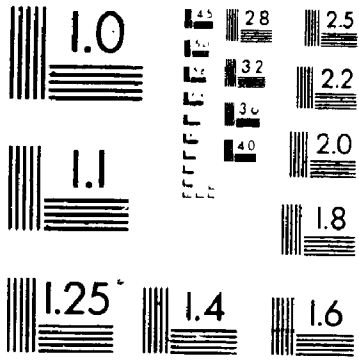


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THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT OF THE
FARMERS' INSTITUTES OF ONTARIO, 1884-1917:
MANIFESTATIONS OF AGRARIAN DISCONTENT

by

Kerry Badgley, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate
Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts

Department of History -

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

March, 1988

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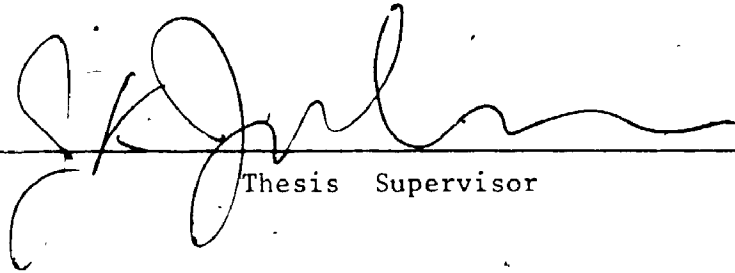
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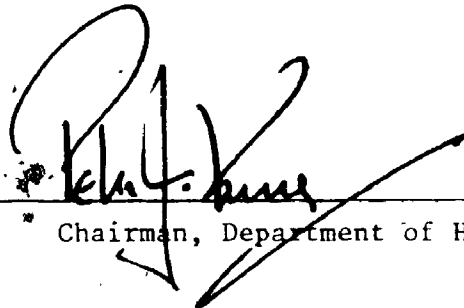
submitted by Kerry Adam Badgley, B.A.

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts



Thesis Supervisor



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April 1988

ABSTRACT

The Farmers Institutes were created by the Mowat Government in Ontario in 1884 in order to quell farmer dissatisfaction with the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm. Professors from the College were to go out to rural communities and educate farmers through Institute meetings. The Institutes, set up as educational bodies, soon became a vehicle through which farmers could articulate their discontent on various topics. This criticism grew in intensity until 1895 when the Mowat Government imposed new and restrictive rules upon the Institutes. Institute members, unable to discuss political solutions to their problems, began to explore other avenues and approaches to remedy what they thought was wrong with the society in which they lived. This continued until roughly 1917 when the Institutes, for all intents, were absorbed into the United Farmers of Ontario.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....iii
Acknowledgements.....iv
Introduction.....1
1. The Farmer in Late Nineteenth Century Ontario
and the Formation of the Farmers' Institutes....19
2. The Development of a Critique of Society
within the Institutes and the Imposition of
New Rules by the Provincial Government.....49
3. The Restructured Institutes, 1896-1917.....79
4. Some Unanswered Questions.....108
Conclusion.....120
Appendices.....124
Bibliography.....129

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Finally, I wish to thank Marion and Aaron Badgley, my mother and brother. They have put up with more than any family should, yet encouraged me to finish, and did so with patience and love.

INTRODUCTION

Ah, the prayers of millions, how they must fight and destroy each other on their way to the throne of God.

John Steinbeck

In 1884, the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm, perceiving criticism from the agrarian community for not being responsive to the needs of the farmers, established the Farmers' Institutes. The Institutes, first run in 1885 lasted, with numerous changes taking place, as a relevant body until roughly 1917. Professors from the College, with funding provided by the provincial government, travelled to rural communities in order to educate the farmers on the latest agricultural techniques and theories. The Institutes, however, became much more than educational bodies. During the first ten years of existence, the Institutes became a vehicle by which the farmers could articulate their discontent, and formulate ideas of what modern, industrial society should be like. This explicit critique of the existing political and economic order only came to an end when the provincial government, in 1895, assumed control over the Institutes and imposed stringent rules upon them. Even so, an implicit critique existed within the Institutes until their final dissolution and absorption into the United Farmers of Ontario.

While it is quite true that technical aspects of farming concerned the majority of discussion at Institute meetings, it is

also true that less tangible topics were brought up as well; and it is these discussions that will be examined in this thesis. From these discussions, the thesis will be advanced that the Farmers' Institutes, in conjunction with and in addition to other agrarian groups, in response to changing conditions in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ontario, formulated a vision of what society should be which was more complex and innovative than historians have allowed, and that an understanding of this vision will aid in a more complete understanding of this crucial period of Ontario, and indeed Canadian, history.

On a practical level, one of the main problems confronting an historian who attempts to study agrarian movements in Ontario is a lack of documentation. Some information can be extracted from sporadic and incomplete collections of various agrarian organizations in Ontario but, more often than not, historians eventually have to resort to examining farm newspapers and journals, such as the Farmers' Sun and the Farmer's Advocate. These sources, it is true, are quite rich and informative. However, they are rather limited in scope since the editor was largely in control of these papers and, consequently, the version or interpretation given tends to be one-sided. As a result, farm newspapers have to be treated with caution and are not always representative of the agrarian community at large.

A study of the Farmers' Institutes, however, may be based on an extremely rich source of documents which alleviates some of

these problems. The Farmers' Institutes left behind more printed material than other agrarian groups, such as the Patrons of Husbandry, Patrons of Industry, or the United Farmers of Ontario. Granted, the majority of the literature left behind deals with practical agricultural topics, but it does not follow that all is of little use. In its initial stages, the Agricultural College required each local Institute to submit a yearly report of the meetings held, and these provide a great deal of information.

Furthermore, after 1891, the Central Farmers' Institutes published an annual report for the government, which contained dozens of papers read by farmers from meetings in almost every locality in Ontario. These papers span some twenty-five years of Institute activity, and are therefore quite valuable since the Institutes, unlike other agrarian groups which rose and fell quite rapidly, provide a continuous account of farmer activity and thought. Granted, this was merely one group, and the views expressed by the Institute membership may not have been held by all farmers, but it is still a much richer source than the records of other farmer organizations.

Numerically, the Farmers' Institute was a significant group. By 1894, there were nearly 16,000 members, and it hovered around this mark until well into the twentieth century. Even more important, however, were the attendance figures of the meetings. In 1894, the Institutes drew well over 100,000 farmers to their meetings, and this figure, as well, remained constant into the twentieth century. While sheer numbers, it is true, do not make

a group worthy of study, it is nonetheless an indicator of how important the group was while it existed. Since hundreds of thousands of farmers attended Institute meetings, one could argue that it was perceived by agrarians to be a significant organization.

From the numbers stated above, one would imagine that the Institutes could command the attention of an agricultural historian. This, on the contrary, does not appear to be the case and, consequently, the Institutes have been severely under-researched. One encounters references to the Institutes very infrequently; and when they are mentioned, they are usually dismissed in a few sentences. For example, A.J. Madill, in his study of agricultural education in Ontario, noted that the Ontario Agricultural College had been criticized prior to the formation of the Institutes by the farming community for not being responsive to their needs. He then went on to state:

In 1885, the Farmers' Institutes were started. The College sent its professors out to get in touch with the people through the Institutes. It was about this time, ten or eleven years after its inception, that real progress in the College commenced...(1)

This, however, is about all Madill has to say about the Institutes. Robert Leslie Jones, in his massive study of agriculture in Ontario, gave the Institutes one sentence and dismissed them, somewhat questionably, as an outgrowth of the

(1) A.J. Madill, History of Agricultural Education in Ontario, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1930), p. 150.

farmers' clubs of the mid 1800s.(1) While there has been a study of the Farmers' Institutes in the North-West Territories during the late nineteenth century,(2) there has indeed been little written on the Farmers' Institutes by Ontario scholars.

This lack of treatment of the Farmers' Institutes is also reflected in theses relating to agriculture in Ontario. Of these, two deserve mention. First, in his thesis on the key issues of the 1891 federal election, Ian Hodson observed that the Institutes "...played an important part in the campaign for commercial union among the rural population of Ontario."(3) While the Institutes, he argued, were unsuccessful in wielding any significant influence in this election, he noted that the activities of the Institutes "...had helped produce a more enlightened rural electorate."(4) Hodson, however, was not concerned with the Institutes per se, and consequently gave virtually no attention to their activities or thought in other areas.

D.A. Lawr's thesis on agricultural education in Ontario also

(1) Robert Leslie Jones, History of Agriculture in Ontario, 1613-1880, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946), p. 345. Jones' work, to be fair covers a period which ends four years before the formation of the Institutes.

(2) F.H. Auld, "Farmers' Institutes in the North-West Territories", Saskatchewan History, Vol. X, Number 2, Spring, 1957.

(3) Ian Hodson, "Commercial Union, Unrestricted Reciprocity and the Background to the Election of 1891", M.A. Thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1952, p. 89.

(4) Ibid., p. 102.

made reference to the Farmers' Institutes. Lawr, however, devoted only a few pages to this organization, and concentrated upon the fact that Institute members were constantly being reminded by the Department of Agriculture to refrain from political discussion.(1) Lawr, in this rather hasty treatment, failed to provide any context within which to place these political discussions. In sum, Lawr dismissed the Farmers' Institutes as a failure in the long run because their methods were inadequate. However, he did not go into any great depth of the topic, and his examination of the organization was based mainly upon a few references from the Ontario Sessional Papers. Again, then, one is confronted with a paucity of information concerning this group of farmers.

Some literature from those who were active in the Institutes also exists. In his memoirs, E.C. Drury, United Farmer Premier from 1919 to 1923, wrote that he had done work for the Institutes from 1902 to 1904. He noted that they had begun in the 1880s, "...some time before the dissolution of the Patrons of Industry. At this time (1902-1904) it was the only active farm organization in the province."(2) W.C. Good, another agrarian activist in Ontario, noted in his memoirs that he, as his father, was active in the Institutes. He then went on to state that the Institutes,

(1) D.A. Lawr, "The Development of Agricultural Education in Ontario, 1870-1910", Ph.D Thesis, University of Toronto, 1972, pp. 44-47.

(2) E.C. Drury, Farmer Premier: Memoirs of the Honourable E.C. Drury, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1966), pp. 48-49.

by the 1890s, were causing problems for the government of Ontario:

...a large gathering of farmers could not be restrained from discussing matters which were felt to be dangerous and, likely to lead to controversy--party political questions.(1)

Good's assessment is quite revealing, for it adds weight to the argument that the Mowat Government, after witnessing the election of seventeen Patron of Industry candidates in 1894, imposed new restrictions upon the Institutes and their discussion topics at the meetings. This is a point which will be examined further in the body of the thesis.

One contemporary source also exists in the form of L.A. Wood's study of farmer movements in Canada. Wood makes some mention of the Institutes, but focusses instead on the Institute Clubs, which were formed in 1905. These Clubs, Wood maintains, were important in that they were eventually absorbed into the United Farmers of Ontario. Consequently, while Wood does not deny their importance, he gives little attention to the Institutes themselves.(2) As a result, much of the history of the Farmers' Institutes remains to be written.

(1) W.C. Good, Farmer Citizen: My Fifty Years in the Canadian Farmers' Movement, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1958), pp. 16, 32.

(2) Louis Aubrey Wood, A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), first published, 1924, pp. 274-276. That Wood gives little attention to the Institutes is perhaps understandable, since he deals with all of Canada and is primarily concerned with political and economic activity of farmer groups, particularly those formed after 1900.

This study, to be sure, is not a history of the Institutes as such, but a study of particular aspects of the Institutes, and of interaction with other agrarian groups of the time. As a result, it is necessary to state at the outset the limitations of this examination.

Some attention will be given to economic factors, and how these affected opinion in the Institutes. The economic conditions of late nineteenth and early twentieth century have been examined extensively by other historians, in order to show the difficult situation facing the farmers, and to demonstrate the linkages between economic hardship and political activity. Falling market prices, the National Policy, wages paid to hired labour, and other factors have all been used to argue that political activity and consequent social ideas were sparked by such problems.(1) While it is true that economic privation and depression do spark, on occasion, some sort of political or social response, it does not necessarily follow that these groups only act when experiencing 'hard times'.(2) What should be

(1) For example, see Ibid., esp. pp. 16-17, 92-98, 152-154, 225-244. See also S.E.D. Shortt, "Social Change and the Political Crisis in Rural Ontario: The Patrons of Industry, 1889-1896", in Donald Swainson, ed., Oliver Mowat's Ontario, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada Limited, 1972), John David Smart, "The Patrons of Industry in Ontario", M.A. Thesis, Carleton University, 1969, esp. pp. 24-37, and Joy Parr, "Hired Men: Agricultural Wage Labour in Historical Perspective", Labour/Le Travail, Spring, 1985, pp. 97-101.

(2) Lawrence, Goodwyn, The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. x-xi.

examined, it can be argued, are the subtleties and special features of a given economic system, as such a study will shed more light on the reasons why a group acts as it does. To ignore these special features tends to produce a rather rigid approach to history, and one in which there is an assumption that people only act collectively when confronted by economic hardship.

Consequently, aspects of rural life such as the problems of swindlers and a diverse market economy at the turn of the century will be studied. Because of developments in technology, such as refrigeration and improved means of transportation, the Ontario farmer had many options in terms of what products to produce, and therefore, many more concerns. As Charles Johnston has pointed out, the diversification of agriculture in Ontario made it almost impossible to unify the farmers, since different types of agricultural endeavours required different concessions from government.⁽¹⁾ The leaders of the Institutes recognized this diversity and, on occasion, accepted it as a reality in certain localities. However, the Institute leadership often attempted to over-ride this diversity by focussing on agricultural topics common to all and, more importantly, by focussing on more theoretical topics which applied to the whole agrarian community, and attempted to act as a unifying agent.

While industrialization brought with it many technological benefits to the farmers in the form of implements and machinery,

(1) Charles M. Johnston, "'A Motley Crowd': Diversity in the Ontario Countryside in the Early Twentieth Century", Canadian Historical Association Paper (unpublished), 1987.

it brought less attractive features as well. Frauds and swindles perpetrated against the farmers appear to have increased significantly in late nineteenth century Ontario, so much so that a federal committee was appointed in 1888 to examine the problem. Swindles, however, did not appear to decrease significantly after this committee was struck, and one finds many examples of frauds well into the twentieth century. While worthy of study in their own right, such frauds and swindles are discussed in this thesis in order to make a link between the farmers' feelings of self-worth, and how they attempted to correct the situation. By the turn of the century, the farmer had become a target for ridicule and derision from those in urban centres, and the frequency of swindles and frauds against the farmers added weight to their belief that the farmer was none too bright. The farmers were fools, backward bumpkins. This, at any rate, was the impression many farmers were receiving from the city. This issue was brought up countless times by members of the Farmers' Institutes, and many papers read at the meetings were intended to raise the status of the farmers, or to instruct them as to how to present themselves so that they would not be looked upon as rubes. It is from these discussions and papers that one can see, quite clearly, what has been referred to as the 'agrarian myth'.

Russell Hann, in his survey of 'farmer movements in Ontario, has defined the agrarian myth as a device by which the farmers could elevate their status (at least to themselves) and give them a feeling of self confidence. Briefly stated, the agrarian myth

was the idea that everything began with agriculture. Nothing could survive or develop without the farmers. Therefore, the farmers enjoyed a unique position among human beings. There was something special, almost spiritual, about being a farmer since it was the agrarian who worked with the forces of nature to produce the most important product--food.(1) The agrarian myth played an important role in the Institutes, and was constantly being repeated to the membership. While it is true that many politicians and other public figures used this myth in an attempt to placate the farmers, the farmers utilized the myth themselves; and it is their own use of the myth which will be examined.

While Hann and others have argued, quite correctly, that the agrarian myth gave the farmers a sense of self esteem, they have not explored the way in which such a myth influenced their thought in other areas. The use and application of the myth in the fields of science, education, and religion will therefore be examined, and it will be argued that the farmers were able to construct innovative approaches to these topics.

Since the farmer, according to a great deal of literature from the Institute, was constantly dealing with nature, a greater understanding of scientific principles was necessary. In other words, one should become a 'scientific' farmer. This goal, if

(1) Russell Hann, Farmers Confront Industrialism: Some Historical Perspectives on Ontario Agrarian Movements, (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1975), pp. 10-15. See, as well, Foster Griezic, "Introduction", in Wood, p. x, and Richard Van Loon, "The Political Thought of the United Farmers of Ontario", M.A. Thesis, Carleton University, 1965, pp. 59-61.

put into practise, enabled the farmer to make gains in terms of self-esteem, since he was no longer an unskilled yeoman, but one who was well versed in the latest technological advances and scientific theories. As well, the forces of nature played an important role in the education of the young, not only in the sense that the child had to have a knowledge of science, but of nature as well. Papers were presented at many Institute meetings which argued that one of the main problems with society--especially urban society--was that they were too far removed from nature, and were therefore unable to appreciate how everything fit into a larger framework. This larger framework, of course, was the one provided by God, and therefore the farmer, close to nature and recognizing the greater implications of His work, was indeed special.

Other topics brought up frequently at Institute meetings will also be studied. Distrust of political parties by Institute members, their notions of decentralization, and their sometimes contradictory ideas concerning the relationship between farmers and urban labour will also be examined. Further, some mention will be made of the social function of the Institutes, especially during periods when other farmer organizations were on the decline since the Institutes, during these periods, allowed the farmers to get together to discuss their problems.

One other aspect of the Institutes will be examined. Van Loon, as well as others, had noted that the leadership of the United Farmers of Ontario were successful in mobilizing mass

support for their movement by working within the Institutes, particularly the Institute Clubs. In other words, the Institutes gave the U.F.O. a ready-made structure and province-wide organization, and this, in part, contributed to the success of the U.F.O. in the 1919 provincial election.(1) The implications of this are quite interesting: If it was the case that the Mowat Government attempted to exert a sort of 'social control' upon the Institutes with the new rules in 1895, then an irony emerges.(2) Mowat, by allowing the creation of a highly co-ordinated organization, provided the farmers with the ideal vehicle for the formation of a political movement and eventual party.

What Van Loon neglects to mention is that the members of the Farmers' Institutes must have been receptive to the ideas of the U.F.O., or the U.F.O. leadership would not have been successful. If this is the case, it can then be suggested that the Institutes harboured the potential for agrarian discontent to be articulated. The Institutes, then, are a significant link

(1) Van Loon, p. 35. This point is also covered in Wood, pp. 274-275, and in Charles M. Johnston, E.C. Drury: Agrarian Idealist, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), pp. 38-39.

(2) The 'social control' model presented here is based largely upon that of Alison Prentice, in her work The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, n.d.), pp. 66-84. That is to say, that by limiting the parameters of debate and discussion, the authorities in question were able to exert influence in the behaviour of the group. The interpretation for this study, however, has been moderated somewhat by a reading of Donald H. Akenson, Being Had: Historians, Evidence, and the Irish in North America, (Toronto: P.D. Meany Company Inc., 1985), pp. 162-163.

between the Patrons of Industry and the United Farmers, for it provides a continuity between the movements and suggests that there were stronger links between the groups than previously assumed.

All this being said, one may still ask: Why study the farmers? In other words, what contributions can a study of agrarians and agrarian organizations make? First, some existing literature regarding the farmers reaches somewhat arguable conclusions. S.E.D. Shortt, for example, in his study of the Patrons of Industry, concluded that the farmers in late nineteenth century Ontario, threatened by urbanization and industrialization, reverted into a shell of classical economic liberalism and became backward-looking and reactionary in outlook.(1) Ramsay Cook, in his examination of populism in Canada in the 1890s, dismissed the platform of the Patrons as being rather mild and none too radical, apparently forgetting that the Patrons called for the farmers to abandon deeply held party loyalties and to accept a view of society quite different from the existing one.(2) Other examples can be found of this somewhat questionable view of the farmers, but it is the lack of treatment by a particular group of historians which is even more important.

Recently, there has been a great deal of literature produced

(1) Shortt, pp. 211-212 and 228-229.

(2) Ramsay Cook, "Tillers and Toilers: The Rise and Fall of Populism in Canada in the 1890s", Historical Papers, 1984, p. 7.

which examines the lives of workers and, especially, how they responded to the onset of industrial capitalism in late nineteenth century Ontario. This work, to be sure, is quite valuable, and has given historians new approaches and interpretations. However, by focussing on the workers, an important element is neglected in the development of turn of the century Ontario. The farmers, as well, responded to the new industrial order and, in many cases, their ideas and actions paralleled those of the workers. To ignore them is to leave a considerable gap in Ontario's history.

A good example of this kind of treatment (or non-treatment) can be found in Kealey and Palmer's study of the Knights of Labor in Ontario. One of the main arguments put forward in their work is that the Knights represented, for the first time in the province, "...a movement culture of alternative, opposition, and potential."(1) Much of their argument is based on two premises. First, that the Knights were able to organize at least 21,800 members and, secondly, that the rituals of this secret order, and the social function it provided in the form of picnics and dances, helped solidify a feeling of class pride and contributed to the formation of a working-class culture.(2) These points are

(1) Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, Dreaming of what might be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 17.

(2) Ibid., pp. 283-301. The figures presented here are from a more recent work by Palmer. See Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980, (Toronto: Butterworth and Co. Ltd., 1983), p. 102.

well argued, and there is little reason to believe that the Knights were not a significant group. The problem, however, is that Kealey and Palmer, for the most part, ignore and obscure a parallel movement operating at roughly the same time.

Agrarian secret societies, complete with rituals, picnics, and alternative social visions, predated the Knights of Labor in Ontario, and in the United States as well.(1) These groups were also successful in attracting many members to their ranks and, as will be seen with the Farmers' Institutes, attempted to form bonds between themselves and the urban work force, including the Knights. However, Kealey and Palmer appear to give little thought to such bonds, and are able to avoid the issue by claiming that the 1890s, "...unlike the 1880s' labour upsurge, was a period of farmers' revolt centred in the Patrons of Industry."(2) They then go on to state:

With this agrarian upheaval flourished the same kinds of rhetoric and analysis used by the Order throughout the 1880s. This should not surprise us, for the Patrons contained an active contingent of former Knights.(3)

This passage leads one to ask the following question: Why were former Knights so easily welcomed and accommodated into the agrarian movement? The farmers could not suddenly change their

(1) The Patrons of Husbandry entered Ontario in 1872, after being formed in the United States in 1867, while the Knights of Labour were formed in the U.S. in 1869, and did not become a force in Ontario until the 1880s. See Wood, p. 60, and Palmer, pp. 99-100.

(2) Kealey and Palmer, p. 387.

(3) Ibid., p. 388.

political outlook due to the addition of a few new members, even if they were somewhat influential.

What one is left with, then, is the impression that there were corresponding goals, values, and beliefs shared by both farmers and labourers, and the implications of this could provide us with a greater understanding of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ontario. Kealey and Palmer, of course, are concerned with the labour movement and, consequently, should not give the farmers primacy. However, by not addressing the significance of the farmer/labour connection, or by denying its existence, an extremely important and numerous group are again neglected.(1)

For many labour historians, the workers had, and still have, the world to win. The farmer, faced with urbanization, a growing industrial sector, indifference from government regarding policy, and a loss of status, had much less to hope for. Yet, they did not retreat into a shell of reaction and intolerance. Instead, recognizing the virtual inevitability of societal change, they formulated positive and indeed fresh ideas as to how this society should operate. This is not to suggest that the farmers were the only people thinking about social problems at the time, nor is it

(1) Kealey and Palmer, to be fair, are not the only ones to understate the role of the farmer during this period. In fact, many examples can be found. See, for example, Gene Howard Homel, "Fading Beams of the Nineteenth Century": Radicalism and Early Socialism in Canada's 1890s", Labour/Le Travailleur, Vol. 5, (Spring, 1980). Homel focusses on labour radicalism, and down-plays the Patrons of Industry who, by his own definition, were quite radical.

to assert that their thoughts were any more profound than other groups. It is only to argue that one cannot begin to put forward a solid notion of what was happening in Ontario at the turn of the century until more of these groups are identified and analysed. This study of the Farmers' Institutes, it is hoped, is a small step in this direction.

CHAPTER I

THE FARMER IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY ONTARIO AND THE FORMATION
OF THE FARMERS' INSTITUTES

Since God created the earth, agriculture has existed; there is no occupation that precedes it; no organization can rank with the tillers of the soil. Before literature existed, before governments were known, agriculture was the first calling of man.

Manual of the Subordinate Granges of the Patrons of Husbandry, 1875

Towns are places where mankind has begun to rot, and unhappily the rottenness spreads.

Leo Tolstoy

The Farmers' Institute was by no means the first agrarian organization to be founded in Ontario, nor did it exist in a vacuum. Consequently, when formed, it bore characteristics quite similar in some respects to a previous farmer group in terms of organizational structure and functions performed. Therefore, a brief account of that group, the Patrons of Husbandry, is relevant.

Although agricultural societies had existed in Upper Canada as early as the 1790s, these groups tended to be sporadic, had no central body, and seemed to spend a great deal of time presenting prizes for the best cattle, wheat, corn, and so on. (1) The first

(1) For a good account of agricultural societies, see James J. Talman, "Agricultural Societies of Upper Canada", Ontario Historical Society, Papers and Records, Vol. XXVII, 1931.

agricultural organization of any significant province-wide size in Ontario was the Dominion Patrons of Husbandry, also known as the Grange. Created in 1867 in the United States as a secret society, the Grange began setting up in Canada in 1872. By 1874, there were 44 local chapters with an estimated membership of 1,300. By the time of its peak in 1879, the Patrons of Husbandry had some 766 chapters and 31,000 members, 26,000 of these living in Ontario.(1)

The Grange was set up to perform many different functions. It was an educational organization, where farmers could meet and discuss the latest agricultural developments, and share other pieces of knowledge.(2) It engaged in commercial ventures, establishing joint-stock companies and co-operative stores where farmers could buy implements and seed or sell their produce without interference from middlemen, who were felt by many Grangers to be profiting from their labour and their consumer needs.(3) It was a pressure group, aimed at achieving more

(1) Louis Aubrey Wood, A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. 60. There is no history of the Grange in Canada. Wood devotes 80 pages to the Patrons of Husbandry and, though somewhat dated (first published in 1924), is still one of the best sources of material relating to the Canadian Order.

(2) D. Sven Nordin, Rich Harvest: A History of the Grange, 1867-1900, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1974), pp. 45-130. Nordin's book is concerned with the Patrons of Husbandry in the United States, but much can be drawn from it and related to the Canadian group which, for the most part, followed the American model.

(3) Wood, pp. 74-83.

favourable legislation by united action.(1) What this implied was that the Grange was not engaged in partisan politics, nor did they field candidates in elections. Even so, the Order encouraged farmers to take greater interest in politics, and attempt to rid government of its corrupt elements.(2) Many farmers found at least some of these functions attractive, as the membership numbers indicate.

Most important, however, was the fact that the Patrons of Husbandry performed a social function. The farmers and their families lived in relative isolation, and the Grange brought them together for meetings, dances, and picnics. The importance of these gatherings should not be underestimated, as they helped form a class awareness in the farmers, and they were usually well attended.(3) For example, in June, 1876, a Grange picnic was held in Brantford, and some 1,500 people attended. When George Dinwoody, a farmer from Tecumseh, heard of the event, he "...gladly seized the opportunity of uniting with his brother

(1) Nordin, pp. 183-213.

(2) Wood, p. 46.

(3) Farmers often referred to themselves as belonging to a class, but not in the Marxian sense. Richard Van Loon, in his discussion of the Grange, refers to their class-consciousness. See Van Loon, "The Political Thought of the United Farmers of Ontario", M.A. Thesis, Carleton University, 1965, p. 22. The issue of class as applied to agrarians is discussed in Lawrence Goodwyn, The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. xv-xvi. For the purposes of this study, the term class may easily be substituted with 'occupational group'.

farmers."(1) Another farmer remembered that the Grange "...set the farmers thinking, and got them together, and gave them a sense of common interest."(2) Bonds were formed, and the farmers began to realize that their problems were not unique to themselves. This, in light of later events, was one of the most important features of the Grange.

Even so, the Patrons of Husbandry, after reaching its peak in Canada in 1879, soon went into decline. The reasons for this drop in popularity were numerous. Some resented the secrecy of the organization,(3) while others soon became disappointed when the majority of the Grange's commercial and co-operative ventures failed.(4) However, it can be said that the chief factor accounting for the decline was that the Grange tried to do too much too soon, with too few resources.(5) One must realize that for the first major agrarian organization on the continent to attempt to be an educational body, a pressure group, a business, and a secret society all at once, was quite a monumental task, and the chances of sustained success were not high. While the organization did not expire completely, and in fact survived well

(1) Toronto Weekly Globe, June 19, 1876, p. 11.

(2) H. Michell, "The Grange in Canada", Queen's Quarterly, Vol. XXII, October, 1914, p. 147.

(3) See Wood, p. 63, or Nordin, p. 33.

(4) Solon Justice Buck, The Granger Movement: A Study of Agricultural Organization and its Political, Economic, and Social Manifestations, 1870-1880, (University of Nebraska Press, n.d., first printed, 1913), pp. 239-277.

(5) Wood, p. 63.

Into the twentieth century, it never reattained the popularity it had enjoyed in the 1870s.

The Ontario government, at the same time, was not ignoring the farmer, and the establishment of the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm in 1874 was proof of their attention. It is interesting to note that there had been no real outcry on the part of the farmers for such a college.(1) At the Agricultural College, students could take courses in subjects such as chemistry, stock-breeding, veterinary surgery, or agricultural chemistry, to name but a few of the practical agricultural topics.(2) The nature of agriculture was changing; scientific crop management was emerging in other countries and the government of Ontario was determined to keep up with the times.(3) The College, they believed, was a step in the right direction.

Topics other than those of a practical nature were taught as well. Students attending the College could also study English Literature or Political Economy to name but two, and it is the latter subject which warrants attention. Those taking Political Economy were exposed to such ideas as utility; the production of wealth; land, labour and capital; the distribution of wealth; trade unions; co-operation; money; functions of government; and

(1) A.J. Madill, History of Agricultural Education in Ontario, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1930), p. 147.

(2) Toronto Weekly Globe, March 31, 1876, p. 11.

(3) Madill, p. 147.

other like topics.(1) Clearly, some of those who were to be the next generation of leaders in the agrarian community were learning more than farming techniques and theories; they were also learning about the major features of a rapidly industrializing society, and the effects of this sort of teaching was felt when many of these students became active in the various agrarian organizations and farmer press.

The creation of the College, however, also created problems. Some farmers saw the College as nothing more than a political ploy on the part of the Mowat Government, while others had no use for such scientific techniques.(2) Some editorials claimed that the College was a monumental waste of money because it had a very small enrollment, and because it was too distant for farmers' sons who were not in the immediate vicinity of Guelph, where the College was situated.(3) It was, quite simply, not reaching the farmers. These, and other problems and criticisms led, in part, to the formation of the Farmers' Institutes.

Before the Institutes are studied, however, one should examine the social and economic climate of late nineteenth century Ontario in which the farmers found themselves. This must be done in order to more fully appreciate the nature and

(1) "Ninth Annual Report of the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm for the Year Ending 31st December, 1883", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XVI, No. 13, p. 111.

(2) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institutes of Ontario, 1893", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXVI, Part VII, No. 36, p. 45.

(3) Ibid., p. 45.

activities of the Farmers' Institutes. Indifference from various authorities, rapid shifts in both technology and markets, and significant social change created an atmosphere of instability and confusion for the farmer. What is important to keep in mind is that the farmer did not simply drift in this atmosphere of confusion. The nature of their response will become more apparent when the Institutes are examined.

First, agriculture fell under concurrent jurisdiction in the British North America Act. In other words, agriculture was both a federal and provincial responsibility. However, it would appear that the federal government did little for the farmers of Ontario. Vernon Fowke, an agricultural historian, claims that:

So great was the early federal engrossment with immigration promotion that in the eighteen-eighties officials of the Dominion Department of Agriculture admitted that since Confederation they had performed scarcely any agricultural functions.(1)

The federal government was also focussing much of their attention on industrial development and railways and, consequently, could give little thought to the farmers, especially ones in more established regions of the country. It would also appear that they only acted when enough farmers in these regions demanded some sort of action, and even then the results were not always satisfactory.

Tied in with railway and other transportation developments

(1) Vernon C. Fowke, Canadian Agricultural Policy: The Historic Pattern, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946), p. 157.

was the new era of diversity for the Ontario farmer. There were now many choices to be made. One could concentrate on dairying, fruit growing, livestock, or mixed farming; not only for the local market, but on an international level as well. The international market, especially for dairy and meat products that opened up in late nineteenth century Ontario was largely due to advancements made in refrigeration technology, which meant that products could be shipped overseas with minimal damage to quality.(1) "The farmer in Ontario who once only competed with his neighbors has now to compete with the whole world...", editorialized the London Free Press, and the opening up of these varied markets made life considerably more complicated for the farmers of Ontario than for the western wheat farmer.(2) As Russell Hann points out:

To find oneself in industrializing Ontario was immeasurably more disquieting than to find oneself at a rail-head in Regina...In Ontario, many roads led to many markets and the problems seemed a great deal more perplexing.(3)

The 'independent yeoman' was disappearing, and the 'new' farmer had to be aware of the shifts in markets, and of the new technology which would help keep him solvent.

(1) D.A. Lawr, "The Development of Agricultural Education in Ontario, 1870-1910", PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, 1972, p. 5.

(2) London Free Press, January 2, 1884, p. 4.

(3) Russell Hann, Farmers Confront Industrialism: Some Historical Perspectives on Ontario Agrarian Movements, (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1975), p. 6. See also Lawr, pp. 15-18.

In order to more fully understand the farmers' situation in the late nineteenth century, one must appreciate the great technological changes which were taking place at the time in agricultural implements. New and improved reapers were developed; harvestors, which could cut, gather, and bind grain were constructed and marketed; seed drills, and many other agricultural implements were either improved or invented in this era.(1) There is no doubt that farming in Ontario was being mechanized. An Ontario Agriculture Commission, in 1881, claimed that "...71 per cent of the farmers of Ontario use machinery in their ordinary operations."(2) Furthermore, there is little reason to doubt that this trend towards machines continued. While there is no doubt that many aspects of farm work was made easier and more cost efficient by mechanization, the fact remains that these technological developments had facilitated the opening up of new and varied markets and therefore made other aspects of farming much more complicated. Furthermore, with these developments came other less noticeable problems.

A consequence of technology often overlooked is the number of swindles which took place during the time. A popular confidence game was the 'hay-fork scam', in which a salesman would come to the farmer with a new type of hay-fork, or some

(1) D.A. Lawr, "The Development of Ontario Farming, 1870-1914: Patterns of Growth and Change", Ontario History, December, 1972, pp. 240-242.

(2) Ontario Agricultural Commission, Report of the Commissioners, (Toronto: 1881), p. 561.

other implement, and ask if he could hang it in the farmer's barn, as a form of advertisement. If the farmer agreed, forms would be signed, and usually in two or three weeks fifteen or twenty hay-forks would arrive at the farmer's house, with an accompanying bill.(1) Many other farmers signed for and made downpayments on implements which were to be delivered at a later date. These implements would either never arrive, or be of such inferior quality as to be useless.(2) Many companies were formed, claiming to represent the Grange, and they also swindled farmers.(3) Newspapers often warned farmers to beware of the latest scam, but sometimes their warnings came too late.(4) The situation had become so serious that a committee appointed to examine these frauds concluded that the swindles had:

...been practised to an alarming extent among farmers, and that the grievances of the farmers in this respect calls loudly for some remedy, if such can be devised.(5)

Apparently, such a remedy either could not be devised, or the federal government was not prepared to find one, as swindles

(1) See the testimony of John Macpherson, Report of the Select Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Fraudulent Practices Perpetrated Upon the Farmers of the Dominion, 1888, (Ottawa, 1888), pp. 12-17.

(2) See the testimony of Alen R. Kelly, in Ibid., pp. 3-10, or Peter G. Dunton in Ibid., pp. 45-48.

(3) Nordin, p. 31.

(4) See, for example, Lindsay, Ontario, The Canadian Post, February 1, 1887, p. 3.

(5) Report of the Select Committee..., p. 1.

continued to be a problem for farmers.(1) 'A farmer had to be very cautious when making business transactions and, as the evidence suggests, some were not careful enough.

Another problem confronting the farmer was the rural-urban ratio. During the late nineteenth century, cities in Ontario grew significantly, and while some of this growth can be explained by immigration, a substantial amount of their growth was due to people leaving the rural areas in favour of the urban ones.(2) This did not mean that the actual rural population was declining; rather, it is to suggest that greater numbers were now living in towns and cities.(3) With this change in the rural-urban population ratio came a perceived shift in the emphasis of government policy. That is to say, governments, recognizing the need and potential benefits of industrialization, began passing legislation which was quite favourable to urban centres, and to the people involved in promoting this

(1) See, for example, Smiths Falls, Ontario, Rideau Record, July 26, 1894, p. 9; August 20, 1895, p. 8; May 21, 1896, p. 4; June 30, 1898, p.6. See also Peterborough Examiner, December 26, 1903, p. 8.

(2) Foster J.K. Griezic, "Introduction", in Wood, p. x. See also Wood, p. 63, or Hann, pp. 11-12.

(3) Ian Drummond, in Progress Without Planning: The Economic History of Ontario from Confederation to the Second World War, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), notes that in absolute terms, the rural population of Ontario did not decline significantly in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. See p. 21.

development.(1) That the farmers ever received favourable legislation from governments of Ontario is a debatable point. In terms of representation, rural ridings tended to be over-represented in the Legislature. Even so, it would appear that they were not able to fully exercise this power since most of the key policy makers were from the cities. The government had been supporting businesses in Ontario well before the 1880s, as evidenced by its encouragement of ventures such as the Grand Trunk Railway, various banks, utilities, and resource-centred firms, to give only a few examples.(2) What should be borne in mind, however, is the question of perception on the part of the farmers. By the 1880s, governments at all levels were aggressively supporting urban-centred economic activity. The farmers, who may well have not been able to exert much pressure before, perhaps now believed that they had lost any influence they once had.

Cities also offered many conveniences which could not be found in rural areas, especially on farms. The advent of electric lighting, street railways, and other such benefits of urban life, combined with the idea that such developments were 'progressive', led many to believe that cities were the most

(1) Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 27-56.

(2) See, J.K. Johnson, "John A. Macdonald", in J.M.S. Careless, ed., The Pre-Confederation Premiers: Ontario Government Leaders, 1841-1867, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 238.

attractive places to live.(1) This notion--that urban life was superior to rural living--plus the frequency of reported swindles against the farmers, aided greatly in creating the impression in the cities that the agrarians were at best anachronisms and at worst uncultured fools. While being a farmer may not have been a noble occupation in the past (except to the farmers themselves), they were, at least, ignored by those in towns. The situation was now such that the farmer was viewed as a bumpkin.

The farmer as buffoon was reflected often in the various city newspapers. One feature of the press at the time was the emergence and growth of humour columns, and various groups, such as women, blacks, Irish, doctors, and lawyers were targets for jokes and anecdotes. The farmer, as well, was a source of material, with many of the jokes relating to the theme of farmers coming into a city and their misadventures with aspects of modern life.(2) Other themes included the stinginess of farmers, and

(1) One must keep in mind that one of the reasons the Grange was formed was to provide the farmers with some of the benefits already enjoyed by those in urban areas, such as an active associational life, libraries, and other social and intellectual aspects. See Buck, pp. 280-290; Wood, p. 28; and Nordin, pp. 109-130.

(2) See, for example, London Free Press, February 9, 1874, p. 3. A farmer, upon coming to a city, had mistaken a garden hose for a snake and had chopped it into twelve pieces before realizing his error.

their rural dialects.(1) What this meant for the farmers was that they were being perceived by the urban press as uncouth and uncultured, as demonstrated by the following joke:

Young farmer. 'Are you fond of beasts, Miss Gusherton?' Miss Gusherton. 'Oh really, Mr. Pawker, if you mean that as a declaration you must speak to mama.'(2)

Furthermore, this negative attitude of the press towards farmers did not, it seems, dissipate through the years. If anything, it worsened.(3) Clearly, farming as an occupation had lost much of its respectability.(4)

Despite all these problems and concerns, this was not an era of pessimism for the farmers. Positive, optimistic ideas emerged, and many of these notions had their basis in a faith in education. One only had to learn more, and ones situation would

(1) See, for example, Perth Courier, September 21, 1877, p. 4; February 8, 1878, p. 4; January 20, 1879, or Beaverton Express, June 15, 1883, p. 7. These references, it should be noted, were compiled from random surveys of the above mentioned newspapers, in order to show that such jokes were not rare. Indeed, many more references can and have been found.

(2) Perth Courier, August 6, 1880, p. 4.

(3) See, for example, the reaction of the press when 5,000 farmers protested in Ottawa over the loss of conscription exemptions in 1918, in Wood, p. 281. As Wood points out, some of the articles were not so much humorous as they were malicious.

(4) For an American perspective on the loss of status of farming, see Don F. Hadwiger, "Farmers in Politics", Agricultural History, Vol. 50, Number 1, January 1976, p. 160. While Hadwiger does not classify the late nineteenth century farmer as a buffoon in the eyes of urban dwellers, he does allow that by this time, farming was seen as a relatively low-status occupation.

improve. Education of the individual led to societal improvement, which led to progress, which in turn cleared the path for a better world.(1) This, at any rate, was the view held by many who promoted education in Ontario, and it can be argued that the atmosphere created by these people, who placed such importance upon the acquisition of knowledge, played a part in the establishment of the Farmers' Institutes.

This was also an age of organizations, and this too played a role in the creation of the Institutes. Societies, orders, and lodges could be found all over North America at the time, representing various classes, professions, religions, and interests. One could become a member of the Y.M.C.A., W.C.T.U., Protestant Benevolent Association, St. Andrew's Benevolent Society, Irish Protestant Benevolent Society, Sons of Canada, Sons of England, Knights of Labour, Knights of Pythias, Royal Templars of Temperance, Masons, Foresters, Oddfellows, or the Orange Lodge, to name but a few.(2) As Bryan Palmer has noted:

The magnitude of this associational network was quite striking, and in a period predating mass culture and highly commercialized form of recreation, it formed a vital part of

(1) Alison Prentice, The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid Nineteenth Century Upper Canada, (Toronto: Maclelland and Stewart, n.d.), pp. 46, 68, 105, 120-125.

(2) Again, as with farmer jokes, these organizations were compiled quite at random from late nineteenth century newspapers. Scarcely any edition of any newspaper failed to mention some sort of association. The Toronto Globe, for example, devoted an entire page to such groups in the Saturday edition. See, for example, Toronto Globe, December 8, 1883, p. 13.

everyday life.(1)

This point, furthermore, was not overlooked by agriculturalists at the time. One of the founders of the Institutes pointed out that "The Lawyers have their society, the doctors their association, and the Knights of Labor their union." Why, then, should the farmers not have their own?(2) Since organizations were so prevalent, it was that much easier to create a body such as the Institutes and to enjoy at least an initial period of success; especially in light of the previously mentioned decline of the Grange during the 1880s.

The Mowat Government had created the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm, but it was not met with wide-spread praise from the agrarian community. Some maintained that money spent on the College was money misspent. As one Toronto paper editorialized:

The truth is that the entire agricultural expenditure of the Province and its whole policy with regard to the encouragement of agriculture need overhauling...

The College, of course, was the place to begin.(3) It was too remote, too distant, and many farmers believed that it was nothing more than a political move on part of Mowat to increase

(1) Bryan D. Palmer, Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980, (Toronto: Butterworth & Co. Ltd., 1983), p. 78.

(2) "Report of the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm, Guelph, for the Year Commencing 1st January and ending 1st December, 1886", Ontario, Sessional Papers 1887, Vol. XIX Part II, Number 6, p. 18.

(3) Toronto Weekly Globe, October 7, 1881, p. 3.

the popularity of the provincial Liberals.(1) The farmers would not come to the College, so, as the President of the College and founder of the Institutes, James Mills, put it, "...we decided to take the College to the farmers."(2) In a report to the Government of Ontario, he further explained his reasoning:

The great majority of the farmers were personally unacquainted with the professors. They had heard unfavorable reports of them; but they knew little or nothing about their attainments...or the work which they were endeavoring to do...I naturally sought for some means of bringing the professors and the farmers together.(3)

Thus, in 1884, the Farmers' Institutes were formed; and early in the next year, the first meetings were held.

While it may well have been the case that the College executive wanted to reach the farmers, this, in itself, does not fully explain why the Institutes were set up. Since, ultimately, the financing for such a venture came from the Ontario government, they too must have had reasons for agreeing to the establishment of the Institutes. It can be suggested, as previously mentioned, that the Mowat Government, in attempting to keep the Ontario farmer up to date with the latest agricultural developments, supported the Institutes. Improved crop yields

(1) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institutes of Ontario, 1893", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXVI, Part VII, Number 36, p. 45.

(2) Ibid., p. 45.

(3) "Sixteenth Annual Report of the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm, 1890", Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1891, Vol. XXIII, Part VII, Number 40, p. 4.

would contribute to the provincial economy, so it would seem logical that the government would want to educate the farmers and thus enable them to increase their productivity.

The creation of the Institutes may also have been attractive to the Mowat Government because little provincial money would have to be spent on such bodies. In 1886, for example, the Institutes cost the provincial government \$502.00. Even as late as 1896, with over 650 meetings held in that year and a highly centralized authority, the Institutes needed only \$10,522.00 from the province to keep operating.(1) If the creation of the Institutes could attend to the criticism levelled at the College from the farmers, and do it rather cheaply, then this might provide another reason for Mowat agreeing to such an organization.

Another reason for the government's approval of the Institutes, and this is a speculative point, could have been that they would be in a position to exert some measure of what has been referred to as 'social control'.(2) In 1898, an Ontario Liberal Party pamphlet noted that the Institutes, unlike organizations for other occupational groups, were "...more directly the creation of the Government than any other

(1) Ontario Liberal Association, Ontario...Record of the Liberal Government: 26 Years of Progressive Legislation and Honest Administration, 1872-1898, (Toronto: Hunter, Rose Co., Limited, 1898), pp. 135-136.

(2) Prentice's The School Promoters, for example, deals with notions of social control in the public education system, and provides a good example of what this means.

associations...".(1) Presumably, this note in the pamphlet was an attempt to demonstrate the benevolence of the Government towards the farmers. However, the question remains: why was it only the farmers who were to have their organization set up by the government?

One reason for this special status for farmers may be that having witnessed the remarkable rise of the Patrons of Husbandry, Mowat may have felt that if the farmers were ever to organize to that magnitude again, it would be prudent to direct them to organize into a body whose primary purpose was to educate; and to have this body run, at 'arm's length', by the 'benevolent' government. One must remember that the Patrons of Husbandry did not favour political action as independents or as a party. They were, however, quite vocal; so while Mowat may not have been terribly frightened by the Grange, its existence and its activities must have informed him that all was not well with the agrarian community. To set up an educational institution, then, did have its advantages.

Any kind of formal or structured educational system implies a certain amount of social control. The parameters of the debate and the topics to be discussed are set out in rules, either formal or implied. More of the original rules of the Farmers' Institutes appear to have been implied than formally set out, and because of this, the parameters of the debate continued to widen

(1) Ontario Liberal Association, Record of the Liberal Government..., p. 134.

until 1895 when, as will be seen, the government imposed a lengthy list of formal regulations upon the Institutes.

The structure of the Institutes was quite simple and straight-forward. Each provincial electoral riding was entitled to hold an Institute meeting, and if such a group was set up, agricultural experts from the College would come and speak at their gatherings. A Central Institute was also established, which met once a year in order to discuss the work of the Institutes. Delegates from each local body attended, and some of the best local papers from throughout the province were presented.(1) Since these professors also had to conduct classes at the College, meetings were held for the most part during the Christmas vacation and in the spring, after classes had ended. The professors received no pay for this work, but were reimbursed for their travel expenses by the provincial government.(2) Local farmers were also encouraged to present papers at these meetings.

Each Farmers' Institute had a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Directors. There were no limits on how many Directors an Institute could have.(3) The local Institute

(1) Madill, p. 150.

(2) "Report of the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm for the Year Commencing 1st January and ending 31st December, 1886", Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1887, Vol. XIX, Part II, Number 6, p. 19.

(3) This information was taken from the Institute report folders, ie., the pre-typed folders each Institute was required to submit to the President of the Central Institute. Archives of Ontario, Department of Agriculture, Farmers' Institute Branch, RG 16-85.

was required to hold at least two meetings per year, and to have a minimum membership of 50. Each Institute could charge any amount of dues it decided upon, but minimum dues were 25 cents per year.(1) Each Institute, providing it submitted a report to the Central Institute, was entitled to a \$25.00 grant from the central body for various expenses incurred during the year. The money for this reimbursement came from the provincial government, but it would appear that the Agricultural College did almost all of the administrative work.

When they started, the Farmers' Institutes had very few regulations pertaining to the actual operation of the meetings. As President Mills pointed out, the Institutes were

....local groupings of farmers for the purpose of comparing notes, giving the results of experience, and reading and discussing papers on agriculture, live stock, dairying, fruit-growing, forestry, and other topics in which the farmers of each locality are specially interested.(2)

In other words, they were intended to be an educational body, where the more technical aspects of farming were to be discussed. It is also interesting to note that in the original set of regulations, discussions of a political nature were not

(1) Almost no Institute charged more than 25 cents between 1885 and 1895. This may or may not have changed in later years. See *ibid.*

(2) "Report of the Agricultural College and Experimental Farm, 1886", p. 19.

prohibited.(1) However, the 'other topics' which Mill mentioned soon became subject to broad interpretation.

Almost from the beginning, farmers saw the Institutes as more than technical educational meetings, and believed that broad social issues should also be brought up. The Hamilton Spectator, in 1885, stated that the purpose of the Institutes was to

...discuss the best methods of farming; to awaken a greater interest in the systematic study of agriculture; and to elevate the general standing of the farming community.(2)

This, and other broad interpretations of the Institutes, did not appear to disturb those at the College; presumably because they felt that since these were institutes for farmers, the farmers should be able to discuss matters which they believed to be important. In addition, as will be seen, many of the original administrators of the Institute shared many of the views expressed at these meetings.

The Farmers' Institute, then, held their first meetings in 1885 and, in fact, twelve ridings held meetings in that year.(3) Over the next few years, they grew considerably. The next year, for example, twenty-eight Institute meetings were held, and they could claim a membership of 2395. By 1889, there were some sixty

(1) The aforementioned report folders had printed on them all the rules of the Institutes. There was no mention of barring political discussions. Archives of Ontario, Department of Agriculture, Farmers' Institute Branch, RG 16-85.

(2) Hamilton Spectator, January 21, 1885, p. 3.

(3) "Report of the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm, 1886", p. 20.

Institutes, with a membership of at least 4830 (see Appendix 1). By 1896, the Farmers' Institutes had a membership of 15,452.(1) What is even more important, however, was that the meetings drew many non-members as well. For example, in 1896, with a membership under 16,000, over 125,177 people attended the meetings.(2) This fact should be stressed, as it shows that the Institutes touched the lives of many farmers. This appears to have been the case for the early years as well. Institutes with much fewer than 100 members could sometimes have over 150 people show up at the meetings.(3) The Institutes were becoming quite popular.

Many reasons accounting for the success of the Institutes can be found not in what they were, but what they were not. First, they were not a secret society. The Grange was, and this bothered many farmers. Furthermore, because of a Papal Bull in 1739, prohibiting membership in secret orders, many Roman Catholics did not join the Patrons of Husbandry.(4) Second, the Institutes were not exclusive. Membership was open to all, male and female alike. One did not have to be a farmer to join an

(1) "Report of the Superintendent of Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario, 1896-7", Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1897, Vol. XXIX, Part VI, p. vii.

(2) Ibid., p. vii.

(3) See, for example, Hamilton Spectator, January 21, 1885, p. 3, or January 18, 1887, p. 5. See also Lindsay, The Canadian Post, January 20, 1888, p. 3.

(4) Nordin, p. 23.

Institute, but one had to be one in order to join the Grange.(1) Third, the Farmers' Institutes did not engage in commercial ventures. The Grange did, and when a good number of these ventures failed, many left the organization.(2) The Institutes were educational bodies, discussion groups. They attempted to avoid many of the more controversial elements of the Patrons of Husbandry. Even so, they were not without their critics.

One of the strongest criticisms leveled against the Farmers' Institutes was that they were controlled, however remotely, by the provincial government. The Farmer's Advocate warned Institute members of this fact on numerous occasions, cautioning them to take the speeches of visiting politicians with a grain of salt.(3) However, as mentioned above, the provincial government, during the first few years of the Institutes, did not seem to interfere to any great extent with the running of the Institutes. Even so, while not everyone became a member of the Institute, many were interested enough to attend meetings.

Though they differed with the Grange on the points mentioned above, and a few others as well, it can also be said that the Farmers' Institutes incorporated many features of the Patrons of Husbandry into their own activities. First, one of the functions

(1) Ibid., p. 110. Also, see regulations on Institute report folders, A.O., Department of Agriculture, Farmers' Institute Branch, RG 16-85.

(2) Wood, pp. 75-83. ,

(3) See, for example, the Farmer's Advocate, October, 1887, Vol. XXII, Number 262, p. 291, or March, 1888, Vol. XXIII, Number 267, p. 77.

of the Grange was to promote education. Consequently, when there was enough money, it was not unusual for members of the central bodies to go out to the various subordinate chapters to give educational talks to local farmers.(1) This may well have been where the idea of the structure of the Farmers' Institutes came from, as it provided a good model on which to create an educational body designed to reach a great number of people.

Secondly, while the Farmers' Institutes did not engage in commercial activity of their own, they nonetheless supported the co-operative efforts of both the Grange and the Patrons of Industry, another agrarian and politically active secret order established in Ontario in 1889.(2) For example, at a Central Farmers' Institute meeting in 1892, a motion was passed supporting the establishment in Brantford of an "...anti-monopoly binder twine and agricultural implement manufactory owned and controlled almost exclusively by farmers for farmers."(3) This joint-stock company was run under the auspices of the Patrons of Industry. The Farmers' Institutes harboured the same

(1) Nordin, p. 90.

(2) The Patrons of Industry in Ontario, much like the Grange and Farmers' Institutes, have not been over-researched, to say the least. See Hann; S.E.D. Shortt, "Social Change and Political Crisis in Rural Ontario: The Patrons of Industry, 1889-1896", in Donald Swainson, ed., Oliver Mowat's Ontario, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1972); and John David Smart, "The Patrons of Industry in Ontario", M.A. Thesis, Carleton University, 1969.

(3) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario, 1892", Ontario Sessional Papers, Vol. XXV, Part IX, Number 84, p. 43.

anti-combine, anti-monopoly feelings as were held by both secret orders, and often urged members to buy from these farmer led co-operatives.(1) Members of the Institutes also believed that 'middlemen' were unnecessary, a feeling which was shared by both secret groups.(2) Though they did not set up these kinds of companies, the members of the Institutes had no qualms about supporting ones already established.

The most striking similarity of the Grange, Patrons of Industry, and the Farmers' Institutes, however, can be found in the social functions of the groups. As previously mentioned, picnics played not a small role in the Grange, and their meetings were often accompanied by music and singing as well.(3) The same can be said of the Patrons of Industry who, as did the Grange, actually published song books for use at the meetings. The Institutes, as well, paid attention to social activities. Thomas Shaw, Secretary of the Central Institute in 1889, suggested that 'mammoth' picnics be held in the early summer for members and non-members alike.(4) The Wentworth Farmers' Institute did not

(1) London Free Press, January 4, 1889, p. 3.

(2) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario, 1892, Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXV, Part IX, Number 84, p. 42.

(3) Nordin, p. 121.

(4) Report of the Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Permanent Central Farmers' Institute of Ontario, (Toronto, 1889), p. 11.

wait for Shaw's suggestion, and started holding picnics in 1888.(1) Other Institutes, as well, began holding picnics around this time. A well attended picnic, put on by the East Middlesex Farmers' Institute featured music, singing, and speeches by many farmers and politicians.(2) In 1892, a huge picnic was planned for Grimbsy, and the Central Institute had even taken the trouble to arrange special railway fares so that farmers from distant communities could attend. Unfortunately, the picnic was a failure due to poor weather.(3) These picnics brought the farmers together, and also took them away, if even for only one day, from the drudgery of the farm; and their importance should not be overlooked.

Singing and music played a part in the actual Institute meetings as well. Many meetings, such as the one held in Woodville on January 10, 1889, featured speeches "...interspersed with songs and music."(4) The evening meeting of the West Victoria Institute on January 16, 1888, "...was opened by the orchestra (sic)."(5) Singers were sometimes brought into the

(1) Farmers' Institutes Report, Wentworth, 1888. A. O., Department of Agriculture, Farmers' Institute Branch, RG 16-85.

(2) Farmer's Advocate, July, 1889, Vol. XXIV, Number 238, pp. 209-210.

(3) "Annual Report, 1892", p. 12.

(4) Farmers Institute Report, West Victoria, 1889. See also reports from East Lambton, 1886, and Peterborough West, 1888. A.O., Department of Agriculture, Farmers' Institute Branch, RG 16-85.

(5) Ibid., West Victoria, 1888.

meetings, but more often than not, it was the farmer and his family who did the singing.(1) One can only speculate as to what kinds of songs were sung. However, if they were anything like the ones sung at the Patrons of Industry meetings, they were songs which called for humanity to unite, and for the improvement of society.(2) Shortly before the Institutes had begun, a writer had noted that "...nine-tenths of the farming community are literally starving, for a lack of recreation."(3) The music, if nothing else, filled a cultural void for the farmers and, as will be seen, the cultural life of the farmer, and their life-styles in general, was to be the subject of considerable discussion at Farmers' Institute meetings.

The similarities in both structures and aims between the Grange and the Farmers' Institutes can be explained in part by noting that many Institute members either were or had been members of the Patrons of Husbandry. When Charles Drury, the first Minister of Agriculture in Ontario, spoke at the Central Institute in 1889, he prefaced his speech with the following statement:

I see around me old friends who were associated with me in the Dominion Grange 12 or 13 years ago, and I must congratulate you

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- (1) See, for example, Peterborough Examiner, March 29, 1888, p. 4.
- (2) Archives of Ontario, Patrons of Industry Records, MU 7185, 'Patrons of Industry Song Book.'
- (3) Edward Amey, Farm Life as it Should be, (Toronto: Ellis and Moore, 1885), p. 32.

gentlemen on the composition of this body.(1)

From this, it can be seen that the leadership of the Farmers' Institutes had some links with the Grange. Since membership lists for the Farmers' Institutes were either destroyed or never existed, it is difficult to make the same claim for rank and file membership. There are sporadic references to farmers being members of both groups, but no concrete connection, it appears, can be made.(2) Still, it is reasonable to hypothesize that some Institute members had been members of the Grange at some point in time; and it is even more reasonable to assume that most farmers had knowledge of the Grange and its activities.

Linking the Farmers to the Patrons of Industry is somewhat more problematic, since even fewer concrete connections can be made between the two groups. However, as will be seen, both the Institutes and the Patrons of Industry addressed certain issues, and their responses to these issues were quite similar. From this, one can speculate that some farmers were members of both groups or, at the very least, that they were aware of each other's activities.

The topics discussed at Institute meetings were quite diverse, and many of the essays and speeches given dealt with technical points regarding agriculture. Draining, seeding, the

(1) Report of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Permanent Central Farmers' Institute of Ontario, (Toronto, 1889), p. 21.

(2) See newspaper articles mentioning a Mr. H. Glendenning in Lindsay, the Canadian Post, March 23, 1888, and the Farmer's Advocate, May, 1891, Vol. XXVI, Number 305, p. 186.

use and abuse of manures, pests, machinery, rotation of crops, soil types, are but a few examples of discussion topics.(1) Many of the queries dropped into the question boxes at the meetings were concerned with technical aspects of farming, and the visiting professors gave full responses to these inquiries.(2) While one can not make a direct link between the Institutes and improved crop yields, due to the many other factors which account for the success or failure of a crop, one could argue that the professors must have provided some useful information to the farmers who, if nothing else, became more aware of new developments resulting from experimental work conducted at the Agricultural College.

While the subjects discussed at these meetings did tend to be of a practical nature, other less tangible topics became more frequently introduced as the Institutes matured and grew. And it is at this point that the structure and activities of the Institutes should conclude, and a new section, tracing the development of some aspects of the farmers' thought, should begin.

(1) Farmers' Institute Reports. A.O. Department of Agriculture, Farmers' Institute Branch, RG 16-85.

(2) See, for example, Lindsay, the Canadian Post, January 20, 1888, p. 2.

CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CRITIQUE OF SOCIETY WITHIN THE INSTITUTES
AND THE IMPOSITION OF NEW RULES BY THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

The great robbers of industry are not behind the bars at Kingston, but you will find them all behind an Act of Parliament. There you will find all our professional gentlemen, all our privileged classes, all our combines, all legally authorized to rob and safely protected behind an Act of Parliament.

Henry Brown, from a paper read at the Central Farmers' Institute, 1891

Politics, n. A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage.

Ambrose Bierce

Regarding the first Institute meetings, founder James Mills noted that ~~the~~ farmers from many localities "...read and discussed papers with great freedom, and entered so heartily into the work that the meetings everywhere were both interesting and profitable." (1) Perhaps, to the government at least, the farmers were too free. The farmers soon began using the Institutes as a platform to articulate their discontent on many subjects.

(1) "Report of the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm, Guelph, for the Year Commencing 1st January and ending 31st December, 1885", Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1886, Vol. XVIII, Number 13, p. 24.

That the farmers should find many problems with their society is hardly surprising. Labour leaders, Church leaders, intellectuals, temperance groups, as well as non-Institute agrarian organizations were by this time pointing to many societal problems, and were prescribing various solutions to these troubles. What is somewhat surprising, however, is the fact that the Institutes, a government-sponsored body, should have emerged as such a vocal critic of existing conditions, not least of which was the condition of government. During the first decade of the Institutes, this was the case; and it was only after the Mowat government imposed a whole set of new rules and regulations upon the Institutes, that this explicit critique abated. What follows is an attempt to trace the development of this critique, and to account for the imposition of stringent rules upon the Institute. While it is true that a good deal of their societal criticisms mirrored those of the Patrons of Industry, it is equally true that a substantial amount of their material came from the Institute members themselves, and that it was quite an innovative and penetrating criticism at times.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the growth of cities and urban dominance aided in fostering an increasing lack of respect for the farmers. They were bumpkins, uneducated and uncultured. This, at any rate, was the impression the farmers were receiving from the towns and cities, and it proved to be a sore spot for them. This becomes quite clear when one notes that from almost the beginning, many Institute meetings featured

discussions on the dignity of farming.

The Institutes soon became a place where farmers could attempt to elevate their status and improve their feelings of self-worth. Speeches entitled 'The Dignity of Canadian Farmers', and other such titles became common.(1) Newspapers began to note that "It is a pride in England and Germany for a man to say he is a farmer", and that the same should be true for the ones in Ontario.(2) Manuals for farmers stated: "If we estimate dignity by immediate usefulness, Agriculture is, undoubtedly, the first and noblest science,"(3) and the same books attempted to assist the farmer in raising his respectability.(4) More importantly, farmers began attempting to eliminate the impressions held by many urban residents.

Charles Drury, Ontario's first Minister of Agriculture and a farmer himself, tried to explain to the farmers why they were not looked upon favourably by people in the cities, and he put a large part of the blame upon the farmers. At an Institute meeting in Kingston, Drury granted that the farmers were not respected, but the reason for this was that they "...had no

(1) Farmers' Institutes Reports, Brantford, 1886. A.O., RG 16-85.

(2) London Free Press, January 2, 1884, p. 4.

(3) J.L. Nichols, The Farmers' Manual and Complete Accountant, (Toronto: J.L. Nichols Co., 1895), p. 5.

(4) In Ibid., one finds 21 pages devoted to penmanship. Presumably, Nichols believed that better handwriting would contribute in making the farmers appear to be more cultured.

respect for themselves."(1) As a result, the idea was implanted that a man "...cannot work on a farm and be a gentleman."(2) The farmer, therefore, should improve his speech, and dress more appropriately when off the farm in order to show urban people that he deserved respect:

And then they should demand their rights, because no man had reason to be prouder than the man who tilled the soil.(3)

Because of the rapid social transformation taking place in Ontario, the farmers had lost much of their status, and this awakened strong feelings in many of them.

As the introduction pointed out, historian Russell Hann has argued that late nineteenth century Ontario witnessed the development of what he has termed the 'agrarian myth'. That is to say, that farmers began to put forward the notion that there was something special, even spiritual, in farming.(4) The myth, Hann claims, resulted from the farmers feeling somewhat alienated from the rapidly industrializing society that Ontario was becoming in the late nineteenth century. The myth reassured them of their place in society and, once they felt they knew their role, they were able to formulate a critique of their

(1) Farmers' Institute Reports, Frontenac, 1888. A.O., RG 16-85.

(2) Kingston Daily Whig, June 16, 1888, p. 8.

(3) Farmers Institute Reports, Frontenac, 1888. A.O. RG 16-85.

(4) Russell Hann, Farmers Confront Industrialism: Some Historical Perspectives on Ontario Agrarian Movements, (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1975), pp. 7-9.

(5) Ibid., pp. 7-9.

society.(5) Hann came to this conclusion after examining the Grange and the Patrons of Industry, and there is little doubt that the myth was an important element in their thought and action. After all, one of the fundamental understandings of the members of the Patrons of Industry, for example, was that

...the Farmer is the chief industrial factor of the world, producing, as he does, under Divine Providence, the two great essentials of life--food and raiment--for which is put forth the one great effort of mankind...(1)

However, the agrarian myth also found an important position in the Farmers' Institute.

One only has to listen to the farmers in the Institutes to get an idea as to how strongly the myth pervaded the meetings. V.S. Fuller, President of the Central Institute in 1889, stated that "...it is beyond a question of doubt, farmers are, especially in a new country like this, the very back bone of it..."(2) G.F. Copeland, a farmer from Hespeler, claimed that the farmer was the most important producer:

...it is his business to take the raw material, which nature commits to his care and by utilizing the forces which she places at his command, he is to involve therefrom the basis of the supply of food and clothing for humanity.(3)

(1) Principles and Rules of the Patrons of Industry: Industrial Co-Operation, (n.p., n.d.), A.O., Patrons of Industry Papers, 1891-1894, MU 7185.

(2) "Report of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Permanent Central Farmers' Institute, 1889", (Toronto, 1889), p. 6.

(3) Ibid., p. 18.

Henry Brown, another farmer, spoke in the same tone:

All wealth is the product of labour; everything that is of any use to man is taken from the earth and is the product of his labours.(1)

Mrs. J.D. Smith, of Whitby, sounded very much like a Patron when she claimed that

In our way of thinking agriculture is one of the noblest arts of civilization and it certainly supercedes all others in one particular--that of being primary in supplying us with the necessaries of life.(2)

Smith's comments, as well, demonstrates that some women were quite active in the Institutes. Professor Robertson from the College noted that since "Plants were a store house of sun strength for the science of man...", the farmer indeed played a major role in society.(3) In fact, it occurred to many farmers that they should assume some, if not all, of the leadership of society. Because of their closeness to the forces of life, and because of their consequent importance, some farmers believed that they had the best perspective on the forward movement of humanity, and would therefore be best equipped to lead it. Thomas Shaw, for one, felt this way:

Give him (the farmer) the right of way and remove all obstacles so that just on time he may bring this express train of progress to

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- (1) "Annual Report of the Central Farmers' Institute for the Province of Ontario, 1891", (Toronto, 1891), p. 39.
- (2) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario, 1892", Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1893, Vol. XXV, Part IX, Number 84, p. 103.
- (3) Peterborough Examiner, March 26, 1889, p. 4.

the desired station.(1)

It was with thoughts such as these in mind that the farmers began forming and developing a critique of society, and their plans for a better one.

It would be erroneous, however, to suggest that the farmers formulated a neat, concise plan for social improvement. It was not always consistent, and suffered at times from ambiguity. A good example of this was the farmers' opinion of labour. At times, the farmers could be unreceptive to organized labour. For example, an Institute meeting in London was visited by three members of the Knights of Labor. They had come to show the similarities between their goals and those of the farmers, and to suggest united action. Many Institute members disagreed. They argued that if the Knights had their way, working hours would be cut, more workers would have to be hired and, consequently, farm implement prices would rise, as would other consumer goods. Most of the farmers at the meeting "...did not see in what particular the interests of the agricultural community were identical with the Knights of Labor."(2) Clearly, the farmers at this meeting wished to avoid linking themselves with organized labour.

However, at other times, it would appear that the farmers were learning from the experiences of labour groups. Henry Brown, speaking at the Central Institute, insisted that farmers

(1) "Report of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Permanent Central Farmers' Institute of Ontario" (Toronto, 1889), p. 11.

(2) London Free Press, January 20, 1886, p. 8.

had to realize how powerful they were:

As this is the age of strikes, let us suppose a universal strike of all the farmers everywhere, and that they refused or neglected to grow a crop for one year--what would happen?(1)

F. Kosmack, President of the Renfrew Farmers' Institute, went as far as to actually call for the formation of a farmers' union.(2) Farm newspapers, such as the Farmer's Advocate, noted that unions were important. If these unions did not exist, "...capitalists and mighty combines would reduce the common people to a state of serfdom."(3) The farmers must also unite and plot a course of action "...as do the Knights of Labor."(4) If nothing else, the farmers could learn from organized labour.

In fact, one could claim that there was a certain amount of unity between farmers and labourers. John Campbell, speaking at a Victoria East Institute, asked how Ontario could prosper "...when its wealth producers--the working classes--are relieved by law of a large portion of their earnings?"(5) Campbell, no doubt, was referring to the protective tariff. At the Central Institute meeting for 1893, a motion was passed which read:

Be it therefore resolved that we hail with pleasure the action by the producers of all prosperity, the farmers and the working

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- (1) "Annual Report of the Central Farmers' Institute for the Province of Ontario, 1891", (Toronto, 1891), p. 39.
- (2) Toronto Globe, April 8, 1887, p. 5.
- (3) Farmer's Advocate, May, 1891, Vol. XXVI, Number 305, p. 169.
- (4) Ibid., p. 169.
- (5) Lindsay, The Canadian Post, January 20, 1888, p. 7

classes, in placing candidates from their own ranks (in federal and provincial elections).(1)

From this, it would seem that the farmers and workers were, at times, on friendly terms.

In fact, the argument can be made that in many respects farmers were very much like the workers. As with labourers, the farmers performed manual tasks, and while they had no owner per se who bought their labour, it was equally true that a certain amount of exploitation occurred in terms of market forces. In other words, the farmer was not always free to produce what he wanted to produce, and his means of production had to be such that he could successfully compete with others. This being said, there remained differences between farmers and workers; such as the fact that most farmers owned their businesses, and at times hired labourers to perform various tasks. In any event, Institute members did, on occasion, support the aspirations and activities of the workers.

The relationship between farmers and labourers is indeed a perplexing one, but one which has been dismissed by some historians as antithetical and therefore unworkable; the argument being that since one group (labour) favoured high tariffs, and the other group (farmers) called for the removal of tariffs, an

(1) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario, 1893", (Toronto, 1893), p. 6.

attempt to join the two would inevitably end in failure.(1) However, recent scholarship has argued that such attempts to unite farmers and labourers was much more feasible, given the ideological position of the groups involved.(2) Working against such a union were external realities; the tariff issue being one of many. What is important to keep in mind is that these conditions were imposed upon the two groups given the existing political and economic structure, and were therefore not necessarily 'natural' ones. In other words, the tariff was a reflection of the given economic and political structure. This did not mean, however, that it was a necessarily natural feature. As will be argued, many members of the Institutes, along with members from other agrarian groups, envisioned a society free from conditions which included the need for divisive economic policies, and therefore their attempts to unite with labour was not as naive or simple-minded as some have argued.

This being said, it should be noted that the farmers were, for the most part, against tariffs. In fact the Institutes were involved in one of the major debates of the 1880s and 90s, that

(1) This point comes through quite clearly in Richard Van Loon, "The Political Thought of the United Farmers of Ontario", M.A. Thesis, Carleton University, 1965, p. 29, and S.E.D. Shortt, "Social Change and Political Crisis in Ontario: The Patrons of Industry, 1889-1896", in Donald Swainson, ed., Oliver Mowat's Ontario, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1972), p. 229.

(2) For example, see Ramsay Cook, "Tillers and Toilers: The Rise and Fall of Populism in Canada in the 1890s", Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers, 1984, esp. pp. 10-20.

of Commercial Union. In 1887, Thomas Shaw and V.E. Fuller, two proponents of Commercial Union and executive members of the Central Institute, sent out a circular letter to each local Institute, asking them to pass some sort of resolution on the question of Commercial Union or reciprocity vs. protection. In the end, 49 local Institutes passed such resolutions, 46 favouring either reciprocity or Commercial Union, and 3 in favour of protection.(1) The federal Conservatives, however, won the 1891 election and consequently the farmers and other supporters of Commercial Union were unsuccessful in their bid to have their policy enacted. However, their activity was not without significance because it points to the political awareness and action in the local Institutes, and to the role of certain leaders in the central body, which will be examined below.(2)

On the local level as well, Institutes sometimes took their own initiatives. At a South Leeds Institute meeting, for example, a resolution was drawn up in 1886 to be sent to A.M. Ross, the Commissioner of Agriculture for Ontario. ~~The members~~ of the Institute had learned of future plans to establish oleomargarine manufactories in Toronto and Montreal, and the

(1) Ian Hodson, "Commercial Union, Unrestricted Reciprocity and the Background to the Election of 1891", M.A. Thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1952, p. 90. These figures are from Hodson's own survey. For individual cases, see, for example, Farmers' Institute Reports Ontario South, 1887, or Simcoe South, 1887, A.O. RG 16-85.

(2) The Institutes were also perceived as significant by the major advocate of Commercial Union. See Goldwin Smith, Canada and the Canadian Question, (Toronto: Rose, Hunter and Company, 1891), p. 282.

resolution expressed the concern of the farmers regarding the damage this would do to the butter industry.(1) The motion on the resolution passed, and it was sent off to Ross. Again, one can see the Institutes attempting to affect the activities of government.

The Institutes also formed ideas concerning technology. On one hand, farmers welcomed the development of new farm implements. Speaking at a Central Institute meeting, Rev. W.F. Clark claimed; "There is no necessity now for farmers and their sons to be drudges on the farm, we now have labor saving machines."(2) This was true enough, but machinery did not solve all problems. As Joy Parr notes, there were still some aspects of farming which could not be done by machines, so hired help and the farmer's own manual labour still played a large part in the operation of a farm.(3) Furthermore, a Mr. Jackson, at a Peterborough meeting, "...went on to point out that undue indulgence in machinery, and useless display and style...were ruining farming."(4) The London Free Press noted that the farmers may "...have made a mistake in devoting too much of their capital to the purchase of farm implements and too little to

(1) Farmers' Institute Reports, South Leeds, 1886, A.O., RG 16-85.

(2) "Report of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Permanent Central Farmers' Institute of Ontario", (Toronto, 1889), p. 20.

(3) Joy Parr, "'Hired Men': Agricultural Wage Labour in Historical Perspective", Labour, Spring, 1985, p. 99.

(4) Peterborough Examiner, January 15, 1886, p. 5.

manuring and improving the soil." (1) The farmers may have been enthusiastic consumers of the latest technological developments, but they were not uncritical of the potential problems associated with them.

Allied with technology was the role of science in agriculture. Experimental stations were set up by the federal government, and the provincially controlled Experimental Union was established. This body was created in 1885 by the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm, and was made up of graduates and ex-students of the O.A.C. The purpose of the Union was to encourage the former students to continue experimentation after they had returned to their farms. (2) The director of the Union, William Saunders, often spoke at various Institute meetings, encouraging farmers to become better acquainted with the results of these experimental bodies. (3) At a Middlesex Institute, a Mr. Shuttleworth argued that "...every farmer should know sufficient of agricultural chemistry to know the composition of the soil, its classification and the manures best suited for certain crops." (4) The term 'scientific farming' became common,

(1) London Free Press, January 15, 1885, p. 4.

(2) Ontario Liberal Association, Record of the Liberal Government: 26 Years of Progressive Legislation and Honest Administration, 1872-1898, (Toronto: Hunter, Rose Co., Limited, 1898), p. 131.

(3) William Saunders, Agricultural Colleges and Experimental Farm Stations: With Suggestions Relating to Experimental Agriculture in Canada, (Ottawa, 1886), pp. 108-109.

(4) London Free Press, January 15, 1885, p. 4.

and science was enabling the farmer to be more productive.(1) Even so, notions of science did not go unquestioned.

Many of the farmers' references to science bring to mind the idea of the agrarian myth. John Hackness, at a Dundas Institute, stated that farmers should learn more about all sciences since their lives were "...spent in constant intercourses (sic) with the laws of science."(2) F.W. Hodson, Superintendent of the Central Institute, claimed that one of the major accomplishments of the Farmers' Institute was that:

A higher ideal of farm life has been attained, and a halo of interest has been shown to surround it, which can only be seen when men read, observe, and study the teachings of science, as the great book of nature spread open before them constantly reveals such.(3)

Not only was farming an ideal occupation for observing the forces of nature, there was, as Hodson argued, something almost holy about the calling.

For others, this holiness was even more important, and they put forward the notion that the farmer held a unique position in the relationship between man and the spiritual world. James W. Robertson, the Dominion Dairy Commissioner, for instance, called for an 'agricultural revival' so that people could meet and

(1) See, for example, Hamilton Spectator, January 18, 1888, p. 5.

(2) Farmers' Institute Report; Dundas, 1887. A.O. Department of Agriculture, Farmers' Institute Branch, RG 16-85.

(3) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario, 1894", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXVII, Part V, 1895, p. 134.

discuss their problems:

To be a preacher in that revival, with the gift of stirring men's hearts...would indeed be a splendid opportunity for helping to call out the good and the God that is in all men. I use that phrase in a spirit of utmost reverence, because in all manifestations of the Godhead in nature, we see a constant endeavor to put and keep all things in their proper relationship with each other.(1)

This was precisely what the farmer did in terms of the proper relationship between seed and soil, and demand and production of food. Furthermore, this closeness to nature, and therefore to the workings of natural laws, also led many farmers to rethink matters of education.

Farmers agreed that one needed a formal education, but some also believed that people could learn much from the world in which they lived. At a Central Institute meeting, G.F. Copeland began with the premise that children were naturally curious:

...and it is just here that we need to be wise to foster the spirit of inquiry and impart information in such a way as to cultivate a love for nature and a desire to know the principles which govern their action. Parents who treat their children thus will find they study the habits of plants, animals, birds and insects more readily than books, and often to greater purpose.(2)

Appreciation of nature would lead to a greater feeling for,

(1) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institute of the Province of Ontario, 1892", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXV, Part IX, Number 84, 1893, p. 33.

(2) "Report of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Permanent Central Farmers' Institute of Ontario", (Toronto, 1889), p. 18.

humanity, because one would realize where everything fit in a larger scheme, and would be less willig to disrupt it.(1) There was room for self-education. A person, in fact, had two educations; "...one which he receives from others, and one more important, which he gives to himself."(2) This point was frequently made at Institute meetings and, as will be seen, formed the foundation for the Nature Study promoters who spoke at Institute meetings in the early twentieth century. As well, other farmers began discussing topics which pertained to the state of politics and economics at the time in Ontario.

S.E.D. Shortt argued that the farmers, in response to the social transformation taking place in late nineteenth century Ontario, reverted into classical economic liberalism whereby, it is presumed, they could maximize their profits.(3) However, the economic view of the farmers was not so simple and not so self-oriented.(4) First, they did not appear to favour a purely competitive marketplace, because if they did, the Institutes would have little reason to exist. Farmers exchanged information at these Institutes: "In this way the whole agricultural

(1) There are, for example, numerous references calling for the ending of cruelty to animals ranging from horses to kittens. See, Nichols, p. 172, and the Farmer's Advocate, April, 1891, Vol. XXVI, Number 304, p. 150.

(2) Nichols, p. 2.

(3) Shortt, p. 220.

(4) Hann, in Farmers Confront..., has argued that the members of the Patrons of Industry were not driven by pure profit motives.

information of a locality is made common, and that can be learned in half an hour which would cost days or weeks to learn by personal experiment." (1) Some farmers maintained that the "...process of selfish refinement and an exclusiveness..." were things which were ruining their society. (2) Farm instruction books reminded the farmers that "Honour and profit do not always lie in the same sack." (3) J. Sissons, an Institute member, noted that many farmers' sons were moving to cities in order to make more money. He believed the sons had to be educated, so that they would realize that money was not everything, and that there was something honourable and special about farming. (4) The farmers, to be sure, were not socialists; they believed that all producers, including industrialists, had a right to a fair profit. (5) However, they also believed that unrestrained personal gain was something to be avoided, as one then lost touch

(1) Welland Tribune, September 14, 1885, p. 2.

(2) Farmers' Institute Report, South Leeds, 1885. A.O., Department of Agriculture, Farmers' Institute Branch, RG 16-85.

(3) Nichols, p. 5, and Amey, p. 6.

(4) "Report of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Permanent Central Farmers' Institute of Ontario", (Toronto, 1889), p. 20.

(5) Farmer's Advocate, May, 1891, Vol. XXVI, Number 305, p. 186.

with humanity.(1)

The farmers also formulated ideas on the question of centralization. Shortt contends that the farmers were decentralists, because decentralization would eliminate urban political domination.(2) However, it does not appear to have been as simple as that. The farmers did not have an aversion to central bodies; in fact, they endorsed central marketing boards.(3) One must also keep in mind that the Farmers' Institute itself had a central body, but one with a difference. As one farmer explained, the beauty of the Farmers' Institute was that it worked "...from the circumference to the centre...the central authority is a collection of the component parts...", as opposed to having the central body hold all the power, and spread it outwards.(4) The farmers favoured decentralization because it was at the community level that real results could be seen, but this does not mean they were pure decentralists. Centralization was fine, so long as the central body was a constitution of the local bodies, and free from arbitrary power arising from within

(1) Lawrence Goodwyn, in his study of the Populists in the United States, reached a similar conclusion: "Populists thought of man as being both competitive and cooperative. They tilted strongly toward the latter, but they also confronted the enduring qualities of the former." See The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. xiii.

(2) Shortt, p. 218.

(3) See, for example, the Welland Tribune, June 15, 1888, p. 2, in which the local Institute endorsed such bodies.

(4) Farmer's Advocate, March, 1888, Vol. XXIII, Number 267, p. 1.

itself.

However, Shortt has identified decentralization as being a feature of the Patrons, and this theme, albeit with the reservations mentioned above, played a role in the Farmers' Institutes. James Mills, founder of the Institutes, realized that if they were to grow and stay relevant, they must encourage local talent. This was something Mills encouraged for a reason other than mere survival. As he told a Central Institute gathering:

In some respects, the papers of local men are the best you can get. The thoughts may not be very elegantly expressed; the diction may be faulty, but they contain the experience of the men who are working under the conditions which exist in your locality...(1)

The farmers also found that the Institutes helped develop local talent, by stressing this locality participation.(2) In fact, in a confidential letter to George Wrigley, then editor of the Farmers' Sun, Institute Superintendent F.W. Hodson wrote:

The hope of the Institute system is the building of the local Institutes. The Central Farmers' Institute should certainly be done away with.(3)

Perhaps Hodson was playing to Wrigley's Patron loyalties, but the

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- (1) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institutes of Ontario, 1893", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXVI, Part VII, Number 36, 1894, p. 47.
 - (2) Farmer's Advocate, July, 1889, Vol. XXIV, Number 283, p. 209, and May, 1894, Vol. XXIX, Number 357, p. 175.
 - (3) A.O., RG 16, Department of Agriculture, Farmers' Institute Branch, Letterbooks, Vol. 1, 1893-1895, Hodson to Wrigley, November 28, 1894, pp. 591-592.

fact remains that he referred to the importance of local bodies, and this may have indicated his fear that the Institutes were becoming more centralized, and that external power might be exercised through the central body.

Unfair power, especially of the political type, was a major item of concern for the farmers in the Institutes; and they believed party politics to be at the root of this problem. In fact, at the 1893 meeting of the Central Institute, a motion was passed endorsing

...independence of political action and freedom from party thralldom...believing that our emancipation can only be brought about by placing in the councils of the nation men who are in every sense of the term representative of the masses, not the classes--the democracy, not the aristocracy.(1)

John Campbell Jr., speaking in Lindsay, stated that the farmers had been guilty of blind party loyalty in the past. Party newspapers, the influence of family and friends, and other factors had, he believed, made some farmers dupes of the parties:

Can we not recall instances of individuals from our own ranks having been so devoted to party politics as to neglect their farm, become reduced in circumstance, were then overlooked or forgotten by those who profitted by their mistaken fidelity?(2)

Another farmer, a W. Thompson, wrote to the Advocate that he had heard a rumour concerning the possibility of the Ontario

(1) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institutes of Ontario, 1893", Ontario, Sesional Papers, Vol. XXVI, Part VII, Number 36, 1894, p. 6.

(2) Lindsay, The Canadian Post, January 20, 1888, p. 7.

Government taking over the Institutes. He maintained that damage had already been done to the Institutes because of the suspicion of some that they were political tools of the provincial Liberals. The situation, he felt, would worsen if the government stepped into the actual operation of them.(1) The rumour he had heard, as will be seen, was not without foundation. In any case, it becomes clear that some farmers were not fond of what parties in late nineteenth century Ontario stood for.

Furthermore, this skepticism of political parties could also be found in the leadership of the Farmers' Institute. In his Presidential Address for 1889, V.E. Fuller stated:

I must say that I have always been opposed to receiving any aid (for the Institutes) from any government, because the government represents a party.

He then went on to say:

I wish I could convince you farmers of the desirability of uniting for your own welfare, and not to keep a set of men, be they Grit or Tory, in office for the purpose of taking out of your pockets the hard earned dollars and cents you have earned.(2)

Other prominent Institute members also spoke out against the evils of party system.(3) Newspapers warned Institute members to think critically whenever their local meetings were visited by an

(1) Farmer's Advocate, May, 1894, Vol. XXIX, Number 357, p. 175.

(2) "Report of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Permanent Central Farmers' Institute of Ontario", (Toronto, 1889), p. 7.

(3) See, for example, Peterborough Examiner, March 24, 1888, p. 4.

M.P. or M.P.P. In fact, one farmer editorial stated: "We believe it would be to the advantage of the institutes to lock the noisy politicians out." (1) Parties, they believed, were not only bad for farmers, but for everyone.

It can be seen that some of the leaders of the Central Institute were quite vocal when it came to questions of party politics. They were outspoken on many other points as well. V.S. Fuller, in addition to being anti-party, held equally strong pro-farmer views. At a Central Institute meeting in 1889, he said that "...the farmers interests have been the most neglected of any class of the whole community." What was needed was action:

...the farmers have within their hand, within their power...to dictate to any government, to any set of people, what their needs are and what they will have and what they must have. (2)

These statements, furthermore, closely resemble ones made by various members of the Patrons of Industry, who stressed the need for political action not for power itself, but to be in a position whereby they could hold the balance of power so that

(1) Farmer's Advocate, March, 1888, Vol. XXIII, Number 267, p. 77. See also May, 1894, Vol. XXIX, Number 359, p. 175.

(2) "Report of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Permanent Central Farmers' Institute of Ontario", (Toronto, 1889), pp. 6-8.

harmful legislation could be avoided.(1) It should also be noted that Fuller was not the only, nor the strongest, critic of the existing political system.

James McEwing, elected President of the Central Institute in 1893, was another harsh critic, and not one to mince words. In his Presidential Address of that year, he had numerous suggestions which would lead, he believed, to the improvement of the political system:

Commence with a clean sweep of that useless and effete body of political failures, the Senate. Abolish that swindle and fraud, the superannuation system...Discharge all unnecessary deputies, clerks and other useless parasites now fattening upon the body politic.(2)

He also had many more suggestions in this address and, in fact, many more in his next speech as President at the 1894 Central Institute meeting. Regarding economics, he claimed:

...that our fiscal policy fosters and strengthens monopolies and combines and enables them to prey upon the industrial classes of the community.(3)

He referred to tariffs, rebates, and bounties as "...legalized

- (1) The Patrons' initial political activity appeared to have been governed to a good extent by their following statement: "Neither office nor power for its own sake do we seek, but to rid the body politic of its partizan parasites." Cited in Smart, p. 45.
- (2) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institutes of Ontario, 1893", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXVI, Part VII, Number 36, 1894, p: 31.
- (3) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario, 1894", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXVII, Part V, 1895, p. 5.

robbery of the many for the advantage of the few."(1) Again, his criticisms closely resemble those of the Patrons of Industry which, by this time, was a strong electoral force in Ontario.(2) This may have played a large role in the eventual take-over of the Institutes by the Ontario government in 1895.

There is little doubt that Mowat was very concerned about the rise of the Patrons of Industry. The organization, by 1894, claimed to have 100,000 members in Ontario, and they were successful in that year in electing 17 candidates to the provincial Legislature.(3) More importantly, as Shortt points out, "...in twenty (other) constituencies an average shift of three per cent of the voters would have resulted in Patron victories."(4) Furthermore, the Patrons seemed to have attracted more votes away from the Liberals than from the Conservatives.(5) While no clear-cut connection between this fear of the Patrons and the government's action toward the Farmers' Institutes can be made, the new rules imposed upon the Institutes do allow for some informed speculation.

Under the Farmers' Institute Act of 1895, the provincial government assumed control of the Institutes, and also set up new

(1) Ibid., p. 5.

(2) The Patrons also called for the abolition of the Senate and for the general cleaning-up of politics. See Smart, pp. 13-15.

(3) Shortt, pp. 212-213.

(4) Ibid., p. 222.

(5) Ibid., pp. 56-58.

regulations. In fact, there were 59 such rules with even more sub-sections.(1) Some of these deserve to be quoted at length, because they demonstrate the shift in the Institutes, and the powers which the Mowat Government now had. For example, rule 19 stated:

No subject shall be presented at an Institute meeting or discussion allowed of a political or sectarian nature; nor shall any speaker be allowed in his lecture, essay, or speech, or in any discussion to advertise wares or schemes in which he has a direct or indirect pecuniary interest.(2)

Note the last clause in this regulation. In 1892, Nicholas Awrey, then-President of the Central Institute stated in his address that he held stock in the Brantford binder-twine manufactory which, as mentioned before, had been run under the auspices of the Patrons of Industry.(3) While it may have been the case that this clause was inserted to prevent salesmen and the like from using the Institutes as an advertisement form, it seems as likely that it was inserted to prevent the farmers from advocating farmer-led co-operatives; because if one held stock in such a company (and there were numerous companies of this nature), one could not legally speak of them at an Institute meeting.

(1) "Report of the Superintendent of Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario, 1895-6", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXVIII, Part V, 1896, pp. 135-141.

(2) Ibid., p. 137.

(3) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario, 1892", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXV, Part IX, Number 84, 1893, p. 15.

To make sure that the political discussion clause was not ignored or overlooked, regulation 7 of the rules governing delegates at the Central Institute repeated the sentiment:

Party politics in any form shall be avoided by each speaker. The chairman of each delegation and the officers of each institute are expected to see that nothing of this kind occurs. Institute speakers are expected to teach practical agriculture, nothing else.(1)

In case these warnings and regulations went unheeded, Institute members were reminded again in the 1896-7 report:

The Farmers' Institute system is non-political in the strictest sense. Persons sent as delegates and officers and directors of the Institutes, are instructed to enforce these rules to the very letter. Delegates are expected not to discuss, either directly or indirectly, political or sectarian question while engaged as delegates, either before, after, or during the meetings.(2)

The message from the provincial government was clear: The Institutes from this point onwards were to be purely technical bodies.

Furthermore, the Institutes became much more centralized--and in a form the farmers were unaccustomed to--as a result of the Act. Rule 22 stated:

The superintendent shall have the power to increase the number of regular meetings held in any district, and also to change the terms on which supplementary speakers are sent out.(3)

(1) "Report of the Superintendent...1895-6", p. 148.

(2) "Report of the Superintendent of Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario, 1896-7", Ontario, Sessional Papers Vol. XXIX, Part VI, 1897, p. vii.

(3) "Report of the Superintendent...1895-6", p. 137.

As previously noted, some farmers felt that one of the more positive features of the Institutes was that the authority stemmed from the circumference, and not arbitrarily from the centre. This, it would appear, was no longer the case.

The post-1895 Institutes would also be much more systematized and formal than in the past. Rule 23 actually stipulated the sizes of posters used in advertising upcoming local meetings.(1) The Superintendent of the Central Institute also circulated a list of suggestions to the local Institute Presidents. One such suggestion went as follows:

Do not cater too much to the popular desire to be amused. These institutes are for business first, then pleasure.(2)

The social function of the Institutes, then, was to be de-emphasized, and with it, the importance of songs, music, and picnics. Even so, the entertainment aspect, as will be seen, did not completely leave the Institutes.

Why, then, did the government step into the actual operation of the Institutes? W.C. Good, writing on the topic, noted the government claimed that political questions tended to "...aggravate political partisanship...", so as to endanger the success of the meeting.(3) In other words, it was believed that deeply held political loyalties tended to produce heated

(1) Ibid., p. 137.

(2) Ibid., p. 142.

(3) National Archives of Canada. W.C. Good Papers, MG 27 III C1, Vol. 18, Subject Files--Political Matters, 1905-1934, p. 013937.

arguments at local meetings. Good, for one, disagreed with this analysis, but the fact remains that this could have played some role in the imposition of new rules.

Another factor, according to the government, was the administration of the Institutes and the demanding work-load. In a Liberal Party publication, it was noted that the Institutes had grown to the point where the Mowat Government felt it necessary to appoint a Superintendent of Institutes, who was attached to the Department of Agriculture.(1) While it is quite likely that the Institute staff at the College were overworked, the question remains: why did the Superintendent have to be connected to the Department of Agriculture? The hiring of an extra administrator attached to the College, it seems, would have been as efficient, and the fact that this was not done casts a shadow of doubt upon the motives of the government.

Finally, one can not ignore the role of the Patrons of Industry as a political threat in influencing Mowat's decision to restrict the activities of the Institutes. While no concrete evidence can be found to support this claim, some indirect--and speculative--evidence does exist. During the 1894 provincial election campaign, Mowat gave a speech entirely devoted to the Patrons of Industry which was subsequently published in a Liberal Party publication. In order to prove that the farmer did not

(1) Ontario Liberal Association, Record of the Liberal Government: 26 Years of Progressive Legislation and Honest Administration, 1872-1898, (Toronto: Hunter, Ross Co., Ltd., 1898), p. 134.

have to support the Patrons, Mowat listed in detail the major accomplishments of his Government regarding the farmers. However, he only mentioned the Farmers' Institutes when he gave a lengthy list of government expenditures for agriculture.(1) Considering the size and popularity of the Institutes, this was quite an oversight. One must keep in mind that by 1894 the Institutes, as has been shown, were at the height of their militancy, and shared many of the Patrons' views. However, during the 1898 provincial election campaign, in the same sort of party publication, the Farmers' Institutes were praised in glowing terms for their accomplishments.(2) This, it must be remembered, was three years after the new rules were imposed. Again, the evidence is not conclusive, but it is nonetheless suggestive. What accounts for the change in reporting about the work of the Institutes? It seems that by 1898, the Institutes were considered to be 'safe' by the provincial authorities. In other words, the restrictions placed upon political discussions lessened the chances of having the Institutes becoming politically active in a way which would harm the provincial Liberals.

Even if the 1884-94 Farmers' Institutes were not subjected

(1) Sir Oliver Mowat, "The Patrons of Industry. From Speech of Sir Oliver Mowat Delivered in North Bruce, 23rd November, 1893", in Ontario Liberal Association, Record of the Mowat Government: 22 Years of Progressive Legislation and Honest Administration, 1872-1894, (Toronto: Hunter, Ross & Co., 1894), pp. 1-10.

(2) Ontario Liberal Association, Record of the Liberal Government...1872-1898, pp. 134-136.

to an amount of 'social control' on the part of the provincial government, there remains little doubt that the post-1895 Institutes were. Political topics were banned, economic topics restricted, and a greater degree of central power now existed as a result of the Act. This, however, did not mean that the Institutes became an intellectually dead body, teaching little more than practical agriculture. While agricultural theory still maintained a prominent position in the Institutes, a new stream of thought--some of it in evidence prior to the imposition of new rules--began to be expressed and articulated at the meetings. This new stream, on the surface, was neither political nor economic, but it was nevertheless provocative, insightful, and full of implications.

CHAPTER III

THE RESTRUCTURED INSTITUTES, 1896-1917

...many well-meaning people will ridicule the Nature Study movement, but this will cease as the results of the 'New Education' are shown in the production of more enlightened, contented citizens, better equipped for complete living.

W. Lochhead, O.A.C. Review, 1903

There is a pitiful lack of appreciation of country values. One of these is the beauty of nature; the love of animals another; the privacy and freedom of life another; environment essentially healthful and creative another.

John MacDougall

While the imposition of new rules and regulations upon the Farmers' Institutes may have hindered political discussion, they remained an active body, especially over the ensuing fifteen years. Practical agriculture remained the dominant subject, but less tangible topics still found their way into Institute meetings. Furthermore, the Institutes did not remain static, and the changes made to them were quite significant in themselves.

During the 1893 meeting of the Central Institute, a paper was delivered by a Miss Nellie Randall entitled 'Air Castles'. In her address, Randall pointed out that the ability to create air castles--in other words the ability to create

abstractions--was one of "God's greatest gifts to man". The farmer, according to Randall, in the course of his work, had much time for thought and reflection and therefore built many castles. For her, such construction was highly significant:

Thus rapidly do we build up air castles, and lose ourselves in the luminous space of an ideal world. What comes of it all? we ask. Well, out of these fancies and airy thoughts have come all that is best in our human effort. The reforms of the statesmen and the systems of the philosophers are at first air castles, and seem as if they would never become realities. Dreams of a better humanity, of a social reform of a near future...may some day undergo an actual development.(1)

Miss Randall's talk, to a great degree, summed up what was to be an important aspect of the post-1895 Institutes--the development of and focus upon ideas as to how society could be run so that the better elements of humanity could emerge.

Her speech is also significant because it points to the role women played in the pre-1895 Institutes. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, it was not uncommon for women to give papers on many diverse topics at Institute meetings, as they were given rights and privileges equal to that of the male membership. With the establishment of the Women's Institute in 1897, however, the rôle of women in the Farmers' Institutes was to be decreased.

No examination of the Farmers' Institutes would be complete without some mention being made of the Women's Institute. In

(1) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institutes of Ontario, 1893", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXVI, Part VII, Number 36, 1894, p. 110.

1897, at a Stoney Creek meeting of the Farmers' Institute, Adelaide Hoodless gave a speech on the necessity of having an organization for rural women. Her talk proved to be quite popular, and later that year her ideas found expression in the Women's Institutes. (1) The Department of Agriculture administered the Women's Institutes, and its object was

...to promote that knowledge of household science which shall lead to improvement in household architecture, with special attention to home sanitation, to a better understanding of the economic and hygienic value of foods and fuels, and to a more scientific care of children with a view of raising the general standard of health of our people. (2)

Women, in other words, were to have an organizational body of their own, in which their specific role in the family unit was to be highlighted. The tasks in and around the home were to be subjected to 'scientific management', and the role of women was clearly articulated. Women were to be educated so that they could better fulfill their role in the household. (3). However, as with the Farmers' Institutes, ideas of an abstract nature were

(1) R.M. Stamp, "Adelaide Hoodless, Champion of Women's Rights", in Robert S. Patterson, John W. Chalmers, and John W. Friesen, ed., Profiles of Canadian Educators, (D.C. Heath Canada, Ltd., 1974), pp. 227-228.

(2) "Report of the Superintendent of Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario, 1896-7", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXIV, Part VI, Number 22, 1897, p. xl.

(3) For more on this notion of the sexual division of labour, see Carol Bacchi, "Race Regeneration and Social Purity: A Study of the Social Attitudes of Canada's English Speaking Suffragists", Histoire social/Social History, Vol. XI, Number 22, November, 1978, esp. pp. 465-467.

expressed in some papers delivered at Women's Institute meetings; and since meetings of both Institutes were often run in conjunction with one another, and the fact that women could remain members of the Farmers' Institutes, these ideas were not without significance, as will be seen.

Another important aspect of the post-1895 Farmers' Institutes was the introduction of speakers provided from the Department of Agriculture. With the Institutes becoming much more centralized as a result of the Institutes Act, the new structure allowed for greater control of the selection of visiting Institute speakers. Consequently, the Superintendent of the Institutes was able to announce in 1897 that speaker lists would now be provided to the local bodies. These lists included the names of the speakers, and the topics in which they were well versed. These people were deemed "...practical and successful farmers...", and local Institutes were encouraged to call upon their services.(1) These government approved speakers, to be sure, were successful farmers, and the Department argued that such speakers were necessary, given the size the Institutes had reached. It should be noted, however, that these official speakers were instructed not to discuss anything of a political or sectarian nature.(2) Arguably, this was another attempt on the part of the government to ensure that political discussions

(1) "Report of the Superintendent of Farmers' Institutes, 1896-7", p. viii.

(2) Ibid., p. vii.

were not carried out at Institute meetings. And, as will be seen, the speakers did not escape criticism from Institute members who wanted more local control of their bodies. This, to some degree, might have played a role in the establishment of Farmers' Clubs, an off-shoot of the Institutes.

Certain aspects of the pre-1895 Institutes continued after the imposition of new rules and regulations; not least of which was the social function the Institutes provided for the farmers and their families. The entertainment value of the Institutes was de-emphasized by the Department of Agriculture in the new Institutes, but accomplishing this goal was easier said than done. In late 1897, an editorial appeared in the Farmer's Advocate, which claimed that many of the visiting Institute speakers were dull and boring. Members of the Institutes needed to enjoy themselves:

People come a long way to such meetings, and some of them have little enough to lighten the burdens of life at home. Small blame to them if they look for and enjoy a good laugh at such times. (1)

The farmers could and needed to be educated, but this education did not preclude pleasure, and some believed that one learned more if the process was made more enjoyable.

For the Directors, the Institutes were not a place for pleasure, but for solid, practical education. Early on in the new Institutes Superintendent F.W. Hodson noted some problems

(1) Farmer's Advocate, December 1, 1897, Vol. XXXII, Number 443, p. 517.

emerging in the Institutes. In the 1898-9 annual report, he warned the local Institutes that 'frivolous entertainment' at meetings was something to be avoided, as this lack of seriousness was one of the main problems with the local bodies.(1) John Dryden, the Minister of Agriculture for Ontario told a group of Farmers' Institute delegates who had gathered at the Provincial Winter Fair at Guelph in 1901 that they should attempt to down-play music, singing, and 'funny stories'.(2) For some Institute executives, the entertainment value of the Institutes was something which was not necessary.

By 1901, according to the Farmer's Advocate, there had been rumours to the effect that the provincial government wanted to eliminate the evening meetings, and instead have the visiting speakers visit some of the farmers in the locality. The evening sessions, it should be noted, were the ones usually set aside for less tangible subjects and entertainment; the practical topics being taught in the morning and afternoon sessions. To abolish evening meetings, then, would be to abolish most of the social role the Institutes played. A Mr. McCulloch, a farmer from Peel, wrote a letter to the Advocate denouncing such a course of action. He argued that the evening meetings were a perfect opportunity for all to get together, and this included farmers'

(1) "Report of the Superintendent of Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario, 1898-9", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXXI, Part VI, Number 22, p. 4.

(2) "Report of the Superintendent of Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario, 1900", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXXIII, Part IV, Number 22, p. 10.

wives and children. He claimed that farmers and their families "...should not be denied the pleasure of such gatherings..."(1) To many, the social impact of these meetings was a very important feature.

Despite the warnings and instructions of the Department, Institute meetings continued to provide entertainment for the members. A Peterborough meeting in 1897 was opened by an orchestra, and featured singing and recitations throughout.(2) A meeting in Lakefield featured similar entertainment in 1905.(3) Evening meetings in Perth, as well, contained many songs and literary entertainments.(4) Furthermore, it should be noted that evening meetings were usually the ones best attended, and this would support the notion that the Institutes performed a very important social function.

Why was this entertainment and enjoyment aspect of the Institutes so important? John MacDougall, who wrote about rural life in Canada in the early twentieth century, observed that entertainment was a source of pleasure and, according to MacDougall, during periods of pleasure

...the instinctive aversion of one individual

(1) Farmer's Advocate, March 15, 1901, Vol. XXXVI, Number 552, p. 190.

(2) Peterborough Examiner, December 21, 1897, p. 2.

(3) Ibid., December 8, 1905, p. 3.

(4) Perth Courier, December 21, 1900, p. 10, December 17, 1909, p. 5, and December 9, 1910, p. 7. Many such references can be found. These are shown in order to demonstrate that the entertainment offered at meetings was something that stayed with the Institutes for quite a long period of time.

to another is most fully overcome. It is when individuals come together with pleasure that they merge so as to become a society, a community.(1)

For the farmer, isolated as he was, these moments of such pleasurable activity were not as frequent for those who lived in cities and towns, and so such moments were all the more important. Barriers were broken down, and the sense of community was strengthened by these social gatherings.

This is not to suggest that there was something conspiratorial or nefarious on the part of the government and their efforts to restrain such activity. Indeed, it could well have been that they believed they were in fact aiding the farmers by downplaying the social features of Institute meetings. However, if this was the case, then the argument can be made that Institute officials, situated as they were in Guelph and Toronto, and exposed to a wide variety of entertainment and associational life, misunderstood the need of the farmers to get together for purely social reasons. The Institutes, especially during periods where other agrarian organizations floundered or disappeared, provided an ideal vehicle for such activity, and the disregard they demonstrated toward warnings from the officials, points to the importance of the social role played by the Institutes.

MacDougall's references to community, as well, should not be overlooked, as a strong tendency toward decentralization and

(1) John MacDougall, Rural Life in Canada: Its Trend and Tasks, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973--first published, 1913), p. 137.

local control continued to be a force in the Institutes even after 1895. Superintendent Hodson recognized this feature in 1898:

Let it constantly be borne in mind that one of the chief aims of the Institutes is the development of local talent, the bringing of the rank and file into close touch with the most successful local men and their methods.(1)

Hodson, no doubt, had touched upon what was perceived to be one of the more positive features of the Institutes; the emphasis upon locality. However, the fact that speakers were now being sent out to give papers at distant Institute meetings on a much more formal basis than before, calls into question the sincerity of Hodson's remarks; at least it is doubtful that the Department was encouraging this sort of decentralization. If anything, speaker lists worked counter to local control. Again, this is not to suggest that this was some sort of malevolent act on the part of the Department. It may have represented yet another misunderstanding of the farmers by the Institute officials. The sending out of official speakers to other localities may have even seemed to Institute executives a benevolent gesture, assuring that each Institute had experts sent out to them. Indeed, when Institute officials began to recognize the strength of this decentralist trait in the farmers, they sanctioned the formation of Farmers' Clubs, which will be examined below.

The system of sending out government approved speakers, for

(1) "Report of the Superintendent of Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario, 1897-8", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXX, Part VI, Number 22, p. x.

the most part, was initially well received. However, fairly early on, criticisms of the system began to emerge. For example, in 1898, a Calvin B. Brown wrote to the Advocate complaining that the speakers sent to the Institute meeting in his county (Durham) were from distant regions, and therefore did their farming under different conditions and circumstances. While some of their advice was useful, much of it was not. As well, he noted that these speakers spoke for too long, so as to limit discussion time in which local problems could be addressed. The solution for Brown was to use local men for these speeches.(1) Years later, Clark Hamilton, a farmer from Dundas, echoed Brown's sentiments. While the speakers sent out might be experts and highly successful farmers,

...in every community there are men who feel that they made as good, and their neighbors regard them in the same light, and conclude that they can gain valuable lessons from their successful neighbor's methods, in which they have much greater faith than in those of a stranger.(2)

Furthermore, this decentralist tendency was not particular to the Farmers' Institutes. The Patrons of Industry stressed the need for local control and the Farmers' Association, a non-political agrarian pressure group formed in 1902 in Ontario, also placed

(1) Farmer's Advocate, February 15, 1898, Vol. XXXIII, Number 448, p. 79.

(2) Ibid., December 24, 1898, Vol. XLIV, Number 848, p. 1988.

great value upon locality.(1) Apparently, such criticisms expressed by Institute members did not go unnoticed, and the Department of Agriculture responded by encouraging the formation of Farmers' Clubs as an extension of Institute work.

Before the Clubs are examined, however, some mention should be made of the initiatives taken by some local Institutes prior to their formation, as it demonstrates not only the other activities of the Institutes, but their assertions of independence as well. For example, the North Bruce Farmers' Institute, having realized a surplus after meeting expenses, started a library. It was not large, containing only 57 books, but the members felt that this was a good foundation to build upon. The Advocate editorialized that this was an act "...of a self-helpful character, based on the diffusion of useful knowledge--the safest of foundations."(2) As will be seen, this 'self-helpful' theme was the subject of considerable discussion at Institute meetings.

Another Institute, the West Peterborough group, found itself acting in an advisory capacity in late 1901. In a meeting held by the local town councils and the Peterborough Board of Trade, the Institute was called upon to represent the interests of the

(1) See S.E.D. Shortt, "Social Change and Political Crisis in Rural Ontario: The Patrons of Industry, 1889-1896", in Donald Swainson, ed., Oliver Mowat's Ontario, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1972), p. 218, and L.A. Wood, A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1924), p. 149.

(2) Farmer's Advocate, October 15, 1901, Vol. XXXV, Number 536, p. 674.

farmers. The meeting was called in order to discuss the establishment of a beet sugar factory in Peterborough, and representatives from the Institute were asked how this would affect the farming community, and whether or not such a venture would be a success.(1) As can be seen, this Institute was performing functions other than that of an educational body, and in fact was involved to some extent with municipal politics. While the councils and Board of Trade may not have taken heed of the opinions expressed by the representatives, the fact remains that the Institute was perceived by some as being important enough to be called upon as an advisory group.

By 1905, it had become apparent to some officials in the Department of Agriculture that certain problems relating to the Institutes were emerging. George A. Putnam, Superintendent of the Institutes, observed that while the Institutes continued to do good work, one of the main problems with them was that they only met once or twice yearly. He also noted that a few local Institutes had set up clubs which met on a more regular basis. He suggested that these clubs be allowed or even encouraged to continue so that discussions on "...agricultural topics of most importance in the respective districts..." could take place.(2) Consequently, the Farmers' Clubs were created as an extension of the local Institutes.

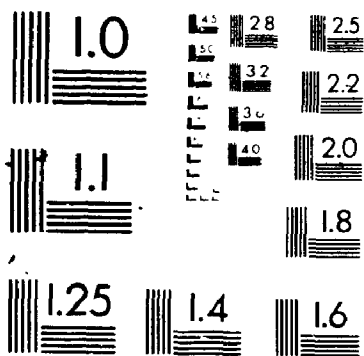
(1) Peterborough Examiner, December 4, 1901, p. 5.

(2) "Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario 1905", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXXVIII, Part IV, Number 25, 1906, p. 6.

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Clubs based upon local Institutes was not a particularly new idea to some farmers. In late 1895, for example, the Advocate editorialized:

If you believe in the Farmers' Institute idea, why not agitate the opening of a small farmers' club having for its members, say, twenty of your immediate neighbours.(1)

Judging from Putnam's remarks, it would appear that some local Institutes had followed this advice. With the creation of Farmers' Clubs in 1905, a greater amount of systematization was to be imposed upon such bodies.

As with the Institutes in 1895, a set of rules and regulations were drawn up for the Clubs. Each Club was to have a President, Vice President, Secretary/Treasurer, and an Executive Committee of four or more. Again, these Clubs were to be strictly non-political. As rule number seven stipulated, "No subject shall be presented at a Club meeting, or discussion allowed, of a political or sectarian nature." (2) Other than that, the Clubs were free to discuss any topic they deemed important, and their popularity grew quite rapidly over a relatively short period of time. In fact, by 1910, there were over 200 local Farmers' Clubs.(3)

(1) Farmer's Advocate, December 2, 1895, Vol. XXX, Number 395, p. 474.

(2) "Report of the Farmers' Institutes...1905", p. 7.

(3)

"Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario 1910", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XLIII, Part IX, Number 40, 1911, p. 5.

The formation of local Clubs, in fact, was encouraged by the Superintendent of the Institutes. According to Putnam, deep consideration could be given to local problems at such meetings; and the problems could be discussed more frequently since the Clubs were not restricted to two meetings per year.(1) Furthermore, a practical benefit resulted from the Clubs:

Young men, realizing their inability to speak are spurred on to make an effort to learn and their wits are sharpened by being brought into contact with men more experienced than themselves.(2)

While Putnam may have been sincere in his expression of the benefits to be derived from Farmers' Clubs, there is another possible reason why they were encouraged. W.B. Hillman has argued that the Clubs may have been introduced as an antidote to renewed agrarian agitation in Ontario at the time, including the amalgamation of the Farmers' Association and the Dominion Grange in 1907.(3) In any event, the early Clubs were met with

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- (1) "Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario 1907", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XL, Part VI, Number 22, 1908, p. 6.
- (2) "Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario 1908", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XLI, Part VII, Number 22, 1909, p. 8.
- (3) W.B. Hillman, "J.J. Morrison: A Farmer Politician in an era of Social Change", M.A. Thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1974, p. 29. Hillman, however, claims without documentation that the Clubs were formed in 1908 by the Whitney Government, while the evidence put forward in this thesis suggests they were formed at least two years prior to his date. Still, Hillman's argument regarding renewed agrarian activity is not without merit, for even in 1905, there was increasing agitation on the part of the farmers, and this may have caused some concern for the government. See Wood, pp. 149-156.

enthusiasm by many Institute members.

One of the more positive benefits to be derived from the Clubs to the farmers was their stress on community problems and agricultural ideas particular to the region in question. This was an element which seemed to be lacking in the institutes themselves as they became larger and more systematized.(1) A Brant Farmers' Club also realized the potential of these bodies in terms of co-operation. As one Brant farmer wrote; "The co-operative buying of seed is only one of the many advantages that will result from organization in a farming community."(2) The farmers in this Club had purchased corn and clover seed on a co-operative basis, and apparently it had worked out quite well. In an editorial, the Advocate claimed that another benefit of the Clubs was that they could be called upon to discuss local political problems which affected the farmers.(3) This, of course, was contrary to the rules regarding the Clubs, but it was encouraged by the Advocate, as well as others.

In fact, Farm and Dairy, another agricultural journal, called on the farmers to act independent of government:

...let the Farmers' Clubs of Ontario forthwith cut off from the meagre Government grant they now receive and for which they sell their freedom of speech.(4)

(1) Farmer's Advocate, January 21, 1909, Vol. XLIV, Number 852, pp. 77-78.

(2) Ibid., February 4, 1909, Vol. XLIV, Number 854, p. 159.

(3) Ibid., May 13, 1909, Vol. XLIV, Number 868, pp. 799-800.

(4) Farm and Dairy, December 22, 1910, p. 10.

For some, as the above suggests, the restrictions imposed by the Department were such that the Clubs could not function as they should. However, some evidence exists which suggests that many Clubs ignored this ban on political topics,(1) and this evidence is reinforced by the fact that as late as 1912, the farmers were being warned by the Department to refrain from such discussions.(2) Despite the controversy associated with the issue of political discussions, the Clubs continued to be successful.

Even years after their formation, farmers were able to speak favourably about Institute Clubs. F.C. Hart, a farmer from Waterloo County, observed that the local Club

...gives the community an organization, which meets regularly, through which any ideas that are brought forward can be pushed to fruition...The moral effect of being able to accomplish things for ourselves has a result on the farmers of the county, and I think will work out to be very important results.(3)

Note the moral and self-help themes in his statement. These, as will be seen, were extremely important concepts in the farmers' thoughts on issues such as education. J.W. Perdue, of Grey County, spoke in the same vein:

(1) D.A. Lawr, "The Development of Agricultural Education in Ontario, 1870-1910", PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, 1972, p. 46. See also W.C. Good, Farmer Citizen: My Fifty Years in the Canadian Farmers' Movement, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1958), p. 92-93.

(2) "Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario 1911 and 1912", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XLV, Part X, Number 40, 1913, p. 55.

(3) Ibid., p. 15.

We have our own local problems to solve, and as individuals we find it a very slow process; but when we have an organization to work through, the work is comparatively easy...(1)

Clearly, one of the main benefits of the Clubs was this notion of local control. While Shortt may be partially correct in his contention that the farmers were decentralists because decentralization rid them of urban political dominance, an argument can be made to the effect that the farmers favoured a decentralist framework because it afforded them the opportunity to deal with local problems themselves, since their knowledge of the problems would be greater than outsiders, including those in the provincial legislature.

It should be pointed out that notions of decentralization, or local control, were not particular to the farmers and their organizations. The Department of Education, as well, was very conscious of the strength of local public school boards, and let them exercise a good amount of local control. The Central Board of Health operated much the same way.(2) The farmers found ideas of decentralization attractive, but they were not the only ones to do so. Consequently, in light of contemporary attitudes regarding decentralization, the farmers were not at odds with some other groups in society on this point.

(1) Ibid., pp. 27-28.

(2) D.A. Lawr and R.D. Gidney, "Who ran the Schools? Local Influence on Education Policy in Nineteenth Century Ontario", Ontario History, Vol. LXXII, Number 3, September, 1980, p. 140.

One other aspect of the post-1895 Farmers' Institutes should be examined; the way in which the agrarian myth manifested itself during this time. The myth did not lose its importance as a result of the rule changes. In fact, it remained a vital part of the Institutes for many members. What is interesting to note is that the myth, originally used to elevate the status of the farmer, was now brought to bear on matters such as education and social reform. Perhaps the myth, in part, explains why the Nature Study movement was so easily accommodated within the Institutes.

It was still generally held by many farmers that their position was indeed a unique one in that they, more so than others, were closer to the natural forces of life. J.M. Kaiser, of Howlett, in presenting his version of the ideal farmer to an Institute meeting, began with the point that the farmer

...realizes that he is an agent through which the Divine mind operates in producing and protecting those forms of vegetables and mineral life which are needed to sustain and perpetuate the human race.(1)

A.J. Reynolds, another Institute member, claimed that husbandry was the highest of human arts, and was the basis of all existence, since almost everything originated from the earth.(2)

J.S. Duff, of Cookstown, echoed these feelings in 1902, and as

(1) "Report of the Farmers' Institutes of Ontario 1897-98", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXX, Part VI, Number 22, 1897-98, p. 301.

(2) "Report of the Superintendent of Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario 1896-97", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXIX, Part VI, Number 22, 1897, p. 237.

late as 1908, William Johnson of St. Mary's was able to tell an Institute gathering "Let every farmer bear in mind that his calling is set apart by the Creator as first of all callings." (1) The farmer was special, and his situation--close to nature--had many advantages over those who lived in cities and towns.

In fact, it is safe to argue that the myth persisted in the Institutes partly as a response to the continued growth of cities. Urban areas were still enticing many farmers' sons away from the farm, and therefore, reasons, it was believed, had to be found to keep them on the farm. One such reason--and this was related to the agrarian myth--was that rural areas had effects upon people which were much more positive than urban ones. E.C. Drury, later the United Farmer Premier of Ontario, maintained that a greater emphasis on farming, and not industrial development, would make Canada what it should be; a country of pastoral beauty. Even more important than this, however, would be the effect on the people. Greater wealth--physical and spiritual--would emerge, society would become more stable, and, most of all, the people would be contented. (2) By making such statements, Drury sounds terribly naive, and it is doubtful that

(1) "Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario 1902 and 1903", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXXVI, Part VII, Number 25, 1904, p. 136, and Ibid., 1907, Vol. XL, Part VI, Number 40, 1908, p. 98.

(2) "Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario 1905", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXXVIII, Part VI, Number 25, 1906, p. 11.

he actually believed Canada would reverse its trend of industrialization. What was important was the maintenance of the ideals associated with rural life. William Johnson pointed out that most city dwellers came out to the country when they vacationed. Why was this the case?

That spiritual essence implanted in all men, coexistent with Nature herself, leads us on with irresistible force to those places where she holds her court in quietness and peace.(1)

The farm was also the place where the individual counted most. C.J. Foy, a farmer from Perth, noted that "The average man is merely a dot in a great city which is controlled by successful industrial and professional men..."(2) If a person wanted a profession where his presence made a difference, he should stick to farming. Rural virtues, which were derived from this close contact with nature, were superior to those of the city, which was a haven for societal problems such as poverty, crime, drunkenness, and child neglect.(3)

With all this in mind, it should not seem surprising that the Nature Study movement found a receptive audience with Institute members. Relatively little has been written about this movement, but it appears to have started in the United States in the late nineteenth century, and was known as the 'country life

(1) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institutes 1907...", p. 99.

(2) Perth Courier, December 17, 1909, p. 5.

(3) Lawr, "The Development of Agricultural Education in Ontario...", p. 196.

movement'. (1) Nature Study, as it was known in Canada, largely accepted the basic ideas of the country life reformers; namely, that courses which would foster an appreciation of rural life should be included in the schools. (2) It would appear that many Institute members took up this cause.

As early as 1895, Institute members were exposed to the idea of Nature Study as a potential course in the public schools. Addressing the Central Institute in that year, John Dearness argued that conventional education had its place, but one should also develop one's own powers of observation and reason. This was where Nature Study fit in. What the child needed was the "...development of mental power and habit which comes with knowledge gained by observation and experiment." (3) This could be accomplished by letting the children become acquainted with the land. Books, on the other hand, while useful, tended to encourage learning by rote. Institute meetings began featuring speeches on the concept of Nature Study.

The inclusion of Nature Study into the curriculum of schools would have many effects, not least of which would be a moral one.

(1) See, William C. Bowers, "Country Life Reform, 1900-1920! A Neglected Aspect of Progressive Era History", Agricultural History, Vol. XLV, Number 3, July, 1971, and David D. Danbom, "Rural Education and the Country Life Movement, 1900-1920", in Ibid., Vol. 53, Number 2, April, 1977.

(2) Little has been written on the Nature Study movement in Canada. Lawr's thesis remains the best source of material in the Ontario context. See, pp. 203-241.

(3) Farmer's Advocate, June 15, 1895, Vol. XXX, Number 384, p. 234.

Children would be inclined towards a greater feeling of humanity, since they would realize the beauty and necessity of all life. In an editorial, the Advocate began with the premise that children should be more interested in observing living things than in killing them:

We should cultivate feeling--We have a right to a poetic interpretation of nature. The child comes to know nature through its imagination and feeling and sympathy.

Nature Study would bring about

...the development of mental power, the opening of the eyes and mind, the civilizing of the individual. As with all education, its central purpose is to make the individual happy...Nature-love tends towards naturalness, and towards simplicity of living...If one is to be happy, he must be in sympathy with common things.(1)

The morality of the child, then, would be heightened.

Thoughts of this type were also expressed at Institute meetings. At a joint Farmers'/Women's Institute gathering in 1904, for example, Mrs. J.W. Truesdell stated that every child should be inculcated with the simple truth that every living, sentient being had certain inalienable rights which had to be respected. She went on to state

Teach him (the child) that the strong should protect the weak, that the fortunate should pity and succor the unfortunate, that dogs and cats, as well as the old grandmother..should be alike the objects of his tender care and solicitude...A man whose heart has thus been kept pure and tender, whose soul is filled with love and compassion for all suffering creatures, can never become hardened with sin. It would be a moral

(1) Ibid., March 15, 1902, Vol. XXXVII, Number 546, p. 205.

impossibility.(1)

Furthermore, humane feelings for animals had a practical effect. As was pointed out at another Institute meeting, some animals, such as swallows, toads, and frogs, were known to destroy flies and mosquitoes, and other pests. To kill these animals was not only cruel, but also counter-productive.(2) The moral effect, therefore, had practical applications.

Another important effect of Nature Study would be that it encouraged independent, analytical thought in the pupil. As early as 1893, the notion had been put forward by some farmers that the whole point behind education was to enable people to think for themselves. Part of the problem, according to J. Armstrong, a farmer from Danforth, was that this goal had been lost sight of, and the consequences were serious:

Have we, as farmers, been thinking for ourselves? Have we not been in the habit of taking or receiving our opinions on all social and political questions ready-made from others? That is why they fit so badly.(3)

Nature Study, then, was ideal because it encouraged the child from an early age to observe and form judgements based upon their observations. Of course, the child was to receive a framework

(1) "Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario 1904", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXXVII, Part VI, Number 40, pp. 89-90.

(2) "Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario 1906, Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXXIX, Part IV, Number 40, 1907, pp. 106-107.

(3) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institute of Ontario 1893", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XXVI, Part VII, Number 36, 1894, p. 92.

within which to form these judgements from textbooks and conventional teaching, but he or she was responsible for the analysis. Much of this notion was predicated upon the premise that children were by nature curious, and all that was needed was some direction on the part of the instructor.(1)

Another central theme of Nature Study was that it centred around an agrarian environment, not an urban one. As G.W. Nash pointed out at an Institute meeting in Perth, "No one has a better opportunity of observing nature in all its forms than our farm youth."(2) It was on the farm where one saw natural forces at work, and if the child was encouraged to appreciate these forces, the moral and practical effect would be incalculable. More to the point, it might also encourage them to stay on the farm, instead of going to the city.

Yet, for all their efforts, those in the Nature Study movement were unsuccessful in implementing their proposed reforms. Danbom, in his study of the movement in the United States, argued that the movement failed due to deep-rooted conservatism in some regions, the fear of additional expenses, and the belief that some degree of local control would have to be given up.(3) Some of this can be applied to the Ontario movement, and Lawr has argued, in addition, that Nature Study was

(1) W. Lochhead, "Nature Study", O.A.C. Review, December, 1903, Vol. XV, Number 15, pp. 11-12.

(2) Perth Courier, December 21, 1909, p. 10.

(3) Danbom, p. 473.

not a success in the province because it "...conflicted with the patterns of use established by those people who patronized and supported the schools." (1) Whatever the reasons for its failure, the fact remains that the movement was accomodated in the Institutes. And, in fact, Nature Study was included in some Ontario Agricultural College short courses. (2) Nature Study, whatever its inconsistencies and eventual failures, represented yet another attempt on the part of the farmers to come to terms with the new industrial order in Ontario.

Despite such initiatives as Clubs and Nature Study, by 1910, the popularity of the Institutes soon began to decline. For some, the drop in popularity had occurred a few years earlier, because the work of the Institutes was no longer seen as vital. (3) Even so, the Institutes had a membership of 21,761 in 1910, the highest it had been since 1903. That same year, over 108,000 people had attended Institute meetings throughout the province. Yet, by 1915, membership had dropped to 18,750, and only 48,182 people had gone to meetings. By 1918, membership figures were not even printed, and the combined attendance of all the meetings amounted to only 31,500. In the same year, over

(1) Lawr, "The Development of Agricultural Education...", p. 243.

(2) Ibid., p. 243. As well, Robert M. Stamp, in The Schools of Ontario, 1876-1976, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), notes that education reformers were somewhat successful at the time in setting up school gardens in rural schools. See pp. 61-64.

(3) See, for example, Farmer's Advocate, December 24, 1908, Vol. XLIII, Number 848, pp. 1987-1988.

250,000 persons had attended Women's Institute gatherings, which indicates that this body was still enjoying immense popularity.(1) Clearly, Institute meetings were no longer perceived as being important to many farmers.

Why, then, did the Institutes lose their popularity? First, by the early twentieth century, farming in Ontario was becoming increasingly specialized.(2) The Institute leadership realized this trend, and in 1907 began holding special meetings for pork producers, fruit growers, dairymen, and so forth.(3) The problem with this, at least in terms of the Institutes, was that advice on agricultural theory and techniques on a general level was much less in demand. For example, while a pork producer may have been enticed to attend a special meeting relating to his speciality, and may have been interested in other aspects of agriculture such as seeding and manuring in order to grow feed for his swine, only one meeting on this topic would be necessary. There would be no reason to hear the same topics presented year after year. The other problem associated with this course of action on the part of the Institute leadership was that special meetings ran the risk of duplicating much of the information already imparted by other specialized groups, such as stock-breeders' associations.

(1) "Report of the Minister of Agriculture, Province of Ontario, 1918", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. LI, Part VI, Number 29, 1919, p. 38. For a detailed listing of Farmers' Institute membership and attendance figures, see Appendix II.

(2) Lawr, "The Development of Agricultural Education...", pp. 1-26.

(3) "Report of the Farmers' Institutes...1907", pp. 10-14.

Furthermore, much of the Institutes' fire was stolen in 1914 with the formation of the U.F.O.

In March, 1914, a convention was held in Toronto with the result being the establishment of the United Farmers of Ontario. The U.F.O. was to be at once a pressure group and a co-operative company, and it enjoyed moderate success during its first few years of operation. Part of the reason for this success was the strategy of one of the U.F.O. leaders, J.J. Morrison. Morrison, in surveying the agrarian climate in 1914, saw that the Farmers' Clubs were still an active concern in the province. As he later recalled in his memoirs,

...my plan would be to visit them, and enthuse them with the spirit of unity...In other words, I said to Mr. Smith (then editor of the Weekly Sun) that we would steal the Government Farmers' Clubs.(1)

In fact, Morrison was quite successful in attracting many individuals and Clubs into the U.F.O. By 1919, a province-wide political organization had been set up that was able to successfully contest the provincial election of that year, capturing forty-five seats.(2)

The Farmers' Institutes in Ontario did not end abruptly, so that tracing their actual demise, which took place over a period of ten or so years, is somewhat problematic. By 1914, annual

(1) National Archives of Canada, "Memoirs of J.J. Morrison", Microfilm, Reel C-1350, p. 44.

(2) See, E.C. Drury, Farmer Premier: The Memoirs of E.C. Drury, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1966), pp. 69-89. for an account of the rise of the U.F.O.

reports of the Institutes were no longer printed in detail in the Sessional Papers; instead, only membership figures and proposed meetings appeared.(1) By 1917, there was no report from the Institutes themselves, only a small reference in the annual report of the Minister of Agriculture, which would indicate that they had declined even further in popularity.(2) For all intents and purposes, the Institute, by this time, was not a significant organization in the province.

Yet Institute meetings were not completely terminated. In the 1920 report from the Minister of Agriculture, Manning Doherty, it was noted that other branches of the Ministry, including the field educational service, had greatly diminished the importance of the Institutes. Even so,

Meetings in a few counties which have continued...along the old lines of work have been much appreciated by those who attended, although the number taking advantage of the service has not been up to the standard of some years ago.

Consequently, while the Ministry would continue to send out speakers to the various localities still requesting them, the numbers did not justify any great consideration on the part of

(1) "Annual Report of the Farmers' Institutes of the Province of Ontario", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. XLVII, Part X, Number 40, 1915.

(2) "Report of the Minister of Agriculture, Province of Ontario", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. L, Part VI, Number 29, 1918, pp. 32-34.

the Minister.(1) As a result, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact date of the termination of the Institutes, although it is safe to argue that by the early 1920s, there was no more Farmers' Institute in the formal sense.

Thus, after more than thirty years of service to the Ontario farmer, the work of the Institutes had reached its end. They had, quite simply, outlived their usefulness. However, during the period in which they were an active body, the Institutes provided the farmer with an important organization. One could learn about the latest agricultural developments and techniques at these meetings, and unlike other agrarian organizations, they sustained a large membership over a relatively lengthy period of time. The Institutes also provided a vital social function which brought people together at these meetings, where the drudgery and loneliness of farm life was temporarily forgotten. Year in, year out, farmers could count on the annual Institute meeting.

(1) "Report of the Minister of Agriculture, Province of Ontario, 1920", Ontario, Sessional Papers, Vol. LIII, Part VI, Number 29, 1921, p. 25.

CHAPTER IV

SOME UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Capitalist 'modernization theory' and Marxist 'democratic centralism', together with supporting linguistic accoutrements, have left mankind in our time with few conceptual options through which to assert believable political aspirations to the mass of the world's peoples.

Lawrence Goodwyn

If you're booked for extinction, there's nothing much you can do about it.

Will Cuppy

Ontario farmers, of course, did not become extinct, but by the 1920s they were, for all intents and purposes, a spent group in terms of having the potential to influence government policy so that their vision of society could be realized. This study has, it is hoped, demonstrated that the farmers in the Institutes expressed ideas which were more complex, creative, and innovative than some historians have allowed. Further, it has attempted to show that thousands of other farmers were exposed to these ideas. However, certain questions remain, and it is the intent of this chapter to attempt to come to terms with some of them.

First and foremost, the following question should be asked: Who were these people expressing these ideas? While it is quite tempting to hypothesize that they were rank and file farmers, it would be more accurate to claim that these ideas were put forward

by people who were more often than not members of the 'rural elite'. In other words, the more prosperous, successful, and politically active farmers of the province, plus those who taught or were educated at the Agricultural College. This was especially true after 1895, when the Institute leadership actively sought out prosperous farmers from various localities for their speakers lists. After all, those farmers who were barely getting by, or those who had to expend great amounts of energy to make marginal lands productive, would have neither the time nor inclination to travel long distances in order to give speeches.

Furthermore, it would appear that the executives of the local Institutes were made up of the same rural elite. A survey of two local Institutes over a four year period (Peterborough West and Lanark South) suggests that this could well have been the case (see Appendix III). Each year, the same figures seem to pop up in the same position, or in some other administrative capacity. It is interesting to note, however, that the local executive in both these cases contained relatively large numbers of Directors. In Peterborough West during this period, there were never fewer than 24 Directors, while in Lanark South the number never dropped below 13.(1) This is significant. While the local Institutes may have been directed by rural elites, they

(1) The time period in question is rather short, owing to lack of documentation. Still, and this is a speculative point, it is reasonable to assume that this feature of the local Institutes did not radically alter either before or after the period examined.

were nevertheless large ones

As well, evidence suggests that these local elites were not, on the whole, politically active in terms of seeking elected office even at the local level.⁽¹⁾ From this, the assertion can be made that while these elites were not 'rank and file' farmers, they were not part of the local power elites.

Regarding these elites, the case can also be made that as an articulate group, they were more numerous than most historians have allowed. Too often, historical studies of agrarian movements have focussed on a very small group of people, and implicit in this treatment is the notion that such movements can be known from the activities of these figures, or that these people came to personify the movements. A good example of this is the U.F.O. One often reads of the thoughts and actions of Drury, Morrison, Good, and a few others; but surely, many more people made contributions to the movement. The Institutes contained many people who formulated ideas and spoke at meetings. This has been illustrated by putting the names of the people who spoke or presented papers at Institute meetings in the body of

(1) This point, it must be stressed, is speculative. The executives of the Peterborough West and Lanark South Institutes were used to test this contention, and surveys of local newspapers (Peterborough Examiner and Perth Courier) as well as local histories were undertaken to see if these people sought office at the local level. Apparently they did not. Whether or not these results can be applied to other Institutes remains open to question. See, Ronald Borg, ed., Peterborough: Land of Shining Waters, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), and Howard Morton Brown, Lanark Legacy: Nineteenth Century Glimpses of an Ontario County, (Perth, 1984).

this thesis. There were, of course, many more who escaped mention. The ideas of these lesser known figures may have been derivative to some degree from the more popular figures, but this does not preclude some innovation on their part. Take, for example, F. Kosmack of the Renfrew Farmers' Institute and his call for a farmers' union, as was mentioned in chapter 2.

As well, the notion of elite control of the Institutes is tempered by the fact that meetings were extremely popular. Hundreds and thousands of farmers attended such gatherings, and this point is made all the more significant when one considers at what time of the year the meetings were held. As mentioned before, professors from the College could only get away from their teaching responsibilities during the Christmas break and in the spring, which meant that half the meetings were held during the winter. The Christmas-time meeting remained a feature of the Institutes even after prominent farmers were chosen as speakers. What this meant then, was that the farmer attended a good number of meetings in the dead of winter. The South Oxford Institute had 82 members in 1889, yet when it met in Mt. Elgin in February of that year, over 150 farmers "...braved a cutting snowstorm..." in order to attend.(1) For some, the trip to the Institute meeting meant a lengthy excursion, often through harsh weather conditions, by sleigh.

Such dedicated attendance suggests that Institute members

(1) Archives of Ontario, Department of Agriculture, Farmers' Institutes Branch, RG 16-85, South Oxford, 1889.

were exposed to, and to some degree inculcated with, the ideas of the speakers. This does not mean that the average farmer was in agreement with everything expressed at the meetings, but the very real possibility exists that they agreed at least some of the time. Besides, as with the farmer quoted in chapter 1 who stated that the Grange 'set the farmers thinking', so too the Institutes must have set off some sort of mental process with the members, even if it was in a negative sense. The Institute member, in other words, did not live in an intellectual vacuum. As has been pointed out, numerous notions other than those of a practical nature were put forward at meetings; so while the Institutes provided a social environment for the farmers--and this should not be downplayed--the fact remains that the Institutes were lively bodies in terms of the articulation of ideas.

Granting this, a larger question emerges: Why study the Institutes in particular, or the farmers in general? For this, there are many answers, not least of which is that the farmers, especially the pre-U.F.O. farmers in Ontario have been severely under-researched. This fact, on its own, does not mean they are therefore worthy of study, but the argument is put forward here that one may gain new insights into the context of this important period. What did the farmers think of education or the educational system? How did the farmers, as opposed to the workers, 'respond' to industrial capitalism? Why did farmers, although part of an increasingly centralizing society, opt for decentralism? These, and many other questions, it is hoped, have

been addressed in this thesis, though many more remain.

Secondly, studying the Institutes, as well as other agrarian groups, may well provide new insights, into the political course followed by the U.F.O. upon emerging victorious in 1919. Implicit throughout this thesis has been the argument that the Institutes and other agrarian organizations contained a great number of what can only be termed idealists. The vision of a society run on a co-operative basis and humane principles rather than on unchecked personal gain was an idealistic one. Linking up with urban labour so that the producing classes could help steer society to its desired station was an idealistic notion. Nature Study was highly idealistic. How did this idealism affect, for example, the U.F.O.?

Take, for example, the case of E.C. Drury.⁽¹⁾ Drury was a prominent member in both the Grange/Farmers' Association and the Institutes. He was also idealistic in many ways.⁽²⁾ Drury, besides indicating his desire to see Canada transformed into a pastoral country at Institute meetings, could also write in 1908

(1) This, it is realized, is falling into the trap already enumerated earlier on; namely, that one should not attempt to personify an entire movement on the basis of the actions of one individual. The purpose of this paper, however, has not been to identify and analyse lesser-known U.F.O. figures. Consequently, one must work with what exists. More is known about Drury than most other U.F.O. members, so he is used here in order to test to what degree earlier ideas (including, of course, the Farmers' Institutes) influenced him.

(2) This is not an unjustified claim. The title of Charles Johnston's biography of Drury is, after all, E.C. Drury: Agrarian Idealist.

that people should be the real rulers of the country and, this being the case, calm discussion and enlightenment were needed in order to fulfill this goal.(1) It would appear, furthermore, that Drury was greatly influenced by his past experiences in these agrarian groups, even after he had assumed office as Premier. In his first speech in the Legislature, Drury spoke to the opposition members:

We invite the co-operation of the gentlemen on the other side of the House. We invite you to come to us with your suggestions, and I think among us we can loosen up a whole lot of these unreasonable parliamentary rules that have grown up more in the last forty years than ever before when the House has resolved itself into two cast-iron sections.(2)

One can almost imagine the members in the opposition benches snickering or holding back laughter at such a remark.

A certain amount of political innocence, then, can be seen in persons such as Drury. Perhaps the Institutes and other agrarian bodies encouraged this sort of innocence with the highly idealistic tone of the meetings. The effect of this political attitude can be seen in 1923, when the U.F.O. failed to be re-elected as the government party. According to Leslie Roberts,

(1) Farmer's Advocate, December 24, 1908, Vol. XLIII, Number 848, p. 1989.

(2) Cited in F.F. Schindeler, Responsible Government in Ontario, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), pp. 178-179. Schindeler then points out that private members enjoyed "greater freedom under his regime than at any other time in the province's history." Ironically, the opposition used this as a device to discredit Drury and the U.F.O., by charging that in doing so he was neglecting his responsibility as Premier. See, pp. 178-179.

they had committed one sin:

...the cardinal error of the Druryites was their congenital incapacity to learn the devious methods by which the practical politician goes about his business...(1)

This is a tongue-in-cheek statement, but it is not without some truth. The United Farmers were harmed to some degree by their innocence. Furthermore, this idealism did not abate. As late as 1932 the U.F.O. could proclaim that what was needed was

The development of a social mind and conscience. Church, school, and all other suitable agencies must preach and teach a faith and an ethic which call for a co-operative view and conduct of life.(2)

Clearly, more work needs to be done on this idealism found within Ontario farmers' movements, and to what extent it may have harmed the aspirations of these groups.

Thirdly, a study of the Institutes reveals that many of the problems which exist in the present existed in their time as well, and that their thought regarding these problems was extremely insightful and penetrating. Drury, for example, was a conservationist, urging the protection of Ontario forests; not only for commercial reasons, but for aesthetic ones as well.(3) One of Canada's foremost scientists recently argued that one of

(1) Leslie Roberts, So This Is Ottawa, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1933), p. 34.

(2) A.O. Drury (E.C.) Papers, MU 955, Box 6, IV, United Farmers Co-operative Company and the United Farmers of Ontario, 1920-1963, Miscellaneous Files. "A Message to the People of Ontario", p. 3.

(3) Drury, Farmer Premier, pp. 135-139.

the major problems with modern-day society is it is too far removed from nature. Dr. Suzuki claims,

Children learn attitudes and values very quickly and the lesson in cities is very clear--nature is an enemy, it's dirty, dangerous or a nuisance...I am astounded at the number of people who loathe or are terrified by snakes, spiders, butterflies, worms, birds...If children grow up understanding that we are animals, they will look at other species with a sense of fellowship and community.(1)

To what extent does Suzuki, quite unintentionally, sound like a member of the Nature Study movement of 80 years ago? Current concerns such as political corruption, free vs. restricted trade, non-responsive political parties, or decentralism; all these were discussed at Institute meetings. If nothing else, the historian can see how the Institute members attempted to deal with such problems. This is not to argue that one should study history only to inform the present; it is only to suggest that there is a timelessness and perceptiveness to some of the thoughts of the farmers. In other words, historians who abruptly dismiss the farmers as an irrelevant group, have failed to appreciate their potential significance.

This dismissal of the farmers and the resulting vacuum it creates is apparent in the theoretical frameworks now employed by many historians. For capitalist historians, agrarian activity is treated for the most part as an aberration; those who, failing to find a place carved out for them in the forward-moving society,

(1) David Suzuki, "Children are inadvertently taught nature is alien, dirty", Globe and Mail, February 7, 1987, p. D4.

looked backwards and became reactionary in outlook. Taken to its extreme, it allows for Shortt to claim that the farmers' fear of bigness and change was "irrational".(1) Statements such as this one, at best, are value judgements, but they reflect a common attitude of 'whig' historians: Since the farmers responded negatively to the 'progressive society', they are not worthy of much study since they ultimately lost out.(2)

For those on the Left, the farmer is equally unappealing. Part of the problem for Marxist historians is that the farmers are not subject to the same kind of categorization as the workers. As C.M. Johnston points out,

...the farmer combined the two worlds that marxist theorists had always perceived as combatants--the capitalist and the labouring.(3)

Farmers, in Marxist terms, are an ambiguous group since not only do they exploit labour, but are exploited themselves. To what extent, then, does this ambiguity obscure the view for Marxist

(1) S.E.D. Shortt, "Social Change and Political Crisis in Rural Ontario: The Patrons of Industry, 1889-1896", in D. Swainson, ed., Oliver Mowat's Ontario. (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1972), p. 235.

(2) Michael Bliss, in Northern Enterprise: Five Centuries of Canadian Business, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), regrets excluding the farmers from his study, while at the same time admitting that agriculture was "Canada's most important single industry." He then goes on to state: "Agriculture is traditionally slighted in the writing of business history, and has been short-changed in most other areas of Canadian historical writing in the last few decades...", pp. 8-9.

(3) Charles M. Johnston, "'A Motely Crowd': Diversity in the Ontario Countryside, in the Early Twentieth Century", CHA Paper (unpublished), 1987, p. 2.

historians such as Kealey, Palmer, and others who constantly down play the role of the farmers, especially in the late nineteenth century?(1)

Lawrence Goodwyn, in his study of American populism, has identified a major problem in studying agrarians, which has definite applications to the Canadian model. Farmers, according to Goodwyn, fall victim

...to the inability of twentieth-century humanists of various ideological persuasions to conceive that authentic political substance might originate outside such acceptable intellectual sources as the progressive, capitalist, middle classes or the European socialist heritage.(2)

One must remember that the farmers in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Ontario did not have the Russian Revolution or other socialist revolutions to use as reference points, and their ideas, consequently, were not bound by such rigid ideological lines. Therefore, the possibilities and potential for an alternative society were much more broad than most movements of the later twentieth century.

What is needed, then, is a conceptual framework that does not exclude the farmers. They were, after all, the largest

(1) As well as the references enumerated in the Introduction, see Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class", Labour/Le Travail, 13, Spring, 1984. Heron identifies many social ideas held by labour reformers, but fails to mention that many of these notions were also held by leading agrarian activists.

(2) Lawrence Goodwyn, The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 318.

occupational group in terms of numbers during the nineteenth century in Ontario, and indeed in most of Canada.(1)

A framework which does not treat the farmers as backward looking or insignificant is necessary in order to explore the impact they had on society at the time. This, no doubt, is easier said than done, for the farmers are indeed a perplexing group to study. As Hadwiger points out, the farmers were "...rural pragmatists who bit hardest for third parties, conservatives who provided the most votes for Socialist and Populist platforms."(2) Difficulty of topic, however, should not be the criteria for study. This is not to suggest that the farmers were any more profound than other groups; it is only to argue that they too made a contribution to the society in which they lived. To ignore them is to ignore a great body of people during an important period of the past.

(1) Ian M. Drummond, Progress Without Planning: The Economic History of Ontario, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 364. Drummond, with statistical backing, argues that as late as 1931, agriculture contained the largest group of those gainfully employed in Ontario (22.6%) while manufacturing came second (22.2%).

(2) Don F. Hadwiger, "Farmers in Politics", Agricultural History, Vol. 50, Number 1, January, 1976, p. 156. Hadwiger is referring to American Farmers, and his remark is not meant to be applied in its totality to the farmers of Ontario. Still, his point that farmers are a puzzling group to study is not without validity.

CONCLUSION

Consistency is the last refuge of the unimagnative.

Oscar Wilde

In 1884, the Mowat Government, seeing that the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm was not being met with wide-spread praise by the agrarian community, established the Farmers' Institutes as an extension of the work of the College. Most, if not all, of the administrative work was to be done by Professors at the O.A.C. While technical aspects were frequently discussed at meetings, other topics emerged which reflected the growing discontent of farmers in the province. The loss of respectability in the profession, growing urbanization, the rise and consolidation of unresponsive political parties, unfair tariffs, increasing centralization of power, the oppression of the producing classes, the emergence of monopolies and combines, and the loss of moral values in society were also discussed at Institute meetings. The farmers, in fact, became quite vocal and perhaps this, plus the fact that the Patrons of Industry were enjoying a good deal of popularity, led to the Mowat Government assuming control of the Institutes and placing rigorous restrictions on the topics to be discussed.

Even with the imposition of new rules and regulations upon the Institutes in 1895, the farmers devised methods to deal with the negative aspects of the society in which they found

themselves. The stream of decentralism which had been present in the pre-1895 Institutes intensified afterwards; the idea being that problems should be broken down to their simplest components in order to be dealt with effectively. This decentralism was reflected in the popularity of Farmers' Clubs, which were smaller, more localized versions of the Institutes. Education of children, as well, became important to Institute members. The inclusion of Nature Study in the public schools would inculcate the child with the spirit of rural life, and thereby lead to greater feelings of humanity on the part of the child. Implicit in this analysis was that cities and towns encouraged the loss of many of the moral values the farmers believed to be positive.

The Institutes also performed a vital social function for farmers. Isolated, as they were, Institute meetings brought farmers together to discuss problems and, of equal importance, enabled them to escape the hard work and drudgery of farm life. Music, songs, picnics, and other activities aided in letting the individual farmer realize that his problems were not unique, and allowed the farmers to attempt to deal with the problems on a collective basis. This was an important feature of the Institutes, and it remained so until most of the Institute Clubs were absorbed into a non-government organization, the United Farmers of Ontario. After this absorption, the Institutes dwindled in both numbers and size until, by 1917, they were a relatively insignificant group.

E.P. Thompson has observed that most criticism of society

"...starts from such a sense of being threatened."(1) This, no doubt, was the case for the farmers; but they did not retreat into a shell of backward-lookingness and reaction, as some historians have contended. Having few other reference points, they did look back upon their own experiences, but extracted what they perceived to be positive aspects of it, and attempted to place them in contemporary society. This aided greatly in the creation of the agrarian myth--the belief that there was something special and spiritual about being a farmer. As Hann pointed out, myths are a way "...in which a people comes to terms with its experience."(2) The myth gave the farmers esteem, dignity, and a sense of importance. It also gave them the material with which to form new ideas as to how society should be run; not just for themselves, but for everyone.

The farmers had glimpses of an emerging culture, and they were not fond of what they saw. Their response to industrial society and prescriptions for how it could be better run--as reflected in the Institutes--was not always consistent, and suffered at times from ambiguity and contradictions. However, those searching for rigid coherence should be reminded of the words of Wilde. The farmers were extremely creative and imaginative in their dreams of a better society, and their

(1) E.P. Thompson, "A Nice Place to Visit", New York Review of Books, XXII, February 6, 1975, p. 20.

(2) Russell Hann, Farmers Confront Industrialism: Some Historical Perspectives on Ontario Agrarian Movements, (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1975), pp. 7-9.

criticisms of the existing one were perceptive and penetrating. Above all, and in spite of the inconsistencies, one ideal remained: In a democratic society, the role of the government was to create policies which reflected the aspirations of the masses. For the farmers, that aspiration was a society which enabled people to realize the full potential of humanity, a society free from corruptive elements and exploitation, a society which was co-operative, kind, generous, and one in which all could participate. That they failed in achieving this ideal should not mean that they should be dismissed or ignored.

The Farmers' Institutes, a government-sponsored body, represents one more aspect of agrarian discontent in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ontario. A better knowledge of the Institutes may help form a greater understanding of farmer movements, and indeed larger social movements, of the time.

Appendix I

Farmers' Institutes Membership, 1886-1889

<u>District</u>	<u>1886</u>	<u>1887</u>	<u>1888</u>	<u>1889</u>
Addington			50	52
Brant	90			
Brant North	60	70		
Brant South		50	60	54
Bruce Centre			80	54
Bruce North			90	65
Bruce South			78	132
Brookville		55	73	50
Dufferin			89	60
Dundas	58	59	*	50
Durham West			80	88
Elgin	84			
Elgin East			78	51
Elgin West			88	56
Essex North				74
Essex South	52		53	
Frontenac			63	52
Glengarry			72	130
Grenville				52
Grenville South				50
Grey Centre	109	60	50	104
Grey North	70	*	54	
Grey South	165	69	92	113
Haldimand			70	83
Halton	150	258	85	105
Huron East	80	96	65	80
Huron South	67	67	75	86
Huron West			117	74
Kent East	95	137	70	61
Kent West	57	56		61
Lambton East	72	60	62	60
Lanark North	125	61	61	74
Lanark South	—	78	53	76
Leeds South	124	73	89	86
Lennox	53		58	55
Lincoln	94	95	122	90
Middlesex East	35	56	68	54
Middlesex North			90	89
Middlesex West				119
Norfolk North	73	57		61
Norfolk South	110			
Northumberland East	54	73	60	70
Northumberland West		89	66	153
Ontario North		57	85	
Ontario South	125	59		
Oxford North			70	82
Oxford South			77	82
Peel		60	60	60
Perth South				160
Peterborough East			73	
Peterborough West			128	50
Prince Edward		95		

Farmers' Institutes Membership, 1886-1889, con't

<u>District</u>	<u>1886</u>	<u>1887</u>	<u>1888</u>	<u>1889</u>
Renfrew South	69	63	62	110
Russell				114
Simcoe Centre				100
Simcoe South		74	69	58
Simcoe West		53	70	
Stormont			69	65
Victoria East	51		65	50
Victoria South	60			
Victoria West		70	51	51
Waterloo North				78
Waterloo South		72	67	68
Welland			88	77
Wellington		53		
Wellington Centre			105	86
Wellington South		57	66	71
Wellington West		54	52	73
Wentworth	90		145	82
Wentworth North				78
York East		56	105	100
York North	73	91	67	251
York West			52	60
Totals	2395	2533	3987	4830

Note: Not all Farmers' Institutes are listed. For example, in 1889, Erant North, Norfolk South, Ontario North, Peterborough East, Prince Edward, Simcoe South, and Welland all held Farmers' Institute meetings, but failed to submit reports.

* Submitted reports, but failed to indicate membership.

Source: Ontario, Department of Agriculture, Farmers' Institute Branch. Archives of Ontario, RG 16-85.

Appendix IIFarmers' Institutes Membership, Meetings Held,
and Total Attendance, 1896-1917

<u>Year</u>	<u>Membership</u>	<u>Meetings Held</u>	<u>Attendance</u>
1896	12,459	659	125,177
1897	15,707	658	126,094
1898	16,624	677	119,402
1899	16,925	715	138,982
1900	N/A	N/A	N/A
1901	20,307	730	131,653
1902	22,948	791	147,542
1903	23,754	837	126,459
1904	N/A	N/A	N/A
1905	N/A	N/A	N/A
1906	N/A	N/A	N/A
1907	21,187	875	110,415
1908	21,163	911	121,323
1909	21,622	829	106,576
1910	21,761	1,133	108,020
1911	20,096	1,230	86,460
1912	18,758	1,415	94,266
1913	18,690	1,403	93,880
1914	N/A	N/A	N/A
1915	18,750	581	48,182
1916	N/A	180	40,379
1917	N/A	N/A	51,500

Source: Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1896-1917

Appendix III

Farmers' Institute Officers and Directors,

Peterborough West and Lanark South,

1905-06 to 1907-08

Peterborough West, 1905-06.

President: P.T.M. Hunter
 Vice President: J.N. Telford
 Secretary/Treasurer: William Collins
 Directors:

Jonathan Smyth	Daniel Crough	F.E. Kline
G.W. Bennet	Samuel Deyell	E.M. Elliott
T.J. Cullen	Robert Chambers	J.E.A. Fitzgerald
G.W. Mann	Alex. Nicholls	Paul Costello
Fred. McKee	Arch. Wilson	J.K. Galvin
John McConkey	John Brown	Robert Hanbidge
R.Q. Dench	H.C. Garbutt	Sandy Matchett
G.J. Galvin	John Stothart	W.B. Stewart
R.H. Leany	T.D. Young	John Purser
G.W. Fitzgerald	C.D. Moore	James McGuire
Stephen O'Reilly	T.T. Milburn	

Peterborough West, 1906-07

President: J.N. Telford
 Vice President: Fred. McKee
 Secretary/Treasurer: William Collins
 Directors:

T.T. Milburn	F.E. Kline	Samuel Deyell
Alex. McGregor	Robert Shaw	Sandy Matchett
John Stothart	Arch. Wilson	Robert Chambers
G.W. Mann	Alex. Nicholls	W.B. Stewart
John McConkey	J.K. Galvin	A.A. Stewart
H.C. Garbutt	Daniel Crough	E.M. Elliott
R.Q. Dench	Stephen O'Reilly	R.H. Leany
T.J. Cullen	Robert Hanbidge	J.E.A. Fitzgerald

Peterborough west, 1907-08

President: J.N. Telford
 Vice President: Fred. McKee
 Secretary/Treasurer: William Collins
 Directors:

T.T. Milburn	Sandy Matchett	Daniel Crough
G.W. Mann	W.B. Stewart	John Brown
T.J. Cullen	E.M. Elliott	T.D. Young
R.Q. Dench	R.H. Leany	S. Deyell
Arch. Wilson	Alex. McGregor	Robert Chambers
J.K. Galvin	John McConkey	A.A. Stewart
John Flood	H.C. Garbutt	J.E.A. Fitzgerald
T.M. Hunter	Robert Shaw	
Robert Hanbidge	Henry Coons	

Appendix III con't

Lanark South, 1905-06

President: J.W. Leaver
 Vice President: Wm. McNaughton
 Secretary/Treasurer: George Oliver
 Directors:
 John Armour William McVeety
 Robert Smith R.S. Campbell
 Harry Chalmers James Glien
 William Watters Richard Ruttell
 R.M. Anderson R.E. White
 R. Motherwell George Kerr
 Carr Thompson

Lanark South, 1906-07

President: J.W. Leaver		
Vice President: Wm. McNaughton		
Secretary/Treasurer: George Oliver		
Directors:		
R. Irvine	Thos. Grier	R.M. Anderson
Thomas H. Ireton	John Armour	R.E. White
Isaac Wilson	R.S. Campbell	Richard Ruttell
Isaac Korry	James Glien	Carr Thompson
John Acheson	William Watson	Peter Cavers
Pat. Corley	William McVeety	

Lanark South, 1907-08

President: J.W. Leaver		
Vice President: James Glien		
Secretary/Treasurer: George Oliver		
Directors:		
R. Irvine	R.E. White	Adam Acheson
Isaac Wilson	Carr Thompson	William Watson
John Acheson	C.A. Farmer	R.M. Anderson
John Armour	Thomas H. Ireton	Richard Ruttell
William McCue	Isaac Korry	T. Cavers
William McVeety	Pat. Corley	William J. Plunkett

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