1957

The Working Men's Party of New York City, 1829-1830

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THE WORKING MEN'S PARTY
OF NEW YORK CITY,
1829-1830

by

James A. O'Brien, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

November
1957
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CHAPTER I

SETTING THE SCENE

Hitherto, my friends, in government as in every branch of morals, we have but too much mistaken words for truths and forms for principles. To render men free, it sufficeth not to proclaim their liberty; to make them equal, it sufficeth not to call them so. True, the Fourth of July, '76, commenced a new era for our race. True, the sun of promise then rose upon the world. But let us not mistake for the fullness of light what was but its harbinger. Let us not conceive that man, in signing the declaration of his rights, secured their possession; that having framed the theory, he had not and hath not still, the practice to seek.

Your fathers, indeed, on the day from which dates your existence as a nation, opened the gates of the temple of human liberty. But think not they entered, nor that you have entered, the sanctuary. They passed not, nor have you passed, even the threshold.

Who speaks of liberty while the human mind is in chains? Who of equality while the thousands are in squalid wretchedness, the millions harassed with health-destroying labor, the few afflicted with health-destroying idleness, and all tormented by health-destroying solicitude? Look abroad on the misery which is gaining on the land! Mark the strife and the discord and the jealousies, the shock of interests and opinions, the hatreds of sect, the estrangements of class, the pride of wealth, the debasement of poverty, the helplessness of youth unprotected, of age uncomforted, of industry unrewarded, of ignorance unenlightened, of vice unreclaimed, of misery unpitied, of sickness, hunger, and nakedness unsatisfied, unalleviated, and unheeded. Go! mark all the wrongs and the wretchedness with which the eye and the ear and the heart are familiar, and then echo in triumph and celebrate in
The above is an impassioned, but fair example of the type of oratory and newspaper editorials the laboring class of New York and elsewhere was eagerly imbibing about the year 1830. Let it serve as an introduction to this history of the Working Men's Party of New York City, and to "Fanny" Wright, the striking Scotswoman who was one of the main protagonists in an apparently futile experiment in political action by the laboring class and its supporters.

It is the purpose of this thesis to show that, although the Working Men's Party had little chance for survival as a political group, the success of the reforms it advocated made its existence a distinctive contribution to the American way of life. By following the workers of 1830 through their brief experiment in the political arena, it will be seen that circumstances made inevitable the collapse of their party, but that subsequent American culture is richer because of their experience.

The year 1827 saw the first attempt at permanent organization among laborers as a class. Fittingly, Philadelphia was

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the birthplace of "The Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations," a group which soon organized itself politically as "The Philadelphia Working Men's Party." This is not to deny that organizations of workers existed before 1827. But these groups were more along the lines of medieval guilds, with social and charitable, rather than political, purposes. An institution uniquely American in the early nineteenth century, universal manhood suffrage, accounted for action on a political front.

A brief consideration of the history of manufacturing in the United States is a necessary prerequisite for a study of the political organization of New York workers in 1829. Most simply put, the development of manufacturing can be traced

2 This fact is largely accepted at the present time. It was once thought that Manchester, England was the parent city of the first permanent trades' union, but the group "expired before it was so much as known to a large majority of the operatives in the neighborhood." Sidney and Beatrice Webb, The History of Trade Unionism, 2nd ed. (New York, 1902), p. 107.

3 The term manufacturing will be used in its literal meaning, i.e., work done by hand. At this period of American history, the cotton trade in New England was the only industry employing a factory system as we know it. In brief, manufacture is here taken in its broadest sense: the opposite of agriculture.

4 The analysis of John R. Commons and associates offers a compact summary of a tremendously diverse evolution, and they are the authorities mainly followed here. For further elaboration the reader is referred to the following works of Professor Commons: History of Labour in the United States, II (New York, 1936), I, 25-107; Documentary History of American Industrial Society, X (Cleveland, 1911), "Introduction to Volumes III and IV"; Labor and Administration (New York, 1913), chapter XIV; Quarterly Journal of Economics, "Evolution of Industry," XXIV, 39-77.
in the gradual separation of the three-fold function of the worker, that of (a) merchant, (b) master, and (c) laborer.

In colonial days all three were grouped in one person. In most trades this individual was the itinerant worker, who took the raw material supplied by the farmer, and worked it into a finished product. Such ability was rare in a country almost entirely devoted to agriculture, and since clothing, shoes, leather, machinery, steel, glass, etc., were necessities, men skilled in producing these commodities were a valuable asset to any community.5

In time, as transportation improved slightly and small towns became more prevalent, this personal arrangement was little changed, except that shoemaking and tailoring became as fixed in location as the heavier trades of printing and steel-making. At this stage the worker tended to own his shop and tools of production, and to purchase his own raw materials. Clearly he had become more independent, and instead of favoring him, assemblies and legislatures often issued measures protective of the general public. He still combined the three functions of trade within his own person, and so, little friction

5The colonial farmer-consumer was willing to go to great lengths to encourage manufacturing, e.g., by loans, tax exemptions, bounties, provisions for cheap raw materials, and monopolies. Cf. Commons, History of Labour, I, 36–44, for citations of various colonial documents.
is to be noted. 6

The first separation of the triple function occurred in general around the period of the Revolution, when towns were growing into cities of some size. Instead of a worker's main business being the filling of individual orders, the retail store became the more profitable and practical method of doing business. Previously, only one or two journeymen and apprentices were necessary, but several were needed now. The master-merchant became more of a manager and a capitalist, for raw materials and other overhead costs required more money while his goods were in the now longer process of making and selling. The men who worked for him still owned their own tools, but they had actually become wage-earners only. Still, there was little conflict between the two groups. Since the master-merchant was a man "up from the ranks," most journeymen seemed to entertain the idea that someday they too would be owners of their own shops. In other words, there was a vast community of interest within each trade. Competition remained on a local basis, enabling the master to satisfy any reasonable demands for higher

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6 The so-called strikes of the colonial period were in reality actions taken by guild-like master craftsmen to protect their business as a whole from what they considered unjust restrictions of governmental bodies. As an example, see Documentary History, II, 343-344, for a statement of the bakers of Charlestown, South Carolina in 1786, setting forth their grievances against the city council.
wages by passing on the increased expense to his customers. Underselling or marketing of inferior articles was the bane of industry at this point, and master and journeymen alike acted in concert to expose and eliminate such unfair competition.7

Obviously, however, in the rough-and-ready atmosphere of early American competition, peace could not always rule the industrial world. The ratification of the Constitution brought internal expansion, and constant improvement of roads and means of transportation, with the prospects of an ever-widening market. Exactly here did conflict and bitter antagonism between employer and employee begin. Such a clash was natural enough, for what had happened was simply this: the merchant could no longer pass off upon the local consumer an increased cost of labor. Because of the competition factor, the price-bargain had escaped his manipulation; the wage-bargain was the only lever under his direct control, and to remain in the race for markets he felt constrained to keep forcing it down.

At the turn of the nineteenth century and thereafter,

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7An advertisement "by order of the Journeymen [italics added] Cordwainers of the City and Liberties of Philadelphia" appeared in Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser for May 16, 1791 and berated "the Patent Boot Ware House of Peter Gordon, Prentiss and Co.," for their competitive practices, since "in point of neatness, ease, and utility, this manner of having boots made is inferior to the way that boots have generally been made for many years past." Reprinted in Commons, History of Labour, I, 59-60.
the skilled trades in the large eastern cities were nurturing the seeds of strife. New York and Philadelphia merchants were discovering a demand for their shoes, custom-made suits, hats, and utensils on a wholesale scale in the new markets of the south and west. Retailers in these regions had neither the skill nor the equipment required to produce extensively on the local level. To compete in this trade the eastern merchant required a larger amount of capital and credit for his raw material, transportation, and completed stock. Besides these economic costs, he perceived a need also to keep his human commodity, the price of labor, at a minimum, if he was going to gain and hold new and promising markets. In the beginning it was to the advantage of the journeymen to go along with the boom, but prosperity in its turn brought higher prices, and a consequent pressure upon their own standard of living. Then came the cries of protest, weak and ineffective at first, but stronger as the century grew older.

One further development requires attention, in order that a background for New York City of 1829 may be sketched. As a

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8 Cf. United States Census, 1910, Population, I, Table 33, p. 54, for the steady upsurge in urban communities at this period. There were eleven cities of eight thousand inhabitants or over in 1810, thirteen in 1820, twenty-six in 1830, and forty-four in 1840. Manhattan borough had a population of 123,706 in 1820, 202,589 in 1830, and 312,710 in 1840.
direct result of the growth of national markets, there came upon the scene the merchant-capitalist, the outsider who tended to take over the merchant function from the old master-merchant, and complete the form which has molded our current economic groupings of capital, management, and labor.

Once again, this was a quite natural evolution. The ever-widening wholesale market in an adolescent United States called for a marketing expert, for a figure capable enough to handle large capital successfully and keep the confidence of the banks and other credit agencies. Since the master craftsman was hardly the man for the task, a new type in the business world, the merchant-capitalist, gradually arose to meet the demand. He did not need to have a technical knowledge of the trade. This was the task of the master, who was really a labor boss after this time. In the scramble for markets, the master's job became more and more to obtain maximum results from his workers for minimum wages. In many cases he resorted to "sweat-shop" methods. Often he tried the expedient of dividing labor so that only the more technical operations were done by skilled journeymen, which meant less work and less wages for them, while the cheaper labor of women, children, and prisoners was

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employed in less skilled aspects of the job. The villain in
the piece, of course, was the merchant-capitalist, either in
his own person, or behind the hated mask of the banks and cor­
porate wealth. Sometimes the hard-pressed journeymen saw
through the disguise,\textsuperscript{10} which explains why the master was sur­
prisingly often included in the labor organizations of the
period.\textsuperscript{11} As will be seen more fully in subsequent chapters,
the battle-lines were drawn between the "producing classes" as
opposed to the "non-producing," rather than between employers
and employees. In the words of Frances Wright, "It [the workers'
movement] is labor rising up against idleness, industry against
money, justice against law and against privilege."\textsuperscript{12}

If, then, one is correctly to understand the discontent

\textsuperscript{10}"We would not be too severe on our employers, they are
the slaves to the capitalists as we are to them," was the way
the journeymen builders of Boston expressed themselves in 1834.

\textsuperscript{11}The Philadelphia Mechanics' Free Press in an editorial
on September 12, 1829 offered this distinction: "If an employer
superintends his own business (still more if he works with his
own hands) he is a working man and has an interest on the side
of the remuneration of labour . . . . If this view of things
be correct, shall we look with a jealous eye on those employers
who prefer being considered working men? who are willing to
join us in obtaining our objects? who wish to see production
attended with respectability, comfort and intelligence?" Still,
journeymen seem to have been more trusted with roles of leader­
ship. \textit{Ibid.}, August 30, 1828.

\textsuperscript{12}New York Free Enquirer, November 27, 1830, cited in
of a century and a quarter ago, he must note this point of prime importance: "Labor organization in America . . . began not in the factories but among the skilled workers in the trades." This group it was which first felt the pressure of the Industrial Revolution dislodging them from their time-honored function in society. Angered and dismayed, they instinctively united against the fearful new evil, and since they were armed with a potent weapon in the ballot, their mode of attack became political.


14Previously, a man had to hold property before the voting privilege was granted. New York, in 1821, was one of the first eastern states to appreciate the inconsistency of this practice with the stirring words of the Declaration of Independence, but the principles of Alexander Hamilton and of Federalism did not give way without a fierce struggle. Power belonged only with property. "The notion that every man that works a day on the road, or serves an idle hour in the militia is entitled as of right to an equal participation in the whole power of government, is most unreasonable, and has no foundation in justice." N. H. Carter and associates, Reports of the Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of 1821, Assembled for the Purpose of Amending the Constitution of the State of New York, 221, cited in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston, 1945), p. 13.

In the correct evaluation of these developments, Jacksonian democracy falls into proper focus. It is seen as the sum total of undercurrents such as these, carrying the country towards the open sea of practical equality. In the words of Arthur Meier Schlesinger, Jr., "Jackson himself was a product rather than the creator, of the new democratic spirit, for he rode into power on a tide of forces that had been gathering strength for more than a decade and which he had done little or nothing to bring into being. It will appear that the new democracy was 'Jacksonian' only to the extent that Jackson stamped the political phase of the movement with the imprint of his personality, lending it certain picturesque characteristics and dramatic qualities." A. M. Schlesinger, New Viewpoints in American History (New York, 1948), pp. 200-201.
Though it was doomed to failure for several reasons, their brave struggle enlists interest and admiration. The particular reasons for organization in New York City, and the captivating personages initiating the movement, call for fuller treatment.
When the skilled craftsmen of 1829 came together, what were their specific demands? Were they looking for minimum wage and maximum hour laws? Present-day labor discussions most frequently center around these points of dispute, but the earliest American movement asked for equality of opportunity rather than for class security. One list of "Working Men's Measures" reads: "Equal universal education, abolition of imprisonment for debt, abolition of all licensed monopolies, an entire revision or abolition of the present militia system, a less expensive law system, equal taxation of property, an effective lien law for labourers on buildings, a district system of elections, no legislation on religion." Among these grievances, important points which merit further comment are the first four, and the plea for an effective lien law.

**Equal Universal Education**

"Equal Universal Education" was undoubtedly the most

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1 *New York Working Men's Advocate*, October 30, 1830. Other lists, substantially the same, may be found in Schlesinger, Sr., *New Viewpoints*, p. 208, and in Schlesinger, Jr., *Age of Jackson*, p. 134.
important plank in the workingmen's platform, both in itself and in its effects. The keynote of the whole political movement of the period is struck here: the workers were looking for equality of opportunity, fearful that the existing system of education, "which tends in a greater or less degree to separate the children of the poor man and the rich, will eventually lead us into all the distinctions that exist under despotic governments, and destroy our political liberties." Dissension over the specific kind of education to be provided, as shall be seen, ate like an acid through the garment of party organization. The fact remains, the status of public instruction around 1830 afforded ample reason for grievance and debate.

In most of New England the principle of free, tax-supported schools had long been accepted, though actual attendance at them was another matter. In the leading states of New York and Pennsylvania the prevailing system was private schools for all who could pay tuition, and charity schools for the rest. The so-called public schools of New York City were conducted by a private organization, the Public School Society, and, until 1832, a small fee was charged. Still, the stigma of charity surrounded the system, a fact which, in large measure, accounted for

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2 Documentary History, V, 158, citing "Proceedings of a Meeting of Mechanics and Other Working Men, held at Military Hall, Wooster Street, New York, on Tuesday evening, December 29, 1829," Working Man's Advocate, January 16, 1830.
poor school attendance. In 1829, the Society estimated that 24,200 children between the ages of five and fifteen were roaming the streets of New York City, and that only about ten thousand were attending the public schools. At the same period, the city's private schools enrolled about 17,500 pupils.\(^3\)

**Abolishment of imprisonment for debt**

The practice of imprisonment for debt was a source of constant irritation to the newly enfranchised citizen. In 1829, an organization known as the Boston Prison Discipline Society estimated that seventy-five thousand persons were imprisoned for debt annually, about ten thousand of these cases occurring in New York and seven thousand in Pennsylvania. Over one-half of the seventy-five thousand incarcerations were for sums of less than twenty dollars. Though all classes of society suffered under the debtor's law, the poor and the unemployed were affected most seriously. The press of the day cites many pitiable cases: a blind man in Boston with a dependent family, imprisoned for a debt of six dollars; a wounded veteran of the Battle of Bunker Hill, a man seventy-six years old, jailed for a debt of a few dollars; and perhaps most ironic of all, a widow in Providence, Rhode Island, imprisoned for non-payment of sixty-

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eight cents—and by the man to save whose property from fire her husband had lost his life!4

The paradox of putting a debtor where he could not possibly pay his debt was preached with eloquent force; witness a working-men's candidate for Congress in Philadelphia: "A law that makes poverty a crime, and a poor man a felon, after those very laws have made poverty inevitable, is not only cruel and oppressive, but absurd and revolting."5 United political action by those without material resources appeared the most effective solution to the problem.

Abolition of all licensed monopolies

In the eyes of righteous workingmen all monopoly was undemocratic, but banks were especially villainous for a double reason. The first was that they ground the "producing classes" under the netherstone of privilege, by granting to the merchant-capitalist huge credit, and therefore, dictatorial power; the other, that they forced toilers to accept their wages in unstable bank-notes, so that often the face value of salaries was in excess of real or purchasing power. Thus, bankers became

4 Commons, History of Labour, I, 178-179. Robert E. Riegel (Young America, 1830-1840, Norman, Oklahoma, 1949, p. 282) states that "as late as 1828 New York had one thousand prisoners whose debts averaged twenty-five dollars apiece."

5 Mechanics' Free Press, September 25, 1830.
"the greatest knaves, imposters and paupers of the age," since they swore to pay their debtors thirty or thirty-five million dollars on demand when they had but three or four million with which to do it. In view of the tremendous number of broken banks and counterfeit notes on the market, the laboring men were counselling against the renewal of bank charters. They did not wish an aristocracy of privilege to be perpetuated nor an economic slavery to be foisted upon their posterity.

An important observation on the bank grievance may well be noted here. A more promising solution to precisely this problem was the factor which finally linked the small political groups of workers to the larger political parties. Because of its strong position in the Bank War in the campaign of 1832, the Democratic Party of Andrew Jackson and of Tammany Hall re-enlisted the support of the laboring classes. "Their own parties, engaged in kindhearted activity on the periphery of the problem, disappeared."8

6Documentary History, V, 152, citing Working Man's Advocate, October 31, 1829, report of a labor meeting of October 19.


8Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, p. 143.
Revision or abolition of the present militia system

The main defense of Jacksonian America was state-trained militia. The Pennsylvania law of 1822, a typical one, ruled that "every free able bodied white male person who has resided within this commonwealth for one month, and is between the ages of eighteen and forty-five . . . shall be enrolled in the militia of this commonwealth." Such a system was being condemned roundly by manual workers because they felt that the training days were largely wasted, more social get-togethers than preparation for possible military service. More important was the loss of three days' wages. The man of means absented himself and paid twelve dollars fine; for the mechanic, the choice was either drill-field or jail.

An effective lien law

A legal claim on property as security for a debt was a petition peculiar to laborers in the building trades. The situation was explained to the farming community in these words:

They ["the mechanics of the country"] need but be told that many of our buildings are erected by designing speculators, or master builders, who, when detected, are


10 Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, p. 354. The laborer had the privilege of paying a fine, but, of course, he rarely had the money.
regularly succeeded by others—that a systematic course of frauds has been practiced on the mechanics, laborers, and furnishers of materials for buildings, for years, in this city, to the amount of $125,000 annually. That the greater part of these losses has fallen upon individuals who have families dependent on their labor for support. That the merchant who vends his merchandise can secure payment, previous to delivery, while the mechanic and producing classes are obliged to fulfill their contracts, or render their services before they can demand such security. That a great part of the distress, experienced in this city during the last winter, originated in these losses. That we are now, from the same causes, looking forward with fearful forebodings to the events of the present winter.

The farmers need but be truly informed of these facts, to unite with one accord in the passage of a lien law, which would protect us, hereafter, from many otherwise unavoidable evils.11

These then were the main planks in the platform of the workers' political parties about the year 1830. In truth, none of them seems radical enough to warrant the consternation which historically attended the existence of the "workies' parties," as they were called. They are, in the main, humanitarian measures, aimed at contributing to the common good, even while they shored up the morale of a skilled working class, fearful of losing its function and importance in society. Though a small minority group—the nation was still predominantly agricultural—the movement might possibly have enlisted the immediate

11Documentary History, V, 159-160, citing proceedings of a workers' meeting. Ibid., p. 153, put the annual loss at "not less than three or four hundred thousand dollars," but the author of the statement is a less trustworthy source, one Thomas Skidmore, soon to be introduced.
sympathy of the "aristocratic orders of society," to grant its reasonable demands. Instead, the rich, the party politicians, and the general public alike, looked on it as "a party founded on the most alarming principles to civil society." The horrified opposition which helped to bring the workers' party to an early demise flowed from a great fear of the radical fringe of the organization, especially from Thomas Skidmore, Frances Wright, and Robert Dale Owen. The picture would lack both color and detail if these interesting characters were not introduced.

Thomas Skidmore was himself a "mechanic," one who worked with machines, and with the passing years he became embittered that his labor brought him such little recompense when its leisure gave the propertied class such a comfortable existence. To Skidmore, something was definitely wrong with such a civilization; a committee report authored by him in the early days of organization of the Working Men's Party summarizes his conclusions. For him, the state of New York, as all governments the world over, had violated the natural right of equality by the initial distribution of property, and the laws of inheritance had perpetuated the gross injustice. The result was,

12 Ibid., p. 155, citing the Morning Courier and New York Enquirer, November 4, 1829.

economically speaking, a Nineteenth Century feudal society, consisting of ruling lords whose families had received huge tracts of land, and their vassals, paupers who had been given little or nothing. His solution was simple: begin all over again; evaluate property within the state and redistribute it equally among all the adult population, making sure that those who attained maturity each year were provided with the property of those recently deceased. The grandiose scheme was proposed and fully developed in a pamphlet of some two hundred pages, with a most arresting title: The Rights of Man to Property! Being a Proposition to Make it Equal among the Adults of the Present Generation; and to Provide for its Equal Transmission to Every Individual of Each Succeeding Generation, on Arriving at the Age of Maturity.

The ideas presented in the volume can be traced to Thomas Paine and his "Agrarian Justice." For this reason the program became known as "agrarianism," and, although they ardently denied affinity with Skidmore's ideas, all workers' movements for decades suffered from association with him. Obviously the plan raised great consternation among the propertied classes, since its author was in reality drawing a line of battle between the rich and the poor, and not between workers and non-workers. Besides obvious targets like William Penn14 and the

Van Rensellaers, he even trained his guns on his own conferees, charging that "Robert Dale Owen and Frances Wright rejected his agrarian ideas because they had 'landed property' which they had 'no idea of parcelling off into agrarian lots.' Such strong animosity within the ranks boded ill for the long life of the workers' political party.

The criticism just mentioned was by no means the most vehement levelled at Frances Wright and Robert Dale Owen. The presence upon the scene of these two figures, who were neither working people nor particularly interested in unions of tradesmen, requires an acquaintance with their characters and backgrounds.

In 1830, Miss Wright—or "Fanny" as the shocked section of the press called her—was about thirty-five years of age, possessing "an attractive unclouded face, with chestnut hair falling in natural curls, large blue eyes, clear and serious, and a tall, slender, graceful figure." A wealthy, free-thinking reformer, she had been brought up by Jeremy Bentham, and lived for many years in the household of Lafayette, where she breathed in the spirit of the French Revolution. Coming to this country from her

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15 Ibid., p. 357.

16 Commons, History of Labour, I, 237, citing the Working Man's Advocate, July 14, 1830.

17 Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, p. 181.
native Scotland, she experimented with a slave-freeing project in Tennessee. Her farm failed in 1826 chiefly because her activities, so unladylike for the period, horrified people, as did her violent anticlericalism, unconventional ideas on marriage and divorce, and atheism. For her part, however, she was convinced that the fault lay primarily in a clerically-controlled education which blinded minds to the true light.

It was in this state that she attached herself to the Owen experiment in communal living at New Harmony, Indiana. Robert Dale Owen, famous son of the crusading English philanthropist, was six years Fanny Wright's junior, a short, blue-eyed, sandy-haired man.\(^18\) His three-year attendance at the Hofwyl School in Switzerland is especially noteworthy. This institution was a unique and apparently highly successful experiment by an educator named Emmanuel von Fellenberg, an associate of Pestalozzi. The boarding school was in reality a junior republic where the students made and enforced their own laws, raised their own food, did their own chores, and in general prepared themselves for an enlightened adult life.\(^19\) With such a background, it is not difficult to see why Owen also would

\(^{18}\)Ibid., p. 182.

\(^{19}\)An interesting description of Fellenberg's school is given by Owen in one chapter of the serialized autobiography he wrote for the Atlantic Monthly: "Threading My Way," XXXII, 1873, pp. 336-348.
blame the lack of proper education for the failure of the New Harmony community in 1829. 20

When New Harmony closed, Miss Wright and Owen decided to transfer their standards to New York City, a spot quite ripe for their educational ideas. Their newspaper, the New Harmony Gazette, became the New York Free Enquirer. In backing the workers' demands, the paper found a grand opportunity to trumpet its own pet project, the national establishment of Hofwyl-type schools, through which the state and not the parents would govern the early years of a child's development. The two were enthusiastic idealists. Some of Fanny Wright's glowing phrases in favor of "these nurseries of a free nation" are worth presenting:

20 New Harmony, west of present-day Evansville and on the banks of the Wabash River, enjoys the distinction of being the birthplace of two of the most famous utopian experiments tried in the United States. The first was made from 1814 to 1824 by The Harmony Society under the spiritual leadership of George Rapp; hence the name "Rappites." The community prospered under the business management of Frederick, George's adopted son. The group, originally from Wurttemberg, Germany, was united by their common belief in the imminent second coming of Christ. Indiana was becoming too civilized for these celibates and so, in 1824, they sold their holdings to Owen and moved further westward.

Owen had associated with himself William Maclure and many other educational pioneers who brought science, culture and education to the Middle West. It was Owen who named the town "New Harmony" in 1826, but its days of concord under this optimist were relatively few. There was no real spiritual binding-force, and inexperience, poor choice of personnel, and the American temperament with its accent on initiative and acquisition, all contributed to the failure of this early experiment in communism. After its communal phase, the town prospered as a conventional settlement and is still in existence today.
Fed at a common board; clothed in a common garb, uniting neatness with simplicity and convenience; raised in the exercise of common duties, in the acquirement of the same knowledge and practice of the same industry, varied only according to individual taste and capabilities, in the exercise of the same virtues, in the enjoyment of the same pleasures, in the study of the same nature, in pursuit of the same object—their own and each other's happiness—say! would not such a race, when arrived at manhood and womanhood, work out the reform of society, perfect the free institutions of America?  

With feelings such as they were in New York, this dream gathered admirers, of course, as did the personalities of its champions; but fierce criticism was even more prevalent. Perhaps only Andrew Jackson inspired more invective than did Fanny Wright. In figure she was pictured as "a great awkward bungle of womanhood, somewhere about six feet in longitude, with a face like a Fury, and her hair cropped like a convict's." She was "the Red Harlot of Infidelity" stalking about to convince people "that religion is a cheat, chastity a dream, and all who adhere to the pure precept of the gospel of our Saviour, fools!"

All things considered, Miss Fanny Wright and young Robert Dale Owen were likely to prove more of a hindrance than a help.


22 Cf. Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, pp. 181-182, for Walt Whitman's entranced recollections of Fanny Wright, "one of the sweetest of sweet memories."

23 Riegel, Young America, p. 142.

24 Ibid.
to the group unfortunate enough to be traveling in the same general direction as they. To trace the first several months of that journey, with all its road-blocks and twisting turns, will be the task of the next chapter.
CHAPTER III

UNDER FIRE

The winter of 1828-1829 was one of intense suffering for the needy in the city of New York and elsewhere. ¹ A hundred years before the days of the Great Depression, bread lines were a common sight, and a depressing one, to judge from this contemporary report: "It makes the heart bleed to look at the hundreds and thousands of shivering, hungry applications for charity, who have thronged the old alms house in the park this forenoon, pleading their cause in the most woeful and supplicating terms . . . There is unquestionably more intense suffering at this moment than there has been for many previous years, if ever."²

Under the warmth of early spring, these haunting memories began to fade, until a well-founded rumor brought them into sharp focus again: New York City employers were about to demand more working time than the customary ten hours a day. The

¹Horace Greeley, Recollections of a Busy Life (New York, 1868), p. 87. His youthful misery in the face of so much distress was an abiding memory during the rest of his days, and an inspiration for his humanitarian activity.

²Free Enquirer, January 11, 1829.
puritan ideal of hard work and frugal living, and the sun-to-sun routine prevalent in agriculture, were factors which made long hours the practice in manufacturing too. Laboring men discerned many discouraging implications in a longer working day. They would continue to be second-rate citizens, possessors of the voting privilege, but with no leisure to become intelligently informed on men and measures. Their children, who in many cases worked from their early years, would have little formal education, and the same second-rate status would be transmitted to the next generation. Even more immediate and practical would be the harm done to employees in the building trades. If, by longer hours, work were concentrated in the period of mild weather, the prospects of another winter of unemployment loomed menacingly.

Small wonder then that the example of the Philadelphia laborers was followed, and united action attempted. A meeting

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3 It is revealing to note that the basic motive inspiring the demand for a shorter working day was, once again, education, a seeking for opportunity as opposed to security.

4 All authorities make mention of the startling facts presented by James Montgomery, superintendent of the York Factories at Saco, Maine, in his Practical Detail of the Cotton Manufacture of the United States (Boston, 1839). Cf. Commons, History of Labour, I, 172-174 for comment. The working week at Lowell, Mass. averaged about seventy-three and a half hours, and in the middle and southern states, about seventy-eight and a half. In the latter especially, a large number of children were employed, another cogent reason why education was not widespread.
of "mechanics and others" was called for April 23, 1829, to re-
monstrate against any addition to the ten-hour day. More than
simple opposition was registered; quite prominent also were
statements which appeared to question the rights of property-
owners in their actions towards those who depended on their
labor alone for a livelihood. Thomas Skidmore was the inspira-
tion behind the resolutions, his strategy probably being to
throw up the smokescreen of property rights in the hope that
employers would be distracted from the ten-hour proposal. 5

Five days later, on April 28th, another meeting was held,
one of the largest public meetings ever held in the city. 6
Here a committee of fifty persons was appointed with power to
work out resolutions and call another assembly when they were
prepared. Since, as anticipated, no action was forthcoming
from employers on the ten-hour issue, members of the committee
were free to concentrate on more general and radical matters.
Their main discussion seems to have centered around the basic
right of private property, the hated and feared institution of
banking, the exemption of church property from taxation, and the

5 For resolutions passed at this meeting, cf. Documentary
History, V, 146–147, citing the Morning Courier, April 25, 1829.

6 Commons, History of Labour, I, 235, citing George Henry
Evans, "History of the Working Men's Party, Chapter I," in the
periodical, The Radical, January, 1842.
absence of a lien law for construction workers. Political action was their solution to problems, evidenced by the closing paragraphs of the long-awaited report, made public on October 19th:

Resolved, that past experience teaches, that we have nothing to hope from the aristocratic orders of society; and that our only course to pursue is, to send men of our own description, if we can, to the legislature at Albany.

Resolved, that we will make the attempt at the ensuing election; and that as a proper step there to, we invite all those of our fellow citizens who live by their own labor, and none other, to meet us at Military Hall, Wooster Street, on Friday, the 23rd day of October instant, at half past 7 o'clock, then and there to nominate suitable persons for candidates for members of the senate and assembly.

There seems to have been little debate over this momentous decision. In consequence of steps taken in Philadelphia, New York journeymen seem to have accepted the venture into politics as a natural course of action. Tammany Hall, the Democratic power in the city, should have filled their needs, but the interests of the leaders of Tammany had become the interests of rich men, and they were as little in accord with the civic views of their followers as Alexander Hamilton and the Federalists had been with the workingmen of an earlier day.

The meeting of October 23rd nominated several candidates,

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7 *Documentary History*, V. 149-153. See also Chapter II of this thesis for a more detailed description of grievances.


and commissioned the "Committee of Fifty" to select twenty-two of these before a gathering on October 29th. That evening witnessed a strange sight. The twenty-two names were put into a box, and eleven were drawn out to become candidates for the State Assembly. Among the lucky winners were Thomas Skidmore and his chief backer, Alexander Ming, Sr. To complete the ticket, two additional candidates for State Senate were selected. 10

Skidmore's was not the only notorious name connected with these developments. Robert Dale Owen, who "happened" to be on hand on October 19th, was appointed one of the secretaries for the meeting, and thus his name was affixed to the list of resolutions. Such was the influence earned by the weekly Free Enquirer which Frances Wright began publishing in New York City in late January, 1829, as the successor to the New Harmony Gazette. 11 While lecturing in Philadelphia the month before, she had become convinced that the large cities of the east were now ready for her new views on marriage, divorce, and priestcraft, and for the antidote for all these doctrinal poisons,

10 Commons, History of Labour, I, 238-239. This haphazard method of nominations was disclaimed by many, and their discontent, as we shall see, contributed to the party's reorganization later in the year.

11 Actually, the Gazette, with Owen as editor, continued to be published until February 25th. (Elinor Pancoast and Anne E. Lincoln, The Incorrigible Idealist, Bloomington, Indiana, 1940, p. 11.)
"republican" education. She took up residence in New York City and Owen joined her there in April. Soon they had formed an independent organization, "An Association for the Protection of Industry and for the Promotion of National Education," in addition to disseminating their theories in the press.

The Association had intended to put an independent ticket in the field, but eleventh-hour strategy seems to have called for support of the wider workers' movement. Hence, no doubt, Owen's convenient presence at their meeting on October 19th.

The workers' entry appeared only about a week before the first of the three election days. Their candidates were in competition

12Ibid.

13Theirs were also the minds behind the Working Man's Advocate, the first edition of which made a sudden appearance on October 31, 1829, barely in time for the coming elections. Lest the laboring cause proper suffer from the prejudices felt towards their other doctrines, George Henry Evans became its editor. Evans had been born in England in 1806, into a family of the lower middle class. When he was fourteen he emigrated to America with his father and his brother, Frederick William, and became apprenticed to a printer at Ithaca, New York. He and his brother studied the writings of Thomas Paine and other freethinkers of the day with the result that both became confirmed atheists. His brother was later converted to the communism of the Shakers, but Henry remained an atheist all his life. With his New York City career, he started on a life devoted to land reform. More will be heard of this interesting young man in subsequent pages. (Commons, History of Labour, I, 237.)

14Commons, History of Labour, I, 249.
with four other groups, only two of which were formidable.\textsuperscript{15}
A short but vigorous campaign was waged. On the last day of
the election, the Tammany press urged all good Republicans\textsuperscript{16}
to exercise their right of suffrage, lashing out indignantly
at those traitors who "have aspired to break down the Regular
Nominations of the Democratic party," especially when "[a] set
of men, who openly proclaim the utter worthlessness of all law,
and all religion, have been engaged for six months past in
inflaming the minds of the honest mechanics of this city."\textsuperscript{17}
The clarion call was heeded, for Ebenezer Ford, a carpenter,
was the Working Men's Party's only successful candidate for
Assembly. But the workers were jubilant over even this much

\textsuperscript{15}Besides the powerful Tammany ticket, there was a
"Masonic Hall" faction, a large segment revolting from the
city machine (though they did nominate eight of the eleven
men already selected by Tammany). Less important were the
Masonic and the Anti-Masonic tickets. The fanatical agitation
between the two latter groups dated from the unexplained disap­
ppearance of William Morgan from Canandaigua, Ontario County,
New York in September, 1826. He was supposed to be about to
publish Masonic secrets. The ordinary citizens' fear of mystery
and intrigue in high places touched off an explosive political
bonfire which burned for several years, raging in western New
York State, and parts of Pennsylvania and Ohio, but only flick­
ering, it seems, in New York City. For more details, see
Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, pp. 337-351.

\textsuperscript{16}The party of Thomas Jefferson is known both as "Demo­
cratic" and "Republican" at this period.

\textsuperscript{17}Documentary History, V, 155-156, citing Morning Courier
and New York Enquirer, November 4, 1829. The traitors referred
to were the leaders of the Masonic Hall rebellion.
success; Skidmore and Ming just missed being elected, and the party's other candidates garnered an average six thousand votes out of a possible twenty-one thousand.\textsuperscript{18} All this was accomplished despite the opposition of the other four groups, of most of the city's newspapers, and of "the immense banking influence." The workers' ticket would have been completely successful, the \textit{Working Man's Advocate} felt,\textsuperscript{19} if it had been nominated but a week sooner.

An optimistic vigor was in the autumn air. Within the next six months, however, two violent eruptions were to becloud the atmosphere. The first shook off Skidmore and his agrarian reforms, apparently over the question of organization, but actually because of wide disagreement in doctrine.

In order to retain authority in the hands of the workers themselves, Skidmore was in favor of general meetings, similar to those first held by the organization. An opposing majority preferred a ward meeting plan, calling for standing committees of up to twenty-five members in each of the city's fourteen wards. From each ward would come five delegates to form a general committee of seventy members. The latter plan promised more orderly procedure, but it was suspect in the eyes of

\textsuperscript{18}Commons, \textit{History of Labour}, I, 240.

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Working Man's Advocate}, November 7, 1829.
Skidmore and others for whom democracy meant direct and active participation in government.

While the original Committee of Fifty was drawing up a program for the coming year, others were busy putting the ward plan into action. On December 29th a meeting called by the Committee of Fifty was held, with nearly three thousand working-men in attendance. In the resulting confusion, Skidmore was shouted down without a hearing, and the insurgent ward organization had its way, dissolving the Committee of Fifty and repudiating its report. Instead, a new address and set of resolutions were approved. These placed special emphasis on the fact that the workers were disavowing Skidmore and his ideas: "We take this opportunity solemnly to aver, whatever may be said to the contrary by ignorant or designing individuals, or biased presses, that we have no desire or intention of disturbing the rights of property in individuals, or the public. On the contrary, we consider the acquiring of property to soften the asperities of sickness, of age, and for the benefit of our posterity, as one of the greatest incentives to industry."20

20Documentary History, V, 157. That the Skidmorian doctrines were ever accepted in the first place was due to a parliamentary ruse whereby the agrarian measures "hidden in a mass of fervid democratic doctrine, were hastily approved, a motion to have the resolutions discussed one by one being overruled by Skidmore." Ibid., p. 142.
A fist-shaking Skidmore, taking with him about a hundred followers,\textsuperscript{21} established another organization, calling it the "original" working party. Meetings were held during the winter, and in April a daily, the \textit{Friend of Equal Rights}, appeared. This group, though vociferous and bitter, was too small to accomplish much. In the 1830 elections its candidates polled a few hundred votes, and after this rebuff it was never a serious threat. Skidmore died in August, 1832, and, as is the wont, his former critics gathered round to say nice things, praising him for "his fearless contention for his own rights and the rights of the poor man."\textsuperscript{22}

This doctrinal descendant of Thomas Paine had been just that—the champion of the propertyless poor. Undoubtedly he was sincere, as were almost all the radicals connected with the Working Men's Party, but he did not help the cause as he intended. In fact, labor organizations for many years to come would suffer because of the connection of "agrarianism" with their first movement. It is safe to assert that, at first, the ordinary worker did not understand the full implications of Skidmore's position, for saner voices prevailed immediately.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{21}Fox, \textit{Decline of Aristocracy}, p. 356.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Free Enquirer}, August 18, 1832.}
after agrarian doctrine was spelled out in his pamphlet. And yet his pioneering efforts were not totally barren of fruit, as the subsequent career of George Henry Evans will bear out.

One radical reformer had been read out of the party. Were all hands now going to pull together, bent on rowing the party's boat towards the port of reform? Who was going to issue orders? Were outsiders like Frances Wright and Robert Dale Owen to be trusted with the helm? If one were perceptive to warnings, he could discern discontented mutterings on board ship, and gathering wisps of storm clouds on the horizon.

The main threat concerned reform of the school system. In the assembly of December 29th which ousted Skidmore and his associates, the question of education was discussed. Instead of advocating Owen's special system, the wording of the recommendation on education was noncommittal in character, merely requesting that public funds "to a reasonable extent" be allotted for the purpose of "a regular system" of education. During the same period, the more radical "Association for the Protection of Industry and for the Promotion of National Education" was addressing a memorial to the State Legislature, and a circular

23 August 18, 1829 was the date it was copyrighted; publication must have taken place shortly thereafter.

letter to the various trade organizations in the city.25 The
former, signed, it was said, by more than two thousand citizens,
urged an appropriation of one hundred thousand dollars for the
establishment of a model National School somewhere in the center
of the state.26 The circular letter solicited the support of
the trade groups in denouncing the present system of day schools,
and in advocating a chain of quasi-vocational institutions ac­
cording to the lines of the "state guardianship" plan.27

The one hundred thousand dollars was never forthcoming, but
reaction to the circular letter, from one quarter at least, was
prompt and bitter. "Entirely visionary," was the keynote of a
heated reply from the New York Typographical Society, composed
of both masters and journeymen, but having in its membership, as
opponents emphasized, only about one-fifth of the city's print­
ers.28 They were "indignant" at the idea of Fanny Wright and
Robert Owen leaving Scotland "where thousands are daily groaning

25These groups were fraternal and social organizations,
akin to medieval guilds. There were several of them in the city
but they were never included as active units within the political
party. In this respect the New York party differed from the
workers' movement in Philadelphia.

26Harry A. Millis and Royal E. Montgomery, Organized Labor

27Free Enquirer, December 19, 1829. "State guardianship"
was another name for the Owen-Wright system.

28Working Man's Advocate, December 19, 1829.
under the yoke of severe oppression" to preach equal rights to "a people enjoying liberty in its fullest extent." The December 19th edition of the Advocate carried a protest from another group within the Typographical Society, critical of the harsh action of their fellows. Later on, other fraternal societies also indicated their displeasure, and promised to give the Owen group fair support.

This verbal altercation, it is to be recalled, did not take place within the ring of the Working Men's Party, but was carried on between an independent association and workers as individuals. Within the party all seemed to be going smoothly. During January, 1830, the General Executive Committee gained from the city's wards its full complement of seventy members, held weekly meetings, discussed issues, and appointed subcommittees to study the more important problems of education, imprisonment for debt, auctions, taxation of bank stocks, and city produce markets. By March all reports except one were presented to

29 New York Mercury, December 16, 1829, cited by Commons, History of Labour, I, 250.

30 The Working Man's Advocate for March 20, 1830 published the names and occupations of all its members, and stated that "if the occupations are given correctly by the individuals themselves, there is but one of the committee who is not a working man." Cited by Commons, History of Labour, I, 246.

31 Documentary History, V, 142.
the general committee and adopted. But the seven-man sub-
committee on education was torn by violent disagreement.

One Henry G. Guyon had been elected, after a struggle, to
chairmanship of the General Executive Committee. He and Noah
Cook were the leaders of a group watching Fanny Wright and Owen
with wary and mistrusting eyes. This was the insurgent faction
which obtained control of the December 29th meeting, barred
Thomas Skidmore, and adopted the hedging resolution concerning
education. Guyon's position probably accounts for the fact that
but one member of the subcommittee was an Owenite, a Mr. Grout.

The subcommittee's report was five months in appearing,
and in the meantime, the subject was much discussed in the press,
especially in a new publication, the Sentinel, which appeared
for the first time on January 10, 1830. It proved a powerful
means of keeping the divisive issue in prominence. Some claimed
that the paper was "a mere tool of the Tammany faction, sent
into our ranks purposely to betray us." Again, it was asserted
that the Sentinel had been established by the original founders
of the party so that they might keep their control, and that it
received its principal contributions and editorials from the pen

32 Ibid.
33 Pancoast and Lincoln, The Incorrigible Idealist, p. 115.
34 Commons, History of Labour, I, 248.
of Robert Dale Owen. The latter opinion is verified by Owen's own testimony in the matter: "I do not choose to appear in the Sentinel office directly, and therefore whatever I do must be done indirectly."36

Besides the editorial agitation by Owen, there appeared in the March 6th edition of the Working Man's Advocate a remarkable

35Ibid., citing the Morning Courier and New York Enquirer, May 20, 1830.


At the risk of unduly enlarging upon a relatively minor problem, a selection from Owen's engrossing memoirs, penned fifty years after the events under consideration, is interesting:

"But the heaviest work I undertook was in connection with an evening paper, called the New York Daily Sentinel, commenced in February [sic], 1830 by a few enterprising journeymen printers, in the interest of what was called the Working Men's Party. They were disappointed in an editor whom they had engaged; and, at their request, I agreed to supply his place for a few weeks, till they could find another. The two weeks stretched into months; and finally to more than a year, during which time I wrote for them, on the average, upwards of a column of editorial matter daily.

"This I did partly because, after a time, I got interested in editorial skirmishing, and partly to help the young fellows in their undertaking; not charging them, nor receiving from them, a dollar for my pains. I concealed my name, always leaving my article with a friend, Mr. Samuel Humphreys; and many were the speculations as to 'who the devil it was that was running the Workies' paper.' I wrote as one of the industrial classes; and certainly had a good right so to do, considering my regular 12 hours' daily labor." Robert Dale Owen, "An Earnest Sowing of Wild Oats," Atlantic Monthly, XXXIV (July, 1874), p. 77.
document, the report of the Education Committee of the Philadelphia workers' group.37 Because of its influence in the New York situation, and since it affords an enlightening coverage of the general education question, it will be helpful to pause, as the subcommittee must have done, and treat the report in some detail.

It began by pointing out that Philadelphia, Lancaster, and Pittsburgh were the only three places in Pennsylvania in which any sort of educational system was in evidence. Even in these scattered locales a "very limited amount of instruction"38 was afforded, and only a small minority were enrolled in the school districts. Strictly speaking, under the provisions of the poor law, the children of the destitute alone were eligible to attend. Thus were excluded thousands of boys and girls whose parents were not paupers, but who did not possess enough money to afford the luxury of a private education for them. In many cases, the children themselves had to work long hours, and this factor in itself made their further education impossible. Excluded also were the children of large numbers of poor parents "whose deep and cherished consciousness of independence determines them rather to starve the intellect of their offspring, than submit

37Documentary History, V, 94-107. Several replies to the arguments used in this report were carried in the New York papers during the spring and summer of 1830. Cf. Documentary History, V, 107-114.
38Ibid., p. 97.
to become the objects of public charity."\(^{39}\)

The solution, as the document develops, is that the Hofwyl-type institutions championed by Robert Dale Owen would be the democratic instrument to make the rights of the Revolution a reality for all.\(^{40}\) But it does so in a moderate and sensible way, admitting that the day-school system must first be developed and strengthened, that "one [Owenite] school, at least, should be established in each county,"\(^{41}\) and that this be for older children only, instead of for youngsters of two years of age and upwards.\(^{42}\)

\(^{39}\)Ibid., p. 96.

\(^{40}\)The committee felt that ignorance and loss of liberty went hand in hand: "The original element of despotism is a monopoly of talent, which consigns the multitude to comparative ignorance, and secures the balance of knowledge on the side of the rich and the rulers. If then the healthy existence of a free government be, as the committee believe, rooted in the will of the American people, it follows as a necessary consequence of a government based upon that will, that this monopoly should be broken up." (Ibid., p. 99.)

\(^{41}\)Ibid., p. 103.

\(^{42}\)Ibid. The committee, in keeping with the principle that one cannot argue with the facts, goes on to tell of the progress of several such schools already established in different sections of the country.

Later economic studies have substantiated the claim that a family in the 1830s usually could not subsist if only one member worked. Therefore, if a child were to receive an education, in many cases the burden of his support and maintenance would have to be borne by some sort of state subsidy. The mistake of those who wanted to make the plan compulsory was the assumption that education belongs primarily to the state and not to the family. (Cf. Faulkner, American Economic History, p. 306.)
The Pennsylvania workers' report just examined was brought to the attention of New Yorkers early in March. For the next two months intense debate on the issue continued, everybody wishing to improve the educational system, but differing as to how precisely to do so. Moderation was not a feature of the Wright and Owen characters, and their stand still called for widespread adoption of the state guardianship plan in its original form. Finally, in the middle of May, the findings of the New York subcommittee on education were made public, or to put the matter more realistically, the threatening storm broke in all its intensity.

Two reports were published, one signed by Mr. Grout, in favor of the state guardianship scheme, and another by his six conferees, denouncing his report. His was said to be but a compilation of editorials from the pen of Robert Owen. Indeed, stubborn views and a vivid style shone out. The majority reply was brief and to the point, recommending that the minority report be rejected. It condemned "any attempt to palm upon any man, or set of men, the peculiar doctrines of infidelity,'

\[\text{Documentary History, V, 175.}\]

\[\text{The minority report, taken from the New York Sentinel and Working Man's Advocate, June 19, 1830, is found in Documentary History, V, 165-174. The majority report from the Working Man's Advocate, May 29, 1830 is Ibid., pp. 174-177.}\]
agrarianism, or sectarian principles, and promised to strive to develop a plan "that shall leave to the father and the affectionate mother the enjoyment of the society of their offspring."

Now, matters moved rapidly. A meeting held on May 21st shows clearly that the workers were growing up in the game of politics. It appears that Cook, Guyon, and their associates called a quick session of the General Executive Committee; at any rate, only forty-seven members were present instead of the full seventy. The vote stood twenty-five to twenty against the minority report of Grout, and it was rejected without a reading. This sudden turn of events was not accepted without vigorous protest, to be sure, and the editorial fur flew as each faction clawed the other. A formal complaint was circulated and a meeting demanded for the evening of May 26th, at eight o'clock. Then came the second piece of political chicanery, apparently perpetrated this time by the Owen group. Handbills appeared on the 25th, calling the meeting for the next night at seven

46 Ibid.
o'clock, instead of the hour of eight as previously announced. So much dust was raised on that memorable evening that the facts are lost in the clouds. What probably happened is that the Owen group arrived in force and got things under way at seven o'clock, selecting their own secretaries, and as chairman electing Ebenezer Ford, the successful candidate from the previous election. Mr. Grout read his report amid general approval. Resolutions were enthusiastically seconded, denouncing in measured phrases the tactics of the opposition at the May 21st committee meeting. When no further business was brought forward, the gathering adjourned.

Meanwhile, a crowd estimated at three or four thousand had gathered for the eight o'clock meeting. There must have been a great deal of confusion and even some physical violence before Guyon gained the chair, though the Journal claimed that "the friends of order and of Mr. Guyon were at least 20 to one of the Agrarian faction and foreign radicals and fanatics." At any rate, Mr. Guyon, "who was approved as the chairman by at least

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48 Charges and countercharges were hurled, but since the Advocate and the Sentinel also carried the notice, one is led to suspect that the change originated with the state guardianship people, editors of these organs. Indeed, they were the ones to profit by the move.

49 Commons, History of Labour, I, 256, citing the Select Excerpts of Mathew Carey, the Philadelphia businessman, XV, 261-266. The clipping is not labeled in Carey's scrapbook, but evidently is from the New York Journal. Cf. footnote 51 below.
one thousand voices,° presided over a session which passed without opposition resolutions of its own, denouncing the radical reformers and approving a more moderate change in the educational system.\(^{51}\)

It is highly improbable that anyone was rash enough to consider reconciliation after the attempted coup d'etat. The personality clashes were too bitter and the doctrinal differences too basic for such a fortunate return to unity. Instead, the editorial artillery was rolled into position and the front lines more clearly marked. The Sentinel, the Advocate, and, of course, the Free Enquirer were trumpets of the Owen-Wright doctrine,\(^{52}\) while the Evening Journal championed the opposition cause. Both claimed to be representing the "original" workingmen,\(^{53}\) and in

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\(^{50}\)Working Man's Advocate, May 29, 1830. Cf. footnote 51.

\(^{51}\)The prime reason for factual haziness is that no copies of the Evening Journal are to be found intact, and references to it and details of the evening's happenings are taken from the Sentinel and the Advocate, both decidedly biased.

\(^{52}\)Soon after the split there was a consolidation of the first two papers. The Daily Sentinel was the day by day edition, and the New York Sentinel and Working Man's Advocate the weekly, reprinting much or all of its material from the daily. Evans remained one of the editors in the new arrangement. (Cf. Commons, History of Labour, I, 259, footnote, and Pancoast and Lincoln, The Incorrigible Idealist, p. 115.)

\(^{53}\)Doctrinally, Cook and company appear to have the better of the claim, but the fact remains that the Journal had previously opposed the workingmen's platform, and did not endorse the new party until after its display of power in the fall elections of 1829.
keeping with the claim, two separate and complete General Executive Committees were soon in operation.

That the divorce was final is evidenced by the activity of the two groups during the month of June. Each held separate sessions, the Cook faction being so mistrusting as to have a check-list at the door, to make sure that only invited guests attended.54 After a defense of their action and a damning of the infidel opposition, they solemnly affirmed that they would "hereafter hold no political connexion with those of the Committee who still continue to advocate State Guardianship, or a Community of Education, as paramount to all other considerations."55

The rivals assembled shortly thereafter, defending and denouncing in their turn. Strange to relate, however, they were rather meek in voicing their educational opinions, merely advocating tax-supported public schools. Perhaps there was some tardy regret at their own uncompromising stand, and, together with a group from one of the wards, they had come to think it "unwise and inexpedient to enter so much into detail on this subject as to create dissension in our ranks."56 Such qualms

54 Working Man's Advocate, June 16, 1830.
55 Commons, History of Labour, I, 257.
56 Working Man's Advocate, June 5, 1830.
of conscience were laudable, if sincere, but it was too late to regret lighting the fuse after the bomb had exploded.

July brought a test of strength, as both factions selected candidates in a special election to fill a vacant alderman's seat. The Journal group won, their man having over seven hundred votes, as compared to about four hundred and fifty for the other. But even the losing faction won more votes than the united party had polled in the district the previous fall. The laborers were far from losing heart as the fall elections hove in sight. From the opposition's point of view, in fact, "workeyism" was growing more formidable daily. In such an atmosphere "the aristocratic orders of society" could be expected to make careful calculations concerning the city and state elections of 1830.

57 Commons, History of Labour, I, 259. The accusation that Cook's North American Hotel party, so called because the crucial May 21st meeting was held there, had sought collaboration in this election with anti-Tammany forces is probably true, judging from future developments.

58 Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, p. 356. Sufficient cause for apprehension can be seen from the following incident: when the common council planned to celebrate Evacuation Day in New York City, the workingmen decided to parade in honor of the recently-reported July Revolution in Paris. It was with reluctance that the original planners consented to a combination pageant. (Ibid., pp. 356-357.)
CHAPTER IV

RETREAT AND REALIGNMENTS

The captivating drama being enacted in New York City was playing to a large audience. Many were the interested onlookers in cities, towns, and villages up and down the state, since several organizations of "farmers, mechanics and workingmen" had sprung into being in imitation of the Working Men's Party. Starting with the laborers of Albany in February, 1830, meetings were convened at Troy, Kingsbury, Lansingburgh, Hartford, Saratoga and Glens Falls, along the Mohawk at Schenectady and Utica, at Auburn and Salina (Syracuse), and in the western counties at Palmyra, Canandaigua, Ithaca, Geneva, Rochester, Batavia, and Buffalo.¹ Some of the groups selected candidates for local elections in the spring of 1830, and their frequent initial successes seemed like a morning star of promise.

When the bomb burst upon the New York City scene in May, the general reaction from other sections of the state favored the North American Hotel faction. The Mechanics' Free Press of Philadelphia, after urging "our friends in New York to forebear

¹Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, p. 356.
with each other a little while, and all will be well with them," closed ranks under the banner of state guardianship. The Genesee Republican was also strongly in favor of the plan, due to its editor, a searching, hard-hitting, enthusiastic ex-minister by the name of Orestes A. Brownson. Elsewhere, however, the names of Wright and Owen swung groups towards what they considered the bona fide workers. Typical was a wordy but forceful resolution coming from Troy: "Resolved, that we regard with unqualified approbation the conduct of the Executive Committee of New York, in preventing the insidious circulation of the visionary and wicked principles of Owen and his abettors, under the colors of the farmers, mechanics and working men, and thus protecting them from the odium of entertaining sentiments, and intending to prosecute objects which they abhor."

This choosing of sides in the city dispute occurred after

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3 Commons, *History of Labour*, I, 260. Robert Dale Owen in his "Earnest Sowing of Wild Oats," p. 67, gives a revealing recollection of the Brownson of those days: "Orestes A. Brownson, well known since, . . . was agent and corresponding editor of our paper for six months (from November 1829 to May 1830), but he sent us only two or three articles. In one of these he thus defines his creed: 'I am no longer to appear as the advocate of any sect nor of any religious faith . . . Bidding adieu to the regions where the religionist must ramble, casting aside the speculations with which he must amuse himself, I wish to be simply an observer of nature for my creed, and benefactor of my brethren for my religion.' (Free Enquirer, vol. ii, p. 38)."

4 *Working Man's Advocate*, June 12, 1830.
plans for action on a state-wide front had already been inaugurated. In April, the Sentinel, and therefore Owen himself, had suggested nominating candidates for state offices. Its close ally, the Advocate, seconded the motion, "not so much on account of the prospect of electing [our candidates] ... as for the facility it would afford us of disseminating a correct knowledge of the principles upon which the working men have organised throughout the state."5 Little did Evans, or Owen, foresee at the time that the "disseminating a correct knowledge" would result in their own censure and expulsion from the labor movement.

In April, too, an insurgent action by the Albany "farmers, mechanics and workingmen, and those friendly to their interests" emphasized the advisability of official, united action. Meeting in the capitol building, they nominated General Erastus Root for the post of governor, and directed that other workers' organizations in the state be informed of their move so that a lieutenant-governor could also be selected.6 Comments ran the gamut from "rather premature"7 to "a matter of astonishment."8

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5 Working Man's Advocate, April 17, 1830.
6 Mechanics' Press (of Utica), April 24, 1830, cited by Commons, History of Labour, I, 264.
7 Ibid.
8 Working Man's Advocate, April 24, 1830.
Motives for this action are difficult to discern through the haze of the years. Root was a rather strange choice since he had long been allied with the "Albany Regency," though a man wont "to take up the battle in his gay and taunting way for all revolutionary theories of politics or of religion."9 Perhaps the fact that he was showing signs of revolt from those politicians against whom the workers were also reacting explains their decision. It is more than probable that General Root's friends encouraged the idea, if they did not inaugurate it. After the Albany group nominated him, a more general gathering of workers would be led to second their selection, and subsequently the regular Democratic Party might be constrained to choose him as its candidate.10

Whatever the motives behind Root's nomination, the Advocate returned to announce that every labor paper in the state was in favor of a gubernatorial convention.11 The place finally decided upon was upstate Syracuse (Salina) and the time, late August.12 The resulting assembly on August 25th was impressive,

9Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, p. 240.

10The Cock faction, which appeared to favor the Root nomination, entertained the notion of sending a workingmen's delegation to campaign for him at the regular Democratic convention. (Working Man's Advocate, June 30, 1830.)

11Ibid., May 1, 1830.

12Ibid., July 28, 1830.
as seventy-eight delegates from thirteen counties met in the Court House for the first state-wide convention which workingmen as a separate group ever held. 13

Who represented the workers of New York City? In those days of eager reform, one may be sure that neither of the warring factions would miss the opportunity of joining with their fellows throughout the state. Both groups sent a full representation, and one of the first and most difficult tasks of the convention was to determine which of the delegations should be seated. The editorial comment of May proved a fair harbinger of the mind of the August assembly. To decide the issue, a committee was chosen "from the country delegates"; it voted in favor of the Cook faction, and the more radical element "retired in a body." 14

After the convention had held off "with horror, the advances of the infidel or agrarian party," 15 it proceeded smoothly with the matter at hand. General Root received the nomination as governor, and another military man, Nathaniel Pitcher, was selected as his running mate. The correct observation seems to

13 Commons, History of Labour, I, 265.

14 Working Man's Advocate, September 4, 1830.

15 Commons, History of Labour, I, 266, citing the Farmers', Mechanics' and Workingmen's Advocate, September 4, 1830.
be that "in the minds of its framers, the movement was primarily a revolt of Democrats against the element then in control of the Democratic party--the so-called 'Regency.'"16 This was scarcely the intention of the hard core of radical veterans among the workers. The Mechanics' Free Press down in Philadelphia, for example, voiced its deep disappointment that the delegates "should be so completely party ridden as to nominate such thorough going hacknied [sic] politicians as General Root and Nathaniel Pitcher."17

After the promising preliminaries, these babes in the woods of party politics suffered a bitter blow. For Root did not receive the regular Democratic nomination, and since he never formally accepted that of the workers, he announced, just a few weeks before the election, that he was not to be considered a candidate for public office.18 If they intended to vote for a governor—and men newly blessed with the franchise are not wont to throw the privilege thoughtlessly aside—the workers would be forced to vote for a man nominated by another group.

One possible choice was that of the Sentinel faction's candidates for state offices. This group, having been barred

16 Ibid., pp. 265-266.
17 Mechanics' Free Press, September 4, 1830.
18 Commons, History of Labour, I, 266.
from the Salina convention, convened separately and selected for
governor a leather manufacturer from Auburn, Ezekiel Williams,
and Isaac S. Smith, a Buffalo merchant, as lieutenant-governor,\(^{19}\)
in addition to candidates for Congress. The other state and
national tickets in the running were entered by the Democrats,
the Anti-Masons, and the agrarian workingmen.\(^{20}\)

In New York City the picture was slightly altered. Here,
local tickets were offered by all three sections of the old
Working Men's Party; the Tammany braves, to be sure, appointed
loyal candidates for all city posts, but the Anti-Masons, not
being a power in the city, did not offer a panel of candidates.\(^{21}\)

"Divide and conquer" was sage military advice in the days
of the Roman Empire. That the same tactics were in operation
in the New York election of 1830 should be obvious. By capital-
izing on internal strife among the workers, by coaxing their
parties into false moves, and by dangling tempting bait before
their eyes, Tammany Hall in the city, and the Regency in the
state, bested the workers' candidates and everybody else in

\(^{19}\)Schlesinger, Jr., *Age of Jackson*, p. 184.

\(^{20}\)Working Man's Advocate for September 11, 1830 reports
that the Skidmorian candidate for governor also declined with
thanks.

the field. 22 Certainly the laborers were outsmarted when the Regency did not nominate Root for governor. 23 Tammany, too, was firm-footed now that its shrewd leaders had had several months to study the revolt—the workers could not depend on the element of surprise which had gained them so much in 1829. Old party politicians kept pointing out that a lien law had been passed by their majority in the legislature, and in chorus with the workers they demanded a "return to specie money in place of paper rags." 24 These were the tactics before the election; after it, the same newspaper rejoiced because "agrarianism in New York is now dead, gone, buried, and transported back to England where it originated," and boasted that "anti-Masonic and workeyism ... have been utterly prostrated, together with all the unprincipled partisans of Clay." 25

Such an exultant outburst in the first flush of victory was timely, but not totally true. For Fanny Wright, though

22 Ibid., p. 268 gives the vote of New York City for state offices: for governor—Regency, 10,654; Anti-Masonic, 7,838; Sentinel faction, 1,959; Agrarian lieutenant-governor, 118. The average vote for candidates for city assembly: Tammany, 10,551; Journal faction, 7,313; Sentinel, 2,220; Agrarian, 131.

23 Throop was renominated for the office. He had become acting governor when Van Buren resigned to go to Washington as Andrew Jackson's Secretary of State.

24 Morning Courier and New York Enquirer, October 9, 1830, cited by Commons, History of Labour, I, 268.

25 Ibid., November 8, 1830.
significantly away in Europe, was still busy stirring up fires of discontent:

What distinguishes the present from every other struggle in which the human race has been engaged, is that the present is, evidently, openly and acknowledgedly, a war of class, and that this war is universal. It is no longer nation pitched against nation for the good pleasure and sport of Kings and great Captains, nor sect cutting the throats and roasting the carcasses of sect for the glory of God and satisfaction of priests, nor is it one army butchering another to promote the fortunes of their leaders . . . . No; it is now every where where the oppressed millions who are making common cause against oppression; it is the ridden people of the earth who are struggling to throw from their backs the "booted and spurred" riders whose legitimate title to starve as well as to work them to death will no longer pass current; it is labor rising up against idleness, industry against money, justice against law and against privilege.  

Thus did a dramatic Miss Wright view the scene. A more balanced if overly optimistic evaluation of prospects came in December from the pen of George Henry Evans. He observed that many of the reforms demanded by the workingmen were now acknowledged as just and reasonable by former opponents, and the promise of future gains was quite encouraging. He concluded with this surprising statement: "Whether these measures are carried by the formation of a new party, by the reform of an old one, or by the

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26 Miss Wright was living in New York City for but a few months during this period, a detail which shall be treated more fully in the next chapter.

abolishment of party altogether, is of comparative unimportance."28

Here was the important insight. Slowly the editorial barrage lifted, and here and there vowed enemies in the front trenches came out to join hands. The lines of difference were becoming less clearly defined. For a period, the units of the working party did go through the motions of nomination and campaign, the Journal people, in fact, electing several of their candidates in the local spring elections of 1831. But even this was accomplished chiefly by an alliance with discontented opponents of Tammany Hall, just as, most probably, had been their previous success. For example, many followers of Henry Clay joined this faction of workingmen in an attempt to keep them independent of Jackson's party, and they preached the benefits to laborers of a high protective tariff. Thus the impression grew that the thickness of a pay envelope was directly proportional to the height of the tariff wall and the success of Clay's American System. It was the resulting alliance of Clay Workingmen in New York City in 1830 which elected National Republicans who were sympathetic to the requests of the workers.29

The other two segments of the party did not propose peace

28 Working Man's Advocate, December 11, 1830.
29 Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, p. 358.
so soon. They had candidates in the fall elections of 1831, though many of them were also on the tickets of the major parties. Of those who were not, the Sentinel's men gained less than a thousand votes of approval, and the agrarian die-hards less than a hundred. The end had come. Within the ranks there remained but a handful, for a reason not difficult to discover. By the fall of 1832, the previously acrimonious Working Man's Advocate, a sure barometer of workers' feelings, was advising them to cast their ballot for Tammany Hall's Congressional candidates since they were "all opposed to the United States Bank," and were "much more favorable to the measures of the working men than their opponents."31

The statement was objectively true. Up in Albany the Democratic majority had reformed the militia system after a fashion, and abolished the debtors' prisons, and in the city itself some improvements in laborers' liens had been legislated.32 The most telling move, however, had been the alertness of the braves to capitalize on the workers' deep desire for currency reform. "Get the Workies to be up and doing on the United States Bank question," Cambreleng wrote to a

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30 Commons, History of Labour, I, 269.
31 Working Man's Advocate, November 3, 1832.
32 Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, p. 184.
Tammany leader early in 1832, and added accurately, "They are democrats in principle." 33

The issue of bank reform had been one of the major considerations in the original platform of the workers' party, it will be recalled. That it had never completely fallen into the background is evident from such editorial remarks as the following from Fanny Wright, who apologized: "[B]ry or not, this is a subject which the Workingmen must take up and examine. (We have hitherto abstained from canvassing this matter at all because we thought the subject of Public Education much more important)." 34 By the national elections of 1832 this reform measure completely eclipsed the education question. Loyalty 35 to Sir Andrew Jackson in his jousting with the bank dragon of Chestnut Street led the workers back into the stronghold from which they

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33 Ibid., citing a letter of Cambreleng to Jesse Hoyt, February 6, 1832. The civic pride of native New Yorkers was a subtle added motive in their antagonism to Biddle's Philadelphia bank.

34 Free Enquirer, September 25, 1830.

35 Jackson was the workingmen's hero by this time, but his running-mate of Regency fame, Martin Van Buren, was not. Rather than risk Jackson's chances, they voted for Van Buren too, but wished they did not have to do so. (Cf. Working Man's Advocate, November 3, 1832). Though he had constantly favored popular measures during his public life, and stood with the common people during the Bank War, Van Buren was never popular with the ordinary citizen. Cf. Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, pp. 47-50 for a character sketch of "the Red Fox," who "rowed to his object with muffled oars."
had departed. For the moment at least, other matters of difference took on a trifling appearance.

Such an atmosphere of enthusiasm did not endure for long, however. Not all in the laboring group were won to complete support of the party line, and subsequent indifference on the part of Tammany sent them off once again on their own. A detailed picture of events would not be to the purpose of this study, but a brief summation of events between 1833 and 1837 would help to place the organization of 1829-31 in proper perspective. Though the earlier Working Men's Party was political in purpose, the later groupings had an economic objective. Here too circumstances conspired to force action into the political theater before the curtain closed in the tragic panic year of 1837.

The common man had had his way, applauding loudly as the hated Biddle Bank was cast into exterior darkness. Not for long however did the situation call for rejoicing. Wildcat banking, and, with it, an increasing economic insecurity became the rule. Prices mounted, the cost of living soared, and once again those without property had to unite for mutual assistance. In the spring of 1833 the carpenters in New York City struck for higher wages,36 supported in their efforts by other trades in the city.

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36Their demand was for an increase of from $1.37½ to $1.50 a day. Typical of a season of inflation, their wage increases were always short of cost demands. In March, 1836 they were asking for $1.75 per day and shortly thereafter for $2.00.
After a successful struggle, the "Typographical Association of New York" suggested that a more permanent organization be formed, ready at hand with fraternal support and financial aid whenever an individual trade was forced to "turn out." In such a manner did the General Trades' Union of New York City come to birth. That it was strong is obvious from the periodic literature of the day. In December, 1833, twenty-one societies and about four thousand persons were represented in a parade, and at the first anniversary celebration the procession was a mile and a half long. 37 Tammany, always quick to capitalize on potential power at the polls, nominated the president of the group, Ely Moore, as its own candidate for the House of Representatives, and, as the first national spokesman for labor, he served creditably two terms. 38

37 Documentary History, V, 203-204.

38 A. M. Schlesinger, Jr. (Age of Jackson, p. 192) describes Moore as follows: "A sallow, restless man, with keen, nervous eyes and long black hair brushed back from his forehead, well dressed, often carrying a heavy ivory-headed cane, he enjoyed a tremendous reputation for eloquence." Indeed he seems to have given the gallery a few memorable moments. On one occasion (April 28, 1836) he rose from a sickbed to defend the union movement. In the middle of a vibrant address he went white, staggered and fainted away.

On October 13, 1837 he broke down again and had to be carried home and bled, this time after an outburst against northern Whigs. John Quincy Adams was inspired to remark: "If his strength were equal to his will, he would be a very dangerous man. As it is, he is a very unsafe one." (Cf. Schlesinger, Age of Jackson, pp. 196-197, 247.)
In general the group sought to eschew politics, not wanting to repeat the mistakes of 1829 with its harrowing cries of "agrarianism" and "infidelity." The trades' main purpose was to support one another during strikes, and their goals had the same economic cast: hours of labor, wages, prices, paper money, public (government) employment, factory legislation, the competition of women, prison competition, and freedom of the public lands. After a period of experimentation they were forced to the conclusion that striking for an increase of wages only added to the upward cycle of inflation. The carpenters' strikes were a particular case in point, and the commodity price listings in the *United States Finance Report* were another obvious indication. With its treasury depleted, the General Trades' Union

39 *Documentary History*, V, 33. Organization did not remain on the local level, for in July, 1834, the General Trades' Union of New York was instrumental in forming a National Trades' Union, a structurally weak confederation, since its component parts were based not on a business, but on a geographical unity. Cf. *Documentary History*, VI, 191-308 for details. By 1837 the movement seemed to be gathering force, but it was impossible for it to survive the year of the great panic, and the subsequent hard times.

40 Cf. footnote #36, this chapter.

41 Schlesinger, Jr., *Age of Jackson*, p. 218 lists the following: "Flour, which had sold at $5.62 a barrel in March, 1835, rose to $7.75 in March, 1836, and $12 in March, 1837. Pork climbed from $10 in March, 1835, to $16.25 a year later and to $18.25 in March, 1837. The wholesale price of coal mounted from $6 a ton in January, 1835, to $10.50 in January, 1837, and rents increased proportionately." Cf. also *Documentary History*, V, 31 for a similar list.
was contemplating recourse to a cooperative movement, when the courts of justice removed the decision from its hands.

The first legal jolt to strike-tactics came in 1835 at Geneva in Ontario County, where Chief Justice Savage of the State Supreme Court ruled a union of journeymen shoemakers a conspiracy to injure others. "If journeymen boot makers," he said, "by extravagant demands for wages, so enhance the price of boots made in Geneva, for instance, that boots made elsewhere, in Auburn, for example, can be sold cheaper, is not such an act injurious to trade? . . . It is important to the best interests of society that the price of labor be left to regulate itself. . . . Competition is the life of trade." 42

Such a precedent was the death-knell. A few months later a group of masters in New York City combined to make a test of a tailors' strike. In January, 1836, twenty tailors were arrested, indicted, convicted, and forced to pay a fine totaling $1,150. 43 Judge Edwards presided over the case, and reaction toward him and his decision was prompt and pronounced. In June, before the day of sentence, handbills headed by the rude drawing of a coffin

42 Documentary History, V, 34.

43 Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, p. 194. Cf. also Commons, History of Labour, I, 406-07, and Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, p. 391, for legal aspects of the trial.

44 Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, p. 195.
were distributed, their contents bitter and outspoken:

Mechanics and workingmen! a deadly blow has been struck at your Liberty! The prize for which your fathers fought has been robbed from you! . . . Twenty of your brethren have been found guilty for presuming to resist a reduction of their wages! . . . On Monday, June 6, 1836, these Freeman are to receive their sentence, to gratify the hellish appetites of the Aristocracy! On Monday, the Liberty of the Workingmen will be interred! Judge Edwards is to chant the Requiem! Go! Go! Go! every Freeman, every Workingman, and hear the hollow and the melancholy sound of the earth on the Coffin of Equality! Let the Court-room, the City-hall—yea, the whole Park, be filled with Mourners! But, remember, offer no violence to Judge Edwards! Bend meekly, and receive the chains wherewith you are to be bound! Keep the peace! Above all things keep the peace! 45

Urged on by such inflammatory literature and by the fiery backing of William Cullen Bryant and his Evening Post, no less than 27,000 persons assembled for a mass meeting in the park before City Hall on June 13th. 46 It was here that the current was directed once again into political channels. The assembly determined to form a "separate and distinct party, around which the laboring classes and their friends can rally with confidence," 47 and a state convention was called for September in Utica.

At Utica in the fall an alliance was effected with the

45 Documentary History, V, 317-318.

46 Commons, History of Labour, I, 410-411, citing the Evening Post, June 14, 1836.

47 Evening Post, June 14, 1836, cited by Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, p. 392.
Loco Foco Party, a faction of Democratic malcontents for whom Tammany Hall was not radical enough. Loco Focos demanded not merely a "judicious opposition to Whig monopoly," but a total dedication to the fight against the banks, since, to their view, all prosperity which resulted from the institution of banking was but "the bloom on the cheek of consumption." When, at a nominating meeting in October, 1835, the anti-banking faction could not be silenced, "an ancient and honorable formula for quelling mutiny at Tammany" was employed: the gas lights were turned out! The new friction-matches of the day, called "locofocos," came to the rescue, and with them came a name, first uttered in derision, but later accepted as indicative of humble origins.

The combination of discontented Democrats and disappointed

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48 Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, p. 190.

49 The conservative group of the Democrats then in control did not have a happy record in this regard. For example: "An investigation in 1833 showed how the founders of the Seventh Ward Bank had distributed thousands of shares among over 100 state and city officials, including every Tammany Senator." (Commons, History of Labour, I, 461).

50 Documentary History, V, 50.

51 Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, p. 191.

52 Ibid., p. 198: "The Founder of Christianity was born in a manger," said the historian of the party; "and it is perfectly in character that the principles of Christian democracy should be proclaimed in such humble places as the Military and Civic Hotel."
working men which formed the new party, the Friends of Equal Rights, held lines for two elections. In the fall of 1836 on the local front, whenever the party combined with the Whigs in backing candidates, it "cut deeply into the Tammany stronghold." In the presidential campaign, it backed Martin Van Buren with some reluctance, although it was loud in praise of his Vice-President, the supposed killer of Tecumseh in the War of 1812, Colonel Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky. It is most interesting to note that Robert Dale Owen had become a conventional Democrat by this time, and that "Fanny Wright began a long lecture tour

53 It is notable that this was the name of Thomas Skidmore's newspaper, founded after the split in 1829. Alexander Ming, Jr., son of Skidmore's close ally, was important in the new councils.

54 Commons, History of Labour, I, 463.

55 Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, p. 394.

56 Besides being a military hero, Johnson in the Senate had attacked the Supreme Court, debtors' prisons, and speculations in public lands. His outstanding performance, as far as the working men were concerned, was his defense of the Sunday mails against the indignant declarations of New England ministers and other representatives of "priestcraft." "If a solemn act of legislation shall in one point define the God or point out to the citizen one religious duty, it may with equal propriety define every part of divine revelation and enforce every religious obligation, even to the forms and ceremonies of worship, the endowment of the church, and the support of the clergy." (Blau, ed., Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy, "Sunday Observance and the Mail: the Report of the Committee on Post-Offices and Post-Roads of the United States Senate, January, 1829," p. 277). Such sentiments, so akin to the Wright-Owen viewpoint, made Johnson a valued ally. "I know of no man whom I believe more likely to unite the votes of the Mechanics than Col. Johnson," was Owen's comment in the Free Enquirer. (Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, p. 140).
in May, 1836, to explain the urgency of the election. In New York she tried to end the Loco Foco schism, feeling that the menace of Whiggery left no time for petulance over doctrine.  

The real achievement of the party was the defeat of Tammany in the city elections in the spring of 1837, after a severe winter made even more chilling by the cold blasts of inflationary prices. In February had occurred the infamous flour riots, attributed to the Loco Focos, and recalling the fact that "[m]obs clamoring for bread had started the French Revolution." After men of this stamp carried the spring elections, Tammany came to life, re-examined its stand, "ousted the aristocratic banking element and began its modern career of organizing the labour vote." In the midst of the storm of panic the Equal Rights

57 Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, p. 213. Miss Wright had mellowed with age, it seems. "In Boston, attended by Abner Kneeland of the local Society of Free Enquirers, she spoke to an audience of two hundred, including thirty-two women. Her interests, reporters noted, seemed now exclusively political; her speech 'did not contain a single allusion, direct or indirect, to any theological topic.'" (Ibid.)

58 Commons, History of Labour, I, 464.

59 The Loco Focos had held a rally "in the park" shortly beforehand, and the mob swept on its way from this starting-point. However, of the fifty-three arrests made, not one was a party member, and the organization disclaimed all participation in the affair. (Cf. Commons, History of Labour, I, 464; Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, pp. 219-220.)

60 Ibid., p. 219.

61 Commons, History of Labour, I, 465.
Party concluded that Tammany had come around to its pure principles of democracy, and there was effected a happy reconciliation in the fall elections of 1837.

Once more the radical forces of laboring men enter the lines of the Democratic Party. The ranks close upon them, and, as a group, they will not be seen or heard until the period of the Civil War. By that time, conditions will be vastly different; even the word "workingman" will not indicate the same type of person. By that time, too, the Working Men's Party of 1829 and 1830 will have become but a fading memory, a few pages inconspicuously hidden away in a history book, passed over in the hurry to investigate more thrilling episodes. As the attempt has been made to pause upon these few pages of American history, a final chapter seems to call for an evaluation of events, to determine if this particular piece fits into the mosaic which is America.
CHAPTER V

DEFEAT--OR VICTORY?

Although to hope to unravel completely the entangled skein of factors which brought about the failure of the Working Men's Party of New York City would be overly sanguine, at least the main threads, uncovered in the course of the previous pages, may be inspected more closely. Certainly inexperience, internal dissension, and external pressures are three factors meriting further comment.

Instances of inexperience come readily to mind: employing Robert Dale Owen as secretary for the October 29th meeting of organization—he was an able writer but a suspect comrade; drawing names from a hat as a method of selecting candidates and gaining the best possible man for a job; choosing a "hacknied politician like Erastus Root"¹ for the workers' representative in the state campaign of 1830. The selection of Root points up, perhaps, the most basic error of all, namely that, as a separate group, workers should not have gone into politics. Root was not the man to attain their goals because a political party was not the means.

¹Working Man's Advocate, September 4, 1830.

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The truth of the matter is that the workingmen's platform as usually formulated did not reach the root of the problem at all. Had their party completely carried the day as a political unit, at best only accidental, fringe benefits would have been achieved. Theirs was a mere humanitarian program and as such would appeal to almost anyone interested in his neighbor's well-being. For example, most balanced conservatives were advocates of the spread of education, if for no other reason than to insure that universal manhood suffrage would not descend into chaotic mob caprice. A number of prominent names may be cited also as favoring the abolishment of imprisonment for debt, and abandoning the militia system. Perhaps without their fully realizing it, the laborers were fighting the much broader economic problem of maladjustment of wealth. The Bank War was the real battle-ground in this conflict, and to wage the war most efficiently, the workingmen should have been within the ranks of the regular Democratic Party of Andrew Jackson. Through sessions in the school of experience during 1829-1831 this is exactly what they came to do.2

This criticism by no means intends to condemn the political venture as a total loss, since it is obvious that the workers

2Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, pp. 142-143. Cf. Millis and Montgomery, Organized Labor, p. 28, for similar views.
represented voting power and their voting power was respected.\(^3\)

We merely wish to note two points: first, that it was the old Democratic Party and not the new Working Men's Party which actually brought about the demanded reforms, the rebellion of the younger group being the occasion rather than the cause of improvement; secondly, most of the advances were local, and of a morale-building nature; the bigger issue of economic equality was nationwide, and success was to be achieved not by a splinter group but by a major party.

A certain amount of frictional loss is to be expected in any machine, but if a motor pulls in three different directions, the grinding of gears will become deafening. Skidmore was old and bitter, and for him agrarian reform was the only answer. Fanny Wright, Owen, and Evans were younger, one-idea enthusiasts, more bent on forging ahead,\(^4\) though not quite certain where the road might lead. Cook and the numerical majority were more conservative, more quick to give ear to the voice of public opinion, and thus more the prey of old party inducements.\(^5\) With

\(^3\)Fox, \textit{Decline of Aristocracy}, p. 357.

\(^4\)In his memoirs, Owen mourns the fact that the vision of youth and the wisdom of mature years cannot be combined in some way. (\textit{Atlantic Monthly}, "Earnest Sowing," pp. 69-70.)

\(^5\)It will be recalled that this was the group which first succumbed to union with the old parties in the fall elections of 1830.
such contrasting viewpoints and tendencies, cooperation was difficult; with such conflicting personalities, strife was inevitable, and reconciliation practically impossible.

Finally, the hopeless situation of the party was intensified by a number of external pressures as well. It must be reemphasized how the partisan press pretended to be, and how the conservative community really was, shocked and thoroughly frightened by the phantoms of atheism, communism, license, and mob rule. The whole movement, moreover, was smeared with the colors of the "red harlot of infidelity," and besieged by the outraged emotionalism Fanny Wright seemed to inspire. With more alacrity than at the tinkling of a leper's bell did the God-fearing and the property-owning (not always a coextensive term) pick up their garments and rush pell-mell away.

The danger inherent in a group of free-thinkers aiding a movement of workers was, from the beginning, recognized. The liberals themselves wanted to "keep religion and politics entirely distinct," and they foresaw that their enemies would seek to condemn the one with the other. "It is the only rock on which we can split, and we are determined to use all possible exertions to steer clear of it." Despite their efforts, the charge

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7*Working Man's Advocate*, June 12, 1830.
of atheism was an important factor in external opposition to the party, as the following newspaper excerpt clearly indicates:

Lost to society, to earth and to heaven, godless and hopeless, clothed and fed by stealing and blasphemy... such are the apostles who are trying to induce a number of able bodied men in this city to follow in their own course... to disturb the peace of the community for a time; go to prison and have the mark of Cain impressed upon them; betake themselves to incest, robbery, and murder; die like ravenous wild beasts, hunted down without pity; and go to render their account before God, whose existence they believed in their miserable hearts, even while they were blaspheming him in their ignorant, snivelling, and puerile speculations. Such is too true a picture in all its parts of some of the leaders of the new political party, which is emerging from the slime of this community.8

There is yet another aspect of the Wright-Owen activity which, to our mind, does not receive proper emphasis. It is admitted by all that they made an end of what should have been but a means. If the Enquirers were more concerned with the genuine grievances of the workingmen and were proposing a more practical and American system of public education, their fervor and skill at organizing might even have carried the 1830 New York election. But the universal panacea of Equal Republican

8Commons, History of Labour, I, 272-273, quoting the Commercial Advertiser, November, 1829. Even as late as 1838 the same notorious names were being used as the prime examples of degradation: "Aye, as well might the Fathers of the Church be contrasted with Robert Dale Owen and his infidel adherents, or the chastest matrons of the land with the followers of Fanny Wright, as Henry Clay with Martin Van Buren." (From the Whig newspaper, the Madisonian, cited by Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, p. 251.)
State Guardianship Education was too heavy a side issue for a young political party to carry.9

It is not generally noted, however, that when the education issue ceased to be of immediate importance, the intellectuals abandoned the workingmen and turned to other fields in which they might more freely "enquire." The writings of Robert Dale Owen seem to bear out this statement both as concerns himself and his confrere. Of Fanny Wright he tells us: "In the autumn of 1829 Miss Wright left [New York] for six months, returning in May, 1830; to remain, however, only two months, then crossing to Europe and not returning until after our paper was discontinued."10 His own preoccupation, and his "real success during this period,"11 was the publication of the first American treatise on birth control, called Moral Physiology, said to be

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9Pancoast and Lincoln, The Incorrigible Idealist, p. 16.

10Atlantic Monthly, "Earnest Sowing," p. 67. Later in the same article (p. 75) Owen gives the reasons for Miss Wright's trips. During the first absence she went to Nashoba, Tenn., closed the negro-freeing venture, took its thirty-one remaining occupants to "Hayti" to settle them there with the assurance of the governor himself that they would be well treated. On her second departure from New York, "she left for France accompanied by her younger sister; and there, next year, two misfortunes happened to her: the one her marriage, the other her sister's death." Her marriage was to Phiquepal D'Arusmont, a teaching companion of New Harmony days. As has been noted, her subsequent public career was not so radical or vehement.

11Pancoast and Lincoln, The Idealist, p. 16.
noted "[f]or its scientific accuracy, humanitarian feeling, literary style and social effectiveness"\(^{12}\)---a damning enough indictment for one convinced of the immorality and the unsoundness of the Malthusian thesis. Slaves in "Hayti," peoples across the earth, marriages, France, England--these broke the spell and centered attention elsewhere than upon New York City and its tradesmen.

Up to this point, the Working Men's Party of New York City has been treated as a failure, but such is hardly the full truth. For a correct evaluation, a distinction must be applied: as a party, a separate organization, it is correct to list the effort as a failure; but as a movement, a democratic influence, it must be emphasized that it was a marked success. Two points especially justify this claim: the success of the reforms the

\(^{12}\text{Ibid., pp. 16-17. In a letter of November 1, 1830, just a week before the elections, Owen tells his friend Trist that the book will be out in three weeks (Sears, "Correspondence of Robert Dale Owen," \textit{NYHR}, p. 313). From other letters we learn that much work, discussion and advice-seeking went into the treatise before its publication "against the advice of every individual here to whom I mentioned the subject." Cf. The Idealist, pp. 16-20, for the wide influence the "little book" attained.}

\textbf{Cf. Ibid.,} pp. 20-23 concerning his own marriage on April 12, 1832 by "the simplest ceremony which the laws of this state recognize." By a written statement he divested himself "of the unjust rights which in virtue of this ceremony an iniquitous law tacitly gives me over the person and property of another ... the barbarous relics of a feudal, despotic system, soon destined in the onward course of improvement, to be wholly swept away" (\textit{Ibid.,} p. 22). Subsequently, he too spent a period in Europe.
workingmen demanded, and the further activity of many connected with the movement.

The reform most directly attributable to the Working Men's Party was the abolition of imprisonment for debt. As early as 1813 Van Buren had sponsored a bill in New York for the relief of small debtors, but his efforts were of no avail. On the national scene, Richard Johnson was constantly clamoring for improvement in the law, but equally without success. Finally, in 1831, conscious of the weight of the workingmen's ballots, the Democrat majority in the state legislature wiped out debtors' prisons, "despite the opposition of the pettifogging lawyers, the state printer (who profited by the necessary legal advertisements), and the business men, especially rum-sellers."13 Congress followed in 1832 with a law concerning federal prisons, and other states soon joined the trend.14

During the life of the party there was also an improvement in the lien law, an extension to include payment to journeymen as well as to master-craftsmen, but the records show that the construction-workers were not satisfied completely, since, among other shortcomings, the law applied only to the city and county

13 Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, p. 357.

14 Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, p. 135.
of New York. Still, it proved a step in the right direction, so much so, that, at the time, Tammany Hall was estimated to have won back about four thousand voters.

Militia reform, initiated at the insistence of the working-men, was more slowly achieved. The old law was almost annihilated in 1830, but the bill which would have reduced the two-day drill period to a single afternoon failed to pass the legislature. The law was revised somewhat in 1831, more fully in 1846, and finally abandoned by an enactment of 1870.

The working out of the answer to the party's agitation against banks is written in large letters in the elimination of the United States Bank in 1832, the wildcat banking period that followed, and the Panic of 1837. This, of course, did not prove to be the final or correct answer, since, of its very nature, the institution of banking cannot be an unshakeable structure, and is vulnerable to the winds of varying theories.

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15 Commons, History of Labour, I, 329. In 1832 Ohio passed the first statewide lien law.

16 Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, p. 358. Tammany's bank stand, as has been seen, also had much to do with the return.

17 Commons, History of Labour, I, 330.

18 Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, p. 359. Until 1846, the reserve militia had to assemble at least once a year. After that year, the muster was discontinued, and a token fine of fifty cents imposed. This operated as a general poll tax.
That over the years it has become much more reliable is due in some measure to the efforts of the workers of 1830 who demanded a reform, even though their reasoning was not especially enlightened.

Their influence in educational reform is quite marked. Gradual improvement did not come until after the actual death of the party, but "the vitality of the movement for tax-supported schools was derived, not from the humanitarian leaders, but from the growing class of wage-earners." Pennsylvania, due to Thaddeus Stevens' crusading zeal, was the first state to legislate improvement of its school system. New York appointed a city superintendent of public education in 1841, and passed a public school law in the city in 1842, a piece of legislation which was extended to the state in 1849. During these reforms, the Working Man's Party was no more, but the men who comprised it remained as voters. Of influence too was their specific contribution, namely that the educational system should be built for all, and not merely for those too poor to attend a private school.

Much more significant than the particular improvements gained is the change of attitude such advances reveal. Herein is a definite sign of the Jacksonian Revolution of which we

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19 Documentary History, V, 28.
often hear, and of the continued democratic evolution into the present day. For the drama in New York City at this period is a reflection, in miniature, of a general trend on the American stage. Previously, property was the major consideration, so that when the journeymen spoke of equality of opportunity and the reforms which would assure this blessed state, propertyholders saw them demanding privilege rather than equality. From later generations, this propertied view, though understood, would receive little sympathy. That very fact bespeaks a change of emphasis from property to man himself. Today we take for granted rights and institutions which workers of a century and a quarter ago were at first denounced for envisioning. It is an encouraging revelation, and prompts the thought that perhaps after all the ideals of social justice in labor relations, in race, and in other fields, will slowly evolve to a fuller reality.

One further observation is in order, emphasizing that the Working Men's Party of New York City was not a mere falling star shooting across the sky, to fade without leaving a trace of its passing. Certainly the personages who lived and fought through its years of existence were different people because of their experience. In turn they went on to affect others, to make their own spheres of influence, and thereby the country at large, better or worse because of their activity in 1829 and 1830.
Frances Wright, Robert Dale Owen, Ely Moore, and Orestes A. Brownson are obvious instances of influential people who matured in the school of the Working Men's Party. So is Isaac Thomas Hecker, who, in company with his brother, set up a hand press in the garret of their bake-shop and printed hard-money propaganda on the paper money received from customers. There is a marked likeness between this youth and the Isaac Thomas Hecker who became a convert to the Catholic Church and the founder of the apostolic-minded Paulist Fathers. Still another example of growth and influence is George Henry Evans.

From the visionary cries of Thomas Skidmore in 1829 to the practical Homestead Act of 1862 is a long journey over difficult terrain. During it, much of the heat of the day's traveling was borne by George Henry Evans. In the Advocate, then in The Man, later on in Young America (a new series of the Advocate), Evans hammered home his point that public lands in the west could best be used to relieve the labor problems of the east. Though the idea was unrealistic to a degree, as later studies have shown, his fiery devotion gathered admirers. A sick man, he came from retirement on a Jersey farm during the eighteen-forties to spearhead an attack under the standard of the "National Reform Association." Street-corners often heard the rallying cry:

[20Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, p. 198.]
"Vote yourself a farm!"; Horace Greeley took it up in the pages of the New York Tribune, and later brought up two unsuccessful homestead bills in Congress. But personal achievement was not to be Evans' reward. In 1849, worn out and penniless, he sadly went back to New Jersey and died there in obscurity seven years later.21

All was not in vain however. "Whatever the objections of Eastern capitalists or Southern planters or Western speculators, the West had to be opened up; the common man everywhere demanded it."22 In May, 1852, after a mass meeting arranged by Evans and his friends, a tailor from Tennessee, Andrew Johnson, was fired with the idea.23 The flame spread; in 1862 the Homestead Act was passed.

In many ways, George Henry Evans is symbolic of the party to which he first pledged his loyalty. In a short-range view of reforms directly accomplished by a here-and-now force, both man and party were failures. In the long-range view of gradual change, however, the view of the historian, both were successes in a true sense. For they were the hidden force in an evolution

21 Schlesinger, Jr., Age of Jackson, p. 348.
22 Ibid.
23 It was under the auspices of a Working Men's ticket that Johnson gained his first public office in 1834, that of alderman (Documentary History, V, 25).
which has held the American stage since the first act of the drama in 1787, the constant evolution towards a democracy in fact and not merely in theory. That today we accept as commonplace what yesterday they fought so hard to gain, is a cogent proof that their experiments have had a definite, though slow and hidden, effect on American life and the development of American culture.
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B. ARTICLES


The thesis submitted by James A. O'Brien, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of History.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

November 17, 1957
Date

Signature of Advisor

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