Workers and Dissent in the Redwood Empire

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Chapter 9
The Organization of Lumber Workers and the 1907 Strike

In August 1905, when Humboldt County lumber workers received a charter establishing the International Brotherhood of Woodsmen and Sawmill Workers (IBWSW), they had founded the first international union of lumber workers.1 Between 1905 and 1907, Humboldt lumber workers were as well, if not better, organized than those in any other region. With limited resources, the IBWSW attempted to spread the gospel of unionism to other lumbering regions. Despite its early success and zeal, however, the obstacles to establishing permanent and broad-based lumber workers’ unions in Humboldt County and elsewhere were as formidable as they had been in the Gilded Age.2

The Big Three and the Company Town

The decentralization of the Humboldt County lumber industry was reaching its culmination in the early twentieth century. During the 1880s, as this process began, a series of epicenters developed in some of the county’s remote regions. The transitory nature and relatively small scale of lumber operations militated against the development of company towns. Indeed, sometimes cabins in lumbering and mining regions were put on wheels. The geographic isolation of these logging and mill operations compelled lumber companies to provide rudimentary housing and sometimes a store. With the possible exception of Scotia, these enclaves can best be described as forest camps. By the
early twentieth century, however, many of the camps were evolving into full-fledged company towns, and most lumber production was taking place in such settings. Scotia, Samoa, and Korbel developed into archetypical company towns, as did Falk, Newburg, Crannell, and Glendale, albeit on a smaller scale.

Several related factors encouraged the development of company towns. First, many lumber companies secured large acreages of timberlands in the vicinity of their mills in the remote hinterlands. This helped minimize the transitory nature of operations and encouraged lumber entrepreneurs to invest in the infrastructure of a company town. Second, most companies greatly improved their railroad networks. A company with 30,000 acres of timberland had to conduct some logging operations far afield from the mill and, indeed, established some forest camps. Usually, though, loggers could commute between the company town and the scene of logging operations. In Humboldt County, however, distances were great, and the railroad network was neither well integrated nor cheap enough to enable most workers to reside in a major city or town. Finally, not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did most lumber companies operate on a large enough scale and possess sufficient capital to establish company towns.¹

The number of workers employed in the lumber industry increased from 2,000 in the 1880s to almost 5,000 by the early years of the twentieth century, and lumber production tripled.² In 1906, 50 plants in the county were engaged in some combination of logging, sawmilling, and the manufacture of finished lumber products. Twenty-six mills produced shingles and shakes exclusively, and 10 manufactured doors, moldings, and house finishings. The remainder of the plants specialized in logging and milling, although they often had subsidiary facilities for manufacturing shingles and shakes and finished lumber products.³ The largest lumber companies owned more than 30,000 acres of timber, employed more than 1,000 workers, and were capable of cutting 600,000 feet of lumber in a day. By most criteria, they were three times the size of their 1880 counterparts. Many mills replaced, upgraded, or expanded their machinery in the early twentieth century. In 1908, the Census Bureau described Humboldt County’s mills as among the most modern in the world.⁴

A considerable amount of outside capital, primarily from San Francisco, had been invested in the nineteenth-century Humboldt lumber industry. But until the twentieth century, most lumber concerns had been owned, managed, and not uncommonly financed by the industry’s pioneers. The growing interest of outside capital and the industry's
increasing capital requirements brought about the demise of many pioneer lumber concerns by the early twentieth century. A few mills and lumbermen survived, but increasingly absentee capitalists, or capitalists, who were new residents of the county, owned and managed the lumber industry. There was also a dramatic increase in the concentration of ownership and production in the industry. By 1904, the Pacific Lumber Company, the Hammond Lumber Company, and the Northern Redwood Lumber Company dominated the industry. The “Big Three” at that date owned 64 percent of the county’s timberlands and accounted for almost 60 percent of total milling capacity. The Big Three were so named not simply because of their size but because they acted in concert in almost all matters from marketing arrangements to labor relations.

The metamorphosis of the Humboldt County lumber industry can be illustrated by briefly outlining the histories of the Big Three. It is appropriate to start with the Hammond Lumber Company. Its owner, Andrew Hammond, was probably the most powerful entrepreneur in the county, and certainly nobody played a more important role in shaping the antilabor policies of the county’s lumber industry. As early as 1904, William Carson, who was constantly at odds with Hammond, asserted that the Humboldt Lumber Manufacturers’ Association “has almost been turned over to Hammond,” and Hammond continued to play a dominant role until his death in 1934.

Hammond was born in the Canadian Province of New Brunswick in 1848. He began work in the woods as a choreboy near Bangor, Maine. After the Civil War, he moved to Montana and engaged in merchandising and lumbering. By the 1880s, he owned the Blackfoot Lumber Company, one of the largest in the state. During the 1890s, his business interests shifted farther westward, and with Collis Huntington and others, he acquired the Oregon Pacific Railroad and three sawmills in Oregon. Hammond’s plans in Humboldt County were equally ambitious. In 1900, he took over the management and ownership of the Vance Lumber Company, which had been founded by pioneer John Vance.

Hammond began by incorporating the Vance properties in New Jersey with a capital of $2 million. By the end of 1901, he had virtually rebuilt the Vance mill and tripled its capacity to 300,000 feet a day; by 1904, the physical plant at Samoa had been expanded and modernized to such an extent that the main sawmill and its auxiliaries were capable of sawing 600,000 feet of lumber in twenty-four hours. Approximately 1,000 men were employed by the company, triple the number ever employed by the Vance family. Hammond owned over 36,000 acres
of redwood timber by 1902, and he continued to add to his holdings. Every phase of the Vance family’s original operation was expanded. In 1901, Hammond acquired a large fleet of steam schooners for the transportation of lumber. The Eureka and Klamath Railroad was extended until it stretched 30 miles north of the mill at Samoa. By 1903, Samoa, which was located on a peninsula across Humboldt Bay a mile west of Eureka, was being transformed from a cluster of dwellings among the sand dunes into a full-fledged company town. Housing was constructed for approximately half of the company’s employees; the other half lived in Eureka and commuted across the bay by ferry. Among the facilities established at Samoa were a cookhouse that could feed 300 men at one sitting, a large meeting house, a well-stocked general store, a bakery, and a butcher shop.

The only other company of comparable size in the county was the Pacific Lumber Company, located at Scotia, 30 miles southeast of Eureka. Incorporated in 1869, it was the first major venture by outside capital into the Humboldt County lumber industry, but full-scale operations did not commence until 1887. In the 1890s, it was the largest lumber company in the county, and Scotia was an embryonic company town. During the first decade of the twentieth century, the Pacific Lumber Company dramatically expanded the scope of its operations. By 1904, the company owned 40,000 acres of timberland. The mill, operating on two ten-hour shifts, cut 300,000 feet a day. Following the installation of new equipment in 1909 and the completion of another mill, 450,000 feet could be produced by the two mills in one eight-hour shift. It was one of the largest mills on the Pacific Coast and indeed in the world. By 1904, the company employed over 1,000 workers, and in 1909 one estimate put the total number of employees at 2,000. Scotia’s population increased from 454 in 1890 to more than 3,000 in the town and its vicinity by 1910, with most employees living in Scotia. By the early 1910s, Scotia was the county’s most-developed company town and one of America’s foremost lumber company towns. It contained two churches, two banks, a saloon, a hospital, a schoolhouse, a library, a clubhouse, and a large, company-owned general store. There was an array of social and cultural institutions, including four fraternal orders and a volunteer fire company.

The final member of the triumvirate, the Northern Redwood Lumber Company, was formed in 1903 when the Riverside Lumber Company, owned principally by Harry Jackson of Humboldt County and the San Francisco shipping magnate Charles Nelson, acquired the Humboldt Lumber Mill Company from the Korbel brothers. The Northern Redwood Lumber Company possessed over 15,000 acres of redwood.
The company's two mills produced about 200,000 feet of lumber a day, and by 1906, the company employed 700 men. Like the other large lumber companies in the county, the Northern Redwood Lumber Company was an almost totally vertically integrated establishment, possessing its own railroad, farm, shipping facilities, and wholesale and retail marketing outlets. Company headquarters were at Korbel, 20 miles northeast of Eureka. By the early 1910s, Korbel was a full-fledged company town, ranking only behind Scotia and Samoa.

The Rebirth of Lumber Unionism

In September 1902, Humboldt County lumber workers made their first serious attempts to organize in almost twenty years when they formed a multiplicity of unions. In addition to separate unions of woodsmen and millmen, filers, donkey drivers, and stationary engineers established unions. At almost the same time, the shingle weavers resurrected their union. By 1903, about 1,000 Humboldt lumber workers belonged to a union of some sort, most of which were affiliated with the Eureka Trades Council and the California State Federation of Labor. Several factors prompted the revival of lumber trade unionism. There was a general fear that the growing domination of the county's lumber industry by outside capital might lead to a harsher regime—a fear that was not assuaged by several actions on the part of these companies. Moreover, the expansion of the county's lumber industry drew many new lumber workers to the county, men who did not have the deferential attitudes of their Gilded Age predecessors, especially if they were employed by one of the new titans of the lumber industry. As was true elsewhere in the county, the great demand for labor in the early years of the twentieth century gave lumber workers some sense of their own power. In this context, the union movement spread from Eureka to the woods and mills. It is surely not coincidence that lumber workers began forming unions at the very time the Eureka labor movement was establishing itself and only a few weeks after the founding of the Eureka Trades Council.

The frequency of small strikes and stoppages increased significantly after 1902. An incident in October 1903 involving workers at the Hammond Lumber Company illustrates the growing volatility of labor relations in the Humboldt lumber industry and the assertiveness of lumber workers. A group of about 20 Hammond employees waited for several hours for the ferry to take them from Eureka to Samoa. When the ferry finally arrived, they decided that overcrowding and
a dense fog would make it an especially dangerous trip and resolved not to go to work. When the men showed up for work the next day, they were all fired. The discharged workers engaged in a vigorous, and partially successful, effort to persuade their replacements not to go to work. In a long letter to the Humboldt Standard, one discharged worker explained the circumstances and added: "We hope that this will set the matter right before the people and workingmen of this section and that they may know the methods of these Eastern lumbermen and beware of them." The San Francisco entrepreneurs who founded the Arcata Barrel Company (to build barrels, wirebound boxes, and wooden containers in 1902) also provoked their workers. In January 1904, they announced that they were increasing the working day from nine to ten hours. In a letter to the Humboldt Times, "the crew" appealed to the general public: "We believe our cause is a just one and are of the opinion that we deserve the support of every fair minded and union principled laborer."20

Despite these incidents, conflicts continued to be relatively minor. For a few years, the booming demand for lumber and the growing strength of the Humboldt County labor movement encouraged lumber companies to proceed cautiously and avoid major confrontations. Nevertheless, the unions displayed an uneven pattern of development between 1902 and 1905 that contrasted with the steady growth of most unions in this period. The lumber unions tended to flourish during the height of the logging season and decline during the winter months; often they had to be reconstituted at the start of a new season. Thus, the Woodsmen’s Union, based at Pepperwood in southern Humboldt County, had to be re-formed in February 1904.21 In the fall of 1904, in an effort to retain their membership, the union moved its headquarters to Eureka, but over the 1904-1905 winter, it petered out. Indeed, by March 1905, almost all lumber unions in the county were defunct.22

The seasonal nature of lumber work and the resultant transient labor force were the greatest obstacles to establishing stable lumber unionism, but there were other hurdles. A significant number of lumber workers found work in the community or sat out the winter in one of Eureka’s boardinghouses; in addition, a core of workers was retained by the lumber companies during the rainy season. These men could have sustained lumber unionism, albeit in a skeletal form. Yet this seldom occurred. The spirit of unionism was beginning to take hold in the woods and mills of Humboldt County, but habits of trade union membership are not acquired overnight, especially by seasonally employed workers with little history of unionism. Furthermore, although there were an increasing number of skirmishes between 1902 and 1904, no
overriding issue or grievance surfaced that might have galvanized the nascent lumber trade union movement. Finally, the social geography of the Humboldt County lumber industry in the early twentieth century made the task of organizing lumber workers even more daunting than it had been in the 1880s. The dispersion of the lumber industry from Eureka to a group of company towns scattered over a large area presented formidable logistical problems in building and sustaining a union movement. Moreover, the fact that many lumber workers lived in a company town made them vulnerable to victimization, more so than their counterparts living in Eureka in the 1870s, who enjoyed at least some small measure of anonymity.

In January 1905, the Humboldt lumber companies handed the labor movement an issue that ignited lumber unionism. Although the lumber market was still booming, most companies announced wage cuts ranging from 10 to 15 percent. More provocative was the declaration that woodsmen would be charged 50 cents a day, or $15 a month, for board. Some companies agreed to offset the board charge by increasing wages, but the charge was a sharp break with long-established practice. Previously, lumber workers were not charged board regardless of how many days they worked. Under the new system, they would pay 50 cents a day for board whether they worked or not. The system made the wage packet of the lumber worker very uncertain, subject to the vagaries of climate, market forces, and other factors beyond his control.

The discontent provoked by the new system indicates that many lumber workers regarded the old arrangement almost as their birthright. In a front-page article, Labor News aired the lumber workers’ grievances. It denounced the “Napoleons of finance of this county” for taking advantage of the disorganization of the woodsmen to break with a system established “from time immemorial.” Labor News added that “it is evident that some of them are making an effort to keep pace with the mark set by the slave drivers of our Eastern cities, and each succeeding year finds another of these privileges taken from them [the lumber workers] and more onerous conditions imposed upon them.” It concluded that the new board system would be “the straw that broke the camel’s back.” The Arcata Union and officials of the Dolbeer and Carson and Elk River Mill companies all thought that a general strike at the start of the 1905 logging season was likely. Labor News cautioned that if lumber workers were not treated “with justice” there might be a strike, but warned lumber workers not to take any precipitate action.
the new board system for a variety of reasons. An official at Elk River Mill argued that "where there is good profit in a business, it is well to let well enough alone. . . . It takes but a little out of the ordinary sometimes to precipitate trouble." Carson condemned the efforts to change the board system and set wages as not only provocative but unfair: "It is just as vicious a scheme as any that labor unions try to force. These are measures for which the Hammond and Pacific Lumber Companies are largely responsible for no doubt. Those institutions will do more to foster the growth of labor unions here than anything else in this county." 

By spring 1905, Carson's forebodings were borne out. In an impassioned and lengthy editorial published on March 4, Labor News called on lumber workers to regroup. The response was immediate. By late April, more than 1,000 woodsmen and millmen had organized. Federal labor unions formed at Eureka, Scotia, Blue Lake, Fortuna, and some of the more remote locales in the county. William Owen, former president of the Eureka Longshoremen's Union, spearheaded the organizing drive, acting in his new capacity as a regional organizer for the California State Federation of Labor. Owen was a dedicated and effective organizer whose endeavors bordered on the heroic. Thrown off a lumber company train on one occasion, he trudged miles through pouring rain to keep a speaking engagement. On another occasion, having been evicted first from a cookhouse and then a blacksmith's shop, he proceeded to hold an organizing meeting on some nearby railroad tracks.

Owen received help from some of the leading lights of the Humboldt labor movement, who made frequent trips to more remote sections of the county to implore woodsmen and millmen to join a union. B. Callaghan of the Painters' Union delivered an eloquent plea to the lumber workers of Blue Lake at a general organizing meeting. He heralded the rising spirit of unionism in the woods and mills and called on all workers to set aside the craft prejudices that had divided workers for so long and "create in its stead a spirit of brotherly love." He yearned for the day "when all the working people will be encircled in one common family, and then the watchword will be 'Union.' " Callaghan stressed the need for unity against the growing might of organized capital: "In the great fight for human rights neither religious, racial, nor political lines must divide us. There must be no Catholics, Protestants, Jews, nor Mormons, no Britshers, Scandinavians, Germans, nor Italians, no Republicans, Democrats, Populists or socialists." There were speeches by other Humboldt union leaders, and after the meeting, 233 men signed the roll and established a federal labor union.
The lumber workers' organizing drive received support from some unexpected quarters. The historically antiunion Humboldt Times insisted that lumber workers had a right to organize and denied that the establishment of a union would lead inevitably to conflict and strikes. On a number of occasions, Labor News denounced the church for its lack of sympathy with working people. Nevertheless, a few pastors gave considerable moral support to the union movement. In a Sunday sermon, the Reverend Teel of the Christian Church explicitly endorsed and legitimized the activities of the lumber workers' unions. He stressed the "indispensable" work the woodsmen were doing in "furthering the advance of civilization" and he invoked the labor theory of value to vindicate their organizing efforts:

We are all agreed that labor creates all wealth, yet the laborer has the smallest amount. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," said Jehovah, but today those who rarely exercise in labor sufficient to cause the brow to perspire are enabled to wine and dine and feed upon dainties and roll in the lap of luxury. Social conditions that produce millionaires and tramps, princes and paupers, are wrong.

By July 1905, the combined membership of the federal lumber unions was approaching the 2,000 mark. Charles Grambarth suggested that the lumber workers apply to the AFL for status as an international union. The pragmatic considerations alone were compelling in that this move would save the federal lumber unions in Humboldt County approximately $2,000 in dues to the national AFL. The money saved could be used to employ a general organizer and provide the basis for an insurance plan. The proposition was unanimously endorsed by the lumber workers, and on August 2, 1905, the AFL issued a charter authorizing the creation of the International Brotherhood of Woodsmen and Sawmill Workers.

The IBWSW embodied many elements of the radical and fraternal union culture that pervaded the Humboldt County labor movement. Like many other Humboldt unions, branches of the lumber workers' union held general social and educational meetings. Leading figures in the county's labor movement usually opened a meeting with an address. Several meetings were open to the general public, with a special invitation to the wives of lumber workers. After the speeches, a program of musical entertainments followed. On one occasion, when a member of the union was killed in an accident, 400 members showed up for the funeral. The IBWSW played the leading role in launching both the Union Labor Hospital and the Union Labor party (ULP). Exactly what percentage of lumber workers voted Union Labor in 1906
is difficult to determine, but Labor News reported that, in a straw poll taken before the 1906 election, 95 percent of the Blue Lake woodsmen supported the ULP. The IBWSW took some tentative steps toward organizing lumber workers outside Humboldt County in 1906. Fully aware that it did not have the resources to launch a major organizing drive outside the county, the union appealed for the assistance of the California State Federation of Labor. Although a formal resolution at the annual convention of the California State Federation of Labor called on the general organizer to assist in the unionization of California lumber workers, the IBWSW received little help from the State Federation of Labor. The union’s secretary, Ernest Pape, made organizing trips to Santa Cruz, California, and Washington State, and several locals were subsequently established. Applications for membership also came from places as far away as Maine, Georgia, and Alabama. Even at its peak, however, the IBWSW could boast only 14 locals outside Humboldt County. For all its good intentions, it found it impossible to mount an effective organizing drive outside the county without substantial assistance from the national and California American Federation of Labor.

Strike Prospects and Organizational Problems

As the 1905 logging season drew to a close, the IBWSW honeymoon ended, as it grappled with a host of problems. The first was the perennial problem of how to prevent large losses in membership during the rainy season. The problem was not viewed as entirely logistical or seasonal, but one intertwined with fostering a well-rooted spirit of trade unionism in general. Aside from the problem of out-migration during the winter months, sustaining participation in union activities among the lumber workers during both the logging and rainy seasons presented difficulties. By the fall of 1905, the IBWSW had six locals, all of which, with the exception of the Fortuna local, contained members from camps and mills that were many miles apart. Thus, sustaining an active local, even at the best of times, was hard. Well-attended meetings were not possible on weekdays. Sunday was the only day when all members of a local could meet, and Sunday was the lumber workers’ only full day of rest. On Saturdays, many married men left the camp to visit their families, while single men often took the excursion train to Eureka for a night on the town and spent Sunday in the city recuperating from their revelries. The Sunday meeting demanded dedication
and commitment, even from men who remained in camp on the weekends. By the time they had trudged several miles to attend a meeting, most of the day was gone.

*Labor News* suggested the establishment of locals at most camps. This would not only allow weekday evening meetings to take place but would make the union more democratic and more responsive to its membership. Union officials would be more accountable, and more members would be able to hold union office. The first formal meeting of the IBWSW discussed the reform. It was rejected, although the possibility of subdividing some locals in the future was not ruled out; indeed, the following year, some locals did subdivide. By September 1906, there were two locals in Eureka, three in the general vicinity of Scotia, and two at Blue Lake. But this limited structural reorganization did not solve the problem and hardly followed *Labor News*'s recommendation for far-reaching decentralization.

Another problem was the reluctance of millmen to join the union on anything like the same scale as the woodsmen. In part, this reflected the fact that the millmen were not affected by the new board regulations, and, unlike the woodsmen, they had attained the ten-hour day. The IBWSW and *Labor News* alternately exhorted and reproached the millmen, warning them that they would become the next victims of the lumber companies' antilabor policies. Some headway was made in organizing mill workers in the Blue Lake and Fortuna regions during the late summer of 1905, but not until the spring of 1906 was any significant progress made. At that time, a rumor that, in the aftermath of the San Francisco earthquake, many lumber companies would pay men in scrip led to an influx of millmen into the union. Still, the millmen remained much less well organized than the woodsmen, especially in Eureka.

Despite considerable efforts, the IBWSW met with limited success in organizing the Italian lumber workers, who were becoming a significant part of the workforce in southern Humboldt County. *Labor News* began publishing its Italian page on June 16, 1906. Using arguments in favor of unionism that were almost identical to the ones addressed to its English-language readership, *Labor News* stressed that workers of all nationalities were brothers and that because a man could not speak English, he should not be treated "like a dog." Italians, however, did not rush to join the union, although they did engage in small wildcat strikes. In March 1907, 30 Italians were fired for going on strike at a planing mill. *Labor News* lamented that the men would not have lost their jobs if they had been union members. In the spring of 1907, when a major confrontation seemed inevitable, the IBWSW redoubled
its efforts to draw Italians into the union fold. A special meeting of Italian lumber workers was held on April 7, 1907, at which Bredsteen and two Italian organizers spoke. There was a “fair-sized attendance,” but only 16 men joined the union afterward. Throughout April, the IBWSW held weekly meetings in Italian and announced that some of the top administrative positions on the Union Labor Hospital Board would be reserved for Italians. One Italian organizer beseeched his countrymen to join the union:

We Italians must unite with our American brothers and with those of other nationalities in order to combat the abuses of our oppressors. The Americans of this county know full well that the Italians work in the wood industries in large numbers and that the success or death of the union is up to them. We do not want to draw the anger of our American brothers at this critical moment by not uniting with them and thereby forcing the failure of their cause, which is also our cause. We endeavor to make ourselves esteemed, not hated. If we raise ourselves to their level they will treat us as their equals.

Despite such entreaties, only a trickle of Italian workers joined the union.

By August 1906, signs of stress appeared in the IBWSW. The union had made only modest gains during the year, and the rainy season, combined with mounting apathy and dissension, threatened to erode the membership base. Bitter disputes erupted over the most effective means of utilizing the union’s limited financial resources and whether to assess a special levy to hire a general organizer. After an acrimonious debate at the first annual convention of the IBWSW, delegates agreed to raise dues 15 cents a month and to put a 10 percent per capita tax on the locals to support a general organizer. The rank and file ratified both decisions. Shortly after the convention, A. E. Zant of the California State Federation of Labor was hired as a general organizer.

The divisiveness that marked the first annual convention of the IBWSW reflected a growing discontent and restlessness among the lumber workers. The incidence and magnitude of “small” strikes increased in 1906. The most important was a “food” strike at two of Hammond’s logging camps. Unlike previous food strikes, this one involved not a handful of men, but 200 woodsmen. Furthermore, the poor quality of the fare was not believed to be the fault of a bad cook but an attempt by Hammond to cut costs. The Eureka Trades Council declared its full support for a general strike of lumber workers, and the IBWSW submitted the issue to a vote of the membership. By a narrow margin (although in conformity with union policy, the results were never published), the membership voted against a strike.
The closeness of the strike vote, and a series of other small strikes, indicate that the patience of lumber workers was wearing thin. In September 1906, Labor News admitted that many lumber workers were complaining that the union had done little for them. The IBWSW faced a difficult dilemma. On the one hand, it realized that with only half the county’s lumber workers organized, a confrontation with the lumber companies was risky. On the other hand, many lumber workers were anxious to redress their grievances. Strong as the support of lumber workers was for the Union Labor party, the Union Labor Hospital, and the fraternal activities of the union, this could not sustain it indefinitely if bread-and-butter issues were not addressed. The union had derived its initial impetus from the indignation that followed the change in the board system and the wage cuts. The lofty rhetoric and promises of organizers and Labor News, combined with the impressive growth of the IBWSW, heightened members’ expectations that action would be taken to better their conditions. After almost two full logging seasons of inaction, the credibility of the IBWSW was at stake. As the strike vote indicated, this was not a question that neatly divided the rank and file from the leadership. Furthermore, there is no evidence to show that during 1906 in the context of the Hammond food strike or at any other time the leadership of the IBWSW, the Eureka Trades Council, or Labor News tried to discourage a strike.

During the winter of 1906, general organizer Zant made a determined effort to sustain lumber unionism and counteract the apathy and dissension engendered by the often unrealistic expectations of new union members. After visiting most of the major mills and camps in Humboldt County in late November and December 1906, Zant reported that he was struck by the “high degree of intelligence and independence” of the lumber workers, and he insisted that “the material is there for the finest kind of an organization,” but, he added, in a somewhat censorious tone:

I am not desirous of having prospective members, who have never belonged to unions, to become over-enthusiastic all of a sudden because such members are not apt to stay enthusiastic very long. Unionism is not learned and comprehended in a day. Those who join without first making a study of the movement are too prone to expect immediate results.\(^58\)

In a report to the American Federationist a few months later, Zant reaffirmed his analysis: “There is a splendid spirit of unionism manifest here but we need more complete organization and education on basic principles of federation and discipline.”\(^59\) Labor News echoed Zant’s complaint and reproached lumber workers who grumbled at
the IBWSW's lack of accomplishments, insisting that the blame lay with members "who have failed to do anything but pay dues and fail to attend meetings. . . . No set of officers can make headway unless the membership is behind them." But Labor News did not confine itself to attempting to instill a greater sense of union discipline and commitment. Simultaneously, it tried to incite the lumber workers by reminding them how, at a time of unequaled prosperity in the lumber industry, wages had been cut and a new board system instituted, while woods men still worked a twelve-hour day.

On February 10, 1907, delegates of the IBWSW met to draw up a list of demands before the new season began. The woodsmen's requests included a restoration of the old board arrangement; a return to the 1904 wage scales; a meal schedule in which breakfast would be no earlier than 6:00 A.M., dinner no later than 6:00 P.M.; and a workday organized in accordance with the meal schedule. The millmen demanded a minimum wage of $40 a month (including board); a 15 percent increase in wages for those earning less than $50 a month, and a 10 percent increase for those earning more, with time and a half to be paid for all overtime. The Eureka Trades Council and the Building Trades Council endorsed the demands. Labor News strongly supported the stance of the lumber workers and reiterated that the lumber companies could easily afford to make these modest concessions.

The Humboldt Lumber Manufacturers' Association (HLMA), however, was in no mood to make concessions and immediately rejected the demands of the IBWSW. The association's leading figure, Andrew Hammond, had already evinced a determination to crush the Humboldt labor movement. Fearful of a strike in 1906, he had attempted to flood the county labor market with lumber workers. In November 1906, he was the only employer not to grant workers in the molding mills an eight-hour day and a wage increase. He refused to give the shingle weavers employed by him the increase conceded by the 20 other shingle mill operators in the county. Hammond also spearheaded a protracted, and ultimately successful, drive to crush the Eureka Longshoremen's Union in the closing months of 1906.

The humbling of the once powerful Longshoremen's Union emboldened the lumber owners to take a tough stand against the IBWSW. The indictment of two Eureka Union longshoremen for the murder of a nonunion longshoreman fortified their position. The two men were acquitted in 1909, but sensational and extensive coverage was given to the story in late 1906 and early 1907. Suddenly the labor movement found itself on the defensive in an attempt to preserve the moral
standing and reputation it had enjoyed in the community for several years. Revelations about corrupt practices of the San Francisco Union Labor party in early 1907 also received much publicity in the Humboldt press, to the extent that they further tarnished the image of the county’s labor movement. In addition, lumber employers drew strength from a mounting open-shop drive against unions at the national level.

Several lumber companies announced small wage increases in an attempt to defuse the resistance. At the same time, the HLMA prepared for a strike. The employers made a major effort to flood the Humboldt County labor market using employment agencies in San Francisco, the Midwest, and the East. Labor News reprinted one notice that appeared in an employment agency in Marinette, Wisconsin: WANTED WOODSMEN FOR EUREKA, CALIFORNIA: WORK GUARANTEED THE YEAR ROUND: WAGES $2.25 PER DAY.” The advertisement offered to pay half the $50 railroad fare after six months of service. During March and April, hundreds of men flocked to Humboldt County in response to such notices.

Not all Humboldt lumber operators relished the prospect of a confrontation with the lumber workers. Several pioneer lumbermen, such as William Carson and Irving Harpster, dissented from the hard-line position of the HLMA. Carson refused to attend its meetings as a strike began to look inevitable: “I declined, not that I favor strikes, but some of the larger lumber companies [especially the Hammond Company] have not treated their employees fairly and for that Dolbeer and Carson don’t care to assume any of their troubles at this time, as we have many friends among the labor unions when Hammond seems to be the bad man.” Carson and Harpster believed that the labor policies of the Big Three were not only harsh and unfair but likely to have an adverse effect on productivity and encourage unionism. Harpster wrote that he felt a confrontation was inevitable ever since the new board system was introduced, and he added:

We also believe the mills that have adopted the board propositions have early been the losers all along, for when men are dissatisfied with conditions they are not apt to take the interest they would otherwise do in their work, while on the other hand if the men feel they are treated fairly they in turn will return value received in the way of honest labor... In fact fair treatment lessens the chances of unionization.

The Dolbeer and Carson Company and the Elk River Mill Company did not negotiate with the IBWSW for fear that this would entail tacit recognition. But Carson and Harpster claimed to be granting practically
all that the union was asking, and they were confident that the few employees of theirs who had joined the union would not strike.\textsuperscript{75}

\section*{The Strike}

On April 28, 1907, the IBWSW submitted the strike question to the membership. By an overwhelming majority—reportedly 35 to 1 outside Eureka and 5 to 1 in Eureka—members voted to strike.\textsuperscript{76} The more benign labor policies of the pioneer lumber companies, and the fact that relatively few of their workers were organized, led the IBWSW to exempt them from the strike.\textsuperscript{77} Still more pragmatic was the decision not to call out Hammond’s mill workers because of the union’s limited following with them. Evidently, Hammond’s unabashed policy of repression was beginning to bear fruit and was as effective in containing unionism as the more conciliatory and paternal policies of the pioneer lumbermen. While Hammond was the \textit{bête noir} of the Humboldt labor movement, to have called a strike at a mill where the union had a small following would have been futile. It would also have raised doubts about the union’s ability to mobilize a mass following and present the solid front essential for the success of the strike. On May 1, the strike commenced as planned. Newspaper accounts concurred in estimating that about 2,500 lumber workers responded to the strike call. At Scotia, 740 Pacific Lumber Company employees walked out; 625 workers struck the Northern Redwood Lumber Company; and 400 woodsmen employed by Hammond left their jobs.\textsuperscript{78}

Even before the strike commenced, lumber companies began evicting workers from company housing and lumber workers left for Eureka in droves. The IBWSW lacked the resources to give much financial support to the strikers. Nevertheless, a committee was appointed to aid the very needy and those who lacked funds to look for work elsewhere.\textsuperscript{79} Within a few days, hundreds of striking lumber workers left the county. A large proportion of them were reportedly men who had worked there for many years. \textit{Labor News} confidently predicted that the exodus would persuade the lumber companies to bargain. The out-migration of lumber workers did indeed concern the employers, to the extent that they formally agreed not to bid for each other’s men after the strike was over.\textsuperscript{80} Notwithstanding these fears, the lumber companies dug their heels in and proclaimed their determination to continue operations “only on an open shop principle.” They warned that they were prepared to close down the plants indefinitely rather than submit to the union’s demands, and on no condition would they
“recognize any union or treat with any committees from the union, now or at any time.” Efforts to import fresh labor were redoubled. On May 22, the Coast Seamen’s Journal estimated that 4,000 workers had “started” for Humboldt County since early 1907. The Eureka Trades Council responded by sending circulars to central labor councils across the country, informing them of the situation in Humboldt. During the strike, pickets were often successful in persuading new arrivals not to go to work, and Labor News claimed that some newcomers actively supported the strike.

For several weeks, a barrage of claims and counterclaims was exchanged about the success of the strike by local newspapers, union officials, and lumber company owners. The Humboldt press tended to highlight rumors of a break in the strike, while Labor News did its utmost to disprove such reports. The disparate nature of the lumber industry made it hard for the press and the strikers to verify or refute reports. By all accounts, the strike held firm for the first three weeks of May. In the last week of May, it began to collapse. A trickle and then a flow of men drifted back to work, although the Pacific Lumber Company was unable to reopen its mill on May 22, as it had planned.

Friction between the IBWSW and the IWW was responsible for the first and decisive break in the strike. The Wobblies had secured a following of a few hundred lumber workers, concentrated mainly in the Fortuna area of southern Humboldt County. Labor News welcomed the IWW’s participation in the strike: “It demonstrates that the rank and file of the labor organization is composed of sincere and honest men, no matter how much they may differ with us on the best course to pursue a common aim.” The sequence and details of the events that produced the rift between the IWW and the IBWSW are not absolutely clear, and conflicting accounts appeared in Labor News and the IWW press. During the third week of the strike, the Eel River Valley Lumber Company, located at Newburg, approximately 2 miles east of Fortuna, indicated its willingness to meet the demands of the strikers, but under no condition would it formally recognize unions. Both the IBWSW and the IWW had a strong following at the Eel River Mill. According to Ben Williams, who had been rushed to the county to lead the strike two days after it began, the IBWSW demanded that any settlement must include union recognition. While there is no hard evidence to support his account, Williams insisted that the IBWSW was also asking for exclusive representation. Williams and the IWW membership decided that in view of the fact that “scale had been offered at Newburg, our men should go to work there, and not cause the IWW to commit suicide by holding out for recognition of the AF of L.”
On May 22, the Humboldt Times and Standard reported that the Eel River Mill and Lumber Company had reached a settlement with the Wobblies and would shortly be reopening with their help. The IBWSW responded by resuming negotiations. Sensing the division, the Eel River Mill and Lumber Company proceeded to retract some of its concessions. Under the agreement reached with the IBWSW, most workers received roughly half what had been demanded originally. The new board arrangements were modified to some extent. Men would not have to pay board if they worked part of the day or were prevented from working by illness, but under all other circumstances, they were to pay full board when not working. Whether, as Williams claimed, the Eel River Mill refused to take back IWW employees is unclear. Although Labor News reported after the strike that many Wobblies did not return to work, a considerable number did. A significant number helped break the strike at Scotia, and they were also among the first to return to work at the Hammond Lumber company. Simultaneously, the IWW helped drive the last nails into the coffin of the embattled longshoremen. On May 23, 17 Wobblies agreed to work for the Humboldt Stevedore Association, the new shipping agency established by the lumber owners to break the Longshoremen’s Union.

Writing in the Industrial Union Bulletin, Williams went to great lengths to vindicate the IWW’s role in the strike. Without elaborating, he accused the IBWSW of conducting the strike “in the same blind, stupid way.” He claimed that the Humboldt County AFL’s decision to organize the lumber workers had been inspired by the presence of the American Labor Union (the IWW’s predecessor). In a lengthy second article, he accused the IBWSW of refusing to cooperate in prestrike deliberations and holding out for a union shop agreement that would exclude the IWW. He lambasted the IBWSW for not striking in 1906 and for not striking against all the mills in Humboldt County in 1907. Williams divulged the contents of a letter from Secretary Ernest Pape of the IBWSW declining prestrike deliberations. Pape’s letter was cordial. He said that he simply assumed the Wobblies would join the strike, that the goals of strike and its timing were clear, and that the general purpose of the two unions the same. Pape had a point, although perhaps the IBWSW can be criticized for not engaging in consultations before and during the strike and thus possibly avoiding the debacle at Newburg. It is also possible, as Williams claimed, that some lumber workers joined the IWW because they were tired of
the inaction of the IBWSW. Nevertheless, estimates from all sources, including Williams, do not put IWW membership at more than 300. There can be little doubt that the IBWSW played the predominant role in organizing lumber workers from the summer of 1905 until the strike, while the IWW made no concerted effort. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the Wobblies belated efforts were an attempt to capitalize on the success of the IBWSW and to take a share of the credit if a showdown between lumber workers and employers occurred. To the degree that the IBWSW wanted primary, or even sole, recognition, this was understandable in view of the dominant role they had played in organizing lumber workers. The timing of the strike might have been a mistake, as Williams argued, but on questions of tactics, the IBWSW was far better placed to make difficult decisions than Williams, who made only fleeting visits to the county and only showed up there two days after the strike had begun.

While the IWW's return to work occurred at an important juncture in the strike, it did not affect the outcome, given the determination of the major lumber companies not to bargain. During the last days of the strike, and in its immediate aftermath, the Humboldt AFL tempered its recriminations. Labor News asserted that a number of Wobblies had refused to return to work, and some had even torn up their membership cards in disgust. In later years, Labor News reflected on the actions of the IWW during the 1907 strike with more bitterness. The Wobblies' role in the strike left a legacy of suspicion and anger in Humboldt County that helped circumscribe their ability to attract a significant following among lumber workers.

While Italians joined the IBWSW in relatively small numbers, they strongly supported the strike. In 1907, only the Pacific Lumber Company employed Italians in significant numbers. At Scotia, support for the strike was greater, in terms of total numbers and the proportion of workers striking, than at any other company. Labor News reported that the "Scotia contingent of Italians all came to Eureka . . . saying they would never work for a company that treated them the way PL does." Several instances occurred where Italians, used as scabs, were quickly persuaded to honor the strike. In the last days of the strike Labor News, while observing that there were some Italian scabs, praised the Italians, saying that "no-one had been more loyal in the present fight." Notwithstanding the failure to draw the Italians into the union in large numbers, the poor treatment that they received from the lumber employers and the continuous efforts of Labor News and the IBWSW to explain the broader issues involved in the con-
frontation, evidently made Italian lumber workers as militant as their counterparts.

Defeat and Decline

The strike dragged on through the end of May. A vote on May 27, at a meeting of about 150 striking lumber workers at Union Hall in Eureka, overwhelmingly favored continuing the strike. But four days later, a referendum vote of the membership reversed the decision. Labor News put the best possible face on things, insisting that in many respects the strike had been a success. It praised the solidarity of the lumber workers, asserting that only 100 members returned to work before the strike was officially called off. Labor News claimed also that as a result of the strike and the massive exodus of lumber workers from the county, "men were offered individually all the union scale called for, and in some cases more." And it concluded that lumber workers had developed a new sense of their own power and that the future of the union was "bright indeed." 100

Harry Jackson, the principal owner of the Northern Redwood Lumber Company, lent some credence to the claims of Labor News when he admitted that in almost all instances where workers had applied for wage increases on an individual basis, they had been granted. Yet, notwithstanding the courage and solidarity of the lumber workers, the 1907 strike was a disastrous setback for the IBWSW. In all likelihood, only the more skilled lumber workers obtained significant wage increases. Most important, the IBWSW failed to bring the lumber companies to the bargaining table and thereby secure the de facto recognition that was essential if it was to retain its credibility. Most union members were disappointed at the fruits of two years of laborious organizational work and a month-long strike. The Humboldt Times reported much dissension and talk of a "bungled affair" when the membership met to vote to discontinue the strike. 102

If the 1907 strike really was a victory, then the IBWSW should have been able to sustain itself in the aftermath in some viable form. But in the wake of the strike, the IBWSW began to disintegrate in Humboldt county, and within a month Labor News was warning the whole Humboldt County labor movement that it faced a "grave crisis," and urging the movement to brace itself for a massive open-shop offensive. 103 In July, Labor News alluded to a "lull" in the activity of the IBWSW, but tried to draw encouragement from the fact that four locals of the union had decided to affiliate with the Building Trades Council. 104
In September, Secretary Pape conceded that “our locals in the county are yet somewhat demoralized since our strike of last spring.” And at the same time, Labor News admitted that both the lumber workers and the longshoremen had been dealt “severe blows.”

The total number of locals embraced by the IBWSW increased from 17 to 24 between September 1906 and September 1907. Ironically, at the very time that the IBWSW was being crushed in Humboldt County, it was beginning to attract a wider following from lumber workers in several other important lumbering regions. By September 1908, however, there were only 3 active locals of the union in Humboldt County, and the number of locals outside the county dwindled to 11. The IBWSW held its 1909 convention outside Humboldt County for the first time—in Everett, Washington. Cognizant of the reverses the union had suffered in Humboldt County, the convention decided to relocate union headquarters to Lothrop, Montana. The union struggled on with perhaps 1,000 members, but expired in April 1911 when the AFL suspended its charter.

The outcome of the 1907 strike was a serious setback for the Humboldt County labor movement. In its immediate aftermath, Hammond launched a relentless, countywide open-shop drive. The AFL and the IWW strove to regenerate lumber trade unionism after 1907, but with very little success. A strike in 1906 might have brought more concessions in the short run, but the union had only a limited following among mill workers and understandably believed that it would have to organize more than half the county's lumber workforce to win a strike. They thought that they could consolidate their membership base and tried hard to do so. By 1907, with its credibility at stake, the union was under enormous pressure to ask for concessions from the lumber companies. The demands were modest, and in many respects an attempt to restore the status quo. Tactically, it may have been a mistake to wait nearly three months before striking, for this gave the lumber companies time to prepare for the strike and to flood the Humboldt county labor market and build up inventories. The fact that Humboldt county redwood lumber production was higher in 1907 than in any previous year and that shipments in May and June 1907 were significantly greater than in May and June 1906 indicate a major logistical problem faced by lumber unions. Lumber companies frequently had a large quantity of logs and cut lumber stockpiled. Even when this was not the case, they usually had the capacity to expand production rapidly in the aftermath of a strike. Finally, lumber companies could use a strike to conduct the routine maintenance or upgrading of their machinery that often closed their mills for two to four weeks.
The defeat of the strike cannot be blamed on tactical errors. By 1906, Hammond was determined to crush the Humboldt County labor movement. In 1907, Hammond and other HLMA members recognized that it was vital not to accord the IBWSW even token recognition if it was to be prevented from establishing itself on a permanent footing. In addition to the intransigence of the HLMA, a host of factors militated against a successful strike and the maintenance of stable trade unionism in the lumber industry: the transient and seasonal nature of the workforce, the widely dispersed character of lumbering operations, the high degree of organization among the lumber companies, and their dominance of the local economy.

The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed a momentous transformation in the structure of the Humboldt County lumber industry. Within the space of a few years, the pioneer lumber industry that had reigned from the mid-nineteenth century was almost eclipsed by a few giant concerns owned and operated by outside capital. When Hammond commenced operations in Humboldt County, Carson had resided there for fifty years. Hammond hardly ever visited the county. The ascendancy of the Big Three betokened a new era in labor relations. Unencumbered by lingering notions of reciprocal obligations, the Big Three resolved that the most profitable way to run their operations was to cut labor costs to the bone and ruthlessly crush any opposition. In contrast, the surviving pioneers wished to preserve the patriarchal features of nineteenth-century labor relations. Quite aside from any sentiments regarding justice and equity deriving from their own experience in the industry and their longstanding ties to the community, they were convinced that this was the most effective way to counteract the rising labor movement and preserve harmonious relations that would maximize productivity.

The fact that, during a rising tide of trade unionism in the county, very few workers of the pioneer lumber companies joined a union vindicated the analysis of the pioneer lumbermen. Unquestionably, also, the hard-line stance of the large "outside" lumber companies fueled the emergence and growth of lumber unionism generally. But the enterprises of Hammond and his associates dwarfed those of the pioneers and left them in no position to dictate the tone or content of labor relations policy. Ultimately, the strategy of no compromise and outright repression proved successful in stifling the growth of lumber unionism. Effective as this policy continued to be after the 1907 strike, within a few years the titans of the Humboldt County lumber industry questioned whether it was the best way to exact maximum productivity from their workers. Approximately a decade after the strike, they be-
gan to see the advantages of fostering a sense of corporate loyalty and, although not abandoning repression as a tool, embraced a scientific paternalism or welfare capitalism as a means to this end. In the meantime, however, they set about the task of extirpating unionism from the lumber industry and the community in general.