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Milk strike! The politics of dairy farmers' movements

Kruger, Thomas Joseph, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1994

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Milk Strike! The Politics of Dairy Farmers' Movements

by

Thomas J. Kriger

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, The City University of New York**

1994

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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this dissertation pass with distinction.
Frances Fox Piven

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List of Organizations

AFBF - The **American Farm Bureau Federation** is a conservative farm interest group, founded in upstate New York in 1914.

BOD - Organized in the Boonville area, the **Brotherhood of Dairymen** were a rival to the Dairy Farmers Union. Led by the Rev. Thomas F. McNeill, the BOD joined in the 1939 strike.

DFU - The **Dairy Farmers Union** led the 1937, 1939, and 1941 milk strikes. It was organized in 1936.

DL - Incorporated as a joint stock company in 1907, the **Dairymen's League** was transformed into an insurgent farm organization during the 1916 and 1919 milk strikes.

DLCA - Following the 1919 milk strike, a new leadership of business-oriented farmers and their advisors reorganized the DL as a profit-oriented marketing association, hereafter known as the **Dairymen's League Cooperative Association**.

ESDA - The **Empire State Dairymen's Association**, led by Albert Woodhead of Batavia, organized the second strike in 1933 (formerly the Western New York Dairymen's Association).

FUNY - The **Farmers Union of the New York Milkshed** was founded by Archie Wright and a splinter group of Dairy Farmers Union members. When charges of communist control split the Union in May, 1941, Wright and his followers abandoned the old DFU and founded the FUNY.

NED - In January, 1944, Wright and the FUNY affiliated with the liberal National Farmers Union. They were known as the **Northeastern Division** of the NFU until 1951.

NFO - The **National Farmers' Organization** is a large marketing cooperative and interest group, with operations in many commodity sectors. Organized to conduct "farm holidays" in 1955, the NFO led a national milk strike in 1967.

DFG - The **Tri-state Master Dairy Farmers' Guild**, led by the Rev. John W. Dorney, led the ill-fated 1957 milk strikes. Guild members were joined in the second 1957 strike by the members of the **Dairy Farmers of America**, with offices in New York City and Columbia County.

UDF - In February, 1942, the leaders of the Dairy Farmers Union affiliated with John L. Lewis and the United Mine Workers. They were known as the **United Dairy Farmers**, District 50 of the Chemical and Coke Producers Division, until the organization faded into obscurity after the war.



New York State

Chapter One

Introduction: Theory, Data, and Methods

This dissertation is a study of the political participation of New York State dairy farmers. My focus is on dairy farmers' movements, in particular the long tradition of milk strikes, or "holidays," that began in 1883 and continued into the 1990s. My thesis is simple: the location of farmers in the political economy of agriculture shapes their political participation. This thesis is tested by a number of propositions that explore the economic, political, and ideological relationships in the New York State dairy industry.

Briefly stated, New York's dairy farmers produce milk within a complex web of power relations involving Congressional and state legislative committees, federal and state department of agriculture bureaucrats, agribusiness, cooperatives, the system of land grant colleges, and other farmers. The farmers' position in this web, or "class position," patterns their political participation by presenting them with a set of limited choices that circumscribe political action. Obviously, not all farmers are alike. Farmers embedded within different relationships offer dissimilar interpretations of their "class position." Farmers with larger operations, on one hand, tend to

participate in interest groups. In contrast, small farmers, under certain circumstances - such as an increase in grievances, together with changes in the larger political environment - tend to participate in social movements.

The purpose of this chapter is to define and explain my argument, to consider its place within the literature, and to explain the methods used to collect the data.

The Literature on Agrarian Politics, 1945-1970

The study of agriculture has long been important in American political science. As group theory gained ascendancy, farmer organizations were often cited to illustrate the power of interest groups in the post-New Deal liberal state.¹ Lowi, for example, argued that farmers represented an important example of the delegation of public power to private interest groups, which illustrated what he later called "interest group liberalism."² According to Lowi, farmers discovered the utility of interest group participation in the 1930s, through a process of trial and error, following earlier experiences with social movements and economic cooperatives.³ In another influential work, Mancur Olson cited the tangible incentives offered to members of the American Farm Bureau Federation, including cheaper tires and insurance, as one way to overcome rational self-interest and induce "free riders" to participate in collective action.⁴

One problem, however, with group theory's emphasis on farm interest groups was that it overlooked the influential role of farmers' movements in American politics. Lowi's focus on farm interest groups, for example, excluded the historic role of small farmers in American politics that began with Shay's Rebellion; nor did his analysis adequately explain why some farmers rebelled, while others embraced conventional political solutions. Simply put, group theory failed to acknowledge differences between farmers. As entrenched as modern farm interest groups may have been within the processes of the liberal state, not all farmers belonged to interest groups. The authors of The American Voter found that a majority of American farmers were not interest groups members.⁵ Their findings were similar to Crampton's claim that 86 percent of the poorest American farmers, and 70.9 percent of middle income farmers did not belong to farm organizations.⁶ What both of these works suggest is that Lowi's analysis of the farmers should be read with Schattschneider's caveat in mind: that the heavenly chorus of (farm) interest groups "sings with a strong upper class accent."⁷

Further, Olson and Lowi's focus on interest groups, such as the American Farm Bureau Federation, obscured important connections between interest groups and movements. As Lowi correctly pointed out, local chambers of commerce and the Federal Extension Service joined in establishing the

Farm Bureau, as part of an effort to modernize early 20th century farming practices. What Lowi failed to mention, however, was that these same business leaders and state bureaucrats also founded the Farm Bureau as an elite counterweight to agrarian movements by poorer, smaller farmers, such as the Populist Movement or Nonpartisan League.⁸ The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 created the Extension Service, which organized and supported the Bureau as a "bulwark against radical farm movements."⁹ As the Bureau's first president, James R. Howard, said in a 1919 address to the Secretary of Agriculture: "I stand as a rock against radicalism."¹⁰ Thus the history of the Farm Bureau calls into question Lowi's assertion that "organized" farmers turned to interest group participation by "a process of elimination." Instead, some elite farmers joined interest groups (the Farm Bureau) at the urging of the Chicago Board of Trade and other business groups;¹¹ other large farmers decided to lobby because they possessed the resources and relationships that were effective in interest group politics.

McConnell's work provided the exception to the rule within this literature. In Private Power and American Democracy, he concluded that the central feature of American democracy was the (public) power wielded by private interest groups. Like Lowi, McConnell pointed out the anti-democratic implications; in agriculture for example, it meant that

organized rural elites often gained control of agricultural policy, at the expense of poorer farmers. As an illustration, however, McConnell explained how the mobilization of wealthy farmers into the Farm Bureau, "following the structure of the local informal organization and status systems," *limited* the opportunities for small farmers.¹² Following the recruitment of larger, more affluent farmers, the Farm Bureau became the legitimate "voice" of all farmers; in addition, Bureau members were afforded a privileged position in the structure of agricultural policy making.

With the main emphasis of group theory placed on elite farmers, the prevailing view of agrarian protest reflected the influence of the collective behavior theory. The influence of mass society theories,¹³ or of the structural-functionalist models,¹⁴ could be observed both in the secondary literature on farmers' movements written in the 1950s and 1960s,¹⁵ as well as within two very influential works on political behavior. In V.O. Key's Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups, and in The American Voter, the "mass" of smaller, poorer American farmers were characterized as possessing limited rationality and being overly susceptible to the influence of economic stimuli.¹⁶ Key, for example, contrasted farmers' movements, which "developed more or less spontaneously in response to frustration and deprivation,"¹⁷ with pressure groups.

Implicit in his analysis was the assumption that interest group participation was a more legitimate and effective form of politics than social movements. According to Key, agrarian movements were a simple reflection of economic stimuli. In his words, "When the [economic] pain left, the farmer quit squawking and went back to the plow."¹⁸

The authors of The American Voter observed a similar correlation between economic hardship and political action. In this landmark study, Campbell et al. found that the salient characteristics of American farmers were sporadic voting habits and inconstant partisan attachments.¹⁹ Like Key, these authors traced the cause of farmers' movements to economic pressure, and to the subsequent psychological response of individual farmers. They defined farmers' movements as a "class phenomenon," that is "a demand for more tangible benefits on the part of a segment of the population suffering economic distress." However, Campbell et al. considered such movements a "class expression at the opposing end of the continuum of involvement, political sophistication, and capacity for group identification."²⁰

The reason farmers turned to protest was because "the farmer has had little psychological anchor in the 'normal' elements of the ongoing political process."²¹ Campbell et al. offered a number of explanations for the farmers' "psychological remoteness," including the physical distance to the polls, and lower education levels. The most important

factor, however, in determining the farmers' "state of mind,"²² was a lack of socialization. In other words, the "mass" of farmers were not psychologically-anchored because they lacked the dense social networks and labor groups that served to socialize and educate workers in other occupations. As a result, farmers' movements were short lived, were aimed at solving only the farmer's immediate economic difficulties, and exhibited a "paucity of anything that resembled ideological comprehension."²³

New Currents in the Literature on Agrarian Politics

Beginning in the 1960s, new research and areas of concern within the social sciences expanded the debate over farmer politics; this brought a renewed emphasis on farmers' (or peasants') movements. In the next few pages I will examine three currents in the literature which greatly influenced more recent discussions of agricultural politics.

First, critics of collective behavior theory developed the Resource Mobilization (RM) perspective. Within the context of increased social activism in the 1960s and 1970s, many analysts concluded that collective behavior theories failed to provide an adequate theoretical framework to account for contemporary protest.²⁴ As a result, critics developed RM theory, based on a systematic rejection of both the normative and methodological assumptions of psychological theories of protest. As an example, where

collective behavior theory emphasized grievances and frustrations to account for movements, RM analysts rejected the role of grievances. Instead, RM theorists attributed protest to an instrumental rationality, based on the premise that "there is always enough discontent in any society to supply the grass-roots support for a movement."²⁵

Further, where collective behavior theory defined movements as an individual response to external stimuli, RM theorists underscored the larger, *political* context which shaped the development of movements. In contrast to the psychology of movements, early formulations of RM theory stressed "objective" variables such as externally-generated resources, organization, and allies (sympathetic third parties) in accounting for social movement mobilization. According to McCarthy and Zald, RM theory made "an explicit recognition of the crucial importance of involvement on the part of individuals and organizations from outside the collectivity which a social movement represents."²⁶

Later formulations of RM theory were based on expanding these early parameters. McAdam's political process model represented one well-known effort to extend the boundaries of early RM theory. His "political process model" incorporated both subjective factors ("cognitive liberation"), that could explain the conversion of structural potential for movement formation into concrete political action, as well as the effects of shifts in the

larger political opportunity structure.²⁷ Jenkins, in his analysis of the United Farm Workers, raised a second point of contention with early RM theory. He highlighted the critical role of the indigenous organizations within the UFW, that contributed the (internally-generated) resources required by movement organizers.²⁸ Further, Tarrow's analysis of cycles of protest represented another attempt to expand RM by considering the effects of long-term "waves of mobilization" on movement formation.²⁹

The second current in the expanded literature on agrarian politics flowed out of a renewed emphasis on protest and other forms of social conflict. As social scientists reconsidered the past in reaction to the turmoil of the 1960s, they restored farmers' movements to a prominent role in politics and history. In recasting agrarian movements, many analysts worked within the general framework of RM theory, or they employed class analysis, a close kin of the RM perspective. The similarities between class analysis and RM theory were located in the shared emphasis on objective factors such as interests and organization; where class analysis diverged was its concern with economic and political structures, and the way these structures shaped the struggles between classes of farmers and other contenders for power.

The result was an expanded literature on American farmers' movements. Kay, for example, defined class

antagonisms, rather than sectional conflict, as the underlying cause of the Regulator movement in North Carolina (1766-1776).³⁰ Szatmary contrasted the tightly interwoven, communitarian life of the subsistence farmers that fought Shays' Rebellion, with the competitive, commercial culture that encroached from coastal Massachusetts.³¹ Hahn observed a similar clash of social relations at work in Georgia. He examined the contrasts between the diversified, upcountry subsistence farmers, who became the main constituency of southern Populism, and the commercial imperative of cotton production that gradually crept in from Georgia's coast.³²

Hahn contributed only one of many works on the Populist Movement.³³ Schwartz analyzed the structures of cotton production in the antebellum South, illustrating how these structures patterned the development of the Southern Farmers' Alliance.³⁴ Goodwyn, in the definitive work in the field, highlighted the role of Alliance cooperatives, which provided the "movement culture," or animating vision of the entire Populist effort.³⁵ Tracing the roots of Southern Populist ideology, Palmer revealed the prominent influence of Southern evangelical Protestant churches, alongside the contributions of Jeffersonian thought and Southern agrarianism.³⁶ In addition, McNall utilized class analysis in his study of the Farmers' Alliance in Kansas. He defined the Alliance struggle in Kansas as a "class movement," emphasizing the importance of organization in class

formation. The reason for the Populists' failure, he argued, was their inability to mobilize an effective, mass-based organization.³⁷

Other analysts produced a large body of literature devoted to peasant rebellions in the developing world. Within this literature, many analysts followed in the footsteps of Barrington Moore,³⁸ who argued that agricultural producers responded to important changes, such as the imposition of market relations, based on their structural position within the political economy of agriculture. Wolf and Paige, for example, took contrasting positions regarding the question of which class of farmers or peasants constituted the driving force behind revolutionary movements in developing countries. Where Wolf saw the middle peasant as the revolutionary class, Paige assigned this role to farm workers, who typically had fewer structural ties to rural elites.³⁹

Scott and Popkin staked out contrasting positions in explaining the motivations underlying peasant rebellions.⁴⁰ For Scott, the peasants' sense of outrage could be traced to a "moral economy," or older notions of social justice and a right to survival that predated the rise of the market economy. Drawing on the work of Moore and E.P. Thompson, Scott emphasized the importance of the peasants' interpretations of their fate, drawn from values and norms that were crystallized within older, pre-market societies.

For Popkin, peasants revolts were driven by interests rather than morality. If peasants took risks, he argued, it was because they were rationally self-interested, not because they sought to return to some overly-romanticized notion of village life. He criticized Scott's "moral economy" theory for being constructed on a values system and conception of the traditional peasant village that never actually existed.

The shift in research on American agrarianism, in response to the 1980s "farm crisis" protest movement in the Midwest, marked the third current in this growing literature. Social scientists approached farm protest in the 1980s from various theoretical and methodological perspectives; this reflected the expanded debate over farmer politics. Browne, for instance, in his analysis of "issue networks" within agricultural policy making in the 1980s, underscored the importance of contemporary farmers' movements. He singled out the rising power of media-conscious movement activists in bringing neglected issues to the national agenda.⁴¹ Cigler studied the precursor to the 1980s protests, the American Agriculture Movement (AAM). He employed incentive theory to evaluate the development of the AAM, its dissolution, and eventual evolution (led by more affluent farmers) into an interest group.⁴² Considered together, both Browne and Cigler's works signaled a renewed emphasis on agrarian protest within mainstream American

political science. In other notable works, Davidson defined the 1980s "farm crisis" as only one part of a larger crisis in rural culture and communities.⁴³ And Mooney, employing class analysis to consider the "farm crisis," identified the social relations within farm production that allowed institutions such as insurance companies and banks to exercise control over small-scale, family-owned farms.⁴⁴

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation draws upon both the Resource Mobilization and class analysis perspectives in social movement theory. An important part of this inquiry, drawn from both paradigms, is the analysis of objective factors that account for farmer protest, such as strategies, interests, and resources. However, my analysis diverges from these perspectives. Briefly stated, my analysis rejects the instrumental construction of interests and rationality that RM theory attributed to movement participants, and it rejects the overly structural orientation of some variants of class analysis. It is my contention that the relationship between political and economic relations in agriculture cannot be adequately explained by a singular focus on objective factors. Rather, I will argue that the political participation of American farmers is better explained by examining the web of political and economic relations, or class position, that farmers are situated within. My

analysis, moreover, places great emphasis on farmers' (subjective) interpretations of their class position.

This definition of class position draws upon Przeworski's survey of the Marxist and non-Marxist debates on class formation.⁴⁵ Within the vast literature on social change, the basic question that began with Marx is this: how do categories of workers become classes? Or in other words, how do individuals whose fate is shaped and collectivized by objective forces become aware of their interests, and then define themselves subjectively, in opposition to other classes?

My analysis follows Przeworski's logic, who answered this age-old question by arguing that classes were not produced uniquely by relations of production, but rather by the actual, concrete struggles of people that were structured by the totality of economic, political, and ideological relations within a particular historical context. Class, as defined in this broader sense, is ideology and structure;⁴⁶ and classes are constantly organized, disorganized and reorganized as collections of people embedded within similar class positions struggle first, to define their interests and identity, and second, to realize them. As Przeworski further explained, the preliminary and most important struggle among any groups of individuals is always *about* class, before there are struggles *among* classes. It is important to consider,

therefore, in addition to economic relations, the parties, organizations, unions, work gangs, and so on, that play a critical role in the process of class formation.

It is also important to point out, as Przeworski does, that political and economic structures "situate" individuals within certain class positions, and may even create the potential for mobilization, yet they do not automatically produce classes of farmers. Subjective variables such as ideology, grievances, or Scott's "moral economy" are important, because they illustrate the ways in which farmers actually experience abstract theoretical categories such as economic and political relations, and the extent to which these experiences influence their selection of different forms of political participation.

My accentuation of the subjective also parallels a turn in the social movement literature. First, as Cohen noted, one of the problems with RM theory was in its out and out rejection of subjectivity as a factor in movement formation. As she put it, "Hasn't the [RM] critique of the collective- behavior tradition thrown out the baby with the bath water by excluding the analysis of values, norms, ideologies, projects, culture and identity in other than instrumental terms?"⁴⁷ Second, the accent on grievances and ideology reflects the influence of "new social movement theory" (NSM) developed in Europe. NSM theorists, such as Melucci, underscored the salience of "collective identity,"

meaning a shared sense of experience and meaning, in movement formation. Rather than common interests traced solely to a shared position in the social structure, NSM theorists located movement formation in a sense of collective identity, that unfolds as individual contenders engage in new forms of social conflict.

My argument is tested and explained in the following propositions, which explore the economic, political, and ideological relations within agriculture.

Class and Economic Relations

The "class position" of farmers, defined as their position in the political economic structure of agriculture, delineates their opponents, allies, and resources available to them. My analysis begins with the collectivities that coalesce within the production relations of American agriculture and the political relations of capitalist democracy. Throughout my analysis, I will employ a concept of class that is defined by political and economic relations, as well as by an individual's interpretation of their life and work. In the next few pages, I will explain the notion of class position, meaning the position of a farmer in the political economic structure of agriculture. Subsequently, I will explain the importance of grievances, values, and ideology in the process of class or movement formation.

The concept of class position highlights the unique position of farmers in relation to the dominant economic and political structures that pattern their lives and work. Lipset, for example, argued that all farmers - especially those who produce for a national or international market - occupied a distinct economic position because of their dependence on powerful agricultural institutions.⁴⁸ Paige, in his extensive study of agrarian revolution, spelled out how commercial farmers were connected (or tied) by dependency relationships to the dominant institutions within market economies. As with Moore, he explained that farmers were dependent on what he termed "structural linkages" to institutions that "provide social services, agricultural credit and collective economic resources that cultivators need but cannot supply themselves." Because of these structural limitations, Paige concluded that only the rural proletariat had real revolutionary potential; only farm laborers were free from such potentially confining relationships.⁴⁹

Where Moore and Paige stressed the social control inherent in "structural linkages," Wolf and Scott identified resources and opportunities. Wolf argued that the middle or independent landholding peasant was better positioned to rebel, because they possessed the resources, such as land and a family labor force, which contributed to independent political action.⁵⁰ Scott located the capacity for peasant

resistance in the dense social networks of traditional peasant society. Together with their lack of integration into market relations, networks built upon notions of justice and exploitation offered peasants greater immunity to the ideological penetration, or hegemony, of dominant classes.⁵¹

The conclusion drawn from these works is that the structure of agriculture delineates the opponents, allies, and resources available to farmers, should they choose to contest their position in the political economy. The contours of each particular struggle would, of course, depend on the "structural linkages" inherent in the class position of the farmers involved. As Schwartz pointed out in a similar argument, the relative class position of farmers impinges on their capacities to mobilize, because it places limits on the resources and allies that farmers might bring to what he called an "elaborate dance" between movement and "parent" structure.⁵²

Schwartz illustrated the connections between structural position and agrarian politics using the case of the Farmers' Alliance.⁵³ The Alliance mobilized to attack the structure of the Southern cotton tenant system. The class position of Alliance yeoman (small independent) farmers, and Alliance tenants, patterned the forms of protest they attempted, the allies they sought, and the resources available. Yeoman farmers, for example, had some degree of

economic independence and could boycott merchants that charged excessively high prices. They also had additional resources, including time, money and the "free spaces" needed to build a social movement. Sharecroppers or debt peons, on the other hand, were tied to merchants by contract and could not boycott, vote, or even speak as freely. The only real resource sharecroppers possessed was the ability to disrupt the production system by striking, or withholding their labor.⁵⁴

In the case of New York State dairy farmers, their class position is defined by their productive capacity, as they are embedded within a web of power relations involving Congressional and state legislative committees, federal and state Department of Agriculture bureaucrats, agribusiness, cooperatives, the system of land grant colleges, and other farmers. The variables used to evaluate a farmer's class position include: size of farm, amount of production, income, debt load, co-op membership, involvement in government farm programs, and amount of off-farm income. Given this data, the position of an individual farmer can be evaluated, relative to the structure of their commodity sector. The variables used to describe the structure of agriculture include: total number of farms within the particular commodity sector, average production per farm, importance of a particular commodity within the local and national economy, and the impact of government policy. The

purpose of comparing these two sets of variables (for the individual farmer and the commodity group) is to determine the class position of individual farmers, and to identify farmers who share similar class positions and forms of political action.

Class and Political Relations

As farmers contest their position in the political economy, political relations pattern these conflicts; farmers embedded within different relationships tend to embrace different forms of participation. In what has been "a growing theme" in the social movement literature, analysts have sought to define how conventional politics provides an "opportunity structure" for collective action.⁵⁵ The structures of capitalist democracies, as Przeworski noted, separate political and economic conflicts, imposing different forms of organization on contending groups. The first barrier that contenders encounter is electoral politics, forcing group leaders to confront profound questions of organizational identity. Parties are obviously important. As McNall pointed out, "they have often served as distinct class organizations."⁵⁶ Party leaders, moreover, often face the difficult choice of maintaining ideological consistency, or reaching beyond class boundaries in order to mobilize enough voters for electoral majorities.⁵⁷ In other cases, parties have served to co-opt popular discontent.⁵⁸

Strikes also are an important form of participation. Strikes are simultaneously a form of economic and political struggle, which represents the antithesis of capitalist democratic politics.⁵⁹

There are many examples from American history that illustrate the prominent role of political structures in imposing forms of organization on farmers' conflicts. As Szatmary pointed out, the political structures of late 18th century Massachusetts shaped the course of Shays' Rebellion. He observed, "The constitutions of many New England state governments. . .enhanced the position of the commercial elite," that included large, commercial farmers. Szatmary cited property qualifications for voting as a notable example, which were often set higher than the average holdings of most yeoman farmers. Without access to the franchise, small farmers were denied a redress in the political system, which in turn led them eventually to armed rebellion.

In the late 19th century, the struggle over railroad rate regulation, access to credit, and land ownership provide an illustration of how political structures patterned the development of the Populist movement. Many analysts, for example, have argued that the elite-driven major parties provoked the formation of the People's Party, by failing to address the interests of "dislocated" farmers and workers.⁶⁰ In another often cited example in the

literature, social scientists have evaluated the various strategies adopted by the leaders of the major parties, in reacting to the Populist challenge. Together, these tactical shifts and reforms shaped the Populists' third party challenge, as well as the possibility of further electoral insurgency.⁶¹ Indeed, the Populists' ideology, as expressed in their 1892 Omaha Platform, made a clear connection between corrupted economic and political structures and the need for sweeping reform. The Omaha Platform began with these words:

The conditions which surround us best justify our cooperation: we meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot-box, the legislatures, the Congress, and touches even the ermine of the bench.⁶²

Westin clarified this last reference to the Supreme Court in a little known article that described how the decisions of the Court greatly angered Midwestern farmers. He explained, in one example, how the Court in the 1890s consistently ruled in favor of full payment of railroad bondholders, even in cases where no track had been built. In another example, Federal court judges went so far as to imprison a number of "state officials who refused to levy taxes as ordered in bondholder judgements."⁶³

The work of Keeler (and McConnell) is especially relevant to the development of farmers' movements in the 20th century. In his study of French neocorporatism, Keeler compared the American Farm Bureau Federation to the official

French agricultural union - the FNSEA.⁶⁴ For Keeler, the Farm Bureau's close relations with the Extension Service was analogous to the position of the FNSEA. State access offered Farm Bureau members a privileged position in farm policy making - and thus a competitive advantage over other farmers. In France, the isolation of rival unions eventually drove them to protest, as they attempted to win concessions from the state. As Keeler explained, the mass protests by French farmers in 1974 and 1975 were "a vivid example of the state's inability to ignore completely nonofficial unions capable of manifesting power in the streets."⁶⁵

Keeler's analysis has particular relevance for my inquiry into the politics of New York dairy farmers. As McConnell and many others have argued,⁶⁶ business leaders and political officials organized the Bureau in order to forestall the possibility of further insurgency, in the tradition of the Nonpartisan League. In New York, the Bureau's formation and active role in state politics contributed to the political isolation of small farmers, who were already fighting their battles in a one-party political system, dominated by the Republicans after 1896.⁶⁷

Throughout American history, as farmers embedded within different class positions have interpreted their position in the political economy, a pattern can be observed. Farmers with larger operations have generally participated in interest group politics,⁶⁸ while farmers with smaller

operations, with fewer of the relationships and resources that are effective in interest group politics, have typically participated in social movements. The connecting thread that runs through these two forms of collective action (interest groups and movements) is the location of the participants in the political economy. Farmers located in positions of greater structural advantage, throughout most of American history, have not had to resort to protest. Their class position (i.e. economic power and representation in agricultural interest groups) served to safeguard their interests. Small farmers, on the other hand, have often turned to protest - by definition unconventional political participation - for the opposite reason. They lacked economic and political power, and believed the "accepted" policy process to be under the control of large farmers and business.

Class and Ideology

As many analysts in the recent social movement literature have emphasized, ideological relations, in addition to economic and political relations, are crucial in the process of class or movement formation. Indeed, critics have identified the neglect of subjective variables as a major weakness in the literature. As Cohen wrote of RM theory, ". . .the resource-mobilization perspective, in all of its variants, operates with a concept of rational action

too narrow" to address questions of subjective variables. She concluded, "One cannot . . . simply add a consideration of solidarity, collective identity, consciousness, or ideology to the [RM] perspective without bursting its framework."⁶⁹ Others have addressed similar criticisms to examples of class analysis. Scott, for example, argued, "It is fashionable in some of the more structuralist variants of neo-Marxism to assume one can infer the nature of class relations directly from a few diagnostic features [such as] the dominant mode of production, . . . or the mode of surplus appropriation." He correctly asked, "is it not far better to understand how those structures are apprehended by flesh-and-blood human actors?"⁷⁰ In addition, Cumings noted that in Paige's sweeping analysis, his concentration on interests gave "short shrift to peasant or landlord morality, values, or ideology. The word *religion* barely appear[ed] in the book." He continued, "For Paige, class interests lead directly to politics; he does not see a need to analyze how this happens."⁷¹

At the heart of these criticisms of the RM and class analysis literature lies one common theme. In essence, political and economic relations force people to confront what Przeworski called "a structure of choices given at a particular moment of history;" however, the way people respond to these choices "should not be interpreted in a mechanical fashion."⁷² Instead, subjective variables such as

ideology or collective identity are important. They illustrate how real people, to use Scott's phrase, "apprehend" their class position - through a lens colored by their culture, values, and individual identities, all of which mediate the effects of class position. My analysis, therefore, will focus on New York dairy farmers' interpretation of their position in the political economy. Because ideology⁷³ is a window into the subjective, this analysis will allow me to consider whether any connections existed between the farmers' class position and their political participation.

This notion of class or movement formation based on a sense of shared interpretations is similar to that of New Social Movement (NSM) theory developed in Europe. As NSM theorists such as Melucci have argued, rather than being based on similar interests, that reflect a shared position in the social structure, movement formation is located in what he termed a sense of "collective identity." Melucci defined collective identity as "a shared definition of the field of opportunities and constraints offered to collective action."⁷⁴

One final note on ideology. In certain instances, ideology must be treated as *both* an objective and subjective variable. When interpretations of class position crystallize over time, in the form of history, folklore, or inherited culture, these subjective values rise up to confront

movement participants. In this new objective form, history and culture serve to define political alternatives. Thus a sense of history plays an important role in movement formation. As Gutman explained,

The central value of historical understanding is that it transforms historical givens into historical contingencies. It enables us to see the structures in which we live and the inequality people experience as only one among many other possible experiences. . . . When people come in contact with that perspective, they are better able to think analytically about the structures that impinge upon them.⁷⁵

From the outset, my focus has been on those remarkable instances when American farmers erupt in protest. My next task, therefore, is to explain the conditions under which they occur.

Grievances and Opportunities: The Emergence of Protest

When changes in structural relations disadvantaged one class of farmers, this often generates grievances, which play a prominent role in the emergence of agrarian protest. Simply put, grievances matter. This proposition expresses another of my major objections to the canons of RM theory, where grievances were defined as a constant. As the history of American farmers' movements illustrates, changing economic and political relationships often initiated an ebb and flow of discontent that provided an essential catalyst for insurgency. Farmers' movements since the end of the 19th century, as Key and the authors of The American Voter

correctly observed, were typically born of depression. Marginalized farmers, in other words, were extremely price sensitive. This was not, however, as explained by collective behavior theory, because such movements were therapeutic or cathartic. Instead, economic crises pushed farmers out of their usual patterns of quiescent behavior. In times of crisis, for example, the stereotypical American farmer, portrayed as the rugged individualist, quite often joined in a long tradition of farm protest groups. It was within such groups that small farmers often discovered the widespread scope of economic deprivation. In addition, as angry farmers sought out the forces that caused them hardship, they often gained a sense that they could successfully address their economic and political predicament through collective action.

What specific level of grievances is necessary to spark a reaction? In many ways these factors cannot be quantified, a statement which might lead to objections given the current theoretical bent in the political science literature. For an answer to this question, I will follow Barrington Moore's logic, as he confronted the similar question of explaining the level of exploitation necessary to produce peasant rebellions in traditional societies. Moore argued that exploitation cannot be measured; no exact level of misery can be specified. Yet exploitation was not purely subjective (in the eyes of the observer), it was based on the

particular relationships in question. He concluded: ". . . the contribution of those [peasant overlords] who fight, rule, and pray must be obvious to the peasant, and the peasants' return payments must not be grossly out of proportion to the services received."⁷⁶

This was directly analogous to the relationship between the grievances felt by New York State dairy farmers and milk strikes. The catalyst for most milk strikes was low prices; as Moore might put it, milk prices could not be grossly out of proportion to the farmers' efforts in producing milk. When milk prices were disproportionate, farmers often resisted. The exact level of grievances required for them to rebel often varied with external factors. Drought was important, as well as the nature of information possessed by farmers, such as the knowledge that milk dealers were engaging in cutthroat competition, which drove down the retail price of milk. As Moore went on to explain, "The timing of changes in the life of [farmers]. . . are crucial factors in their own right." Sudden changes in economic status, or the imposition of new, arduous work rhythms upon a broad segment of farmers served to "infuriate" them. As he explained, "The significant point is that under these conditions individual grievances in a flash become apparent as collective ones."⁷⁷

Second, when escalating grievances occur within the context of shifts in the larger political environment, this

creates the opportunities for farmers' movements to emerge and contend for power. The concept of "political opportunity structures," as I referred to above, has become increasingly prominent in the recent social movement literature. The purpose of its development was to shed light on the multifaceted relationships between conventional politics and movements. At its core, "opportunity structures" are a result of the unstable nature of power relations in conventional politics. In the case of farmers, during periods of turmoil, economic and political alignments fluctuate, disrupting the established class relations that delineate farmers' opponents, allies, and resources. It is within this context that farmers' movements often arise, as farmers gain new allies and resources, which allows them to exploit the new opportunities in the political system. Drawing upon works by Piven and Cloward, Jenkins, and McAdam, Tarrow outlined the main variables in this concept of "political opportunity structures." These variables include the degree of openness of the polity, the stability of electoral alignments, the presence of allies, divisions within elites, and elite tolerance of protest.⁷⁸

Social Movements and Change

Movement success depends on the convergence of different factors. First, changes in the larger political structure must be significant and of a kind to create

opportunities for collective action. Second, successful insurgency depends on the ability of movement leaders to capitalize on the interdependencies within structural relations, or as Schwartz put it, to "utilize [their] position within the system to disrupt or threaten the system itself."⁷⁹ Farmers facing a tightly integrated market, for example, could turn "structural linkages" to their advantage by joining together and refusing to produce. In fact, this is the theory behind most farm strikes. By dumping milk, farmers believed they could force milk dealers to capitulate, because the dealers lacked another source of milk. The more perishable the commodity (such as milk), the greater the farmers' advantage. Structural interconnections, of course, have changed over time. As an illustration, dairy farmers lost some of their leverage with advances in transportation. Better roads and railways gave milk handlers the ability to rapidly ship milk over greater distances. Thus armed, they could "break" strikes, and lessen their interdependencies with striking farmers.

Further, protest success depends on a protest organization developing an independent source of resources and power. In other words, protest can only be successful when a group is able to "form and maintain an organization independent of the original structure."⁸⁰ On this basis Wolf concluded that the "middle peasantry" provided the most effective mass base of revolutionary movements; only the

independent peasant possessed the indigenous resources of secure access to land and family labor.⁸¹ Externally generated resources can also help offset the dependencies involved in "structural linkages" to dominant institutions. As an example, movement activists in the 1980s "farm crisis" staged high profile events - such as Willie Nelson's Farm Aid concerts - to generate greater resources from sympathetic third parties.⁸²

One important resource that is often overlooked is information. Information is essential in the process of what McAdam called "cognitive liberation," or similarly, in defeating what Schwartz termed "structured ignorance."⁸³ Structured ignorance is defined as the limited information people have access to, based on their incomplete knowledge of the entire social structure; it reflects the biased sources of information, biased interpretations of history, and obscured inequalities of power in any given social structure. Because movements are constructed as aggrieved people question the prevailing information in society, or the "received culture," as Goodwyn called it, movement leaders by necessity must construct a convincing alternative "vision," or identity, upon which movements can be based. In order to sustain or expand an insurgent organization, the same is true: leaders must continually explain and justify the legitimacy of their struggle, particularly as they attempt to activate new members.

A Brief History of Milk Strikes in New York State

Dairy farmer activism, in the form of milk strikes, is an important yet neglected part of New York State politics and history. The first milk strikes or "holidays" occurred in the late 19th century, as a movement of small, commercial farmers battled with milk dealers for control of the lucrative New York metropolitan milk market, or milkshed.⁴ The penetration of market relations into the Hudson and Mohawk Valleys, that accompanied the construction of the railroads, gave rise to this new class of strictly "dairy" farmers. With a better system of transportation, many previously semi-subsistence farmers began to sell their milk in New York City, and hence began to depend on the returns from the sale of milk for their livelihood. The Orange County Milk War marked the first full-scale strike, in 1883; it was the first shot in a political "war" that would continue for more than 100 years.

The first statewide milk strike occurred in 1916, within the context of important structural changes in New York State agriculture. First, World War I disrupted production relations, driving up the farmers' cost of production and increasing the demand for products such as (lower priced) powdered milk. Second, the creation of a new state agency represented an important change in the

⁴Farmers use the analogy of the flow of water in a watershed to explain the flow of milk from upstate New York and surrounding states into the New York City market.

political opportunity structure for small, commercial dairy farmers. John J. Dillon, Commissioner of the newly created New York State Department of Food and Markets, played a key role in the 1916 strike. Dillon was an outspoken critic of milk dealers and, like the Populists, a supporter of farmer-owned cooperatives. Under Dillon's guidance, striking farmers revitalized the defunct Dairymen's League, channelling the grievances of small, commercial farmers into an effective political force. This strike, in which as many as 100,000 farmers may have participated, forced the Borden's Condensed Milk Company and other dealers to recognize the power of the League, as farmers were given a voice in setting wholesale milk prices.

The next great wave of strikes occurred in the 1930s. During the Depression, market relations in dairy farming nearly collapsed, as declining demand and increased predatory competition among milk dealers put severe downward pressure on prices. Faced with a loss of livelihood, small, commercial farmers again turned to milk strikes as a way of disrupting the market and extracting concessions. As in previous strikes, farmers withheld their own milk and "spilled" the milk of nonstrikers. These tactics, of course, sometimes led to tension and violence. In some instances, strikers clashed with police. On other occasions insurgent farmers fought other farmers, quite often large, commercial dairy farmers, who usually opposed strikes and maintained

closer relations with local and state policy makers.

Within this heightened period of discontent, tensions in the dairy industry reached a flashpoint. The infamous "Battle of Boonville," and the "Second Battle of Oriskany" occurred during the 1933 strikes. In the former incident, 75 State Troopers routed 400 farmers peacefully picketing a local milk plant. Photos of the Boonville "battle" in the New York Times were reminiscent of pictures of World War I, as troopers in steel helmets chased farmers across fields clouded with tear gas. In the latter skirmish, 150 farmers "hurled stones, swung clubs, and swarmed over" State Troopers escorting milk trucks to local plants.⁸⁴

In the late 1930s, two important political developments influenced the political participation of New York State dairy farmers. First, the great conflicts earlier in the decade prompted state and federal intervention in the dairy industry. Beginning in 1938, the federal milk "order" established bargaining agencies for farmers and milk dealers, and created the position of Market Administrator. The Administrator's job was to hold hearings, and to consider the farmers' and dealers' petitions for higher prices. These new governmental structures had the effect of circumscribing future political action by farmers, because they established the guidelines under which farmers could (legitimately) participate in the formulation of milk prices.

The second development was the organization of a union of small, commercial farmers, bent on establishing a set of broadly participatory structures that could serve as an alternative to the corporate-dominated, government-regulated milk market. The Dairy Farmers' Union, founded in northern New York in 1936, organized and led the 1939 strike. It was the largest statewide strike since 1916. The leader of the DFU was Archie Wright, a former IWW member, World War I draft resister, and journalist. Under Wright's leadership, the DFU was able to choke off the supply of milk going into New York and other upstate cities in the summer of 1939. This conflict was eventually settled by Fiorello LaGuardia, who negotiated an agreement between farmers and dealers at a conference held in New York City. The significance of the strike was the extent of the price increase the DFU gained for farmers. Moreover, it signaled the emergence of the DFU as a powerful movement in New York politics. None of this was lost on the milk dealers, however, who immediately began a well-financed Red-baiting campaign to discredit Wright, which eventually split the Union into rival, and sometimes hostile, factions.

Only two milk strikes occurred in New York State in the years between 1942 and 1991. The decline in activism, in large part, can be attributed to a series of important changes in the structure of agriculture, which during this period disadvantaged small, commercial farmers. The most

noticeable change was a sharp decline in the number of small dairy farms. Other important trends included a continuing decline in milk price support levels, and a trend toward dairy farms that were, on the average, larger, more productive, and increasingly technologically sophisticated. An ineffective strike in 1957 signaled the demise of the Dairy Farmers Union; in 1967, a few thousand New York farmers joined a nationwide strike led by the National Farmers Organization.

In 1991, however, the remaining New York dairy farmers faced economic conditions not seen since the 1930s, driven by the combination of a 29 percent drop in the farm price of milk and increased production costs. Farmers reacted by holding a series of meetings in the spring, to discuss possible responses to their deteriorating economic situation. The mass meetings in New York State were part of a sporadic and uneven mobilization of farmers in 17 major dairy states. In 1991, as in earlier strikes, the farmers' rising discontent occurred within a context of important changes in the political opportunity structure. First, the sharp drop in prices provoked the New York State legislature to enact an emergency price increase, causing some farmers to anticipate federal action on milk prices. Second, the increased political activism associated with the midwestern "farm crisis" roused New York dairy farmers, and the resurgence of protests afforded greater legitimacy to their

efforts toward organizing a strike movement in New York State.

By the summer of 1991, many New York farmers were advocating a milk strike. Their analysis was not complicated: their only power lay in their control over the production of milk; only by dumping their product could they force concessions from milk handlers and government farm agencies. In early August, farmer-representatives from across New York and Pennsylvania voted to call a strike on October 1. Behind the strike vote was a sense of urgency. In New York alone, farmers had witnessed their numbers decline sharply from 16,035 in 1980, to 11,272 in 1990.⁸⁵

The 1991 strike movement put forth two main demands. The first was an immediate price increase from \$10 to \$17 per hundred pounds of milk.^b The second was passage of the National Dairy Act. Briefly, this legislation would have established farmer control over federal milk policy, limiting the amount of milk produced. The intent was to guarantee farmers their cost of production, and at the same time eliminate over-production. Both the legislation and the price increase, movement activists theorized, would come by way of consumer-citizen pressure on milk dealers and policy makers. The movement's leadership believed this pressure would increase as the milk supply got shorter.

^bThis is the standard unit for measuring milk. It is abbreviated cwt.

In the end, the 1991 strike movement never reached the point of widespread milk dumping. The closest the farmers came was a number of symbolic dumps, held mainly for the media, and involving at most a few hundred farmers. Farmers from 14 counties participated in the movement, ranging from the Hudson Valley to Northern New York. Jefferson County farmers provided the strongest support, with 20 percent (approximately 100) signing a petition or "dump list," stating they would withhold their milk. On September 20, 1991, at a national meeting of dairy producers from 20 states and Canada, in Derby Line, Vermont, farmer-representatives voted again, this time to postpone the strike. Movement organizing continued through the end of 1991, but the strike was never rescheduled.

Data and Methodology

This dissertation began as a study of political participation in the 1980s "farm crisis." However, a teaching assignment in Northern New York brought me face to face, quite literally, with the milk strike protest movement. In the Fall of 1991, I was able to observe the development of a milk strike protest movement firsthand. From August until December, I attended nine strike meetings, ranging from small meetings held in local fire halls to the Northeast regional meeting held in Champion, New York. In addition, I attended numerous conferences on farm politics,

including the National Farmers' Organization state conference in West Potsdam, New York. In all of these forums, I participated in an ongoing dialogue with farmers that either supported or opposed the milk strike movement.

The primary source of data is 40 open-ended interviews with dairy farmers in Northern and Central New York, conducted in the Spring of 1992.⁸⁶ I conducted 27 interviews with the participants and opponents of the current strike movement.⁸⁷ In addition, I interviewed 13 farmers or organizers who were either participants or opponents of milk strikes dating back to 1933.⁸⁸ As I traveled throughout New York, I reviewed newspaper coverage of past strikes in the Jefferson County Journal (Adams, NY), The Boonville Herald and Adirondack Tourist, the New York Times, the Ogdensburg Journal, the Oswego Palladium-Times, and the Watertown Daily Times. At St. Lawrence University, I reviewed taped interviews with participants of 1939 milk and industrial strikes in Northern New York, compiled by Professors Robert Schwartz (History) and Richard Guarasci (Government). In the archives of Kroch Library, Cornell University, I examined the records of the Dairy Farmers Union. Mr. Harold DeRienzo, Vice President of the Consumer-Farmer Foundation, Inc. made available the records of the Consumer-Farmer Milk Cooperative. And, at his Brooklyn Heights home, I interviewed the longtime President of the Co-op and DFU attorney, Meyer Parodneck.

The sample of farmers consisted of six separate groups. In the first group were organizers of the 1991 strike movement. I interviewed ten of the organizers that had most consistently attended the state-level strike meetings in Constableville, New York. The second group included farmers who attended one or more strike meetings, or who signed a petition in support of the strike, but who were not involved in organizing. To identify and select these non-leadership strike supporters, I used a petition signed in Jefferson County, New York. I assigned random numbers to the signers, and sought out seven farmers (approximately two percent of the farmers in the county) for interviews. The third group was comprised of five farmers who have recently held leadership positions in the New York State Farm Bureau. The Bureau is a conservative interest group that opposed the strike.

Farmers in the last three groups were selected through a process called snowball sampling. Here I used information from the preliminary interviews to identify further respondents. The fourth group consisted of five farmers who were opposed to the strike, yet who were not active in the leadership of the Farm Bureau. The fifth group included seven older farmers who supported past strikes. In the sixth group were six farmers who opposed past strikes.

In the interviews with dairy farmers, I sought

information that would bear upon my propositions.^c The questions I asked were designed to solicit two types of information. The first was the objective variables that would define an individual farmers' class position. To obtain this information, I relied on a questionnaire that included the following questions: education, co-op membership, number of cows milked, quantity of milk marketed per month, yearly net farm earnings, yearly off-farm income, and level of farm debt. Wherever possible, I cross referenced this data with information on New York dairy farms published by the Cooperative Extension or the DHIA (Dairy Herd Improvement Association).⁸⁹

The second kind of information I sought was the farmers' subjective interpretation of their class position, as a part of their larger ideological framework. When I began the interviews, I asked a series of questions that explored the major issues in the dairy industry: the role of an individual farmer; the question of farm size; the question of farm size vs. level of efficiency; the survival of family-owned farms; the role of government dairy policy; the competitiveness of the market; and the role of other institutions including banks, equipment dealers, fertilizer dealers, and chemical companies. In the possession of these two sets of (objective and subjective) information, I will be able to test for correlations that exist (if any) between

^cThe complete questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

class position and forms of political action.

The first is the simple correlation between class position and political participation. To test for this, I will compare the class position of the respondents with their decision to either support or oppose the 1991 milk strike. My expectation is that the main constituency of the milk strike movement will include farmers with smaller operations. In addition, I expect farmers with larger, capital-intensive operations to oppose the strike, and favor conventional political participation. If there is no correlation between these two variables, this would cause me to reject my hypothesis.

The second is the more complex correlation between the farmers' subjective interpretations of their role in the dairy industry and their class position. Simply put, if farmers identify qualitative differences between farmers that correspond to the quantitative differences that define their class position, this would support my hypothesis that class position patterns political participation. A few sample responses will perhaps clarify this point. My expectation is that small and large dairy farmers will offer divergent interpretations of the dairy industry, based on the fact that they are embedded within vastly different relationships. With regard to policy, for example, I expect small farmers to state that farm policy favors large dairy farmers. If they respond differently - if they claim that

government policy has an equal effect on all farmers, for better or worse, this will cause me to reject my hypothesis.

The last set of questions I posed were designed to solicit the farmers' explanations of why they selected one particular mode of political participation over another, and how their participation was carried out. I asked the strike movement leadership and supporters why they chose protest over other forms of political activity; how the strike movement was organized; where their resources came from; who they saw as potential allies; what they identified as their greatest obstacles, and what the goals of the movement were. I was particularly interested in the role that grievances played in the formation of the 1991 movement.

For the farmers opposed to the strike, I asked a similar set of questions involving interest group participation. In evaluating these responses, my expectation is that farmers will cite the limitations or opportunities inherent in their class position as the dominant factor in moving them to political action. If they claim otherwise - if farmers claim that the differences between striking farmers and nonstriking farmers is simply a matter of opinion (rather than one of class), or if they claim farmers protest only because their neighbors were involved (social solidarity), this would cause me to reject my hypothesis that class position patterns modes of political participation. The same would be true if movement farmers

identified their resources, allies, or opponents in a manner not consonant with their class position. If farmers, in other words, identified the targets of protest based on anti-Semitism, or said the movement was mobilized solely because of their religious beliefs, this would again cause me to reject this proposition. The standard of proof that I will follow is whether the farmers ideological and political responses *explicitly* connect their class position to their economic and political conflicts both within and outside of agriculture.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation has a total of seven chapters. Chapter Two examines the history of milk strikes in New York from 1883 to 1930. It traces the penetration of market relations within New York dairy farming, and the development of a movement of small, commercial farmers that became the main constituency of subsequent milk strikes. This chapter is one of only a few examinations of Populist-era protests in major industrial states. Chapter Three continues with the history of milk strikes from 1932 until the National Farmers' Organization strike in 1967. It includes the violent strikes in 1933, the rise and fall of the Dairy Farmers' Union movement, and effects of the post-war restructuring of agriculture. An overview of the economic, political, and ideological relations in the contemporary

dairy industry is the subject of Chapter Four. Chapter Five examines the 1986 and 1991 milk strike movements, including a profile of participants and opponents of the 1991 movement. Chapter Six looks at the competing ideologies put forth by large and small dairy farmers, that both explained and supported their political participation. Chapter Seven presents my conclusions and how they are related to the literature.

Notes

1. For an overview of Group Theory, see G. David Garson, Group Theories of Politics (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1978); see also E. E. Schattschneider, The Semisovereign People (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960). For individual works that draw upon agriculture, see David Truman, The Governmental Process (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951); Grant McConnell, Private Power and American Democracy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966); Mancur Olson, The Logic of Collective Action (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971); Graham K. Wilson, Special Interests and Policy Making (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1977); Theodore Lowi, The End of Liberalism, 2nd edition (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1979).

2. Lowi, 68-77; for an earlier version of this argument see "How the Farmers Get What They Want," in The Reporter, 21 May 1964, 34-37.

3. Lowi, The End of Liberalism, 70. As Lowi put it, "By a process of elimination, organized agriculture turned then to another way: the regulation of itself."

4. See Olson, 150.

5. Angus Campbell, et al., The American Voter (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960), 416.

6. A. J. Crampton, The National Farmers' Union, Ideology of a Pressure Group (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 59.

7. Schattschneider, 35. Wilson, 76, offered the comparison of Schattschneider's analogy with agricultural interest groups.

8. Eric F. Goldman, Rendezvous With Destiny (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 229-30; Grant McConnell, The Decline of Agrarian Democracy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953), 44-52; Samuel R. Berger, Dollar Harvest (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Company, 1971), 89-93; A. V. Krebs, The Corporate Reapers, (Washington, DC: Essential Books, 1992), 276-277; Wesley McCune, Who's Behind Our Farm Policy (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956), 15-19; Lowell K. Dyson, "American Farm Bureau Federation," in Farmers' Organizations (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 14-16; Wilson, 77, quotes the President of the Illinois branch of the American Farm Bureau Federation, who said, "It is our duty in creating this organization to avoid any policy which will align organized farmers with the radicals of other organizations." For the "official" history of the American Farm Bureau Federation, see O. M. Kile, The Farm Bureau Through Three Decades (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1948).

9. Berger, 93.

10. Goldman, 229; Berger, 93.

11. Berger, 91-92; Krebs, 277.

12. McConnell, Private Power and American Democracy, 234.

13. William Kornhauser, The Politics of Mass Society (New York: Free Press, 1959).

14. Neil Smelser, The Theory of Collective Behavior (New York: Free Press, 1962).

15. Robert Morlan, Political Prairie Fire (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955); Fred Shannon, American Farmers' Movements (New York: D. Van Nostrand and Company, 1957); Carl C. Taylor, The American Farmers' Movement, 1620-1920 (New York: American Book Company, 1957); John Shover, Cornbelt Rebellion (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965).

16. V. O. Key, Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups, 4th ed. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1964), 23-27, 40-43; Campbell, et al., 425-440; see also Walter Dean Burnham's criticism of the characterization of farmer politics contained in Campbell, et al., in The Current Crisis in American Politics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 35-38. Burnham's interpretation of voter turnout in the 19th century lead him to conclude, "it seems extremely likely that the nineteenth-century farmer was at least as well integrated into

the political system of that day as any other element in the American electorate."

17. Key, 29-35.

18. Key, 30. In his work, the normative emphasis was on the limited rationality of movement participants. When confronted with economic stimuli such as low prices, farmers often became frustrated, raising the possibility that skilled agitators, schooled in the effective use of propaganda, could build a movement out of these frustrations. For this leadership to be effective, it had to simplify political issues to make them more accessible to the average farmer. As Key explained, "For effective agitation, the most complex measures must be reducible to simple slogans." He concluded, "The principal task of those who govern," was "to identify and deal with maladjustments that gave rise to social discontents." 42-3.

19. Campbell, et al., 408.

20. Ibid., 440.

21. Ibid., 431.

22. Ibid., 408.

23. Ibid., 437.

24. For a critique of the collective behavior and socio-psychological perspectives, see Michael Schwartz, Radical Protest and Social Structure (New York: Academic Press, 1976), 135-153; Doug McAdam Political Process and The Development of Black Insurgency (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 11-19; J. Craig Jenkins, The Politics of Insurgency (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1-3. A more complete list of critics is found in McAdam, 11; Jenkins, 232n. For an explanation of the resource mobilization perspective, see John D. McCarthy and Meyer Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," American Journal of Sociology 82 (No. 6): 1212-1241; McAdam, 20-35; Jean L. Cohen, "Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements," Social Research (Winter 1985): 674-90; Carol McClurg Mueller, "Building Social Movement Theory," in Frontiers in Social Movement Theory, eds. Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 3-25.

25. McCarthy and Zald, 1215.

26. Ibid., 1216.

27. McAdam, 36-59. His political process model is based on earlier works by Schwartz, 1976; and Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, Poor People's Movements (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

28. Jenkins, 1985.

29. Sidney Tarrow, Struggle, Politics, and Reform: Collective Action, Social Movements, and Cycles of Protest. Western Societies Occasional Paper No. 21 (Ithaca: Center for International Studies, Cornell University, 1989).

30. Marvin L. Michael Kay. "The North Carolina Regulation, 1766-1776: A Class Conflict," in The American Revolution, ed. Alfred A. Young (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), 71-105.

31. David Szatmary, Shays' Rebellion: The Making of An Agrarian Insurrection (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).

32. Steven Hahn, The Roots of Southern Populism. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

33. For an overview of the Populist Movement, see Gene Clanton, Populism: The Humane Preference in America (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991); Robert McMath, American Populism (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993). The Populists' own words and documents can be found in George B. Tindall, ed, A Populist Reader (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966).

34. Schwartz, 1976.

35. Lawrence Goodwyn, Democratic Promise (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

36. Bruce Palmer, Man Over Money (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1980).

37. Scott G. McNall, The Road to Rebellion (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).

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39. Eric R. Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); Jeffrey M. Paige, Agrarian Revolution (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1975).

40. James C. Scott, The Moral Economy of the Peasant (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Samuel L. Popkin, The Rational Peasant (Berkeley: University of California Press,

1979).

41. William P. Browne, Private Interests, Public Policy, and American Agriculture (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1988).

42. Allan J. Cigler, "From Protest Group to Interest Group," in Interest Group Politics, 2nd ed., ed. Allan J. Cigler and Burdett A. Loomis (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1986), 46-69.

43. Osha Gray Davidson, Broken Heartland: The Rise of America's Rural Ghetto (New York: Anchor Books, 1990).

44. Patrick Mooney, My Own Boss: Class, Rationality and the Family Farm (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988).

45. Adam Przeworski, "Proletariat into a Class: The Process of Class Formation from Karl Kautsky's The Class Struggle to Recent Controversies," Politics and Society Vol. 7, No. 4, (1977): 343-401.

46. Class is defined in the same manner in Scott G. McNall, Rhonda F. Levine, and Rick Fantasia, eds., Bringing Class Back In (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991), 8.

47. Cohen, 687-88.

48. Seymour Martin Lipset, Agrarian Socialism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950).

49. Paige, 37. Paige's concept of "structural linkages" was similar to the concept of "institutional links binding peasant society to the upper classes," that Moore drew upon to explain the emergence (or non-emergence) of peasant rebellions. See Moore, 478.

50. Wolf, 291.

51. James Scott, "Hegemony and the Peasantry," Politics and Society Vol. 7, No. 3, (1977): 267-293.

52. Schwartz, 145.

53. For a discussion of the way in which the Farmers Alliance was influenced by economic relations in cotton production, see Schwartz, 31-32, 63-67, 171-173; for a discussion of the way in which the Farmers Alliance was influenced by political relations in the cotton-producing South, see Schwartz, 270-71.

54. The many limitations inherent in sharecroppers movements are illustrated in H. L. Mitchell, Mean Things Happening in This Land (Montclair, New Jersey: Allanheld, Osmun, 1979); see also, David Eugene Conrad, The Forgotten Farmers (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1965).

55. See Tarrow, 28-34, for a list of the analysts that have developed this theme.

56. McNall, 10.

57. Przeworski, 380.

58. The classic example of co-optation was the Democrats' adoption of the rhetoric of the common man in 1896. See Goodwyn's analysis of "the shadow movement of Populism," in Democratic Promise, Ch. XIII and XIV.

59. Przeworski, 373.

60. Burnham made the argument that elites gained control of the major parties during the industrial revolution. He writes, "Prior to the closing years of the century the middle class character of the political culture and the party system, coupled with the afterglow of the Civil War trauma, had permitted the penetration and control of the cadres of both major parties by the heavily concentrated power of our industrializing elites." This was significant for the Populist electoral effort. He continued, "But this control was inherently unstable, for if and when the social dislocations produced by the industrial revolution should in turn produce a grassroots counterrevolution, the party whose clienteles were more vulnerable to the appeals of the counterrevolution might be captured by them." Burnham, 47. Piven and Cloward noted the connection between 19th century political structures and forms of participation during the period of industrialism:

It was probably inevitable that contention would take electoral form, given the vigor of political participation in nineteenth-century America, together with the government's enlarging role in promoting corporate growth while breaking strikes and thwarting the demands of distressed farmers.

Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, Why Americans Don't Vote (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 44. See also, Goodwyn, The Populist Moment, 3-8.

61. First, Southern Democrats sometimes resorted to force and fraud to keep Populists out of office. C. Vann Woodward, Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel (New York: Oxford University Press,

1963), 238-243; Lawrence Goodwyn, The Populist Moment (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 187-200); for an account of the political attacks on the Kansas Populists, see Gene Clanton, Populism: The Humane Preference in America (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 114-17.

Second, the national Democratic party successfully co-opted the Populist message, nominated William Jennings Bryan in 1896, following his fiery "Cross of Gold" speech at the 1896 Democratic Convention. See Goodwyn, The Populist Moment, 231-32, 254-56.

Third, following the defeat of the Populist-Democratic "fusion" ticket in 1896, both major parties slowly adopted a series of what Piven and Cloward termed "institutional barriers," including voter registration, the poll tax, the literacy test, and the other mechanisms, to reduce the likelihood of further electoral challenges by insurgent small farmers. It was not by coincidence that the National Farmers' Union, founded in 1902 by veterans of the Populist struggles, opted to stay out of politics altogether, devoting their energy instead toward developing cooperatives. Piven and Cloward, Why Americans Don't Vote, Ch. 3. For the Farmers' Union decision, see Krebs, 276; for a brief history of the Farmers Union, see Lowell K. Dyson, Farmers' Organizations (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986), 215-32.

62. "The Omaha Platform," in The Populist Mind, ed. Norman Pollack (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1967) 60-67.

63. Alan Furman Westin, "The Supreme Court, the Populist Movement and the Campaign of 1896," Journal of Politics, 1953 (No. 15): 3-41.

64. John T. S. Keeler, The Politics of Neocorporatism in France (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 278-282.

65. John T. S. Keeler, "Corporatism and Official Union Hegemony," in Organizing Interests in Western Europe, ed. Suzanne D. Berger (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 188-190, 205.

66. See Goldman, 229-30; McConnell, The Decline of Agrarian Democracy, 44-52; Berger, 89-93; Krebs, 276-77; McCune, 15-19; Dyson, Farmers' Organizations, 14-16.

67. Robert F. Wesser, A Response to Progressivism: The Democratic Party and New York Politics, 1902-1918 (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 6-7. As Wesser explained, ". . . the Democrats' fate in New York was sealed in 1896 with the nomination of Nebraskan William Jennings Bryan for the presidency; neither businessmen nor farmers and workers could be persuaded that western "free silver" would restore prosperity to the Empire State. William McKinley's victory in

New York, therefore, was sweeping. A badly divided Democracy was reduced to barebones in the state; even New York City went Republican for the first time in a presidential contest in GOP history, . . . " Schattschneider provided the statistics; Democratic turnout in New York State fell from 654,868 in 1892 to 551,369 in 1896. Schattschneider, 83. While the Democrats quickly regained control of New York City politics, GOP domination over upstate New York was long lasting. In 1960, a survey of New York politics revealed that "the typical rural upstate voter is [still] a Republican." And importantly for challengers, such as insurgent dairy farmers, this translated into GOP control over local politics. According to Straetz and Munger, "The maximum impact of this rural Republicanism is probably felt at the level of county government." Ralph A. Straetz and Frank J. Munger, New York Politics (New York: New York University Press, 1960), 53.

68. There is one important exception involving the participation of farmers with large-scale operations. Conditions of economic and political crisis, such as the 1890s Depression or the 1980s "farm crisis," sometimes caused large farmers to protest. When this occurred, farmers' movements were confronted with the possibility of oligarchic leadership. Schwartz, 159-162, Chapter 6, 7. This question of oligarchy is also described in Robert Michels, Political Parties (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1989). Large farmers, with greater access to resources and better communication skills, quite often attempted to steer movements toward the protection of their particular interests. An illustration of this could be seen in the American Agricultural Movement of the late 1970s. As the economic "crisis" in agriculture drove large farmers to protest, they brought with them their own particular interests and resources. In fact, the interests and resources of larger farmers characterized the AAM, such as tractor-cades to Washington and the hiring of professional lobbyists to press for higher price supports. Not surprisingly, "most of the benefits [of the price support program] end up in the hands of the biggest farmers. "For a discussion of the American Agricultural Movement and the divisions within AAM, between financially troubled farmers who favored direct action protests, and better off farmers who favored lobbying (conventional participation), see Browne, 66-72; Cigler, 51-60; For a brief history of AAM, see Lowell K. Dyson, "American Agricultural Movement," in Farmers' Organizations, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 8-14. The price support quote is taken from Joseph N. Belden, Dirt Rich, Dirt Poor, (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 45.

69. Cohen, 687.

70. James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 42-3.

71. Bruce Cumings, "Interests and Ideology in the Study of Agrarian Politics," Politics and Society, Vol. 10. No. 4, (1981): 477-80. Emphasis in the original.

72. Przeworski, 377.

73. Ideology in this sense is defined as "patterns of symbolically-charged beliefs and expressions that present, interpret and evaluate the world in a way designed to shape, mobilize, direct, organize and justify certain modes of or courses of action and to anathemize others." David Kettler, "Ideology," in The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought, ed. David Miller (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 235-238.

74. Alberto Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements," Social Research, Vol. 52, No. 4, (Winter 1985): 793.

75. "Interview with Herbert Gutman," in Visions of History, eds., Henry Abelove, et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 203.

76. Moore, 470-71.

77. Ibid., 474-475.

78. Tarrow, 31-34. For an analysis of "political opportunity structures," see Schwartz, 145-153; Piven and Cloward, Poor People's Movements, 14-32; McAdam, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 36-59; see also Sidney Tarrow, "National Politics and Collective Action: Recent Theory and Research in Western Europe and the U.S.," Annual Review of Sociology, 14, (1988): 427-30.

79. Schwartz, 172-173.

80. Ibid., 173.

81. Wolf, 291.

82. For a discussion of the importance of outside participation in movement success, see Michael Lipsky, "Protest as a Political Resource," American Political Science Review 62 (December 1968): 1144-1158; David Garrow, Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); for a more general analysis of "expanding the scope of conflict," see Schattschneider, 1-20.

83. McAdam, 48-51; Schwartz, 150-153.

84. New York Times, 6 August, 1933, 1.

85. New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, Division of Dairy Industry Services, New York Dairy Statistics, 1990 Annual Summary (Albany: Research and Information Unit, 1991), 2.

86. For information regarding interviews and interviewing techniques, see Robert Lane, Political Ideology (New York: Free Press, 1962); see also University of Michigan, Survey Research Center, The Interviewer's Manual (Ann Arbor: The Center, 1976).

87. For purposes of confidentiality, I have labeled these Interview #101 through Interview #127 and will cite them accordingly.

88. For purposes of confidentiality, I have labeled these Historical Interview #101 through Historical Interview #114 and will cite them accordingly.

89. The Dairy Herd Improvement Association began in 1942 under the supervision of the Cooperative Extension. It was a later version of the many cow testing associations that were organized in New York in 1908. "Purpose of NEDHIA is to Help Dairy Farmers Increase Net Profits," Country Folks, 7 December 1992, A18.

Chapter Two

The History of Milk Strikes in New York State, 1883-1930

At a critical moment in the 19th century, the introduction market relations in milk production precipitated important changes in the lives of New York farmers. The sale of milk opened up the possibility of increased material wealth, made possible through advances in technology and transportation. This enabled farmers, first in the Hudson Valley and then farther upstate, to sell their milk in New York City - the most lucrative market in the country. Other sizable markets existed as well for upstate farmers in Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo. Over the years, milk became an important source of wealth to the state and its farmers. Today, dairy is still the largest part of agriculture, the biggest industry in New York. In 1990, there were 55,000 people employed in producing dairy products worth \$5.4 billion dollars (retail).¹

The sale of milk in distant markets, however, raised the potential for conflict, along with the potential for financial gain. From the beginning of New York farming through the mid-19th century, most farmers worked to feed their families, rather than producing "commodities" to be sold for profit. Any surplus generated on the farm was usually bartered or sold locally, where an individual farmer

had great influence in determining prices. Selling milk in a faraway city meant that farmers encountered new relationships, where they had much less control. Upstate farmers were often at a disadvantage when selling milk in New York because the individuals or corporations that controlled the transport, handling, processing, or manufacturing of milk often had greater financial resources, better political connections, or a more complete understanding of the milk market.

Structure and Class Relations in the New York Dairy Industry

This chapter begins with the transformations that accompanied the penetration of market relations in New York dairy farming. These structural changes generated conflicts, as the new, more specialized "dairy" farmers surrendered control over the distribution, marketing and sale of their product; in essence, they lost control over the rhythms of their lives and work. When farmers lost control of their livelihood, they resisted. The broadest and most highly organized form of resistance was the milk "strike," or withholding of production from the market. Through an analysis of milk strikes, and of the changes in the structure of New York farming, this chapter illustrates: how the political and economic structures of New York farming gave rise to different classes of farmers; how changes in the structure of dairy production generated new classes and

affected the power and position of existing classes of farmers; and how the structure of the dairy industry delineated the forms of political participation available to different classes of farmers.

Class Relations in 19th Century Agriculture

By 1815, New York state was a leader in agricultural production in the U.S.² This was due to a convergence of factors, including a temperate climate, fertile soil, proximity to large, urban markets, and access to navigable waterways. The structure of farming, from the early years of New York state agriculture to the mid-1800s, was based upon two divergent classes of farmers. The first were farmers with greater political power, who held large - and often extremely large - land holdings. Such farmers were found in the remnants of the patroon system in the Hudson Valley, or were the beneficiaries of the "rampant" speculation,³ and concentrated land ownership that characterized 19th century New York. Even in the "frontier mansions" of Western New York, large farmers were able "to live in opulent style in the pattern of the English landed gentry."⁴ Large farmers were often landlords as well as farmers; the tenancy rate in New York was already near forty percent in 1821.⁵ In fact, vast areas of the state were not settled until late in the century because speculation and large holdings kept land ownership concentrated.

Two famous examples of New York's largest landholders were Stephen Van Rensselaer and Robert Livingston. Rensselaerwyck was originally a 700,000 acre empire or "patroonship," that dated from the days of Dutch control of what was then called New Netherland.⁶ Chancellor Livingston's estate was part of another Dutch land grant of 300,000 acres. Livingston himself kept up on all the latest scientific developments in agriculture; he was Jefferson's Minister to France. His house - with a "breathtaking view of the jagged Catskills" - was adorned with "tapestry, silver and fashionable French furnishings."⁷

Farmers who worked small, semi-subsistence farms constituted the second and more numerous class of agricultural producers. These farmers typically produced a diversified selection of crops; their goal was self-sufficiency. New York was typical of neighboring states, where since the early 18th century, "most Northern whites belonged to small-farm families that consumed most of what they produced. . .[and] what trade there was tended to be exchange among neighbors."⁸ As Levine et al., correctly noted, however, the self-sufficiency of semi-subsistence farmers: was not absolute, by any means. Farmers lived in small communities, often brought together by close ties of kinship, religion and ethnicity. The heart of such a community would be a small village, with little more than a church, a general store, and a few artisans such as carpenters and blacksmiths, who might ply their trade only part time. . .The individual farmer

was thus firmly woven into a dense network of family and neighborly ties that simultaneously encouraged independence and mutual reliance.⁹

Production relations added another layer of ties in this "dense network" within which farmers were embedded. Whether planting, harvesting or selling their products, farmers often worked in close cooperation with their neighbors. In addition, when farmers sold or bartered either a small surplus or a cash crop, in order to raise money for taxes or manufactured goods, both the selling and the bartering usually involved face to face transactions with local people. Within such intimate relationships, farmers had great leverage in determining the prices they received for their goods. Semi-subsistence farmers were thus an important part of communal, locally-oriented economies throughout rural New York.

Wheat and whiskey were important cash crops in 19th century New York State, both easily transportable and not immediately perishable.¹⁰ Fluid milk fit into neither of these categories; what milk farmers produced was consumed at home, or was made into cheese. By 1850, New York produced almost half the total cheese in the U.S.;¹¹ northern New York (known as the "North Country") became known nationwide for its cheese production.¹²

Francis W. Squires might have been a typical North Country semi-subsistence farmer, if on the higher end of the scale. In 1845, his Martinsburgh (Lewis County) farm, with

34 cows, produced cheese worth \$552.79 and butter worth \$89.64. The average Lewis County farm had 10 cows. In addition to dairy products, Squires sold potatoes and flax, and produced "wheat, corn, hay and garden products such as onions, cabbage, and watermelon. . .mostly for home consumption." At times, farmer Squires bartered, as on Sept. 20, 1841, when he exchanged potatoes for shoe-making. He also worked in close cooperation with his neighbors. In the early 1850s, according to his records, Squires grew crops and made barrels with one neighbor, Hawks. The next year, he and neighbor Charles Duell, "planted potatoes, made fences, made barrels, and went to sell them together."¹³

Asa Carter of Jefferson County provides another example of the diversified production of semi-subsistence farmers. In 1837, his 150 acre farm produced a wide variety of products: "1,008 pounds of maple sugar worth \$108.80; 35 pounds of wool worth \$17.50; 4 veal calves worth \$10; 5 lambs worth \$10; 5 calves worth \$20; 6 pigs sold at \$6; 50 tons of hay worth \$350; 80 bushel of apples worth \$20; 1,535 pounds of cheese worth \$122; 280 bushel of potatoes worth \$70; 1,482 pounds of pork worth \$103; 108 pounds of butter worth \$19;" and other items such as fruit, trees and vegetables.¹⁴ It is likely that Carter's diversified farm gave him the satisfaction of the semi-subsistence farmer: "a feeling of pride in achievements, absence of concern about price fluctuations, self-reliance, and security." According

to Gates, "Among farmers of this type the difference in social and economic position were small."¹⁵ Moreover, comparing the lives of typical semi-subsistence farmers such as Asa Carter and Francis Squires with the larger commercial farmers like Robert Livingston, reveals that the social, political and economic distances *between* classes of farmers in New York were considerable.

The Development of A Market Economy in Dairy Farming

By mid-century, few New York farmers produced milk as a "cash crop" for sale at market. In fact, "As late as 1848 a report of the Seneca County Agricultural Society of New York could say of farms in the county: The dairy only receives the attention necessary for supplying the inhabitants with milk and butter." (emphasis in the original)¹⁶ The extension of rail service into the Hudson Valley, however, dramatically changed the structure of New York state farming. Rail service allowed farmers to sell perishable goods such as milk in distant communities; the introduction of market relations was a byproduct of this technological innovation. In 1842, Philo Gregory, a farmer from near Chester, consented to taking part in a rather daring experiment. Thomas Selleck, the Station Master on the New York and Erie Railroad, had the idea that upstate farmers could sell fresh "country" milk in New York City via the Erie line. When Gregory shipped a few cans of milk in an unrefrigerated baggage car, this was the first recorded

upstate milk ever sold in New York.¹⁷ That year, trains carried an average of 45 cans (daily) to the city. By 1843, the number was up to 275 cans. By the following year, the railroad brought 420 cans per day. The first regular milk train began operation in 1847 and service was extended to Port Jervis in 1868.¹⁸

One beneficial aspect of upstate milk being sold in New York was the improvement of the city's milk supply. For many years the growing population of New Yorkers had been forced to consume "swill" milk, which was milk produced within the city itself, by cows housed in foul sheds and fed brewer's waste. Swill milk was poor in both nutrition and appearance. Dealers got around the latter problem by adding chalk, gypsum, plaster of Paris, burnt sugar or annatto to turn the milk from blue to white.¹⁹ Sadly, they were not able to overcome the former problem. As Gates put it, "The charge that eight or nine thousand children died annually in New York from drinking contaminated milk is believable."²⁰ However, Gates quoted the Goshen Independent Republican, that proclaimed, "Orange County milk is driving swill milk from the city."²¹

The penetration of market relations into the Hudson Valley prompted significant changes in farmers' lives. First, the new economic relationships associated with the sale of milk in New York gradually created a entirely new type of farmers - commercial dairy farmers - who quite

willingly surrendered to the market imperative and the chance to produce milk as a cash crop. To cite one example, "A farmer in Carmel, some 35 miles from the city, related in 1851 how he had shifted from sheep and beef cattle to dairy cows when the Harlem road made possible the shipping of milk to the big market."²² Second, as farmers added more cows and expanded their milk production, they satisfied fewer of their families' needs on the farm and became less self-sufficient in the process.

In a larger sense, market relations represented external controls over the lives of farmers. Whereas semi-subsistence farmers worked according to the dictates of the seasons, or their particular needs (cutting wood in winter, planting in the spring, milking cows in the spring and summer when grass was plentiful), with the beginning of regular milk trains, farmers lives began to be patterned by the dictates of the market. Full-scale market production required that farmers milk their cows 365 days a year; it required that they produce and deliver their milk according to the schedule of the railroad; and it meant that they surrender control of the marketing and sale of their product to New York City milk dealers or their agents. The greatest change was perhaps the farmers' loss of control over prices. In contrast to the face to face exchanges that farmers were accustomed to in their local community, farmers now sold milk by contract. In these new contractual relationships, it

was the milk dealers who often had greater financial resources, better legal advice, and were more accustomed to the workings of large-scale market relations. The milk dealers were therefore better equipped to manipulate these relationships for their own advantage.

The key question concerning market relations was whether any group of farmers or dealers would be powerful enough to dictate the terms of market operation. From 1842 to 1870, the Hudson Valley milk market would have done Adam Smith proud. It was said that, "the milk manifest at any station where a large amount of milk was loaded contained so many names of shippers and consignees that it resembled the poll list at an election district."²³ The large number of dealers and agents available gave small, commercial dairy farmers the option of avoiding those dealers that offered low prices. As one rural editor said of the period up to 1870: "prices fair, farmers prosperous."²⁴ However, after 1870 milk dealers began to combine, and through mergers the market became more concentrated, to the point where a few dealers were able to dominate. In 1882, a number of larger dealers established the Milk Exchange, Limited, led by a small group of Wall Street financiers and lawyers that incorporated for the purposes of setting or "fixing" prices. The Exchange was "the first incorporated [milk] distributors' organization."²⁵

Class Position and Milk Strikes

The farmers' reaction to the Milk Exchange was swift. Within one year, the battle over market relations would generate an all out political and economic conflict in the milk industry. This "war" signaled the emergence and politicization of a movement of small, commercial, dairy farmers who would become the main constituency of milk strikes over the next 100 years. The common thread that united this movement was a class issue - one based on farmers' common position in the structure of agriculture. The only aspect of the production, distribution, marketing, and sale of milk that small, commercial farmers still controlled, after the transition from semi-subsistence farming, was milk production. By "striking," or withholding production, these farmers sought to combine their power and bring the market to a standstill. The strike, for them, represented the most obvious demonstration of their remaining market power. In addition, this movement demonstrated the importance of a sharp increase in grievances in driving farmers to collective action.

There have been similar reactions, over the course of American history, to the imposition of market social relations that farmers perceived to be unfavorable. One of the earliest and most important farmers' movements was Shay's Rebellion, which had a great effect on the writing of the American Constitution.²⁶ Szatmary explained how Daniel

Shays and his neighbors rebelled because of the penetration of market social relations of "an ever-encroaching commercial society," upon their "traditional, agrarian way of life, "based on a communal, barter economy."²⁷ A second example, and one more relevant to this study because it occurred parallel with the first milk strike, was the Populist Movement. Hahn argued that the roots of Southern Populism were found in the imposition of market relations in the hill country in Georgia.²⁸ There were numerous parallels between Southern Populism and the early milk strikes. In Georgia, market relations were initiated with the coming of the railroad, as was the case in New York. Moreover, Georgia farmers became more specialized, as did New York dairy farmers, and became less self-sufficient as they expanded production of a cash crop, in this case cotton.

The Orange County Milk War of 1883

The catalyst for the Orange County Milk War of 1883 was low milk prices. According to John J. Dillon, Editor of the Rural New Yorker, "after the organization of the Milk Exchange, Limited, prices fell to such a low level that the pent up resentment of producers broke out in open rebellion."²⁹ The "war" began when New York farmers in Orange, Sullivan and Delaware Counties, along with farmers in Sussex County, New Jersey, joined forces to challenge the Milk Exchange over the question of "fixing" milk prices. The prevailing custom was for Exchange dealers to meet and fix

milk prices for six months in advance. Farmers objected because they had no idea of the price when they shipped their milk. They were paid the following month; only then did they learn of the price.³⁰ Orange County was the center of the 1883 revolt because this area was the main source of milk for the New York market.³¹

Both political and economic relations patterned the development of the first milk strike movement. In March, 1883, a number of dairy farmer organizations held a conference where they set their own price for milk, directly challenging the power of the Exchange. As far back as 1872, farmers in this region had tried to organize to abolish the "middlemen."³² Until the creation of the Exchange, however, they were unable to sustain an organization. The largest group at the 1883 meeting was the Erie Mutual Milk Producers' Association, with 700 of the 800 farmers on the Erie line. The Association was organized in the Fall of 1882 with the support of important allies: the freight officers of the Erie Railroad. Its purpose was "to aid farmers in obtaining the market value of their milk and enable them to determine the market value before delivery of the goods."³³ Other groups at the conference included the Midland Milk Producers' Union and the Sussex Milk Producers' Association. The meeting concluded as farmers demanded a price of three and one half cents per quart, one half cent above the Exchange price. Exchange leaders opposed the farmers'

conference; in their defense they claimed that milk prices was set by supply and demand, rather than by the action of any individuals.³⁴

Milk strikes, however, were more than simple conflicts over milk prices. Low prices produced intense grievances among farmers, which propelled farmers to confront the more fundamental questions of political and economic power in their industry. The 1883 strike, for example, and many subsequent strikes, were fought over an entire range of conflicts involving farmers and milk dealers. Price was only one of many grievances, though perhaps the one felt most sharply. Another issue that angered farmers was the dealer's practice of holding the farmers' milk cans for two or three days (not returning them), any time they wanted to prevent an oversupply.³⁵ Further, dealers attempted to control prices by manipulating the milk supply. As Dillon recounted, "when because of drought, low prices or other reasons the supply of milk became short," dealers would use the following strategy: "A meeting [of the Exchange] would be called and a very substantial increase would be made on the price of milk to producers." This price increase "would be widely published." Then, milk dealers would send buyers into Pennsylvania to procure "droves of milkers." In other words, dealers would flood the milk producing region with cows, which, when combined with the promise of high prices, would entice farmers to add cows and increase production. The

final outcome would be a milk price that was "drastically reduced".³⁶

On March 12, 1883, farmers held a large and spirited meeting at the Court House in Goshen, New York. At this meeting, they passed two resolutions. The first resolution called on Erie Mutual members to suspend deliveries to the Milk Exchange, beginning the following day. The second resolution urged all nonmembers to join the Erie Mutual Association, especially those that were delivering milk to local creameries. Dr. H.A. Pooler, Director of the Erie Mutual Milk Producers' Association, expressed the sentiments of the members: "The time has come for the farmers to decide whether they would put an end to this systematic robbery."³⁷ The New York dealers reacted to the strike vote with skepticism; the next day, the New York Times headline on this story read: "Middlemen Laughing at Farmers' Threats."³⁸

The majority of farmers that attended meetings like the one in Goshen were small, commercial farmers. These farmers felt the greatest impact from market relations because they were dependent on the sale of milk for their livelihood. Such farmers tended to be better off financially than semi-subsistence farmers; thus the New York Times referred to the striking farmers as "well to do."³⁹ The small, commercial farmers were joined by those semi-subsistence farmers who, for many reasons including proximity to the railroad or need for cash, might ship milk to New York City.

As the strike began, movement participants continued with daily meetings to plan strategy, and to "affirm" the movement's power by their large turnout. On the 19th of March, for example, 600 farmers attended a meeting at Goshen. The New York Times reported no dissent at the meeting, and concluded that the strike movement was "rapidly gaining ground."⁴⁰ One topic farmers discussed at the daily meetings was raising money "to indemnify poorer farmers." In Goshen, 1,000 farmers raised \$1,392 on March 22nd and expected \$1,000 more,⁴¹ which offered testimony to the presence - and cash flow - of commercial dairy farmers, who were the movement's main constituency.

Another topic was the recruitment of "spilling committees." Spilling committees widened the impact of the strike by keeping nonparticipating farmers' milk off the market. This tactic, common in subsequent strikes, often had a potential for violence. Committee members dumped the milk - peaceably or otherwise - that nonstriking farmers brought to the rail stations. Or, they would patrol country roads, and dump the milk of non-participants on their way to the station. The New York Times reported that on March 21, "A party of colored men seized 22 cans of condensed milk belonging to the Orange County Milk Association." In Middletown, the same day, a spilling committee "numbered, according to various reports, 75 to 100 men, mostly Negroes."⁴² The effectiveness of this tactic was clear. By

March 21, not one can of milk was delivered to the railway station at Goshen. Sheriff Mills of Goshen, in fact, came under harsh criticism for not protecting the milk of nonstriking farmers.⁴³

The problem with spilling milk was that it gave strikes the reputation for violence that milk strikes still have today. This was true even if the violence was perpetrated by those opposed to the strikes. On March 21, for example, a New York milk dealer named Doshier came to Oxford, on the mainline of the Erie Railroad, "armed with a club and a loaded revolver. Upon his arrival at the station he was surrounded by a crowd of men, some black and some white." When confronted, Doshier proceeded to shoot a member of the crowd, described by the New York Times only as "a young man."⁴⁴

The first milk strike had a telling effect on the New York milk market by March 20th. On the 15th, the Erie Railroad was 761 cans short of its normal delivery of 3,800 cans.⁴⁵ By the 19th, it was 1,106 cans short; on the 20th, only 1542 cans were delivered. Facing shortages, the milk dealers limited purchases of milk, and blamed the railroads for not protecting their freight.⁴⁶ For New York consumers "in many places it was utterly impossible to get more than a single pint."⁴⁷ As farmers tightened the boycott, this translated into increased pressure on city milk dealers. The Milk Exchange acknowledged this pressure by proposing a

conference to set milk prices over the next three months. The proposed conference, supported by Erie Railroad executives, would have three members: the Exchange would chose one, farmers would select the second, and these two would in turn select the third. These talks, however, did not yield a settlement. The Erie Mutual Association countered with their own proposal: farmers would bypass the milk dealers, delivering their product directly to New York consumers.⁴⁸

On March 24, 1883 the first New York milk strike ended. Erie Mutual farmers reached an agreement with independent milk dealers (independent of the Milk Exchange), who agreed to set a price approved by both farmers and dealers for one year. The settlement represented a victory for farmers; they were to receive forty out of the forty-one cents they had demanded over the next twelve months. The farmers' victory was, however, tempered by the lack of an agreement with the powerful Milk Exchange. The Exchange, in what would become a pattern in subsequent strikes, launched a counterattack after the strike settlement removed the threat of disruption. First, Exchange leaders condemned the independent dealers and sought to repudiate the terms of the settlement. George Allison, an Exchange member, declared that the Exchange's real enemy was the "independent dealer," who was willing to engage in cutthroat competition.⁴⁹

The next step was for Exchange leaders to call upon

their own allies within the dairy industry. Exchange members persuaded railroad executives to begin running milk trains from Sullivan, Delaware, Chenango and Otsego counties, giving them a greater supply of milk and, more importantly, the ability to bypass the farmers' organizations that organized the strike. This ability to extend the milkshed was and would continue to be one of the dealers' key resources. When milk trains pushed further upstate, farmers close to New York City were forced to compete with farmers farther away, driving a wedge between small, commercial farmers, and preventing them from organizing around class issues in their attempt to build an effective political-economic organization.

The New York Milk Industry, 1884-1915

From 1884 to 1915, New York milk dealers were able to continue their domination of market relations, despite recurring challenges from farmers. In 1889, farmers from five states organized a regional milk producers organization in Oxford (Orange County) - the Milk Producers' Union. The Union was unsuccessful in organizing a second strike, but did initiate legal action that eventually brought down the Exchange.⁵⁰ In January, 1891, Attorney General Charles Tabor filed suit against the Exchange, charging restraint of trade. The suit was upheld by the New York State Supreme Court and the Milk Exchange was dissolved on May 1, 1895.⁵¹

Exchange members responded to the Court's action by setting up shop across the Hudson River in Jersey City, New Jersey, just out of the reach of New York State anti-trust laws. In November, 1895, a similar group of investors, including four members of the old Exchange and former Exchange Attorney Alfred Ely established the Consolidated Milk Exchange, Limited.⁵² This new organization was capitalized at \$25,000; its purpose was the same - to fix prices paid to producers, although this time Exchange members did so "more cautiously."⁵³

The creation of the Consolidated Exchange only further angered farmers, setting off another round of protests. Shannon claimed that the "subterfuge" of the Consolidated Exchange "stampeded the producers of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Massachusetts" into the Five States Milk Producers' Association, founded in 1898.⁵⁴ John J. Dillon, editor of the Rural New Yorker, went further, claiming that the Executive Committee of the Five States organization was actually controlled by agents of the dealers.⁵⁵ In any case, the Five States group represented the farmers' most ambitious attempt at organizing thus far, with 8,000 members who owned 200,000 cows.⁵⁶ The Five States organization had little impact however. Following a five day strike that collapsed in 1902, the group lapsed.⁵⁷

At the turn of the century the New York milk market was "characterized by a great wave of mergers and

consolidations" among dealers.⁵⁸ A similar course of events occurred in other cities. In Boston, for example, by 1897 seven milk dealers controlled 75 percent of the milk sold.⁵⁹ In New York, after a series of consolidations, two new milk companies, the Borden Condensed Milk Company and the Sheffield Farms-Slawson-Decker Company, gained a significant share of the market. Thomson W. Decker represented a number of large, commercial farmers who eventually became milk dealers. Decker originally worked on the estate of Gouverneur Morris, where he saved to buy a 400-acre farm in Fordham, starting with 150 cows. He then began a milk route in New York. At the time of the Sheffield-Slawson-Decker merger, Decker's business empire had grown to include 33 routes and 3 stores.⁶⁰ In later years, Borden and Sheffield would dominate the metropolitan market after the close of the Consolidated Milk Exchange in 1913.⁶¹

A 1909 report by New York State Attorney General Edward O'Malley outlined the milk dealers' power to fix prices. The "O'Malley Report" cited the history of the Milk Exchange and its move across the Hudson, and its continued effort to fix prices by a "Committee on Value." The Report demonstrated how Exchange leaders pointedly referred to the "value" of milk, specifically avoiding mention of the price of milk to circumvent the law. The O'Malley Report concluded that as a result Exchange's evasion of anti-trust laws, "general competition . . . has ceased," and "The [New York] consumer

is at the mercy of the [milk] dealer."⁶²

New York State initiated state regulation of dairy production between 1884 and 1915. The focus of state regulations was on sanitary standards in the production and manufacture of milk products. Previously, regulation of food production was the domain of local government such as the New York City Board of Health, established in 1866.⁶³ New York State organized a Dairy Commission in 1884, to "prevent deception and adulteration of dairy products," which was renamed the Department of Agriculture in 1893.⁶⁴ By 1896, the State required all milk dealers to have permits, and by 1906 most farms, processing plants, and manufacturing plants were regularly inspected.⁶⁵ The "next major breakthrough" in sanitary regulation occurred in 1911-12, with the pasteurization of milk to eliminate pathogens. Milk was graded and defined as Grade A (raw or pasteurized): "produced under exceptionally sanitary conditions and supplied only by Tuberculin tested cows;" Grade B (pasteurized): "the regular grade of approved milk;" or Grade C (pasteurized): "to be used only for manufacturing."⁶⁶

The effects of the sanitary regulations on farmers varied. The positive effect was to finally end the production of "swill" milk, or milk produced under unsafe conditions. With systematic government inspection and enforcement milk products maintained a better image and

demand increased. However, state inspection had the negative effect on farmers. First, the new regulations forced many small dealers out of business, which "encouraged the rise of large companies."⁶⁷ Market consolidation increased the power of companies such as Borden's and Sheffield Farms and their ability to dictate prices paid to farmers. Second, state inspection limited the farmers' leverage over the dealers. Strict sanitary regulations meant that farmers could no longer threaten to sell "raw" or unpasteurized milk directly in New York, as they had in the 1883 strike, unless they owned pasteurization plants. Under the new rules, therefore, farmers assumed "most of the work and expense" involved in producing Grade A milk, rather than the dealers. In addition, farmers were dependent on the dealers' honesty, because it was the dealers who tested milk and paid price differentials based on weight, butterfat content and bacteria count.⁶⁸

After 1900, the emphasis of New York dairy farmers shifted from a strategy of strikes to one of building cooperatives. This was similar to the reaction of farmers in other states following the collapse of the Populist Movement, The National Farmer's Union, for example, was established in 1902 in Texas with an renewed emphasis on what Goodwyn called the "cooperative vision," the basis of the Farmers' Alliance.⁶⁹ One exception was the Boston Milk Producers' Union, who waged the Boston Milk War (strike) of

1910.⁷⁰ In New York, state legislators created a separate state agency in 1914 in order "to assist in the distribution of farm produce, and to aid in the organization of cooperative societies."⁷¹ Governor Glynn named as the first Commissioner of the Department of Food and Markets the outspoken country editor John J. Dillon. Within two years, Dillon would play a key role in the largest milk strike in state history.

Structural Change and Political Opportunity

In 1916, a number of important structural changes transformed New York State agriculture. One result of this transformation was an intense, angry reaction from many of the state's dairy farmers. The farmers' intensified grievances, combined with specific changes in the political structure, created an opportunity for small, commercial farmers to alter the balance of power in dairy production. The Dairymen's League movement, that led the 1916 milk strike, again represented dairy farmers' efforts to capitalize on their control over the production of milk. Analysis of this strike helps explain how changes in the structure of agriculture alter the power and position of different classes of farmers. In addition, it illustrates how a particular farmers' movement used their structural interconnections within the system of milk production to disrupt the market and exact concessions.

The Rise of the Dairymen's League Movement

In 1916, the effects of World War I exacerbated the perennial conflict between milk dealers and farmers, now 45 years old. The war precipitated a rise in the cost of production for farmers, who saw no corresponding increase in the price of milk. This led to yet another organizing campaign, as dairy farmers sought to counter the greater economic and political power of the New York milk dealers. There were two specific structural changes, however, that converged in a way that made this organizing campaign different from previous attempts.

The first change was the penetration and subsequent development of market relations in Northern and Central New York. With an increased population and demand for milk, together with advances in transportation, the New York City milkshed now extended as far north as Jefferson and St. Lawrence County, and included the Hudson Valley, the Mohawk Valley, and the Southern Tier counties. The milkshed extended westward as far Sterling Valley (Cayuga County), a small town 15 miles west of Oswego on Lake Ontario. In Sterling, farmers had a number of choices when it came to selling their milk. Most sent it to a local cheese factory, "except when prices [were] high in New York," while others shipped milk to Rochester.⁷² With the milkshed extended this far, New York dealers found it more difficult to pit one group of farmers against another by bringing milk from

greater distances, as they had after the 1883 strike. One alternative was for dealers to bring in out-of-state milk to "break" strikes, but this required legal sanction because of state sanitary laws.

The second change was personified by Department of Food and Markets Commissioner John J. Dillon, who was ready and willing to use the power of his office to assist farmers. In John J. Dillon the state's farmers had a strong and knowledgeable advocate, but one who was also "acerbic, egotistic and self-righteous."⁷³ Dillon was the editor of the Rural New Yorker, one of the state's most influential farm publications. His political philosophy was shaped by his experiences in Orange County in the development of the milk market and the battles with the Milk Exchange. Dillon, for example, felt strongly about the democratic prospects inherent in farmer-owned and controlled co-ops. One of his highest goals was for the state to build and operate a "demonstration" milk processing plant, that could be used to determine the exact cost of producing milk. Such a plant could be used as a "yardstick" to evaluate the rest of the industry. Dillon shared the Populists' view that state power should be used to benefit working people. The problem with Dillon was that his rhetoric was strident to the degree that he would disrupt meetings and alienate his opponents. When the 1916 strike began there were no doubts as to his loyalties. He said, "This fight has been going on for forty

years and at least now [farmers] have the whip hand."⁷⁴

In the spring of 1916 dairy farmers' grievances over low milk prices prompted existing farm organizations such as the Farm Bureau and the Grange, supported by influential publications such as the Rural New Yorker and the American Agriculturist, to promote the creation of a new organization of dairy farmers. The vehicle for their efforts was the Dairymen's League, founded in the Orange County area in 1904. The League was incorporated in New Jersey as a stock company in 1907; farmers joined as "stockholders at the rate of 25 cents a cow."⁷⁵ The League had been unsuccessful over its first 12 years, but it was the only farmers' association that was organized statewide. This meant the League was the only suitable framework that activists could employ, building on the rank and files' intensified anger.

At a meeting of the Dairymen's League's Executive Committee on April 26, 1916, Commissioner Dillon proposed that the League market its milk solely through his Department. On June 1, the Executive Committee met again, this time voting to withhold deliveries from the New York City dealers, by force if necessary. A strike date was set on August 14 when the League accepted Dillon's offer, following Jacob Brill's election as League President. The League strike would begin on October 1 if the dealers did not accept the prices set by Dillon and the League, on all

milk deliveries after that date.⁷⁶

The possibility of a confrontation accelerated the League's organizing effort. Throughout the milkshed there were speeches, meetings, and picnics in the summer of 1916 with the purpose of educating farmers on the advantages of cooperation. The League organizing drive rolled through the North Country; on July 3, 30 farmers organized an association of dairymen in Chaumont (Jefferson County). In Adams, 15 miles away, 300 farmers met for the same purpose on August 25. A few of these new organizations were independent "protective associations," but the vast majority were affiliated with the Dairymen's League. On September 6, 500 farmers began a League membership drive in Utica. Two weeks later, 200 more formed an independent group in Ogdensburg (St. Lawrence County). The same day, 400 farmers met on the steps of Watertown City Hall (Jefferson County) to join the League.⁷⁷

Two unrelated events aided the organizing drive. First, news of a successful strike in Chicago, earlier in 1916, inspired New York farmers. On August 14 W.J. Kittle, leader of the Chicago strike, spoke in Middletown on how to conduct a successful strike in New York.⁷⁸ The second event was the Wicks Investigating Committee hearings on problems in the milk business, held in various towns and cities around the state. The state legislature had authorized the Wicks Committee to conduct an investigation of the dairy industry;

the hearings - and ensuing charges of industry corruption - served to legitimize farmers' grievances. Together with Dillon's appointment, the Wicks hearings signaled a receptive political context for the development of the movement.

The majority of farmers who joined the League were small, commercial farmers. Tiffany found, for example, that early League members owned larger farms, kept more records, and were more cost-conscious than the average farmer.⁷⁹ The Watertown Daily Times also identified a certain level of affluence among League members - that the paper commented upon - which stemmed from the fact that commercial farmers had larger farms than semi-subsistence farmers. A Times writer had this to say about a September 29 League meeting in Canton: "Many came in automobiles, showing a degree of prosperity that belies the assertion that under the present prices of milk they are losing money on their farms."⁸⁰ One tactic used in the strike also revealed the class position (and cash flow) of movement farmers. In some small towns, rather than forcibly dumping the milk of nonstriking farmers, movement participants simply paid them for it.⁸¹ Although only 25 percent of the state's dairy farmers were actual League stockholders, the majority of small, commercial farmers supported the movement.⁸²

New York milk dealers responded to the League's organizing drive with a public relations campaign that was

critical of the League, the proposed strike, and John J. Dillon. One example was an eight column advertisement by the Borden Company in the August 23 New York Times. The ad specifically criticized Dillon, the Wicks Committee hearings, and the presence of farmers who had recently directed the Chicago strike. In the ad, Borden distinguished between "modern businesslike" farmers and those "wasteful and unbusinesslike" farmers who sought an "arbitrary and general [price] increase in the strike." This violated the "just demand" of the dealers, who sought only "a fair return for our contribution." After all, it was the milk dealers not the farmers, who were distributing "a delicate and perishable product," through a "maze of local regulations and state laws," all of which ultimately created "a business hazard not commonly experienced." Acting on these beliefs, Borden and the other dealers rejected the League's attempt to set the milk price and sell their milk through Dillon's agency. "A fluctuating selling price," it said in the ad, was appropriate for milk that was "best handled by private enterprise."⁸³

The Milk Strike of 1916

The League strike began rather quietly on October 1. The League's primary demand was for a 45 cent price increase (cwt) on one year contracts. As with the 1883 strike, however, the 1916 strike should be viewed as a struggle for power, more than simply a fight over milk prices. The

League's second demand, for example, was for recognition in the signing of all contracts. The latest offer from Borden was a price of \$1.90 per hundredweight, good for only one month. Therefore, the League strike targeted the "Big Three" milk dealers: Borden, Sheffield Farms, and Mutual McDermott, who between them controlled 51 percent of the city's milk supply.⁸⁴ The dealers also defined this strike as a struggle for power, a point illustrated by a New York Times survey of milk dealers taken on the eve of the strike. In responding to the survey, dealers claimed that they were more opposed to the existence of the League than they were to paying higher prices. Dealers placed the League in "the same class as a labor union,"⁸⁵ not surprising given the current state of labor relations in New York. On strike's sixth day, for example, Mary Harris "Mother" Jones spoke in Manhattan, where a minor riot followed her speech.⁸⁶

The League was "largely successful" in disrupting the flow of milk from the first day, often with significant support from the local community. Some upstate counties, including Broome, Tompkins, and Delaware shipped no milk.⁸⁷ In the Hudson Valley farmers spilled much of the milk destined for New York. Some farmers diverted milk to local cheese plants; others kept it on their farms and made butter. "Well to do farmers" volunteered to pour milk on the highway at Brewster, while at Poughkeepsie one farmer was held up and beaten by a group of men while he tried to get

his milk on the train. Some of the men he recognized. Among them were "prominent politicians and dairymen, including a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Sheriff." Warrants were issued for their arrest.⁸⁸

In Northern New York, a majority of farmers diverted their milk to the many local cheese plants, rather than dumping it. Given the abundance of independent manufacturing plants in this region, farmers had alternatives to simply pouring their product on the ground. This is one reason why Northern New York was to become a center of persistent milk strike activity over the next 75 years. In Adams (Jefferson County), the local paper reported:

Our local dairymen seem to be largely diverting their product for the making of butter and cheese which is more profitable than disposing of it to New York buyers. . . They are in full sympathy with the movement to secure living prices.⁸⁹

Some North Country farmers did spill milk, at times by force. Mexico (Oswego County) experienced a "near riot" during the strike; picketing led to fist fights, milk was dumped in the streets, and the opening of the local school was postponed indefinitely.⁹⁰

It is important to remember that while the strike was a statewide endeavor, the focal point in a dairy farmers' life was the local town or railroad station, which served as their link to the market. This is where the real conflicts occurred, despite the fact that the strike itself was directed against corporations in New York. In some upstate

towns farmers chose not to strike, even though neighboring towns - just a few miles away - were torn by violence. The Gouverneur Milk Producers' Association farmers, for example, were "satisfied," and declined to join the strike, while the rest of St. Lawrence County sent only 20 percent of the normal delivery of milk.⁹¹

The "Big Three" milk dealers mounted a variety of responses to the strike. First, they filed suit, charging the League with illegal restraint of trade, going so far as to challenge the existence of the League itself. Second, they tried to extend the milkshed as they had in 1883, by bringing in milk from as far away as Illinois and Canada.⁹² Third, the dealers stepped up their well-financed public relations campaign. The President of Sheffield Farms appealed to nonstriking farmers in a four column New York Times ad on Oct. 3:

You farmers . . . who know our standards are good and prices are right, use your influence to keep your rabid neighbors from trying to carry out hopeless contracts by violence and mob law.⁹³

The milk dealers also tried to discredit the strike movement, charging that the boycott denied milk to infants and invalids. The dealers were aided on this front by the New York Times, which after October 1 kept up a steady drumbeat of criticism of the strike, the League, and especially John J. Dillon. The Times' distaste for Dillon's role was evident in this editorial attacking his use of position within state government:

But won't somebody kindly advise [Gov.] Whitman to inform the public if the State of New York pays the Honorable John J. Dillon, Commissioner of Food and Markets \$6,000 a year to be the agent, advocate and counselor to the Dairymen's League? Would the State Commissioner of Excise be permitted to take charge of a barkeeper's strike?⁹⁴

The ire of the milk dealers and the Times' editors was perhaps due to the increasing effectiveness of the boycott through its first week. By October 6, there were milk riots at Department of Health milk stations on the Lower East Side, as the city received only a third of normal deliveries.⁹⁵ Northern New York plants were drying up - the Rensselaer Falls Sheffield plant was off 95 percent, the Lisbon Sheffield plant was completely dry, and the remaining St. Lawrence County milk stations were getting only 15 percent of usual deliveries.⁹⁶ Support for the League was growing with its success. Even the Governor joined in, claiming farmers were justified in seeking a higher price, which spurred the League's mobilization.⁹⁷ On October 3, 800 Onondaga County farmers joined the strike movement. In Mexico, the scene of pitched battles, the local League chapter added 50 new members the first day of the strike alone, accounting for 25 percent of its total membership.⁹⁸ The Ogdensburg paper reported that "membership of the League has increased considerably here the past few days."⁹⁹ In addition, there was a rush of small milk dealers to sign League contracts. Twelve independent dealers, representing one third of the New York supply, signed a six month League

contract on October sixth.¹⁰⁰

In the strike's second week, clashes continued both in the press and among farmers. A 16 year old boy was wounded in Middletown; shots were fired to disperse pickets in Newburg. The Times claimed that "from no place was it reported that the spirit of farmers had waned."¹⁰¹ On October 8, 100 smaller dealers signed League contracts, multiplying the pressure on the "Big Three." Borden's initial offer to pay 70 percent of the League's price, with no League recognition, came on October 5. It was rejected by the Executive Committee of the League. Borden countered on the 10th with a more tantalizing offer, which split the League's leadership when President Brill - acting on his own - accepted a six month contract with a 45 cent price increase. Although the offer made no mention of League recognition, Brill telegraphed farmers, announcing that the strike had been settled.

Brill's action set off a revolt in the Executive Committee, where a majority of members rallied behind Dillon and repudiated the agreement with Borden. Therefore the strike continued. Dillon said with typical candor, "There is not enough money in Wall Street to make me sign such a contract. If these people want our milk they must agree to every one of our demands."¹⁰² Following an all-night bargaining session on October 14, Borden did just that, finally giving in to the League's demands. The New York

Times called it a "full victory" for League farmers. They were granted a 45 cent increase (cwt) until January. After that the milk price would be set by a committee that included two representatives of the dealers, two farmers, and five members selected by dealer-farmer representatives. On October 15, Commissioner Dillon addressed a "jubilee in celebration" for farmers at Pawling (Dutchess County); Borden passed on the price increase to consumers, immediately raising the milk price one cent per quart.¹⁰³

In retrospect, the 1916 milk strike was politically and historically quite significant. For the next year, collective action by farmers played a important role in setting milk prices in New York. This was the first time in forty years that dairy farmers were able to successfully influence the social relations of production that governed their lives. In this respect the 1916 milk strike was on a level of historical significance with other victories by small farmers, such as the Populist's victory over the jute bagging trust, or the Nonpartisan League's electoral success.

Structural Change and Dairy Farmer Protest, 1917-1919

Following the Dairymen's League strike in 1916, there were important changes in the political and economic conditions that contributed to the League's victory. First, there were changes in the structures of government. The

federal government intervened in dairy production during World War I; in addition, New York City milk dealers and their allies pressured New York State policy makers for a reorganization of state agricultural agencies. Second, there were important changes in economic structures. The rank and file of small farmers that constituted the Dairymen's League confronted a new, oligarchic leadership,^a which guided the organization away from political activism. The new League leadership forged a close working relationship with the Borden's Milk Company, and out of this collaboration (between milk dealers and co-op leaders) came a new system of paying farmers for their product. The end result of these changes was that by 1919, small, commercial farmers were divided by region and co-op membership, which effectively preempted their continued organization around class issues. The dairy industry experienced a period of quiescence that lasted into the early 1930s.

Changes in the Dairy Industry, 1917-1919

The period from October 15, 1916 to October, 1917, was truly an era of collective bargaining in the milk industry. The milk dealers, however, did not stand still during this period. With the strike over and the threat of disruption removed, the New York dealers and their allies attacked the sources of the League's power. High on the list was John J. Dillon and the Department of Food and Markets. As early as

^aSee Chapter 1, p.19.

January, 1917, there was talk of replacing Dillon in a reorganization of New York State agencies.¹⁰⁴ The Wicks Investigating Committee, under pressure from milk dealers and from a new governor, was now "determined to emasculate the powers of the Department of Food and Markets."¹⁰⁵ The Committee proposed, in February of 1917, the creation of a reorganized Department of Agriculture, Food and Markets. The new agency would be headed by a seven member committee (including Dillon), with five salaried members and three representatives "of dairy and agricultural interests of the state."¹⁰⁶ Even though Dillon retained a position, when this reorganization was implemented, his power had been checked.

The pressure continued. By December 11, Dillon was out, replaced by the new head of the Division of Food and Markets, Dr. Eugene H. Porter.¹⁰⁷ The final straw in Dillon's ouster was most likely his efforts to inaugurate the Nonpartisan League in New York State. The Nonpartisan League was an insurgent movement of Northern Plains wheat farmers that controlled all three branches of the North Dakota state government in 1917. The Nonpartisan League created a set of state institutions, including farmer-controlled banks, grain elevators, and insurance companies, to counter the political and economic power of banks, railroads, and grain merchants. The appeal of the Nonpartisan League, according to Morlan, was that North Dakota farmers "for the first time experienced real personal

participation in the democratic process."¹⁰⁸ Dillon spoke at a conference of farmer and labor groups in the Great Hall of Cooper Union on November 26, 1917 that featured A.C. Townley, the NPL founder. The Times reported that Dillon was to play "no small part" in establishing an offshoot of the Nonpartisan League in New York.^b On December 5, 1,000 delegates at the Dairymen's League convention voted to adopt a resolution favoring a nonpartisan party.¹⁰⁹ Within one week Dillon was gone from his position in state government.

World War I prompted the Federal government, through the War Food Administration, to directly intervene in the dairy industry. The WFA, created in 1917, tried to stay out of the day to day affairs of the industry, originally offering only advice to milk dealers and farmers. After the failure of the dealers and the Dairymen's League to reach an agreement, however, the WFA appointed a milk commission to fix milk prices from January 1 to April 1, 1918. For the rest of that year, the Board maintained an active role in the industry^c by recommending prices, serving as arbitrator, examining costs, and investigating profits.¹¹⁰

At the end of the war government price fixing ended, and the demand for milk decreased. The loss of government contracts had a particular effect on farmers who delivered

^bIt is unclear as to what became of the movement to establish the Nonpartisan League in New York.

^cThe War Food Administration was the model for subsequent Federal intervention in dairy production in the 1930s.

milk to condenseries that were geared up for the war effort. These farmers were unhappy with the leadership of the Dairymen's League, which was undergoing an important transition. The original League officers, who were farmers committed to the cooperative movement, were replaced by what Dyson called "hard-headed business types," who were "in control of what had been a moribund organization that was now flush with cash and popularity." The new League leaders, including President R. D. Cooper and Vice President John D. Miller, a Pennsylvania lawyer, split with the farmer-activists and John J. Dillon. They were more interested in buying condenseries and processing milk than they were in political protest. In the fall 1917, League officers got tangled in a dispute over milk prices they had negotiated in New York. The problem was that official League stockholders received one price, while other farmers received a lower price, thus splitting the membership. Further, farmers were agitated because League negotiators had accepted two price reductions, and had accepted without question the prices mandated by federal intervention in 1918. At the League convention in December, 1918, the current League officers were reelected, but they were under increasing pressure to take actions that would restore the confidence of farmers.¹¹¹

The 1919 Milk Strike

The League leadership acted by forcing an immediate

confrontation with the New York milk dealers. They demanded a price of \$4.01 cwt for January 1, 1919, far above the dealers' offer of \$3.60. When the dealers refused the League's offer, League officers called a hastily organized strike that began on January 1. There were important differences between this strike and the previous one. First, John J. Dillon was gone from his position in state government. Second, the League was not as organized, and the dealers were in a much stronger position. Milk dealers immediately countered the effects of the strike by enlarging the milkshed, bringing in milk from as far away as Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Chicago.¹¹²

The 1919 milk strike had an immediate impact, although not as great as in 1916. The later strike followed the pattern established in 1916, as farmers close to New York City dumped their milk, while Northern New York dairy farmers diverted much of their milk to manufacturing plants that had signed League contracts.¹¹³ One importance difference was a much lower level of participation than in 1916.¹¹⁴ In addition, charges of "greed and rapacity" leveled at the League's new leadership undercut the legitimacy of the strike. On the strike's fourth day, New York Assistant District Attorney Dooling announced that a recent investigation revealed that the League's officers, directors, and representatives had recently received a substantial increase in salary. President Cooper's salary,

for example, was increased from \$7,000 to \$10,000 a year; as a result, according to Dooling, farmers were resigning from the League. To some observers, such as Dillon, the business orientation of the League officers was a problem. To others, it represented a logical solution to the League's powerlessness: if the League was to compete with the New York dealers, League members would have to purchase and manage their own milk plants. On January 8, the Millerton branch of the League voted to incorporate a joint stock company for the purposes of acquiring their own plant.¹¹⁵

As the strike entered its second week, the contestants offered conflicting claims as to its effectiveness. While League officials claimed a 75 percent reduction in the flow of milk into New York, Loton Horton, Sheffield Farms President, estimated only a 40 percent reduction. New York's milk supply actually increased after January 10, despite the fact that 3,000 farmers had gathered in Utica the night before, voting to support the League's demand for \$4.01 milk.¹¹⁶ The main reason for the increase in milk supplies was the dealer's ability to bring in milk from outside the milkshed. The true cost of this "imported" milk was revealed at a mediation conference called by Governor Smith. The Governor asked C. A. Weiant, President of Borden's Milk Company, to report the cost of milk not purchased from the League - in other words, from out of state. At first, Weiant claimed he did not know. Later, it was revealed that milk

from out of state "was costing the dealers more than the cost of production asked by local farmers."¹¹⁷ This gave credence to League President R. D. Cooper's charge that by extending the milkshed, the Milk Conference Board (the dealers' organization) was actually attempting to destroy the League.¹¹⁸

The 1919 Dairymen's League strike ended when the League signed an agreement with the major dealers, achieving their goal of \$4.01 milk. Yet this victory gained substantially less than the 1916 strike settlement. One reason was the duration of the agreement. The \$4.01 price was only good for one month; the February price was set at \$3.54 per hundredweight, the March price at \$3.31. The second reason was a new course chosen by the Dairymen's League leadership. The League's officers, joined by many farmer-members, supported the idea that the League should buy its own plants and distribute its own milk. Buying plants and selling milk, however, raised serious questions regarding the organization and purpose of the League. The League's processing and manufacturing of milk, for example, raised the possibility of a serious conflict of interest. Where did the interests of the League lie? In higher prices for its members? Or in higher profits on milk sales, and higher salaries for its Board of directors? This was the dilemma dairy farmers faced after 1919.

The Transformation of the Dairymen's League

There were no milk strikes in New York between 1920 and 1932. This period of quiescence can be explained in part by an increase in demand for milk, which diminished farmers' grievances. The nation as a whole enjoyed a period of greater prosperity, which translated into increased demand for a variety of goods, including dairy products. In New York, sanitary standards for milk were no longer an issue; this also contributed to an increased demand for dairy products. In fact, demand reached a point in the 1920s where industry analysts questioned whether the milk supply would be adequate in certain seasons.¹¹⁹ A more important reason for the decline in farmer activism was the transformation of the Dairymen's League, from a politicized co-op to a profit-oriented marketing association. This transition was important because it meant that the only statewide organization of dairy farmers would no longer serve as a vehicle for struggles over class issues. Moreover, it led to the effort of the new League officers, in conjunction with the large milk dealers, to rationalize the milk market.¹²⁰ The new, business-oriented League leadership wanted to secure greater predictability and stability in the milk market. Critics charged, however, that their primary goal was to suppress the political activism of small dairy farmers that had continued since 1883.

The reorganization of the Dairymen's League took place

between 1919 and 1921. On March 27, 1919, the League's officers filed a charter for a new organization called the Dairymen's League Cooperative Association, Inc. (DLCA), a corporation that would be run by a board of eight directors. The officers voted to use League money to promote this new company. As Dyson pointed out, "The [new] leaders of the DL had their fill of collective bargaining even before the second strike." Their idea was to transform the organization from a protest group to a "business cooperative, many of whose directors were lawyers and accountants with peripheral farming interests."¹²¹ The DLCA was organized as a marketing association, that would profit from the distribution and sale of milk and milk products. It began operation in May, 1921, concurrently existing with the old League organization for approximately twelve months. Although the new DLCA continued to appeal to farmers, it had much closer relations with the major milk dealers - especially Borden's. According to the New York State Legislature's official history: "A major factor in the [newly reorganized] League's successes was the willingness of the Borden Company and certain other dealers to buy milk. . . through the [DLCA] cooperative."¹²²

Classified Pricing and Pooling

The DLCA and major milk dealers rationalized the milk production and distribution system through the introduction of classified pricing and pooling. The basic problem for the institutions that "handled" milk - i.e., processed,

distributed, and marketed milk - was that milk production was complex and unpredictable. First, there were two separate milk markets in New York. One market was for fluid milk, which was more perishable, priced higher because of higher production costs, and which had more stringent sanitary requirements. Large dealers handled the bulk of fluid milk sold in New York City. The other market was for milk destined for manufactured products. This milk went mainly to the hundreds of small cheese and butter plants scattered across the state. Second, milk production varied by the season. Farmers produced more milk during the spring "flush" when forage was plentiful. They produced less in the winter when their cows were in the barn. The handlers' biggest problem, therefore, was to maintain a steady supply of fluid milk in the face of both market and seasonal uncertainty. To accomplish this milk dealers had to carry a reserve supply of at least 20 percent, that enabled them to meet fluid demand during the "short" season. This reserve supply was known as "surplus" milk.

The related dilemma for milk handlers was to devise a system to pay farmers for their milk. The earliest pricing system, paying farmers a flat rate, was problematic from the dealers' perspective. It did not reflect the different uses for milk - for fluid or manufactured products. Further, if the price was too low, farmers might not produce an adequate fluid milk supply. When the price of fluid milk

fell to a level near the price offered at local cheese plants, for example, farmers usually shipped milk to the closest and most convenient outlet. In response, the handlers introduced the base-excess plan, where farmers were paid one price for fluid milk and a lower price for milk produced in excess of fluid demand. In the 1920s, the DLCA and large dealers introduced a similar system, called classified pricing, that paid farmers according to how their milk was used - one price for fluid milk, a lower price for milk manufactured into cheese and butter.

The purpose of classified pricing and pooling, from the dealers' perspective, was to rationalize milk production throughout the market. First, milk handlers set a Class I price for fluid milk, which was set higher than the Class II price, for cream and manufactured products. The purpose was to encourage farmers to produce enough fluid milk to satisfy demand even in winter, when total production declined. Farmers were actually paid a "blend" or average price, representing the ratio of the percentage of their milk that went into fluid use and the percentage used in manufactured products. According to Manchester, "Pooling was a necessary complement to classified pricing."¹²³ With pooling, co-ops determined the prices paid to their members by pooling their receipts, deducting their expenses, and dividing what was left among (member) farmers. This "blend" or "uniform" price paid to farmers was also "subject to certain differentials

adjusted for the farm's location and butterfat content."¹²⁴

Dairy farmers benefitted from classified pricing and pooling in some respects, because farmers no longer had to compete for markets. Markets were now guaranteed. In fact, a League slogan read, "No League producer is ever without a market."¹²⁵ A second advantage for farmers was that classified pricing would keep prices up during the spring "flush," when increased milk production tended to drive prices down. Classified pricing and pooling, however, were of greater benefit to the milk handlers. First, prices were standardized across the market; milk distribution and marketing were therefore more predictable. Second, pooling offered milk handlers greater economic and ultimately political control over farmers because once they signed pooled contracts, farmers were obligated to deliver milk to a certain co-op or handler for one year. This made it far more difficult for farmers to strike; it gave dealers legal leverage over farm production. The only group of farmers not accounted for in this system were the independents, or farmers who did not belong to co-op. Last, classified pricing shifted the burden of carrying surplus milk to farmers, where it was distributed equally among the members of the various co-ops in the system. Farmers carried the burden of surplus because they were paid in proportion to how their milk was used. If the handlers used less fluid milk, farmers received a lower "blend" or average price.

Critics of the classified system, like John J. Dillon, argued that although it was "announced as something new and a great discovery for dairy farmers," this system was actually a plan to benefit the dealers and the DLCA. Dillon claimed, for example, that the DLCA's pooling contract was one-sided. He decried the fact that the League was not obligated under the terms of the contract to pay a specified price for milk at the moment it was shipped. Dillon summarized the agreement this way:

Under the plan the farmer ships his milk to a dealer on consignment, waits an average of 40 days for his money, authorizes the dealer to fix his own price for it and waives his right for an accounting for money or milk.

Given his public split with the League (DLCA), and his intense dislike for the DLCA leadership, Dillon perhaps ground his axe too hard. Yet he clearly identified many of the dangers farmers faced in the new classified system. He stressed the point that under pooled contracts, when handlers held farmers' money for a month before payment, farmers were in effect providing much of the capital involved in marketing their own milk - with an unequal share of the reward. In addition Dillon saw that the whole system was predicated on the dealer's honesty: the milk dealers calculated the blend price, and only they knew how the farmer's milk was actually used.¹²⁶

The Borden's Condensed Milk Company was quick to join with the DLCA in the pooling arrangement. In late March,

1922, the DLCA announced that as part of their pooling system, dealers would have to buy milk solely from the League in order to receive preferential prices. If any dealer purchased milk from outside the DLCA, they would have to pay higher prices for League milk. The purpose was to wean dealers away from "unpooled" milk, or in other words, from those farmers who had not signed DLCA contracts. Sheffield Farms and the Empire State Dairy Company, the second and third largest milk dealers respectively, rejected the proposal. Borden's accepted the offer, buying almost its entire milk supply from the DLCA.¹²⁷ The DLCA officers, for their part, promised not to compete with Borden in the New York City market. It was a mutually beneficial arrangement. The DLCA officers found a ready market for their fluid milk supply, and the DLCA's membership developed into a kind of "company union" for Borden's. Importantly, the League (DLCA) was no longer a vehicle for political unrest. This arrangement was so beneficial that Sheffield Farms followed suit. Sheffield "assisted its patrons in organizing the Sheffield Producers Cooperative Association," which sold milk only to Sheffield Farms. It was only later that Borden's "arrangement" with the DLCA was revealed to be closer previously reported. To sign the agreement, Borden's executives had demanded and were paid rebates of tens of thousands of dollars by the DLCA leadership.¹²⁸

The New York Farm Bureau and the Decline of Insurgency

The creation of the American Farm Bureau Federation also played a prominent role in the decline of agrarian activism in New York after 1919. The Smith-Lever Act, passed by Congress in 1914, laid the foundation for the Farm Bureau. The Act provided matching grants to the states to establish a system of county agents, whose job was to organize farmers and advise them on recent scientific developments. These county agents were eventually known as the Extension Service; as this movement expanded agents recruited large commercial farmers into "farm bureaus" around the country. As Berger correctly pointed out, "The Farm Bureau was mainly an organization for wealthy farmers."¹²⁹ In 1911, the Broome County Chamber of Commerce, with support from the Lackawanna Railroad, established the first Farm Bureau in the heart of the New York milkshed. The Broome Chamber hired a private county agent who founded an agricultural committee "from among his best co-operating farmers." Although the first bureau was privately funded and organized, subsequent bureaus were organized by the Extension Service, which endowed them with a quasi-public status and consequently a great deal of authority in local politics.

The New York State Farm Bureau supported the 1916 milk strike,¹³⁰ but this position changed dramatically over the next 20 years. As the number of county and state bureaus

expanded, with the support of Congress, in addition to corporate funding from organizations such as the Chicago Board of Trade,¹³¹ the Farm Bureau acquired the political function of a counterweight to farmer activism, contesting in particular organizations such as the Nonpartisan League. State leaders founded the national American Farm Bureau Federation in Ithaca, New York in 1919. As the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture David Franklin Houston explained in a 1919 address, farmers were urged to join the Bureau in order to "stop bolshevism."¹³² Over the next 20 years, the New York Farm Bureau would evolve - much like its national counterpart - into the conservative "voice" of large farmers. The Bureau would play an prominent role in New York policy making, especially given its close connections with Cornell University, influential large farmers, and agencies such as the Extension Service and the New York Department of Agriculture and Markets.

Conclusion

Following the rationalization of milk production and distribution in the 1920s, and the creation of the New York Farm Bureau, the balance of power in the milk industry again favored the New York dealers. Small farmers were isolated as independents or they were members of profit-oriented co-ops. Out of the 80,000 farmers in the New York milkshed in the mid-1920s, 66,000 were members of either the League (DLCA)

or Sheffield Producers' Co-op, both of whose leadership favored close cooperation with milk dealers - and low prices for farmers. The League (DLCA), which critics considered the company union for the Borden's Condensed Milk Company, had the most farmers (50,000) under contract. The League (DLCA) also "paid the lowest price to fluid milk producers in the state," taking "deductions from its member checks to finance its substantial investment in plants and transportation equipment."¹³³ Sheffield Farms, with 16,000 producers in what critics charged was its own company union, paid 10 to 20 cents more per hundredweight than the League.¹³⁴ With the majority of farmers thus under contract to the dominant co-ops, this precluded a movement of small, commercial farmers from organizing around class issues and challenging this system.

The price fixing scandals of 1930 illustrated this balance of power between dairy farmers and the major dealers, along with their cooperative allies. In 1930, the DLCA, Borden's, and Sheffield Farms were named in a food profiteering investigation by the New York State Attorney General. Assistant Attorney General William B. Groat charged the League (DLCA) with selling milk for \$4.40 per can in most New York City neighborhoods, while selling milk below cost (\$2.00 per can) in selected neighborhoods. According to Groat, the League's intent was to drive independent milk distributors out of business. Groat's findings were

significant because they revealed the extent to which the largest "farmer's" co-op in the state was involved in both retail price fixing (which boosted dealers' profits) and wholesale price cutting, the principal factor in driving down farmers' income. Incredibly, the Groat investigation revealed that the retail cost of fluid milk in Miami was actually a few cents cheaper than in New York City, even though Miami milk came from Wisconsin, while New York City milk came by rail from only 30 miles up the Hudson.¹³⁵

As the milk industry entered the 1930s, a great upheaval lay just over the horizon. With the onset of the Great Depression, market relations neared the point of collapse, and farmers again returned to political activism. Between 1932 and 1941, four major strikes would spread like summer grassfires through the milkshed.

Notes

1. New York State Senate, Legislative Commission on Dairy Industry Development, "New York's Dairy Industry," (Albany: New York State Senate, 1989), photocopied.

2. Paul W. Gates, The Farmer's Age: Agriculture, 1815-1860 (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 31. As late as 1870 New York State still led the nation in number of farms, value of farm property, and was second to Illinois in improved acreage. Lee Benson, Merchants, Farmers, and Railroads: Railroad Regulation and New York Politics, 1850-1887 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 80-81.

3. Gates, 39.

4. Ibid., 39.

5. Ibid., 36.

6. Richard N. Current, et al., American History, Volume 1: to 1877 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 48.
7. James MacGregor Burns, The Vineyard of Liberty (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 278-9. For more on Robert Livingston, see Lawrence H. Leder, Robert Livingston, 1654-1728, and the Politics of Colonial New York (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961).
8. Bruce Levine, et al., Who Built America? Vol. I, From Conquest and Colonization Through Reconstruction and the Great Uprising of 1877 (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 224.
9. Ibid., 233.
10. Gates, 35-36.
11. Eunice R. Stamm, The History of Cheese Making in New York State (Endicott, NY: Lewis Group Ltd, 1991), 36.
12. Harry F. Landon, The North Country (Indianapolis, Ind.: Historical Publishing Company, 1932), 483.
13. Yasuo Okada, "Squires' Dairy: New York Agriculture in Transition, 1840-1860," New York History, (October, 1971): 396-422.
14. Gates, 247-248.
15. Ibid., 248.
16. Ibid., 232.
17. "The Big Haul," Dairy Industries Supply Association Quarterly, (Vol. 2, No. 2): May, 1939, cited in An Economic History of Milk Marketing and Pricing, Leland Spencer and Charles J. Blanford (Columbus, Ohio: Grid, Inc., 1973), 678, hereafter cited as Spencer and Blanford; Russel Headley, ed., The History of Orange County (Middletown, New York: Van Deusen and Elms, 1908), 762.
18. Headley, 761-3.
19. John J. Dillon, Seven Decades of Milk (New York: Orange Judd Publishing Co., 1941), Ch. 3; Gates, 236-7; Ulysses Prentice Hedrick, History of Agriculture in the State of New York (Albany: J.B. Lyon Co., 1933), 366. Hedrick had an interesting theory concerning the role of milk drinking in human history. He wrote, "Of all races, the Aryans seem to have been the heaviest drinkers of milk and the greatest users of butter and cheese, a fact that may in part account for the quick and high development of this division of human beings."

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20. Gates, 238.

21. Ibid., 240.

22. Ibid., 240.

23. Headley, 723.

24. Dillon, 3.

25. Ibid., 5.

26. David Szatmary, Shay's Rebellion: The Making of An Agrarian Insurrection (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).

27. Ibid., xiv.

28. Steven Hahn, The Roots Of Southern Populism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

29. Dillon, 6.

30. New York Times, 11 March 1883, 7.

31. Dillon, 5.

32. New York Times, 26 September 1872, 2. The Farmers' Milk Company and the United Farmers Committee joined in a convention in New York that "adjourned without taking decisive action." Dairy farmers' organizations were only one part of the many farmers' organizations in New York in the 1870s. As Benson pointed out, farmers had also organized chapters of The Patrons of Animal Husbandry, better known as the Grange, in Western New York. As for the New York farmers' "relatively late and numerically minor response to the Grange," this was due to the Grange's support for cheaper freight rates, which would put New York farmers at a competitive disadvantage with Midwestern grain farmers. Interestingly, Benson claimed that the Farmers' Alliance, the organization that eventually formed the core of support of the later Populist Movement, was (originally) born in New York in March, 1877. He claimed that New York Alliance members, mainly influential grain and meat farmers from Western New York, provided Texas Grange members with the "inspiration" for National Farmers' Alliance; his evidence was a number of letters from Texas farmers published in the Husbandman, the official organ of the Elmira Farmers' Club. Benson, 84-5, 92-3, 110-111. Goodwyn (and others) date the beginning of the Farmers' Alliance to September, 1877, in Lampasas, Texas. As for the idea that the Alliance "had

connecting antecedents in other regions," he explained this "apparently cannot be sustained in the presence of [my] varied and mutually supporting evidence." Lawrence Goodwyn, Democratic Promise (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 32, 620n.

33. New York Times, 11 March 1883, 7.
34. New York Times, 14 March 1883, 2.
35. New York Times, 11 March 1883, 7.
36. Dillon, 9-10.
37. New York Times, 13 March 1883, 1.
38. New York Times, 14 March 1883, 2.
39. New York Times, 13 March 1883, 1.
40. New York Times, 20 March 1883, 5.
41. New York Times, 16 March 1883, 2; 23 March 1883, 8.
42. New York Times, 22 March 1883, 5; Headley also discussed "spilling committees," 766-67.
43. New York Times, 22 March 1883, 5; Headley, 767.
44. New York Times, 22 March 1883, 5.
45. New York Times, 16 March 1883, 2.
46. New York Times, 20 March 1883, 5; 21 March 1883, 5.
47. New York Times, 22 March 1883, 5.
48. New York Times, 23 March 1883, 8.
49. New York Times, 25 March 1883, 2; 29 March 1883, 3.
50. New York Times, 15 June 1889, 2; 25 October 1889, 6; W.H. Bronson, General History of Milk Producer Cooperatives in New England, unpublished manuscript, cited in Spencer and Blanford, 691.
51. Dillon, 8; Fred A. Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897 (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1945), 335.
52. Dillon, 8; Shannon, 335.

53. Shannon, 335.
54. Shannon, 335 (although Shannon mistakenly dates the Five States organization to 1898); New York Times, 27 July 1899, 5.
55. Dillon, 11-12.
56. New York State, Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate the Milk Industry, Report of the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate the Milk Industry, (Albany: J. B. Lyons, 1933), 98.
57. Bronson, cited in Spencer and Blanford, 691.
58. New York State Senate, Legislative Commission on Dairy Industry Development, Review of Dairy Regulations (Albany: New York State Senate, 1988), 2.
59. Alden C. Manchester, The Public Role in the Dairy Economy (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983), 10.
60. Oliver Goldsmith Seidman, "A Financial History of the Dairy Industry," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, School of Business Administration, 1959), 76-78.
61. Dillon, 39.
62. Dillon summarized the O'Malley Report, 37-9.
63. Review of Dairy Regulation, 287.
64. Ibid., 287.
65. Ibid., 288.
66. Ibid., 289-90.
67. Ibid., 2.
68. Dillon, 45.
69. The origins of the Farmers Union is found in Murray R. Benedict, Farm Policies of the United States, 1790-1950: A Study of Their Origins and Development (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1953), 134. Goodwyn described the "cooperative crusade" of the Populist Movement in Democratic Promise, 109-53.
70. Michael McMenamin and Walter McNamara, Milking the Public (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1980), 19.
71. New York Times, 21 November 1914, 8.

72. Oswego Palladium, 9 October 1916, 3.
73. Lowell K. Dyson, Farmers' Organizations (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 72.
74. New York Times, 1 October 1916, 1.
75. The quote is from Dyson, Farmers' Organizations, 72; The early history of the Dairymen's League is found in Roland Willey Bartlett, Cooperation in Marketing Dairy Products (Baltimore: Charles C. Thomas, Pub., 1931), 34-6. See also Report of the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate the Milk Industry, 1933, 98-100.
76. Dyson, Farmers' Organizations, 73; David M. Tiffany, The New York Milk Strike of 1916, unpublished manuscript, (Dairymen's League Cooperative Association, from an unpublished M.S. thesis, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1966), cited in Spencer and Blanford, 714-15.
77. Watertown Daily Times, 3 July 1916, 12; 25 August 5; Tiffany, cited in Spencer and Blanford, 715; Watertown Daily Times, 20 September 1916, 3.
78. Tiffany, cited in Spencer and Blanford, 714-5. For the Chicago Milk Producer's Association strike and its effects on other dairy farmer organizations, see Theodore Soloutos and John D. Hicks, Twentieth Century Populism: Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West 1900- 1939 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1951), 309-11.
79. Ibid., 714.
80. Watertown Daily Times, 30 September 1916, 3.
81. New York Times, 3 October 1916, 1.
82. Ogdensburg Republican-Journal, 4 October 1916, 3.
83. New York Times, 23 August 1916, 6.
84. New York Times, 7 October 1916, 1.
85. New York Times, 1 October 1916, 21.
86. New York Times, 7 October 1916, 10. There were many examples of organized labor supporting the Dairymen's League. Former Mayor John Fitzgibbons of Oswego, representative of the Railway Trainmen, urged farmers to join forces with workers at the ballot box. He said of striking farmers, "If they are wise they will join with the wage workers and so vote as to

preserve self-government and repudiate the big interests and the idle rich." Oswego Palladium, 3 October 1916, 8. In Watertown, blacksmiths promoted the Dairymen's League strike, refusing to shoe the horses of non-League farmers. Watertown Daily Times, 5 October 1916, 1.

87. New York Times, 2 October 1916, 1; Watertown Daily Times, 2 October 1916, 7.

88. New York Times, 2 October 1916, 1; 3 October 1916, 1.

89. Jefferson County Journal, 4 October 1916, 1; Watertown Daily Times, 2 October 1916, 7.

90. Oswego Palladium, 2 October 1916, 1; New York Times, 3 October 1916, 1. See also, Jefferson County Journal, 4 October 1916, 8.

91. Ogdensburg Republican-Journal, 14 October 1916, 3: 4 October 1916, 8.

92. New York Times, 1 October 1916, 1; Oswego Palladium, 2 October 1916, 1.

93. New York Times, 3 October 1916, 3.

94. New York Times, 7 October 1916, 10.

95. New York Times, 6 October 1916, 1.

96. Ogdensburg Republican-Journal, 4 October 1916, 1,2,3,8.

97. New York Times, 3 October 1916, 1; 4 October 1916, 1.

98. Oswego Palladium, 2 October 1916, 2.

99. Ogdensburg Republican-Journal, 9 October 1916, 3.

100. New York Times, 7 October 1916, 1; see also Watertown Daily Times, 2 October 1916, 10.

101. New York Times, 7 October 1916, 1.

102. New York Times, 13 Oct 1916, 1. See also, Dyson, Farmers' Organizations, 73-74.

103. New York Times, 15 October 1916, 17; 20 October 1916, 1.

104. New York Times, 8 January 1917, 1.

105. Dyson, Farmers' Organizations, 75.

106. New York Times, 12 February 1917, 11.
107. New York Times, 11 December 1917, 10.
108. Robert Morlan, Political Prairie Fire (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 48.
109. New York Times, 26 November 1917, 22; 5 December 1917, 24.
110. U.S. Federal Trade Commission, Report on Milk Products, 1914-1918 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921), cited in Spencer and Blanford, 201.
111. The information in this paragraph is based on Dyson, "The Dairymen's League," in Farmers' Organizations, 74-5.
112. New York Times, 2 January 1919, 8.
113. New York Times, 13 January 1919, 22.
114. Bronson, cited in Spencer and Blanford, 693.
115. New York Times, 9 January 1919, 22.
116. New York Times, 10 January 1919, 24.
117. New York Times, 9 January 1919, 22.
118. New York Times, 2 January 1919, 8.
119. Review of Dairy Regulation, 5.
120. Rationalization in this sense is defined as "the organization of the economy and the larger political and social spheres in a manner that will allow corporations to function in a predictable and secure environment permitting reasonable profits over the long run." Gabriel Kolko, The Triumph of Conservatism (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 3.
121. Dyson, Farmers' Organizations, 72-76.
122. Review of Dairy Regulation, 8.
123. Manchester, 12-14.
124. For an explanation of classified pricing and pooling see Review of Dairy Regulation, 7; Manchester, 9-17.
125. Report of the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate the Milk Industry, 1933, 111.

126. Dillon, 175-193.

127. New York Times, 30 March 1922, 19.

128. Dillon, 193.

129. Samuel R. Berger, Dollar Harvest: The Story of the Farm Bureau (Lexington, Mass.: Heath Lexington Books, 1971), 91-93; see also Eric F. Goldman, Rendezvous With Destiny (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 229-30; Grant McConnell, The Decline of Agrarian Democracy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953), 44-52; A. V. Krebs, The Corporate Reapers, (Washington, DC: Essential Books, 1992), 276-277; Wesley McCune, Who's Behind Our Farm Policy (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956), 15-19; Lowell K. Dyson, "American Farm Bureau Federation," in Farmers' Organizations (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 14-16. For the "official" history of the American Farm Bureau Federation, see O. M. Kile, The Farm Bureau Through Three Decades (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1948).

130. See Dyson, "Dairymen's League," Farmers' Organizations, 72.

131. The American Farm Bureau Federation had from its inception maintained close relations with corporations. Krebs claimed that although the AFBF represented itself as a farmers' organization, as far back as the early 1920s it was "involved in a number of questionable business alliances with chemical companies, cement associations, power and lumber interests, canning jar manufacturers, and grocery chain stores." Krebs, 278; Berger charged that in addition to the AFBF's ideological position as "the right wing in overalls," the national organization actually controlled "one of the largest commercial conglomerates in the country, with nearly \$4 billion in total assets." Farm Bureau- controlled businesses included insurance, car rentals, mutual funds, and communications. Berger, 5, 71,

132. Berger, 93.

133. Review of Dairy Regulations, 9.

134. Ibid., 9.

135. New York Times, 30 August 1930, 1.

Chapter Three

The History of Milk Strikes in New York State, 1932-1967

For the American farmer the Great Depression began long before the stock market crash of 1929. Farm commodity prices had fallen since the end of World War I; in the same years both production and surpluses had increased. During the 1920s farmers sought relief in Congress through the McNary-Haugen Act.¹ When the industrial depression began, hard on the heels of five years of farm depression, many farmers sought relief by other means.

Class Relations and the 1930s Milk Strikes

In the 1930s a number of contentious milk strikes erupted in the New York milkshed, occurring within the context of the greatest structural changes in agriculture to date. My task in recounting the history of these strikes is to develop three themes. The first is the near-collapse of market relations in dairy farming, which generated intense anger among farmers as well as a political upheaval across New York State. These two factors combined to create the opportunities necessary for political action by dairy farmers. Milk strike movements were aided by working people in similar class positions, who also utilized unconventional

political participation to address their grievances. Second, milk strikes in 1933, 1937, 1939 and 1941 illustrated the newly defined possibilities and limitations inherent in the class position of small dairy farmers. The focus on structural transformations is a continuation of my argument in the previous chapter, based on the notion that structural change transforms the position and power of farmers embedded with different class positions. Third, this chapter examines the deeply intertwined connections between economic relations, social movements, and political structures with New York State agriculture. Both economic and political relations shaped the 1930s milk strike and were in turn shaped by these insurgencies. My starting point is the farmers' movement in the Midwest corn belt; conflicts such as those occurring in New York in the 1930s were typical of increased agrarian activism across the nation.

The Farmers' Holiday Association

Although strikes in the New Deal-era were usually associated with organized labor, farm strikes played an important role in shaping New Deal politics. As early as 1931 the Depression had spawned a large and very angry insurgency in the Plains states. The largest and most infamous farmers' organization was Milo Reno's Farmers' Holiday Association. This group of prosperous and usually quiescent Corn Belt farmers pressured the Roosevelt Administration with a series of "holidays" or farmer strikes

in 1933. What is perhaps less well known is that dairy farmers were the driving force behind the early "holiday" or farm strike movement. There were "milk wars" in St. Louis and central Illinois in 1931, and "holidays" in the Houston, Sioux Falls, Atlanta, Chicago and Indiana milk markets in 1932.²

The largest milk strike was the Sioux City Milk War, which served as a catalyst for the Farmers' Holiday strikes of the same year.³ The issue that sparked farmers grievances was the "spread" between the retail and farm price of milk in Iowa. Dairy farmers received just two cents per quart, while the retail price was eight cents per quart in Sioux City. The Sioux City Milk Producer's Association - whose membership overlapped with that of the Farmers' Holiday Association - called the strike, which was settled only after violence and mass arrests. At one point, 3,000 farmers marched on the jail of Council Bluffs, Iowa, forcing the Sheriff to release jailed farmers.

New York Dairy Farmers and the Depression

The Depression hit New York dairy farmers hard. They reeled under the combined effects of the same forces that produced the Midwestern strikes: decreased demand (for milk) and a concurrent oversupply (of milk products). Like their western counterparts, with technological advances New York dairy farmers had greatly increased their capacity to produce milk. Further, a wave of retail price cutting swept

through the New York City milk market in the early 1930s. This had a negative impact on both farmers and milk dealers. As a result of cutthroat competition, market relations nearly collapsed; according to the New York State Department of Agriculture's Annual Report, "At the close of 1931 prices paid to producers were lower than in many years."⁴

A short, local strike in Northern New York in the Fall of 1932 provided the first insight into farmers' intensified grievances, and presaged the larger conflicts to come later in the decade. Farmers near the towns of Adams, Pierrepont Manor, and Boonville took issue with price cutting by New York dealers. On October 2, 250 Adams farmers, who were joined by 75 more in Boonville the next night, voted to strike against the United Milk Producers' Corporation.⁵ At issue was the retail prices charged by United and its patron, Eisenburg Farms, Inc., of Brooklyn;⁶ local farmers had travelled all the way to New York City to check these prices for themselves. In all, 600 Jefferson and Lewis County farmers diverted milk from United's plants for four or five days. The protesters "won" the strike when Alexander Eisenburg, President of Eisenburg Farms, posted a \$2,500 check, promising to sign an agreement not to cut retail prices in the metropolitan market.⁷ If Eisenburg broke the agreement, he agreed the money would go to upstate charities.⁸

By early 1933, the financial conditions of New York

dairy farmers were "desperate," and growing "increasingly critical," according to a Joint [State] Legislative Committee appointed to investigate the industry.⁹ The State Legislature created the Committee, under the leadership of State Senator Perley A. Pitcher of Watertown, to examine the causes of increased dairy farmer activism. The Committee identified the immediate problem: wholesale milk prices had fallen well below the farmers' cost of production. According to a Milk Control Board report

Prices paid for milk had fallen to such a low level that dairymen could not possibly meet their most pressing obligations. Even the bare necessities of life could not be secured by many farm families, and many dairymen were threatened with the loss of the farms and homes in which their meager lifetime savings were invested.¹⁰

The 1933 Annual Report of the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets quantified the "state of demoralization" of farmers:

The prices paid to producers had dropped off 67 percent in four years. The total value of milk to farmers had fallen from \$193,434,000 in 1929 to \$129,789,000 in 1931 to \$88,700,000 in 1932. . The retail price of milk in New York City had dropped from 16 cents a quart to 10 cents a quart in two years.¹¹

In addition, the average blended price for 3.5 percent (butterfat) milk reached 99 cents per hundredweight (cwt) in April, 1933. In January, 1931 the price had been \$2.25 cwt.¹²

The Pitcher Committee Report identified a number of causes for the low milk prices paid to farmers.¹³ First,

there was the national decline in prices associated with the Depression. Second, New York dairy farmers were more productive. Farmers had increased both the number of cows in New York and pounds of milk produced. Third, transportation and distribution costs to farmers had not fallen proportionately to the decline in the milk price. Fourth, the Report cited the unfair, destructive trade practices among milk dealers, in particular the dealers' practice of cutting retail prices in the New York City retail market.

The explanation for the rampant price cutting was that the large milk distributors such as the Dairymen's League and Sheffield Farms carried large quantities of the surplus milk in the state, and they needed to keep retail prices high to support this practice. The reader will recall that surplus milk was that additional amount of milk, around 20 percent above the average demand, that dealers carried to cover the "short" production season, when upstate farmers produced less fluid milk. Many small dealers carried no surplus milk, and could therefore afford to cut prices below that of the large distributors. In retaliation, large distributors cut *their* prices, trying to force the smaller companies out of the market. As the 1934 Milk Control Board Report concluded: "Price cutting by milk dealers had reduced, and in some cases destroyed, their income."¹⁴

The resulting decline in farm prices had a devastating effect on small farmers, in particular on those farmers that

did not belong to a co-op. These "independents," as they were called, often had to scramble to find a market for fluid milk or be forced to accept a lower price at local manufacturing (cheese) plants. At Pitcher Committee hearings, some farmers testified that low prices forced them to have their phones taken out to save money; many claimed they kept even their youngest children at home to work on the farm. Those hit the hardest were unable to pay their taxes or debts; many were forced into foreclosure.¹⁵

The most important repercussion from the desperate conditions considered by the Pitcher Committee was an increase in farmers' grievances. Farmers were faced with a loss of their livelihood, and this raised the possibility of political conflict commensurate with the level of tension in the milk producing regions. The Pitcher Committee, after surveying the dairy industry in 1933, warned:

The forecast of strikes and violence among producers of milk is supported by the actual occurrence of disturbances recently in Wisconsin and by the recurring threats of strikes within the state of New York during the past few months.¹⁶

Changes in the Class Position of Small, Commercial Farmers

When dairy farmers began to organize in the early 1930s, they confronted new limitations and opportunities that were a product of the structural changes in agriculture. In the next few pages, I will outline the characteristics of the class position unique to small,

commercial dairy farmers that both limited and facilitated their ability to organize. The limitations were many; small farmers faced enormous divisions in their ranks. Following the rise of the Dairymen's League and Sheffield Farms Cooperative Associations - as "company unions" for the major milk dealers - small, commercial farmers were divided by region, co-op membership, and market. Further, the declining economic conditions provided small farmers with few resources - such as money or time - on which to build effective organizations.

In some ways, however, the class position of small farmers contributed to effective collective action. First, the rapid and widespread price decline that produced intensified grievances unified small farmers. As Moore explained, changes that impacted a broad segment of farmers were often perceived as collective grievances, rather than individual ones.¹⁷ Second, production relations in 1930s dairy farming were communal, which promoted solidarity among dairy small farmers, and created effective communications networks. As this farmer remembered:

Years ago everybody worked back and forth. Thrashing. Corn cutting. You might say it was a family affair almost. I heard one fellow say - he turned out to be a minister - "I used to enjoy the fall. We'd all get together and visit with each other and back and forth. Now? You don't know your next door neighbor." (History Interview #108)

Another older farmer expressed a similar sentiment:

Before we used to go around and maybe one farmer could afford an ensilage cutter or something. Or a

thrashing machine. So the word went out, the thrashing machine is coming here Tuesday. All the farmers come over here and helped him thrash. And then tomorrow they go on to the next guy. And so on. (History Interview #102)

The farmers' social ties functioned much in the same way, promoting the solidarity and communication which became the foundation for effective collective action. This small farmer, a participant in the 1939 Dairy Farmers Union strike, described the process by which social events promoted farmer solidarity:

It would be like I say. A farmer would be going through and would stop and talk with the neighbor. Saturday night used to be a big night here. The farmers would come over here and there would be a band playing. And these farmers would probably some go into the beer joint and the women would be sitting in the car or on the bench or something. And that's how the word [about strikes] got around. . . Oh yeah, they had dances, and we used to have picnics on Potato Hill and like that. They'd get together. Now? It's - I don't know. The changes as far as I'm concerned is not for the better. There was togetherness. (History Interview #102)

The focal point in the lives of small, commercial farmers was the local milk plant. Therefore, many small farmers either delivered milk to this common point or shared in the delivery of their milk. The result was continued close communication among a large number of producers. When asked how he heard about milk strikes, this farmer replied:

The milk hauler. See in those days, I drew milk myself, well into the '50's. And you would go and pick up maybe 12 farmers' milk and then into Hammond with it and then unload milk there at the milk plant. You helped the guy ahead of you or maybe some guy behind you helped you unload. You're talking all the time. You're finding out

all the news. . .You know everything that is happening all over the town.

Given these communications networks, if a strike or other form of collective action was planned,

You knew it two or three days [in advance], so and so were going to strike together and so on. If you were real interested, you could go up to the feed store and you find 15 or 20 guys setting there. If it was this close to a strike, just go up to the feed store or the barbershop. That's where it was at. You could find out just what you wanted to know right there. (History Interview #106)

In fact, farmers noted that one great disadvantage of strikes was their potential for disruptions in the close knit social fabric of the countryside.¹⁸ According to this farmer:

It was neighbor against neighbor in some places. You might talk a little over the fence but you still had it in the back of your mind, that he was on that milk strike and things like this. (History Interview #106)

The 1933 Milk Strikes

The "disturbances" referred to in the Pitcher Committee Report began in Western New York in early spring, 1933. The Western New York Milk Producers Association, led by Albert Woodhead, began organizing dairy farmers based on class issues. Woodhead's group seized the political opening exposed by the inability of state policy makers to resolve the expanding economic crisis, and the concurrent debate in Congress over the New Deal farm bill and emergency farm relief. The specific issue that ignited the movement was the difference in price or "spread" in the Rochester area

market, between a farm price of one and one-half cents per quart and a retail price of ten cents per quart. On March 30, at a meeting called by Woodhead, 1,000 farmers from the Rochester area voiced support for the Association's demand for a flat price of four and one-half cents a quart for all milk, which meant rejection of classified pricing.* If dealers rejected this demand the Association would use their control over milk production as leverage. In other words, they would strike. The movement thus began to reunite farmers along class lines. The Association's main constituency was small, commercial farmers. Most were independents; a significant number were Dairymen's League (DLCA) defectors. Out of the 1,000 strike supporters at the March 30 meeting, 600 were former League members who had canceled League contracts.¹⁹

The first 1933 strike began when Woodhead's group began dumping milk and picketed milk plants in Wyoming, Genessee, and Wayne counties. It quickly developed into a "war" between Association farmers and the remaining League members, many of whom were large dairy farmers. The Dairymen's League Cooperative Association (DLCA) leadership consistently opposed the strike, as they would with all the

*Under a system of classified pricing, dealers paid farmers according to how their milk was used. A Class I price was set for fluid milk, a Class II price set for milk used in manufactured products such as cream and cheese. Farmers were actually paid an average or "blend" price, which represented the ratio of how their milk was utilized in either fluid or manufactured form.

subsequent strikes; this marked a new turn in the history of milk strikes. With the rise of the DLCA, powerful farmers' organizations were found on both sides of the battle lines drawn in the 1933 strike. And battle they did. The New York Times reported "pitched battles" between Association and League farmers, who were aided by the State Police. State Troopers "swung their heavy riot clubs" and "one even drew a gun," attempting to get League milk through pickets lines.²⁰

The Western New York Association suspended the strike on April 1, when the State Senate passed a bill sponsored by Senator Pitcher, establishing a temporary board to fix milk prices.²¹ The Milk Control Board, which was opposed by the Dairymen's League, was composed of the Commissioner of Agriculture, the Commissioner of Health, and a third member appointed by Governor Herbert Lehman. Woodhead renewed the strike after a one week "truce" on April 7, only to end the strike for good the next day following the final passage of the Pitcher bill.²² The Milk Control Board immediately went to work, holding its first public hearing on April 13. On April 17, the Board fixed minimum prices for a quart of milk and cream: dealer to the store, 8 cents; store to consumer, 9 cents; home delivery, 10 cents. The Board adopted a classified pricing plan on May 10. On May 16, it set minimum prices paid to farmers: a Class I (fluid) price of \$1.88, that represented an increase of 60 cents cwt. The Class II price was set lower.²³

Over the next few months, the Milk Control Board was somewhat successful in stabilizing the dairy industry. As evidence of its effectiveness, a Board Report cited the "reduction in the spread between the farm and retail price. In April, when the Board was created, the statewide spread measured 7.27 cents per quart. Three months later it had been reduced to 6.84 cents a quart."²⁴ To attack the problem of retail price cutting, the Board audited milk dealer's books, revoking the licenses of certain dealers. The biggest obstacle the Board faced was a lack of cooperation on the part of dealers. The Board's 1934 Report stated that in New York City, "Secret rebates were made," to evade fixed prices, and that "Schemes for falsifying records were entered into." The Report concluded that even with all of the state's efforts to the contrary, "price cutting in this field continued and increased." By November, 1933, it was clear many dealers were evading the State-mandated prices.²⁵

With the Milk Control Board's failure to control price cutting the pressure on farmers continued. When the effect of low prices was combined with a July-August drought, the worst in New York in many years, tension in the milk producing regions reached the flash point. On July 25, farmers again threatened to strike, this time based on new grievances over the Milk Control Board, as well as the classification plan adopted by the Board. Farmers charged, for example, that the Board was supporting the Dairymen's

League at the expense of independent producers by raising milk prices paid by consumers, while not raising prices paid to farmers.²⁶

Movement organizers called for a second "holiday" to begin on August 1. Since the earlier strike, the movement had grown in strength and had expanded outside of Western New York. Albert Woodhead was now head of the new Empire Dairymen's Association; Felix and Stanley Piseck joined Woodhead representing farmers in the Oneida-Lewis-Herkimer County region.²⁷ As the expanded Association movement began the new strike, many Sheffield Producers' Association and Dairymen's League members joined the Association's mainly independent (non-co-op membership) farmers in withholding milk. When 400-500 farmers in Pulaski (Oswego County) gathered for a strike vote, for example, the local paper reported that a majority shipped their milk to Sheffield Farms, and "a fair proportion of League members. . . promised to support the holiday."²⁸ The League's officers met the strike threat by calling on Governor Lehman to protect their members. Lehman was under increasing pressure from local Republicans, the Dairymen's League, the milk dealers, and the media because of the disruptions in the previous strike. The Governor answered the call on July 30; he pledged to use state power to protect "all law abiding citizens."²⁹

The Battle of Boonville

The Empire Dairymen's Association strike began as threatened on August 1. From its very beginnings it revealed the depths of anger among farmers and state officials. The first serious clash occurred in the small town of Boonville. In what became known as the "Battle of Boonville," 50 well-armed State Troopers rushed 300 to 400 farmers picketing peacefully in front of a local milk plant. Farmers picketed local plants because "Dairy farming in the thirties was a small scale, hand-labor operation," where farmers transported their milk in 40 quart cans.³⁰ Therefore, confrontations occurred at the point where milk was collected, processed, and shipped to New York City.

In Boonville State Troopers armed with "steel helmets, riot sticks, gas bombs, gas masks, [and] semi- or hand machine guns," routed a crowd of farmers blocking the local plant.³¹ The Troopers injured 17 men, a few of them seriously. Victor Nelson, a non-farmer, was hit by a tear gas bomb fired at short range.³² He was among the many bystanders who had come to see the "excitement" of the strike and who ended up being beaten in the confusion. The New York Times blamed the farmers, charging that "many [were] armed with axes and clubs."³³ However, former Boonville Postmaster Henry J. Vollmer offered a different version. He claimed that at the time of the attack, "no milk trucks were in sight," and that "the troopers attacked

without provocation." He called the Boonville clash "a wanton example of men in uniform drunk with power."³⁴

Farmers and non-farmers alike in the Boonville area reacted with anger and indignation. The streets of the town were "thronged with people" until well after midnight on the day of the attack. The local newspaper, after recounting "82 years of neutrality, opposition to violence and belief that milk strikes could lead to violence," used strong language to condemn the State Police. An editorial declared:

As a result of the heartless, brutal, inhuman, and absolutely unnecessary display of armed force against a group of striking farmers who congregated on the State road south of the village Tuesday morning, the Herald is with the farmers, and the strikers 100 per cent.

The editors continued:

The farmers made no resistance or show of resistance. . . .whoever was in charge . . .showed damnably poor judgement . . .in not being able to differentiate between a mob of hoodlums gathered on the lower East side of New York and a group of hard working dairymen.³⁵

Witnesses to the attack gave similar accounts to the paper. A "reputable young lady" stated that the troopers charged without warning, hitting bystanders as well as farmers. She called the attack "an outrageous example of bloodthirsty savagery." Mrs. Frank Sassenbery, a farmer's wife, saw troopers enter a house in pursuit of someone fleeing the attack. When told the Trooper had no right to enter the house without a warrant, she said he replied, "We take the right." Dr. Charles R. Barlett, who treated some of

the wounded, said, "If I would have been there with a gun I would have used it."³⁶

Such bad feelings lingered for some time. In an interview with the author, a Boonville farmer made a statement similar to that by Dr. Barlett when asked about the incident:

Oh yeah. They pretty near had a riot there. It was too bad the farmers didn't have some guns over there or there would have been less troopers. That's the way the troopers were against the farmers. They were just - oh my god - the farmers weren't human to them, not in the '33 strike.
(History Interview #102)

As a result of the attack, the State Police moved its barracks out of Boonville, did not attend the local county fair for many years, and were asked not to patrol within the village. Another farmer recalled this incident, one that took place some time after the Boonville clash:

One of them [troopers] went into Carl Jones's barbershop, and he said that he wanted a shave. And Carl says, "You can't get a shave in Boonville." And the trooper says, "According to the law, I can make you shave me." And Carl says, "Alright, get in the chair. I won't guarantee my razor won't slip." And the Trooper? He walked out.
(History Interview #103)

The Battle Of Oriskany

Four days after the Boonville skirmish the outcome was reversed when farmers and the State Police clashed again, this time near the Revolutionary War battlefield in Oriskany. In this incident, 150 striking farmers stopped a convoy of milk trucks escorted by the State Police and deputy sheriffs, by dragging a spiked plank across the

highway. The farmers then "hurled stones, swung clubs and swarmed" over the Troopers, sending eight to the hospital. The New York Times reported Trooper George Marshall was "struck on the head, scalp cut and suffering from a hemorrhage of the brain, feared dying." The Commander, Capt. Stephen McGrath, had "lacerations to the scalp;" Trooper George Lewis had a "possible fracture of the skull."³⁷ Whether revenge was a motive in the Oriskany attack is not clear. Oriskany is only 25 miles from Boonville, however, and local farmers may purposely ambushed Captain McGrath, the officer in charge of the Boonville assault.

By this point, the second 1933 strike had turned rather quickly into a full-scale rebellion. Confrontations with the State Police did not diminish the strike movement. Rather, they incited more farmers to join. On August 2, for example, 600 farmers met in Lowville (Lewis County), and voted to strike. They were joined by 200 farmers in Canastota (Madison County), 500 in Delhi (Delaware County) and 350 in Rutland, Vermont.³⁸ In Oswego County, between 200 and 250 producers from Pulaski voted to strike on August 3. Three days later 300 Red Creek and Fair Haven farmers (Cayuga County) did the same.³⁹ And so it went, like a steady drumbeat across the state. In Oswego County, Mexico dairymen prepared to strike on August 8; 250 farmers from Central Square were next.⁴⁰ At the Dairymen's League plant in Sherburne (Chenango County), the crowds on the picket line

got bigger each day. On August 6, 600 farmers picketed; the next day, 1,500 farmers closed down the plant.⁴¹ By August 8, the strike had spread across the Southern Tier counties near Binghamton; the movement peaked at more than 15,000 (mostly independent) farmers, from at least 12 of the largest milk producing counties.⁴²

Curiously, many small dairy farmers in Northern New York did not participate. Some were afraid of losing their markets, like the farmers in Adams and Adams Center (Jefferson County). When a group of Lewis County farmers approached them about joining the "holiday" movement, the local paper reported a "feeling not favorable to any strike."⁴³ Some farmers, like those near the city of Oswego (Oswego County), received a higher return in their local market and thus had less reason to strike.⁴⁴

What the uneven strike mobilization indicated was the varied conditions that small, commercial farmers faced across New York.^b Even though market relations permeated the entire state, most farmers experienced these relations as they were reflected through the prism of their local circumstances. The average dairy farm in Cayuga County, for example, had 13 cows, while in Orange County the average was 26 cows, and in Chenango and St. Lawrence County 18 cows. Producers also faced different weather conditions and costs.

^bOn all of the farms included in the following survey, the sale of milk was the major source of income.

In Orange County, closer to New York, farmers produced more milk in November (107 percent) than they did in the summer (June = 100). Yet Orange County farmers needed to produce more milk because they faced higher costs, spending 40 percent of their total expenses for purchased feed, while Cayuga County farmers paid only 13 percent. In far off St. Lawrence County, on the Canadian border, farmers "dried" most cows in the winter, producing only 46 percent of their June total. This in part reflected weather conditions and also lower expenses, including taxes of only \$124 per year per farm. As you moved closer to New York, taxes on farmland increased (Chenango County was \$172).⁴⁵

As the strike became increasingly disruptive Governor Lehman stepped up the use of state power. On August 6, for the first time, 40 steel-helmeted State Troopers guarded the daily milk train that traveled from Northern New York to New York City.⁴⁶ In addition, Troopers in Broome County were armed with rifles.⁴⁷ Lehman, under pressure to call out the National Guard, ordered Sheriffs in 12 counties to enlist enough deputies "to quell the milk strike disorders."⁴⁸ The State Legislature passed a similar bill on August 9, giving Sheriffs the power to appoint as many deputies as needed. That day, Troopers returned 300 rounds of fire against strikers near Little Falls (Herkimer County).⁴⁹ Wholesale arrests began on the tenth. Near Owego (Tioga County), 125 strikers were arrested; in De Ruyter (Madison County), 52

farmers were rounded up. In Oxford (Chenango County), 52 more were arrested on charges of unlawful assembly. In Cuyler (Cortland County), 15 farmers were charged with riot. The reports came from across the state: 6 men charged with riot in Utica, 2 men charged with assault in Oriskany, 5 men charged with unlawful assembly in Avon, south of Rochester.⁵⁰ In Hannibal (Oswego County), 13 farmers were arrested, and charged with disorderly conduct for dumping milk headed for the Sodus Creamery.⁵¹

For their part, the milk dealer's strategy was to join with the League and enlarge the milkshed, bringing in milk from other states. Next, they pooled their resources to avoid serious shortages. Last, they mounted a public relations campaign against striking farmers. The dealers charged that "Reds," "Bolsheviks," and "Communist agitators" were behind the strike, a charge that was echoed by government officials.⁵² Representative Hamilton Fish, Jr., for example, stated that "Communist Party leaders are the real directors behind the scenes." Lieutenant Gerald D. Vaine, Commander of the State Police in Rochester, claimed he was informed of a secret plot by strikers to dynamite bridges and culverts, although he refused to reveal his source. The New York State Conference Board of Farm Organizations, which included the League, the Farm Bureau, and the Grange, called for martial law.⁵³ Nonstriking farmers went on the offensive after August 8, carrying

weapons to defend their milk deliveries. The "first strenuous resistance" was in Chittenango where Dairymen's League members fought with pickets in order to get their milk into the local plant.⁵⁴

The combined efforts of the State, the milk dealers, and the League had an noticeable affect on the movement after August 10. The strike continued, but with fewer pickets and fewer confrontations. And both sides sought a solution to the conflict. Albert Woodhead offered a plan for farmers to cut back deliveries to the level of fluid consumption. This was followed by the Piseck Brothers' proposal for a one week truce. Governor Lehman rejected the truce proposal on August 12, but then responded with a more conciliatory tone. He promised a full investigation of the milk business, including audits of dealers' books if the strike was ended. Further, state officials urged farmers to allow time for the new Agricultural Adjustment Act's marketing agreements to be applied in New York.

Largely on the basis of these promises movement leaders called an end to the strike on August 14. The leadership split on how to end the strike. Woodhead pronounced the strike over; the Piseck brothers renewed their call for a one week truce. On August 14, 500 farmers marched on the state Capitol in Albany, where the Governor met with them in small groups.⁵⁵ The next day Lehman called for development of a long-range policy in the milk industry to solve the

problems of low prices and oversupply. He also renewed his pledge to investigate the dealers, including the Dairymen's League.⁵⁶ The strike was not renewed.

The New York Dairy Industry, 1934-1937

In retrospect, the results of the 1933 strikes were inconclusive. The violent strikes propelled policy makers to initiate the first, tentative steps toward state intervention in the dairy industry, but this had little effect on raising prices paid to farmers. Moreover, the insurgent organizations that led the strikes were ineffective and quickly disintegrated, which meant the anger and energy of small farmers that propelled the revolt was not translated into lasting political gains. After the second 1933 strike New York state officials carried out the investigations that Lehman promised, but the price of milk actually went down two cents from August to September, 1933.⁵⁷

A further problem was that many independent farmers lost their markets as a result of the strike. The 250 Adams farmers had this on their minds in October, 1933, when they decided not to risk their market in another strike. The Jefferson County Journal reported that the farmers were opposed to joining what they called "the mid-west strike movement."⁵⁸ Indeed by 1934 the focus of milk strikes had shifted back to the Midwest. In January, 1934 there were

strikes in Indiana, Wisconsin, Chicago, and California. New York farmers invoked the threat of a strike in January, 1934 and again in May, this time with the support of organized milk consumers in New York City,⁵⁹ but did not follow through with another boycott.

The New York State legislature passed a permanent Milk Control Law in 1934.⁶⁰ The law established a Division of Milk Control within the Department of Agriculture and Markets. The Division's Commissioner had the power to "adopt and enforce rules and orders, issue licenses by area, bond milk dealers, require that records be kept and reports filed." The Commissioner also was "granted the right of entry and inspection and access to [the dealers] records." The Milk Division struggled over the next three years in the absence of federal regulation, that had been successfully implemented in other markets. In 1936, New York dairy farmers again threatened to strike - this time even setting a date - before backing down at the last minute, following an increase in the farm price.⁶¹

Throughout the 1930s, the provisions of the Agricultural Adjustment Act that governed Federal intervention in the dairy industry were slowly implemented on a market by market basis across the country. In Chicago, the first of 15 "marketing agreements" was enacted in August, 1933. The Chicago regulations were written in conjunction with the "Pure Milk Association [Co-op] and the

larger dealers," and contained many of the same provisions of the New York milk control law. The "major advantage" in the Chicago law was the dealers' power to fix prices, which limited (what the dealers defined as) unfair competition.⁶² As the AAA provisions were extended, the threat of insurgency in many of the nation's major milk markets loomed over the development of Federal milk policy. A new national policy was written in 1934, and then rewritten in 1935 after the Schechter case struck down the AAA on Constitutional grounds.⁶³ As Congress was rewriting dairy policy, one of the largest milk strikes occurred in Chicago, as farmers struck again in 1935. During the strike, a Federal judge called for the imposition of martial law.⁶⁴ In 1937, Congress reenacted the main provisions of the AAA within in the Agricultural Marketing Agreement, which this time survived Constitutional scrutiny. New York State implemented this version of federal dairy policy in 1937, and state milk regulations have changed little since then.⁶⁵

The Rise of the Dairy Farmers Union Movement

In 1937, small, commercial dairy farmers gained new resources and allies, which altered the balance of power in the dairy industry. The most important resource was the Dairy Farmers Union, founded by eight dissatisfied dairy farmers at the Heuvelton (St. Lawrence County) Odd Fellows Hall in the fall of 1936. This Heuvelton farmer recalled

that his father played an active role in Union's birth:

My father had quite a lot to do with getting it started and getting into it. And then [Archie Wright] took it over. Because he was in favor of wanting to get something done, and in the wintertime he had the radio on here and some place out in - some program and it was a cloudy day and it came in good. And it told where he could write and get the papers on getting this union started. . . And my father took these papers and went to a meeting. Of course, he wasn't qualified or educated to be a good talker, so he showed them to Archie Wright and he really got interested in it and thought it could happen. And Dad said, "That's what I got 'em for, so somebody could take over." (History Interview #110)

The DFU, led by President Archie Wright, offered farmers skilled leadership and effective organization. Although Wright was a slight, unassuming fellow of often questionable health, he brought a wealth of experience to the Union. A native of Ogdensburg, he was jailed as a draft resister in World War I, and was an IWW member from 1920-1924. Wright also had experience as a merchant seaman, a reporter for the Springfield (Mass.) Union, and a lawyer's assistant in Ogdensburg.⁶⁶ In the late 1930s, he lived nearby on his family's 39 cow dairy farm.

Wright was an effective leader for a number of reasons. First, he possessed a detailed knowledge of the almost impenetrable rules and regulations of the milk business. As a former DFU organizer remembered:

He was the most knowledgeable person I ever listened to. . . because he knew the milk orders down to every section, subsection and sub-subsection. He was the greatest threat at milk hearings because he was - outside of Frank Lent of the Dairymen's League and the dealer lawyers - he

was the only person that understood the milk orders. His idea wasn't to give them hell, it was to change section 17. (History Interview #111)

In addition, Wright was a prodigious letter writer, corresponding regularly with DFU delegates, state politicians, and others, including Senator Herbert Lehman, Fiorello LaGuardia, Watertown Daily Times Editor Harold B. Johnson, and Vito Marcantonio.⁶⁷

Wright was also skilled in public relations. He wrote, "One of the first things an organization has to do when farmers get ready to strike is to muster all possible public support on the farm side."⁶⁸ He pioneered the use of radio as an organizing tool, giving daily strike updates on WFBL in Syracuse. He paid close attention to public opinion, which was illustrated by the Union's strategy in Clinton County, employed during the 1939 strike. The Union decided not to withhold milk from League plants in Clinton County, because these plants supplied 52,000 soldiers on Army summer maneuvers. In doing so, Wright was careful to avoid the charge that the Union obstructed the war effort. Because of this strategy, the Clinton County DFU Secretary- treasurer could write that, "Public sentiment was largely with the Union throughout the strike."⁶⁹ Wright also made arrangements to distribute free milk to New York orphanages and hospitals during strikes, labeled "Compliments of the DFU."⁷⁰

The Dairy Farmers's Union was an organization of small,

commercial farmers, the main constituency of previous milk strike movements. As a former DFU organizer explained,

Now the farmers that we worked with, you got most of the smaller farmers, 20 cow farms and those were the majority. Those that belonged to the Dairymen's League tended to be anti-union. So you didn't get too many of them, or the larger farmers. (History Interview #111)

Dennis O'Brien, with his 200 cow farm near Ogdensburg, was the largest farmer signed up with the Union; the participation of large farmers like O'Brien in the DFU movement was such a rarity that it warranted mention in the local paper.⁷¹

The Union's headquarters was located in Ogdensburg. The DFU had a president, a secretary-treasurer, and a five member organizing committee, elected by a mail-in vote of the membership.⁷² In 1937, the Union gained a foothold throughout Northern New York as organizers found a receptive audience among discontented dairy farmers. As one farmer explained:

At that time there wasn't that many farmers that were really organized. The Dairymen's League, they were a farm organization, but they were pretty much against [the DFU]. And that didn't sit very good with a lot of the farmers. The farmers had the idea that they produced the milk but had nothing to say about whatever they got for it. And they felt that they should have. (History Interview #110)

In many ways, the Dairy Farmers' Union was similar to past strike movements. Its organizers faced the same dilemma of building a social movement composed of poor, small farmers, whose class position severely limited their

options. In the 1937 Union strike, for example, DFU farmers proposed building their own milk processing plants, but this alternative was nearly impossible given the farmers' lack of resources. The Jefferson County Journal noted the Union's lack of financial resources, calling for wider participation in their effort:

In Canton, the former patrons of Sheffield are selling stock at \$10.00 per share to raise a fund of \$25,000 to be used in the erection of a cheese factory. . . It is also felt if left entirely up to the farmers the chances of raising all of the funds are rather slim, so there is being a general appeal made to the merchants and citizens of the community to subscribe for the stock. (emphasis added)⁷³

The DFU slogan: "Power lies in their milk," acknowledged the class position of small farmers, along with the potential power embodied in their control over milk production. What set the Union movement apart, however, was that sought it harness the farmers' anger and energy in support of a specific, class-based political program. Archie Wright's analysis of the dairy industry was a mixture of Marx and Jefferson, with the Populist Movement thrown in. It began with the "family" or small, independent dairy farmer, who produced milk that was "nothing more nor less than crystallized labor power."⁷⁴ Family farming, according to Wright, was the basis for American democracy because it preserved broad based representation and political participation. In a Union pamphlet, he wrote:

Our government, reflecting small farm, small business ownership was set up as a democracy that

attracted worldwide attention and no small amount of envy.

He continued,

Suppose this situation should change. Suppose all of our rural counties were in one or two, or even ten farms. What would happen to our town meetings and town government? . . . [they] are the backbone of our democratic form of government, both national and state. Fascism, monopoly business dictatorship, is not inevitable as long as these town and county governments can be preserved. The preservation is dependent upon the preservation of family type farming and farm ownership.⁷⁵

In addition to the problem of limited resources, Wright and the Union had to confront the fact that small, commercial farmers were not represented in the dairy industry, nor for that matter in contemporary electoral politics.⁷⁶ In New York, according to Wright, an "interlocking directorate of farm organizations, politicians, publishers, alleged co-ops, and Cornell University" ruled the dairy industry in the interests of the milk dealers. The "directorate" operated on the principle of "The working farmer be damned."⁷⁷ To solve the problems of small farmers, Wright proposed the creation of "a strong, militant Union of enlightened farmers,"⁷⁸ who would use their power over milk production to disrupt the industry and gain concessions. The Union's goals were: to organize all small, commercial dairy farmers (throughout the Northeast) into one unified movement; to construct alternatives to the corporate-dominated structures in the dairy industry; and to form alliances with other "exploited" groups in similar

positions within the political economy, such as organized labor and consumer groups.

The key, for Wright, was an organization that could harness the energy of farmers' discontent. It was important for the Union to wait until after the farmers' anger reached its peak. To call a strike any sooner was unwise because this anger should only be unleashed when it could be used most effectively. He wrote:

Farm organizations don't make a milk strike. A milk strike is something like an earthquake. You can't even set the day. The farmers are the people who make a milk strike.

The Union's role was to have a well-planned organization in place that could translate farmers' grievances into support for the Union's specific, class-based goals. Wright continued:

A milk strike without organization and preparation is just a blind rebellion. Organization puts the milk strike on a business basis. It provides leadership, experience, program . . . Farm organization is work, day in day out, week in week out, To live, you have to think.⁷⁹

To accomplish these goals, Union leaders forged alliances with organized consumer groups in New York City, including the Consumers' Union and the Milk Consumers Protective Committee. The Protective Committee was an association of 15 separate organizations, including The League of Women Shoppers, the Progressive Women's Council, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, that mobilized to protest high milk prices in 1936.⁸⁰ On November 22, 1937,

DFU representatives combined their resources with consumer and labor groups and established the Consumer-Farmer Milk Cooperative, the centerpiece of DFU-consumer efforts. The Consumer-Farmer Co-op was the model for the broadly-participatory structures that might serve as alternatives to the corporate-dominated, government-regulated milk industry.

The Consumer-Farmer Milk Co-op was licensed by New York State on January 19, 1938, in part because of concerted pressure from the organized consumer's movement. "At the hearing for the license held in the fall of 1937, the League of Settlement House Mothers and others filled the Hall of the State Office Building demanding the granting of a license."⁸¹ The Co-op's President was Mayer Parodneck, a Brooklyn attorney later named council to the DFU. The Co-op handled milk with an "all-union policy."⁸² It pasteurized DFU milk from upstate, distributed it in trucks driven by union drivers, and sold it to cooperative members in New York. Dues were 25 cents; members were required to buy \$5 worth of milk a year. At the end of the year each member, who had one vote in the co-op, could claim a dividend by turning in certificates clipped from each quart of milk. Two thirds of the profits went to consumers, one third to farmers.

The DFU-affiliated Chatagway Cooperative Marketing Association delivered the first load of milk to the Co-op on April 1, 1938. Right from the start the Consumer-Farmer Co-

op faced organized resistance in New York, including law suits, stolen tank cars, and retail price cutting. One dealer in Coney Island, for example, was reported to get 30 cases of free milk for every one case of League milk that he sold.⁸³ Total sales for the Co-op in September, 1938 were 206,631 quarts.⁸⁴ By 1943, the Co-op had much greater success, selling 1.3 million quarts a day and returning over \$40,000 in patronage dividends.⁸⁵ That year the Co-op purchased its third milk plant in Belle Mead, New Jersey. In 1957, Meyer Parodneck testified that the Co-op paid premiums and dividends to farmers amounting to over \$600,000 between 1939 and 1955.⁸⁶

In addition to consumers, the Dairy Farmers' Union maintained another important alliance with organized labor. The CIO, for example, pledged to support the Consumer-Farmer Co-op and was instrumental in supporting milk strikes with money and organizers. In the DFU milk 1939 strike, the Transport Workers' Union sent an organizer to assist Archie Wright. Later, the Transport Workers joined with the CIO Retail Clerks Union and the National Maritime Union to picket stores using milk from companies refusing to abide by the strike settlement.⁸⁷

For its part the DFU also supported labor whenever possible. The DFU joined with aluminum and iron workers in Malone and Massena in 1938, creating the Northern Federation of Farmers and Trade Unions.⁸⁸ At its 1940 Convention in

Utica the DFU voted unanimously to support the American Newspaper Guild strike in Monroe, Louisiana, repaying Guild support for the 1939 milk strike. In 1940, "the DFU helped the labor movement win two other important victories in New York State." The first was a strike by restaurant workers in Rochester against an anti-picketing ordinance. The second strike was by New York City taxi drivers (Transport Workers) against the Terminal and Parmelee cab companies.⁸⁹ Various locals of the DFU sent \$228 and donations of food to New York to support the cab drivers.⁹⁰

Government Intervention in the Dairy Industry

As the dairy industry entered 1937 farmers were still plagued by economic crisis. The Depression continued to cripple the national economy - and milk dealers continued to practice price cutting, the prime cause of low milk prices. To industry analysts and farmers, it was evident that the 1934 Milk Control Law had been ineffective in regulating the industry. As the State Legislature's official history recalled, "Prices received by producers varied widely. Some dealers, with a high percentage of milk sold for fluid use, strictly observed the minimum prices and their producers benefitted. Other farmers were not that fortunate."⁹¹ In March, 1937 the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate the Milk Control Law issued its final report, containing a number of recommendations. First, the Committee cited the

problem of "out of state" milk. The Supreme Court, in Baldwin v. Seelig, had ruled that one state could not fix the price of milk coming from another state. This hurt New York farmers, who lost some of their market to unregulated milk. Second, the report concluded that because of widespread price cutting, the Milk Control Law could not be enforced in the metropolitan market. Third, although "The Committee made no recommendations concerning cooperatives," it traced the powerlessness of New York farmers to limited resources and divisions among farmers. The report stated:

One of the most serious problems that have confronted the producers of milk is their failure to get together and co-operate with one another. The limited resources of the individual producer places him at the mercy of a dealer in better financial circumstances especially when there is a large surplus market.⁹²

Following the Committee report the legislature began debate on two bills aimed at promoting cooperation among farmers. The first was the McElroy-Young bill, which had the support of John J. Dillon, as well as many small farmers. This bill would establish a local association of farmers at every milk plant in the state. These organizations would be independent, although together they would be part of a "statewide body known as Milk Producers, Inc, to be composed of farmers and distributors."⁹³ Farmers would benefit because these associations would be operated democratically: farmers would vote on issues at the local level, and each local would send one delegate to the statewide association.

The McElroy-Young bill also required a more open exchange of information. Milk prices were to be "posted 5 days before deliveries are due, along with weight of milk shipped for the following month;" the bill also required that dealer's profit and loss statements be posted in public.⁹⁴

The second bill was called Rogers-Allen, named for the Joint Legislative Committee Chair, Senator George F. Rogers of Rochester, and Assemblyman Howard N. Allen, the Committee's Vice Chair. This bill would establish collective bargaining agencies made up of recognized co-ops and milk dealers. These agencies would negotiate a marketing agreement, or order, to be presented to the Commissioner of Agriculture for approval. The advantage to farmers was their ability, through their bargaining agency, to petition for the Commissioner to hold hearings on a new market order, that would mandate a higher milk price. According to a State Legislature's history of dairy regulations,

The [Rogers-Allen] act was written specifically to provide a means for farmers to obtain a reasonable and stable price for milk by use of the market order device. . . .The Commissioner could not call a hearing without petition from a producer bargaining agency or cooperative.⁹⁵

Even though State officials claimed the Rogers-Allen bill was written for farmers, milk dealers and the New York Conference Board of Farm Organizations, that included the Dairymen's League (DLCA) and the Farm Bureau, supported the bill. The "Ithaca Plan," as the bill was also known (because the faculty at Cornell helped write it), served the dealers'

interests by bringing all farmers under the "universal application" of the classified pricing plan. This would work toward establishing a uniform fluid milk price across the state, which would spread the burden of carrying surplus milk to all farmers. The bill also used state power to end destructive competition. A clause was included "for the benefit of the distribution industry," that restricted entry into the market by limiting new licenses conferred to dealers.⁹⁶

As both bills were debated, critics of the Rogers-Allen bill charged that it would create a system dominated by milk dealers. On May 3, 10 Assembly Democrats voted against the bill following Democratic leader Irwin Steingut's allegation "that its enactment would permit big distributors to fix prices for the producers and consumers."⁹⁷ State Senator Rhoda Fox Graves, whose district included St. Lawrence and Franklin County (home of the DFU), joined Steingut in criticizing Rogers-Allen. Graves called it a "spider web" bill, that "would deliver the milk into the hands of 'a vicious monopoly.'"⁹⁸ The State Legislature finally passed both bills; Governor Lehman signed the Rogers-Allen Act into law on May 18, 1937. In his signing memorandum the Governor cited the support for Rogers-Allen by the Conference Board of Farm Organizations, and he decried McElroy-Young because it did not require mandatory membership in the producer associations. The Governor wrote that he feared a situation

where "a small percentage of producers" could fix a price for milk that the state would be required to enforce."⁹⁹

In the final analysis, the Rogers-Allen Act represented yet another attempt by the dominant powers in the milk industry to rationalize¹⁰⁰ the relations of production and exchange. The bargaining system established by the Rogers-Allen Act tied all producers into one organization controlled by the major co-ops - the League (DLCA) and the Sheffield Producers Associations - that were little more than company unions for the dominant milk dealers. The most important mechanism that allowed these co-ops to control the Producers Bargaining Association was the provision for bloc voting. Under bloc or unit voting, the board of directors of a cooperative, such as the League or the Sheffield Producers' Association, was allowed to vote *for their members as a bloc*. This took the real power of Rogers-Allen, the ability of farmers to petition and vote on new market orders, out of the hands of individual farmers and put it in the hands of the officers that controlled the largest co-ops.

The 1937 Dairy Farmers Union Strike

The Producers and Distributors Bargaining Agencies created under the authority of the Rogers-Allen Act set their first milk price in July, 1937. The Class I price was set at \$2.00 cwt, the blend price at \$1.61 - 18 cents below the average blended price in August, 1933. Only few days

later, Sheffield Farms announced the closing of 12 fluid milk plants in Northern New York. After August 1, the plants would be operated by the Sheffield Condensed Milk Company, paying the corresponding lower prices for Class II or manufacturing grade milk. Both Sheffield Farms and the Sheffield Condensed Milk Company were wholly owned subsidiaries of the National Dairy Products Corporation.¹⁰¹ The actions of the Bargaining Agencies, together with that of Sheffield Farms, set the stage for the first strike called by the Dairy Farmers' Union. DFU locals voted immediately to strike against Sheffield Farms, and to divert Union milk to cheese factories or to Union cream separators. The DFU planned to picket the 12 plants, keeping out the remaining nonunion milk. This strike vote in part represented the Union's test of its growing power in Northern New York. By the summer of 1937, 2,000 of the 2,300 dairy farmers in St Lawrence, Franklin, and Clinton counties, where the 12 Sheffield plants were located, had joined the Union.¹⁰²

The narrowly targeted strike began August 1. It was the chance for Archie Wright to put his theory of a tightly-organized strike movement into practice. According to DFU estimates, the 12 Sheffield plants took in only 5 percent of their normal supply on the first day. The second day they were down to 2 percent; Wright's organizing seemed to have paid off.¹⁰³ The Union demanded an end to individual

contracts, with one settlement covering all 12 facilities. They also demanded an end to the Sheffield Producers' Cooperative Association, which DFU leaders considered a "company union." Their final demand was for a September price of \$2.00 cwt based on milk with 3 percent butterfat.¹⁰⁴ On August 4 Wright announced that telegrams of support had come in from the Milk Consumers Protective Committee and the Consumers Union.¹⁰⁵

The Union Strike Committee supervised general strike affairs and issued daily strike updates. To achieve their goals the DFU leadership employed a variety of tactics. Union milk, for example, was diverted to other uses so that farmers could maintain their incomes. This kept the Canton and Morley cheese factories running day and night throughout the strike.¹⁰⁶ The Union also employed passive resistance. On September 21 DFU farmers and their families used a sit down strike on highways leading to the Sheffield plant in Ellenburg.¹⁰⁷ The sit-down strike was "borrowed" from industrial strikes in the 1930s; the widespread use of strikes in general strengthened the legitimacy of the DFU effort. In 1937 workers in a diverse range of occupations - from grave diggers to movie ushers - used strikes as a form of collective action.

By late August, rising discontent among dairy farmers allowed the DFU strike movement to expand. On August 19 delegates from the Metropolitan Producers' Bargaining

Agency, created by the Rogers-Allen Act, voted to begin a separate strike on September 1. What lay behind the strike vote was dissatisfaction with the new bargaining agencies; members complained that the Rogers-Allen producers' agencies had been in existence for months, with only a ten cent price increase to show for their efforts.¹⁰⁸ The Distributors Bargaining Agency rejected the farmer's demand for \$2.40 milk, but moved to head off a wider strike by offering a 35 cent price increase. After the Board of Directors of the Producers' Agency voted to accept the offer, and "deferred temporarily" the strike threat, many angry farmers began to defect from the "officially-sanctioned" producers' agency. On August 25, the DFU-led strike expanded when 300 farmers in northern Oswego County voted to strike the Sheffield and Borden plants in Lacona and Pulaski.¹⁰⁹

On September 10 the DFU strike spread again, this time with Union organizations in 7 upstate counties voting to strike. As more farmers joined the Union, Wright escalated the Union campaign into a statewide effort against the "Big Three" milk dealers on October 29. The strike had become by this time for the Union a part-boycott and part-organizing campaign. On September 20th, 200 Delhi area farmers (Delaware County) voted to enlist in the DFU strike. The Dolgeville Cooperative Association (Herkimer County) affiliated with the DFU on November 12, followed by the 155 Cape Vincent Cooperative Association farmers (Jefferson

County), who voted to discontinue their association with the Producers' Bargaining Agency.¹¹⁰ By November the Union had swelled to 9,000 members in 17 counties.¹¹¹

The Union issued a new set of demands as it found itself leading a wider movement. The DFU leaders sought recognition as the sole agent of farmers, eliminating the "company controlled unions." The Union also demanded a flat rate of \$2.50 for milk, with all prices announced on the basis of 3 percent butterfat content. Archie Wright announced the demands, stating "This strike is a battle of principle and not of price."¹¹²

Picketing in the 1937 strike was generally nonviolent, but scattered confrontations occurred throughout the 19 county strike area. The largest "clash" was in Heuvelton (St. Lawrence County), where State troopers from as far away as Long Island battled hundreds of farmers picketing the local Dairymen's League plant.¹¹³ Here pickets used a new and effective tactic - throwing balloons filled with kerosene onto trucks loaded with milk cans, in order to contaminate the milk. The Distributors' Bargaining Agency raised milk prices, again, by 28 cents cwt on November 4, but this had little effect in slowing the DFU strike movement. Wright declared the price increase a victory for the strikers, but called it "just another temporary and arbitrary pacifier."¹¹⁴ On November 9, 3,000 Jefferson County farmers gathered at the Starbuck Arena in Watertown,

voting to enroll in the swelling DFU strike movement.

The Union was fighting its battle on a number of fronts. On November 22 DFU representatives met with consumer and labor representatives in New York City to lay the foundation for the Consumer-Farmer Milk Cooperative. One Columbia County Union farmer brought a cow all the way to New York, wearing a sign reading: "I am a union cow, my milk is for babies, not for the milk trust."¹¹⁵

As the Union continued the pressure, the 1937 strike wound down, with the DFU signing contracts or reached an impasse on a plant to plant basis. The Union reached tentative agreements with many independent dealers beginning in November. Dake Brothers, a Saratoga Springs dealer, agreed on November 11 to pay \$2.10 cwt and handle only Union milk.¹¹⁶ At many other plants picketing lasted well into December. At the Northeastern Milk Company plant in Ogdensburg farmers signed an agreement complete with a check-off on November 11, only to see the agreement fall into dispute. They resumed picketing after an 111-1 re-strike vote on November 20. Farmers at the Horton plant in Gouverneur voted in favor of a Union contract - with a check-off - on December 8. At the Massena Dairymen's League plant farmers ended their picketing three days later.¹¹⁷

Federal Intervention: The Milk Market Order System

On the heels of the Dairy Farmers Union's mostly

successful strike in the summer of 1937, federal intervention in the dairy industry the following year created new and formidable obstacles to the Union's efforts to transform the milk industry. In August 1938, the New York State Commissioner of Agriculture and the Secretary of Agriculture reached an agreement placing the New York milkshed under the concurrent jurisdiction of the Rogers-Allen Act and the Agricultural Marketing Agreement of 1937. This meant the Federal government had joined with New York State in enacting a set of political structures that reflected the current state of economic power in the dairy industry. The new Federal Milk Order system was identical to the one defined by the Rogers-Allen Act: the new law organized milk producers and distributors (dealers) into state-sanctioned bargaining agencies, with the power to petition a market administrator for an increase in the milk price. Moreover, the new Federal Order system had the effect of circumscribing future political action within the dairy industry, which was illustrated in the 1939 milk strike, because it established the guidelines for "legitimate" participation in the debate over milk pricing.¹¹⁸

The 1939 Dairy Farmers Union Strike

The Dairy Farmers' Union's success in 1937 translated into a sizable increase in membership. Union member-farmers voted to strike on two occasions in 1938, but put their plans on hold when milk prices were increased. Archie Wright

noted the impact of the Union's threat of disruption:

It is a significant fact that one week the market is demoralized by surplus with no relief in sight. Farmers start to vote strike. The surplus disappears and demoralization ends.¹¹⁹

The issue that fueled farmer's anger in 1938 was the failure of the Rogers-Allen bargaining system. By "August 1938, the price of milk had approached the 1933 level; Dairy Lea members received \$1.19 per cwt net cash for their milk."¹²⁰

So state officials tried again, this time with the help of the federal government. On August 26, 1938 the Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets and the Secretary of Agriculture signed an agreement placing the New York milkshed under the concurrent jurisdiction of the Rogers-Allen Act and the Agricultural Marketing Agreement of 1937. The Market Order system, now under the jurisdiction of Federal Order Number 2 for the New York milkshed, went into effect on September 1; its impact was immediate. "In September, the price [of milk] jumped to \$1.87 under the Order, a 57 percent increase." A separate Order was enacted in the Buffalo market in October, and in Rochester in 1939.¹²¹

Farmers were far from satisfied, however, even with prices stabilized temporarily. In January, 1939 John J. Dillon chaired a hearing of the independent State Milk Committee, where farmers voiced their grievances. Governor Lehman and Commissioner [of Agriculture] Noyes attended, along with 600 representatives of farmer and consumer

groups. Criticism of the market order system was a recurring theme. Farmers complained that the order system institutionalized the status quo in the industry, giving an unfair advantage to the dealers and the League - and shutting out independent farmers. William Berghold (Dillon's son-in-law) expressed "the general opinion of the meeting" when he characterized the state and federal laws as "dealer-devised, dealer written and dealer sponsored." Dillon called for "strong legislation" that would replace the orders altogether.¹²²

Dillon did not have long to wait. On February 23 U.S. District Court Judge Frank Cooper struck down the federal marketing order, declaring it unconstitutional. The Judge ruled that the law illegally confiscated money from some co-ops, while discriminated in favor of the Dairymen's League and dominant dealers. The Judge's decision was noteworthy because it substantiated many of the criticisms put forth by Dillon and the DFU. The League (DLCA) and Sheffield Producers Cooperative Association said the Judge, "exercised an important if not the dominating influence over the activity of the Bargaining Agency." Their influence, he wrote, could be traced to the original referendum initiating the order, where "a favorable vote [was] obtained or influenced by misinformation as to the terms and effects of the order." The Judge cited a Department of Agriculture pamphlet as an example of the disinformation. The pamphlet

contained a "misleading statement in the Department's published statement of August 1938, taken verbatim from the Dairymen's League News of August 16, 1938." Judge Cooper concluded, "Had this order been prepared by and for the Dairymen's League and other large cooperatives, it could hardly have been more favorable to them."¹²³

Cooper's decision prompted yet another crisis in the dairy industry. Faced with the loss of government protection the Producers Bargaining Agency threatened to strike on February 26, in order to prevent price cutting by milk dealers.¹²⁴ The Agency's threat, however, had little effect. From March until July, when the Secretary of Agriculture reinstated the Order (following a Supreme Court reversal), milk dealers "joyfully slashed" prices and "dairymen once more found their monthly checks shriveling."¹²⁵

What was the effect on farmers? The average price decline between February and April, between 1933 and 1938, was 24 cents. In 1939 the milk price dropped 69 cents between February and April.¹²⁶ Moreover, this price slide occurred at a very bad time for farmers. In July and August, a severe drought hit New York, forcing farmers to reduce their feed to almost winter ration levels. As they watched their pastures and wells go dry, farmers feared the coming winter, when increased feed costs might drive them out of business. The market price of a pound of butter hit 24 cents in July, the lowest since 1932.¹²⁷ Even when the Order was

reinstated, this did little to ease tensions in the milk producing region. E. M. Harmon, Market Administrator, announced a new Class I price of \$2.25 cwt in July, but this meant the blend price was only \$1.50 per hundred pounds of milk, far below what farmers needed to make up for the drought.¹²⁸

Farmers were angry - yet this time the DFU was in place to give them an outlet for their anger. In early August across Northern New York DFU locals met to discuss the drought and to consider solutions. A group of 200 farmers met in Canton on August 3, voting to demand a blend price of \$2.35, by way of a strike, if necessary. The same day 200 DFU members voted in LaFargeville, joined by "a large number of LaFargeville businessmen" ready to support a strike. Another 35 farmers voted to strike at a meeting in Lowville.¹²⁹ The following day the Tritown DFU local (Philadelphia, Antwerp, Evans Mills) voted to strike.¹³⁰ On August 10 the call for a strike reached a crescendo when 600 DFU farmers in Canton voted to strike "without a voice of protest," and 1,000 farmers voted with the same result in the South Jr. High Auditorium in Watertown.¹³¹

At a special convention in Utica on August 12 Union representatives made it official - the 14,962 members of the DFU would begin picketing and withholding milk in three days. The "principle demand" was for \$2.35 for 3.5 percent milk for August, September, and October. Other demands

included a check-off provision, the end of "unpriced milk," and the termination of market service or "bribery" payments to certain co-ops.¹³² The battle lines were drawn when Lawrence Clough, spokesman for the New York Agriculture Department, announced that the State Milk Control Division would assist dealers whose plants might be tied up by strikers.¹³³ As with previous strikes, the opposing forces in this conflict were patterned by the political and production relations in the milk industry. On one side stood the small farmers of the DFU, along with many farmers that defected from the dominant coops, and sympathetic rural editors and politicians. Opposed to the Union were the milk dealers, the directors of the League and Sheffield co-ops, large, commercial farmers, the Producers Bargaining Agency leaders, and such institutions as the New York Times and the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

Representatives of the dealers and state officials called the strike a failure on its first day. New York State Health Commissioner John L. Rice called the strike "insignificant." Henry Rathbun, Vice-President of the League, declared that the League was short only 2 percent of their normal deliveries; he cited the cause as "threats, intimidation and fear of CIO brutality." Charles Baldwin, Executive Secretary of the Producers Bargaining Agency, used the favored tactic of strike opponents - red-baiting. Baldwin claimed farm families "are guarding homes tonight in

fear of armed invaders. The Dairy Farmers Union is an out and out CIO Communist movement." He continued, the CIO "is sending 700 pickets from automotive industrial centers into the country to help close milk plants and rule the highways."¹³⁴ The Watertown Times on the other hand estimated that the strike was 30 percent effective on the first day.¹³⁵

On day two the DFU strike gained momentum, as it would on each succeeding day. The strike spread into Pennsylvania on August 16, where a truck driven by a strike opponent killed Union farmer Paul Hicks in the town of Sayre. By August 17, the effects of the strike reached New York City, where the milk supply was 37 percent below normal.¹³⁶ On the 18th the holdout Boonville Brotherhood of Dairymen, led by the Rev. Thomas F. McNeill, joined the DFU strike.¹³⁷ By now it was clear the strike was having a considerable effect. Sizable crowds gathered on picket lines across the state, many milk plants were dry, and some large commercial, or "prominent" farmers were having considerable problems delivering their milk. In Adams, for example, 1,500 people watched as the "loads of four prominent farmers was taken in [to the plant] under guard of troopers." Everett Eastman, "operating one of the largest farms in the section" was reported to have been attacked and beaten.¹³⁸ The Watertown Times noted with approval that:

The Farmers Union, to whose support countless farmers have rallied in the withholding campaign,

today held the unique position of being in control of a majority of the farmers' milk in the state. .

¹³⁹

In response, Governor Lehman ordered all available Troopers on duty. In addition, he sent a letter to the District Attorneys in 14 counties, reminding them that Grand Juries could be called "to deal with persons guilty of breach of the peace."¹⁴⁰

The large crowds that turned out in small towns across New York signaled the harsh economic conditions and the depths of support for the Dairy Farmers' Union. There were numerous spectators crowded into small towns like Hammond and Adams, but many - such as the aluminum workers that joined picket lines in Massena¹⁴¹ - were willing participants in the Union movement. The increased participation of farmers signaled the rising prominence of the Dairy Farmers Union as a class-based social movement; among small farmers in particular, the Union was increasingly able to redefine the conflicts in the milk business along class lines. This point is illustrated by the participation of Dairymen's League and Sheffield Farms Producers' Association members in the strike - farmers that went against the express wishes of the Co-op's leadership and dumped their milk. When asked to estimate the extent of League defections in 1939, a DFU organizer answered,

I would say probably more than half. The membership was for the strike, the leadership wasn't. And after that [the League] became better organized to prevent strikes. (Hist. Int. #111)

Some League and Sheffield farmers worked around their contractual obligations by "arranging" to have their milk dumped. In this way they participated in the strike while maintaining their public opposition to the Union. The important point is that they were *acting* collectively as members of a class of small, commercial dairy farmers. As one Union farmer recalled:

Now we were in Remsen, we were there on a picket line and the Troopers were there by us to make sure that nobody got hurt, and a fellow comes around with a car and he comes up and he says, "Who is the leader here?" Well, we haven't got no leaders. we all stick together. And he says, "I haul milk with my truck and I'm under contract. But you come here at 8:30, go up on that hill around that curve over there and stop me. And spill my milk." *In other words, he was on our side.* But he was under contract and there was nothing that he could do. He had to haul the milk. (emphasis added) (History Interview #102)

Women pickets were another group that were essential to the Union effort. While women had always played an important role in farm strikes, the 1939 strike marked the first large-scale picketing by women in a milk strike. On August 15 women filled picket lines at Burdicks Crossing (Lewis County). The next day, 100 men and women worked to make sure the Borden plant in Gouverneur was completely dry. As more women got involved the local press began to take notice. The Ogdensburg Journal, reporting on riots in Hammond and Heuvelton, noted that:

Women seemed to be just as active as the men here, as they were in Hammond and more than one officer's face turned crimson at the remarks tossed their way by the fairer sex.¹⁴²

Yet women did more than talk. In many instances, they were more effective than men in keeping milk out of the plants.

The Jefferson County Journal reported,

In the Adams area the strike has been very active right from the first day and much of the credit for its success locally is due the women who have been credited with turning back more milk than the men.¹⁴³

A possible break in the strike was made possible by DFU allies on August 18. New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia invited representatives of the Union, the dealers, and other important organizations to a conference in New York that would begin on August 21. LaGuardia claimed that he was acting because of the public health threat caused by the milk shortage, but he was also under pressure from the consumer's movement in New York.¹⁴⁴ In the meantime, Governor Lehman stepped up the use of state power: he ordered all available troopers into the strike area to escort convoys of milk trucks, a move that was hailed by the dealers.¹⁴⁵ Lehman's actions, however, were not well received in upstate New York. To the Boonville Herald editors, the Governor's actions stirred painful memories of the 1933 strike, as well as his family's role in the milk business:

When an executive sitting on a swivel chair up the river lawfully employs armed force of the state to protect life and property, and likewise the flow of steady financial income to a banking firm controlled by his own brothers; and when at the same time these same armed forces of the state are enjoined on behalf of the oppressor against the oppressed, you are sitting in on a game, my farmer

friend, where the dice are loaded against you.¹⁴⁶

In the days leading up to LaGuardia's conference, the DFU worked to tighten their blockade. This produced the largest confrontations yet seen in the strike. In Camden (Oneida County), five farmers were shot and seriously wounded trying to dump the milk of non-strikers.¹⁴⁷ One of the wounded farmers recalled the Union's attempt to close any remaining plants:

It didn't take us long to close the milk plant here in Boonville. Or Lyons Falls, Remsen, Holland Patent. Then we got word that they can't stop the milk in Camden, and a milk strike isn't complete unless you stop a lot of milk. So a whole bunch of us went down to Camden. And they come through with trucks. . . We stopped a few trucks and dumped their milk and so on, arguments and hollering and yelling. Then one stake rack comes through with two guys in the back with shotguns. Well, we stopped them but when we started to dump their milk they started shooting.

He continued,

I've still got [buckshot] in my body. That's what kept me out of the service. I got it in my lungs. They took a lot of them out of me here. The only thing that prevented by privates [from being shot off], I had my brothers folding Kodak camera, that caught 12 of them. (History Interview #102)

In St. Lawrence County, the DFU stronghold, large crowds watched farmers battle with steel-helmeted police in Heuvelton and Hammond, on the day the milk strike conference opened in New York City. Deputies shot another farmer outside the Sheffield plant in Heuvelton, where a crowd of 500 assembled around the Sheffield and League plants.¹⁴⁸ One Union farmer who claimed he was there remembered,

. . .along towards the start of it everybody went to Heuvelton in the evening, there was a Sheffield plant there, to see that and watch what was going on there. . .It was just like going to the fair down there, people around visiting. (History Interview #110)

In nearby Hammond, 2,000 spectators saw a large clash between farmers and police in which farmers broke windows, overturned cars, and threw kerosene on trucks loaded with milk cans. When the police forced the pickets to retreat, the farmers still were able to prevent the milk train from departing for New York - they had greased the rails during the night.¹⁴⁹

Following a marathon bargaining session lasting well into the morning of August 22, the DFU and the dealers reached a tentative agreement. Archie Wright refused to sign, however, until he presented the accord to the membership for ratification. The following day, a special Union convention endorsed the pact 166-18, officially ending one of the most successful strikes in state history.¹⁵⁰ The terms of the agreement reflected many of the Union's demands. In terms of price, for example, from August 25 to October 31, the Class I (fluid) price would rise by 35 cents to \$2.60, and the Class II (manufactured products, such as cheese, etc.) price would rise by 30 cents to \$1.90. This meant a blend (average) price of \$2.15, although this was not explicit in the agreement.¹⁵¹

Farmers, editors, and merchants hailed the agreement across upstate New York. The Watertown Times cited "the

overwhelming public support which the farmers received in their strike," as a significant factor in the victory, and added:

. . .The Dairy Farmers' Union emerges on top. In few short years it has become the dominant organization throughout the entire milkshed. And why should this not be so? The union was formed as an organization of producers for the benefit of producers.¹⁵²

Celebrations across Northern New York marked the Union's victory. On August 23, residents and merchants in Potsdam staged a celebration for farmers. On the 26th, 5,000 people in Dexter watched firemen join hands with farmers at the annual firemen's parade. A crowd of 900 held a mock funeral for the Dairymen's League and the Milk Monopoly in Canton, two days later. The crowds numbers 400 in Malone and 2,500 in Evans Mills. On August 29, 1,000 people attended a victory parade at the firemen's festival in LaFargeville.¹⁵³ The largest rally was in Watertown on September 30, where Archie Wright, Earl Latham, Jefferson County DFU chair, and Harold Johnson, editor of the Watertown Daily Times, attended a rally for farmers from Jefferson, St. Lawrence and Lewis Counties. The crowd listened as Congressman Francis Culkin from Oswego accused Governor Lehman of "indifference to dairymen's needs," and called for the abolition of the bargaining agencies and the "milk trust."¹⁵⁴

Class Position and the Limits of Popular Participation

Within two years of the 1939 strike, however, the DFU stood in ruin. Its membership was hopelessly divided over the question of Communists in their ranks; most of the gains of the 1939 strike had proven illusory. The demise of the Union serves to illustrate both the unique and innovative, class-based Union strategy, which provoked an intense counterattack from its opponents, and the limits of popular participation by people of limited resources and alliances. Although Wright and the Union made the most of the limited resources of their main constituency, they ultimately could not prevail. In the short term, the Union did benefit farmers by raising milk prices, and giving them a new-found sense of power. As a DFU opponent said later, "It was only a miracle that the Dairy Farmers' Union didn't take over complete control of the New York Milk Shed."¹⁵⁵ For DFU members, the strike meant much more than a few extra dollars a month. In the words of the DFU Journal, "The principal benefit of the strike lay in the realization which producers gained of their own power."¹⁵⁶ This Union farmer, for example, recounted the 1939 strike victory in terms of his newfound control over the workday. After the strike, he recalled that the milk company no longer set deadlines on milk deliveries:

But the one thing I always said [the strike] did, even if it hadn't raised the price of milk, it got it so we could take our milk through the day, not exactly at 9 o'clock. Because I've been down there

more than once when you were taking in a lot of milk and set and the plant would open - you'd go there and sit and wait - to get unloaded. And if you wasn't there early enough, come 9 o'clock they'd shut the door. I remember twice that I went back and set the milk back on the truck and brought it home. (History Interview #110)

Over the long term, however, the decline of the DFU, as with earlier milk strikes, can be traced to the class position of its main constituency. First, small, dairy farmers were politically isolated, which meant their disruptive power could not be translated into lasting political gains. DFU members had the support of a few local politicians, but they were generally excluded from GOP-dominated local and state politics. Such politics were more the domain of large, commercial farmers, who in many cases held local and state office. As a 1939 editorial in The Dairy Farmer explained, there had always been a "certain class among farmers bitterly opposed to the [Dairy Farmers'] Union," that included "professional, 'prominent local dairymen,' who were also town supervisors, town clerks, justices and League officials."¹⁵⁷ Further, the DFU was not part of the officially sanctioned bargaining structure created by federal intervention in the dairy industry (the Market Order System), which undercut the legitimacy of Union actions.

Second, the Union's opponents, such as the milk dealers, had access to far greater resources. First, by petitioning the State Department of Health (for relaxed

sanitary standards), they had the ability to extend the milkshed and bring in out of state milk to "break" a strike. Second, they had the support of influential media. Third, they were backed up by the coercive powers of the state. Last, and perhaps most importantly, they possessed greater financial assets.

All of these resources were brought to bear in, or immediately after, the 1939 strike. During the strike, the main tactic of Union foes was to question the motives of the DFU and its allies. After the strike, with the threat of disruption removed, milk dealers launched a well-financed counterattack against the Union.¹⁵⁸ The first part was a Red-baiting campaign, aimed at discrediting Wright and dividing the DFU. League officers, joined by influential publications such as the Dairymen's League News and Gannett's American Agriculturalist, charged that the DFU was dominated by either Communists or the CIO. Many of the charges mentioned Wright specifically, in part because of his background as an IWW member and draft resister. New publications also carried the charges. As Dyson noted, "Mimeographed letters, signed by Robert Eastman, a frequent contributor to the American Agriculturalist, came from Ithaca bearing the title 'The Red Line from Moscow.'" The Dairy Farmers' Digest was another well-funded example, which was a new publication sent to almost every farmer in the state, unsolicited and free of charge. V. R. Tompkins,

former editor of the Producers Bargaining Agency journal, published the Digest, whose purpose was to fight "Communitistic and CIO activities." Not surprisingly, the Digest's favorite target was the DFU. It was alleged that money for the Digest came from the Producers Bargaining Agency and the League, who bought out Tompkins when he retired in 1949.¹⁵⁹

Next, the dealers chose to simply ignore the terms of the 1939 strike settlement, forcing the Union into a lengthy (and expensive) court battle. Some dealers refused to acknowledge the agreement; others argued it did not apply to them. When Market Administrator Harmon announced the price for September, 1939, the dealers claimed they had used less fluid milk than anticipated, and the price was set at \$2.085 - 6 and one half cents less than the DFU expected.¹⁶⁰ Wright and the Union immediately criticized the dealers' actions, but Wright faced the difficult decision of calling another strike or fighting back in the press and in the courts. He reluctantly chose the latter course. Wright's criticisms were seconded by Mayor LaGuardia, who blasted the dealers for going back on his agreement. The Mayor, who had originally threatened to use his police power to enforce the agreement, declared,

This is not only disappointing and shocking but it is chiseling in the very lowest sense of that contemptible word. . . We are not going to stand for any milk company politics or shenanigan in this manner.¹⁶¹

The dispute lasted for a year, before the dealers surrendered in the face of a DFU boycott, CIO picketing, and continued pressure from LaGuardia. In 1940, the dealers paid DFU farmers the sum of \$91,090.25 to replace the missing \$.065 cents.

Powerful allies in the business community supported the counterattack by the dominant milk dealers and cooperatives. One such ally was Frank Gannett; publications owned by Gannett, such as the American Agriculturalist, charged the DFU with being dominated by the Communist party, the CIO, or both. On August 24, only one day after the Union vote to end the strike, Gannett was already writing to condemn the DFU for its connections to the CIO, and to lament the breakdown of law enforcement during the strike. By September 1, the Watertown Daily Times had identified a "campaign to minimize the strike victory," launched by "anti-Dairy Farmers' Union groups."¹⁶²

Union opponents also had important allies in Washington. There, the attacks on the Union were aided by conservatives in Congress, who launched investigations of consumer and labor organizations. In December, 1939, the House Committee on Un-American Activities, chaired by Texas Democrat Martin Dies, turned its attention to the milk industry. The Dies Committee at times had an element of absurdity - one witness spoke of subversion in the Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls, for example - yet these

allegations raised serious concerns for farmers. Dies charged that the Consumer-Farmer Milk Cooperative, the Consumers Union, and the Milk Consumers Protective Committee, were "Communist or Communist controlled."¹⁶³

As McAdam has pointed out, a movement's chances of success are ultimately dependent on the response it provokes, in what he called "the reciprocal relationship that exists between the movement and its external environment."¹⁶⁴ Nowhere was this more true than of the 1939 milk strike. In the end, the crucial weakness of small, dairy farmers was inherent in their class position. Their opponents, with whom they were inextricably linked in the structures of the dairy industry, had the resources and allies necessary to, as Schattschneider put it,¹⁶⁵ expand the scope of conflict, to a level where their resources could be applied most effectively. Schwartz defined this as escalation, meaning the introduction of new adversaries into the conflict between an insurgent movement and its "parent" structure.¹⁶⁶

The political attacks on the DFU, in particular, had the effect of redefining the basic conflict in the milk strike. Redbaiting transformed the strike from a conflict over the control of farmers' livelihood to one of CIO or Communist influences in dairy politics. Union opponents could then tap into the currents of anti-semitism, nativism, and patriotism that flowed throughout rural New York, in the

process destroying class-based alliances cultivated by the DFU. The immediate result was that insurgent farmers began to doubt their own organizations and leaders.

Archie Wright's response to the red-baiting was to claim that he was not a Communist, and to point out what he believed to be the real purpose behind the red-scare. As the attacks wore on, he wrote:

There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that the attack on Communists was designed in great part to bring about the destruction of all trade unions and farmer organizations or to scare those organizations from protection of their people, and in this the campaign has been quite successful. Most people's organizations are now much more interested in proving that they are not Communists, by chasing Communists all over the lot, than they are in protecting the interests of their own people.¹⁶⁷

Much as Wright described, the accusations continued, and drove a wedge within the Union. The attacks also exacted a toll on Wright personally. In June 1940, he resigned because of ill-health, and was given a leave of absence by the Executive Committee. Wright returned two months later to regain his position, with popular support, at the Union general convention. Here, he worked to forestall a resolution stating that the Union had no connections to the Communist Party. From Wright's perspective, the resolution deflected the Union from more important business; it symptomatic of the negative effects of the red-scare. The fact that this issue was raised at all, however, signaled the trouble brewing within the membership.

In October 1940, the Union, now 22,000 strong, voted to strike because of a low Federal order price. The strike was postponed, however, pending the outcome of a hearing held to discuss the milk order. Fiorello LaGuardia again played peacemaker, flying to Utica to address the DFU convention in person. LaGuardia pledged his aid if there was no strike. He persuaded Union representatives to vote 103-72 against a boycott, and received a large ovation from the DFU members. One delegate shouted "You must be a farmer too."¹⁶⁸

Unfortunately for the Union, the accusations of Communist conspiracies would not go away. In November, Wright filed suit against DFU Executive Committee members Frank Brill and Sam Schou for calling him a Communist. In December, 1940, he forced a confrontation at the Union convention, over a letter signed by 51 members who had accused him of Communist sympathies, and who had worked against his reelection. At the meeting, Wright spoke for two hours with great emotion, advocating that the delegates expel his enemies. When the convention refused, by a vote of 118-52, to expel the 51 delegates, Wright quietly walked back to the microphone and resigned. The Union Secretary later wrote that Wright could have gotten a vote of confidence from the Union, in spite of losing the expulsion vote.¹⁶⁹ But for Archie Wright, the convention fight itself signaled that it was too late. The red-scare attacks leveled by the milk dealers had irreparably split the Union.

In the wake of Wright's resignation, pro-Wright factions among the various DFU locals demanded his reinstatement. Further, some DFU members called on the signers of the "Open Letter" to surrender their delegate cards. At a few meetings, violence broke out between pro and anti-Wright forces during Union elections. At the Montgomery County meeting, John Matis, 69, suffered a "two and one half inch gash" to his head, as an anti-Wright slate was elected amid fist fights.¹⁷⁰ When the DFU General Organizing Committee removed a dissident group of St. Lawrence County farmers in April 1941, a pro-Wright faction of 2,000 farmers broke away. The dissidents joined Wright on May 12 in forming a separate organization - the Farmers Union of the New York Milk Shed (FUNY).

The 1941 Dairy Farmers Union Strike

As the Union was beset with internal conflict, the larger struggle with the milk dealers remained. Shortly after the formation of the FUNY, an 8 week drought, together with a tight labor market caused by the preparations for war raised tensions in the milkshed. A 20 cent Class I price increase announced by Market Administrator N. J. Cladakis on May 24 did little to pacify farmers. As one upstate farmer pointed out in a letter to the New York Times, the increase translated into only 8 cents more per hundredweight at the farm gate.¹⁷¹ Also in May an indictment of Bordens and Sheffield Farms for price fixing served to fuel farmers'

indignation. Mayor LaGuardia reacted to the charges by stating, "The fact that Borden's and Sheffield have been fixing prices is not news."¹⁷²

The farmers' anger came out in meetings held in the milk producing region. In St. Lawrence County, where the drought was the worst in history, the meetings were the largest since 1939. Encouraged by the news of a successful strike in Flint, Michigan, by the United Dairy Farmers, 28 DFU County Chairmen voted unanimously on June 27 to declare a "holiday" starting July 1.

The DFU strike was successful at the start. Farmers' spirits were buoyed when dairy farmer Owen D. Young, former Chairman of the General Electric Corporation, joined the strike. By July 4, 120 out of 480 milk plants in the state were completely dry. And, when 200 locals of the Dairymen's League voted to strike, this raised the possibility that 86 percent of the state's dairy farmers might soon be on the picket lines.¹⁷³ The DFU, however, quickly ran into adversity. On July 6, the leadership of the Dairymen's League prevailed in keeping the membership out of the strike. Although 20 percent of League farmers eventually joined, the League officers were successful in persuading League members not to strike. Leon Chapin, Secretary of the DLCA, expressed the leadership's view when he said,

Dairymen's League members preferred, and still do prefer, to solve their problems through the ordinary process and under the machinery set up by the state and federal government for that

purpose.¹⁷⁴

The League's official opposition was a blow to the Union leadership, who were under increasing pressure from the dealers, the Governor, and the press to work - as the League leadership advocated - within the "orderly procedures" of the officially-sanctioned Market Order system.

By 1941, the milk dealers had developed a familiar strategy for fighting milk strikes. The first (and oldest) tactic was to enlarge the milkshed and bring in milk from other states. In 1939, for example, dealers had shipped in cream from as far away as Michigan. Second, dealers temporarily abandoned their competitive relations and pooled their resources. In 1941, the Distributors Bargaining Agency met daily at the Hotel New Yorker, where they worked on "allotting a considerable quantity of its milk to small local dealers whose supply has been cut short."¹⁷⁵ Third, the dealers tried to undercut public support for farmers. In 1933 and 1939, Communism had been the dealers' bogeyman. In 1941, they framed the conflict in terms of the war effort. Joseph O. Eastlack, Vice President of Borden's Farm Products Division, evoked the powerful issue of the war preparation when he disparaged the strike's impact on Army food orders.¹⁷⁶

The Union leadership was under pressure to attend a conference called by Owen D. Young to mediate the strike. Young in many respects had taken over leadership of the

strike. On July 5, League President Fred Sexauer and Union President Holland Foster joined other dairy leaders at Young's farm to plan strategy. The one group not represented was the FUNY, who cooperated in the strike but played no major role. Archie Wright for his part attacked DFU leaders for their attacks on LaGuardia; he also claimed to have no confidence in Owen D. Young.¹⁷⁷

On July 9, the DFU County Chairmen voted to adjourn the strike, following Young's plan to petition for higher prices. At this point the Union leadership was divided. Some farmers openly questioned Young's proposal to work within the bargaining system. This Union farmer, a Wright supporter, traced the Union's failure to the leadership's trust in Young:

But the stipulation was that once Owen D. Young went into the meeting room, he's got to send his milk on the market. Follow me? And that ended the strike right there. . . [he] got us into trouble over there, see? [The Union leaders] made a stipulation that they shouldn't have. (History Interview #102)

More importantly, there were obvious differences between the strike settlements in 1941 and 1939. First, the Union missed Archie Wright's skills at handling the media. Foster and others handled the strike effectively, but they were not nearly as skilled in handling the public relations or negotiations. Second, the new leadership was not as careful as Wright when it came to organizing public support. Upstate New York papers, for example, questioned the timing

of a strike when prices were rising due to the defense buildup. By not effectively answering these charges, the DFU leaders handed their opponents vital ammunition in the propaganda war.

The Demise of the Dairy Farmers' Union

In February, 1942, the DFU announced it was affiliating with John L. Lewis and the United Mine Workers.¹⁷⁸ The DFU became the United Dairy Farmers, District 50 of the Chemical and Coke Producers Division. The connection to Lewis's union was imaginative - the farmers joined the cosmetics division because casein, a milk by-product, was used in the manufacturing of make-up - but the alliance was of little practical significance for farmers. Lewis and the UMW devoted few resources to organizing dairy farmers, and the creation of yet another organization in the dairy industry further divided farmers. The UDF came under attack from the left - by Wright and the FUNY - and the right - by a new organization called Free Farmers, Inc. As Dyson pointed out, "[John L.] Lewis frightened the established powers even more than Wright had done."¹⁷⁹ In April, 1942, the League, the Farm Bureau, and the Grange poured money into establishing Free Farmers, Inc., creating a New York equivalent of the notorious, far-right Associated Farmers of California. Free Farmers, Inc. offered farmers free fire insurance; its leadership spread lurid tales of UDF terror and arson campaigns in the countryside.¹⁸⁰

The alliance with Lewis proved a fatal one for the Dairy Farmers' Union. Within a few years the Union had declined in influence and faded into obscurity. Some of its members joined Wright and the FUNY, revitalized during the war by an influx of cash, and an alliance with the liberal National Farmers' Union. In January, 1944, the FUNY became the Northeastern Division of the NFU.¹⁸¹ There were many advantages in the alliance for Wright's organization. First, it gave New York dairy farmers a greater collective voice in Washington. Second, the alliance was a practical one, given the smaller membership - around 5,000 - of the FUNY. With the support of the NFU, for example, farmers in other states could stop the flow of interstate milk in the event of a strike. In addition, the NFU was the farm organization closest to Wright and the FUNY politically. The leadership of both groups were on the left, with a constituency of small, commercial farmers. Third, the FUNY took advantage of NFU programs offering incentives to members, such as hospitalization, which the NED offered its members in March, 1949.¹⁸²

Postscript: Milk Strikes in the Post-war Era

By the end of the war, Wright and his followers were optimistic. The New Deal farm policies, together with war production, had raised the income of small, commercial farmers. With a return to peacetime production, Wright

looked forward to an end to the Red Scare and a chance to increase the FUNY's membership. A continued and expanded version of the red-scare, however, haunted Wright and the Union. In 1946, Wright received the bad news that his suit against the Farm Journal, for a 1944 article naming him the leading Communist in the NFU, had been decided against him. The jury ruled that calling someone a Communist was not libel.¹⁸³ In 1948 Wright's support for Henry Wallace and his criticism of the Marshall Plan, the draft, and universal military training brought renewed attacks, this time from old allies. On April 7, the Jefferson County unit of the NED, the second largest, withdrew its membership over Wright's foreign policy critiques. The Watertown Daily Times was next, prompting Wright to inform NED delegates that Times Editor Harold B. Johnson, a long time DFU supporter, had shifted to "the Wall Street line."¹⁸⁴ As late as 1956 Wright was still being called to testify before Senator James O. Eastland's Internal Security Committee, investigating "alleged Communist influences in agriculture."¹⁸⁵ In 1951, the NED broke with the NFU, again becoming the independent Farmers Union of the New York Milkshed.

Within the context of rapidly changing post-war agriculture, structural changes posed the next set of challenges for Wright and the remnants of the FUNY. In the post-war period, government policies facing lower price

support levels, together with rapid technological change, propelled a extensive restructuring of American agriculture. Farms in general became larger, more productive, and technologically sophisticated; in New York this translated in a steep decline in the number of small farms.^c

The post-war restructuring of agriculture posed immediate problems for a class-based movement like the FUNY because it altered the political and economic relations of dairy farming. As small farmers were forced out by lower price support levels, this eliminated the main constituency of groups such as the FUNY. Fewer small, commercial farmers also meant the Union lost electoral power, especially on the local level. Second, the restructuring placed insurgent small farmers in conflict with the increasing number of large farmers who were oriented toward expansion and the increased use of technology. The new production relations gave large, commercial farmers the leading role in milk production, with close political support from industry, government, and institutions such as Cornell University. Moreover, the new production relations emphasized farming as a business, driving a wedge between farmers and organized labor.

In practical political terms, the restructuring of agriculture made organizing and striking more difficult. The

^cThe structure of contemporary dairy farming in New York State is explored in detail in Chapter 5.

introduction of new technologies made life easier for farmers, but they destroyed the social networks that fostered solidarity and kept farmers informed. As farmers bought their own equipment, for example, they cooperated less with their neighbors. As this former Union farmer explained,

And the farmers? Now their independent. When we were on the farm hauling milk with a horse, sometimes my father would stop to the neighbors and say, "Hi, John, how are you." And so on. Then the farmer got a truck and he's a little better than I am and I don't like that. And instead of stopping in front of my place to talk, its just honk, honk, and he'll go. Now I figure, wait a minute. If he can afford a truck, maybe I can. Now we lost contact, you're an individual. (History Int. #102)

Another important change occurred when individual farmers stopped purchasing supplies from local merchants, ending their daily trips to town. As many retired small farmers pointed out in recalling the 1930s milk strikes, institutions such as the feed store were a great source of information and solidarity. But as this farmer pointed out,

Where today? You go into the feed store and I don't know anybody at the feed store. And nobody goes to the feed store anymore. The feed all comes in bulk. (History Interview #106)

The introduction of bulk milk tanks and milk tank trucks provides another example of technological change that altered political relations. When farmers no longer delivered milk to a single collection point, either the railroad line or the milk plant, this made the disruption of the market much more difficult. As this former Union farmer

explained:

. . .the idea of [a strike] is when you stop the milk you don't only stop it going to New York City, but you stop it locally. And [the local milk companies] got their own trucks that go pick it up. **So you can't picket the plant anymore because the truck goes right to the farm.** Your farm, my farm. And you can't be all over. Before it was a little simpler because you had one collecting point. Today, the only way it could be is the farmers got to be unionized and then the truck driver's union will stay with you. (emphasis added) (History Interview #102)

In 1956, Archie Wright made a similar point in a letter to Union delegates. Discussing a proposal for a strike by the remaining Union farmers scattered across upstate New York, he wrote:

A milk strike here has to cover 90,000 square miles. It won't be centered around factory gates or a building, where a determined minority can tie up the works and get results.¹⁸⁶

The 1957 Milk Strikes

The 1957 milk strike illustrated the cumulative effects of the restructuring of agriculture and the continued McCarthy-era political repression on the FUNY. In the late 1950s, an attack on price supports by agribusiness again spawned dairy farmer discontent and talk of milk strikes. The blend price in New York fell for five straight years, from \$4.64 in 1952 to \$3.63 in 1956.¹⁸⁷ Many farmers were in a situation like that of Mrs. John M. Cole, who wrote the Union in 1954:

Unless you are prepared to take some drastic action in the very near future in favor of the farmers, you may as well cancel our membership and refund the yearly dues. Today our milk check came,

the immense sum of \$90 for 15 days work. Out of that we have a tractor payment of \$56, a light bill of \$40, and a phone bill of \$10, besides other payments. Strange as it may seem, we also have to eat. There are seven of us, five of them children and all are badly in need of clothes. Part of the time we don't even have enough to eat. This may seem strange to you but we can't eat hay, neither can we live on milk. We all work from morning until night for the barest subsistence. I, myself, milk 28 head of cattle with a ten year old boy to help me so the rest can draw in hay. And a six year old child has to care for a year old baby. And they say child labor has been abolished. I am not in favor of strikes but certainly something must be done.

In his reply, Archie Wright cited a lack of public support as the reason a strike would be ill-advised. He added,

Your letter is very well written. . . These are hard conditions which dictate Union policy and from which there is no escape for any of us.¹⁸⁸

In February, 1957, Wright resigned from the Union because of ill health.

When Wright and the FUNY refused to strike, a new organization, the Tristate Master Dairy Farmers' Guild, assumed a leading role in forcing a confrontation with milk dealers. The Guild's Executive Director, Rev. John W. Dorney of Branchville, New Jersey, called a strike to begin February 25. Although a FUNY poll found that "farmers have little interest in a milk strike at this time," the Union lost 500 members when they refused to endorse the Guild's strike.¹⁸⁹ The Eastern Milk Producers Association (formerly Sheffield Farms) and the Mutual Federation of Co-ops immediately attacked Dorney's plan, claiming that "marketing orders were the key to the solution."¹⁹⁰

The strike began February 25. At its peak, 10 percent of the dairy farmers in scattered counties of New York, Eastern Pennsylvania, and Northern New Jersey withheld 15 percent of the normal milk deliveries. A major problem for Dorney and the Guild's 3,200 members was that the political climate in the late 1950s was not receptive of milk strikes. Aside from the usual opposition from the dealers and the League, Guild strikers faced heavy opposition from government officials. First, a judge in Newark restricted picketing with an injunction. Then, the FBI investigated, "making a preliminary check to determine whether the boycott had involved any violation of anti-racketeering statutes."¹⁹¹ In the face of such overwhelming opposition, the Guild strike collapsed on March 4.

In June of 1957, the Dairy Farmers of America, a new organization with offices in New York City and Columbia County,¹⁹² proposed a second strike. This time the FUNY joined the strike movement, as President Raymond Knack offered the support of the Union and its 6,000 members. The DFA-led strike began on August 14, yet collapsed after only two days. According the Northeastern Union Farmer, one reason the strike failed was that,

Less than the number of people who voted to strike turned out to strike meetings. Our speakers and organizers went unprotected. As soon as the dealer-cooperative gang realized this they began to break up meetings and get adverse publicity into the newspapers.¹⁹³

This account was confirmed by a former FUNY organizer, who

recalled,

Now for example, if you held a meeting. . .you made sure that the head table was by the door, because during the course of your meeting you wanted to be able to get out. You'd set it up so this was the way into the Grange Hall. (gestures) You'd set your head table, where you're going to run the meeting, by the door, and the people were back here. Because what happened on various occasions was the American Legion. . .would come in to get those "damn Red, Communist bastards." And they'd wreck the meeting. (History Interview #111)

The private groups attacking the FUNY were joined by government agencies who moved to break the strike. State Troopers, for example, "ushered" milk through picket lines during the aborted strike.¹⁹⁴ In January 1958, Archie Wright was reelected as President of the FUNY. In November, "the FUNY merged into the DFA, with the agreement that Wright would play no further role." Dyson speculated that some DFA farmers may have joined the National Farmers' Organization in the early 1960's.¹⁹⁵

The 1967 NFO Strike

The National Farmers' Organization, founded in 1955, was organized in circumstances similar to those that produced the 1957 milk strikes. "Low prices aggravated by dry weather were the catalysts" for the organization of a new Midwestern farmers' movement. Grain and dairy farmers joined the NFO, protesting the "systematic dismantling of reasonable farm programs," that occurred in the restructuring of agriculture.¹⁹⁶ NFO organizers resurrected the strike or "withholding action" as their strategy to

increase commodity prices. The NFO drew support mainly from the class of small, commercial farmers in various commodity groups. It claimed 175,000 members in 1957.¹⁹⁷

In March, 1967, the NFO - now with 250,000 members - began a nationwide milk "holding action" to demand higher milk prices. NFO leaders claimed that in Wisconsin alone 84 dairy farmers went out of business each week.¹⁹⁸ The strike began March 16, quickly spreading through 25 states. Strikers were encouraged when Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman criticized the milk dealers and defended the farmers' right to withhold their milk.¹⁹⁹ The NFO's main support in New York was found in Herkimer, Jefferson, and St. Lawrence counties. On March 22, 150 farmers attended an NFO strike meeting in Watertown.²⁰⁰ In all, less than one thousand farmers dumped milk in New York; the strike had little impact on the New York metropolitan market.

In some cities however, the NFO strike had a greater impact. In Nashville, for example, the NFO forged an agreement with the Teamsters, closing four major milk processors and blocking the delivery of milk to 1.5 million people.²⁰¹ On March 29, the Justice Department all but ended the strike by filing an antitrust suit. The Department charged that the NFO attempted to monopolize the sale of milk in 19 states.²⁰² Following the Johnson Administration's action in 1967, the NFO did not attempt another strike. NFO farmers did, nonetheless, have the dubious distinction of

being the only farmer's organization to be included on Richard Nixon's enemies list.²⁰³

Notes

1. For the history of the McNary-Haugen Act, see Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, Twentieth Century Populism: Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West 1900-1939 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1951), Ch. XIII; Murray R. Benedict, Farm Policies of the United States, 1790-1950: A Study of Their Origins and Development (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1953), Ch. 10; Sidney Baldwin, Poverty and Politics (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 35-46; Van Perkins, Crisis in Agriculture: The AAA and the New Deal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), Ch. 2; John Mark Hansen, Gaining Access: Congress and the Farm Lobby, 1919-1981 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 41-61.

2. New York Times, for St. Louis: 8 November 1931, 6; 15 November, 25; central Illinois: 31 October 1931, 5; Houston: 15 February 1932, 3; Sioux Falls (SD): 1 September 1932, 3; Atlanta: 24 September 1932, 32; 25 September, 16; 27 September, 1; 28 September, 21; 29 September, 15; Chicago: 17 July 1932, 15; Indiana: 20 September 1932, 15.

3. New York Times, 14 August 1932, 8; 15 August, 14; 16 August, 2; 18 August, 42; 19 August, 19; 20 August, 28; 21 August, 7; 30 August, 36; 1 September, 1; see also John Shover, Cornbelt Rebellion (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965); Dale Kramer, The Wild Jackasses (New York: Hastings House, 1956), 224-41; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Roosevelt, Vol. I, The Crisis of the Old Order (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), 266-67; Studs Terkel, Hard Times (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 213-29.

4. New York State, Department of Agriculture and Markets, Annual Report of the Department of Agricultural and Markets, 1931 (Albany: J.B. Lyons, 1932), 32.

5. New York Times, 2 October 1932, 1; 3 October, 19; Jefferson County Journal, 28 September 1932, 1.

6. New York Times, 24 September 1932, 17.

7. Jefferson County Journal, 5 October 1932, 1; New York Times, 7 October 1932, 23.

8. New York Times, 7 October 1932, 23.
9. New York State, Joint legislative Committee to Investigate the Milk Industry, Report of the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate the Milk Industry (Albany: J.B. Lyons, 1933), 14.
10. New York State, Milk Control Board, Report of the Milk Control Board to the Governor and the State Legislature (Albany: J.B. Lyons, March, 1934), 3.
11. New York State, Department Of Agriculture and Markets, Annual Report, 1933, 8.
12. Ibid., 87.
13. Report of the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate the Milk Industry, 15.
14. Report of the Milk Control Board, March, 1934, 3.
15. Report of the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate the Milk Industry, 60-66.
16. Ibid., 75.
17. Barrington Moore, Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 474-75.
18. One farmer I interviewed would not consent to my tape recording the interview. He refused to discuss milk strikes because he believed they were injurious, often pitting "father against son" and "neighbor against neighbor." His own father, as he went on to explain, had once cut the fences of a neighbor, a Mennonite, releasing his cattle during one of the 1930s strikes. (History Interview #113)
19. "Many Rochester Milk Producers to Quit League," Oswego Palladium Times, 1 April 1933, 1.
20. "Troopers Convoy Milk to Rochester," New York Times, 31 March 1933, 6.
21. New York Times, 1 April 1933, 1; Oswego Palladium Times, 1 April 1933, 1.
22. New York Times, 9 April 1933, 20.
23. Report of the Milk Control Board to the Governor and State Legislature, 4.

24. Report of the Milk Control Board to the Governor and State Legislature, 18.
25. Ibid., 11.
26. New York Times, 25 July 1933, 21.
27. The Piseck's organization became the New York Milk Producer's Federation in early 1934.
28. "Milk Producers Around Pulaski Support Strike," Oswego Palladium-Times, 4 August 1933, 12.
29. "Lehman Promises Milk Strike Curbs," New York Times, 31 July 1933, 15.
30. Alden C. Manchester, The Public Role in the Dairy Economy (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), 24-26.
31. "Nearly Score Injured in Boonville Milk War," Boonville Herald, 3 August 1933, 1, 5; "Troopers Battle Striking Dairymen," Oswego Palladium-Times, 1 August 1933, 1; New York Times, 2 August 1933, 2, 5.
32. Boonville Herald, 3 August 1993, 1.
33. New York Times, 2 August 1993, 5.
34. Boonville Herald, 3 August 1993, 1.
35. Ibid., 1.
36. Ibid., 5.
37. "8 Troopers Hurt in Milk Rioting; Talk of Guard Call," New York Times, 6 August 1933, 1; "Nat'l Guard May Be Called," Oswego Palladium-Times, 5 August 1933, 1.
38. "More Milk Spilled As Strike Spreads," New York Times, 3 August 1933, 3.
39. Oswego Palladium-Times, 4 August 1933, 12; 7 August, 8.
40. Oswego Palladium Times, 7 August 1933, 8; 8 August, 11.
41. New York Times, 7 August 1933, 6; 8 August, 8.
42. Oswego Palladium-Times, 8 August 1933, 2.
43. Jefferson County Journal, 9 August 1933, 1.
44. Oswego Palladium-Times, 8 August 1933, 4.

45. Report of the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate the Milk Industry, 53.
46. New York Times, 7 August 1933, 6.
47. New York Times, 10 August 1933, 3; "Troopers in Strike to Carry Rifles," Oswego Palladium-Times, 9 August 1933, 1.
48. New York Times, 7 August 1933, 6.
49. "Milk Strikers Fire On State Troopers," New York Times, 9 August 1933, 1.
50. "200 Milk Strikers Seized Up-State," New York Times, 11 August 1933, 1; Oswego Palladium-Times, 10 August 1933, 1.
51. Oswego Palladium-Times, 8 August 1933, 5; 10 August, 10; 14 August, 4. In all, 13 farmers including local "radicals" Ellery and Raymond Marsh were arraigned for unlawful assembly; Elmer Parkhurst was sentenced to 30 days and fined five dollars for dumping milk. One half of these striking farmers were League members.
52. Oswego Palladium-Times, 8 August 1933, 2; New York Times, 5 August 1933, 1.
53. New York Times, 8 August 1933, 8; 9 August, 4.
54. "Non-Strikers Fight Back," New York Times, 9 August 1933, 1; for plans by the Dairymen's League and Sheffield Producers Association to arm themselves to combat the strikers, see also, Oswego Palladium-Times, 8 August 1933, 2.
55. "Milk Strike Ends; Board Pledges Aid," New York Times, 15 August 1933, 19.
56. "Gov Orders Wide Milk Inquiry," New York Times, 16 August 1933, 19; "Milk Board Calls Farmer Hearings," 17 August, 24.
57. New York State, Department of Agriculture and Markets, Annual Report, 1933, 87.
58. Jefferson County Journal, 25 October 1933, 1.
59. New York Times, for the Chicago strike, see 6 January 1934, 32; 7 January, 21; for strikes in Indiana, Wisconsin and California, see 8 January 1934, 3; for the threatened strike in New York, see 10 January 1934, 29; 16 May, 4.
60. New York State Senate, Legislative Commission on Dairy Industry Development, Review of Dairy Regulations (Albany: New York State Senate, 1988), 25-26.

61. New York Times, 11 August 1936, 1; 15 August, 25; 23 August, 28; 6 September, 1; 7 September, 1; 13 September, 1; 23 September, 3.
62. Manchester, 138-141.
63. For a brief explanation of Schechter, see William Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 145.
64. New York Times, for details of the Chicago strike, see 5 October, 1935, 8; 6 October, 3; 7 October, 34; 9 October, 20; 10 October, 2; 11 October, 8; 13 October, 19.
65. Manchester, 140-41; Review of Dairy Regulation, 30-33.
66. New York Times, 21 August 1939, 1; Farmers Defender, January 1943, 3; Lowell K. Dyson, Farmers' Organizations (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1968), 172.
67. These letters, to and from Archie Wright, are found in Dairy Farmers Union (DFU) Papers, and Farmers Union of the New York Milkshed (FUNY) Papers, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, New York. Hereafter cited as DFU Papers or FUNY Papers, Cornell.
68. Wright letter to delegates, 17 December 1956, FUNY Papers, Cornell.
69. Dairy Farmers Union Journal 1939-1940 (Ogdensburg: Dairy Farmers' Union, November, 1939), 16. DFU Papers, Cornell.
70. The Dairy Farmer, 25 August 1939, 4.
71. Ogdensburg Journal, 3 August 1937, 10.
72. Dyson, Farmers' Organizations, 71.
73. Jefferson County Journal, 18 August 1937, 1.
74. Wright speech, 19-20 September 1940, DFU Papers, Cornell.
75. Archie Wright, "For How Long . . . Does the Farmer Feed Them All?" (Ogdensburg: Farmers Union of the New York Milkshed, 1953[?]), 10-11, photocopied, FUNY Papers, Cornell.
76. Although a few local, state, and national representatives were sympathetic to the DFU cause, such as St. Lawrence County State Senator Rhoda Fox Graves, in general the Union was excluded from the one party, Republican-dominated political system in upstate New York. The origin of GOP domination in upstate New York is examined by Robert F. Wesser, A Response

to Progressivism: The Democratic Party and New York Politics, 1902-1918 (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 6-7. As he explained, ". . .the Democrats' fate in New York was sealed in 1896 with the nomination of Nebraskan William Jennings Bryan for the presidency; neither businessmen nor farmers and workers could be persuaded that western "free silver" would restore prosperity to the Empire State. William McKinley's victory in New York, therefore, was sweeping. A badly divided Democracy was reduced to barebones in the state; even New York City went Republican for the first time in a presidential contest in GOP history, . . ." As late as 1960, a survey of New York politics revealed that "the typical rural upstate voter is [still] a Republican." According to Straetz and Munger, "The maximum impact of this rural Republicanism is probably felt at the level of county government." Ralph A. Straetz and Frank J. Munger, New York Politics (New York: New York University Press, 1960), 53. Accordingly, Wright and the DFU leadership had little faith in the two-party system. As Wright wrote in a letter to (then) Senator Herbert Lehman, "Sometimes it seems that the Democrats' stock in trade is domestic liberalism and foreign wars, and the Republicans' peace and reaction. So, the bad drives out the good and we wind up with war and reaction. . .It's the logic of the mad-house and the continuity of a nightmare." Wright letter to Senator Herbert Lehman, Washington, 22 October 1955, FUNY Papers, Cornell.

77. Watertown Daily Times, January 1946, date and edition unknown. Clipping from a DFU scrapbook, DFU Papers, Cornell.

78. Dairy Farmers' Union Journal, 1939-1940, 10, DFU Papers, Cornell.

79. Wright letter to delegates, 17 December 1956, FUNY Papers, Cornell.

80. Caroline Whitney, What Price Milk? (New York: Caroline Whitney Memorial Fund, 1939), 73.

81. Consumer-Farmer Foundation, 1937-1987 (New York: Consumer-Farmer Foundation, 1987), 4.

82. Whitney, 76.

83. Consumer-Farmer Milk Foundation, 1937-1987, 3; Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Directors, Consumer-Farmer Milk Cooperative, 3 October 1938, Consumer-Farmer Foundation, New York City. Hereafter cited as "Minutes."

84. Consumer-Farmer Milk Cooperative Minutes, 3 October 1938.

85. Consumer-Farmer Foundation, 1937-1987, 3.

86. The Organized Consumer, January 1957, 2. The Organized Consumer was the official publication of the Consumer-Farmer Milk Cooperative. It began in June, 1938 and continued until 1970; In 1946 it was renamed The Consumer-Farmer Cooperator. A separate publication, titled The Link, was published by the Coop's membership committee from February, 1939 until April, 1941. In 1970, Meyer Parodneck and the Co-op's board liquidated the milk business, founding the Consumer-Farmer Foundation, a not-for-profit housing cooperative. The Foundation has a quarterly publication called The Cooperator. Partial records of The Link and The Organized Consumer are found in the New York Public Library, Main Research Branch, New York. A more complete record of The Organized Consumer and The Consumer-Farmer Cooperator are found in the archives of the Consumer-Farmer Foundation, New York.

87. Lowell K. Dyson, Red Harvest (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 172-173; New York Times, 1 September 1939, 18.

88. The Dairy Farmer, 25 July 1938, 1, DFU Papers, Cornell.

89. Labor Research Association, Labor Fact Book, Vol. V (New York: International Publishers, 1941), 178.

90. The Dairy Farmer, 25 June 1940, 1, DFU Papers, Cornell.

91. Review of Dairy Regulation, 26.

92. Ibid., 26-27.

93. New York Times, 30 April 1937, 7.

94. New York State Legislature, Assembly, Milk Producers, Inc. Act, 160th sess., Assembly Bill No. 2087, Statutes, (22 March 1937).

95. Review of Dairy Regulations, 29.

96. Ibid., 29-35.

97. New York Times, 4 May 1937, 18.

98. New York Times, 6 May 1937, 14.

99. New York Times, 20 May 1937, 2.

100. Rationalization in this sense is defined as "the organization of the economy and the larger political and social spheres in a manner that will allow corporations to function in a predictable and secure environment permitting reasonable profits over the long run." Gabriel Kolko, The

Triumph of Conservatism (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 3.

101. New York State, Department of Agriculture and Markets, Annual Report, 1937, 143.

102. New York Times, 2 August 1937, 5.

103. Archie Wright, "Dairy Farmers' Union Strike Bulletin No. 1, 1937," DFU Papers, Cornell, photocopied.

104. Archie Wright, "Dairy Farmers' Union Strike Bulletin No. 5," DFU Papers, Cornell, photocopied.

105. Archie Wright, Dairy Farmers' Union Strike Bulletin No," DFU Papers, Cornell, photocopied.

106. Ogdensburg Journal, 3 August 1937, 2.

107. New York Times, 22 September 1937, 4.

108. New York Times, 20 August 1937, 10.

109. New York Times, 26 August 1937, 23; Jefferson County Journal, 18 August 1937, 1.

110. New York Times, 20 October 1937, 25; Ogdensburg Journal, 13 November 1937, 2; 15 November, 2.

111. New York Times, 24 October 1937, 20; Ogdensburg Journal, 2 November 1937, 4.

112. New York Times, 24 October 1937, 20.

113. Ogdensburg Journal, 8 November 1937, 2; New York Times, 7 November 1937, 15.

114. New York Times, 5 November 1937, 25.

115. New York Times, 23 November 1937, 1. The 50 people at the DFU-organized meeting in New York represented the Consumers League of New York, the Progressive Women's Council, Consumers Union, the League of Mothers' Clubs, the Women's Trade Union League, the United Cannery, Agricultural Packers, and Allied Workers' Union, the Henry Street Settlement, the League of Women Shoppers, and the Department Store Employees' Union; the quote is taken from 21 November 1937, 1.

116. Ogdensburg Journal, 12 November 1937, 2.

117. Ogdensburg Journal, 12 November 1937, 2, 5; 20 November, 4; 8 December, 10; 11 December, 2.

118. For a discussion of the relationship between the "structural isolation" of farmers and the mobilization of protest, see John T. S. Keeler, "Corporatism and Official Union Hegemony," in Organizing Interests in Western Europe, ed. Suzanne Berger (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 188-90.

119. The Dairy Farmer, 25 August 1938, 1.

120. Review of Dairy Regulation, 32.

121. Ibid., 32.

122. New York Times, 18 January 1939, 9.

123. United States v. Rock Royal Co-op., Inc. et al, Federal Supp. 26 (Dist. Court, N.D. New York 1939).

124. New York Times, 27 February 1939, 6.

125. Dyson, Red Harvest, 171.

126. New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, Annual Report, 1939, 125.

127. Ibid., 126.

128. Dyson, Red Harvest, 171.

129. Watertown Daily Times, 3 August 1939, 4, 8, 19.

130. Watertown Daily Times, 4 August 1939, 9.

131. Watertown Daily Times, 10 August 1939, 3.

132. "Unpriced milk" was milk from outside of the milkshed that was purchased at prices lower than that specified in the Federal market Order and then sold in the New York metropolitan market. The Dept. of Agriculture and Markets reported that "dealers take advantage of producers by such 'loopholes' as 'interstate' milk and thereby 'reduce the price they pay to the producers to almost any figure which they think the producers will stand.'" New York State, Department of Agriculture and Markets, Annual Report, 1936, 113; Market service payments were payments to dealers whose plants were only equipped to handle fluid milk, and who transferred milk to manufacturing plants when not required for fluid consumption. "The dealer. . . is entitled to receive. . . an amount established by the Order to cover the cost of putting the milk through his plant," plus an additional amount to cover transportation. New York State, Department of Agriculture and Markets, Annual Report, 1938, 121.

133. "Milk Strike Today Faces State Curb," New York Times, 15 August 1939, 1. The DFU wired a demand to Acting Governor Poletti upon hearing Clough's statement, asking that the Department of Agriculture and Markets take a neutral position in the strike. Watertown Daily Times, 15 August 1939, 18.
134. New York Times, 16 August 1939, 25; 17 August, 42.
135. Watertown Daily Times, 15 August 1939, 18.
136. New York Times, 17 August 1939, 42; 18 August, 1.
137. "All Peaceful in Boonville as Strike Gets Under Way," Boonville Herald, 17 August 1939, 1; "Strike Tightens Against Dealers," Watertown Daily Times, 19 August 1939, 18.
138. "Milk Plants in North Nearly Dry," Watertown Daily Times, 18 August 1939, 20.
139. Watertown Daily Times, 17 August 1939, 20.
140. "Milk Strike Cuts City Supply 37%; Troopers On Guard," New York Times, 18 August 1939, 1.
141. Watertown Daily Times, 16 August 1939, 19.
142. Ogdensburg Journal, 21 August 1939, 1.
143. Jefferson County Journal, 23 August 1939, 1. For its part, the Dairy Farmers Union certainly appreciated the role of women in milk strikes. After the 1939 strike, the Union yearbook acknowledged that:

. . .A milk strike places an additional burden upon every farm family, not only in the actual carrying on of the strike, but in doing the redoubled farm chores.

It was upon the women that the burden of extra chores fell heaviest. While the men were busy doing picket duty, women did extra work around the farm. They milked more cows, they cranked the [cream] separator, they churned thousands of pounds of butter, some of it in electric washing machines, and they took over the duties normally carried on by the men.

In addition, women helped materially on the picket line. Many a man kept his milk home because a women pleaded with him. All in all, the strike brought a greater feeling of camaraderie among farmers than has existed in a long time.

144. As a member of Congress, Fiorello LaGuardia had often spoken out concerning the plight of the American farmer. See his "Urban Support for the Farmer," in New Deal Thought, Howard Zinn, ed. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, Inc., 1966), 227-31. For a discussion of LaGuardia's campaign for lower consumer milk prices, see Charles Garrett, The LaGuardia Years (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1961), 209.

145. New York Times, 19 August 1939, 7.

146. Boonville Herald, 24 August 1939, 1.

147. New York Times, 23 August 1939, 10; Boonville Herald, 24 August 1939, 1; Watertown Daily Times, 22 August 1939, 12.

148. "Rioting at Heuvelton and Hammond Feature Milk Strike," Ogdensburg Journal, 21 August 1939, 1; Watertown Daily Times, 21 August 1939, 18.

149. Ogdensburg Journal, 21 August 1939, 1.

150. "Milk Strike Ended By Farmers' Vote," New York Times, 24 August 1939, 21; "Farmers Win Victory in Strike; Get \$2.15 Price," Watertown Daily Times, 22 August 1939, 20; Ogdensburg Journal, 22 August 1939, 1. The only conflict among movement farmers occurred at the Union strike ratification meeting. The Rev. Thomas F. McNeill, leader of the Boonville Brotherhood of Dairymen, criticized both Wright and LaGuardia over the strike settlement, and walked out of the meeting. Boonville Herald, 31 August 1939, 1.

151. If the Order price was higher than the settlement, that price would override the agreement; if it were lower, the dealers would pay the difference. The full text of LaGuardia's agreement is reprinted in New York State, Department of Agriculture and Markets, Annual Report, 1939, 127-8.

152. Watertown Daily Times, 22 August 1939, 4.

153. Watertown Daily Times, 23 August 1939, 2; 26 August, 20; 28 August, 3, 9; 29 August, 6.

154. New York Times, 1 October 1939, 12.

155. Dyson, Red Harvest, 175.

156. Dairy Farmers Union Journal 1939-1940, 8, DFU Papers, Cornell.

157. The Dairy Farmer, 25 December 1939, 2.

158. For an explanation of the campaign waged to discredit and destroy the DFU, see Dyson, Red Harvest, 177-185.

159. The smear campaign against Wright is explained in Dyson, Red Harvest, 178-180.

160. The price dispute and the dealers' counterattack is described in Dyson, Red Harvest, 175-176.

161. New York Times, 17 October 1939, 1.

162. Watertown Daily Times, 24 August 1939, 10; 1 September, 24.

163. The Dairy Farmer, 12 December 1939, 1; Consumer-Farmer Foundation, 1937-1987, 3.

164. Doug McAdam, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 56.

165. E.E. Schattschneider, The Semisovereign People (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960).

166. Michael Schwartz, Radical Protest and Social Structure (New York: Academic Press, 1976), 209-210.

167. Ogdensburg Journal, 19 July 1956, 4.

168. Watertown Daily Times, 14 October 1939, 20; 15 October, 22.

169. Doris Rogers letter to delegates, 13 May 1941, FUNY Papers, Cornell.

170. Watertown Daily Times, 30 April 1941, 12.

171. New York Times, 24 May 1939, 27; 30 May, 14.

172. New York Times, 6 May 1941, 1.

173. New York Times, 5 July 1941, 12; 4 July, 1.

174. Ogdensburg Journal, 5 July 1941, 8.

175. New York Times, 6 July 1941, 25.

176. New York Times, 3 July 1941, 11.

177. Syracuse Post-Standard, 9 July 1941, page and edition unknown. Clipping from a FUNY scrapbook, DFU Papers, Cornell.

178. Farmers Defender, February, 1942, 1; Dyson, Red Harvest, 182.
179. Dyson, Red Harvest, 182.
180. Farmers Defender, April, 1942, 7; June, 1942, 1; Dyson, Red Harvest, 182.
181. Dyson, Red Harvest, 185; Farmers' Organizations, 127; Farmers Defender, January, 1944.
182. Northeastern Union Farmer, March, 1949.
183. Dyson, Farmers' Organizations, 128.
184. Wright letter to delegates, undated, (September-October, 1948?), FUNY Papers, Cornell.
185. Ogdensburg Journal, 19 July 1956, 4.
186. Wright letter to delegates, 18 April 1956, FUNY Papers, Cornell.
187. Watertown Daily Times, 15 April 1956, page unknown. Clipping from a DFU scrapbook, DFU Papers, Cornell.
188. The Cole letter and Archie Wright's reply were reprinted in a Wright letter to delegates, 23 August 1954, FUNY Papers, Cornell.
189. The poll is cited in a Wright letter to delegates, 17 December 1956; the loss of membership is mentioned in the Northeastern Union Farmer, September-October 1957, 4; FUNY Papers, Cornell.
190. New York Times, 25 February 1957, 27.
191. New York Times, 28 February 1957, 1.
192. Wright letter to delegates, 23 April 1956, FUNY Papers, Cornell.
193. Northeastern Union Farmer, September-October 1957, 4; FUNY Papers, Cornell.
194. In addition to the overt help offered by the State Troopers, some farmers claimed the FBI kept Union (FUNY) leaders under constant surveillance throughout the late 1950s. As this FUNY organizer alleged,

I was followed around - you could see him right across the road. The guy from the FBI. He came up

to me and he said, "We're going to get you." .they had this one guy from the FBI would come up and - what was interesting was that his daughter and my daughter were students together at Geneseo [State University]. So we'd have a great visit. So we'd have lunch together. [And I'd say], "I know you son of a bitch, you're out to get me, give me a screwing right?" [And he'd answer], "Yes, that's what I'm here for." (History Interview #111)

195. Dyson, Farmers' Organizations, 130.
196. National Farmers Organization (Ames, Iowa: National Farmers Organization, 1991), 2.
197. National Farmers Organization, NFO: The Early Years, 60 minutes, (date unknown), Videocassette.
198. New York Times, 16 March 1967, 22.
199. New York Times, 24 March 1967, 17.
200. Jefferson County Journal, 22 March 1967, 1.
201. New York Times, 26 March 1967, 1.
202. New York Times, 30 March 1967, 1.
203. NFO: The Early Years, NFO Videocassette.

Chapter Four

The Structure of the Contemporary Dairy Industry

This chapter outlines the economic, political, and ideological relations in the contemporary New York State dairy industry. These relations are important to my analysis for two reasons. First, economic, political, and ideological relations define the class position of dairy farmers; they establish the boundaries of the web of power relations that dairy farmers are embedded within. Second, the totality of economic, political, and ideological relations structure the conflicts that occur among farmers, and the conflicts that occur between farmers and other groups or institutions. It is out of these conflicts that classes arise.¹

My analysis begins with post-war agricultural policy which laid the foundation for the contemporary dairy industry. In the 1950s, changes in farm policy, together with technological innovation, produced an extensive restructuring of American agriculture. The latter part of the chapter outlines the specific economic, political, and ideological relations in New York in the early 1990s. The chapter then concludes with a brief look at the emerging biotechnological revolution, which has the potential to again restructure the New York dairy industry as it approaches the millennium.

The Origins of the Contemporary Dairy Industry

The structural origins of the New York dairy industry can be traced to a struggle over agricultural policy in the years after World War II, involving farmers, business leaders, and policy makers. The stakes in this battle were high. Important issues were contested, including: the number of farmers this country should have; the size and nature of the farms that would typify American agriculture; the political and economic power of different classes of farmers; and perhaps most important, the role of government in agriculture. This conflict was fundamentally a conflict over state power because the Federal government had been, since the New Deal, the major actor in American agriculture.

The New Deal Farm Program

Large-scale government intervention in agriculture began with the Agricultural Adjustment Act in 1933. The AAA was the Roosevelt Administration's response to the depression in the agricultural sector dating to the early 1920s, as well as its response to the increased political activism of Midwestern and Northeastern farmers. Milo Reno and the Farmers' Holiday Movement, for example, threatened a full-scale "holiday" or farm strike across the Corn Belt in the summer of 1932.² By the following spring, the rank and file of desperate Midwestern farmers were beyond the control of movement leaders. As Leuchtenburg recounted:

As Congress continued to wrangle over the farm bill, rebellion again broke out . . . In late

April [1933], a mob of farmers, masked in blue bandanas, dragged Judge Charles C. Bradley from his bench in Lemars, Iowa, took him to a crossroads out of town, and nearly lynched him in a vain effort to get him to promise not to sign mortgage foreclosures.³

In addition, milk strikes had broken out in Iowa, Wisconsin, and New York. To many observers, it was clear that the crisis in agriculture required immediate action.

Congress and the Roosevelt Administration answered with the AAA.⁴ The Administration's immediate goal was to provide direct relief to farmers and to stabilize farm incomes; this would also address farmers' grievances, possibly putting an end to the unrest in the Midwest and New York. The longer term goals were to insure the production of an adequate food supply, and at the same time to master the age-old problem of overproduction. Continued overproduction meant continued low farm prices. Over time, the New Deal farm program had important consequences for electoral politics as well, by creating ties between farmers and the Democratic Party.

The underlying principles that emerged in the New Deal farm program were production controls and parity. The idea was to limit production, in order to raise prices to a level of parity. Parity was defined as "the average ratio between the prices farmers paid for inputs and living costs and the prices they received for their products in the base period of 1910-1914."⁵ The 1910-1914 base period was selected because it had been a profitable period in general for farmers. Parity was significant, particularly for small

farmers, because it represented the use of state power to support a level of income that would keep farmers producing and on the land.

There were three mechanisms used to achieve parity. The first was the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), an agency that made loans to farmers with the farmers' crops offered as collateral. The CCC loan program kicked in when the prices paid to farmers - by the corporations that handled their products - fell below the farmers' cost of production. When prices went up, the farmers could sell their crops and repay the loans, plus a small interest charge. In many respects, the CCC loan program was a vastly scaled-down version of the Subtreasury program, championed by the Farmers' Alliance in the 1890s.⁶ The connecting thread was that the CCC loans embodied the Populist view of state power: government was a positive force that should be put to use for working people, as well as for business and financial elites.

The second mechanism used to achieve parity was direct payments to farmers, which they would use to take land out of production. The purpose of subsidies was to eliminate the overwhelming surpluses that had been driving down commodity prices since the end of World War I. For dairy farmers, New Deal policy makers eschewed direct payments and production controls in favor of the market order system. Under the market order, a Market Administrator, answering directly to

the Secretary of Agriculture, regulated the milk market; the Administrator set prices in a bargaining process that included officially-sanctioned milk producer and distributor organizations.⁷ The third mechanism used to achieve parity was "a national grain reserve . . . established to prevent consumer prices from skyrocketing in times of drought or other natural disasters."⁸

One important proposal rejected by the Roosevelt Administration was a guaranteed cost of production program, "introduced in the Senate by George Norris."⁹ John Simpson, President of the National Farmers' Union, promoted a cost of production formula as a way to solve the problem of low farm income. The NFU proposal was to have the Secretary of Agriculture calculate the cost of production for farmers (plus a reasonable profit), and then declare this price as the mandated minimum price for all commodities. Production controls were built in: the Secretary would also estimate domestic consumption, and all products produced in excess of these levels would be priced by the market (not by government). Simpson and the NFU felt that this would be a powerful incentive for farmers to bring production in line with consumption.

The overall effect of the New Deal farm program was positive for many farmers. Although there were notable shortcomings, such as the perpetuation of inequalities in the Southern plantation system, which excluded tenants from

the protection of government intervention,¹⁰ the system of production controls and parity raised incomes and kept many farmers on the land. As contemporary defenders of the New Deal legislation such as Ristau and Ritchie explain:

From 1933 to 1953 this legislation remained in effect and was extremely successful. Farmers received fair prices for their crops, production was controlled to prevent costly surpluses, and consumer prices remained low and stable. At the same time, the number of new farmers increased, soil and water conservation practices were implemented, and overall farm debt declined dramatically.¹¹

In addition, because of the economic and political turmoil of the decade - in particular the great increase in farm activism by small farmers - the New Deal farm program (with all its shortcomings) granted access to "a broad constituency that included poorer as well as better farmers, tenants as well as landlords, migrants as well as employers."¹² This political access was especially important to small farmers, because in alliance with organized labor they became an integral part of the New Deal electoral coalition.

Post-War Agricultural Policy

At the end of the Second World War, farmers, business leaders, and policy makers were concerned over the expected drop in demand for agricultural production. The biggest problem farmers had to confront was the potential of renewed overproduction, a dilemma that had plagued American agriculture since the 1920s. The possibility of surpluses

loomed so large because American farmers were becoming increasingly productive. Farming in general had undergone three overlapping "technological revolutions" since the 1930s.¹³ The effects of these "revolutions" made possible the transition to larger and more productive farms. The first was the mechanical revolution, which introduced tractors to American farms. For dairy farmers, the mechanical revolution brought about bulk milk tanks, pipeline milkers, silo unloaders, and mechanized gutter (barn) cleaners, in addition to field equipment.¹⁴ The biological revolution introduced disease-resistant and drought-resistant hybrid plant varieties. The latest was the chemical revolution, which saw the development of pesticides, herbicides and rodenticides. The combined effect of these "revolutions" was an almost frightening increase in farm productivity, while the amount of land in production actually decreased. In terms of corn production alone, American farmers increased their average yield from 32.7 bushels per acre in 1945, to 62.1 bushels in 1964.¹⁵

There were two schools of thought regarding the problems confronting agricultural policy makers.¹⁶ The first can be called the free-market approach. Beginning in 1945, agribusiness' leaders and bankers, with the support of the

¹⁶Agribusiness is defined as those corporations that provide agricultural inputs (including finance) and process, store, and transport agricultural commodities. Ingolf Volgeler, The Myth of Family Farm (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 4.

Land Grant College System and the American Farm Bureau Federation, launched a well-funded lobbying effort aimed at changing federal farm policy. These efforts have been described by critics as "an all out political war against the supply management and price support legislation of the 1930's."¹⁷ Free market advocates believed that unregulated supply and demand would be the most efficient method to control overproduction. If farmers produced too much, the government should allow prices to fall to a level where only efficient producers would remain in business. If there was too much production, the free market advocates concluded, there were probably too many farmers producing. With less producers, the problem of oversupply would be solved; government, therefore, should fund research and development for efficient farmers. It should not utilize production controls or subsidies to keep (parity) prices artificially high. Many political leaders supported the free market approach because one of its consequences was low food prices, an idea popular with consumers, who also happened to be voters.

The writings of the Committee for Economic Development provide a clear statement of the free market perspective on post-war agricultural policy. The CED was organized by forward-looking corporate leaders in 1942, "to seize the opportunities for unprecedented peacetime prosperity in the postwar era."¹⁸ Members of the CED were representative of a

particular segment of American corporate leadership that believed in a positive role for government in the economy.¹⁹ Their Research Committee included Chairmen from two Federal Reserve Banks, the Vice President of J.P. Morgan and Company, and the Dean of the Cornell University College of Agriculture. In a 1945 report, Theodore Schultz, writing for the CED, recommended that government farm policy "enlarge" the small family farm. In his words,

Many thousands of family farms in the United States are *too small as operating units* to make efficient use of modern farm technology and to earn a return for labor and capital inputs that are at all comparable to returns in other fields. (emphasis added)

Schultz concluded that this was "one of the manifestations of an overcrowded agriculture."²⁰

A later CED report, "An Adaptive Program for Agriculture," was more explicit. In this report, CED analysts concluded the problem in farming was that,

. . . as a result of changes in the [farm] economy, the labor and capital employed in the industry cannot all continue to earn, by producing goods for sale in a free market, as much income as they formerly earned, or as much as they could earn employed in some other use; that is - the industry is using too many resources.

The report continued: "*The movement of people from agriculture has not been fast enough to take full advantage of the opportunities that improving farm technologies, thus increasing capital, create*" (emphasis added). Therefore, specific government policies (the "adaptive program") should be enacted, in order to "induce a large, rapid movement of

resources, notably labor, out of agriculture." The CED report claimed that the most effective way to restructure farming was through a continued policy of lower farm prices; it urged that "the price supports for wheat, cotton, rice, feed grains and related crops now under price supports be reduced immediately."²¹

The second and competing perspective on farm policy favored (continued) active federal intervention in farm production. Advocates of this course included the National Farmers' Union, the Northeastern Division of the NFU (Archie Wright and the remnants of the FUNY), and post-war Democratic Administrations. Government intervention was important, the "interventionists" believed, for the nation's many farmers to earn a "living wage" on their farms. Without price supports, for example, rural America would return to the Depression-era conditions, such as those so starkly documented by James Agee and Walker Evans.²² Further, the interventionists recognized a direct connection between the health of the farm economy and urban America: if millions were forced off their land, they would flood the cities seeking employment, taxing an overcrowded post-war labor market.

Critics of the free market approach among the interventionist school often ascribed concealed motives to some free market advocates. Agribusiness, they charged, initiated the attack on supply management and price support

policies for several unstated reasons. First, the end of production controls and lower price supports would together drive down farm prices, meaning higher profits for the firms that handled and processed commodities. Second, lower prices would not only force many small farmers off the land, freeing up a huge potential industrial labor supply, it would also require that the remaining farmers expand, creating a new mass market for agribusiness's products and services. Ristau and Ritchie make this argument, concluding that agribusiness attacked price support programs because:

. . . farmers with stable, secure incomes were much less likely to borrow large amounts from the banks. Government intervention to stabilize grain prices hurt grain monopolies, which benefitted from large fluctuations in the market. Effective supply management meant that fewer acres would be planted, thus reducing sales of pesticides and fertilizers by the chemical and oil companies.²³

Moreover, critics of the free market viewpoint charged that implicit in the CED's reports, as well as those by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the American Bankers Association,²⁴ was another goal of agribusiness and its supporters: to restructure agriculture in a way that would weaken the political power of small farmers. With lower farm prices there would simply be less small farmers, thus diminishing their electoral power. Further, agribusiness would stand to gain if small farmers were split from the New Deal coalition and their progressive alliance with labor. The new capital-intensive farmers would have no reason to strike, protest, or seek alliances with labor. Their

interests would be represented in a policy process geared toward productivity, efficiency, and technology - and administered by the trustworthy combination of agribusiness, government, and academia.

The Restructuring of American Agriculture

As the policy debates raged in and around Congress and the Department of Agriculture, the New Deal farm program remained more or less intact until the early 1950s. One reason for this was continued high levels of demand for commodities, fueled by the post-war reconstruction and the Korean War.²⁵ Another important factor was Truman's surprise victory in the 1948 presidential election, which along with the return of the Democrat's control of Congress kept price supports high.²⁶ The Truman Administration, however, initiated a number of changes in farm policy that were to be accelerated once he left office. In December, 1947 Truman ended wartime price guarantees set at ninety percent of parity. The Agricultural Act of 1948 also reflected a slightly more conservative turn in farm policy; the Act redefined parity as a standard of living equivalent to other occupations, and a new "flexible" price support program was enacted at levels from sixty to ninety percent of parity. By the end of the Korean War, many Democrats, in particular those from urban areas, were having second thoughts about spending more money on farmers.

The Eisenhower Administration, under the leadership of

Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson, brought about major changes in farm policies, particularly with price supports. Benson, an advocate of the free market approach with the zeal of an evangelist, favored "flexible" price supports set at much lower levels. Benson's ideological convictions were evident in this speech given two weeks after he took office:

Freedom is a God-given, eternal principle vouchsafed to us under the Constitution. It must be continually be guarded as something more precious than life itself. It is doubtful that any man can be politically free who depends on the state for sustenance . . . The future of agriculture and the preservation of a sound economic system depends on the vigorous re-emphasis of the principles, benefits and values of private competitive enterprise . . .²⁷

Under Benson's guidance, the Eisenhower Administration reached a consensus on farm policy that was part free market and part interventionist perspectives. Government intervention (price supports) would continue, "but only at a low level, designed to protect [farmers] against a precipitate break in market prices but not to guarantee a high income permanently regardless of long-term demand and price trends."²⁸ The effect of the new policy was a downward pressure on commodity prices. "By the end of 1955, the parity ratio had dropped to 80 percent, its lowest level since the end of September 1940."²⁹

The Structural Transformation of American Agriculture

The overall effect of the new bent in farm policy was a

structural transformation of sizeable dimensions, driven by lower commodity prices, together with the technological changes in farming. As Table I illustrates, the number of farms decreased dramatically, while average farm size increased. Farm prices and income, in constant dollars, fell throughout the post-war period; in only two years between 1954 and 1984, for example, did net farm income exceed the 1954 level (1973 and 1974). The same was true of the parity ratio.³⁰ Moreover, The decline in farm prices

Table I

Number of Farms, Average Farm Size, Total Farm Debt, Deflated Net Farm Income and Parity Ratio, 1940-1985

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Farms</u>	<u>Average Farm Size Acres</u>	<u>Total Farm Debt (Millions)</u>	<u>Deflated Net Farm Income (1982 \$)</u>	<u>Parity Ratio</u>
1940	6,096,799	174	\$ 10,034	\$34,477	81
1950	5,382,162	215	\$ 12,454	\$57,105	101
1960	3,962,520	297	\$ 24,775	\$36,282	80
1970	2,954,200	373	\$ 53,027	\$34,205	72
1980	2,432,510	427	\$165,803	\$23,547	65
1985	2,274,730	446	\$216,319@	\$31,943*	58*

@:1983, *:1984

Sources: USDA, Agricultural Statistics; USDA, Economic Research Service, "Economic Indicators of the Farm Sector"; USDA, Farm Income Data: A Historical Perspective

precipitated a even sharper decline in the number of small farms. Declining prices squeezed farmers' profit margins, which were more important on farms that produced less volume. The vast majority of farms lost in this period were small, family-owned farms.³¹

The average statistics in Table I, however, do not adequately express the degree of concentration in ownership and production that resulted from this vast transformation of American agriculture. A more telling statistic is that by 1981, the top five percent of U.S. farms produced forty-nine percent of total farm sales.³² Farm debt also increased, from a combination of lower prices and the increased cost of inputs supplied by agribusiness. In 1950, labor constituted forty percent of the value of resources used on farms and capital twenty-five percent. By 1977, labor measured fourteen percent of the value of resources used on farms and capital forty-three percent.³³ In 1974, the CED - whose Subcommittee on Government Farm Policy included the Chairmen of the Franklin National Bank, the Independent Bancorporation, Kraft, Green Giant, Del Monte, Universal Foods, Pillsbury and Heinz - noted with approval that:

Farmers are vastly more dependent on industrial products such as power equipment and agricultural chemicals than they were a few years ago. Tractors, harvesters, chemical fertilizers, pesticides . . . have replaced both family manpower and hired labor on American farms.³⁴

It is important to note that the restructuring of agriculture was not accomplished without a struggle. During the Eisenhower Administration, Ezra Taft Benson's policies immediately generated renewed protest, as small, commercial farmers fought to preserve the principles of the New Deal farm policies. In 1955, a group of Midwestern farmers established the National Farmer's Organization, which vowed

to fight for a return to one hundred percent parity. The NFO's strategy was to attain parity through the use of "holding actions" or farm strikes. In 1962, the NFO turned out 20,000 farmers in Des Moines, Iowa to protest the CED report, "An Adaptive Program for Agriculture."^b Northeastern dairy farmers also resumed milk strikes in 1957.

Structural Changes in the Dairy Sector

American dairy farmers experienced a similar structural transformation (Table II). Dairy farms grew larger after 1954, and were vastly more productive; production per cow nearly doubled between 1954 and 1974. Overall, dairy farming became a more capital-intensive, specialized type of farm production, and the industry became more concentrated. By 1974, the largest 8.1 percent of American dairy farmers accounted for 34.9 percent of the value of farm products marketed in the U.S.³⁵ Although family farm ownership

Table II

Number of Farms with Milk Cows, Percent of All Farms with Milk Cows, Average Number of Cows per Farm, Production per Cow, and Total Milk Production, 1940-1985

<u>Year</u>	<u>Farms with Milk Cows</u>	<u>Farms with Milk Cows(%)</u>	<u>Cows per Farm (Ave.)</u>	<u>Milk per Total Cow(lbs)</u>	<u>Total Milk</u>
1940	4,663,413	76.4	5.1	4,622	109.5
1954	2,956,000	61.8	7.3	5,842*	122.9*
1964	1,133,589	35.9	13.8	8,304@	124.2@
1974	403,624	17.5	27.8	10,305#	115.3#
1985	272,000	12.0	40.0	12,994	143.1

*:1955, @:1965, #:1975

Sources: Jacobson, 1980; Hooks, 1988.

^bThis report is cited on page 197.

remained the rule in dairy farming into the 1980s, corporate farms grew both in number and market share.³⁶ A large part of this structural transformation (and increased concentration) in national milk production can be traced to a major geographic shift away from the traditional dairy states of the Northeast, such as Wisconsin, New York, and Minnesota, to states in the South and Southwest. As the New York Times reported:

An average [dairy] farm in the Northeast or Midwest is still a small business, with herds of 50 to 75 cows. In California, dairy farms are more like factories, averaging 500 cows, with a growing number of farms exceeding 2,000. To raise more cattle on less land, California dairymen buy feed instead of following the traditional practice of growing it themselves. Needing neither cold-weather barn nor the land and equipment for raising feed, they have lower production costs.³⁷

The "factory farms" noted by the Times are common in many Western, Southwestern, and Southern states. These farms are typically "drylot" farms (without pastures), with herds as large as 2,000 to 10,000 cows, far larger than national averages.³⁸

In retrospect, the restructuring of American agriculture has had a contradictory legacy. Its defenders point to benefits that are plentiful and obvious. American farmers are some of the most productive in the world, and American agriculture as a whole has become more efficient through the increased use of technology. Yet this headlong rush toward production and efficiency raised unsettling questions as well. One main question concerned the

livelihood of the millions of farmers who no longer made their living in agriculture. In the post-war manufacturing boom of the 1950s and 1960s, this problem could be overcome. As this restructuring has continued in a "post-industrial" economy, however, the answer has not come so easily. During the 1980s "farm crisis," Midwestern farmers were signing up for food stamps.³⁹

A related question has been the decline of rural America, especially those communities once dependent upon an abundance of small farms. Goldschmidt first traced the connections between the structure of farming and the character of rural communities. In his study of communities in California that were surrounded by small farms, "⁴⁰ he concluded that:

The small farm community [has] a population of middle class persons with a high degree of stability in income and tenure, and strong economic and social interest in their community.

In his study of communities surrounded by large-scale, factory farms, however, Goldschmidt reached a conclusion that would have far-reaching consequences for rural communities across the U.S., given the increased concentration in farming that resulted from the post-war restructuring of agriculture. He found that a community located in an area dominated by factory farms:

. . . consist[ed] of relatively few persons with economic stability, and large numbers whose only tie to the community is their uncertain and relatively low-income job. Differences in wealth are great among members of this community and social contacts between

them are rare. . . Attitudes such as these are not conducive to stability and the rich kind of rural community life which is properly associated with the traditional family farm.⁴¹

The Structure of the Contemporary Dairy Industry in New York

The New York state dairy industry is a product of the same forces that defined the structure of American agriculture (Table III). Due to the combined effect of changes in policy and technological innovation, the number of New York dairy farms declined by almost 50 percent between 1954 and 1964, and then declined by another 50 percent over the next 10 years. More than fifty percent of New York dairy farms in production in 1950 were gone by 1968.⁴² While the total number of cows in New York declined, the average number of cows per farm more than doubled between 1954 and 1987. The end result was larger, more

Table III

Number of Dairy Farms, Total Number of Cows, Average Number of Cows per Farm, and Deflated Total Net Farm Income in New York State 1954-1987

Year	# of Farms	Total # of Cows	Ave. Number Cows/Farm	Deflated Net Farm Income (1982=100)
1954	71,765	1,297,048	35@	1,100,163
1964	39,564	1,134,315	48@	740,483
1974	20,711	891,422	57@	597,696
1987	13,840	814,461	75	305,653*

@: These figures are from the years 1957, 1967 and 1977;

*: These figures are from 1984.

Sources: 1987 Census of Agriculture, Part 32, New York State and County Data; Cornell Department of Agricultural Economics, Staff Paper, "80 Years of Changes in Dairy Farming," March, 1989; USDA, Farm Income Data: A Historical Perspective.

productive dairy farms. The dairy farm with 20-29 cows, for example, declined in number from 11,000 in 1960, to 4,700 in 1968, while the number of farms with 50 or more cows increased by 1,100 (25 percent) in the same years.⁴³

As on the national level, a policy of declining price supports squeezed the income of dairy farmers (see Table III, for aggregate net farm income). The records provided by one long-time Northern New York dairy farmer illustrate how these policy decisions affected individual producers. This farmer, milking 30 cows on the same farm since 1929, provided me with access to his records from 1929 to 1985, including total pounds of milk produced per year, total income per year, and average milk price per year. In constant 1982 dollars, he received an average price of \$15.02 (per hundredweight) in 1954. Over the next thirty years, he was able to exceed this price only three times: 1957 (\$15.08), 1974 (\$15.22), and 1980 (\$15.27), which meant this farmer had to squeeze his operating expenses - not to mention his families' living expenses - out of an ever-declining margin over a thirty year period. The lowest price he received was \$12.05 per hundred pounds of milk in 1984 (Historical Interview #110).

The Dairy Industry in the 1990s

As the New York dairy farmers entered the 1990s, the structure of the industry was comprised primarily of small farms, which accounted for a majority of the milk produced.

Large dairy farms, however, produced a significant market share. In 1989, the average New York dairy farm had 69 cows and produced 962,436 pounds of milk.⁴⁴ A more specific breakdown of this structure can be seen in Table IV. The majority of dairy farmers milked between 30 and 99 cows, the largest group in the 50 to 99 cow range. Farms in these two categories can be considered "small" or "family farms," that is, "a farm small enough to be farmed by a family, and one that is farmed by a family - perhaps with a small amount of hired help."⁴⁵ Larger dairy farms, defined as those milking over 100-120 cows in New York, are characterized by a greater division of labor and a greater reliance on hired labor.⁴⁶ In the late 1980s, operators of very large farms increased production to the point where they controlled a significant market share. In December, 1988, for example,

Table IV

Number and Percent of New York State Dairy Farms
And Milk Cows, 1987

<u>Milk Cows</u>	<u>Farms</u>	<u>(%)</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>(%)</u>
Total Inventory	13,840	---	814,461	---
Farms with ----				
1 to 4	1,308	9.5	2,480	0.3
5 to 9	315	2.3	2,007	0.2
10 to 19	495	3.6	7,023	0.9
20 to 29	952	6.9	23,345	2.9
30 to 49	3,776	27.3	147,988	18.2
50 to 99	5,178	37.4	343,965	42.2
100 to 199	1,492	10.8	190,489	23.4
200 to 499	295	2.1	76,888	9.4
500 or more	29	0.2	20,276	2.5

Source: 1987 Census of Agriculture, Vol. 1, Part 32, New York State and County Data.

farmers that marketed more than 150,000 pounds of milk per month (usually milking more than 150 cows) made up only 9.8 percent of New York farmers, yet they accounted for 31.7 percent of the total milk produced.⁴⁷

The prevailing trends in the New York dairy industry continue toward fewer, larger farms, and in favor of technological innovation. Biotechnology, including growth hormones, gene insertion, and embryo transfer, stands as the next revolution to confront dairy farmers, and this may again greatly affect the structure of the industry. In 1982, for example, the average milk production per cow was 12,000 pounds per year. Based on introduction of new biotechnologies this number is expected to double, reaching 24,000 pounds by the year 2000,⁴⁸ raising the potential for even greater milk production on fewer farms.

Economic, Political, And Ideological Relations

The contemporary structure of the New York State dairy industry is based upon an intricate web of power relations involving government, cooperatives, corporations that supply agricultural inputs, milk handlers, the system of land-grant colleges, and of course, farmers. The current state of these relations are briefly summarized in the following pages.

Economic Relations

Milk Processors - The processing end of the milk industry is dominated by a few large corporations, as it has been

through much of New York State history. In the second quarter of 1989, the three largest milk processors in the Metropolitan New York market had a market share of 58 percent. The five largest processors controlled a 79 percent market share, led by LaBatt's of Canada, who acquired a 40 percent market share in New York City. This was in addition to LaBatt's 50 percent market share in New Jersey and a 75 percent share in Philadelphia.⁴⁹ Kraft General Foods Inc. is another major player in the New York milk market, with 7 processing plants spread throughout upstate counties.⁵⁰ Kraft's impact on the national market was the subject of a recent series of articles in the Milwaukee Sentinel. According to two Sentinel reporters, Kraft "has dominated selling for five years on Green Bay's National Cheese Exchange, which is the benchmark for setting all wholesale dairy prices in the United States."⁵¹ Since 1988 Kraft has accounted for 72 percent of the cheese sold on the Exchange (as much as 91 percent in 1989), in a period when wholesale milk prices went down. This decline in farm prices would have a direct effect on Kraft, which buys 10 billion pounds of milk from farmers annually. In another recent major industry controversy, in May, 1993 48 major dairy corporations, including Borden, Pet, and Dean Foods were convicted or pleaded guilty to price-fixing and bid-rigging on government contracts for milk and milk products.⁵²

In recent years, milk processors have been forced to

adjust to a significant shift in consumer preferences. Overall demand for milk has remained stable for many years, in large part because milk demand is considered inelastic. In other words, consumers perceive milk to be a necessity and will spend a little more if the price goes up. Consumers, however, have shifted their preferences from whole milk (and whole milk products) to low fat or skim milk, and have increased their purchases of low fat milk products.⁵³

Cooperatives - Different types of cooperatives are an important part of the dairy industry. Briefly, there are two basic types of co-ops: bargaining co-ops market the milk of their members to other processors and distributors, while operating co-ops control fluid and/or manufacturing plants.⁵⁴ In 1989, co-ops owned seven of the forty-six pasteurizing plants, and eight of the sixty-two manufacturing plants in the state.⁵⁵

In December 1988, sixty percent of New York dairy farmers belonged to co-ops, which varied widely by size and market power. Eastern Milk Producers, with 3,200 farmers, and Dairylea, with 2,500 farmers were the largest co-ops in New York (and PA). In the entire Northeast, co-ops control almost one half of all milk produced.⁵⁶ Co-op membership declined "significantly" in 1985 as a direct result of the collapse of NEDCO, the Northeast Cooperative Federation.⁵⁷ NEDCO was created in 1965 as a regional bargaining co-op,

through the merger of the Metropolitan Milk Producers Bargaining Agency and other cooperative alliances. When it became the largest co-op ever to declare bankruptcy in 1985, some NEDCO member farmers were liable for as much as \$30,000 apiece to cover NEDCO's losses.⁵⁸ State policy makers and many farmers supported another regional co-op association, the Regional Cooperative Marketing Agency (RCMA), as a way to raise milk prices in the late 1980s. Unfortunately, RCMA met a fate similar to NEDCO late in 1993.⁵⁹

Historically, co-ops have been more important to small farmers, as a means of aggregating their scarce resources. An important question dating back to the revitalization of the Dairymen's League (and the 1919 milk strike) has been the question of "co-op democracy." At issue has been the degree to which co-op leadership is responsible to the wants and needs of the farmer-membership. Today, some small farmers question whether the leadership of New York's larger co-ops act in the best interest of their members. The views of this small farmer was representative of many that were interviewed:

The dairy industry is made up of a lot of different co-ops. Some very large. It appears to me that their main goal, by the people that run them, is to better themselves than it is to better the lot of the farmer. You see an awful lot of it in the big co-ops here in New York . . . I organized a small co-op, which none of the officers get any salary. So if we don't negotiate a good premium, there's no benefit for us. (Int #103)

Farm Inputs - The market for farm inputs has undergone great

changes in the last few years. Although the national market is described by critics as "tightly concentrated,"⁶⁰ the dealers and corporations that provide farm inputs have been badly shaken by the recent decline in the number of farms. Between 1979 and 1984 alone the farm-equipment industry lost 22 percent of its dealerships nationwide. As a result, New York dairy farmers have fewer options, and often have to travel farther for services. In some ways, however, farmers found advantages in the adverse economic conditions: they were sometimes able to buy used equipment "at bargain prices from the many farmers that are going out of business."⁶¹ A Northern New York equipment dealer (who was also a dairy farmer) substantiated this view of the equipment industry, when he explained,

I talked to a group of farmers the other day and I told them right to their face, I said, "Don't cry on my shoulder." . . . [Farmers have] been in a good advantage for buying iron for the last 15 years. Whether it'd be used equipment coming off farms that had gone under, . . . or the excess iron setting in equipment manufacturers' inventory.
(Interview #113)

Political Relations

State and Federal Market Regulations - The Federal government is the dominant actor in the national dairy industry, in large part through three regulatory programs.⁶² The first is the Market Order system, which regulates milk production by requiring handlers to pay farmers government-mandated minimum prices based on how their milk is utilized. Currently, Federal Market Orders cover seventy percent of

the milk produced in New York State.⁶³ The second program is the Commodity Credit Corporation, which purchases surplus milk (products) on the national level "to hold prices at designated levels." The third program consists of import restrictions, such as quotas on imported cheese.

Within the Market Order System, milk prices paid to farmers are determined in an incredibly complex formula; the calculations begin with a monthly survey of the value of milk made into manufactured products in Minnesota and Wisconsin. This is the "M and W price," which is used as a base price for all of the separately-administered Federal Market Orders. The Class I, or fluid milk price "is derived from the M and W [price] through the simple [sic] addition of a differential" to adjust for the cost of transportation. This transportation differential is based on the distance from Eau Claire, Wisconsin, the area that had the largest milk surplus when the Department of Agriculture designed and implemented the current Market Order formula.⁶⁴

New York state government also maintains active intervention in the dairy industry, from providing research money to establishing economic and public health regulations.⁶⁵ Over the last forty years, state officials have had to balance the political power and conflicting goals of different classes of large and small dairy farmers. In recent years, state policy makers have attempted to

secure additional money by way of an over-order price,^c for all dairy farmers. This was done in part to combat what New York officials perceived as a regional bias in Federal policy toward Southern and Southwestern states. State legislators have supported policies including the Rogers-Allen Act, the Regional Cooperative Marketing Agency (RCMA), and, currently, the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact, a collective pricing agreement negotiated by states in the region, as a way to increase milk prices paid to farmers.

Dairy Policy in the 1980s - Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Washington policy makers began to consider the consequences of post-war farm policy. Projections for the future of the dairy industry forecast a continued trend toward fewer, larger, technologically-oriented farms. One of the first examples was a Senate Committee report entitled Farm Structure. In the report, Agriculture Committee Chairman Herman Talmadge wrote:

As the number of farms has declined, farms in general have become larger in size. There are rising fears that the traditional family farm in America may be marked for extinction and that we may be headed toward a system of agriculture based on giant, corporate-type farms. As a result, the structure of agriculture is a matter of growing concern.⁶⁶

Talmadge's report was written in response to a call by Bob Bergland, Carter Administration Secretary of Agriculture, for a "dialogue" on farm structure as a preface to the 1981

^c On over-order price is a state-mandated minimum price for milk above the Federal Order price.

farm bill. In 1981, the USDA released Bergland's widely circulated report, entitled A Time to Choose. The report concluded that:

unless present policies and programs are changed so that they counter, instead of reinforce and accelerate the trends toward ever-larger farming operations, the result will be a few large farms controlling food production in only a few years.⁶⁷

The newly-elected Reagan Administration chose to ignore A Time to Choose. In fact, "the USDA quickly allowed the report to go out of print."⁶⁸ Rather, the Administration's farm policy focused, in one respect, on sizable cuts in price supports. In 1983, the Senate Agriculture Committee approved lower dairy price supports, the first time these supports were cut in 20 years.⁶⁹ On October 1, 1983 the milk support price was set at \$12.60, down from \$13.10. By January 1, 1988, the support price had been cut to \$10.60, as required in the Food Security Act of 1985.⁷⁰ For all commodities, price supports soon reached their lowest levels since the 1930s. As Reagan critic Krebs noted, "In the five worst years of the Great Depression the average parity figure was 66 percent; in the 1981-1985 period the average was 56 percent."⁷¹

The second aspect of Reagan Administration farm policy was increased financial support for technological innovation in agriculture.⁷² In the dairy sector, this included research money and promotional support for biotechnologies including bovine growth hormone (bGH), as well as increased

money for transportation differentials.⁷³ The result was an overall farm policy that worked against itself. At the same time the Reagan Administration was spending more money on technological innovation, that would have the effect of increasing the amount of milk produced and most likely driving milk prices down, it was paying farmers **not** to produce milk. The Administration's goal here was to cut the large surpluses of government-purchased dairy products.

In 1983, the Reagan Administration enacted a diversion program, paying farmers \$10 per hundredweight to cut their production from 5-30 percent.⁷⁴ When this program failed to reduce production (only 13 percent of Wisconsin farmers signed on), the Administration tried again the next year. In April, 1984, the Dairy Termination Program or "Buyout" went into effect, paying farmers to reduce their herds by killing or selling cows. In New York State alone, the dairy buyout cost the Federal government \$75 million. The result, however, was that milk production actually increased, as farmers either added cows in expectation of higher prices, or sold or killed off their most unproductive stock.⁷⁵ By the end of the decade, USDA economist James Miller reported that 20 percent of U.S. dairy farms were in serious financial trouble.⁷⁶

When the effects of lower price supports and increased production were combined with high interest rates and the declining dollar in the early 1980s, the result was a

crisis in the entire farm sector. Midwestern farmers, whose land had rapidly appreciated in the 1970s, were faced with a sharp decline in the value of their assets, on top of the mountains of debt many had acquired by expanding and applying the latest technologies. By the mid-1980s agriculture had come full circle. The "farm crisis," as the farm Depression came to be known, was reminiscent of the Great Depression. Total farm debt, as one measure of the "crisis," rose from \$50 billion in 1970 to \$190 billion in 1984.⁷⁷ More than thirty thousand family-run farms were lost per year,⁷⁸ - along with 281 farmer suicides in Iowa alone between 1980 and 1985, an average of 47 per year.⁷⁹ Ironically, those farmers that best weathered the crisis had taken a more conservative approach to farming: their farms were smaller, more diversified, and had less debt.⁸⁰

A second aspect of the farm crisis that was reminiscent of the 1930s was an increase in government payments to forestall rising farm activism and protest. The Reagan Administration spent \$4 billion on agriculture in fiscal 1981; by 1986 this figure had skyrocketed to \$25.8 billion.⁸¹ In total, "the Reagan Administration's outlay in its initial three years in office was \$34 billion, the most massive federal intervention in the annals of agriculture."⁸²

Ideological Relations

In my discussion of the post-war agricultural policy, I

described the two competing ideologies that contested the New Deal farm program: the "free market approach" vs. the "interventionist" perspective. In New York State, after 1954 the free market perspective had become dominant. This new ideology permeated state agricultural institutions, led by the New York Farm Bureau. As Krebs correctly pointed out:

It is important to understand that at this point in the history of American agriculture a fundamental shift in both priorities and structural concepts was taking place that would dictate the basis for U.S. farm policy right up to the present day.⁸³

Within New York State agriculture, an important institution that embodied this ideology was Cornell University, located in upstate New York. Cornell "is both a privately endowed university as well as a state land-grant university."⁸⁴ Hightower, in one of the first critical analyses of the Land Grant College system, called them "the intellectual fathers" of a revolution "that have worked to the advantage and profit of large corporations involved in agriculture."⁸⁵ The "Cornell philosophy" favored "a maximum freedom from government interference" and "from high fixed price supports," and also "a preference for big agriculture over the individual farmer."⁸⁶ Historically, Cornell played a leading role in New York farm policy making. During the Eisenhower Administration Cornell played a similar role in Washington. As Alan S. Emory wrote in the Watertown Times in February, 1954:

The boys from Ithaca have really taken over. Farm

policy in the Eisenhower Administration was, to a large extent, taught in the classrooms of Cornell University, organized by the Cornell faculty and furnished to farm groups by Cornell experts.⁸⁷

As Emory noted, this free market ideology supported by Cornell had several important tenets. One tenet was that large farms were more efficient and productive than small farms. A second tenet was faith in the unrelenting drive for technological innovation. Third, it was believed that government should play an important, proactive role, even though some academics and policy makers declared government intervention to be synonymous with dictatorship.⁸⁸ What they meant was that government should have less of a role in *setting prices and regulating the market*. With the free market approach, government policy was to be judged by a different standard. Policy was no longer evaluated, as it was in the New Deal era, by its effects on rural communities or by the number of farmers kept on the land. Rather, a new standard emerged based on productivity and efficiency. Through tax policy, research money, grants, regulatory policy and ideological support, government was to play an important role in facilitating the transition to large scale, capital-intensive farms.⁸⁹

In the ideological struggle within New York farming, perhaps the most controversial idea among farmers was the question of efficiency. As the free market ideology became ascendant, efficiency became a standard used to judge not only policies but individual farmers. A modern or

"efficient" farmer was one that would adopt new technologies and expand. A farmer who preferred the old methods, who did not want to expand, or who could not turn a profit risked being labeled "inefficient." It was as if success or failure in farming depended on the individual character of farmers, separate from any consideration of the larger forces that shaped the structure of agriculture, including government policies. When asked about the concept of efficiency in contemporary dairy farming, many of the small farmers I interviewed reacted with anger. The response of this small farmer was typical:

Everyone's efficient. If we weren't efficient we wouldn't be in business today. I hate that word! Because how do you classify someone as being efficient? If a person is doing what works on his farm, maybe he doesn't seem as efficient as the guy next door to him. But if it's working, and his operation is working well, then he is as efficient as he can be. (Int #116)

Bovine Growth Hormone: The Convergence of Economic, Political, and Ideological Forces

The issue of bovine growth hormone provides an example of a convergence of economic, political, and ideological forces within the New York dairy industry, around a commitment to capital-intensive farming. The example of bGH also illuminates how this commitment to capital-intensive farming carries with it the potential for significant changes in both structure and class relations within the

dairy industry. BGH, or BST (for bovine somatotropin),^d is a genetically engineered growth hormone said to increase milk production by 10-40 percent in lactating cows. BGH was developed by four companies - Monsanto, American Cyanamid, Upjohn and Elanco (a unit of Eli Lilly); Monsanto made bGH its "flagship biotech product," based on a potential market originally estimated at one billion dollars by Dale E. Bauman, a Cornell researcher.⁹⁰ Recent estimates have been scaled back, although the potential market is still pegged at \$400 million.

BGH has generated great controversy because its use could have a considerable effect on the structure of the industry. A 10 to 40 percent increase in milk production, fueled by bGH, would mean lower milk prices, and with it the potential for many small farmers to be forced out of the industry. In addition, there are potential health questions with bGH, raising the possibility that consumers might shun bGH-treated milk.⁹¹ A study by Dr. Robert Kalter, Professor and Chair of the Dept. of Agricultural Economics at Cornell, estimated that within the first three years of the adoption of bGH, 25 to 30 percent of all dairy farmers (in the U.S.) may be forced out.⁹² Testifying before the House Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy and Poultry, Kalter claimed that New York State alone would lose 4,500 dairy farmers.⁹³

^dEven the name has a political significance. BST is the preferred name of the biotechnology industry and its supporters; bGH is used by its critics.

A major part of the controversy over bGH can be traced to the different effects it would have on dairy farmers in different class positions. The industry claim, supported by many on the faculty at Cornell, is that bGH would be "size-neutral." Lee Miller, Vice President and General Manager of Monsanto's Animal Science Division, testified that "The greatest benefit of BST is likely to accrue, as it has in the past, to the better, more efficient managers. The technology does not favor the large over the small."⁹⁴ Miller went on to say that small farmers could best utilize a technology such as bGH because they would not have to hire extra labor to inject bGH into their cows.

Small farmers, however, and critics of bGH have made the opposite argument, claiming that bGH will accelerate the trend in the industry toward fewer, larger farms. This small farmer, active in the 1991 strike movement, was convinced that bGH was "hurting the small dairy farmer." He continued:

There's farms here in the county now that are experimenting with BST. And what the hell do we need more milk for? Here we are fighting for supply management program so the government doesn't have to buy the surplus. It doesn't make sense to me. (Interview #109)

Jeremy Rifkin, President of the Foundation on Economic Trends and perhaps the most outspoken bGH opponent, agreed with this view: "Simply speaking, the large chemical companies are going to benefit because they're going to be putting this out on the market, and the large agrifarms, the huge managerial farms, will benefit."⁹⁵ The definitive

answer to the question of bGH and "size-neutrality" may have been provided by Cornell's Dr. Kalter, who at the end of his testimony placed bGH in the context of the current technological revolution in the industry:

Initially, we agree with the previous speakers, that the size of the operation is not critical here; it is really the farm management ability that is critical, not the size. But in the long run, as other new technologies such as computer controls and other items that are capital intensive . . . come into the market, it may be that we're looking at a bias toward larger operators, not because of growth hormone but because of the other technologies that work with it.⁹⁶

The larger significance of bGH, for this analysis, is that it represents a convergence of economic, political, and ideological forces that patterns present and future struggles among farmers. In many ways the contestants in the debate over bGH illustrate the balance of power in contemporary dairy farming, one that falls heavily in favor of larger farmers and the increased use of technology for even greater milk production. Hooks spelled out these relationships quite clearly in a 1988 Cornell Masters thesis.⁹⁷ bGH was developed at Cornell, paid for with over one million dollars in pharmaceutical industry money. According to Hooks, Monsanto's contract with Cornell was unique; it set unusually strict limits on access to data, and on the right to publish the results of bGH-related experiments. Cornell faculty members have in turn promoted bGH, with at least one research scientist becoming a paid

consultant for Monsanto. The Cornell Animal Science and Agricultural Economics Departments have done the following: made presentations on the safety of bGH to farmers (along with Cornell Cooperative Extension); spoken on the safety of biotechnology in the food supply (specifically bGH); and targeted health professionals proclaiming the safety of bGH in The Journal of the American Medical Association.⁹⁸

In addition to the pharmaceutical industry, milk handlers and retail chains have promoted bGH. In a brochure entitled "On Milk and BST," P and C foods, an upstate supermarket chain, assured consumers of the safety of bGH-treated milk:

Years of research have confirmed and reconfirmed that milk and dairy products from cows treated with BST are safe for human consumption.

For their part, New York State and Federal policy makers have supported bGH in a variety of ways. The Federal government has provided research money, patents for biotech products, a "lenient" regulatory environment, and the USDA has directly promoted bGH. New York state government has provided research money and ideological support, important in what Hooks characterized as "laying the political and economic groundwork for a new era of technological change."⁹⁹ New York State Commissioner of Agriculture Richard T. McGuire provided an example of this support, when he condemned milk dealers who refused to accept milk from bGH-treated cows:

Responsible health authorities at the state and federal level, including the National Institute of Health, the Journal of the American Medical Association, the Congressional Office of Technical [sic] Assessment, and the Nutrition Committee of the American Academy of Pediatrics have all concluded that the milk from BST supplemented cows is safe and not different, therefore the issue of the safety of milk produced from BST supplemented cows would appear to be a false issue.¹⁰⁰

According to Hooks, the ideological support of bGH has been the most significant and consistent form of support offered by government at any level.¹⁰¹ In November, 1993, the Food and Drug Administration approved the use of Posilac, Monsanto's version of bGH, following a 90 day moratorium imposed by Congress.¹⁰²

Conclusion

In 1990, the dominant economic, political, and ideological forces within the New York dairy industry would be shaken by insurgency, on the heels of a much larger uprising in the American Midwest. The 1980s "farm crisis" protests were a reaction to the most rapid restructuring of farming since the 1950s, and they raised the loss of small, commercial or "family" farms as a national political issue. As this movement developed, it fostered an ideology that stood counter to the dominant free-market perspective. Groups like the National Save the Family Farm Coalition, Prairiefire Rural Action, Minnesota Groundswell, and many others combined a concern for the environment with an older standard of evaluating farm policy by its effect on rural

communities. With the help of supporters in Hollywood and Willie Nelson's Farm Aid concerts, the plight of the small "family farmer" became a widely debated political issue.

The "farm crisis" protest movement provided the context for increased activism among dairy farmers. In New York, the effects of the "farm crisis" were not as severe as in the Midwest. New York farmers did not experience a comparable fluctuation in land values; in addition, most New York farms were smaller and carried less debt load than their Midwestern counterparts. New York dairy farmers saw their incomes slashed in the mid-1980s nonetheless, as support prices were cut on top of increases in the cost of inputs such as fuel and interest rates. In response, aggrieved farmers began to organize meetings and discuss collective solutions to their predicament. The next chapter documents the rise of milk strike movements in New York in 1986 and 1991.

Notes

1. Adam Przeworski, "Proletariat into a Class: The Process of Class Formation from Karl Kautsky's The Class Struggle to Recent Controversies," Politics and Society Vol. 7, No. 4, (1977): 343-401. For an explanation of the concept of class employed in this inquiry, and a brief look at Przeworski's analysis, see Chapter One, 15-19.

2. The idea of a "farm holiday" or withholding of production was first put forth by the Farmers' Union, founded in Texas in 1902. The leader of the Union was Newton Gresham, a former organizer of the Texas Farmers' Alliance. Murray R. Benedict, Farm Policies of the United States, 1790-1950: A Study of Their Origins and Development (New York: Twentieth Century

Fund, 1953), 134. For more on the National Farmers' Union, see Wesley McCune, Who's Behind Our Farm Policy? (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956), Ch. 4; Lowell K. Dyson, "The National Farmers' Union," in Farmers' Organizations (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 215-32. The history of the Farm Holiday Association strike is found in Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, Twentieth Century Populism: Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West 1900-1939 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1951), Ch. XV; John Shover, Cornbelt Rebellion (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965); Dyson, "The Farm Holiday Organization," in Farmers' Organizations, .

3. William Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 51. For firsthand accounts of the tarring and feathering of Judge Bradley, see also Studs Terkel, Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 217-30.

4. For an overview of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, see Van Perkins, Crisis in Agriculture: The AAA and the New Deal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Theodore Saloutos, The American Farmer and the New Deal (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1982).

5. Richard M. Valelly, Radicalism in the States, The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and the American Political Economy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 95-96.

6. For an explanation of the Sub-Treasury Plan, see Lawrence Goodwyn, Democratic Promise (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 565-81. For overview of the Populist Movement, see Gene Clanton, Populism: The Humane Preference in America (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991); Robert C. McMath, Jr., American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993). Other invaluable recent works on Populism include Bruce Palmer, "Man Over Money": The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Steven Hahn, The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Scott G. McNall, The Road to Rebellion: Class Formation and Kansas Populism, 1865-1900 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). The Populists' own words and documents can be found in George B. Tindall, ed, A Populist Reader (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966).

7. For an explanation of the New Deal dairy policy, see Murray R. Benedict and Oscar C. Stine, The Agricultural Commodity Programs (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1956), 441-64; New York State Senate, Legislative Commission on Dairy Industry Development, Review of Dairy Regulations (Albany: New York State Senate, 1988), 13-33; Alden Manchester, The Public

Role in the Dairy Economy (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983), 21-37.

8. Kevin Ristau and Mark Ritchie, "The Farm Crisis, History and Analysis," Shmate, (Fall 1986): 10-20.

9. Lowell K. Dyson, Red Harvest (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 110. George Norris was the longtime supporter of Populist and Progressive causes from Nebraska. See George W. Norris, Fighting Liberal (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1945). The cost of production program has been debated for many years in American agriculture. In 1991, New York State dairy farmers made a guaranteed cost of production one of the main goals of the milk strike protest movement. For a discussion of the earlier National Farmers' Union proposal, see A.J. Crampton, The National Farmers' Union, Ideology of a Pressure Group (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 139-44; Perkins, 62-78; Valelly, 93-100.

10. See David Eugene Conrad, The Forgotten Farmers: The Story of Sharecroppers in the New Deal (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982).

11. Ristau and Ritchie, 12.

12. Grant McConnell, Private Power and American Democracy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 235.

13. Willard W. Cochrane, The Development of American Agriculture: A Historical Analysis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 304.

14. Lyle P. Schertz, et al., Another Revolution in U.S. Farming? (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1979), 127.

15. Nancy A. Blanpied, ed., Farm Policy: The Politics of Soil, Surpluses, and Subsidies (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1984), 115.

16. These two perspectives on post-war farm policy are neatly summarized in Blanpied, 109-112; see also Max J. Pfeffer, "Industrial Farming," democracy, Vol. 3, No. 2, (Spring, 1983): 37-49.

17. Ristau and Ritchie, 12.

18. Theodore W. Schultz, Agriculture in A Unstable Economy (New York: McGraw-Hill Books, 1945), 273.

19. Brian E. Waddell, "Economic Mobilization for World War II and the Transformation of the American State" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1993), 410-16; see also Karl Schriftsgieser, Business and Public Policy: The Role of the Committee for Economic Development (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967).

20. Schultz, 247.

21. Committee for Economic Development, An Adaptive Program for Agriculture (New York: Committee for Economic Development, 1962), 7, 9, 25, 42; Over the years, the CED made specific policy recommendations for dairy, such as calling for continued downward pressure on dairy prices by lowering price supports and increasing import quotas on cheese and butter. Committee for Economic Development, A New U.S. Farm Policy (New York: Committee for Economic Development, 1974), 47-8.

22. James Agee and Walker Evans, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969).

23. Ristau and Ritchie, 12.

24. Ibid., 13.

25. Blanpied, 109.

26. Benedict, Farm Policies of the United States, 1790-1950, 474-483.

27. A.V. Krebs, The Corporate Reapers: The Book of Agribusiness (Washington, D.C.: Essential Books, 1992), 212. The relationship between Eisenhower and Benson is discussed in Herbert S. Parmet, Eisenhower and the American Crusades (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 320-25; for a critical view of Benson's role in the Eisenhower Presidency, see Chester J. Pach, Jr. and Elmo Richardson, The Presidency of Dwight David Eisenhower (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991), 35, 177,

28. Blanpied, 110.

29. Krebs, 218; The parity ratio is defined as "the ratio of prices received by farmers to prices paid by them." Benedict, Farm Policies of the United States, 1790-1950, 450.

30. Gary Lucier, Agnes Chesley, and Mary Ahern, Farm Income Data: A Historical Perspective, Statistical Bulletin No. 740 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Economics Division, Economic Research Service, October, 1986), 15, 29.

31. Richard S. Kirkendall, "A History of the Family Farm," in Is There a Moral Obligation to Save the Family Farm?, ed. Gary Comstock (Ames: University of Iowa Press, 1987), 91-97; for statistics on the loss of small farms in the New York State Dairy industry, see George Connerman, Toward the Year 1985: Milk Production and Consumption, Special Cornell Series Number 1, (Ithaca: New York State College of Agriculture, Cornell University, 1970), 2. In the American South, the postwar transformation of agriculture resulted in the elimination of small subsistence and sharecropper holdings, while the number of small, family-operated, commercial farms actually increased. Peggy F. Barlett, American Dreams, Rural Realities (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), Ch. 2.
32. Joseph N. Belden, Dirt Rich, Dirt Poor: America's Food and Farm Crisis (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 22.
33. Schertz, 27-28.
34. Committee for Economic Development, A New U.S. Farm Policy New York: Committee for Economic Development, 1974), 30.
35. Robert E. Jacobson, "Changing Structure of Dairy Farming in the United States: 1940-79," in Farm Structure: A Historical Perspective on Changes in the Number and Size of Farms, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, United States Senate, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, April, 1980), 133.
36. Schertz, 120.
37. Barneby J. Feder, "Cows on a Technological Tightrope," New York Times, 10 June 1990, Section III, 10.
38. Schertz, 119.
39. Osha Gray Davidson, "The Rise of the Rural Ghetto," The Nation 242, (14 June 1986): 820-21; Davidson found that in 1985, the number of farm families receiving food stamps in Iowa increased 400 percent.
40. In addition to Goldschmidt, Carey McWilliams was perhaps the foremost observer of California agriculture. His work underscored California's unique development, apart from the traditions of small farm ownership that typified Eastern agriculture. See his Ill Fares the Land (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1942), and especially Factories in the Field (Santa Barbara, California: Peregrine Publishers, Inc., 1971).

41. Walter Goldschmidt, So As You Sow: Three Studies in the Social Consequences of Agribusiness (Montclair, New Jersey: Allenheld, Osmun, 1978), 284-5.

42. Connerman, 2.

43. Ibid., 2.

44. State of New York, Department of Agriculture and Markets, Changes in the Marketplace and Operations of the New York State Dairy Industry 1985 -1989 (Albany: Division of Dairy Industry Services, January, 1990), 14. Hereafter cited as "Changes in the Marketplace."

45. Wendell Berry, "A Defense of the Family Farm," in Is There A Moral Obligation To Save The Family Farm? ed. Gary Comstock (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1987), 347. The United States Department of Agriculture defines "family" farms by income. According to the USDA, a small family farm has an income between \$10,000 and \$39,000; for a medium family farm: \$40,000-\$249,000; and for a large family farm: \$500,000 and up. For an analysis of recent structural trends within these classifications, see Harold D. Guither and Harold G. Halcrow, The American Farm Crisis (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 1-14.

46. The best source for statistics on hired labor costs on dairy farms in New York State is Stuart F. Smith, Wayne A. Knoblauch, and Linda D. Putnam, 1991 Dairy Farm Business Summary (Ithaca: Cornell University Department of Agricultural Economics, August, 1992), 42-9; According to the Survey, in 1991 the accrual expenses for hired labor (defined as "cash expenses adjusted for changes in inventory, prepaid expenses, and accounts payable") were \$5,894 on the 73 farms surveyed with 40-54 cows, \$8,708 on the 72 farms with 55 to 69 cows, \$23,886 on the 36 farms with 85 to 99 cows, and \$32,865 on the 77 farms with 100 to 149 cows. On the 21 farms cited with 200-299 cows, the accrual expenses for labor were \$85,569; for the 18 farms with 300 or more cows, they were \$265,896. It is important to point out that the 1991 Dairy Farm Business Summary is not a random survey. Nonetheless, it is the most comprehensive data set available that correlates farms by size of herd and labor costs .

47. Changes in the Marketplace, 18.

48. United States Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, Technology, Public Policy, and the Changing Structure of American Agriculture: A Special Report for the 1985 Farm Bill (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1985), 10.

49. New York Times, 3 August 1988, Section D, 3.

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Chapter Five

The 1991 Milk Strike Protest Movement

The late 1960s and early 1970s were relatively profitable years for many American farmers. An increasing export market moved commodity prices higher and this potential for higher earnings, together with speculation, translated into rising land values. In the late 1970s, however, the American farm economy changed rapidly. High interest rates and collapsing commodity prices resulted in a restructuring of American agriculture that became known as simply the "farm crisis." Hardest hit were Midwestern farmers; by 1985, economic measures such as bank failures and farm foreclosures in Iowa and Minnesota reached levels not seen since the Great Depression. In another echo of the 1930s, the harsh conditions in agriculture generated a farmers' protest movement in the American Midwest. Within this context of renewed activism, New York dairy farmers revived the tradition of milk strike protest movements in 1986, and again in 1991, as small dairy farmers responded to a sharp drop in the milk price, declining price supports, and the increased possibility of bankruptcy or foreclosure.

This chapter begins with a brief analysis of the Midwestern farm crisis protest movement and continues with an analysis of the 1986 and 1991 milk strike movements in

New York. Its purpose is to illustrate how the changes in the structure of New York State agriculture brought about an angry reaction from many small, and even a few large, dairy farmers. When these grievances were combined with shifts in the larger political opportunity structure, this created a small opening for political action. As I will demonstrate, farmers in different class positions responded differently to the changes in structural relationships. The key to unlocking the different forms of political action can be traced to farmers' position in the structure of agriculture, because it was their class position that delineated their modes of political participation.

This analysis considers the important questions of why some farmers joined milk strike movements and some did not; why movement farmers chose the milk strike as a method of addressing their grievances; why other (usually larger) farmers had greater faith in lobbying and other forms of conventional participation; and the characteristics of the "micromobilization contexts" in which farmers were recruited into the strike movement. The final section includes a detailed profile of four groups of dairy farmers: the strike movement leadership, the movement's rank and file, and farmers opposed to the strike movement - both elite and non-elite.

The 1980s Farm Crisis

In the 1970s, higher prices and government encouragement enticed American farmers to expand at a rapid rate. Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz urged farmers "to plant fencerow to fencerow," because the Nixon Administration believed the nation's agricultural yield, in particular increased grain production, had taken on increased economic and political importance. First, the Nixon Administration viewed grain as a potential geopolitical counterweight to Middle Eastern oil. Second, Administration officials sought farmers' support in their reelection efforts.¹ The statistics on farm exports confirmed the importance of food production in the overall economy, as they increased from \$8 billion in 1971 to \$43.8 billion in 1981.² For farmers, the rapidly increasing export market provided the expectation of a continued upward trend in farm income. In 1971, for example, a bushel of wheat brought farmers \$1.74; after government subsidized sales of over 400 million bushels of grain to the Soviet Union, the price of wheat soared to a high of \$5.52 per bushel in 1974.³

To finance expansion, many farmers relied on borrowed money. And farmers did more than plant more acres; they bought bigger tractors, used more chemicals, and had to account for higher fuel costs. Department of Agriculture statistics show that total farm debt rose from \$53 billion

in 1970 to over \$165 billion in 1980.⁴ As Friedberger correctly pointed out, expansion was a rational choice for farmers in an inflationary economy.⁵ The problem was that in this headlong rush to "get big or get out," many potential problems within American agriculture were glossed over. One not so minor detail that was overlooked was the farmers' ability to repay these new loans. In the mid-1970s, for example, when "Land that produced, on average, \$1,200 per acre sold for \$6,000 to \$7,000 per acre,"⁶ bankers urged farmers to borrow more money based on their net worth, rather than their cash flow.⁷ Davidson told of one Iowa farm family that tried to borrow \$12,000 in 1979, only to find their check made out for \$25,000. "When they called their loan officer about the mistake, he just laughed. 'Don't be foolish,' he chided them. 'Go ahead and use the extra money for whatever you want. You're good for it.'"⁸ Other potential problems that were overlooked included the rising cost of government farm programs, the potential for overproduction, and the ecological impact of bringing marginal land into production. All of these issues seemed insignificant in the headlong rush to increase production - and profit.

In the late 1970s, however, the agricultural economy changed rapidly. The new Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker - in loose coordination with the Carter Administration - engineered a recession to fight inflation

by cranking up interest rates. Volcker's policy eventually lowered inflation, but at a great cost to the nation's agricultural sector. The ensuing recession and high interest rates precipitated a deflationary shock that reverberated through the commodity markets, eventually lowering crop prices **and** land values, and decreasing demand for commodities worldwide. In addition, the Carter Administration launched a grain embargo against the Soviet Union, in retaliation for the Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan. Together, these actions generated a depression in the agricultural economy that became known simply as the "farm crisis."⁹

The Reagan Administration's farm policy exacerbated the farm crisis after 1981. Administration officials cut farm subsidies as part of their initial strategy to cut certain elements of the Federal budget. In June, 1983, for example, the Senate Ag Committee followed the Administration's lead in approving lower milk price supports, the first decrease in 20 years. On October 1, the support price fell from \$13.10 to \$12.60 per hundredweight.¹⁰ Ironically, as the dimensions of the crisis grew worse, the Administration poured money into the Midwest in an effort to forestall both the economic and political consequences of the farm depression. All told, the Administration spent more on agriculture in the 1980s than all previous Administrations.¹¹

Analysts were divided as to where to place the blame for the crisis. Some mainstream farm economists placed a share of the blame on individual farmers. In a 1987 Business Week article a number of economists pointed out that the "farm crisis" was not without its positive effects; in one respect, the farm sector was more efficient as "marginal" or "inefficient" farmers were forced out. As Emmanuel Melichar, a Federal Reserve Board economist, put it, "The [farm] sector's improved because the weak people have been bankrupted."¹² Other analysts disagreed. Neopopulist critics blamed government policy for the crisis. Two analysts for the Texas Department of Agriculture wrote, "The family farmer is bearing the cost of the new policies in the form of low prices, high interest rates and plummeting land values."¹³ Journalist William Greider argued along the same lines. He absolved farmers, instead faulting the policies of the Federal Reserve Board:

These failing farmers were widely described as "inefficient," but nothing had changed about their efficiency except the price they received for their output and the price they paid for their loans.¹⁴

The primary consequence of the farm crisis was an accelerated and sweeping restructuring of American farming. Farmers stopped farming, which in turn devastated rural economies across the Midwest. States such as Iowa and Minnesota felt the greatest impact. Farmers in these states experienced the greatest fluctuations in interest rates,

prices, and land values, which plunged in the midst of financial conditions not seen since the 1930s. In Iowa, the value of an acre of farm land fell 63 percent between 1981 and 1986; in the same period Iowa averaged 47 farmer suicides a year.¹⁵ Between 1981 and 1987, 26,000 Iowa farmers (20 percent) went under.¹⁶ In one study of Iowa farmers, Friedberger found that the "key factor" in the "shakeout" of family farmers was the degree to which farmers had expanded prior to the "crisis." The greater the farm expansion, the greater the chances of foreclosure during the 1980s.¹⁷

Davidson defined the farm crisis as a crisis of rural communities, producing what he termed "the rise of the rural ghetto." The number of farm families receiving food stamps in Iowa, for example, increased by 400 percent in 1985.¹⁸ He also noted the economic "ripple effect" of the crisis on rural communities:

Between 1976 and 1986, Iowa's small towns suffered the following losses: the number of gas stations fell almost 41%, grocery stores 27%, building material stores 21%, variety stores 37%, men's clothing stores 38%. Bankruptcies among Iowa businesses rose 46% in 1985,, the largest one year jump since records were first kept 25 years earlier.¹⁹

The "winners" in the farm crisis were agribusiness, the farm management industry, and some farmers with very large operations. Conagra, the nation's leading pesticide supplier as well as food processor, "reported record sales and earnings each year" during the 1980s. This was consistent

with a Forbes survey of 50 food processing firms, that had an average return on equity of 15 percent from 1981 to 1986.²⁰ According to another survey, the number of farms operated by farm management companies increased by 48 percent during the farm crisis. Metropolitan Life, for example, purchased the largest farm management firm in the U.S., that had acquired 3,900 farms, accounting for 1 million acres of farmland.²¹

Class Position and Modes of Political Participation

The farm crisis protest movement that emerged in the late 1970s provides a preliminary illustration of how the structure of American farming patterned the political response to the "farm crisis." In the American Agriculture Movement (AAM), the precursor to 1980s protests, the participation of farmers embedded within different class positions in the same protest organization produced immediate tension, ultimately resulting in organizational infighting over questions of resources, tactics, and leadership. As the following brief discussion of AAM reveals, the highly publicized split within AAM reflected the differences in class position and political attitudes among farmers. One class of financially-stressed farmers within AAM argued in favor of unconventional politics such as strikes and protests, based on grassroots organizing. A second class of more affluent farmers favored lobbying and

pressure group tactics, based on a formal, dues paying organization.

The Farm Crisis Protest Movement

Time and again analysts have compared the 1980s "farm crisis" to the Great Depression; indeed one marked similarity was an increase in political activism that signaled, like the 1930s Farmers Holiday Association or the Dairy Farmers Union, a rebellion born out of crisis conditions in American agriculture. To many observers, the individual symptoms of the 1980s farm crisis, including foreclosures, bankruptcies, and auctions, were not unknown in American agriculture. What defined this period as a "crisis," however, was the shock of such sudden, sweeping changes in the structure of agriculture; for farmers, the pace of such overwhelming changes made existing inequities more acute and imbalances in power all the more visible.

The "farm crisis" protest movement originated with five farmers in Southeastern Colorado in 1977. As Cigler pointed out, the limited resources of many farmers, as defined by their class position, left them with few options other than collective action - in the form of a general farm strike - as a way to address their grievances:

With a minimum in tangible resources, this small cadre of entrepreneurs was quickly able to mobilize a large number of farmers in an attempt to organize a strike to shut down farm production. The key elements were the skillful use of solidary incentive in recruitment and organizational formation, along with an emotional message stressing collective and expressive goals.²²

The goals of the strike movement were policy-oriented; the main goal was a return to 100 percent of parity. Although AAM never actually organized a widespread strike, its organizing drive was quite successful, in part a testimony to the harsh economic conditions. By January 1978, AAM reported 1,100 locals in 40 states, with over 3 million people having attended AAM rallies.²³ AAM was perhaps best known for its high profile tractorcades in Colorado and Washington. Following one well-publicized tractorcade in 1978, Congress and the Carter Administration raised farm subsidies by 11 percent overall.²⁴

Immediately following a second tractorcade in 1979, notorious for its destruction more than anything positive, a split appeared in the AAM ranks. This split reflected important differences in the class position and political attitudes of AAM farmers. One faction of mainly Colorado and Kansas wheat farmers, who Cigler claimed "represented some of the most financially troubled farmers in the AAM," many of whom "were victims of farm foreclosures in the early 1980s" ²⁵ - chose a political path that was consonant with their tenuous hold on their farms. That is, they favored unconventional political participation, including direct protests, strikes, and educational activities. The second faction, mainly from Texas and Oklahoma, had taken part in the tractorcades - which presupposed a certain level of resources - and supported greater participation in

conventional politics. This too was a reflection of their class position. As Cigler pointed out:

Some had been previously active in farm cooperatives, a few had had actual experience in government, and others had been involved in a variety of farm interest groups.²⁶

By 1980, the split in AAM had widened. The pro-lobbying and conventional politics faction campaigned for Ronald Reagan for President, angering many of the grassroots organizers.²⁷ In 1981, at a September convention, AAM delegates were presented with a proposal to "refocus" AAM, with the creation of a lobbying and public relations office in Washington. The consultants that made this proposal identified two key issues - resources and tactics - that had to be resolved for AAM to become an organization devoted to conventional politics. First, they claimed that AAM had to develop and tap the resources of its more affluent membership. Then, the group had to abandon its emphasis on unconventional political participation. The report stated:

In carefully maintaining the American Agriculture Movement as a *movement*, rather than an *association*, the American Agriculture Movement has sacrificed financial support and discipline. . . . Thousands who wear the caps and believe in the goals. . . do not pay dues nor even subscribe to the newspaper. They are like professed Christians who don't belong to a church. They've got the spirit but the spirit doesn't pay the rent. (emphasis added).

The report continued:

The second point which must be addressed is the Movement's willingness and ability to employ extreme tactics. The heritage of the American Agriculture Movement is in the tractorcades, and

it is a proud heritage. But. . .if a well-conceived program for achieving farm profit is developed and carried out, then there should never again be a need to have the tractors on city streets.²⁸

This proposal generated a great controversy that eventually split AAM into two new groups. Protest-oriented farmers founded a separate organization called Grass Roots AAM, while the lobbying wing became AAM, Inc.²⁹ Ironically, many AAM organizers from both factions eventually became involved in later protests, as economic conditions worsened and protests expanded after 1982.

As the effects of the farm crisis worsened in the early 1980s, "neopopulist" groups were organized across the Midwest, including Prairefire Rural Action in Iowa, COACT and Groundswell in Minnesota, the Illinois Farm Alliance, the Missouri Rural Crisis Center, the North Plains Research Council in Montana, and the Wisconsin Farm Unity Alliance.³⁰ Friedberger defined neopopulism as a belief in a positive role for government in the farm economy, through such programs as price supports and production controls. The central tenet of neopopulism was that "agriculture must be reorganized to meet the needs of farmers rather than agribusiness."³¹ Farm activists in these new organizations initially tackled the immediate problems of foreclosures and suicides. Prairiefire Rural Action in Des Moines, for example, established a 24 hour hotline that counseled farmers on personal and financial issues. Later, as these

groups became established, movement leaders got around to addressing the critical questions of the political and economic power within American agriculture. Most activist groups endorsed Iowa Senator Tom Harkin's Save the Family Farm Act in 1985. The next year, many activist organizations sent representatives to the National Farmer Rancher Congress, where producers from a wide spectrum of states and commodity groups met to exchange ideas. Among the delegates at this Congress were a number of dairy farmers from upstate New York, who faced their own problems of powerlessness and declining milk prices. It was in this context of renewed activism that New York farmers resurrected milk strikes as a form of collective action.

Class Position and the 1986 Milk Strike in New York

The brief history of the 1986 milk strike offers a more detailed portrait of the relationship between class position and forms of political participation. In particular, my evaluation of the movement points to the importance of the farmers' interpretations of their class position as a guide to their political action. In 1986, there were notable similarities to previous strike movements. When farmers explained their participation, most of the small, dairy farmers that organized the strike movement explicitly acknowledged the *limitations* inherent in their class position. In the face of both economic and political

powerlessness, these farmers fell back on their control over milk production. By withholding milk, they would effectively disrupt the industry, using their control over food production as their only real political and economic leverage.

The "Farm Crisis" and Farmer Activism in New York

There were direct connections between the "farm crisis" protest movement and the 1986 strike movement in New York. Both were organized in response to similar forces, although different in magnitude and scope. Second, New York farmers closely followed the events in the Midwest, citing the "farm crisis" movement as a guide for their actions. When asked to describe the 1986 milk strike movement in New York, one organizer began by stating:

During the mid-'80's times were tough all over. There were *protest movements going on in the Midwest*, and things were really looking bad in the dairy industry in '86. We had assessments and the prices were dropping. (emphasis added) (Interview #101)

Another farmer recalled that anger was a common denominator for both Midwestern farmers and New York farmers in 1986.

After discussing her experiences in New York, she continued,

And then we went to the United Farmer and Rancher Congress [in St. Louis, September 11-13, 1986] and we got talking to other farmers from all over. And they were all ticked off! (Interview #105)

Class Position and the 1986 Strike Movement

The 1986 dairy farmers' movement reflected the class position of its main constituency of small, commercial

farmers. First, in what were obvious patterns that emerged from interviews with movement participants, insurgent farmers chose protest as a mode of political action because they were convinced it was futile to operate through the "normal" or conventional political channels. One farmer recalled how she,

went down to Washington in '86 and whatever hearings would come up I would go and testify on behalf of the farmer. A lot of times they wouldn't make it open enough for the farmer to go and testify. They would pick their cronies that would say what they wanted them to hear. (Interview #105)

Another farmer offered a similar explanation:

I felt there was no alternative [to a strike]. I had been to Washington twice visiting people on the House and Senate Ag Committees. I have been to Ag hearings. I've been to two Senate Ag hearings in Vermont. I've been to a House hearing that they had here a couple of years ago in Syracuse. And when you go to these hearings and see the way that they were conducted, and you see the attitude of the people making these laws, you realize that they're not going to pay attention to anything that you tell them. (Interview #116)

Second, when faced with the limitations inherent in their class positions, these small, commercial farmers - as they had on many occasions in New York State history - fell back on their control over the production of milk. Most of the movement organizers described striking as their only alternative. The view of this farmer was representative of many:

[The farmer's] product is their wealth and that's the only leverage over the people who buy it. (Interview #101)

The strike movement began in July, 1986, when a few dairy farmers from Oneida, Lewis, and Herkimer Counties organized regularly scheduled meetings to discuss problems in their industry. One of the farmers described these gatherings:

A small group of farmers. There were about 6 or 7 of us, and a number of different ideas. We agreed how the price should be arrived at. There was a little bit of controversy over whether there [should be] a quota or not, the majority of us favored a quota system. There was some that thought that an RCMA was the way to go. And there were some that talked strike. (Interview #101)

As this group of primarily small, dairy farmers met, near the town of Boonville, they discussed a number of issues that provoked their anger and concern. The most important issue was the price of milk, which serve as a catalyst for the 1986 movement. Milk prices had fallen steadily throughout the 1980s, from \$13.87 per hundredweight in 1981 to \$12.00 by 1986.³² When asked why they chose to strike, this farmer replied:

The price of milk. I can't recall exactly what it went down to at the time. But, it just got to the point where you went out to milk the cows, and they came to pick the milk up, and when you read the weigh slip there just wasn't anything left for me. You - just out of pure frustration - were ready to do anything. (Interview #103)

A second movement participant offered a similar logic:

We were just fed up with being taken advantage of. Not getting a fair price for your product. To work so hard and get nothing for it in return, it's very demeaning. (Interview #105)

As in past milk strikes, there was an explicit link

between grievances and collective action. As this farmer recalled,

I think that's the whole origin behind the milk strike - because there's so much anger and frustration. . . When the prices go down you can see it. You can feel the anger. When you go anyplace that farmers go, out to a diner where there's a lot of farmers that congregate, to a feed store - you can go anywhere where farmers are, if you light a match you can blow the place up. (Interview #104)

In this case, a sudden price decline forced farmers to confront their position in the industry. As an example, in discussing the movement farmers often spoke of their growing need to identify either the forces or individuals responsible for the decline in milk prices. It was this growing awareness that often spurred farmers to take political action. When farmers were angry, they called meetings. Such meetings had the function of transforming their individual grievances into a larger collective identity.

Dairy farmers were also frustrated with the contradictory aspects of farm policy. At the same time Federal farm policy had the effect of increasing milk production, through funding for research on products like bGH^a, the Department of Agriculture was paying farmers to cut their production (herds) under the Whole Herd Buyout

^aBGH is a synthetic growth hormone developed by four major pharmaceutical firms. It is estimated that cows injected with bGH could increase milk production from 10 to 40 percent. See 220-24.

program.^b Moreover, farmers faced increased assessments on their milk checks due to the Gramm-Rudman Act. One estimate claimed that Gramm-Rudman assessments would cost dairy farmer 88 cents per hundredweight (cwt) in the coming months. Another 50 cent reduction was scheduled for January 1, 1987.³³

In a larger sense, the class position of movement farmers continually shaped the movement. In August, 1986, the Boonville area farmers organized their first collective action: a "Green Monday" protest, or public demonstration of their cumulative importance in the local economy. On August 10, movement organizers targeted a Boonville bank, where participating farmers cashed their milk checks and withdrew the money, effectively draining the bank of cash reserves. As one of the organizers recounted,

We decided something drastic had to happen. We decided to do protest at a bank. What we did - I called a lot of neighbors to get them to go in - the way the protest would work, instead of cashing our checks and depositing it in the bank, we would cash it and pull the money out of the bank. This would make the statement that this was the amount of money that farmers contribute to the community. (Interview #101)

On August 13, 40 farmers met in Boonville, where they voted to call a strike beginning September 1.³⁴ After the strike date was set, more farmers joined the movement. On August 21, 200 farmers gathered in Constableville (Lewis County), where a majority supported the scheduled strike.

^bThis program is also described in Chapter 4, 216.

One week later 80 farmers voted in Lowville (Lewis County), with a similar result.

The 1986 milk strike began on September 1. Although the movement was centered around Boonville, New York, a few farmers as far away as Maine and Vermont also participated. The Watertown Daily Times, that was opposed to the strike on its editorial page, estimated that only 2-3 percent of the dairy farmers in Northern New York dumped their milk.³⁵ Organizers, on the other hand, claimed that 20-40 farmers were striking in St. Lawrence County, 100 farmers in Oneida and Lewis Counties, and that scattered farmers were dumping milk in Herkimer, Clinton, and Franklin Counties.³⁶ Importantly, there was little or no strike support from Jefferson County's 600 dairy farmers.³⁷ On September 8, Lewis County organizers called a recess, joined by Franklin and Clinton County farmers on September 10. Movement organizers then moved to "stage other actions," including a tractorcade up Route 12 on September 8. Further, movement organizers sent milk for the needy to New York City and picketed a Kraft General Foods plant in Lowville (Lewis County). The purpose of the picketing was to draw attention to the farmer's plight, rather than stopping the flow of milk into the plant. As the strike movement lost momentum, a few St Lawrence County farmers continued to dump their milk for another week or two.³⁸

On October 1, 1986, farmers in St. Lawrence, Herkimer,

and several Western and Southern Tier counties resumed milk dumping, this time in conjunction with Midwestern protests in support of Senator Tom Harkin's Save the Family Farm Act.³⁹ Four days later, a group of Franklin County farmers, known as the Organization of Concerned Farmers (OCF), staged a protest in Chateauguy, where 100 farmers dumped 55,000 pounds of milk. OCF leaders announced they were calling another strike beginning October 15, aimed at disrupting the supply of four local co-ops. Local farmers also picketed the Sealtest plant in North Lawrence and the Chateauguy Co-op.⁴⁰ The same day, "nearly a dozen" St. Lawrence County farmers dumped 1,500 gallons, or 13,000 pounds, of milk on a farm owned by the county NFO President.⁴¹ Organizers eventually called off the Franklin County strike, planned for October 15, when only 100 farmers - too few, they believed, to significantly effect the local plants - signed petitions committing to dump their milk.⁴²

Estimates of the effectiveness of the 1986 strike varied. The milk handlers in the region claimed the strike had no impact.⁴³ State Agriculture Commissioner Gerace credited movement farmers with increasing public awareness of their distressed conditions, but continually pushed RCMA as the proper alternative for farmers' political participation.⁴⁴ RCMA stands for the Regional Cooperative Marketing Association, a marketing agency organized by representatives of Northeastern cooperatives and state

officials in 1973. From 1973 to 1975, RCMA established an over-order price (above the Federal Order) in scattered areas of the state, distributing premiums to farmers ranging from \$.35 to \$1.48. For the next ten years RCMA was inactive, as many member co-ops withdrew. In 1986, State policy makers, along with a number of co-op officers, proposed reactivating RCMA as a solution to the decline in milk prices.⁴⁵

Movement organizers for their part claimed the strike had been a success. One organizer agreed with Gerace, as far as the movement raising awareness of farm problems in New York:

But the main thing - to me - we accomplished was that we changed the whole discussion. Prior to '86 and the protests we had, what we were hearing was that all the problems were in the Midwest. There was no problem in New York State. In New York we don't have the debt. . . It keeps price right out of the discussion. Ever since then, the debate has been on what's the best thing to do on the family farms in trouble and that's one thing that was changed dramatically. (Interview #101)

Others farmers believed the strike actually did have an impact on the handlers, forcing them to pay increased premiums for milk. This farmers' views were representative of such farmers; she maintained that the 1986 milk strike:

got the ball rolling. And then other guys got going. Other co-ops. Farmland gave 10 cents so then Kraft had to match that, so they gave 15 cents and it kept going back and forth. Our last contract we were up to \$1.40 [in premiums]. (Interview #105)

Class Position, Political Participation, and the 1991 Strike

My analysis of 1991 milk strike movement offers a more detailed portrait of the role of class position in delineating modes of political participation. Its greater detail is based on extended interviews with the participants and opponents of the movement, in addition to direct observation. Briefly, my analysis again highlights the importance of grievances in the mobilization of the strike movement. When combined with increased production costs, a precipitous decline in milk prices in 1991 incited anger and frustration among New York farmers. As a result, farmers were moved to actions that were atypical of their daily routines. Many farmers, for example, were spurred to attend any one of many local meetings held to discuss the dairy crisis. As in 1986, it was in these meetings that farmers' individual grievances became shared grievances, which laid the groundwork for collective action. In addition, when faced with a loss of income, many small farmers initiated their first investigation into the forces that influenced milk prices. Atypical of their usual quiescent behavior, it was this search for answers that often activated farmers politically. Within a few months, the anger that moved farmers to action would produce a movement that endeavored, ultimately, to change the basic structure of the industry.

Furthermore, movement participants, during the interviews, made similar reference to a recurring theme:

small, dairy farmers were driven to protest because of limitations inherent in their class position. There were several factors that influenced these farmers. On one hand, the farmers that joined the strike movement concluded they were relatively powerless as individuals, both economically and politically. In addition, almost all movement farmers described the conventional political process as being pointless and ineffective. They, therefore, believed they were left with no alternative but to strike. Farmers with larger operations, on the other hand, embraced conventional forms of political participation such as lobbying, which reflected their advantages in resources, political access, and communication skills. Rather than protest, these farmers stressed their increasingly important role in the international economy. They voiced opposition to milk strikes because they were either ineffective, or because strikes presented a poor public image to consumers.

The Crisis in the Dairy Industry, 1990-1991

As with past milk strikes, the catalyst for the 1991 milk strike movement was a sudden decline in the price of milk. The average blended price of milk fell \$4.36 cwt, or 29 percent, between its five year high in January 1990, and April 1991.⁴⁶ The reason for the price volatility, according to industry analysts, was a decrease in surplus dairy products held by the federal government, and the deregulation of support prices. Whatever the reason, milk

prices were becoming increasingly unpredictable. In March 1990, the blend price in New York stood at \$13.54; a year later it was down to \$10.90,⁴⁷ the lowest price since 1978, and more importantly, below the production costs for most farmers.

As milk prices declined over the Winter of 1990, farmers and state policy makers, acting independently, called a number of ad hoc meetings to discuss milk prices and policy. The farmer-led meetings in New York were part of a sporadic and uneven mobilization in 17 major dairy states. Rural Vermont, for example, a rural advocacy group, organized informational and strategy meetings in several Vermont counties; organizers passed out leaflets "designed to explain the dairy farming crisis and to propose remedies in plain language."⁴⁸

One solution to the crisis, supported by organizations such as the Committee on Rural Affairs, the small, Boonville-area group active in the 1986 strike, was the National Dairy Act.^c The National Dairy Act had been developed by dairy farmers from across the country, in conjunction with the National Family Farm Coalition, a Washington D.C.-based organization of over 40 farm and rural advocacy groups. Many of the Coalition's member organizations were part of the "farm crisis" protest movement.⁴⁹ Briefly, the National Dairy Act proposed putting

^cSee Appendix B for the text of the National Dairy Act.

federal dairy policy under the control of committees of farmers elected at the county level, rather than administrators or legislators influenced by the major farm interest groups. The Act sought to establish a two-tier, supply management system for dairy production. In other words, milk that was produced to satisfy the national demand for milk (and milk products) would be priced at a level above the farmer's cost of production. Milk produced in excess of national demand, as allocated to each dairy farm, would be priced much lower to discourage overproduction. The Act would also reduce government expenditures because the Commodity Credit Corporation would no longer purchase large amounts of surplus dairy products.

A second solution that farmers discussed was to put increased pressure on representatives, with the goal of direct New York State intervention in raising milk prices. In response, on May 2, 1991, the New York State legislature passed a three-part law, designed to alleviate the immediate price squeeze on farmers.⁵⁰ The first provision of the law, promoted by State Senator John H. McHugh, Chairman of the Legislative Commission on Dairy Industry Development, was as emergency interim price increase. The price increase would allow farmers immediate relief, as they petitioned for a permanent over-order price (a price over and above the federal support price), under the authority of the 1937 Rogers-Allen Law. New York set an interim price of \$13.85

for Class I (fluid) milk, that would last from June 1 to August 1, 1991. After August 1, an over-order price would take effect, if supported by farmers in a referendum. The second part of the emergency legislation shortened the hearing and consideration process in the Rogers-Allen Law. The third part contained a provision to protect consumers from milk price gouging by retail merchants. While milk prices paid to farmers had fallen nearly 30 percent, the Legislature noted there had been little or no movement in retail prices.

The State Legislature's action was part of a critical shift in the political opportunity structure, that opened up a small opening for political action. Given the fact that government officials had responded to the dairy "crisis," this raised the possibility that other changes were possible - including the National Dairy Act. Thus the effect of government action was to energize farmers. Following the State Legislature's intervention, farmers focused their anger on other targets. The first was the milk handlers. On May 11, dairy farmers held protests at four milk plants in Northern and Central New York. New York farmers picketed the Kraft General Foods plant in Franklin County, the Crowley plant in Lafargeville, and the H. P. Hood plants in Vernon and Oneida.⁵¹ On the same day, Vermont farmers picketed and stopped trucks from entering the Kraft plant in Middlebury, Vermont.⁵² Tragically, six days later Rutland Center

(Jefferson County) dairy farmer Herb Freeman shot himself, an act that was attributed to his despair over his debt-laden farm. The Watertown Daily Times cited the "many north country farmers," who considered Freeman "the first fatal victim of the worst economic crisis they have [ever] lived through."⁵³

Insurgent farmers also targeted members of Congress. Later in May, farmers brought cows to a protest at the office of Rep. James Walsh, (R., Syracuse). Next, a group of women farmers from Northern New York went directly to Washington to meet with legislators, in hopes of averting a possible milk strike.^d The third group targeted was the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board; farmers protested at the Board's meeting in Lake Placid, to call attention to the Board's "excessive salaries [that came out of assessments on all farmers], dubious research projects, and BGH promotion."⁵⁴

Micromobilization Contexts

The concept of micromobilization contexts was developed in the social movement literature, in the effort to examine in some detail the process by which individuals are mobilized or activated into movements.⁵⁵ The "micro" or small group-level focus provided a necessary "bridge"

^dThis trip, and its effects, is discussed in detail beginning on page 275.

between macroprocesses, such as industrialization or urbanization, and the cognitive transformation individuals experienced as they joined a movement, or in other words became part of what was defined as a larger collective consciousness. An analysis of the micromobilization contexts within the milk strike protest movement provides insight into how the movement came into being, focusing on these intimate structures within which movement participants were activated.

The Mobilization of the Milk Strike Movement

One major problem confronting contemporary farmer-activists was the fact that contemporary farmers are atomized. Today, farmers are no longer embedded within the close-knit production and social networks that were so effective in fostering solidarity and communications in previous strikes. Contemporary (small) dairy farmers each own their own equipment, have their milk picked up by large tank trucks, and are simply fewer in number. In 1991, all of these factors limited communication and solidarity, make organizing more difficult. As this farmer, an organizer in both 1986 and 1991, explained:

One thing is that we've come down the road to slavery so far. Even though farmers may have physically done more handwork in the past, there were more people involved and I think there was more free time to chat with your neighbors - more of a community at the time. Everybody went to the milk plant to deliver their milk and people talked to each other there. Now you don't even see your neighbor for months or years. So I think communications is a big limiting factor. (Int #102)

There was, however, one important tradition among dairy farmers that had endured since the 1880s. In hard times, farmers called mass meetings. As economic conditions deteriorated in 1991, state officials, farm organizations, and local organizers (some from the 1986 strike movement) held a series of meetings throughout New York state. Based on interviews with farmers, the majority of participants in the emerging movement decided to take part after first attending one of these meetings. They were held either in a local public space, such as the local firehall or town building, or in a private home. When asked how she ended up as a participant in the strike movement, this farmer replied:

The informational meetings. [An organizer], he had some informational meetings in Lowville. I went to one at the fire hall up there and they were talking about the National Dairy Act. That's how I first got involved. (Interview #108)

Another farmer described how she and her husband joined the movement in similar circumstances:

. . .we decided, [the farmer's husband] and I, decided that there was a meeting up in Constableville and I said let's go up there and evaluate it. We had no intention of going on strike at that time. We went up and sat through a meeting and we were very impressed with how logical and how well planned it was. And so we decided - we talked about it for a couple of weeks - that we would help. (Interview #104)

Based on interviews with farmers, it was apparent that farmers were activated in these meetings for two main reasons. First, public gatherings offered farmers a sense

that the dairy crisis was a collective phenomenon, rather than a reflection of their individual failure. Piven and Cloward noted the importance of this "transvaluation" in the mobilization of social movements, citing an example from a vastly different context. Of the 1960s ghetto riots, they wrote, "The sheer scale of these dislocation helped to mute the sense of self-blame, predisposing men and women to view their plight as a collective one, and to blame their rulers for the destitution they experienced."⁵⁶ New York dairy farmers described a similar process. In the following conversation, this farmer described the relief she found in the collective identity of troubled farmers, and how she tried to pass this on while organizing other farmers:

When I started going to the meetings and talking to other farmers - it was like a support group. And when you started talking to other farmers? Gee! You weren't as half as bad off as a lot of them! But we were all in the same boat. And one thing that I stressed to a lot of the farmers was that it was okay to say that you were having problems, because these are very proud people. They are proud and they are very independent. And these farmers are not the type of people to go in and say, "I'm having problems on my farm, do you think that you could help me?" (Interview #108)

Similarly, when faced with declining prices this farmer recalled:

I started blaming myself. I said, 'I'm doing something wrong.' And I'd change this and do that and get further behind. What I was doing was tearing myself apart. With guilt. Blaming myself. And I did that right up to the point that I walked into the firehall [for a meeting.] And I met these people and it was probably the best therapy I could ever have. I'd probably be in a rubber room today. I guess after talking to them, I realized

that it wasn't my fault. I was being beaten. I didn't know enough about the system to know who was doing it, why they were doing it or anything about it. We started waking up. (Interview #106)

This metaphor - equating politicization with waking from a long sleep - was most often used by farmers in describing their decision to participate in the movement or support its goals.

Second, mass meetings provided farmers with information, most importantly - whether correct or incorrect - a more complete explanation of their political and economic predicament. This allowed them to identify the targets of their anger, and gave farmers the idea they could address their grievances through collective action. Consider the politicization of this farmer, who began his involvement at his kitchen table and ended up, for the first time in his life, organizing demonstrations. He began:

We were sitting at this table and we were doing our bills and after 23 years of farming and producing the same milk and the same number of cows, we couldn't pay our bills. We had to dip into our savings to pay our bills. And I got wondering so I got on the phone and called [the manager] down here at [the local milk plant], and asked him why we weren't getting the same money enough to pay our bills.

He continued:

And so it was just a coincidence that [a neighbor] called the same day, and she said to ask [the farmer's wife] to ask me if we'd come down to a little meeting at her living room, which we knew nothing about. I wasn't too keen on this getting into meetings, I just was a farmer that wanted to do my work and shut my mouth and take my pay and that was it. So I told her we would go down for an hour. I think we stayed two and one half. She had

17 farmers there, [local organizers], and they started shooting the figures and I was getting more impressed by the second. *And I finally realized who was taking our money.* Right there, that day I realized it - it was the milk handlers mostly. And the retailers. . . .*I knew nothing about the milk market situation but I was mad enough that I wanted to find out.* (emphasis added) (Interview # 109)

It is worthwhile to note that some farmers were informed of the emerging movement by the remaining institutional connections in dairy farming, that allowed information to be diffused from farm to farm. As this farmer, a strike opponent, related:

[Information on the strike movement] was passed around word of mouth by veterinarians, the [milk company] trucker, the route people, [organizers] passed out leaflets, and what we read in the newspapers. I kept abreast of it in the Watertown Daily Times on a daily basis. (Interview #124)

Others heard about it at co-op meetings, or from salesmen. The response of this farmer was typical of many, who claimed the best source of information was:

The milk truck drivers. They'd say, 'So and so is going to [strike].' (Interview #127)

Farmers Vote To Strike

Protests and meetings continued throughout the summer of 1991. On July 13, farmers voted in the Rogers-Allen referendum - 6,377 for and 2,927 against - for a six cents a gallon over-order price increase.⁵⁷ A few weeks later, representatives from various protest organizations from around the state held a meeting in Constableville (Lewis County), organized by farmers active in the 1986 strike. The

purpose of the meeting was to inaugurate a statewide organization, giving the scattered groups and activists the ability to coordinate protests and collective action. The structure of the state level organization was loose and democratic. A state coordinator and five-member bargaining committee were elected by farmers at the first state meeting. The remaining "officers" were county chairpersons, all volunteers. There were no formal dues or organizational structure, nor restrictions on who could attend. In fact, it was quite common for different farmers, from different areas of the state, to attend ensuing state meetings. On July 24 in Constableville, representatives from across New York State and Pennsylvania held a regional meeting, where they voted to strike on October 1. From discussions with farmers present, it was a group of Pennsylvania farmers who pressed for the October 1 deadline, a decision that would become a center of controversy in the following months.

Class Position and Participation in the Milk Strike Movement

In the next section, I will present a detailed profile of the class position of four sample groups of farmers.⁵⁸ My task is to examine how and why, in 1991, farmers embedded in different class positions responded differently to the changes in the dairy industry. Typically, large dairy farmers embraced conventional political participation, such as lobbying, while small farmers described themselves as

being driven to unconventional action - represented by the strike. The connecting thread that runs through these divergent forms of political action is the farmers' class position, which continually shaped their analysis and actions; class position delineated the opponents that confronted the milk strike movement, the alliances sought by movement participants and opponents, and the resources available to both large and small dairy farmers. My analysis begins with the objective aspects of class position, and then considers the farmers' interpretation of their position in agriculture.

A Profile of Movement Participants and Supporters

In my analysis of contemporary dairy farmers, the categories of small and large dairy farms are defined by the operator's position in the political economy. A small dairy farmer, therefore, is defined as one who milks less than 100 cows, employs family labor as their primary labor source, and depends upon milk production as their principal source of income.⁵⁹ In 1991, out of a total of 10,900 non-hobby farmers, there were 9,100 such farmers in New York, defined solely by the number of cows milked.⁶⁰ A large dairy farmer, on the other hand, is defined as one who milks more than 100 cows, makes much greater use of hired labor, and may depend on other sources of farm income - including grain or fruit and vegetables - in addition to milk production. In 1991, there were 1,800 farmers that occupied this category in New

York, again defined by cows numbers only.⁶¹ The small number of farms with 500 or more cows (29 in 1987)⁶² are defined as very large dairy farms. In the following pages, I will use averages (defined as the mean unless otherwise indicated) computed by either the New York State Department of Food and Markets or the Bureau of the Census as benchmarks for comparison. In 1989, the average number of cows milked by New York dairy farmers was 68.9.⁶³ Average milk production in New York per farm per month stood at 80,203 pounds, and the average age of a New York dairy farmer was 48.9 (1987).⁶⁴

Of the farmers involved in the 1991 milk strike movement, both the leadership strata and strike supporters were composed of small farmers.⁶⁵ First, a profile of the sample of ten movement activists or organizers, defined as those farmers who regularly attended the state-level strike meetings, and who also held the position of county-level organizer. These ten farmers milked an average of 56 cows⁶⁵ and a majority (7/10) had a debt load of less than \$50,000. Based on this data and on visits to their typically well-maintained small operations, these ten farmers occupied a position in the industry analogous to Wolf's "middle peasant."⁶⁶ They marketed an average (defined as the mean unless otherwise indicated) of 81,500 pounds of milk per

⁶⁵The following data is based on answers to interview questions found in Appendix A; a summary of the data is found in Appendix C.

month, very near the state average of 80,203, and were an average 41.7 years old. The majority (7/10) had a high school education, while three had attended college. Four of the ten farmers in this sample group of activists were women.^f

As for their self-identification, the movement leadership strata identified themselves - in every case - as "working class," as opposed to "middle class." Their party identification was predominantly Democratic (6/10); however, three listed themselves as Independents and one as an Independent socialist. With the surveys conducted in the midst of a presidential primary campaign in New York, the farmers were asked to list a favorite candidate in the upcoming presidential election. For the movement leadership the favorite was Jerry Brown (7/10), with one vote for Ross Perot and two undecided. When asked to place themselves on a scale of 1 to 10, with one representing the best possible conditions in the dairy industry and ten the worst possible conditions, the average for the movement leadership was 6.6. This figure was considerably higher than for farmers opposed to the strike, suggesting that grievances were important in moving these farmers to political action.

The next sample of seven movement supporters also fit the definition of small farmers. In order to select this

^fNone of the farmers in this sample group were related by marriage.

sample, I assigned random numbers to farmers' names on a petition, which movement organizers referred to as a "dump list," circulated in Jefferson and Lewis counties. These seven farmers, all males, milked an average of 71 cows, which placed them closer (than the movement leadership) to the state average of 68.9 cows per farm. The higher average in this second sample can be attributed in part to the two farmers included that milked over 100 cows, although predominantly with family labor. The seven farmers in this sample marketed an average of 90,000 pounds of milk a month, and all had a debt load greater than \$50,000. Their average age was 46.8 years, and all had a high school education.

For their self-identification, all but one strike supporter listed himself as being "working class," rather than "middle class." One farmer identified himself as a Democrat, two as Republicans, and the remaining four as Independents. Their preferred candidate was Ross Perot; two were undecided, one listed Jesse Jackson. When asked to place themselves on a scale of 1 to 10, with one representing the best possible conditions in the dairy industry and ten the worst, the average answer for movement supporters was 6.7, very close to the movement leadership's average answer of 6.6 for this question.

One final note on the issue of farm size and political participation. The petitions that were circulated in Northern New York provided the widest sample of strike

supporters. On the petition I mentioned above, which was distributed in Jefferson and Lewis counties, 88 of 345 Jefferson County producers signed up, pledging to withhold their milk. With data on cow numbers provided by the Jefferson County Office of Cooperative Extension, I was able to calculate that these farmers milked an average of 64 cows, a number consistent with my definition of small dairy farms. This petition offered the widest sample of strike backers, and therefore provided the strongest empirical evidence that the movement's rank and file supporters were drawn from the population of New York's small dairy farmers.

Opponents, Allies, and Resources

In his analysis of the southern Farmers' Alliance, Schwartz outlined a structural theory of protest. He argued that protest groups were born of structural inequities, and were therefore designed to attack the "parent structures" that perpetuated (and ruled on the basis of) unequal power.⁶⁷ Upon examination, the targets of the 1991 milk strike movement, as defined by the strike committee's demands and the National Dairy Act, conformed to Schwartz's theory. The milk strike movement targeted milk handlers, along with state and federal policy makers. The purpose of the strike, in the short term, was to force milk handlers to raise prices; the long term goal was to significantly change the Federal Market Order system, that defined the basic

structure of the industry. In its place, individual farmers would be given greater input at the county level, where production decisions would be made within the more widely-participatory structures established by the National Dairy Act.

When faced with such a challenge to the very structure of the industry, the institutions of New York State agriculture responded with near unanimous opposition to the strike movement. Local milk handlers, for example, made preparations for a possible strike. According to this farmer, a member of her co-op's board of directors, Kraft altered the routines at its local milk plants:

One thing I found out later was that Kraft had planned for the strike. Therefore, they were stockpiling. They worked Saturdays. They never do that. Just in this one plant they stockpiled, [and] that's not counting the other plants. They prepared for it. They prepared for somebody contaminating milk trucks. They sealed milk trucks . . . they bought seal things and if the seal was broken they would reject the load of milk.
(Interview #104)

In addition, during interviews and at strike meetings, farmers alleged that local bank officers had put pressure on farmers not to strike.⁶⁸

Others in the industry offered ideological opposition to the strike. Anthony G. Schlesier, the member-manager of the Eastern Milk Producers Cooperative (formerly Sheffield Farms), condemned the strike, urging farmers instead to participate within established political channels. According to Schlesier, the milk strike would "get publicity, but it

will be all bad." He continued, "Instead of striking, farmers should try more established lines of communications to reach legislators on the milk price issue."⁶⁹ The faculty at Cornell also played an important role, offering support for farmers opposed to the strike movement. Dr. Bernard F. Stanton, Professor of Agricultural Economics at Cornell, said of movement farmers:

The people who have been crying are the smaller individuals who are struggling to make it, who don't want to change with the times. The successful farmers are doing quite well.⁷⁰

Government policy makers, for their part, criticized the strike movement, proposing alternative solutions to the dairy crisis within the domain of conventional politics. In early October, Massachusetts and New York State policy makers revived plans for Northeast dairy compact, an agreement among states in the region to raise milk prices.⁷¹ Further, the Senate Agriculture Committee proposed a voluntary diversion program, in which farmers would receive government payments if they voluntarily cut production.⁷² Unfortunately for insurgent farmers, neither program had sufficient support on the Senate floor, or were certain to survive a presidential veto. In Washington, the dairy crisis was not perceived to be as severe as it was in Albany, which illustrated the limits in the political opportunity structure that confronted movement organizers.

In addition to opponents, the class position of movement farmers also patterned the alliances they sought.

At various times over the course of the movement, farmers discussed and attempted alliances with consumers, organized labor, local agri-business, church groups, and farmers in other states. Perhaps their most successful alliance was that with local agri-business, whose fortunes were directly tied to the survival of small farmers. This organizer explained how she:

. . .went around and got donations from different people - the feed companies. Everyone was so desperate, everyone was hurting so bad that they would have given you anything because they thought, 'Maybe they're our hope.' (Int. #108)

Movement farmers were less successful with organized labor, or with consumers. A related problem was a lack of resources, including time and money, for an outreach or education effort necessary to reach consumers.

Most importantly, the class position of small dairy farmers limited their access to critical resources. When asked what factors limited the strike movement, this small farmer-organizer explained:

What limited the [strike movement] was our lack of organization. . .and we just didn't have the resources. It was resources and organization. *Most everybody that was in it was [just] trying to run their farm at the same time. . . .If we'd had better resources and a staff or skilled people, we probably could have pulled it off better.* (emphasis added) (Interview #116)

First, as I have discussed previously, movement farmers lacked the dense social and production networks that were invaluable in fostering communications and solidarity in previous strikes. As this movement organizer lamented:

[In years past], you always had time to stop to your neighbor, and you had to make the trip to the milk plant with the cans. And my 78 year old father-in-law often talks about how they would hook up the team and take the milk to the milk plant. . .they would stop at everyone's house on the way to the plant. By the time they got to the plant. . .they would be sitting there talking to their friends. (Interview #108)

The result was that small farmers were atomized and disconnected from each other. As this movement supporter explained:

We're just too far spread apart. Even at the House of the Good Samaritan {a Watertown hospital involved in a nurses strike} there is only a couple hundred nurses but they all work in one little building. They see each other every day. They mix. But some farmers don't see anybody for a couple of weeks at a time, especially in the busy season. (Interview #121)

Moreover, the day-to-day work rhythms of small dairy farming limited the indigenous resources available to the movement. Small dairy farming is unique because the farm owners are also the principal labor force. This type of farm produces 365 days a year, rather than during one specific harvest time. In essence, everyday is "harvest time" on a dairy farm, which imposes strict limits on the amount of time small farmers can spend away from their work. According to this small farmer:

What limits dairy farmer is the cows have to milked morning and night. The cows limit me and my ability, they limit [another farmer-organizer] and his ability and everybody else and their ability to get out and get people activated. (Interview #106)

Another farmer claimed the greatest limiting factor was:

Having enough time to get out to more people. That was very difficult. Sometimes we would have three or four meetings in a week. (Interview #108)

Material resources posed a related problem. Raising money from a constituency of mainly small farmers could be daunting task, particularly in the face of declining milk prices. What did the farmers do to generate resources?

According to this farmer:

It was a grassroots, seat-of-the-pants thing, if you could raise a little money by selling a few tee-shirts to kick in toward a few phone bills. (Interview #101)

Another movement organizer explained:

We had a little group down here and we had bake sales and 50-50 drawings. And we did ask for a contribution [from farmers] when we started up - of ten percent of one days milk. And that netted us about \$400. (Interview #109)

In contrast, movements opponents such as Kraft General Foods' North American Division had profits of approximately \$20 billion in 1991, accounting for 70 percent of the company's total food sales.⁷³

A Profile of Strike Movement Opponents

In contrast to the farmers involved with the strike movement, the farmers opposed to the movement tended to be operators of large or very large dairy farms. The first sample group consisted of five farmers who were past or present officers of the New York State Farm Bureau, a conservative interest group, and who were identified by the media, industry officials, or other farmers as prominent

strike movement opponents. These farmers milked an average of 208 cows, which stood in stark contrast to the movement leadership's average of 56 cows. It must be noted that the average cow numbers for the Farm Bureau leadership was skewed by the inclusion of one very large farmer, who milked 572 cows. What is more important, however, is the fact that all of these farmers fit the definition of large (or very large) farmers. In the case of those Farm Bureau farmers with less than 100 cows, for example, each made extensive use of hired labor, and had important sources of farm income (corn and grain) in addition to their dairy production. The five farmers in this sample marketed an average of 228,000 pounds of milk, and the majority (3/5) listed a debt load in excess of \$50,000. One farmer, due to a fortuitous sale of land, had a debt load under \$25,000; one very large farmer spoke of a debt load of over one million dollars. These five farmers, all males, were an average 43.2 years old; four of the five had a college education.

In terms of their self-identification, these farmers were more conservative and Republican than movement farmers. Three of the (current or former) Farm Bureau officers considered themselves as belonging to both the "working class" and "middle class," while two described themselves as belonging to the "middle class." All were Republicans; one considered himself a conservative Republican. Two preferred

President Bush, two were undecided, and one chose Ross Perot. When asked to place themselves on a scale of 1 to 10, with one representing the best possible conditions in the dairy industry and ten the worst, the average answer for the strike movement opponents was 3.5. This was significantly lower than the responses of the movement leadership, whose average answer was a more pessimistic 6.6.

The last sample group consisted of five farmers who were opposed to the strike movement, yet who were not active in the Farm Bureau. In general, these farmers had operations that were larger than movement organizers and participants, yet smaller than the Farm Bureau leadership. They milked an average of 136 cows, marketed an average of 194,000 pounds of milk a month, and all listed a debt load greater than \$50,000. It is important to note that there was a large degree of variation *within* this group of farmers. Regarding size of farm, farmers in this category ranged from one farmer with between 201-250 cows, to another with only 21-40 cows. In addition, their average age, 39.5 years, was skewed because two of the farmers interviewed were under 30 years of age, far below the average age of a New York dairy farmer, 48.9 years. Members of this sample group were alike in their education: all listed high school. All were male.

As to their self-identification, three of the five nonelite strike opponents considered themselves both "working class" and "middle class," while two identified

themselves as "working class." Four were Independents, one was a Republican. For their favorite candidate, two chose President Bush, two were undecided, and one supported Ross Perot. When asked to place themselves on a scale of 1 to 10, with one representing the best possible conditions in the dairy industry and ten the worst, their average response was 5.2, again in the middle of the range between the strike supporters and the Farm Bureau officers.

Opponents, Allies, and Resources

For large dairy farmers, their opposition to the strike movement reflected their class position, in particular their greater access to resources. First, large commercial farmers tend to have higher levels of education. This large farmer cited a specific link between lobbying and his college education:

I do a lot of lobbying. I'm very active in the Farm Bureau, and lobby on the local, state, - whatever level. Just trying to become educated. Ever since I got out of college in the late '70s, I've tried to keep myself informed and learn as much about our marketing system. I'm still learning. (Interview #110)

Another key resource for large farmers was time. Large dairy farmers have a greater reliance on hired labor,⁷⁴ which presents certain management problems, but also allows more time off the farm to attend to politics. Third, large dairy farmers often have greater political access, due to their greater involvement in politics, but also because of their position in the local economy as important small businesses

and employers. As this farmer recounted:

I've been to Albany with the School Board. . . .We have these conferences, it's like a breakfast where they have [State Senator John] McHugh and [State Assemblyman Robert] Nortz there and I can call both of those fellows by their first name. They know who I am and I know who they are.
(Interview #125)

Large dairy farmers displayed a greater familiarity with political leaders on the local, state, and national level. When asked to name "accessible" members of Congress, this farmer said:

Charlie Stenholm right now. Kiki de la Garza, he's been there for years. . . .I've been in the rooms with both of them and discussed agriculture.
(Interview #113)

It was not uncommon for large farmers to refer to state representatives on a first name basis. According to this very large farmer:

I met with [State Senator John] McHugh about a year ago with a group that was connected with the Farm Bureau. But they were more larger farms, not all real large. They were market oriented in terms of what they were trying to tell John. And John's been trying to make the government the solution to the dairy industry. (Interview #126)

Class Position, Interpretation, and the 1991 Strike Movement

These quantitative (or objective) differences between large and small dairy farmers, that I described in the last section, were associated with qualitative (or subjective) differences in the way farmers interpreted their position in

the dairy industry.⁸ In the following pages, I will illustrate how the farmers' interpretations of their class position influenced their political participation. Class position was thus the dominant factor, among a range of factors that included traditional partisan political attachments, religious beliefs, or simply differences in opinion, that explained why and how New York dairy farmers chose to participate politically.

Movement Participants Interpret Their Class Position

For strike movement participants, there was a recurring theme in the interviews: farmers claimed they were driven to protest, *and specifically to strike*, because of limitations inherent in their class position. First, movement participants were nearly unanimous in their belief that as small, commercial farmers in an industry increasingly dominated by large operators, they held little economic or political power individually. Small farmers traced their powerlessness to the domination of the dairy industry by a few large corporations. Only when the supply of milk was limited did these small farmers believe they had power in the market. As this farmer described the industry:

In the whole [dairy] industry, taking the manufacturing and distribution end of it, they're well organized. The corporations: Philip Morris, Dean Foods, the big dairy processors, they're well organized. They have their act pretty well

⁸This analysis is expanded in Chapter Six. Its focus is the larger system of beliefs that served to explain and justify the farmers actions.

together The farmer? We're not well organized.

When asked to elaborate, this farmer continued:

[Farmers] don't have the leverage. They don't have the big numbers or the PAC contributions.
(Interview #116)

Kraft General Foods was the corporation most often mentioned by movement farmers; the most common complaint cited was Kraft's alleged ability to control the price of milk through the National Cheese Exchange in Green Bay, Wisconsin. The National Cheese Exchange is a small center of wholesale cheese sales, but one of great importance because Exchange prices are used to determine milk prices in each Federal Market Order.⁷⁵ When asked about the milk market, this farmer replied:

Kraft controls it. They control 70 percent of the processed cheese purchased or used in the U.S. And if you control that, you are setting the price. They control the Cheese Exchange. . . They can manipulate the Cheese Exchange such that they can control the price. (Interview #105)

Her views were representative of many farmers. Another farmer, for example, offered a similar explanation:

Kraft is probably the worst. They own probably 72 percent of the cheese market. So they more or less determine the price [of milk]. It is whenever they want to dump barrels of cheese on the market.
(Interview #108)

Although many industry analysts disagree, a January, 1993 investigation of the Cheese Exchange by the Milwaukee Sentinel gave some credence to the farmers' charge. The investigation found that Kraft sold 72 percent of all cheese traded on the Exchange in 1988, and as much as 91 percent in

1989.⁷⁶

Only a few farmers cited banks and their ability to control small farmers, most of whom are by necessity tied to banks through debt relations. This farmer, a strike movement supporter, explained the position of the small dairy farmer:

He is not only governed by the government, he is governed by the bank, because everybody is in debt unless they had the farm left to them. But even in this type of situation the debt load governs more than anything. (Interview #123)

Insurgent farmers more often cited cooperatives as a source of their powerlessness. Many claimed that co-ops, at one point in history, had been effective in aggregating the market power of small farmers. Today, however, this was no longer the case. In the contemporary dairy industry, movement farmers considered many of the larger co-ops to be undemocratic or not representative of the their members' interests. As former co-op officer put it,

The dairy industry is made up of a lot of different co-ops. Some very large. It appears to me that their main goal, by the people that run them, is to better themselves than it is to better the lot of the farmer. (Interview #103)

Movement participants traced this problem to the fact that many co-op were involved in milk processing. When co-ops owned their own plants, this gave co-op officers a greater incentive to seek higher profits than to protect the interests of their farmer-members, who were often paid lower prices. This farmer asserted:

Even though when you take a look at a lot of large co-ops, like the National Milk [Producers]

Federation, . . .as soon as they got into processing, they are married to that plant and they no longer associate themselves with what is the best interests of the farmer. (Interview #105)

Many movement farmers also complained of the fact that under current dairy policy, co-ops had the power to bloc vote for their members in producer referendums. According to this organizer,

Right now the way the [dairy industry is] set up is there are Federal milk marketing orders, that are above most of the farmers in the country. . . These are heavily influenced by the co-ops, through their bloc voting. (Interview #102)

Second, movement farmers explained how they were driven to protest because participation in the conventional political process was pointless and ineffective. Many believed small farmers had too few resources or too little electoral power to constitute an effective political force. When asked about the power of small farmers, this farmer remarked:

Politically, he has very little. The farmers represent less than two percent of the population, so obviously we have less than two percent of the vote. We feel the farmers' clout lies more in his marketing of his production, rather than his political clout. (Interview #111)

Still others spoke of the futility of conventional politics. When asked why she rejected other (nonstrike) forms of participation, this farmer replied:

Cause it never paid off. Back in '91, we petitioned, we got surveys done. You talked to your Congressman individually, you write letters, everything. (Interview #105)

Movement Farmers go to Washington

Perhaps the one event that influenced the participants in the strike movement the most, in regard to the futility of conventional politics, was a well-publicized trip to Washington by a group of women farmers. This group made the trip in an effort to head off a possible strike. One of the participants described her reasons for going:

I went because I sat here last January - we've been in farming 14 years, we came from nothing to something, what I call something - and the American dream was to buy a farm and build that farm up to something that you could sell someday for your retirement. And be proud of all the time you are doing that because you are growing and you are advancing yourself. And. . .last January, I'm sitting here thinking is it all worth it? Because now I can't pay my bills and I've never faced this in my whole life.

She continued,

So I got involved and started going to the meetings and I started educating myself, my husband and myself. (Interview #108)

In May, 1991, the farmer quoted above, along with six others, traveled to Washington to lobby local representatives and members of the House and Senate Agriculture committees. Local co-ops donated money; the National Farmers Union set up the appointments with members of Congress. The purpose of the trip, as the farmer quoted above explained, was:

To be noticed by someone that might help us. . .To let them know how desperate things were out here. (Interview #108)

Rather than a sympathetic hearing, however, which these

farmers expected, they found that some members of Congress refused to see them, and that others (or their staff members) were blunt in their assessment of the dairy industry. In fact, one Congressional aid claimed a strike might be the only way to bring changes in dairy policy. The reaction of the farmers was one of shock and disbelief. Initially, they were amazed at how little local representatives knew about agriculture. According to this farmer:

We went down and we talked, and I found more uneducated people making decisions for us.
(Interview # 104)

Another participant made a similar statement:

I mean that you cannot talk to people like that because they have no idea where you're coming from. They have no idea. One of the things that when I left Washington is that we have people down there that have no idea what farming is all about and they are determining my future. (Int. #108)

Further, these farmers were angered when staff members were unresponsive or unsympathetic to the plight of small farmers. Describing a House Ag committee member's aid, this farmer recalled:

He infuriated me. And he was the one that was talking about moving our milk supplies out to California, let the big farms do it and let the people get used to reconstituted milk. I was blown away. . . I never expected to hear what I did there. . . I know we were sitting there in the halls with tears and I'm thinking, 'This is crazy.' (Interview #117)

The effect of the trip was to increasingly politicize this group of farmers. Ironically, although they went to

Washington in hopes of averting a strike, their experiences angered them sufficiently enough to consider unconventional forms of participation - especially a milk strike! As the farmer quoted above remembered:

I came home and I dove right into the books. Where the power was, where the voting - all that stuff that I didn't pay attention to in school, was all of a sudden of interest in where I had to go and what I had to do to get through to [other farmers]. (Interview #117)

Another member of the delegation added:

So we came back and I went through three or four days of complete - I thought I was going to lose it. Because I didn't think that our government was that uncaring. We though all these years that they cared about what happened to Americans. And I come back with the idea that if you don't look out for yourself, nobody else is gonna. That's why I have been doing what I have been. (Interview #104)

The trip had a wider impact when news of the women's experiences spread through northern and central New York. Many of the strike supporters I interviewed made specific reference to the women's ordeal; the general lesson was one of unresponsive government. As this farmers said of conventional politics:

Nothing works. Lobbying? They just tell you if you don't like it, get out of here. *Those women told us that.* They went down there. But they don't give a shit in Washington. (emphasis added) (Interview 119)

Another strike supporter added:

. . . it does no good to lobby. There's not enough of us, and probably other people that you've interviewed that's went to Washington, they laughed at you [to even ask about lobbying]. (emphasis added) (Interview #123)

What was the only alternative, therefore, for movement participants? When faced with the limitations inherent in their class position, they fell back on their control over the production of milk. Down the line, almost all of the farmers in the movement described striking as their only possible alternative. This is the connecting thread that runs through the following sample of responses:

I think that [a strike] seemed to be the ultimate activity. We did do some protesting and it came down to the point that people felt that we had to withhold the product. (Interview #101)

Well, we don't have the vote, all we have is the product. And even if a large number of farmers marched on Washington, and displayed, for the number of farmers, a lot of unity, the bottom line is that it probably wouldn't mean anything without eventually putting the product on the ground. Withholding is the only thing that is eventually going to work. (emphasis added) (Interview #103)

Back in '91 we petitioned. We got surveys done. You talk to your Congressmen individually. You write letters, everything. And they don't give a shit whether you live or die. What you got to do is take [milk] away from them. And that's the only recourse. That's all that was left. (Interview #105)

I'm not opposed to any activity that would get us near our goal, but I think the corporate power that we're dealing with, the only strength that we have is in withholding the product. That is our ultimate strength and that is [the milk handler's] ultimate weakness - not having the milk. (Interview #106)

[Why a strike?] Because we are taking away something that they need. They need food, everyone needs to eat and I can control that. (Interview #108)

Movement organizers summarized their perspective in a strike pamphlet circulated throughout central and northern

New York. In the response to the question, "Why We Need This Strike," the pamphlet answered: "Lobbying, petitioning and letter writing has been ignored by politicians. A strike is the only real option left. Everything else has failed."⁷

Movement Opponents Interpret Their Class Position

As with the farmers in favor of the milk strike, its opponents provided a set of similar responses when asked to interpret their position in the dairy industry. These responses, for the most part, reflected the class position of large or very large dairy farmers.

Many of the farmers with larger operations, for example, had a greater sense of efficacy, especially regarding the power of dairy farmers in the market, both individually and collectively. As this large farmer explained:

As far as the individual farmer, he can have as much of a role or power as he is willing to develop into. . . . In general, farmers do have some control over [the market]. They can negotiate, and they can do some little things that can make a few percentage points in income.
(Interview #110)

Another large farmer, a strike opponent, offered a similar analysis. He claimed the power of individual farmers:

. . . depends on how active you are in the co-ops.
. . . I have a very positive attitude about dairying or I wouldn't be - it's been a lifelong profession for me and I'm encouraging my two sons who work here on the farm full time. (Interview #124)

Regarding the milk market, it is important to distinguish between the responses of Farm Bureau leadership and those

farmers who opposed the strike, who were not active in the Farm Bureau. The responses of the latter groups were often closer to those of the movement farmers. Many of the (nonelite) strike opponents, for example, maintained that the milk market was dominated by corporations, where the Farm Bureau leadership did not. What separated the (nonelite) strike opponents from movement participants was the question of how they would respond to corporate power. Obviously, this group rejected the idea of a milk strike.

Both the Farm Bureau officers and the (nonelite) strike opponents, in a striking contrast with movement farmers, expressed overwhelming faith in the conventional political process. Both sample groups (of strike opponents) rejected the milk strike as simply too radical a form of participation. According to this large farmer:

I think if we take a reasonable approach, and we have to turn the discussion [with legislators] around to a point where they can see that it's beneficial for all of society, not just agriculture, I think we can be successful. The chicken little arguments, if you will, aren't going to do any good. (Interview #110)

Referring to the striking farmers, this strike opponent said:

I think they believe - it's kind of a militant attitude - 'We'll take it away from them and then see how they like it.' And I think, like I said before that's part of the problem with the whole country. . . .Everybody is out for themselves. (Interview #118)

More often, the larger dairy farmers believed that milk strikes presented a harmful image to consumers. As this

farmer put it,

Dead against it. I feel that [a strike's] not the right action. I feel that the negative publicity gained from it will far outweigh any benefit. It isn't going to work. (Interview #110)

His analysis echoed the views of many large farmers:

I don't think - especially the public perception of [a strike] is probably the biggest thing that hurts you. I think the public perception of strikes in general anymore is not that good. They figure anybody that strikes is being a little obnoxious, maybe greedy. (Interview #112)

For large dairy farmers, the preferred mode of political participation was lobbying, or direct contact with policy makers.⁷⁸ When asked about the effectiveness of lobbying, this operator of a very large farm answered:

It is. Lobbying is effective. It's the way to do it. It's the way the whole world probably works, in terms of politics. (Interview #126)

His answer was typical of strike movement opponents; even the (nonelite) Farm Bureau members recalled participating in this manner:

Yeah, I've been, one time I was in Albany a few years back to lobby for the Farm Bureau. (Interview #118)

In fact, in the discussions of lobbying and its effectiveness, several large farmers made specific reference to the women in the strike movement who had gone to Washington to meet with legislators. They were in general agreement that the reason these farmers were unsuccessful was because of the their inexperience, rather than the futility of conventional politics. As this operator of a

large farm explained:

And you've got to sell [legislators] something they want to listen to. You can't go in there and expect to sell them that we need a higher price of milk up in Jefferson County. And give them no reason. And for these people to go down [to Washington] and come home discouraged because nobody wanted to listen to that story? Well, they've got to change the story. (Int. #112)

The New York State Farm Bureau's "Adopt-A-Legislator" program played an important role in demonstrating to strike opponents the effectiveness of conventional politics. This large farmer explained how the program worked, and why it was effective:

We visit with our state senators and representatives and we try to zero in on one or two issues. We don't try to go in with a grocery list of things that we need done. . . .The same goes in Washington. I haven't been in the last year or so, but naturally my co-op, Dairylea, and the Farm Bureau is lobbying hard in our interests, hopefully on a daily basis. I think that lobbying has maybe been misused by some and I think it's probably one of the only ways that Congress can get a feel on what's going on in the countryside. (Interview #124)

One of the greatest contrasts between large and small farmers were their views on local government. Most small farmers regarded local government as unresponsive and ineffective. The views of these small farmers were representative of many, who when asked about local government replied:

They don't do anything for us. They just patronize you. (Interview #105)

I don't see any support at all. I went to town board meetings and [dairying is] the large industry here in the town of [name]. And - 'you

get it together and we'll sign it,'. . .kind of attitude. . . .It really surprises me that they can't see what's happening to the township. What's going to happen to the taxes and the things around them? (Interview #117)

Every elected official could do something. . . . But unless you go and jump all over them, they don't take the initiative to do it themselves. (Interview #102)

Large dairy farmers, in contrast, expressed a much greater faith in local government. According to these large farmers:

I believe that local officials are pretty supportive, pretty much. Yeah, I don't have any problems with that. (Interview #118)

Our [town] supervisor is a dairy farmer. And he is also the head of the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors. So I don't have to call and remind him that we need all the support we can get. (Interview #125)

From my experience, . . .I think that [local government] is great. I think it's one of the greatest resources this county has. . . that is, the attitude that [farming] is a viable local industry and we as local legislators better stand up and fight for it. (emphasis added) (Interview #113)

The reason for the great differences in these responses? Local government was a key point of political access for large dairy farmers; in many cases large dairy farmers were the local government - from town supervisors, county legislators, and school board members, to soil conservation officers and advisors to state government. Their participation in local government was thus a reflection of their position in the local economy, and of their access to the resources and relationships were effective in politics

at this level.

The Movement Approaches the October 1 Strike Date

In preparation for the October 1 strike deadline, organizers worked to expand the strike movement. First, they scheduled another series of organizational meetings around the state, typically held in local firehalls. At these meetings, the County Committee leaders explained the goals of the strike - an immediate price increase to \$17 per hundredweight, along with passage of S1340, the National Dairy Act. As an appeal to potential supporters, organizers stressed the possible increase in income farmers might realize if the strike was successfully settled. A strike pamphlet spelled out the arithmetic:

Now if this same farm [that lost money in the price decline] withheld one weeks worth of milk (about 20,000 lbs.), this would cost the farmer about \$2,200 at this year's prices. . . .If the strike should gain the \$6.00 we want, the farmers would gain \$28,000 in six months, at his strike cost of \$2,200 of milk "dumped" for one week.⁷⁹

Second, organizers explored possible alliances with consumers and labor, leading to an August 30 meeting with representatives from the Teamsters.⁸⁰ At one strike meeting, one farmer suggested green ribbons for consumers, analogous to the red ribbons worn by AIDS activists.⁸¹ Third, organizers conducted a petition drive that was later linked with opposition to bGH. This wide range of tactics was discussed, proposed, and coordinated at weekly strike meeting in Constableville (Lewis County), attended by an

average of 25 farmers.

Efforts to garner publicity for the strike movement revolved around a number of symbolic milk dumps, aimed at the local media. On August 24, between 75 and 100 farmers dumped 650 gallons of milk on the Dan Cummings farm, in Otisco (Onondaga County).⁸² The protest received coverage on local television and newspapers; one organizer was interviewed by National Public Radio.⁸³

As strike organizing reached a crescendo in late September, organizers recruited farmer-delegates to represent the New York Strike Committee at a national strike meeting in Derby Line, Vermont, held on September 22. At the national meeting, 21 farmers from New York, the largest delegation at the meeting, deliberated with farmers from 21 states and Canada. Vermont Representative Bernard Sanders addressed the assembled crowd, instructing farmers that the American political system was "governed by crisis," and that farmers needed to create a crisis if they were to change dairy policy. Sanders suggested a voluntary cut in production, emphasizing that farmers needed to seek closer alliances with consumers. To support such an alliance, Vermont farmers, joined by Ben Cohen of Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, established a special phone number (1-900-EIO-FARM), where callers heard Willie Nelson and former Texas Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower discuss the dairy crisis.⁸⁴ At the close of the meeting, farmer-delegates

voted to reaffirm the goals of the strike, but most importantly, they voted to postpone the October 1 deadline. Many delegates were concerned the movement had insufficient support to conduct a successful strike. They were aware that New York was probably the most highly-organized state, with only 10 percent of farmers signed up in a few key counties.

On September 27, New York dairy farmers voted in a referendum, on whether to continue the over-order price increase they had approved in July, under the terms of the Rogers-Allen Act. Independent dairy farmers (those not belonging to a co-op), a key movement constituency, voted overwhelmingly for the price increase. Out of a total of 3,813 independent farmers, 2,525 voted to pass the amendment. Even though the vast majority of farmers voted for the amendment, however - 6,537 votes for, as opposed to 3,614 votes against - the amendment failed to pass. Under the terms of the Rogers-Allen law, amendment referendums must receive the support of 66.7 of all farmers to pass; votes not returned are counted as no votes. Because amendment supporters did not reach this level of participation, the amendment failed, and the milk price, currently set at \$14.50, reverted to the Federal order price of \$13.92.

The primary opposition to the amendment (and higher milk prices) came from the New York's major co-ops, who were allowed, under the terms of the Rogers-Allen law, to bloc

vote for their members.⁸⁵ Co-ops cast 6,338 bloc votes; Dairylea, Upstate Milk Cooperatives, Inc, and Niagara Cooperatives bloc voted against the increase, casting a large portion of the 2,326 no votes. Reacting to the defeat of the amendment, as well as the loss of income to follow, strike organizers were curiously optimistic. Some believed the amendment's collapse would finally convince farmers of the biases built into the Market Order system; they also hoped it might demonstrate to farmers the futility of conventional politics in general.⁸⁶

On October 1, the originally scheduled strike date, organizers held a second symbolic milk dump. At this protest, 200 farmers from eight counties dumped 2,500 gallons of milk from tank trucks on the Luis Pereira farm, in Deerfield (Oneida County). Local television and newspapers covered the event. On October 5, the state convention of the National Farmers Organization refused to endorse the strike movement,⁸⁷ even though many NFO members recalled participating in previous strikes.⁸⁸ Five days later, the Jefferson County Farm Bureau refused to take a stand on the milk strike, reflecting the division between the Farm Bureau leadership, who often spoke against the strike, and the dissenting opinions expressed by some of the Farm Bureau's 326 dairy farmers members.⁸⁹

Later in October, as farmers continued to organize for a possible strike, divisions appeared within the movement.

The source of the divisions was a basic disagreement over the question of organizational structure, which had been often debated at the weekly state strike meetings. By the end of October, a small group of farmers split from the movement over the question of formal organization. On one side were a number of farmers, usually the vast majority at the meetings, that resisted the implementation of a more formal organizational structure - with membership lists, dues, and officers. Their opposition was based on their experiences with the traditional farm organizations - from the more liberal NFO and National Farmers Union, to the conservative Farm Bureau. Most farmers considered these organizations to be too bureaucratic and too concerned with the needs of the organization - rather than the needs of farmers.⁹⁰ On the other side was a small group of farmers that believed a more structured organization was necessary, in order to generate greater resources and to institute an expanded education effort. A proposal to change the State Strike Committee's structure, specifically to organize a mailing system that would reach all New York dairy farmers, was voted down by a wide margin on October 22. Later, this schism would prompt the farmers that sponsored the proposal to break away from the strike organization, establishing two separate groups. The first was the National Dairy Campaign, founded in December, 1991⁹¹; the second offshoot was the National Milk Producers Association, established in 1992.

On November 15-16, strike organizers held a Northeast Regional meeting at the Champion fire hall (Jefferson County). The purpose of the meeting was clear; the discussion would be limited to the strike. Invitations to the meetings read: "This meeting will specifically address ideas for direct action and milk strike strategy."⁹² The first night, in what could be taken as a metaphor for the limited resources of the movement, farmers provided their own food, beer, and entertainment. The following day they held various seminars, including an extended strategy session from which the press was excluded. Seminar topics included how to organize effective protests, stress management, and milk pricing. In the course of one seminar, in discussing how the federal government calculated the milk price, one farmer exclaimed, "If Gorbachev had run Russia this way, communism would still be going strong."⁹³ The overall effect of the meeting, however, was unclear. The farmers in attendance voted again to affirm their commitment to a strike, yet they set no new date, nor clarified their short-term goals.

The strike meetings continued through December, 1991, but it was apparent that the movement had passed its high water mark. Support for the strike movement had waned. One reason, most often cited by farmers, was the deferral of the October first strike date. Many farmers specifically noted that the strike had raised expectations which were never

fulfilled. Others complained of not being able to release the pent up anger they carried. As this organizer said:

And I got farmers that come up to me and say today, like [a local farmer], and say, 'The only thing I can't figure out is why we didn't dump our milk. Why the 100 farmers [that signed petitions] didn't dump our milk. Even for week.' Almost all of them said that. I do regret the postponement and we didn't dump the milk. I do regret that. (Interview #109)

More importantly, support for the strike fell off as milk prices rose over the winter of 1991, which had the effect of pacifying aggrieved farmers. To explain the effects of increased prices, this strike organizer again used the analogy of sleep to signify increased political apathy. When asked what limited the strike movement, he replied:

The price coming up little bit put farmers back asleep. . . .Personally, I just think that farmers opened their milk check and figured that they were going to breathe again for a little while, and they weren't ready to take the big step. (Interview #103)

Another organizer expressed similar amazement at the ability of some farmers to tolerate harsh conditions and **not** act on their grievances. When asked what it took to communicate with dairy farmers, she exclaimed:

A two by four. I'm serious! The only thing that is going to make them see straight is that they got to be down and out - it's just like accepting God. You have to be down and out to see that God can do something for you. (Interview #105)

By January, 1992, the milk strike movement was dead. There were no more meetings, although a few organizers continued their efforts. One new project included work in

conjunction with dairy farmers in Wisconsin and Minnesota, on the petition drive to abolish the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board.⁹⁴

Conclusion

In the 1991 milk strike movement, a small group of farmers faced economic, political, and ideological forces which undercut their best efforts in organizing and motivating small dairy farmers to act as a class. To a much greater degree than in previous strike movements, contemporary farmers were economically and politically isolated. They faced vigorous opposition from large dairy farmers, whose most potent rejoinder was a continued affirmation of the conventional political process. This message was reinforced by the institutions of New York State agriculture, from the halls of Cornell, through milk plants around the state, in Farm Bureau meetings, and in the corridors in Albany and Washington. The prevailing sentiment was that a strike simply could not work.

To overcome such a unified chorus of opposition would have required many more resources than small farmers could ever raise selling pies or t-shirts. It was this immense disadvantage in resources that was perhaps the greatest obstacle the movement faced; in large part, it convinced farmers they could only succeed through desperate measures. As this farmer, an officer in a small co-op, explained, his

class position left him with few of the resources possessed by his opponents. As a result, he foresaw only one option:

There's some of these [strike opponents] are so big, like Crowley's and Kraft, that are so big that they can jockey milk from one area where they might be short into another area. Those guys, they don't have to work 18 hours a day at labor, they can sit in an office. Those guys can think. We go to a meeting with these guys and we've already worked 8 or 10 hours. And we walk into a meeting and these guys? They've had their staff working and all those guys have been thinking. It's hard to outsmart these guys. The only way you can ever deal with these guys is when there is no product for them. Otherwise? And they've got guys in think tanks and they know every loophole and every angle. Not to say that farmers are dumb, but when you go in to these places with these guys and you start throwing figures at them and they got them in another folder from another angle... like a Philadelphia lawyer after about 2 minutes. So I've been through all that shit with these guys. The only time that we've ever been successful is when there's not enough product. (Interview #122)

In retrospect, the obstacles faced by the 1991 milk strike movement were, on a vastly smaller scale, reminiscent of something Lawrence Goodwyn once wrote of the Populist Movement. In describing the Populists and their opponents, he wrote:

The force of traditionalism were narrow in outlook, primitive in economic theory, and well protected by an enormous and passive constituency. Most importantly, the advocates of the "sound dollar" possessed all of the commanding heights in the culture-the nation's press, the universities, the banks, and the churches. Collectively, they had power.

The forces of reform, on the other hand, deployed several regiments of stump speakers, a thousand weekly newspaper editors, and a sizable constituency. . . Collectively, they had hope.

It was not a balanced contest.⁹⁵

Notes

1. Following a series of mergers among the nation's dairy cooperatives in the late 1960s and early 1970s, leaders of the new, more powerful co-ops sought a much greater role in the Washington policy process. Led by the Associated Milk Producers Inc., co-op leaders began to contribute very large sums of money to Congressional and presidential campaigns. AMPI's political action committee, the Trust for Agricultural Political Education (TAPE), contributed \$40,000 to Hubert Humphrey's 1968 campaign, as well as \$55,600 to Wilber Mill's 1972 presidential effort. The greatest controversy surrounding TAPE and the other dairy co-op PACs, however, involved their offer of \$2 million to the Nixon campaign in 1971. Congressional Watergate investigators alleged that this offer was a not so subtle "quid pro quo," in exchange for an increase in the milk support price. On March 24, 1971, SPACE and ADEPT, PACs organized by the Mid-American Dairyemen Inc. and the Dairyemen Inc., contributed \$75,000 to the Nixon campaign; the next day, Nixon Agriculture Secretary Clifford Hardin raised the support price 5 percent, from 80 to 85 percent of parity. As a result, the dairy PACs came under close scrutiny from Watergate investigators. In one prominent link between the White House plumbers and the dairy PACs, a \$5,000 TAPE check was used in 1971 to fund the break-in of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist. This entire dubious legacy is documented in Michael McMenamin and Walter McNamara, Milking the Public (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1980), 37-203.

2. Heather Ball and Leland Beatty, "Blowing Away the Family Farmer," The Nation 239 (3 November 1984): 442-4.

3. Allan J. Cigler, "From Protest to Interest Group: The Making of American Agriculture Movement, Inc.," in Interest Group Politics, 2nd ed., Allan J. Cigler and Burdett A. Loomis (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1986), 46-69.

4. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Economic Indicators of the Farm Sector: Income and Balance Sheet Statistics, 1982, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 1983), 118, cited in Joseph N. Belden, Dirt Rich, Dirt Poor (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 32.

5. Mark Friedberger, Shakeout: Iowa Farm Families in the 1980's (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 51.

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29. Cigler, 61-64; Browne, 71-72.
30. Schwab, 291-295.
31. Friedberger, 81.
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33. Watertown Daily Times 30 August 1986, 22.
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37. Watertown Daily Times 2 September 1986, 26; The statistics on the number of farmers in Jefferson County were found in U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1987 Census of Agriculture, Vol. 1, Part 32, New York State and County Data, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987), 245.

38. Watertown Daily Times (St. Lawrence County Edition) 17 September 1986, 36.
39. Watertown Daily Times 1 October 1986, 23; see also Tom Harkin's summary of the Save the Family Farm Act in Comstock, 388-397.
40. Watertown Daily Times 6 October 1986, 26, 16.
41. Watertown Daily Times 5 October 1986, B1.
42. Watertown Daily Times 15 October 1986, 25.
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44. Watertown Daily Times 6 September 1986, 30.
45. New York State Senate, New York State Legislative Commission on Dairy Industry Development, The Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact Public Hearings Report (Albany: New York State Senate, June, 1990), 21-24; Brian M. Henehan, The Situation of Member Co-ops Following the Financial Failure of The Northeast Dairy Co-op Federation, Inc. (Albany: New York State Department of Agricultural Economics, March 1986), 14-15.
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47. New York Times, 12 May 1991, 25.
48. Rural Education Action Project, "Farmers Respond to the Dairy Crisis," Rural Vermont Report, Vol. 2, (No. 2): 1.
49. A partial list of the organizations included in the National Family Farm Coalition are: American Agriculture Movement, Inc., Citizen Action Coalition of Indiana, Dakota Resource Council, North Dakota, Dakota Rural Action, South Dakota, Farm Alliance of Rural Missouri, Groundswell, Inc. of Minnesota, Empire State Farm Alliance, Illinois Stewardship Alliance, Iowa Farm Unity Coalition, League of Rural Voters, Michigan Farm Unity Coalition, Minnesota COACT, Missouri Rural Crisis Center, New York Committee on Rural Affairs, Prairiefire Rural Action, Rural Vermont, Wisconsin Farm Unity Alliance.

50. For details of the emergency legislation, see New York State Senate, Legislative Commission on Dairy Industry Development, "New York State Acts Quickly in Response to Dairy Crisis," photocopied.

51. New York Times, 12 May 1991, 25.

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54. The criticisms of the National Dairy Board were taken from a petition entitled "Dump the National Dairy Board," circulated by members of the New York Farmers Union, photocopied.

55. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Meyer N. Zald, "Social Movements," in Handbook of Sociology, ed. Neil J. Smelser (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1988), 710-13; see also Carol McClurg Mueller, "Building Social Movement Theory," in Frontiers in Social Movement Theory, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 7-8, 10-12.

56. Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, Poor People's Movements (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 11-12.

57. New York Times, 14 July 1991, 24.

58. The information in the following paragraphs is based on interviews with farmers unless otherwise indicated. For the strike movement leadership, I interviewed approximately 50 percent (10 out of 20) of the farmers that regularly attended the New York Strike Organizing Meetings. For the rank and file movement supporters, I interviewed seven farmers who had signed one of the strike petitions, pledging to dump their milk. The opponents of the strike movement can likewise be divided into two groups: five farmers representing an elite group of former or present officers in the New York State Farm Bureau - a conservative farm interest group - and five farmers representing a group of nonelite (non-Farm Bureau leadership) farmers who were opposed to the milk strike movement. Opponents of the movement were selected through a process known as snowball sampling, where information from preliminary research, the media, and other farmers was used to identify further respondents. **Appendix A** contains the interview questionnaire; **Appendix C** contains a summary of the Interview Data.

59. This definition of small farms is similar to that used by Berry, who defined a small or "family" farm as one that is "small enough to be farmed by a family, and one that is farmed by a family - perhaps with a small amount of hired labor." Wendell Berry, "A Defense of the Family Farm," in Comstock, 347.

60. New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, Division of Statistics, New York Agricultural Statistics, 1992-1993 (Albany: New York State Agricultural Statistics Service, July, 1993), 52.

61. Ibid., 52.

62. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1987 Census of Agriculture, Vol. 1, Part 32, New York State and County Data (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987), 134.

63. New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, Changes in the Marketplace and Operations of the New York State Dairy Industry, 1985-1989 (Albany: Division of Dairy Industry Services, January 1990), 14.

64. 1987 Census of Agriculture, 133.

65. For the four groups of farmers, the number of cows per farm is an approximate average. In the questionnaires farmers filled out, they selected a herd size of either 0-20, 21-40, 41-60, 61-80, 81-100, 101-150, 151-200, 201-250, or 250+ cows. In compiling the average number of cows per farm, I used the midpoint in this range for each farmer. While this might seem arbitrary, in fact, for most farmers the exact size of their herds varies within this range from week to week. Cows are added to the herd as they freshen, or begin to give milk after calving; they are moved out of the herd because they dry, or get sick, or become too old. The exact number of cows in any one herd is thus less important than the range of cows typically in the herd, and the amount of milk the farmer markets in an average month.

66. Eric R. Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 291-292.

67. Michael Schwartz, Radical Protest and Social Structure: The Southern Farmers' Alliance and Cotton Tenancy, 1880-1890 (New York: Academic Press, 1976), 145-50.

68. Notes from local strike organizing meeting, LaFargeville, New York, 5 September 1991; Notes from state Organizing Committee meeting, Constableville, New York, 24 September 1991; Interview #105.

69. Watertown Daily Times, 24 August 1991, 32.
70. New York Times, 13 October 1991, 45.
71. Watertown Daily Times, 13 October 1991, B1.
72. Watertown Daily Times, 24 October 1991, 1.
73. Kathleen Deveny, "After Some Key Strategies Go Sour, Kraft General Foods Gets Back to Basics," Wall Street Journal, 18 March, 1992, B1.
74. The best source for statistics on hired labor costs on dairy farms in New York State is Stuart F. Smith, Wayne A. Knoblauch, and Linda D. Putnam, 1991 Dairy Farm Business Summary (Ithaca: Cornell University Department of Agricultural Economics, August, 1992), 42-9; According to the Survey, in 1991 the accrual expenses for hired labor (defined as "cash expenses adjusted for changes in inventory, prepaid expenses, and accounts payable") were \$5,894 on the 73 farms surveyed with 40-54 cows, \$8,708 on the 72 farms with 55 to 69 cows, \$23,886 on the 36 farms with 85 to 99 cows, and \$32,865 on the 77 farms with 100 to 149 cows. On the 21 farms cited with 200-299 cows, the accrual expenses for labor were \$85,569; for the 18 farms with 300 or more cows, they were \$265,896. It is important to point out that the Farm Business Summary is not a random survey. It is, however, the most comprehensive set of data that correlates farms by size of herd and labor costs available.
75. For an explanation of milk pricing policy, see Murray R. Benedict and Oscar C. Stine, The Agricultural Commodity Programs (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1956), Ch. 11; Alden Manchester, The Public Role in the Dairy Economy (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), 200-27; New York State Senate, Legislative Committee on Dairy Industry Development, The Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact Public Hearings Report (Albany: New York State Senate, June, 1990), 1-6, 14.
76. George Stanley and Cary Spivak, "Cheese Squeeze: Kraft Wields Huge Clout on National Dairy Pricing," Milwaukee Sentinel, 5 January 1993, 1(A) and 10 (A).
77. New York Strike Organizing Committee, "A Milk Strike Now! Why We Need This Strike," photocopied.
78. For an explanation of lobbying, see Jeffrey M. Berry, The Interest Group Society (Boston: Scott, Foresman, 1989), 5-6, Ch. 4; for an explanation of contemporary agricultural interest group lobbying, see Browne, 1988; John Mark Hansen, Gaining Access: Congress and the Farm Lobby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 101-230.

79. New York Strike Organizing Committee, "A Milk Strike Now! Why We Need This Strike," photocopied.
80. Notes from a local strike organizing meeting, Lowville, New York, 29 August 1991.
81. Notes from the New York Strike Organizing Committee meeting, Constableville, New York, 10 September 1991.
82. Watertown Daily Times, 24 August 1991, 32.
83. Notes from a local strike organizing meeting, Lowville, New York, 29 August 1991.
84. Tom Quinn, "The Farm Crisis Strikes Again in Dairy Country," Utne Reader, Sept/Oct. 1991, 96-97.
85. Watertown Daily Times, 27 September 1991, 30.
86. Watertown Daily Times, 28 September 1991, 3.
87. Watertown Daily Times, 6 October 1991, B1.
88. Notes from interviews with NFO members at the New York State National Farmers Organization convention, West Potsdam, New York, 5 October 1991.
89. Watertown Daily Times, 13 October 1991, B2.
90. Notes from the New York Strike Organizing Committee meeting, Constableville, New York, 24 September 1991; 22 October 1991.
91. Watertown Daily Times, 16 December 1991, 29.
92. New York Strike Organizing Committee, "Dairy Farmers Meeting," November, 1991, photocopied.
93. Notes from the Northeast Regional Milk Strike meeting, Champion, New York, 15-16 November 1991.
94. In August, 1993, the "Dump the National Dairy Board" campaign failed in its effort. Campaign organizers had originally forced a referendum on the Board, after submitting 16,000 petition signatures (1,500 more than necessary) to Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy. In the national referendum, American dairy farmers and cooperatives cast 55,713 votes in favor of continuation of the national advertising check-off, administered by the National Dairy Board. Out of this total, cooperatives "bloc voted" 49,026 votes for their farmer-members. In June of 1993 farmers

opposed to the Board filed suit in Federal Court, for an injunction to stop bloc voting in the upcoming referendum. On July 21, a Federal Court judge in Madison, Wisconsin advised campaign organizers to drop their lawsuit. See "Dump NDB Group Files Suit Against Block Voting," Country Folks, 28 June 1993, A3; Lee Mielke, "Dairyline," Country Folks, 2 August 1993, C28; "Dairy Farmers Say 'Yes' to Nat'l Dairy Board," Country Folks, 25 October 1993, A3.

95. Lawrence Goodwyn, The Populist Moment (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 212.

Chapter Six

Class Position, Ideology, and the 1991 Milk Strike Movement

This chapter examines the competing belief systems, or ideology, articulated by dairy farmers with large and small operations in New York State. Ideology, in this sense, is defined as the "patterns of symbolically-charged beliefs and expressions that present, interpret and evaluate the world in a way designed to shape, mobilize, direct, organize and justify certain modes of or courses of action and to anathemize others."¹ The focus on ideology in my inquiry follows a turn in the literature; recent works have placed greater emphasis on beliefs, ideas, and values in the construction of social movements.² On one hand, this reflects certain limitations in prevailing theory. As Taylor and Whittier explain, "resource mobilization and political process theories cannot explain how structural inequalities get translated into subjectively experienced discontent."³ Further, the renewed emphasis on values and ideology reflects the influence of "new social movement theory" (NSM) developed in Europe. NSM theorists, for example, underscore the importance of "collective identity," meaning a shared sense of experience and beliefs, in social movement formation.⁴

The focus on ideology in my analysis provides the most comprehensive examination of dairy farmers' interpretation of their class position. Because ideology is a window into the subjective, this analysis will allow me to consider whether any connections existed between the farmers' class position and their political participation. The first question is whether ideology served as the potential bridge between structure and political action. Thus an important subtext in this chapter is the question of whether the farmers who participated in the 1991 milk strike movement defined themselves as a class. In other words, even though the movement farmers occupied a similar position in the political economy, and even though these farmers chose similar forms of political participation - did they define themselves as a class of farmers?

The second question is concerned with the source of farmers' grievances. Ideology serves as a lens through which individuals interpret their lives and work. In the case of dairy farmers, ideology was the prism through which small farmers interpreted either structural inequalities, or changes in the structural relationships that disadvantaged them, or both. By examining their interpretation of these changes, this analysis will provide further insight into farmers' discontent. Put another way, by looking at the belief systems articulated by small farmers, I will be able to identify the cultural and political "baggage" that they

brought to the "micromobilization contexts," from which the movement arose.

The chapter begins with a discussion of class and agriculture. The prevailing view in the literature has been based on the assumption that farmers could not define themselves (subjectively) as a class, because they were precluded from doing so by the objective conditions in agriculture. The second section is an examination of the competing ideologies articulated by New York dairy farmers. In the final section, I will consider the way in which farmers in the 1991 strike movement translated ideology into a coherent political program.

Class Formation and Agriculture

Analysts have advanced many different and often conflicting answers to the question of whether farmers or peasants have the potential for class formation. Marx provided one of the first and most influential perspectives on this question in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte; he analyzed the independent small farmer or peasant in 18th century France. In a passage cited in many recent works in rural sociology and politics, Marx wrote:

The small holding peasant forms a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with one another. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. . . . In this way, the great mass of the French nation is formed by a simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as

potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes.⁵

Marx's judgment led many later analysts to conclude that *all* farmers were incapable of organizing themselves as a class, due to their structural isolation within the political economy of agriculture. Marx, however, in the same work outlined the criteria necessary for class formation among farmers. This suggests that under specific historical conditions, a group of farmers that live under similar conditions, and define themselves in this manner, *could* form a class:

In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interest and their culture from those of other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organization among them, they do not form a class.⁶

The conventional interpretation of Marx's opinion regarding the "class potential" of farmers was, of course, colored by his other writings on "the idiocy of rural life."⁷ Further, in his Theories of Surplus Value, he concluded that, under the capitalist mode of production, the small farmer or independent peasant would eventually disappear. For Marx, the problem with the independent, small farmer was that they were "cut up into two persons." They embodied both the capitalist, in owning their own means of production, and the laborer, because they constituted their

own wage labor force. Because of this contradictory position, Marx concluded:

. . .the peasant who produces with his own means of production will either gradually be transformed into a small capitalist who also exploits the labor of others or he will suffer the loss of his means of production and be transformed into a wage laborer. This is the tendency in the form of society in which the capitalist mode of production dominates.⁸

What Marx failed to anticipate was the stubborn resistance shown by independent, small farmers or peasants, in particular to the penetration of market social relations. As many later analysts have observed, farmers or peasants, more than industrial workers, were the decisive force in revolutionary movements around the world. Marx's writings, however, had enormous influence on generations of activists and scholars. In practice, the American Communist Party followed Marx's thinking on agriculture, placing little emphasis on organizing farmers throughout the early 20th century. In a famous letter, Lenin queried the CPUSA, "Have you no farmers in America?"⁹ Moreover, Marx's writings on peasants influenced academic studies of farmers' movements around the world. Paige, for example, concluded in his sweeping study of rural social movements:

The greater the importance of land as a source of income for cultivators, the greater the structural isolation or dependence on non-cultivators [such as banks, railroads, and export firms] and the weaker the pressures for political solidarity.¹⁰

Paige's reasoning was very similar to that employed by Marx. For Paige, small, commercial farmers "operate in isolation,"

and have developed an ideology of "self-reliance and rugged individualism." This means they are less willing to form political associations, and thus have less potential for class formation.¹¹

Other analysts, working far outside the Marxist tradition, have reached similar conclusions regarding the structural isolation of small, independent farmers. One well-known example in American political science was The American Voter, a work with enormous influence on the conceptualization of the political participation of American farmers. For the authors of this study, the two salient characteristics of American farmers were their sporadic voting habits and inconstant partisan attachments.¹² They attributed these characteristics to the farmers' isolated position in the social structure. According to the authors,

The full time farmer has been much less firmly bound up with the flow of national events than any other group in the society. He has tended to work alone in an occupation which, save for the winter months, has left little leisure to attend to the world beyond the horizon.¹³

Campbell et al. attribute the history of agrarian movements in the U.S. to individual, psychologically-driven reactions to economic stress, rather than arising from the farmers' political and economic interests. The farmers' isolated position within agriculture, they believed, precluded the development of a coherent political organization or program.

There have been some analysts, however, who have concluded that small, independent farmers possessed the

capacity to overcome their structural isolation. Wolf, for example, challenged Marx's assumption about the independent peasant, arguing that it was the class of "middle peasants," who owned their own land and cultivated it with family labor, that had the resources and tactical freedom to initiate revolutionary movements.¹⁴ Rather than living and working under conditions of structural isolation, Wolf wrote, ". . .it is exactly this stratum that which most depends on traditional social relations of kin and mutual aid between neighbors."¹⁵ In addition, analysts have observed that farmers' relatively isolated position constituted something of a political asset. Scott, in another example, argued that isolation of traditional agrarian life offered peasants greater immunity from the penetration of hegemonic cultural values and institutions.¹⁶

McNall, in a recent analysis of the Populist movement, incorporated a renewed emphasis on class analysis;¹⁷ he labeled the Populists' efforts in Kansas a class movement. Citing Marx, McNall argued for the importance of centralized, bureaucratic organization for successful class formation.¹⁸ Likewise, Mooney, in a study of contemporary farmers in Wisconsin, argued that farmers were capable of "complete class formation," but only under certain conditions. As he put it, "only when the participants are aware that it is their common concern with the relations of production and their common interest" to transform these

relations can farmers constitute themselves as a class.¹⁹

The analysis of the milk strikes presented in previous chapters falls within the boundaries of this second interpretation; my analysis suggests that under certain conditions, specifically those illustrated in the 1916 and 1939 milk strikes, small dairy farmers exhibited the potential to organize themselves as a class. For evidence to support this conclusion, I will return to the criteria that Marx identified for class formation among farmers. I will then employ these criteria in evaluating the position of, and relations between, dairy farmers with large and small operations. To summarize these criteria, an array of farmers could constitute a class if, first, they experienced "economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of other classes." Second, a collection of farmers would have to acknowledge their interests and articulate them "in hostile opposition" to other classes.²⁰ The history of milk strikes considered in Chapters Two and Three suggests that, contrary to Marx's analysis of the French peasantry, New York dairy farmers possessed the potential to overcome whatever structural isolation they faced, and to engage in what Marx called "manifold relations." In the 1930s, for example, the structural position of small dairy farmers, embedded as they were within the web of an interconnected rural society, served as a significant political resource.

The small farmers' production and social networks, as I explained in Chapter Three, facilitated collective action by fostering solidarity and communications. Even in the most recent milk strike movement, farmers were able to utilize their few remaining structural interconnections to disseminate information concerning the proposed strike.

The key to the farmers' potential to act as a class was organization; insurgent dairy farmers made use of two types of organizations in their political-economic struggles. As Prezworski pointed out, organizations are essential in the process of class formation. This is because, as he put it, the first struggle is always about class, before there can be any struggles among classes.²¹ The first type of farmers' organization was the formal farmers' organization, which included the Erie Mutual Milk Producers Association (1883), the early Dairymen's League (1916), the Empire Dairymen's Association (1933), the Dairy Farmers Union (1939), and the 1991 New York Strike Organizing Committee. These groups provided the organized framework for milk strikes and channeled farmers' grievances into an effective political-economic force. The second type of organization, that has been overlooked in the literature, is the long tradition of ad hoc, community meetings. As illustrated in the most recent milk strike movement, many small, dairy farmers eschewed formal organization, which they associated with the traditional farm interest groups, preferring instead the

looser, more accessible form of the community meeting. It was in this context that farmers, from 1883 through 1991, first discussed the possibility of political action; and it was here they perhaps first discovered that their individual grievances were actually collective grievances. In past milk strikes, it was also in these preliminary meetings that farmers took the first steps toward establishing the formal, political organizations that worked to clarify and defend their interests.

Regarding the second criteria for class formation, or whether "economic conditions" of the dairy industry situated small, commercial farmers "in hostile opposition" to other classes (including classes of farmers), the best authorities on this subject are the farmers themselves. In the following section, I will systematically evaluate the competing ideologies articulated by large and small dairy farmers. In the farmers' own words, this analysis shows how small farmers articulated themselves in hostile opposition to large dairy farmers. These class differences and antagonisms were apparent on a wide range of issues, including the idea of individualism, the notion of freedom, the role of government, the nature of agriculture, and the qualitative differences between farmers with different sized operations.

Competing Ideologies in the Dairy Industry

Currently . . . yeah, I'd say there are some real different thoughts and ideas coming from a 3,000

cow producer, compared to a 30 cow producer. The 3,000 cow producer - call him a young tiger or whatever - at this point in their life they are ready to take on the world, they feel that they can compete, they feel they are politically active and can make difference. They're more willing to take on the world. The 30 cow producer, he tends - by nature has been an isolationist. He's doing what he's doing, in some degree, because he wants to get away from that kind of environment. So without stereotyping either one, I'd say generally speaking, yeah, there is some major differences [among dairy farmers] philosophically. (Int. #113)

The farmer quoted above, operator of a large dairy farm, offered a perceptive overview of the philosophical distinctions between large and small farmers. Thus far, in previous chapters, I have examined how the class position of New York dairy farmers, and their interpretation of this position, influenced them to choose certain forms of political participation. These interpretations, however, were part of a larger system of beliefs that served to explain and justify the farmers' entire range of actions. My task in the following pages is to consider whether any congruities existed between the farmers' class position, this larger belief system, and forms of political participation.

The Ideology of Competitive, Free Market Individualism

Discussions with farmers who opposed the 1991 milk strike movement revealed an underlying system of beliefs, that was the basis for their political and economic interests, as well as their corresponding patterns of

political participation. This belief system, or ideology, can be summarized as one of competitive, free market individualism. What follows is a brief explanation of its major tenets:

*** Individualism** - In open-ended discussions, both large and very large dairy farmers emphasized the fact that owning and managing a dairy farm tested the ability and self-worth of the individual. When asked about the survival of small farmers, this large dairy farmer stressed the importance of individual ability:

. . .I don't think that they can have the opinion that somebody owes them a living. I think they have to prove that they can survive on their own. But I think they are important to the rural community and to the tax base to have a number of small farms. But I think that everybody has to prove *on their own* that they can do it. (emphasis added) (Interview #112)

This very large dairy farmer, when asked about the future of the industry, made specific reference to management skills. Large farmers generally ranked management ability high on the list of individual talents required in modern farming:

I think there's a lot of hope, but again, it's going to take a lot of management. You're going to have to have to be willing to make trade offs and take risks, and that's going to be a way of life. . . .But I feel optimistic that our business - that we will be survivors. And we'll just be personnel managers and, we'll be crop managers, and business people and risk takers. You got to be willing to take risks. (Int.#126)

This emphasis on ability (and competition) was consonant with the position of large farmers in the dairy industry. The large farmers cited in these interviews

preside over expansive operations, farms that are monuments to modern technology and productivity. On these farms, a certain proficiency in management skills is essential. With a job description closer to that of an industrial manager, large farmers must supervise a large hired labor force, direct a fleet of tractors, and maintain quality control over a substantial volume of milk production.

The large farmers' class position, and their corresponding emphasis on competitive individualism, greatly influenced their attitudes concerning the milk strike. As this large operator explained, in what was a common refrain among large farmers, the hard times experienced in 1991 had one benefit. The dairy crisis eliminated, unfortunately for some, those farmers who lacked the necessary abilities to compete:

Every time that there's a sift out and the price is depressed - it's a cruel way to do it because I think because there's some very good people that got hurt - but it does shake out the chaff.
(Interview #124)

Further, large dairy farmers considered the strike itself as evidence that participating farmers could not compete. Operators of large farms used words such as "challenge" and "risk" to describe the attraction of contemporary farming. Discussing his opposition to the 1991 strike, this large proprietor remarked,

I thought that we should be challenged, we should be rewarded for our efforts and things should be done in a business-like manner. I don't want the public to say, 'We feel sorry for them.' The

profit motivation is what we do it for, beside the fact that we like to do it. (Interview #124)

*** Freedom** - Large dairy farmers defined freedom as the absence of restraints. This concept was often linked with the idea of government intervention; simply put, large farmers saw an inverse relationship between personal freedom and government power. In particular, many large farmers raised objections to mandatory supply management plans, such as those spelled out in the National Dairy Act or in effect in the Canadian "quota" system. Both of these programs, according to the large farmers, mandated unnecessary restrictions on individual farmers. As this operator of a very large farmer said of (government-mandated) supply management programs in dairy farming:

I think that that's very poor, poor economic policy. I think that's now being proven in Canada. . . .It doesn't open the industry to private ingenuity and efficiencies. It's a step backwards. (Interview #126)

Another large farmer offered a similar argument:

. . .I could go along with a voluntary supply management type program, industry sponsored or paid for. . . .I just don't feel that the government is ever going to [enact a mandatory program] - I just don't feel that it's the American way, the predictive American way, to stifle the ability of the individual to be innovative and productive. (Interview #110)

*** The Nature of Agriculture** - Large dairy farmers, like their smaller counterparts, paid homage to the cultural advantages of farming over other professions. Farming, they believed, was a good occupation for raising children in a

healthy environment, developing sound values, or for "being your own boss." Yet large dairy farmers, in particular the former officers of the New York State Farm Bureau, stressed the fact that farming was a business, rather than a way of life. When asked to describe the ideal conditions in their industry, for example, many large farmers defined ideal conditions in terms of a rate of return on their investment:

Dairy farming under the best conditions would be a lot more exciting, in terms of meeting challenges. . . .I think there'd have to be conditions that create profitability in terms of operation and faster paybacks in terms of long term investments. (Interview #126)

[Ideal conditions would mean] a good fair return on our labor and management. I don't think that the time would ever come when we're going to get what other industries would consider a fair return on our investment. (Interview #124)

Moreover, most large farmers voiced faith in the self-regulating potential of the "free market." As this farmer said:

That is, I really believe in the market place in the economics of any business to survive. And I think government is overly involved in all of agriculture. And probably they're overly involved in an awful lot of things that the private sector could take on. That's one of the scariest things about the dairy industry right now. (Int. #126)

The large farmers' faith in the market strongly influenced their choice of forms of political participation. It also colored their view of the strike movement. In the eyes of most large producers, the 1991 strike movement - with its demands for \$17 milk, along with new forms of government intervention - constituted unnecessary

interference with the workings of supply and demand. In what was another common refrain from large farmers, this large farmer observed:

I don't really think the government should support the price because farmers are on strike. I think that should be in the marketplace. If there's not demand enough to get it out of the marketplace, then you shouldn't be on strike. (Interview #114)

The New York State Farm Bureau was perhaps the leading proponent of the competitive, free market ideology. An illustration can be seen in the comprehensive proposals for dairy reform, submitted to the Farm Bureau's Dairy Committee in 1991. One proposal, by a Cayuga County dairy farmer, included a number of "general observations." His first two observations were:

1. Capitalism or a free-market economy has proven to be the most effective way to allocate resources and improve the general welfare of the people.
2. The market is stronger and smarter than any government. Forces of the market always prevail in spite of the government's efforts to alter them.²²

According to this Farm Bureau member, the solution to the dairy crisis was for New York farmers to voluntarily convert whole dairy farms to other uses; the diversion, as it was called, would control over-production and raise the milk price. In addition, the advantage of voluntary restrictions was that they would operate according to the dictates of the market: "If there are no low bids [from farmers willing to convert], then it would indicate that dairymen are satisfied with their profits. If there are numerous low bids, it would

mean that the market price is too low to provide satisfactory profits. Production would need to be reduced to allow the market price to rise."²³

The last important distinction between large and small farmers, concerning the nature of agriculture, could be seen in the scope of their interests. Small farmers typically first discussed the local effects of the dairy crisis, perhaps then moving to the national economy. Large dairy farmers, however, stressed the fact that all farmer were competing in an increasingly complex international market. According to this very large dairy farmer:

And the fact is, we are a global agriculture. We have to recognize that. You can't subsidize. In the paper yesterday or someplace I just saw, a farmer from France at Euro-Disney - madder than hell because they were reducing the subsidies to agriculture in Europe. Well, it's going to happen. . . .You'd better find a way to survive making \$10 milk, instead of trying to spend all your energies trying to get \$17 somewhere. . . .[the strike demand] If I can't get enough to survive, I'm going the hell out of business. I don't want someone to support me. (Interview #126)

*** Differences between farmers** - When asked to describe the differences between farmers, large farmers varied in their responses. Although some large operators believed there were clear distinctions between large and small dairy farmers, just as many attributed the differences between farmers to matters of opinion. On one issue, however, large farmers were united; they unanimously interpreted the demands of the strike movement as proof that small farmers wanted government support. This large farmer expressed an opinion

that was representative of many:

. . .a smaller operator. . .if it is someone that doesn't want to get bigger or doesn't have the opportunity to get bigger. . .I think more from history or government programs - they may be more inclined to think that someone else has got to subsidize their business or their survival.
(Interview #126)

This view was echoed by Patrick Hooker, Associate Director of Government Relations for the New York Farm Bureau. Hooker referred, in the text of a speech, to the strike, saying:

On the other side, are the folks who feel they have special status and a right chartered by the King of England to be dairy farmers. These are the same folks who want a government-guaranteed 'cost of production, plus a profit.' This concept is amazing to me and to most Farm Bureau members. Here, in the United States of America, land of the free, someone wants to be guaranteed a living by the government.²⁴

The Ideology of Self-sufficient, Communitarian Individualism

Dairy farmers with smaller operations, who participated in or supported the 1991 milk strike movement, offered a vastly different set of ideological beliefs. The ideology set forth by small farmers is similar to the main ideological currents in the 1980s "farm crisis" movement; the common thread in both is the survival of what is termed the "family farm."²⁵ Strange summarized the ideal types of agriculture posited by the family farm movement, in contrast to what he labeled "industrial agriculture."²⁶ The former ideal-type is owner operated, entrepreneurial, diversified, family centered, resource conserving, and based on farming

as a way of life. The latter is industrially organized, financed for growth, large scale, specialized, management centered, capital intensive, resource consumptive, and based on farming as a business. Many of the distinctions within Strange's two ideal-types were reflected in the ideological beliefs expressed by small dairy farmers.

Small dairy farmers defined themselves in clear and angry terms as having separate interests and philosophical orientations from large farmers, indeed an entirely separate culture. Within these philosophical distinctions could be seen the guiding principles behind the small farmers' participation in the 1991 milk strike movement. Their embrace of unconventional politics was derived from their economic, moral, environmental, and political justifications for broad-based small farm ownership. Based on these convictions, most small producers reached the conclusion that forceful - even radical - measures were necessary, to protect and preserve their position in the political economy. What follows is brief explanation of their ideology, which can be summarized as one of self-sufficient, communitarian individualism:

*** Individualism** - In New York State, small, commercial dairy farmers put forth their own variation of the ideology of family farming. These small farmers, like their larger counterparts, began from the premise of individualism, expressed in ownership and control. Many, such as this

farmer, advocated dairy farming because of the control it offered them over their own lives. When asked about the positive aspects of farming, he replied:

I thought it was a real good life. You worked hard, but yet the rewards were good. You were your own boss. It was a good life. (emphasis added) (Interview #101)

Small farmers, however, rejected the competitive, risk-taking model of agriculture. Rather, they favored self-sufficiency and independence, but only within the context of a dynamic local community. In discussions with small farmers, many returned again and again to the word (and concept of) community. One of the primary benefits of widespread small farm ownership was its contribution to community life. According to this small farmer:

So looking at the whole thing, the small farms are better for the community economy-wise. They are better for the community because they are the community. If you take in an agricultural community, money starts when something is produced and in a lot of rural communities the only thing that is produced is an agricultural commodity. . . For the whole community the small farms are better. (Interview #106)

Another movement organizer and small farmer made a similar claim:

Because we founded this - we're the backbone of the country. We made this country what it is today. Our communities. You had your farm, and people who came to sell to the farmer. [Small farmers] made your towns. (Interview #108)

*** Freedom** - The small dairy farmers' sense of individualism was closely linked to their notion of freedom. For small farmers, freedom was defined by their ability to remain self-sufficient and independent. When asked to describe the

ideal conditions in the dairy industry, this small farmer explained:

That's all we farmers want is a reasonable fair price for milk. No more no less. So you can replace your machinery if you have to, you can go out to dinner if you want to, you can get your bills and keep them up. That's the only thing farmers ask. I don't know any farmers that want to get rich. Or they wouldn't be in farming.
(Interview #104)

Older dairy farmers attached one important condition to the concept of freedom expressed as self-sufficiency: their ability to retire, or to find a buyer for their farms. Many older farmers defined the greatest obstacle to their retirement as the taxes and costs involved in selling out. As this small farmer said:

We really don't have any idea in milking 1,000 cows whatsoever. The headaches that go along with it. . . In our case we wanted to make a decent living and we didn't want to get rich. Coming now our biggest problem is wanting to retire. If we sell out the government wants most of it. So the only other thing we could do is pass it on to the family. And hope that they can take care of you.
(Interview #120)

The small dairy farmers' emphasis on self-sufficiency recalls an idea central to 19th century republicanism,²⁷ defined as the ideology of the small, independent producer in early American society. This is the idea of the competence, defined as "the ability to get along well in economic terms - to possess real estate or savings sufficient to house a family, or tide it over during hard times, or support husband and wife during old age."²⁸ As Krause explained, working class Americans "since the

Revolutionary Era" have sought a competence, because they shared the belief that the fruits of work should result in the dignity and independence of the worker. As he put it, "To live with dignity meant having a modicum of material security and, therefore, a job that guaranteed security."²⁹

Small dairy farmers employed a number of ideas that were synonymous with the notion of a competence; they spoke often of the necessity of an income sufficient to provide a degree of security. In this discussion, for example, this small farmer used the words "comfortable" and "just compensation" as synonyms for a competence - in other words, to signal a standard of living his family should attain from working his farm:

Comfortable is the ability to meet your financial commitments and to have enough extra so that maybe you can take your family on a vacation. I never wanted to light Havana cigars with \$100 bills, that wasn't my goal when I started farming. But one thing I didn't do either when I started farming is I didn't take an oath of poverty. (laughter). All I want is my just compensation. (Interview #106)

This concept of the competence was also expressed in interviews with retired small farmers. When this small producer recalled the farms that formerly occupied the road on which he lived, he used the word "reasonable" to represent those farms that could be worked by one family, with sufficient income to provide a comfortable life:

Oh yeah. For instance, next door was a farm and it was a small farm. He didn't milk more than 20-25 at the most. Then the next place was a small farm, then another small farm. . . And then the next 2

places were just reasonable sized, . . .Then the next place was quite a large farm, he had something to do with the Civil War. . . .I presume that they probably milked 35, maybe 40. . . .Then the next farm was a smaller farm. Just reasonable - probably 25-30 cows. (emphasis added) (History Interview #108)

The contemporary small farmers' notion of self-sufficiency had an important influence on their attitudes concerning politics and government. Most small operators believed they were best able to prosper, and to remain free and independent, when government actively intervened with policies that preserved broad-based farm ownership. An example of such a policy was the National Dairy Act, which many farmers' endorsed because it would protect their ability to perpetuate their class position. Most small farmers endorsed the theoretical principles on which the Act was based; they favored restrictions on the size and production of all farms, as a way of preserving their freedom. Simply put, where large farmers saw an inverse relationship between freedom and the power of government, small dairy farmers believed their freedom and independence to be directly tied to government power. The small producers' freedom was tied to the willingness of government to intervene in such a way that would preserve their position in the industry. As an illustration of this attitude, consider the following representative responses by two small farmers, who were asked to define the ideal conditions in the dairy industry:

Ideally, I think farms should be limited to 30 milkers per family unit and a limit of maybe three as far as a family unit. . . .Also, I feel then there should be a few other things like chickens and pigs and - just a well-diversified small farm. (Interview #102)

Under ideal conditions for me the dairy industry would have a quota system. And it would be geared toward keeping small farms in business. That would be the way that I would like to see it. And it would price the product at somewhat close to 100% of parity. (Interview #116)

*** Nature of Agriculture** - In stark contrast to large dairy farmers, the smaller farmers involved in the strike movement pointedly defined farming as way of life, rather than as a business. This farmer, for example, believed that at some point, many young, large farmers, as they got older, would reevaluate their attitudes toward agriculture. As she explained:

But the young farmers - there's always going to be a need for somebody to produce milk and I honestly don't think someday those big farmers are going to - they'll stay in business but I think they'll come to the realization that farming is not just a business, it is a lifestyle. (Interview #104)

Because they defined farming as a way of life, small dairy farmers also considered small-scale farming as more personal and caring. Notice the emphasis on stewardship that is depicted in the following comments:

I don't think that a large farm is any more efficient than a small one. I think we care more about our animals and we've got more feelings about the animals and everything else - the environment - and I think a large farm doesn't. They're out there, they're like a factory, they've got an assembly line, they've got to keep moving and make the money because their debt load is so great. (Interview #109)

When you have a smaller farm you farm it on a more personal basis. You know all your cows, you know them by name. You know them by number. They're pets. Some of them are pets. When you get into a bigger farm you lose that personal side of farming, it becomes a business. You make money. A cow is a machine. And that's it. Is he making you money? If not then get rid of it. That's the difference. (Interview #108)

Definitely the small farm is a lot more efficient than a large farm. Because generally it is the owner himself and his family or maybe a hired man or two, so there is a lot more care taken of the animals. I think there's a lot less drugs and hormones used because there's two ways of keeping a cow healthy: one is preventive maintenance and the other is to shoot it full of drugs. And I think the small farmer has the tendency to know each cow better. (Interview #102)

*** Differences Among Farmers** - Small dairy farmers identified qualitative distinctions between different classes of farmers with a much greater clarity and emphasis than large farmers. In citing these distinctions, the small proprietors defined themselves in "hostile opposition" to large farmers, claiming to have distinct interests and a separate culture. For the small farmer, large farmers *as a class* were much more concerned with their own individual prosperity than that of other farmers. In addition, large farmers valued their *individual* success over the health of their community. Farmers in the strike movement often referred to the same words - such as "predatory" or "competitive" - to describe the attitudes of large dairy farmers. These two small operators, for example, related sharp differences between farmers with different sized operations:

I've never studied the differences but from my

observations I think a lot of the big farmers think that they are operating on a predatory philosophy that they're going to put the small guys out of business and when all of those little farmers are gone they're going to be king of the mountain. Some of the smaller farmers - in fact most of them - don't think that way, they're just trying to make a living. (Interview #116)

Usually [large dairy farmers are] into this capitalist predatory system type thing where when my neighbor goes out I'll be better off, I'm a survivor. That's what I generally find with the big farmers. (Interview #106)

Many small farmers illustrated the class differences they observed by reporting anecdotes about personal experiences with large farmers. This small farmer described her experience with a large dairy farmer who lived nearby:

So this farmer, we went to an auction a while ago and he doesn't care who's bidding on the cows, he wants those cows and he doesn't care what he has to pay. He's going to buy them and you have no chance of bidding against him. . . .He doesn't care for the workers - he pays slave wages to his help, cause I know one family that works for him. And no insurance, minimum wage. I mean they were living on less than poverty. And that's the people that he hires, he knows that he can get away with it. And that's big business. (Interview #104)

For most small farmers, however, the critical difference between classes of farmers was not determined by size of farm per se, but rather through a combination of size of operation and ideological perspective regarding agriculture. As this farmer explained, class differences were not expressed in numbers of cows, but rather when a farmer underwent a qualitative change in attitude. This change usually occurred, however, in the process of expansion:

You probably could generalize that and say yes [there are differences in the way large farmers think], but sometimes it surprises you, the difference. I've had people with 350 head think the same way I do politically. Where you see the differences are the ones with 350 head and they plan on having 1,000. That's where you see the differences. There is an attitude among some of them that they're going to expand their way to prosperity and when the guys with less than 100 cows go out of business they'll be better off.

As he went on to explain, small farmers were more concerned with this philosophy of competition and expansion, than they were with the sheer size of a farmers' operation. This was because the process of expansion itself raised serious questions regarding the future of the dairy industry. He continued:

On that, I want to say something. People think like its a threat, like the 350 cow herd is the threat to the 50 cow herd, and in a sense I suppose it is. But really, I'm not that threatened by the 350 cow herd. The threat that I feel is what happens to these herds that are going to 1,000 or 2,000 head - who is going to own those? Somewhere down the road it isn't going to be a young guy 25 years old buying a dairy farm, as it has been the custom over the past 30 or 40 years. There's not one individual that can go out and go into debt to buy out a 2,000 cow herd. The big difference coming on is like a vertically integrated structure, such as the poultry business. When those herds go out of business, whose going to buy them and where are they going to consolidate? They are going to consolidate to the point where it's going to be a big corporation owning the herd. (Interview #101)

In considering this central difference between classes of dairy farmers, most small farmers described and pondered the process by which farmers began to think differently, as the size of their operations grew. Some decried this

transition with a sense of loss, claiming that large farmers became disconnected from their community. In the words of this small farmer:

Yeah, they do think differently. Like I said, the bigger you are the more it's a business. A very, very competitive business. And sometimes when it gets to be that big, sometimes [the large dairy farmers] seem to lose their roots - what they are all about. (Interview #108)

This "transvaluation of values" within farmers is perhaps most eloquently depicted by Wendell Berry, an outspoken advocate of the preservation of small farms. For Berry, the increasing size and technological complexity of farms was a metaphor - one of the most important, given our experience as an agrarian nation - for American culture. In a sense, Berry forcefully laid out what the small farmers described in the interviews; he simply carried these ideas to their logical conclusion. According to Berry, the philosophy of exploitation apparent in modern agriculture was symptomatic of problems within our national culture. The philosophical metamorphosis some farmers experienced represented a change in values, from an older, more conservative notion of farming (and American life) that embodied stewardship and the ideal of the nurturer and conservator. The new values, on the other hand, represented the ideal of the modern businessman or technician, and with it the corresponding cultural assumptions of the developer, the profit seeker, and the exploiter. In his own words,

The concentration of the farmland in larger and

larger holdings and fewer and fewer hands . . . forces a profound revolution in the farmers' mind: he must forsake the values of husbandry and assume those of finance and technology. . . .He is caught up in the drift of energy and interest away from the land. Production begins to override maintenance. The economy of money has infiltrated and subverted the economies of nature, energy, and the human spirit. The man himself has become a consumptive machine.³⁰ (emphasis in original)

The Moral Economy of the Small Dairy Farmer

To defend their position in the political economy, small dairy farmers assembled many of the ideological tenets discussed thus far into an elaborate set of justifications or "moral economy,"³¹ for maintaining broad-based small farm ownership. From discussions with small farmers, this as much as any other factor served to animate and drive the strike movement. First, small farmers defended their farms on economic grounds. They claimed, in near unanimous agreement, that agriculture is "the number one industry" in the U.S., accentuating their significant and often unappreciated contribution to the national economy. The sentiments expressed by this small farmer were representative:

Agriculture has been the number one industry in the country . . . It will be hard for me to visualize that the country will be financially prosperous if [government] let agriculture die out and we rely on imports, because when you stop to think about it, it is the number one industry in the country. And you're going to let that go? It's the number one generator of jobs and everything else in the economy. (Interview #103)

Most small farmers made similar statements regarding their contribution to the local economy:

If the small farmer is gone, the whole rural economy is going to collapse and in rural places that is quite a lot of jobs. And then you are talking social services that in the end are going to have to come up with taxpayer dollars.
(Interview #107)

In explaining their contribution to the American economy, the small farmers' revealed one source of their heightened sense of grievance, that was the driving force behind the 1991 dairy crisis. As a class of producers, these farmers were convinced of the significance of their contribution, yet they felt they were not justly compensated for their efforts.

Second, small farmers justified their position in the political economy on environmental grounds. Inherent in the expansion of dairy farms were increasingly obvious environmental problems. There were, for example, larger volumes of manure to dispose of - a problem that often generated controversy in a climate of increased concern for water quality.³² Other environmental dilemmas included the increased potential for erosion, as well as consumer concerns over increased use of fertilizers and agricultural chemicals.

Third and most importantly, small dairy farmers defended their class position on political grounds, claiming small farm ownership was the basis for a stable democracy. There were a number of variations in this line of argument. Some small proprietors emphasized the importance of broad-based control of property as a counterweight to increasingly

concentrated political and economic power. To explain their justification of small farms, for example, these small farmers compared recent trends in American agriculture with political developments abroad:

I think that's the only way you can justify [small farms] socially, when you think of it in a political sense as democracies . . . I think we only have to look at the extreme where the land is taken out of the control of people - look at the Central American countries, the oligopolies, the plantations, farms...you've got big rich wealthy land owners and very poor people working for them. . . . You go to the other extreme to the Communist countries, where it was all collective farms you've got the same problem. And in neither situation do you have democracy. Where you have a situation where either big government or big industry controls the land, and in a way controls the people - I think you lose democracy.
(Interview #101)

Another small producer explained:

I feel the trend that we've had over the last 40 or 50 years of the small farms going out of business - being consolidated into large farms - I think they've had a very detrimental effect on what has happened to our rural communities. . . . There's a saying that a democracy works better when power is in the hands of the many rather than the few. Look at what's happening over in the break up of the USSR, you actually have the opposite over there - we're kind of heading towards where they've been and they're trying to head back to where we've been from. (Interview #111)

In another variation on this argument, a few small producers argued that in the future, given the trend toward larger and larger farms, the dairy industry would be controlled by a few large corporations. Thus control over the production and distribution of the food supply would end up in very few hands. For these small farmers, this prospect

represented the greatest danger involved in the negation of their class position. As this small farmer explained:

[Small farms] just makes for a better democracy. I have trouble with the notion that the whole country is going to be run by giant corporations and everyone is going to be working for them. I know that's the accepted way of doing things but I have trouble with that. (Interview #116)

In a third variation, small farmers, voiced concern for the loss of "democratic" control over their own lives.

Because of this, many small farmers expressed enmity toward the very nature of large-scale agriculture. In such a system of production, small producers observed the penetration of capitalist social relations earlier described by Marx. They made reference to the increased use of wage labor; the loss of individual ownership; and the celebration of profits over community. And this was what scared the small producers the most. In the worst case scenario, they might be forced into wage labor on a large farm. This small farmer, for example, defined the worst possible conditions in the dairy industry in terms his lost freedom. In his response, the worst he could imagine was becoming dependent on another farmer for a paycheck:

I wouldn't feel very happy working on somebody's farm - a big farm. Even if they paid me well, I wouldn't get the same satisfaction working for a big corporation, milking their cows as you would milking your own. There's the pride of ownership and all that. (Interview #116)

Ideology and Political Participation

The goals of the 1991 milk strike movement illustrate the final connection between the ideology of self-sufficient, communitarian individualism and the political participation of small dairy farmers. The component parts of the National Dairy Act in many ways represent the moral economy of the small dairy farmer.

The National Dairy Act set forth a new model of government intervention in the dairy industry. This proposed legislation would establish a new set of county-level structures, offering all farmers an equal chance to participate in (milk) supply management. According to the text of the legislation:

County ASCS [Soil Conservation] Committees will be responsible for local administration of base programs. Dairy producers in each county will elect a separate Dairy Board who are active dairy producers. This Board will be responsible for decisions concerning base allocations and appeals.³³

Further, farmers in each existing Federal Market Order would vote again, on a new set of broadly-participatory national structures. Farmers would elect a Federal Order Milk Marketing Board, composed of six active farmers and three consumers. Board members would serve a three year term and be limited to two consecutive terms. The function of this Board would be to "develop and supervise the administration of programs" created under the Act, and to "review price increases at the retail level."³⁴ These new structures,

where each farmer would have one vote, would work to prevent large farmers from dominating the decision-making process, through their advantages in resources, such as communication skills, time, and money.

The basic principle of the legislation would be mandatory limits on production, which would guarantee that at least some small farmers would remain in operation. Each farmer would be allocated a production "base," by the county-level dairy board. According to the text of the legislation, "Each existing producer will receive a production base equal to either: 1) their previous year's production, or; 2) the average of their last five years of production, after eliminating the high and low years."³⁵ The production base would determine the amount of money each farmer would be paid for their milk. If the farmer produced within the parameters of their base allocation, they would be paid a blend (average) price for fluid (Class I) milk, calculated by each regional Market Administrator. Any milk produced in excess of the base, called "overbase production," would be priced much lower, subject to assessments for "processing, transportation, storage and other charges."³⁶ The calculation of the overbase price would reflect the price of milk on the international market; the purpose of the assessments would be to "achieve maximum savings to the Federal treasury."³⁷

With the base allocation determined by democratic vote

on the county level, the National Dairy Act would preserve the position of the small producer. The expansion of large farmers would be checked by the production controls; in order for a farmer to expand, they would either have to buy more "base," or production capacity, or wait for another farmer in the county to cease operation. Small farmers would thus have a much greater chance of remaining "their own boss." The legislation even set limits on the sale of "bases" to prevent large farmers from simply buying their way to greater production control. One provision of the Act stated, "Production bases may not be sold or leased except in regions where 'Class I monetary bases' [the value of fluid milk production quotas to be allocated on a per farm basis by county-level committees] have previously been established."³⁸

Finally, the two-tiered pricing plan in this legislation would satisfy the small producers' quest for a "competence." With farmers penalized for producing more than their "base," there would be a great incentive for all producers to curtail production; the purpose of these new structures were to drive up the milk price. In addition, both the Class I (fluid) and Class II and III (manufactured) price would be determined by a cost of production formula. The Market Administrator in each Order would compute the Class I price; the Agricultural Marketing Service of the Department of Agriculture would figure the price for Class

II and III milk, based on the average cost of production for farmers nationwide. Thus farmers would be insured of their self-sufficiency, because this legislation would guarantee their cost of production, *plus a return on equity equal to the average percentage return for nonfarm businesses* (emphasis added).³⁹

The cost of production formula was not a new idea. It was the driving force behind the McNary-Haugen legislation championed by farmers in the 1920s. It surfaced again in the National Farmer's Union demands in the debate over the New Deal farm program, and in the demands of the Farmers' Holiday Association and Dairy Farmers Union strikes. In the 1960s, the National Farmers' Organization championed a similar formula. What all of these groups shared was a basic assumption, first put forth by the Populists of the previous century: that the state should have a positive role in protecting the position of the small producer in American society. For small farmers, a guarantee of their cost of production written into law was one important way to maintain their existence.

Conclusion

The "class conflict" between large and small dairy farmers in New York was far from "revolutionary" conflict in a Marxian sense. Rather, small dairy farmers were driven by a particular form of working class consciousness, the

ideology of one of the last movements of independent, small producers in American society. In defense of their niche in the dairy industry, small farmers rejected the dominant ideas of competition and expansion, so powerful in an age of corporate capitalism. In its place, they substituted a collection of rights and privileges developed over many generations of small farm ownership.

In this sense, the small dairy farmers in New York State were not unlike the Luddites, the 19th century movement of British master weavers, famous for their destruction of the frames used in the mass production of woolen goods. The conventional view of the Luddites has been one of an irrational rejection of the progress inevitable to English society.⁴⁰ They are viewed as the last of an anachronistic class of workers, because they lashed out, breaking their looms in a futile effort to resist the introduction of new technology. There have been similar characterizations of the recent milk strike movement. Dr. Bernard F. Stanton, professor of Agricultural Economics at Cornell, said of the 1991 movement: "The people who have been crying are the smaller individuals who are struggling to make it, who don't want to change with the times."⁴¹ In addition, a New York Times reporter characterized bGH, which small farmers have played an active role in opposing, as "likely to be mired in continuing controversies instigated more by ignorance, nostalgia, and a Luddite view of

technology than by understanding and actual facts."⁴²

The small dairy farmers, however, like the Luddites of E.P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class, were in reality not opposed to technology per se. In fact, a few small farmers expressed concern that technologies more appropriate for smaller farms were unavailable. As this small producer explained:

There's so much what I call the real technology - the technology that could really help the individual using it - that we can't even begin to consider. (Interview #102)

What small dairy farmers opposed was the introduction of *specific* technologies - such as bGH - that presupposed the restructuring of existing social relations. Simply put, both movements contested the introduction of technologies that threatened their ability to make a living. At worst, the "progress" inherent in these instruments would render them dependent on others for their livelihood.

Another important parallel between Luddites and the striking dairy farmers is manifest in their political response to the threat to their existence. Both the master weavers and the small farmers grounded political movements in the rights possessed by working people, in what Thompson called "a powerful notion of what ought to be."⁴³ Both movements were based on an older notion of workers rights, that was threatened in a climate of rapid technological and social change. Thus, rather than lashing out at inevitable progress, both movements attempted insurrections that looked

into the future, with the past as a guide. When considered in this way, the goals of the 1991 milk strike movement were quite conservative. Its aim was to preserve a way of life that was built on the memories of what one farmer called "life in abundance." Behind the 1991 milk strike movement, hopelessly outdated as it was, were memories of vibrant rural communities in upstate New York, where workers enjoyed the respect of the community - and the basic economic and political unit was the small dairy farm.

Notes

1. David Kettler, "Ideology," in The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought, ed. David Miller (New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987), 235-238.

2. For an overview see Carol McClurg Mueller, "Building Social Movement Theory," in Frontiers in Social Movement Theory, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 13-17.

3. Verta Taylor and Nancy E. Whittier, "Collective Identity in Social Movements: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization," in Frontiers in Social Movement Theory, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 104; see also Jean L. Cohen, "Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements," Social Research 52, (No. 4): 663-716. As Cohen put it, "One cannot. . . simply add a consideration of solidarity, collective identity, consciousness, or ideology to the resource mobilization perspective without bursting its framework."

4. Taylor and Whittier, 104-105; Mueller, 14-16; Cohen, 663-716.

5. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works in One Volume, (New York: International Publishers, 1978), 171-172. This passage is cited in Barrington Moore, Jr., Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 477; Jeffery M. Paige, Agrarian Revolution (New York: The Free

Press, 1975), 35; James Scott, "Hegemony and the Peasantry," Politics and Society, Vol. 7, (No. 3): 268-9; Scott G. McNall, The Road to Rebellion: Class Formation and Kansas Populism, 1865-1900 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 11; Patrick Mooney, My Own Boss?: Class, Rationality and Family Farming (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 16-17.

6. Marx, 172.

7. Marx wrote, "The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life." Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Works (New York: International Publishers, 1984), 39.

8. Karl Marx, Theories of Surplus Value (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963), 408-409.

9. Lowell K. Dyson, Red Harvest: The Communist Party and American Farmers (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 3; Dyson writes, "The official organ of the Communist party dismissed six million farm owners and tenants as a 'social ancranism [sic]' because of their notions about property."

10. Paige, 34.

11. Ibid., 36.

12. Angus Campbell, et al., The American Voter: An Abridgement (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1946), 213.

13. Ibid., 216.

14. Eric R. Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), 291-292.

15. Ibid., 292.

16. Scott, 270, 273-91.

17. See Scott G. McNall, Rhonda Levine and Rick Fantasia, eds., Bringing Class Back In (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).

18. McNall, The Road to Rebellion, 5, 19-30.

19. Mooney, 208.

20. Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, 172.

21. Adam Przeworski, "Proletariat into a Class: The Process of Class Formation from Karl Kautsky's The Class Struggle to Recent Controversies," Politics and Society, Vol. 7 (No. 4): 343-401.

22. Douglas Young, "Voluntary Conversion Program: A Proposal for the Dairy Industry," (Glenmont, New York: New York Farm Bureau, 1991), photocopied. For the history and politics of the American Farm Bureau Federation, see Samuel R. Berger, Dollar Harvest: The Story of the Farm Bureau (Lexington, Mass.: Heath Lexington Books, 1971); Grant McConnell, The Decline of Agrarian Democracy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953); A. V. Krebs, The Corporate Reapers, (Washington, DC: Essential Books, 1992), 276-277; Wesley McCune, Who's Behind Our Farm Policy (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956), Ch. 2; Lowell K. Dyson, "American Farm Bureau Federation," in Farmers' Organizations (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 14-16. For the "official" history of the American Farm Bureau Federation, see O. M. Kile, The Farm Bureau Through Three Decades (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1948).

23. Ibid., 4.

24. Patrick Hooker, "The Dairy Dilemma," (Glenmont, New York: New York Farm Bureau, 1991), photocopied.

25. For the "family farmer" perspective, which defends small-scale, independently owned farms on economic and political grounds, see Wendell Berry, The Unsettling of America (New York: Avon Books, 1977); Patrick Mooney, My Own Boss? Class, Rationality, and the Family Farm; Marty Strange, Family Farming: A New Economic Vision (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988); A.V. Krebs, The Corporate Reapers (Washington, D.C.: Essential Books, 1992); see also articles including David L. Ostendorf, "A Protestant, Populist View;" Jim Hightower, "The Case for the Family Farm;" and for a critique of "family farm" policy, Gregg Easterbrook, "Making Sense of Agriculture: A Revisionist Look at Farm Policy;" in Is There A Moral Obligation To Save The Family Farm?, ed., Gary Comstock (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987).

26. Strange, 39.

27. The concept of republicanism has been variously interpreted. As Sean Wilentz explains, in the early years of American history the "versions of republicanism multiplied" as different classes seized this mantle to explain and justify their political action. For the contrasting versions of "entrepreneurial" and "artisan" republicanism, see his Chants Democratic: New York City and the rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 292, Ch. 2. Not surprisingly, social scientists have also

produced widely differing interpretations of the concept of republicanism in early American history. For an overview of this debate, see Robert Shalhope, "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," William and Mary Quarterly, Vol. 39, (1986): 335-56; for two representative works in this "debate," see Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); and Alfred F. Young, ed., The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism (Dekalb: University of Illinois Press, 1976). Recent works include Thomas Pangle, The Spirit of Modern Republicanism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Isaac Kramnick, Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Joyce Oldham Appleby, Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

28. Alan Dawley, Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 151; see also Paul Krause, The Battle for Homestead, 1880-1892: Politics, Culture and Steel (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 9-10.

29. Krause, 9-10.

30. Berry, 45-46.

31. My conclusion regarding the "moral economy" of New York dairy farmers is very similar to that of James C. Scott, in his The Moral Economy of the Peasant (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976). According to Scott, his analysis was contingent on the class position of farmers. As he wrote, "The argument I am making about the economics of subsistence is meant to apply in its full force, then, only to those cultivators who share a common existential dilemma. For those peasants with very low incomes, little land, large families, highly variable yields, and few outside opportunities, the pattern of safety first, and the social patterns to be described later, should hold quite consistently. For peasants with high incomes, abundant land, small families, reliable crop yields, and outside employment opportunities, the argument is probably not applicable. In general terms, [my argument] will apply to the poor peasant or tenant and not to the rich peasant who regularly hires labor and has ample acreage and savings." 25.

32. Large dairy farmers in New York State were very concerned over a recent case involving the state Department of Environmental Conservation. In the fall of 1992, DEC officers ticketed Montgomery County's largest dairy farmer, Michael Pank of Ceres Farm, for manure run-off in local streams. Pank's operation has 700 cows and 400 young stock. The farmers' concerns were in large part attributed to the lack of

state guidelines for manure management. Janice Handy, "Is It Possible to Satisfy DEC and Continue Dairying in New York State?" Country Folks, 25 January 1993, A2. For a discussion of ecological issues in contemporary agriculture, see Wes Jackson, Wendell Berry, and Bruce Colman, eds., Meeting the Expectations of the Land: Essays in Sustainable Agriculture and Stewardship (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984); Paul B. Thompson and Bill A. Stout, eds., Beyond the Large Farm (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); Judith D. Soule and Jon K. Piper, Farming in Nature's Image (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1992).

33. "The National Dairy Act," (Washington: D.C.: National family Farm Coalition, 1991), 2. The text of the Act is reproduced in Appendix B.

34. Ibid., 2.

35. Ibid., 2.

36. Ibid., 4.

37. Ibid., 4.

38. Ibid., 3.

39. Ibid., 2.

40. E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 549; see also David F. Noble, "In Defense of Luddism, Part I-III" democracy, Vol. 3, No. 2, (Spring 1983): 8-24; Vol. 3, No. 2, (Summer 1983): 70-82; Vol. 3, No. 2, (Fall 1983): 71-93.

41. New York Times, 13 October 1991, 45.

42. Jane E. Brody, "Personal Health," New York Times, 17 November 1993, C17.

43. Thompson, 544.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions

In this dissertation, I have argued that the location of American farmers in the political economy of agriculture shaped their political participation. As my analysis has indicated, operators of large and small dairy farms in New York State were embedded within different economic, political and ideological relationships. Their position within these different relationships, or class position, was important because it presented farmers with a set of structured choices as to their opponents, resources, and allies. Across New York history, large farmers interpreted these choices and embraced conventional political action, while small farmers traditionally took part in social movements. My task in the following pages will be to summarize my findings, as well as to relate my analysis to the literature on political participation and social movements.

This inquiry began with New York agriculture in the mid-nineteenth century, as the introduction of market social relations brought about great changes in the lives of semi-subsistence farmers. As regularly scheduled "milk" trains began rolling through the Hudson Valley, the rise of market relations in milk production inaugurated a contentious

relationship between two groups of New Yorkers with opposing interests: the new small, commercial "dairy" farmers and New York City milk dealers.

As small farmers approached the expanding conflicts with the New York dealers, resulting mainly from the question of who would profit from the sale of milk, their options were first limited by the capitalist democratic system in which they lived and worked.¹ The structures of capitalist democracies separate political and economic conflicts, and impose different forms of organization on contenders in economic or political contests. The problem for small, commercial farmers was that they could not "vote" the New York milk dealers out of power. Moreover, the Republican-dominated party structures in upstate New York put further limitations on their ability to wage their struggle in the electoral arena.

The political options available to all farmers were further patterned by their access to resources. Large farmers, for example, typically did not have the same adversarial relationship with milk dealers as did small producers. Their interests were protected by their individual economic power; by their position in the local community as employers and business people; by their involvement in state and local politics; and after 1900, by their membership in powerful interest groups such as the New York Farm Bureau. Within these spheres of participation

large farmers benefitted from the resources inherent in their class position; a list of such resources would include financial assets, political access, communication skills, and the time required to take part in politics.

Small farmers, on the other hand, were limited in their choices of political participation. Only after their chores were done could they devote time to politics; in addition, the scale of their operations limited their financial resources. Small farmers were not, however, totally without resources. Within the social and production relations of their rural communities, there existed both the relationships and values that would serve as the basis for effective collective action.

In 1883, small farmers inaugurated a long tradition of social movement participation. They drew upon one very important resource at their disposal - control over milk production - which they would return to again and again over the next 110 years. Through the use of strikes, small, commercial farmers sought to destroy what they perceived to be the dealers' control over the lucrative New York City milk market. The milk strike itself was an explicit recognition of the small farmers' class position. As Przeworski pointed out, the strike, as a form of participation, is the antithesis of the structures of capitalist democratic politics.² A strike is simultaneously an economic and political struggle, in this case one that

redefined conflicts in the dairy industry to fit the particular resources of small farmers.

The role of ideology in milk strike mobilization, defined as the farmers' interpretation of their position in the political economy, points to the importance of subjective factors in accounting for social movement formation. In milk strikes from 1883 to 1919, the small dairy farmers' interpretations of their conflicts with the milk dealers reflected their position in the expanding market economy. Their interpretations, moreover, were grounded in a set of values developed in an older, more personal, semi-subsistence economy. Dr. H. A. Pooler, Director of the Erie Mutual Milk Producers Association, the group that organized the 1883 milk "war," expressed the concerns of small, commercial farmers, when he said, "The time had come for the farmers to decide whether they would put an end to this systematic robbery."³ Implicit in the doctors' comments was the sense of right and wrong that guided the political action of insurgent farmers. Inherent in Pooler's concept of robbery was a larger notion of justice, in this case the theft of just compensation for one's labor.

In the 1930s, small commercial farmers grounded their participation in milk strikes in different values, and employed different forms of organization during strikes. This reflected the changes in their class position. The New

Deal period signaled the beginning of large-scale government intervention in the milk business. In a combined effort, New York and U.S. Department of Agriculture officials established a new set of political structures, which overlay the existing economic structures in milk production. The system of Federal Milk Marketing "Orders" patterned farmers' participation in new ways, foremost by establishing "bargaining" agencies, which defined how farmers could legitimately have input in milk pricing decisions. New Deal policies also institutionalized the power of the dominant co-ops, when co-op officers were given the authority to vote in place of member-farmers, in what was called "bloc voting."⁴

The organizational model of the Dairy Farmers Union, the group that led successful strikes in 1937 and 1939, was that of an industrial union. During the Great Depression, many small farmers defined themselves in a similar position as organized labor; farmers also exchanged support with industrial unions during strikes. Milk strikes in this period were justified as a legitimate exercise of power by small producers - in a rural society dominated by small farmers. The DFU's motto, "Power lies in their milk," was an acknowledgement of the power that small farmers retained over milk production. Occurring as they did within the structural upheavals of the Great Depression, the 1930s milk strikes marked the high water mark for social movements

comprised of small, commercial dairy farmers.

The most recent milk strike movement occurred in 1991, and was vastly limited in scale and accomplishments when compared to previous strikes. In the years after World War II, changes in agricultural policy, together with rapid technological change, propelled an extensive restructuring of American agriculture. For small dairy farmers, this restructuring meant a great decline in their numbers, and perhaps more importantly, a redefinition of their position in the industry. Post-war agricultural production took place increasingly on larger and larger, technologically sophisticated farms. In such a climate, it was the large producers who were given the bulk of political and ideological support. As the dairy industry increased production per cow and increased the number of cows per farm, milk production was shifted away from the traditional small farm dairy states in the Northeast, to the super large "dry lot" farms in the Sunbelt.

The 1991 milk strike in New York, therefore, was a testament to the increased marginalization of small, dairy farmers - in a dairy sector now dominated by large-scale, capital-intensive producers. As such, strike organizers offered new interpretations to justify the survival of the small producer. First, they pointed to their under-appreciated contribution to the local and national economy. Second, they justified the merits of the strike on

environmental grounds. Third, they claimed that broad-based small farm ownership was the basis of a stable democracy. As for strategy, the farmers involved in the 1991 movement made the same choice as many others before them. Faced with the loss of livelihood, these small, commercial farmers fell back on their power as producers, threatening to withhold their milk in order to extract concessions. One farmer expressed this idea succinctly. When asked why farmers decided to strike, he replied, "We don't have the vote, all we got is the product."

In summary, there are patterns that can be observed in the history of milk strikes in New York. The timing and development of milk strike movements points to the relevance of three convergent factors necessary for movement formation. First, milk strikes occurred within the context of changes in the larger "structure of political opportunities."⁵ During periods of political and economic instability, established political alignments often fluctuated; in 1916, for example, John J. Dillon, an important ally of small farmers, used his newly-created position in state government to help lead a very successful strike. Further, during periods of upheaval, established configurations of dominance became unstable, often redefining farmers' opponents, resources, and allies. During the collapse of market relations in the 1930s, even those farmers under contractual obligation to powerful

cooperatives risked legal sanction by joining insurgent farmers during milk strikes.

The second factor was grievances, which played a critical role in the germination of milk strikes. Although the farmers' conflicts with milk dealers were continuous over the period I examined, the level of grievances was not. In certain periods, often associated with a rapid decrease in the milk price, or moments of severe drought, a sharp increase in grievances served as a catalyst for social movement mobilization.⁶ Grievances were significant because they pushed farmers out of their normal routines, causing them to alter their established patterns of deference. One very important part of the process of movement formation was a tradition of informal meetings, where angry farmers gathered during periods of economic crisis. It was at these meetings that small farmers often discovered the widespread scope of economic deprivation. In addition, as angry farmers sought out the forces that caused them hardship, they often gained a sense that they could successfully address their economic and political predicament through collective action. The third factor in milk strike development, therefore, was organization, which allowed protest leaders to channel the anger of aggrieved farmers into an effective political force.

What small commercial farmers could not control was the process of what Schwartz termed escalation, understood as

the introduction of new adversaries into conflicts defined by existing structural relationships.⁷ In most milk strikes, the milk dealers were typically supported by important and powerful allies. Large farmers provided an important source of milk during strikes, as well as an influential endorsement of conventional channels of political participation. Government officials, on both the state and federal level, played a key role in erecting structures that limited the potential for insurgent access to milk policy. At times, the power of the state was used most forcefully to break strikes. Finally, academics provided ideological arguments that condemned milk strikes as ineffectual, reinforcing the message that change had to occur through the workings of the "accepted" political process.

The Forgotten History of Milk Strikes

In retrospect, the one fundamental resource that movement organizers lacked in 1991 was the knowledge of their own history. While a few farmers I interviewed knew occasional details of past milk strikes, most farmers knew little substantive information. As evidence, consider the following responses from farmers who were leaders of the 1991 movement:

I really don't know a lot, only hearsay. I read the article in the [Watertown Daily] Times. Some of the farmers that lived through some of the earlier strikes - 40's maybe? 30's and 40's? I've heard that. But other than that I don't know much about milk strikes. (Interview #108)

I have a sketchy knowledge of it. I know there have been milk strikes. What I can find out they probably had a positive effect. (Interview #116)

Nonelite farmers opposed to the strike offered similar responses, when asked about their knowledge of previous milk strikes:

Not a lot. Probably just slightly more than average. (Interview #114)

Nothing. I ain't going to lie to you. (Interview #115)

I really don't know too much about it, other than I know that they've happened in the past. (Interview #118)

I think my dad told me about a milk strike in this early '30s. I think that if you could withhold the product and everybody would do it, then it could be used in a way. But as far as just a few dumping, I think that's very counterproductive. (Interview #125)

No. (Interview #127)

Based on this lack, or "loss" of historical consciousness, the prevailing view in the dairy industry was that strikes were ephemeral, insignificant, and ineffective. Milk strike opponents, for example, were able to claim with few voices to the contrary that all milk strikes had been failures. As this operator of a very large farm explained - quite matter of factly,

The history is, as far as I'm concerned, is that there's never been a successful strike and there never will be. (Interview #126)

There are four main reasons why the history of milk strikes has been "lost." First, the American Midwest and South have been the focus of academic research on late 19th

and early 20th century farmer activism. In the vast literature on the Populist Movement, for example, there is little or no emphasis on farmers within the Northeastern "industrial" states. The same is true of later movements including the Nonpartisan League, the Farmers' Holiday Movement, and the "farm crisis" protest movement in the 1980s. In the secondary literature, there are few books or articles written on milk strikes.⁸

Second, there are simply fewer small, commercial farmers left today who either remember past strikes, or might choose to carry on in this tradition. Since World War II, farm policy and technological change have driven a complete restructuring of American agriculture. The result has been a precipitous decline in the number of small, commercial farmers, who were the main constituency of milk strikes since 1883. Since 1954, the number of dairy farms in New York - predominantly small farms - decreased from 71,765 to 11,272 in 1990.⁹

The third reason is that milk strikes acquired the reputation as an unacceptable form of political participation. In upstate New York, many local historians do not consider milk strikes legitimate history. The Jefferson County Historical Society in Watertown, for example, is located in one of the largest dairy producing counties in the state¹⁰ - and the center of persistent milk strike activity since 1916 - yet the Society retains no records,

photographs, or other historical material pertaining to strikes. And Jefferson County was typical of local historical societies across Northern and Central New York.¹¹ Further, state policy makers, academics, and agri-business leaders have traditionally favored the conventional farm policy-making process, viewing milk strikes as an angry or irrational rejection of "normal" politics. Thus the dominant institutions of New York State agriculture, including the Department of Agriculture and Markets, the New York Farm Bureau, and influential members of the Cornell faculty have consistently opposed milk strikes. Their role in defining dairy industry history brings to mind George Orwell's statement from 1984, "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past."

In the 1930s, moreover, milk strikes were considered unpatriotic - and were attributed to "outside agitators" and "Communists." The reader may recall the following statements from Charles Baldwin, Executive Secretary of the Milk Producers Bargaining Agency, made during the 1939 Dairy Farmers Union strike. Baldwin asserted that farm families "are guarding homes tonight in fear of armed invaders. The Dairy Farmers Union is an out and out CIO Communist movement." He continued, the CIO "is sending 700 pickets from automotive industrial centers into the country to help close milk plants and rule the highways."¹² Again, the dominant view of strikes has been prejudiced by similar

interpretations. Strikes were regarded as illegitimate and ill-advised, and for this reason, historians placed little emphasis on preserving the record of such a controversial and denigrated aspect of New York State history.

Finally, from conversations with farmers it was apparent that local history, especially the history of working people, is not taught in New York's public schools. Rather, students are offered programs such as the recent "Ag in the Classroom," developed by Cornell University, and funded by Niagara Mohawk, Price Chopper Supermarkets, and Crowley Foods, Inc.¹³ In many ways, the "Ag in the Classroom" program serves as an appropriate metaphor for New York agriculture. This program was developed through the cooperative efforts of the dominant institutions in New York farming; it also reflects their institutional biases. "Ag in the Classroom" favors the positive aspects of New York farming, which are many, but neglects the contribution of small farmers, as well as their long tradition of farmer activism.

The lack of an adequate historical consciousness greatly undermined the 1991 movement. The notion of history as a both an subjective and objective political force has been emphasized by other analysts, particularly within the literature on black history. As a historian concerned with the rewriting of African history once wrote, "a society's capacity to shape its destiny is partly determined by its

past and [existing objective] real conditions."¹⁴ Historical consciousness, as an "ideological force," is thus important, because it offers people the memory of expanded possibilities, beyond what is defined as acceptable or possible in any society. In many ways, insurgent dairy farmers confronted a dilemma in 1991 that paralleled these concerns in the literature on black history. Because New York's small dairy farmers had no idea of their long tradition of agrarian activism, the 1991 milk strike had no legitimacy in their society, nor a sense of continuity with the struggles of small farmers in the past. As Vincent Harding wrote, discussing the "river" of black struggles for freedom in America:

considering the precarious terrain of our current lives, I am concerned about the one force that may surely stop the river: the self-destructiveness and despair that overwhelm us when we no longer know our course, no longer remember our origins.¹⁵

Class Position an the Literature on Political Participation

In this dissertation, I have also argued that analyzing New York dairy farmers as they exist within a complex web of power relations offers a more complete explanation of their political participation. In the following pages, I will relate my analysis to the literature on political participation and social movements.

First, this dissertation provides the first comprehensive examination of milk strikes in New York State.

My analysis points to the need for further research, particularly on farm activism within the states of the "industrial" Northeast.

Second, by defining and analyzing farmers as socially embedded-actors, my analysis contributes to the debate over social structure and political participation in agrarian communities. The dominant current in the literature, as I have described in previous chapters, is that the structures of rural societies isolate peasants or small farmers, precluding political action. On the left, Marx's writings influenced generations of scholars, in particular his "potatoes in a sack" analogy,¹⁶ where he argued that the structural isolation of the French peasantry precluded class formation. In American political science, The American Voter was likewise influential in its characterization of the "farm vote."¹⁷ Burnham, for example, summarized Campbell et al.'s findings:

. . .since rural voters lack the solid network of group identifications and easy access to mass-communication media enjoyed by their city cousins, they tend to be both unusually apathetic and exceptionally volatile in their partisan commitments.¹⁸

Other analysts have argued, however, that contrary to Marx's assumptions, and to those expressed in The American Voter, the structural relations of peasant communities did not render farmers isolated and atomistic. An instructive example is Scott's analysis of the peasantry in developing countries.¹⁹ Scott argued that the "relative isolation of

the peasantry from the cultural and institutional life of the state has meant it is more immune to the hegemony of dominant classes." Moreover, this isolation did not render the peasantry incapable of collective action. According to Scott, there were two components of peasant society that contributed to their capacity for collective action; both were analogous to the case of milk strikes. One was the "Informal connections" of peasant societies, which "provided the social grid for communal action." The second component was the moral economy of the peasantry, that "constituted a decisive advantage for [their] revolutionary potential." The peasants' moral economy contributed "a rich and nearly ageless set of values" that shielded the peasants from the hegemony of ruling ideas. It also provided a moral foundation that could be used to guide collective resistance.

My analysis of milk strikes suggests that American farmers have made use of similar resources. As my investigation of milk strikes attests, New York dairy farmers have employed rural production and social networks that were equally as effective as social relationships analysts observed in urban areas. One source of these social networks was market social relations; for small producers, it was the trip to the milk plant (or delivery truck) that typically brought news of the political events. However, older notions of a "moral economy," developed in an older,

cooperative rural society, where farmers shared work and social existence, provided both the relationships and values that facilitated collective action. Cooperative work gangs, for example, enforced a sense of solidarity among farmers. In addition, farmers were convinced of the importance of their contribution to the community, which underscored their feelings of grievance during economic crises. If New York dairy farmers were "volatile" in their voting habits, this was better explained by the farmers' perception that their interests were not addressed within Republican-dominated party politics.²⁰

Third, by defining and analyzing farmers as embedded within a network of class relations, my analysis supports the recent trend in the social movement literature, where analysts have placed greater emphasis on social networks.²¹ This concern can be traced in part to Olson's seminal work on rational self-interest and collective action. In The Logic of Collective Action, Olson claimed "The individual member of the typical large organization is in a position analogous to that of the firm in a perfectly competitive market, or the taxpayer in the state: his own efforts will not have a noticeable effect on the situation of his organization, and he can enjoy any improvements brought about by others whether or not he has worked in support of the organization."²² These individuals that did not contribute, yet enjoyed the benefits of collective action

Olson labelled "free riders." However, as Mueller perceptively pointed out, with the focus in the literature on social networks, "Olson's free rider problem is . . . recast."²³

My analysis of milk strikes challenges the universality of Olson's model of self-interested decision making. As Schwartz and Paul have similarly argued,²⁴ the "group logic" of rural society meant that small farmers had many factors to consider, other than their own rational self-interest, when deciding whether or not to participate in a strike. Foremost would be their tightly interconnected relationships of work and leisure. It is difficult to conceive how a small farmer would "free ride" on a 1930s milk strike, for example, given the fact that producers shared machinery and labor. Rather, it was more likely that farmers faced intense pressures to conform, in particular within those labor groups in which a majority were committed to the strike. The opposite was also true; if a sub-group of farmers opposed a strike, there would be social "costs" involved if any member chose to participate. In open-ended interviews, many retired small farmers made specific reference to pressures to maintain solidarity, on both sides of the milk strike issue.

Moreover, because milk strike participation did not depend on formal group membership, some farmers could in effect "free ride" with the movement. They could do so without incurring the social costs involved, either in

explicitly endorsing the movement organization, or purposely joining the strike. I will cite an example to illustrate this point. In the 1930s milk strikes, many New York dairy farmers belonged to cooperatives such as the Dairymen's League or Sheffield Farms, whose leadership vehemently opposed strikes. Yet when strikes were called, many members of these co-ops followed what they believed to be their rational self-interest. In this case, it meant dumping milk in the hope that the overall price would rise.

The way these farmers participated raises questions regarding Olson's free rider problem. Some Dairymen's League or Sheffield Farms members "arranged" to have their milk dumped, contacting farmers on the picket lines, informing them as to the exact moment they would deliver their milk. Farmers made these "arrangements" to insure their milk would never reach the market. In addition, some farmers sometimes refused to deliver at all, citing the potential violence they might face if they attempted delivery. In both cases, their actions furthered the cause of the strike movement. Their participation, however, was structured so they could contribute to the movement, without risking either: the possibility of censure for joining a "radical" movement; the legal sanction involved in breaking their co-op contract; or the disruption of their local work and leisure group. These farmers were in effect, "free contributors," to the movement.

Based on my research, Olson's model seems more applicable to interest group participation.²⁵ Of the five farmers I interviewed that were opposed to the 1991 milk strike, and who were *not* past or present officers in the New York State Farm Bureau, four listed themselves as Farm Bureau members. Out of these four farmers, three specifically pointed out that they joined the Bureau because of the tangible incentives that accompanied membership. The Farm Bureau, a conservative farm interest group, offers discounts to members on goods such as tires and insurance, a major subsidiary business of the organization. The participation of these farmers in the Bureau was exactly in keeping with Olson's analysis; he claimed that "large organizations that are not able to make membership compulsory *must* also provide some noncollective goods in order to give potential members an incentive to join."²⁶

Milk Strikes and Nomads

In a recent work, Jacques Attali, President of the European Bank for Research and Development, offered an insightful look at what he defined as "the contours of the future. . .[that] can already be glimpsed on today's horizon."²⁷ For Attali, the impending hyperaccelerated world would be populated by two distinctly different sets of "nomads." At the bottom of the post-industrial food chain would live the "poor nomads," concentrated at the destitute

margins of an increasingly competitive society. At the heights of the new order would stand the rich "nomads," an elite that had "severed its ties with place nation, or neighborhood." Armed with the latest electronic wizardry, these nomadic elites would freely roam the planet; indeed their chief characteristics would be their great wealth and mobility.

In many respects, the struggle of small dairy farmers in New York State does not fit into Attali's design, nor for that matter in any conception of an increasingly technological and disconnected world. Like the last of the weavers who refused to surrender in the face of the industrial revolution, New York's small dairy farmers remained absolutely committed to "place, nation and neighborhood," and to an anachronistic way of life that has survived only by stubborn resistance. In this respect, small dairy farmers were the antithesis of Attali's nomads, armed with values defined in an era when people's horizons lay just over the next hill, rather than over far oceans and continents. In stark contrast to the "nomads" of the future, the protests of small dairy farmers were perhaps the last gasp of the small producer in a rapidly changing American society.

Notes

1. Adam Przeworski, "Proletariat Into A Class: The Process of Class Formation from Karl Kautsky's The Class Struggle to Recent Controversies," Politics and Society, Vol. 7, (No. 4): 373. Przeworski's analysis of capitalist democracy is based on the writings of Rosa Luxemburg.
2. Ibid., 373.
3. New York Times, 13 March 1883, 1.
4. An explanation of The Federal Market Order System is found in, New York State Senate, Legislative Commission on Dairy Industry Development, Review of Dairy Regulation (Albany: New York State Senate, March, 1988), 24-40.
5. The timing of milk strike movements points to the relevance of those works that emphasize the larger political context of social movement formation. For an analysis of "political opportunity structures," see Michael Schwartz, Radical Protest and Social Structure (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 145-153; Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, Poor People's Movements (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 14-32; Doug McAdam, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 36-59; see also Sidney Tarrow, Struggle, Politics, and Reform: Collective Action, Social Movements, and Cycles of Protest. Western Societies Occasional Paper No. 21 (Ithaca: Center for International Studies, Cornell University, 1989).
6. See Barrington Moore, Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 474-475.
7. Schwartz, 209-10.
8. The only recent work on milk strikes in New York State is Lowell K. Dyson, Red Harvest: The Communist Party And American Farmers (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), Chapter 9; see also the sections on the Dairymen's League, the Dairy Farmers Union, and the Farmers Union of the New York Milkshed in Lowell K. Dyson, Farmers' Organizations (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986).
9. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1987 Census of Agriculture, Vol. 1, Part 32 New York State and County Data, (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987), 7; New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, New York State Dairy Statistics, 1990 Annual Summary,

(Albany: Dept. of Agriculture and Markets, Division of Dairy Industry Services, Research and Information Unit, 1991), 2.

10. In 1992, Jefferson County ranked fourth in milk production out of all counties in the Order No. 2 (New York City) milkshed. "Top Ten Counties For Milk Production," Country Folks 23 August 1993, 22.

11. The same is true for the St. Lawrence County Historical Society, the home of the Dairy Farmers Union in the 1930s.

12. New York Times, 16 August 1939, 25; 17 August 1939, 42.

13. Watertown Daily Times, 28 March 1992, Farm and Garden Section, 4.

14. Lansine Kaba, "Historical Consciousness and Politics in Africa," in Black Studies: Theory, Method, and Cultural Perspectives ed., Talmadge Anderson (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 1990), 35-51.

15. Vincent Harding, There is A River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 11.

16. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in Selected Works in One Volume (New York: International Publishers, 1978), 171-72.

17. Angus Campbell, et al., The American Voter: An Abridgement (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1964), Ch. 13.

18. Walter Dean Burnham, "The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe," in The Current Crisis in American Politics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 37.

19. James Scott, "Hegemony and the Peasantry," Politics and Society, Vol. 7, No. 3, (1977): 267-93.

20. My analysis of milk strikes in the late 19th century gives credence to Burnham's conclusion that, "it seems extremely likely that the nineteenth century farmer was as least as well integrated into the political system of that day as any other element in the American electorate." However, I would question Burnham's explanation, where he claims " . . . communications and non-family-group interaction were probably much more developed in rural areas before 1900." Rather, as my analysis has shown "non-family-group interaction" such as those of farmers' associations or cooperative work groups actually facilitated collective action. The problem for dairy farmers was that there was no way they could "vote" the New York milk dealers out of power. Thus they had to find some other way to effect social change. Burnham, 37.

21. See Carol McClurg Mueller, "Building Social Movement Theory," in Frontiers in Social Movement Theory, eds., Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 6-13.
22. Mancur Olson, The Logic of Collective Action (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 16.
23. Mueller, 8.
24. Michael Schwartz and Shuva Paul, "Resource Mobilization versus the Mobilization of People: Why Consensus Movements Cannot Be Instruments of Social Change," in Frontiers in Social Movement Theory, eds., Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 213-17.
25. Mueller, 9.
26. Olson, 16.
27. Jacques Attali, Millennium (New York: Times Books, 1991).

Appendix A**FACESHEET**

1. Name:

2. Number:

3. Date of interview:

4. Address of farm:

1. Number: _____

2. Date of Interview:

3. Date of Birth:

4. Sex:

5. Number of Years Farming:

6. Membership in Farm organizations:

7. Membership in non-farm organizations:

8. How many cows do you milk: _____ 0-20 _____ 101-150
 _____ 21-40 _____ 151-200
 _____ 41-60 _____ 201-250
 _____ 61-80 _____ 250+
 _____ 81-100

9. Quantity of milk marketed per month: (in pounds)

0-19,999	100,000-149,999
20,000-39,999	150,000-199,999
40,000-59,999	200,000-299,999
60,000-79,999	300,000-399,999
80,000-99,999	400,000+

10. What is your yearly income from the farm: (net farm earnings)

0-\$4,999	\$25,000-29,999
\$5,000-9,999	\$30,000-34,999
\$10,000-14,999	\$35,000-39,999
\$15,000-19,999	\$40,000-50,000
\$20,000-24,999	\$50,000+

11. What is your yearly off-farm income: (choose one from above)

. From what source?

12. What is your level of farm debt? ☐ 0-\$25,000
☐ \$25,000-50,000
☐ \$50,000+

13. Do you think of yourself as belonging to either the MIDDLE CLASS or WORKING CLASS?

14. Would you say you feel closer to WORKING CLASS people or to MIDDLE CLASS people?

15. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an independent or what?

16. Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican? _____

Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat? _____

17. Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party? _____

18. In the last four years did you vote in a presidential election? _____, a state election? _____, a local election? _____

19. (Optional) Which presidential candidate would you vote for in 1992? _____

Interview Guide

1. How is the dairy industry organized as a whole? Where does the individual producer fit in?

2. Are there differences between farmers with smaller operations and a farmer, say, that milks 350 head? Do these farmers think differently? Do they have political differences?

3. Which are most efficient, large or small dairy farms? Why?

4. Is the survival of the farmer with the smaller operations justified? Why or why not?

5. Some people say that the government looks out for the small farmer, while others say government only protects the interests of large farmers. What do you think?

6. Who do you sell your milk to? Does anyone or any institution control the milk market? How much control do farmers have?
7. How would the same questions apply to the markets for the thing you need to run your farm: credit, machinery, fertilizer, chemicals?
8. What do you know about the history of past milk strikes? How much of this did you know before the current strike was proposed? How much have you learned since the strike was proposed?
9. How did you come to hear of the milk strike protest movement?
10. Different people have spoken of different reasons for joining or not joining the strike movement. Why did you join or not join?
11. What was the differences, if any, between the farmers that joined the strike movement and those who did not?
12. What are the chances for success of a milk strike? Why is this so?
13. Describe your participation in the strike movement (lobbying)?
14. How much time did you spend on strike related (lobbying) activities?
15. Would you say you were more alike or different from the farmers who joined the milk strike (were involved in lobbying)?
16. Imagine the best possible conditions in the dairy industry, what would your life be like? Where are you now on a 1-10 scale? Are there any farmers who are in this position today? Who are they?

17. Now imagine the worst possible conditions? What would your life be like? Are there any farmers in this position today? Who are they? Which way is the dairy industry headed?

18. (Movement Participants) Imagine that the strike was successful, what would the dairy industry be like? What would your life be like?

19. (Movement Participants) Why a milk strike, as opposed to some other kind of activity to get what you want? Were there any other ways to achieve your goals?

20. (Non-participants) Why do you think some farmers want to dump milk?

21. How would the milk strike achieve your (their) goals?

22. Should policy makers listen to striking farmers?

23. What were the goals of the milk strike movement?

24. Tell me what you think of the following statements:

Choices: 1-agree strongly
2-agree somewhat
3-neither agree nor disagree
4-disagree somewhat
5-disagree strongly

The goal of the movement was: higher milk prices,
passage of the National
Dairy Act,
control of the industry,
to disrupt the industry,
to get attention from the
press, consumers,

25. What allies do you see that could have supported the strike, if any, from outside of agriculture?

26. Did your participation in the strike movement change your view of the dairy industry? Of American politics?

27. Was the strike movement successful?
28. What most limited the success of the milk strike protest movement? What else worked against the movement?
29. What do you think, now, when you see other protesters? Do you feel differently about them?
30. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Historical Interviews

1. What strikes do you recall?
2. Who took part in the strikes? Which farmers? Was there a certain kind of farmer that joined a strike?
3. Did Dairywomen's League members strike?
4. What kind of farmers joined the Dairy Farmers' Union? How many farmers were members of the Union at its peak?
5. How did farmers hear about the milk strikes and strike plans?
6. How did the farmers "strike?" What exactly did they do?
7. What percentage of farmers joined in the strike?
8. Were the strikes supported by people in the community? Who was in favor of the strikes? Who was opposed?
9. What did the strikers think of the local police? What did they think of the State Police?
10. What did the local radio and newspapers say about the strike?
11. Were any of the strikes successful?
12. Why were there fewer strikes after 1941? In other words, why were there fewer strikes during the 1950s and 1960s than there were during the 1930s?

Appendix B

The National Dairy Act

The following draft is proposed by a coalition of farmers from different regions of the country. The goal of this program is to establish a long-term supply management system which is controlled by farmers. The program is based upon the principles of fair market prices, targeting to family-size farms, and regional equity.

This proposal is not meant to impose any economic hardships on family dairy farmers whose total milk production in a consecutive 12-month period is less than either; a) 1.5 million pounds: or b) less than 25 percent of the average production of his or her region; whichever is greater.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE

This act may be cited as the "National Dairy Act of 1991."

SECTION 2. ESTABLISHING A FAIR BASE PRICE FORMULA

A. All milk shall be placed under an existing or new federal milk marketing order (FMMO) by June 1, 1992. Such FMMO's shall be defined by the Secretary of Agriculture.

1) For the period beginning January 1, 1992, and ending June 30, 1992, the price of milk shall be supported at a rate equal to \$14.98 per hundred weight of milk containing 3.67 milkfat, as adjusted in accordance with clause (11). This level is based on the 1989 economic costs (\$13.62) as determined by USDA plus 10% return to producer.

2) On July 1 of each of each of the marketing years 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, the Secretary shall:

a) utilize the pricing formula in Section 3

B. Class I fluid milk

1) Each FMMO shall have a minimum Class price calculated by the Market Administrator by June 1 based on the formula in Section 3. It shall go into effect on July 1.

C. Class II and Class III Manufactured Milk

1) This price shall be calculated by the Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS) of USDA by averaging the cost of

production nationwide using the formula in Section 3 by June 1. This price is the national minimum class II and III price shall take effect July 1.

D. Producer Pay Price

1) The producer pay price shall be calculated by the Market Administrator for each FMMO using a blend price of its Class I, II, III, price according to that FMMO's utilization.

SECTION 3. MILK PRICING FORMULA

FORMULA

\$\$\$ / cwt

1) Cash Costs (excluding interest and labor) Calculated by using the top 75% of 2% of randomly chosen milk producers in the FMMO.	_____
2) Labor cost (calculated by using the average gross hourly earning for private non- agricultural workers as calculated by the Bureau of Labor Statistics/US Dept. of Labor) divided by the cst./milk produced hourly. This level would be calculated on a regional level.	_____
3) Return on equity (average percentage return for non-farm businesses.	_____
4) Interest (paid on debt adjusted for house).	_____
5) Depreciation - Buildings	_____
6) Depreciation - Cows	_____
7) Depreciation - Machinery	_____
Total of Items 1-7	_____
(ITEMS 1-7 X 5% = MANAGEMENT FEE)	
8) Advertising Assessment	_____
9) Milk hauling cost	_____
10) FMMO Administration Cost	_____
TOTAL COST PER HUNDREDWEIGHT MILK PRODUCED	_____

- F. The Federal Order Milk Marketing Board (FOMMB) (see section II subsection B) has the authority to adjust class prices with the Federal Milk Marketing Order (FMMO) to ensure adequate supplies of Class I milk.

SECTION 4. FARMER ELECTED MILK MARKETING BOARDS

A. Local Administration of Supply Management Programs

County ASCS Committees will be responsible for local administration of the base programs. Dairy producers in each county will elect a separate Dairy board who are active dairy producers. This board will be responsible for decisions concerning base allocation and appeals. Counties that have fewer than five active dairy producers shall join with other counties in order to compose an adequate Dairy Committee. This Committee will serve dairy producers in the combined counties.

This Committee shall consist of three dairy farmers with one year terms, limited to two consecutive terms.

B. Federal Order Milk Marketing Board

Farmers in each FMMO will elect a Federal Order Milk Marketing Board (FOMMB) to develop and supervise the administration of the programs and referendums under this Act. This Board will also monitor and review price increases at the retail level. This board shall consist of six active dairy farmers and three consumers. Members of this board shall serve 3 year terms limited to 2 consecutive terms. The first election shall be implemented on a staggered basis. Nominations and voting will be based on ASCS procedures.

1) In order to protect their producers, the FOMMB shall administer the national supply management program. Any additional provisions that are appropriate to their Federal Order must be approved in a referendum by a majority of producers in that federal order. NO BLOCK VOTING WILL BE PERMITTED. Federal Orders shall establish and follow guidelines to provide for family farm targeting of base between farmers.

C. National Milk Marketing Board

Representatives to the FOMMB's will annually elect, from their own ranks, a National Milk Marketing Board (NMMB), which will provide general oversight to the administration of the national dairy program. The NMMB will monitor CCC and ASCS actions, can review changes in program regulations, and will annually determine the estimated

production levels needed to balance national dairy production and demand. This board shall consist of one farmer member from each region. Funding for Marketing Boards will be the responsibility of FMMO's thorough assessments.

SECTION 5. NATIONAL REFERENDUM

A) The secretary shall conduct a referendum within 30 days after the date of enactment, by secret ballot, of all milk producers engaged in milk production for commercial use, in the U.S. to determine whether a majority of dairy producers support the implementation of the national supply management program.

1) The continuation of the national base program will occur unless Congress approves a Joint Resolution of disapproval prior to July 1, 1995. This measure will eliminate repeated national referendums of dairy producers on the program.

B) Marketing Year - The marketing year shall begin on July 1 and end on June 30th.

SECTION 6. ANNUAL BASE ALLOCATION

A) The NMMB will make an annual determination of the amount of increase or decrease in production which is needed to meet the projected demand for dairy products in the next year, allowing for the required CCC purchases for existing food programs, government usage, and adequate supplies for food reserves.

B) Initial Transition Period - To allow for appeals and special circumstances during the first two years of the program, 1% of the total national base will be allocated for use in appeals and emergency base adjustments. During this transition period, producers in regions which have held production within their regional base will not have their base reduced by more than this one percent.

C) Individual Producer Caps - Every region shall set an individual producer cap based on the economic and production needs of that region. Existing bases shall not be reduced, but no new or returned base will be allocated to producers whose existing base exceeds that cap.

SECTION 7. ESTABLISHMENT AND TRANSFER OF PRODUCTION BASES

A) Individual Bases - Each existing producer will receive a production base equal to either:

- 1) Their previous year's production, or;
- 2) the average of their last five years of production, after eliminating the high and low years.

B) Transfer of production bases between producers.

1) When a producer ceases his/her dairy operation, his production base reverts to the county pool; with the exception of those transfers that qualify under Sec. 7

(C) 1, 10% of all returned bases shall be held in county pool to be allocated to qualifying producers in Sec. 7 (C) 2, 3, 4 and 5.

2) Production base may not be sold or leased except in regions where "class I monetary bases" have previously been established. Transfer of these class I bases must be in accordance with the provisions of this bill.

3) Producers in regions which are in a deficit supply situation may arrange for temporary base exchange (up to one year) between producers in order to maintain a stable production base for the region.

C) Allocation of New or Returned Base

Allocation of new or returned base shall be in the following order;

1) Transfer of base between family members shall not be restricted. Family members shall be defined as spouse, parents, sibling, children and grandchildren.

2) First priority in allocation of base will be to "new milk producers" purchasing the production units (i.e., cows and/or farm). The term "new milk producer" means someone who has no milk marketing history and/or someone has returned their base to the county pool.

3) To beginning dairy farmers in a county (at least 25% of all new and returned base must be offered to beginning milk producers.) The term beginning milk producer means a milk producer who is in the process of establishing a milk production operation and who has not assumed the full control and risk of such operation for longer than 5 years.

4) To existing producers in a county below the regional producers cap who apply for it equally.

5) An agriculture commodity producer in the county, except that in the case of a county in which at least 5% of

the agriculture producers are a member of a socially disadvantaged group (as defined by the Small Business Administration) and have farmers who are or have expressed interest in being "new or beginning milk producers," the county committee shall transfer to these producers a percentage of the milk marketing base that is at least equal to the members of the socially disadvantaged group.

6) If a county is unable to allocate new or returned base to producers within that county, that base may be allocated by the FOMMB to qualified producers within the state, and finally to qualified producers within the region.

7) If a region is unable to allocate new base to qualifying producers within the region, that base will be distributed equally among other regions.

Source: Franklin County Committee on Rural Affairs

Appendix C

Summary of Interview Data

Strike leadership:

No.	# of Cows	lbs of milk 1000/month	net farm income \$/year	off-farm income* \$1000/yr	farm debt \$1000	age	Party
101	40-60	80-99999	20-24999	0	0-25	39	Dem
102	21-40	40-59999	25-29999	0	0-25	37	Soc
103	61-80	100-149999	25-29999	0	0-25	50	Ind
104	21-40	40-59999	5-9999	5-10	0-25	38	Dem
105	81-100	100-149999	5-9999	0	50+	39	Ind
106	81-100	100-149999	25-29999	0	50+	38	Dem
108	81-100	100-149999	25-29999	0	50+	41	Ind
109	41-60	60-79999	10-14999	5-10	25-50	55	Dem
116	61-80	80-99999	10-14999	0	50+	49	Dem
117	41-60	60-79999	20-24999	0	25-50	31	Dem

Strike supporters:

No.	# of Cows	lbs of milk 1000/month	net farm income \$/year	off-farm income* \$1000/yr	farm debt \$1000	age	Party
107	101-150	150-199999	35-39999	0	50+	49	Ind
111	41-60	40-59999	5-9999	35-40	50+	42	Ind
119	41-60	60-79999	15-19999	0	50+	42	Rep
120	101-150	100-149999	10-14999	0-5	50+	54	Rep
121	41-60	40-59999	25-29999	0	50+	47	Ind
122	41-60	80-99999	20-24999	0	50+	49	Ind
123	41-60	60-79999	5-9999	10-15	50+	44	Dem

* Totals for off-farm income are rounded to nearest 1000.

Opposed Strike, Nonelite farmers (Non-Farm Bureau leadership):

No.	# of Cows	lbs of milk 1000/month	net farm income \$/year	off-farm income* \$1000/yr	farm debt \$1000	age	Party
114	201-250	300-399999	35-39999	0	50+	38	Ind
115	101-150	150-199999	35-39999	0-5	50+	29	Ind
118	61-80	100-149999	35-39999	0-5	50+	40	Ind
125	101-150	200-299999	40-50000	0	50+	51	Rep
127	21-40	60-79999	5-9999	0-5	50+	23	Ind

Opposed Strike, Elite farmers (Farm Bureau leadership):

No.	# of Cows	lbs of milk 1000/month	net farm income \$/year	off-farm income* \$1000/yr	farm debt \$1000	age	Party
110	201-250	300-399999	20-24999	0	50+	36	Rep
112	41-60	80-99999	15-19999	15-20	50+	36	Rep
113	101-150	150-199999	25-29999	30-35	50+	39	Rep
124	61-80	100-149999	25-29999	0	0-25	49	Rep
126	550-600	400000+	50000+	0-5	1000+	56	Rep

* Totals for off-farm income are rounded to nearest 1000.

See Questions 8-12, Appendix A.

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