

The Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations and the Formation of the Philadelphia Workingmen's Movement

ALTHOUGH historians are agreed that the American labor movement had its beginnings in Philadelphia in 1827, there is little understanding as to how the movement itself began. Since the pioneer historians of labor, John R. Commons and his associates at the University of Wisconsin, declared that the Philadelphia workingmen had launched the labor movement in the United States,¹ researches have been made into many phases of labor history, but no further information of substance has been added to our knowledge of the nature and origins of labor's first awakening. Certain new material recently uncovered in the course of this investigation will permit modification of the current opinions concerning the Philadelphia workingmen's movement.

The activities of the Philadelphia journeyman mechanics in the late 1820's can be considered a labor movement in the fullest sense of that term. As journeymen, they considered themselves a depressed class with a common cause; designating them as originators of the labor movement in the United States is therefore not without justification. Considering the diversity of their activities, Helen L. Sumner, writing for the Commons associates, indicated that they "produced a *labour movement*" because their activities transcended the limits of a single trade to which previous efforts had been limited.² While there is ample precedent to demonstrate that journeyman artisans had asserted themselves before 1827 through trade society participation and stand-outs (the contemporary term for "strike"), the conscious effort of the Philadelphia workingmen of 1827 to secure for themselves, as a class, a larger share of the national wealth was unique.

¹ John R. Commons, *et al.*, *History of Labour in the United States* (New York, 1918), I, 185.

² *Ibid.*

In aspiring to general social reform, the Philadelphia workingmen were guided, unknowingly to be sure, by a fragment of theory from Ricardo's *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (London, 1817), which offers a theory of value based on expended labor. Ricardo's idea of labor value was soon broadened into a school of economic thought by a group of English economic thinkers and publicists, known as the Ricardian socialists, who spoke for the "producing classes," as they termed workingmen. The Ricardian socialists, forerunners of modern socialism, were in violent revolt against the unequal distribution of wealth under capitalism which resulted in the accumulation of large amounts of capital in the hands of a few. The workingmen freely mingled their ideas with reformist allies outside their class, such as the Ricardian socialists, and, in the process of this association, their own idea of social reform became more inclusive.

The enthusiasm of the Philadelphia workingmen and their co-reformists among the Owenites and freethinkers became contagious. Smaller movements soon followed in the wake of the Philadelphia vanguard, as the workingmen of such widely separated areas as New England, Ohio, and Delaware organized themselves, while the larger movement of workingmen in New York City began to crystallize. In this period of awakening, from 1827 to 1831, farmers' and mechanics' parties were formed and liberal weeklies optimistically dedicated to reform were issued all over the country.

During this period, the Philadelphia workingmen maintained a library company, complete with reading and debating rooms, and a committee that edited their weekly newspaper, the *Mechanics' Free Press*, a widely circulated publication which enjoyed the flattery of imitation. A group within the movement founded the Philadelphia "Labour for Labour" Association, modeled after Josiah Warren's Time Store in Cincinnati. The Association operated three co-operative barter stores, dealing in general merchandise which catered to their domestic needs. Most important of all, a central union of trade societies was formed to serve as an executive body for these societies. Known as the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations, it was the first federation of its kind ever established.

This article will be limited to an investigation of the forces and ideas which brought the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations into being and to the course that it followed.

II

The Philadelphia workingmen's movement introduces William Heighton (1800-1873) to the history of American labor. A man of provocative ideas and organizing abilities, Heighton's timely, exhortative pamphlet, published in April, 1827 under the pseudonym, "A Fellow-Labourer," was the inspiration for the movement. The prophetic work was titled:

An ADDRESS to the Members of Trade Societies, and to the WORKING CLASSES Generally: Being an Exposition of the Relative Situation, Condition, and Future Prospects of Working People in The United States of America. Together with a Suggestion and Outlines of A PLAN, By which they may gradually and indefinitely improve their condition.³

At the time of his writing, Heighton was a young cordwainer living in Southwark, a southerly district of Philadelphia County, just below the city line. He had come from Oundle, Northamptonshire, England, as a youth, but the circumstances surrounding his leaving England are yet unknown; nor is much known of his early life in America except that he received little formal education, and preferred to be known as the "Unlettered Mechanic" in his subsequent writings and public addresses.

Heighton's principal economic premise, derived from the Ricardian socialists, was that the producer should receive the whole product of his labor.⁴ Because they were deprived of the entire proceeds of their productions, laborers were beset with poverty and suffered inequality in a society ruled by nonproducing classes which abstracted the greater portion of their rightful wealth.

The Ricardian socialists, in turn, derived the substance of their beliefs from two main sources: the morality of Robert Owen, and the economics of primitive communism. Ricardian socialists believed

³ Published by the author, Philadelphia, 1827. The extant copy is in The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP).

⁴ For further comment on this theory, see Anton Menger, *The Right to the Whole Produce of Labour*, trans. by M. E. Tanner, with an Introduction by H. S. Foxwell (London, 1899); Esther Lowenthal, *The Ricardian Socialists* [Columbia University, *Studies in History, Economics and Public Law*, Vol. XLVI, No. 1] (New York, 1911); Max Beer, *A History of British Socialism* (London, 1919), I, 143-244. There were three fairly distinct groups of early socialists at this time in England whose ideas on the creation of a co-operative society overlapped at many points: the Owenite communitarians, the co-operative socialists, and the Ricardian socialists.

with Owen that a newly constituted society, born of rationalism, was at hand, waiting to confer its benefits upon a people sufficiently initiated in the true facts of political economy to demand it. The new society of the future would operate under a co-operative barter system and would recognize labor as the basis of exchange. Under such a system only an equivalent amount of labor time from one producer could purchase an article from another. In an economy of artisan producers, there would be no room for middlemen.

Economists from Adam Smith to Marx have been concerned with the measurement of value. Anticapitalist thinkers such as Marx doubted that the entrepreneur added any value to an article. As this concept became the property of hard pressed journeymen, it assumed the proportions of a creed rather than an economic theory, a great truth which was believed and fought for by succeeding generations of socialists.

The most articulate theoretician of the Ricardian socialists was William Thompson (1783-1833), once secretary to the Utilitarian, Jeremy Bentham. Thompson concurred with Bentham's maxim that the aim of every enlightened government ought to be the happiness of the greatest number of its citizens. The present competitive system, Thompson explained, should be replaced by one operating under the principles of "voluntary labor and exchange." Under the "natural laws of distribution," a system of "mutual cooperation" would flourish where the laborer would receive the entire proceeds of his efforts.⁵

Heighton, however, did not read Thompson's *Distribution of Wealth* (London, 1824), the erudite Englishman's lengthy and repetitive treatise on the benefits of a co-operative economy, although it was available in Philadelphia. Instead he turned to the more concise and easily obtainable disquisition of another Ricardian socialist, the youthful Scottish economist, John Gray (1799-1850?). Heighton's *Address* was an extension of Gray's *Lecture on Human Happiness* (London, 1825).⁶ Gray's *Lecture*, unlike the more restrained Thompson's, was an inflammatory tract, but both men readily acknowl-

⁵ William Thompson, *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness; Applied to the Newly-Proposed System of Voluntary Equality of Wealth* (London, 1824).

⁶ The text referred to here was printed by D. & S. Neall (The Vertical Press), Philadelphia, 1825.

edged their debt to Mr. Owen of New Lanark. Gray possessed none of Owen's philosophic calm about the inequalities in society, nor did he desire to explore the ramifications and historical origins of the causes, as did Thompson. Gray had been shocked by the tables in Patrick Colquhoun's dramatic statistical survey, *Resources of the British Empire* (1814), a work which depicted in detail the incomes of the various classes in Great Britain from paupers to high nobility. Colquhoun's tables convinced Gray that there was sufficient production in England to accommodate the entire population, Malthus notwithstanding, except that under the "existing *Commercial arrangements of society*" the producers were being deprived of their share. There was, however, no necessity to make such radical changes as the "new order of things proposed by Mr. Owen,"⁷ Gray explained; there was simply a need for a new method of distribution (also Thompson's major argument) to insure the equitable division of wealth.⁸

By curious coincidence, Gray's *Lecture* was to become a rare item in England, but was readily obtainable in America, especially in Philadelphia. Only a few hundred copies were printed in London, as Gray's publisher failed in business and the pamphlet was not reprinted until recently.⁹ However, a copy brought to this country in 1825, the year of its publication, was handsomely published in Philadelphia the same year for eighteen and three-quarters cents.¹⁰ Appended to this edition were the Articles of Agreement of the London Co-operative Society, a small group who were hopeful of organizing a co-operative community near London, but whose dream was never to come to fruition. The first Philadelphia edition quickly sold out, but the *Lecture* was soon republished under the imprint of another Philadelphia publisher, John Coates, Jr., of Southwark, a friend of William Heighton's. Appended to Coates' edition (1826) was the preamble and constitution of the Friendly Association for

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸ Gray became more of an individualist as he matured. In his later years he repudiated socialism and engaged in various successful business ventures, and developed an interest in the nature of currency. Little biographical work has been done on Gray. Foxwell, Introduction in Menger, l-li; Beer, 211-218.

⁹ See the facsimile edition reproduced by the London School of Economics and Political Science, *Series of Reprints of Scarce Tracts in Economics and Political Science*, No. 2 (1931).

¹⁰ Among the booksellers who stocked Owenite and liberal publications was John Mortimer of South Second Street. Gray's *Lecture* also sold well at New Harmony, Owen's Indiana community. See advertisement in the *New-Harmony Gazette*, May 29, 1826.

Mutual Interest, a congregation of thirty families from the Philadelphia and Wilmington areas who desired to form a community at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.¹¹ That year in the midst of the unsuccessful Valley Forge communitarian venture, Coates brought forth still another American edition of Gray's *Lecture*, this time referring to the preamble and constitution of the disbanded Association as "An original Plan of society, similar to Robert Owen's."¹²

Since it was rapidly republished and made inexpensively available, Gray's *Lecture* was an important link between English and American Ricardian socialists and communitarians. Paradoxically, while the *Lecture* remained scarce in England, Heighton's *Address* was republished in England by Robert Owen, where two separate editions appeared in 1827 and 1833.¹³

Heighton's *Address* was a unique departure in Ricardian socialist literature, both here and abroad.¹⁴ Directed to the urban worker, it

¹¹ Niles' *Weekly Register*, Dec. 31, 1825; see also an informal account of this community in Harry E. Wildes, *Valley Forge* (New York, 1938), 287-289. The best account of this short-lived community, brief though it is, can be found in a meticulous work, Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian and Owenite Phases of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1632-1829* (Philadelphia, 1950), 202-203.

¹² All three American editions of the *Lecture* are deposited at the HSP.

¹³ Menger (Appendix II, "Bibliography of the English Socialist School"), 217-218; see also *ibid.*, Foxwell Introduction, xlix; Beatrice and Sidney Webb, *History of Trade Unionism* (London, 1911), 540 (bibliography).

¹⁴ Early though Heighton's *Address* was in American Ricardian socialist literature and in the literature of economic protest, a predecessor had appeared in New York in the previous year, 1826. This first indigenous example of the school was an isolated tract which has become a curiosity, since it never obtained a following, and was probably never seen by Heighton. Written by Langdon Byllesby, a Philadelphia printer, editor, publicist and amateur inventor, it was titled, *Observations on the SOURCES AND EFFECTS of UNEQUAL WEALTH; with Propositions Towards Remedying the Disparity of Profit in Pursuing The Arts of Life, and Establishing Security in Individual Prospects and Resources* (New York, 1826). See especially the copy in the HSP for its interleaved comment by the author. Byllesby, who had read both Thompson and Gray, was an admirer of Jefferson and an apologist for Owen. He felt that the solution to the severe competition among the journeymen and the small shopowners might be found in co-operative associations of "producers," and to that end he offered an outline of a constitution for the journeymen. He was always foremost an individualist, and sagely suggested in his pamphlet that "there seems to be something in the human disposition or temper which revolts at the idea of a pure community . . . which it is difficult to reconcile with the common notions of the 'rights of things.'" The purpose of Byllesby's *Observations* was not to offer a panacea, but to "excite a train of popular reflection" which will "ignite a course of reflection that will lead to a conviction of the approaching absolute necessity for a revision of the present system of the arts of life, and distribution of the products of labour." For further commentary see Joseph Dorfman, *Economic Mind in American Civilization* (New York, 1946), II, 638-641, and Dorfman, "The Jackson Wage-Earner Thesis," *American Historical Review*, LIV (1949), 269-297.

offered a workable plan for the alleviation and final solution of the "hard times," without resorting to communitarianism. He developed a "plan" designed to operate within existing urban social and political conditions rather than suggesting retreat to a remote community. Heighton was neither influenced by Owen's New Harmony experiment, nor by the idea of founding co-operative societies of journeymen, although he was favorable ultimately to the latter idea.

The fears which had permeated the minds of Heighton's followers as they discussed their situation in 1826 after reading Gray's *Lecture* had been the motivation for Heighton's April *Address* and the entire workingmen's movement. Heighton mentioned the "few reflecting individuals among the working people" who had "clearly perceived, that there are in these United States many evils of the most fearful magnitude existing by permission, or under the direct sanction and support of our legislative authorities." Because Heighton's *Address* was so important to the beginning of the labor movement in the United States, it should be here briefly summarized.

All efforts of the working people in the United States to assist themselves during periods of hard times had been ineffective, including those of the trade societies. The dilemma of the working people was caused chiefly by their failure to understand political economy; consequently the wealth created by them was summarily abstracted by the nonproducers. Therefore, it was necessary that the producers, or working people who actually produced articles of wealth, understand the operations of the economic order that they may be able to secure the benefits of their labor.

Heighton included six classes of nonproducers: theologians, jurists, the military, manufacturers and commercial people, the gentry, and legislators.¹⁵ Of these, the legislators most directly kept the workingmen in subjugation, since they were the most influential and intelligent. The legislators had it within their power to assist the producers, but to their shame had neglected them. Although legislators were

¹⁵ Heighton introduced a new distinction into Ricardian socialist language, dividing the "producers" into two categories, the "productive" and the "official" laborers. "The first [productive labor] is that which produces or brings into existence some real, tangible article of wealth; as for instance, a loaf of bread, a coat, a table, &c.; the latter is necessary in effecting exchanges of these different articles; in transporting them from . . . one place to another . . . and in various modes of preparing them for man's use. Those employed in these latter operations are as useful and necessary to the happiness of the community as those actually employed in productive labour, inasmuch as these exchanges and transportations constitute the means of supplying. . . ." *Address*, 8.

popularly elected to govern all men equally, they obviously favored the nonproducers, since they themselves were usually lawyers, a class of notorious nonproducers. While the working people languished with hard times, legislators abetted this condition by authorizing new inventions of "labor-saving machinery." Such machinery was employed "under the influence of commercial competition," rather than used to reduce labor time and ease work by the proper utilization of these devices. At present, science was a curse to the workingman; it was the duty of legislators to harness it properly and make these new discoveries a blessing to all. Legislators compounded injustice when they catered to "overgrown capitalists," granting them charters of incorporation under which they might intensify the monopoly of invention. Furthermore, the legislatures had been generous in granting bank charters, which in turn furnished more capital for the manufacturing corporations. Heighton felt that legislators should penalize inventors whose machines led to labor displacement.

In Heighton's opinion, legislators were empowered to enact special laws capable of insuring the happiness of the majority. Should new and liberal laws prove ineffective, it would then be necessary to establish "*new institutions*" to assure the working people an equitable proportion of the national wealth.

Happily there was a solution, according to Heighton, which might counteract the "supine negligence" of the lawmakers: workingmen have the "blessings of universal suffrage" in the United States and can choose whom they will to represent them. But in electing adequate officials, the workingmen must proceed with caution lest they discover that the potential benefits of the suffrage are kept beyond their reach, as in the case of machinery which had never lessened their labors. The workingmen must be schooled in political economy in order that they might learn their relative situation in society and know how to enjoy their franchise privilege. Of paramount importance in assisting themselves the workingmen had to consider at once *nominating* their own candidates, selecting men pledged to serve the interests of working people. The nomination of candidates was more important than the mere formality of elections, and on this sphere of action the workingmen should concentrate.¹⁶

¹⁶ See Frederick W. Dallinger, *Nominations for Elective Office in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass., 1916), 25-29, for additional data on the nominating procedure at that time.

The realization of Heighton's plan was predicated upon the education of the working classes. Information had to be dispensed thoroughly throughout the country. In every city in the United States, a workingmen's press had to be founded. He suggested a free press, guided by liberal principles and dedicated to the interests of the working classes. To supplement the newspaper, a workingmen's library for each locality should also be established, with facilities for reading, lecturing, and debating. Here the workingmen might educate themselves and learn to speak in their own behalf. In such an atmosphere of knowledge, they could learn of one another's talents and qualifications for public office. Soon the working classes would be in a position to nominate candidates from their own ranks.

The plan, as it pertained to the founding of the library and the weekly newspaper, depended upon the co-operation of the various journeyman trade societies. Heretofore, the trade societies had been parochial associations, concerning themselves entirely with their occupational problems. Under Heighton's plan a higher purpose was to be served. To this end, Heighton suggested that the trade societies appoint committees of journeymen from their number who were known to be favorable to the producers' cause. Inquiry should then be made by this committee into the formation of the most convenient form of a central trades organization. Although the scope of activities of Heighton's proposed organization was vague, it would presumably concern itself with the direction of all workingmen's operations. Meanwhile, the trade societies would be urged to lend the proposed organization sufficient funds to put the plan into operation, at least on a minimum basis. This would include the founding of a library and a newspaper. Additional funds could be secured from individual journeymen for further expansion.

Heighton, always concerned with unity among the working classes, suggested that no more than one movement be put into being for each locality. Rival groups might foster social and political jealousies, foredooming the working people from ever becoming an "all powerful class" with a program to achieve. He estimated that there were about twenty trade societies in Philadelphia with nearly two thousand members. At least five hundred of these could be persuaded to join at first, and surely, he reasoned, a similar number could easily be enlisted from among all the local workingmen. At least a thousand

dollars working capital could be raised if fifty dollar loans were made by each of the contributing trade societies and if individuals were encouraged to pay dues. In this way an income of \$125 each month could be assured. Such a calculation was wholly reasonable, Heighton concluded, if just one thousand of the twenty thousand working people of Philadelphia were recruited.¹⁷

Heighton was not content to wait for the seeds he had planted to break through the stubborn soil themselves. While his *Address* was yet in the press, he and his circle had begun to meet regularly. Heighton placed an addendum leaf in his pamphlet informing readers that the group was meeting on Monday evenings at Reeves' School Room, No. 1 Bread Street, in the northern part of the city. A workmen's library was being formed, and plans were being laid to publish a newspaper. All interested journeymen were invited, the addendum stated, to attend these preliminary sessions.

The following months were indeed formative ones for the American labor movement. In June, Robert Owen himself arrived in Philadelphia on one of his numerous visits to the city, and spoke at the Franklin Institute. He had just received a copy of Heighton's *Address* and was much impressed with the forceful expression of its message. Owen recommended the anonymous pamphlet to the Institute audience as important reading for "every producer in America," commenting inimitably that it contained more valuable knowledge than "all the writings on political economy that I have met with."¹⁸ Owen was delighted that the author, whom he had not met, was an unlettered man, for it meant that he was unencumbered by the false erudition of the dismal scientists.

III

In June, too, the journeyman house carpenters began their strike, which was destined to last almost two seasons, and which, at its peak, caused more than six hundred men to quit their work in protest

¹⁷ Philadelphia County had a population of 108,306, while the city had 80,467, according to my calculations from the Fifth U. S. Census (1830).

¹⁸ *Address Delivered by Robert Owen, . . . at the Franklin Institute in . . . Philadelphia, on . . . June 25, 1827 . . .*, taken in shorthand by M. T. C. Gould, and reprinted in the *New-Harmony Gazette*, Aug. 8, 1827.

against the dawn-to-dusk summer working hours.¹⁹ The carpenters had harbored this complaint for at least thirty years, and possibly longer. In the spring of 1791 they had quitted work in the first recorded stand-out of that trade.²⁰ The issue then was the same, as the masters in the building trades had insisted on utilizing the maximum daylight hours during the outdoor season. The issue had become perennial, occurring in the spring of the year, when the building season commenced. Daylight hours were longer, and a fourteen-hour workday was imposed at substantially the same wages offered for winter shop work.

However, it no longer can be said that the formation of the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations was precipitated by this most recent stand-out of the house carpenters in 1827. This oft-repeated assumption cannot be substantiated.²¹ The Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations was independently formed by William Heighton and his colleagues, having been conceived by them in 1826. While the organizational activities of the Association were conducted during the strike action of the house carpenters, the two occurrences were separate undertakings.²²

Heighton's plan for the advancement of the workingmen did not depend solely on the strengthening of the trade societies for purely unionist functions—to raise wages and shorten hours—but rather to

¹⁹ The more important notices announcing the strike, along with rejoinders from the masters, are reprinted in John R. Commons, *et al.*, *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society* (Cleveland, 1910), V, 81-84; see also Commons, *History of Labour*, I, 186-189. It is interesting to note that the minutes of both the General Meeting and the Managing Committee of the Carpenters' Company, Carpenters' Hall, fail to reveal any mention of the strike.

²⁰ Commons, *History of Labour*, I, 127, cites "An Address of the Journeymen Carpenters," issued by their trade society in the *American Daily Advertiser*, May 11, 1791; see also John B. McMaster, *History of the People of the United States* (New York, 1907), 84, where mention is made of an indeterminate action of the Philadelphia millwrights and machine workers in 1822, who met at a tavern and passed resolutions for a six-to-six workday, with an hour for breakfast and another hour for dinner. These were part of a larger effort of workingmen to regulate work hours in accordance with urban conditions rather than with the workday of the farmer.

²¹ Commons, *Documentary History*, V, 75-76. This deduction is repeated in Commons' *History of Labour*, I, 169, 185-186, and has gained currency in almost every text dealing with the subject. Actually, the Philadelphia workingmen were not as concerned with the ten-hour day as with other problems of unionism and general reform.

²² There seems to be no indication that the Journeymen Carpenters' Society was the controlling organization in the Mechanics' Union, judging from a knowledge of the personnel of both groups.

use the societies as a medium for political activity. He viewed standing-out for higher wages a temporary expedient, and was willing to sympathize with the workaday unionist aspirations of his fellow artisans only as they enhanced the purposes of his plan.

After six months' discussion among the workingmen, Heighton was ready, by November, to make a direct appeal to the working-class public. He and his associates engaged the use of the pulpit of the liberal Universalist Church on Callowhill Street, in the northern part of the city, to deliver an address on the evening of the twenty-first.

Meanwhile, the busy organizing group had prepared a preamble, a constitution, and bylaws for the organization they were to call the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations. They inserted notices in the press requesting trade societies to appoint delegates to attend a constitution ratifying convention in December, at the widow Tyler's at Bank Street and Elbow Lane. While many of the societies had already responded to the call, there were laggards. The organizing committee urged the societies to join the Association, describing it as one formed "for raising a general fund to assist each other in cases of emergencies."²³

The November *Address* of William Heighton at the Universalist Church²⁴ is significant as the first formal speech of the American labor movement. Heighton was a gifted speaker, capable of com-

²³ The *Mechanics' Gazette*, Nov. 10, 1827. This is the first issue of this previously undiscovered weekly, and is located in the Library of Congress. The *Mechanics' Gazette* was a commercial undertaking, edited by Edmund Morris, also editor of the semimonthly literary journal, the *Ariel*, another Philadelphia publication. The *Mechanics' Gazette* was not the first Philadelphia newspaper directed to the journeymen and designed to cater to the "mechanic arts." It actually was the successor to the *Journeyman Mechanics' Advocate*, another weekly, edited by Alexander Turnbull, which commenced publication in the spring, 1827, lasting only a few months. Mr. Morris then acquired Turnbull's subscription list. The files of the *Advocate* are not extant. The *Democratic Press*, June 20, 1827, contains a reference to the *Advocate* in reference to the carpenters' strike. See also the *Mechanics' Gazette*, Nov. 10, 1827.

²⁴ *An Address, Delivered Before the Mechanics and Working Classes Generally, of the City and County of Philadelphia. At the Universalist Church, on Wednesday Evening, November 21, 1827, by the "UNLETTERED MECHANIC."* Published by request of the Mechanics' Delegation. (Printed at the office of the *Mechanics' Gazette*, No. 2. Carter's Alley.) The surviving copy is deposited at the HSP, and is inscribed, "Presented to Mathew Carey, Esq. by the Author." The choice of the liberal Universalist Church for the delivery of the *Address* is not surprising. For the past ten years its sister church on Lombard Street, near Southwark, had been under the pastoral care of the contentious Abner Kneeland, who had presided during its most recent doctrinal schism. Kneeland became a supporter of Owen, as well as an ardent Jacksonian, and was on the platform when Robert Dale Owen and Frances Wright lectured at the Arch Street

manding his audience.²⁵ Speaking to a capacity assembly, he reiterated his plan, grounding his remarks, as usual, on Ricardian socialist political theory. He was distressed at the hundreds of sober, industrious mechanics unable to obtain work. "Stand-outs," he said, using the idiom of his trade, "at best are poor patch work to cobble up a condition so tattered as ours." The time had arrived for the workingmen to use their franchise without fear of intimidation and to nominate candidates to represent them.

His remarks, when one removes the oratorical façade, were designed to muster sympathy for the Association, which was hardly beyond the planning phase and had barely scratched the surface in securing membership. Organizational delays, however, were not entirely due to the recalcitrance of certain trades to send their delegates (at a ratio of one to ten) to the "General Convention." The proposed constitution was essentially a document concerned with the details of collecting and administering a growing financial fund. In his November *Address*, Heighton had anticipated natural distrust among the heterogeneous co-members over the disposition of these assets. Bick-

Theater on Sept. 29, 1829. During that year Kneeland was expelled from the Universalist fellowship. Four years later he was the principal in the celebrated Blasphemy Trial in Boston, for publishing material in the Boston *Investigator*. His article doubted the divinity of Jesus. His position in Philadelphia was filled by Theophilus Fisk, another preacher in the natural rights-liberalism tradition. Fisk's weekly sermons and his journals were always listed among the notices in the *Mechanics' Free Press*. The tenor of Fisk's preaching at Lombard Street can be gleaned from a printed sermon, *The Rich Man in Hell*, delivered in March, 1828. The connotations of this sermon are akin to the principles of the workingmen, but set forth in the language of the pulpit. At New Harmony, Robert L. Jennings, a former Universalist minister, was preaching equalitarianism at the Preliminary Society, organized by Owen in 1825. See the manuscript Church Minutes of the First Universalist Church of Philadelphia, HSP; John T. Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884* (Philadelphia, 1884), II, 1442-1448; Henry S. Commager, "The Blasphemy Trial of Abner Kneeland," *New England Quarterly*, VIII (1935), 31-32; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (New York, 1945), 356-359; Bestor, 178.

²⁵ Editor Morris grudgingly admitted that the speaker was "lucid," although possibly too forceful, and might cause the mechanics to be "misunderstood." But the audience was attentive, he said, and the speech would be delivered again in Southwark. *Mechanics' Gazette*, Nov. 24, 1827. "Philo Veritas," a correspondent to the *Gazette*, was shocked at the impudence of the speaker, but conceded that he "deserves great credit for the ability displayed throughout his performance." *Ibid.*, Dec. 22, 1827. When Heighton gave the same address in Baltimore, he met with similar enthusiastic audience receptiveness. *Ibid.*, Jan. 26, 1828 (letter from "Philip").

ering among the trades, he said, resulted from trade snobbishness—contempt for the occupations of others—and bred disunity. Concern among the rank and file about the authorization of their stand-outs by the Association, in order that they might qualify for funds from the Association's treasury, was a source of debate in the affiliating societies. The existence of the fund was an invitation to the less responsible to strike; and, if the urge were uncontrolled, bankruptcy of the Association was certain to result. Heighton wisely encouraged the societies to join the Mechanics' Union on economic grounds, for he realized that compromise could be more readily reached in this area. Thus he avoided debate over the feasibility of political participation, turning the attention of his colleagues to the disposal of a defense fund in case of stand-outs; although in his public addresses, he had made general references to ultimate reform being brought about through political action.

The Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations offered substantial inducement for the trade societies. Benefits were especially lucrative in cases of stand-outs for either "wages or hours." Legally correct, the constitution contained twenty-three articles in addition to sixteen bylaws.²⁶ When a constituent trade society decided upon a strike, it was to notify the president of the Mechanics' Association in writing at least one week in advance of the intended action. A special meeting of the delegates was then to be called, and should two thirds of those present approve the proposed stand-out, the applicant society became eligible for assistance from the Association. In cases where the employer instituted the action, the journeyman's trade society was required to give but twenty-four hours' notice to the Association.

During the course of a stand-out, single men were to be given travel expenses of from three to six dollars, provided they left the Philadelphia area for its duration. Married men were to receive two

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Dec. 1, 1827, Jan. 12 and 19, 1828. Location of the *Mechanics' Gazette* has made possible an examination of the constitution of the Mechanics' Union for the first time. Except for the fourteenth article of the bylaws, the political clause, it is a conventional document and its authorship is unimportant. However, one historian of labor makes the improbable suggestion that William M. Gouge, the hard-money advocate, helped draft the preamble. There seems to be little doubt that the author of the preamble was Heighton. Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York, 1947), 104 (note).

dollars with additional sums for each member of their family and were not expected to evacuate. Presumably, provision for supplemental benefits was left to the powerful committee of finance to decide upon in cases of hardship emergencies during stand-outs.²⁷

The Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations fortified its constituent societies through its central office, which assured the societies support, both financial and otherwise. The finance committee collected ten-cent monthly dues from the membership, each society having a representative on the committee who was responsible to the central organization. All funds collected by these bonded custodians were bank-deposited and accounted for according to carefully prescribed regulations. The central union was bracing, psychologically, for the Philadelphia journeymen, since the advantage would no longer rest entirely with the masters during a stand-out.

In his April *Address*, Heighton had discussed in detail how power-driven machinery employed without regard to the human operators had caused the period of distress which the journeymen and operators alone were experiencing. These were not hard times for everyone, there being no general depression, but the trade societies were ineffectual in assisting their members during this localized recession affecting the skilled trades. Legislators need write no laws against "combinations," Heighton wrote, referring to the trade societies. "So long as the present wretched system of commerce is suffered to continue, INVENTION, *through the medium* of COMPETITION, will make all the laws that are necessary on that head."

A central trades society of journeymen, it must be observed, would certainly have invited litigation for violation of conspiracy regulations under English common law, considering the succession of labor conspiracy cases in the United States since the Philadelphia cordwainers' case of 1806 (*Commonwealth v. Pullis*). In that first case, as in almost all the known labor conspiracy cases in the United States to 1827, the court had rendered judgment against the journeymen, although severe punishment had not been imposed and fines had been nominal. However, the desired effect—stopping the strike—had been

²⁷ The bylaws were soon amended, and Article 6, Section 1, read: "When any represented society shall have been declared entitled to support from the funds of this association, each legal member of such society, on applying for benefit shall (while residing in the City or County of Philadelphia) receive the sum of \$2 weekly, during the continuance of the stand-out." *Mechanics' Gazette*, Jan. 19, 1828.

accomplished.²⁸ Nevertheless, fear of prosecution for conspiracy had not endangered the existence of the trade societies in the United States any more than the English Conspiracy Acts of 1799 and 1800 had made journeyman organization extinct there during the twenty-five years of their statutory life. In America, there being no statute prohibiting journeymen from trying to raise wages or shorten hours, employers had recourse to common law, especially in strikes involving aggressive picket patrol action by the journeymen against "scabs," as they were even then called. The Mechanics' Union seemed unconcerned that it might be enjoined by the court. In fact, the Association was founded in large part to enable the societies to wage strikes under more favorable conditions. While the Mechanics' Union was apparently in violation of common law, legal action was never taken against it.

The reason for the confidence of the Association was in part due to an opportune decision in the case of *Commonwealth v. Moore, et al.*, twenty-four journeyman tailors of Philadelphia, against whom charges of conspiracy and assault were brought by their employers in the September (1827) Sessions of the Mayor's Court.²⁹ The Recorder summarily charged the jury at the trial's conclusion to ignore the prosecution's plea that the tailors' trade society constituted a conspiracy per se. The point of law to be considered, he said, was the tactics employed by the strikers, not the efficacy of the stand-out itself. The tailors were convicted, but were charged only with intimidating nonstriking workers, not with conspiracy. The presiding judge, Recorder Joseph Reed, was influenced by *Commonwealth v. Carlisle* (1821)³⁰ in which action was brought against the master ladies' shoemakers. *Commonwealth v. Carlisle* represented the first prosecution of masters for conspiracy. The masters in this case were indicted for conspiring to *reduce* wages, but the court held that they

²⁸ Commons, *Documentary History*, III and IV, contain court transcriptions of proceedings of leading labor conspiracy cases. See also Commons, *History of Labour*, I, 162-165; Walter Nelles, "The First American Labor Case," *Yale Law Journal*, XLI (1931), 165-200, which contains the best analysis of the cordwainers' case of 1806; and Edwin E. Witte, "Early American Labor Cases," *ibid.*, XXXV (1925-1926), 825-828.

²⁹ Commons, *Documentary History*, IV, has the proceedings of this case, taken in shorthand by Marcus T. C. Gould, court stenographer.

³⁰ *Com. ex. rel. Chew v. Carlisle* (1821), in Frederick C. Brightly's *nisi prius Reports* (Philadelphia, 1851), 36-43; see also Commons, *History of Labour*, I, 163-164.

were not in conspiracy, which Recorder Reed had to accept as precedent and accordingly interpreted the ruling to apply also to the journeyman tailors in 1827. "It is unnecessary to go out of our way to examine the question as to the right to combine to raise wages," Reed said, "which has never been decided on in the United States, and for this I have the authority of the present Chief Justice of the state."³¹

Nevertheless, when the Mechanics' Union amended its bylaws in January, 1828, Article 16 provided specifically for the possible prosecution of any of its members in the line of duty. This bylaw provided that should any member be prosecuted in performance of any duties under the laws of the Association, he should be fully indemnified by the Association for all expenses incurred while defending himself against such prosecutions, provided the defendant act "in conformity to the direction of the principal officers of the Association."³²

Among the most attractive features which the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations contained for the trade societies was its potential ability to solve intratrade society disagreements, especially ones involving the propriety of waging a stand-out, or in cases of the administration of a particular society's funds. The Mechanics' Union was empowered to designate an authorized stand-out in order to declare participating individuals eligible for benefits. Thus the Association automatically served as a judicial body for the constituent trade societies, deciding issues which had previously consumed much time in parliamentary debate, causing considerable internal division.

With its ever-mounting treasury, the Mechanics' Union was an effective agent in preserving industrial peace during its two years of existence. Following the termination of the journeyman house carpenters' strike in the spring of 1828, there is no record of further dispute among the skilled trades.³³ For this brief period at least, an equilibrium had been reached.

³¹ Commons, *Documentary History*, IV, 261. The State Supreme Court Justice was Gibson.

³² *Mechanics' Gazette*, Jan. 19, 1828. Other journeymen commented on the prospects of conspiracy: see letters from "A Mechanic," and "A Subscriber," in the *Mechanics' Free Press*, Aug. 9 and 30, 1828. The journeymen did not fear prosecution for conspiracy, but had an indignant attitude toward such litigation.

³³ It would appear that a notable exception would be the case of the Philadelphia spinners, *Kennedy v. Treillou* (1829). See the incomplete proceedings in Commons, *Documentary History*,

The Mechanics' Union was as generative as it was stabilizing. It was instrumental in founding at least six new trade societies, as well as a new beneficial society.³⁴ At the height of its activities at least fifteen societies graced its dues-paying roll.³⁵

The journeyman ladies' cordwainers, for example, makers of ladies' shoes, in forming a new trade society invited all members of that profession who favored uniformity of wages to join with them. Disparity of wages had long been a by-product of the industry because of the great volume of trade and large variety of product.³⁶ Combined, the cordwainers were the most numerous occupation among the trades in Philadelphia. In late 1827, during one effort to organize, the constitution of the Mechanics' Union was read to prospective members of this society. The organizing committee recommended the Mechanics' Union to its members, because it would "combine all the advantages of separate Trade Societies; and at the same time avoid all the dangers that many persons apprehend, in regard to the security of the funds, also to prevent any rashness in turning out for wages, justly complained of by many persons; because a minority of the Association will be disinterested, consequently more impartial judges, than it is possible for any separate society to be."³⁷

IV, 265-268. However, this case involved a personal dispute among some factory hands at the large cotton spinning mill of Borie, Laugerenne & Keating at Manayunk, on the falls of the Schuylkill, a large manufacturing area to the northwest of the city. Between September and December, 1828, there had been another strike of spinners in Norristown. Wages in both places had been cut twenty-five per cent, and the workers had walked out. The *Mechanics' Free Press* (Sept. 27, Dec. 13, 20, and 27, 1828) supported the strike editorially, and Heighton formed a committee of cordwainers to raise funds for them. It must be observed that these were not journeymen, but factory operatives out on strike; they were not out for higher wages or shorter hours, but to resist further reductions in pay, a common reason for stand-outs during the early factory period.

³⁴ The trades included: tobacconists, ladies' cordwainers, printers and compositors, blacksmiths and whitesmiths, leather manufacturers, saddlers and harness makers, as well as Heighton's benefit society, the United Beneficial Society of Journeymen Cordwainers.

³⁵ Commons, *Documentary History*, VI, 215. William English, cordwainer, estimated the number at fifteen. He was one of the more active workingmen, and discussed the Mechanics' Union's constituent societies at a convention of the National Trades' Union in 1834. The Mechanics' Union doubtless was unable to induce the older, more substantial, incorporated journeyman societies to join, and had to be content to draw its membership from among the newer trade societies.

³⁶ See "Crispin's" letter, bitterly complaining of the plight of the cordwainer, in *Mechanics' Free Press*, May 3, 1828.

³⁷ *Mechanics' Gazette*, Nov. 10, 1827.

The journeyman house carpenters, another influential society, were about to enter the second season of their stand-out. Limited success in the 1827 season, and new developments the following year, had reinforced their confidence in achieving a ten-hour workday during the summer construction season. In December of that year, Chairman Joseph A. Dean called a meeting of all journeyman house carpenters in the District Court room where a preamble and a series of resolutions were passed affirming the decision of the previous June to stand out. The journeymen were anxious for mediation with the masters, however, and they appointed a nine-man committee to arbitrate with them. The strike had been a particularly bitter and spirited dispute, the masters accusing the journeymen alternately of arson and walking off their jobs without sufficient notification.³⁸ Moreover, the masters threatened to extend their practice of employing large numbers of apprentice boys as replacements and to undermine the journeymen further by importing outside carpenters to break the strike. When the masters declined to call upon the journeyman committee at the appointed place, No. 1 Raspberry Alley, the journeymen indignantly issued a public circular early in 1828.³⁹ The circular was a most optimistic document, as the journeymen felt that the strike was now proceeding in their favor. In part, the circular stated that "You ought to know, if you do not, that all things into consideration, we are two to one this, to what we were last season, [and] a great number will have the hours without a word. Our arrangements at home and abroad are ample, and we with ourselves, (if it can be void,) do not want so much trouble this, as we had last summer; we therefore have thought fit thus to address you, not as humble dependents, but as men opposed to your requirements, and stating our intention, and informing you in some sort what again will be the consequence if you persist in your determination to oppress because you are so disposed." An "unconditional" ultimatum was then given to the masters stating that the journeymen would not return to work until their demands had been satisfied.

The stand-out of the house carpenters is of interest to a study of the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations since it is now certain that the stand-out was supported in its second year by the Mechan-

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Feb. 23 and May 3, 1828.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Nov. 10, 1827, and Feb. 23, 1828.

ics' Union. Observers have been unanimous in asserting that the Association had never supported a strike,⁴⁰ but apparently its treasury was opened to the journeyman house carpenters. When in April Thomas H. Goucher, secretary of the journeymen, called another meeting, he encouraged the craft to hold fast against the remaining masters who had not yet acceded, since that "we shall gain our object there can be little doubt, as circumstances of the most encouraging nature are daily transpiring; the natural conclusion therefore is, if we fail in accomplishing our purpose, that we have not paid proper attention to the good old motto, 'United we stand, divided we fall.'"⁴¹ By June, 1828, the anniversary of the strike, the bricklayers had joined them, as the painters and glaziers had done in the first year, and a mass meeting was called. The committee was especially hopeful, advising the members that "if you stand out for your rights as nobly this season as you did last, you are certain of success, for we gained half last season *without funds*."⁴² By mid-June, another meeting was held at which an address was delivered by an unidentified person on behalf of the six hundred house carpenters. Their "six to six" demand was being respected, the speaker indicated, and the few reluctant masters "would immediately come into the measure, if the workmen would but demand it."⁴³ When the Mechanics' Union announced its intention to nominate candidates for public office, the house carpenters called a special meeting to announce their "heartfelt satisfaction and approbation," promising to make "every exertion" to insure success for the venture.⁴⁴

IV

As ratified early in January, 1828, the constitution and bylaws of the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations made it a central organization of trade societies designed to insure the success of its constituent societies in the event of stand-outs. In this undertaking it was

⁴⁰ For example, see Commons, *History of Labour*, I, 190-191.

⁴¹ *Mechanics' Free Press*, June 7, 1828.

⁴² *Ibid.*, May 17 and June 7, 1828. Italics mine.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, June 14, 1828, from "An Address to the Journeymen House Carpenters of the City and County of Philadelphia." When an entire trade engaged in a stand-out, the settlement was, however, piecemeal, just as if the employees working for a particular master had decided to strike against their employer individually. The time had not arrived when industry-wide bargaining was introduced.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, July 5, 1828.

a unique group, taking a step which represented a mature approach in trade unionism. However, later that month, four additional articles and amendments were made to the bylaws, one being a novel article destined to alter the purpose of the Association. This was the fourteenth article,⁴⁵ providing that, three months prior to the general elections, the membership of the Association should "nominate as candidates for public offices such individuals as shall pledge themselves . . . to support and advance . . . the interests and enlightenment of the working classes . . . and to recommend to the members of the represented societies, and to the working classes generally, to support and promote the interests of the same [candidates] at the next ensuing general election.

"In the above nomination, party politics shall be entirely out of the question, since this Association ought to know no party that is opposed to the general interests of the working classes."

This belated bylaw, which became the crucial clause in the constitution, committing the organization to politics, was the only one in the entire corpus of laws of the Association which did pertain to politics. Knowledge of its existence disallows the assertion of William English, a cordwainer who later went to the state Assembly (1835-1837) and was active in the Philadelphia workingmen's movement from its inception,⁴⁶ that one clause of the Association's constitution specifically excluded political participation. English's assertion has long fostered the belief among historians of labor that the Mechanics' Union rather accidentally went into politics in violation of its own laws and policies.⁴⁷

The first society to applaud the Association's entry into politics was the newly formed United Beneficial Society of Journeymen Cordwainers, Secretary William Heighton making the announcement. He took the occasion to place a notice in the *Mechanics' Free Press* with the hope that his endorsement would induce similar receptivity among the other societies.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Mechanics' Gazette*, Jan. 19, 1828. The article reads the "15th" in the *Gazette*, a typographical error.

⁴⁶ For a further estimate, see Schlesinger, 204 and 204 (note).

⁴⁷ See Note 35; see also Commons, *History of Labour*, I, 426-427. English is quoted here as attributing the decline of the Mechanics' Union to its merger with the workingmen's party in 1828!

⁴⁸ June 28, 1828.

As chief editor of the *Mechanics' Free Press*, Heighton maintained a lively journal, gently prodding his fellows along the path of reform and into politics. The four-page, five-column (later six-column) weekly was first issued in January, 1828, and was the first of the mechanics' newspapers in this country edited by journeymen and directed to them,⁴⁹ Heighton was a judicious editor, careful not to discuss prematurely the political ambitions of the Association. As the official organ of the workingmen's movement, the *Mechanics' Free Press* was both a purveyor of information and propaganda and a forum in which its readers might expound. From its first issue, it kept pace with developments in the Mechanics' Union. Its pages presented a spectrum of reform, from Pestalozzian educational ideas and co-operative store suggestions to the views of freethinkers and reprints from works like Gray's *Lecture*.

Meanwhile the Mechanics' Union was meeting monthly, urging those trades yet destitute of societies to organize and send delegates to its meetings. On the last of May, the Association authorized its recording secretary, Humphrey Kelsey, a tailor, to open the Association's political campaign officially by placing a short resolution and preamble in the *Mechanics' Free Press*.⁵⁰ The resolution requested the delegates to "lay the subject before their several trade societies, and report severally at our stated meeting (in July) on the expediency of adopting measures for nominating suitable persons to represent the interests of the working classes in the city councils and state legislature." The resolution was in compliance with Article 14 of the bylaws. Heighton editorially remarked that the workingmen should no longer tolerate "the miracles of self-nomination" exercised by the

⁴⁹ See Note 23. Beatrice and Sidney Webb make mention of three English precursors to the *Mechanics' Free Press*. In 1825, "a committee of delegates from the London trades" started the *Trades Newspaper and Mechanics' Weekly Journal*, a seven-penny, stamped paper. This newspaper encouraged the organization of trade societies in all industries, and aimed to make working class opinion felt on political issues. It was managed by a committee of eleven delegates from different trades, of which John Gast was chairman, and it was edited by the son of the proprietor of the *Leeds Mercury*, Mr. Baines. Its laws and regulations are preserved in the Francis Place Manuscripts 27803-414, which, together with its issues from July 17, 1825, to its amalgamation with *The Trades Free Press* in 1828, are in the British Museum. Two rival journals, *The Journeyman's and Artisan's London and Provincial Chronicle*, and *The Mechanic's Newspaper and Tradesman's Journal*, were also started, but soon expired. B. and S. Webb, 99, 99 (note), 100, 100 (note), 525.

⁵⁰ May 31, 1828.

candidates of the major parties. With a dramatic flourish, he decried dishonesty "mingled with election practices," asserting that the workingmen must "drive these money changers from the temple of freedom, and . . . restore its pristine purity, the legacy of our fathers." He then congratulated the newspaper's foremost political correspondent, "A Word to the Wise," calling for more comment and advice from his readers.⁵¹

In America, entry into politics as a third party is always precarious, but in 1828, the year of the presidential election between the incumbent John Quincy Adams and General Andrew Jackson, the debut was especially portentous. In those years, such an amenity as the secret ballot had yet to be introduced, and rowdyism was an accepted form of election sport. Wild party meetings marked by inflammatory oratory were held in an accommodating tavern, which usually came to be associated with the party. The franchise was open to all free, white males (provided a nominal tax of any kind was paid), but voting procedure was so obvious that intimidation ruled, and made political participation for the workingmen a tenuous adventure. Nominating procedure was ensconced in the inner caucus of the party, and their control precluded the possibility of an idealistic reformer's placing his choice on the ballot.⁵²

The Association tried to avoid the stigma of party by professing not to be one. It nevertheless played a political role, bringing workingmen together in order to prepare a ticket of reform without regard to party. The distinction is, of course, academic, but although the workingmen continually expressed their disapprobation of party politics, the Association was hardly able to escape the high emotion of a presidential election.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Philip S. Klein, *Pennsylvania Politics, 1817-1832: A Game Without Rules* (Philadelphia, 1940); Marguerite Bartlett, *Chief Phases of Pennsylvania Politics in the Jacksonian Period* (Allentown, 1919); Dallinger; George D. Luetscher, *Early Political Machinery in the United States*; Herman Hailperin, "Pro-Jackson Sentiment in Pennsylvania, 1820-1828," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, L (1926), 193-240. A perusal of the state constitution and the city charter will reveal that requirements for officeholding were not restrictive. The excuse offered by one historian that the workingmen could not run for office because of "property qualifications" is without foundation. The qualifications included personal as well as real property, and the tax was most often as low as thirty cents. See pamphlet of Alden Whitman, *Labor Parties, 1827-1834* (New York, 1943), 25.

Through its delegates, the Mechanics' Union decided to call three meetings during the second week in August, one in each of the most populated districts of Philadelphia City and County. The meetings were called ostensibly to discuss the "propriety of nominating suitable persons to be supported at the ensuing elections."⁵³ The first meeting was to be held in the city, at the District Court room. In the days before the city and county consolidation the contours of Philadelphia City were hourglass in figure, bounded on the north by Vine and below by South Street. The Delaware and Schuylkill rivers formed the easterly and westerly boundaries. The city was divided into fifteen wards, carved from its pattern of street squares, but the Association divided the city into four election districts, using Eighth and Market streets as the demarcation lines.

The second of the scheduled meetings was to be held in the Northern Liberties, to the northeast of the city, and was also to accommodate the workingmen of such lesser populated townships of that area as Penn Township and Kensington. The final meeting was called for Commissioners' Hall, Southwark, Heighton's bailiwick, and the most densely populated district in the county.

The voting strength of the workingmen's ticket would come from the laboring districts which fanned out from the jutting wharves along the Delaware into the myriad of alleys and courts which characterized that side of the city and county. Here the mechanics lived in their distinctive quarters. Their homes, extensions from the taller street-front houses, were strung along, side to side as boxcars, stretching to the rear court, obscured from the street view, until they met others like them. These homes were usually two stories high, containing one room on each floor. Entrance to back-yard quarters could be gained by a narrow walk under a brick arch which spanned the breach between two street-front homes. The homes facing the city street, in contrast to what lay to their rear, presented a pleasing proscenium of painted brick and smartly scrubbed marble stoops. Huddled to the rear lived Mr. Heighton's men, victims of a parsimonious building policy. Younger men and bachelors roomed in workingmen's boardinghouses. Common to the area were crowding, noise, inadequate sanitation and lack of facilities for rubbish re-

⁵³ *Mechanics' Free Press*, Aug. 9, 1828.

moval. When pumps had been installed throughout the city and county to pipe in Schuylkill water, these districts had been neglected, a fact Heighton observed in one of his addresses.⁵⁴

Heighton put his paper to press on August 9, editorially pondering the impending week's inaugural public meetings. "We flatter ourselves with the expectation of witnessing a large assemblage of working men, at the meetings to be holden on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday evenings next," he wrote. "The object will be the advancement of the *working classes*. . . . An opportunity will then be offered to disprove the notion that men of mechanical pursuits, are unfitted for political and civil stations." The purpose of their effort was to achieve finally a "fair representation . . . from the working classes" in the legislatures. But withal, there was skepticism in his editorial. "The ticket," he wrote, "will in all probability be unsuccessful owing to circumstances which are temporary in nature. But an attempt at this time, if nothing more, will at least afford a demonstration of our strength as regards point of numbers, talent and character. It will excite our friends who have been indifferent to their interests, to laudable exertions, without which the best cause must be forever abandoned."

Heighton considered the meetings pivotal to the entire movement. The Mechanics' Union-sponsored ticket required a respectable vote; it was the duty of all to attend and to interest their fellows to join them. Workingman self-consciousness may be seen in Heighton's concluding remarks in that editorial. "Every one who hears of it [the Monday meeting], will be enabled to discover, if he is, in the estimation of those who arrogate to themselves the claims of superiority over a mechanic, yet that he is a citizen of a country where perfect liberty and equality are secured to him, if he be disposed to possess and enjoy them."

Heighton's apprehensions were justified. Two of the three meetings were rendered unparliamentary brawls. If the first, in the city's District Court room, was comparatively unmolested, the workingmen of the Northern Liberties were to experience a rude introduction

⁵⁴ *The Principles of Aristocratic Legislation, developed in An Address delivered to the Working People of the district of Southwark, and townships of Moyamensing and Passyunk, in the Commissioners' Hall, August 14, 1828.* By an Operative Citizen. (Philadelphia, John Coates, Jr., Printer, 56 Almond Street, 1828.) The unique copy is deposited in the Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

to politics. Michael Labarthe, hatter, one who was to be active in the labor movement for many years, chaired the proceedings at Commissioners' Hall. About twenty members of an unruly mob were standing in the overflow in the passages, evidently in a festive mood. Chairman Labarthe finally secured order and time in which to explain the purpose of the gathering, but he was soon interrupted by an unidentified listener who offered a series of extraneous resolutions. The partisan faction provided a lusty background and, when Labarthe attempted to restore order, they greeted him with cries of "Throw the chairman out of the window!" The unruly ones, it developed, were Jackson men—the majority in that district—and they loudly accused the chairman of being an Adams (Administration) man. They were led by one of the magistrates and were reputed to be under his patronage. After the tumult, Labarthe was able to secure passage of the usual resolutions, and to appoint staff committees to attend the nominating convention of the whole county.⁵⁵

John Binns, contentious editor of the fiercely partisan (Administration) *Democratic Press*, gave a complete journalistic account of the proceedings.⁵⁶ When he absolved the Adams' forces of blame, the Jacksonites rejoined with the charge that the workingmen were certainly involved in an "Administration Plot," much to the consternation of Heighton who was striving to remain politically neutral. On the day of the Southwark meeting, Binns published a brief item stating that Dr. Joel Sutherland, leader of the Jackson forces in Philadelphia and candidate for Congress from the Southwark area, "has been to wait on one of the Secretaries of the Working People and had himself introduced, and made a proposition of a trade in relation to the County Ticket. Are the votes of the people of Philadelphia County," Binns asked indignantly, "to be traded away by this 'man of principle in proportion to his interest'?" Heighton was

⁵⁵ *Democratic Press*, Aug. 13, 1828.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* On hand himself as a "public journalist," Binns, a reporter and editor of the old school, gave one of the most colorful accounts we have of early political meetings in this country. It is a reportorial gem. It was Binns, rabid anti-Jacksonian, who was responsible for the famous "coffin handbills," eulogizing six young Creek War volunteers who had been summarily executed by General Jackson in 1815 for desertion. These macabre, eight-inch, black-bordered drawings shaped like coffins were used in the vitriolic *Democratic Press* to illustrate the ruthlessness of the opposition candidate. Partly because of Adams' defeat, Binns' paper was forced to suspend publication, and to merge with the *Pennsylvania Inquirer* in November, 1829.

infuriated by this obvious implication. He charged that the "traitorous kisses of the wily Binns" had caused division among the workingmen, and stated flatly that he was interested only in the "INDUSTRIOUS AND PRODUCTIVE PARTY," and none else.⁵⁷

At the Southwark meeting, three preambles and constitutions were successively read, but none was able to pass in the melee which prevailed, and the meeting had to be adjourned.⁵⁸ However, the resourceful Heighton, secretary of the meeting, recalled the disbanding assembly and proceeded to deliver a prepared speech in order to restore dignity to the occasion. Heighton's address, soon published under the title, *Principles of Aristocratic Legislation*,⁵⁹ was a restatement of his original plan set against a background of a plea for political interest on the part of working people. In the course of this address he advanced the notion that rent was a form of tax paid chiefly by the poor, which not only amortized the original investment on the land and building improvements, but even supported the various "public improvements" under construction. Underlying this speech, as always, was Heighton's concern with the "caprices of insatiable accumulation" of the "monopoliser and capitalist."

If any factor can be considered the prime mover of the Philadelphia workingmen's movement, it was the workingmen's all-consuming fear of being reduced to vassalage by the new entrepreneur. To the workingmen the trend of labor-displacing machinery signified the obliteration of their way of life. Mechanization was the antithesis of their idealized conception of what America stood for: a nation of small, independent producers. The "degraded" British working classes stood starkly before them as an example of what could happen to a nation which allowed itself to be industrialized. To Heighton, the cruel paradox facing the working people was that their government, founded in the midst of plenty on the principle of equality for all, now encouraged a policy of inequality and oppression by assisting wealthy and influential groups to enlarge the gap between them and the working people by issuing charters of incorporation to them for banks, canal syndicates, lottery brokerages and large manufactures.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Principles of Aristocratic Legislation*, Introduction.

⁵⁸ *Mechanics' Free Press*, Aug. 16, 1828.

⁵⁹ See Note 54.

⁶⁰ For a good expression of the workingmen's program, see Heighton's *Address of the County Delegates to their Constituents*, delivered in September, 1828, and reprinted in the *Mechanics' Free Press*, Sept. 27.

The Mechanics' Union was trying to arrest incipient capitalism and to institute instead a system of small producers in which the journeyman artisan would have a respected place in the community. It was understandable that its members spoke of Jefferson's Declaration of Independence with reverence and that Owen's ideas had appeal for them.

The journeymen wrote realistic letters offering their views on how to conduct the election. "A Word to the Wise," that perennial sage, reminded his fellows that they were neither Jackson nor Adams men, and were entering politics to ascertain their strength, not to throw away their votes. To this end he suggested the selection of but two or three candidates of the total of twenty-four offices on the City Council in order to test the new ticket's drawing power. He disapproved of involvement in national issues and national candidates as being a diversion from the local problems at hand. "Jack Plane" hoped for a thousand votes, or enough to "induce the party leaders to consider our claims, and a coalition with us in forming tickets will be courted, and some of our brethren be favoured with an office." "A Subscriber" approvingly noted that in Southwark three candidates for the office of assistant secretary had been rejected by the workingmen because they were employers. "An Operative Voter," however, thought that the workingmen should nominate nonproducers, since the producing classes had so long been depressed that they were unfit to serve adequately. "Tim Hatchet" insisted that no lawyers be nominated, and "An Operative" was of the opinion that the working people should wait until the major parties designated their nominees before they made their choice and then form the new ticket from among agreeable members of the old parties. To him, the establishment of an efficient police force was necessary, considering the interferences at the recent meetings.⁶¹

Advice from correspondents was generally heeded by the policy makers. Candidates were entered for all thirty-nine municipal and county offices, but none for any of the three congressional seats. Only four of the candidates endorsed were exclusively on the workingmen's ticket, the remainder being chosen from either the Administration or Jackson choices. Delegations of workingmen visited each of the major candidates, inquiring if he would support the working classes if elected.

In the first year of the Philadelphia workingmen's movement, the

⁶¹ *Ibid.*; see also issue of Sept. 20, 1828 (editorial).

reform issues had not fully crystallized. At that time they were like the preacher who was against sin, denouncing "capitalist accumulators." They had only begun to discuss those problems which have come to be associated with them, such as free public education, abolition of militia training, and the enactment of a mechanics' lien law.

Except for their practice of nominating candidates in a convention of popularly elected delegates, the workingmen conducted their campaign in the conventional manner of the time, with tavern headquarters in each of the three main districts of the county. Committees of correspondence and vigilance were formed, one hundred and twenty men signing for duty in Southwark alone and a like number in the various city wards.⁶²

Organization of the new ticket proceeded with remarkable thoroughness in the midst of the election tenseness. Eleven of the fifteen wards in the city had chosen delegates to attend their convention, while to the north of the city, meetings had been held in Frankfort, Kensington, Penn Township, Manayunk, Roxborough, Germantown and the Northern Liberties. To the south not only Southwark had been organized, but adjoining Passyunk and Moyamensing were also the scenes of meetings.

Of the eight exclusively workingman candidates, only two had been prominently mentioned in workingmen's activities. They were James Glasgow, plasterer, who ran for Common Council, and James McAllister, shoemaker, candidate for City Assembly.

WORKINGMEN AND THE 1828 CITY AND COUNTY ELECTIONS

<i>Office</i>	<i>Total Candidates</i>	<i>Total Workingman Candidates</i>	<i>Exclusive Workingman Candidates</i>	<i>Jackson Candidates Endorsed</i>	<i>Administra- tion Candidates Endorsed</i>
<i>City Ticket</i>					
City Assembly	6	6	1	3	2
Select Council	4	4	1	3	0
Common Council	20	20	2	12	6
<i>County Ticket</i>					
County Assembly	7	7	4	1	2
County Auditor	1	1	0	1	0
County Commissioner .	1	1	0	0	1

⁶² *Ibid.*, Aug. 9 and Sept. 13, 1828.

Heighton's pre-election editorials displayed uncommon restraint. Although the workingmen had nominated worthy candidates, they were still not "in *entire* accordance with the recently developed political principles," he wrote. Moreover, the cordwainer editor was disheartened by the "embarrassing and inauspicious circumstances" under which the ticket had been formed. Some of the workingmen's delegates had engaged in "treasonable conduct," "openly, and without shame" injuring the ticket "to their eternal disgrace." Heighton's only praise for the ticket was that "it is in many respects unobjectionable." The whole city had been engulfed by the interest of the presidential race, and the major parties seized the opportunity to cajole the workingmen and circulate "unfounded rumours" about them, even to the point of attaching to their electioneering carriages signs reading "The Working Men's Ticket coupled with the names of Jackson and Adams." Two congressional candidates had marched with election bills emblazoned with the motto "FROM SIX TO SIX."

Heighton unburdened his mind, and confessed that it was "but of trifling importance, whether the efforts of the Working People this year become successful, or the contrary," so long as the foundation of a future party, a "PEOPLE'S party," was laid, "based upon the immutable rock of *equality*, industry, utility, and the real intelligence of all mankind."⁶³

V

As the returns were posted, it was soon evident that Jackson's party had won an emphatic victory both nationally and locally. The Tennessee General won a personal triumph, enjoying a two-to-one majority over his rival, President John Quincy Adams, as Philadelphians followed the national trend. All three Jackson congressional candidates, including Dr. Joel Sutherland, won easily. In the city, victorious Jacksonites averaged 4,500 votes to about 3,500 for the Administration, while three of the exclusively workingmen's candidates polled about 240 votes each, and another received 539. In the county, where the Jackson plurality ran better than two to one, four exclusively workingman candidates received about 420 votes, but William O. Kline, a last-minute lawyer selection and regularly a

⁶³ *Ibid.*, editorials for month of October, 1828.

Jackson man, got an encouraging 1,400! If success at the polls was the rock on which the movement was to stand, the floundering vote made the outlook dreary indeed.

In all, the workingmen had no more than six hundred active members, and the roll of the Mechanics' Union was probably not much more. Of these, three hundred and fourteen had volunteered for election duty, or had been officers in the Mechanics' Union. The journeymen were roughly divided between the city and county, Southwark having the greatest single number. The Northern Liberties during the first year was not represented in proportion to its population, but later became the most active district.

Thirty-two of the three hundred and fourteen political participants may be designated as having shared in the leadership of the workingmen's movement during the first year. The selection is based on the offices they held, and the frequency of their participation.

1. Francis Brelsford, cordwainer, Northern Liberties
2. John Dubois, Sr., cordwainer, Southwark
3. William English, cordwainer, City
4. Joseph Goldey, cordwainer, City
5. William Heighton, cordwainer, Southwark
6. James McAllister, cordwainer, City
7. Frederick Rooke, cordwainer, City
8. Israel Young, cordwainer, Southwark
9. James Burns, brushmaker, Northern Liberties
10. Thomas Rutherford, brushmaker, City
11. Daniel Buzzell, button manufacturer, Southwark
12. Joseph Carter, cut-nail manufacturer, Southwark
13. William J. Young, mathematical instrument maker, Southwark
14. John Coates, Jr., printer, Southwark
15. Joseph C. Molloy, printer, Southwark
16. John Thompson, printer, City
17. Isaac Cullin, tailor, City
18. Samuel Harper, tailor, City
19. George W. Jones, hatter, City
20. Michael Labarthe, hatter, Northern Liberties
21. John Napier, chairmaker, City
22. Thomas Taylor, currier, City

23. John Thomason, tin-plate worker, City
24. Benjamin Phillips, storekeeper, Southwark
25. Jacob Deaves, carpenter, City
26. Peter Benner, brickmaker, City
27. James Glasgow, plasterer, City
28. Thomas H. Goucher, house carpenter, City
29. Robert E. Morrell, house carpenter, City
30. John W. McMahon, house carpenter, City
31. Joseph A. McClintock, house carpenter, City
32. Amos Lower, bricklayer, Northern Liberties

The occupations of these thirty-two leaders may be summarized as follows:

Professional men	0
Businessmen, small	1
Manufacturers, small	3
Printers	3
Cordwainers, all	8
Building trades	8
Other artisans	9

The election demonstrated that the Mechanics' Union could not continue to provide political leadership for the Philadelphia workingmen's movement, but only part of this conclusion arises from their crushing defeat. For political purposes, the movement was clumsily organized. The natural unit for political action was always the ward and the district, not the trade society. The Association had performed a valuable service in developing the movement, but it could not sustain continued participation in politics and fulfill its other obligations. Central organization for political parties, though necessary, is better provided by a purely political group than by one devoted in part to economic activity.

The workingmen were now a force in Philadelphia, and their work had to go on. Heighton recognized this, and early in November he editorially urged his colleagues to take a new departure and establish "ward political clubs."⁶⁴ Such clubs could be built on the work done by the Mechanics' Union, and would be "free from the common

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Nov. 1, 1828.

intrigues of politics." The clubs would serve several purposes. They would assist in the main object of electing "our own public officers" and would also establish a fund. The fund would enable the clubs to perform a host of services, including the "general diffusion of constitutional, legal and political knowledge among the working people." By printing legislative enactments and information on important legislation members would become better acquainted with their contents. The clubs would encourage stimulating debates on the merits of current issues, thereby aiding in the formation of intelligent opinions among themselves. They would also supply gratuitous legal advice to their members, but the principal utility would be in requiring "their candidates, in case of election, [to use] their influence in procurement of appropriations of public money for the above [laws] and such other useful purposes, as may from time to time present themselves."⁶⁵ In the following month, Southwark took the lead in forming the first "Republican Political Association of Working Men," as the various district clubs all came to be known, "to check . . . that glaring aristocracy and political intrigue, which has so long preyed on the vitals of our republic, and doomed to slavery so large and useful a portion of our fellow men."⁶⁶

The Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations, however, continued to meet during 1829 on trade union matters, but it was spent as a political force. Michael Labarthe and Frederick Rooke offered toasts to its continued success at the first anniversary dinner of the *Mechanics' Free Press* in January, and the financial committee met on schedule to settle the accounts of the Association. During the remainder of the year, the Association met regularly in monthly meeting, but the prominence of its activities was considerably diminished, until the notice of its final meeting, in November, 1829, signified that it had disbanded, doubtless dividing the residue of its funds among the several societies.⁶⁷

VI

The Philadelphia workingmen's movement as a whole survived the demise of one of its parts, the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations, remaining a force until 1831. Even to its contemporaries, the

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Mechanics' Free Press*, Dec. 6, 1828 (editorial).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Nov. 21, 1829.

Mechanics' Union may have been little known. Records of its activities are not extant, and references to it are few. When the Association supported a strike, it did so in the name of the striking trade society. When it endorsed candidates for public office, the name "Working Men's Ticket" appeared in print.

One may ask, What did these humorless journeymen, possessed of a monomania against capitalists, accomplish with their Mechanics' Union? They were naïve; they hoped for an Athenian democracy in a nation which reveled in hard-headed, bargaining politics. They sought to arrest the momentum of incipient capitalism, using a tool they were not adept in wielding: the apparatus of government. The workingmen wished to revert to an economy of small production wherein the worker was identified with his product in the community. They desired to assert their individualism at a time when new methods of production would force them into a stereotype.

In the process of a revolution in production techniques, proponents of older methods must assert themselves as a matter of survival. But as a class they seldom overcome the new techniques destined to displace them. They do, however, leave their pattern before parting. The Philadelphia workingmen's movement left to the operatives in the textile mills and the production workshops of less skilled workers a cultural legacy.

It is significant that when the mill hands of the outlying cotton factories were on strike to recoup their wages, Heighton himself formed a committee of journeymen to offer them relief.⁶⁸ Further research into the effects of labor displacement due to the expanding market and new production methods will doubtless reveal that the journeymen in the trades, in accepting employment in the production shops, brought with them their organizing and parliamentary methods of trade unionism.

Through the leadership of William Heighton, the Philadelphia journeymen broke the inertia of the workingmen in the United States; they taught the working classes everywhere the art of articulate protest. Once they launched their activities, the floodgates were opened. But before working people could begin to assert themselves as a self-conscious class, they had to begin to analyze their place in society and to formulate concepts about themselves as a class in

⁶⁸ See Note 33.

American life. Heighton assisted their articulation, the preliminary step in self-evaluation, by offering them a set of values based on the dogma of the Ricardian socialists: the whole produce of human labor. He suggested to them mediums of expression by which they might develop their new concepts.

The Philadelphia journeymen were guided by an economic theory which could excite them, but which was a hopeless anachronism. The utopianism of the Ricardian socialists was no match for the energy of rising capitalism, but its ideology was a prime mover. The organizational methods used by the journeymen, exemplified in the Mechanics' Union, were an important innovation. Political participation and the demand to be included in the benefits of production were the bold strokes which welded the workingmen together, making them conscious of their capabilities. If these early unionists were soon replaced by more pragmatic people who scorned political action and who would not have the workingmen collide with the economic system, we must remember that the idealism of the members of the Mechanics' Union was ultimately more important than the pragmatism of the pure unionists. For while the pragmatists among the workingmen had always existed, whether in guild or in trade society, the labor movement in the United States did not arise through their activities. It was born rather of a reformist hope for the security and dignity of the entire working class.

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