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The cooperative spirit in the novels of John Steinbeck.

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Thesis

THE COOPERATIVE SPIRIT IN THE NOVELS OF JOHN STEINBECK

by

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steinbeck's interest in the struggle for security.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The causes which influenced him.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The furore caused by <em>The Grapes of Wrath</em>.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallelism between Steinbeck's book and Carey McWilliams's <em>Factories in the Field</em>.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Purpose of the thesis.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INHUMANITY IN CALIFORNIA'S RURAL HISTORY.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landgrabbing in early California history.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The concentration of land and farms.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The growth of the &quot;factory in the field&quot;.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origins of racial abuse.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The advent of the Okies and Arkies.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative organization an increasing factor in farming in California.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification of cooperative functions in farming.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization among the workers prior to the '30's.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The I.W.W. and the Wheatland Riot.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fascism on the West Coast.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The migrants learn the techniques of organization.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE GRAPES OF WRATH ARE STORED.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steinbeck's orientation towards an interest in the fate of the dispossessed.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His social awareness pictured in <em>In Dubious Battle</em>.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Areas for investigation for the thesis...19
Novels providing the source material...20
III. STEINBECK'S OBSERVATIONS PIN-POINTED IN 'THE SEA
OF CORTEZ'...21
Steinbeck's theory of special traits possessed by
the species...21
The causes of murder and destruction...22
The tendency towards collectivism a true mutation...23
Steinbeck's belief in the efficacy of group action...24
The struggle between the 'dominant humans' and
'the lean and hungry'...25
IV. THE FLY-PAPER AND THE FLIES...27
Steinbeck's conception of 'the people'...27
The desire for social identity with the group...28
The love of teamwork...29
The function of a definite objective in group action...30
The urge for security cements the group...31
Dispossession starts a search for security...32
The beginnings of community action on the highways...33
The need for leadership in the group...34
The qualities necessary for leadership...35
Democracy in the selection of a leader...36
The basis of authority in 'the people'...37
Violent opposition unites the group to resist...40
The growth of resistance pictures in The Moon is
Down...42
The symbol of martyrdom in providing positive action...44
The sight of blood as an irritant to 'the people'... 46
Hunger provides spontaneity of group action. ... 47

V. THE DOMINANT HUMAN

The description of the 'dominant human' ... 49
Steinbeck's attempt at fairness in his perspective ... 51
The landowners' use of collective action. ... 52
The cooperative power of the 'dominant humans' ... 55

VI. THE FAMILY SPIRIT ... 57
Reference to the contribution of the individuals. ... 58
The squeeze of adversity strengthens families. ... 58
Examples of cooperation in Steinbeck's works ... 59
Democratic method of making family decisions ... 60
Concerted effort provides success in objectives ... 61

VII. THE ALTRUIST ... 63
Examples of man's devotion to man ... 63
Altruists appearing in various Steinbeck novels. ... 64
The characteristics of altruists. ... 65
The reason for continued appearance of altruists ... 65

VIII. CONCLUSION ... 67
The complexity of present day civilization. ... 67
Investigators of conditions arouse opposition. ... 68
Criticism of The Grapes of Wrath. ... 69
Steinbeck's loyalty to the democratic ideal ... 71

THE ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS ... 74

BIBLIOGRAPHY ... 78
INTRODUCTION

One of his earlier critics has said of John Steinbeck that he writes like a European novelist of the soil. The truth is that like the European novelist he is intensely aware of the elemental emotions and the habit patterns of man against the background of nature and he has explored their tragic effects with the passionate fidelity of a great artist. In the history of American letters there have been few more thoughtful observers of our cultural scene than Steinbeck. Through the mainstream of his writing runs a steady current of speculation, a persistent inquiry into the real causes that motivate the actions of people, and this inquiry has lent to all his major novels a depth and a continuity.

Steinbeck's chief concern has been with man's effort to find security in the drift of changing conditions. He attaches the greatest importance to this frantic struggle and he makes it evident, as any conscious artist must, that the struggle is not in itself an unrelated act but that it is symptomatic of a deeper and more restless compulsion common to all mankind — an impulse so irresistible that he calls it "the great drive of our people." 2

To approach the philosophy of Steinbeck the customary channels of criticism are not enough. For Steinbeck, to say the least, is independent in his judgments and conclusions.

1. Harry Thornton Moore, The Novels of Steinbeck, p. 39
2. John Steinbeck, The Sea of Cortez, p. 86
Since the pattern of his thought often escapes the orthodox frames of logic it is folly to try fitting his ideas into accepted classifications or associating them too closely with current trends and movements. The critic must proceed along different lines altogether.

What are the factors which have influenced Steinbeck's imaginative life? Perhaps the most significant is a life-long passion for his native California, particularly the beautiful region overlooking Monterey Bay. Not only is this the land where "Steinbeck spent most of his life; this is the world that has contributed the realistic and symbolic elements of his fictional locale" as well. 1

The area has served over and over again as the physical background for his stories. The characteristics of its people often find their way with uncompromising candor into the pages of his books. One critic emphasizes the point that while working in the fields as a boy, he "learned at least the motions through which the agricultural workers must go, came to understand the small hopes and fears and ambitions of the floating population on which California depends for fulfillment of its seasonal labor requirements." 2 Finally it happened, as an ominous circumstance, that Steinbeck came of literary age at precisely the time when a serious crisis developed in the migratory labor problem.

1. Fred B. Millet, Contemporary American Authors, p.50
2. Joseph Henry Jackson, In Why Steinbeck Wrote the Grapes of Wrath; vide Carey McWilliams, Ill Fares the Land, p.42
He had already four books to his credit, none of them successful or significant, when the Salinas lettuce strike broke out in 1936. "Now", said Mr. Jackson who studied Steinbeck's background, "something happened under his very nose, in his own Salinas Valley." The story of In Dubious Battle (1936) was, in one sense, the result of this experience. 1

Steinbeck's literary stature increased so rapidly that in 1937, when the influx of migrants was at its height, he was persuaded to write a series of articles for the San Francisco News. These articles were later reprinted as Their Blood is Strong. From the trend and tone of his subsequent work it is easy to assume that his extraordinary social sensitivity was affected then by what he has called "the shock of experience"; 2 and that his mind was troubled by issues involved in the recurrent conflict between the landowners and their employees. The Steinbeck who sought in The Pastures of Heaven the sources of human frustration finds "its true origin in the social pathology of an economic system both incoherent and inexcusable." 3 The Curse was indeed the imposition upon the land of a mechanical civilization!

Under the impact of passionate conviction, his talent began to reach a swift maturity. Within a few years, in 1939, appeared Steinbeck's climactic novel, The Grapes of Wrath. The publication of the book, followed by the release of the motion

1. Ill Fares the Land, p. 42
2. Steinbeck's The Sea of Cortez, p. 86
3. Writers in Crisis, p. 266
picture of February 27, 1940, raised a furore of excitement which has not wholly subsided. 1

An interesting sidelight on this event is disclosed in a book by Carey McWilliams, a well-documented study of migratory labor, called Ill Fares the Land (1942). In a personal note McWilliams gives an account of the storm stirred up by Steinbeck's work and at the same time reveals a practical application of Steinbeck's philosophy. 2

The Grapes of Wrath was published on April 14, 1939, and and within a year over 420,000 copies had been sold --

Appearing at this particular time, the book had the effect of a match being tossed into a powder keg. California had been in a state of considerable political tension since the General Strike and the Epic campaign of 1934. . . Not only had there been much agitation over the problem of migratory labor from 1934 to 1938 and much agricultural labor unrest, but the migrant problem had by 1939 become most acute. 3

Governor Olson of California, in January 1939, appointed Mr. McWilliams Chief of the Division of Immigration and Housing, an agency which handled the problem of migratory workers. Several months later, in July, 1939, when McWilliams's first volume, Factories in the Field, was published, it seemed as though a campaign had been organized against the Associated Farmers. But McWilliams explains in both his books that he had no knowledge of Steinbeck's work along parallel lines. "I think it should also be stated," he said, "that the manuscript for this volume (Factories in the Field) was forwarded to the

1. Ill Fares the Land, p. 43-5
2. Ill Fares the Land, p. 42-3
3. Ibidem, p. 42
publishers prior to the time that Mr. John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* was published. "1 Not only was McWilliams unaware of Steinbeck's project, but the fact remains that he had never met John Steinbeck. Yet, strangely enough, "to give the conspiracy a really murky atmosphere", he adds some time later, "the Steinbeck Committee to Aid Agricultural Workers had been formed in 1938, with the approval of Mr. Steinbeck, and I was elected its first chairman." 2

When these circumstances were noted, regardless of their coincidence, the *San Francisco Examiner* flared out first with the headlines: *Reds Blamed For Books On Migrant Laborers*. The Associated Farmers took up the torch and denounced the works, hinting that their appearance at approximately the same time might have even more sinister implications.

Nevertheless the events of the last ten years have vindicated John Steinbeck. His serious attempts to evaluate the responsibility for technological displacement in agriculture have brought enlightenment to a great reading public; his analyses of the motives involved in industrial struggle are grave and challenging; and the measures which he suggests to restore strength and dignity to the dispossessed have been more than thought-provoking. Yet critics have reviled him again and again; he has been accused of being a Communist, a fellow-traveler, and a trouble-maker, and threatened with censorship.

1. *Factories in the Field*, p.10
2. *Ill Fares the Land*, p.43
His novels have been interpreted as a persistent attack upon the whole structure of capitalism.

But why have many qualified critics been blinded to the sincerity of his motives? Why have they seemed to overlook the vital points of his perspectives? The purpose of this thesis is to establish the prime factors which have directed Steinbeck's interest towards the flagrant inhumanity of a technological civilization and to discover the pattern of his analytical thinking which he has translated into unforgettable imagery through the magic of his narrative power.
I. INHUMANITY IN CALIFORNIA'S RURAL HISTORY

The first step in understanding the motives of Steinbeck is a knowledge of California itself, since that state has played such an important part in Steinbeck's work. The economic history of California has been one of abysmal contrasts. On the one hand —

"In the saga of the States the chapter that is California has long fascinated the credulous and charmed the romantic." 1 But on the other hand, there has also existed another California -- a hidden chapter, full of exploitation, ruthlessness, and violence.

Those practices of human exploitation which Steinbeck dramatized so vividly were well established from earliest times. A study of land grants in California which appeared many years ago revealed that the grabbing of large tracts had discouraged immigration to the state more than any other factor. The existence of huge ownership units "made possible the exploitation of cheap coolie labor; while the availability of great reserves of cheap labor delayed the subdivision of land and prevented land settlement by small individual owners." 2 Shady frontier characters and squatters were the first to help themselves to virgin territory along the West Coast; but those men were amateurs in comparison with the hard-headed adventurers who came in the confused period after the acquisition of California. They, in turn, took ad-

1. Introduction to Carey McWilliams' Factories in the Field
2. Ibidem, p. 103
vantage of the unsettled times in which "military law, Spanish law, and American law were simultaneously administered"; they challenged vague titles in the courts, bought up huge areas of old Spanish land grants which the easy-going Californios had owned, and stole vast domains by every kind of artifice and trickery. 

Then, when the State Legislature was established in 1848, the new landholders proceeded boldly to make their plunder legal.

In his novels Steinbeck has pictured clearly the consequences of this predatory greed. California's far-flung central valleys were found to be especially adapted to large-scale agriculture. Statistics have revealed that "more than 36% of all large scale farms in the United States are located in California." This situation was reinforced by the inability of the average farmer to buy productive land, the only acreage available to him being swampland or other submarginal soil rejected by the great corporations. The result is that broad stretches of farmland are now sown with a single crop; in one area as far as the vision can reach there may be nothing but wheat, in another nothing but hops, and still another only grapes. The distances, however, are so vast that California is made up of a crazy-quilt pattern of crops reaching in every direction. The total variety of fruits and vegetables under normal conditions is great enough to offer employment to the

1. A Guide to the Golden State, p.53
2. Factories in the Field, p.147
crop picker for several months of the year if he should travel from one ripened crop to the other. Yet the most amazing integer in the equation of West Coast agriculture is not the abundance of crops as it is the abundance of labor to gather the crops -- labor made up of an anchorless class of workers who have followed the harvesting seasons stolidly, living in want and distress, and yet forced by circumstances to compete for the marginal existence offered by large-scale farming.

Modern technology has not only encouraged concentration of productive landholding but it has mechanized the processes of planting and harvesting, industrialized agriculture, and turned the farm into a "factory in the field". Its effect upon the relationship between the planter and the farmhand has been revolutionary too. The traditional ties are no longer in existence; for the growth of industrialized agriculture is linked with the availability in large numbers of short-term, seasonal workers. In 1930, the percentage of paid farm labor in the entire United States was 26%; while in California paid workers made up 57% of all persons gainfully employed in agriculture. 1

With the ownership of land so concentrated and the production of crops dependent to such an extent upon the employment of casual labor, it is easy to understand that the problem of labor management must be quite complex. It is not surprising that the history of migratory labor is one of force and violence: harsh suppression interrupted by frequent explosions of wrath. The

1. Factories in the Field, p.147
full effect of migration upon the social picture in rural Califor-
nia was not felt until a decade ago when a flood of native
white farmhands invaded the state from the "Dust Bowl" area;
yet the techniques of control on the one hand and of resistance
on the other were developed long before the arrival of families
like Steinbeck's Joads.

"To understand why the valleys are made up of large feudal
empires; to know why it is that farming has been replaced by
industrialized agriculture, the farm by the farm factory; to
realize what is back of the terror and violence which breaks
out periodically in the farm valleys, it is necessary to know
something of the social history of California. . . It is a
story of nearly 70 years exploitation of minority racial and
other groups by a powerful clique of landowners whose power is
based upon an anachronistic system of landownership dating from
feudalistic patterns of ownership and control." 1

The origins of racial abuse lay with the use of Indian
labor in the missions during the heyday of Spanish overlord-
ship. Real labor violence, however, goes back to the anti-
Chinese agitation of the 1870's. It began with the completion
of the first continental railroad in 1869 when an era of com-
parative independence for labor came abruptly to a close. The
workers "hard hit by the falling wages and the rising unemploy-
ment of the depression-ridden decade that followed, began to lay
the blame for misfortunes on the thousands of Chinese coolie
railroad workers turned loose on the labor market." 2 Before
the advent of Chinese labor in the field the California farmer
depended for help upon the fruit tramp and the "bindle-stiff"
who came over the dirt roads in spring with walking staff and

1. Factories in the Field, p. 6-7
2. Ibidem, p. 97
pack on back and disappeared by winter into the dark side-streets of San Francisco’s slums. But now the greater stability of the Chinese workers, as well as their adaptable nature and self-effacement, delighted the farmer. It was only when the Chinese attempted to buy land and bargain for higher wages that they became the center of a furious campaign of bitterness and extermination.

The outburst of hatred that was directed at them soon repeated itself in a similar pattern when workers imported from India at the turn of the century became overplentiful. The farmers had bargained for their services with the short-sighted greed that has characterized their dealings with migratory labor in general; but as soon as there was a surplus the eagerness of the landowners suddenly cooled and the Asiatics became an object of scorn and fear. Then bands of terrorists organized by the planters hounded the despised "ragheads" until they were eliminated from the labor market.

The farmers themselves had now learned the value of collective activity in protecting their economic interests. When the Filipinos and Japanese appeared in the harvesting seasons during the next decade, their arrival increased the urge to combine. The Japanese were a special object of distrust because most of them had no intention to join the floating population indefinitely. As soon as possible they bought or rented small holdings, in many cases land considered unfit for cultivation. They managed their acres so thriftily that they outraged the
white workers and underbid white farmers at the wholesale market.

So once more a savage outcry was raised against the "yellow peril". The persecution persisted in various forms with "military and patriotic groups, merchants' associations and labor organizations combined" until the Japanese were humiliated, segregated, and deprived of nearly all their rights. ¹ The state legislature, in response to popular clamor, even went so far as to pass an alien land law in 1911 and to augment it in 1913 with the Wobb Act, barring aliens ineligible for citizenship from owning agricultural land in the state. When the Japanese circumvented the law by forming land corporations or by transferring titles to their American-born children, the "hue and cry forced enactment in 1920 of the Asiatic Land Law, forbidding such evasions." ²

Economic stability in labor relations might have been reached at least to the satisfaction of the planters if the most tragic migration of workers into California had not taken place after the depression years of the 1930's. This time, however, there was a different element involved; the emigrants were not of the darker races, nor of alien birth, but were native white Americans who came from the blighted regions of Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. They were driven from their homes by blown topsoil which spread a blanket of dust "over their corn, piled up on the tops of fence posts, piled up on the wires. .." ³

¹. California, A Guide to the Golden State, p.60
². Ibidem, p.62
³. The Grapes of Wrath, p.6
The magazine Business Week for June 3, 1937, estimated that 30,000 families had left the dust bowl and termed the shift in population as "one of the greatest interstate migrations since the gold rush." The circumstances surrounding their flight has been recorded with disarming simplicity --

On the highway leading into California there appeared in the late 1930's, among the long lines of streamlined automobiles, more antiquated vehicles. Like the covered wagons of earlier days they carried all their owners' worldly goods: those elemental necessities that change but little in 80 years -- pots, pans, bedding, basins, washtubs. But the newcomers were ignorant of conditions that existed before their arrival. Few of them were informed that earlier immigrants had swarmed over the rich fields so thickly that wages never rose above the level accepted by coolie and peon labor; fewer still realized that they would be forced to make homes under conditions "where in 1934 the Nation Labor Relations Board found filth, squalor, an entire absence of sanitation, and a crowding of human beings into totally inadequate tents or crude structures built of boards, weeds, and anything that was found at hand to give a pitiful semblance of home at its worst."3

Their economic ailments were complicated by the unprecedented number of hands in a similar desperate plight. In 1938 the influx from the dust bowl rose to 10,000 a month, and within three years the total reached 350,000.4 The pressure for jobs intensified competition to such a degree that conditions became

1. Quoted from Factories in the Field, p.308-9
2. California, A Guide to the Golden State, p.64
3. Ibidem, p.64-5
4. Ill Fares the Land, p.10
quite critical. It is difficult to estimate how disastrous the situation might have been if the migrants had not discovered spokesmen like John Steinbeck to call attention to their plight. Steinbeck dramatized their pitiful odyssey in terms that "will not soon be forgotten in America." 1 After the appearance of The Grapes of Wrath in 1939, Congress sent the LaFollette Committee to California to investigate the extent to which civil liberties were being violated. In the course of their research they unearthed the facts about changes that had already taken place in the set-up of California agriculture. Economists began to realize that these changes were likewise shaping the transformation of the American farm in general into an industrialized economy.

The Committee found that one constant factor in the development of California's large-scale agriculture has been an increasing reliance upon cooperative organization -- in cultivation, harvesting, processing, marketing, in labor relationships and in management. They learned that there are still a great many individually owned-and-operated farms, but that in 1939 out of a total of 150,000 units, 2892 "large-scale" farms dominated the agricultural scene. Although these totaled only 2.1 percent of all the farm units in the state, they produced 28.5 percent of agricultural produce by value, hired the majority of the 200,000 transient workers and paid 75 percent of the wage bill for labor. 2

1. Ill Fares the Land, p.10
2. Ibidem, p.16
The figures are amazing, but they are no more amazing than the widespread integration of efforts and services which the growers effected to increase their efficiency and control. This concentration is not restricted to any particular produce or type of agriculture. It applies to many major crops such as apricots, asparagus, cotton, hops, lemons, lettuce, olives, grapes, oranges, peaches, potatoes, prunes, rice, sugar beets, and wheat. 1 Much of the farm land is held and cultivated by an interlocking directorate of corporations and enterprises. Their function is not only to grow the food, but to supply the water for irrigation, the chemicals for fertilizing, the lumber for boxes, the finances for mechanical equipment and labor; not only to harvest, but to pack, ship, advertise, and market the produce wherever there are consumers.

Many owners of smaller-scale farms have been forced to co-operate with these huge agricultural units almost to the point of surrendering their independence. Either that, or they have taken the alternative of forming cooperatives among themselves the better to compete with the mass-production farms.

Agricultural organizations in California are now divided into three principal categories which overlap in their functions and membership. The first group includes such bodies as the Grange, the Farm Bureau Federation, the Farmers Educational and Cooperative Union, and Associated Farmers, Inc. These unite into general organizations growers engaged in all branches of

1. Ill Fares the Land, p.17
agriculture. The second group embraces the marketing cooperatives such as the Citrus Growers Exchange, the Prune and Apricot Growers Association, and the California Walnut Growers Association. The third, represented by combinations like the Wool Growers and Cattlemen's Association, organizes almost on the basis of a single industry the poultry-growers, sheep-raisers, beef-ranchers, and dairymen.¹ The purpose of these organizations is primarily to protect the farmer and to provide for his economic betterment: the hazards of nature, the seasonal uncertainties of distribution, the problems of labor -- all these, without cooperative action, would have been insurmountable to the individual farmer.

The struggle for economic improvement among the workers has been even longer and more bitter. The lessons of community effort had to be learned in the midst of terrible impoverishment and violence, for organization of transients at first proved ineffective. The earliest known union of farm laborers was formed at San Jose, California, in 1903.² It was soon discovered, however, that the customary set-up of maintaining permanent locals for dues-paying memberships was impractical; there was nothing rooted for permanency about mobile laborers who appeared on the fields for a fleeting season of weeks and then vanished almost without trace.

Under the circumstances the pattern of migratory labor

¹ California, A Guide to the Golden State, p. 77-8
² Factories in the Field, p.100
was bound to be one of disorder. Steinbeck highlights the causes and gives a running account of the inflammatory conditions in Chapter Nineteen, one of the most significant in *The Grapes of Wrath*, a version of history which is unexcelled.

A most lucid example of the deep-seated unrest which existed in the past was the Wheatland Riot. This revolt broke out on August 3, 1913 at the ranch of a hop grower named Durst, near Wheatland, California. Carey McWilliams, in a graphic chapter of his book, summarizes the affair thus:

Wheatland, clearly marked as one of the most significant episodes in the history of migratory labor in the West, also forms an important chapter in the social history of California. In the lurid illumination which the fires of the riot cast forth, the ugly facts about the condition of farm labor were, for the first time, thoroughly exposed. 1

The Wheatland Riot culminated several years of organizational work and agitation by the Industrial Workers of the World. The roots of the I.W.W. -- if the organization may be characterized as having roots -- were to be found among the workers of seasonal occupations, especially in the outdoors. The wobblies who were themselves essentially migratory, swept into the currents of farm labor shortly before the First World War. They moved with the laborers and unionized them in transit. They adapted their techniques to the needs of the crop workers -- organizing them at the spot, collecting low dues or no dues at all, fighting meanwhile for better work standards.

The situation that sparked explosion at Wheatland was

1. *Factories in the Field*, p.154
later pictured by Carleton W. Parker, executive secretary of the State Commission of Immigration and Housing, in the following details:

2800 pickers were camped on a treeless hill. . . Some were in tents, some in topless squares of sacking. . . there was no provision for sanitation, no garbage disposal. The temperature during the week remained near 105°, and though the wells were a mile from where the men, women, and children were picking. . . no water was sent into the fields. . . the overcrowding of the camp was found to be aggravated by the fact that the ranch owner had followed the practice of advertising for twice the necessary numbers of pickers in order to keep down wage levels. . .

After the uprising came a reign of terror which nearly wiped out all organization among the agricultural workers for some time. Within a few months two of the leading figures among the wobblies -- Blackie Ford and Herman Suhr -- were arrested and tried at Marysville, California. Herman Suhr had not even been present when the riot occurred; but both he and Ford were convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment nevertheless. 1 Then the I.W.W. itself was struck a death blow. Late in 1917 the U.S. Department of Justice sought out agitators for violation of war-time statutes. Wherever there were wobbly strongholds -- in Wichita, Sacramento, and Chicago -- Federal agents rounded up the leaders, raided headquarters, seized papers and books, and impounded union funds. When this assault was over the organization collapsed and never recovered.

Although the attempt to unionize the agricultural workers

was ill-fated, however, the experience which some of the workers gained was to serve a useful purpose in the years ahead. For a most critical period for migratory labor existed during the depression years between 1929 and 1935. All this time agricultural production continued to rise and the value of the products to mount, while farm wages on the other hand ebbed steadily to an all-time low.1 Those causes, coupled with housing and economic conditions that went from bad to worse, started a chain of events which led to rebellions "without precedent in the history of labor in the United States." 2 The farm workers had never conducted strikes of such magnitude and great social significance nor organized on such a scale before.

The events of these disturbances are exceptionally well documented and must have been a ringing challenge to the social conscience of men like Steinbeck. Reporters appeared on the scene to chronicle the incidents and professional observers have produced a formidable list of articles and books on the topic. In the midst of the fever-heat partisanship which news gatherers encountered in the area factual reporting required exceptional restraint. One witness, for instance, wrote under the caption Fascism on the West Coast, a story of the brutality of fruit farmers in their offensive against organized work stoppages in the fruit fields. The onslaught took place in the Imperial Valley when 7,000 Mexican, white, and Filipino

1. Factories in the Field, p.211
2. Ibidem, p.211
lettuce pickers went on strike for wages of twenty cents to thirty cents an hour. The tactics of suppression used against the strikers were those which had become classic in labor uprisings: The growers formed quickly into strongarm squads, hired men who were sworn in as deputies, arrested 400 of the strikers and flung 200 into jail. The strike leaders received savage beatings and some of them were escorted to the border and dumped there with instructions not to return.¹

In spite of this resistance the strikes spread like brushfire through the state, with outbreaks occurring at Oxnard, Tulare, Fresno, San Jose, Merced, Chico, San Diego, Gridley, and Sacramento.² The planters made no effort to hide the identity of forces used to quell them. In the case of the Imperial Valley work stoppage, the Calexico Chronicle of January 12, 1934, reported the "mobilization of the American Legion to check the rising tide of strike sentiment". During the "Red" hysteria of that year "vigilante committees" were formed in nearly every city, town, and rural district of California.³

On the side of the workers there were other forces equally as zealous and just as insistent upon promoting their own social philosophies, whether sinister or noble. The strike which was to extend the length of the entire San Joaquin Valley was already underway when four organizers of the Communist Party arrived to lend their support and exploit the party line. The

1. Ella Winter, in The Nation, Feb. 28, 1934, p.241
2. Factories in the Field, p.219
3. Terror in San Jose, The Nation, July 18, 1934
strikers not only accepted their services but enlisted considerable support as well from among the small growers in the vicinity of Corcoran, where most of the activity centered. One local minister, carrying a Bible, a Communist Party membership card, and a union card, exhorted the workers to carry on their boycott.1 The work stoppage, which eventually involved 18,000 laborers, paralyzed the cotton industry throughout the whole valley. But after three weeks the strikers were able to force the planters to make a favorable compromise.

The techniques adopted by the workers on this occasion have been depicted with remarkable realism by Steinbeck.2 The strikers, pooling their resources, rented as a headquarters a small forty-acre farm outside Corcoran. They staked off streets, established a duty roster of guards to watch the entrances, and set up shelters for a community of five thousand men, women, and children. Committees of workers were then selected to govern the camp; two trained nurses were obtained; authorized personnel carefully supervised sanitary conditions. Throughout the whole affair it was evident that the workers had learned well the power of community action, the lesson that greater bargaining strength lay with the group.

1. Factories in the Field, p. 221
2. In Dubious Battle, Chap. 8-15
CHAPTER II . . . THE GRAPES OF WRATH ARE STORED

Three years after the Great Strikes John Steinbeck had the opportunity to study conditions in San Joaquin Valley. At that time new floods of migrants entered the state. The competition for work was again so savage that wages reverted to what they had been during the darkest depression years; and thousands of newcomers, who were unable to find work, were stranded and threatened with starvation. The atmosphere of chaos vexed the temper of Californians who had too often been exposed to disturbance in the state. The factors that prompted Steinbeck's writing In Dubious Battle were still valid; but now, in 1937, when his examination of the struggle between planter and picker was more intensive, the events seemed to deepen his convictions about the economic circumstances shaping the lives of men.

There is reason to believe that his active concern with social disparity goes back to the time when his imagination was playing over the events of Tortilla Flat (1935). The story itself has been called "reminiscent of the folk epics of John Henry and Paul Bunyan." 1 But beneath the satiric and mock-epic content a moral significance is disclosed in the notion that "these marvelous paisanos gain their happiness by refusing the dominant values of our vaunted American civilisation; they scorn equally our competitive motivation and our individualistic power-rewards." 2

1. Maxwell Geismar, Writers in Crisis, p.252
2. Ibidem, p.253
The publication of Tortilla Flat, therefore, marks a split in the trends of Steinbeck's imaginative thinking, a shift in tendency, a departure from the portrayal of a "glittering" past hallowed by blood and violence to the realism of the present. The early Steinbeck is "individualistic, advocating the free life of adventure, the bold man, scorning the blind, doddering worm of the world." But the implications of Tortilla Flat are somewhat different -- the emotions deeper and more tender, the irony gentler, everything apparently indicating the change taking place in Steinbeck's perspective. For the first time Steinbeck has related himself with the more immediate issues of his own world.

"The story," says the Preface, "deals with the adventuring of Danny's friends, with the good they did, with their thoughts and their endeavors. In the end this story tells how the talisman is lost and how the group disintegrated." The talisman of Danny's tumbledown property is just as effective in its symbolism as the holy grail of Arthur and his Round Table, and its loss through fire denoted likewise the passing of a golden age, an era of mysticism and beauty.

Steinbeck's first labor novel, In Dubious Battle, (1936), along with such shorter companion pieces as Vigilante and The Raid, is still somewhat in the nature of a prelude, a foreshadowing of his growing social awareness. As a study in development,

1. Maxwell Geismar, Writers in Crisis, p. 247
it is perhaps unique among the major novels. For even in his earliest contemplation of social grievances Steinbeck realizes the ugliness of the entire situation and he balances his own ardor for the cause of labor with a masterful portrayal of all the forces involved. An eminent critic has called attention to the fact that there is a feeling of "uneasiness which profoundly affects In Dubious Battle", and he is convinced that "what he attempts so blithely to portray, Steinbeck can't altogether accept." 1

But In Dubious Battle is a trivial thing compared to the broad canvas of The Grapes of Wrath, and Steinbeck's attitudes are still immature.

In the intervening years the subject had been growing in his mind and imagination. He had written up for a San Francisco newspaper his observation on seasonal labor and life in the bunkhouses. He had visited the Oklahoma dust bowl which sent so many homeless families to California, and made the trek along with them. He had seen the uprooting of men in epic proportions. He had reflected on the broad social problems underlying the special predicament of the California orchards. And so, taking his departure naturally from what he had seen in his native valley, from the men and women of his own acquaintance in Monterey County, he had let his thought widen out and deepen down until he was ready to make of his story the vehicle of comprehensive and significant attitudes on the major topics of social philosophy. 2

As a vehicle for the most extended explanation of his philosophy, however, Steinbeck wrote The Sea of Cortez in collaboration with Edward F. Ricketts in 1941. This book will probably reach its ultimate level as a classic in the science of marine biology; but over and above it will remain as a tribute to Steinbeck's intellect, a testament which one may study

1. Maxwell Geismar, in Writers in Crisis, p.261
to piece together the most vital elements of his perspectives.

There is a wealth of explanatory notes scattered almost at random through the work to document the issues developed in his works of fiction. From the time that Steinbeck was provoked into writing *In Dubious Battle* as a burning indictment of our agricultural economy until he shamed humanity with his terrible pilgrim's progress of the Joads, the thoughts that he has re-iterated in narrative form have now matured, and they render a direct glimpse into the working of his mind and imagination.

Not least among his ideas is his recognition of that phenomenon which is rather new to our society; and that is, the development of a greater and greater reliance upon cooperative action to achieve or to retain a place of security. This observation seems to be a prime factor in his philosophy. The immediate problem is to evaluate the impact of the movement and to identify its different tendencies as Steinbeck pictures them in his novels.

The cooperative element will be subjected in this thesis to examination in four separate areas: (1) There will be a study of the group spirit from the standpoint of the 'people', and (2) there will also be a consideration of groups working in opposition to 'the people'. (3) The family spirit in its various relationships will be investigated next -- not merely blood kin alone but the family in its extensional pattern, that of friends drawn together by a bond of common interest for the sake of security. (4) Last to be assessed is the altruistic devo-
tion of man to man, or cooperation on a level approaching the
philosophic.

Most of the source material used comes from four of Stein-
beck's novels -- *In Dubious Battle* (1936), a skillful picture
of the class struggle; *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), a monumen-
tal study of migrant America; Steinbeck's portrayal of the
'people' under war conditions, *The Moon is Down* (1941), and
his latest long novel, *The Wayward Bus* (1947). In these works
the activities of the group furnish the vital forces, the mo-
tives, and the goals; the human soul is revealed in the mass.
But there are supplementary references from other works as well
in which the accent is not placed particularly on the group --
such stories as *To a God Unknown* (1933), *Tortilla Flat* (1935),
and *Of Mice and Men* (1937).

The introduction has already sketched the factors that
instigated the author's concern with social conflict; the main
body of the thesis will portray the background to this struggle
and attempt to piece together with illustrations from the no-
vels themselves the total picture of Steinbeck's philosophy.
The final problem will be to evaluate the validity of the au-
thor's perspectives in the zeitgeist of a scientific and in-
dustrial age.
CHAPTER III. STEINBECK'S OBSERVATIONS PIN-POINTED IN ‘THE SEA OF CORTEZ’

The whole conception of Steinbeck’s philosophy seems based on the premise that modern civilization has affected mankind with a change in values that is far-reaching in significance and catastrophic in the moral sense. Steinbeck appreciates the historical tendencies that have influenced the development of our present habit-patterns. Writing as a biologist in his journal, The Sea of Cortez, however, he deprecates our inability to appraise our own species as accurately as we measure the reactions of other creatures:

... We do not objectively observe our own species as a species, although we know the individual fairly well. When it seems that men may be kinder to men, that wars may not come again, we completely ignore the record of our species. If we use the same smug observation on ourselves that we do on hermit crabs we would be forced to say with the information on hand, 'It is one diagnostic trait of Homo sapiens that groups of individuals are periodically infected with a feverish nervousness that causes the individual to turn on and destroy not only his own kind, but the works of his own kind'.

The emphasis in this passage, as one can see, is on the words 'species' and 'groups', not on 'individuals'; and it is evident that Steinbeck is concerned with this unreasoning intensity of mass emotion that engulfs the individual and sweeps him into acts of primitive violence which of his own accord he would seldom have courage to commit.

The urge towards destruction seems to be ingrained in the

1. Sea of Cortez, p.16
habit-pattern of the mass, planted in the dark psychological roots of the group; and it is unlikely that people, in a collective sense, would ever lose that impulse without a well-established 'mutation'. Such is Steinbeck's belief; for he says --

When two crayfish meet they usually fight. One would say that perhaps they might not at a future time, but without some mutation it is not likely they will lose this trait. And perhaps our species is not likely to forego war without some psychic mutation which at present, at least, does not seem imminent.

Then he fortifies his thought with a grim statement of the causes that have led to lust and slaughter --

And if one place the blame for killing and destroying on economic insecurity, on inequality, on injustice, he is simply stating the proposition in another way. 2

With those words he establishes the basic principle of his social philosophy; but he goes on wistfully to add, however --

When in the world there shall come 20,30,50 years without evidence of our murder trait, under whatever system of justice or economic security, then we may have a contrasting habit pattern to examine. So far, there is no such situation. 3

But what has brought about the condition of 'inequality', 'injustice', and 'economic insecurity'? Steinbeck realizes that those characteristics have become more pronounced than ever in the mechanism of our modern civilization. He underscores their importance when he observes, "The great drive of our people.

1. The Sea of Cortez, p. 16
2. Ibidem, p.16
3. Ibidem, p.16
stems from insecurity." 1

The maladjustments in our social economy, according to his thinking, concern more than the hazards of economic failure, more than the loss of steady job or take-home pay; they involve a universal pride in physical ownership -- a concept of the closest integration between man and the material details of his existence.

Physiological man does not require this paraphernalia to exist, but the whole man does. He is the only animal who lives outside of himself, whose drive is in external things -- property, houses, money, concepts of power. He lives in his cities and his factories, in his business and job and art. But having projected himself into these external complexities, he is them. His house, his automobile are a part of him. . . If then the projection, the preoccupation of man, lies in external things so that even his subjectivity is a mirror of houses and cars and grain elevators, the place to look for his mutation would be in the direction of his drive or, in other words, the external things he deals with. And here we can readily find evidence of mutation.2

The ownership of property, which people link with stability, grew most desirable during the industrial revolution; therefore Steinbeck was inclined to consider that movement in our economic history as "a true mutation". Yet the most momentous change he found not in the past but in something going on at the present time; a change too ominous to evaluate entirely.

"The present tendency towards collectivism," he explains, "whether attributed to Marx or Hitler or Henry Ford, might be as definite a mutation of the species as the lengthening neck

1. *The Sea of Cortez*, p.98
2. Ibidem, p.87
of the evolving giraffe." 1 The force of this 'tendency' as he observes it, is irrevocable; and no matter what course it takes, "nothing stemming from thought can interfere with it or bend it". 2

The question is whether he accepts this situation with enthusiasm; and the answer seems to be no. His reception appears to be conditioned upon reserve, and perhaps actual distaste; for he continues in his analysis by saying:

If then this tendency toward collectivization is a mutation there is no reason to suppose it is for the better. It is a rule in paleontology that ornamentation and complication precede extinction. And our mutation, of which the assembly line, the collective farm, the mechanized army, and the mass production of food are evidences of even symptoms, might well correspond to the thickening armor of the great reptiles -- a tendency that can end only in extinction. 3

So it appears that regardless of his own emotional reaction to it, Steinbeck is convinced that the trend towards collectivism has reached an unusual growth and has become a dominant characteristic of this age even if it leads to disaster. For better or for worse, he feels there is more emphasis upon community endeavor of all kinds; upon unison, and upon mass undertaking, as if people had come to an instinctive realization that their greatest hope towards retaining a place in our social structure depended upon their working together within large units.

Steinbeck's novels are often filled with forbidding pic-

1. *The Sea of Cortez*, p.88
2. Ibidem, p.88
3. Ibidem, p.88
tures of violence that occurs when divergent groups clash in promoting their aims; but almost as often, in the midst of tur-
moil, there is an affirmation of faith in those who are working out their social destinies. The ultimate goal of conflict and struggle is, of course, security; yet no security is permanent for anyone as long as its retention is based on a dog-in-the-
manger denial of similar stability to others. It is only when dominance and intrenchment are abolished that there is hope for social peace. Otherwise from among the dispossessed there will always arise a challenger to continue the fight.

One can think of the attached and dominant human who has captured the place, the property, and the security. He dominates his area. To protect it he has police who know him and are dependent on him for a living. . . One would say that he is safe, that he would have many children, and that his seed would in a short time litter the world. But in his fight for dominance he has pushed out others of his species who were not so fit to dominate, and perhaps these have become wanderers, improperly clothed, ill fed, having no security and no fixed base. These should really perish, but the reverse seems true. The dominant human, in his security, grows soft and fearful. The lean and hungry grow strong, and the strongest of them are selected out. Having nothing to lose and all to gain, these selected hungry and rapacious ones develop attack rather than defense techniques and become strong in them, so that one day the dominant man is eliminated. . . .

The conflict between the 'dominant humans' and 'the lean and hungry' among the dispossessed is portrayed with theatrical intensity in Steinbeck's novels. Steinbeck pictures the willingness of individuals to work together for a common cause as the greatest source of strength to either side. In the economic development of California the banded efforts of the farmers in

1. *The Sea of Cortez*, p. 95
forming growers' cooperatives and vigilante societies resulted in increased efficiency and protection; among the migrant workers the only resistance to exploitation lay with the strength of organisation and with the ties of desperate loyalty.
CHAPTER IV. THE FLY-PAPER AND THE FLIES

Since the case of the migrant laborer was closest to his heart, labor's point-of-view is reflected most frequently in Steinbeck's stories. He thought of the underprivileged, the disinherited, the conquered, and the dispossessed as being almost in the same category, and lumped them together in his mind as 'the people'. In this conception, however, he has evolved an altogether unusual perspective in his storytelling technique. He writes of 'the people' as though there were intuitive unwritten laws governing their joint actions, or as if some secret channel of sensitivity formed the mechanism for their communication. His stories are filled with references as to how the mass responds to situations, and he has a great gift for depicting great movements with a sweeping grandeur.

Steinbeck's concept of 'the people' is found most strikingly in Ma Joad's comment to Tom during a moment of discouragement:

"Why, Tom -- us people will go on livin' when all them people is gone. Why, Tom, we're the people that live. They ain't gonna wipe us out. Why, we're the people -- we go on."

In a sombre description of group migration in California which makes up Chapter Twenty-one of the Grapes of Wrath, the migrants are mentioned as the 'people' several times. The chapter starts with "The moving, questing people were migrants

1. The Grapes of Wrath, p.383
2. Ibidem, p.385-8
now," and ends with, "On the highways the people moved like ants and searched for work, for food. And the anger began to ferment."

In *The Moon is Down* there is a similar treatment of the people in an invaded country. The 'people' were at first slow to resist their conquerors, but finally the time came for action:

"Well, people are talking."
Annie sighed with tension. "Ah-h-h!"
Joseph at last had opinions. "People are getting together," he said. "They don't like to be conquered."

But what brings about this solidarity among the common people? How do they "get together" for cooperative action? In his observance of human nature Steinbeck has noticed several traits which may be enlisted for unity.

One of the basic tendencies is the eagerness to retain social identity with the group, a bond of fellowship, especially where a community enterprise is involved. This characteristic is pictured quite feelingly in an incident of *In Dubious Battle* where Lisa gives birth to her child inside one of the tents of a work-camp. When Mac, the labor agitator, appealed to some men for assistance, "a change was in the air. The apathy was gone from the man. Sleepers were awakened and told, and added themselves to the group. A current of excitement filled the jungle, but a kind of joyous excitement". 2 Later, Mac's

1. *The Moon is Down*, p.77
2. *In Dubious Battle*, p.57
partner, Jim, asked him, "'How did it happen? You didn't say much but they started working like a clock, and they liked it. They felt fine.'

"'Sure they liked it. Men always like to work together. There's a hunger in men to work together.'"

Mac's success as an organizer, in fact, depended upon his ability to spur that fellowship and direct it into action that would lead to collective security.

The Wayward Bus provides another example of how teamwork affected people. The incident in this particular case is of lesser importance but it shows how seldom Steinbeck lost an opportunity to emphasize his favorite theory. In one of the leisurely opening scenes of the book Juan Chicoy, the owner of the bus, started repairing his vehicle in the early hours of the morning. His helper, Pimples Carson, fought off sleep to work with him.

Suddenly the lights in the lunchroom sprang on and the geranium border around the building leaped into being. Juan glanced towards the lights. "Alice is up," he said. "Won't be long till the coffee's ready. Come on, let's move the rear end in now."

The two men worked together well. Each understood what was to be done. Each did his piece. Pimples lay on his back too, tightening the housing nuts, and in the teamwork a good feeling came to him. 2

The most striking instance of fellowship, however, occurs near the end of The Grapes of Wrath when Rosasharn was in the midst of labor. The flood-waters were reaching the box car where women were helping her when Pa "hurried to the lowest part of

1. In Dubious Battle, p.61
2. The Wayward Bus, p.24
the bank and drove his shovel into the mud. . . And beside him
the other men ranged themselves. They heaped the mud up in a
long embankment, and those who had no shovels cut live willow
whips and wove them in a mat and kicked them into the bank.
Over the men came a fury of work, a fury of battle. When one
man dropped his shovel, another took it up."

The action of *In Dubious Battle* is also illustrative of
the same principle: an emergency or a definite objective brings
unity and identity of interest. There is one incident espe-
cially to emphasize this point, the incident where the strikers
learn that they have been given a few acres of land on which
to camp.

. . . "We got to get out o' here. We got a ranch to stay
on. There's goin' to be order, too. That's the only way we
can win this. We all got to take orders. Now the guys that
got cars take all the women an' kids an' the truck that can't
be carried. The rest'll have to walk. Now be nice. Don't
break nothing -- yet. An' stay together. While you're gettin'
your stuff picked up, London wants to see his committee."

. . . Their laughter was heavy. Into the rooms they
swarmed, and carried out their things and piled them on the
ground -- pots and kettles, blankets, bundles of clothing. The
women rolled out push-carts for the children. . .

Another reference to the scene where Lisa's baby is born,
is necessary to supplement the theory that people find joy in
cooperation. Mac had only to ask for volunteers to contribute
their services or for articles of white cloth to be used dur-
ing the process of birth. The response was eager and over-
whelming. After the birth, Jim said --

1. *The Grapes of Wrath*, p.599
2. *In Dubious Battle*, p.132
"You didn't need all that cloth. Why did you tell London to burn it?"

"Look, Jim, Don't you see? Every man who gave part of his clothes felt that the work was his own. They all feel responsible for that baby. It's theirs, because something from them went to it. To give back the cloth would cut them out. There's no better way to make men part of a movement than to have them give something to it." 1

The final episode of The Wayward Bus presents a picture of wholehearted cooperation under conditions only slightly less discouraging than those at the end of The Grapes of Wrath. Juan Chicoy had foundered his bus in the mud of the back road so deeply that it took all the efforts of the driver and passengers to restore it to dry roadbed again.

Outside, Pimples was performing miracles of muscle and fortitude. His two-toned oxfords were destroyed with mud. . .

Ernest Horton took a pickax and crossed the ditch. He picked away the turf and roots and topsoil until he found what he wanted. The broken stone from the ancient crash of the hill. He lifted the stones out and piled them on the grass beside his hole.

Camille came over to him. "I'll help you carry some of these down." 2

Thus each contributes his share and experiences the joy of working together, and in that joy may be found peace and stability.

Of all the adhesives that unite the group towards associative action the urge for security is the most binding. In Steinbeck's world of violent transitions, where nothing remains fixed and where stability is often an uncertain and marginal thing, the search for security is intense. Life itself under such conditions is frequently measured by the meanest economic

1. In Dubious Battle, p.61
2. The Wayward Bus, p.306
foot-rule.

"Three dollars a day. I get damn sick of creeping for my dinner -- and not getting it. I got a wife and kids. We got to eat. Three dollars a day, and it comes every day."

But there are many for whom even a "three dollars a day" scale of values does not exist. They have nothing but grinding poverty to bring despair to the heart and to broaden the psychic dimensions of their resentment and bitterness.

A typical instance is pictured in *Grapes of Wrath*:

"Suppose they's a hundred men wants that job. Suppose them men got kids, and them kids is hungry. Suppose a lousy dime'll buy a box a mush for them kids. Suppose a nickel'll buy at least somepin for them kids. An' you got a hundred men. Jus' offer 'em a nickel -- why they'll kill each other fighting for that nickel. Know what they was payin', las' job I had? Fifteen cents an hour. Ten hours for a dollar and a half, and ya can't stay on the place. Got to burn gasoline gettin' there.' He was panting with anger, and his eyes blazed with hate.

Squeezed by such poverty, the wretched often arouse themselves to begin a fearful search for security. Wherever there is need, families like the Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath* or London and his daughter of *In Dubious Battle* are driven to adjust themselves in different ways. Frequently they take to the highways and join an army of frantic migrants -- "... Moving 'cause they want somepin better'n what they got. An' that's the on'y way they'll ever git it. Wantin' it an' needin' it, they'll go out an' git it."

There along the roadside the uprooted wander in an odys-

1. *The Grapes of Wrath*, pl 50
2. Ibidem, p.354
sey of bewilderment until a small group gathers at some point, perhaps one that offers a natural shelter. Then oftentimes the first miracle occurs which gives the group an intimation of their real power. Solitude begins changing to sociability; the gravest hurt is soothed with comradeship; and the whole pattern is transformed into something rich and strange. For no matter how deep the sense of loss and loneliness it takes the personal philanthropy of friendship to renew the will and restore a dignity to the soul. This is a cardinal principle of Steinbeck's. He explains his point in a passage of sonorous beauty.

One man, one family driven from the land; this rusty car creaking along the highway to the west. I lost my land, a single tractor took my land. I am alone and I am bewildered. And in the night one family camps in a ditch and another family pulls in and the tents come out. The two men squat on their hams and the women and children listen. Here is the node, you who hate change and fear revolution. Keep these two squatting men apart; make them hate, fear, suspect each other. Here is the anlage of the thing you fear. This is the zygote. For here "I lost my land" is changed; a cell is split and from its splitting grows the thing you hate -- "We lost our land." The danger is here, for two men are not as lonely and perplexed as one. And from this first "we" there grows a still more dangerous thing: "I have a little food" plus "I have none." If from this problem the sum is "We have a little food," the thing is on its way, the movement has direction.

Perhaps in an open field or near a ditch the nucleus of cooperative action comes into being. There in the transient communities the migrants soon find confidence in sharing their belongings. They learn the joy of building through collective

1. Grapes of Wrath, p. 206
enterprise. They experience the safety of social insurance; and they evolve a code of social conduct based upon their actual needs, not upon the calcified procedure of tradition.

The families moved westward, and the technique of building the worlds improved so that the people could be safe in their worlds; and the form was so fixed that a family acting in the rules knew it was safe in the rules.

There grew up government in the worlds, with leaders, with elders. A man who was wise found that his wisdom was needed in every camp; a man who was a fool could not change his folly with his world. And a kind of insurance developed in these nights. A man with food fed a hungry man, and thus insured himself against hunger. And when a baby died a pile of silver coins grew at the door flap, for a baby must be well buried, since it has had nothing else of life. An old man may be left in a potter's field, but not a baby.

This new spirit, it is true, is often a spontaneous impulse born of desperation. For any extended amount of cooperative activity, however, the original emotions would eventually lose their combustive qualities if they were not directed properly. Then it is imperative for the group to find someone with the qualities of leadership to lend them driving powers. What sort of person is qualified to act as leader? Those traits are not easy to define, but they are recognizable nevertheless --

... "Who's London?" he asked. Lean-face answered him, "London's a good guy -- a big guy. We travel with him. He's a big guy."

"The boss, huh?"

"Well, no, he ain't a boss, but he's a good guy. We travel with him. You ought to hear him talk to a cop." 2

It is easily seen that whatever qualifications Steinbeck

1. Grapes of Wrath, p.266
2. In Dubious Battle, p.52
considers necessary for "the big guy" he ruled out the possibility of his being obeyed as a "boss". He must be one of the 'people'. No matter how desperate a bid for strength the group is making, no matter how grave the need for discipline, the leader must consult the group and command through the effect of his personality.

There is an especially vivid picture of such a man in the story Of Mice and Men:

A tall man stood in the doorway. He held a crushed Stetson hat under his arm while he combed his long, black, damp hair straight back. Like the others he wore blue jeans and a short denim jacket. When he had finished combing his hair he moved into the room, and he moved with a majesty only achieved by royalty and master craftsmen. He was a jerkline skinner, the prince of the ranch, capable of driving ten, sixteen, even twenty mules with a single line to the leaders. He was capable of killing a fly on the wheeler's butt with a bull whip without touching the mule. There was a gravity in his manner and a quiet so profound that all talk stopped when he spoke. His authority was so great that his word was taken on any subject, be it politics or love. This was Slim, the jerkline skinner.  

A contrasting example may be found in The Moon is Down, with the first glimpse of Mayor Orden --

"He had been Mayor so long that he was the Idea-Mayor in the town. . . He and his office were one. It had given him dignity and he had given it warmth."  

Perhaps the "big guy" principle is enough in itself to motivate confidence, since the group is likely to favor the person who is bold, determined and calm. But Steinbeck is em-

1. Of Mice and Men, p.61  
2. The Moon is Down, p.21
phatic in his belief, however, that there is too much at stake for arbitrary leadership, that authority "has to come from the men." There must be a democratic process involved in selecting the right leader. The group confers the honor usually on the one among them whose judgment is always cool and whose head remains level in any emergency.

There is a hint of how the selection is made in the story, *In Dubious Battle*, when Mac suggests to the strikers:

You guys can think it over, and then you can maybe get the whole bunch to vote on it. Most strikes break down because they got no discipline. Suppose we divide the men in squads, let each squad elect a leader, and then he's responsible for his squad. We can work 'em in groups then.

One of the men said, "Lot of these guys was in the army. They didn't like it none."

"Sure they didn't. They was fightin' some other guy's war. They had officers shoved down their throats. If they elect their officers and fight their own war, it'd be different."

"Most o' these guys don't like no officers."

"... If the squad don't like the leader, let 'em vote him into the ranks and elect another leader." 2

Not only is Steinbeck definite about the characteristics which designate a leader but there is a great frame of reference in his works as evidence of his thinking in this respect. He hammers away at the importance of leadership in organizing and bargaining for security. First of all, the leader must be courageous --

London walked fiercely into the crowd of men. "You guys get back," he cried. "You got enough to do without no kid tricks. Go on, now, get back where you belong." The author-

1. *In Dubious Battle*, p. 60
2. *Ibidem*, p. 154
ity of the man drove them sullenly back, but they dispersed reluctantly.

The deputy shouted, "You keep those guys in order or we'll do it with Winchesters." 1

The leader must be conscious that his authority is bestowed upon him by the 'people' and that it can be removed at the people's will. This point Steinbeck underscores in The Moon is Down particularly. When Mayor Orden, for instance, is pressed by enemy officers to "cooperate", he replies:

... "This is a little town. I don't know. The people are confused and so am I."
"But will you try to cooperate?"
Orden shook his head. "I don't know. When the town makes up its mind what it wants to do, I'll probably do that."
"But you are the authority."
Orden smiled. "You won't believe this, but it is true: authority is in the town. I don't know how or why, but it is so. This means that we cannot act as quickly as you can, but when a direction is set, we all act together. I am confused. I don't know yet." 2

The most significant statement is that "authority is in the town", since it emphasizes again Steinbeck's consistent loyalty to the democratic ideal.

In one instance he has Mayor Orden say, "Sir, I am of this people. ... Some people accept appointed leaders and obey them. But my people have elected me. They made me and they can unmake me... " 3

Later on, the mystical powers of democratic authority is further asserted --

1. In Dubious Battle, p.140
2. The Moon is Down, p.40-1
3. Ibidem, p.36
"... Orden must be held against rebellion."
"And if they rebel and we shoot Orden?"
"Then the little doctor is next; although he holds no position he is next in authority in the town."
"But he holds no office."
"He has the confidence of the people."
"And when we shoot him, then what?"
"Then we have the authority... When we have killed the leaders, the rebellion will be broken."
Lanser asked quizically, "Do you really think so?"

Towards the end of the story, when the Mayor's life is made forfeit, the idea of a democratic procedure in replacing a leader is further developed. Dr. Winters, who is highly respected in the community, makes the observation, when Orden continued "as though he had been talking":

"You know, I couldn't stop it if I wanted to."
"I know," said Winter, "but they don't know." And he went on with a thought he had been having. "A time-minded people," he said, "and the time is nearly up. They think that just because they have only one leader and one head, we are all like that. They know that ten heads lopped off will destroy them, but we are a free people; we have as many heads as we have people, and in a time of need leaders pop up among us like mushrooms."

Even when he realizes that he is doomed, Mayor Orden comments philosophically about his relationship to 'the people' especially in a time of rebellion:

And the Mayor smiled helplessly at him. "They cannot stop, sir."
Colonel Lanser said harshly, "I arrested you as a hostage for the good behavior of your people. Those are my orders."
"But that won't stop it," Orden said simply. "You don't understand. When I have become a hindrance to the people, they will do without me."

1. The Moon is Down, p.171
2. Ibidem, p.175
3. Ibidem, p.183
Just to compare his own conception of a natural leader with the sort of leadership principle observed under authoritarian conditions, Steinbeck reverts again and again to irony. His use of terminology is one way of making fine distinctions. Whenever he refers in *The Moon is Down* to the authoritarian leader, for instance, he capitalizes the word; otherwise it is written entirely in lower case letters. He also emphasizes a difference in the leaders' relationship to the people quite in accordance with the understanding of the times.

Corell jumped to his feet excitedly. "This is contrary to the Leader's words!" he said. "The Leader has said that all branches are equally honorable."

Lanser went on very quietly, "I hope the Leader knows. I hope he can read the minds of soldiers." . . . 1

The last words in particular drip with scorn.

For the wretched, the downtrodden, and the dispossessed, the uses of adversity are often sweet. Given a motive, a strong directive impulse of some sort, with or without a leader, the group will unite fearlessly and fling themselves upon the source of their irritation in a blind fury of anger. The pattern of oppression is an ancient one and quite extensive, but no amount of force is so certain to arouse the group into activity as ruthless violence. Steinbeck explains this theory by placing a different sort of interpretation upon the instinct for self-preservation: "There would seem to be only one commandment for living things: Survive! This commandment decrees the death and destruction of myriads of individuals for 1. *The Moon is Down*, p. 64
the survival of the whole." 1

An early chapter of In Dubious Battle gives a running account of how brutality often accomplishes this end. The realism of this incident is valid enough so that the description might have come directly from an account of one of California's great strikes.

"Well, Suppose," Jim insisted, "suppose the owners do meet the demands?"

"I don't think they will. There's the bulk of power in the hands of a few men. That always makes 'em cocky. Now we start our strike, and Torgas County gets itself an ordinance that makes congregation unlawful. Now what happens? We congregate the men. A bunch of sheriff's men try to push them around, and that starts a fight. There's nothing like a fight to cement the men together. Well, then the owners start a vigilantes committee, bunch of fool shoe clerks, or my friends the American Legion boys trying to pretend they aren't middle-aged, cinching in their belts to hide their pot-bellies -- there I go again. Well, the vigilantes start shooting. If they knock over some of the tramps we have a public funeral; and after that, we get some real action. Maybe they have to call out the troops." He was breathing hard in excitement. "Jesus, man! The troops win, all right! But every time a guardsman jabs a fruit tramp with a bayonet a thousand men all over the country come on our side. . ." 2

The idea in its application is made even more effective through the experience of Al Anderson. Al is a "sympathizer" who is beaten up and whose lunchroom is demolished because of his clandestine relationship with strikers.

The heavy face twisted in a grimace. Al swung his head back and forth. "I been thinkin'," he said. "Ever since they beat me up I been thinkin'. I can't get those guys outa my head -- my little wagon all burned up, an' them jumpin' on me with their feet; and two cops down on the corner watchin', and not doin' a thing! I can't get that outa my head."

1. Sea of Cortes, p.241
2. In Dubious Battle, p.32-3
"And so you want to join up with us, huh, Al?"
"I want to be against 'em," Al cried. "I want to be fightin' 'em all my life. I want to be on the other side."
"They'll just beat you up worse, Al. I'm tellin' you straight. They'll knock hell out of you."
"Well, I won't care then, because I'll be fightin' 'em, see?"

Al's resentment is typical, for nothing strengthens the will to resist more than high-handed oppression. To illustrate the form this resistance might take, Steinbeck has a passage which is on the very borderline of burning poetry:

... This land, this red land, is us; and the flood years and the dust years and drought years are us. We can't start again. The bitterness we sold to the junk man -- he got it all right, but we have it still. And when the owner men told us to go, that's us; and when the tractor hit the house, that's us until we're dead. To California or any place-- every one a drum major leading a parade of hurts, marching with our bitterness. And some day -- the armies of bitterness will all be going the same way. And they'll all walk together, and there'll be a dead terror from it. 2

The march of bitterness is instinctive and fearful, it is true, but never without hope. The Sea of Cortez establishes the principle especially that "among men, it seems, historically, at any rate, the process of coordination and disintegration follow each other with great regularity, and the index of coordination is the measure of disintegration which follows". 3

In this alternating mood of resistance and resignation one element, however, remains fixed -- and that element is the potential resilience of those who have been oppressed. The entire story of The Moon is Down is based upon such a theme, let

1. In Dubious Battle, p.198
2. The Grapes of Wrath, p.119
3. The Sea of Cortez, p.264
alone the memorable incidents of *The Grapes of Wrath*. The reader is conscious of the growing of the people's will all through the narrative until it becomes a vital force, piecing itself together first in scattered signs and then showing itself with dynamic power like the gathering of a tropical storm.

During the course of one scene, Mayor Orden remarked:

... "You mean, the people feel there is collaboration involved?"
"Yes, I suppose that is it."
Mayor Orden looked hopelessly at Doctor Winter, and Winter could offer him nothing but a wry smile. Orden said softly, "Am I permitted to refuse this honor?"
"I'm sorry," the colonel said. "No. These are the orders of my leader."
"The people will not like it," Orden said.
"Always the people! The people are disarmed. The people have no say."
Mayor Orden shook his head. "You do not know, sir." 1

Again, in chapter three of the same story there is another salient passage suggesting the growth of rebelliousness --

... In the town the people moved sullenly through the streets. Some of the light of astonishment was gone from their eyes, but still a light of anger had not taken its place. In the coal shaft the workingmen pushed the coal sullenly. The small tradesmen stood behind their counters and served the people, but no one communicated with them. The people spoke to one another in monosyllables, and everyone was thinking of the war, thinking of himself, thinking of the past and how it had suddenly been changed... 2

The mood of resistance continues to increase until Colonel Lanser himself is forced to admit its reality --

1. *The Moon is Down*, p.38-9
2. *Ibidem*, p.72
... He looked up quickly. "You will stay for the trial?"
"Yes, I'll stay. Then Alex won't be so lonely."
Lanser looked at him and smiled a little sadly. "We have taken on a job, haven't we?"
"Yes," said the Mayor, "the one impossible job in the world, the one thing that can't be done."
"And that is?"
"To break man's spirit permanently." 1

Man's spirit is the unknown quantity in group insurgency. The time comes when the 'people' start searching for means to activate their resistance into forms of revenge. Then the hatreds and the resentments crystallize and express themselves in terms of open warfare. When it comes to a condition like that no amount of suppression or violence can prevail; the conquerors find themselves isolated and grow "afraid of the conquered". There is a wall of "cold, sullen silence" that brings on fear and cruelty. At last a climax is reached in a thirst for weapons of destruction.

Orden began slowly. "I want to speak simply. This is a little town. Justice and injustice are in terms of little things. Your brother's shot and Alex Morden's shot. Revenge against a traitor. The people are angry and they have no way to fight back. But it's all in little terms. It's people against people, not idea against idea."

Winter said, "It's funny for a doctor to think of destruction, but I think all invaded people want to resist. We are disarmed; our spirits and bodies aren't enough. The spirit of a disarmed man sinks."

Will Anders asked, "What's all this for, sir? What do you want of us?"
"We want to fight them and we can't," Orden said. "They're using hunger on the people now. Hunger brings weakness. You boys are sailing for England. Maybe nobody will listen to but tell them from us -- from a small town -- to give us weapons." 2

1. The Moon is Down, p.89
2. Ibidem, p.185
A people aroused can be dangerous, but a determined people who have found weapons can never be permanently overcome.

The 'people' learn to cooperate in secrecy through those unfathomable channels of communication, striking out always more boldly along the road to independence and rehabilitation. No matter how desperate their incentives may be the act of "working together" brings release to their greatest vigor and intelligence and drives them on until their aims are met.

In the little town the news ran quickly. It was communicated by whispers in doorways, by quick, meaningful looks - 'The Mayor's been arrested' -- and through the town a little quiet jubilance ran, a fierce little jubilance. . .

The people went into the country, into the woods, searching for dynamite. And children playing in the snow found the dynamite, and by now even the children had their instructions. They opened the packages and ate the chocolate, and then they buried the dynamite in the snow and told their parents where it was. 

Twice in the story Steinbeck compares the resistant people to "flypaper". By judicious use of the explosives at hand, the "flypaper" was able thus to nullify the victory of the conquering "fly"!

Of all the means of channeling grievances into positive action perhaps the most compelling is through martyrdom. Whether or not the victim warranted veneration is aside from the issue. The only thing that matters is the revelation of how far the opposition will go in its tactics. And the disclosure of the fact that the opposing forces will not stop at murder is an irresistible device for developing or stiffening the unity of resistance. Martyrdom, to say the least, is an ancient emblem of

1. The Moon is Down, p.172
injustice, and Steinbeck is well aware of its impact upon the emotions.

There is a remarkable instance of its effect on the Strikers in In Dubious Battle:

Joy had stopped, his eyes wide. His mouth flew open and a jet of blood rolled down his chin, and down his shirt. His eyes ranged wildly over the crowd of men. He fell on his face and clawed outward with his fingers. The guards stared unbelievingly at the squirming figure on the ground. Suddenly the steam stopped; and the quietness fell on the men like a wave of sound. The line of strikers stood still, with strange, dreaming faces. Joy lifted himself up with his arms, like a lizard, and then dropped again. A little thick river of blood ran down on the crushed rock of the roadbed.

A strange, heavy movement started among the men. London moved forward woodenly, and the men moved forward. They were stiff. The guards aimed with their guns, but the line moved on, unheeding, unseeing. . . The ends of the long line curled and circled slowly around the center of the dead man, like sheep about a nucleus.

Mao's funeral oration which he held later on beside the body of Joy is strictly in the bloody shirt tradition. Mark Antony's passion could not have been more forceful nor his eloquence more cunning. After whipping up a sort of hysteria in the crowd, Mao "broke the rhythm, and the break jarred them. He said quietly, 'This little guy is the spirit of all of us. We won't pray for him. He don't need prayers. And we don't need prayers. We need clubs!'

"Hunggrily the crowd tried to restore the rhythm. 'Clubs,' they said. 'Clubs.' And then they waited in silence. . ." 2

There was no telling what the group would do next when

1. In Dubious Battle, p. 162
2. Ibidem, p. 227
passions were inflamed.

A little less effective as an irritant to the wrath of an already aroused people is the sight of blood or the witnessing of an injury caused by faulty equipment. These, too, have their symbolic associations and people respond to them with the infectiousness of fear caused by tribal taboos. Through emotional transference, the onlookers connect those injuries with their own conditions, feeling that but for the grace of God the accident might have happened to them instead.

But whether it be exercise of force, assassination, or the sight of blood pouring from a wound, that feeling, "like water just before it gets to boilin'", is aroused wherever there is deep injustice. Near the climax of In Dubious Battle an intense moment, resulting from such an emotion, marks an episode of outrage:

Mao was up now, and excited. "Tell me."
"Well, when the crowd saw the blood they went nuts, and London started 'em down to break the barricade."
Mao cried, "Didn't I tell you? They need blood. That works. . . ."
"They're down there now. God, Mao, you ought to of seen them. It was like all of them disappeared, and it was just one big -- animal, going down the road. Just all one animal. . . ."
"Right!" said Mao. "People think a mob is wasteful, but I've seen plenty; and I tell you, a mob with something it wants to do is just about as efficient as trained soldiers, but tricky. They'll knock that barricade, but then what? They'll want to do something else before they cool off."
And he went on, "That's right, what you said. It is a big animal. It's different from the men in it. And it's stronger than all the men put together. . . ."

1. In Dubious Battle, p.316-7
When men are denied the vital elements of security — food, jobs, homes — they are most likely to act as a unit — "It's like the whole bunch, millions and millions was one man. . . The stiffs don't know what's happenin', but when the big guy gets mad, they'll all be there. . . They'll be bitin' out throats with their teeth, and clawin' off lips."¹ Such is the fury of indignation when people can no longer stand the extremes of hunger and want! The mass becomes solidified into a single creature, a monster, raging and ravishing in animal violence.

But before this can happen there must be something on the borderline of actual starvation and denial for many at the same time; otherwise there would be no spontaneity of collective action. Steinbeck seems to emphasize that point.

He exemplifies it first in his working philosophy in an outburst of symphonic prose. The Joads are on the road towards California when he inserts the following observation:

The western land, nervous under the beginning change. The Western States, nervous as horses before a thunder storm. The great owners, striking at the immediate thing, the widening government, the growing labor unity; striking at new taxes, at plans; not knowing these things are results, not causes. Results, not causes; results, not causes. The causes lie deep and simple — the causes are a hunger in a stomach, multiplied a million times; a hunger in a single soul, hunger for joy and some security, multiplied a million times; muscles and mind aching to grow, to work, to create, multiplied a million times. The last clear definite function of man — muscles aching to work, minds aching to create be-

¹ In Dubious Battle, p. 67
yond the single need — this is man. . .1

Then he re-asserts that pain of hunger must be a necessary driving force since a full stomach sometimes dulls rebellion —

"... Look, Tom. Try an' get the folks in there to come out. They can do it in a couple days. Them peaches is ripe. Tell 'em."

"They won't," said Tom. "They're a-gettin' five, an' they don' give a damn about nothin' else."

"But jus' the minute they ain't strikebreakin' they won't get no five."

"I don' think they'll swalla that. Five they're a-gettin', Tha's all they care about."2

Given an objective to accomplish or a commitment to fulfill, however, men, as a rule, will cooperate selflessly and without stint. But the objective must be made clear, or it must result from a great emergency, for although people enjoy teamwork they need an incentive for any prolonged drive to attain security. Nevertheless, Steinbeck sees the whole picture of economic and social conflict as a looked struggle between the "innumerable" forces of "Spirits armed", opposing each other "in dubious battle" for the great stakes of economic stability and justice.3 He sees an increasing reliance upon the group for accomplishment, and he values the power of "the people" aroused as the most extraordinary source of strength.

1. *Grapes of Wrath*, p.204
2. *Ibidem*, p.524
3. Vide Introduction to *In Dubious Battle*, Modern Library edition. The reference is to the lines from Milton's *Paradise Lost* where Steinbeck derived the title of his story.
CHAPTER V. THE DOMINANT HUMAN

There is another side to the pattern of collective security -- one that Steinbeck pictures more by implication than otherwise. The descriptions of the 'dominant human' and his activities, however, contrast strongly in Steinbeck's technique with those of the 'common man'. Yet this area of understanding is as vital to the knowledge of Steinbeck as his sympathy for the underprivileged. The author appreciates the importance that inference and suggestion can assume in "pointing up" his perspectives; and in this case even his negative approach is a calculated one. His heart is all with the common people who live on the edge of economic security -- the tenant farmer, the fruitpicker, the industrial worker. When he writes about them there is a far-reaching omniscience to his point of view, an intimacy and an understanding that he seldom achieves with his pictures of the more prosperous classes. He has little sentiment for the rich, the well-born, and the able; and he feels that in their success they have already sown the seeds for their own destruction.

Steinbeck's novels supply several words which he associates with his dominant human. Such names, for instance, as "capitalist", "owner men", "proprietor", and "business man" are typical. What is characteristic about them is that they are imposed as generic terms to distinguish an entire class.
and they are sometimes so confused that like the groups which make up 'the people', there are no distinctive outlines at all in their meaning.

Steinbeck seems to impose an arbitrary pattern of behavior upon representatives of this group. He often conceals their individuality by "typing" them. He makes them look alike, dress alike, and think alike; as though in their uniformity they would find a bolster for their courage. This procedure is not an artistic lapse; it is intentional. Nevertheless it raises a critical question about the extent of Steinbeck's detachment.

The story of In Dubious Battle is one of open warfare between the forces of two economic territories. The class struggle is complicated by frenzied emotions and made all the more vicious and unrelenting. Both factions involved separate into armed camps, the customary channels of communication are blocked, and each contingent develops its own devices and weapons of resistance. As long as passions run high, however, there is no compromise. Both sides lay frantic claim to justice. They try to paint the issues in colors of black and white and to defend their own interests with every possible subterfuge.

Throughout the narrative Steinbeck weights his observations in favor of the lesser privileged (or at least he seems to, because his story is told from the perspective of the
worker), yet he is not wholly biased. Through the arguments of Doc Burton, one of the noblest personages of the book, he retains a balance of fairness in his account. In one episode he develops his thesis that there is often only an unthinking obsession involved in supporting the cause of the underprivileged, a blind emotion that leads to fanaticism, a compulsion to worship something. During the course of the scene, while London is addressing the striker, Jim and Doc hear "an angry crowd roar, a bellow like an animal in fury" -

"London's telling them... They're mad, Jesus, how a mad crowd can fill the air with madness. You don't understand it, Doc. My old men used to fight alone. When he got licked, he was licked. I remember how lonely it was. But I'm not lonely anymore, and I can't be licked, because I'm more than myself."

"Pure religious ecstasy. I can understand that. Partakers of the blood of the Lamb."

"Religion, hell!" Jim cried. "This is men, not God. This is something you know."

"Well, can't a group of men be God, Jim?"

Jim wrenched himself around. "You make too damn many words, Doc. You build a trap of words and then you fall into it. You can't catch me. Your words don't mean anything to me. I know what I'm doing. Argument doesn't have any effect on me."

And in the same incident Steinbeck interprets further his views on economic warfare and its causes and effects, with Doc Burton again as his mouthpiece:

Jim said, "You ought to think only of the end, Doc. Out of all this struggle a good thing is going to grow. That makes it worthwhile.

"Jim, I wish I knew it. But in my little experience the end is never very different in its nature from the means.

1. In Dubious Battle, p.254-5
Damn it, Jim, you can only build a violent thing with violence."

"I don't believe that," Jim said. "All great things have violent beginnings."

"There aren't any beginnings," Burton said. "Nor any ends. It seems to me that man has engaged in a blind and fearful struggle out of a past he can't remember, into a future he can't foresee nor understand. And man has met and defeated every obstacle, every enemy except one. He cannot win over himself. How mankind hates itself."

Jim said, "We don't hate ourselves, we hate the invested capital that keeps us down."

"The other side is made of men, Jim, men like you..."

That last statement -- "The other side is made of men, Jim, men like you" -- is particularly significant for an impartial understanding of Steinbeck. For injustice and greed is to him a human failure, with "the other side" as headstrong in defense of their rights as Jim and his companions are in theirs. Just as the strikers muster their strength by collective activity, so do the orchard owners likewise band together to insure their own welfare. Their first impulse, however, is to obscure the brutality of their means by calling it "protection", as if the old device of verbalization could soften the cruelty of their methods or cushion the impact of their ruthlessness.

Both In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath have numerous descriptions of the tactics used by the landowners to forestall any hazard to their profits. In Dubious Battle pictures the orchard owners of Torgas Valley as having organized themselves into the Fruit Growers' Association -- al-

1. In Dubious Battle, p.253
though the controlling authority of the association is made up of Gillray, Martin, and Hunter. In *The Grapes of Wrath* the combination of landholders is called vaguely "The Bank" or "The Company" or "the great owners".

How those landowners marshal their exploitive powers against the migrants and the tenant farmers and how they combine to frustrate any resistance is an old topic in economic history. Steinbeck, however, documents his events in such a way that there is an exciting freshness even to the most reminiscent echoes and a ring of validity to the smallest details.

The methods used by the associated owner in breaking strikes and discouraging rebellion are themselves a series of object-lessons in calculated ruthlessness. A few examples are suggested by Mao while he was persuading Mr. Anderson to let the strikers camp on his fallow land in Torgas Valley:

... "The reason for the strike is this pay-out. Now the owners will run in scabs, and there'll be trouble. But there's a bunch of men going out, enough to picket the Valley. D'you get the picture?"

"Part of it; but I don't know what you're driving at."

"Well, here's the rest. Damn soon there'll be a supervisors' ordinance against gathering on a road or on any public property. The owners'll kick the strikers off their land for trespassing." 1

A little later on, when Mao and Jim had left Anderson's, they encounter on the road a few overcoated figures --

1. *In Dubious Battle*, p.112
One of the overcoated men lounged around the car and leaned on the door. The motor idled unevenly. Because of the light beam, the man leaning on the door was almost invisible. He said, "We want you two out of the Torgas Valley by daylight tomorrow, get it? Out."

Mao's foot crept over and pressed Jim's leg. His voice became a sweet whine. "What's the matter 'th us, mister? We never done nothing."

The man answered angrily, "Lay off, buddy. We know who you are, and what you are. We want you out."

Mao whined, "If you're the law, we're citizens. We got a right to stand trial. I pay taxes back home."

"Well, go home and pay 'em. This isn't the law; this is a citizens' committee. If you think you God-dammed reds can come in here and raise hell, you're crazy..."

Soon there is a hint of excitement to come when Mao reports to London at the strikers' camp.

Mao asked, "Have you heard from the owners yet?"

"Yeah, 'super' camp in. Asked if we was goin' back to work. We says 'no'. He says, 'Get the hell off the place by morning.' Says he'll have a trainload of stiffs in here by mornin'." 2

But Jim is yet to discover a new line of approach in collective organization for security when Mao and he are seized by deputies with menacing guns. Mao says --

"You takin' us to jail, mister?"

"Jail, hell, we're takin' you God-dammed reds to the Vigilance Committee. If you're lucky they'll beat the crap out of you and dump you over the county line; if you ain't lucky, they'll string you up to a tree. We got no use for radicals in this valley."

"But you guys are cops, you got to take us to jail."

"That's what you think. There's a nice little house a little ways from here. That's where we're taking you." 3

They learned in that way the length to which the opposition would go, and the revelation was galling. It was

1. In Dubious Battle, p.116-7
2. Ibidem, p.120
3. Ibidem, p.150
only when the two men had escaped in the darkness that Mac made a bitter confession.

Jim looked out through the tent opening. "Do you think we'll win this strike, Mac?"

"We ought to go to sleep; but you know, Jim, I wouldn't have told you this before tonight: No, I don't think we have a chance to win it. This valley's organized."

But it is Bolter, president of the Fruit Growers Association, who, in the long run, discloses the far-reaching influence of cooperative action among those of vested interests. In his conference with the strike leaders, he remarks at one point:

"... Come back to work. We only want peace."

London was scowling. "I had enough o' this," he said. "You want peace. Well, what we done? Marched in two parades. An' what you done? Shot three of our men, burned a truck and a lunch wagon and shut off our food supply." He shook his head sadly. "We don't want to fight you men," he said. "We want you to come back to work. But if we do have to fight, we have weapons. The health authorities are pretty upset about this camp. And the government doesn't like uninspected meat moving in this county. The citizens are pretty tired of all this riot. And of course we may have to call troops, if we need them."

He then tips his hand as to how the scales of justice are balanced completely in favor of the landowners:

"... We have a right to protect our property, and we'll do it. I've tried to deal man to man with you, and you won't deal. From now on the roads are closed. An ordinance will go through tonight forbidding any parading on the county roads, or any gathering. The sheriff will deputize a thousand men, if he needs them."

Yet for all his candor Steinbeck occasionally relents in his

1. In *Dubious Battle*, p.166
2. Ibidem, p.248
3. Ibidem, p.250
attitude towards the dominant human. He is careful not to saddle him with all the blame for class friction, not to denounce him for all the unmerciful brutality in connection with economic strife. He emphasizes the fact repeatedly that "the dominant human in his secularity grows soft and fearful", and he makes it plain that this fearfulness accounts for the extremes of his actions; since there is probably more apprehension in his struggle to maintain his security than in that of the "common" man. Protective associations, a force of deputies, troopers, and vigilantes -- those are means of perpetuating a system that has brought about ease and comfort. But Steinbeck concedes that in the use of violence there is something deeper, too; and that that urge is one common to all classes of people.
CHAPTER VI. THE FAMILY SPIRIT

Where the cooperative spirit has its most constructive influence is in family relationships; and in this area of accounting Steinbeck is at his best. There is a tenderness of compassion in his writing that turns most of his references into poetry when he records the activities of a family.

One instance of family solidarity is given in Steinbeck's earlier novel To A God Unknown. No sooner had Joseph Wayne acquired land in California than his first act was to write a letter to his brothers inviting them to settle with him. It was not long before they came.

The families clustered about the house Joseph had built. They put up little shacks on their own land as the law required, but never for a minute did they think of the land as being divided into four. It was one ranch, and when the technicalities of the homesteading were satisfied, it was the Wayne ranch. Four square houses clustered near to the great oak, and the big barn belonged to the tribe.

The success of community enterprise, however, depends upon the contribution of individuals towards the group as a whole. The integration of such effort and the ardor of accomplishment are the yardsticks by which the result is measured. In The Wayward Bus Kit's understanding of mechanical necessities wins praise from his employer, Juan Chico'y. The Grapes of Wrath has in it numerous instances of special aptitudes which are indispensable to the group. Not the least in importance is the recognition given Al Joad for his mecha-

1. To A God Unknown, p. 29
ical skill. This skill is one that Steinbeck rates quite highly.

Al, his hand ready if Tom should want to shake it, grinned self-consciously. Tom stuck out his hand and Al's hand jerked out to meet it. And there was liking between these two. "They tell me you're a good hand with a truck," said Tom.

And Al, sensing that his brother would not like a boaster, said, "I don't know nothing much about it." 1

The boy not only helped to nurse the ailing Joad truck against fearful odds along the road to California but he was able to prove his mechanical wisdom in helping the Wilsons as well. When Mr. Wilson complained, "Well, she jus' won't run," he said:

"Runs a minute an' then dies?"
"Yes, sir. An' I can't keep her agoin' no matter how much gas I give her. God worse an' worse, an' now I can't get her a-movin' a-tall."

Al was very proud and very mature, then. "I think you got a plugged gas line. I'll blow her out for ya."

And Pa was proud too. "He's a good hand with a car," Pa said. 2

Whenever the squeeze of adversity closes in, then the family ties are cemented and the members draw together to find strength and comfort in physical nearness. The Joads, when deprivation hit them hardest, found salvation in working towards a common goal. There is no scene more pathetic and yet heart-warming than the explanation of how the family pooled their efforts when the time came to leave their land and homes.

1. The Grapes of Wrath, p. 115
2. Ibidem, p. 201
"Well," said Pa, "we sol' all the stuff at our place, and the whole bunch of us chopped cotton, even Grampa."

"Sure did," said Grampa.

"We put ever'thing together -- two hundred dollars. We give seventy-five for this here truck, an' me an' Al out her in two an' built on this here back. . . ." 1

A fine example of cooperation occurs also in the same story with the burial of Grampa Joad. The family, in council, had decided that funds were too low for a decent funeral and the men accepted the responsibility of digging the grave themselves.

On the edge of the ring of firelight the men had gathered. For tools they had a shovel and a mattock. Pa marked out the ground -- eight feet long and three feet wide. The work went on in relays. Pa chopped the earth with the mattock and then Uncle John shoveled it out. Al chopped and Tom shoveled, Noah chopped and Connie shoveled. . . . 2

And so in deep solemnity the family works together in an age-old function. Such experiences as these, marked with misery, Steinbeck believes, are the climactic events which draw the group closer together, bind family ties, develop common interests. In The Grapes of Wrath it is Ma Joad who senses the importance of unity when the family have left the homestead on their tragic flight. "What we got lef' in the worl'?" she says. "Nothin' but us. Nothin' but folks." . . .

And a little later she voices her fierce determination to keep the family intact: "All we got is the family unbroke. Like a bunch a cows when the lobos are ranging, stick all together. I ain't scared while we're all here, all that's

1. The Grapes of Wrath, p. 113
2. Ibidem, p. 194
alive, but I ain't gonna see us bust up." 1

When a family is united, the members must occasionally make a vital decision in matters affecting the group as a whole. A situation like that is one in which, throughout his work, Steinbeck stresses again and again the importance of democratic procedure. No significant move is attempted unless the men-folk at least have agreed upon it or have given an opinion. The whole process is as serious in its way as a congressional declaration of war.

A manifestation of this spirit in *The Grapes of Wrath* is found just before the departure of the Joads, when the "preacher", Casey, asked if he might go along.

Ma looked to Tom to speak, because he was a man, but Tom did not speak. She let him have the chance that was his right, and then she said, "Why, we'd be proud to have you. 'Course I can't say right; Pa says all the men'll talk tonight and figure when we gonna start. I guess maybe we better not say till all the men come. . ." 2

That is the first indication of the family "get-together". The scene of the conference which soon followed is a vivid one -- perhaps one of the most memorable incidents in American fiction:

The family met at the most important place, near the truck. The house was dead, and the fields were dead; but this truck was the active thing, the living principle. The ancient Hudson, with bent and scarred radiator screen, with grease in dusty globules at the worn edges of every moving part, with hub caps gone and caps of red dust in their places -- this was the new hearth, the living center of the

1. *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 231
2. Ibidem, p. 127
family; half passenger car and half truck, high-sided and clumsy.

Pa walked around the truck, looking at it, and then he squatted down in the dust and found a stick to draw with. . . And Uncle John moved toward him and squatted down beside him. Their eyes were brooding. Grampa came out of the house and saw the two squatting together, and he jerked over and sat on the running board of the truck, facing them. That was the nucleus. Tom and Connie and Noah strolled in and squatted, and the line was a half-circle with Grampa in the opening. And then Ma came out of the house, and Granma with her, and Rose of Sharon behind, walking daintily. They took their places behind the squatting men; they stood up and put their hands on their hips. And the children, Ruthie and Winfield, hopped from foot to foot beside the women; the children squided their toes in the red dust, but they made no sound. . .

At a solemn conclave like that the cooperative spirit reaches its highest level. There is a report of accomplishments in behalf of the family, and a proud submission for approval; suggestions are made of steps to be taken; and grave decisions are reached from which there is no retreat.

With their meager equipment and pitiful funds the journey to California would seem ill-starred for the Joads. If it were not for their stout courage and capacity to endure heartbreak and if it were not for their willingness to sacrifice all for the sake of the group, there would be nothing to encounter but failure and despair. Discount also the efforts of Mao and Jim and Doc Burton and the bewildered strength of London and the struggle for economic justice among the fruitpickers would end in defeat. For only through concerted effort are the common goals of group activity reached. That is Steinbeck's conviction; and his doctrine

1. Grapes of Wrath, p.135-6
is carried alive into the heart by impassioned illustration.
CHAPTER VII. THE ALTRUIST

The cooperative spirit depends not alone upon the group but upon the individual too. As often as not, that person is one whose only ties with the group are bonds of sympathy, nothing more. He asks no other reward for his services than the physical satisfaction of helping acquire security for the underprivileged. Even with a gunshot wound in his arm, Jim Nolan was not discouraged in his efforts to organize the strikers --

"I'm happy," said Jim. "And happy for the first time. I'm full-up."
"I know. Don't let it die. It's the vision of Heaven."
"I don't believe in Heaven." Jim said. "I don't believe in religion."
"All right, I won't argue any more. I don't envy you as much as I might, Jim, because sometimes I love men as much as you do, maybe not in just the same way."

In the story Of Mice and Men George Milton's altruism takes the form of a sentimental guardianship over Lennie Small. They were not otherwise related. Slim asks George:

"You guys travel around together?"
"Sure. We kinda look after each other." He indicated Lennie with his thumb. "He ain't bright. Hell of a good worker, though. Hell of a nice fella, but he ain't bright. I've knew him for a long time."

And because of Lennie's helplessness, George felt morally responsible for the big simpleton.

The figure of the altruist appears in nearly all of

1. In Dubious Battle, p.200
2. Of Mice and Men, p.63
Steinbeck's later works. *Tortilla Flat* has its Danny, who "was a generous man", sharing all he had with his fellow-paisanos. The story *In Dubious Battle* has several characters whose very lives have been dedicated to helping the cause of the downtrodden and the dispossessed. First comes Mac MeLeod, the organizer, who admits reluctantly, "O.K., then, I'm a red. There ain't a hell of a secret about it." Then follows Jim Nolan, a young man with a growing talent for leadership. His apprenticeship to Mac brought him only a violent death and a heart broken eulogy by Mac at the very end of the story -- "Comrades! He didn't want nothing for himself --." Dr. Burton, while not too plausible as a character, serves Steinbeck by lending his scientific comfort to the striking fruit-pickers and providing a vehicle for the author's dialectics.

There is also the pudgy figure of Al Anderson who comes to grief through his warm-heartedness. He takes a brutal beating and watches his restaurant burn when he infuriates his neighbors by "givin' bums a handout."

Finally, and not least in importance, there is London, who says, "I been doin' kind o' like that, lookin' out for the guys that travel with me."

_Surprisingly enough, nearly all those characters suffer_

1. *Tortilla Flat*, p.16
2. *In Dubious Battle*, p.259
3. Ibidem, p.343
4. Ibidem, p.283
for their philanthropy, but injuries and slights only strengthen their motives for wanting to help in the fight for humanity.

Among those whose lot has been thrown in with the dis-inherited of the earth, the one who attains the greatest "flesh and blood" individuality is the preacher, Casy. From the time he meets Tom Joad until he asks humbly to accompany the Joad family to California -- to "be near folks" -- his stature grows. His presence provides a moral comfort to those he meets and his meek philosophy a stimulant; nothing in life or death is distasteful to him, no amount of cooperation too exhausting.

But the preacher, Casy, and Uncle John, who also joins with the Joads to give what aid he can, are only symbols of their kind. Uncle John works quietly with the family, denying his own fierce desires and placing the needs of the family before his own needs. Casy finally enlists himself in the fight for security and puts his life in jeopardy.

Casy's example bore fruit when his friend Tom, who saw him killed, dedicated himself to continue the "preacher's" work. "Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat," he says, "I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. . . I'm talkin' like Casy. Comes of thinkin' about him so much." 1

As long as there are born in the world men who feel a

1. The Grapes of Wrath, p. 572
deep concern for those who are in want and those who are floundering and lost, the cooperative spirit is a live and glowing impulse. There is no limit to their devotion now ourb on strength in serving their fellow-men, no sacrifice too great to make.
VIII. CONCLUSION

While there are few to challenge the sincerity of Steinbeck's motives, many critics have arisen to question the profundity of his observations and the wisdom of his aims. It has been only in recent decades altogether that writers have accepted their responsibility of portraying the dynamic social and industrial forces which have emerged uppermost in our civilization. And the risks they run of being condemned for hereby are no encouragement for those who are timid.

The causes of upheaval are often too complex to evaluate or to define; the factors of change too elusive to be hunted down. In the whole pattern of shifting tendencies the only recurrent theme is the theme of struggle -- the fight for power and privilege, for balance, for a place in the sun. No matter what form it has taken, whether economic, political, or social, the conflict has continued, with those who have benefited most from our modern economy seeking to consolidate or solidify their advantages and those who have been denied the fruits of industry fighting tooth and nail for material betterment.

A number of years ago, Walter Lippmann wrote a significant diagnosis of present day conditions. He said:

We are homeless in a jungle of machines and untamed powers that haunt and lure the imagination. Of course our culture is confused, our thinking spasmodic, and our emotion out of kilter. No mariner ever enters upon a more uncharted sea than does the average human being born in the twentieth century.1

1. Drift and Mastery, p.196-7
Everywhere a sense of revolution disturbs the industrial picture. The effects of mass production and mechanical efficiency are appalling. The issues are vital enough to awaken the interest of thoughtful men and women in every intellectual field. Poets, playwrights, and novelists have abandoned their old motifs to explore the dramatic possibilities of economic displacement upon social classes. Psychologists, biologists, and engineers too have attempted to investigate the impact of social and industrial problems upon their fields of information. But any honest and penetrating discussion of these conditions is certain to arouse a storm of reproach. Hysterical charges that "this or that individual or group advocates the violent overthrow of government, is not loyal to the Constitution, or is openly or secretly working for the abolition of private property" must be endured by the writer as a continued test for his courage. 1

And if those accusations are not enough, he must also subject himself to criticism from another direction -- from critics of the extreme left, challenging his deviations from "party line" interpretation of the class struggle.

Men like Steinbeck are too often caught between these millstones of partisanship. Observers have tried to evaluate Steinbeck's ideology from the context of his novels. While his works have been invigorating to the cause of migrant labor,

1. James Harvey Robinson, The Mind in the Making, p. 204
they have incurred the antagonism of men like George Thomas Miron, who took *The Grapes of Wrath* as an affront against the capitalistic system. He begins his criticism by saying:

The stuff of which John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* is made: A novel wherein naturalism has gone berserk, where untruth has run amuck drunken upon prejudice and exaggeration, where matters economic have been hurled beyond the pale of all rational and realistic thinking.

Mr. Steinbeck's apparent bias in favor of the have-nots over the haves, which probably accounts for his great affection for the shiftless and the unproductive inhabitants in *Tortilla Flat*, is embodied in Chapter 15 of *The Grapes*. . . This, a perfect example of Steinbeckism in one short scene, is naturally the key in which the entire proletarian tune is played.

Then, having indulged in name-calling and having deployed his arguments in terms of polar extremes, Mr. Miron is prepared to launch his assault in another direction --

The Joads were always the helpless victims who were ground under the crushing iron heel of the oppressor who, in turn, was oftentimes a victim of the system which protected and promoted his actions.

It will be recalled that the Joads found peace and security only while living in the government camp where they are pictured as safe and secure from the tyranny without. The State is their friend and benefactor, the capitalistic overlords their deadly enemies.

Finally he reaches the climax of his scorn when he concludes --

Of all the revolutionary-proletarian fiction, and I have tried pretty well to cover the ground, I can think of no other novel which advances the idea of class war and promotes hatred of class against class, in the most classless society of the world, more than does *The Grapes of Wrath*. 1

The unmodified sharpness of the attack leaves one with the impression that the critic paid no attention to the other

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1. The Truth About John Steinbeck and the Migrants, p.6
characteristics of the novel -- to its thematic beauty, its powerful characterizations, its warm humanity, and the sweeping grandeur of its conception. Mr. Miron was concerned only with its social connotations; he was interested only as to whether Steinbeck's philosophy clashed with orthodox opinion. From the tone of his essay there appears to be a vindictiveness in his argument.

Enough documented studies of the migrants exist now to confute any accusation of "shiftlessness" and "unproductive-ness"; those studies together with a knowledge of Steinbeck's aims, arouse the suspicion that The Truth About John Steinbeck and the Migrants is true about neither Steinbeck nor the migrants.

Too many have attempted to measure the impact of current political trends upon Steinbeck's thought, and too many have been confused by his zeal in heralding the cause of the dispossessed. On the strength of his reportorial recording of the events that happen in the story, In Dubious Battle, in particular, some have even permitted themselves to "build a trap of words" and call the author a Communist or a fellow-travâler.

But if Steinbeck promoted the "idea of class war" there should be some evidence of party standing. Yet all testimony seems to indicate an opposite conclusion. Percy Boynton, in his America in Contemporary Fiction, says, "Communists have wanted to claim Steinbeck but have spoken guardedly as of one
who might be too intractable for membership." 1 Another critic, Joseph Warren Beach, perhaps one of the most discerning in the field of the modern novel, says of *In Dubious Battle*: "It is not a communist tract; it was not favorably received by the party, I believe, in spite of the highly sympathetic way in which he treats the party leaders. The ideology is somehow wrong. . ." 2 And the fact that "the ideology is somehow wrong" is most significant. The makeup of Communism or any other totalitarian philosophy is actually abhorrent to Steinbeck. His novels, as this thesis has emphasized, are rich with examples of democratic procedure and the dignity of individual rights, just as they are illustrative of the strength of the people's will.

Professor Beach continued in his analysis of *In Dubious Battle*:

It is not a good communist tract, but as between labor and commercial profit, the author's sympathies are on the side of labor. The law, the guns, and the dirty tricks are all with the big producers. You are made to feel the absolute necessity as well as the righteousness of organization among the workers.3

Steinbeck's anxiety to improve working conditions and restore pride and stability to labor should not condemn him as being antagonistic to "the American way of life"; far from it. Perhaps the most conclusive evidence of his loyalty to it is indicated in a passage of *A Russian Journal* which he wrote in 1948:

1. America in Contemporary Fiction, p. 248  
3. Ibidem, p. 329
In nothing is the difference between the Americans and
the Soviets so marked as in their attitude, not only toward
writers, but of writers toward their system. For in the
Soviet Union the writer's job is to encourage, to celebrate,
to explain, and in every way to carry forward the Soviet sys-
tem. Whereas in America and in England a good writer is the
watch-dog of society. His job is to satirize its silliness,
to attack its injustices, to stigmatize its faults. . . and
only time can tell whether the architect of the soul approach
to writing can produce as great a literature as the watch-dog
of society approach. So far, it must be admitted, the archi-
tect school has not produced a great piece of writing. 1

It is obvious Steinbeck has taken the watch-dog approach.
His objective as a writer is to picture the injustices of
society and to stigmatize its faults. His sympathies are
with the victims of our technological civilization, it is
true; yet he will not permit himself entirely to "put on blind-
ers of 'good' and 'bad'", and to limit his vision. He wants
"to look at the whole thing" 2 clearly, candidly.

What "message of the zeitgeist" does Steinbeck derive
from a world torn with turmoil? If anything his thought par-
allels the convictions of a distinguished teacher of philoso-
pher, Erwin Edman, whose words are full of promise:

The experiment is young yet, that of arranging the con-
ditions of life so that men can quietly be themselves and
lead decently shared lives. The community feeling in any
village in Vermont, even the help and kindliness in a slum
in London or New York, has shown what can be done in that
direction. . . The common good is the good of each. . .
. . . It is hard to realize how much moral loneliness
and spiritual isolation there is in a society where people
have no roots, no common bonds, no comradely concerns. 3

There is the essence of Steinbeck's belief. The total

1. Steinbeck, A Russian Journal, p.164
2. In Dubious Battle, p.144
3. Erwin Edman, Candle in the Dark. Included in Present
Tense, edited by Sharon Brown, p.630
fulfillment of the common welfare is an end to be reached after a long and bitter struggle. But Steinbeck sees its realization with an acuity of vision that is far-sighted and prophetic and sharp with the understanding of experience.
IX. AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

There is much evidence to prove that the social and economic history of California has exerted a predominant influence upon the work of John Steinbeck. The great fertile valleys of that state have offered natural opportunities for extended landholding and for mechanized cultivation which have changed the entire picture of agriculture. The farm has been turned into a "field factory" of large-scale organization and mass production. Steinbeck has been appalled at the social consequences of this trend. He has had vision enough to realize that farmers in California are merely pioneers in this agricultural development, that the possibilities of the "factories in the field" are far-reaching and revolutionary.

He has witnessed a change in relationship between the landowner and the farmhand and has had first-hand experience with the effect of displacement and dispossession among the victims of this economic system.

The industrialized form of agriculture has mustered a great army of mobile workers who travel from one crop to another the length and breadth of California, competing for the most pitiful forms of subsistence. Steinbeck found them living always steeped in poverty and neglect. Their condition disturbed him greatly, for he was not inclined to underestimate their strength. He realized that their resentment could reach a boiling-point and turn its force into extreme violence.
He first called attention to the plight of the migrants in his *In Dubious Battle* (1936), although he had been brooding over the consequences of our machine-age civilization since the publication of *Tortilla Flat* (1935).

The flight of native American farmers from the "dust bowls" of Oklahoma and Arkansas to swell the ranks of transient workers in California provided Steinbeck with the topic and the materials for his masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). His investigation of the upheaval caused by their migration hardened his perspectives and staked out the course of his philosophical thinking.

The most salient account of his speculations are included in a volume of marine biology, *The Sea of Cortez* (1941), which he wrote in collaboration with his friend Edward Ricketts after a voyage of research along the coast of Southern California. He revealed in it his fear of a growing collectivism and of an orientation of people towards its various tendencies. He explained his theory of the species or the mass as having separate impulses from the individuals in it. "A man in a group," he says, "isn't himself at all, he's a cell in an organism that isn't like him anymore than the cells in your body are like you. . ." 1

The groups are periodically infected with a feverish desire to murder and destroy. This violent trait Steinbeck blames upon the factors of economic insecurity, inequality, and injustice. He feels that the selfishness of the 'dominant

1. *In Dubious Battle*, p. 145
humans' in concentrating ownership and power into their own hands is responsible for a tooth-and-claw struggle between the classes. The dominant classes often become soft and fearful in their security, however; and then many of those whom they have deprived of rights develop the cunning and the strength to challenge them.

Steinbeck's principal topic is that of security. The search for security in a civilization hag-ridden with economic injustice forms the theme for continuity among his major novels. There is a constant emphasis on faith and affirmation in the ideals of the dispossessed and a passionate belief in the righteousness of their cause. Steinbeck sees in the strength of organization, in cooperative activity, in group unity, the greatest hope for the attainment of justice and stability.

His studies of cooperative endeavor seem to sort themselves roughly in four categories. The most important is an evaluation of the group spirit from the perspective of 'the people'. The second is an examination of the 'dominant humans' who combine to protect their security against the assaults of the less privileged. The third is the study of the group nearest Steinbeck's sympathy -- the family. The last is the most difficult to assess; i.e., the altruistic devotion of man to man.

Steinbeck's concern is with the dynamics of the situation; for he feels that in times of unrest groups can go out
of control and act with wild beast ferocity. The remedy, he thinks, lies in the equalization of justice and opportunity, with security shared by all.

Again and again critics have tried to pin the label of "Communist" on Steinbeck and have classified his novels as "proletarian", but somehow those designations have failed to stick. Steinbeck himself considers his function as a writer not as an apologist for any ideological system but as a watchdog of society, one who "attacks its injustices" and "stigmatizes its faults". Throughout his works the discerning reader finds a steady allegiance to the democratic ideals and an insistence upon democratic procedures in the struggle for economic security.

Steinbeck scholarship is now only beginning, and there remains yet for the patient and discriminating scholar a great quarry of research to provide the masonry for what may be a monumental study of social tendencies in our era. It is hoped that this thesis may contribute at least a small share towards that inevitable end.
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