

PERSPECTIVES ON THE HISTORIO-SOCIOLOGICAL NOVEL:

FRANK NORRIS' THE OCTOPUS

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FRANK NORRIS' THE OCTOPUS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The union of social history and literature in the historio-sociological novel creates "a transparency through which we may catch glimpses of other art, of politics, of philosophy, of science."¹ Frank Norris' novel The Octopus is an attempt to capture this special quality. One of Norris' goals in life was to write an epic trilogy dramatizing American life. His idea was "to write three novels around the one subject of Wheat. First, a story of California (the producer), second, a story of Chicago (the distributor), third a story of Europe (the consumer). . . ."² The first novel, The Octopus, was Norris' favorite principally because he felt "he was at his best when writing of California."³ For suitable material with which to inaugurate his story of wheat, Norris chose the bizarre events surrounding the battle at Mussel Slough in 1880. The skirmish at Mussel Slough was the climax of events that had occurred during the 1870's between

¹Grant C. Knight, The Strenuous Age in American Literature, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1954), p. viii.

²Norris to William Dean Howells, March, 1899, as cited in Mildred Howells, editor, Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, Vol. II of 2 vols. (Garden City, New York, 1928), pp. 102-103.

³Franklin Walker, Frank Norris A Biography (New York, 1963), p. 240.

the wheat farmers of California's San Joaquin Valley and the Southern Pacific Railroad. Having chosen his material, Norris enthusiastically declared,

I mean to study the whole question as faithfully as I can and then write a hair-lifting story. There's the chance for the big, epic, dramatic thing in this, and I mean to do it thoroughly--get at it from every point of view, the social, agricultural, and political--just say the last word on the R.R. question in California.⁴

Wedged as it was between the fin de siècle and the Progressive Era, The Octopus appeared during a transition period in American history, a period noted for the emergence of realism and naturalism and the rising tide of social justice. The Octopus is clearly a naturalistic novel. This is true in spite of often uncertain and diffuse efforts to explain naturalism and how or whether Norris' book met the test. Hopefully, a survey and analysis of some of the attempts to explain naturalism and its relationship to Norris and The Octopus can refine the diverse interpretations of naturalism as well as re-evaluate them.

Much of Norris' collegiate life as well as his professional career brought him into contact with muckraking. In 1898 the roving muckrake publisher S. S. McClure offered Norris a job in New York. Although Norris' tenure was brief, he nevertheless conceived his idea for the wheat trilogy while at McClure's. Scholars have yet to agree on the

⁴Norris to Harry Wright, April 5, 1899, as cited in Walker, Norris, p. 244.

influence of muckraking on The Octopus. However, Norris' familiarity with it, as well as its special relationship to naturalism, warrants a re-examination of The Octopus as a muckraking novel.

Because it is at once both social history and a novel, The Octopus should have special consideration. There have been extensive analyses of The Octopus as a novel, but, apart from some perfunctory appraisals, there have been no attempts to examine Norris' claims that it is historically accurate. The climax of the struggle between the San Joaquin Valley wheat farmers and the Southern Pacific Railroad was the incident at Mussel Slough. This skirmish, together with the overpowering political and economic position of the Southern Pacific in California, was the historical base upon which Norris fashioned The Octopus. Norris contends, and his biographer agrees, that he thoroughly researched both. However, neither Norris' version of the Mussel Slough incident nor his references to the Southern Pacific political power have been subjected to a comparison with generally accepted facts.

By examining these components of The Octopus--naturalism, muckraking, the Mussel Slough incident, and the political power of the Southern Pacific Railroad, it will be possible to evaluate The Octopus as an historio-sociological novel.

CHAPTER II

NATURALISM, NORRIS, AND MUCKRAKING

Studies of Frank Norris inevitably encounter a stumbling block in the form of definitions. Perhaps the most perplexing of these is the term naturalism. Often as not definitions and labels become a critic's nemesis. In the case of Frank Norris' critics, nuances of naturalism have been relentlessly pursued. The result has been to create questions rather than to supply answers. Hopefully, an examination of several opinions can simplify the confusion.

In his The Beginning of Critical Realism in America 1860-1920, Vernon L. Parrington outlines his interpretation of naturalism. His basic view is that "naturalism [is] a child of nineteenth century thought--an offspring of Darwin, Marx, Comte, Taine." Parrington detects "two diverse tendencies of the movement--a sociological study of background, with a multitude of characters dwarfed by the milieu; and psychological study of individual character." Through further analysis, Parrington suggests a procedure that includes: objectivity, frankness, an amoral attitude toward material, a philosophy of determinism, a bias toward pessimism in selecting details, and a bias in selection of characters. Two additional characteristics, which he regards as distinctly American aberrations, are "the belief in the supremacy of the

moral law and the conviction that this is a good world that man shapes to his will." Synthesizing his points, Parrington concludes that "naturalism is pessimistic realism. . . ."¹

Richard Chase, in The American Novel and Its Tradition, considers naturalism "a necessary word in discussing the novel." According to Chase, "naturalism is a special case of realism. . . [that clings] to a necessitarian ideology. In aesthetic terms this ideology becomes a metaphor of fate and of man's situation in the universe, and so, although naturalism begins as a special emphasis within the limits of realism, it culminates in a form of poetry." Chase holds that the roots of American naturalism are with Emile Zola and his contemporaries who parlayed science with fiction into a "revolt against romanticism." Typically, "the naturalistic novel took a bleakly pessimistic view when considering the ability of the individual to control his fate."²

A more exclusive effort to demarcate naturalism is Lars Ahnebrink's The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction. Ahnebrink develops his thesis in an historical context by placing special emphasis on the national metamorphosis of the post Civil War period. He considers westward movement,

¹Vernon L. Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America 1860-1920, Vol. III of Main Currents in American Thought, 3 vols. (New York, 1930), pp. 323-327.

²Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City, New York, 1957), pp. 185-187. Chase assumes that the novel is realistic by definition.

industrialism, urbanism, and Darwinism as distinct consequences.³ Ahnebrink notes a concomitant reaction against romanticism and "Emersonian idealism"⁴ In the nineties, a trend towards realism developed into "an experimental naturalism. . . ." Ahnebrink traces the origin of naturalism to Flaubert's Madame Bovary (1857) and its development "in the works of the brothers Goncourt, Zola, Daudet, Maupassant, and others. Zola became the champion of the new literary tendencies."⁵ These naturalists used a technique that included objectivity, frank portrayal of sex, a denunciation of "the traditional, romantic, symbolic view that conceived of nature as a living, incarnate entity," and social ethics.⁶ Briefly then, "literary naturalism was an outgrowth of nineteenth century thought and involved the application of scientific methods to literary creation."⁷

Charles Walcutt's American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream is an intensive survey of the indigenous strain of naturalism. Walcutt's "thesis is that naturalism

³Lars Ahnebrink, The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction (New York, 1961), pp. 1-8.

⁴Ibid., p. 11.

⁵Ibid., pp. 19, 21.

⁶Ibid., pp. 23-29. Social Ethics is one of the criteria cited by Ahnebrink in his earlier work, The Influence of Emile Zola on Frank Norris (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1947), p. 17. Its later deletion indicates a change in attitude towards Zola.

⁷Ibid., p. 33.

is the offspring of transcendentalism."⁸ He characterizes monism as "the dream that glowed behind naturalism in American thought."⁹ For Walcutt "naturalism had its roots in the Renaissance, its backgrounds in the Middle Ages" and grew accordingly, through the efforts of Sir Isaac Newton, August Comte, Charles Darwin, and Herbert Spencer.¹⁰ The accompanying controversy of the theories of these men spread to the United States in the form of transcendentalism. However, "time and experience divided it into streams of optimism and pessimism, freedom and determinism, will and fate, social reform and mechanistic despair."¹¹ Walcutt is hesitant to define the naturalistic novel in explicit terms, but he does suggest certain features of literary naturalism. "The major themes and motifs are determinism, survival, violence, and taboo. . . . [Its forms] are clinical, panoramic, slice-of-life, stream of consciousness, and chronicle of despair." Naturalistic styles are even less static: "documentary, satiric, impressionistic, and sensational. . . ."¹² Although Walcutt recognizes Zola's indebtedness to his contemporaries for the germ of naturalistic theory, Walcutt considers Zola

⁸Charles Child Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream (Minneapolis, 1956), p. vii.

⁹Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 4-9, 291.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 10, 12.

¹²Ibid., pp. 20-22.

"the fountainhead of naturalism. . .a source of naturalistic theory."¹³ For Walcutt naturalism is a philosophical orientation that often generates conflict because of "the idea that scientific attitudes produce equivalent aesthetic effects." He submits that resolution "lies in a distinction between what the socially minded man thinks and what the work of art is."¹⁴

"The Original Social Purpose of the Naturalistic Novel," by George Wilbur Meyer, is a special study devoted to a reappraisal of the social aspect of Emile Zola's credo and a refutation of criticisms that challenge Zola's guidelines. Meyer insists that "the Naturalistic novel, as Emile Zola originally conceived of it, was based. . .upon a philosophy of optimism: and. . .its fundamental purpose was. . .the immediate betterment of human society." Suggestions that naturalism is a pessimistic breed of realism are unacceptable to Meyer in view of "the acknowledged fact that almost all Naturalistic novelists have attempted to reform society." Meyer concludes that the ambivalence attributed to several naturalistic novelists reflects a flaw not in the novelists, but rather in the definition of naturalism. As an example of the inadequacy of definitions, he notes that "ording [sic] to Zola, a pessimistic Naturalist is a contradiction in terms."

¹³Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 24.

In conclusion, Meyer reasons that

the Naturalistic novel was merely a late nineteenth-century continuation in prose fiction of a movement that began in the eighteenth century, if not earlier. . . . Philosophically the movement is based on the old idea of progress and the perfectibilitarian principle that man has an infinite capacity for improving himself and his environment. The purpose of Naturalism, moreover, is primarily utilitarian--that of stimulating and strengthening man's ability to better his society. The movement takes its name from the belief of its exponents that human society. . . must rest upon a precise and comprehensive understanding of nature and its immutable laws.¹⁵

Few critics allow themselves the luxury of permitting Emile Zola to speak for himself on the subject of naturalism. Because his name is always linked with naturalism, his interpretations and comments are essential. Zola expressed chagrin at the interpretations accorded his purpose of naturalism:

What always puzzles me is the manner in which my words are read. For more than ten years I have been repeating the same things, and I must really express myself very badly, for the readers are very rare who will read "white" when I write "white." Ninety-nine people out of a hundred persist in reading "black." I will not utter hard words about stupidity and unfairness. We will admit that their sight is impaired.

For example, do they not say foolish enough things about this poor naturalism? If I were to gather together all that has been published on this question, I should raise a monument to human imbecility.¹⁶

¹⁵George Wilbur Meyer, "The Original Social Purpose of the Naturalistic Novel," Sewanee Review, L (October-December, 1942), 563-570.

¹⁶Emile Zola, The Experimental Novel, translated by Belle M. Sherman (New York, 1893), p. 259.

To clarify his position Zola suggested several items that might be included in a naturalistic novel: the influence of heredity and milieu, Darwin's theories, impersonality, ethics, morality, determinism, and truth.¹⁷ Zola stressed morality and the difference between determinism and fatalism. "In our role as experimental moralist. . .we disengage the determinism of the human and social phenomena so that, in turn, the legislators can one day dominate and control these phenomena. In a word, we are working with the whole country toward the great object, the conquest of nature and the increase of man's power a hundredfold."¹⁸ On the subject of determinism versus fatalism, Zola flatly states that "we are not fatalists, we are determinists, which is not at all the same thing. . . . [the point of departure is that] the moment that we can act, and that we do act, on the determining course of phenomena. . . we cease to be fatalists."¹⁹ Zola was especially disdainful of critics who equated naturalism with obscenity. "You make naturalism, in a miserable fashion, a question of rhetoric, while I have always striven to make it a question of method. It is stupid to pretend that I. . .have reduced it to obscene language. . . ."20 An important feature of Zola's views is that he considered the existing naturalism as a fulfillment, through nineteenth century thought, of a basic human drive--

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 18-29, 123-127.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 29-30.

²⁰Ibid., p. 260.

the search for and the expression of truth.²¹ Furthermore, he attributes naturalism's viability to group action in which "there could be neither innovators nor leaders: there are simply workmen, some more skillful than others."²²

The probability of a consensus definition of naturalism borders on the impossible. Certainly many of the views presented here are logical and relative, but to select one as typical or to accept one as definitive would merely confine rather than expand knowledge of the subject.

In spite of the diversity of opinions, there are similar attitudes towards naturalism. Critics diagnose naturalism as a movement that evolved primarily from nineteenth-century thought but more emphatically as a movement steeped in reaction. Parrington's terms "pessimistic" and "departure" compare with Ahnebrink's "reaction" and Chase's "revolt." Walcutt acknowledges the reactionary milieu, but insists that naturalism is more a by-product of transcendentalism than an entity in itself. Meyer and Zola share a belief in the evolutionary nature of naturalism, but Meyer would likely reject Zola's reproach of romanticism.²³ More specific uniformity appears in the characteristics assigned to naturalism. The most consistent of these is determinism. The value of other qualities, such as character types, morality, objectivity,

²¹Ibid., p. 111.

²²Ibid., p. 45.

²³Compare Meyer's comments in "The Original Purpose," pp. 569-570 with Zola's in The Experimental Novel, pp. 116-118.

ethics, and heredity, must be measured against a critic's viewpoint and his use of synonyms.

Emile Zola's relation to naturalism is the constant subject of a verbal tug-of-war.²⁴ Individual appraisals are particularly troublesome, as Charles Walcutt attests: "Zola is the fountainhead of naturalism, in a double and possible triple sense."²⁵ George Meyer's observation that "there is something wrong, not with the novelists, but with the definition"²⁶ is a rare yet welcome comment critics might consider. Meyer himself gives a Zolaesque appraisal of naturalism, stressing the novel's intent and not its externals: the naturalistic novel "had for its aesthetic object, not a futile pity for the impotence of man, but the revelation that vital knowledge can be made to spring from human suffering."²⁷

A glance at the above opinions of naturalism affirms the need for a reappraisal of naturalism. Charles Walcutt's axiom that naturalism "covers the whole literary landscape--but very thinly"²⁸ suggests a simple yet comprehensive reappraisal--that naturalism is a method, a method to which Emile Zola is linked, a method to which determinism is basic, and a method

²⁴Compare Ahnebrink, The Influence of Emile Zola on Frank Norris, p. 14, with Parrington, Critical Realism, III, 325.

²⁵Walcutt, Literary Naturalism, p. 30.

²⁶Meyer, "The Original Purpose," p. 565.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 569-570.

²⁸Walcutt, Literary Naturalism, p. 297.

to which attitudes and purposes accrue according to the needs and desires of individual authors. This reappraisal is necessarily open-ended. It does, however, suggest that no single definition of naturalism is entirely acceptable and that individual analysis, using Emile Zola as a point of departure, is one means of determining what naturalism might be.

Frank Norris' The Octopus has contributed immensely to the difficulty of understanding naturalism. Scholars have always been puzzled by The Octopus, and, until recently, their interpretations have been as dissimilar as their views of naturalism itself.

According to Vernon L. Parrington, Frank Norris is guilty of "certain unconscious exaggerations of naturalism . . . [principally that of becoming] partisan to a cause . . . [and] of creating grotesques. . . ."²⁹ Parrington praises Norris' conscientious devotion to his chosen art although he suspects "that Norris began as a romantic and worked out of it slowly."³⁰ As a proselyte of Zola, Norris strove for truth and scientific detachment, but with only limited success. Norris' love for "large canvases. . . induced him rather to the sociological than to the individualistic

²⁹Parrington, Critical Realism, III, 325.

³⁰Parrington divides Norris' novels into three groups: (1) Romance--Blix, Moran of the Lady Letty, (2) Naturalism--McTeague, Vandover and the Brute, (3) Unnamed--The Pit, A Deal in Wheat. "Between the two latter groups stands The Octopus." Ibid., p. 329.

study. . . . [with the theme of] man in society. . . ." To Parrington The Octopus "is a study of economics. . . . [into which] ethical values persist in intruding themselves. . . ."³¹

Lars Ahnebrink maintains that Norris "did not only adhere to Naturalism generally but also, consciously or unconsciously, molded some of his novels. . . on the French master Zola."³² In particular, Ahnebrink finds similarity in their use of epic themes, and the "desire to expose social conditions which victimized the individual. . . . [although] the extreme naturalism of Zola was toned down to suit the author's temperaments, purposes, and artistic effects."³³ In addition to Zola's influence, Ahnebrink suggests that Huysmans, Turgenev, and Ibsen also actuated Norris' novels.³⁴ Ahnebrink believes that The Octopus initiates the third phase of Norris' literary career, that is, the emphasis on "sociological novels from a deterministic point of view."³⁵ However, he qualifies this third phase by emphasizing that "Norris's concern [as expressed through The Octopus] was primarily artistic and not ethical."³⁶

³¹Ibid., pp. 330, 332.

³²Ahnebrink, The Influence of Zola, p. 67.

³³Ahnebrink, The Beginnings of Naturalism, pp. 300-308.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 309-314, 332-342, 381-409.

³⁵The first two phases are: (1)"naturalistic novels of character," (2)emphasis on "moral values," ibid., p. 124.

³⁶Ibid., p. 121.

Richard Chase asserts that "it is in Norris that we see the glories and perils of naturalism in their sheerest form."³⁷ Chase claims that Norris achieves a "romantic nihilism" through a union of naturalistic pessimism with "the folklore of Populism."³⁸ According to him, Norris did not revel in the Zola syndrome but rather "adopted the practice of Zola to American conditions." Specifically, "although The Octopus seems to be a liberal diatribe against capitalist reaction. . . . [it reflects the] tension between Norris the liberal humanist and ardent democrat and Norris the protofascist. . . ." Although in comparison with older American novelists Norris' posture is mildly rebellious, he nevertheless sustains the "American tradition of the romance-novel" as did Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville.³⁹

A recent study of Frank Norris comes from Warren French, who comments that Norris' "closest link is not with the imported naturalistic tradition but with the transcendentalist tradition of those native writers who most vigorously denounced consistency--Emerson and Whitman." He further proposes that Norris used naturalism merely as a tool "to give new impetus

³⁷Chase, The American Novel, p. 204.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 201, 203. The phrase "the folklore of Populism" is from Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform, (New York, 1955), p. 60. To Chase, it means "a pastoral golden age. . . and the mythology of Calvinism. . . ." pp. 201-202.

to the irrepressible tradition of American romanticism."⁴⁰ In support of his thesis, French analyzes Norris' "remarkably sophisticated theories about the writing of fiction. . . [and his] staggeringly naive notions about 'instinct,' 'sixth senses,' 'superior races,' and 'natural goodness.'"⁴¹ In perhaps his boldest assertion, French claims that Norris was at heart an escapist. According to French, The Octopus is representative of this tendency in Norris "to turn back the clock."⁴² French rejects traditional interpretations that equate Norris with one or more of the characters in The Octopus. He contends that Norris' turbid presentation of ideas impedes any possible links.⁴³ French further speculates that Norris was not a reformer because he questioned both cooperation and conflict between individuals. Similarly French suggests that The Octopus was not meant to be a reform novel because it "dealt with conditions that could not have persisted much longer." He believes that The Octopus is valuable "because it expresses a philosophy that is not a lesson to its time, but a reflection of it. . . ." ⁴⁴

In his "A New Interpretation of The Octopus," George Meyer suggests that previous appraisals of the novel be rejected or re-examined on the basis of Norris' original intentions. Meyer explains that The Octopus was primarily a study in

⁴⁰Warren French, Frank Norris (New York, 1962), preface.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 46.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 47-48, 94, 106.

⁴³Ibid., p. 95.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 92, 105.

economic determinism through which Norris hoped his readers would reorganize the existing socioeconomic system. In developing his theory Meyer maintains that, in Norris' judgment, both the ranchers and the railroad were guilty of crimes against the natural order. Meyer further suspects that Norris implies a harsher criticism for the ranchers who "become selfish individuals, social and economic anarchists out to make a fortune at any cost." A vital point in Meyer's argument is the differentiation between determinism and fatalism. For Meyer, any interpretation of Norris as a fatalist is shallow because Norris "did not believe the socioeconomic confusion of the world he lived in. . . was predestined to continue throughout eternity." Furthermore, through The Octopus, "Norris hoped to move his readers to intelligent reformatory action."⁴⁵

Norris' biographer, Franklin Walker, devotes an entire chapter to The Octopus. Walker's approach is critical, yet with more emphasis on informing than on analyzing. Two themes which dominate the novel are "the conquering of the frontier and the growth of business enterprise. . . ."⁴⁶ In The Octopus Norris uses these themes as manifestations of an irrepressible economic order. Walker outlines Norris' eclectic preparation of the novel, emphasizing that, although

⁴⁵George W. Meyer, "A New Interpretation of The Octopus," College English, IV (1943), 351-359.

⁴⁶Walker, Norris, pp. 241, 272.

the opportunity to exploit the social potential of the novel was tempting, Norris refrained and selected volatile issues primarily because they "contained an abundance of drama" and because his interest was "in stories, not reforms."⁴⁷ In defense of this claim, Walker recounts Norris' exhaustive preparation for the novel, including his interviews, his research for facts and his separation from that avant garde of muckraking, McClure's.⁴⁸ Walker concedes the artistic, or technical, influence of Zola on The Octopus, but rejects any consideration that implies Norris' capitulation to Zola's propagandist zeal. That Norris merely modified the deterministic philosophy of naturalism is considered apparent by Walker, who interprets the character Presley as a "register [of Norris'] impressions."⁴⁹

Frank Norris might well have dismissed the opinions on his works and pointed to his own suggestions, such as those regarding the troublesome "isms" of the day. Norris considered realism "minute. . .the drama of a broken teacup. . . the adventure of an invitation to dinner." It is most appropriately as "respectable as a church and proper as a deacon. . . ."⁵⁰ Naturalism drew a unique assessment from

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 243, 257.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 258-267.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 261.

⁵⁰Frank Norris, The Responsibilities of the Novelist, Vol. VII of The Collected Works of Frank Norris, 9 vols. (Garden City, New York, 1928), pp. 164-165.

Norris:

Terrible things must happen to the characters of the naturalistic tale. They must be twisted from the ordinary, wrenched from the quiet, uneventful round of everyday life and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama. . .no teacup tragedies here. . . . [There is a visible] love of the extraordinary, the vast, the monstrous and the tragic. . . .

It is, proclaims Norris, "a form of romanticism, not an inner circle of realism. . . ."51 As a case in point, he rejects the label of realist for Zola and instead suggests that he is "the very head of the Romanticists."52 The distinction is clear for Norris: Romanticism "is the kind of fiction that takes cognizance of variations from the type of normal life. . . ." It is "a teacher sent from God. . . . [to explore] the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man."53

"An idea that's as big as all outdoors"54 is Norris' description of The Epic of the Wheat, of which The Octopus is part. Norris' research for The Octopus was both extensive

51"An unsigned editorial on Zola as a Romantic Writer appeared in the Wave on June 21, 1896. There is little question that it was written by Norris." Walker, Norris, pp. 83-84.

52Norris, Responsibilities, VII, 164. Compare with Zola's view of Romanticism, The Experimental Novel, pp. 116-118.

53Norris, Responsibilities, VII, 164, 167-168

54Norris to Harry Wright, April 5, 1899, as cited in Walker, Norris, pp. 243-244.

and intensive. "It is the hardest work I have ever done in my life, a solid year of writing and 4 months of preparation. . . . You've no idea of the outside work on it. I've been in correspondence with all kinds of people. . . . [and even] helped run and work a harvester in the San Joaquin."⁵⁵ In The Octopus Norris pursues the ex post facto standards he prescribes in his essay "The Novel with a Purpose." The best novel, according to Norris, "proves something, draws conclusions from a whole congeries of forces, social tendencies, race impulses, devotes itself not to a study of men but of man."⁵⁶ Norris insists that "the man must be above the work or the work is worthless. . . ." But he concedes "the purpose is for the novelist the all-important thing, and yet it is impossible to deny that the story, as a mere story, is to the story-writer the one great object of attention."⁵⁷ Puzzling though it may be, Norris explains that the purpose is best thought of as an "ever-present guide"; ambivalence can be avoided "by telling things and showing things. . . . [rather than] direct appeal by the writer."⁵⁸ The self-styled "Boy-Zola" admonished his namesake for writing a novel whose purpose "ran away with him."⁵⁹

⁵⁵Norris to Isaac F. Marcossou, September 13, 1900, as cited in Isaac F. Marcossou, Adventures in Interviewing (New York, 1923), p. 238.

⁵⁶Norris, Responsibilities, VII, 21-22.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 13, 23.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁵⁹Norris to Isaac F. Marcossou, n. d., as cited in Marcossou, Adventures in Interviewing, p. 239; Norris, Responsibilities, VII, 24.

A synthesis of opinions on Frank Norris and The Octopus is difficult because of the diversity of views. Conceptions of naturalism, viewpoints, and intents muddle the issue. Even the maxims of Norris generate doubt. The only consideration that achieves even an unequal distribution is the influence of Emile Zola. If a consensus is reliable on this point, then adoption of technique would seem acceptable. Lars Ahnebrink's suspicion that "at least three of Zola's novels [influenced] The Octopus. . . ."60 is based on an adoption of method and is reliably representative of the group.

Richard Chase and Warren French suggest a point that Parrington alludes to--Norris' Romantic heritage. Although Chase and French differ considerably on the exact nature of this heritage, they admit its presence. Apart from the dissents of Parrington and Meyer, there is a semblance of agreement that Norris chose such a volatile subject for artistic means rather than for social ends. For the minority's sake it must be added that the selection of one over the other implies merely subordination and not negation. Norris' own views suggest such a consideration. Despite the fact that Norris' explanation of naturalism is difficult to reconcile with the explanations of most scholars, at least one consideration of naturalism is uniform--that naturalism is a reactionary breed of realism.

⁶⁰Ahnebrink, The Influence of Zola, p. 42.

Frank Norris realized that "in the larger view, in the last analysis, the People pronounce the final judgment."⁶¹ The preceding collection of criticism, both on naturalism and Norris, was the result of random selection from among a great many criticisms. They were, in Norris' words, "the People." Such a widely controversial novel as The Octopus deserves a larger view, one that seeks perspective. A few scholars have re-examined The Octopus on specific points and have suggested additional points by which this might be done.

George Johnson suspects that Norris' fame suffered earlier because "literary trends were understood as battles to extinction between forces of progress and reaction, when 'romance' was a pejorative term connoting the genteel and meretricious. . . ." Norris' heritage burdened and sustained him in that it called for a great American novel somehow fashioned from the puzzle of Romance-Realism and in that it provided the more palatable "spiritual antinomies" of Calvinism as opposed to the "firm doctrines of Comte, Taine, and Bernard." Johnson believes that Norris' career is best defined within the limits "of his attempt to reconstitute romance in American letters."⁶²

⁶¹Norris, Responsibilities, VII, 6.

⁶²George W. Johnson, "Frank Norris and Romance," American Literature, XXXIII (March, 1961), 52-63.

Stanley Cooperman and William B. Dillingham develop two aspects of Norris' style. Cooperman explains Norris' Calvinist heritage and maintains that

the American naturalist movement as a whole did absorb scientific determinism. . .in terms of previously existing religious pressure. It is the imposition of Calvinist determinism on the newer scientific material that produced the unique coloration of American naturalism in patterns of romance and brutality, degradation and purity, realism and rhetoric.

Cooperman insists that Norris "combines all of these elements."⁶³ Dillingham's study traces Norris' link with the genteel tradition. Dillingham contends that Norris' reputation as a young rebel is an incomplete and unjust analysis. Rather than mutiny over American literature "which was molded by the 'polite' manners and the vigorous taboos of refined society," Norris incorporated into his novels the traditional themes of "a Puritan view of sex, an emphasis upon the importance of woman in man's moral life, and a belief in the virtues of self-control. . . ." Furthermore he frequently succumbed to sentimentality, a technique, Dillingham notes, that Norris personally abhorred.⁶⁴

⁶³Stanley Cooperman, "Frank Norris and the Werewolf of Guilt," Modern Language Quarterly, XX (September, 1959), 252-258.

⁶⁴William B. Dillingham, "Frank Norris and the Genteel Tradition," Tennessee Studies in Literature, V (1960); for Norris' comments on sentimentality see Responsibilities, VII, 163.

A composite of the theories advocated by Johnson, Cooperman, and Dillingham is both the theoretical and the actual approach of Donald Pizer. In striving for what he refers to as "wholeness," Pizer recommends "a critical eclecticism. . . . [which includes some knowledge] of Norris' biography, of the intellectual and literary influence upon him, and of his social milieu. . . ."65 For The Octopus, Pizer proposes that an understanding of evolutionary theism clarifies any philosophical inconsistencies and illumines Norris' purpose "to discover and to reaffirm the bases of moral order and religious faith in new worlds of experience and ideas created by a changing society and an advance in science."66

Pizer's insistence that Norris be considered with critical eclecticism indicates an awareness of the most fundamental, yet most elusive, quality of scholarly research--perspective. Reflecting upon the problem, Ernest Marchand maintains that "the student who makes his way patiently through the contemporary reviews, and through all that has since been written of Norris will leave a good many things about him and his work that cannot lie down peaceably together

65 Donald Pizer, "Synthetic Criticism and Frank Norris; Or Mr. Marx, Mr. Taylor, and The Octopus," American Literature, XXXIV (January, 1963), 540.

66 Pizer, "The Concept of Nature in Frank Norris' The Octopus," American Quarterly, XIV (Spring, 1962), 73, 80.

in the same mind."⁶⁷ By studying The Octopus separately some of the difficulties can be avoided, although the dissident criticisms of Norris' other works linger. An apparent fact is The Octopus' individuality; it is altogether unlike any of Norris' other works. Its salient features include naturalism, romanticism, and reaction. The degree of blending is the crucial point among scholars. Suffice it to say then that The Octopus functions amidst the naturalistic method, but with a definite Romantic legacy, a legacy confronted by reaction.

In The Octopus reaction has an adjunct of significance--reform. In the first decade of the twentieth century, reform was often synonymous with muckraking. As a facet of The Octopus, muckraking has received only slight analysis. This is in part due to historians' unofficial designation of 1902 as the beginning of the muckraking movement in America.⁶⁸ However, scholars have also pointed out that muckraking existed prior to 1902, a consensus based upon the broad conception of muckraking as the literature of exposure.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Ernest Marchand, Frank Norris A Study (Stanford University, California, 1942), pp. 193-194.

⁶⁸Louis Filler, Crusaders for American Liberalism (Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1950), p. 55; for comparison see Arthur and Lila Weinberg, editors, The Muckrakers (New York, 1961), pp. xvii-xviii.

⁶⁹Filler, Crusaders, p. 19; Hofstadter, Age of Reform, pp. 186-187; David Mark Chalmers, The Social and Political Ideas of the Muckrakers (New York, 1964), pp. 9-12.

That muckraking became a pejorative term connoting sensationalism and yellow journalism histrionics can be attributed to Theodore Roosevelt.⁷⁰ In a 1906 speech Roosevelt recalled Bunyan's "Man with the Muckrake, the man who could look no way but downward, with a muckrake in his hands; who was offered a celestial crown for his muckrake, but who would neither look up nor regard the crown he was offered, but continued to rake to himself the filth of the floor."⁷¹ Roosevelt pointed out that presently there were those whose attitudes were much the same. Although he endorsed the need for sound criticism, Roosevelt's acrid tone did not go unnoticed.⁷² "The term [muckraker] was speedily attached to all reformers who were engaged in denouncing corruption, whether or not they deserved the odium explicit in the President's application of the epithet."⁷³

The business of muckraking was twofold: exposure and reform. Although, "since the 1870's, exposure had been a

⁷⁰For a contrasting opinion see Robert Cantwell, "Journalism-Magazines," in Harold E. Stearns, editor, America Now An Inquiry into Civilization in the United States by Thirty Six Americans (New York, 1938), p. 346.

⁷¹Theodore Roosevelt, "The Man with the Muckrake," as cited in Weinberg, The Muckrakers, p. 58.

⁷²Lincoln Steffens, The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens (New York, 1931), p. 581.

⁷³C. C. Regier, The Era of the Muckrakers (Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1957), p. 2.

recurrent theme in American political life,"⁷⁴ the advent of the cheap magazine facilitated exposure en masse. Muckraking's heritage was synonymous with reform movements and most immediately with Populism, which "might well be considered as one of the most important forerunners of muckraking"⁷⁵ Admittedly, some of the muckraking degenerated into sensationalism, but the majority was sincere and compassionate.⁷⁶

Muckraking scoured all suspicious areas of industry, finance, labor, government, and even the church.⁷⁷ Motivation for this introspection came especially from the realization that big business, under the guise of prosperity, was monopolizing the country, that, in short, it was "the greatest enemy to orderly government."⁷⁸ Railroads were prime targets of the muckrakers not only for their railway activities but also for their infiltration into government and into the public domain.⁷⁹ Such accusations were, however, commonplace

⁷⁴Hofstadter, Age of Reform, p. 187.

⁷⁵Filler, Crusaders, p. 22.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 53; Regier, Era of the Muckrakers, p. 10; Chalmers, Ideas of the Muckrakers, p. 14.

⁷⁷Filler, Crusaders, p. 9; Weinberg, The Muckrakers, pp. 308-310.

⁷⁸Chalmers, Ideas of the Muckrakers, p. 21.

⁷⁹Filler, Crusaders, p. 15; Weinberg, The Muckrakers, pp. 146-149.

to railroad leaders.⁸⁰

Frank Norris' The Octopus was among the contributors to the railroads' depraved image. Prior to The Octopus' publication in 1901, the Southern Pacific "was clearly established in the common mind as the outstanding enemy of democracy in the Far West."⁸¹ The trend, then, was established and "whatever Norris' intention was in writing his story of wheat and the railroad, the reading public interpreted the novel as another assault on the Southern Pacific."⁸²

Scholars have since been caught in the balance. Historians of the muckraking movement generally regard The Octopus as an unconscious contribution to muckraking primarily due to the belief that Norris was "more an artist than a publicist."⁸³ However, Arthur and Lila Weinberg disagree. They consider Norris one of the more famous "fiction writers who exposed, appealed, exhorted and dramatized the various problems which the muckrakers posed."⁸⁴ John Chamberlain similarly insists that "in The Octopus. . .Norris became, quite emphatically,

⁸⁰For example see George W. Julian, "Railway Influence in the Land Office," North American Review, CXXVI (March, 1883), 237-256.

⁸¹Filler, Crusaders, p. 131.

⁸²George E. Mowry, The California Progressives (Berkeley, 1951), p. 20.

⁸³Filler, Crusaders, p. 60; Regier, Era of the Muckrakers, p. 47; Chalmers, Ideas of the Muckrakers, p. 12.

⁸⁴Weinberg, The Muckrakers, p. xxi.

a muckraker. . . .⁸⁵ A scathing appraisal comes from Gerald Nash, who disliked

the tendency of the muckraker to slight the positive achievements of administrators. . . . Perhaps the most important of the literary figures [in California] was the novelist Frank Norris. In The Octopus. . . he sought to expose the Southern Pacific Railroad, and its control over the political and economic life of California. Starting with a definite bias against the railroad, Norris secured most of his information from newspaper clippings, in many of which he rearranged the facts to suit his story. As a novelist he was fully justified in making such alternations, though it was often forgotten that his work was mainly one of fiction in which historical accuracy was secondary.⁸⁶

The apparent antithesis of these appraisals can be resolved. David Chalmers has suggested that "muckraking was . . . a movement by association as well as identity of purpose."⁸⁷ This might be restated as a muckraking ethos that sustains itself by virtue of kinship. Several of the more famous muckrakers were at one time or another affiliated with newspapers.⁸⁸ They inherited "the bohemian nature of newspaper life in the 'nineties" as well as a deep appreciation for "the dramatic implications of life."⁸⁹ Norris was similarly affected by his

⁸⁵John Chamberlain, Farewell to Reform (New York, 1933), p. 108.

⁸⁶Gerald D. Nash, "Bureaucracy and Economic Reform: The Experience of California, 1899-1911," The Western Political Quarterly, XIII (September, 1960), 679.

⁸⁷Chalmers, Ideas of the Muckrakers, p. 20.

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 15-19.

⁸⁹Joseph J. Kwiat, "The Newspaper Experience: Crane Norris, and Dreiser," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, VIII (September, 1953), 99, 102; Steffens, Autobiography, pp. 314-319.

newspaper experience.⁹⁰ Norris' biographer, Franklin Walker, notes that "as he wrote The Octopus, he was living in a hotbed of incipient Muckrakers."⁹¹ A majority of these incipient muckrakers were eventually employed by McClure's, where Norris worked until late in 1899. "One thing McClure wanted was the facts: these were his obsessions."⁹² A year later Norris admitted that The Octopus was "the hardest work I have ever done in my life. . . 4 months preparation. . . . You've no idea of the outside work in it."⁹³ This passion for facts was a characteristic of many of the muckrakers.

The machinations of railroads were constant themes for the muckrakers before and after Lincoln Steffens.⁹⁴ Pre-Steffenites (October, 1902) Henry George and Henry Demarest Lloyd exposed aspects of railroad monopoly. George recognized the beneficial effect of the Southern Pacific in California, but "he also anticipated that it would cause some social dislocation. . . ." and that the railroad land monopoly

⁹⁰Kwiat, "Newspaper Experience," 99-117 passim.

⁹¹Walker, Norris, p. 255.

⁹²Filler, Crusaders, p. 81; Steffens agrees, but adds, "Mr. McClure was interested in facts, startling facts. . . ." Autobiography, p. 393; for Theodore Roosevelt's view, see Roosevelt to Samuel Sydney McClure, October 4, 1905, in E. E. Morison, et al, editors, The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt, Vol. V of 8 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1951), p. 45.

⁹³Letter to Isaac F. Marcossou, September 13, 1900, as cited in Marcossou, Adventures in Interviewing, p. 238.

⁹⁴Filler, Crusaders, p. 67.

would hinder California's progress.⁹⁵ Louis Filler considers Lloyd's Wealth Against Commonwealth "as the first muckraking book."⁹⁶ In it "the father of all muckrakers"⁹⁷ attacked railroad rebates and the discrepancies in freight rates.⁹⁸ Prior to writing Wealth Against Commonwealth, Lloyd had investigated the political activities of the Southern Pacific.⁹⁹

Ray Stannard Baker and Charles Edward Russell were two important post-Steffenite muckrakers. For Baker, "no issue better suited his talents than the railroad issue."¹⁰⁰ Reflecting the sentiments of fellow writers, Baker declared that he wanted "to present the explosive new economic and social and perhaps political forces that affected America."¹⁰¹ Baker's articles on the railroads were applauded for being deliberative and for teaching "that these railroad men are not to be treated as exceptional villains but merely as

⁹⁵Charles A. Barker, "Henry George and the California Background of Progress and Poverty," California Historical Society Quarterly, XXIV (June, 1945), 109.

⁹⁶Filler, Crusaders, p. 26.

⁹⁷Chamberlain, Farewell to Reform, p. 48.

⁹⁸Henry Demarest Lloyd, Wealth Against Commonwealth (New York, 1896), pp. 69, 212-240 passim.

⁹⁹Chamberlain, Farewell to Reform, p. 52.

¹⁰⁰Filler, Crusaders, p. 214.

¹⁰¹Ray Stannard Baker, American Chronicle The Autobiography of Ray Stannard Baker (New York, 1945), p. 164.

ordinary Americans, who under given conditions are by the mere force of events forced into doing much of which we complain."¹⁰² Pure accident cast Charles Edward Russell into the role of muckraker.¹⁰³ Of the muckrakers, "Russell was one of the fiercest of them all. . . ." ¹⁰⁴ He was highly critical of the railroads which he believed held sway throughout the West.¹⁰⁵ His timely articles on the monolithic nature of the Southern Pacific contributed to the defeat of its political arm in the 1910 California gubernatorial election.¹⁰⁶

One internal link of The Octopus with the ethos of muckraking is Presley's poem "The Toilers." Although the text of "The Toilers" is omitted, its purpose, its implied tone, and its reception are remarkably similar to Edwin Markham's renowned muckrake poem "The Man with the Hoe." "The Toilers" "was a comment upon the social fabric, and had been inspired by the sight of a painting he [Presley] had seen in Cedarquist's

¹⁰²Theodore Roosevelt to Ray Stannard Baker, September 13, 1905), Letters, V, 25.

¹⁰³Charles Edward Russell, Bare Hands and Stone Walls Some Recollections of a Side-Line Reformer (New York, 1933), p. 126.

¹⁰⁴Filler, Crusaders, p. 115.

¹⁰⁵Russell, Bare Hands, pp. 57-58.

¹⁰⁶Mowry, California Progressives, p. 128; Spencer C. Olin, Jr., "Hiram Johnson, The Lincoln-Roosevelt League, and the Election of 1910," California Historical Society Quarterly, XLV (September, 1966), 225-240.

art gallery."¹⁰⁷ After its publication "editorials were written upon [sic] it. Special articles, in literary pamphlets, dissected its rhetoric and prosody. The phrases were quoted--were used as texts for revolutionary sermons, reactionary speeches."¹⁰⁸ Markham's poem was inspired by Jean Francois Millet's painting, "The Man with the Hoe." It "was one of the literary sensations of 1899. . . [and] called forth innumerable commentaries from preachers, statesmen, and men of letters in every part of the globe. . . ."¹⁰⁹ Norris' biographer, Franklin Walker, is certain that "in describing the composition and sale of the poem, The Toilers, by Presley, he [Norris] clearly referred to The Man with the Hoe, published by Edwin Markham. . . ."¹¹⁰

Theodore Roosevelt, perhaps unknowingly, recognized The Octopus as part of the mainstream of muckraking. Writing to Owen Wister, Roosevelt remarked that "he [Norris] has a good idea and he has some power, but he left me with the impression that his overstatement was so utterly preposterous as to deprive his work of all value. . . . More and more I have grown to have a horror of the reformer who is half charlatan and half (dude) fanatic, and ruins his own cause by

¹⁰⁷Norris, The Octopus, II, 85.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁰⁹Filler, Crusaders, p. 57.

¹¹⁰Walker, Norris, p. 261.

overstatement."¹¹¹ The significance of Roosevelt's evaluation is that The Octopus received a harsher criticism than one of the premier muckrake novels, The Jungle.¹¹²

The Octopus' link with the spirit of muckraking is more evident when Norris' social attitudes are compared with those of contemporary recognized muckrakers. Norris gave more than tacit support to the needs of society. He advised that "to know life around you you must live--if not among people, than in people."¹¹³ Norris strongly emphasized the value and needs of the common people, of "Mrs. Jones and her neighbours [sic] . . ."¹¹⁴ In The Octopus, Presley "would declare himself the champion of the People in their opposition to the Trust. He would be an apostle, a prophet, a martyr of Freedom."¹¹⁵ This attitude compares with those of Ray Stannard Baker and Upton Sinclair. Baker recalls, "I have always liked, best of all, to study minorities. Majorities may have power; minorities often have understanding. Majorities

¹¹¹Roosevelt to Owen Wister, July 20, 1901, Letters, III, 127; compare with Roosevelt's muckrake speech in Weinberg, The Muckrakers, pp. 58-59 and with Roosevelt's comment about Charles Edward Russell, in Roosevelt to John Graham Books, November 13, 1908, Letters, VI, 1343-1344.

¹¹²Roosevelt to Owen Wister, April 27, 1906, Letters, V, 229-230.

¹¹³Norris, Responsibilities, VII, 17.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 6.

¹¹⁵Norris, The Octopus, II, 109.

are commonly interested in property; minorities in ideas."¹¹⁶
 Commenting on The Jungle, Sinclair surmises that it "differs from most of the work of the realists in that it is written from the inside."¹¹⁷

A glance at the potential muckraking aspects of The Octopus indicates at least a distant relationship to the spirit of the muckraking movement. The Octopus was influenced by early muckrakers, such as Henry Demarest Lloyd, and in turn influenced later muckrakers, such as Charles Edward Russell.¹¹⁸ Exposure, attacking the monopolies, and attending society's needs are symptoms of an all too familiar muckraking syndrome that appears in The Octopus. Several dimensions of the novel obviously overshadow the vestiges of muckraking, yet their presence does not obscure the ethos of muckraking.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶Baker, American Chronicle, p. 167.

¹¹⁷Upton Sinclair, "What Life Means to Me," Cosmopolitan Magazine, XLI (October, 1906), 594; Sinclair considered at least part of The Octopus as muckraking. Sinclair, editor The Cry for Justice An Anthology of Social Protest (New York, 1915), pp. 111-116.

¹¹⁸For interesting appraisals see "The Way of a Crusading Liberal: A Composite," Filler, Crusaders, pp. 3-7 and Stanley K. Schultz, "The Morality of Politics: The Muckrakers' Vision of Democracy," The Journal of American History, LII (December, 1965), 527-547.

¹¹⁹For treatment of other aspects of Norris' novels see Billy Allen Grider, "Romantic Elements in Five Novels of Frank Norris," unpublished master's thesis, Department of English North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, 1967 and Jack O. Hazlerig, "Naturalism in the Novels of Frank Norris," unpublished master's thesis, Department of English, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, 1961.

CHAPTER III

FACT OR FICTION: THE MUSSEL SLOUGH INCIDENT

Norris claimed that he researched The Octopus as thoroughly as possible in the hope of presenting a clear and accurate picture of the struggle between the San Joaquin wheat farmers and the Southern Pacific. Although scholars have analyzed The Octopus in terms of its literary assets and liabilities, few have gone beyond a perfunctory appraisal of Norris' presentation of facts. If the facts presented in The Octopus measure favorably with the facts of nineteenth century America, then Norris' claims of honesty and objectivity can be accepted. If, however, there are discrepancies, what is a proper appraisal of The Octopus? Since both Norris and critics of The Octopus recognize the incident at Mussel Slough as the central feature of the novel, the comparison of facts will focus on this skirmish as well as the events which prompted it.¹

In The Octopus Norris explains that in the 1870's many of the settlers in Tulare County, California, secured options to buy land from the railroad. According to a railroad pamphlet, these options entitled the settlers to buy the land

¹Norris to Isaac F. Marcossou, September 13, 1900, as cited in Marcossou, Adventures in Interviewing, p. 238; Marchand, Norris A Study, p. 74; Walker, Norris, p. 242.

when the options were up at prices ranging from \$2.50 to \$10.00 per acre; improvements made by the settlers would not be considered in assessing land values. Four of the farmers, Magnus Derrick, Annixter, Broderson, and Osterman, held railroad options. Each of these men made substantial improvements on otherwise barren land. When the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad (the Southern Pacific) gave notice that the options were due, the settlers were anxious to close the deal. However, the settlers regarded the P. and S.W. with distinct animosity. To them the railroad was "the leviathan, with tentacles of steel clutching into the soil. . . ." Its president was the most hated and dreaded man on the continent. The settlers had tried to get freight rates reduced, but as Annixter always said, "You can't buck against the railroad." The Interstate Commerce Commission was no help, and, furthermore, the settlers were certain that both the I.C.C. and the Railroad Commission were subsidized by the P. and S.W.²

When the railroad published the schedule of land values, the settlers were bewildered. The prices were well above the guarantees of the railroad pamphlet. But the railroad was firm; the P. and S.W. owned the lands, a fact confirmed by the government. The settlers were weary. Tempers often flared and oaths were registered, but the railroad refused to budge. The settlers appealed to the courts, but received little satisfaction. Driven by fear and the possibility of losing

²Norris, The Octopus, I, 48, 100-101, 113.

their land, the settlers formed a league. Reluctantly, Magnus Derrick accepted the presidency. As an honorable man, Derrick did not indulge in corruption, but in any case the railroad had to be met and there was strength in numbers.³

Discreet efforts by the League to alter the railroad's position were futile. In desperation, the League's executive committee considered bribery. Magnus Derrick hesitated but eventually yielded in view of the need for action. The executive committee elected to bribe one of the three railroad commissioners in the hope of getting the oppressive rates reduced. Their efforts were negligible because the railroad had subsidized the other commissioners. Consequently, the Commission "did not lower rates in the valley of the San Joaquin." Even worse, the railroad had dismissed the settlers' appeal to the United States Supreme Court and had sold their land.⁴

The new owners repeatedly importuned the railroad to put them in possession. The old settlers were certain that the new owners were dummies for the railroad, and, consequently, the old settlers swore that they would not be driven from their land. The P. and S.W. was anxious to install the new owners but waited for a suitable opportunity. The jack-rabbit drive at Osterman's ranch gave the railroad its opportunity.

³Ibid., pp. 60, 101, 263-274.

⁴Ibid., II, 157, 201.

Delaney, one of the dummy railroad buyers, was put in possession of Annixter's place. The United States Marshall, together with S. Behrman and Ruggles, representatives of the railroad, Delaney, and about a dozen deputies, headed for Magnus Derrick's ranch. The settlers were alerted and decided to stop them at Hooven's, one of Derrick's hired hands. The settlers could gather only nine men to meet the marshall and his group. When the armed settlers arrived at Hooven's, they grouped in an irrigation ditch (Mussel Slough). Magnus cautioned them against violence. When the marshall's group approached, Magnus leaped from the ditch and advanced unarmed toward the marshall. Their dialogue quickly became quite heated. In the meantime, Delaney and two others placed themselves between Magnus and the ditch.

Till this moment, the real-estate broker, Christian, had taken no part in the argument, but had kept himself in the rear of the buggy. Now, however, he pushed forward. There was but little room for him to pass, and, as he rode by the buggy, his horse scraped his flank against the hub of the wheel. The animal recoiled sharply. . .and threw him to the ground. . . ; the incident, indistinctly seen by them [the Leaguers], was misinterpreted. . . .Hooven raised a great shout: "Hoch, der Kaiser! Hoch, der Vaterland!" With the words, he dropped to one knee, and. . .fired into the group of men around the buggy. Instantly the revolvers and rifles seemed to go off of themselves. Both sides, deputies and Leaguers, opened fire simultaneously. At first, it was nothing but a confused roar of explosions; then the roar lapsed to an irregular, quick succession of reports. . . ; then a moment's silence. . . [and] three shots at exact intervals. Then stillness.⁵

⁵Ibid., pp. 162-163, 217-218, 220, 221, 237-333.

Annixter, Osterman, Broderson, Harran Derrick, and Dabney were killed, along with Christian and Delaney. The League collapsed soon after the incident. The executive committee's bribery had astonished and shamed the League members. Magnus Derrick was forced to resign. The P. and S.W. assumed possession of all the other ranches.

The drama was over. The fight of Ranch and Railroad had been wrought out to its dreadful close. . . . Into the prosperous valley. . . that terror of steel and steam had burst. . . leaving blood and destruction in its path. . . . Yes, the Railroad had prevailed. The ranches had been seized in the tentacles of the octopus. . . .⁶

The Octopus is a compelling novel. If the substance of the novel is true, or even if it is not, the most sedate reader will likely be unnerved by the inexorable leviathan, the railroad. Under Norris' direction, the Southern Pacific became a monster of unparalleled voracity. It controlled the newspapers, the state legislature, state and even federal courts. Everything it did was suspect and contemptible. The railroad lied, cheated, drove men beyond the law and beyond themselves. The Mussel Slough incident was the climax of these factors.

The clash at Mussel Slough has its place in history, as well as the conflict between the Southern Pacific and the settlers. But did Norris embellish these facts or cling to them as he has suggested? An examination of California and the Southern Pacific during their early years, especially the 1870's, will test Norris' representation.

⁶Ibid., p. 359.

In 1865 the Southern Pacific Railroad was incorporated under the laws of California.⁷ Its owners were anxious not only to extend their railroad monopoly, but also to secure valuable government lands. In 1866 the Southern Pacific was given permission to "connect with the . . . Atlantic and Pacific Railroad. . . near the boundary line of the State of California, as they shall deem most suitable for a railroad line to San Francisco. . . ."⁸ The railroad was to receive government land in return. On January 3, 1867, in accordance with the act, the Southern Pacific filed a proposed route with the Commissioner of the General Land Office.⁹ The route ran from San Francisco in a southeasterly direction through the San Joaquin Valley and from there to the Arizona border in San Bernadino County. This route differed from the route proposed in the 1865 articles of incorporation. The earlier route ran from San Francisco south along the coast. The Southern Pacific received land grants for each of these routes, but surveying

⁷Testimony of Leland Stanford, "The United States Pacific Railway Commission Report," Senate Executive Documents, 50th Congress, 1st Session, No. 51, part 8 (Washington, 1887), p. 2934.

⁸The San Francisco Chronicle, May 12, 1880, The Visalia Weekly Delta, May 7, 1880; A Memorial and Biographical History of the Counties of Fresno, Tulare, and Kern, California (author not given) (Chicago, 1890 [?]), pp. 166-167.

⁹Stuart Daggett, Chapters on the History of the Southern Pacific (New York, 1922), p. 124; Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of California, 1860-1890, Vol. VII of The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, 39 vols. (San Francisco, 1890), pp. 594-596.

these grants was slow and tedious.¹⁰ Consequently, the Southern Pacific requested and received an extension in time and a reduction in its annual construction quota, although the entire line was to be completed by the previously set date of July 4, 1878.¹¹

On October 12, 1870, the Southern Pacific, together with four other California railroads, was incorporated into the Southern Pacific Railroad Corporation of California.¹² Before the actual consolidation took place, the Southern Pacific had difficulties with the settlers along the San Joaquin Valley. The Secretary of the Interior ruled in favor of the settlers, thereby confining the Southern Pacific to its original coastal route.¹³ However, the railroad appealed and Congress overturned the Secretary's decision. The Southern Pacific was permitted to construct its line "as near as may be on the route indicated by the map filed in 1867. . . ." ¹⁴ This was the valley route. Shortly afterward the Southern Pacific Railroad Corporation of California was chartered. Under its

¹⁰House Executive Documents, 40th Congress, 3rd Session, No. 1 (Washington, 1869), p. 397.

¹¹The Statutes at Large, Treaties, and Proclamations of the United States of America, December, 1867, to March, 1869, XV (Boston, 1869), p. 187.

¹²Daggett, The Southern Pacific, p. 123; The Public Laws of the United States of America, 1865-1866, XIV (Boston, 1866), p. 299.

¹³Bancroft, History of California, VII, 596.

¹⁴United States Statutes, XVI, 382.

rights the new corporation claimed the lands adjacent to its proposed routes, including both the coastal and the valley routes. Many of the settlers along the valley route feared that they would lose their land. Their fears were well-founded because throughout the 1870's the railroad maintained its annual construction quota and in 1879 even received praise for the quality of various parts of the line.¹⁵ Nevertheless, many of the settlers in the valley, especially those of Tulare County, remained on the land. They hoped that in time Congress or the courts would grant them preemptory rights to the land.

Although much of the San Joaquin Valley had acres of arable land, portions of it were quite desolate and arid. Touring California in 1861, William Brewer noted that the "San Joaquin . . . plain. . . [is] without trees save along the river, without water during nine or ten months of the year, and practically a desert." Brewer judged that "the soil is fertile enough, but destitute of water, save the marshes near the river and near Tulare Lake."¹⁶ In 1868 Pearson and Company, a San Francisco land company, advertised that "no part of the civilized world presents rarer inducements for settlement or occupation. . . than the area [the San Joaquin Valley] embraced in this

¹⁵House Executive Documents, 42d Congress, 2d Session, No. 1, part 5 (Washington, 1872), p. 23; House Executive Documents, 44th Congress, 1st Session, No. 1, part 5 (Washington, 1876), p. xix; House Executive Documents, 46th Congress, 2d Session, No. 1, part 5 (Washington, 1880), pp. 62-68, 72-73.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 203.

review. . . ." Potential farmers were urged to take advantage of the rich soil as well as the gratuities offered by the state legislature for certain amounts of the great staples.¹⁷

The Southern Pacific was aware of the farm potential of the San Joaquin Valley, aware even of the more desolate lands of Tulare County. The railroad urged the migrants to settle their land, often waiving payment until the government deeded the land to the railroad.¹⁸ In Tulare County potential settlers were promised that they would have preference on the land if they would occupy it. Prices were quoted at from \$2.50 to \$5.00 per acre for most of the land. Settlers were reminded that "in addition to being accorded the first privilege of purchase, they will also be protected in their improvements."¹⁹

Southern California was "perhaps the best-advertised portion of the country during the third quarter of the last [nineteenth] century."²⁰ The Southern Pacific's barrage of promises and propaganda brought a remarkable response. "There are no statistics to show how many people came to southern California as a direct result of the company's propaganda. . .",

¹⁷Pearson and Company, Brief Description of the Great San Joaquin Valley, printed pamphlet distributed by Pearson and Company (San Francisco, 1868), pp. 3, 7, 9.

¹⁸Testimony of Leland Stanford, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 2934.

¹⁹The San Francisco Chronicle, May 12, 1880; The Visalia Weekly Delta, May 7, 1880; A Memorial History of California Counties (author not given), pp. 166-167.

²⁰Glenn S. Dumke, The Boom of the Eighties in Southern California (San Marino, California, 1944), p. 29.

but the census does indicate a substantial increase during that time.²¹ The Southern Pacific developed a highly efficient propaganda machine that embraced all methods of advertising, including books, pamphlets, and newspapers.²² The Company paid the famous traveler Charles Nordhoff to sing the praises of southern California. Nordhoff observed that the San Joaquin Valley contained "the bulk of the richest farming land in the State." He was especially amazed at the amount of wheat grown in the area. "Wheat, wheat, wheat, and nothing but wheat, is what you see as you journey. . . over the plain in every direction."²³ In addition, the Southern Pacific owned or subsidized promotional agencies. "Perhaps the most ambitious type of promotional organization was the state-wide agency that operated under the name of the California Immigrant Union."²⁴ Some of the lands in Tulare County were uninviting, but the Southern Pacific did all it could to attract settlers for their land, even to the extent of finding jobs and providing free transportation.²⁵

²¹Edna Monch Parker, "The Southern Pacific Railroad and Settlement in Southern California," The Pacific Historical Review, VI (1937), 103.

²²Ibid., p. 109; John Walton Caughey, California (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1953), pp. 400-401.

²³Charles Nordhoff, California: A Book for Travellers and Settlers (New York, 1873), pp. 124, 127, 182; Dumke, The Boom of the Eighties, p. 34.

²⁴Dumke, The Boom of the Eighties, pp. 202-203.

²⁵Parker, "The Southern Pacific," p. 103.

Many settlers accepted the railroad's assurances at face value, "putting in jeopardy every dollar they had in the world; and with their own unaided labor out of a dreary waste created one of the most fertile and productive farming regions in California."²⁶ Other settlers questioned the validity of the Southern Pacific's San Joaquin Valley route. While they cultivated and improved the land, these settlers also carried strenuous appeals to the state and federal courts.²⁷ The railroad was not overly concerned with the settlers' appeals. In most instances, the Southern Pacific was content to let the settlers occupy and improve the land according to the settlers' options. This was a wise decision. Tulare County, if irrigated, could become "one teeming field of grain."²⁸ The settlers' irrigation, although judged substandard by the federal government, was nevertheless quite extensive.²⁹

^{26A} Memorial History of California Counties (author not given), pp. 166-167.

²⁷ Eugene L. Menefee and Fred A. Dodge, History of Tulare and Kings Counties California (Los Angeles, 1913), pp. 110-111.

²⁸ House Executive Documents, 40th Congress, 3rd Session, No. 1 (Washington, 1869), p. 397; during the 1870's, the Southern Pacific was a secondary problem for many wheat farmers. For an interesting discussion see Rodman Wilson Paul, "The Great California Grain War: The Grangers Challenge the Wheat King," The Pacific Historical Review, XXVII (November, 1958), 331-349.

^{29B} S. Alexander, George H. Mendell and George Davidson, "Report of the Board of Commissioners on the Irrigation of the San Joaquin, Tulare, and Sacramento Valleys of the State of California," House Executive Documents, 43rd Congress, 1st Session, No. 209 (Washington, 1874), p. 37; Menefee and Dodge, History of Tulare and Kings Counties California, pp. 192-199.

On October 20, 1877, after they received patents to 230,540.30 acres of land, the Southern Pacific regraded the land.³⁰ During the regrading many settlers in the Tulare area became apprehensive and decided to continue their appeals to the courts and to Congress concerning the railroad's right to the land.³¹ In the spring of 1878 the settlers decided to initiate an alternate solution: "under the auspices of the 'Vigilant Clubs,' a mass meeting was called. About 600 men assembled at Hanford, and there was organized the Settlers' Grand League."³² The new league was determined to seek an equitable settlement with the railroad. Shortly thereafter, the Southern Pacific notified settlers of the regraded prices. Most of the land was priced from \$27.50 to \$35.00 per acre, a reduced price, according to the railroad, but considered outrageous by the settlers.³³ The settlers appealed to the courts throughout 1879 and the League's representatives met with Leland Stanford to discuss price reductions. Although the settlers foresaw a reduction, the railroad was indifferent. In December of 1879 the federal circuit court ruled in favor of

³⁰Francis P. Farguhar, editor, William H. Brewer, Up and Down California in 1860-1864 (New Haven, 1930), pp. 202-203.

³¹Journal of the Senate of the United States of America, 45th Congress, 2d Session (Washington, 1877), pp. 60, 109.

³²The Visalia Weekly Delta, May 7, 1880.

³³Ibid.

the Southern Pacific on an important test case.³⁴ The Southern Pacific considered the decision final. If the settlers did not exercise their options, the land would be sold to the public. The settlers again appealed to Stanford. Stanford agreed to re-examine the land and to take no further judicial action until the settlers' appeal time to the United States Supreme Court expired.³⁵ In the meantime Charles Crocker, one of the railroad owners, notified the League that the Southern Pacific pamphlets in question quoted "the prices at from \$2.50 upward . . . not from \$2.50 to \$5 per acre." The settlers were indeed angry, but their anger shortly turned to rage when they learned of the regraded prices: \$5.00 to \$45.00 per acre, with the majority of the prices unchanged. After consultation the settlers informed Stanford that they saw "no prospect whatever for a settlement of existing difficulties, on a basis of less reduction than 50 per cent of your former graded prices." Stanford replied that he was disappointed in the settlers' attitude because they knew that the regraded prices were "at least 50 per cent below the actual value of the land. . . ." The settlers were nonplused. Their appeals to Congress, to the courts, and even to the railroad had been to no avail. In

³⁴Southern Pac. R. Co. v. Orton, 32 Federal Reporter, 457 (1879); see also P. L. Weaver et al v. Matilda Fairchild, 50 California Reports, 360 (1875) and Boyd v. Brinckin, 55 California Reports, 427 (1880).

³⁵Sacramento The Daily Bee, May 13, 1880.

spite of their dilemma the settlers were confident "that a wronged and outraged people will yet come to our relief, rather than see us openly robbed. . .and to prevent what appears to us. . .as VERY SERIOUS TROUBLE, which will undoubtedly result in bloodshed and outlawry. . . ."36

For the Southern Pacific this must have had a familiar, yet unwelcome, ring. As early as 1873 California farmers formally complained against the Southern Pacific. On April 26, 1873, several loosely knit farmers groups met to organize an anti-railroad party. Among the resolutions adopted was one in which the farmers vowed that they would "wage no war against the railroads and other modes of transportation only so far as their treatment of the farming interest is manifestly unjust and aggressive. . . . But when they form 'rings' or odious combinations to oppress the farming interests. . .then we may be compelled to beat our ploughshares into swords and our pruning hooks into spears, and go after the common enemy."³⁷ In spite of the intensity of these emotion-charged resolutions, they should not be accepted beyond their pretension. The leaders of the first militant farm groups were wealthier and better educated than one would suspect. Indeed, "they remind

³⁶The Visalia Weekly Delta, May 7, 1880.

³⁷Winfield J. Davis, History of Political Conventions in California, 1849-1892 (Sacramento, California, 1893), p. 322.

one of Magnus Derrick and his associates in Frank Norris' novel, The Octopus."³⁸

Although the Southern Pacific "exacted excessive rates as a prerogative of its monopoly,"³⁹ it was more interested in land. Huntington admitted that the Southern Pacific was "always after real estate."⁴⁰ Consequently, after the settlers' time expired, the Southern Pacific opened the land for sale to the public. M. D. Hart and Walter J. Crow purchased some of the land. Each of these men asked to be put in possession of the lands. The railroad company requested the occupants to get off; they refused to go. The railroad company commenced suit in ejectment against them. . . ."⁴¹ The circuit court decision in December of 1879 set the precedent in these cases, having ruled in favor of the railroad. The Southern Pacific believed that they had been more than fair to the Tulare settlers. Consequently, the railroad obtained writs of execution for the ejectment of the occupants. On May 11, 1880, United States Marshall Poole left Hanford with W. H. Clarke, land grader for the Southern Pacific, and two of the new owners, M. D. Hart and Walter J. Crow. After Poole put Hart in

³⁸Paul, "The Great California Grain War," p. 344.

³⁹Dumke, The Boom of the Eighties, p. 21.

⁴⁰Testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 30.

⁴¹The San Francisco Chronicle, May 12, 1880.

possession, all four continued on to Crow's land in the Mussel Slough district. Shortly before the group arrived, they were met by members of the League. The exact number of Leaguers was disputed, with estimates ranging from fifteen to forty.⁴² There was similar disagreement concerning the number of arms the settlers carried. Marshall Poole claimed that "each horse-man cocked a weapon."⁴³ He also asserted that he was "covered with rifles and pistols."⁴⁴ The settlers reported that there were about fifteen horsemen and "only seven of us were armed, and some of these with small pocket pistols of no account. There was not a rifle or shot gun in the crowd."⁴⁵ An eye-witness report from a settler claimed that most of the settlers were unarmed and did not provoke any of the Marshall's group. This eye-witness swore "that Crow and Hart had a complete arsenal at the former's house. The house was pierced with portholes and Crow, Hart and others had been practicing for months in expectation of a collision."⁴⁶

Marshall Poole informed the settlers that he was there to enforce the suits of ejectment. Once again, reports varied on the encounter that followed. Poole alleged that he was knocked down by one of the settler's horses and consequently that he

⁴²The Visalia Weekly Delta, May 21, 1880; The San Francisco Chronicle, May 12, 1880.

⁴³The Visalia Weekly Delta, May 14, 1880.

⁴⁴The San Francisco Chronicle, May 12, 1880.

⁴⁵The Visalia Weekly Delta, May 21, 1880.

⁴⁶The San Francisco Chronicle, May 15, 1880.

was "not certain who fired first."⁴⁷ M. D. Hart testified that "Harris [one of the settlers] had drawn his revolver on the marshall, when he suddenly whirled and shot at him (Hart)" ⁴⁸ The settlers swore that "Hartt [sic] made a motion to use his gun. . . ," paused and then fired at Harris.⁴⁹ The actual shooting lasted only a few minutes. Five settlers died, while M. D. Hart and Walter J. Crow were mortally wounded. A second group of settlers arrived shortly after and escorted Marshall Poole and W. H. Clarke, the land grader, to the nearby town of Kingston.

Reaction to the Mussel Slough incident was varied. Local papers could be expected to condemn the railroad for its part. Of three local papers, only The Visalia Weekly Delta denounced the Southern Pacific, but even here it was more by implication than by accusation.⁵⁰ The Tulare County Times gave surprisingly little coverage to the incident and was primarily neutral.⁵¹ The Fresno Weekly Expositor did little more than summarize reports from The Visalia Weekly Delta.⁵² Most of the state's leading newspapers, such as The Daily Bee of Sacramento,

⁴⁷Ibid., May 12, 1880.

⁴⁸The Visalia Weekly Delta, May 14, 1880.

⁴⁹Ibid., May 21, 1880.

⁵⁰Ibid., May 14, 1880.

⁵¹The Tulare County Times, May 15, 22, 1880.

⁵²The Fresno Weekly Expositor, May 19, 1880.

censured both the railroad and the settlers,⁵³ although The San Francisco Chronicle stressed the railroad's tenuous position. The Chronicle was certain "that all the equities were in favor of the settlers" and that "intelligent public opinion will hold them [the railroad] culpable the more the matter shall be thought over and discussed."⁵⁴ One California historian has claimed that The San Francisco Bulletin "unequivocally took the side of the Southern Pacific."⁵⁵ This appears to be an oversimplification. The Bulletin may have been partial towards the railroad, but it was discreetly so.⁵⁶

Frank Norris' version of the Mussel Slough incident is similar to that reported by California newspapers and recorded by California historians. There are minor discrepancies concerning the number of people involved in the incident and the exact setting, but these are acceptable. The major inconsistency is the attitude of the Southern Pacific. In The Octopus the railroad's role is clear--it is a machine-like leviathan that left "blood and destruction in its path. . . ." ⁵⁷ In comparison, an examination of contemporary accounts reveals that in general

⁵³Sacramento The Daily Bee, May 12-14, 1880.

⁵⁴The San Francisco Chronicle, May 12, 13, 1880.

⁵⁵Irving McKee, "Notable Memorials to Mussel Slough," The Pacific Historical Review, XVII (1948), 23.

⁵⁶The San Francisco Bulletin, May 12-14, 1880.

⁵⁷Norris, The Octopus, II, 359.

both the railroad and the farmers were condemned for their parts in the clash. Legally the Southern Pacific was on hallowed ground, but the clash was more damaging to the railroad because "all the equities were in favor of the settlers."⁵⁸ Norris exploited this sentiment in The Octopus. While his account of the Mussel Slough incident is fairly representative, his version of the Southern Pacific's attitude during this time is exaggerated.

⁵⁸The San Francisco Chronicle, May 12, 1880.

CHAPTER IV

THE POLITICAL POWER OF THE SOUTHERN PACIFIC

By the time the Mussel Slough incident occurred, Californians were saturated with Southern Pacific influence. Norris suggested such a condition in The Octopus. The Southern Pacific was accused of corrupting the state legislature and the state railroad commissions. The railroad's vice-president, Collis P. Huntington, was similarly charged as the head of the powerful national Southern Pacific lobby. The extent of these charges should be examined.¹

According to The Octopus, the California state legislature was a puppet whose strings were pulled by the Southern Pacific.² Although this is a valid generalization in terms of an end result, it is insufficient in view of the contributing factors. In the decade preceding the Mussel Slough incident, 1870-1880, the Southern Pacific's success in the legislature depended on the interaction of several variables. Two unsolicited elements of the Southern Pacific political machine from 1871 to 1876 were the local interests of the city of San Francisco and portions of southern California.

¹Norris, The Octopus, I, 100-101. Huntington was the model for Shelgrim, the president of the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad in The Octopus.

²Ibid.

Much of the Central Pacific's (Southern Pacific) success in California rested with San Francisco. Initially some San Francisco commercial interests opposed the Central Pacific because they believed it would jeopardize their city's prosperity in favor of Sacramento, while competing transportation and telegraph companies operating out of San Francisco feared the rivalry of the Central Pacific.³ Although San Franciscans reluctantly voted a subsidy to the Central Pacific, they soon realized the immense benefits their city would reap because of the railroad.⁴ Consequently San Francisco civic and political groups blunted any Central Pacific efforts to receive an alternate Pacific terminus, while San Francisco state representatives opposed reductions in railroad aid in the 1871-1872 legislature.⁵ The unwritten alliance between San Francisco and the Central Pacific was upset briefly in 1872 when the Central Pacific tried to obtain Yerba Buena, a government owned island situated between Oakland and San Francisco, for use as an alternate terminus to San Francisco.⁶

³Ward Merner McAfee, "Local Interests and Railroad Regulation in Nineteenth Century California," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of History, Stanford University, Palo Alto, California, 1965, p. 11; testimony of Leland Stanford, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 2535; George T. Clark, Leland Stanford (Stanford University, California, 1931), p. 203.

⁴McAfee, "Local Interests," p. 15.

⁵Bancroft, History of California, VII, 581, 685-687.

⁶Testimony of Leland Stanford, "Pacific Railway Report," pp. 3170, 3613; Clark, Leland Stanford, pp. 313-326; Lewis B. Lesley, "The Entrance of the Santa Fe Railroad into California," The Pacific Historical Review, VIII (1939), 90.

San Franciscans deeply resented this challenge to their lifeline. Fortunately for the Bay City, the infamous Credit Mobilier scandal handicapped the Central Pacific's political arm, thereby effectively incapacitating its normally efficient Washington lobby. Although Leland Stanford claimed foul play by some San Francisco citizens, the Bay City retained its status as the lone Pacific terminus of the Central Pacific.⁷ Backed by a resurgence of anti-railroad sentiment, the 1873-1874 legislature ended the era of local subsidies in California.⁸ Additional anti-railroad measures gained more appreciable acceptance in this legislature, but most San Francisco representatives continued their opposition to such measures.⁹ Although strong railroad regulation was the most popular political vehicle for candidates to the 1875-1876 legislature, San Francisco representatives refused to support legislation inimical to their civic interests.¹⁰

From 1871 to 1876 local interests, especially those in southern California, vied intensely for railroad service. "Each locality was anxious to force capital 'out of one channel into another' in order to gain a commercial advantage over its rivals."¹¹ Impatient southern Californians voted munificent

⁷Testimony of Leland Stanford, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 3170.

⁸McAfee, "Local Interests," p. 24.

⁹Ibid., pp. 29-30, 188-190.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 75-79.

¹¹Ibid., p. 17.

local subsidies to the Central Pacific and their state representatives opposed anti-railroad legislation.¹² Although some citizens regretted it later, Los Angeles County offered the Central Pacific substantial benefits in exchange for transcontinental railroad service.¹³ Other more isolated areas of southern California similarly opposed state regulation and offered local subsidies to the railroad in order to increase their local prosperity and "to break the grip of the 'octopus' on their county--the 'octopus' being the city of San Francisco."¹⁴

San Diego was particularly stymied by the two octopuses, the Central Pacific and San Francisco. The originally projected southern transcontinental railroad, the Texas and Pacific, designated San Diego as the western terminus.¹⁵ Because the Central Pacific's existing routes veered far north of the city, San Diegans aligned themselves with the interests of Thomas Scott's Texas and Pacific Railroad, a move that increased the rivalry between San Diego and San Francisco.¹⁶

¹²Ibid., pp. 188-193; testimony of Leland Stanford, "Pacific Railway Report," pp. 2731-2733.

¹³Richard W. Barsness, "Railroads and Los Angeles: The Quest for a Deep-Water Port," Southern California Quarterly, XLVII (December, 1965), 379-380; J. M. Guinn, "Pioneer Railroads of Southern California," Historical Society of Southern California, VIII (1911), 188-192.

¹⁴McAfee, "Local Interests," p. 102.

¹⁵United States Statutes, XVI, 574.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 579.

Unfortunately for San Diego, Central Pacific's president Leland Stanford dutifully reminded San Franciscans of the impending challenge to their economic interests, "a blow from which she never would have recovered."¹⁷ In the struggle between the Central Pacific and the Texas and Pacific, San Diegans supported "any measure which would weaken Tom Scott's opponent."¹⁸ However, when Scott's Texas and Pacific failed in its 1876 bid for a vital federal subsidy, "San Diego was forced to turn elsewhere for a transcontinental railroad connection."¹⁹ That connection did not arrive until 1885.²⁰

The pattern of railroad support in California shifted dramatically in 1877. Waves of the depression which had rocked the nation in the early 1870's finally shook California in 1877. A barrage of attendant financial problems slowed local railroad construction in California.²¹ This, along with a surging labor movement centered in San Francisco and mounting discontent about the vast amount of railroad political involvement, spelled trouble for the Central Pacific.²²

¹⁷Leland Stanford, The San Francisco Chronicle, May 19, 1875, as cited in Clark, Leland Stanford, p. 337.

¹⁸McAfee, "Local Interests," p. 121.

¹⁹Lewis B. Lesley, "A Southern Transcontinental Railroad into California: Texas and Pacific versus Southern Pacific, 1865-1885," The Pacific Historical Review, V (1936), 60.

²⁰Lesley, "The Entrance of the Santa Fe Railroad into California," 96; Dumke, The Boom of the Eighties, pp. 132-127.

²¹Daggett, The Southern Pacific, pp. 169-180.

²²McAfee, "Local Interests," p. 145; Bancroft, History of California, VII, 689.

Usually reliable Los Angeles and San Bernadino had their rail connections by this time and consequently aligned themselves with San Diego in support of both regulatory measures for the Central Pacific and favorable legislation for the potentially competitive Texas and Pacific.²³ The labor drive against wealth and corporations was devoid of "high principles and influential leadership," yet it had strength in urban San Francisco and in principal area localities.²⁴ Remarkably, however, the Central Pacific politicians used these impending disasters to their advantage. Fear of communism and attacks on property drove men to the railroad and away from the often rabid ideology of the labor leader Dennis Kearney.²⁵ What had appeared to be a favorable milieu for strict railroad regulation was modified by this action and by shrewd political pressure as evinced by the passage of the vacuous Hart bill to regulate railroads.²⁶

As has been shown, much of the Central Pacific's success from 1871 to 1876 depended on the power of local interests. During this time the Central Pacific also relied on its own state political machine. Leland Stanford personally headed the railroad's California operation. The Central Pacific retained

²³McAfee, "Local Interests," pp. 121-123.

²⁴Bancroft, History of California, VII, 689, 359.

²⁵McAfee, "Local Interests," p. 140.

²⁶Ibid., p. 132.

a battery of counsellors in San Francisco and Sacramento, with William B. Carr and Stephen T. Gage as chief troubleshooters for the railroad.²⁷ Carr, whose duty was "to look after legislation at Sacramento," endured a reputation as "that terrible man. . .who presides a hideous nightmare over the dreams of the Bulletin, Call, Sacramento Union and we don't know how many other leading journals."²⁸ Gage, who doubled as Stanford's political manager and legislative whip, gave a qualified "yes" to a Pacific Railway Commissioner's query as to whether or not he had used money to influence legislation in California.²⁹

In most instances the state senate proved to be the most malleable arm of California government. During the 1870's the power of its forty-odd members could be managed through a combination of railroad-controlled senators and those senators whose local interests dictated favorable railroad legislation. At least ten senators were known to have close ties with the railroad. Any senators who wavered were subject to the threat of economic extinction for their county. To combat the feverish drive for railroad regulation in the 1875-1876 legislature, the Central Pacific expanded its field of action to include the assembly as well. For example, several of the assemblymen

²⁷Testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 23.

²⁸Ibid., p. 3731; Kern County Weekly Courier, May 9, 1874, as cited in Clark, Leland Stanford, p. 335.

²⁹Clark, Leland Stanford, p. 431; testimony of Stephen T. Gage, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 3267.

were treated to an elegant excursion complete with exquisite cuisine and superb lodging and relaxation.³⁰

The railroad met its sternest test in the legislature of 1877-1878 and consequently was forced into complex maneuvers beyond mere bribery. "As a political force in the legislature, the company could, by logrolling and skillful bargaining, use the concentrated power of those whom they did control to create majorities to block railroad regulation and pass desired legislation."³¹ The result was a legislature infamous for the domineering influence of the railroad.

Curiously enough this "legislature most obviously dominated by railroad power during the 1870's was the one to pass a constitutional enabling act."³² However, as fear of Kearneyism abated, the specter of the Central Pacific returned. Agitation for changes in the state constitution had simmered throughout the 1870's. The chief exponents of this drive, the Grangers and the Workingmen's Party (labor party), represented the most populous regions of the state.³³ Corruption in government, railroad monopoly and land abuses were grievances shared

³⁰McAfee, "Local Interests," pp. 70, 11, 114.

³¹Ibid., p. 141.

³²Ibid., p. 143.

³³Dudley T. Moorhead, "Sectionalism and the California Constitution of 1879," The Pacific Historical Review, XII (September, 1943), 287-293; Davis, Political Conventions, pp. 390-392.

by most delegates to the constitutional convention of 1878-1879.³⁴ The Central Pacific was unable to curb anti-railroad sentiment in the convention because "the framework of the convention simply worked against corruption."³⁵ It was too large, too intent, and too well covered by the press.

Although newspapers across the state generally opposed the changes, the agricultural sections of the state had enough votes to pass the new constitution.³⁶ For the Central Pacific the constitution's most salient feature was a three-man elected railroad commission with explicitly strict regulatory powers.³⁷ To combat this the railroad became more overtly involved in politics. In the case of the new commission, "they [the Central Pacific] probably resorted to the direct use of money to accomplish their ends."³⁸ In The Octopus Frank Norris alleged that the state railroad commission was subsidized by the Central Pacific.³⁹ Reference here is to the 1880 commission, but there is evidence that the Central

³⁴Moorehead, "Sectionalism," p. 291; Bancroft, History of California, VII, 353.

³⁵McAfee, "Local Interests," pp. 145-146.

³⁶Bancroft, History of California, VII, 400; Moorhead, "Sectionalism" p. 293; Theodore H. Hittell, History of California, Vol. IV of 4 vols. (San Francisco, 1898), 638-639.

³⁷McAfee, "Local Interests," pp. 147-155; Daggett, The Southern Pacific, pp. 184-188.

³⁸Daggett, The Southern Pacific, p. 199.

³⁹Norris, The Octopus, I, 100-101.

Pacific infiltrated previous railroad regulatory bodies. In 1876 a State Board of Transportation Commission had been established with stringent guidelines on rates and fares.⁴⁰ However, the Central Pacific refused to submit the required reports; the Commission, acting more like the Central Pacific's lackey, could not force them.⁴¹ In 1878, as a result of the Hart bill, this commission was replaced by a single commissioner, but he proved no more effective than his predecessor.⁴² Through the 1878-1879 constitutional convention, the public demanded substantive railroad reform. It came in the form of a three-man elected railroad commission that was thought to be foolproof, principally because "the legislature would be bound to enforce the stringent railroad regulations as part of the state's fundamental law."⁴³ The first group of commissioners were committed to a rate reduction, but "the reports of the majority were filled with apologies for the existing rates. . . dissertations upon the complexity of the railroad problem, the need for patient investigation and study. . . and the iniquity of yielding to popular clamor."⁴⁴

⁴⁰McAfee, "Local Interests," pp. 69-74; Daggett, The Southern Pacific, p. 183; Bancroft, History of California, VII, 626-627.

⁴¹Testimony of Leland Stanford, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 2573; Hittell, History of California, IV, 585.

⁴²Hittell, History of California, IV, 590.

⁴³McAfee, "Local Interests," p. 151.

⁴⁴S. E. Moffett, "The Railroad Commission of California. A Study in Irresponsible Government," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, VI (November, 1895), 471.

Newspapers were apprehensive and sensitive about the new commissioners. The San Francisco Chronicle noted that "the unjust and arbitrary system of discrimination so long complained of. . .has not been modified to the slightest degree."⁴⁵ The Stockton Mail complained that "they [the commissioners] will run things to suit themselves, and it will be very strange if they don't at the same time incidentally run things to suit the railroad company."⁴⁶ The Kern County Gazette was gravely concerned over what it felt were "ominous indications that its [the Commission's] allegiance is to the railroad company."⁴⁷ In an attempt to embellish the Commission's stature, "the railroad raised its grain rates to enable the commission to lower them to their former levels."⁴⁸ A later investigation of the Commission revealed that none of the three commissioners, Joseph S. Cone, Charles J. Beerstecher, and George Stoneman, had become a public hero by virtue of his "attempt to accomplish something in the way of regulating freights and fares. . . ."⁴⁹

A recent critic of the California railroad commissions has raised an objection to this traditional view of the

⁴⁵The San Francisco Chronicle, May 4, 1880.

⁴⁶The Stockton Mail, May 5, 1880, as cited in The San Francisco Chronicle, May 8, 1880.

⁴⁷Kern County Gazette, May 8, 1880, as cited in The San Francisco Chronicle, May 10, 1880.

⁴⁸McAfee, "Local Interests," p. 159.

⁴⁹Hittell, History of California, IV, 677; Daggett, The Southern Pacific, pp. 189-198.

commissions. Gerald Nash contends that the railroad commissions "were not mere creatures of the powerful railroad corporation," but rather were the victims of inexperience and the pressure of many groups who sought transportation advantages. Nash agrees that the first commission, in 1880, left a "barren record," but he objects to what he considers the stereotyped conclusion that indicts the commission for abetting "a contest between the forces of wickedness and virtue." In attempting to recast the view of commissions, Nash explains that "their lack of immediate success was due more to the complexity of new difficulties which confronted them than to malfeasance." The point is well-taken but implicit in Nash's thesis is the preponderant, and often collusive, influence of the Southern Pacific on the commission. That "successive Commissions [after 1880] initiated cycles of action, obstruction, reaction and inaction," is acceptable, but the subordination of the railroad's role is not. Nash's estimate of the strength of other interest groups fails to recognize their principal motivation--the Southern Pacific. Rather than subordinate the Southern Pacific's influence on the California railroad commissions, Nash's revisionist view achieves the opposite effect. It substantiates the Southern Pacific's reputation as the majority stockholder of the early California railroad commissions.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Gerald D. Nash, "The California Railroad Commission, 1876-1911," Southern California Quarterly, XLIV (December, 1962), 287-305.

There was no known hierarchy in the Southern Pacific national lobby except for Collis P. Huntington and his chief agent in Washington, General Richard Franchot.⁵¹ However, there is sufficient evidence, especially from 1871 to 1877, that associates several individuals with the Huntington lobby.⁵²

Between March, 1871, and December, 1877, the California Congressional delegation had several Huntington supporters. From March, 1871, to March, 1873, three of the five-man California delegation had definite Central Pacific connections. Senator Cornelius Cole was an original purchaser of stock in the Central Pacific Railroad Company of California⁵³ and "in former years in Sacramento. . . had been in close political fellowship with Huntington. . . ." ⁵⁴ Representative Aaron A. Sargent was the Central Pacific's most reliable Congressman. During his first term he vigorously supported Pacific railroad legislation⁵⁵ "and by all his subsequent acts in Washington. . .

⁵¹Testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 23.

⁵²Between 1871 and 1877 the Southern Pacific lobby received nationwide attention because of its Congressional battle with Thomas Scott's Texas and Pacific lobby. For information concerning this confrontation see C. Vann Woodward, Reunion and Reaction (Boston, 1951), pp. 68-185 passim.

⁵³Oscar Lewis, The Big Four (New York, 1938), pp. 22, 25.

⁵⁴Cornelius Cole, "Memoirs," pp. 179-180, as cited in Daggett, The Southern Pacific, p. 47.

⁵⁵The Congressional Globe, 37th Congress, 2d Session (Washington, 1862), pp. 1594-1598.

proved himself a statesman after Huntington's heart."⁵⁶ In 1872 Sargent affirmed his allegiance in the Yerba Buena issue.⁵⁷ This San Francisco Bay Area island was government property, and the Central Pacific hoped to use it as a central terminus for the San Francisco-Oakland area.⁵⁸ San Francisco had always been a hotbed of opposition to the Central Pacific,⁵⁹ and this issue was no different. The city contended that the Central Pacific's real purpose was "to rear up a rival city on the opposite side of the bay that would be in substance owned and its concerns managed by the railroad company. . . ." ⁶⁰ Sargent skirted the issue and countered these claims with the hollow appeals for commercial opportunities afforded by the railroad.⁶¹ In a heated exchange between Sargent and Representative Samuel A. Cox of New York, Cox claimed that he did "not represent any bank, [but only] . . . the property and the people of the United States now sought to be despoiled by this species of legislation."⁶² Another Californian, Representative John M.

⁵⁶Lewis, The Big Four, p. 243.

⁵⁷See Chapter IV, pp. 56-57.

⁵⁸Hittell, History of California, IV, 490-491.

⁵⁹Lewis, The Big Four, pp. 354-355, 362.

⁶⁰Hittell, History of California, IV, 490-491.

⁶¹The Congressional Globe, 42d Congress, 2d Session (Washington, 1872), p. 2692; Lewis H. Haney, A Congressional History of Railways in the United States, 1850-1887 (Madison, Wisconsin, 1910), p. 150 for comment on this type of argument.

⁶²The Congressional Globe, 42d Congress, 2d Session (Washington, 1872), p. 2697.

Coghlan, joined Sargent in support of the Central Pacific. Coghlan also assailed the Daily Alta California, one of the Yerba Buena project's opponents, as "a great commercial paper, one that can be bought cheaper to do dirtier actions than any other paper in the United States."⁶³ Coghlan's association with the Central Pacific is vague, but his defense of the Yerba Buena bill is suspect.

The 1873-1875 California delegation was stronger and more vigorous than its predecessor. Former Representative Aaron A. Sargent, established as "an ally of Collis Huntington's railroad octopus. . . ,"⁶⁴ became Senator in 1873. Two new representatives, John K. Luttrell and Horace Page, were Huntington men. In 1876 Luttrell was an outspoken critic of the Texas Pacific and a staunch supporter of the Central Pacific. As observed by The Arizona Sentinel, "Luttrell launches out against the Texas Pacific Railway in grand style. . . . He comes out boldly for the Central Pacific."⁶⁵ Luttrell opposed federal subsidy for the Texas Pacific and signed a House minority report opposing federal subsidy to the Texas Pacific.⁶⁶ Luttrell's minority response was significant

⁶³Ibid., p. 2700; ibid., p. 2698 for Representative Cox's comment on the honesty of the Daily Alta California.

⁶⁴Matthew Josephson, The Politicos 1865-1890 (New York, 1938), p. 92.

⁶⁵Yuma The Arizona Sentinel, May 27, 1876, p. 2.

⁶⁶House Reports, 44th Congress, 2d Session, No. 139, part 2 (Washington, 1877).

because, at the time, the Southern Pacific-Texas Pacific feud was at such a point that the combatting lobbies were bound to show themselves.⁶⁷ Horace Page's position was not clear, except that Huntington considered that "it would be a misfortune to California not to have him in Congress."⁶⁸

The 1875-1877 California delegation contained some of Huntington's most avid supporters. Sargent, Luttrell, and Page were joined by Peter D. Wigginton. Huntington was cautious about Wigginton, but judged him as "a good fellow and. . . growing every day."⁶⁹ The remaining California representative, William Piper, obviously offended Huntington, as demonstrated by Huntington's reference to Piper as "a damned hog. . . ."⁷⁰ Huntington's aversion to Piper was so strong that Piper was not re-elected for a second term.⁷¹ Piper's defeat can be attributed to Huntington, for although Huntington denied using "any money of the Central Pacific to defeat a member of Congress,"⁷² he gave his West Coast aide, David Colton, instructions to

⁶⁷Ibid., part 1 for an example of the views of the opposing lobby.

⁶⁸Lewis, The Big Four, p. 216.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.; testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 3704.

⁷¹Lewis, The Big Four, p. 317; Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1961 (Washington, 1961), p. 1461.

⁷²Testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 3741.

defeat Piper.⁷³ Piper's replacement was Horace David, whose later appointment to the Board of Trustees of Stanford University marks him as a Huntington man.⁷⁴

As might be expected, Huntington had considerable influence among politicians outside of California. Some of these men were openly allied with Huntington, while others were more discreetly linked with him. Senator John Gordon of Georgia was a favorite of Huntington's and rightly so. In 1876 when Thomas Scott's Texas Pacific lobby was entertaining Southern politicians, Huntington suggested that Gordon "get a party of. . .25 Southern members of Congress to to [sic] go out to Cal., and over the line of the S. P., and see what we have done and our ability to do."⁷⁵ Gordon's loyalty was evident in February of 1877 when he spoke in favor of his bill on repayment of the Central Pacific debt. Gordon's bill called for adherence to the principles of earlier government aid to the Central Pacific. Such adherence, Gordon contended, was "good faith on the part of this Government toward its citizens. . . ."⁷⁶ The citizens Gordon referred to were, in fact, the Central Pacific because earlier government aid to the Central

⁷³Ibid., p. 3721.

⁷⁴Biographical Directory, p. 783.

⁷⁵Testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 3741.

⁷⁶The Congressional Record, 44th Congress, 2d Session, Appendix (Washington, 1877), p. 109.

Pacific was liberal and repayment terms were lenient.⁷⁷ Gordon was lugubrious and yet somewhat ironic in his plea that "the proudest character in Holy Writ. . . is 'he that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.'"⁷⁸ In 1877 such an appeal was trite,⁷⁹ and Gordon's bill was justifiably defeated. Huntington himself identified Gordon as one of his men when he mentioned to David Colton that "Scott went to Washington to get . . . one of our men off and one of his on. . . . Gordon of Ga. was taken off and H. Bogy of Mo. put on."⁸⁰

Senator John P. Jones of Nevada had substantial mining interests and, consequently, the need of a railroad.⁸¹ Jones owned a railroad, the Los Angeles and Independence Road, until he sold it to Huntington. Jones' lawyer claimed that the only money transaction between Huntington and Jones was for the railroad.⁸² Oddly enough, the sale came at a time when Huntington expressed a desire to have Jones "help us with our sinking fund bill in Congress. . . ."⁸³ Huntington also hoped that by

⁷⁷United States Statutes, XII, 489-498; ibid., Vol. XIII, pp. 356-365.

⁷⁸The Congressional Record, 44th Congress, 2d Session, Appendix (Washington, 1877), p. 110.

⁷⁹Haney, Congressional History of Railways, pp. 100-101.

⁸⁰Testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 3744.

⁸¹Josephson, The Politicos, p. 444.

⁸²Testimony of John P. Jackson, "Pacific Railway Report," pp. 3853-3854.

⁸³Testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 3746.

relieving Jones of the financially burdensome railroad that "he [Jones] would have more time to attend to his public duties, one of which would be to kill this Texas Pacific subsidy bill."⁸⁴

Representative John M. Kasson of Iowa strongly denied having been in the pay of the Central Pacific.⁸⁵ The Pacific Railroad Commission accepted Kasson's affidavit and agreed that no investigation was necessary. However, two incriminating situations involving Kasson remain unresolved. Although Huntington and Kasson disclaimed the correspondence between Huntington and David Colton that mentioned Kasson, the highly respected railroad historian Stuart Daggett cites this letter as fact.⁸⁶ In addition, Kasson signed the House minority report that opposed federal subsidy to the Texas Pacific.⁸⁷

Although other politicians participated in the Huntington lobby, evidence is scarce and circumstantial. Thomas M. Norwood represented Georgia in the United States Senate from 1871 to 1877.⁸⁸ In June, 1878, Norwood received a letter from Huntington enlisting his counsel to explain matters "to members of

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 3748.

⁸⁵Testimony of John M. Kasson, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 3852.

⁸⁶Daggett, The Southern Pacific, p. 203.

⁸⁷House Reports, 44th Congress, 2d Session, No. 139, part 2 (Washington, 1877).

⁸⁸Biographical Directory, p. 1396.

Congress about what we were doing."⁸⁹

Norwood explained that his duty involved discussing "the question among the people of the South as to the relative merits of the two roads; in other words, to advocate the building of the Southern Pacific Railroad."⁹⁰ As an ex-Congressman from both Mississippi and California, William Gwin was employed by Huntington to explain "some of our matters. . . to his Southern friends."⁹¹ Senator Roscoe Conkling of New York was hired "from time to time for arguing cases in the Supreme Court of the United States."⁹² Conkling also joined Senator Gordon of Georgia in opposition to a bill that would have forced quicker repayment of the Central Pacific government loans.⁹³ California Governor William Irwin's soft approach to the railroad issue in his state branded him as a Huntington man.⁹⁴ Huntington appraised Irwin's inaugural message as "well enough, although not such a one on R. R. matters as I expected."⁹⁵

⁸⁹Testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 4028; testimony of Thomas M. Norwood, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 3894.

⁹⁰Testimony of Thomas M. Norwood, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 3894.

⁹¹Biographical Directory, p. 984; testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 3728.

⁹²Ibid., p. 2950.

⁹³Ibid., p. 2951.

⁹⁴Hittell, History of California, IV, 568.

⁹⁵Testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 3729.

In the midst of the Texas Pacific-Central Pacific struggle, Huntington suggested that "it is of much importance that we have some rights in Arizona. . . . We should not be known in it, but should be sure that we have the control, in black and white, before they become law." Shortly after, Huntington urged Colton to "have Safford [Arizona territorial governor] call the Legislature together and grant such charters as we want at a cost of say \$25,000? . . . It would be worth much money to us."⁹⁶

Federal officials were not immune to Huntington's overtures. Theophilus French, the United States Auditor of Railroad Accounts in 1878, was employed by the Central Pacific from 1882 to 1885.⁹⁷

The Huntington lobby embraced all political levels, including the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House. The President of the Senate between 1871 and 1873, Schuyler Colfax, was apparently beyond reproach.⁹⁸ However, the erstwhile "'Christian Statesman'. . . ." was contaminated with the Credit Mobilier scandal.⁹⁹ The Speaker of the House, "the bottleneck of all legislative traffic. . . ." ¹⁰⁰ was

⁹⁶Ibid., pp. 3722, 3724.

⁹⁷Testimony of Leland Stanford, "Pacific Railway Report," pp. 2946-2947.

⁹⁸Josephson, The Politicos, p. 53.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 183.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 110.

James G. Blaine of Maine. Blaine's career as House Speaker was often brilliant, but it was unfortunately tainted by the Credit Mobilier. Blaine's position was often vague,¹⁰¹ especially since "the value of each appointment to oversee appropriations or railroad legislation must be measured against a thousand thrusts and pressures of lobbyists and party factions."¹⁰² Evidence of Huntington's rapport with Blaine is meager, yet the relative merits of the Texas Pacific bill indicate that there was a workable relationship.¹⁰³ Blaine continued as Speaker of the House in the 1873-1875 Congress. There was no need to pressure the new President of the Senate, Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, for Wilson favored aid to the railroads irrespective of pressure groups.¹⁰⁴

Huntington's influence in the House swelled in December of 1875 with the election of Michael C. Kerr of Indiana as Speaker. Shortly after Kerr's election Huntington suggested that "the vote in the House the other day will do much good in helping Speaker Kerr make up the R.R. and land committees in such a way that they will not be likely to report in favor of any subsidies. . . ."¹⁰⁵ Kerr's value to Huntington was shortlived,

¹⁰¹Ibid., pp. 184-185; see also pp. 209, 211 for comparison.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁰³Haney, Congressional History of Railways, chart opposite p. 152.

¹⁰⁴Josephson, The Politicos, p. 55.

¹⁰⁵Testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," pp. 3728-3729.

however, for Kerr died in August of 1876. Kerr's successor was his former opponent for House Speaker, Samuel J. Randall of Pennsylvania. Thomas Scott supported Randall's candidacy, but it was a tenuous alliance in view of Randall's conservatism, especially regarding subsidies.¹⁰⁶

Huntington's influence in the Senate expanded after the hectic 1876 election. The Congressional struggle over the Texas Pacific in the spring of 1877 reduced Scott's chances for a federal subsidy, yet he was optimistic because President-elect Hayes realized the need to satisfy Southern demands for internal improvements.¹⁰⁷ Hayes' vice-president and President of the Senate, William A. Wheeler of New York, supported railroad aid, but his prior allegiance was more often to Huntington than to Scott. Although Wheeler, as a House member, sponsored an amendment that in effect became the Texas Pacific bill, the bill was modest in comparison with other Pacific railroad bills.¹⁰⁸ In addition, in the Yerba Buena controversy it was Wheeler who introduced legislation that favored the Central Pacific's views.¹⁰⁹ At times Wheeler's oratory was deceptive,

¹⁰⁶Woodward, Reunion and Reaction, p. 97; for details concerning the 1875 Speaker contest see Albert V. House, "The Speakership Contest of 1875: Democratic Response to Power," The Journal of American History, LII (September, 1965), 252-274.

¹⁰⁷T. Harry Williams, editor, Hayes The Diary of a President 1875-1881 (New York, 1964), pp. 68, 74.

¹⁰⁸Haney, Congressional History of Railways, chart opposite p. 152.

¹⁰⁹The Congressional Globe, 42d Congress, 2d Session (Washington, 1872), p. 2691.

but a positive attitude toward the Central Pacific can be detected.¹¹⁰

Huntington's fiscal policy toward his lobby sustained the Central Pacific throughout Reconstruction. Central Pacific records indicate a total of almost two million dollars expended through unexplained vouchers from 1869 to 1880. Coincidentally, these vouchers often peaked during crucial legislative periods.¹¹¹ Although Huntington denied that he bought votes, he confessed a belief in the sanctity of bribery.¹¹² Such a creed, coupled with his ambiguous explanations of the vouchers, cast considerable doubt on his testimony.¹¹³ Huntington did admit that his chief agent in Washington, General Richard Franchot, received an annual salary ranging from thirty to forty thousand dollars.¹¹⁴ Records also indicate that Franchot operated with a sizeable expense account, an account through which Franchot often lavished champagne, cigars, and dinners on important politicians.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 2702.

¹¹¹Call for Vouchers, "Pacific Railway Report," pp. 2953-2955.

¹¹²Testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 3735; Collis P. Huntington, "Huntington Manuscript," p. 80, as cited in Daggett, The Southern Pacific, p. 211.

¹¹³Testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," pp. 23-26, 34-39, 3701.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 23.

¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 38, 3738.

Huntington's testimony and the evidence presented by the Pacific Railroad Commission were often so contradictory as to be amusing. Huntington emphasized that the Central Pacific never used money to influence legislation, but only "to bring proper influences to bear to get votes. . . ." In the same vein Huntington admitted that he would have given Franchot ten thousand dollars without an account for it because Franchot "was of the strictest integrity, and as pure a man as ever lived. . . ." This was the norm, or more precisely the pattern, that Huntington pursued in financial matters. He parcelled out huge sums of money ostensibly without knowledge of where it went. Such a procedure was in keeping with Huntington's unctuous slogan, "Trust all in all Or trust not at all. . . ."116

Huntington's formula for success blended money, initiative, and pressure with morality and public interest as afterthoughts. In dealing with politically valuable individuals, Huntington uniformly expressed a belief in the integrity of his actions. "We wanted to inform every member [of Congress] that had a vote in regard to what we wanted, and that it was useful to the public and was proper and right to do." On matters of legislation crucial to the Central Pacific, Huntington's probity was particularly notable as he worked "to get good men on the committees." "I always told our people to keep on "high

116 Ibid., pp. 3715, 35-36.

ground,' . . .to fix them all as well as they could, but never to buy a vote." During the Texas Pacific-Central Pacific feud, Huntington set the pace by staying "in Washington two days to fix up R.R. committee in the Senate."¹¹⁷

Although Huntington found the term lobbyist distasteful, he, nevertheless, outlined and defended a system that would best be described as a lobby.¹¹⁸ He confidently disclosed that he retained men in Washington "to influence members of Congress by giving them good and solid reasons to show that what I wanted done was in the interest of the people."¹¹⁹

On his own Huntington

would sometimes catch a man at Washington, and would say, "I should like to have you speak to Congressman So-and-So, or to Senator So-and-So." Sometimes he would say, "I will do that." I might say, "We should like to have you stay over." Some would stay over, from good nature, while others might say, "I want the cash." Of course I do not refer to the members of Congress.¹²⁰

Any Congressmen who resisted Huntington in Washington were often approached by their constituents who invariably suggested that certain legislation "was in the interest of the people, and was a thing that they could not afford to vote against." Still another procedure involved Congressmen who accepted generous lawyer's fees. Huntington unhesitatingly employed

¹¹⁷Testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," pp. 3699, 3753, 3735, 3743.

¹¹⁸Ibid., pp. 3730-3731.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 3706.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 3763.

"the best man available . . . whether he was a member of Congress or not."¹²¹

The Pacific Railroad Commission agreed "that a large portion of the unexplained vouchers . . . was used for the purpose of influencing legislation and of preventing the passage of measures deemed to be hostile to the interests of the company. . . ."¹²² Huntington vigorously defended his actions with a mixture of vested rights, public trust, and morality.¹²³ However, a consistent weakness appeared in the juxtaposition of might and right. This was particularly evident in Huntington's attitude toward Scott and the Texas Pacific

I have been working for the last two months to get a party of, say, 25 Southern members of Congress to go [sic] out to Cal., and over the line of the S. P., and see what we have done and our ability to do. Of course I want no one to go except the best men of the South; men that will go for the right as they understand it, and not as Tom Scott or somebody else understands it.¹²⁴

Huntington further contended that "every tax-payer in the United States" was against a subsidy to the Texas Pacific, but he also admitted that "it would have been very injurious to the Central Pacific." Often when under intense questioning

¹²¹Ibid., pp. 3732, 3698.

¹²²Report of the Commission, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 84.

¹²³Testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," pp. 3732, 3741, 3776.

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 3741.

Huntington parried accusations with innuendoes reflecting on Congressional integrity: "what annoyed me most was that the representatives of the people in Washington should fail to recognize the great work that we had done for the country." Huntington's assertion that Congressmen who opposed him did so "to advance their own selfish interests" was bold considering that he himself sponsored numerous railroad excursions for Congressmen.¹²⁵

Part of Huntington's defense before the Pacific Railroad Commission hinged on his denial of having written several letters to David Colton, his West Coast factotum. The Commission used copies of these letters and Huntington's lawyers often rejected them as such.¹²⁶ All too often, however, Huntington's rejection of the letters was circuitous or ambiguous.¹²⁷ His oblique replies, his emphasis on morality, and his self-indulgent patriotism were shallow defenses. Even these meager fronts were shattered when he filed suit against use of the original Colton letters.¹²⁸ This delaying action merely affirmed the Commission's suspicions that the Central Pacific was guilty of improper use of "very large sums of money. . . in connection with legislation."¹²⁹

¹²⁵Ibid., pp. 4035, 3765, 3726, 3741.

¹²⁶Ibid., pp. 3710-3711.

¹²⁷Ibid., pp. 3730-3731.

¹²⁸Ibid., pp. 3540, 3854.

¹²⁹Report of the Commission, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 121.

Although the Commission's indictment was an obvious conclusion, it came in 1887, ten years after Huntington had overpowered his most vigorous opponent, Thomas Scott. During the quarter century between the first Pacific railroad act in 1862 and the Commission's report in 1887, Huntington's lobby manipulated a substantial portion of the nation's financial and commercial activity. The fortunes of the Central Pacific rose and fell according to the success or failure of the lobby, and, in most instances, the lobby succeeded. Huntington invariably sensed the mood of the nation and played it to his advantage. As a result, the Central Pacific grabbed the lion's share of benefits during the years of national subsidy from 1862 to 1871. He also parlayed the militant mood of the 1870's against subsidies to thwart his foremost Pacific railroad opponent, Thomas Scott. Throughout these years the lobby was Huntington's alter ego. The lobby was bold, efficient, and pretentious, traits dear to Huntington's heart. Although Huntington likely would have designated himself as one of the great Americans of the nineteenth century, such has not been his fate. Ironically Huntington passed judgment on himself when he suggested that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."¹³⁰

¹³⁰Testimony of Collis P. Huntington, "Pacific Railway Report," p. 3735.

Norris' suggestions that the Southern Pacific wielded enormous political power in California and in the nation are generally true. In California the railroad relied heavily on local interests, especially that of San Francisco, for favorable railroad legislation. This, together with its own finely tuned state political machine, gave the Southern Pacific firm control over California railroad policy. Collis P. Huntington's vigorous direction of the railroad's national lobby insured continued success for legislation favorable to the Southern Pacific. Clearly then, Norris' references to the Southern Pacific's political power are acceptable.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

One of the most rewarding features of The Octopus is its value as an historio-sociological novel. As such, The Octopus integrates several aspects of late nineteenth century America, including literature, politics, economics, agriculture, and business. From a literary viewpoint the novel is a capsule of American response to naturalism and, to a lesser degree, a study in muckraking. Although there is no conclusive definition of naturalism, Norris' adoption of its technique suggests a definition that recognizes naturalism as a method to which determinism is basic. The Octopus cannot be called a muckraking novel, but most Californians and others familiar with the Southern Pacific in 1901 regarded it as an attack on the railroad. Norris was familiar with muckraking and adopted many of its characteristics for use in The Octopus, especially that of attacking monopolies.

Politics, economics, agriculture, and business were expressed in The Octopus through Norris' version of the Mussel Slough incident in 1880 and his references to the political power of the Southern Pacific. His presentation of the Mussel Slough incident compares favorably with contemporary accounts of it. However, he does exaggerate the Southern Pacific's

attitude, especially toward the San Joaquin Valley wheat farmers. His remarks that the Southern Pacific wielded enormous, and often corrupt, political power are generally true. In two cases, the state legislature and the United States Congress, Norris merely states an opinion, although the Southern Pacific's control of the California state railroad commissions is a subplot in the novel. Each branch of the railroad's political machine was a powerful influence on legislation, whether in Sacramento or in Washington. The most important figure behind this machine was the company's vice-president, Collis P. Huntington, who personally headed the Southern Pacific's national lobby in Washington.

As an historio-sociological novel The Octopus is important because it synthesizes several features of late nineteenth century America, especially naturalism and the political preponderance of the Southern Pacific railroad. An analysis of this novel provides a better understanding of its features and adds a dimension to the perspective of history.

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