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THE COMMONWEAL IN THE HEARTLAND: CHARLES T. KELLEY AND IOWA'S INDUSTRIAL ARMY

An Abstract of a Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Ryan James Sprau

University of Northern Iowa

July 1999

ABSTRACT

Decades before the 1930s, or the period most Americans refer to as the Great Depression, the United States suffered through one of the worst economic crises in national history. While not as devastating nor as prolonged as the economic disaster that affected the United States in the 1930s, the depression that gripped the nation from 1893 to 1897 forced millions out of work. The Commonweal of Christ, more commonly known as the industrial army movement of 1894, offered one solution to the nation's crippling unemployment problem. Crusade founder Jacob S. Coxey planned to lead the nation's unemployed and discontented into Washington, D. C., where the massive "petition in boots" would lobby Congress for the creation of a national public works relief system.

The largest Commonweal contingent, known as Kelley's Army, originated in California and spent nearly one month in Iowa during the spring of 1894. Named for its leader, Charles T. Kelley, the group marched from Council Bluffs to Des Moines and rafted down the Des Moines River before leaving the state for Missouri. While in Iowa, Kelley's Army aroused a fascinating combination of apprehension, sympathy, loathing, curiosity, and fear in the Iowa populace.

Unfortunately for Kelley, Coxey, and other industrial army participants, their efforts to convince Congress and the American people of the need for a federally funded work relief program ultimately failed. Despite this failure, the

Commonweal movement did challenge long-held beliefs about the relationship between unemployment and the nation's economic health. The crusade also generated questions and debates over traditional concepts of individual responsibility and the role of government in American society.

This thesis makes several contributions to the history of the industrial army movement. Specifically, it contributes to the traditional narrative of Kelley's Army and its travels in Iowa while focusing on the response by Iowans to the presence of the contingent in their state and communities. In addition, this work also provides information about army leader and activist Charles Kelley and his life after the failed industrial army movement of 1894.

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Entitled: "The Commonweal in the Heartland: Charles T. Kelley and Iowa's Industrial Army"

Has been approved as meeting the thesis requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts

4/19/99 — Date — Dr. John Johnson, Chair, Thesis Committee

4/19/99 — Date — Dr. Donald Shepardson, Thesis Committee Member

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people played roles in the successful completion of this thesis – far too many to list in a limited format such as this. I would, however, like to acknowledge those people who played key roles in my life and scholarship during this time. My family served as a wonderful support network and I would like to thank Kris and Price Dahlstrom, Jim and Leanne Sprau, and Katy Sprau for their encouragement and aid while I worked to complete this degree. My grandparents, Mary Louise and Marlen Torgerson and Alvin and Darlene Sprau, took an early interest in my work and consistently supported my efforts. I am also grateful to Sherri McGivney for the patience and understanding she demonstrated as I worked to complete this thesis.

Employees and volunteers of the Iowa State Historical Society, the San Francisco Public Library, the California State Historical Society, and the California Genealogical Society were very helpful and provided valuable advice and direction. I would also like to thank Barb Kueter for her generous assistance.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my thesis committee: Dr. John Johnson, Dr. Robert Martin, Dr. Donald Shepardson, and Dr. Charles Holcombe. The committee members provided consistent support, insightful suggestions, and great encouragement throughout this process.

Thank you all very much.

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CHAPTER ONE

> The subject of Coxey Army literature in general would appear to be even yet a fruitful thesis for a collegiate degree, as, so far as I know, this field is by no means overworked even if it has been worked over.
>
> - Carl Browne, 1912[1]

State Highway 83 is used rather infrequently these days, most motorists preferring instead to use the larger and much faster U. S. Interstate 80 to travel across western Iowa, usually moving to and from Des Moines or the Omaha/Council Bluffs area. Over a century has passed since the route now known as Highway 83 (formerly a Rock Island railroad route) provided Iowa with one of the state's more fascinating but obscure historical chapters.

In the spring of 1894 small Iowa communities such as Walnut, Stuart, and Red Rock, along with their larger counterparts in Council Bluffs and Des Moines played reluctant host to a remarkable assortment of unemployed laborers known as "Kelley's Army."[2] This industrial army constituted one of forty unemployed contingents attempting to reach Washington, D. C. and petition Congress for government-funded work relief during one of the harshest depressions in American history.[3]

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[1] Carl Browne and William McDevitt ed., "When Coxey's 'Army' Marcht on Washington, 1894," (San Francisco: n. p., 1944), 29. The original version of this pamphlet was published by Browne in 1912.

[2] Historians and other commentators have not agreed upon the spelling of Charles T. Kelley's surname. The 1920 census, Kelley's 1924 *Current History* article, and a 1935 *San Francisco Chronicle* obituary all used "Kelley," which is the spelling I will use throughout this study.

[3] Franklin Folsom, Impatient Armies of the Poor (Niwot, CO: University of Colorado Press, 1992), 168.

The contingent that received the most publicity and gave the movement its name was not the largest group but would, over time, symbolize the entire crusade. Jacob Coxey's "Commonweal of Christ," like its unemployed counterparts originating in other regions, ultimately failed in its attempt to convince the United States Congress, and many citizens, of the importance of federally funded work relief. The attitudes and conventions against which the Commonwealers protested, specifically the commonly held belief that unemployment correlated directly with laziness or poor work ethic, presented the industrial armies with an insurmountable obstacle.

The *laissez faire* attitude embraced by political and business leaders in the late nineteenth century also played a role in the failure of the Commonweal movement. This "hands off" approach by the nation's ruling bodies reinforced American beliefs about the primacy of self-help and individual responsibility. Coxey, Kelley, and other Commonweal leaders would have to wait nearly fifty years for the federal government, under the aegis of Franklin Roosevelt's unprecedented governmental policies, to provide individuals with employment relief. *Laissez faire* government, which by nature interferes very little with private sector matters, also hastened the ascension of Industrial America during the twilight years of the Gilded Age.

Railroads, which would later hamper and in some cases stop the progress of several Western industrial armies, became the nation's most powerful business and possibly its most hated during this time. Spurred by advances in steelmaking and refining, the steel and oil industries, along with railroads, created the country's first multimillionaires or, as some called them, America's first robber barons. Industry magnates like Gould, Carnegie, and Rockefeller dominated the business world and made millions by minimizing their competition and maximizing profits through trusts and holding companies. The federal government and most state authorities followed *laissez faire* fiscal policies, which made for very little public intervention in matters involving the private sector and, coupled with expansive and rapid industrialization, resulted in the unchecked accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few.

Advances in other industries like meatpacking, textiles, and electricity transformed the nation's cities, formerly havens for the middle and upper classes, into urban manufacturing centers dominated by workers and newly arrived immigrants. New York City on the eve of the Civil War, for example, boasted a population of 813,000; thirty years later its population had nearly doubled to over 1.5 million. The nation's industrial belt stretched from Boston

over to Milwaukee, down to St. Louis and back to Baltimore, an area that contained seventeen of America's largest cities.[4]

Two sources supplied this urban population explosion: rural areas and foreign immigration. When Frederick Jackson Turner announced the closing of the American frontier in 1890 and consequently that region's demise as a national safety valve for population pressure in the cities, he failed to see the cities themselves as society's central safety valve. The city, not the western frontier, provided the safety valve for the nation's dissatisfied migrants. Rural America, with its surplus population and declining economic opportunities, consistently lost numbers to urban areas throughout the Gilded Age. One historian claimed that "at least twenty farmers moved to town for each industrial laborer who moved to the land, and ten sons of farmers went to the city for each one who became the owner of a new farm."[5]

Meanwhile, foreigners continued flocking to American shores. Between 1881 and 1900 nearly nine million immigrants arrived in the United States.[6] The century's earlier influx of northern and western Europeans (Germany, Ireland, Scandinavia) paled in comparison to the large number of "new immigrants," many of whom hailed from southern and eastern Europe (Poland, Russia, Italy,

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[4] Raymond A. Mohl, The New City: Urban America in the Industrial Age, 1860 - 1920 (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1985) 15.
[5] Ibid., 19.
[6] Ibid., 23.

Greece, and Austria-Hungary). Like their predecessors, most new immigrants settled in the nation's urban industrial centers. Unlike the old immigrants, however, newcomers in the Gilded Age faced intense discrimination from established American communities struggling to cope with a rapidly changing society.

Nativism, the fear of alien infiltration and subversion of American society, reappeared in the United States following the Civil War. Nativist fears intensified during the era's many economic recessions and depressions. Immigrants were often targeted by native born Americans and blamed for adding to the ranks of the unemployed by flooding the labor market, which in turn allowed businessmen to hire workers on management's terms. Unskilled immigrant labor was particularly unpopular with the new voice of American working class discontent: national labor unions.[7]

As industry flourished and the number of new rich grew each year, so too did the power and influence of organized labor. The last decades of the nineteenth century included several of the nation's bloodiest battles between labor and management. Newly formed unions such as the Knights of Labor, the American Federation of Labor, and the American Railway Union clashed with business leaders over wages, hours, and working conditions. The Great Strike of

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[7] John Higham, Strangers in the Land (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 71.

1877, initiated by eastern railroad employees over wage cuts, spread nationwide and cost hundreds of lives before President Rutherford B. Hayes reluctantly used federal troops to quell the disturbances.[8] Chicago's 1886 Haymarket Riot ignited widespread fears about anarchist revolt, dealt a mortal blow to the Knights of Labor, and ended with a trial marked by hysteria and prejudice.[9] Later strikes in Homestead, Pennsylvania and Pullman, Illinois left dozens dead after violent clashes between labor, private security forces, and state militias.

Industrial workers, however, were not the only laboring class disenchanted with their socio-economic situation. Workers in America's agricultural and former frontier areas also raised their voices against the perceived injustices of industrial capitalism and a distant, corrupt national government. Years of declining prices coupled with higher borrowing and shipping costs led angry farmers in the Midwest, South, and West to join forces in 1892 to form the People's, or Populist, Party. Many Populists viewed the maldistribution of wealth and the apparent partnership of big business and government as a "vast conspiracy against mankind" that would ultimately leave the country with two classes: tramps and millionaires.[10] In addition to calling for a graduated income tax and the direct election of U. S. senators, western and

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[8] Mark Wahlgren Summers, The Gilded Age or, The Hazard of New Functions (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 88.
[9] George Tindall, America: a Narrative History (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1984) 772.
[10] Ibid., 855.

midwestern Populists also took aim at the railroads, a mutual enemy of farmers and miners, for whom railroad transport represented survival.[11]

While Populists never realized their goal of nationalizing the railroads, the People's Party did gain significant political power in the Rocky Mountain and Plains states during the 1890s. Iowan James B. Weaver, the 1892 Populist presidential nominee, won nearly ten percent of the popular vote, received twenty-two electoral votes, and carried four western states. Weaver, along with other prominent Populists and labor leaders, would provide much of the support base for the nation's widespread industrial army movement.

Economic booms and busts also typified Gilded Age America and established the period, as one scholar noted, as one of "recurring calamities and almost unrelieved discontent."[12] Beginning in 1873, economic panics and depressions bookended periods of extraordinary national growth. The worst of these financial downturns began on May 5, 1893, only four days after President Grover Cleveland started the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, a celebration of American industry, ingenuity, and enterprise. European financial woes, originating in the worldwide depression of 1890, contributed to America's problems as overseas banks failed and foreign investors, skeptical of America's declining financial situation in early 1893, exchanged their American securities

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[11] Robert H. Wiebe, The Search for Order 1877 - 1920 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 85.
[12] Higham, 68.

for American gold, helping to drain an already taxed gold supply.[13] The stock market crash in May accelerated the crisis and signaled the start of the worst depression in the nation's short history.

By year's end, over 15,000 businesses and over 500 banks had closed their doors, leaving over 2 million people, or roughly 18% of the workforce, without jobs and thousands bereft of savings.[14] The fabulously wealthy remained relatively unscathed, however, which only fueled the anger and frustration of those directly affected by the economic crisis. As the jobless wandered city streets in search of work and food, reform-minded individuals looked for answers to the nation's growing unemployment problem. One novel solution came from an unlikely source: a middle class Ohio rancher and Populist, Jacob Sechler Coxey, who believed his "good roads" plan would help solve the nation's growing unemployment problem.

The plan Jacob Coxey proposed and the means by which he chose to realize his goals, the "petition in boots," enjoyed only a brief brush with fame before quickly fading from the American memory. A brief paragraph or footnote regarding the Commonweal crusade occasionally finds its way into college textbooks or local histories, and some historians include brief accounts of the

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[13] Summers, 235.
[14] Gerald T. White, The United States and the Problem of Recovery after 1893 (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 23.

industrial armies in studies of the Gilded Age, Populism, and American labor. The body of primary and secondary material available on Iowa's detachment, led by a San Francisco printer-turned-activist named Charles T. Kelley, is meager.

The most plentiful primary source on Kelley's Army, and of all such groups, is America's printed press. In addition to local and regional publications such as the *Weekly Iowa State Register*, the *Midland Monthly*, and the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, several large circulation papers and magazines, including *Harper's Weekly*, *The Outlook*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *Public Opinion* also provided national coverage of "General" Kelley and his army's trek through Iowa.

Accounts of Kelley's Army, both scholarly and popular, spend little, if any, time analyzing Iowa's response to the invasion of the state by the "Tramp Army," opting instead to provide a narrative of the group's experiences. The purpose of this study is to examine these responses and place them within a political and social context specific to Iowa in order to explain why Iowans, in communities within and outside of the army's path, reacted as they did towards the Commonweal and its stated objectives.

This study also attempts to fill a void in the literature on Kelley's Army by surveying a range of primary sources from across the entire state. Coverage by the Des Moines and Council Bluffs papers, used heavily in earlier reconstruction of the army's adventures, remains especially important because smaller papers

often pulled *Register* and *Nonpareil* stories off the wire. The majority of Iowans, however, lived in communities much smaller than Des Moines and along with their local newspapers, represent a much more rural segment of the population. Smaller papers, especially those published in towns through which the army passed, including the *Stuart Locomotive*, the *Casey Vindicator*, and the *Anita Tribune*, are given equal billing with reports from the larger circulation papers.

The explanations, accusations, and condemnations directed at the army and emanating from local newspapers reflect the fascinating combination of apprehension, sympathy, loathing, curiosity, and fear generated by the army's appearance and subsequent journey across the state. Iowans, the large majority of whom lived in small farming communities, were still a localized people living for the most part in what Robert Wiebe, author of The Search For Order 1877 - 1920, called "island communities." Analysis of these reactions, in addition to those from larger areas like Des Moines and Council Bluffs, presents a balanced response to the unemployed crusade and highlights the larger issues and tensions facing the nation in the late nineteenth century. This local perspective is quite important given, as one Coxey scholar argued, the "intensely local orientation of the United States" that made the Commonweal crusade possible.[15]

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[15] Carlos Schwantes, Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 268.

Fortunately, historians need not rely solely on the nation's newspapers for information on Kelley and Coxey; several eyewitness accounts of the Commonweal surfaced after the abrupt demise of the movement. The most valuable account of an individual's experiences with Kelley's Army belongs to writer Jack London, whose membership in the army and later literary success most likely rescued Iowa's Commonweal contingent from complete historical obscurity. London, only eighteen at the time, joined Kelley's Army as it camped several miles east of Council Bluffs and deserted the group in Hannibal, Missouri. London's twenty-two diary entries, coupled with his 1907 collection of tramp memories, The Road, comprise the only published accounts penned by a Kelley veteran. His work is especially significant for the author's recorded observations of the army, the countryside, and the Iowa natives during the group's movement, and lack thereof, through the state.

London's observations ranged in length and detail from succinct ("Monday we worked all day & at night till 12") to elaborate, as this entry from the army's journey down the Des Moines River illustrates:

> We were underway at 12 o'clock...scraping the bars showing big rocks round which the water boiled & foamed, over others with such force as to almost stove us in till we were way ahead of the fleet which was tangled up and stranded in an astounding manner. We ran this 25 miles and then almost two more below the town of Eldon to camp.[16]

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[16] Richard W. Etulain, ed., Jack London on the Road: The Tramp Diary and Other Hobo Writings (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1979), 49.

Most of the secondary material available on Kelley's Army reconstructs its Iowa experiences through London's diary and relate virtually the same tale. Examples include "A Jack London Diary: Tramping With Kelley Through Iowa" in a 1926 issue of the Iowa historical journal *The Palimpsest* and Ruth Bietz's "Across Iowa with Jack London," a 1960 article published in *The Iowan*. The *Des Moines Register*, oft-cited source for information on the army in 1894, later included an article entitled "How Jack London Joined Jobless 'Invasion' of Iowa" in its 1946 centennial history series, based largely on the earlier *Palimpsest* article. Norma Jean Langford's 1970 *Annals of Iowa* article "Kelley's Army" and William Petersen's "Jack London and Kelley's Army," which appeared in a 1971 *Palimpsest* issue, round out the London-inspired secondary literature. These reconstructions, while important, provide very little information about how Iowans reacted to the presence of Kelley's Army in their state and in some cases, in their communities.

Henry Vincent's The Story of the Commonweal gives the only other primary, albeit incomplete, account of the 1894 crusade for work relief. Vincent, the self-proclaimed "official historian of the commonweal," followed Jacob Coxey's group from its origination in Massillon, Ohio to Washington, D. C. Vincent also included details of the journeys of several other industrial armies, including Kelley's midwestern contingent. Vincent devoted five chapters to

General Kelley and his men; four of these chapters detail the group's experiences and problems with the railroads and state officials after its arrival in Iowa.

A Chicago newspaperman and founder of the Chicago Commonweal contingent, Vincent most likely relied on dispatches from several Chicago newspapers to compile his account of Kelley's group. In his capacity as the movement's official historian, Vincent painted a rather glowing portrait of Kelley's reception in Iowa. One Coxey scholar noted Vincent's sympathetic tone and questioned the veracity of the accounts that chronicle the distant industrial armies. Donald McMurry, author of the first comprehensive study of the industrial army movement, referred to Vincent's accounts of distant armies as "hasty compilations with a few discrepancies and inaccuracies."[17] Bias and degrees of truth notwithstanding, The Story of the Commonweal endures as one of only two published eyewitness accounts of the industrial army movement. Unfortunately, Vincent's undocumented coverage of the midwestern army ended in late April, before Kelley's arrival and prolonged stay in Des Moines.

Three scholarly works comprise the bulk of academic research on the Commonweal movement and provide the most comprehensive coverage of Coxey and Kelley. These studies, unlike the narratives of Henry Vincent and William Peterson, also attempt to explain the causes and significance of the

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[17] Donald McMurry, Coxey's Army: A Study of the Industrial Army Movement of 1894 (New York: AMS Press, 1929), 312.

movement. Donald McMurry contributed the first scholarly look at the crusade with his 1929 book Coxey's Army: A Study of the Industrial Army Movement of 1894. Relying heavily on Vincent and a wide range of national and regional newspapers, journals, and newsletters, McMurry detailed the origins of the movement, provided narrative accounts of several armies, and analyzed the Commonweal's impact and historical significance. McMurry also presented the first comprehensive study of Kelley's Army and its journey from San Francisco to Washington, D. C. Relying predominantly on Vincent's account, London's diary, the *Weekly Iowa State Register*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, McMurry referred to Kelley's group as "the largest of the unemployed armies, and in many respects the most interesting of them all."[18]

McMurry discussed the immediate and underlying causes of Coxeyism, arguing that the economic malaise of the early 1890s and subsequent unemployment sparked the industrial protests and concluded that the Commonweal movement was a symptom of the economic revolution taking place within the United States in the late nineteenth century.[19] McMurry noted that the movement failed to achieve its initial goals but "to dismiss the subject as a comic performance with a farcical ending does not explain it."[20] Coxeyism, the

[18] Ibid., 149.
[19] Ibid., 285.
[20] Ibid., 262.

author continued, was essentially Populism and a product of the same influencing elements: anti-monopolism, greenbackism, Granges, and Farmers' Alliances. The movement remains important for what it signified, not for its fleeting accomplishments. Specifically, it publicized the reactions of the American frontier spirit to growing industrialism and the closing of the frontier.[21]

Carlos Schwantes, in his 1985 book Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey, used a number of newspapers from a wide range of states to expand upon McMurry's earlier contribution. Schwantes argued that the Commonweal movement should be viewed as chapters in the history of the American West, American journalism, and American reform. He then claimed four forces caused and/or propelled the Coxey crusade: the misery created by economic depression, the boost given the movement by the press, the sympathy and support extended by organized labor and Populism, and the local orientation of the nation's communities, which kept the armies fed and moving even through unsympathetic areas.[22]

Relying heavily on Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, Schwantes also claimed that Coxeyism presented a "double-barreled" assault on several fundamental American beliefs: it called into question governmental

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[21] Ibid., 283 & 285.
[22] Scwantes, x & 261.

responsibility for the nation's economic health while concurrently undermining the popular belief that the American frontier provided a form of social security for problems stemming from the country's industrial areas. McMurry touched upon Turner' frontier argument in his book, and Schwantes spent considerable time expounding on this thesis, arguing that the American West, at least in the eyes of many Americans, long served as a safety valve for tensions found elsewhere in the country, especially in the urban industrial centers. The close of the frontier in 1890 and the onset of economic depression three years later prompted the appearance of large industrial armies flowing out of the West and proved to many people that the frontier could no longer serve as an alternative to governmental paternalism.[23]

Schwantes also dedicated several chapters in his book to Kelley's adventures. In contrast to McMurry, Schwantes used six different Iowa newspapers including the *Des Moines Leader*, the Populist *Farmers' Tribune*, and the *Atlantic Weekly Telegraph*, along with London's eyewitness testimony, to produce his narrative. Whereas McMurry presented a relatively straightforward narrative of the Kelley contingent, Schwantes reconstructed the tale and contributed several new insights. Chief amongst these was an analysis of the tension between corporate, state, and local authorities, specifically the railroads

[23] Ibid., 274.

and Iowa governor Frank D. Jackson. Schwantes also presented new information on the role of women in the Commonweal movement, including "Kelley's Angels," two Omaha women who accompanied the general and his men across the state.

Franklin Folsom's Impatient Armies of the Poor, the third and most recent study of the Commonweal, took a labor-oriented approach to Coxeyism. Surprisingly, Folsom started his story with coverage of Kelley's Army, remarking that "the small army Coxey assembled and led to Washington has received attention out of proportion to its real role in other migrations of the jobless in 1894."[24] Folsom, unlike McMurry and Schwantes, spent little time analyzing the causes and historical significance of the Commonweal, opting instead to present the movement as a chapter in American labor history. Folsom concluded that Coxeyism failed due to internal squabbles and diversions, which hampered the Commonwealers from achieving their public relief objectives.

Impatient Armies of the Poor incorporated information from McMurry, Schwantes, and eleven Iowa papers for coverage of Kelley's Army. Folsom was the first scholar to utilize a wide geographical sampling of state papers, including smaller publications from communities outside of Des Moines such as Stuart, Gladbrook, and Washington, but his chapter on Iowa's army contributed

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[24] Folsom, 155.

little new information. The author also did not provide specific citations for his writing and in what capacity he used the smaller papers is unknown.

Several state, county, and city histories include information on Kelley's Army, though most descriptions are very brief. S. B. Evans' History of Wapello County is perhaps the most interesting account of Charles T. Kelley and his unemployed troops. Focusing on Kelley's pass through this southeastern Iowa county, Evans noted how the navy (as the group was known during its journey down the Des Moines River) "terrorized communities, not by actual acts of violence, but by their numbers and threats, and in this way secured subsistence from towns."[25] A second history of Wapello County, published thirteen years later and on the eve of Kelley's 1914 attempt to duplicate his earlier march, branded the unemployed army as "riff-raff and ne'er-do-wells" who undertook "a desultory and disastrous march on the capital of the nation."[26]

Johnson Brigham's History of Des Moines and Polk County was more sympathetic. Brigham noted that the appearance of the army in the state's capital remains "one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of Des Moines" but also admitted "there was no moaning at the Raccoon Fork when Kelley's navy passed out of sight!" Brigham's version is most valuable for its inclusion of a

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[25] S.B. Evans, ed., History of Wapello County, Iowa (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Co.,1901), 114 & 115.

[26] Harrison Waterman, ed., History of Wapello County, Iowa (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co.,1914), 427 & 428.

survey, conducted by Drake University President B. O. Aylseworth and his sociology class, that included biographical information on 763 Kelley men.[27]

Suffice it to say, Kelley's Army failed to gain the same scholarly and popular attention awarded its eastern counterpart led by Jacob Coxey. The eccentricity and novelty of Coxey's group, led by the outspoken Carl Browne, a jack-of-all-trades activist who boasted that he had been in more jails than any other contemporary labor agitator and including other characters like the "Great Unknown" and Christopher Columbus Jones, quickly caught the attention of the national press, which was only too happy to publicize the story of Coxey's motley crew.[28] One finds references to the eastern Commonweal contingent in a number of contemporary publications including *The Arena, The Independent, The Chautauquan, Cosmopolitan,* and *The Nation.* The arrival of the eastern army in Washington, D. C., coupled with its march on the Capital and arrest of Coxey, Browne, and Jones, only fueled the public's interest in the drama unfolding in the nation's capital.

Joseph Gustaitis's article "Coxey's Army," published in 1994, is the most recent addition to the Coxey canon. Containing little new information on the Commonweal, Gustaitis focused on the exploits of Coxey's Army and Coxey's

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[27] Johnson Brigham, History of Des Moines and Polk County, Iowa (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1911), 330 - 332.
[28] Schwantes, 39.

life after 1894, including his 1944 return to Washington, D. C. on the fiftieth anniversary of his march.[29]

Those living in Gilded Age America witnessed a period of distinct and abrupt change, in a nation coming to grips with rapid industrialization and its side effects: urbanization, unprecedented immigration, and the maldistribution of wealth. Change, however, often creates resistance, particularly by those who feel threatened by the transformations they see taking place. The Gilded Age, often associated with political corruption and the rise of American big business, also witnessed solutions, put forth by the nation's laboring classes, to these perceived problems of industrial capitalism. The industrial army movement, despite its shortcomings, was one such solution.

In order to foster a thorough understanding of the Commonweal crusade and the period in which it developed, the following chapters are organized chronologically. Chapter Two provides information on Gilded Age concepts of unemployment, charity, and work relief. This chapter also focuses on the creation and growth of the Commonweal movement. Chapter Three details the development of Kelley's Army in the San Francisco Bay Area and recounts its movement from California to Des Moines, Iowa. The third chapter also begins an analysis of Iowa's response to the army's arrival and presence in the state.

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[29] Joseph Gustaitis, Coxey's Army," *American History Illustrated* 24 (March/April 1994): 39 - 45.

Chapter Four begins with the army in Des Moines, offers a brief narrative of the army's journey from Des Moines to Washington, D. C., and ends with an analysis of the explanations and accusations directed at Kelley's Army by the state's newspaper during the army's travels through the state. The fifth and concluding chapter is devoted to Charles T. Kelley and his life after the 1894 protest.

CHAPTER TWO

> It is to be regretted that any number of men should have been taught to think it the government's duty to provide for them. It is not the American idea. We have "armies" of farmers all over the land who "march" every morning to their work.
>
> -The *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*
> May 20, 1894[1]

Kelley's Army arrived in Iowa via train on April 15, 1894, several weeks after Jacob Coxey's groundbreaking band left Massillon, Ohio, on its way to Washington, D. C. Iowans, at least those who read newspapers or relied on others for information about current events, knew and talked about the industrial army movement and its significance, or lack thereof, weeks before Kelley's men landed in Council Bluffs. The ridicule aimed at Coxey's contingent combined with the anxiety and fear generated by William Hogan's western army presented Iowans with two contrasting examples of Coxeyism.

While Coxey's strange conglomeration of jobless met ridicule and condescension at the hands of the nation's media, Hogan's adventurous group generated anger and anxiety in most areas. The actions of these other industrial armies, especially Coxey's men, are important for understanding Iowa's response to Kelley's group, for it was the Commonweal of Christ, under the leadership of Coxey and Carl Browne, that not only inspired and initiated the industrial army

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[1] *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, 20 May 1894.

movement, but also affected, both negatively and positively, the nation's attitude towards the crusade.

Media coverage accounted for only part of the preconceived notions surrounding Kelley's arrival on Iowa soil. In order to understand the Commonweal crusade, its proponents, and its many critics, one must also consider prevailing American ideas about work ethic, unemployment, charity, and social evolution.

After watching the nation's unemployment problem grow during the harsh winter of 1893-94, President Grover Cleveland acted in accordance with the traditional governmental attitude towards unemployment: he did nothing. This is not to say, however, that Cleveland cowered in the White House while the homeless and jobless roamed city streets and the countryside. The depression and its possible cure certainly concerned the president, but Cleveland simply did not believe it was the government's duty to provide individuals with work. Late nineteenth century relief emanated exclusively from private agencies and municipalities, state and federal aid did not exist. Historian Robert Weibe listed the primary responsibilities of the late nineteenth century national government as gathering income and appropriating funds, not providing for those who could not, or would not, find work.[2] Cleveland, like many of his

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[2] Robert H. Weibe, The Search for Order 1877 - 1920 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 31.

contemporaries, assumed that work was available for those who wanted employment, an assumption that lost credibility as the number of "tramps" roaming the nation grew in 1893.

American ideas about the existence and persistence of poverty and joblessness reflected a larger debate within society over evolution, individual and moral responsibility, and governmental paternalism. Most Americans, like President Cleveland, were slow to recognize the link between unemployment and the appearance of tramps, both of which came as an affront to contemporary conceptions of frugality and hard work. The Protestant work ethic, most often associated with Calvinism and the Puritans, claimed that success stemmed from hard work and thrift; those who worked hard and spent conservatively would live comfortably. The unsuccessful, often referred to as tatterdemalions and ragamuffins, did not symbolize the human cost of rapid industrialization and economic downturns; they were instead looked upon as victims of their own laziness. Richard T. Dugdale, who gathered information on a derelict New York family (the "Jukes") and linked the inheritance of unfavorable traits with crime and poverty, helped reinforce traditional ideas about vagrancy and personal deficiency with his research.[3]

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[3] Paul Ringenbach, Tramps and Reformers, 1873 - 1916 (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1973), 18.

Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution, introduced at mid-century, was used to strengthen the idea that poverty and unemployment were solely individual matters. Most Social Darwinists considered competition the first law of life and sought to explain the human state of affairs in the modern age using terms originally intended for the animal kingdom. Herbert Spencer, arguably the most prominent and recognizable social Darwinist, made an international name for himself by coining the phrase "survival of the fittest" to explain how successful individuals came to enjoy such success. Spencer and other orthodox social Darwinists rejected public support of education, public mail systems, and the regulation of business or trade.[4] Social Darwinists also opposed state aid to the poor, a segment of society Spencer considered unfit: "the whole effort of nature is to get rid of such, to clear the world of them, and make room for better."[5]

Richard Hofstadter notes that post-bellum America, with "its rapid expansion, its exploitative methods, its desperate competition, and its preemptory rejection of failure...was like a vast human caricature of the Darwinian struggle for existence and survival of the fittest."[6] Most Americans

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[4] Walter I. Trattner, From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America, 5th edition, (New York: the Free Press, 1994), 90.
[5] Richard Hofstadter, "The Vogue of Spencer," in Darwin, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Philip Appleman (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), 394.
[6] Ibid., 396.

probably knew little about Spencerian concepts of social selection, but many of America's most prominent businessmen knew of and espoused Spencer's ideas, which included, as Hofstatder pointed out, the biological apology for laissez faire economics.[7] Industrialist Andrew Carnegie became close friends with Spencer, eventually producing his own commentary on social selection, The Gospel of Wealth, which proclaimed the "concentration of business. . . in the hands of the few; and the law of competition between these, as being not only beneficial, but essential to the human race."[8]

Fortunately for the unemployed participants of the Commonweal crusade, Spencerian concepts of social selection had not gained widespread acceptance in all areas of the country. The jobless and needy often turned to relatives and friends for food and shelter before seeking assistance from church groups, fraternal associations, local ethnic groups, and trade unions. According to William Trattner, the unemployed generally sought assistance from private charitable agencies as a last resort.[9]

In states like Iowa which consistently, if not begrudgingly, provided sustenance to Kelley's group, many still adhered to socially and religiously based concepts of charity. Scientific charity, a variation on traditional concepts of

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[7] Ibid., 397.
[8] Ibid., 399.
[9] Trattner, 93.

philanthropy, challenged the self-help mentality of the Gilded Age. This organized charity movement, founded in the late 1870s, sought to discourage vagrancy and pauperism by coordinating private relief agencies, investigating relief applicants, and promoting self-sufficiency.[10] Philanthropists hoped that investigation into the neediness of individual applicants would silence critics who warned that the poor and unemployed would use relief as a substitute for honest work, a charge consistently levied against Kelley's Army during its travels in Iowa.

Uncertain how to deal with the growing tramp problem following the Civil War, many states and municipalities turned to the traditional American method of dealing with difficult social problems: they legislated against the offending activity. Iowa, like many other states, saw fit to legislate against vagrancy following the 1873 financial panic. Early Iowa code defined a vagrant as

> all common prostitutes and keepers of bawdy houses or houses for the resort of prostitutes . . . habitual drunkards, gamesters or other disorderly persons . . . persons wandering about and having no visible calling or business to maintain themselves . . . persons begging in public places, or from house to house, or procuring children or others to do so . . . persons playing or betting in any street or public or open place at any game or pretended game of chance, or at or with any table or instrument of gaming.[11]

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[10] Ibid., 95.

[11] Annotated Code of the State of Iowa (Des Moines, IA: F.R. Conaway, State Printer, 1897), 1980.

The word "tramp," a blanket term often used to describe all types of unemployed men, appeared in the American vernacular following the Civil War. By the 1890s the Iowa state legislature redefined the vagrant and inserted the term "tramp" to describe "any male person sixteen years of age or over, physically able to perform manual labor, who is wandering about, practicing common begging, having no visible calling or business to maintain himself, and is unable to show reasonable efforts in good faith to secure employment."[12]

Depending on the community, tramps faced harsh punishments if found in violation of state or local vagrancy laws. Prohibited from putting "fear in any inhabitant of the state" and congregating in groups of two or more, vagrants convicted in Iowa communities could expect between one and six months of hard labor in and around the area. In actual practice, many vagrants found their way to or officials placed them in local poorhouses, especially in the winter months.[13] Officials in El Paso, Texas, and Washington, D. C. used local and state vagrancy ordinances to arrest Lewis Fry, leader of one California detachment, and George Primrose, leader of an advance northeastern army.[14] Officials dismissed both cases for lack of evidence, perhaps indicating that city leaders

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[12] Ibid., 1981.
[13] John L. Gillin, History of Poor Relief Legislation in Iowa (Iowa City, IA: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1914), 291.
[14] Donald L. McMurry, Coxey's Army: A Study of the Industrial Army Movement of 1894 (New York: AMS Press, 1929), 106 & 153.

harbored concerns about public reaction to the conviction and sentencing of Commonweal leaders.

The harsh economic conditions initiated by the Panic of 1893 forced the nation's cities to develop work or other relief programs for the local unemployed. In San Francisco, municipal officials put several thousand people to work constructing parks, roads, and bike paths. City leaders housed the jobless in vacant buildings and, using funds donated by citizens, also supplied food.[15] Charity organizations in Indianapolis developed the Indianapolis Plan, which supplied the unemployed with food rations in return for a day's labor. Detroit's Mayor Hazen S. Pingree created the "Pingree Potato Scheme" to combat growing unemployment in that city. The plan, described as municipal farming for the poor, utilized vacant lands as garden plots for the needy.[16]

The vast number of unemployed crowding city streets and roaming the countryside in search of jobs, shelter, and sustenance in 1893-94 forced many to reconsider the connection between tramps and economic depression. Populists quickly recognized this connection and defended the nation's newly unemployed against inhumane treatment by the law. In Kansas, Populist governor Lorenzo Lewelling protested his state's harsh treatment of those searching for

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[15] Lawrence Kinnard, History of the Greater San Francisco Bay Region, vol. II (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1966), 109.
[16] Samuel Rezneck, Business Depressions and Financial Panics (New York: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1968), 184.

employment. In an 1893 executive proclamation, quickly deemed "The Tramp Circular," Lewelling blasted municipal police commissioners for condemning "thousands of men, guilty of no crime but that of seeking employment," to hard labor "as municipal slaves, because ignorance of economic conditions had made us cruel." Harkening back to the 1892 Populist platform, Lewelling argued that vagrancy laws polarized society and entitled only those with money to the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.[17] Populists were perhaps the only group to agree that a sudden increase in the number of tramps moving about the country represented a natural product of America's economic and social condition.

Ohio Populist Jacob S. Coxey not only recognized the roots of unemployment, he also believed he had the answer to the country's most serious socio-economic problem. The 1893 Panic and ensuing depression brought a number of activists into the public spotlight, including Charles T. Kelley, but none captured the public's attention like Coxey and journeyman activist Carl Browne. A successful businessman, Coxey managed to stave off the economic troubles of the 1890s through ownership of several horse ranches and a profitable limestone quarry. Coxey's answer to the nation's employment woes combined a national road building project with a plan for federally funded non-interest

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[17] Norman Pollack, ed., The Populist Mind (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1967) 331 - 332.

bonds. He believed that the cash wages provided by his "good roads" work relief program would invigorate business, consume apparent surpluses, cause credit to flow, and raise prices. The public works project required the U.S. Treasury to issue legal-tender currency on the security of bonds deposited by state and local governments. Repayment at an annual rate of four percent canceled the bond and retired the currency from circulation at the end of a twenty-five year period.[18]

Coxey believed his plan possessed two important selling points: it would introduce enough new hard currency into the economy, replacing unstable credit money with cash, and it would also eliminate interest paid by local governments for public improvements.[19] In addition to the alleviation of the current economic trouble, Coxey also foresaw local and state governments using public works projects during future financial downturns to employ the jobless.

While attending a Populist convention in Chicago in August 1893, Coxey met the Commonweal's future "Originator, Organizer, and Chief Marshall," Carl Browne. The antithesis of the reserved Coxey, Browne's boisterous personality made the two strange allies. They quickly became comrades in the battle against big business. The eccentric Browne, an Iowa native, convinced Coxey of the

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[18] Embrey Howson, Jacob Sechler Coxey: Biography of a Monetary Reformer, 1854 - 1951, (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1973), 134.
[19] Ibid., 134 - 135.

need for an active reform movement aimed at work relief and funded by the federal government. Browne had once attempted to march "a host of congenial tramps" to Sacramento to intimidate the slow moving California legislature to provide work relief.[20] This precursor to the Commonweal movement never materialized, but the concept of a march on the federal capital caught Coxey's attention and the duo wed Browne's "petition in boots" notion with Coxey's non-interest bearing bond and public works ideas.

In late January 1894 Coxey and Browne published a plan of action in Coxey's hometown newspaper in which they proposed a march on Washington, D. C., estimated to arrive in early May. Once in Washington, Coxey would ascend the Capitol steps, present his Good Roads and Non-interest Bearing Bond Bill to Congress, and camp in the nation's capital until Congress acted on the proposal. Coxey predicted the nation's unemployed and disillusioned would also arrive in the first week of May, boosting the number of protesters identifying with the Commonweal of Christ from "three thousand to five hundred thousand strong."[21]

Several stories published by the Massillon newspaper caught the attention of the national press and by mid-March reporters from many of the country's

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[20] Carlos Schwantes, Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 3.
[21] Henry Vincent, The Story of the Commonweal, Mass Violence in America Series (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 51.

large circulation papers presented daily coverage of the peculiar congregation forming in Ohio. Positive press coverage saved the Commonweal from Jacob Coxey's lingering doubts about the crusade's potential for success. As news spread to all areas of the country in early 1894, mail and pledges arrived in Massillon along with several hundred recruits. This outside interest renewed Coxey's optimism, although he admitted that his movement would "either mark the second coming of Christ or be a total failure."[22]

The arrival of several colorful characters, like the individuals calling themselves "The Great Unknown" (with his wife "the Veiled Lady") and "Doctor Cyclone Kirkland," increased national fascination with the proposed march but assured many Americans that Coxey's Army was yet another example of late nineteenth century crankism. Jacob Coxey helped to identify himself with this strange entourage when he named his newborn son Legal Tender Coxey several weeks before setting out for Washington.[23]

The journey to Washington, D. C. started on March 25, Easter Sunday, an especially important date for Carl Browne, who had officially entitled the organization the Commonweal of Christ. Browne hoped, perhaps too optimistically, that the religious connotation would win adherents and quiet skeptics. Fighting the inclement spring weather of the Northeast, several

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[22] Scwhantes, 40 - 41.
[23] Howson, 140.

hundred industrial soldiers marched past large crowds in Dayton, Ohio and other towns and cities along the way. The army relied exclusively on individual communities for food, a tactic that quickly created controversy. While citizens in many eastern towns flocked to welcome Coxey's bizarre assortment of characters, the industrial army also received cool receptions in some areas. Enthusiasm and apprehension over the group's appearance in communities from Massillon to Washington often hinged on the local Populists and labor union members. In Sewickly, Pennsylvania, an aristocratic Pittsburgh suburb, the group initially received no provisions from the community and were ordered by local police to remain in their campgrounds.[24] One commentor reported on the fear and general lack of enthusiasm that greeted the Coxeyites along the entire route, remarking that "in nearly every town passed through there had been a greatly increased sale of locks, bolts, and firearms."[25]

The army arrived in Washington in late April and after waiting impatiently for several days in a nearby Virginia campsite, Coxey and Browne chose a course of action on April 30. The next day, May 1, marked the anti-climatic ending to Coxey's march on the capital, and the beginning of the end of America's Commonweal crusade. After parading the army into town, Coxey's daughter leading the procession on a white horse as the "goddess of peace," the

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[24] McMurry, 78.

[25] Shirley Plummer Austen, "Coxey's Commonweal Army ," *The Chautauquan* 19 (June 1894): 336.

industrial army continued up Pennsylvania Avenue. Anywhere from fifteen to thirty thousand spectators lined the streets and cheered as the parade passed. A number of policemen also kept vigil, prompting one eyewitness to later remark that "there were enough on duty to take every single Coxeyite into custody, and many seemed anxious to do so."[26]

As the five hundred Commonweal members looked on, Coxey and Browne attempted to reach the stairs of the Capitol. Washington police immediately took the leaders into custody under the pretense of an antiquated "keep off the grass" ordinance. They then turned on the crowd, beating nearly fifty spectators. A Washington, D. C. court wasted very little time finding the Commonweal leaders, including New England contingent leader Christopher Columbus Jones, guilty of violating the archaic Capitol Grounds Act. Coxey and Browne received twenty day jail sentences and five dollar fines.[27]

As the Commonweal leaders fell victim to a nervous Washington, D. C. police force, other groups of unemployed men, some of which started organizing before Coxey's nationally publicized announcement in March, made their way towards the capital to join up with their eastern Commonweal compatriots. Coxey's conviction and imprisonment did not immediately spell disaster for the movement, for armies from Montana, California, New England, Washington

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[26] McMurry, 116.
[27] Ibid., 123.

state, and Chicago continued march towards the capital. As Donald McMurry notes, Jacob Coxey's group "set the wheels in motion, or accelerated" the country's other armies.[28]

While Coxey's Army provided many Americans with a good laugh, industrials from the Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountain areas came to represent a serious and threatening side of the Commonweal crusade. Donald McMurry labeled the Northwest and mountainous contingents the most "intractable and troublesome of all the industrial armies." He further asserted that the "hardy miners and mountaineers were less accustomed to the restraints of civilization than the workingmen of the industrial region."[29] William Hogan's army, comprised predominantly of those "hardy miners and mountaineers," proved particularly troublesome.

Montana's mining industry, a primary source of livelihood for many of the state's 132,000 citizens, was hit particularly hard during the depression, forcing an estimated 20,000 miners out of work.[30] Several hundred of those unemployed citizens met in Butte under the leadership of William Hogan. After forcing their way across the state by commandeering freight trains in late April, Hogan's army clashed with federal deputies and local residents in Billings,

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[28] Ibid., 127.
[29] McMurry, Coxey's Army, 199.
[30] Schwantes, Coxey's Army, 150

Montana. The incident left one person dead and several others wounded. The clash also prompted the Cleveland administration to call in federal troops both to quell the disturbance as well as to soothe the concerns of railroad officials. Charles Kelley, camping in Council Bluffs and sparring with attorneys from the Rock Island and Northwestern lines in April 1894, worried that the actions of the Montana army would result in Americans regarding his contingent as "lawless men."[31]

Hogan's confrontation with U.S. deputies produced a vitriolic response from the previously patronizing, often condescending, national press. Shirley Austen, for example, wrote blistering criticisms of the Coxey movement in *The Chautauquan*. He called the group "a heterogeneous collection of bona-fide workingmen, cranks, and would be museum freaks, with the workingmen in the minority."[32]

The Chicago Herald joined the growing chorus of Commonweal detractors, referring to the movement as "an act of hostility against the government." *Herald* editors also compared the various armies to the Confederate rebel army, declaring it "an attempt to overawe congress...reach its end by terrorism and

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[31] *Waterloo Courier*, 28 April 1894.
[32] Shirley Plummer Austen, "Coxey's Commonweal Army," *The Chautauquan* 19 (June 1894): 334.

violence" and "wrest from the terrorized representatives of the people the objects of their extravagant and lawless claims."[33]

Not all Americans, however, looked so unfavorably on the industrial armies and their objectives. The editor of the Christian journal *Outlook*, for instance, observed in late April that Coxeyism had "risen from the proportions of a National joke into those of a serious National problem."[34] Not surprisingly, Populists quickly came to the defense of their industrial army brethren. While many partisan newspapers quarreled over which party should take responsibility for the movement's existence and questioned the constitutionality of the "petition in boots," Populists debated the causes and circumstances responsible for the movement's creation. Populists also found themselves defending both the Commonwealers' right to petition and the much-aligned character of the individuals comprising the industrial armies.

None of the Commonweal contingents managed to destroy the general public perception that the ranks of the industrial armies consisted predominantly of lifelong tramps and ne'er do wells, but Populist mouthpieces like the *Topeka Advocate* attempted to dispel the myth:

> These men have as much right to go to Washington and demand justice at the hands of congress as bankers, railroad magnates and corporation attorneys have to go and lobby for measures by which to plunder the

[33] Reprinted in *Waterloo Courier*, 9 May 1894.
[34] "The Week," *Outlook* 49 (April 1894): 1.

> public. Men do not become tramps and vagabonds from choice. When forced into idleness and employment it requires but a short time to make a vagabond of the man who under other and more favorable circumstances would be numbered among our best citizens. The causes which force people into idleness are therefore responsible, not only for this Coxey movement, but for nearly all the lawlessness and crime of the country, as well.[35]

Journalist Ray Stannard Baker, sent to Massillon while reporting for the *Chicago Record*, discussed his experiences with Coxey's Army, recalling that "many of the cranks of the country seemed to have scented spoil."[36] Yet the Commonwealers ultimately found a sympathizer in Baker, who later remarked that calling them "an army of 'bums, tramps, and vagabonds,' as some of the commentators were doing, was a complete misrepresentation." Most members, Baker explained, were honest farmers and workers "whose only offense was the fact that they could not buy or rent land . . . or find a job at which they could earn a living."[37]

In an attempt to defend themselves against charges of laziness and to legitimize their cause in the public eye, industrial army leaders kept tight control over their members and drafted constitutions that included relief program details and declarations of intent. After battling the railroads and coping with uncooperative, if not hostile, cities in Ohio and Indiana, Lewis Fry's Los Angeles

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[35] Pollack, The Populist Mind, 343.
[36] Ray Stannard Baker, American Chronicle: The Autobiography of Ray Stannard Baker (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945), 12.
[37] Ibid., 19.

contingent arrived in Washington, D. C. at the end of June. Fry, like the other Commonweal leaders, provided the press with a copy of his constitution. Reminiscent of the Populist's Omaha Platform, Fry's constitution reflected the socio-economic concerns of the worker in the American West. The document also contained a distinctively nativist slant, as noted in this language:

> Whereas, the evils of murderous competition; the supplanting of manual labor by machinery, the excessive Mongolian and pauper immigration; the curse of alien landlordism; the exploration, by rent, profit, and interest, of the products of the toiler, has centralized the wealth of the nation into the hands of the few, and placed the masses in a state of hopeless destitution.[38]

Several non-Populist commentators managed to grasp the social and historical significance of Coxeyism but questioned the movement's goals and methods. The most insightful of these commentaries, penned by economist Thorstein Veblen, appeared in *The Journal of Political Economy* in September 1894, one month after officials from the Washington, D. C. area forced the few remaining Coxeyites from their camps near the capital, marking the official end of the industrial army movement. After calling the Commonweal's public works program an "articulate hallucination," Veblen remarked that "the sentiment on which it proceeds must not be entirely, or even mainly spurious."[39] The

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[38] Vincent, The Story of the Commonweal, 163.
[39] Thorstein B. Veblen, "The Army of the Commonweal," *The Journal of Political Economy* 2 (December 1893 - September 1894): 457.

Commonweal crusade, Veblen continued, demonstrated a new sense of entitlement apparent in American society: "the classic phrase is no longer to read, 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'; what is to be insured [sic] to every free-born American . . . is 'life, liberty, and the means of happiness.'"[40] The movement indicated a watershed in labor protest, Veblen claimed, because army leaders disregarded local self-help, the foundation of nineteenth century public relief, and instead appealed directly to the federal government.

Most Americans did not read Veblen's article and, as Coxey scholar Donald McMurry postulated, "the mass of the general public was sympathetic, amused, or mildly concerned, but, on the whole, not greatly excited" about the Commonweal crusade.[41] For several weeks in April and May 1894, however, hundreds of men under the command of Charles Kelley created considerable sympathy, amusement, and concern in the small farming communities of southern Iowa.

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[40] Ibid., 458.
[41] McMurry, Coxey's Army, 284.

CHAPTER THREE

> Voluntary idleness and dependence upon the State or local authorities for support are contagious diseases which should be rooted out. The sooner a man learns that the only way to get a living is to work for it the better it will be for him and the community.
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> - *San Francisco Call*, August 4, 1894[1]

Around noon on April 15, 1894 a Union Pacific freight train stopped in Council Bluffs, Iowa. As thousands of interested onlookers gathered nearby, nearly fifteen hundred men streamed out of the train's twenty-seven boxcars onto Iowa soil. Kelley's Army, named for its civilian leader, Charles T. Kelley, had finally arrived in the Midwest. Iowa played reluctant and sometimes unwilling host to this unemployed mass for over one month. By the time the group moved past Keokuk, located near the confluence of the Des Moines and Mississippi rivers in southeast Iowa, cynical commentators were already labeling the Commonweal movement as one of the most laughable crusades in American history. During its month in Iowa, however, news and issues involving the army and its leader consistently made the front pages of Iowa's newspapers. For many Iowans, particularly those responsible for ensuring the army's survival, the Commonweal movement was anything but laughable.

Iowa's experiences with an industrial army differed from that of other states and regions in the amount of time the contingent actually stayed in the

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[1] "A Prospective Nuisance," *San Francisco Call*, 5 August 1894, 14.

area and relied on local populations for food and shelter. With the exception of Commonweal encampments in Virginia and Maryland, no other state in the 1890s coped with an industrial army in its midst for such an extended period of time. The prolonged and imposing stay by the Commonwealers in Iowa fueled numerous and wide-ranging debates in the state's printed press. During the last half of April 1894, after Kelley and his orderly troops surprised many with their discipline and model behavior, the state's papers tended to focus less on the army and more on peripheral issues. Specifically, the media targeted controversies such as Governor Frank Jackson's decision to use the state militia in response to the army's arrival, the power and influence of the railroad industry, and the feud between Council Bluffs and neighboring Omaha. The Commonweal presence also engendered thoughts and opinions concerning "General" Kelley's policy of obtaining food, the responsibility of Iowans to feed the men, and the lengths to which communities should go to meet the army's needs.

Earlier studies of the Commonweal crusade by Henry Vincent, Donald McMurry, Carlos Schwantes, and Franklin Folsom include thorough narratives of Kelley's Army and its journey from San Francisco through Iowa. This chapter and the one that follows do not constitute a new narrative of the army's journey through the state; the facts surrounding that journey are well established and

well documented. Instead, this treatment seeks to add new insights to previous studies by focusing on the reactions of Iowans and the numerous issues generated by the army's presence in Iowa as reported by a cross-section of the state's print media. One could not, of course, analyze these reactions without using the background narrative put forth by earlier commentators, so the analysis and research presented in the following pages are juxtaposed with the traditional accounts of Kelley's Army in Iowa. The only comprehensive resource available for documenting this reaction remains Iowa's newspapers, many of which sent correspondents to travel with and report on the exploits of the self-proclaimed "living petition."

Journalistic accounts, like all historical sources, contain varying degrees of bias and subjectivity. This is especially true of nineteenth century papers, many of which aligned themselves with the nation's political parties. The Des Moines based *Farmer's Tribune*, for instance, served Iowa's Populist interests. Other papers, such as the *Anita Republican* and the *Ottumwa Democrat*, supported the nation's major political parties. Publications with less partisan names also openly proclaimed their political leanings. The *Fairfield Ledger*, for example, considered itself a "Republican Journal."

In addition to the political preferences of the print media, those reporting and commenting on Kelley's unemployed army held steady jobs themselves.

Newspaper references to the army often included descriptors such as "tramp" or "hobo" when, in fact, many of the jobless were just that: men out of work due to the nation's economic crisis. Reporters and editors often questioned the work ethic and motivation of Kelley's men because most newspapermen could not, by virtue of their employment, identify with the unemployed's plight. Jack London's diary entries from the period provide the only glimpse of Kelley's army from an insider's viewpoint, a glimpse that even those in Company Q, an outfit of reporters who traveled with the army and sent daily dispatches to various papers, could not possibly capture. London's diary entries are also valuable when analyzed next to the reports published by the state's print media, for the different sources sometimes provide contrasting accounts.

Determining authorship is problematic when working with nineteenth century newspapers. Editors rarely attributed authorship to letters and other opinion-based contributions, leaving researchers with few clues as to individual sources. Opinion pages generally consisted of pieces written by the paper's editor or editorial staff, reprints attributed to other publications, and unsigned letters. Unless otherwise noted, the opinion-based documents cited in this study are credited to the respective publications and their editorial staffs.

As the national media spread news and rumors of Coxey's planned march, the discontented and jobless in California began organizing western

industrial army divisions. In Los Angeles, Lewis Fry, an Iowa native and former compatriot of Carl Browne, organized an army of over 800 men and, setting a risky precedent that would eventually strand Kelley in the Midwest, captured a freight train owned by the Southern Pacific, California's railroad power. Fry then started east towards El Paso, Texas, nearly two weeks before Coxey and Browne led their contingent out of Massillon, Ohio.[2]

In San Francisco, then California's largest city, local officials struggled to keep their unemployment problem in check. Work relief measures funded by the city included street paving programs, construction of a bicycle path, and landscaping projects in Golden Gate Park. To keep the jobless off the streets, the city provided housing in vacant buildings and paid the needy one dollar per day for their labor. San Francisco's Salvation Army chapter aided the city by supplying beds and simple meals for $1.40 a week.[3] These measures, however, did not dissuade the unhappy and unemployed from organizing a Commonweal division based on Jacob Coxey's eastern model.

The Bay Area's industrial army, the movement's largest contingent, numbered around 1500 men by the end of March. The founder of this division, San Francisco laborer William Baker, relinquished his control over the men after

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[2] Donald L. McMurry, Coxey's Army: A Study of the Industrial Army Movement of 1894 (New York: AMS Press, 1929), 131.
[3] Lawrence Kinnard, History of the Greater San Francisco Bay Area, vol. II (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1966), 109 -110.

marching them from San Francisco to Oakland in early April. In his place, 32 year old Charles T. Kelley, a San Francisco typographer who left his job to join the Commonweal crusade, took command.

Little is known of Charles Kelley's life before his association with Jacob Coxey's Commonweal movement; he seldom discussed his childhood or family life during his many years in and around the public spotlight. Henry Vincent, in his Story of the Commonweal, provided the most complete, albeit undocumented, biographical sketch of General Kelley. Vincent, who compiled most of his information about Kelley from newspaper articles, listed the Commonwealer's birthplace and date as Hartford, Connecticut in 1861. Kelley received a "common-school education" in Hartford but left home and moved to Chicago at the age of sixteen. After working as a newsboy for a Chicago newspaper, Kelley relocated to St. Louis, where he learned the printing trade.[4]

Married in 1888, Kelley and his new bride Lillian lived for a time in Texas, where Charles served as a proofreader in a legal publishing house and, according to Vincent, acquired a working knowledge of common law. The couple eventually relocated to Northern California and settled in San Francisco, where Charles quickly gained notoriety as an outspoken advocate for the

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[4] Henry Vincent, The Story of the Commonweal (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 125.

unemployed. Kelley also reportedly spent some time in the Salvation Army and held a leadership position in his local typographical union.[5]

Kelley's union experience probably played the largest role in his rapid ascension to the leadership position of the Bay Area army. Perhaps, as Henry Vincent speculated, Kelley also moved quickly through the ranks by virtue of his charisma: "there is a personal magnetism about him that gives him a strong hold on the men under his command and enables him to maintain order and discipline with comparatively little effort."[6]

Kelley wasted little time in asserting the authority of his new position. With the army stalled in Oakland, representatives from the Southern Pacific offered the men transportation to Sacramento for $200. Kelley agreed to the price but voided the deal when the train arrived with only six cars. He declared the accommodations unfit for animals and demanded passenger coaches.[7] Oakland mayor George C. Pardee responded to Kelley's refusal by calling out his entire police force. Pardee then ordered Kelley arrested, surrounded the army campgrounds with 1200 men, and demanded that the Commonwealers board the train provided by the Southern Pacific. The industrials, upset at the

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[5] Franklin Folsom, Impatient Armies of the Poor (Niwot, CO: University of Colorado Press, 1992), 157.
[6] Henry Vincent, The Story of the Commonweal (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 125.
[7] Carlos Schwantes, Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 100.

imprisonment of their new leader, refused to move until the mayor released Kelley. The general returned to the camp an hour later and led his men to the train depot. During the interim, the railroad provided an additional car which prompted Kelley to accept Southern Pacific's offer.[8]

On April 6, the army reached Sacramento, where local citizens donated a meal and extra provisions. Intent to avoid a situation like that in Oakland the day before, state and local authorities arranged for the train, now seventeen cars long to accommodate new recruits, to continue east towards Ogden, Utah. Unlike California state and local officials, Utah state authorities were not content to feed the army and speed it along towards Washington, D. C. Their reluctance stemmed in part from political and financial pressure applied by the railroad industry. Ogden marked the connecting point between the Southern Pacific and Union Pacific lines. On April 8 the Union Pacific, in anticipation of the army's arrival, made its stance on transporting the industrials quite clear: the company announced that they would not carry the army any further for less than full fare, which equaled around $40,000. In response, Utah governor Caleb West declared that Utah law prohibited railroads from transporting indigents into the territory and demanded that the Southern Pacific return the men to California. The

[8] Ibid., 101.

railroad refused, stating that it too would only transport the army if paid full fare for each member.[9]

After watching state and railroad officials squabble while the industrial army rested in his town, Ogden mayor Charles Brough decided to take matters into local hands. The mayor ordered Kelley's group to march east out of town to nearby Uintah. Once in Uintah a Union Pacific freight train with 27 boxcars stopped near the army camp. The crewmen, probably sympathetic to the industrial cause, reportedly called out playfully, "Tickets please gentleman!" and put up little resistance as they watched the Commonwealers stream into the box cars. Carlos Schwantes concluded that the railroads manufactured the incident to avoid charges by the state of Utah that it brought indigents into the state in violation of Utah law.[10] From Uintah the train sped east towards Omaha, Nebraska.

As Kelley's Army moved closer to Omaha on the Union Pacific, Iowans, especially the people of Council Bluffs, took notice. An early headline concerning Kelley's men appeared in the April 12 edition of the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*. The paper acknowledged the army's imminent arrival in Council Bluffs and called for a "policy of peace . . . treat them decently, feed them, and

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[9] Ibid., 102 -103.
[10] McMurry, 160; Schwantes, 110.

send them on their way as speedily as possible."[11] The *Burlington Hawk-Eye* chose April 15, the day the army crossed the Missouri River into Iowa, to run an editorial on the Commonweal movement entitled "More Serious than Funny." Echoing a growing national sentiment concerning the industrial armies, the author noted the "funny paragraphs" appearing in newspapers at the expense of the Commonwealers, but warned of the "very serious phases to this crazy movement."[12]

Rather then stopping for the day in Omaha, as many Iowans hoped, the train rumbled across the Missouri River on April 15 into Council Bluffs, the end of the Union Pacific line. Iowa Governor Frank D. Jackson, under pressure from the state's resident railroads and understandably unsure what to expect from the 1500 men invading his state, called out four hundred state militia members to keep order in Council Bluffs. Jackson quickly discovered, however, that the presence of the tramp army did not warrant the National Guard.

With the exception of Hogan's Montana contingent, the Commonweal armies displayed considerable discipline and order as they advanced towards Washington. Charles Kelley kept his men on an exceptionally tight rein throughout their travels in Iowa, a remarkable accomplishment considering the number and variety of personalities within his ranks. In addition to expelling

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[11] *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 12 April 1894.
[12] "More Serious Than Funny," *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 15 April 1894.

troublesome individuals, Kelley also asked that each man sign a written contract upon joining the army. Always mindful of the importance of good press, Kelley gave newspapers the text of the contract, which included the stipulation that army members never "aid or abet any riotous conduct" or violate any laws.[13] The well-behaved Commonwealers surprised many, prompting the *Nonpareil* to commend the army's peaceful nature and report that "men of intelligence and refinement" walked aside disciplined hoboes in the army's ranks.[14] The appearance of the militia allowed Kelley to contrast his peaceful and well-disciplined troops with Jackson's armed state forces. The media quickly picked up on the comparison and editorials commending Kelley and deploring the state's highest official soon followed.

Jackson's militia call, while popular with most Council Bluffs residents and endorsed by Republican papers like the *Nonpareil*, generated angry and cynical responses elsewhere. These responses ranged from sympathetic defenses of the unexpectedly peaceful army to wholehearted support for the governor. Others criticized Jackson, claiming he used his executive authority only to appease the railroads. The *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, based in a town which would later find itself feeding the army, criticized Jackson for calling out the militia and attacked the *Nonpareil* for supporting the governor. Five days later

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[13] "Kelly's Army," *Fontanelle Observer*, 4 May 1894.
[14] *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 15 April 1894.

the *Democrat* published an editorial that demanded the governor disperse the army.[15] The *Dubuque Daily Times* labeled Jackson's militia call as heartless while the *Democrat* of Fort Madison referred to the Republican Jackson as that "rascally flittertigibit for governor."[16] The Populist *Farmer's Tribune* ran an editorial criticizing the Republican's decision in which the author referred to the governor as "Frank Don (Quixote) Jackson."[17]

Negotiations among Governor Jackson, the mayors of Council Bluffs and Omaha, and railroad attorneys began shortly after the army's arrival. Jackson and the two mayors offered to pay the expenses associated with transporting the men to either the Mississippi River or Chicago. The railroads refused, arguing that such action would set a precedent that would encourage other unemployed conglomerations to expect free transportation.[18] Jackson continued his attempts to bargain with the railroads as Kelley's Army marched to and camped in Des Moines. The railroads, however, staunchly rejected all offers, thus forcing Iowa to support the industrials for over one month.

The refusal of the state's resident railroads to transport the men prompted a flurry of caustic responses. Railroad stubbornness also diverted attention from some of the criticisms that followed the industrials as they marched across the

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[15] *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, 20 April 1894.
[16] *Dubuque Daily Times*, 21 April 1894; *Fort Madison Democrat*, 25 April 1894.
[17] *Farmer's Tribune*, 18 April 1894.
[18] McMurry, 169.

state and intensified the longer the men depended on Iowans for food and shelter. As in Utah, many Iowans resented the power and influence of the railroads. The industry's unwillingness to transport the men out of Iowa intensified the already bitter feelings many held for big business. Judge Nat M. Hubbard, attorney for the Chicago and Northwestern line and outspoken critic of the Commonweal movement, repeatedly presented Iowa's newspapers with quotes verifying what many Iowans viewed as the unfeeling arrogance of the railroads. Carlos Schwantes postulated that by contrasting Hubbard's callousness with the plight of the unemployed, the daily press evoked "a tremendous outpouring of public sympathy for the crusaders."[19] Though there is no way of determining just how much Hubbard's inflammatory rhetoric aided the Kelley cause, many papers did take the attorney to task for his cold-hearted pronouncements. The *Fort Madison Democrat*, for instance, reported on Hubbard's "tyrannical and bloodthirsty" opposition to the impoverished laboring men. In Neola, angry citizens reportedly hanged the attorney in effigy as the army passed through town.[20] The *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, commenting on reports that Governor Jackson called the state militia to appease railroad owners, referred to the governor as "office boy Jackson" and awarded Hubbard the title of

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[19] Schwantes, 121.
[20] *Fort Madison Democrat*, 25 April 1894.

governor.[21] Hubbard, who contributed an article to the spring edition of the *Midland Monthly*, a general interest journal, added fuel to the fire by questioning the intelligence of the Commonwealers then pondering why the state's laboring citizens sympathized with the men.[22]

A brief feud between Council Bluffs and Omaha also diverted the media spotlight away from the army, if only temporarily. During the negotiations in Council Bluffs between Governor Jackson and the railroads, laborers and concerned citizens met in Omaha. Their plans included a mass demonstration they hoped would pressure the railroads into transporting the army to Chicago. As the Kelleyites camped in nearby Weston on April 20, nearly 800 demonstrators marched into Council Bluffs. The protest, while peaceful, included the forcible theft of a Union Pacific train, which the thieves presented to General Kelley at the Weston campsite. Kelley quickly refused the transportation and asked that those responsible for taking the train return it. Concerned about the army's public image, Kelley recognized that accepting passage on a stolen train would damage the army's shaky credibility with Governor Jackson and the people of Iowa. When several daily papers ran stories

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[21] *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 18 April 1894.
[22] N. M. Hubbard, "The Invasion of Iowa," *Midland Monthly* 1 (June 1894): 588.

indicating that the army accepted the stolen property, Kelley quickly demanded that the publications correct the false reports.[23]

The Omaha intervention in Iowa's affairs generated a barrage of critical editorials condemning Iowa's western neighbor for renouncing responsibility for the army's wellbeing. On April 22 *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* editors lashed out at the Omaha press for giving its populace credit for the army's care during its stay in Council Bluffs and Weston campsites.[24] After the army started its march towards Des Moines, the war of words between the two towns heated up when the *Nonpareil* labeled Omaha's actions towards Council Bluffs as "treachery" and reiterated that Omaha dropped the men across the Missouri River without attempting to care for the group.[25] Other Iowa papers quickly echoed the *Nonpareil*'s indignation.

Stuart's *Locomotive*, based in a town thirty miles west of Des Moines and directly in the oncoming army's path, blasted Nebraskans for shunning Kelley like "pestilence" and expressed anger that the Omaha papers inappropriately gave Nebraskans credit for Council Bluff's donations to the army.[26] The *Casey Vindicator* predicted that once the Kelleyites left the state, Iowans would look back on Omaha's actions as "one of the greatest insults ever patiently

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[23] "They Are Greatly Incensed," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 17 April 1894.
[24] *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 22 April 1894.
[25] *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 26 April 1894.
[26] *Stuart Locomotive*, 27 April 1894.

condoned."[27] On April 25 the *Fairfield Ledger* accused Nebraskans of inciting trouble across Iowa borders and speculated that if each Nebraska citizen had donated "the proceeds of a day's work to 'General Kelley,' his army might have been off Iowa soil by this time."[28]

Unfounded accusations and hyperbole notwithstanding, the ire directed at Nebraska for not supporting the Kelleyites stemmed more out of frustration on Iowa's part than any treachery committed by Nebraskans. Council Bluffs, not Omaha, marked the end of the Union Pacific line and thus the logical destination for Kelley and his troops. Contrary to reports in Iowa papers, Omaha citizens did donate food to the army as it passed through the city. According to Henry Vincent, Omaha residents and local businesses donated 2500 loaves of bread, two thousand pounds of cooked beef, and one thousand pies to the army. Volunteers packed the food in two box cars and attached the cars to Kelley's train.[29] This substantial contribution did not, however, mask the fact that Omaha city officials prevented General Kelley from unloading his troops in town and making camp in Nebraska, an action Kelley, anxious to move further east, did not dispute.

Nebraska's involvement west of the Missouri after Kelley's arrival, which many Iowans perceived as meddling, was generated predominantly out of self-

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[27] *Casey Vindicator*, 22 April 1894.
[28] *Fairfield Ledger*, 25 April 1894.
[29] Vincent, 130.

interest. Schwantes noted that the Omaha workers demonstrated on the army's behalf out of sympathy for the Kelleyites as well as self preservation: many probably realized that if men such as Judge Hubbard realized their wishes, Iowa would disband the army and the jobless horde would cross the river and flood Omaha's already tight job market.[30] Nevertheless, criticism of Omaha's involvement in Iowa's affairs continued for several weeks after the group's departure from Council Bluffs.

The soon to be famous writer, Jack London, joined Kelley's Army in Weston on April 19, one day before Omaha's controversial demonstration. London, only 18 years old, referred to himself as Captain Jack and joined the crusade in the hopes of finding work but also for the crusade's adventurous possibilities. London later reminisced about his experiences with the industrial army in the autobiographical work The Road, and his diary entries were eventually published as The Tramp Diary. The story London related through his diary typifies the experiences of a "soldier" in Kelley's Army. Entries include numerous references to the cold, wet Iowa spring, and inadequate rations. London also mentioned the poor condition of his shoes and feet, which at one

[30] Schwantes, 122.

point during the march to Des Moines were so blistered he refused to walk any further.[31]

London's observations of the army's march from Council Bluffs to Des Moines and its receptions by Iowans along the way are overwhelmingly positive. According to London, "every day was circus day" when the Kelleyites passed through or by Iowa's towns. His diary entries abound with descriptions of warm receptions and the people he later called "hospitable Iowa farmer-folk."[32] After passing through Neola, for example, London compared the atmosphere surrounding the army's arrival to a Fourth of July celebration. Atlantic townspeople marched a brass band into camp, prompting London to conclude that most Iowans held "a good opinion of the army and a great many were surprised at the gentlemanly bearing and honest appearance of the boys."[33] Overnight stays often brought a mix of curious and sympathetic locals out to army campsites. In addition to the talents showcased by the unemployed ("a lot of talent can be dug out of 2000 hoboes"), London recalled baseball games played between army members and townspeople, church services conducted by local clergy, and "a great making of political speeches."[34]

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[31] Richard Etulain, ed., Jack London on the Road: The Tramp Diary and Other Hobo Writings (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1979), 49.
[32] Jack London, The Road (Santa Barbara, CA: Peregrine Publishers, Inc., 1970), 180.
[33] Etulain, 45 & 48.
[34] London, 180.

According to reports published by some Iowa papers, including papers from affected towns, some communities did not greet London and his companions with the same degree of enthusiasm afforded the group in Neola and Atlantic. Avoca, twenty one miles west of Atlantic, took measures to ensure that the crusaders moved quickly and quietly through town on their way to Des Moines. In lieu of the army's arrival, Avoca mayor W. H. Schilling ordered the army camp sealed off after 6:00pm, the town's saloons shut down at 7:00pm, and reportedly declared that anyone caught blowing a horn in honor of the army's arrival would receive a one month jail sentence.[35] A reporter from the *Fontanelle Observer* following the army noticed a significant lack of enthusiasm as the contingent arrived in Avoca. "It was an entirely different affair from that of Neola," he wrote, "and the mayor informed General Kelley...that the men must remain where they were camped during the night."[36] Stuart, another overnight stay for the weary Kelleyites, attempted to follow Avoca's lead in quietly welcoming the group but then speeding it eastward. The *Locomotive* asked that the public not express any encouragement or sympathy because, as the editors explained, "no general sympathy is felt."[37] After the army marched out of town, a *Locomotive* headline announced that Stuart received the army "without Pomp or

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[35] *Atlantic Weekly Telegraph*, 25 April 1894.
[36] "Kelly Crossing the State," *Fontanelle Observer*, 27 April 1894.
[37] "Will Reach Stuart Today," *Stuart Locomotive*, 27 April 1894.

Enthusiasm" and an accompanying article reported that some army members were overheard complaining about the cool reception they received in Casey, Stuart's western neighbor.[38]

London's diary entry from Avoca includes no observations about the army's reception. His entries from Anita, Casey, and Stuart mention only that curious citizens again descended upon the Kelley camp to catch a glimpse of the "living petition." Perhaps London's lack of detail concerning the army's receptions in these communities verifies the observations emanating from the media, namely that support for the army dwindled as it approached Des Moines. The brevity of his entries after the army left Atlantic may also relate to London's health, for the entries from those particular days also include considerable detail about the poor condition of his feet, which suffered so much from the forced march that he resigned to begging rides from sympathetic citizens.[39]

London's account verifies that none of the towns that lay in the path of Kelley's Army, despite the curfews and horn blowing ordinances, shunned the basic needs of the group. Even the small farming villages of Walnut and Earlham managed to accumulate adequate foodstuffs and organize enough volunteers to feed nearly 1500 hungry men. Such benevolence was not uncommon; the other industrial armies relied on public charity and generosity to

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[38] "Kelly Come and Gone," *Stuart Locomotive*, 4 May 1894.
[39] Etulain, 49

stay alive and on route to the nation's capital. With the exception of two conglomerations camping near Washington, D. C. for the entire summer after Jacob Coxey's arrest, no state supported an industrial army as long as did Iowa's citizens.

Kelley, meanwhile, did not rely solely on the spontaneous goodwill of the masses to feed the army as it came upon new communities. In addition to charity donated directly by sympathetic individuals, Kelley contacted officials from upcoming towns by telegraph and used an advance guard to procure food and make overnight camping arrangements. While approaching Omaha, for instance, Kelley wired a message ahead from Willow Island, Nebraska to Omaha's mayor and city council that read: "We need your assistance; need food and shelter . . . If in your power, it will kindly be accepted."[40] James B. Weaver, Des Moines activist and 1892 Populist presidential candidate, anticipated the army's arrival in the Iowa capital by collecting food donations from the populace days before the group's arrival on April 29.

It was this support issue that created the most controversy during the army's march to Des Moines. Specifically, Iowans disagreed over the amount of support affected communities should show the army. The Commonweal's presence forced towns such as Neola and Avoca to walk a delicate line between

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[40] Vincent, 129.

providing too much food and giving too little. If towns displayed too much support, their precedent might attract more hungry and unemployed individuals. Conversely, if communities shunned Kelley's Army, they risked being labeled unfeeling and cruel. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* editors, for example, expressed concern that if their city did not feed the men, criticism would soon follow: "we cannot afford to have it said that naked and hungry men came to our doors and we turned them away to starve."[41] The *Nonpareil* even included a response to such criticism in their April 22 Sunday edition to refute "some of the wild reports appearing in the eastern papers . . . one would think that they (the army) are on the brink of starvation."[42]

The *Atlantic Weekly Telegraph* reported on Avoca's intent to feed the army and "pass them on without delay" while treating them with "firm coolness."[43] The *Dubuque Daily Times* recommended giving the army enough to survive, but no more.[44] Anita, a dinner stop for the army on April 26, criticized nearby Atlantic for proposing to use county funds to feed and house the army. The editors then congratulated the people of Anita for using their own money "with no other thought in view than that the hungry should be fed, the naked clothed .

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[41] *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 13 April 1894.
[42] *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 22 April 1894.
[43] *Atlantic Weekly Telegraph*, 25 April 1894.
[44] *Dubuque Daily Times*, 22 April 1894.

. . the sick and distressed made comfortable."[45] The *Burlington Hawk-Eye* noticed that each town was willing to "placate the gang for itself, if only thereby the problem may be shifted upon the next town beyond" but remarked that this policy was "an exhibition of cowardice and at the same time of selfishness."[46] The editorial staff at the *Fairfield Ledger* observed that "no one would withhold a certain measure of charity from these unfortunates and many of them may be worthy of sympathy" but then declared that "there is nothing heroic in their so-called marches or their forced levies of food and transportation from the communities through which they pass by sheer force of numbers."[47] The *Ledger* also expressed relief that Fairfield would not be "pestered with the grand aggregation of the industrials."[48] The *Souix City Journal* also deplored the "pass the buck" mentality of the communities within Kelley's path. The paper, which earlier labeled the Commonweal's mission ridiculous and futile, reasoned that the policy would only cause trouble for Washington, D. C. in the future.[49]

Other commentators expressed concern that communities visited by Kelley's Army provided too much charity and demonstrated too much support. Concerned commentators believed Iowa walked a dangerous line between

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[45] "The Paradise of Tramps," *Anita Tribune*, 3 May 1894.
[46] "More Serious Than Funny," *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 15 April 1894.
[47] "Editorial Notes", *Fairfield Ledger*, 9 May 1894.
[48] "Editorial Notes," *Fairfield Ledger*, 2 May 1894.
[49] *Souix City Journal*, 20 April 1894.

providing for the needy and giving too much, thereby transforming the state into a "tramp's paradise." As the army set its sites on Stuart, for example, editors at the *Locomotive* admitted that while the town could not "afford to let any one suffer for food or shelter" while in their midst, neither could Stuart "encourage men making useless journeys across the country" and warned that "evil results will surely follow if Kelley's army is lionized to such an extent that others will follow."[50] The *Anita Tribune* blasted neighboring Neola for the "gushing welcome" given Kelley's men and sarcastically predicted that the jobless and homeless would no longer beg at kitchen doors, but would "hasten to the place where they will be received with brass banners and brass bands . . . on to Neola."[51] The *Tribune* later instructed its readers to "look for a tremendous multiplication of the permanent tramp army" because Iowa was quickly becoming "the dumping ground for the scum and bum element of the western states."[52] From Dubuque, the *Daily Times* equated Kelley's policy of obtaining sustenance with train robbing and argued that feeding the army set a dangerous precedent which would only bring greater numbers of homeless and jobless to Iowa.[53]

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[50] "Will Reach Stuart Today," *Stuart Locomotive*, 27 April 1894.
[51] "The Paradise of Tramps," *Anita Tribune*, 3 May 1894.
[52] *Anita Tribune*, 10 May 1894; 17 May 1894.
[53] *Dubuque Daily Times*, 25 May 1894.

Kelley's Army remained intact and orderly throughout its Iowa crossing because Iowans turned out to support the men. Whether that support stemmed from genuine sympathy and understanding or from a belief that the most efficient way to push the army on to the next town meant giving them what they needed is difficult to discern. Based on editorials and opinion pages in Iowa's papers, most towns feared the consequences of withholding food and shelter from the men. Other sources, like the editorial staff at *The Outlook* magazine, argued that the support extended the industrial armies did not stem from fear and self-interest. The true significance of the movement, *The Outlook* claimed, was the popular sympathy that indicated a "popular consciousness that there is somewhere a social wrong to be redressed."[54]

For farming towns like those in western Iowa, the possibility of over one thousand unemployed and hungry men descending on their small rural communities seemed intimidating and called for a peaceful acquiescence to General Kelley's demands. The majority of these locales, however, gladly and willfully turned out to support the men as they passed through, especially after word spread that Kelley kept his troops on a tight and orderly leash. The army's march from Council Bluffs to Des Moines often generated considerable anticipation and excitement in most communities along the route. As one

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[54] "The Week," *The Outlook* 49 (28 April 1894): 733.

contributor to the *Eddyville Tribune* later remarked, the group's passage through that tiny community marked "one of the most notable days that Eddyville has ever had."[55]

General Kelley, anxious to reach Des Moines, ordered a forty-mile forced march on April 28, putting the contingent in the state capital the next day. Kelley marched his men to Des Moines in the hopes that state officials would somehow convince the railroads to transport the men to Chicago. The railroads, however, remained determined to keep the industrial army off the rails. Charles Kelley certainly realized that more time spent on Iowa soil meant risking what had been until that point a generally supportive public attitude towards the Commonweal. The army's ten day stay in Des Moines quickly eroded much of the support extended to them during the first week of their journey through the state. The prolonged visit to Des Moines also diverted the media's attention away from earlier issues, such as the dispute between Omaha and Council Bluffs, that served to take the focus off the industrial army. Newspapers quickly turned their attention to the army, its leader, and the Commonweal movement itself.

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[55] "Kelly's Army," *Eddyville Tribune*, 18 May 1894.

CHAPTER FOUR

> As a painting of humanity in tears and incompetence, it is sublime in all of its features. For the first time in its foolish journey the Kelley army has ceased to be ridiculous and has become picturesque. The historians will not laugh at it any longer.
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> - *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, May 15, 1894[1]

Des Moines marked the halfway point for Charles Kelley and his troops as they traveled across Iowa towards Washington, D. C. Kelley, aware that the army was testing the patience and good-nature of its Iowa hosts, hoped its intrusive but orderly presence in the state capital would pressure the railroads into transporting his men eastward. Unlike the first leg of the contingent's Iowa campaign, during which the group spent only one night in or near towns along the way, their Des Moines visit lasted ten days. As Jack London wrote, "Des Moines was hospitable, but this was too much of a good thing."[2] The prolonged delay in the state capital caused by the standoff between General Kelley and the railroads opened the army up to intense, often critical, scrutiny from the media.

This is not to say that the army marched into Des Moines on a wave of public support, for critical editorials appeared on opinion pages in Iowa papers prior to April 29. The editorials and opinion letters written and published in the first three weeks of May 1894 provide an insight into perceptions and opinions of

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[1] *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, 15 May 1894.
[2] Jack London, The Road (Santa Barbara, CA: Peregrine Publishers, Inc., 1970), 180.

the industrial army movement. Perhaps most illuminating are the letters and opinion pieces that purport to explain the origins of the movement, the cause of the nation's depression, and viable solutions to the country's unemployment problems.

The fierce spring thunderstorm that accompanied Kelley's men on their forty mile march from Avoca to Des Moines foreshadowed the army's stormy visit to the state capital. The exhausting march coupled with the inclement weather convinced many Kelleyites, including Jack London, that Des Moines would be the army's final destination on foot. London, whose diary entries include numerous complaints about blistered feet, recalled that shortly after arriving at their Des Moines campsite the army "swore a mighty oath that its feet were sore and that it would walk no more."[3]

In Des Moines, Kelley sought to keep his exhausted troops content and hoped the combined support of the state's leading elected officials and its large Populist presence would pressure the railroads into transporting his men to Chicago. Kelley's optimism arose in part from his correspondence with Des Moines resident James B. Weaver, the 1892 Populist presidential candidate and vocal Commonweal sympathizer. Weaver contacted Kelley as the industrial army camped outside of Atlantic and reportedly assured the Commonweal

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[3] Ibid.

leader that transportation out of Des Moines was forthcoming.[4] Weaver also prepared for the army's arrival by organizing a citizen's committee that canvassed door-to-door for food and monetary donations. As the weary industrials arrived in their campsite east of Des Moines on April 29, a generous food donation, the result of Weaver's activism, greeted the army.[5]

Unfortunately for General Kelley and his army, Iowa's resident railroads maintained their ban on transporting the industrials. Repeated pleas by Weaver and Governor Frank Jackson failed to soften the railroads' steadfast opposition to the Commonwealers. Kelley responded by announcing that his men would not, under any circumstances, continue their trek on foot. The general's proclamation and the ensuing impasse dampened local enthusiasm for feeding the men, prompting the *Des Moines Capital* to remark that "sympathy for the Kelley army is on the wane in this city, at any rate it is not taking the form of cash or bread."[6]

On May 1, the army's second full day in Des Moines, Kelley received news of Jacob Coxey's aborted demonstration and subsequent arrest in the nation's capital. The incident jeopardized what little leverage Kelley possessed in his stand-off with the railroads and damaged the legitimacy of the entire movement. The May Day fiasco in Washington, D.C. also raised questions about the unity of

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[4] Henry Vincent, The Story of the Commonweal (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 152.
[5] H.L. Stetson, "The Industrial Army," *Independent*, 31 May 1894, 5.
[6] *Des Moines Capital*, 3 May 1894.

the Commonweal movement.

Kelley's relationship with Coxey, Browne, and the other Commonweal generals remains sketchy. Sources do not indicate the extent of the relationships between the industrial army leaders or even if the men corresponded with one another during the pivotal months of April and May of 1894. Charles Kelley's statements about Coxey's Army indicate an uncertainty about his relationship with the movement's founders. During the army's journey from San Francisco to Council Bluffs, Kelley indicated that neither he nor his army had any direct connection with Coxey's contingent.[7] In Avoca, however, Kelley altered his earlier position and told reporters he would join Coxey in Washington if time permitted, but would continue the crusade regardless of Coxey's actions.[8]

General Kelley also used the Avoca interview to outline the plan he hoped to present to Congress. Kelley's program, a western variant of Coxey's "good roads" proposal, called for federal aid in developing and irrigating land west of the Rocky Mountains, or as Kelley called it, "redemption of arid lands in the west." The general reasoned that if the federal government put the unemployed to work irrigating these desert areas, "by the time those arid wastes are wrested from the sage brush and jack rabbits . . . the men who worked there will have

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[7] Donald McMurry, Coxey's Army and the Industrial Army Movement of 1894 (New York: AMS Press, 1929), 189.
[8] "Object of Kelly's March," *Waterloo Courier*, 25 April 1894.

saved enough money to carry them through the first year of farming." The men would then settle on the land and prove themselves to be "sturdy farmers and property owners."[9]

Following Coxey's arrest on May 1, Kelley again distanced himself from the eastern army by criticizing Coxey for marching on the capital prematurely. He also called Carl Browne a "conceited ass" and announced that the fate of the movement now rested with his men, the nation's largest contingent.[10] Coxey's willingness to march on the capital without waiting for the larger western armies to arrive suggests that his immediate goals did not correspond with those of the other armies. Apparently the various contingents bearing the Commonweal namesake and heading towards Washington D.C. had very little or no contact other than the newspaper reports they read about one another.

Despite the devastating possibilities for the entire crusade, Coxey's arrest during the May Day fiasco barely affected newspaper coverage of Kelley's Army in Iowa. Perhaps Charles Kelley's claim as the movement's only hope rang true for many Iowans, who rarely linked Coxey's ill-fated march on the capital with Kelley's ambitions. Iowans, especially Des Moines residents, seemed more concerned with Kelley's unwillingness to keep his men moving east.

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[9] Ibid.

[10] McMurry, 189 and Carlos Schwantes, Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press), 188.

Sympathy and patience for Kelley's stand against the railroads quickly diminished. On May 3, approximately 300 people gathered at the state capital and requested that the governor use his power to force the railroads into compliance with Kelley's demands for transportation.[11] The people of Des Moines, the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* reported, were "very much discouraged over the disposition of the army to do nothing for itself."[12] Finally, on May 5, General Kelley broke the deadlock by agreeing to act on a suggestion made by a local resident. Rather than marching out of Des Moines, the concerned citizen reasoned, the army would transform itself into a navy and float down the Des Moines River to Keokuk, where the smaller river emptied into the Mississippi. The army, aided by local volunteers and using wood donated by a nearby lumber yard, started construction on the flat-bottomed vessels the following day.

Much to the relief of the Des Moines populace, Kelley's Navy set afloat on May 9. In addition to the anxiety surrounding the presence of over one thousand unemployed men, the army's ten day stay cost the community an estimated 12,000 dollars. By the end of the ten day visit, the army's make-shift campsite, an abandoned stoveworks, showed the ill effects of accommodating too many people. Visitors to the camp were appalled at the pestilential conditions. H. L. Stetson, the president of Des Moines College, declared it a "festering mass of

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[11] McMurry, 190.
[12] *Council Bluffs Nonpariel*, 4 May 1894.

corruption."[13] Despite the poor living conditions the Kelleyites persevered; hundreds gathered to watch several baseball games between a local team and a Kelleyite squad. General Kelley occupied his time by speaking at various church, labor, and civic functions.[14]

Tacitus Hussey, a local writer and poet, observed the navy's well attended departure and wrote a poem about the experience. Published two years later and entitled "A Friend in Need," the poem captured the ambiguous and sometimes contradictory feelings many held for the Commonweal army:

> How sweet of you, dear river, when our folks began to shout
> That 'Kelley's hungry army had worn their welcome out;'
> When railroads, so aggressive and so fond of the 'long haul,'
> Would not even furnish "hog rates," -- or any rates at all
> How sweet of you, I say again, to bare your breast and say:
> 'Come rest upon this bosom! Accept this shining way!'[15]

In another verse that reflects as much about gender relationships in the late nineteenth century as it does the anxiety surrounding the army's presence, Hussey warned husbands to keep their wives away from the Commonwealers lest they fall victim to the wily charms of the unemployed:

> His tars are very harmless-- you need not fear your lives--
> Leave your chicken coops wide open -- but fasten up your wives!
> I always thought 'twas uniforms which charmed a women's gaze--

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[13] Stetson, 5.
[14] William Peterson, "The Industrial Army in Des Moines," *Palimpsest* 52 (June 1971): 304.
[15] Tacitus Hussey, "A Friend in Need," The River Bend and Other Poems (Des Moines, IA: Carter and Hussey, 1896), 51.

But brass buttons are 'not in it' compared to pretty ways;
For women are intuitive and maybe this is how
They see the noble purpose which wreaths each manly brow.[16]

During the river journey, Kelley's previously tight control over his men slipped. Jack London's "Sacramento Regiment" proved particularly troublesome to the newly commissioned "Admiral." London's mid-May entries detailed how he and his cohorts managed to "live without the commissary." Paddling ahead of the flotilla, London's group declared themselves the "advance boat" of Kelley's Navy and delighted in taking the best of the donated foodstuff. "My, but the ten of us did live on the fat of the land," London recalled.[17]

London's diary entries also confirm that despite the army's troubled stay in Des Moines, public curiosity remained so strong it sometimes infringed on the men's privacy: "from Des Moines and all along, the banks have been lined with the natives, and we would have to go for miles to find a secluded spot in which to bathe, or make our toilet."[18] While curiosity remained steady, food donations to the army diminished in some areas along the river. At one point during their river journey, London noted that the army went hungry for forty eight hours. In Red Rock, a small town twenty miles downstream from Des Moines, local officials initially resisted Kelley's requests for food. The representatives who met

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[16] Ibid., 52.
[17] London, 184.
[18] Robert Etulain, ed., Jack London on the Road: the Tramp Diary and Other Hobo Writings (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press), 52.

Kelley at the river bank also refused to sell anything to the industrials. At that point, London recollected, Kelley resorted to extortion, threatening to turn his men loose on the hamlet in search of food. Red Rock representatives quickly acquiesced and initiated food collections.[19] Nearly all remaining river communities readily contributed to the Commonweal cause. In Eddyville, for example, the community donated 960 pounds of bread and 400 pounds of meat. The *Eddyville Tribune* reported that "the much feared army passed peacefully down the river" as three to four thousand people, "the largest crowd Eddyville has had for years," lined the banks to watch.[20]

In Ottumwa, further downstream, the *Daily Democrat* requested that citizens refrain from displaying any sentimentality for the army because the unemployed strangers deserved no sympathy. Ottumwa, the editorial continued, had its own deserving poor to deal with and that was where money should be directed. The author then equated the intrusion of the navy to an epidemic of small pox "coming unbidden and unwelcomed" but supposed that it should be "treated the same as any other pestilence."[21] While the *Democrat* recognized that all citizens had a right to contribute, the editor reminded his readers that "no one is under any obligation to give them a red cent, and should

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[19] London, 186 - 187.
[20] "Kelly's Army," *Eddyville Tribune*, 18 May 1894, 1.
[21] *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, 10 May 1894.

not do so."[22] After the navy passed, the newspaper claimed the Kelleyites received a cold response in Ottumwa, but also ran briefs describing how locals swarmed to the camp and others formed a "Kelley Glee Club."[23]

In Eldon, south of Ottumwa, the industrials engaged in their first physical confrontation with detectives from the Rock Island railroad. The detectives, hired by the railroad to spy on the army and prevent it from boarding nearby trains, barred boats from landing and picking up provisions south of Eldon. Several guards threw rocks at approaching vessels, reportedly injuring two Commonwealers. The next morning angry industrials crossed the river to confront the guards, nearly all of whom escaped. Kelleyites caught and punished two unfortunate detectives who were unable to escape the pursuing industrials.[24]

The Eldon fracas generated disparate responses in the print media. The *Ottumwa Democrat* ran a headline exclaiming "Trouble at Eldon . . . Kelley's Band of Murdering Marauders Thirsting for Blood." The accompanying article described the "Kelley mob" which went "wild with fury" and poured forth "their curses and threats at a fearful rate."[25] The *Fort Madison Democrat*, on the other hand, blamed Eldon residents for the confrontation and speculated that if

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[22] *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, 13 May 1894
[23] *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, 16 May 1894.
[24] Schwantes, 193 - 194.
[25] *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, 17 May 1894, 1.

Kelley's army "had not been the most peaceable of scalawags in the country . . . they would have captured the silly people of Eldon."[26]

Citizens in Keokuk, the navy's last stop in Iowa, pondered, argued and debated how their community should deal with the navy's upcoming arrival. As Admiral Kelley and his sailors moved closer, Keokuk citizens formed committees and held town meetings to discuss and contemplate courses of action. One of these organizational meetings degenerated into a heated shouting match that reportedly created more problems than it solved.[27]

Keokuk's Republican paper, the *Gate City*, distinguished itself as a fervently anti-Commonweal as soon as the army arrived in Iowa. Few Iowa papers exhibited any approval for the motives and policies of the industrial armies, but editors at the *Gate City* consistently demonstrated a genuine dislike for the unemployed crusade. On April 18, several days after Kelley's arrival in Iowa, the *Gate City* ran an opinion piece that referred to Coxeyism as "a senseless piece of buncombe by cranks and loafers." After May 10, when the paper recognized the destination of the army's river voyage, the *Gate City* called the group "toughs and hoodlums," claimed they preyed upon the people for sustenance, and labeled the movement a "disgrace to civilization."[28] Once the

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[26] *Fort Madison Democrat*, 23 May 1894
[27] *Keokuk Gate City*, 16 May 1894
[28] *Keokuk Gate City*, 10 May 1894 and 17 May 1894.

army passed through, an occasion that prompted the appearance of 10,000 curious locals, the *Gate City* called the entire incident "much ado about nothing." The army, editors admitted, was "the best advertised attraction touring the country."[29]

After leaving Keokuk the navy reached the Mississippi River and floated into Missouri. Jack London traveled with the army to Hannibal, Missouri then deserted on May 25, tired of traveling on an empty stomach.[30] Others soon followed suit; between St. Louis and West Virginia the army's numbers quickly shrank. Only one third of the Kelleyites who camped in Des Moines managed to reach Washington, D. C. to join their Commonweal brethren.[31] Charles Kelley arrived in the nation's capital in July, only to rush back to San Francisco when a family member purportedly fell ill.[32]

Those who managed to reach Washington probably wished they would have stayed away. The remnants of Coxey's Army camped in Bladensburg, Maryland and battled hunger, summer thunderstorms, and searing heat until early August. On the morning of August 9, Maryland governor Frank Brown ordered forty Baltimore policemen to invade the camp and arrest its inhabitants on vagrancy charges. After a speedy trial in which the defendants had no

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[29] *Keokuk Gate City*, 20 May 1894.
[30] Etulain, 54.
[31] McMurry, 256.
[32] Schwantes, 248.

attorney nor were allowed to call witnesses, the Commonwealers were sentenced to three months in the Maryland House of Corrections. Several days into their sentences, Brown ordered the men released in exchange for a pledge that they would leave Maryland and return only as self-supporting citizens. The governor even provided rail transport to Cincinnati for any westerners among the group.[33]

A larger campsite in Rosslyn, Virginia was home to nearly one thousand hungry industrials during much of the summer, most of whom hailed from Fry, Kelley, and Galvin's armies. Faced with the same problems encountered by the Bladensburg camp, the Rosslyn site steadily lost men throughout the summer until less than 400 remained in early August. On August 11, three companies of Virgnia militiamen, acting under orders from Virginia governor Charles O'Ferrall, pushed the industrials out of Virginia and forced them into the District of Columbia. District authorities, anxious to remove the protestors from their area, signaled the official end to the movement when they charted several railway coaches to transport the remaining Commonwealers back to their respective regions of the country.[34]

For most Iowans the protest ended months earlier when Kelley's Army passed through Keokuk and reached the confluence of the Des Moines and Mississippi rivers. Newspaper coverage of Kelley and his army declined

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[33] Ibid, 251.
[34] McMurry, 259.

precipitously after the group floated out of the state. The army, at least in Iowa's eyes, was Missouri's problem. As one contributor to Keokuk's *Gate City* observed on May 20, "the papers find that people are losing interest in the Coxey and Kelley business and so they say little more about it."[35] For the first time since early April, the industrial army no longer commanded the attention of Iowa's newspapers.

The criticism which appeared in the print media before May 1 but more frequently after the army's arrival in Des Moines provides valuable insights into contemporary thinking about the Commonweal movement. One discourse that started before the army arrived in Iowa but intensified after May 1 involves perceptions of how and why the Commonweal existed. Commentators sought to explain the crusade's origins in a variety of ways. Some explanations were consistent with existing concepts of unemployment and economic depressions, while others had political and historical roots. Most dismissed the movement as yet another example of crankism. Others, however, warned those who chose to scoff at the movement that the Commonweal reflected a deeper problem in American society, one which would not disintegrate with the passing excitement and enthusiasm for a march on Washington.

Even those who opposed the Commonweal had to reconcile their distaste

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[35] *Keokuk Gate City*, 20 May 1894.

for the movement and its goals with the Kelleyites' model behavior. The *Fontanelle Observer*, for instance, refused to sympathize with a crusade they considered a "wild goose chase," but admitted that the Kelleyites were not a "gang of tramps."[36] H. L. Stetson, who visited the army at its Des Moines campsite, remarked that the men kept sober, quiet, orderly, and "gave the police no trouble."[37] The overwhelming evidence that most army members were well-behaved citizens, not a loose group of professional vagrants, forced detractors to differentiate between types of unemployed people. The *Stuart Locomotive*, for example, divided the Commonweal participants into four classes: the "semi-criminal class, always found in large cities," the "never working tramp," "good, but unemployed men," and "superior machines."[38] The *Fairfield Ledger* claimed the army consisted of three varieties: "bums and offscourings" of western mining camps, "stupidly insane" political enthusiasts, and regular tramps.[39] The *Dubuque Daily Times* saw only two types of men in Kelley's ranks: honest but misguided workingmen and hoboes, whom the *Times* claimed would "join an army to march to New Orleans or the north pole . . . if they got free food and railway transport."[40] Likewise, a *Des Moines Leader* editorial listed only two

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[36] "A Visit to Kelly's Army," *Fontanelle Observer*, 4 May 1894.
[37] Stetson, 5.
[38] "Kelly Come and Gone," *Stuart Locomotive*, 4 May 1894.
[39] "Kelly and His Gang," *Fairfield Ledger*, 9 May 1894.
[40] *Dubuque Daily Times*, 2 May 1894.

varieties of Kelleyites: worthy and undeserving.[41]

An academic study confirmed the sundry composition of what one *Waterloo Courier* reporter described as a "strange heterogeneous mass of humanity."[42] B. O. Aylesworth, the president of Drake University, used the army's prolonged stay in Des Moines as an opportunity to conduct a sociological study. Aylesworth, aided by students from his sociology class, interviewed and collected data from over 700 Commonwealers. Participants answered questions about their employment history, political and religious affiliations, and national origin. The report and interview excerpts, published by several newspapers, verified the diverse nature of Kelley's industrial army. Three hundred fifty-eight Kelleyites identified themselves as Protestants while 240 claimed allegiance to the Populist party. Most of the industrials, nearly six hundred, declared themselves American born citizens. The interview excerpts often indicated a genuine frustration with the depression and accompanying unemployment. The experience of Thomas Riley was typical of many participants:

> Thomas Riley, born in Boston. Came from Frisco. Stone mason. Had no work at his trade for a year. Been doing a little well digging. Willing to take any job to earn a living. Unmarried. Voted for Cleveland and was sorry for it. Wanted free coinage of silver so there would be a market for silver and the West would be revived.[43]

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[41] "Democratic Opinions of Kelly," *Fairfield Ledger*, 9 May 1894.
[42] "Three Weeks with Kelley," *Waterloo Courier*, 16 May 1894.
[43] S.A. Heath, "The Unemployed," *Farmer's Tribune*, 9 May 1894.

Aylesworth also determined that the average Kelleyite, like Riley, had been without work for at least six months.

Hard luck stories told by Commonweal members failed to shield the living petition from cries of absurdity. Few commentators believed that Kelley and Coxey would ever convince Congress or the American people of the need for public works relief. For many people, the entire purpose of such a quest seemed entirely absurd. "What will be gained," a *Waterloo Courier* editorial asked, "if the army does reach Washington?" "Nothing, absolutely" the author answered prophetically, "and the march home will not be as full of interest as when the army started out."[44] Other answers to the question posed in the *Courier* included allegations of forced tribute and wanton terrorism by the industrial armies. Explaining that "hen roosts must be guarded, and smoke-house doors nailed up, and the good looking women all hurried away" in anticipation of the army's arrival, the *Burlington Post* labeled the army "purposeless, vagrant, idealess . . . and irresponsible."[45] Others described the march as "perfectly foolish" and argued that there was "absolutely no occasion for it, absolutely no useful purpose to be accomplished."[46] Mason City's *Globe Gazette* decried the march as a "wild, senseless move" and the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* declared the petition in boots

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[44] "The Army," *Waterloo Courier*, 24 April 1894.
[45] Reprinted in the *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, 15 May 1894.
[46] *Souix City Journal*, 17 April 1894

"utterly foolish and purposeless."[47]

If people were generally certain about the diversity the army and the absurdity of its motives, they were genuinely confused about the origins of the Commonweal. Industrial armies, after all, followed no precedent. The 1873 Panic, though not as severe as the 1893 depression, did not produce such widespread agitation: serious strikes developed but large groups of men did not organize and march across the country. Thus many critiques of the Commonweal and explanations of its origins demonstrate a lack of understanding of economic cycles. In the absence of economic understanding, some Iowans devised politically based explanations for the origins of the unemployed crusade. Many of the politically motivated criticisms included indictments of paternalism, a nineteenth century term used to describe intrusive and overly active governmental policies. Newly elected president Grover Cleveland warned against such policies in an 1892 speech: "the lessons of paternalism ought to be unlearned and the better lesson taught that while the people should . . . support their government, its functions do not include the support of the people."[48]

Predictably, Democratic papers targeted Republicans for instigating a

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[47] *Mason City Globe Gazette*, 5 May 1894 and *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 18 April 1894.
[48] Gary B. Nash and Julie R. Jeffrey, eds., The American People (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1990), 663.

perceived turn towards governmental activism, claiming that the industrial armies were "the natural progeny of the Republican party."[49] The *Fort Madison Democrat,* for example, attributed the Commonweal's appearance to "thirty years of Republican law making."[50] The *Ottumwa Daily Democrat* noted that the armies originated "chiefly from republican states - states in which republican teaching has done its perfect work in undermining the democratic doctrine of self-help and no paternalism."[51] The *Daily Democrat* also presented its version of the Commonweal's evolution. Beginning its political life as Republicanism, the movement than transformed into protectionism, socialism, followed by its current stage of Coxeyism, then eventually evolved into anarchism.[52]

Iowa's Republican publications responded by attributing responsibility for the nation's economic doldrums to the Cleveland administration. The *Cedar Falls Gazette* maintained that the Democrat's 1892 presidential campaign encouraged the industrial army movement through its "systematic plan of inciting the poor against the rich."[53] The *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* confidently predicted that once Republicans ousted the Democratic administration, there would "speedily be work for all."[54]

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[49] *Mason City Daily Times - Herald,* 16 May 1894.
[50] *Fort Madison Democrat,* 2 May 1894.
[51] *Ottumwa Daily Democrat,* 20 May 1894.
[52] *Ottumwa Daily Democrat,* 8 May 1894.
[53] *Cedar Falls Gazette,* 11 May 1894.
[54] *Council Bluffs Nonpariel,* 24 April 1894.

Evidence of growing regionalism and regional identification also manifested itself as many commentators looked west for explanations of the Commonweal's origins. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* editors targeted California for that state's inability to care for its own workers, citing "the inhuman practice of casting out her unfortunate workingmen and unloading them upon us."[55] The *Souix City Journal* described Kelley's Army as "men who have been in the far west out of employment and anxious to get back to their old home, absolutely void of any notion of 'protesting at Washington.'"[56] In a similar vein, the *Fairfield Ledger* attributed the Commonweal movement to easterners who moved west during the boom years and returned to their eastern homes "as beggars." The western states, according to the *Ledger*, "have taken this method of getting rid of the poor devils who were enticed to the west a few years ago by promises of plenty of work and big wages . . . this is the end of the western boom."[57] Perhaps the most complete statement of this regionalist outlook appeared in a May 3 issue of the *Mason City Express*:

> The Pacific Coast is thronged with people out of employment. The towns especially, contain lots of idlers who cannot get work and have not money to get away. The cessation of railroad constructions stranded many, and others, attracted during the railroad boom by the expectations that all kinds of business would be correspondingly active were doomed to

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[55] *Council Bluffs Nonpariel*, 18 April 1894.
[56] *Souix City Journal*, 17 April 1894.
[57] *Fairfield Ledger*, 2 May 1894.

disappointment.[58]

Other individuals and papers took aim at the Kelleyites for shirking their familial duties. B. O. Aylesworth's study confirmed that many Commonwealers left wives and children behind to take part in the petition in boots. Critics used the information to support their claim that Kelley and his men abandoned their families to join a senseless and futile quest. The *Fairfield Ledger* sardonically pointed out that Kelley's men were "brave soldiers, indeed, to run away from hard times on the Pacific coast and leave their wives and children to battle with them."[59] The persevering, ambitious workingman does not, a *Des Moines Leader* editorial added, leave his home and family to go on a pilgrimage to the national capital.[60]

Some found fault with the media for creating the economic crisis and subsequently, the industrial armies. An individual writing to the *Dubuque Herald,* for instance, insisted that newspapers were responsible "in a large measure" because the press "howled about 'hard times' so much for partisan reasons that capital . . . became timid and locked itself up."[61] After running a commentary on a public loss of interest in Coxey and Kelley on May 20, the *Keokuk Gate City* also accused the press of escalating the industrial protests:

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[58] *Mason City Express,* 5 May 1894.
[59] *Fairfield Ledger,* 2 May 1894.
[60] "Democratic Opinions of Kelly," in *Fairfield Ledger,* 2 May 1894.
[61] Reprinted in *Ottumwa Daily Democrat,* 27 April 1894.

> Kelley and his mariners is the best advertised attraction now touring this country. The advertising given him, however, is of itself a big advertisement for the newspapers, showing as it does what can be accomplished by newspaper advertising."[62]

One of the most frequent allegations levied against the industrial armies involved their propensity to work, or specifically, to avoid work. Generally, Iowa's newspapers used much of their critical ammunition to fire at the Commonwealer's apparent disregard for the cherished American work ethic. Editorials questioning the Kelleyites' ability and desire to work appeared regularly in opinion pages during April and May 1894. A *Des Moines Leader* editorial, for example, called the Commonwealers

> an army of tramps and malcontents who are hunting for snow to shovel in summer. About the hardest work any of them would contract to do would be to pick flowers off a century plant. They are passing farms every day where help is wanted and where honest labor can receive good pay.[63]

The contention that the Commonwealers simply ignored employment opportunities reappeared in other papers as well. An editorial in the May 17 issue of the *Mason City Daily Times* claimed that "at the very time the army of the Commonweal began its march farmers in many parts of the country were short of help and could not get it for love or money."[64]

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[62] *Keokuk Gate City*, 22 May 1894
[63] Reprinted in *Souix City Journal*, 25 April 1894.
[64] *Mason City Daily Times*, 17 May 1894.

Several papers reprinted an interesting anecdote that illustrates how little most people understood the depression. The anecdote described a dialogue between a farmer resting by his field and a passing Kelleyite:

> To one of the natives resting from his plow to see Kelley's men passing by, a member of the navy said: "Say mister, give me a plug of tobacco." "If you want tobacco work for it," was the prompt reply. "That's how I get my chawin."[65]

Keokuk's *Gate City* cynically predicted that the Commonwealers "could be dispersed by someone offering to give work to the members of the respective armies . . . they would run at the mere mention of the word toil."[66] Fort Madison's *Democrat* questioned whether the "impoverished itinerants and farmers" that comprised the army could serve any function on a farm.[67] A contributor to Ottumwa's *Daily Democrat* wondered why the industrials were running a fool's errand rather than looking for work:

> If many of the men who compose the so-called industrial armies had displayed half the ability and tact in pursuit of legitimate industry that they are showing in their determination to get to Washington, they would not be out of employment.[68]

As so often happens in times of crisis, few people understood or comprehended the scope of the nation's economic problems. The *Des Moines Capital,* for

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[65] *Cedar Falls Gazette,* 18 May 1894.
[66] *Keokuk Gate City,* 29 April 1894.
[67] Reprinted in *Ottumwa Daily Democrat,* 28 April 1894.
[68] *Ottumwa Daily Democrat,* 2 May 1894.

instance, blamed individuals rather than attributing the unemployment problem to the nation's depression: "the men...are nearly all responsible for their own conditions and there is no use of their shifting the responsibility upon the government."[69]

The Des Moines visit did not make or break support for Kelley's army nor did it discourage curious, sometimes sympathetic, Iowans from turning out to gawk at and contribute to the industrial army. The ten day stay in Des Moines and ensuing journey down its namesake river did give Iowans and their papers more time to formulate criticisms, explanations, and rationalizations about the army's existence and presence in the state. Criticism of Kelley's Army and the Commonweal appeared in Iowa newspapers well before the army's arrival in Des Moines but the intensity and frequency of anti-Commonweal sentiments increased significantly after the first of the month. Several factors contributed to the increase in critical editorials and letters. The first was Charles Kelley's proclamation that he and his men only would leave the state with the aid of railway transportation. This announcement, made soon after the army reached Des Moines, cast a shadow of uncertainty on the army's stay in that city. It also significantly altered the army's previous policy, which called for a one night stay in those communities serving as "host" towns. Kelley's decision put Des Moines

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[69] *Des Moines Capital*, 3 May 1894.

residents in the middle of his struggle with the railroads, a position many citizens and newspapers resented.

Jacob Coxey and his decisions also played an important role. Coxey's anti-climactic arrest at the Capital verified what many considered the futility of the "petition in boots" concept. Even Iowa's Populist mouthpiece, James Weaver's *Farmer's Tribune*, admitted that the colossal political and social changes Coxey and other Commonwealers proposed could only occur through that most democratic of instruments: the ballot box.[70]

The most important factor, however, was the public's inability and in some cases, unwillingness, to recognize how the nation's deeply troubled economy affected individual Americans. This lack of understanding is evident in Iowa editorials that explained the Commonweal crusade in terms of individual laziness and a declining work ethic.

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[70] *Farmer's Tribune*, 9 May 1894.

CHAPTER FIVE

> At this point they caught sight of thirty or forty windmills which were standing on the plain there, and no sooner had Don Quixote laid eyes upon them than he turned to his squire and said, "Fortune is guiding our affairs better than we could have wished; for you see there before you...some thirty or more lawless giants with whom I mean to do battle.
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> - Miguel de Cervantes, Don Quixote[1]

The circumstances surrounding Charles T. Kelley's abrupt departure from his post as industrial army general in July 1894 remain as unclear as his rapid ascension to the leadership position. According to Carlos Schwantes, Kelley developed a serious illness as his contingent moved through Ohio and demanded that his men continue to Washington, D. C. without him.[2] Donald McMurry reported that Kelley arrived in the capital on July 12 and contributed two thousand dollars to the Commonweal coffers.[3] Two weeks later Kelley took his final leave of absence and returned to San Francisco, apparently in response to a family emergency.[4]

Despite his failure as the leader of the 1894 industrial army, Kelley devoted the remainder of his adult life to a successful, if unheralded, fight against unemployment and related problems. Thirty years after the aborted Commonweal crusade of 1894, Reverend Kelley, the Presbyterian evangelist,

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[1] Miguel Cervantes, Don Quixote de la Mancha (New York: The Modern Library, 1949), 71.
[2] Carlos Schwantes, Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press), 228.
[3] Donald McMurry, Coxey's Army and the Industrial Army Movement of 1894 (New York: AMS Press, 1929), 248.
[4] Schwantes, 248.

continued his campaign for the creation of a national public works relief system. While his concept of efficient activism and appropriate protest changed significantly after 1894, Kelley's concern for those unable to find work remained the dominating theme in his life.

Shortly after his return to California in early August 1894, Kelley addressed a Socialist Party function in Oakland. The "general" maintained a positive outlook on the struggling unemployed crusade, declaring that despite its apparent failures as a mass protest, the movement had awakened the whole world "from its indifference upon labor problems." In five years, Kelley predicted, there would be no such thing as an idle man who was willing to work.[5] Several days later authorities officially ended the movement when they forced the remaining Coxeyites out of their Maryland and Virginia campsites.

Sometime after the Socialist Party gathering in August a police officer assaulted Kelley as he spoke from an Oakland street corner. The incident prompted Kelley to leave California and embark on the first of several nationwide speaking tours. The seasoned orator moved east in a covered wagon and "talked commonwealism in every village through which he passed."[6] According to a report in the *San Francisco Call*, Kelley's wife and child accompanied him. The paper's reference to a child marks the first and last

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[5] "Kelley Orates," *San Francisco Call*, 4 August 1894, 4.
[6] "Returns Alone and Unheralded," *San Francisco Call*, 11 December 1896, 11.

mention of any Kelley children. If the couple actually had a child after 1894, they evidently lost their infant between 1896 and 1898.

When he returned to California months, perhaps years later, Charles Kelley announced his allegiance to the Republican Party and president-elect William McKinley. Despite his departure from Socialist and Populist politics, the new Republican maintained his vision of a federally funded public works program. Personal correspondence with the new president, who assured Kelley that the new administration would push for laws benefiting the unemployed, buoyed the ex-Coxeyite's optimism. For the first time on record, however, Kelley admitted that he and other Commonweal leaders erred when they selected industrial armies as their vehicles of protest in 1894. "Experience has shown me," Kelley explained, "that the manner in which we attempted to bring the Government of this country to a sense of its duty was not perhaps the most expedient."[7]

Following his conversion to the Grand Ole' Party, Kelley's life took a turn for the worst. In April 1897 Oakland police arrested him twice in one night for speaking from the steps of city hall.[8] Three months later he released a public statement to the *San Francisco Call*. Apparently disillusioned with the labor

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[7] "General Kelly a Republican," *San Francisco Call*, 15 December 1896, 11.
[8] "Arrested for Speaking," *San Francisco Call*, 25 April 1897, 15.

movement and his fellow activists, Kelley expressed deep regret over his years spent trying to combat unemployment:

> After three years of hard work, during which time I have sacrificed what little I had in a conscientious effort to benefit thousands of my fellow-men, I have been forced into the conclusion that nothing can be accomplished by the present methods of labor agitation...It is very humiliating to have to acknowledge defeat after all these years, but it is the only honest course to take. I have sacrificed my little home and my position, and I have endeavored to benefit my fellow-men, but this agitation is only superficial, and no matter how long it is kept up it can end in nothing.[9]

Kelley also vowed to renew his focus on his family, something he recommended for all those involved in the "labor agitation" movement:

> My bitter experience has proved that if every man of the tens of thousands who have been allied in so-called labor agitation during the past few years would make his home his altar, there would soon be an improvement of the workingman's condition.[10]

Over one year later, perhaps still depressed over his perceived failures as a labor agitator and the possible death of his child, Kelley attempted suicide. Shortly after Kelley ingested an unspecified amount of carbolic acid, a neighbor found him and alerted a local doctor. The physician gave Kelley a clean bill of health after noting that he sustained only minor acid burns to the lips and mouth.[11]

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[9] "Kelley Confesses Defeat," *San Francisco Call*, 22 July 1897, 11.
[10] Ibid.
[11] "General Kelly Tries to Commit Suicide," *San Francisco Call*, 16 October 1898, 15.

Sometime after his suicide attempt Kelley's enthusiasm for activism and politics returned. In 1902 he spoke at a rally for California gubernatorial candidate, Republican George C. Pardee. Kelley first met Pardee eight years earlier when Pardee, then mayor of Oakland, arrested the industrial army leader and allegedly ordered his police force to wield pickhandles and firehoses against any uncooperative Kelleyites residing in Oakland. Rival Democrats, eager to damage Pardee's credibility with California workers, altered the story during the 1902 campaign to fit their political agenda.

Kelley played political character witness at the rally, defending Pardee against Democratic charges by accepting blame for the incidents surrounding his army's stay in Oakland. Kelley recalled how he refused the Southern Pacific Railroad's offer for transportation out of the city due to substandard accommodations. Rather than leaving Oakland on foot, Kelley ordered his army to remain in Oakland an additional day. The move prompted more unemployed men to descend upon the community. Mayor Pardee, fearing Oakland's possible transformation into a "tramp's paradise," visited Kelley at home during the night in question and asked that the general lead the army out of town the following day. The former Coxeyite admitted that, from Pardee's standpoint, one thousand unemployed men who appeared ready to make Oakland its summer residence posed a significant threat to the city and its leadership. "I want to

say," Kelley declared at the end of his testimony, "that I was responsible for two-thirds of the odium that has been cast upon Dr. Pardee."[12] Kelley then encouraged "all laboring men" to cast their votes for Pardee, who later won the election.

After the devastating Bay Area earthquake in 1906, Kelley and his wife moved to Chicago. According to the *Labor Clarion*, a San Francisco labor journal, Kelley spent the next six years as a strikebreaker, working for various companies in efforts to "formanize" their plants. A 1914 *Clarion* editorial described "Strikebreaker Kelly" as someone who "tears down where labor has struggled to build up."[13] In an interview with the *Sacramento Bee*, *Clarion* editor James Mullen also claimed Kelley's malevolence towards unions reached back into the previous century. Specifically, Mullen alleged that Kelley served as a "rat printer" during an 1898 San Francisco printer's strike.[14] Jon Jamieson, the author of a 1953 study that detailed Kelley's second unemployed march to Sacramento, also criticized the activist's stance on unions. Jamieson, who predominantly relied on *Sacramento Bee* articles for source material, referred to Kelley as a "scab leader of longshoremen and printers."[15]

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[12] "Leader of the Unemployed Tells the Truth about Dr. Pardee," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 18 October 1902, 14.
[13] "'General Kelly,'" *Labor Clarion*, 6 March 1914, 6.
[14] "Kelley Was 'Rat' Printer and 'Scab,'" *Sacramento Bee*, 9 March 1914, 1.
[15] Jon J. Jamieson, "General Kelley's 'Army' of 1914," Golden Notes 8 (January 1962): 3.

These uncharacteristic descriptions of Kelley, a former union leader, as a strikebreaker and enemy to the laboring class seem questionable in light of his long record of supporting both workers and their unemployed counterparts. If Kelley did serve as a strikebreaker perhaps he did so because he believed unions, through strikes and exclusionary tactics, prohibited viable but non-union men from working. Kelley may also have decided that the most efficient way to fight unemployment meant working from within companies rather than as an outside agitator.

If Kelley's enthusiasm for unionism did in fact decline, his desire to aid the jobless did not. In 1912, eighteen years after leading an unemployed army of nearly 1500 men through Iowa, Kelley retraced his journey through the state with his wife Lillian. Traveling in a horse drawn, flag draped wagon, the Kelleys stopped in Atlantic, where a reporter from the town newspaper interviewed Charles. After speaking with the former Commonweal general, the reporter compared Kelley to Don Quixote, the Spanish knight in Miguel de Cervantes's novel. Kelley, the journalist explained, preferred "the road and the soap-box on the corner as an impromptu platform from which to fight imaginary windmills and inveigh against imaginary ills."[16] The reporter's literary allusion probably

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[16] "General Kelly Has Departed," *Atlantic Weekly Telegraph*, 2 August 1912.

was not the first or last time someone compared Kelley to the misguided but well-intentioned Quixote.

Kelley indicated in the *Telegraph* interview that he planned to organize a new industrial army if economic conditions worsened.[17] Soon after returning to California in 1913, Kelley started preparing for this second unemployed protest. Northern California's rainy months, a consistently slow time for Bay Area labor, presented the activist with a prime opportunity to contact a large number of discontented and jobless men. In October 1913, Kelley initiated recruiting efforts for his second mass protest. Over the next several months Kelley recruited hundreds of unemployed men and boarded them in an abandoned San Francisco hotel. By the following spring General Kelley had nearly 2000 men under his command.[18]

In a statement to the *Sacramento Bee* in March 1914, Kelley divulged his motives for organizing a new industrial army and discussed his plans for this second Commonweal crusade. "The tariff, the currency bill and the Democratic administration," Kelley explained, amplified the nation's labor problems and forced the creation of a new petition in boots.[19] Kelley planned to march this living petition to Salt Lake City, Utah where it would unite with several other

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[17] "General Kelly Has Departed," *Atlantic Weekly Telegraph*, 2 August 1912.
[18] Jamieson, 3.
[19] "Unemployed Army is Here," *Sacramento Bee*, 7 March 1914, 10.

jobless contingents. From Utah the unemployed mass would split into two divisions: one would travel to Council Bluffs and the other to Denver, presumably in an attempt to replicate the 1894 routes of Kelley's Army and William Hogan's Army. The two armies would continue east before stopping to unite again in Jacob Coxey's hometown, Massillon, Ohio. With Coxey helping to lead the way, the protest would make its way to the nation's capital. Kelley predicted that 300,000 men from New York would join his western contingent in Washington, D. C. as Coxey, "that grand old man," led the unemployed protest to the Capital steps.[20]

Unlike the 1894 march, during which Kelley managed to move his men from California to Utah before clashing with local and state authorities, the 1914 effort ran out of steam in Sacramento, only ninety miles east of San Francisco. After three days in California's capital, city and county officials presented Kelley and his troops with an ultimatum: return to San Francisco peacefully or law enforcement officials would force them out of town. Kelley refused to acknowledge the ultimatum, a decision that prompted his arrest on March 9, conviction on vagrancy charges, and subsequent six month jail sentence.[21]

Colonel Harris Weinstock, a member of President Wilson's newly formed Industrial Relations Commission, visited Kelley while the activist was serving his

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[20] Ibid.
[21] Jamieson, 5.

jail time. In his conversation with Weinstock, Kelley elaborated on the motives behind marching an unemployed army to Washington. The "low tariff, increased labor-saving devices," and decreasing construction due to "the present scientific methods," Kelley believed, all contributed to the nation's labor troubles.[22] Focus the nation's attention on unemployment, Kelley reasoned, and Congress would feel undeniable pressure to create a national unemployment relief system.

After listening to Kelley's story, Colonel Weinstock informed him that President Wilson created the Industrial Relations Commission to serve the same purposes as the failed unemployed protest. Kelley, unaware of the commission's existence, agreed with Weinstock that the new federal agency effectively negated the need for any future industrial army movements.[23] While Weinstock did not arrange for Kelley's release from jail, the colonel did convince jailers to transfer the general to the facility's upper floor. Kelley, equipped with his own space and furnished with writing tools, recorded his views on the nation's unemployment problems, views that Weinstock would eventually present to the Industrial Relations Commission.[24] After his meeting with Kelley, Weinstock

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[22] "Weinstock Talks to Kelley," *Sacramento Bee*, 10 March 1917, 2.
[23] Ibid.
[24] "'General' Kelley Given Room to Write Troubles," *Sacramento Bee*, 11 March 1914, 2.

complimented the activist, referring to him as "a man of considerable mentality" with "well founded arguments."[25]

In addition to using his jail time to write, Kelley also used the idle time for serious self-reflection. Upon his release in October 1914, Kelley characteristically criticized the inhumane conditions and deplorable food in the county jail. He also announced that he had embraced Christianity over the past six months.[26] By the time he opened a mission in San Francisco three years later, Charles Kelley had reinvented himself as a Presbyterian evangelist. Qualities that previously had elevated him to various leadership positions, specifically his charisma and speaking ability, transferred well to religious proselytizing.

In 1917 Kelley and his wife, under the authority of the Presbyterian Extension Board and aided by the Workingmen's Christian Temperance Association, opened the Hope Hall Rescue Mission. Kelley spent his remaining years working at the mission, which served as a halfway house for the unemployed and needy.[27] In the mission's first six months Kelley and his staff held 150 meetings, provided free coffee and sandwiches to over 4000 men, converted 87 convicts, and helped locate jobs for 220 men.[28] His passion for

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[25] "Weinstock Says Kelley Is Man of 'Mentality,'" *Sacramento Bee*, 12 March 1914, 4.
[26] "Kelley Released," *Sacramento Bee*, 5 October 1914, 5.
[27] "'Gen.' Kelly, Ex-Hobo Chief, Opens Mission," *San Francisco Examiner*, 11 December 1917, 2.
[28] "Helping Hand Given to 87 Former Convicts." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 5 May 1918, 10.

unemployment relief, meanwhile, did not dwindle with his new found love for Christianity and focus on mission work.

Seven years after serving jail time for his desire to end unemployment, Kelley continued fighting for a national work relief system. In 1921 he again targeted Congress in his efforts to cure unemployment. His ideas about public works, virtually unchanged after nearly three decades, involved furnishing the jobless with day work at a fixed per diem wage. To fund the wages, Kelley called for the Secretary of the Treasury to issue three billion dollars in treasury notes which could be used "for all debts, public and private, and for customs duties."[29]

Kelley recorded these ideas then sent them to Secretary of Labor James J. Davis and Herbert Hoover at the Department of Commerce. Through their subordinates, both men responded with reassurances that that they found Reverend Kelley's objectives commendable and "quite in line with the desires of those in public office - that is, to solve the present unemployment situation."[30]

In 1924 Reverend Kelley, as he was known after 1917, contributed an article to *Current History Magazine*. Other than his newspaper obituary, this article represents the last known piece of historical evidence relating to Charles Kelley. Entitled "Are Radicals Insane?," Kelley's argument in the piece revolved

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[29] "Appeal to Aid Idle Men Made to Housewives," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 September 1921, 5.
[30] Ibid.

around a psuedo-scientific analysis of the radical mind and the evangelist's contention that a correlation existed between "immature intelligence and unsound radicalism."[31] Specifically, Kelley argued that radicals looked upon the American government as an oppressive monster for three reasons: radicals misinterpreted other people's theories or statements, they lacked inherent intelligence, or they lacked education. Kelley pointed out that he found radicals very similar to other humans: "kindly, sincere, earnest, and striving for what he honestly believes to be right." Convince the radical of his errors, the reverend proposed, and "he will become a valuable member of society; oppress and antagonize him and he becomes a dangerous criminal."[32]

Kelley's analysis of the radical mind sometimes verged on the ridiculous: "Mankind falls intellectually into four main divisions which may be classified through the medium of a simile between the human brain and a common blackberry." His thinking also contained a distinctive Social Darwinist tone: "No two men are equal in their wants and desires or in their physical stature; nor are they equal in their innate intelligence." [33]

Eventually Kelley returned to his long held belief that the federal government could only combat radicalism, especially the type that flourished

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[31] Charles T. Kelley, "Are Radicals Insane?" *Current History Magazine* 20 (May 1924): 205.
[32] Ibid., 206.
[33] Ibid., 207.

during poor economic periods, by creating and implementing a national system for public work relief. Kelley proposed one solution to the country's future unemployment problems in the article's conclusion:

> It will not be long before we shall again experience a recurrence of another labor glut such as occurred directly after the war and during the financial depression. Unless provision is made to overcome the difficulty this new period of unemployment will result, as in the past, in the recruiting of thousands of hungry workingmen to the radicalism of direct action...Thus we are left with the one possible remedy - the construction of great public works. Such tasks as the building of dams and the improvement of public highways could be carried on under the auspices of the War Department in a manner similar to the Panama Canal.[34]

Though thirty years had intervened, Kelley's message remained nearly identical to the "arid lands redemption" program he proposed from a street corner in Anita, Iowa.

On March 31, 1933, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed a bill that approved the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps. The legislation initiated the country's first national effort to combat the crippling unemployment that accompanied the Great Depression. Unfortunately, Reverend Kelley disappeared from the historical record after his contribution to *Current History* in 1924, leaving no indication of his thoughts on the Depression, the devastating unemployment that accompanied it, or the federal government's response to the crisis. Based on his fervent passion for helping the unemployed, however, one

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[34] Ibid., 210.

could safely assume that in the last several years of his life, Charles Kelley watched with a dual sense of redemption and pride as millions of Americans took part in federally funded organizations such as the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Charles T. Kelley died on March 25, 1935, two years after Roosevelt's momentous first month in office. Fittingly, his death also occurred exactly forty-one years and one day after Jacob Coxey led the nation's first industrial army out of Massilion, Ohio. A *San Francisco Chronicle* obituary declared him "one of the most colorful characters of the old hell-roaring days of Pacific street and the Barbary Coast." In recognition of his decades of hard work and commitment, the obituary also noted Kelley's long held position as "the general of the down-and-outers and the unemployed."[35] It is this latter description that Charles Kelley certainly would have appreciated most.

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[35] "'General' Kelly, Evangelist, Dies," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 26 March 1935.

CONCLUSION

> No person can gaze on the throng without a feeling of sympathy rises [sic] in his heart, but it sets him into a train of moralizing that develops two sides to a great question that is confronting the American people today.
>
> -The *Atlantic Monthly Telegraph*
> April 25, 1894[1]

"Industrial army," the term used by journalists and others to describe the various Commonweal contingents of 1894, first appeared in Edward Bellamy's novel Looking Backward. Published in 1888, Bellamy's combination of utopian vision and social criticism made the work one of the best selling books of the Gilded Age. The novel chronicled the extraordinary experiences of Julian West, an independently wealthy Bostonian who fell asleep in 1887 and awoke one hundred and thirteen years later. Bellamy's industrial army, unlike those of Coxey and Kelley, was not unemployed. On the contrary, Bellamy's futuristic army was a highly organized mass of workers that provided America with its entire supply of goods and services. Ironically, the army also constituted the nation's sole work force in the year 2000.

Bellamy's book about the revolutionary changes that he predicted would take place in America's 20th century met with almost instant success. How and why his term "industrial army" became linked with the Commonweal crusade of 1894 remains unknown. Sources also do not indicate whether any of the

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[1] *Atlantic Weekly Telegraph*, 25 April 1894.

movement's leaders read or were familiar with Bellamy's radical vision of America's future social and political culture.

Unlike the industrial army in Looking Backward, the Commonweal movement was neither revolutionary nor radical. The goals and methods of Jacob Coxey's "petition in boots," despite its rather unconventional approach, paled in comparison to the radical protests undertaken by other Gilded Age activists. Native and foreign-born anarchists, for example, presented Americans with much more extreme examples of activism in the Gilded Age. The Haymarket Riot, blamed in part on several self-proclaimed anarchists, set off a wave of public hysteria eight years before the industrial army movement. Paul Arvich, author of The Haymarket Tragedy, claimed the explosion at Haymarket provoked a "nationwide convulsion of deep-rooted and violent prejudice."[2] Anarchist Alexander Berkman's vicious attack on U. S. Steel manager Henry Clay Frick, perpetrated in the midst of the brutal Homestead Strike of 1892, produced a similar public response.

While the unemployed congregations under the leadership of Charles Kelley, William Hogan, and Jacob Coxey challenged several of the sacred tenets of American life, specifically *laissez faire* government and its relationship to individual responsibility, they did not lead a revolt against the nation's political

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[2] Paul Avrich, The Haymarket Tragedy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 215.

or social institutions. As Carlos Schwantes noted, both the Commonwealers and the government "chose to respond to one another within the framework of America's long standing values and traditions...they appeal - they petition - they protest - they reason."[3] Nevertheless, the crusade did employ unconventional methods and demanded unprecedented changes from the people and government of the United States.

Unfortunately for crusade founder Jacob Coxey, the latter half of his prediction - that the movement would mark either the second coming of Christ or result in a humiliating failure - proved all too true. Shirley Austen Plummer, writing in the *Chatauquan*, captured the opinion many held of the movement when he called the crusade "the most complete, most ridiculous fizzle that has smirched history's pages for many generations."[4] The Commonweal was, in the eyes of many Americans, completely unsuccessful. Due to the rapid rise and demise of the industrial armies, one might argue, as Plummer did, that the Commonweal movement bears no historical significance other than to provide another example of Gilded Age crankism and snake oil salesmanship. Such an interpretation, however, shortchanges the importance of this unprecedented, peaceful, and national protest.

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[3] Carlos Schwantes, Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 259.
[4] Austen, "The Downfall of Coxeyism," *The Chautauquan 19* (June 1894): 443.

The poor decision making that led to the premature march on the Capitol was one of the central reasons for the movement's rapid deterioration. The May Day debacle in Washington, D. C., which resulted in the arrest of Coxey and Carl Browne, occurred long before the movement's larger contingents crossed the Mississippi River. By acting too quickly, Coxey and Browne effectively negated the crusade's best opportunity to present a unified and powerful statement to Congress. Their arrest and detainment, while the other industrial armies struggled eastwards, damaged the little credibility the movement possessed.

In addition, the very means by which the Coxeyite leaders chose to reach their goals, the "petition in boots," proved too intrusive and potentially intimidating to garner the widespread sympathy and support needed to force change. Without the aid of the railroads, the industrial army as a vehicle of protest was cumbersome and plodding. Charles Kelley later admitted that "the manner in which we attempted to bring the Government of this country to a sense of its duty was not perhaps the most expedient."[5]

Groups such as Kelley's Army generated attention and sustenance not only by their size and composition, but also because of their potential for intimidation, violence, and lengthy visits. If Jack London's recollections of the confrontation between the town leaders of Red Rock, Iowa and "Admiral" Kelley

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[5] "General Kelly a Republican," *San Francisco Call*, 15 December 1896, 11.

were accurate, Kelley recognized this potential for violence and occasionally used it to the army's immediate benefit. Nevertheless, Iowans fed Kelley's Army and came to view the unemployed spectacle most often out of curiosity, not because the proximity of the industrials posed a serious threat to the safety of themselves, their families, or their communities.

The industrial army concept and the arrest of Coxey and Browne on May Day did not destroy the movement. Coxey and others failed to bring about long lasting and widespread change because the ideas and possibilities the armies represented posed a very serious threat to long held beliefs about individual responsibility, hard work, and the role of government in society. Those who participated in the "petition in boots" not only marched against unemployment, their crusade also challenged one of the most fundamental and traditionally conservative institutions in the country: the federal government. Simply admitting that the crusaders had a valid point, which very few people or newspapers dared to do, implied that the role of government in society needed immediate and serious alteration. For those born after the advent of the national welfare state, created as response to the twentieth century's worst depression, a proactive federal government remains a fact of life. Such was not the case for those living in the Gilded Age.

The changes proposed by Coxey and Kelley in 1894 were not simply short-term answers to the nation's unemployment and economic problems. Indeed, the solutions offered by the Commonweal reached far beyond the period of economic depression that gripped the country starting in 1893. A program funded by the federal government that put individuals to work on the government's time clock and payroll had many far-reaching consequences. First, successful implementation of such a program would force Americans to reconsider and ultimately reconstruct their long held beliefs regarding chronic unemployment. Specifically, individual responsibility for financial wellbeing would need to be reconciled with the nation's economic health. Acceptance of any Commonweal proposals meant that Congress, simply by approving such programs, was legislating that a hard day's work did not always translate into certain comforts for all people. Approval by Congress would also require the federal government to acknowledge a fundamental shift from limited federal policy to an undeniably more intrusive role in the lives of their American constituents.

The ideological conflict between the concepts of individual and governmental responsibility often manifested itself as Kelley's Army traveled through Iowa. This was most evident when Iowans consistently refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Commonweal's goals but continued to turn

out in droves to view the spectacle and ensure that the participants did not want for food, water, and shelter. Sympathy in the form of food and shelter, however, did not mean support for the movement's goals.

In their newspaper articles and editorials, Iowans consistently took issue and disagreed with the fundamental tenets of the Commonweal crusade while reinforcing the role of individual responsibility in American society. In numerous opinion letters, Iowans concluded that the only way to make a drastic change like that proposed by the Commonweal leaders was to use the traditional American instrument of change: the ballot box. Then, and only then, would the people of the United States accept such a program.

The amount, variation, and scope of the newspaper coverage of Kelley's Army in Iowa also demonstrated the seriousness with which Iowans viewed the Commonweal movement. Most newspapers surveyed in this study ran Kelley related articles on their front pages for over one month. The protest was also grist for the editorial mill from April through May. Coverage subsided only when the group left Iowa for Missouri.

The Commonweal crusade did not provide any immediate answers to the "great question" that confronted many Americans in 1894. Nor did the New Deal policies of Franklin Roosevelt offer a conclusive solution. Historians and economists generally agree that World War II, not Roosevelt's programs, ended

the Great Depression in the United States. The issues raised by the Commonweal crusade persist yet today, as the 20th century gives way to the 21st. What, if any, responsibility should the government take in providing work and wages for the governed? The industrial army movement of 1894, along with Charles Kelley's life long campaign for public work relief, are but a small chapter in the much larger debate surrounding this great question.

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