

## Epilogue

This discussion of household-based masculinity and the labor movement has 1 focused on the years between 1800 and 1840, but organized working men continued to ground their trade union and political party efforts in domestic concerns throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The early republic organized-labor movement ended abruptly with the economic dislocation caused by the Panic of 1837, which sent a ripple through working men's neighborhoods as thousands lost their jobs and thousands more scrambled to make ends meet. Whereas a Loco Foco handbill once read "Bread, Meat, Rent, And Fuel," Horace Greeley wrote in 1838 that artisans new "cry was, not for the bread and fuel of charity, but for Work!"<sup>1</sup> Trade unions and other labor organizations became quick casualties of the financial downturn as organized working men decided to allocate membership dues in other places to help their families. Although the early organized labor movement died abruptly with the financial Panic of 1837, later unions and labor parties in the 1850s, 1870s, and 1890s looked to this period for organizational and rhetorical models.<sup>2</sup> Not all labor activists were identical, however, as changes to the demographic profile of organized working men and different industrial and domestic contexts altered the way subsequent labor movements formulated domestic masculine identity and its relationship to the workplace and political arena.

The biggest difference in New York's organized working population after 1840 was the dramatic rise in the number of immigrants; the massive wave of Catholic immigration included large numbers of Irish and German immigrants who brought with them a radical tradition from the European revolts of 1848.<sup>3</sup> The new union movement struggled with cohesive self-definition because, even though working men and their families still clustered in tight neighborhood groups by trade, ethnic and religious differences now altered the demographic landscape and changed the way working men related as neighbors and co-workers. New trade unions in the late 1840s and early 1850s often formed along ethnic lines; just as native-born and English shipwrights had lived together, worked together, and formed a union together in the 1810s, German tailors and locksmiths did likewise in the 1850s.<sup>4</sup> The demographic shift continued later in the nineteenth century as new arrivals from southern and eastern Europe joined the earlier immigrants from Germany and Ireland.

The number of semi-skilled and unskilled laborers in New York also rapidly increased throughout the nineteenth century, inspiring skilled artisans to adapt their rhetoric about their craft standing in the economy to new workforce realities. The two camps split the labor movement; semi-skilled and unskilled workers joined broad-based organizations like the Knights of Labor and skilled workers joined the American Federation of Labor and its method of business or "bread and

butter" unionism. Skilled organized working men continued the artisan tradition of using their craft standing to make particular claims about their place in the economy and society, using their position to gain better wages and benefits in the name of the family wage and the protection of their household-based masculinity.<sup>5</sup>

Skilled working men faced other competition in these years and developed new ways to answer the challenge while protecting their household economies. In 1850, New York shoemakers formed the "United Society of Operative Cordwainers of the City of New York," a labor organization that included among its constitutional bylaws the rule that members could not work alongside female shoemakers unless these women were family members.<sup>6</sup> Skilled artisan shoemakers still attempted to differentiate themselves from other types of labor (in this case, female) as they had done a generation earlier but adapted to contemporary workplace necessities that included more piecework done by multiple family members.

Changing demographic patterns among the city's working population altered the structure and context of the labor movement, but unions and political parties still used their collective power to enable working men to fulfill their domestic obligations.<sup>7</sup> The end of the financial Panic in 1843 did little to ameliorate working families' living conditions and new labor organizations continued to press for breadwinning wages.<sup>8</sup> New ways of dealing with the problem of household economy also developed. Multiple consumer cooperatives-including the New York Protective Union-formed to pool labor in order to run bakeries and other types of shops which benefited numerous families.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, not all labor activists from the 1830s and earlier disappeared from the public eye. George Henry Evans moved away from Robert Dale Owen's educational plan in the 1840s when he turned to the issue of land reform. His National Reform Association tried to assist working men and their domestic economic situation by pressing for federal homestead legislation that would allow working families free access to western farm lands while limiting the amount of land any one person could own.<sup>10</sup> Thomas Skidmore would have been proud.

As the country's economic development provoked Evans to shift his sights from education to western lands, other working men shifted their frustrations about industrial capitalism from local monopolies and banks to railroad companies and national corporations.<sup>11</sup> While the terms of debate constantly shifted to reflect demographic realities, workers' household-based identities, and economic challenges, the connection between domestic and work-related responsibilities remained important.



**Bachelor Workers on Strike,  
New York City (1948)**

More than 100 years after the collapse of the Loco Foco Party, members of New York City's wholesale and warehouse workers, Local 65 protested wage rates in a series of contract disputes in the 1940s.<sup>12</sup> A picture taken in February 1948 showed unionists holding a placard that questioned their pay within the context of their household realities: "Of Course We're Bachelors. How Can We Marry on \$34.00 A Week?"<sup>13</sup> Members of the General

Trades' Union would surely have understood the sentiment.

**Notes:**

**Note 1:** *New Yorker*, January 20, 1838, quoted in Samuel Rezneck, "The Social History of an American Depression, 1837-1843," 40, issue 4 (July, 1935), 666. For more on the effect of the Panic of 1837 on working families in New York, see Reginald Charles McGrane, *The Panic of 1837: Some Financial Problems of the Jacksonian Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924).

**Note 2:** Cultural representations of artisans and working men remained relatively consistent in these years. See Frances Harriet Whipple, *The Mechanic* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1842) and the morality tale of "Frank Manly" in the January 10, 1846 issue of Mike Walsh's radical newspaper, *The Subterranean*.

**Note 3:** See Robert Ernst, *Immigrant Life in New York City, 1825-1863* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1949).

**Note 4:** For a more detailed and eloquent discussion of ethnic neighborhoods and workers, see Richard B. Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis: Class, Ethnicity, and Youth in Antebellum New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 190-211.

**Note 5:** See Ava Baron, "Questions of Gender: Deskillling and Demasculinization in the U.S. Printing Industry, 1830-1915," *Gender and History* 1, number 2 (Summer, 1989), 178-198, Chistina Burr, "Defending 'The Art Preservative': Class and Gender Relations in the Printing Trades Unions, 1850-1914," *Labor/Le Travail* 31, number 1 (Spring, 1993), 47-73, Ileen A. Devault, "'To Sit among Men': Skill, Gender, and Craft Unionism in the Early American Federation of Labor," in Eric Arnesen, Julie Greene, and Bruce Laurie eds., *Labor Histories: Class, Politics, and the Working-Class Experience* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 259-283, and Gwendolyn Mink, *Old Labor and New Immigrants in American Political Development: Union, Party, and State, 1875-1920* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

**Note 6:** For more on the organization, see Norman J. Ware, *The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860: The Reaction of American Industrial Society to the Advance of the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), 230-232.

**Note 7:** This continued into the twentieth century. See Elizabeth Faeu, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991). For a recent look at masculinity and the labor movement see Stephen H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

**Note 8:** See Douglas T. Miller, *Jacksonian Aristocracy: Class and Democracy in New York, 1830-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press), 128-154.

**Note 9:** Ware, *The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860*, 193.

**Note 10:** For more on the National Reform Association, see the excellent new study by Mark A. Lause, *Young America: Land, Labor, and the Republican Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005) and Jamie L. Bronstein, *Land Reform and Working-class Experience in Britain and the United States, 1800-1862* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

**Note 11:** After the massive nationwide uprising of railroad workers in 1877, American Federation of Labor president Samuel Gompers wrote in his memoirs that the rebellion was "a declaration of protest in the name of American manhood against conditions that nullified the rights of American citizens." See Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor: An Autobiography of Samuel Gompers* edited by Nick Salvatore (New York: ILR press, 1984), 46-47. On the development of public economic policy and labor, see Edward Chase Kirkland, *Industry Comes of Age: Business, Labor, and Public Policy, 1860-1897* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961).

**Note 12:** The union was a C.I.O. affiliate and was later attacked for being run by Communists.

**Note 13:** Union Voice Staff, *Bachelor's Demonstration*, February 15, 1948, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York.