardships of San Jose and the Santa Clara Valley in

¹⁴Daniel Allardyce Cornford, "Lumber, Labor, and Community in Humboldt County, California, 1850-1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1983), 114. See also Ralph Kauer, "The Workingmen's Party of California," Pacific Historical Review 13 (Sept. 1949): 278-91; Shumsky, Evolution of Political Protest; Ira B. Cross, A History of the Labor Movement in California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Company, 1966); Alexander Saxton, The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

¹⁵ As far as can be ascertained, any minutes or notes of the party are not available.

the mid-1870s are not usually addressed in these local histories. Their picture of the prosperity and serenity of the times does not explain the, albeit brief, appearance of the local WPC. Who and what provided the impetus for the founding of the San Jose branch of the WPC? What were the local issues of concern to the San Jose WPC? What were the successes and/or failures of the local party? Who was attracted to the Workingmen's Party in San Jose? Though it enhanced a few political careers, did the WPC benefit the general citizenry of San Jose? And finally, how can the demise of the party be explained?

The answers to these questions are elusive. The local histories treat the party as a historical footnote, if at all. While the local histories furnish a cursory picture of the community, it is the newspapers, the San Jose Daily Mercury, the San Jose Daily Patriot, the San Jose Daily Herald, and the San Jose Daily Morning Times, that provide the primary sources of information for the party's activities and the community in which it functioned.

Information regarding the individual members is limited. For some of its leaders, the WPC was merely a political diversion. Many left either the local Republican or Democratic Party briefly, but continued to be politically active members of their community after the WPC's demise. For the most part, very few records were left by working

people, especially the unemployed and unskilled. The available bits and pieces of the WPC-SJ membership have been gleaned tirelessly by Dr. David Eakins of San Jose State University from the era's numerous anti-Chinese newspaper articles. Census information on individuals associated with the San Jose WPC was meticulously recorded by Clay Trost, a San Jose State history graduate student. The SJSU Special Collections Library, the San Jose Historical Museum, the California History Center at De Anza College, the California State Library in Sacramento, and the knowledgeable and enthusiastic staffs of each, plus numerous public libraries all prove to be invaluable sources. The San Jose city directories, the Great Register of Voters, the California Death Index for 1905-1929, and obituaries help provide a more well-rounded portrait of the members, especially a small handful of vociferous movers and shakers of the San Jose branch of the Workingmen's Party of California.

The lives of these local political activists were intrinsically interconnected with the lives of the people of other Bay Area communities. To understand the rise of the WPC in San Jose and the Santa Clara Valley, a picture of the political upheavals in San Francisco during the late 1870s is first necessary. Its social, economic, and political concerns reverberated throughout the state and especially the surrounding region. Nowhere was the turmoil and

disillusionment of the era more consequential or concentrated than in San Francisco. Many found their belief in the American dream shaken and their desire for a better life challenged on numerous fronts. Several found their gains eroded as their hopes dissolved into disappointment and bitterness. Consequently, many sought redress and relief in the Workingmen's Party of California.

CHAPTER ONE

SAN FRANCISCO, THE "JULY DAYS," DENIS KEARNEY, AND THE FOUNDING OF THE WORKINGMEN'S PARTY OF CALIFORNIA

By the mid-1870s, working-class discontent pervaded California. With over a quarter of the state's population, San Francisco's impact on the rest of California was so influential that turbulence engendered by its aggrieved working class had ramifications up and down the state.¹ The San Francisco branch of the Workingmen's Party was founded to relieve worker misery, fear, and frustration at the ballot box. A seemingly unresponsive and corrupt government compounded by a serious economic depression, provided the drive for the organization of the Workingmen's Party and a working-class attempt at political reform.

Rapid changes had generated business uncertainty, unemployment, and destitution. Typically, the changes far outpaced the capacity of social and political institutions to handle the problems they created. During the severe depression of the mid-1870s, scant relief was provided for the indigent despite the efforts of a few church groups,

¹U. S. Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce, Compendium of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 28.

almshouses, philanthropic agencies, and municipal authorities. Crime and vice were commonplace.²

The depression and turmoil of the 1870s produced what some perceived to be a genuinely fertile atmosphere for revolution in the United States. The apparent threat of that labor revolution soon became only too real to the citizens of San Francisco. On July 23, 1877, a solidarity meeting on behalf of the eastern railway strikers was called by the San Francisco branch of the Workingmen's Party of the United States.³ It soon degenerated into a riot. Instigated by a few described in the San Francisco Chronicle as "a class of idle, bumming, thieving loafers known as hoodlums,"⁴ the mob vented its wrath and frustration on the Chinese community and the companies encouraging their

²Ira B. Cross, A History of the Labor Movement in California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Company, 1966), 72 (page references are to reprint edition); Frank Roney, "Frank Roney's San Francisco--His Diary: April 1875-March 1876," ed. Neil L. Shumsky, Labor History 17 (Spring 1976): 245-64;

³The WPUS was a labor-based, national socialist party with its origins in the Marxian International Workingmen's Association. Founded the previous year in the East, it was an effort to reconcile Marxian and Lasalleian socialists after the demise of the First International. See Alexander Saxton, The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 113; Neil Larry Shumsky, The Evolution of Political Protest and the Workingmen's Party of California (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 13.

⁴San Francisco Chronicle, 27 July 1877.

immigration.

After three successive nights of burning, looting, and street battles, the authorities restored the peace. An overwhelming show of force, similar to President Hayes', seemed to be "the only agency they could think of using in coping with the situation."⁵ The mobs were finally controlled by a local force of 252 policemen, about 1,200 state militia, plus a four-thousand-member Committee of Safety of San Francisco citizens. In addition, "within forty-eight hours after the first night of rioting, the United States authorities had agreed to supply rifles, carbines, and ammunition to the Committee of Safety; the gunboats 'Pensacola,' 'Lackawanna,' and 'Monterey' had been ordered to give all possible assistance in protecting the city from the mob,"⁶ including federal reinforcements from the Presidio, Mare Island, and Benicia.⁷

Much of the working-class misery and frustration was the result of a complicated combination of national, state, and local issues, most of which were beyond their control.

⁵Frank Roney, An Autobiography, ed. Ira B. Cross (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 277.

⁶Cross, History of Labor, 91.

⁷Ibid.; Michael Kazin, "Prelude to Kearneyism: The 'July Days' in San Francisco, 1877," New Labor Review 3 (1980): 22; Ralph Kauer, "The Workingmen's Party of California," Pacific Historical Review 13 (Sept. 1949): 279.

It was this sense of powerlessness and futility that sparked the "July Days" of 1877 and eventually the organization of "California's first large-scale labor movement," the Workingmen's Party of California.⁸

The fear of unemployment and destitution loomed daily for many San Francisco workers. Only a few years earlier, the California wage laborer had been the highest paid in the nation.⁹ In certain manufacturing categories the demand for labor had created wage levels that were two-and-a-half times greater in the Pacific states than in the Middle Atlantic states.¹⁰ The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 not only tied California to the rest of the United States, it also glutted the labor market. Along with a new rush of eastern migrants, an estimated ten thousand Chinese and between two and three thousand white railroad workers were released to compete in the local work force.¹¹

⁸James J. Rawls and Walton Bean, California: An Interpretive History, 6th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1993), 228.

⁹Shumsky, Evolution of Political Protest, 79; William Issel and Robert W. Cherny, San Francisco, 1865-1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 15.

¹⁰Shumsky, Evolution of Political Protest, 49-50.

¹¹Lucile Eaves, A History of California Labor Legislation with an Introductory Sketch of the San Francisco Labor Movement (Berkeley: The University Press, 1910; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1966), 135 (page references are to reprint edition).

Resentment of the railroads continued to grow when the Southern Pacific was ultimately granted 11.5 percent of the total land area of California.¹² During the decade of the 1860s, eight million acres of California public land passed into private ownership. Land that could have produced fifty thousand 160-acre farms, or twenty-five thousand 320-acre farms, produced instead only 7,008 parcels averaging 1,141 acres.¹³ Combined with other factors, this land monopoly made ownership of a small farm difficult. Traditionally considered an outlet for any worker desiring self-sufficiency and independence, the small family farm was not an option for many of California's wage workers. Unable to purchase land, many gravitated to San Francisco, adding to the ranks of the unemployed. As early as January 1870, the Evening Bulletin of San Francisco stated that "there are those who estimate the proportion of laborers in California who are out of work to the rest of the population, as high as twenty percent, or one-fifth of the entire mass of inhabitants."¹⁴

The completion of the transcontinental railroad also

¹²Rawls and Bean, 170.

¹³Paul W. Gates, "Public Land Disposal in California," Agricultural History 49, no. 1 (January 1975): 176.

¹⁴Evening Bulletin, 12 January 1870; quoted in Cross, History of Labor, 63.

forced California merchants into stiff competition with eastern suppliers, whose goods were often produced by cheaper labor and with cheaper raw materials. In 1868, only one year earlier, the California Legislature had declared eight hours a legal day's work. Fierce competition and mounting unemployment forced the once-powerful labor unions of San Francisco to relinquish the high wages and the long-sought eight-hour work day.¹⁵ The subsequent financial difficulties and unemployment eroded the previous economic and political gains of labor and their unions.

Already strained, the San Francisco working class saw no relief in sight when the full effects of the 1873 national depression were finally felt in 1876. Fear, disappointment, and embitterment became state by-products of the long depression. The failures of numerous banks and mining speculations wiped out the life savings of many San Franciscans. Heavily dependent upon the manufacture of mining equipment for California and Nevada, San Francisco had already suffered the loss of its monopoly of location with the transcontinental railroad. The national industrial depression made the city especially vulnerable. Although, the state's previous agricultural prosperity had eased the

¹⁵Ibid., 61.

severity of the industrial decline,¹⁶ the rainfall for the winter of 1876-77 was the lowest in twenty-five years, adding crop failures to the state's manufacturing depression. It was estimated that by the spring of 1877 between one-fifth and one-quarter of the white population of San Francisco was unemployed.¹⁷

While working-class conditions had deteriorated, a few capitalists had disproportionately benefitted, and the disparity did not go unnoticed. The economic dependence on the railroad created the state's greatest concentration of power and wealth and the now legendary domination of California by the Central Pacific Railroad.¹⁸ Through the manipulation of routes and freight rates, as well as vast land holdings, this oligarchy of ostentatiously wealthy railroad men controlled the lives and earned the envy and hatred of most of the farmers, laborers, and merchants of the state. These apparently omnipotent men not only dominated the land and economy of California, but also the government. These men were suspected of controlling the state through many public officials, ranging from members of

¹⁶Ping Chiu, Chinese Labor in California, 1850-1880: An Economic Study (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963), 55.

¹⁷Saxton, 106.

¹⁸Rawls and Bean, 217.

the State Board of Equalization to justices of the United States Supreme Court.¹⁹ By the 1870s, perhaps no state's politics was more subservient to big business than was California's.²⁰

Unemployment, monopolies, and an unresponsive government led to the formation of the San Francisco WPC and ultimately the formation of WPCs in most California counties. Why the necessity for a Workingmen's Party? Why did the working-class electorate not turn to the more established Republican and Democratic Parties? The more traditional parties in California suffered, at best, from tarnished reputations. The Republican Party, the once glorious party of anti-slavery and the preservers of the Union, had become known in California as the party of corporate manipulation and corruption due to its much too close association with the Central Pacific Railroad. "The Republican party has been the railroad ring party of the State. It has been run in the interests of Leland Stanford and his cohorts of the Central Pacific Railroad. It has

¹⁹Carl Brent Swisher, Motivation and Political Technique in the California Constitutional Convention 1878-79 (Claremont, California: Pomona College, 1930; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 113 (page references are to reprint edition).

²⁰Rawls and Bean, 217.

been owned by him; controlled by him."²¹

By the 1870s, the Democrats were gaining strength within the state, but not due to their platform. Still divided between the Chivalry, or Southern Democrats, and those Democrats who fought for the Union, the California Democratic Party benefitted from the electorate's hatred of the railroads and their Republican associates. The Democratic Party, however, proved to be just as susceptible to corruption as the Republican Party. Government debasement was so pervasive that the railroads would support any candidate, Democrat or Republican, with the best chance of election.²² Working-class futility and frustration found little redress when neither political party was trustworthy, and any politician seemed corruptible. As anti-monopoly meeting organizer, I. M. Zion, explicitly maintained, "nothing was to be hoped for from either of the old parties. The leaders were subsidized by the corporations. Both parties were alike controlled by them....The corporations control our government. They substitute machine politicians for statesmen."²³ As the Santa Clara Echo sarcastically, yet succinctly, commented,

²¹San Jose Daily Mercury, 16 May 1877.

²²Rawls and Bean, 225.

²³San Jose Daily Mercury, 10 August 1881.

"for years the real difference between the republican and democratic parties has been like the difference between tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee."²⁴

The development of the Workingmen's Party in California provided an alternative for the state's workers. According to its platform, it was a party that desired to reform and re-democratize California government "as may be necessary to secure the rights of the people as against those of capital, to maintain life, liberty, and happiness against land and money monopoly. Only in the people, the honest workingman can hope to find a remedy."²⁵

The WPC platform called for land reform, an equitable tax system, secular education, and opposed corporate monopolies. It also addressed such decidedly working-class issues as day wages for public works projects, the return of the eight-hour work day, compulsory education up to the age of fourteen, equal pay for men and women, and opposition to prison labor and Chinese immigration.²⁶

The WPC was not the first party to address the issue of Chinese immigration and labor. Hostility toward the Chinese

²⁴Santa Clara Echo, 10 May 1879.

²⁵Winfield J. Davis, History of Political Conventions in California, 1849-1892 (Sacramento: Publications of the California State Library, 1893), 379.

²⁶Ibid., 379-81.

had been especially evident in California's attempts at restrictive legislation. The decline of gold mining and the completion of the railroad flooded cities with both white and Chinese workers. California's scarcity of females allowed the Chinese to fill the services traditionally supplied by women. Most found work as cooks, domestics, and laundrymen, as well as farmers and gardeners. Not content with menial jobs, the growing number of Chinese immigrants gradually moved into more skilled trades. This brought more Chinese into direct competition with white men in an increasing number of occupations.²⁷ Once a novelty, the Chinese soon became a perceived threat to the white community.

As early as 1852, the Democrats officially protested "the introduction of serfs or coolies into California to compete with white laborers"²⁸ and by 1867, Chinese immigration was the most burning political issue. While the Democrats had opposed the introduction of Chinese labor,²⁹ the Republicans, in 1867 and 1869, supported voluntary immigration, yet opposed the indentured or coolie system of

²⁷Cross, History of Labor, 74.

²⁸Davis, 23.

²⁹Ibid., 265.

labor.³⁰ Despite this declared hostility to Chinese immigration, the WPC argued that these party planks "proved to be only idle vaporings of the politicians."³¹

One factor that set the WPC apart from the other parties of the day was Denis Kearney, a thirty-year-old Irish immigrant.³² A husband and father of four, Kearney was the epitome of the self-educated, successful entrepreneur. He had gone to sea at the age of eleven from his home in County Cork, settled in San Francisco in 1868, and, by 1872, had saved enough money to buy a drayage company.³³ To overcome his awkwardness in public speaking, Kearney regularly attended the Lyceum for Self-Culture in San Francisco where it is said he denounced with "bitter vulgarity" the Catholic Church, high wages for workingmen, and the anti-Chinese movement. From a new-found empathy for the working class to political opportunism, many explanations have been suggested for Kearney's radical

³⁰Ibid., 260, 293.

³¹[J. C. Stedman and R. A. Leonard], The Workingmen's Party of California: An Epitome of its Rise and Progress (San Francisco: Bacon, 1878), 11.

³²Shumsky, Evolution of Political Protest, 145-70.

³³P. O. Ray, "Denis Kearney," in Dictionary of American Biography, 1960-61 ed.; Biographical Dictionary of American Labor, 1984 ed. s.v. "Denis Kearney."

reversal of principles.³⁴ For whatever reason, change they did. Kearney, through his sand lot harangues, "became the recognized leader of the unemployed and discontented masses,"³⁵ and in the eye of the public, the representative and "embodiment"³⁶ of the Workingmen's Party of California.

Under Kearney's fiery leadership, the workers of San Francisco, and soon California, found someone who understood them. He was not a man to be ignored. Using little solid evidence, Kearney based his speeches on simple common knowledge and established prejudices.³⁷ Supported by a platform plank demanding life imprisonment for malfeasance in public office, Kearney's speeches threatening violence, lynching, and incendiarism stirred the passions of the frustrated, and often unemployed, workers. "If it becomes necessary every freeman in California has a right to keep a musket in his house, and ammunition to use it. In one year we can have 20,000 men upon our rolls, and 20,000 muskets in

³⁴Henry George, "The Kearney Agitation in California," The Popular Science Monthly 17 (August 1880): 438; James Bryce, The American Commonwealth, 3rd ed., vol. 2, The Party System, Public Opinion, Illustrations and Reflections, Social Institutions (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1897), 431.

³⁵Cross, History of Labor, 95.

³⁶George, 443.

³⁷Charles W. Lomas, "Dennis Kearney: Case Study in Demagoguery," Quarterly Journal of Speech 41 (October 1955): 236-37.

our hands."³⁸

Only a couple of months after the July riots, Kearney's vehemence attracted the attention of both capital and labor. He spoke to sand lot crowds in front of the San Francisco City Hall on the usual anti-monopoly labor issues, but found the key to solidarity when he demanded an end to "cheap Chinese labor," finishing every speech with "the Chinese must go!" Many San Francisco citizens' fears and anger regarding economic uncertainties, the daunting scope of the corporate monopolies, and an unresponsive government became focused on the Chinese immigrants. Kearney, and soon a vast number of Californians, once again found a scapegoat in the vulnerable Chinese workers. Here was the catalytic issue on which not only laborers, but a majority of the electorate could agree. Tired of political rhetoric and empty promises, the working class had found in Kearney a man who not only spoke their language, but also promised to alleviate their abundant grievances.

Under Kearney's leadership, and probably in reaction to the military force used to suppress the "July Days" riots, each ward of the San Francisco WPC formed its own paramilitary or militia group. Whether highly trained or not, these groups added fear and credibility to Kearney's

³⁸Denis Kearney, 1878; quoted in [Stedman and Leonard], 19.

threats of lynching and revolution, which, in turn, led to his numerous arrests by the San Francisco authorities for incendiary speeches. This unconstitutional repression only succeeded in making a martyr of Kearney and attracted more members to the new San Francisco party."

For the most part, the story of the Workingmen's Party of California has understandably revolved around the San Francisco movement. From the ostentatious splendor of the railroad barons of Nob Hill to the crowded squalor and misery of the south of Market workers' district, San Francisco could not be matched for the power, tension, and drama of the Workingmen's story. It is, however, these very extremes of the social and economic spectrum that make it an unbalanced representation of the Workingmen's Party within California in the late 1870s. The city of San Jose and its environs were more representative of the state as a whole and provide better insight into the WPC story elsewhere in California.

³⁹Roney, Autobiography, 273-74.

CHAPTER TWO

SAN JOSE: FROM PUEBLO TO THE GILDED AGE

Distant enough to be a separate community, yet close enough to be influenced by the vagaries of San Francisco, San Jose was a microcosm of Gilded Age California. Although, still within San Francisco's sphere of influence, the city of San Jose, an agricultural community with a budding industrial and mercantile class, was a better socio-economic representative of California in the 1870s. For an understanding of the rise of the Workingmen's Party, without the backdrop of the extremes of San Francisco, San Jose and Santa Clara County should be seen as typifying the problems facing California's working class in the 1870s.

Whether compared demographically or economically, San Jose and Santa Clara County were more like most of California's other counties than San Francisco. The ethnic backgrounds of the people of San Jose and Santa Clara County were proportionally more representative of the state than was the more cosmopolitan San Francisco. By 1880, San Jose's 69.5 percent U. S.-born population was more exemplary of the state's 66.1 percent than was the more diverse San Francisco, with only 55.4 percent native inhabitants. With

20.2 percent of its foreign-born population from Ireland, Santa Clara County was much closer to the state's 21.5 percent proportion than San Francisco's Irish population, which comprised almost 30 percent of its foreign citizenry.¹

Even racially, San Jose and Santa Clara County were more like the remainder of California. By 1880, the average California county had a 6.5 percent Chinese population. While the Chinese accounted for 9.3 percent of San Francisco's population in 1880, the 7.7 percent Chinese population of Santa Clara County was a better representative of an average county. San Francisco's Chinese population constituted 29 percent of the state's total. They were employed predominantly in the urban occupations of entrepreneurs, factory workers, or laundrymen. The remaining 71 percent of California's Chinese were scattered about in the other 51 rural counties.² In the 1870s, most Chinese in the state earned their living either in agriculture, mining, or fishing.³

¹U. S. Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce, Compendium of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 1:482, 485, 491-92.

²Ibid., 1:337-38.

³Sucheng Chan, This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 43, 62-63, 68-69.

Economically, San Francisco did not typify the state as a whole. By the 1880s, "the city had more manufacturing establishments, more employees in workshops, greater capitalization, larger value of materials, and higher value of products than all the other twenty-four western cities combined."⁴ When tallied with other counties with comparable economic bases, Santa Clara County residents resembled more people around the state than did those living in San Francisco.⁵ The small-scale manufacturing of Santa Clara County that created 2.5 percent of the state's production value for 1880 was far more representative of a typical California county when compared with the 67 percent production value provided by San Francisco. When the city and county of San Francisco paid 43 percent of the combined state, county, and city taxes in the state, Santa Clara County's 4 percent was a better model of one of the other 51

⁴William Issel and Robert W. Cherny, San Francisco, 1865-1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 23.

⁵Dudley T. Moorhead, "Sectionalism and the California Constitution of 1879," Pacific Historical Review 12 (September 1943): 289-90. Moorhead divided California into ten economic sections based upon the 1870 and 1880 census. Santa Clara County along with Colusa, Sutter, Yuba, Napa, Yolo, Sacramento, Solano, Contra Costa, San Joaquin, Alameda, and Stanislaus counties comprised his Valley Grain-and-Fruit Belt. This section of counties had the largest total population, the greatest number of registered voters in 1877, and had one of the greatest increases in population between 1870 and 1880. The city and county of San Francisco was an entity unto itself.

counties.⁶

San Jose and Santa Clara County had a more stable, more conservative economic history than the metropolis to the north. One of California's oldest communities, San Jose was known by the 1870s as a progressive town "unsurpassed for beauty, fertility and healthfulness, and is noted for the public spirit and enterprise of its citizens."⁷

Celebrating its centennial months earlier as Spain's first city in California, the San Jose of the Workingmen's Party of California was already a thriving community with a wealth of traditions of its own.

Three miles west from the new Santa Clara de Asis Mission, el Pueblo de San Jose de Guadalupe was founded on November 29, 1777. It was established as Spain's first civil settlement to support the existing missions and presidios of the region. The ideal agricultural site was located about fifty miles southeast of the presidio and mission at San Francisco and accessible not only to the ocean and the bay, but also to the interior of the state.

Mexican independence in the 1820s meant a shift from a Spanish to a Mexican administration, one more amenable to foreign settlers. By 1845-46, about 150 Americans were

⁶Tenth Census of the U. S., 1880, 2:1561.

⁷San Francisco Chronicle, 9 November 1873.

estimated to be living in or near San Jose.⁸ Although there were about 40 ranchos scattered around the valley in 1845, wheat fields slowly replaced the Mexican cattle grazing lands.⁹

A growing trade center, San Jose, like the rest of California, saw its modest transitions greatly accelerated with the discovery of gold in 1848. On the routes to both the northern and southern gold fields, San Jose became a terminus for many argonauts. San Jose's geographic connections with the Central Valley of California, either by way of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers or overland through the gap in the Diablo Range, played a vital role in the development of the area.¹⁰ Many failed forty-niners settled in the Santa Clara Valley and San Jose, increasing the city's population to about 3,000 by 1850,¹¹ and the county of Santa Clara to 6,764 two years later.¹²

⁸Oscar Osburn Winther, "The Story of San Jose, 1777-1869: California's First Pueblo," California Historical Society Quarterly 14 (March 1935): 18.

⁹Clyde Arbuckle, Clyde Arbuckle's History of San Jose (San Jose: Memorabilia of San Jose, 1986), 137.

¹⁰Jan Otto Marius Broek, The Santa Clara Valley, California: A Study in Landscape Changes (Utrecht: N. V. A. Oosthoek's Uitgevers, 1932), 56.

¹¹Winther, 155.

¹²U. S. Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce, Compendium of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 28.

San Jose grew steadily throughout the 1850s, quickly recovering from a minor business slump following the loss of its site as the capital.¹³ Agriculture, mainly range cattle and extensive wheat cultivation, provided the economic base for San Jose and the valley.¹⁴ The valley soil and climate provided two wheat crops annually, eventually making Santa Clara County the fifth county in wheat production in California.¹⁵ Horticulture developed slowly. Many local farmers made fortunes selling fresh fruit and vegetables to gold miners, produce originally grown only for local consumption. Improvement of their stock prompted the development of the nursery industry in the valley and the founding of the State Horticultural Society in San Jose in 1853.¹⁶

¹³At California's first constitutional convention in 1849, San Jose was named the state capital. With poor housing, inadequate offices and legislative buildings, the city was unprepared to be the new capital. One of the enactments of the legislature, for political and economic reasons, was to move the capital first to Vallejo and eventually to Sacramento. James J. Rawls and Walton Bean, California: An Interpretive History, 6th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc. 1993), 101.

¹⁴Ibid., 187; Arbuckle, 137-49.

¹⁵Yvonne Jacobson, Passing Farms. Enduring Values: California's Santa Clara Valley (Los Altos, California: William Kaufmann, Inc., 1984), 65.

¹⁶William F. James and George H. McMurry, History of San Jose, California (San Jose, California: Smith Printing Co., 1933), 88; Broek, 67.

The area's wheat crops soon resulted in mills. San Jose, by 1854, had four mills for grinding flour and subsequently boasted the finest mill in the state.¹⁷ Some San Jose industries grew directly from the agricultural and horticultural needs of the area, such as foundries that manufactured steam-driven farm machinery.¹⁸ Indirectly fostered by the flourishing agricultural economy, many other businesses were established to cater to a growing community. By the mid-1850s, San Jose had carriage factories, harness shops, a grocery store, photographer, book store, drug store, clothing store, two beer breweries, and several saloons.¹⁹

By 1860, San Jose had grown to a population of 4,579 and the county increased 176 percent to almost 12,000,²⁰ as the gold seekers established a more permanent life. Although the population steadily grew, the early 1860s marked a period of decline for San Jose. The loss of the

¹⁷Broek, 138.

¹⁸J. P. Munro-Fraser, History of Santa Clara County, California; including its Geography, Geology, Topography, Climatography and Description (San Francisco: Alley, Bowen & Co., Publishers, 1881), 516-17.

¹⁹San Jose Daily Telegraph, 1 January 1856; quoted in Winther, 156-57.

²⁰U. S. Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce, Compendium of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1862), 31, 247.

state capital and the gold rush trade, and a financial panic during 1854-55 all finally took their toll.

The doldrums ceased in January 1864 with the completion of the San Francisco-San Jose Railroad and the end of the Civil War the next year. Overcoming difficulties with finances, war-time supplies, and more than two-and-a-half years of building, the railroad brought an economic boom to San Jose equal to that of the Gold Rush.²¹ A resurrection of civic pride as well as a certain sophistication came with the economic resurgence. It was a city that could support not only its first daily newspaper; it even founded its first amateur theatre group.²² An estimated fifty to one hundred buildings a year, including the elegant Auzerais House, were constructed in the central portion of the city.²³ The Bank of San Jose, the city's first, opened in 1866. Several new enterprises were started, including more flour, lumber, and woolen mills, and a silk factory, as well as more banks and dry goods stores.²⁴

By 1865, the city's euphoria was due only in part to the end of the war. San Jose also found itself out of debt,

²¹Winther, 165-67.

²²James and McMurry, 100.

²³Ibid., 105.

²⁴San Jose Daily Argus, 20 October 1866; quoted in Winther, 167.

economically confident, and flush with community spirit. Streets, bridges, and parks were finally improved or built.²⁵ Widespread city construction included a new court house, numerous new schools, more churches, a new water and sewage system, and the city's first street car line.²⁶

Agriculture, still the main source of income, expanded, utilizing the new railroad for exporting wheat, flour, and fruit.²⁷ San Jose, having more than doubled in size in the past ten years,²⁸ became the shopping center and supply depot for farmers and millers from around the county. As they prospered, so did the city's merchants, bankers, and implement dealers.²⁹

San Jose's economic rebound and growth had been precipitated by the coming of the railroad beginning in 1864 with the San Francisco-San Jose Railroad. The Santa Clara Valley's, as well as the entire state's, dependence on the Central and later the Southern Pacific, has become legendary. Agriculture, the economic base for the valley, was dependent upon a corporation notorious for creating

²⁵Arbuckle, 37-38.

²⁶James and McMurry, 100.

²⁷Winther, 168.

²⁸San Jose Daily Mercury, 30 July 1868, quoted in Winther, 169; Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, 129.

²⁹Arbuckle, 139.

strangle holds upon communities. Known corruption of national, state, and local political officials offered little relief from the growing omnipotence of the Central Pacific. The county, and most certainly the state, were rapidly falling under the control of the all-powerful railroad with money enough to buy whatever or whomever it desired.

In February 1870, the Central Pacific Railroad came to San Jose when it bought the San Francisco-San Jose Railroad and began an "unending series of expansions and improvements" in and around San Jose over the next several years.³⁰ Eventually "the Southern Pacific owned every foot of important coastal rail between San Francisco and Los Angeles. It controlled all traffic between those points by any route until 1897."³¹ Much of the hatred and resentment of Californians of the era rightly focused upon the Central and Southern Pacific Railroads and their owners. Referring to the Central Pacific, the San Jose Daily Mercury candidly stated, "we venture the assertion that it has done more to corrupt the manhood of the State, to demoralize the press and to cheapen public virtue than all other causes

³⁰Ibid., 109.

³¹Ibid., 105.

combined."³²

The more the area's agricultural economy grew, the more the farmers depended upon the railroad to get their crops to market. The valley was evolving from extensive range cattle and wheat farming to the more intensive dairy farming and the raising of fruit, vegetables, and seeds.³³ While wheat growing still dominated the area, a combination of population pressures, increased land values, and easier transportation led to the breaking up of many large farms during the 1870s. The valley had a handful of large estates, for example, the 35,000 acres owned by General H. M. Naglee and the land owned by the numerous Martin Murphy clan. Essentially, however, with over 80 percent of its farms less than 400 acres each, and the average 517 acres, land monopoly was not an issue for Santa Clara County in the 1870s.³⁴

The local agricultural community was more distressed by the inequitable state tax system. Facilitated by state and federal legislators, the California tax system encouraged the continued ownership of undeveloped land with a lower tax rate. With the tax burden disproportionately heavy for the

³²San Jose Daily Mercury, 8 August 1873.

³³Broek, 66.

³⁴San Francisco Chronicle, 13 November 1873.

owner of improved land,³⁵ the intensive agriculturists of the Santa Clara Valley with their small farms, averaging 173 acres in 1880,³⁶ were especially affected.

Before the railroad and improved transportation, drying of produce had been the only answer to overproduction.³⁷ By the early 1870s, railroads, refrigerated cars, and new fruit canning methods ended the fear of overproduction and allowed local farmers to export their produce to the East Coast of the United States and to Europe.³⁸ By 1876, San Jose was the capital of the state's nascent fruit industry.³⁹

When the national depression of 1873 finally hit the California economy in 1876, it became the state's first industrial depression.⁴⁰ Unlike San Francisco, that relied

³⁵Paul W. Gates, "Public Land Disposal in California," Agricultural History 49, no. 1 (Jan. 1975): 176-77.

³⁶Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, 1:689.

³⁷In the early 1870s, the abundant grape crop led the valley's farmers, reminiscent of the early Spanish fathers, to attempt to make wine. This early California wine was so undrinkable that no market could be found on the East Coast despite the fact that the Franco-Prussian War had cut off the East's supply of French wine. Broek, 69.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 67; Arbuckle, 155-57.

³⁹Arbuckle, 158.

⁴⁰Ping Chiu, Chinese Labor in California, 1850-1880: An Economic Study (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963), 55.

heavily on manufacturing, agriculturally-based Santa Clara County was more fortunate. Although hurt by the depression, agriculture was less affected than manufacturing.⁴¹ The transition from wheat to fruit in the Santa Clara Valley meant a shift from the local manufacturing of threshing machines to fruit processing machinery. Less susceptible to the manufacturing depression, the transition and expansion of regional agriculture led to further growth in manufacturing in San Jose. The evolution of the valley actually allowed expansion of both industry and mercantile firms. During the 1870s, San Jose alone saw the establishment of two new foundries, three new carriage makers, several new lumber firms, as well as a box factory, a broom manufactory, two glove factories, another brewery, new shoe stores, grocery stores, jewelry, and clothing stores. The growth of the community provided the base upon which four new banks were founded in San Jose during the 1870s.⁴²

Despite its progress, San Jose finally fell victim to the depression. Not as severely affected as San Francisco, San Jose had its own significant unemployment problem, widening the gap between its gentry and working classes. In

⁴¹Ibid.; O. V. Wells, "The Depression of 1873-79," Agricultural History 11 (1937): 241.

⁴²Munro-Fraser, 521-23.

January 1876, an impassioned letter from a laborer appeared in the San Jose Daily Patriot, claiming unemployment was so severe that should anyone advertise for a worker, "by the setting of the sun on that day he will have as many as twenty applications!"⁴³ The local Protestant ministers of San Jose took up a collection of \$650 "in behalf of needy in our midst" in December 1876.⁴⁴ It was a community with a serious unemployment problem, but wealthy enough to support four new banks. Noting the inconsistency, the San Jose Daily Mercury wrote "that the wealthy city of San Jose ought to take some care of these indigent people. It is a disgrace to our city that we do not make some provision for the hundreds of destitute persons in our midst."⁴⁵

The disparities affected the entire community. Those not concerned with losing their own jobs were frequently reminded of the dangers of bands of unemployed vagrants. The San Jose Daily Herald warned in November 1878 that "petty thievery is reported from all parts of the city, and housekeepers are kept in a constant state of alarm."⁴⁶ Two days later a tramp was arrested under suspicion of murdering

⁴³San Jose Daily Patriot, 21 January 1876.

⁴⁴San Jose Daily Herald, 11 December 1876.

⁴⁵San Jose Daily Mercury, 13 September 1877.

⁴⁶San Jose Daily Herald, 6 November 1878.

a woman in her home with an axe.⁴⁷

Despite some early sympathy, however, with widening economic distinctions in the city, the local newspapers reflected and reinforced the hostility of the gentry toward the working class and immigrants. Numerous anti-immigrant remarks could be found in the pro-Republican San Jose Daily Mercury. Almost ten years before the WPC, editor J. J. Owen claimed that the anti-Chinese plank of the Democratic platform "won the votes of many Irish laboring men."⁴⁸ As early as 1869, the Daily Mercury concluded that if Irish immigrant Democrats were behind the anti-Chinese movement, they were also responsible for the local anti-Chinese violence and lawlessness.⁴⁹ After the Methodist Episcopal Church and General Naglee's distillery were burned by an arsonist, Owen equated the "hatred of the Negro and Chinaman (as their) chief stock in trade." He laid the blame directly at the door of the Democratic Party and "especially of that class, foreign born whose necks, in their native

⁴⁷Ibid., 8 November 1878.

⁴⁸San Jose Daily Mercury, 10 September 1868.

⁴⁹The irony of Owen's remarks was that the Irish, Democratic Murphy family was also one of the wealthiest, most influential, and most popular in the valley. See Earl F. Schmidt, Who Were the Murphys: California's Irish First Family (Murphys, CA: Mooney Flat Ventures, 1989).

land, were ever beneath the heel of British tyranny."⁵⁰

WPC leader Denis Kearney became an easy target of Owen's more obvious taunts. Was the poem "written for the Mercury," in a mock Irish brogue, "Och, Dinnis, me darlint,..."⁵¹ because Kearney was an Irish immigrant or because Irish workers constituted a large number of San Jose's working class? The organization of the WPC in San Jose, with its almost one-quarter Irish immigrant membership,⁵² its strong anti-Chinese stance, and its volatile Irish leader, Denis Kearney, only reinforced Owen's opinions.

The most vicious anti-immigrant writing was a San Francisco Argonaut article reprinted in the Santa Clara Echo. It may have been another example of the extremes of San Francisco, but it obviously had an audience in the Santa Clara Valley as well. It rebuked immigrant WPC supporters for:

Cowardly threats towards that class of foreigners whom you Irish and Germans have undertaken to drive out of

⁵⁰San Jose Daily Mercury, 25 February 1869.

⁵¹Ibid., 27 March 1879.

⁵²This figure and subsequent WPC-SJ calculations were roughly determined by using the census and Great Register information for the known members. Admittedly, these names were the only ones to be mentioned in the local newspapers, for whatever reason, and not a complete roster. It still points out the large Irish immigrant portion of the working class in San Jose.

the country in violation of laws made before your arrival and international treaties entered into before you came to this country. You, an ignorant mob of unwashed foreigners, would teach Americans their political duties. You, a propertyless mass of unskilled laborers, who are too idle, too vicious to earn your beer and whisky--you demand of us a division of our earnings, and call it Communism. You would steal the money you have not earned, and call it Agrarianism.⁵³

When the Daily Mercury chastised the Chivalry's, or Southern Democrats', objection to certain city candidates for their Irish and Catholic background, it again acknowledged not only San Jose's economic and ethnic delineations, but also the superficial, post-Civil War mending of the quarrelsome local Democratic Party. Eleven years after Appomattox, there still existed "a chronic feud in this county, between what is known as the chivalry and Irish wings of the Democratic party."⁵⁴

A fragmented Democratic Party offered little hope of a remedy for the working class' economic suffering. The stigma of statewide corruption made the Republican civic leaders of San Jose and their party questionable. It was considered a party "hopelessly under the dictation of leaders who are the paid and unscrupulous agents of a monopoly that defies the will and wishes of the people."⁵⁵

⁵³Santa Clara Echo, 29 March 1879.

⁵⁴San Jose Daily Mercury, 7 April 1876.

⁵⁵Ibid., 23 May 1875.

The city's distrust and frustration with the calibre of its politicians was blatantly evident when the Daily Mercury denounced the 1876 state legislature as an example of "the unwisdom of raising to the dignified position of a legislator, men cramped by ignorance, shrunk by bigotry and glazed by conceit and self-will."⁵⁶

In an attempt to mitigate the factionalism that pervaded San Jose politics in the early 1870s, the city charter was revised in 1874 to eliminate partisan political contests in municipal elections. In a city of about ten to eleven thousand, political alliances had become more a hindrance than a help in the view of the Republican Party political elite. Since the Civil War, San Jose had been predominantly a Republican-run city, yet the drive for nonpartisan municipal government was strongly supported by the Republican Daily Mercury. The removal of partisan politics also revealed the depths of the political cynicism of the electorate. Given the Hobson's choice of "Republican ring leaders on one side, and Democratic patriarchal dictators on the other", Owen promoted the nonpartisan stance to support men "whom personally we believe to be most fit for the place and the responsibility, whether their associations have been, or are still with Republicans or

⁵⁶Ibid., 6 April 1876.

with Democrats."⁵⁷ By 1877, the nonpartisan municipal elections had created, according to the Daily Mercury, "a new era of political fellowship and good will in this city. The people have wisely set their face against partisan interference in our local elections, and the party or clique who seeks to overturn this well established policy can not stand."⁵⁸

That so-called era of political fellowship and good will evidently reflected only the gentry's view of local politics. San Jose's political establishment failed to comprehend the depth of the fears and frustrations of its working class. The press seemed to reinforce the barely covert indifference of the civic leaders and served to diminish their perception of the anxieties of its lower class. Even in the Elysian fields of San Jose and Santa Clara County, the entangled working-class problems of inequitable taxes, expensive agricultural land, an apparently omnipotent railroad, and rising unemployment required complex political solutions.

The local politicians were unable to reassure San Jose's working class that they either understood, cared, or were capable of providing any sort of relief or assistance. The

⁵⁷Ibid., 23 May 1875.

⁵⁸Ibid., 29 March 1877.

fear of "partisan manipulation,"⁵⁹ two apparently impotent political parties, and the political establishment's ill-concealed disdain left an angry, frustrated working class searching for answers. Ironically, the Republican-inspired San Jose Daily Mercury could not have envisioned the importance of the working class and the resulting turbulence when it prophesied that, despite the unresponsiveness of both major parties, "the triumph of a party born of vital, vitalizing principles is not so far off."⁶⁰

⁵⁹Ibid., 10 April 1877.

⁶⁰Ibid., 23 May 1875.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ANTI-CHINESE MOVEMENT AND THE MAKING OF THE WORKINGMEN'S PARTY IN SAN JOSE AND SANTA CLARA COUNTY

The frustrations and turbulence that split the San Jose and Santa Clara County electorate produced the area's first significant labor party. A brief examination of the issues instrumental to the organization of the Workingmen's Party reveals the WPC to have been a forefather of the Populists. Despite their deep-felt, populist grievances, it was the Chinese and the anti-Chinese sentiment in the valley that played the dominant role in the creation of the local WPC. The party's connection with the anti-Chinese movement simultaneously galvanized its electorate while damaging its credibility in San Jose. The WPC's campaign of Chinese persecution and exclusion became a two-edged sword that attracted a broad spectrum of people to the party, yet ironically, diverted party attention away from such populist issues as expanding monopolies and the inequitable tax system.

Many Santa Clarans shared other Californians' deep distrust, if not hatred, of the state's principal monopoly, the Southern Pacific Railroad. In part, this was due to

local newspaper coverage of the plunderings of the Southern Pacific elsewhere in the state. But their distrust was also based on personal experience. Local farmers had already faced the incursion of the Southern Pacific. In the valley since 1870, by 1872, the Southern Pacific discontinued the night train that allowed fruit picked during the day to arrive the next morning in San Francisco. For this reduction in service, the railroad raised its rates. The valley's farmers retaliated by establishing the San Jose Farmers Club and Protective Association. Circumventing the railroad, the local farmers saved their crops and money when the group hired a steamer to ship their produce from Alviso to San Francisco. The outmaneuvered Southern Pacific soon resumed the night train at reduced rates.¹

Resenting the monopolistic power of the Southern Pacific Railroad, James G. Fair and disgruntled strawberry growers embarked on the construction of South Pacific Coast Railroad.² The South Pacific Coast, "the least of existing

¹Stephen M. Payne, Santa Clara County: Harvest of Change (Northridge, Calif.: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1987), 88.

²Fair, of Comstock Lode fame and fortune, was one of the few men to challenge the supremacy of the Southern Pacific locally. When completed, at approximately \$110,567 per mile, his South Pacific Coast was the most expensive narrow gauge in the state. Clyde Arbuckle, Clyde Arbuckle's History of San Jose (San Jose, CA: Memorabilia of San Jose, 1986), 105. In February 1879, poor ventilation in a 6,115-foot tunnel at Wright's Summit resulted in a natural gas

evils,"³ offered the possibility of railroad competition.⁴ Having weathered an assault by the Southern Pacific-Central Pacific monopoly a few years earlier, by 1877, the people of Santa Clara County were aware of the cupidity and greed of railroad men.

As stated earlier, the people of the valley were not faced with the extreme cases of land monopoly found in other parts of the state.⁵ They were, however, sensitive to the statewide situation. While distressed about property assessments, and inequitable state and county taxes on improved land, during the late-1870s, the immediate concern of the local working class was rising unemployment in the valley and the resulting poverty. The valley's working class faced a dual onslaught in the 1870s. The depression proved to more protracted and more severe than any previous economic decline. The resulting unemployment was further impacted as the valley's population continued to grow.

pocket explosion killing 32 Chinese laborers. San Jose Daily Herald, 13 February 1879. Despite the monetary and human expense, it was completed April 1, 1880. Ultimately, the Southern Pacific triumphed when the "Octopus" swallowed the South Pacific Coast on July 1, 1887. Arbuckle, 106.

³San Jose Weekly Mercury, 24 January 1878.

⁴Norman W. Holmes, Prune Country Railroading: Steel Trails to San Jose (Huntington Beach, Calif.: Shade Tree Books, 1985), 29.

⁵San Francisco Chronicle, 13 November 1873.

Santa Clara County and San Jose each increased in population approximately 135 percent during the 1870s.⁶ As their fears and frustrations simmered, a few local working-class activists searched for solutions.

Only twenty years earlier, a severe labor shortage in the valley had made imported, prefabricated houses necessary. Despite that shortage, the strong labor movement of San Francisco had not made inroads into Santa Clara County in the 1860s.⁷ Working diligently in 1869 through its own branch of an Eight-Hour League, San Jose's laborers were still in the initial stages of organization, when the local economy fell on rough times and high unemployment in the mid-1870s.

For some of San Jose's workers, their fear and frustration focused on a familiar target, the Chinese immigrant. Suspecting that the unique, low-waged Chinese were the cause of many of their troubles, the local working class was convinced a solution included the anti-

⁶U. S. Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce, Compendium of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 1:17, 452.

⁷The earliest known effort of a labor union comprised approximately fourteen hundred Mexican miners, presumably at the New Almaden quicksilver mines. The four unsuccessful strikes during the 1860s achieved very few concessions. Exhibit Script. California History Center Labor Exhibit, Fall 1988.

Chinese movement. Intentional or not, the nascent local labor movement found an answer to its dwindling influence. The anti-Chinese movement provided a catalyst and foundation for labor's stalled ascendancy. When combined with the eventual political experience acquired through the WPC, anti-Chinese sentiment became an added tool for labor activists.⁶ The amalgamation of the anti-Chinese movement and the ascendancy of labor activism was epitomized in the San Jose labor movement. An 1876 boycott of Chinese-made cigars created the white cigar makers' label and the establishment of San Jose's first labor union, the White Cigar Makers' Association of the Pacific Coast, the next year.⁷

Although, the local anti-Chinese movement commanded everyone's attention by the 1870s, apparently, the sentiment grew as the valley's Chinese population grew. The first record of a Chinese person in San Jose was a "tartar," who accused a Spaniard of assault in 1851. By 1860, of the 12,000 population of Santa Clara County there were still only 22 Chinese, or .18 percent of the county's total. By 1870, however, the Chinese community had grown to 5.4

⁶Alexander Saxton, The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 68.

⁷The Union, "Labor Day Historical Review," (Santa Clara County, 1910), 36.

percent or 1,525 out of a total population of 28,000 for the county. While the county's population had more than doubled in the decade, the Chinese population had increased seventy times in those same ten years. In 1870, San Jose had a Chinatown of about 532 people, about 5.8 percent of its 9,089 population. As the area developed and grew, so did the Chinese community. By 1880, the proportion of the Chinese population, in comparison to that of the county, had increased to 7.7 percent or 2,695 of the county's 35,146 population.¹⁰

Many Chinese came to San Jose initially on their way to the southern gold fields during the Gold Rush.¹¹ When the mining industry declined, many of the Chinese truck gardeners of the Mother Lode returned to the San Francisco Bay Area, including Santa Clara County, to continue their livelihood.¹² As Chinese immigration increased in the 1860s, many found local employment, first in railroad construction, and then in agriculture, becoming an integral part of the valley's economy.

Completed in January 1864, the San Francisco-San Jose

¹⁰Connie Young Yu, Chinatown, San Jose, USA (San Jose: San Jose Historical Museum Association, 1991), 19.

¹¹Sucheng Chan, This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 32.

¹²Ibid., 88.

Railroad predated the transcontinental railroad as one of the first railroads to employ Chinese labor. At a time of little anti-Chinese agitation, they attracted minimal attention and were soon forgotten.¹³ Drawn to Santa Clara County by opportunities for jobs on its farms and ranches, the Chinese provided much needed labor as the valley evolved from wheat farming into more labor-intensive fruit orchards.

The development and profitability of labor-intensive horticulture in the Santa Clara Valley required a large population of farm laborers. Like much of the state, the county's economy began to depend on a pool of immigrant labor.¹⁴ Working predominantly in the area's expanding, labor-intensive horticulture, the Chinese were one of the valley's first immigrant groups to make up a lower stratum in the developing two-tier economy. With the costs of land, machinery, and transportation fixed, many farmers felt the only cost they controlled was the variable cost of labor.¹⁵ It was estimated that, by 1873, about 2,000 Chinese were

¹³Ping Chiu, Chinese Labor in California, 1850-1880: An Economic Study (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963), 41; Henry George, "The Chinese in California," New York Tribune, 1 May 1869; Sandy Lydon, Chinese Gold: The Chinese in the Monterey Bay Region (Capitola, CA: Capitola Book Company, 1985), 80.

¹⁴Paul S. Taylor and Tom Vasey, "Historical Background of California Farm Labor," Rural Sociology 1, no. 3 (Sept. 1936): 289.

¹⁵Chiu, 71.

employed as farm laborers in the Santa Clara Valley growing onions, garlic, cabbages, cauliflower, asparagus, raspberries, blackberries, hops, seeds, and especially strawberries.¹⁶

In 1868, some local farmers began leasing small plots of land to Chinese share-croppers.¹⁷ Labor-intensive strawberry cultivation, in particular, provided the landlords with added income for land that might otherwise have been left uncultivated. It was a profitable, innovative business partnership. The landlord provided the land, farm tools, plants, irrigation water, marketing skill, and sometimes housing materials, while the Chinese tenants supplied the labor and cultivation expertise. In turn, these Chinese tenant farmers hired other Chinese farm-laborers.¹⁸ Many Chinese gardeners soon monopolized the berry cultivation within the county, and the local landowners became the prominent strawberry growers within the state.¹⁹ Chinese agricultural workers were a crucial element to the local economy, making Santa Clara County California's leading producer of strawberries by the mid-

¹⁶San Jose Daily Mercury, 12 June 1873.

¹⁷Chan, Bittersweet Soil, 124.

¹⁸Sucheng Chan, "Chinese Livelihood in California," Pacific Historical Review 53, no.3 (August 1984): 296.

¹⁹Chan, Bittersweet Soil, 107, 124-28.

1870s.²⁰ Without the Chinese farm laborers, Santa Clara Valley farmers would have been compelled "to abandon berry culture almost wholly and devote their lands to grain and grazing."²¹

By the early 1880s, about 64 percent of the Chinese in the county were involved in some form of farm work;²² the rest were employed in a variety of other enterprises. An 1882 business directory of San Jose's Chinatown shows numerous laundries, almost a dozen provisions shops, a couple of interpreter's offices, five barbers, three drug stores, three physicians, two boot makers, two vegetable shops, a cigar maker, a tailor, and three opium shops.²³

Chinatown was a segregated haven for the Chinese who lived, worked, and played there. However, many San Jose Chinese, whether they were textile workers,²⁴ common laborers, or even truck gardeners, were frequently dependent on whites for a living. Chinese cooks and domestic servants

²⁰Yvonne Jacobson, Passing Farms, Enduring Values: California's Santa Clara Valley (Los Altos, Calif.: William Kaufmann, Inc., 1984), 55.

²¹San Jose Daily Mercury, 12 June 1873.

²²Chan, Bittersweet Soil, 312.

²³Wells Fargo & Co. Express, Directory of Chinese Business Houses (San Francisco: Britton & Rey, Lithographers, 1882), 97-106.

²⁴Chan, Bittersweet Soil, 65-66.

often lived with white families. As the Chinese became more dependent on white employers for their livelihood, more intermingling of the cultures occurred. As the area's needs demanded that more Chinese work for or with whites, the more frequent the interaction.²⁵

Despite the fact that over 40 percent of the 1870 county population was foreign born,²⁶ the employment of Chinese immigrant-workers led to tensions,²⁷ and over the years, San Jose had its share of anti-Chinese anxieties and violence. As in San Francisco, as the once-novel Chinese population grew, so did anti-Chinese feelings. Many considered the sometimes clannish, yet segregated Chinese incapable of assimilation. In the words of the San Jose Daily Mercury, "Try we never so hard to civilize or Christianize him, John is an alien and will always be an alien."²⁸

Complaints about the Chinese ranged from fears of economic competition, to ones that defied reason and rationale. The foremost "rational" objection was their

²⁵Chan, "Chinese Livelihood in California," 291.

²⁶U. S. Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce, Compendium of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 401.

²⁷Taylor and Vasey, 289.

²⁸San Jose Daily Mercury, 25 June 1876.

willingness to work for less wages than whites. A San Jose anti-Chinese mass meeting in 1876 charged that their subsistence life style enabled the Chinese "to underbid the white man or woman in the labor market and in many industries, entirely driving out white laborers from many employments which heretofore afforded support to thousands of white laborers, having families to support, children to educate, houses to maintain, taxes to pay and public duties to perform; depriving our boys of the opportunity of employment and contributing to close against them the avenues of trade and manufacturing and mechanical employments."²⁹ For some, competition between white and cheap Chinese labor constituted a threat to the American way of life. As the San Jose Daily Herald put it, "It will be a dark day for California and civilization when the white laborer either chooses or is compelled to live like the Mongolian, or to imitate him in anything."³⁰

Despite the ethnic diversity of the area's population and frequent cultural interaction, intensified competition for dwindling employment accelerated the anti-Chinese movement. While some local landowners and horticulturists developed partnerships with Chinese farmers, others were

²⁹Ibid., 26 April 1876.

³⁰San Jose Daily Herald, 3 February 1879.

establishing covert anti-Chinese groups within the area. Regardless of the economic advantage of the Chinese to the agricultural community, more and more white laborers blamed the growing unemployment problem on the Chinese. In competition with some white workers, yet hired by other whites, the Chinese employment issue sharpened the demarcation of labor and capital.

While the depression of the mid-1870s heightened anti-Chinese sentiment, it is evident that strong anti-Chinese sentiment was not new to the area. In February 1869, ironically, two weeks after the Daily Mercury wrote a story praising the efforts of the Methodist Episcopal Church and its Chinese Sunday School for teaching English to 166 local Chinese,³¹ the church was destroyed by an arsonist. Mostly volunteer labor rebuilt the church within five months. The project had enough community support so that, until its completion, the Chinese Sunday School held classes each week in the City Hall. The same day that the San Jose Daily Mercury reported the fire, it reprinted a letter sent to the minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church threatening him as well as the church. The next day General H. M. Naglee's distillery, a known employer of Chinese labor, suffered

³¹Howard A. Christman, ed., First Methodist Church, San Jose, California: Issued in Celebration of the Centennial, November 2-9, 1947 (San Jose: First Methodist Church, 1947) no pagination.

forty to fifty thousand dollars damage at the hands of a suspected arsonist.³²

The altruistic community spirit that rebuilt the Methodist Episcopal Church was short-lived; by that December the San Jose Daily Mercury charged that "the City Fathers are going to drive all the Chinamen out of Market street."³³ Houses of prostitution and the enticing of American men were the arguments for ridding the city of the Chinese residents of this coveted piece of central real estate. Two weeks later, on January 14, 1870, a suspicious fire destroyed Chinatown. The Daily Mercury accused the San Jose Fire Department of negligence and of taking rest and refreshment breaks rather than fighting the fire. The honor and professionalism of the city fire department was hardly upheld when a letter, published in the Weekly Mercury from "a fireman," never denied negligence, but rather justified the department's apparent inaction because the fire had "purged our city of an abominable nuisance."³⁴ The pro-Republican newspaper claimed that San Jose's firefighters were Democrats!

As the economic pressures of the 1870s increased, the

³²San Jose Daily Mercury, 25 February 1869.

³³Ibid., 30 December 1869.

³⁴San Jose Weekly Mercury, 20 January 1870.

city's anti-Chinese movement gained momentum. There was a steady stream of stories about the city's harassment of Chinese prostitutes and laundrymen, the charges of extortion of Chinese businesses by the San Jose police, and the occasional burning of a couple of Chinese houses. Initially part of the anti-slavery movement, the Republican Daily Mercury had supported the rights of the Chinese and the interests of the business community, but that changed. Its once tolerant and humanitarian spirit, by the mid-1870s, stressed the economic necessity of Chinese labor, but suggested that the county's Chinese labor be confined to agriculture.

Let those who control our factories, mills and fruit-packing establishments employ white labor and give living compensation for service. There is a field, and a wide one, in which the present Chinese population could support itself thriftily in this State. Let them colonize on the acres upon acres which might be turned into strawberry beds and berry farms, and work these on the share system.³⁵

It also recommended that white women replace Chinese as domestic servants.

Its major competitor and political rival, the San Jose Daily Patriot, added another log to the almost literal anti-Chinese flames when it called for another abatement of

³⁵San Jose Daily Mercury, 31 March 1876.

Chinatown.³⁶ With a series of stories about its alleged health hazards and immorality, one article included references to opium dens frequented by "well-known townsmen and several women of questionable morals who are also sometimes their companions."³⁷ Whether based on morality, health, or economics, the local press and partisan politics escalated the campaign against the Chinese.

The rhetoric of the press aside, there can be little doubt that many workers in Santa Clara County were suffering acutely from the depression of the mid-1870s and that this fuelled existing anti-Chinese sentiment. As white unemployment increased, so did the protests about cheap "coolie" labor. In January 1876, the San Jose Daily Patriot published a poignant letter written by a local workingman, signing himself only "H. N." While protesting the hiring of Chinese labor for the construction of the Santa Clara and Alviso Narrow Gauge railroad, he did not "wish to bring forth the well thrashed sayings, 'the Chinese take the money out of our county;' 'they will not allow their bones to be buried here to enrich our soil;' 'they would rather walk than spend their money for a ride,' etc."³⁸ His primary

³⁶ Over the years, San Jose had four different Chinatowns. Yu, xii.

³⁷ San Jose Daily Patriot, 9 November 1875.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 21 January 1876.

concern was the "lower ten thousand," men with families to support, who unsuccessfully searched for months for employment, only to find that the railroad had hired Chinese workers. "Imagine our feelings [when] we learned that Chinese had succeeded in procuring that for which we would almost have begged."³⁹

With the mounting pressures of unemployment and partisan politics, the San Jose Daily Mercury sought a moderate, reasonable solution to the growing working-class tensions. In the spring of 1876, over a period of several weeks, it cautioned against anti-Chinese meetings that could "arouse bad passions, excite prejudice against race and give further license to lawless mob practices."⁴⁰ As the spate of incendiary speeches grew, especially in San Francisco, it warned that "demagogue lunatics" would prove more dangerous to society than the Chinese. It tried to placate all factions: workingmen, local Chinese immigrants, as well as the agricultural, and business communities. It called for a cessation of Chinese immigration, but argued for the fair treatment of those already here.⁴¹

Regardless of the local agitation, the problem of

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰San Jose Daily Mercury, 31 March 1876.

⁴¹Ibid.

Chinese immigration, as stipulated in the Burlingame Treaty with China, remained a federal issue. On April 5, 1876, an enormous anti-Chinese demonstration, with an estimated 25,000 attendance, was held in San Francisco. Its expressed objective was to send a delegation to Washington, D. C. to explain the serious conditions in California and the importance of the immediate cessation of Chinese immigration. Organized by a nonpartisan Citizens' Committee, it was a political response to the growing number of anti-coolie clubs and incendiary speeches around the state, as well as the increase in the sale of firearms within many Chinatowns. Politicians of every persuasion, Mayor Andrew Jackson Bryant of San Francisco, C. T. Ryland, the former speaker of the Assembly from San Jose, and Governor William Irwin, were present to show their solidarity with their constituents. While all noted the numerous problems with the Chinese, the Committee also advised "patience, moderation, and cool counsel" to handle the Chinese question.⁴²

Three weeks later, on April 24, San Jose held its first anti-Chinese mass meeting to write its own memorial to Congress requesting the abrogation of the Burlingame Treaty. Lacking published attendance estimates, the presumably

⁴²San Francisco Alta, 6 April 1876.

small-scale version of the San Francisco demonstration was equally bipartisan. The San Jose meeting was attended by such local luminaries as James T. Murphy, Judges C. N. Senter and Dennis J. Toohy, and once again the Hon. C. T. Ryland.⁴³

J. J. Owen, the editor of both the San Jose Daily Mercury and the San Jose Weekly Mercury, was selected to sit on the committee, along with Democrats Ryland and Mayor B. D. Murphy, to write the memorial to Congress. As the long-standing Republican editor in a Republican-dominated city, Owen was probably selected as a spokesman for San Jose's elite. These men had to convince the working class that the local political establishment was capable of finding a solution to the workers' fears and frustrations. Given the potentially explosive situation, the Congressional memorial acknowledged the necessity for a moderate, rational, and legal solution to a very complex situation built on visceral fears and racism.

By May 8, 1876, volunteers had collected two thousand signatures on the petition. With a new solidarity of purpose growing among the working class, the local anti-Chinese movement gained momentum. Out of that first mass meeting came the Anti-Chinese Club of the City of San Jose,

⁴³San Jose Daily Patriot, 25 April 1876; and San Jose Daily Mercury, 27 April 1876.

with elected officers, by-laws, and a constitution. Noting that "In Union there is Strength," the group was not another clandestine anti-coolie club, like the Order of Caucasians. Concerned solely with "all legal and reasonable means to secure the discontinuance of Chinese immigration into the United States, and especially into the State of California," the club's constitution specifically stated that "the discussion of partisan politics and the use of language calculated to create disrespect for the laws of the land, are prohibited."⁴⁴ Founded by "several hundred citizens chiefly of the working class,"⁴⁵ the Anti-Chinese Club was a union of local workers and the anti-Chinese movement.

The new organization desired no association with any anti-Chinese lawlessness; they had unified to seek a peaceful resolution to their problems. "The mechanics and workingmen of Santa Clara county, do hereby earnestly request our fellow laborers in San Francisco to call a Convention of the laborers and mechanics of the Pacific Coast at as early a day as possible, that we may adopt a general line of policy for the discouragement of the employment of Coolie labor, and thus reach a prompt and

⁴⁴San Jose Daily Mercury, 10 May 1876.

⁴⁵San Jose Daily Patriot, 2 May 1876.

peaceful solution of the Coolie labor question."⁴⁶

The desire for recognition and credibility also became more discernible as the new organization struggled to separate itself from the more notorious anti-Chinese groups like the Order of Caucasians. With its pledged defense of every "member of the Caucasian civilization within and without the law,"⁴⁷ the Order of Caucasians had earned a reputation for secrecy, incendiary speeches, and violence. By the end of June 1876, the Anti-Chinese Club of the City of San Jose had officially changed its name to the equally cumbersome Anti-Coolie and Workingmen's Protective Association (ACWPA) of San Jose. The ACWPA's desire for respectability sometimes compelled it to repudiate the actions of some members. The club conceded a degree of internal factionalism existed when it admitted that, while a few members were more zealous than prudent, the club itself sought only a peaceful solution to the Chinese question.⁴⁸

By the late fall of 1876, the desired mainstream credibility and peaceful intentions of the new ACWPA appeared within reach, when the club appointed a committee to research the effects of the Chinese and Chinatown on San

⁴⁶Ibid., 9 May 1876.

⁴⁷Sacramento Daily Union, 23 March 1877.

⁴⁸San Jose Daily Mercury, 29 June 1876.

Jose and its residents. The results of their study were presented to the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration held in San Francisco and Sacramento. The protests from the West Coast had reached such a pitch that Congress delegated a joint committee to hear first-hand testimonies from all concerned parties.⁴⁹

Testimony on the employment of Chinese in San Jose was delivered by Judge R. F. Peckham, the former district attorney of Santa Cruz and now president of the San Jose Woolen Mills;⁵⁰ and William Vinter, a San Jose tailor, represented the city's Anti-Coolie and Workingmen's Protective Association. Peckham not only admitted that the cheaper wages paid the industrious Chinese workers allowed the San Jose mill to remain competitive with eastern mills, he also claimed "that if we had not had the cheap labor that the Chinese afforded us, that the industries of the State would not have been developed as they have now for twenty

⁴⁹The joint committee's objectivity was questionable given that the two California members, Senator Aaron A. Sargent and Congressman W. A. Piper, were both honorary officials of the Anti-Coolie Union of San Francisco. Royce D. Delmatier, Clarence F. McIntosh, and Earl G. Waters, The Rumble of California Politics, 1848-1970 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1970), 72.

⁵⁰J. P. Munro-Fraser, History of Santa Clara County, California; including its Geography, Geology, Topography, Climatography and Description (San Francisco: Alley, Bowen & Co., Publishers, 1881), 770-80.

years."⁵¹

Vinter, married father of four, was an English immigrant tailor in his late forties. Although little is known of his formal education, he was said to have "an easy flow of language."⁵² A Republican prior to the WPC, Vinter became a Democratic convert following the demise the WPC. "An enthusiastic worker in the cause of political reform,"⁵³ Vinter also championed such diverse causes as the city free library,⁵⁴ support for the Mussel Slough settlers,⁵⁵ fund raising for the widow and children of abolitionist John Brown,⁵⁶ the organization of San Jose's

⁵¹San Jose Daily Mercury, 16 November 1876. Employing 68 Chinese of its 80 employees in 1877, the mill began training local white boys and girls in 1878. By 1880, 45 of its 80 workers were white. Acquiescing, the San Jose Woolen Mill board was apparently willing to sacrifice production for the anti-Chinese movement when it resolved "that we shall start with the best white help that can be procured, and that we run only so much of the machinery as can be used with such help." San Jose Daily Morning Times, 27 February 1880.

⁵²San Jose Daily Herald, 28 January 1878.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴San Jose Daily Mercury, 28 April 1880. Apparently the driving force behind it, the San Jose Daily Herald referred to Vinter as the "Father of San Jose's free library" on March 28, 1881.

⁵⁵San Jose Daily Mercury, 13 February 1881.

⁵⁶Ibid., 16 April 1881.

own Anti-Monopoly League and,⁵⁷ however odd for Englishman Vinter, participation in the Irish Land League.⁵⁸

Founding not only the Anti-Chinese and Workingmen's Protective Association, but several branches of the far more clandestine Order of Caucasians, William Vinter was rabidly anti-Chinese. He proved to be a zealous emissary from the Anti-Coolie Club. His testimony before the Joint Congressional Committee about a single city block in San Jose's Chinatown that contained "28 houses of prostitution, in which there are 140 female inmates; there are 28 gambling dens; the opium dens are numerous but were not counted," seemed so outrageous,⁵⁹ the Daily Mercury was compelled to question Vinter's facts and figures regarding crime and law enforcement in Chinatown.⁶⁰

By April 1877, the escalating anti-Chinese agitation resulted in San Jose's first partisan municipal election in

⁵⁷San Jose Daily Morning Times, 10 August 1881.

⁵⁸Ibid., 26 November 1881. It was not a coincidence that the Irish Land League should have attracted many anti-monopoly supporters. Organized to help the oppressed in Ireland, the Land League also recognized that "we cannot shut our eyes to oppression at home. We condemn as being inhuman the unjust laws that enable the strong and wealthy to persecute and oppress the weak, and more particularly the C.P. and S.P.R.R. corporations." San Jose Daily Herald, 7 February 1881.

⁵⁹San Jose Daily Herald, 28 October 1876.

⁶⁰San Jose Daily Mercury, 2 November 1876.

three years. Despite the Daily Mercury's denials to the contrary,⁶¹ the advent of both an ACWPA ticket and a presumably nonpartisan Citizens' ticket appeared to be a return to partisanship. Some candidates ran on one ticket, others ran on both tickets. The electoral results reveal that the anti-Chinese candidates made some inroads into municipal politics. By itself, the ACWPA elected one councilman and two school trustees. Jointly the Citizens' Party and the Anti-Coolie Club elected one more councilman, as well as the city clerk, W. N. Castle,⁶² by a majority of 324 votes citywide.

The small gains by the Anti-Coolie Club in the April election did not ameliorate the conditions of the working class. Unemployment persisted, and the San Jose Daily Mercury did little to promote any empathy for any unemployed worker associated with the anti-Chinese groups. "These Anti-Coolie Associations pander to the lowest and worst elements in the community; because they embitter the laborer against his employer; and because they incite incendiarism

⁶¹Ibid., 24 March 1877.

⁶²W. N. Castle went on to be one of San Jose's more notorious municipal employees. After he stole \$1,893 in city funds in the spring of 1879, he eventually fled to Oregon. Learning of Castle's whereabouts, Police Chief Dan Haskell telegraphed the authorities in Astoria. Upon his arrest, Castle shot himself with a pistol he had concealed up his sleeve. He died instantly leaving a widow and four children, but apparently no money. Arbuckle, 344-45.

and murder, and stir up the worst passions of bad men."⁶³

Despite the participation of the anti-Chinese forces in the electoral process, they were regarded with great suspicion by the political and economic elite of the county. In many areas of California and the West, the anti-Chinese forces were dubbed communists or Molly Maguires. There was no denying the fact that the issue of Chinese labor was one that usually split labor and capital into opposing camps. Although realizing the workers' plight, the local gentry appeared more concerned with the effect the reports of violence would have on future capital for the valley. When it worried that the West Coast anti-Chinese groups were "defeating themselves and leading others on the ruin in their violent agitation of the Chinese question,"⁶⁴ the San Jose Daily Mercury defended that opinion. Local capital's greater long-term worry was that the violence was not only frightening potential newcomers and capital investment, but also damaging everyone's chances for change on Chinese legislation in Congress.

S. H. Herring, secretary for a local branch of the Order of Caucasians, agreed that the issue was part of the on-going labor-capital conflict, but he justified the

⁶³San Jose Daily Mercury, 21 April 1877.

⁶⁴Ibid., 29 April 1877.

violence. According to Herring, capital was, in part, responsible for the almost unavoidable anti-Chinese trouble. "While capital is intent on absorbing to itself all the proceeds of enterprise and labor, indifferent to the wants and rights of laborers, the laborer has not only the right to act, but he finds it his duty to act for self-protection."⁶⁵

The battle between labor and capital escalated by the summer of 1877. An attempt to burn down the San Jose Chinatown on July 10, 1877 made not only the Chinese community, but most of San Jose, nervous.⁶⁶ Two weeks later, when the "July Days" occurred in San Francisco with three successive nights of riots, looting, and incendiarism, San Jose became an armed camp at dusk for several evenings. The Common Council gave the police chief special powers to call on the military and citizenry for extra assistance, if needed. Chinatown was doused each evening to discourage fires and 150 special Chinese policemen were hired. The San Jose Fire Department not only kept the engines constantly under steam, but its men were also armed.⁶⁷ The city was a tinderbox awaiting a match.

⁶⁵Ibid., 4 April 1877.

⁶⁶Ibid., 13 July 1877.

⁶⁷Ibid., 27 July 1877.

Unlike San Francisco, that match never appeared. Faced with a possible response from a potentially powerful, local militia, anti-Chinese hoodlums did not riot like their San Francisco counterparts. According to the San Jose Daily Mercury, it was the concentration of unemployed in San Francisco, or rather "on account of a greater proportion of respectability than hoodlumism," in San Jose that prevented the development of a similar situation."

The magnitude of the San Francisco riots almost destroyed the local anti-Chinese activists' struggle for respectability. Before the riots were suppressed, the San Jose Anti-Coolie Association and the Order of Caucasians met jointly to distance themselves from the violence and to "utterly repudiate any and all connections for sympathy with any such persons or classes" in San Francisco. They even pledged their support to the community in the form of a militia should it be necessary."

While the restraint shown by San Jose's anti-Chinese activists gave it "a greater proportion of respectability," the local working class found means to express its strong anti-Chinese sentiment. One such example was a Mr. Ross, a San Jose merchant who found his fruit stand boycotted by the

"Ibid.

"San Jose Daily Herald, 26 July 1877.

ACWPA for employing Chinese. It was claimed Ross favored four times the present rate of Chinese immigration, "that not until then could a person purchase goods at reasonable rates."⁷⁰ The rift between labor and capital over the employment of Chinese workers had become a chasm.

The rift caused by the employment of Chinese was not simply between labor and capital. It is evident that the Santa Clara Grange, which included many small landowners, did not rate the Chinese issue as an especially important one in their list of grievances of August 11, 1877.⁷¹ Their resolutions passed in support of writing a new state constitution addressed land assessments, the state tax, banking, and monetary systems, yet made no mention of a Chinese labor problem.⁷² Since the meeting was only two weeks after the riots in San Francisco, the omission could not have been an oversight. Evidently, despite the fever pitch of the anti-Chinese movement, a majority of the local grange acknowledged, or at least acquiesced in, the necessity of Chinese farm labor in the valley.

⁷⁰Ibid., 18 December 1876.

⁷¹Since most of the farmers in the county were small land owners, for the purposes of this study, the majority will be considered part of the working class. However, a few of the larger land owners, like Martin Murphy and Henry M. Naglee, distinctly constituted part of the valley's political and economic establishment.

⁷²San Jose Daily Herald, 15 August 1877.

Faced with less than universal support for their anti-Chinese crusade and continuing economic hardship, many dissident Santa Clarans were determined to find a political outlet for their grievances. Previously providing support and endorsements, the Democratic Party should have been the source of unity and aid. Despite acknowledging the needs of the workingmen and the anti-Chinese activists, the San Jose Democratic Party did not adequately address their issues. San Jose may have been a Republican city, but, in 1877, Santa Clara was a Democratically-controlled county. The local workers turned to the more powerful county faction of the Democratic Party. However, both the city and county Democratic Parties were ostensibly in the hands of those few "patriarchal dictators."⁷³

Whether impatiently demanding their issues finally be addressed or attempting to wrest party control for themselves, working-class Democrats from San Jose challenged those "patriarchal dictators," when they took the local labor-capital struggle to the Santa Clara County Democratic Convention in July 1877. Defying the power brokers, dissident San Jose third and fourth ward delegates placed incumbent Judge Lawrence Archer up for nomination for the

⁷³San Jose Daily Mercury, 23 May 1875.

state senate.⁷⁴ After Archer's speech, the remaining county convention delegates humiliated Archer and the San Jose working class representatives by placing the very popular San Jose mayor, B. D. Murphy on the ticket. The same county convention that unanimously endorsed "the able statesmanship and integrity of Hon. Lawrence Archer," elected Murphy, in absentia, by a clear two to one margin.⁷⁵

The county Democratic political elite was seemingly hesitant to disrupt the local economic establishment to address the demands of the working class, if it meant an association with the anti-Chinese violence. Claiming "'from 800 to 1,000 voters, who have put me forward for this nomination,'" J. J. McDaniels, a 42-year old carpenter and president of the Anti-Coolie and Workingmen's Protective Association, pressured the county Democrats for one of the three assembly seat nominations.⁷⁶ Evidently reluctant to have the remotest connection with the anti-Chinese violence, the county Democrats finally acquiesced in working-class McDaniels' lobbying on the eighth ballot.

The deep divisions within the county Democratic Party

⁷⁴Ibid., 20 July 1877.

⁷⁵San Jose Daily Argus, 21 July 1877.

⁷⁶San Jose Daily Herald, 25 July 1877; San Jose Daily Argus, 1 August 1877.

manifested themselves at a protest meeting less than a week after the county convention. Several party activists, including future WPCer and present member of the Democratic County Central Committee, F. P. Hennessey, met with C. T. Ryland to protest the chairmanship of Alfred French. The group criticized the incumbent French for his previous party mismanagement, and complained that he had never been elected to the present county central committee over which he now presided. French himself, also admitted to making remarks "against so large and influential a class as the Irishmen of Santa Clara county" the evening of the convention. Despite his duplicity, Owen may have been accurate, when he asserted "the illiberal and anti-Democratic sentiment has been too generally the sentiment of individual Democrats hereabouts for years."⁷⁷

Perhaps it was complacency that grew out of its control of county politics or simple short-sightedness, but the county Democratic Party leaders failed to seriously appreciate the divisiveness of the situation. Despite the offense to a large segment of the local Democratic electorate, Ryland's support allowed French to maintain his chairmanship, further alienating and restricting the party's working-class base. Unable to turn to the Republican Party,

⁷⁷San Jose Daily Mercury, 18 August 1877.

the local working class found it equally difficult to rely on the seemingly unresponsive and entrenched Democrats.

In the September 1877 election, the county Democrats still demonstrated a reluctance to be associated with the anti-Chinese trouble. Santa Clara County elected two new assemblymen, one Democrat and one Republican. McDaniels almost went to Sacramento; he narrowly missed an assembly seat by 20 votes.⁷⁸ Despite the countywide Democratic strength that elected nine of twelve candidates, there was still not enough working-class solidarity with the anti-Chinese movement to secure Democrat McDaniels an assembly seat.

McDaniels made such a poor showing in San Jose that he came in sixth in a field of six. Only in the working-class fourth ward, where he missed being the top vote-getter by nine votes, was his campaign successful. The strongly Republican city elected two Democrats for the Assembly, yet handily rejected McDaniels.⁷⁹ The county Democrats had reluctantly nominated McDaniels before the San Francisco riots. A month and a half later, the wild ferocity of the July Days was obviously still on the minds of the voters, especially the conservative San Jose electorate.

⁷⁸San Jose Daily Herald, 10 September 1877.

⁷⁹San Jose Daily Argus, 11 September 1877.

Apparently, San Jose was sensitive to working-class problems, but the rejection of McDaniels demonstrated the city's ambivalence and hesitancy over the anti-Chinese groups and their related violence.

Still troubled with high unemployment, San Jose continued to grapple with its discontent, anxiety, and frustration. Suspecting that the Chinese were the root of many of their problems, the local working class presumed that a solution to their difficulties lay in the anti-Chinese movement. The insistence of the connection between labor and the anti-Chinese movement, not only diverted their attention from the larger issues, but hurt labor's credibility as a viable political entity. The burgeoning working-class activists of San Jose must have been disappointed by the cautious, entrenched attitude of the political elite and the strong influence of capital in local politics. If resolution of their problems lay in a coalition with the anti-Chinese movement, both local parties were reluctant to actively support any effort identified with wanton violence.

The election results of September 5, 1877, only confirmed the necessity of a working-class political organization in the city. Addressing the needs of San Jose's workers, a branch of the National Labor Party of California was organized in San Jose in November 1877 with

approximately fifty charter members.⁸⁰ They not only voted to support Denis Kearney and the Workingmen's Party of California in San Francisco, but a committee of D. N. Haskell, E. W. Shortridge, and William Vinter was selected to represent San Jose's workingmen in a Thanksgiving Day solidarity parade in San Francisco.

The NLP platform endeavored to address the concerns of the labor and working class with a combination of Greenback, Grange, labor, and anti-Chinese issues. Among other things, it demanded the establishment of a bureau of commerce, the abolition of the national banks and government subsidies, free compulsory education, the remonetization of silver, smaller government land grants, a more equitable land tax system, and the prohibition of Chinese immigration.⁸¹ This broad platform represented its broad membership.

The party's elected officers were a combination of those from the working class and professionals with a presumed empathy for workingmen. The president, James E. Rymal, and Elias W. Shortridge, the vice president, were new attorneys in town. Both recent arrivals to the area, Rymal, at age 26 was newly-admitted to the bar, and Shortridge, at about 50, had just been re-admitted to the bar, having spent

⁸⁰San Jose Daily Herald, 27 November 1877.

⁸¹San Jose Daily Mercury, 14 December 1877.

several years as an itinerant minister. Both had been very active in the local women's suffrage movement.⁸² W. J. Wolcott, the treasurer, was a produce merchant. The party secretary, W. D. J. Hambly, was aptly a printer, and one can easily understand the election of a burly blacksmith, D. N. Haskell, for party marshall. William Vinter sat on the executive board.

Reflecting the divisions over Chinese labor among the working class, a second political party was organized in San Jose in about the first two weeks in December 1877. Although, cheering his name at meetings, this second party, the Workingmen's Party of San Jose, did not recognize Denis Kearney as a leader, but did support anyone looking to benefit the workingmen.⁸³ It is unclear how many charter members the Workingmen had. Apparently, the officers were more working class than the NLP, with the president, E. K. Robinson, a newsstand owner, and architect, former Democrat, and executive committee member, F. P. Hennessey, the only exceptions. The treasurer, William Meadowcroft, was a

⁸²In a November 24, 1877 letter to the San Jose Daily Mercury, E. W. Shortridge wrote that he preferred "a working people's platform" and asked that women as well as men join the new party. This editorial letter from the father of women's suffrage activist, Clara Shortridge Foltz, provides insight into her background and family support. See page 104.

⁸³San Jose Daily Mercury, 30 December 1877.

carpet weaver from England. Secretary John Barcel, a cigar maker, was probably one of the few whose job was actually in direct competition with Chinese labor.

The Workingmen's Party's first party plank, like the NLP's, dealt with railroad rates and commerce. While similar to the NLP, the Workingmen's agenda had a more labor-oriented tone. They favored the establishment of a board of arbitration to settle labor disputes, mandatory jail sentences for elected officials guilty of bribery, the use of public works to address the unemployment problem, and enforcement of the eight-hour work day. In common with the NLP, they favored the direct election of the president, vice-president, and senators.

It is doubtful that the San Jose Daily Mercury forgot to print it, but conspicuous by its absence was any mention of the Chinese issue.⁴⁴ Presumably organized to address similar issues, the absence of an anti-Chinese plank in the decidedly more labor-oriented party's platform pointed up the dilemma facing the working class of San Jose. Conceivably, a segment of the Workingmen perceived working-class troubles to be more complex than simply the divisive Chinese-labor issue. Familiar with the local split, perhaps the Workingmen sought working class unity through its

⁴⁴Ibid.

platform omission. The aforementioned quest for respectability could have justified the Workingmen's exclusion of the issue. Possibly, the Workingmen believed the local press and did not wish to further alienate local capital, exacerbating the unemployment problem. Despite speculations regarding this major difference, both new parties had been founded to aid the suffering working class. To that end, and only weeks after their founding, both the Workingmen's Party and the National Labor Party, organized committees to negotiate a consolidation.

Providing color to the consolidation negotiations was the appearance of the always controversial Denis Kearney. Together with Henry L. Knight, former editor for the San Jose Daily Patriot and now his right-hand man, Kearney spoke in San Jose three days before Christmas 1877.⁵ Kearney's speech was typically inflammatory. Speaking to "a good-sized audience," Kearney threatened to "get rid of the Chinamen [even] if it cost a revolution of the State and the lives of

⁵Born in Yorkshire, England, Knight emigrated to the United States in 1842 to become a lawyer in Missouri. He came to California in 1852 where he spent three years in mining before returning to the law. He was said to have "a strong proclivity for reforms, any kind being better than none." Bancroft said he became "a social parasite." Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of California, Vol. 7, 1860-1890 in The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft (San Francisco: This History Company, Publishers, 1890), 358.

10,000 whites. We will drive them out at all hazards."⁸⁶

The extreme hostility of the San Jose press toward Denis Kearney cannot be overstated. Denis Kearney's antics and speeches repelled some and attracted others even within San Jose's working-class community. Regardless of his rhetoric, Kearney attracted attention and helped make the rally and consolidation a success. Whether the Chinese posed a genuine threat to San Jose's workers or not, both the NLP and the Workingmen agreed that the local working class required assistance. Focusing on the similarities rather than the differences, consolidation of the two divergent groups on January 10, 1878, went smoothly with each organization equally represented in officers and on committees.⁸⁷ Seemingly more concerned with local working-class problems, than with any potential schism over Kearney and the Chinese, on January 26, 1878, the two-week-old United Labor Party of Santa Clara County officially became the San Jose Branch of the Workingmen's Party of California with three cheers for Denis Kearney.⁸⁸

⁸⁶San Jose Daily Mercury, 23 December 1877.

⁸⁷San Jose Daily Herald, 12 January 1878.

⁸⁸Ibid., 28 January 1878.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RISE OF THE WORKINGMEN'S PARTY IN SAN JOSE AND THE NEW CALIFORNIA CONSTITUTION

Despite its brief existence and controversial association with Denis Kearney, the Workingmen's Party of California had a major impact on San Jose and Santa Clara County. It also helped in the drafting of California's second constitution. The WPC-SJ was not only ably-represented at that convention but, together with the other local delegates, it helped contribute historic constitutional clauses protecting women's rights. Representing an area already supporting women's rights, the Santa Clara County delegates were further encouraged in their revision of the state constitution by the progressive stance of the WPC.

The WPC-SJ joined the state WPC's call for reform to make a positive contribution to San Jose and their working-class constituents. Fearful and frustrated, the working class had received only pleas for patience and promises of future relief from the Republican and Democratic Parties. Yet such issues as the severe unemployment problem, control of the growing San Jose Water Company monopoly, and women's

rights were of direct concern to many in the community besides the working classes. The WPC provided a plan of action, an alternative, albeit a rather crude and disjointed program of social and political reform. However rudimentary, the necessity for urgent reform struck a chord with more than the local working class.

The WPC attracted a broad range of members. By March 1878, the San Jose Daily Herald unreservedly stated that the WPC was taking the county and state by storm, "organizing all over the State, even in the small villages, and the new party fever has become quite widespread."¹ Branches were established in such diverse areas as Colusa, Sacramento, Gilroy, Watsonville, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and by the fall of 1878, Los Angeles alone had seven clubs.² With its program of political reform, the WPC attracted an eclectic cross-section of progressive San Jose citizenry. It not only offered an alternative to the tainted Republican and Democratic Parties, it addressed concerns of both the local middle and working classes. Whether of personal concern or not, severe unemployment affected the entire community. The problems of unfair taxation, unscrupulous politicians, omnipotent monopolies, and women's suffrage

¹San Jose Daily Herald, 19 March 1878.

²Royce D. Delmatier, Clarence F. McIntosh, and Earl G. Waters, eds., The Rumble of California Politics, 1848-1970 (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1970), 82.

affected everyone, regardless of economic classification. If the various local contractors, foremen, entrepreneurs, professionals, and agriculturists associated with the WPC are considered middle class, they would have constituted almost 30 percent of the Workingmen's Party in the San Jose area.³

By studying the 150 names collected from local WPC and anti-Chinese newspaper articles by Dr. David Eakins, manuscript census information compiled by Clay Trost, and supplementary Great Register voting records data, a picture develops of the Workingmen's Party supporter in San Jose. While the average San Jose WPCer was about forty-two years old, the local membership ranged from as young as twenty-one to more seasoned men of sixty-four. The average WPCer in San Jose was a family man with three or four children at home. Most members (84 percent) were married with one to four children, but eight couples were childless, two families had nine, and one family had eleven children all under one roof!

San Jose's typical WPC supporter was either a semi-skilled or skilled worker such as a teamster, or a skilled

³These 150 names were people associated with the Workingmen that did or said enough to be mentioned in a newspaper article. Since these names represent only a fragment of the WPC-SJ, the figures presented here must be considered incomplete until further information, such as a party roster, becomes available.

laborer, not uncommonly in the building trades. The local party also had its share of entrepreneurs, ranchers, and professionals. Besides cannery workers, teamsters, carpenters, and brick masons, there were also a physician, an architect, two hotel proprietors, three grocers, three blacksmiths, four teachers, five cigar makers, and eight attorneys.

The usual local WPC member was an urban dweller. The known WPC residences within the San Jose city limits were distributed proportionately throughout the four voting wards. Even the predominantly Republican second ward contributed one-fourth of the city's known WPC supporters. It seems strange that the working-class fourth ward should not have been more heavily represented. Perhaps the workers were too busy putting food on the table to participate in politics, or maybe their political contributions failed to make the newspapers. It could also illustrate the limits of the sources available. Possibly, the newspapers only covered the leaders and prominent people in the party.

While one-third of San Jose's population in 1880 was foreign-born, almost one-half of the members were immigrants. As in San Francisco, immigrants, especially Irish immigrants, played an important role in San Jose's WPC. Irish immigrants comprised only 6.6 percent of Santa

Clara County in 1880,⁴ yet 25 percent of the local WPC membership came from Ireland. Despite the preponderance of Irish members, several other nationalities, including German, French, English, and Canadian were represented in the local party.

Kearney has been called the "recognized leader of the unemployed and discontented masses."⁵ This described an unfortunate number of workers in San Jose where the local unemployment problem was substantial. If the number of WPC-SJ members unemployed three or more months of the previous year was representative, the city's jobless rate was approximately 16.5 percent in 1880.⁶ When as many as one in every six workers was unable to feed his family for weeks at a time, it must certainly have inspired insecurity and anxiety even among the employed.

The very breadth of the WPC program was also one of its troubles. The effect of this broad constituency was a party

⁴U. S. Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce, Compendium of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 1:491-92.

⁵Ira Cross, A History of the Labor Movement in California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1966), 95 (page references are to reprint edition).

⁶This information came from Clay Trost's work with the manuscript census materials for San Jose and Santa Clara county. The names Trost used were supplied by David Eakins from local newspaper articles.

membership that did not share all the same goals. This ultimately led to internal dissension. In addition, the original schism over Kearney and the anti-Chinese issues, plus a lack of political expertise contributed to the local party's lack of cohesion. Externally, the local Republican, and especially the Democratic Party, sought to recapture their errant voters by adopting some of the rhetoric and planks of the WPC.

That the Kearney-aligned WPC should have found any support in the local electorate is surprising considering the virulent opposition of the San Jose press. While local WPC meetings attracted more and more people, the Democratic Party's official organ, the San Jose Daily Herald, published the state WPC principles (a combination of the earlier Workingmen and NLP platforms), under the headline "Verbosity, Mendacity & Venality." The San Jose WPC's affiliation with Kearney only provided a bigger target for the Daily Herald's broadsides.

His every utterance is a standing disgrace to written law and civilized jurisprudence. His every sentence is a disgrace and perpetual insult to some of the best men in our midst. His corrupting influence is a poison to the moral and social atmosphere, and his cacophony a chill to the warmest impulses of humanity. His doctrine would blast the sweetest and most precious blossoms upon our trees of progress, and dismantle every healthy sentiment in the breast of society, scattering desolation and blight over native and

⁷San Jose Daily Herald, 14 February 1878.

foreigner alike.⁹

Both the daily and weekly editions of the Republican-influenced San Jose Mercury were still edited and published by the far more moderate J. J. Owen. The Mercury was just as critical:

It is simply as representatives of an incendiary movement that we shall oppose them, believing that the best interests of laboring men will be subverted by defeating their ticket, and thereby restoring business confidence. The triumph of Kearneyism cannot but postpone the day of better times for workingmen, as industrial enterprises of all kinds are hanging in the balance. Capital must have the assurance of protection, such as the defeat of the Kearney ticket will give it, before we can expect much employment for laboring men.⁹

An examination of later editions substantiates the claim that eventually even the more moderate Mercury refused to print the proceedings of the WPC meetings.¹⁰

Beginning in July 1879, the city had a third daily newspaper, the San Jose Daily Morning Times. Published by former Daily Herald editor, Stephen DeLacy, the Times prided itself on its nonpartisan independence and aversion to political shenanigans. The WPC of San Jose came to rely upon the Daily Morning Times for slightly more impartial reporting, as well as a column's space in a few editions.

⁹Ibid., 16 February 1878.

⁹San Jose Daily Mercury, 16 February 1878.

¹⁰San Jose Daily Morning Times, 7 April 1880.

Before the Times, to overcome the obvious prejudice of the local press, the San Jose WPC founded its own publishing company in March 1878. After almost a year of financial difficulties, the Silver Dollar News Publishing Company was finally able to get the presses rolling on its newspaper, the New Era, in March 1879. Continuously beset by financial problems,¹¹ the New Era was printed daily for less than five months, when it finally succumbed about August 15, 1879.¹² The local newspapers, despite their obvious antagonism, were evidently accurate in detailing the New Era's deficiencies. In an era of almost libelous newspaper writing, the local press' criticisms of the New Era go far beyond political vitriol and professional jealousy. The short life of the WPC organ and its constant problems provides credence to the charges of the other newspapers.

If the competing journalists were remotely accurate, from the beginning, the New Era was afflicted with fundamental problems of both readership and credibility. The Daily Mercury succinctly stated one of the New Era's major difficulties when it reported "the public is evidently

¹¹San Jose Daily Herald, 8 April 1878.

¹²C. J. Curtis and C. J. Odum were publishers and editors for the New Era. Little can be found concerning Odum. There is nothing in the 1879 San Jose voters' records or in the State Library archives. Other than court records of his lawsuit when the New Era folded, it is as if C. J. Odum had never existed in San Jose or California.

well informed as to the literary defects of the New Era, and avoids it accordingly."¹³ Less than a month after its March 22, 1879 premier issue,¹⁴ the New Era had earned a reputation for inaccurate reporting. The Santa Clara Echo described the New Era's journalistic proclivities as follows: "the 'irregularities' are as abundant as fleas on a dog's back, but not half as hard to find."¹⁵ Its young and perhaps over-zealous editor, C. J. Curtis, was described as one who "was not at all particular about confining himself to facts and made innumerable reckless assertions."¹⁶ Even the temperate Daily Mercury asserted that the state WPC newspaper, the Open Letter, referred to Curtis' editorials as a "'mass of ungrammatical twaddle.'"¹⁷

One known copy of the New Era remains today in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. Unfortunately, the local press' criticisms of the New Era cannot be substantiated, since little of this July 11, 1879 edition was written by the New Era's staff. One primary article was simply published resolutions passed by the WPC's

¹³San Jose Daily Mercury, 13 April 1879.

¹⁴San Jose Daily Herald, 24 March 1879.

¹⁵Santa Clara Echo, 12 April 1879.

¹⁶Ibid., 19 April 1879.

¹⁷San Jose Daily Mercury, 13 April 1879.

county convention, and the only other major column was a four-month-old anti-Chinese article written by the Santa Clara correspondent of the Chicago Tribune.

By the time the New Era was declared officially dead on August 28, 1879, the San Jose WPC was paying for a "Workingmen's Column" in the independent Times that ran from August 24 to September 3, the eve of the state and county elections. As of September 4, 1879, the San Jose Branch of the Workingmen's Party of California ceased to have an official voice. By the middle of January 1880, the Silver Dollar Publishing Company even lost its physical assets when fire destroyed all the New Era's equipment, including the presses.¹⁸

Two years prior to the ignoble finale of its newspaper, the nascent WPC of San Jose was handed a perfect scenario for its entrance into local politics. Only two days after William Vinter's motion that changed the United Labor Party of Santa Clara County officially to the San Jose Branch of the Workingmen's Party of California, W. Z. Angney, Santa Clara County's state senator since 1875, died.¹⁹ The vacancy was perfectly timed for the advent of the new party. Seizing the moment, Denis Kearney promptly responded to the

¹⁸San Jose Daily Herald, 14 January 1880.

¹⁹San Jose Daily Mercury, 19 January 1878.

local party's invitation to speak two days following Angney's death. Kearney shook the local political rafters when he called for the nearly 2,000 cheering men and women "willing to unite and build up a party to defy the rotten carcasses of the Republican and Democratic parties, to show their hands."²⁰

If Senator Angney's death had been an opportunity, good fortune truly smiled on the new party when local assemblyman Clarence Upton, a 27-year-old Democrat, died of consumption, February 5, 1878. Drawing still larger crowds,²¹ Kearney and state WPC vice-president William Wellock continued to stump the county for the next two weeks until the special local election of February 19, to fill the two vacant seats, was held.

Kearney's incendiary rhetoric, not only attracted cheering crowds, it also introduced bipartisanship to Santa Clara County politics. The Weekly Mercury commented: "Many prominent Republicans and Democrats are in favor of uniting upon some first-class candidate, and thus prevent the possibility of the election of some small bore politician, such as we are likely to have if outside foreigners are permitted to dictate and control the workingmen's movement

²⁰San Jose Daily Herald, 2 February 1878.

²¹Ibid., 11 February 1878.

in this county."²²

The county's leaders of the bipartisan Citizens' Committee were scared. The WPC's rapid ascent, compounded by Kearney's inflammatory speeches, frightened the county's politicians enough to dispense with party differences and unite against the supposed revolutionaries. The stakes were high. "The stability of the State is threatened; its laws are in jeopardy; prosperity is being undermined; security to life and property is at stake." Referring to the WPC as "modified communism," the Citizens' Committee called on the county voters to "coalesce into a union against a common enemy whose world's history is the synonym of rule and ruin."²³

The Citizens' ticket attempted to placate the many factions of the county electorate as well as co-opt potential WPC voters. While addressing a number of WPC issues, the Citizens' appeal was also to a more moderate, middle-of-the-road electorate calling for equal taxes, legislation proscribing monopolies and subsidies, fair pay for a day's work, equal rights for labor and capital, and the abrogation of the Burlingame Treaty.²⁴ The appeal of

²²San Jose Weekly Mercury, 7 February 1878.

²³Citizens' Committee petition to the voters of Santa Clara County, San Jose Daily Herald, 15 February 1878.

²⁴San Jose Daily Mercury, 15 February 1878.

the coalition also left little doubt as to who they felt should "dictate and control" county politics--anyone, but Denis Kearney. Seeking to appease anti-Chinese sentiment, labor, capital, Democrat, and Republican, the Citizens' Party nominated Democrat S. W. Boring, a founding member of the South East Railroad Co., and former officer in the San Jose Water Company for the vacant state senate seat. Republican Justice of the Peace and member of the anti-Chinese Order of Caucasians, William M. Williamson, was the Citizens' candidate for the assembly seat.

To fill the vacated state senate seat, the WPC nominated Giles E. McDougal, a San Jose carpenter active in the anti-Chinese movement and county politics, and J. E. Clark, an English carpenter and farmer from Gilroy for the assembly seat.²⁵ With 4,800 votes cast in the special election, Santa Clara County elected Clark assemblyman by 158 votes. S. W. Boring, the Citizens' upper house candidate, won, but only by a twenty-one vote majority countywide. Of equal significance to the political establishment of San Jose, the combined votes for the special county election gave the new WPC party a citywide majority of 201 votes.²⁶

²⁵Ibid., 16 February 1878.

²⁶San Jose Daily Herald, 26 February 1878.

The rapidly growing strength of the Kearneyites, coupled with the poor showing of the coalition Citizens' Party in the special election, forced a local bipartisan regrouping and reorganization. The combined efforts of the county's leading Republicans and Democrats had failed to divert the WPC juggernaut. The possibility of Kearney-led "communists" in control terrified most local leaders. Five hundred of San Jose's political and economic establishment signed an open letter calling for a Citizens' ticket for the upcoming municipal election in April.²⁷

This election provided further evidence of the WPC influence on local politics. The WPC elected two city councilmen and the city's new police chief, the party's most popular candidate. Blacksmith Daniel J. Haskell was elected by a comfortable margin in three of the city's four wards. He received a citywide majority of 358 over the two-term Democratic incumbent, James V. Tisdall. Despite the efforts of the Citizens' Party, the first ward elected WPCer Charles L. Kennedy councilman, by eighteen votes. Henry C. Kaiser's election in the working-class fourth ward gave the WPC two of the four vacancies on the eight-man council. Elected on the Citizens' ticket was Democrat Lawrence Archer, mayor; the consistently Republican second ward sent Benjamin F.

²⁷Ibid., 11 March 1878.

Cottle to the council with a 78 vote majority; and with a 130 vote majority, the third ward soundly preferred Citizen C. J. Martin, an active Democrat before 1878.²⁸

The same atmosphere of discontent and hostility that made the WPC a major force statewide also created a demand for a new state constitution. Hoping to solve many of the state's problems by replacing its presumably outmoded 1849 version, the state's electorate authorized, in September 1877, that a new constitution be written. In May 1878, the county prepared to select its five constitutional convention delegates. As happened in many other areas around the state, the county political establishment again united against the WPC. A coalition at the city or county level was one thing, but that partisan politics were set aside in a state as diverse as California exemplified the anxiety engendered by the WPC. "Only primal fear could have united extreme partisan politicians as they were united against the Workingmen."²⁹ The occasion should not be compromised by party jealousies the fusionists rationalized; the integrity of a new state constitution demanded the election of only

²⁸San Jose Weekly Mercury, 11 April 1878.

²⁹Barbara Allen Babcock, "Clara Shortridge Foltz: Constitution-Maker," Indiana Law Journal 66 (Fall 1991): 875.

the "best" men of California.³⁰

Despite the wonderfully oxymoronic title of the Non-Partisan Party, its claim of neutrality was largely rhetorical. "Underlying all the conversation, the old partisan prejudices were particularly apparent among the non-partisans, it was a mixing of water and oil apparently, which as long as stirred in opposition to the Workingmen could not well be distinguished apart, but when left to subside floated separate and distinct."³¹ Apparently, every political faction in the county desired to contribute to the new constitution. By election time, Santa Clara County's "separate and distinct" tickets seeking delegates' seats at the convention, included the Non-Partisan, the WPC, and the Democratic Parties.

The June 19th election determined that one WPCer and four Non-Partisans would represent Santa Clara County at the Constitutional Convention. The valley may have been fiscally conservative, yet with San Jose an active center for women's suffrage, Santa Clara County also had a certain progressive vitality, a political dynamism. The local electorate apparently agreed with the Daily Herald, however, when it called for "men of integrity" to create "an

³⁰San Jose Daily Herald, 12 June 1878.

³¹Ibid., 19 June 1878.

unimpeachable constitution."³² A constitution was not the place for radical concepts. The county's five delegates were a respectable representation of their politically eclectic, fiscally conservative, progressive county.³³ It was fitting that the Santa Clara County WPC delegate, the so-called revolutionary party, should have been a former Republican, a respected attorney, and supporter of women's suffrage.

The county's single WPC delegate was Dennis Wiley Herrington, a resident of the city of Santa Clara and an attorney for the city of San Jose. Herrington came to the legal profession by a most circuitous path. He was employed most of his teenage years as a carpenter until an injury to his right arm forced him back to school.³⁴ After a brief career as a teacher, he studied law and passed the bar. A

³²Ibid., 12 June 1878.

³³D. G. Waldron and T. J. Vivian, pubs. and eds., Biographical Sketches of the Delegates to the Convention to Frame a New Constitution for the State of California, 1878 (San Francisco: Francis and Valentine, 1878). Although vanity biographies written by the delegates themselves, they are a valuable source of information. Also valuable are such local histories as H. S. Foote, ed., Pen Pictures from the Garden of the World or Santa Clara County, California (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1888); and J. P. Munro-Fraser, History of Santa Clara County, California; including its Geography, Geology, Topography, Climatography and Description (San Francisco: Alley, Bowen, and Co., Publishers, 1881).

³⁴Foote, 93-94; Waldron and Vivian, 122.

former district attorney and assemblyman for Santa Clara County, Herrington had been politically active for a number of years preceding his election to the Constitutional Convention. A Democrat who converted to the Republican Party prior to the Civil War, he spent the rest of his political life as a man "who worked exclusively for the advancement of public welfare."³⁵

Discussing the WPC delegates, historian Carl B. Swisher claimed that those nominated "outside San Francisco were not necessarily controlled by the Kearney element, and it is a mistake to assume that all were ardent followers of his tactics."³⁶ A most credible representative of both county and party, Dennis W. Herrington may have personified the little control Denis Kearney actually had within Santa Clara County. Kearney had chided the local National Labor Party months earlier for having an attorney president. Not only were attorneys active in the San Jose WPC, but two WPC-SJ presidents, James E. Rymal and C. A. Grimmer, worked in

³⁵San Jose Daily Mercury, 25 October 1902.

³⁶Carl Brent Swisher, Motivation and Political Technique in the California Constitutional Convention 1878-79 (Claremont, California: Pomona College, 1930; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 23 (page references are to reprint edition).

Herrington's law office, and were presumably proteges.³⁷

Judging from his experiences and affiliations, his modest background, his support of the Republican Party, his years as a public attorney for San Jose and Santa Clara County, and his advocacy of women's and working-class issues, Dennis Herrington was a man who was probably respected across the economic spectrum.

Santa Clara's Non-Partisan delegates were equally distinguished and influential men from around the county. Thomas H. Laine was a local lawyer, former state senator, and Democrat. An advocate of women's rights, Republican Assemblyman Rush McComas was also a county agriculturist and horticulturist. Edward O. Smith, a staunch Democrat, suffragist, and stock raiser, at 62 was the oldest and most experienced of the delegation. A former mayor of Decatur, Illinois, Smith had been a delegate to write the Illinois state constitution in 1847. Joseph Rush Weller, also an agriculturist and stock raiser, referred to himself as a "Progressive Republican," another convert following the

³⁷Rymal, a popular labor activist and women's suffrage advocate, was elected president of the San Jose Workingmen's Party in May 1878; and C. A. Grimmer, an avid supporter of Kearney and the Greenback Labor Party, took the president's seat in July 1880 when dissension split the local party.

Civil War.³⁸ Santa Clara County contributed an additional local Non-Partisan delegate to the convention when Pleasant B. Tully, a criminal lawyer and Democrat from Gilroy, was elected delegate-at-large from the Fourth Congressional District.

It was not chance that three of the five delegates specifically elected to represent Santa Clara County were advocates of women's suffrage and rights. Women's rights, the WPC's support for "their sisters in all walks of life," was a point of agreement among many of the valley's politicians. Apparently, not enough WPCers statewide however, could agree on women's suffrage. While promoting equal employment and equal pay for women, the state WPC did not specifically advocate women's suffrage.³⁹ Ironically, similar to the anti-Chinese issue, the election of Republican, Democrat, and WPC suffragist delegates demonstrated that women's suffrage and rights also transcended political boundaries in the county.

Santa Clara County's reputation for promoting women's

³⁸"Santa Clara County's Bald-Headed Brigade. Our Santa Clara delegation has taken a position in the first rank of the Convention both as to intelligence and bald headedness. Smith, Weller and McComas, flanked on either side by Laine and Herrington occupy places in the forward row of desks, and when the sun gets round so as to shine on the craniums of the center of the battalion, the effect is dazzling." San Jose Daily Herald, 8 October 1878.

³⁹Ibid., 14 February 1878.

rights was well-earned. As early as 1872, "the Woman's Journal noted that there were about 200 members in the San Jose suffrage association."⁴⁰ Excepting the occasional condescending tone from the Times,⁴¹ women's suffrage was generally supported by the local press. The Mercury's editor, J. J. Owen, proved such a champion that he served as president of the Official Board of the State Woman's Suffrage Society of California in 1878.⁴²

The Santa Claran suffragists did more than organize; they also initiated landmark legislation. In the early 1870s, William Knox, a state senator from Santa Clara County, drafted and secured passage of a bill that enabled a

⁴⁰Barbara Allen Babcock, "Clara Shortridge Foltz: 'First Woman'," Valparaiso University Law Review 28 (Summer 1994): 1242.

⁴¹The Daily Morning Times prided itself on its independence, yet editor DeLacy sometimes crossed the line into simple patronizing contrariness. Late in 1879, he editorialized that the suffragists worked to compel "the monster man to take his iron heel off the dear little necks of the gentler sex, and give them the ballot to play with." 11 December 1879. This unctuous condescension was not, however, the Times' consistent attitude. Six months later, under the title, "What the Times Would Like To See," DeLacy listed, along with such hopes as "A politician who won't lie," another desire: "Women paid the same wages as men, when engaged in similar employment." 16 June 1880.

⁴²Besides Owen, the fourteen-member board included three additional Santa Clara County residents, Sarah Knox and Clara Foltz of San Jose, and Sarah Wallis of Mayfield. San Jose Weekly Mercury, 7 February 1878.

married woman to dispose of her separate property by will.⁴³ After his death, Knox's widow, Sarah, spearheaded a bill, in 1874, making women eligible for educational offices. This "first legislative victory for organized women in California" became part of the new San Jose charter rewritten that same year.⁴⁴

Sarah Knox's younger friend and protege was Clara Shortridge Foltz. Similar to the Owen's family, support for women's issues was generational. Foltz's father and founding WPC-SJ member, Elias Shortridge, promoted women's active participation in the city's new WPC.⁴⁵ In April 1878, Foltz drafted the legislation and her friend, then State Senator B. D. Murphy, introduced, and helped pass, the historic Woman Lawyer's Bill in Sacramento, "one of the earliest statutes of its kind."⁴⁶ After a law apprenticeship in the office of WPC-SJ member, C. C.

⁴³Babcock, "'First Woman'," 1240-41.

⁴⁴Ibid., 1241. In the first municipal election open to women candidates, Jennie Owen, along with Lucie Guppy, ran for the San Jose school board. Although neither Guppy nor his daughter was elected, J. J. Owen sounded pleased and hopeful. "The ladies need feel no chagrin over their defeat. They were the pioneer representatives of a principle. It is the principle only that has suffered a temporary defeat." San Jose Daily Mercury, 10 April 1877.

⁴⁵San Jose Daily Mercury, 24 November 1877.

⁴⁶Babcock, "Constitution Maker," 869; Babcock, "'First Woman'," 1257.

Stephens, Clara Shortridge Foltz became California's first woman attorney on September 5, 1878.¹⁷ Considering Santa Clara's active participation, it was reasonable that 60 percent of the county constitutional convention delegates supported women's rights. From the delegate election forward, Knox and Foltz, along with other California suffragists, lobbied for women's rights and suffrage in Sacramento, and Santa Clara County delegates Herrington, Smith, and McComas "voted steadily in women's favor at the Convention."¹⁸

While the county delegates prepared for their task in Sacramento, the San Jose WPC had an unexpected task of its own. The local party suffered a setback when James Rymal, the San Jose president, died on August 18, 1878. Seeking medical assistance at the local drugstore rather than with his physician, he died unexpectedly at the age of 26. His funeral was held in Herrington's office.¹⁹ Memorials and resolutions in the newspapers from the WPC and the San Jose Woman Suffrage Association honored a young man active in

¹⁷Babcock, "'First Woman'," 1261.

¹⁸Babcock, "Constitution Maker," 880.

¹⁹San Jose Weekly Mercury, 22 August 1878, 26 September 1878; San Jose Daily Herald, 19 and 20 August 1878.

local progressive movements.⁵⁰ C. J. Curtis, a dry goods clerk, express agent, WPC-SJ financial secretary, and beginning the coming March 1879, the New Era editor, was elected to fill the vacancy. Curtis helped continue the local progressive suffrage focus when he and fellow WPCer I. N. Kusel addressed a group, late in 1878, to organize a Colored Workingmen's Club.⁵¹

Despite the party's progressivism and rapid ascent, the local WPC still struggled against internal dissension. As at the state level, at the center of the local party's conflict stood Denis Kearney and the question of his incendiary tactics. Ironically, the focus of the local trouble was William Vinter's denigration of Kearney following the state convention. The requests for Vinter, one of the few genuine ideologues of the San Jose WPC, to leave the party for "vilifying" Kearney,⁵² underscored the primary problem of Kearney's incendiary speeches and dictatorial leadership tactics. Eventually, other local, as well as state WPC supporters, would also be branded traitors for disagreeing with Kearney. Kearney's fiery speeches attracted attention and party membership, but they also

⁵⁰Two of the signatures for the Suffrage Association were Sarah Knox and Clara Foltz.

⁵¹San Jose Daily Mercury, 8 December 1878.

⁵²San Jose Daily Herald, 22 May 1878; 15 July 1878.

created an irreparable breach between the moderate and more radical factions within the party ranks. The petty name-calling and innuendo more importantly showed that loyalty to Denis Kearney, for some members, was tantamount to loyalty to the party.

If not mended, party divisions over Kearney had, at least, been tabled by the spring of 1879. Having spent from September 28, 1878, to March 3, 1879, writing a new constitution, the county's delegates returned, most to campaign for its ratification. The battle for ratification was hard fought locally. The city's major newspapers, like most statewide, opposed the state's cumbersome new "hermaphrodite document." An unfortunate, but apt description, the new constitution was too long for a constitution and too short for a code, one that satisfied neither the monied nor the working class.⁵³ It was not the reform document initially intended.

Although unintentional, this was partially the fault of Denis Kearney. Seeking to avoid a party cadre similar to other parties, it was Kearney's own WPC resolution that declared no party officer could be a delegate to the constitutional convention. Represented by its less capable members, the party failed to meet the necessary challenges

⁵³Ibid., 31 October 1878.

of the convention, "seriously lessening its influence in that very important gathering."⁵⁴ No matter how talented, the WPC's fifty-one constitution writers comprised a minority one-third of the total delegates that created overwhelming obstacles for the party from the beginning of the convention.

The WPC constitution writers were neither the "primitive band of fake reformers" plagued with a "general dumbness" seen by Kearney's rival Frank Roney,⁵⁵ nor the promised reformers of California democracy. A more balanced, less emotional description was offered by delegate-at-large P. B. Tully from Gilroy. Speaking before a WPC group in San Francisco, he had found the WPC delegates' efforts commendable. "He had been taught to believe that the Workingmen were ruffians and rioters, but since the assembling of the Convention he had found that they were not. He had voted with the Workingmen many times, and he said that there had been no question before the Convention on which they had not voted right."⁵⁶

⁵⁴Cross, 113-14.

⁵⁵Frank Roney, Frank Roney, Irish Rebel and California Labor Leader, ed. Ira B. Cross (Berkeley, 1931), 312-13; quoted in Alexander Saxton, The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 130.

⁵⁶Gilroy Advocate, 8 March 1879.

Over the years, many analyses have maintained that the WPC's constitutional contributions were negligible, charging most WPC delegates lacked the skills to compete with established lawyers and legislators. One breakdown of the conservative and liberal factions of the convention reveals that despite their equal distribution, the conservatives had the greater proportion of politically experienced lawyers.⁵⁷ Carl B. Swisher's detailed study of the techniques employed by the various political and economic blocs at the convention vividly illustrates the WPC's lack of political acumen, especially when dealing with some of the most influential men in the state. When opposed, the WPC delegates deferred too frequently to a sort of social aristocracy of conservative capital and their lawyers.⁵⁸

Restricted to the efforts of its less effective members, the inadvertently handicapped WPCers did little to counter the manipulation and intimidation of the convention's more experienced delegates. There apparently was minimal cooperation with other reform groups with similar interests. An earnest coalition of the state's farmers and WPC could have produced a much stronger reform document. The few WPC-backed articles written into the 1879

⁵⁷Delmatier, McIntosh, and Waters, 86.

⁵⁸Swisher, 44.

Constitution have been attributed to the demands of dissident farmers and not the direct result of the WPC.⁵⁹ However, the WPC can take some credit for the provision for an eight-hour work day for all public works projects.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, too much WPC delegate energy was expended writing the Constitution's anti-Chinese articles. Considered by the more astute to be meaningless at the time of their writing, these articles were certain to be challenged, and later declared unconstitutional in the federal courts.

Frequently overlooked by historians were the WPC's constitutional contributions to women's rights. Their collective ineffectiveness aside, WPC delegates were apparently the sum of the more progressive of their reform party. Despite the fact that their state platform did not specifically support it, the WPC delegates led the floor debates in favor of women's suffrage. Although, they failed to secure suffrage, they were instrumental in obtaining two anti-discrimination articles for women. One stated that "no one shall be disqualified, because of sex, from pursuing any

⁵⁹James J. Rawls and Walton Bean, California: An Interpretive History, 6th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1993), 183.

⁶⁰Saxton, 129.

calling,"⁶¹ thus allowing a woman to hold any employment she wished.

The second article passed in direct response to the previous day's press coverage of Clara Foltz's lawsuit against Hastings Law School, part of the University of California. With Herrington's assistance, the article ensuring women access to a state university education carried 103 to 20. As the San Francisco Chronicle commented: "Those who have charge of the law school at the University may be ungenerous and narrow enough in their views to wish to limit the sphere of women, but a majority of the members of the Constitutional Convention are not."⁶² Following the convention and eventually winning her suit, Foltz returned to San Jose, her five children, and her full-time law practice. Returning to their constituencies, the delegates' next order of business was the ratification of their labors.

The local Workingmen's Party, including Councilmen Corkery and Kennedy and delegate Herrington, as well as Non-Partisan P. B. Tully, endorsed the new document.⁶³ Apparently, the genuine need and desire for reform had

⁶¹Sacramento Bee; quoted in the San Jose Daily Herald, 8 March 1879.

⁶²Quoted in Babcock, "Constitution Maker," 898.

⁶³San Jose Daily Herald, 6 March 1879; Swisher, 106.

produced a certain complacency, but the local campaign favoring ratification had a more visceral than logical tone. C. J. Curtis, the San Jose WPC president, supported ratification because "when you find the Alta and the Record-Union opposing the Constitution, that is proof enough that every honest man should vote for it." William Vinter approved of the new version and "advised the workingmen to give no heed to what the d___ lawyers and drunken preachers, hired by political thieves, might say against it."⁶⁴

The campaign opposing ratification was well-represented and analytical. H. L. Knight, founding member of the San Francisco WPC and excommunicated Kearney "traitor," came to San Jose advising against ratification. He charged "the new one is inconsiderate, impracticable, absurd and contrary to the Constitution of the United States. Twenty years of litigation will not settle its inconsistencies."⁶⁵ Even Santa Clara County's own constitutional delegate, T. H. Laine, opposed the new document as cumbersome. "It is too much of an attempt to harmonize interests in order to carry the State, while the real fundamental principles that should comprise an organic law have been lost sight of."⁶⁶

⁶⁴San Jose Daily Herald, 6 March 1879.

⁶⁵Ibid., 2 April 1879; Gilroy Advocate, 5 April 1879.

⁶⁶Santa Clara Echo, 22 March 1879.

The ample press coverage of the speeches and editorials of the opposition created a constant barrage against ratification. Threats of doom and gloom appeared almost daily. "The new Constitution is heartily supported by every man of communistic tendencies in the State, because it will entirely upset the existing state of affairs."⁶⁷ The threats then shifted from the general statewide implications to specific local ones.

The campaign against the constitution acquired an ugly, intimidating tone with threats of further unemployment in a community already suffering. First, the Daily Mercury claimed the San Jose Water Company had halted its planned expansion until after the ratification vote. "Workingmen, the new Constitution is now withholding from you \$10,000, and in the event of its adoption it will rob you entirely of that amount, as the Company will never manufacture or lay a foot of it. This is but one item of the losses to you to result from the adoption of the Constitution, the sum total of which is to create and perpetuate your utter ruin."⁶⁸ A week before the ratification election, the Daily Herald published a story of a threat to close local canneries. In fact, it would have been economic suicide for the cannery

⁶⁷San Jose Daily Herald, 24 March 1879.

⁶⁸San Jose Daily Mercury, 10 April 1879.

owners to actually cease operations. Ripe fruit must be processed, regardless of politics. The statement that "operations have been deferred until after the 7th instant, and if the proposed new Constitution is adopted the factories will remain closed" was equivalent to blackmail for the families of the canneries' three hundred women employees.⁶⁹

Despite the organized opposition, on May 7, 1879, the state ratified the new constitution, with 77,959 (53.7 percent) favoring it and 67,134 (46.3 percent) of the voters rejecting it.⁷⁰ Statewide, "mining and lumbering areas rejected it by small majorities. The agricultural counties of Colusa, Lake, Mendocino, Monterey, Placer, San Joaquin, Santa Cruz, Sonoma, and Tulare voted heavily in the affirmative."⁷¹ Primarily, farmers in the southern counties, the Central Valley, and farmers and lumbermen in the far northern counties provided enough votes for ratification.⁷²

Generally, those local communities, Evergreen, Mayfield, Milpitas, Lexington, and Los Gatos, that favored

⁶⁹San Jose Daily Herald, 2 May 1879.

⁷⁰Swisher, 109.

⁷¹Delmatier, McIntosh, and Waters, 96, n. 35; Swisher, 109-10.

⁷²San Jose Daily Herald, 11 June 1879.

the new constitution were predominantly either farming or lumbering communities. The mining community of Almaden soundly rejected it 176 to 26,⁷³ but there were numerous allegations that the election ^{was} manipulated by mine owners.

The local ratification vote exemplified the dilemma that progressive communities like San Jose and Santa Clara County faced in the late-nineteenth century. Despite growing railroad infringements and inequitable taxes, the concern for stable business interests and threats of unemployment took precedence over the proposed reforms of an untested constitution. Santa Clara, like most of the populous counties of the state, voted 56.6 percent against the new constitution.⁷⁴ Rejecting it by a 13.2 percent total majority, Santa Clara County aligned itself with the state's urban centers.⁷⁵ San Francisco's 4.2 percent lesser majority opposing ratification presumably indicated that city's WPC strength.⁷⁶

The WPC's supposed urban strength failed to secure

⁷³Ibid., 12 May 1879.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵These figures are the difference between the votes cast in favor and those against the new constitution as a percentage of the total number of votes cast.

⁷⁶Delmatier, McIntosh, and Waters, 88.

enough votes for ratification even in San Jose. With half of the county's electorate in urban San Jose, 53.7 percent of Santa Clara County's opposition votes came from that city. Even the predominantly working-class fourth ward voted against it, albeit by a smaller margin than the other city wards.

It was not simply fiscally conservative Santa Clara County and San Jose that desired to retain the constitutional status quo. San Francisco, the strongest labor city in the West, only one year earlier had elected all thirty of its Constitutional Convention delegates on the WPC ticket, yet refused to ratify their efforts. This phenomenon could be seen in other urban areas. A year earlier, Oakland gave the WPC state senate candidate a 52 percent majority, yet a 1,496 vote majority against the constitution."

The scrutiny of the press revealed the less-than-promised performance of the WPC at the Constitutional Convention; yet statewide, the voters were willing to try the new, untested document. The dissension that weakened Kearney's incendiary leadership removed part of the voter apprehension about the WPC's program. There were still

⁷⁷Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of California, Vol. 7, 1860-1890 in The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft (San Francisco: This History Company, Publishers, 1890), 407, n. 1.

enough problems, especially unemployment and monopolies, that many voters were willing to support the new document. Despite concerns about the long-term ramifications of the new constitution, voters around the state were still willing to try a new strategy for change.

Although, discord in the city of Santa Clara forced the WPC to put up two separate, yet unsuccessful municipal tickets that spring of 1879,⁷⁸ the WPC still found significant support in Oakland and Salinas.⁷⁹ In fact, in the 1879 statewide elections, the Workingmen elected a new Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court, five of the six associate justices, one railroad commissioner, eleven senators, and sixteen assemblymen. In San Francisco, the voters chose the WPC's candidates for mayor, sheriff, auditor, public administrator, surveyor, attorney, justice of the peace, three of the twelve supervisors, four of the twelve school directors, and nine of the judges.⁸⁰

Only one month before rejecting the supposed Workingmen's constitution, even the citizens of San Jose revealed their continued desire for change and elected three

⁷⁸Santa Clara Echo, 5 April 1879; San Jose Daily Mercury, 13 April 1879.

⁷⁹Santa Clara Echo, 15 March 1879.

⁸⁰Ralph Kauer, "The Workingmen's Party of California," Pacific Historical Review 13 (September 1949), 287.

more WPC councilmen. With its two preceding council members, the WPC achieved a majority of five on the eight-man city council following the April 1879 election. The San Jose WPC may have failed to deliver Santa Clara County's constitutional ratification, but the party was now in a position to reform San Jose politics and correct local problems.

CHAPTER FIVE

A CHANCE TO MAKE CHANGES

By April 1879, the WPC majority on the San Jose Common Council put the party in a position to implement its program of reform and address some of the city's more crucial problems. Grappling with even local problems, the WPC-SJ discovered that the reality of politics was far more complex than the simple solutions of campaign rhetoric. In the spirit of its labor/anti-monopoly platform, San Jose's WPC fought, with limited success, for jobs for the city's unemployed and control of the San Jose Water Company. Within the party, the local WPC quarreled over finances, fear of its own potential political machine, a clearly defined political agenda, and the constant question of loyalty to Denis Kearney. In addition, outside partisan pressure and political machinations from the Democratic Party worked to undermine the local party. The final blow to the WPC, both statewide and locally, was the fundamental flaw of the party--the limits of an essentially local political party when dealing with state and federal issues.

When the WPC-SJ put aside petty internal disputes and concentrated on larger local issues, it came closest to

success. Ironically, that success was achieved through compromise and against party edicts. Its established political base of 1878 allowed the San Jose party to elect a WPC majority to the city council in 1879 and indicated that the strongly Republican city of San Jose was willing to try the WPC's reform program. The April 14, 1879, municipal election selected WPC members Dennis Corkery, Rinaldo S. Carter, and Simon Grozelier from the first, third, and fourth wards respectively. With previously elected WPCers, Charles L. Kennedy and Henry C. Kaiser from the first and fourth, this gave the party five out of eight seats on the council.

The WPC councilmen represented a cross-section of San Jose's population. Although, the party had a number of professionals, San Jose's WPC electorate more readily selected skilled workers and entrepreneurs from the working and middle classes for their councilmen. For instance, Henry Conrad Kaiser was a German plasterer in his late twenties. He was also the youngest WPC councilman. One of the two first elected in 1878, Kaiser represented the working-class fourth ward. He was re-elected to represent his fellow laborers once again in 1880, but his second term was on the Democratic ticket.¹ Despite the growing

¹San Jose Daily Herald, 13 April 1880.

dominance of the Republican Party in San Jose, Kaiser apparently remained active in local Democratic associations.²

Charles L. Kennedy was the second WPC councilman elected in 1878. A Canadian wood grainer and painter in his mid-thirties, Kennedy had been a vigorous supporter of San Jose's anti-Chinese movement, as well as the WPC's predecessor, the Labor Party of California. According to the Daily Mercury, Kennedy failed to receive the Republican nomination for the first ward's school trustee position in 1877.³ He also failed to get elected despite running on San Jose's Anti-Chinese and Workingmen's Protective Association ticket for the same election.⁴ Finally, he secured a council seat in 1878 as a WPCer.⁵ Remaining active in the WPC until 1880, Kennedy lost his WPC re-election bid by an almost two to one margin to Republican and future mayor C. T. Settle.⁶ Accurately sensing the shift in the political wind, Kennedy defeated temporary Democrat Dennis Corkery, when he returned the next year to

²Ibid., 5 April 1882, 4 May 1884.

³San Jose Daily Mercury, 31 March 1877.

⁴Ibid., 10 April 1877.

⁵San Jose Daily Herald, 9 April 1878.

⁶Ibid., 13 April 1880.

both the Republican Party and the Common Council chambers.⁷

Dennis Corkery, an Irish immigrant grocer in his early thirties at the time of the 1879 election, had been active in the city's Irish community and a voice for Irish causes. His election continued the first ward's two-year tradition of having an outspoken anti-Chinese advocate on the council. Married with four children, Corkery sat on the city council for only a single two-year term.⁸ Apparently, his participation in city and county politics began with the Workingmen's Party, but he continued as a Republican after a brief dalliance with the Democratic Party. Former WPCer C. L. Kennedy, running as a Republican in 1881,⁹ surprised both the editors of the Daily Morning Times and the Daily Herald when he defeated the momentary Democrat, Corkery, for the first ward council seat by only 33 votes.¹⁰ By 1884, Corkery was himself active in the Republican Party where, it is said, his loyalty remained.¹¹

⁷Ibid., 12 April 1881.

⁸J. P. Munro-Fraser, History of Santa Clara County, California; including its Geography, Geology, Topography, Climatography and Description (San Francisco: Alley, Bowen and Co., Publishers, 1881), 463.

⁹San Jose Daily Herald, 6 April 1881.

¹⁰San Jose Daily Morning Times, 6 April 1881, 27 March 1881; San Jose Daily Herald, 12 April 1881.

¹¹San Jose Daily Mercury, 24 August 1884.

Coincidentally, 1884 was the same year C. T. Settle was elected San Jose's first Republican mayor in fifteen years.¹² San Jose had been predominantly a Republican city since the Civil War, yet had elected popular Democrats such as B. D. Murphy and Lawrence Archer for mayor. By the late-nineteenth century, however, a Republican political machine was developing,¹³ one that lasted into the early-twentieth century. Corkery's later active participation on the San Jose Board of Trade aligned him with the local power structure. Prior to his election, the first ward had not shown any recent political support for a particular party. Corkery won his 1879 council seat by only ten votes over his Republican opponent. Apparently, future success in the first ward and the city lay with the Republican Party and Dennis Corkery proved politically flexible. With party-hopping commonplace, WPC members statewide have been accused by historians of political opportunism and political expediency. As seen by their council voting records, both

¹²Clyde Arbuckle, Clyde Arbuckle's History of San Jose (San Jose: Memorabilia of San Jose, 1986), 39.

¹³David W. Eakins, ed., Businessmen and Municipal Reform: A Study of Ideals and Practice in San Jose and Santa Cruz, 1896-1916 (San Jose: Sourisseau Academy for California State and Local History, San Jose State University, 1976), 2-3; Philip J. Trounstine and Terry Christensen, Movers and Shakers, The Study of Community Power (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 80.

Kennedy and Corkery were apparently strong party men, no matter what party.

Rinaldo Shelton Carter's 1879 election win in the city's most populous ward was only by a 31 vote margin over the Republican candidate.¹⁴ The newly-elected third ward WPC councilman was in his mid-forties, married, and the father of one teenage daughter. Carter's occupations, listed in the San Jose directories and manuscript census, ranged from carpenter (1870), to capitalist (1878), to seven-month unemployed carpenter (1880), and in 1882 to building contractor, and vividly illustrated the vagaries of the era's economy. As a one-term councilman, like Corkery,¹⁵ there is little evidence that Carter promoted the anti-Chinese movement, but he went on to be active in the organization of the Anti-Monopoly League in San Jose in 1881.¹⁶

First elected in 1879, fourth ward WPC councilman Simon Grozelier was a tanner by trade. When re-elected in 1881, and again in 1886,¹⁷ it was on the Democratic ticket.

¹⁴San Jose Daily Herald, 15 April 1879.

¹⁵H. S. Foote, ed., Pen Pictures from the Garden of the World or Santa Clara County, California (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1888), 153.

¹⁶San Jose Daily Mercury, 10 August 1881.

¹⁷Foote, 153.

Unlike Corkery's and Kennedy's later affiliation with San Jose's establishment leaders, Grozelier remained a more working-class representative of the fourth ward. Active not only in the city, county, and state Democratic Party, Grozelier, like Carter, may have been drawn to the WPC more for its anti-monopoly stance, than its anti-Chinese position. As well as campaigning to raise funds for the Mussel Slough settlers against the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1881, French immigrant Grozelier supported land rights in Ireland as the vice-president of the Land League.¹⁸

The election that added to the WPC leverage in San Jose politics also added to the Democrats' resentment against the WPC. The fourth ward notwithstanding, San Jose's Democrats' hostility toward the WPC was understandable. If strongly Republican San Jose sought change, why had it not turned to the Democrats? The election of April 1879 revealed an apparent distrust, or perhaps suspicion, of the San Jose Democratic Party. The Democrats, still factionalized by the "bloody shirt" accusations of the Civil War, continued to be dominated by a small cadre of local men. In the council election, San Jose's voters vacillated between the known Republicans and the untested WPC, leaving the Democrats a distant third. Citywide, the electorate voted 40 percent

¹⁸San Jose Daily Herald, 16 February 1882.

WPC, 37 percent Republican, and 23 percent Democratic for its city council seats.¹⁹

Following on the heels of the WPC's victorious municipal election was the party's less successful ratification of the new state constitution. The area's power elite could not afford complacency, however. Forming a coalition that included some WPC supporters, the New Constitution Party was based upon the principle that the ratifying electorate wanted the new document "put in force by legislative action."²⁰ "A necessity of the times,"²¹ a local branch of the New Constitution Party was established with the active participation of most of the county's constitutional delegates, as well as some members of the WPC.²² The new party had a familiar sounding platform of anti-corporate monopoly, anti-land monopoly, and anti-Chinese sentiment, demonstrating the impact of the Workingmen and the continued pressure for reform. By August 1879, each party was apparently drawing, if not large,

¹⁹Ibid., 15 April 1879.

²⁰San Jose Daily Morning Times, 14 August 1879.

²¹Ibid., 1 August 1879. Speech by Cornelius Cole, New Constitution Party mass meeting, 31 July 1879.

²²San Jose Daily Herald, 26 May 1879; San Jose Daily Morning Times, 14 August 1879.

certainly enthusiastic crowds to their meetings.²³

With his WPC authority already challenged at the June 4 state convention,²⁴ Kearney ignored the two parties' obvious ideological similarities. He decried a potential loss of hard-fought political identity for the WPC, and refused to join the NCP. Kearney insisted that his affiliation with the National Greenback Labor Party was essential for the abrogation of the Burlingame Treaty and he would not dilute his control by coalescing with another California-only party.

Despite Kearney's confusing and contradictory political convictions, the WPC had a mandate from the San Jose voters for change. The WPC councilmen were soon entangled in their own ideological dilemma that revealed a primary failing of the party. Despite all the campaign rhetoric, the local party never produced a clearly defined political agenda. It needed a clear definition of the community's immediate problems, as well as pragmatic solutions for those problems. Lacking a specific program, the WPC left its councilmen to struggle with ideological choices. Had the WPC councilmen been elected to represent the party and its dictates, and to aid its labor electorate? Or was the council's primary

²³San Jose Daily Morning Times, 9 August 1879.

²⁴San Jose Daily Herald, 5 June 1879.

responsibility to the city in general? How should the council use city funds to help the most citizens? Would San Jose best be served by short-term unemployment relief or long-term sanitation renovation?

The much needed sewer expansion project provided the city with public works employment and the WPC councilmen with a lesson in political realities and compromise. In response to the city's rapid growth, the San Jose sewer project had been planned since 1870. A decade later, the city was in desperate need of the long-anticipated sewer expansion and could finally finance the undertaking.²⁵ The new project, essentially a large brick tunnel and redwood-lined ditch, was to connect the center of San Jose with the San Francisco Bay at Alviso.²⁶

To provide jobs for as many of their unemployed supporters as possible, the San Jose WPC petitioned their councilmen to build the new sewer with day labor and a supervisor rather than through a contract. Councilman Corkery argued that lowest bidder contracts with cheap labor would provide work predominantly for unmarried men, leaving men with families "out in the cold."²⁷ Concerned with

²⁵Ibid., 10 July 1879.

²⁶San Jose Daily Morning Times, 27 August 1880.

²⁷San Jose Daily Herald, 10 July 1879.

favoritism, the fourth ward's WPC councilman, Henry Kaiser, opposed this view. "The contract system offers a fair show to everybody, whereas a Superintendent can employ whom he likes and reject whom he likes."²⁸

After much debate, the council finally reached a compromise. It agreed to WPC Councilman Carter's resolution to contract five-hundred-foot sections only to San Jose residents, allowing one section per contractor. Faced with a disgruntled, impatient electorate, and no party consensus on the council, three WPC councilmen, Carter, Grozelier, and Corkery, chose to ally with one Republican and one Democrat, contract with the lowest bidders, and avoid further delay for work for some of the city's workers. Only Kennedy and Kaiser voted according to the party's petition for day labor.²⁹

A lesson in political realities and council priorities, WPCer Carter agreed with Republican McMillan that the sanitary needs of the city took precedence over how or by whom the sewer was built. Only Councilman Kennedy continued to vote the WPC dictates a month after the compromise, refusing to accept the contract bids before the council.³⁰

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹San Jose Daily Morning Times, 17 July 1879.

³⁰Ibid., 5 August 1879.

As the months passed, the council continued to approve bids for separate sections, receive inspection reports from the city engineer of completed sections, and produce jobs for area workers.³¹ The WPC councilmen's compromise may not have provided the promised work for every unemployed San Jose laborer, but it did supply as much work as possible while renovating the city's sanitation system. Rarely, however, did the WPC council majority vote as a bloc. The WPC councilmen's schism indicated the party's lack of clearly defined remedies for city problems rather than a lack of control over its elected officials.

Hopes of greater party solidarity were apparently restored when, just before the September 1879 state and county election, Denis Kearney returned to the valley to speak. At a WPC grand rally filled with "frenzied cheers,"³² the magnetism of Kearney's controversial personality filled the block between First and Market to capacity. Three days later, a stellar collection of WPC and New Constitution state candidates looked, according to the Times, "as if all of Santa Clara county had concentrated in San Jose."³³

³¹Ibid., 7 October 1879, 6 January 1880, 4 May 1880.

³²Ibid., 31 August 1879.

³³Ibid., 3 September 1879.

Despite the struggle to preserve the integrity of the WPC, the campaign for the September 1879 state and county elections clearly revealed a division within the party. Sharply contrasting with Kearney's coarse, divisive bravado, C. C. Stephens represented the principles of the more moderate faction of the WPC. A former Republican, Stephens campaigned countywide as a WPC and NCP candidate for Superior Court judge along with Dennis Herrington. Evidently, there was a sizable contingent of moderate WPC supporters within the county. Without using Kearney's scurrilous style, Stephens attracted an equally enthusiastic crowd in Gilroy when he concluded that:

Local or State reforms were needed, we concern ourselves about matters at Washington too much. We have to deal with land monopoly, and that other great evil, the Chinese monopoly. We have to deal with the wrongs among you. The bloody-shirt, the war talk of sixteen or eighteen years ago, or the Democratic reforms of General Jackson will not meet present wants.³⁴

Regardless of its struggles, the San Jose WPC was remarkably tenacious. If one were to believe the negligible WPC reporting in the Democratic Daily Herald, the local WPC was in the throes of a death rattle. Its analysis of the September 1879 state and county elections, that "by dividing the Democratic party, the WPC has elected the very men whom

³⁴Gilroy Advocate, 16 August 1879.

it has cause to fear the most,"³⁵ was only partially correct. It was probably true that a large number of Democrats left the party when the local WPC was organized in January 1878. Two years earlier, the county Democrats had succeeded in electing nine of the twelve candidates on the ballot. In 1879, Santa Clara County had elected thirteen Republicans to state and county positions, one WPC and NCP candidate, James H. Campbell, for district attorney, and not a single Democrat. Since the county electorate had a history of changing party majorities every couple of years, perhaps the Democrats would have been out regardless of the WPC. Considering the Democrats' sound defeat in the San Jose election in April, after the September county election the WPC was the obvious scapegoat.

Perhaps the Daily Herald's diatribes should more accurately have been aimed again at Denis Kearney and his followers for eschewing consolidation with any other party. In actuality, the county WPC came in a strong second place in twelve offices with the Democrats and New Constitutioners placing third and fourth respectively. The WPC in Santa Clara County was not strong enough to win any elected positions on their own, but the returns showed that the local NCP and Democrats had split the opposition, not the

³⁵San Jose Daily Herald, 6 September 1879.

WPC. The September election could easily have been interpreted by the WPC as a temporary setback. Contrary to neighboring WPC branches in Santa Cruz and Alameda counties with coalition tickets, the relatively strong Santa Clara County returns vindicated Kearney's and the county WPC's avoidance of a combination ticket.

Continually battling the external pressure for a coalition, by December 1879, the San Jose WPC faced yet another internal dilemma, one of political principle. How could a party of laborers, several unemployed, justify municipal employment for members of a party opposed to political favoritism? When the city council was asked to fill new vacancies in the fire and police departments, the five WPC councilmen refused a party edict to select WPC candidates exclusively, irrespective of their qualifications. The Daily Morning Times called the local WPC action a "humiliating dictation" that, for the councilmen, would have meant a "surrender of their manhood."³⁶ When the councilmen voted in the best interest of all their constituents, the result was the election of only one WPC candidate, the party's denunciation of the five councilmen, and the WPC-SJ's demand for their councilmen's resignations. The five WPC councilmen "proved themselves

³⁶San Jose Daily Morning Times, 3 December 1879.

above the average ward politicians, as gratifying as it was unexpected,"³⁷ was the Daily Herald's grudging, backhanded praise.

While satisfying the press, the WPC councilmen's stand only succeeded to further weaken the local party's cohesiveness, credibility, and political strength. The winter holiday season of 1879-80 found the San Jose WPC retrenching and reorganizing. Rather than one citywide party, four separate associations, one for each ward, were organized. Hopefully, more responsive and with more direct control, each ward club would decide ward issues and select ward candidates, with the city central committee handling only citywide political issues.³⁸

It was this revived grass roots connection that afforded the WPC the ready network to canvass the individual wards on the rates charged by the San Jose Water Company in February 1880. The new constitution stipulated that the San Jose Common Council must set the water rates for the city's residents each February based upon a report submitted by the water company and testimony from the community. The council's concern focused on the slow economy, the lower interest rates and wages paid by the Water Company, and the

³⁷San Jose Daily Herald, 2 December 1879.

³⁸San Jose Daily Morning Times, 28 December 1879.

financial hardships upon certain members of the community.

Discrepancies had been discovered between the company's property valuation report to the county assessor and the report the company filed with the Common Council.³⁹ Since the council had difficulties inspecting the company's financial records, the WPC clubs surveyed customers in their respective wards for their own report to the council. In part, the WPC report to the council made the alarming, and potentially deadly, charge that "in the summer time the supply of water was insufficient, causing great inconvenience and endangering life; and that the fire department had not been furnished with a sufficient supply."⁴⁰ Implying the company's long time political influence in San Jose, the Daily Morning Times charged that the responsibility for this cost-cutting scandal lay with a previous council that had permitted the company to install three-inch pipes contractually specifying five-inch for proper water pressure for fire contingencies.⁴¹

The San Jose WPC led a campaign against the water company, presumably drawing on a long-standing resentment

³⁹Ibid., 11 February 1880.

⁴⁰San Jose Daily Herald, 25 February 1880.

⁴¹San Jose Daily Morning Times, 13 June 1880.

over the company's local water monopoly and monopolies in general. The Times fuelled the controversy and resentment when it alleged that the Daily Mercury and the Daily Herald were controlled by the San Jose Water Co. "In the hearing of the loud complaints continually made of the onerous burdens laid on the people by the Company, neither of these papers have yet dared to utter a word on the subject, but they remain as silent and servile as their masters could wish."⁴²

Attempting to offset "a determined effort to manufacture public opinion against the Company," the position of the water company and its investors was not only represented before the council by company officers, but also by San Jose's illustrious banker and respected politician emeritus C. T. Ryland. An anonymous stockholder credited company investors with public sacrifice while simultaneously taking a slap at the "communist" WPC council in a letter to the Daily Herald. "Any reduction from the present rates, if they are not now (and we contend that they are not) unreasonable, will be nothing more nor less than confiscation by the Common Council of the property of those citizens, who, through hazard and danger, invested their capital in this enterprise without which San Jose would be a

⁴²Ibid., 19 February 1880.

desert instead of a flower garden."⁴³

In the name of the entire economically-strained community, the WPC attempted to take the moral high ground against the monopoly of the San Jose Water Company. Poorly schooled in political diplomacy, the WPC council members angered the officers of the water company when they appointed C. A. Grimmer, a law apprentice with D. W. Herrington and WPC third ward secretary,⁴⁴ to inspect the financial records of the company.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, only days before his council appointment, the Daily Morning Times published Grimmer's letter to the editor. Grimmer called the water company an "unprincipled, thieving corporation." The same issue of the Times carried an anonymous letter suggesting the city of San Jose buy out the water company assets, leaving the council and water company little room for negotiation. When the company refused Grimmer access to its records, Grimmer's retaliatory response was a WPC resolution calling for its majority council members to set a fifty percent rates reduction for the city as well as calling for an inspection of the county water rates by the

⁴³San Jose Daily Herald, 26 February 1880.

⁴⁴San Jose Daily Morning Times, 11 February 1880.

⁴⁵Ibid., 19 February 1880.

Board of Supervisors.⁴⁶

The WPC may have been seeking equity for the city's water customers, but the enmity created with name-calling and threats of confiscation looked more like a drive to destroy the water company. By making irresponsible demands upon the WPC councilmen, Grimmer's actions only succeeded in further eroding the credibility of the party. When WPC councilman Corkery proposed the suggested halving of the rates at the council meeting, his motion was not even seconded; not one of the other four WPC councilmen stood with their party's recommendation.

The Common Council appointed a Rates Committee comprised of two Workingmen, C. L. Kennedy and Simon Grozelier, as well as C. J. Martin, Citizen and former Democrat. The council passed the committee's suggested rates schedule, an average reduction of 17-1/2 percent by a vote of six to two. All five WPC councilmen, plus Martin approved it. The council's two Republicans, Cottle and McMillan rejected it, after their suggested 10 percent compromise reduction was voted down.⁴⁷

The Times gave the new schedule its hearty approval. "One important change in it is a discrimination in favor of

⁴⁶San Jose Herald, 23 February 1880.

⁴⁷Ibid., 28 February 1880.

very small families. The large consumers will be forced to pay a heavier rate than heretofore."⁴⁸ Even the City Central Club praised its councilmen for what it considered a just settlement for both the water company and the community.⁴⁹

Not as impressed with the council's settlement, the San Jose Water Company made its opinion clear two weeks later. Claiming a waste of water and dirty surroundings, the water company, in "a piece of ineffable meanness," cut off the water to the fountain on Santa Clara near First Street.⁵⁰

Following the April 1880 municipal election, the new Common Council of three Republicans, three WPCers and two Democrats faced a double hazard of little water pressure, but an overflow of political pressure. At the first meeting following the swearing in of the new councilmen, the water company came before the new Council seeking a restoration of the old rates.⁵¹ If they took affect July 1, 1880, the company contended the new rates would "deprive them of their revenue to an extent that would cripple them, render them incapable of operating their works on a scale commensurate

⁴⁸"San Jose Daily Morning Times, 4 March 1880.

⁴⁹Ibid., 29 February 1880.

⁵⁰Ibid., 12 March 1880.

⁵¹Ibid., 4 May 1880.

with the requirements of the city, in fact, reduce them to the verge of dissolution."⁵² Resurrecting the threat of low pressure for the fire department, the company also asserted it found at least 3,000 discrepancies in the WPC's ward canvassing. While the February rates schedule favored the poorer, smaller water customers, the company pointed out, it was the wealthier citizens, "men who will not be imposed upon," who dug wells on their property and refused to pay their increased water rates.⁵³

After being "shown every courtesy possible by the officers of the Water Company," the new Fire and Water Committee's investigating experts filed a report recommending the restoration of the old rates, undoing the previous council's work. The report noted that errors had been discovered in the company's accounting, but made no mention of intentional wrong-doing. The water committee's restoration report was only signed by Abram King, a Republican councilman, and H. C. Kaiser, a former WPCer, now a Democrat. It should be noted that C. J. Martin, the committee chair refused to sign the report. Following a council chamber debate which the Times termed "a preconcerted sham," the council voted five to two to restore

⁵²Ibid., 30 June 1880.

⁵³Ibid., 10 June 1880.

the old rates. The council's three Republicans, one WPCer and member of the 1879 Rates Committee, Simon Grozelier, and Henry Kaiser, Democrat and former WPCer, formed the required majority. With WPCer Rinaldo Carter chairing the meeting in Mayor Murphy's absence, it was left to Dennis Corkery and C. J. Martin to provide the dissenting voice in support of San Jose's poorer citizens.⁵⁴

What happened in those three-and-a-half months that prompted Kaiser and Grozelier to reverse themselves? Was the Times referring to Grozelier and Kaiser when it contemptuously wrote of the councilmen who "are still young, lithe and active, neither too fat, nor too senile, nor too clumsy to turn a summersault without touching the ground?"⁵⁵ Had the WPC councilmen anticipated the city's political shift away from the WPC? Perhaps as a final effort to keep at least one campaign promise and some political credibility, the five WPC councilmen voted in February for San Jose's lower income families and against the water company. After the April 1880 election, their reform party no longer enjoyed the mandate to challenge the local power structure. Did Grozelier and Kaiser choose to cut their losses as WPCers and vote with the city's and the

⁵⁴Ibid., 30 June 1880.

⁵⁵Ibid.

council's new majority?

As possibly anticipated by some WPC councilmen, the 1880 municipal election marked the party's collapse within the city. The election that gave the WPC in San Jose its one last electoral success also was full of manipulations and machinations. The party conventions and tickets, assorted mudslinging, and notorious party jumping provided color for the already lively San Jose political scene.

The Workingmen's convention on March 27, 1880, produced a city ticket of four council candidates, four school trustee candidates, police chief, city treasurer, street commissioner, and mayor. By election day, half of the WPC candidates declined their convention nominations for various reasons. Even Dr. M. S. McMahan dropped out as the WPC mayoral candidate in anticipation of his appointment to the State Board of Censors by the California Medical Society in late April 1880. The WPC City Central Committee selected his replacement, the very popular Democratic candidate, Bernard D. Murphy.⁵⁶ Since "the respectable portion of the community all favor his retention," the renomination of Police Chief Dan Haskell was a genuine asset for the WPC ticket.⁵⁷

⁵⁶Ibid., 10 April 1880.

⁵⁷Ibid., 9 March 1880.

The Democratic convention on March 31, 1880 was significant for the active participation of a number of San Jose's WPC supporters, including founding executive committee member, Thomas A. Carroll and former councilman, Simon Grozelier, now both Democratic convention delegates. Referring to past party ballot box failures, convention chairman, M. H. Hyland, did not exaggerate when he predicted that a Democratic victory in San Jose would "astonish the community."⁵⁸ The unquestioned popularity of Bernard D. Murphy guaranteed a Democratic mayor, especially after his addition to the WPC ticket.

Although on the Workingmen's ticket, B. D. Murphy's speech at the city Democratic convention revealed that the Democrats intended to rid San Jose of the WPC. The adept Democrat's skillfully worded acknowledgement of the WPC's popularity undermined the Workingmen by claiming the WPC's program originated with the Democrats. He claimed that the WPC "in the main, intended to do right," but was limited as a local party. Only the Democratic Party, the party that "has always looked to the interest of the laboring classes" could "drive out the Chinese and give them and their children an opportunity to earn their bread."⁵⁹

⁵⁸San Jose Daily Herald, 1 April 1880.

⁵⁹Ibid.

If an appeal to the hearts and minds of the "laboring classes" proved inadequate to destroy the WPC-SJ, it was rumored that the city's Democrats had a second, more covert plan. After two years of frustrated campaigns and humiliating election defeats, it is possible local Democrats were ready to right some past wrongs by any means necessary. The city Republican convention on March 25, 1880 was remarkable, according to the Daily Morning Times,⁶⁰ for the number of Democrats present who allegedly controlled the Republican ticket selections, "a comparatively easy matter, in the confusion of an unwieldy crowd."⁶¹ The Times accused Democrat James V. Tisdall of "wire-pulling" to promote the Republican nomination of W. H. Brown for police chief. It was allegedly the Democracy's attempt to thwart the re-election of Dan Haskell, the WPC's most credible candidate, with an equally popular Republican candidate. Ostensibly, local Democrats could endure a couple years of a Republican police chief if, ultimately, it hastened the destruction of the WPC.⁶²

There were no direct responses in the press to the Times' charges, but a certain credibility can be concluded

⁶⁰San Jose Daily Morning Times, 30 March, 10 April 1880.

⁶¹Ibid., 27 March 1880.

⁶²Ibid., 27 March 1880.

from further evidence. The Republican convention, described as "very harmonious and orderly"⁶³ in the Democratic Daily Herald, contrasted greatly with the independent Times' description of "a very humiliating spectacle."⁶⁴ A glance at the pre-election Daily Mercury validated the Times' charges that despite the fact that "the head of the Republican ticket is also the head of the Mercury Publishing Company,"⁶⁵ other than party advertisements, the Daily Mercury made no further mention of the Republican city ticket. There may also have been the added dimension of "the deep down animus"⁶⁶ and personal revenge for Tisdall. Dan Haskell had unseated the twice-incumbent Police Chief Tisdall two years earlier.

The Times' allegations of Democratic wire-pulling became more plausible with the election results. Haskell was re-elected by an incredibly slim two vote majority citywide over Republican Brown and provided the WPC-SJ with its one final election success.⁶⁷ The narrow margin may

⁶³San Jose Daily Herald, 26 March 1880.

⁶⁴San Jose Daily Morning Times, 27 March 1880.

⁶⁵Ibid., 7 April 1880.

⁶⁶Ibid., 27 March 1880.

⁶⁷Following a recount, Haskell still had a two vote majority and Brown had a bill for the recount of \$500. San Jose Daily Herald, 13 May 1880.

not have been the strength of "Tisdall's candidate" Brown in Republican San Jose, but rather that Haskell's personal popularity had been greatly weakened by the WPC's eroding credibility and reliability. Apparently, the Daily Mercury agreed with the Times' assertions that a number of Republicans were "disgusted with the manner" in which their ticket had been selected.⁶⁸ Even the Daily Mercury contended that "at least two hundred Republicans voted for Mr. Haskell, and his plurality would have been far greater, had he been more discreet in his choice of friends."⁶⁹

While unable to deny Haskell two more years as police chief, San Jose's Democratic machinations rewarded that party with an electoral success in the 1880 municipal election. The Democrats saw their party go from third place in 1879 with only 23 percent of the votes cast for their council candidates to first place with 45 percent one year later. An added bonus to the Democratic victory in San Jose was the apparent imminent demise of the WPC-SJ. The WPC had garnered 40 percent of the city's council ballots the previous year, but by April 1880, all they could manage was a meager 16 percent. With 39 percent of the council votes, plus the offices of street commissioner and city treasurer,

⁶⁸San Jose Daily Morning Times, 27 March 1880.

⁶⁹San Jose Weekly Mercury, 15 April 1880.

Republicans maintained their influence within San Jose. None of the three remaining WPC councilmen had faced re-election. The only WPC councilman to be re-elected was now a Democrat.

Not only had the local Democrats undermined the vulnerable WPC, so had the economy. The WPC had ridden the political wave as an alternative remedy for local problems, especially unemployment. Since the economy had improved and the number of unemployed had "visibly diminished,"⁷⁰ little interest remained in the WPC. The recent city elections, together with the failed attempts of the WPC majority city council, showed the party lacked control and reliability.

Its urban strength rapidly failing, the WPC strained to broaden its countywide appeal when it resolved to be the party of the "agricultural, mechanical and laboring interests in the state and national legislatures."⁷¹ By May 1880, the party occupied itself with electing county delegates to the coming state convention in San Francisco. Due to the deepening state party schism over national politics, the county WPC hesitated to support any presidential candidate or any particular policy. The county

⁷⁰San Jose Daily Morning Times, 29 May 1880.

⁷¹San Jose Daily Herald, 10 May 1880.

delegates required time to "survey the situation."⁷²

Lacking direction, it was essential that the local party should look to the state WPC for leadership. Unfortunately, the state WPC was again at odds over Denis Kearney. When he endorsed the Greenbackers' candidates and party to get a national forum for the anti-Chinese issue, Kearney also committed the California WPC to the Greenbackers. As leader of the state WPC, he headed a WPC delegation to the National Greenback Labor Party convention in Chicago where he sat on the national executive committee.⁷³ Kearney had a receptive audience with the Greenbackers for the abrogation of the Burlingame treaty, but by 1880, the national Democratic Party had a plank that addressed the anti-Chinese issue of the West Coast.⁷⁴ Other WPCers, especially former Democrats, felt individuals should be free to support whom they wished in national politics. Kearney's affiliation and support of the NGLP was an anathema to many of his own WPC constituents and, ultimately, destroyed the WPC. Divided between the Greenbackers and the Democrats, the state WPC disappeared

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ira B. Cross, A History of the Labor Movement in California (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1935; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Company, 1966), 127 (page references are to reprint edition).

⁷⁴San Jose Daily Herald, 26 June 1880.

after the national campaign and election of November 1880.⁷⁵

Officially siding with Denis Kearney, the Santa Clara County WPC sent J. E. Clark, the WPC assemblyman from Gilroy, and C. A. Grimmer, now president of the San Jose branch to Chicago. At the same time, without noting the irony or hypocrisy, the City Central Committee investigated Thomas S. Nagle's active participation in the county's Democratic convention.⁷⁶ When the city party charged Dan Haskell with joining the Republican-based Union League, "for the sole purpose of foisting himself into power," the sixteen attending members demanded Dan Haskell's resignation as police chief.⁷⁷ The WPC disintegration became inevitable when, refusing to be bound by any pledge to a Greenback candidate, diehard WPC supporter William Vinter resigned.⁷⁸

By June 1880, the apparently merged WPC of San Jose and Santa Clara County was reduced to sparse meeting attendance, little press coverage, and impotent protestations to the Common Council regarding the reversal of February's water

⁷⁵Cross, 127-29.

⁷⁶San Jose Daily Herald, 31 May 1880.

⁷⁷Ibid., 5 June 1880.

⁷⁸San Jose Daily Morning Times, 30 May 1880; San Jose Herald, 31 May 1880.

rates reduction. Following a mass meeting for the national Democratic presidential and vice-presidential candidates, the local WPC expelled a number of members for participating. Searching for explanations for the party's collapse, members looked inward to cleanse its ranks. The party had become so ineffectual that it expelled William Vinter, one month following his own resignation.⁷⁹

Although the politically independent Daily Morning Times was more generous, waiting until the conclusion of the presidential election,⁸⁰ for all intents and purposes, by July 3, 1880, the San Jose Branch of the Workingmen's Party of California ceased to function as a viable political entity. The early July meeting of the San Jose/Santa Clara County WPC ended when half of the already meager membership walked out, refusing to follow the state party's leadership endorsing Denis Kearney and the Greenback Labor ticket.⁸¹

The fourteen months, from the February 1878 special election that elected J. E. Clark to the state assembly to the April 1879 charter election that gave the WPC a majority on the Common Council, marked the WPC's pinnacle of political power in San Jose. The election to ratify the new

⁷⁹San Jose Daily Morning Times, 27 June 1880; San Jose Daily Herald, 28 June 1880.

⁸⁰San Jose Daily Morning Times, 3 November 1880.

⁸¹San Jose Daily Herald, 6 July 1880.

constitution in May 1879 began the WPC's decline, and following the national elections in September 1880, it had all but disappeared. Existing approximately two-and-a-half years, the unfulfilled reform possibilities of the WPC-SJ died in ignoble sniping, finger-pointing, name-calling, and general pettiness.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SAN JOSE BRANCH OF THE WORKINGMEN'S PARTY OF CALIFORNIA

Born of violence, artless and naive in its approach, and debased by demagogism and racism, the Workingmen's Party of California is not a comfortable chapter in labor history. However tainted, it has been called the "opening act, the first successful 'labor' party of the Great Upheaval," a time of political disturbances that began with the 1877 national rail strike and continued through the Pullman strike of 1894.¹ It was a response to the genuine evils of the times. During its brief existence, it played a relevant role in state and local politics, and indirectly influenced national and foreign policies. Its impact on the two major parties contributed political credibility for subsequent labor organizations and demonstrated to the working class the power of the ballot box. The WPC's role in promoting that political credibility and activism is probably secure, yet Denis Kearney's intended contribution continues to be an historic enigma well over a century after the party's

¹Philip J. Ethington, The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850-1900 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 242.

demise.

Locally, the WPC reflected the progressive politics of the Santa Clara Valley, but the fears and petty jealousies of powerful politicians and the party's inherent weaknesses proved fatal. By the elections of November 1880, "the Workingman's party [had] practically disappeared from the field; its elements having distributed themselves among the Democratic, Republican and Greenback parties--the Democrats and Greenbackers absorbing the greater portion of them."² Confident and hopeful when it leapt on the local political scene, why, less than three years later, had the WPC "practically disappeared?" In terms of achieving its immediate goals, the WPC-SJ still had much work to do, so what happened?

Like so many other aspects of the WPC-SJ, its disintegration was the consequence of a combination of external and internal factors. Extrinsically, promises of economic relief, especially for the urban unemployed, had helped establish the WPC. But by 1880, the economy and working-class employment had appreciably improved locally. Since the 1879 municipal election that gave the WPC-SJ a Common Council majority, jobs were far more plentiful. "Skilled or unskilled laborers can find more to do than for

²San Jose Daily Morning Times, 3 November 1880.

some months past, and for certain kinds of work men are scarce and in demand."³ This, however, was due to a generally improved economy and not the consequence of WPC-SJ action.

Despite the efforts of its city council majority, the WPC pledge to curb monopolies like the San Jose Water Company proved a more complex political undertaking than anticipated. The more the WPC-SJ functioned in San Jose politics, the more they became like all the other political parties, regardless of party promises of political reform. Internally, its members had been asked to implement a fundamentally progressive program that was also a confusion of contradictions. Like the WPC, Denis Kearney was himself a jumble of incongruities and idiosyncrasies. A controversial, almost evangelical, dictatorial firebrand, he simultaneously stirred the working class to political activism and self-respect, while inadvertently wrecking his party.

By the spring of 1880, Kearney was again pivotal in one last WPC controversy, but this time the polemic proved fatal. The dissension over his affiliation with the National Greenback Labor Party split both the state and local organizations into the Workingmen with the

³Ibid., 29 May 1880.

Greenbackers and the Workingmen without the Greenbackers. When the press called those WPC members who desired to choose their own national candidates "Hancock Workingmen," it rightly assumed many preferred this national Democratic presidential candidate. San Jose WPCer E. K. Robinson undoubtedly expressed many WPC members' sense of futility that a national third party candidate could "not get one Electoral vote."⁴

The destructive early July 1880 walkout and the subsequent antics of the once high-minded San Jose WPCers provided the local press with juicy, gossipy articles. Each faction defensively proclaimed itself the "only genuine Workingmen's organization."⁵ Previously committed to social and political reform, by the summer of 1880, the San Jose Workingmen's Party was preoccupied with the inconsequential possession of the club's flag, street banner, party minutes, and membership rolls. Secretary Robert Summers' rather juvenile challenge of "'that's all right, get (the gear) if you can,'" embodied the petty jealousy and rivalry Kearney unintentionally generated.⁶

One of the last times Kearney appeared in San Jose as a

⁴San Jose Daily Herald, 10 August 1880.

⁵San Jose Daily Morning Times, 1 August 1880.

⁶Ibid., 8 August 1880.

political agitator was on September 19, 1880, at the county Greenback convention and political rally. Despite his brief appearance, convention participation was so meagre that even the convention "chairman expressed his regret at seeing so small an attendance."⁷ The Greenback rally that evening, however, was one of the largest of the campaign according to the Daily Morning Times, and Kearney delivered his characteristic harangues. Locally, his magnetic personality and fiery style usually recharged waning enthusiasm for the WPC. That Kearney "failed to evoke the slightest enthusiasm, and his speech fell like a wet blanket" at the "tame, spiritless affair" was a predictable reaction from the Democratic Daily Herald.⁸ Yet, contrary to past coverage, even the independent Times made no specific mention of the large crowd's response to Kearney's speech, while reporting that another speaker was "loudly applauded."⁹ Were the people tiring of Kearney? Were they becoming disillusioned? Since the winter of 1877-78, he had been "telling the crowd not to rise up--yet. To wait and

⁷Ibid., 19 September 1880.

⁸San Jose Daily Herald, 20 September 1880.

⁹San Jose Daily Morning Times, 19 September 1880.

see."¹⁰ His promises, his threats, had "always been with an 'if.'"¹¹ With the lack of notable WPC success, were Kearney's threats and promises sounding hollow?

Yet, to attract a crowd's attention, his conditional language demanded extremes; his menacing style permitted nothing in moderation. His common, uncomplicated language of honesty vs. dishonesty, of good vs. evil, made the WPC's interests synonymous with the interests of the virtuous citizen.¹² Kearney made the social and economic needs of the working class the moral needs of the entire society.

Like his language, Kearney's good vs. evil remedy for California's problems had been straightforward, however simplistic. Get rid of the Chinese labor that robbed white workers of jobs and provided morally-bankrupt monopolists with still more obscene profits. This entire depraved system was aided and abetted by graft-prone politicians. The virtuous WPC blamed the tyrannical behavior of corrupt politicians and greedy businessmen for working-class economic distress. With little working-class control over the economy, Kearney and the WPC provided a political answer

¹⁰Neil Larry Shumsky, The Evolution of Political Protest and the Workingmen's Party of California (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 179.

¹¹Henry George, "The Kearney Agitation in California," The Popular Science Monthly 17 (August 1880): 441.

¹²Ethington, 271-79.

to California's predicament--elect virtuous workingmen to office.

In practice, Kearney's language of extremes ultimately hurt the party and its effectiveness. Concerned with the virtue and righteousness of a free, democratic society, Kearney justified his dictatorship of the party. His fear of succumbing to the pervasive system of corrupt, backroom political machines would not allow WPC officers to participate in the California Constitutional Convention, and his moralistic stance hamstrung his party's effectiveness for reform. Such supposedly incorruptible attitudes left little room for compromise. Unwilling to compromise, most WPCers lacked the political adeptness to achieve their truly beneficial goals. Kearney eventually forfeited his own integrity and destroyed his party when he sought a broader forum for WPC issues within the National Greenback Labor Party, antithetic to his own party resolutions.

With its contribution to women's rights usually overlooked, the state WPC is regrettably remembered primarily for its anti-Chinese articles in the 1879 California Constitution. Over the years, these vicious articles were declared unconstitutional by the U. S. Supreme Court. Some of these anti-Chinese provisions lasted almost three-quarters of a century; the last was not repealed until

November 4, 1952.¹³

While not directly responsible, the WPC's anti-Chinese agitation did play an important role in national politics. With partisan control of the presidency and Congress frequently shifting, the crucial votes of the California delegation in Washington held the balance of power. As more Chinese moved and settled in the East,¹⁴ even those few lent credibility to the WPC's charges. This migration, the violence associated with the anti-Chinese movement, and the extreme measures of the new California constitution strengthened the hand of West Coast legislators resulting in the abrogation of the Burlingame Treaty and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.¹⁵ "It can be argued that the Chinese Exclusion Act was the hinge on which all American immigration policy turned. Prior to 1882, there were no

¹³Royce D. Delmatier, Clarence F. McIntosh, and Earl G. Waters, eds., The Rumble of California Politics, 1848-1970 (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1970), 93-94.

¹⁴San Jose Daily Herald, 25 September 1879; San Jose Daily Mercury, 26 March 1880. See also Stuart Creighton Miller, The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 167-90.

¹⁵Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, The Anti-Chinese Movement in California (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1939), 97; Alexander Saxton, The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 133.

significant legal inhibitions to immigration."¹⁶

The Chinese Exclusion Act damaged Chinese communities throughout California. Many Chinese entrepreneurs and workers faced economic hardships due to white-community boycotts. Locally, many Chinese lost their factory and canning jobs. These occupations made Chinese workers too visible for their employers who feared reprisals from the exclusionists. Yet, despite the restrictions and the harassment of barn-burnings, local farmers continued to hire Chinese laborers and allowed them to share-crop.¹⁷ The vital Chinese contribution to the valley economy was conveniently overlooked when promoting local commerce and tourism. "It was not good public relations to advertise the presence of Chinese."¹⁸

Nonetheless, the Chinese farm workers recognized the value of their labor to the valley economy. Suchen Chan noted that supposedly "docile" Chinese pickers went on strike in Santa Clara County in August 1880. After the 1882 exclusion, the number of strikes increased as the demand for

¹⁶Harry H. L. Kitano and Roger Daniels, Asian Americans: Emerging Minorities (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1988), 23.

¹⁷San Jose Daily Morning Times, 27 February 1880; Connie Young Yu, Chinatown, San Jose, USA (San Jose: San Jose Historical Museum Association, 1991), 37, 46-47.

¹⁸Yu, 27.

Chinese farm labor increased.¹⁹

The necessity and demand for local Chinese farm labor again revealed how the anti-Chinese movement had split the valley's white community. Despite the opinions of many white workers and coverage in the press, obviously not everyone was afflicted with Asian xenophobia. When San Jose's "public nuisance" Chinatown was suspiciously destroyed by fire on May 4, 1887, the Chinese merchants relocated, leasing land from John Heinlen, a local farmer and businessman from Germany.²⁰ In spite of the support of men like Heinlen, the establishment of a lasting community was a struggle. "The exclusion law not only made it nearly impossible for additional Chinese to enter California, it also caused great hardships for those who were already here."²¹ With few Chinese women in California at the time of exclusion, most Chinatowns became predominantly cities of old men. Heinlenville lasted until the early 1930s when

¹⁹Suchen Chan, This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 332.

²⁰Yu, 29-30. Successfully creating a haven for the local Chinese, Heinlen later leased property to new Japanese immigrants. Other than ostracism by the white community and minimal business contacts, there was little commonality between these next-door neighbors. Yu, 48.

²¹James J. Rawls and Walton Bean, California: An Interpretive History, 6th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1993), 185.

most of its population of aged men died or returned to China.²²

Although many Chinese people suffered throughout California, statewide, not all Workingmen's groups were sinophobic. Despite a significant Chinese population, Humboldt county had a flourishing Workingmen's Party without the Chinese issue.²³ With corporate monopoly, land monopoly, unequal taxation, and political corruption, California's working class could unquestionably maintain a political organization without the Chinese issue. Nevertheless, nativism and anti-Chinese sentiment were more predominant in certain areas of the state. Regarded as an extension of corporate monopolies, "cheap Chinese labor" was a vital concern in San Jose and especially in San Francisco. Frank Roney, an early WPC officer, found it impossible to later establish labor groups in San Francisco that educated and included the Chinese. He quickly discovered that in California "the most effective organizing tool was precisely the crusade against the Chinese."²⁴

Where it was a predominant issue, the anti-Chinese

²²Yu, 108.

²³Daniel Allardyce Cornford, "Lumber, Labor, and Community in Humboldt County, California, 1850-1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1983), 115.

²⁴Saxton, 155-56.

movement proved to be a paradox for labor and the WPC, simultaneously sustaining and hampering their interests. In San Francisco, the strongest labor city in the western United States, no labor party could survive without addressing the Chinese issue.²⁵ Yet, the experience of the WPC showed how the broad appeal of the Chinese issue could dilute the member loyalty to its working-class base and labor reforms. The economic demand for Chinese agricultural workers alienated many Grange members from affiliating with those involved with the violence-prone movement. If "the anti-Chinese crusade was but a deflected manifestation of the struggle between capital and labor as American capitalism matured in the last decades of the nineteenth century,"²⁶ deep-rooted hatred blinded a portion of California labor to the necessity of including Chinese labor in their fight against California's monopolies. By convincing white workers that the Chinese were the source of their low wages and unemployment, the anti-Chinese movement shifted attention away from a unified anti-monopoly coalition. The impassioned anti-Chinese issue split the white community into labor vs. capital and rural agriculture vs. urban wage earner. There is credence to the charge that

²⁵Ibid., 156.

²⁶Chan, 377.

the monopolies themselves quietly promoted the anti-Chinese movement, thus hindering any serious solidarity and anti-monopoly reforms.²⁷

Corporate manipulation or not, the anti-Chinese movement was one more instance of group identity for express objectives. Whether immigrant, laborer, former slave, or female, since the Civil War, more citizens associated with specific groups to achieve their political goals. The nation was developing from the mythical melting pot into a complex society of diverse interests. The campaign for women's suffrage and the successful enfranchisement of former slaves illustrated, as well as substantiated, the benefits of group identity.

The political parties, forever vying for electoral majorities, noted an untapped voter resource in the growing urban wage earner. Politicians, along with newspaper editors and their local partisan publications, found topics that both sold newspapers and attracted party votes. With "politically profitable appeals," the parties and the press appealed to and created their own working class constituencies long before the emergence of the WPC.²⁸ The

²⁷Ping Chiu, Chinese Labor in California, 1850-1880: An Economic Study (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963), 86.

²⁸Ethington, 251.

anti-Chinese sentiment in California not only unified labor, but its broad appeal made it a useful political issue.

San Jose epitomized the connection between the partisan scramble for votes, the development of a working-class electorate, and the value of the anti-Chinese movement. As elsewhere, competition for votes was a local political fact of life. Although, lacking San Francisco's gothic scandals,²⁹ the fiercely competitive San Jose newspaper market had each publication's partisan alignment creating and appealing to its own political constituency. The South Bay community had grown so fast that the county population had almost trebled in twenty years, making San Jose the state's fourth most populous city by 1880. With a mushrooming urban working class, San Jose's laborers comprised a potential voting bloc that could not be ignored.

As early as 1872, the Daily Mercury acknowledged a division of labor and capital when its editor, J. J. Owen, declared that "working-men in our democratic society includes almost everybody."³⁰ Owen's inclusive classification was consistent with the Republican support of

²⁹For details of the Kalloch-DeYoung murder sensation in a story already laden with colorful characters, see Saxton, 140-41, 150; and Ralph Kauer, "The Workingmen's Party of California," Pacific Historical Quarterly 13 (1944): 286-91.

³⁰San Jose Daily Mercury, 1 June 1872.

capital. As the working class grew, Owen frequently wrote of the necessity of both labor and capital and the dependence of one on the other. Even when the anti-Chinese movement swelled the ranks of labor voters, Owen wrote of protecting labor from the Chinese wage earner or the monopolies, but never from capital. With a strong local majority, it was logical that the capital-supported Republicans of San Jose should include the workers. The Democrats endeavored to enhance its constituency with the votes of labor. Long cultivating the growing legion of wage earners, the Democracy, via its official organ the Daily Herald, was understandably bitter when the WPC pirated away part of its shrinking share of the San Jose electorate.

Whether promoted by the politicians and press or not, the resulting anti-Chinese labor identity proved to be a formidable political faction. At the same time, however, some of the earliest developments of local unions and labor political activism can be directly traced to the Workingmen's Party in San Jose. Originally established to boycott the local Chinese cigar makers, many former WPCers became founding members of San Jose's Cigar Dealers' Union. By April 1882, San Jose organized its own branch of the

Pacific Coast White Cigar Makers' Association.³¹ The local labor movement grew from this basic foundation.

San Jose labor first showed signs of evolving past the singular hatred of the Chinese when, in July 1883, the local cigar makers successfully opposed a reduction in wages.³² The Knights of Labor organized in the Bay Area, including San Jose, in September 1882.³³ Four years later, on October 2, 1886, the National Union of United Brewery Workmen of the United States established Local No. 16 in San Jose.³⁴ The next year local labor ranks swelled with carpenters, printers, bricklayers, painters, plasterers, stonecutters, and bakers all forming unions.³⁵ By January 1888, with almost 2,000 union men in San Jose, all the foregoing unions were represented when the Santa Clara County Federation of Trades was organized. Its first president was former WPC-SJ secretary, John Norton Barcel.³⁶

³¹Ira B. Cross, A History of the Labor Movement in California (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1935; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Company, 1966), 144 (page references are to reprint edition).

³²Ibid., 146.

³³Ibid., 153.

³⁴Ibid., 190.

³⁵Ibid., 194-95.

³⁶Ibid., 198.

The working class/labor identity that motivated independent political activism was evidently inaugurated by the WPC in San Jose. For many of the known local party members, the WPC was their first foray into the realm of active political organization. Almost two-thirds of the approximately 150 names associated with the party remained politically active in local union affairs and/or further anti-Chinese agitation following the demise of the WPC.³⁷ The few members known to have participated in politics prior to the WPC had been involved with distinctly working class, labor issues such as the Eight-Hour League rather than the more economically-ambiguous anti-Chinese issues of the Order of Caucasians. Surprisingly, more known Republican activists than Democrats joined the WPC-SJ.

As the Daily Morning Times maintained, most WPCers statewide left for the Democratic or Greenback parties. Of the known local post-WPC party affiliations, half became active Democrats, one-quarter joined the Greenbackers, and about one-quarter became Republicans. Subsequent to the Workingmen's Party, four previous activists were known to have changed parties, three from the Republican to the

³⁷The following figures were calculated on information taken from previous party tickets, biographical sketches in assorted local histories, but again primarily Dr. David Eakin's copious notes from the local anti-Chinese newspaper articles. This information, while pertinent, is far from a complete, detailed picture.

Democratic or the Greenbacker Parties and one from the Democratic to the Republican Party. The ideological similarities and working-class identities of the Democrats/Greenbackers and the WPC explain the Republican partisan switch. The defection of the one Democratic activist to the San Jose Republican Party could conceivably be interpreted as political opportunism in the Republican-dominated city. Yet, it is noteworthy that in San Jose about 25 percent of its former WPCers joined the Republican Party. That so many WPCers once were active in the Republican Party could have been simply because more Republicans were active in San Jose politics. With the fall of their party, many former WPCers could have found a commonality with the local, progressive Republicans, the expanding power of the majority party, or a myriad of other explanations.

Despite the statewide accusations of opportunism, seemingly few San Jose WPCers fell into this category. Of those WPCers known to have held or sought office prior to the organization of the party, no greater number held or sought office locally after the party's collapse. Apparently, the politically-vague First Ward engendered its own opportunism in its councilmen. Active in the Republican Party, the Labor Party of California, and the Anti-Chinese and Workingmen's Protective Association, Charles L. Kennedy

had a history of political eclecticism before the advent of the WPC-SJ. Dennis Corkery may have been a political opportunist changing from WPC to Democrat to Republican within a couple of municipal elections, but while in the WPC, he was a steadfast Workingman. Even if unpopular with his fellow WPC councilmen, Corkery consistently voted according to the directives of the San Jose party.

In addition to drawing attention to working-class issues, one of the most constructive and far-reaching contributions of the WPC-SJ was its support of women's rights. That the county's two Non-Partisan delegates, E. O. Smith, a previous Democrat, and Rush McComas, a past Republican, and WPCer Dennis Herrington, a former Republican, were directly instrumental in obtaining the women's rights articles in the new state constitution, show that no one party had a local monopoly on women's suffrage and rights. The addition of the anti-discrimination articles was more representative of Santa Clara County and San Jose political principles than the direct influence of the WPC.

No matter how progressive and compatible the WPC was with local political precepts, the San Jose branch of the Workingmen's Party of California was still plagued by inherent flaws. These defects contributed significantly to the party's squandering its city council majority. The WPC-

SJ councilmen were asked to govern a community with a party ideology that was a confusion of agendas. It was a conflict of public interest, of private property, of social reform, of economic opportunity, and political machinations. The practical application of WPC reforms was weakened by contradicting principles. Like most members statewide, the San Jose WPC lacked the depth of political expertise to achieve harmony among such incongruities. It was a labor-based party that opposed political favoritism. Yet, the WPC-SJ city councilmen faced the dilemma of appearing either insensitive or hypocritical, when they were able to supply jobs for several unemployed party members. The people of San Jose, searching for a change, open to something new, elected WPC members as political outsiders. Yet, the unsophisticated WPCers found themselves trapped in a no-win situation. Unaccustomed to diplomacy and political stratagem, the WPCers were continually outmaneuvered on the council. Failing to achieve their goals, the local party lost credibility. The more political knowledge and expertise their leadership gained, the more they became like every other politician, losing the very characteristics that initially set them apart. With the loss of credibility, the once-unique party's demise was a matter of time.

From September 1879 to November 1880, the WPC watched its electorate evaporate from the San Jose political scene.

Citywide, the third-party WPC had garnered a respectable 32 percent in the gubernatorial election in September 1879. By the next April, the WPC could accumulate only 16 percent following San Jose's council race. Kearney's support of the WPC-Greenback union was apparently meaningless to San Jose's working class. The Greenbackers received an embarrassing 1.3 percent of the city's votes in the November 1880 presidential election. In the wake of the July WPC split, even Kearney's fiery flamboyance was not enough to revive his party.

If only the local Democrats had been more patient, the WPC was obviously terminal. Bitter that the WPC had split their electorate, the San Jose Democrats succumbed to their old familiar tactics of backroom politics and convention wire-pulling. Kearney's charges that "no Democrat dared make a speech until it had been first prepared for him in Mr. Rylands (sic) back office," had perhaps more than a little truth to it.³⁸ Unfortunately, their machinations reinforced one of the basic complaints about Ryland's party and the Democrats' bitter resentment goaded them into ultimately damaging their own party.

Quite possibly tired of political manipulations, frustrated and disillusioned WPC supporters may have

³⁸San Jose Daily Morning Times, 19 September 1880.

switched their allegiance to the Republican Party. If the Republican Party gained one-quarter of the WPC activists, how many WPC voters chose city-controlling Republican candidates over manipulative, arrogant Democrats. Rather than social and political reform, were enough former WPC voters willing to settle for fiscally responsible municipal officials that could supply public works jobs? With no third-party ticket, the local Republicans garnered 53.1 percent of all votes cast in the April 1881 San Jose municipal election.

It was appropriate that the Republican Party should be so influential within San Jose. In the 1870s and 1880s, it was a city of progressive politics and fiscal conservatism. In a capital-dominated, Republican-led city, it was almost impossible for a labor party to attain social respectability and political acceptance, especially one associated with violence and threats. The WPC taught the local business establishment and politicians the consequences of the betrayal of the working class. Although, many of its desired reforms did not come until years later, the Workingmen's Party in San Jose showed the local working class the possibilities of political activism and gave the business establishment a new respect for the economic and political power of labor.

While undeniably a central figure in the WPC-SJ story,

was Denis Kearney directly responsible for that new-found working-class activism and political respect? In 1889, Kearney provided his own interpretation of the organization of the WPC and its collapse. His objective had been "'to tell our people to strike at the "ballot box" to do which they must be organized. . . . [The WPC] stopped when I stopped, that was after accomplishing what we desired.'"³⁹ Did teaching California's working class respect for the ballot rather than the bullet justify the threats and fear created by the Kearney and the WPC? Conceivably, terror was necessary for the California political establishment to seriously consider the plight of the working class. Kearney's conditional threats did bridge the gap between frustrated immigrants unfamiliar with democratic procedures and the power of the ballot box. In that light, Kearney's methods may have been justified. In retrospect, this was part of the success of the WPC.

Did Denis Kearney possess such admirable foresight?⁴⁰ Was that Kearney's purpose in 1877 for the WPC or was it the hindsight of a middle-aged entrepreneur more than ten years after the fact? A close examination of late-1870s newspaper

³⁹Doyce B. Nunis, Jr., ed., "The Demagogue and the Demographer: Correspondence of Denis Kearney and Lord Bryce," Pacific Historical Review 36 (1967): 279, 286.

⁴⁰Shumsky, 206-14.

articles makes acceptance of Kearney's principled-reformer explanation untenable. The press coverage of Kearney was indisputably biased, yet, it is difficult to see a man of integrity behind his scurrilous and incendiary quotes. Perhaps objective opinions regarding Denis Kearney are not possible. Perhaps the interpretation of the role of this conundrum says as much about the attitudes of each historian as it does about Kearney.

Despite its enigmatic leader and its reprehensible foundation of a hatred of the Chinese, the San Jose branch of the Workingmen's Party of California played a major role in setting the stage for the era of the working class. Locally, statewide, and even nationwide, the WPC was the forefather of future labor movements; its concerns would continue to be issues within working-class politics for the next several decades. From William Jennings Bryan and the Populists of the 1890s to the Progressives in the 1910s, and even Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, the Workingmen helped sire a long, distinguished line of reform-minded, working-class progeny.

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