Knights Down Under

Knights Down Under:
The Knights of Labour in New Zealand

By

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This work is respectfully dedicated to the people of New Zealand, especially the many friends and colleagues I made while there as a Fulbright scholar in 2001. Thank you for your many kindnesses.

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PREFACE

THE WORLD HAS BEEN FLAT FOR A LONG TIME

Mark Twain once jested,

> All people think that New Zealand is close to Australia or Asia, or somewhere, and that you cross to it on a bridge. But that is not so. It is not close to anything, but lies by itself in the water. It is nearest to Australia, but still not near…It will be a surprise to the reader, as it was to me, to learn that the distance from Australia to New Zealand is really twelve or thirteen hundred miles, and that there is no bridge.[1]

Jokes about New Zealand's relative remoteness were not (and are not) uncommon. Although Twain was having a bit of sport at New Zealand's expense, late nineteenth century New Zealand was a difficult-to-reach but not uncommon destination for Western travelers. American whalers docked on New Zealand shores long before the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi established the parameters of British colonial control, and an American consul established residency in Kororareka the year before Waitangi. By the time Twain's comments appeared in print in 1897, steamboats had been sailing the Pacific between San Francisco and New Zealand for two decades, disgorging goods, news, and passengers. West Coast newspapers, especially *The San Francisco Mail* and the *San Francisco Call*, made their way to New Zealand on a regular basis, and telegraphed stories from other North American papers were reprinted in colonial publications.[2]

In the early twenty-first century we glibly speak of living in a "flat" world, one in which the statute miles separating lands have been obliterated by e-mail, satellite communications, international flights, changes in work processes, and global trade.[3] It remains to be seen if spatial relations will be altered to the degree that flat-world advocates predict, but the very notion of such a world strikes few historians as new or unique. Today's electronic mail was yesterday's transoceanic cable as surely as jet planes are the contemporary analog of fast packet boats. A flat world was the very logic behind the post-1492 European voyages of

discovery, the articulation of mercantilist economic principles, and imperialist control over colonial resources. Europeans sought nothing less than a global network through which raw materials could be obtained, cheap labor secured, and wide-flung markets guaranteed. It was at the heart of what led Dutch and French navigators to ply New Zealand waters in the first place, and the centerpiece of Britain's logic to colonize the islands with Pakeha (white) settlers to intermingle with (and ultimately subdue) native Maori *iwi* (clans and tribes).

That Britain colonized New Zealand had profound ramifications, as it was the United Kingdom where merchant capitalism first began to give way to industrial and finance capitalism. All varieties of capitalism ultimately rest on sacrosanct principles of private property, opportunities for individual profit, and the workings of a (relatively) unfettered market, but under industrial capitalism labor itself is commoditized to a much greater degree. Pressures to rein in labor costs intensify when paternalist proprietary variants of industrial capitalism yield to finance capitalism with its distant boards of directors and stockholders.

Globalized finance capitalism is commonplace in the twenty-first century, but it was an emergent and contested system for much of the nineteenth century. Many workers voiced their displeasure at being viewed as a commodity on par with flax, wool, kauri, or lumber. Some began to equate "wage slavery" with chattel slavery or serfdom.[4] Such was assuredly the view of European social revolutionaries during 1848 uprisings, and was a rhetorical hammer wielded by those associated with the International Working Men's Association as it evolved from a gathering of dissidents in London during 1864 to a movement with chapters in numerous lands. The First International (1864-1876) paved the road for the Second International in 1889, and the emergence of a transnational socialist movement.[5]

Though nineteenth-century workers complained of being treated as commodities, it did not alter the fact that they *were* in circulation as if they were so many raw materials. Historians Marcel der Linden, Ken Fones-Wolf, and Neville Kirk are among those who note that the late-nineteenth-century workforce was highly mobile.[6] A skilled glassworker might find himself in Belgium one year and Pittsburgh the next, or a young man seeking a sheep run might try his luck in Scotland and Vermont before establishing himself in Australia. The very instability of industrial capitalism also mobilized workers. The unevenness of nineteenth-century industrial and industrializing economies encouraged enterprising (or desperate) individuals to cross borders when seeking opportunity. Certain trades, such as shipbuilding, fishing, and sailing, naturally encouraged

movement, but there were few professions whose workforces remained stationary. Nineteenth-century labor organizations such as the Knights of Labor routinely issued "traveling cards" to members that served as letters of introduction for peripatetic workers. Shearers bounced between Australia and New Zealand depending upon where work was more plentiful and sometimes they ranged even further—perhaps to South Africa or Great Britain. Journalists and writers were also highly mobile. Indeed, so many workers were in motion that Neville Kirk suggests a paradigm of "comrades" and "cousins" to discuss the manner in which individuals responded to international socialist movements. In his breakdown, "comrades" came to a fully realized understanding of the exploitation of labor inherent in global capitalism—a fundamental form of class consciousness—whereas "cousins" shared the social reality of class but did not fully articulate an internationalist perspective.[7] Kirk's target of study is worker responses to socialism, but his model is useful in a broader perspective.

Indeed, mobile workforces and wholesale immigration had become so commonplace that by the early twentieth century, American thinkers such as Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne articulated early versions of what is now labeled transnational history. Kallen went so far as to comment that it was futile for North Americans to discuss restricting immigration, as such actions "can naturally succeed only with the restriction of the entrepreneur's greed."[8] For his part, Bourne spoke of the "migratory habit" of unskilled workers, issued a call for "free and mobile passage of the immigrant between America and his native land," and put forth a plea to set aside ill-conceived and pragmatically irrelevant nationalisms.[9]

What we find in small supply in Kallen, Bourne, or Kirk are "strangers"; that is, working-class individuals who were oblivious to labor's position within the socio-economic hierarchy. The vast majority of North American workers never boarded a New Zealand-bound ship in search of work, but many (probably most) were aware of the fact that their struggles were not unique. Labor publications such as *John Swinton's Paper*, *The Irish World and Industrial Liberator*, and *The Journal of United Labor* (the Knights of Labor's official paper) kept readers informed. Their editorial and letters columns were filled by writers who made the connection between local and faraway conditions. In most places full-blown "comrades" were less plentiful than socialist ideologues wished to believe, but a sense of international kinship—cousinhood if you will—was more common than capitalist apologists were comfortable contemplating.

This book probes how North American ideals of working-class reform embodied in the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labo(u)r (KOL) managed to find their way to New Zealand. To play off Twain's jest, for a brief and brilliant moment the KOL managed to build a "bridge" that brought North American and New Zealand labor into consonance. The KOL came to New Zealand at a time in which it was beginning to decline in North America, but in its new context was able to contribute to a wave of social and economic changes that made New Zealand a role model for other Western reformers.

Chapter one looks at the early days of KOL activity in New Zealand. Like any new movement there were moments of euphoria punctuated by equally emotional let-downs. As a transplanted organization, early Knighthood was marked by both wise choices and missteps. Eventually the KOL established toeholds in Christchurch and Auckland. Then came the 1890 maritime strike, which redrew New Zealand's labor landscape. The Knights of Labour was there to reassemble the pieces of a wrecked labor movement.

Chapter two turns its attention to how the KOL spread. This process involved a strategic use of ritual as an organizing tool and immersion into pressing social issues such as early-shop-closing campaigns, the anti-sweatshop crusade, and enthusiasm for Henry George's single-tax plan. It also looks at KOL involvement in strikes and how Knights negotiated New Zealand's regional, racial, and gender divisions.

In chapter three I address the place New Zealand Knights experienced their greatest successes: Parliament. This chapter shows how KOL politicians, political activists, and local political networks transformed organizational ideals into laws. It also looks in depth at the KOL's efforts at land reform and in the creation of a mandatory arbitration system to settle labor disputes. The impressive array of enacted reforms, I argue, necessitates reconsideration both of New Zealand's Liberal Party and of liberalism in general.

Chapter four takes a closer look at many of the personalities found among New Zealand Knights of Labour. It is, more broadly, a study of labor union leadership which, I argue, may be as close as one can get to unraveling the varied sentiments one might have found among the elusive rank and file. I develop leadership "types" and place individuals within them as a way of looking at the ideals and issues that unified Knights and those that divided them. "Zealots" were the true believers who both generated enthusiasm for the KOL and, on many occasions, alienated outsiders. "Reformers" were those who saw the KOL as a means to an end. They also highlight the fluid world of nineteenth-century reform, one

marked by multiple allegiances. The "young Turks" were those who cut their public teeth with the Knights of Labour. Some remained loyal; quite a few moved on to other things. Many Knights were "politicians," those who exercised legislative and political might and viewed the KOL's platform and principles as improbable or impossible to achieve outside of political channels. There were also "fakirs," an assortment of self-aggrandizers, unwise leaders, and corrupt individuals. Finally, there were "organizers," those often bland or low-key pragmatic individuals who oiled the organizational machinery and without whom bureaucratic functions would be chaotic.

Chapter five takes us to the KOL's demise in New Zealand. Although I attend to in-fighting, battles with other organizations, and repression, I reject outright the notion that the KOL "failed." Later in the chapter I assess its achievements within New Zealand to advance the argument that one might just as easily argue that the KOL declined because of its successes rather than its disappointments.

Chapter six places the New Zealand Knights of Labour within the KOL's global organizing efforts. It briefly surveys KOL efforts in a variety of settings and speculates about why the KOL enjoyed success in some places and failed to catch on in others. Chapter six also expands upon political debates first raised in chapter four and argues that politics is a more fruitful avenue to pursue than digressive forays into debates over exceptionalism.

Long before Thomas Friedman's flat-earth musings made their way into popular discourse, academics wrestled with the sort of conundrums raised by Kallen and Bourne. Scholars such as Ferdinand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein have argued that economic systems historically trump ideological ones in defining capital/labor relations, trade policy, and international relations.[10] More recent proponents of transnational history assert that borders are and have been imprecise fictions when applied to trade, immigration, and work.[11]

This strand of scholarship is so persuasive that, insofar as there are any analytical axes to grind in this study, two varieties of exceptionalism stand out. The first of these is the notion that international socialism was the *sine qua non* of late-nineteenth-century working-class expression. It is far too easy to be seduced by revolutionary tracts, fiery oration, or labor upheaval and wrongly conclude that most global workers were either socialist comrades or comrades-in-the-making. Given the imprecision with which the term socialism was used in the nineteenth century (and since) one certainly *could* make the case that Western workers adhered to socialist ideals; indeed, in chapter five I argue that the gap between KOL ideals and

those of Australasian socialist organizations was largely illusory. It is probably more accurate, however, to consider that most workers held liberal views rather than radical ones, and that they preferred the idea of reform to that of revolution (broadly defined). This was, ultimately, the conclusion socialist-leaning labor party activists came to embrace. Only a romantic would equate the actions of New Zealand's Labour Party with the vision of the First or Second International.

The Knights of Labor's international efforts in New Zealand and elsewhere may have implications for transnational labor movements of our own time. As a historian, not a union organizer or policy strategist, I cannot speak with certainty about how applicable KOL models are for today. I can, however, say that the KOL's global efforts defuse at least one aspect of the pessimist's brief against transnational labor organizing. It is simply inaccurate to assert that labor unions cannot cross national boundaries and be successful. It has been done—by socialists, Knights, craft unions, and others who came after them. Conversely, though, the KOL's experience also suggests that far more than ideology or idealism is needed to sustain transnational organizing.

The other form of exceptionalism rejected in this work is American exceptionalism, the belief that the historical development, geography, economic prosperity, character, and politics of the United States made it develop along a unique historical path.[12] Of these factors, I will argue, the only one that mattered in a substantive way was politics. Mine is also a comparative history that argues that American-based Knights of Labor found a foothold in New Zealand because the two places were more similar than dissimilar.

The latter claim may seem, on the surface, an odd one. In 1890, the population of the United States stood at 62,947,714. By contrast, New Zealand's 1891 total of 668,651 was less than 11 percent of the U.S. tally. Numerous American cities had more people than all of New Zealand, and the number of Irish immigrants entering the U.S. between 1881 and 1890 also exceeded New Zealand's total population. Moreover, more than half of New Zealand's population was listed as "dependents," that is, non-wage-earning women, children, and elders. Its entire industrial workforce was just 70,521, with another 90,546 working in agricultural sectors broadly defined to encompass mining and timber work. (The rest of New Zealand's workforce pursued various professional, domestic, and commercial jobs.) By contrast, the United States contained 23,318,000 wage workers, and another 24,771,000 farmers and agrarian laborers.[13] The question naturally arises: What could an emergent world power share

in common with a small British colony whose very remoteness was the butt of jokes?

Quite a bit, actually. Both were relatively young by global standards. The United States had a longer colonial period, but only achieved official nation-state status after its revolution was confirmed by the 1783 Treaty of Paris. New Zealand was even more recent, having only been explored by Europeans following the voyages of James Cook in 1769-1770. For a time, its European population consisted mainly of transient seal and whale hunters and missionaries seeking to convert Maori, those Polynesian peoples who began arriving in New Zealand around 1000 A.D. Land disputes between Europeans and Maori, plus fear of possible French annexation, stimulated Britain to jump-start colonialism. New Zealand became an official colony through the controversial Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, under which Maori were said to have pledged sovereignty to the British Crown in exchange for British citizenship rights. These included property guarantees, and a promise that all land purchases would be restricted to the Crown, and thus beyond the encroachment of land speculators and soldiers-of-fortune.[14]

Just what the Treaty of Waitangi did and did *not* promise soon led to clashes between Maori and Pakeha. The situation was analogous to that between Native Americans and white settlers in the United States. In both places, white land hunger—whether driven by desire to farm, to extract natural resources, or to speculate—led to cultural misunderstanding, broken treaties, and violence. Between 1860 and 1872, Pakeha and Maori engaged in what came to be called the New Zealand Wars. Bloodshed there was coeval with the United States' wars against native tribes west of the Mississippi River. In both lands some natives allied with whites and took up arms against other natives. Both places "settled" the violence before the nineteenth century ended, largely to the deficit of indigenous peoples.

By then, both New Zealand and the United States had in-place racial stratification systems that placed whites of European heritage at the top of the social pyramid and peoples of color at the bottom. The situation in the United States was complicated by the presence of over 7.4 million African Americans in 1890, many of whom had been slaves a generation earlier, but in both New Zealand and the United States whiteness trumped any parsing of diversity. This was especially true of what was commonly called "the Chinese question." White New Zealanders shared the Sinophobia of North Americans, as well as the penchant for steady discrimination and occasional violence against Chinese settlers. Chinese were viewed as inassimilable and virulent stereotyping was the norm.

Speculative storms raged in both New Zealand and the United States throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century, of which industrial and investment capitalism were the pursuits favored by the well-heeled. As noted, the land itself was viewed as ameliorative, the very source that could further enrich investors and absentee landlords, deliver self-subsistence to those of more humble stock, or liberate urban workers from the wage system.[15] In still another variant, speculative fever fueled periodic gold rushes, such as those in California in 1849, the Coromandel in 1852, Central Otago between 1861 and 1865, the Waihi region from 1868 to 1870, the Black Hills of South Dakota in 1874, and Alaska, the Klondike, and again in the Coromandel from the 1880s on.

Rural dreams in both New Zealand and the United States increasingly ran afoul of the reality that urbanization, commercial development, and industrialization were expanding in ways that made the fulfillment of those dreams disproportionate to the ability to realize them. Even in New Zealand, where the economy remained dependent upon agricultural production for much longer than that of the United States, by the 1880s laborers in the countryside were more likely to become rural proletarians than independent yeomen. They became the hired muscle that sheared the wool, butchered the meat, and bucketed the milk that found its way into export markets. Yet urban-based labor movements there and in the United States invariably found that rural nostalgia blunted their ability to articulate a class-based agenda rooted in hard fact.

But they found issues upon which workers could agree because in neither land did economic development take place in an orderly, consistent, or progressive fashion. New Zealand's "Long Depression" began officially in 1878, when the Bank of Glasgow failed.[16] By then the United States was just beginning to pull itself out of the Panic of 1873, occasioned when Jay Cooke's Philadelphia-based banking empire crumbled. But the term "Long Depression" has also been applied to the United States during the last third of the nineteenth century. The economy expanded tremendously in aggregate terms, but in classic boom-bust cycles. The depression lasting from 1873 through 1877 gave way to a brief downturn in 1884, and the ruinous Panic of 1893, which lingered into 1898. Fortunes accrued to a small group of monopolists dubbed "robber barons" by their detractors, but it was the very emiseration of the working classes that occasioned the rise of the Knights of Labor.

In fact, there was scarcely an issue touching North Americans that did not have its analog in faraway New Zealand. Both gave rise to champions for the eight-hour work day, the elimination of strikes, women's suffrage, dress reform, an end to child labor, temperance, and banking and currency

reform. In like fashion, a pervasive nervousness prevailed, made manifest in a sense that society needed to be reformed lest it collapse under the weight of its collective problems.[17] This partly explains why both Henry George and Edward Bellamy found enthusiastic readers among North Americans and New Zealanders alike, including members of the middle class.

For the most part, the differences between the United States and New Zealand during the late nineteenth century were those of scale rather than substance. Yet New Zealand enacted broad social, economic, and political reform in the 1890s, but the United States only tentatively waded into shallow reform waters nearly a decade later. It would take roughly forty years for the United States to approximate what New Zealanders accomplished by 1895 and, even then, it looked pale by comparison. Why?

Here is where we find the substantive difference between the two lands. It did not lie in isolation, national character, geography, the frontier, abundant resources, precocious outbreaks of popular democracy, or any of the other characteristics routinely cited by apologists for exceptionalism—it was due to politics. At first glance, the U.S. and New Zealand political systems appear similar. Both are dominated by two major parties, both legislative systems employ a winner-takes-all approach to allocating seats (as opposed to proportional representation), and both disperse power on federal, regional, and local levels. For the nineteenth century, however, very important differences existed in the nature of political parties and approaches to federalism.

The United States developed a two-party state in advance of New Zealand. The Democratic Party was weakened by the temporary loss of its Southern base during the Civil War and Reconstruction, but by the late 1870s, it and the Republican Party had become entrenched political institutions. As will be discussed in chapter three, there were periodic challenges to the two-party system—most notably the Greenback-Labor Party in the 1870s, various labor parties in the 1880s, and the People's Party (Populists) in the 1890s—but only the Populists mounted any sort of national challenge and it too fell well short of loosening the Republican/Democratic grip on political control.

By contrast, New Zealanders were in the early throes of developing political party structures during the 1890s. The lack of an entrenched party system allowed the New Zealand judiciary to operate with more independence than American courts, where justice too often smacked more of partisan ideology than principled jurisprudence. It also meant that other New Zealand institutions—notably the press and organized religion—had fewer cozy ties to politicians.

As I will argue in several sections, labor parties, grassroots organizing, and unionization within the United States were not frustrated by exceptionalism as much as by rigid constructions of American federalism. The development of popular democracy within the United States is often greatly exaggerated. The nineteenth-century working class was a numerical majority, but workers bargained for social justice with power brokers dealing cards from a stacked deck. Working-class votes were courted, but systemic safety valves were in place to "correct" missteps of the public will: the electoral college, the power of injunction, criminal conspiracy statutes, the ability to manipulate labor markets, gerrymander power, media control .... And when democracy poured into the streets, ragtag worker mobs (no matter how enraged) were no match for private industrial armies, state militias, the National Guard, or the U.S. Army.

New Zealand's government proved to be more pliable and responsive to public need than U.S. (or even Canadian) elected officials. New Zealand's first organized party called itself the Liberals, named and patterned after those in Great Britain. Like British Liberals, those in New Zealand were an assortment of radicals, reformers, labor-party advocates, champions of popular democracy, and critics of inherited privilege. Mostly they were lower-case liberals, promoters of reform and managed change, not revolution and chaotic upheaval. New Zealand Liberals, quite unlike the British governments of William Gladstone, initially faced a weak and unorganized opposition. New Zealand's second true party, the Reform Party, did not cohere until around 1903, more than a decade after Liberals took power. New Zealand Liberals also had the luxury of articulating reforms without contending with issues that often sidetracked Gladstone's social agenda, including Irish Home Rule, church reform, and imperialism.

By the time that New Zealand Liberals finally yielded power in 1912, two important developments had taken place. First, two decades of Liberal control ensured that once-controversial "reforms" had become institutionalized "rights." The conservatives who staffed Reform Party governments could tinker with Liberal reforms, but full-scale dismantlement was impossible. Second, by the time Reform came to power, it faced a potentially more radical opponent in the form of the socialist-endorsing United Labour Party.[18]

The net result of New Zealand's state and political evolution was a government that was far more responsive to commoners than any U.S. government would be until the New Deal programs of the 1930s. Above all, this book tells the story of how a transplanted American organization, the Knights of Labor, helped articulate the very reforms that made New Zealand more open, more democratic, and more focused on collective

need than U.S. society. New Zealand Knights became the envy of their North American comrades, and many of the reforms they helped implement became models for future adjustments within the United States. I tell the story of how Knights achieved so many of their goals in New Zealand at a time in which the North American KOL was beginning to disintegrate.

I have spoken of my distaste for exceptionalism rooted in national character and conditions. If there is an overarching historical lesson I wish to impart it would be to discourage unexamined application of the failure thesis when applied to social movements such as the KOL. Alas, this is sometimes encouraged by debates over what the working class *ought* to want instead of what it actually *did* want. As I will argue numerous times in the pages to follow, it is hard to sustain the notion that nineteenth-century workers were doctrinaire socialists or false-consciousness-toting drones. If one's measure of success is one articulated by zealous theorists, then nearly all social movements have "failed." If, however, one applies a more prosaic before-and-after standard, one must conclude that the KOL's brief time in New Zealand was a rousing success. People at the time certainly thought so. New Zealand was not so remote that news of its experiments remained hidden below the long white clouds that Maori referenced when they called the land Aotearoa. Metaphorically speaking, there *was* a bridge that connected New Zealand to the rest of the globe.

Notes

[1] Mark Twain, *Following the Equator, Volume I* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1992 reprint of 1897 original), 211.

[2] Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand,* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1986).

[3] The concept was popularized in Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century,* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005). Friedman discusses ten factors—ranging from electronic communications and fiber optic cables to political change and outsourced labor—which he argues have altered the way we perceive borders and distances.

[4] Both chattel slavery and serfdom were dead or dying in most places by the late nineteenth century, but remained in living memory well into the twentieth century. Slaves remained in British colonies in the West Indies until 1840 and in India until 1843, France did not outlaw slavery in the Caribbean until 1848 (and held slaves in Madagascar until 1896), U.S. slavery persisted until the end of the Civil War in 1865, Portugal held African slaves until 1869, Spain held Cubans in bondage until 1886, and Brazil did not begin to manumit slaves until 1888. Even then, numerous African, Asian, and South American nations retained slave-like labor systems.

(Peru, for example, waited until 1969 to abolish agricultural arrangements that held many in virtual thralldom.)

Serfdom was even more complex. In theory, much of Europe had rid itself of serfs by the eighteenth century, but Karl Marx thought it far from a dead issue in *Das Kapital*. Marx was correct; the abolition of serfdom was a piecemeal operation throughout the German states and much of Central and Eastern Europe. Russia officially retained its serfs until 1861, and unofficially serfdom lingered into the twentieth century. In some places Roma were serfs until 1888. Britain retained archaic landholding policies (copyholds) until 1925 that, in some cases, allowed landlords to view individuals working on the land as part of the lord's property.

[5] An excellent discussion of this can be found in Marcel van der Linden, *Transnational Labour History: Explanations* (Aldergate, England: Ashgate, 2003).

[6] Van der Linden, *op. cit;* Ken Fones-Wolf, "Transatlantic Craft Migrations and Transnational Space: Belgian Window Glass Workers in America, 1880-1920," *Labor History* 45:3 (August 2004), 299-321; Neville Kirk, *Comrades and Cousins: Globalization, Workers, and Labour Movements in Britain, the USA, and Australia from the 1880s to 1914,* (London: Merlin Press, 2003).

[7] Kirk, *op. cit.* Kirk discusses numerous reasons why cousins did not become comrades, among them sidetracking circumstances such as racism, nationalism, sexism, or mediating hostile state mechanisms.

[8] Horace Kallen, "Democracy Versus the Melting Pot," *The Nation*, February 25, 1915.

[9] Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America," *Atlantic Monthly* 118 (July 1916), 86-97.

[10] Ferdinand Braudel, *The Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Centuries*, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.) This work originally appeared in 1979. Immanuel Wallerstein, *European Universalism*: *The Rhetoric of Power*, (New York: New Press, 2006); Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization*, (London: Verso, 1996). These are but several of the Wallerstein books to spin off *The Modern World-System*, three volumes originally published in 1974, 1980, and 1989.

[11] A good overview and sampling of recent transnational scholarship can be found in Peggy Levitt and Sanjeev Khagram, *The Transnational Studies Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2007).

[12] An excellent overview of American exceptionalism pros and cons is Ian Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History," *American Historical Review*, October 1991, 1031-1055. Although this piece is now dated and new exceptionalist debates have raged, most follow the parameters Tyrrell identified.

[13] New Zealand Census Tables (1891), microfiche, ATL; United States Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (1975).

[14] The controversy over the Treaty of Waitangi is beyond the scope of this book, but suffice it to say that the treaty was born in controversy and remains contentious. In broad strokes, the dispute proceeded along several lines. First, there

is controversy over which treaty Maori chiefs actually signed. Some critics claim that chiefs were hoodwinked into signing a final document that was slightly different from that which had been agreed to. Nearly all scholars agree that translation problems led to controversy, the key issue being over the English word "sovereignty." There are several Maori words that could loosely translate into the English term sovereignty, though their Maori meanings differ significantly from one another. If the translator, Henry Williams, used the word *kawantanga* in explaining the treaty to Maori chiefs, they would have understood it as the equivalent of "governor," which implies stewardship of the land. The actual treaty, however, uses the term *mana*, a far more powerful concept implying ownership bordering on mystical right to property. Another treaty dispute revolves around whether or not the chiefs who signed at Waitangi had the right to represent all Maori. Over time, the biggest issue became overt violations of the treaty by both Maori and Europeans, though mainly by the latter. In contemporary New Zealand, the Waitangi Tribunal exists to mediate disputes that date from 1840 on.

[15] I suppose one could, if so motivated, link contemporary cultural fixations on possessing real estate to nineteenth-century land hunger.

[16] The Bank of Glasgow had underwritten investment schemes hatched during the booster days of the Vogel ministry in the 1870s. As the bank failed, it withdrew investments and called in loans.

[17] Ironically, agreement on the need for reform often led to more social fragmentation. Although it was easy to identify problems, how to fix them invited intense debate. To pick just one conundrum, hard-to-resolve squabbles broke out as to whether the best response to the business boom-bust cycle would be to encourage free trade or enact protectionist legislation.

[18] The New Zealand Labour Party underwent numerous name changes and ideological refinements before it took power for the first time in 1935. One wing originally formed as the Socialist Party in 1901. Several other groups came together in 1912 to form the United Labour Party. Other changes ensued until 1916, when the tag Labour Party was adopted.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAPA	Auckland Agricultural and Pastoral Association
AES	*Auckland Evening Star*
AFL	American Federation of Labor
AK	*Adelphon Kruptos*
ATL	Alexander Turnbull Library
BLS	Bureau of Labor Statistics
DA	District Assembly
DOL	Department of Labor/Labour
DMW	District Master Workman
GA	General Assembly
GEB	General Executive Board
GMW	General Master Workman
I C & A	Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act
JBP	John Balance Papers
JUL	*Journal of United Labor*
JKL	*Journal of the Knights of Labor*
KOL	Knights of Labor
LA	Local Assembly

Lib-Lab	Liberal-Labour
LT	*Lyttleton Times*
MHR	Member of the House of Representatives
MLC	Member of the Legislative Council
NANZ	National Assembly of New Zealand (Knights of Labour)
NTA	National Trade Assembly
NZFL	New Zealand Federation of Labour
PLA	Progressive Labor Association
PP	Powderly Papers
T & L C	Trades and Labour Council
WPC	Workers Political Committee

A note on terminology: U.S. and New Zealand spellings often differ. I have opted to use “Knights of Labor” when referencing the KOL in non-British contexts and “Knights of Labour” when discussing the organization in New Zealand, Australia, and Britain.

Similar spelling variation occurs in the use of the consonants “z” (U.S.) or “s” (U.K.) in a word such as organization/organisation. In these cases I have used North American convention *unless* the term in question is part of a quotation, in which case I retain the original.

CHAPTER ONE

THE KNIGHTS COME TO NEW ZEALAND: THE EVOLUTION OF AN IMPORTED MOVEMENT

In 1887, New Zealand was deep into a prolonged economic slump that left unemployment and misery in its wake. In the South Island city of Christchurch, unemployed workers gathered weekly in Cathedral Square to hear speeches, protest conditions, and demand that Premier Sir Harry Atkinson create state-funded work projects to relieve deprivation.[1] Speakers such as W. H. Hosking, James Bowman, James Caygill, Frank Guinness, J. J. Parker, William Powell, and Leonard Pozzi launched impromptu salvos that channeled worker discontent. Although a local paper blasted Hosking and his associates as “lamposters and professional loafers,” they were, for the most part, a mix of reformers, wage earners, and disgruntled members of the middle class driven to desperation.[2] Guinness, for example, was a retired auctioneer known for his political radicalism, and Pozzi a gunsmith, pamphleteer, and inventor.

The Cathedral Square mobs did more than grumble; they began to organize. Soon weekly demonstrations were preceded by meetings in which resolutions were issued calling for everything from feeding the hungry to enacting protectionist legislation.[3] As local conditions grew more desperate, the speakers’ rhetoric became more heated. Hosking was greeted with wild applause when he told a Cathedral Square crowd, "Lawyers and professional politicians must be wiped out."[4]

On November 3, 1887, the leadership group began to call itself the Canterbury Labour Union (CLU), and began recruiting members. William Powell declared himself a “Radical” in the tradition of (former and future) British Prime Minister William Gladstone, and blasted "men who had gotten good billets [yet] treated other men like dogs." He warned them that "their time would come."[5] Premier Atkinson came in for special scorn and his ministry’s jobs program along the Kaikoura coast was proclaimed a failure.[6]

Then something extraordinary occurred. In the midst of a late November CLU meeting in which government immigration and fiscal policy were debated, "The rules of the Knights of Labour Society were… read to the meeting, and the committee were empowered to incorporate a part or the whole in the rules of the union." Frank Guinness was anointed chair of future CLU/KOL meetings. Within weeks the Canterbury Labour Union became the New Zealand Knights of Labour. Papers reported that, “It was also adopted that correspondence be opened with other centres for the purpose of establishing Unions there."[7]

The 1887 attempt to establish a New Zealand chapter of the Knights of Labour (KOL) was short-lived, but the abortive effort nonetheless raises questions. Why, in the midst of economic crisis, did a group of Christchurch men seek solutions in a North America-based movement thousands of miles away? What did the KOL offer disgruntled Christchurch workers that they could not find in New Zealand social movements? Why, indeed, proclaim affiliation with an organization with which no Christchurch resident would actually correspond until late 1888? Why, in fact, create a local of an organization when no one even knew the mechanics for doing so?[8]

Desperate Times, Desperate Men

The short answer to the above questions is deceptively simple: New Zealanders were desperate. New Zealand’s hyperbolic claim to be a “workers’ paradise” met a bitter end when wool prices collapsed in the late 1870s and laborers began to leave New Zealand rather than clamor to immigrate there. The Canterbury region of New Zealand’s South Island near Christchurch was particularly hard hit and, by 1887, some wool traders and ranchers were in year eight of what textbooks routinely call the “Long Depression” (1879 to 1896).

New Zealand's economic downturn stemmed in large part from policies enacted during the phase of New Zealand politics known as the Continuous Ministry (1869 to 1891). With the exception of Sir George Grey's brief tenure between 1877 and 1879, most of New Zealand's premiers held views akin to those of the British gentry. Their vision was one of a productive countryside administered by worthy men and worked by sturdy yeomen. In the minds of men such as Sir Julius Vogel—who served as finance minister under several premiers and himself held the top office between 1873 and 1875, and again for seven months in 1876—New Zealand's extractive industries could fuel British manufactories, siphon off its idle population, and enrich the colony. To enact such plans, Vogel

crafted a program that relied upon government borrowing, emigration to New Zealand, and high commodities prices. In 1870, Premier William Fox submitted to Parliament a plan drafted by Vogel that set aside more than six million acres of public land as security against a £10 million crown loan to finance railroads and rural roads, and to recruit and assist immigrants.

The Fox-Vogel budget raised alarm, but most New Zealand politicians were bullish on the colony's future. Their scheme, as one group of historians put it, led to a rhetorical "creation of rural New Zealand … a romanticized version of rural England" that never quite matched its hype.[9] Early promise fueled ballyhoo, however. By the 1860s prices for New Zealand wool were high and the colony was producing enough of it to drive out many competitors, including those in the state of Vermont, whose wool industry imploded as a direct result of New Zealand's dominance of the wool market. From the standpoint of boosters, however, New Zealand was severely under-populated. Labor shortages led to rising wage levels that gave rise to another false hope: that New Zealand would become a workers' paradise where high wages and boundless opportunity would reign.

Investors supported various immigration schemes designed to swell New Zealand's white population. Although many of the new immigrants headed for the gold-rush areas rather than to rural estates or city workshops, Vogel's plan showed initial promise. English émigrés praised New Zealand wage rates, Scots were attracted to the opportunity to purchase land, and American workers bolted to New Zealand to escape the ravages of the Panic of 1873. The early 1870s saw not only increased wool production, but also a rise in new tanneries, mines, breweries, sawmills, and kauri gum production.[10]

But Vogel's scheme ultimately fell prey to the vicissitudes that often plague economies relying on raw materials: its health was pinned to assumptions of continuing high commodity prices and an infinitely expanding economy. Such blind faith led the Continuous Ministry to ignore economic warning signs. Labor shortages quickly became surpluses in regions where gold finds were exhausted, leading New Zealanders in those areas to criticize ongoing government expenditures on recruiting still more immigrants. As early as 1875, more than a thousand unemployed Dunedin residents pressured the Daniel Pollen ministry to end immigration, and the next year, Premier Vogel was forced to enact a six-month moratorium on giving government assistance to any immigrants except married women. When wool prices began to drop after 1876, the recipe was ripe for disaster. By 1877, harbingers of the coming depression

were evident in the form of weekly protests by unemployed Christchurch workers.[11] The interregnum premiership of Sir George Grey (October 1877 to October 1879) enacted social policies that presaged the reforms of the 1890s, but Grey was unable to right a foundering economic ship. His attempts to purchase more public lands threatened to rekindle conflict with the Maori and served only to worsen the debt crisis. The very countryside that was supposed to be the foundation of New Zealand's future became instead a repository of unemployment, temporary labor, and falling wages. John Martin recounts misery among South Island rural workers well in advance of the official onset of depression. By the 1880s, rural workers who used to command as much a shilling per hour were reduced to eight or nine pence, if they were lucky enough to secure work.[12] City laborers made roughly half that amount. Moreover, once commodity prices collapsed New Zealand was saddled with a debt estimated to be over £41 million, a staggering amount for a nation of fewer than 700,000 white residents.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the severity of New Zealand's depression. The North American economy also underwent several recessions between 1873 and 1900, but these were punctuated by equally dramatic periods of expansion and boom. The New Zealand economy, by contrast, remained moribund after 1876, and its associated suffering disproportionately fell upon the very workers recruited under the Vogel-Fox scheme. According to John Martin, over three-quarters of the unemployed of Christchurch in 1888 were immigrants who arrived after 1869.[13] Not surprisingly, immigration patterns reversed themselves. The city of Dunedin lost 11 percent of its population between 1880 and 1885, and one group of unemployed men even petitioned the U.S. government to assist them in emigrating. In 1887, more people left New Zealand than entered, exiting at a rate as high as 1,400 per month.[14]

Problems snowballed throughout the decade. Unemployment demonstrations were widespread, frequent, and boisterous. South Islanders petitioned the government for assistance to move to the North Island, apparently unaware that conditions there were only marginally better; Auckland, for instance, saw demonstrations in 1886 that dwarfed those in supposedly more radical Christchurch. Other groups tried to circumvent the colonial government altogether; in 1884, the Otago Trades and Labour Council lobbied the British Parliament to halt emigration to New Zealand.[15] Workers who held onto jobs faced deteriorating conditions; by the late 1880s, numerous investigations were conducted into alleged sweatshop labor.