

A Reappraisal of the New England Labour-Reform Movement of the 1840s: The Lowell Female Labor Reform Association and the New England Workingmen's Association

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I

The Panic of 1837 ushered in six years of "hard times" for American workers. By early 1838 one-third of the workforce was jobless; many others had only part-time employment. By 1839 wages had dropped thirty to fifty percent below the pre-panic average. The first significant signs of economic recovery appeared in 1842.¹ In 1843 expansion replaced recovery: the next five years witnessed a rapid industrialization in the northeastern United States which jolted the economy out of recession and into a period of vigorous economic growth. Even 1848, a year of severe depression in Europe, was only mildly disruptive to the new growth tempo of the American economy.² Nevertheless, American working-class people of the "fabulous forties" were far from satisfied with their lot.

Workers in the industrializing Northeast were assured jobs and apparently enjoyed steady increases in real wages in the post-depression decade.³ But they had

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¹ Joseph G. RAYBACK, *A History of American Labor* (New York, 1964), p. 92.

² Douglass C. NORTH, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1961), pp. 204-08.

³ Stanley Lebergott asserts that real wages advanced markedly from 1832 to 1850 despite the 1837 Panic. According to his estimates, real wages increased by 25 percent. Increased productivity, which lowered consumer prices, was the main determinant in the upward secular real-wage trend. The impact of immigrant job competition on the wage-earning population up to 1850 was not so great as to lower appreciably the real-wage gain brought about by higher productivity. In the 1832-1850 period the ratio of immigration to labour-force increase was 53 percent; the decennial change in real wages was >25 percent. But in the 1850-1860 period the ratio of immigration to labour-force increase was 91 per cent; the decennial change in real wages was only >1 percent. Stanley LEBERGOTT, *Manpower in Economic Growth: The American Record Since 1800* (New York, 1964), pp. 147-62, *passim*. Lebergott's findings are more empirically based than older interpretations of the 1840-1860 period which stress the immiseration experience for the worker of the American industrial revolution. Such early studies as Norman WARE, *The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860* (Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1959), while impressionistic, contain a wealth of information in support of the immiseration thesis (Ware's book first appeared in 1924). More recently works on this period which follow Ware's insight in this respect have begun to surface. See for instance P. G. FALER, "Workingmen, Mechanics and Social Change: Lynn, Massachusetts, 1800-1860" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1971).

seen their infant labour movement of trade unions and workingmen's parties wrecked upon the shoals of depression. They had experienced bitter hardships during the depression years when work of any kind was difficult to procure. Workers were not blind to the development of a new class structure which they thought jeopardized their chances of enjoying upward occupational mobility in their lifetime. A small group of industrial capitalists, made up for the most part of former merchants and master mechanics, was coming to own the means of production. A class of permanent wage earners was also developing. The "yeoman mechanic" of pre-industrial America was being demoted to wage-earner status along with the children of farmers who could no longer earn a livelihood from the soil and did not possess the necessary funds for purchasing land in the west. Along with unskilled labourers, these men and women were being forced to sell their labour-power to industrial capitalists in a "free" commodity-oriented national market. Increasing numbers of workers found themselves employed in factories where the work-load was intensifying, causing the hours of labour to sit heavily upon their shoulders. From the workers' point-of-view, the negative results of industrialization outweighed the positive.

II

It has long been the habit of American labour historians to view the labour movement of the 1840s as visionary or backward-looking because it was intertwined with various social reform schemes such as Associationism (Fourierism) and National Land Reform. The liberal Wisconsin school of labour history regards the broad reform perspective of the labour movement as a regrettable diversion of working-class activity from its proper path — "pure and simple" trade unionism.⁴ Reformers, usually termed middle class and utopian, whether Owenites (a vanishing breed in the 1840s), Associationists or Land Reformers, are portrayed disparagingly as escapists who rejected the reality of the industrial revolution. Workers, naive and gullible, followed these reformers only to discover at the close of the decade that retreat to the Associationist phalanx or the 160-acre homestead was impossible. A wiser and more cautious working class was then able in the 1850s to take up its "correct" activity: the development of unadulterated trade unionism.

This frame of reference, while it serves to delineate certain major characteristics of the 1840s labour movement, also distorts and oversimplifies this decade. The line separating workers and reformers was not always clearly drawn in New England. Although workers pressed more eagerly for the ten-hour day and consumer cooperatives than did Associationists or Land Reformers, they lent a ready ear to

⁴ For the Wisconsin school see John R. COMMONS, *et al.*, *History of Labor in the United States*, Vol. I (New York, 1918). The Wisconsin school interpretation, developed by Commons and his associates, has had a profound influence on the writing of American labour history. For other examples of the use of the Wisconsin school interpretive framework see WARE, *Industrial Worker*, and Henry PELLING, *American Labor* (Chicago, 1960). See also Philip S. FONER, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, Vol. I: *From Colonial Times to the Founding of the American Federation of Labor* (New York, 1962). Foner, a Marxist historian, is, like the proponents of the Wisconsin school, contemptuous of the role of the "utopian" reformers in the 1840s labour movement. While the Wisconsin school blames reformers for the non-development of trade unionism at this time, Foner, in addition to this, holds reformers largely responsible for retarding the development of "political action" among workers (FONER, *Labor Movement*, I: 190).

general reform schemes from which they could not hope to benefit immediately. Though Associationists proselytized for phalanx living and Land Reformers campaigned for free and inalienable homesteads, they also supported the drive for the ten-hour day and eventually endorsed consumer cooperatives. This overlap of interests and goals is almost totally ignored in the literature on the 1840s labour movement. Instead, in line with the Wisconsin school interpretation, scholars have been content to discuss the labour movement in terms of two polarized groups: workers struggling for bread-and-butter goals and various types of reformers promoting their respective reform programmes. Although a certain polarization was a reality in the 1840s, especially in 1845, there was also a fruitful interchange of ideas and goals among workers and reformers. The proceedings and activities of the New England Workingmen's Association demonstrate that at many points the worker and reformer merged together to become the "labour-reformer" of this era. For to be a labour-reformer was to be an energetic critic of the human and social costs of the industrial revolution.

III

This essay will explore the nature of the labour-reform movement in the 1840s by highlighting the activities of one organization of labour-reformers, the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (LFLRA), within the broader context of the New England Workingmen's Association (NEWA). The members of the LFLRA, as the name indicates, were women. The majority were daughters of New England farmers who came to the Lowell textile mills to earn their living for a few years. Lowell was a company town, developed in the early 1820s by a group of Boston capitalists, the originators of the famous "Waltham System".⁵ By the 1840s company towns like Lowell dotted the New England landscape, often controlled by the same Boston capitalists who had built Waltham and Lowell. The early history of these towns reveals a paternalistic social structure, replete with boarding houses, churches, schools and improvement circles, designed to draw a female workforce to the mills. Wages were high enough to attract farm women away from the poorly paid occupations of domestic service or teaching. In the early years operatives worked an average of seventy-five hours per week; but the low level of technology meant that they were not required to mind more than two looms, thus minimizing somewhat the hardship of the long workday.⁶

Lucy Larcom, a factory operative, wrote an epic-style poem of her experience in Lowell entitled *An Idyl of Work*.⁷ If the long work week is regarded as relatively non-exploitative, it may not be incorrect to view the 1820s in such terms. However, the "idyl" receded quickly. In the 1830s rumblings of discontent became public when in February 1834 and October 1836 Lowell operatives "turned out" in

⁵ Hannah JOSEPHSON, *The Golden Threads. New England's Mill Girls and Magnates* (New York, 1967), and Vera SHLAKMAN, *Economic History of a Factory Town. A Study of Chicopee, Massachusetts*, Smith College Studies in History, Vol. XX (Northampton, Massachusetts, October 1934-July 1935).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ See Lucy LARCOM, *An Idyl of Work* (Westport, Connecticut, 1970). Originally published in 1875. It is ironic perhaps that Larcom was a mill operative from 1835 to 1846, the decade in which the "idyl" was destroyed.

opposition to wage cuts. In the latter case women formed a short-lived Factory Girls' Association credited with 2,500 members. The National Trades' Union, which was in session in Philadelphia, sent messages of support and passed resolutions in favour of the factory women's actions.⁸ As in 1834, the operatives were unsuccessful in their bid to avoid wage cuts and soon returned to work.⁹

Conditions in the mills deteriorated rapidly in the period from 1834 to 1844. Throughout this decade the average work week was more than seventy-three hours.¹⁰ The average actual weekly wages ranged from \$2.00 to \$3.00, with \$1.25 automatically deducted each week for boarding-house upkeep.¹¹ Whereas real annual earnings were as high in the mid-1840s as they had been in 1834, output per worker nearly doubled in this decade.¹² Women operatives had to work harder in 1845 to receive the 1830s wage equivalent for their labour.¹³ Moreover, testimonies of factory operatives before a Massachusetts legislative investigating committee in early 1845 indicate that the mills and boarding houses were overcrowded and poorly ventilated.¹⁴ All but one of the six factory operatives who spoke before the committee complained of poor health which they related to substandard working and living conditions.¹⁵

Factory owners set about securing in a variety of ways more labour without corresponding wage increases. They instituted the "speed up" whereby operatives were required to tend two, three or even four looms.¹⁶ In addition, overseers who

⁸ JOSEPHSON, *Golden Threads*, p. 238.

⁹ HOWARD M. GITELMAN, "The Waltham System and the Coming of the Irish", *Labor History*, VIII (1967): 238.

¹⁰ Charles E. PERSONS, "The Early History of Factory Legislation in Massachusetts", in *Labor Laws and their Enforcement*, ed.: Susan M. KINGSBURY (New York, 1911), p. 23.

¹¹ For wages see SHLAKMAN, *Economic History of a Factory Town*, p. 117. Chicopee, the town of Shlakman's study, was developed as a centre for textile mills by the same capitalists who founded Waltham and Lowell. See also Robert G. LAYER, *Earnings of Cotton Mill Operatives, 1825-1914* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1955), pp. 24-25. For the boarding-house rule, see "General Regulations, to be observed by persons employed by the Lawrence Manufacturing Company". The Lawrence Company was located in Lowell.

¹² Using 1844-1846 as the base period, Layer finds that real annual earnings declined between October 1834 (107.9) and October 1837 (77.0). But from 1838 the secular trend was upward; in November 1844 the index is 101.3 and in November 1845 it is 102.0. Again with 1844-1846 as 100, he determines that the output per worker rose steadily, with only a slight dip between 1835 and 1837, from 64.9 in December 1833 to 103.9 in November 1844 (LAYER, *Earnings*, pp. 24-25).

¹³ A large part of the increased output of mill workers in this period was due to labour intensification. However, increased output was also to some extent a function of capital intensification. See Caroline WARE, *Early New England Cotton Manufacture. A Study in Industrial Beginnings* (New York, 1966), p. 269.

¹⁴ *Massachusetts House Documents*, 1845, No. 50, pp. 2-6.

¹⁵ Four years later Dr. Josiah Curtis's report to the American Medical Association substantiated the operatives' observations: "There is not a State's prison, or house of correction, in New England, where the hours of labor are so long, the hours for meals so short, or the ventilation so much neglected, as in all the cotton-mills with which I am acquainted." Josiah CURTIS, "Public Hygiene of Massachusetts but more particularly of the Cities of Boston and Lowell", *Transactions of the American Medical Association*, II (1849): 518.

¹⁶ *Voice of Industry*, 13 March 1846, 17 April 1846, 24 April 1846, 15 May 1846 and 11 September 1846. See 6 February 1846, for the speed-up in Newburyport mills. The *Voice of Industry* was published variously in Fitchburg (29 May 1845 through 9 October 1845), Lowell (7 November 1845 through 19 November 1847) and Boston (26 November 1847 through 14 April 1848).

managed to secure extra cloth production from operatives under their supervision received bonuses or premiums.¹⁷

Factory owners also insisted that operatives adhere to a set of company regulations, the most contentious of which was the twelve-month contract.¹⁸ According to this regulation, an operative when hired agreed to work for twelve consecutive months. If she chose to leave before the period was over she could request permission to do so.¹⁹ If permission were granted the operative received a "regular discharge". But failure to obtain a regular discharge for whatever reason usually meant that the operative's name would appear on a blacklist which was circulated among Lowell mills. The blacklist thus became a powerful weapon of labour control, in Lowell and elsewhere.²⁰

By 1845 many factory operatives were no longer the proud daughters of respectable farmers. Instead, according to one operative, the mills were filled with "poverty's daughters, whose fathers do not possess one foot of land, but work day by day for the bread that feeds their families".²¹ Indeed, "many of the operatives of Lowell have no fathers or homes, and many are foreigners who are *free* to work there according to the mandates of heartless power, or go to the poor house, beg, or do worse."²² By the mid-1840s textile corporation agents found it increasingly difficult to attract New England women, whether "well-born" or not, to Lowell. A description of the method used to recruit operatives at this time, which first appeared in the *Cabotville Chronicle*, helps to underscore the demise of the Lowell "idyl":

Observing a singular looking "long, low, *black*," wagon passing along the street, we made enquiries respecting it, and were informed that it was what we term "a *slaver*." She makes regular trips to the north of the state, cruising around in Vermont and New Hampshire, with a "commander" whose heart must be as black as his craft, who is paid

¹⁷ *Voice of Industry*, 2 January 1846. See also 9 January 1846.

¹⁸ See *Factory Tracts*, No. 1, pp. 5-6, for a discussion of the "tyrannous and oppressive rules" which the corporations imposed upon their operatives, especially that of the twelve-month contract.

¹⁹ Sometimes in the summer months operatives were allowed to return to their homes for a vacation. Sarah Bagley, who became the first President of the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association in 1845, reported to the House legislative investigating committee in 1845 that she had returned to her home in New Hampshire one summer to regain her health. *Massachusetts House Documents*, No. 50, p. 4. Lucy Larcom, another mill operative, was forced to admit that a year's sojourn by the seaside with her sister's family was providential, coming "just when the close air and long day's work were beginning to tell upon my health". Lucy LARCOM, *A New England Girlhood* (New York, 1961), p. 188. Originally published in 1889. Harriet Robinson, a factory operative who wrote her reminiscences of mill life, mentioned the summer holiday custom. Like Larcom, she worked in the Lowell mills in the 1830s and early 1840s. Harriet ROBINSON, *Loom and Spindle, or Life among the Early Mill Girls* (New York, 1898), p. 73. See also Henry A. MILES, *Lowell as it Was and As It Is*, 2nd ed. (Lowell, 1846), p. 103, and *Voice of Industry*, 4 September 1845.

²⁰ See *Massachusetts Archives*, 1842, No. 1215, which is a petition from seventeen operatives from the Middlesex Corporation in Lowell who complained that they had been blacklisted because they had quit their jobs in protest against a twenty-five percent wage reduction. Descriptions of the use of the blacklist are also found in *Voice of Industry*, 17 April 1846 and 12 February 1847. In *ibid.*, 11 September 1846, a description is provided of one operative who was fired by an overseer in the Merimack Corporation of Lowell because she had left her loom for a few minutes to wash her hands. She was refused a regular discharge, and her name was placed on a blacklist which circulated in Manchester and Newburyport mills as well as in Lowell.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 3 July 1845.

²² *Ibid.* In 1845 slightly less than ten percent of the mill workers were Irish. MILES, *Lowell*, p. 193. By 1850 one-fourth of the mill operatives would be Irish.

a dollar a head, for all he brings to the market, and more in proportion to the distance — if they bring them from such a distance that they cannot easily get back. This is done by “hoisting false colors,” and representing to the girls, that they can tend more machinery than is possible, and that the work is so very neat, and the wages such, that they can dress in silks, and spend half their time in reading. Now is this true? Let those girls who have been thus deceived, answer.²³

IV

The Lowell factory operative, in common with most other workers in this period, lacked a strong tradition of labour organization. Nevertheless, the beginnings of a tradition existed; in the late 1820s and 1830s various associations devoted to working-class causes flowered briefly. Edward Pessen contends that the major institutions of the 1830s labour movement were devoted *simultaneously* to certain reform programmes relating to education, banking and the militia system and to bread-and-butter issues such as better wages and the ten-hour day. Workingmen’s parties, organized to secure reforms, also defended the right of workers to join unions and supported the drive for the ten-hour day. Similarly the National Trades’ Union, created to bring local craft unions together on a national level, went on record at its annual conventions from 1834 till 1837 as favouring various reforms which the workingmen’s parties advocated.²⁴ A New England Association of Farmers, Mechanics and other Workingmen also existed from 1831 to 1834, its primary concern being the ten-hour day.²⁵ Except for a handful of craft unions, these organizations were swept away in the depression. When New England workers began taking steps to reorganize in 1844, however, the experience of the 1830s was not forgotten.

The initial impetus for the creation of an association of New England workers came from the Fall River Mechanics’ Association. In the spring of 1844 it issued a circular which suggested the founding of an organization to aid in the “elevation of the Working Classes” upon the premise that the “prevailing system of labour... is at war with the real interest of man’s physical, intellectual, social, moral and religious being.”²⁶ Preoccupation with the ten-hour day was evident. In July 1844 representatives of the Mutual Benefit Society of the Journeymen Cordwainers of Lynn and the Fall River Mechanics’ Association suggested that a definite date be set for a meeting of New England workers. A meeting was arranged for October in Boston. Labour newspapers throughout New England began advertising the forthcoming convention.

To ensure a large turnout, the Fall River Mechanics’ Association delegated mechanic S. C. Hewitt of Dighton, Massachusetts, to tour working-class communities in the spring and summer of 1844.²⁷ Hewitt’s appointment foreshadowed the

²³ Quoted in *Voice of Industry*, 2 January 1846.

²⁴ Edward PEsSEN, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians; the Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany, New York, 1967), pp. 28-32 and 44-51.

²⁵ Foner, *Labor Movement*, I: 104-06.

²⁶ “Circular of the Fall River Mechanics”, cited in J. R. Commons, et al., *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, Vol. VIII: *Labor Movement 1840-1860* (New York, 1958): 91, 86.

²⁷ Edwin Rozwenc, *Cooperatives Come to America: The History of the Protective Store Movement, 1845-1867* (Mount Vernon, Iowa, 1941), p. 20, and Foner, *Labor Movement*, I: 204.

influence Fourierist socialism, which in America was popularly known as Associationism, was to have on the budding labour-reform movement: he was an Associationist.²⁸ In addition to Hewitt's lecture trip the Fall River Mechanics' Association circulated a well-known working-class tract of the 1830s, Seth Luther's *Address*, among worker committees in various towns. Its thirty-two pages contained a scalding indictment of the factory system. In it Luther urged the "producing classes" to unite in support of the Declaration of Independence's avowal that "all men are created equal".²⁹

The carefully nurtured efforts of the Fall River and Lynn workers bore fruit in October 1844 at the first organizing meeting of the New England Workingmen's Association. Over 200 delegates from two dozen New England towns attended. Lynn alone sent 96; Fall River and Lowell were also well represented.³⁰ A large number of the delegates were workingmen, but Associationists and Land Reformers were also in attendance.³¹ Resolutions were passed recommending petitions to the legislature for the ten-hour day, use of the ballot box to secure the inalienable homestead in the west (Land Reform), the introduction of "attractive industry" (Associationism) and establishment of consumer and producer cooperatives since "by the present system of labour, the interests of capital and labour are opposed, the former now securing the reward which should only belong to the latter."³² The convention was firmly committed to the creation of an organization which would bring workers together as a class:

Resolved, that we recommend to our brother mechanics and laborers throughout the country, (who are not already associated), immediately to organize for the purpose of defending our common interests, to vindicate labor from reproach — to secure to the laborer a more just equivalent for his toil — for moral and intellectual improvement — to investigate the causes of the present fearful and still daily increasing disparities of social condition, and to inquire why it has been and is, that the workingmen in society, by whose labor all wealth is produced, on whose industry rests the arts of civilized life, are condemned to occupy the meanest position in that society, are stigmatized as ignorant and inferior, and universally regarded as the Helots of capital.³³

A committee was chosen to draw up a constitution and to arrange for the next organizing convention.

Although no women's organizations were represented at the October meeting, the intense propaganda campaign of the spring and summer must have struck a responsive cord for in January 1845 fifteen women operatives organized themselves

²⁸ ROZWENC, *Cooperatives*, p. 20. Hewitt was elected Vice-President of the New England Fourier Society at its annual meeting in January 1846. *The Harbinger*, 7 February 1846. *The Harbinger* was published in New York and Boston, 1845-1849.

²⁹ PERSONS, "Factory Legislation", p. 29, and Seth LUTHER, *An Address to the Workingmen of New England* (Boston, 1832).

³⁰ "Proceedings from *Working Man's Advocate*, 19 October 1844", cited in COMMONS, *et al.*, *Documentary History*, VIII: 91-95, and FALER, "Workingmen, Mechanics and Social Change", p. 404.

³¹ Helen Sara ZAHLER, *Eastern Workingmen and National Land Policy, 1829-1862* (New York, 1941), p. 63, n. 13. Zahler points out that the Boston *Investigator* commented that "mechanics" played a conspicuous part at the October convention.

³² "Proceedings from *Working Man's Advocate*, 19 October 1844", cited in COMMONS, *et al.*, *Documentary History*, VIII: 97-98.

³³ *Ibid.*: 97.

into the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association. Sarah G. Bagley was elected President, and Huldah J. Stone was elected Secretary. By March, at the second organizing convention of the Workingmen's Association in Lowell, the mill women reported 304 members.³⁴ Delegates at this gathering adopted a constitution which brought the New England Workingmen's Association into being. Article Nine specifically provided for the admission of female labour-reform groups on terms of equality: "Female Labor Reform Associations shall be entitled to all the rights, privileges and obligations secured by this constitution."³⁵

The first formal meeting of the New England Workingmen's Association took place in Boston in May. Although only thirty delegates attended, "there was a fair representation of the laboring classes, and a spirit of enquiry and advancement was plainly visible."³⁶ After some discussion the convention officially resolved that membership was open to anyone who was "interested in the elevation of the Producing Classes, and Industrial Reform, and the extinction of Slavery and Servitude in all their forms".³⁷ As in the previous two conventions, Associationist and Land Reformers were present. Lewis K. Ryckman, a cordwainer who was at this time living at Brook Farm, an Associationist community near Lowell, was chosen to be President of the NEWA.³⁸ George Ripley, a Unitarian minister and the founder of Brook Farm, became treasurer. No Land Reformers held office at this time. Two women, Bagley of Lowell and Ruby Hatch of Fall River, served on the business committee. Bagley also joined the ranks of the male officers of the NEWA as Recording Secretary.³⁹

As the broad membership resolution and the choice of officers indicate, the NEWA, while sensitive to such issues as the shorter work day, was also prepared to ponder possible solutions to more fundamental socio-economic problems. Resolutions were passed which supported "Labor Reform" and the organization of workingmen throughout New England. The aging Robert Owen spoke of the iniquities of the factory system and urged a campaign for a shorter work day. The convention delegates also heard addresses from Associationists Albert Brisbane of New York and Charles A. Dana of Brook Farm. Delegates, two of whom were Bagley and Stone, were appointed to attend the Industrial Congress to be held in October in New York. National Land Reform leader George Henry Evans was doubtless pleased to hear of the NEWA's resolution supporting the movement for free land and the inalienable homestead.⁴⁰

The LFLRA now had 500 members, and its officers were delighted with the prospect of an organizational structure designed to encourage workers to help themselves. Representatives of this association, as well as delegates from the Fall River Ladies Mechanic Association, enthusiastically participated in the May meeting.

³⁴ WARE, *Industrial Worker*, p. 207.

³⁵ PERSONS, "Factory Legislation", pp. 35-36.

³⁶ *Voice of Industry*, 12 June 1845. Poor attendance was probably the consequence of the discontinuance of the *New England Mechanic*, the association's official journal, a few weeks before the meeting.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Lindsay SWIFT, *Brook Farm. Its Members, Scholars, and Visitors* (New York, 1961), p. 119. Originally published in 1900.

³⁹ *Voice of Industry*, 12 June 1845.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Besides presenting a banner to the Workingmen's Association which read "Union for Power — Power to Bless Humanity", Bagley delivered a ringing speech which made it clear that factory women were determined to organize themselves for their own betterment regardless of society's sanction against women's participation in such affairs:

For the last half a century, it has been deemed a violation of woman's sphere to appear before the public as a speaker; but when our rights are trampled upon and we appeal in vain to legislators, what shall we do but appeal to the people? Shall not our voice be heard, and our rights acknowledged here; shall it be said again to the daughters of New England, that they have no political rights and are not subject to legislative action? It is for the workingmen of this country to answer these questions — what shall we expect at your hands in future?⁴¹

As if reminded by her last sentence that her organization's fate was indeed in the hands of these workingmen she was so boldly challenging, Bagley added a piece of humble pie: "We do not expect to enter the field as soldiers in this great warfare; but we would like the heroines of the Revolution, be permitted to furnish the soldiers with a blanket or replenish their knapsacks from our pantries."⁴²

Despite an ebullient and harmonious July 4th celebration at Woburn which was attended by some 200 delegates, many of whom were women, the NEWA, one critical observer felt, was in danger of being split between reformers and workers.⁴³ William Young, editor of the *Voice of Industry*, a new weekly newspaper located in Fitchburg and devoted to the "speedy amelioration of the laboring classes", issued a word of friendly advice to "our friends at Brook Farm and some others".⁴⁴ Young explained that workers were interested in reform schemes but that they were not, perhaps, ready for the "strong measures" advocated at the May meeting by Associationists. For this reason, Young and some others would refuse to adopt some Associationist measures at an official convention of the NEWA even though they might approve of the resolutions privately: "The reason is very obvious — we then should cut ourselves loose from many good and honest workingmen who are willing to go with us as far as they can see and understand."⁴⁵ Therefore, Young suggested that "while we are agitating the various speedy and partial ameliorations; beginning at the incipient stages of our glorious reform... let our friends of social science and philosophy continue to perfect their system of human elevation and receive all who are prepared for so high a stand." For "there exists no sound reason for disunion; our cause is one; our aim is one; our principles are harmonious."⁴⁶

The "strong measures" Young mentioned almost certainly revolved around the primary goal of Association at this time: the formation of model communities or "phalanxes", organized according to the principles of Charles Fourier as interpreted by his American disciple, Albert Brisbane. Associationists rejected the institutions and class structure of western industrializing society. They believed that capitalist society had to be totally transformed by new institutional arrangements which

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ For July 4th see *ibid.*, 10 July 1845.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 29 May 1845 and 12 June 1845.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 12 June 1845.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

would establish cooperative production in both agriculture and industry in place of competitive production; the Associationist term for this was "attractive industry". The present competitive, individualistic society was being torn apart by "false" class antagonisms and would fall eventually into a state of barbarism. To avoid this catastrophe Associationists had established a dozen or so phalanxes by the mid-1840s to serve as models for a projected new social order. Ideally they consisted of about 200 inhabitants. Each phalanx member performed labour according to his or her ability. Property was not communal but in the form of a joint-stock company. In accordance with Fourier's equation for dividing wealth (accrued labour), five-twelfths went to labour, four-twelfths to capital (which represented "past labour") and three-twelfths to talent. Associationist ideas and activities were discussed in *The Harbinger* (1845-1849), a weekly newspaper published by a committee consisting mainly of Brook Farm residents; it served as Association's official organ. Horace Greeley's *New York Daily Tribune* also printed a weekly column on Association in the 1840s.⁴⁷

Mechanics and factory operatives found it difficult to visualize phalanx living as the solution to their problems, but they were attracted to the Associationist critique of contemporary society. Although Associationists envisioned a place for the "producer" capitalist in their new social order, they decried the inequities perpetrated by the present "coalition of shameless capitalists".⁴⁸ Articles on poor living and working conditions among the working classes appeared in *The Harbinger*. For instance, in November 1846 it printed a two-page article on the "false association" of the Lowell factory system.⁴⁹

Associationists sometimes displayed an arrogant élitism towards the working class, but more often they recognized that workers had to manage their own affairs. In July 1846 an editorial in *The Harbinger* asserted, perhaps in response to Young's comments, that Associationists did not wish to control working-class associations; they merely wished to propagate their general theories to as wide an audience as possible. Associationists would serve as the intellectual gadflies of the labour movement and would rouse workers from their "apathy". Otherwise, "the time will come when the evils now gathering, will burst upon the astonished workmen in tremendous fury, and when their unwilling eyes will open to the fact of their true position."⁵⁰

At the September meeting of the NEWA in Fall River Young's prophecy that a rift between reformers and workers was imminent came true. Despite the conciliatory attitude expressed in *The Harbinger* a certain tension existed at this time between Associationists and workers. Two controversial resolutions were presented which were worded so as to be mutually exclusive. One stated that "a resort to the Polls is the only practical and effectual measure which the Workingmen can at pre-

⁴⁷ In addition to *The Harbinger* and the *New York Daily Tribune* see A. E. BESTOR, "Albert Brisbane — Propagandist for Socialism in the 1840s", *New York History*, XXVIII (1947): 128-58, and Albert and Redelia BRISBANE, *Albert Brisbane, A Mental Biography; with a Character Study by his Wife, Redelia Brisbane* (Boston, 1893).

⁴⁸ *The Harbinger*, 11 September 1847.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 November 1846.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 26 July 1845.

sent adopt for the defense of their rights."⁵¹ The other declared that since "all means of Reform heretofore offered by the friends of Social Reform, have failed to unite the producing classes, much less attract their attention, therefore, resolved, that Protective Charity and concert of action in the purchase of the necessaries of life, are the only means to the end, to obtain that union which will end in their amelioration." Associationist Ryckman spoke against the latter resolution as too narrow. He urged that the NEWA keep in mind its broader goals and supported the ballot box as one of the proper strategies labour could pursue to "disenthral the laborer from the power of misused capital".⁵² However, the resolution on protective charity related to the newly formed Workingmen's Protective Union, a consumer cooperative organization founded by Boston mechanics, and had the full support of the workers.⁵³ The controversy created at this meeting carried over to October in Lowell where the adjourned NEWA reconvened. Ryckman and other Associationists were absent. After endorsing the *Voice of Industry* as the association's official organ, the members of the convention compromised on the two September resolutions. The delegates resolved that both the ballot and protective charity were useful methods for improving the workers' conditions; the section of the resolution on protective charity which had commented on the failure of the "friends of Social Reform" was dropped.⁵⁴

The October NEWA meeting demonstrated that workers would try to retain a broad outlook by accepting more than one avenue as valid for achieving reform objectives. But workers were also determined to push strenuously to secure bread-and-butter goals. Throughout most of 1846 the NEWA concentrated its efforts on the ten-hour day and consumer cooperatives. When Associationists and Land Reformers learned to accept these goals as their own, they found themselves in late 1846 and 1847 once again active participants in the labour-reform movement. But for most of 1846 they sat on the sidelines. It is instructive to see how at least one group of labour-reformers, the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (LFLRA), managed to ignore the controversy between workers and Associationists at this time and to take instead what they felt they needed from each group in order to advance their own objectives.

According to the preamble of its constitution, the purpose of LFLRA "in the present age of improvement" was to "throw off the shackles which are binding us in ignorance and servitude and which prevent us from rising to that scale of being for which God designed us." Accepting the Associationist attitude that the labourer was "a slave to a false and debasing state of society", the preamble stated single-mindedly: "There must be reasonable hours for manual labor, and a just portion of time allowed for the cultivation of the mental and moral facilities." Proper cultivation of the mind would create self-respecting labourers who would then "merit the

⁵¹ *Voice of Industry*, 18 September 1845.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Ironically, the committee which first recommended the establishment of protective unions included John Allen, an Associationist, among the other members who represented the Boston Mechanics' and Laborers' Association. This committee reported that it wished to found "a sort of Fourier Association". "Working Man's Advocate", 11 January 1845", cited in COMMONS, *et al.*, *Documentary History*, VIII: 263.

⁵⁴ *Voice of Industry*, 7 November 1845. *The Harbinger* regretted that it had not been able to send delegates to the Fall River meeting, evidently not realizing Ryckman's presence, but wished the workers well. *The Harbinger*, 4 October 1845.

companionship and esteem of their fellow beings". The LFLRA did not see itself as functioning as a trade union. Article Nine of the constitution stated that the LFLRA disapproved of all "hostile measures" such as strikes and turnouts. Nevertheless, if all "pacific measures" proved abortive, it would be the duty of every member "to assert and maintain that Independence which our brave ancestors bequeathed us, and sealed with their blood".⁵⁵

The Lowell association was fortunate to possess leaders of outstanding ability. Sarah Bagley, the President in both 1845 and 1846, described herself as "a common-schooled New England factory operative".⁵⁶ She had worked in the mills eight and one-half years. Bagley was an able speaker and possessed a magnetic personality.⁵⁷ Her special skills in writing and speaking won many recruits to the mill women's crusade for the ten-hour day. Huldah J. Stone, the Secretary of the LFLRA in 1845 and 1846, appears to have been the organizational genius of the association. Besides serving as Secretary to the LFLRA, Stone held many important committee posts in the NEWA and was repeatedly chosen its Recording Secretary. She became correspondent to the Female Department of the *Voice* and provided it with many articles. Both the tireless Bagley and the equally indefatigable Stone attended the National Land Reform Industrial Congresses as delegates of the LFLRA. They also became members of the American Union of Associationists in 1846.

As the programme of the LFLRA developed throughout 1845, it became in effect a three-pronged offensive: propaganda, political agitation and organizational work among mill women in neighbouring towns. In a militant and fighting spirit the association published its first *Factory Tract* in October 1845 which demonstrated a determination to resist the erosion of the factory operatives' position in New England society:

In the strength of our united influence we will soon show these *drivelling* cotton lords, this mushroom aristocracy of New England, who so arrogantly aspire to lord it over God's heritage, that our rights cannot be trampled upon with impunity; that we will not longer submit to that arbitrary power which has for the last ten years been so abundantly exercised over us.⁵⁸

The *Factory Tract* was not the only propaganda tool utilized by the association members. They also established a Female Department as a regular feature of the weekly format of the *Voice* in January 1846.⁵⁹ In this section the same topics appeared week after week: poor working conditions, necessity for the ten-hour day, importance of organized resistance against the corporations, and vaguely conceived plans for a better society.⁶⁰ The members of the LFLRA established a committee in Au-

⁵⁵ *Voice of Industry*, 27 February 1846.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 May 1846.

⁵⁷ At the July 4th, 1845 Workingmen's Association celebration the *Voice* correspondent had been struck by Bagley's attractive personality. He described her as "a lady of superior talents and accomplishments" and added that Bagley's "refined and delicate feelings gave a thrilling power to her language and spell-bound this large auditory". *Ibid.*, 10 July 1845.

⁵⁸ *Factory Tracts*, No. 1, p. 7.

⁵⁹ *Voice of Industry*, 7 November 1845.

⁶⁰ Another theme was that of women's rights, specifically the idea that women, as the standard bearers of the morality of society, were dutybound to join the reform of the time. See for instance, *ibid.*, 9 January 1846. This notion that women had the right as well as the duty to participate in reform activities was also forcefully expressed in *The Harbinger*, 18 July 1846.

gust 1845 to expose the untruths of pro-corporation propaganda, and in early 1846 they organized an Industrial Reform Lyceum to facilitate the reform cause.⁶¹ These women also held fairs and social gatherings and sponsored improvement circles in order to influence uncommitted factory workers as well as the community at large,⁶² but the main thrust of their propaganda work revolved around what became the labour-reform movement's main objective in 1846: the ten-hour work day.

In the very first months of 1845 the LFLRA had pledged its support of the ten-hour day petition campaign. Petitions had flowed into the state legislature from 1842 onwards urging passage of a law to limit the hours of work in factories to ten per day.⁶³ It was not until 1845, when the LFLRA took the initiative in the campaign, that any action was taken by the legislature to investigate the reasons behind the workers' demand for a shorter work day.

In response to petitions which could no longer be ignored, the Massachusetts legislature decided in early 1845 to conduct an investigation of factory conditions within its state. A committee was appointed by the House which was chaired by William Schouler, editor and proprietor of the pro-corporation Whig newspaper, the *Lowell Courier*, and part-owner of the factory women's magazine, the *Lowell Offering*.⁶⁴ The committee asked representatives for the petitioners to appear before them, specifically requesting that women form the major part of the workers' group. In the words of Schouler: "I would inform you that as the greater part of the petitioners are females, it will be necessary for them to make the defence, or we shall be under the necessity of laying it aside."⁶⁵ Schouler was perhaps surprised when Bagley, speaking for the petitioners, replied that a group of women would be happy to appear before a House committee hearing. Six women and three men testified before the Schouler committee.

The six women represented the petitioners well. Only one of the women appeared to be less than enthusiastic about ten-hour legislation. Bagley and the other four women stressed the poor work conditions in the factories and provided relevant data to support their position that twelve to thirteen-hour work days were detrimental to health.⁶⁶ After listening to the testimonies of the mill workers, the committee conducted an investigation of Lowell mills. However, with Schouler as chairman, the outcome of the investigation was never really in doubt.

The committee decided against legislation for the ten-hour day, although it admitted that a corporation could be regulated by the legislature which had chartered it. While the committee felt that conditions of work were less than perfect, it declared that if a ten hour law were enacted for Massachusetts factories, cotton mills

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 14 August 1845 and 3 April 1846.

⁶² See for instance, *ibid.*, 23 January 1846, 13 February 1846, 24 April 1846 and 22 May 1846.

⁶³ The impetus for this campaign came largely from President Van Buren's executive order of 1840 which decreed that government employees would not be required to work more than ten hours per day.

⁶⁴ Schouler made the relationship between the *Courier* and the *Offering* explicit when, in 1842, he announced that, though the *Offering* was written and edited by operatives, the printing and publishing tasks were the responsibility of his paper. *Lowell Courier*, 20 August 1842.

⁶⁵ *Voice of Industry*, 18 September 1846.

⁶⁶ *Massachusetts House Documents*, No. 50, pp. 2-6.

in other northern states, which were not similarly restricted, would be at a competitive advantage. It argued that ten-hour legislation would, in effect, "close the gate of every mill in the State".⁶⁷ The members of the House committee were firmly committed to the doctrine of free contract and asserted that "labor is intelligent enough to make its own bargains, and look out for its own interests without any interference from us." As proof of this statement, the committee pointed to "the intelligent and virtuous men and women who appeared in support of this petition, before the Committee". The committee smugly concluded that "labor is on an equality with capital, and indeed controls it."⁶⁸

The negative decision reached by the House committee convinced the LFLRA to campaign against Schouler's re-election in the fall of 1845.⁶⁹ In November the editors of the *Voice* announced that Schouler had been defeated at the polls.⁷⁰ By this time, too, the widely-heralded *Lowell Offering*, which was written and edited exclusively by factory women, had folded, which pleased the members of the LFLRA. They had sought throughout the year to discredit the editors of the pro-corporation *Offering*, who had consistently refused to publish articles which were more than mildly critical of the conditions in the Lowell factories and boarding houses.⁷¹

With Schouler's influence muffled, at least in the legislature, and victory over the *Offering* complete, the LFLRA was free to devote most of its time to the ten-hour campaign. It began in December to send out form petitions to neighbouring towns "asking the Legislature to prohibit incorporated companies from employing one set of hands more than ten hours per day".⁷² In April 1846 the *Voice* announced that almost 5,000 Lowell signatures and 10,000 signatures from other towns had been sent to the legislature in the form of petitions requesting the ten-hour day.⁷³ Although the 1846 committee had a new chairman, Nathaniel Borden of Fall River, the verdict, this time from the Senate, was negative. Especially irksome was the fact that Borden had utilized the findings of the Schouler committee in deciding that ten-hour legislation was not necessary.⁷⁴

This second defeat was not enough to convince the LFLRA that it was time to capitulate. At the April 1846 meeting of the Workingmen's Association in Lowell,

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁶⁹ *Voice of Industry*, 9 January 1846. The LFLRA's resolution to keep Schouler "in the 'city of spindles' where he belongs" was published in the *Voice* many months after the fact.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 14 November 1845. The LFLRA had not heard the last of Schouler. Unable to find an issue upon which to discredit the association's officers, Schouler turned to John Cluer, a British weaver who was involved in the Workingmen's Association and who accompanied Bagley on speaking tours to other factory towns. Cluer's reputation was clouded with rumours of intemperance and bigamy which Schouler exploited. The *Voice* defended Cluer, and a group of Lowell mechanics and workingmen even hired one of their number, Joel Hatch, to investigate Cluer's past in hopes of clearing his name. *Ibid.*, 23 January 1846, 30 January 1846, 20 February 1846 and 27 February 1846. However, it appears that Schouler's smear campaign was successful as it cast some doubt over the movement's leadership.

⁷¹ For the anti-*Offering* propaganda campaign by the LFLRA and the outcome see *ibid.*, 10 July 1845 and 25 September 1845. See also JOSEPHSON, *Golden Threads*, p. 188.

⁷² *Voice of Industry*, 26 December 1845.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 17 April 1846.

⁷⁴ See *Massachusetts Senate Documents*, 1846, No. 81.

the women joined with the rest of the delegates in unanimously adopting veteran labour leader Seth Luther's resolution calling for a determined ten-hour campaign:

The Committee recommend agitation by the press; by lectures and tracts on this subject, in all places where manufactories are established; also in all towns, cities and villages [sic] in N. England where the Ten Hour system is not already established.⁷⁵

Though the Workingmen's Association strongly endorsed consumer co-operatives, the main preoccupation of the organization in the spring of 1846 remained the ten-hour day.

At this convention Seth Luther declared that the ten-hour campaign's failure was due in part to worker apathy. This lack of working-class involvement in labour reform was taken to heart by the women of the LFLRA. Already in the closing weeks of 1845 association leaders had been busy proselytizing the ten-hour cause in various sections of New England. In December Bagley travelled to Manchester at the request of women operatives who wished to form a female labour association. She presented the interested women with a constitution which they adopted, followed by the selection of officers. Sixty operatives signed up immediately, while many others were reported to be eager to join at the first "favorable opportunity".⁷⁶ In a letter addressed to its sister organization a few days later, the women of the association made it quite plain that they wished to restore lost status to the "real producers" of society. In like manner the time had also come for women to demand justice: "Too long have our females been treated like as many senseless automatons in the kitchens of the purse-proud aristocrats of the Republic."⁷⁷

In January 1846 Bagley received another invitation from factory women, this time in Fitchburg, to help them form a society.⁷⁸ By May the *Voice* reported the existence of two more female labour reform associations, both in Nashua, New Hampshire.⁷⁹ Within the year, Dover, New Hampshire, too, boasted its own female association.⁸⁰ All of these associations sent delegates to the Workingmen's Association conventions; their members contributed much time and energy to spreading ten-hour day propaganda.

During this period the LFLRA chapter remained by far the most active despite the proliferation of new associations. In March 1846 the Lowell association bought the printing press of the *Voice* which was now located in Lowell.⁸¹ William Young was forced to retire from the editor's chair because of ill health in April, and for a time a publishing committee consisting of Bagley, Joel Hatch and J. S. Fletcher carried on in Young's stead.⁸² Then in May the *Voice* announced that Bagley would take over the chief editorial reins. In her introductory editorial Bagley hinted at the direction the *Voice* would take under her guidance:

Our end, aim, and soul's wish, is the improvement of the condition of the laboring masses. The division of labor consequent upon the introduction of machinery, while it

⁷⁵ *Voice of Industry*, 10 April 1846.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 19 December 1845.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 25 December 1845.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 9 January 1846.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 22 May 1846.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 July 1847.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 24 April 1846.

⁸² *Ibid.*

has enhanced the general stock of human production, and thereby benefitted the general weal, has at the same time entailed terrible calamity — unutterable woe... The great evil that accrues from the introduction of machinery, and division of labor, is the *caste* it gives to society. — Two great principles must be introduced as a basis for the organization of the factory system in this country, or the same results are to flow in here that have caused such crying anguish in the old world. *Capital must not be permitted to demand so much of labor. Education of the mass, must be made to possess an individual certainty, past escape.*⁸³

Bagley's comments were not solely concerned with "great" principles. Referring to a recent threat made by a corporation agent that he intended to fire individuals involved in the LFLRA, she blasted out a challenge which might have shocked some of the subscribers to the *Voice* for it revealed that Bagley, in spite of her Associationist beliefs, subscribed to a primitive version of the class struggle:

What! Deprive us, after working thirteen hours, of the poor privilege of finding fault — of saying our lot is a hard one! Intentionally turn away a girl unjustly persecuted, as men have been persecuted, to our knowledge, for free expression of honest political opinions! We will make the name of him who dares the act, stink with every wind, from all points of the compass. His name shall be a by-word among all laboring men, and he shall be hissed in the streets, and in all the cities of this widespread republic; for our name is legion though our oppression be great.⁸⁴

This same issue contained a report that a group of tough-minded members of the LFLRA, weavers in the Massachusetts Corporation of Lowell, who had been ordered to take on another loom at one cent less per piece, had "kept inviolate" a pledge to refuse additional work without adequate compensation.⁸⁵ This action reveals a streak of trade-union consciousness in at least one group of LFLRA members.

Unfortunately for the Lowell women, militancy and "great principles" were not sufficient means for achieving better working conditions in the mills. By mid-1846 the propaganda and petition campaigns had failed to bring results. The Lowell factory women, in tune with the mood of many other workers in this decade, opposed the use of the strike, thus precluding the development of true trade-union structures.⁸⁶ John Cluer, an English weaver and ex-Chartist who was active in the Workingmen's Association, had suggested in late 1845 that if the petition campaign failed, a general strike of New England mill operatives and mechanics should be called.⁸⁷ At first workers appeared to approve of Cluer's plan, but by June 1846 this strategy had been rejected by operatives and factory mechanics. Workers were dejected and discouraged. Bagley's unexplained resignation from the editor's chair in June and her gradual withdrawal from the LFLRA's activities did not help. John Allen, an outspoken Associationist, replaced Bagley as editor of the *Voice*. His approach, as indicated in his first editorial, was less combative than that of his pre-

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 15 May 1846.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* In September the LFLRA urged all women fired without regular discharge for whatever reason to report to the Association so that it could institute legal proceedings against the guilty corporation for "conspiracy and libel"! However, nothing more is heard of this bold plan in subsequent issues of the *Voice*. *Ibid.*, 11 September 1846.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 15 May 1846.

⁸⁶ For instance, Article Nine of the Constitution of the Dover Labor Reform League used the same words which were contained in the Constitution of the LFLRA. It stated its disapproval of "all hostile measures... until all pacific measures prove abortive". *Ibid.*, 2 April 1847.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 5 December 1845.

decessors.⁸⁸ In fact, the following statement could be interpreted as a veiled attack on previous *Voice* editors:

It [the *Voice*] will endeavor to remove the causes of evil, rather than quarrel with their effects. It will not, therefore, deal in low personalities, in private abuse, in condemnation of individuals, nor in indiscriminate warfare upon classes.⁸⁹

Except for the change in the *Voice* editorial staff, summer 1846 constituted an apparent hiatus in the history of the LFLRA and the NEWA. Not much organized activity was reported for either association. Nevertheless, when the NEWA convened in Nashua in September it became obvious that the summer months had not been wasted. A committee had been engaged in evaluating the aims and organizational structure of the NEWA, and change was in the air. John Allen, business committee spokesman, made the opening remarks. He presented four resolutions pertaining to working conditions in the mills, the ten-hour day and anti-labour practices such as the black-list. These resolutions later passed with ease. Before they came to a vote the committee responsible for reorganizing the NEWA along more successful lines presented a preamble and constitution for a new association which the convention delegates adopted: "The Labor Reform League of New England" (LRL). The preamble specifically mentioned land reform and consumer cooperatives — "guaranteeism in Protective Union".⁹⁰ The aim of the League, according to the constitution, would be "the promulgation of the principles of Industrial Reform by public lectures and discussions, by the circulation of books and tracts, and by the support of a weekly paper [the *Voice*,] which shall be the organ of the movement".⁹¹ The Industrial Reform Pledge of George Evans's National Reform Association was passed as a resolution, and the members of the LRL committed themselves to pressuring political candidates into accepting the pledge goals of free land for homesteaders and the ten-hour day for workers.⁹² The delegates also chose representatives to attend the National Reform Convention in October. This group included Allen, Bagley, Stone and Mehitable Eastman, who was Secretary and former President of the Manchester Female Labor Reform Association. Three members of the LFLRA became officers for the new LRL: Stone, Recording Secretary, and Mary Emerson and C. N. M. Quimby, Directors. Young, the former *Voice* editor, became Corresponding Secretary. David Bryant, a prominent land reformer from Boston, was chosen President.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 19 July 1846.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 19 June 1846.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2 October 1846.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² See *ibid.*, 16 October 1846 and subsequent issues of the *Voice* for the attempts of labour leaders, especially land reformers, to secure from political candidates endorsement of labour-reform measures. The Industrial Reform Pledge included the demand for the ten-hour day. The text read:

We whose names are annexed, desirous of restoring to man his Natural Right of Land, do solemnly agree, that we will not vote for any man for the Presidency or Congress who will not pledge himself in writing to use all the influence of his station, if elected, to prevent all further traffic in the Public Lands of the States and of the United States, and to cause them to be laid out in farms and lots for the free and exclusive use of actual settlers; or for any man for the Governorship or the Legislature who will not so pledge himself to the Freedom of the Public Lands, to a Limitation of the quantity of land to be obtained by any individual hereafter in this State, or to the exemption of the Homestead from any future debt or mortgage, and to a limitation to ten of the hours of daily labor on public works or in establishments chartered by law. (*Ibid.*, 25 September 1846).

Clearly land reform was ascendant at this convention, but almost equal weight must be accorded the protective union movement for delegates spent a great deal of time discussing consumer cooperatives. Resolutions favouring the creation of protective unions throughout New England were passed with the support of Associationists like Allen, land reformers like Bryant and operatives like Eastman. Moreover, Eastman made sure that the ten-hour struggle was not entirely swept under the rug. She reported a membership of 300 operatives in the Manchester organization and declared that the association was continuing its campaign for the shorter work day.⁹³

Dating from this meeting, and in subsequent conventions of the LRL in 1847, land reform, protective unions and the ten-hour day shared the spotlight as labour-reform goals. Auxiliary associations of the LRL, whose members signed the Industrial Reform Pledge, sprang up in Lowell, Dover, Exeter and Clintonville.⁹⁴ Protective unions rapidly fanned out from Boston where the first union had been formed in the autumn of 1845.⁹⁵ Meanwhile the ten-hour campaign churned ahead with renewed vitality. In February 1847 a petition was sent to the legislature of Massachusetts under the auspices of the LRL, signed by Stone and Bryant.⁹⁶ In July 1847 a *Voice* editorial proudly reported the passage of the New Hampshire ten-hour bill and warmly urged that other state legislatures follow this example. When the British ten-hour bill also passed in the same month, solidarity with British workers was expressed and their success cheered.⁹⁷

A new mood of cooperation among reformers and workers enveloped the LRL meetings of January, March and July 1847. Associationists, who had always supported the ten-hour day, had been won over to the other two goals of labour reform.⁹⁸ They now felt that before the transformed cooperative society could emerge, a transition period of "Guaranteeism" had to intervene which would consist of various experiments in "partial association".⁹⁹ Greeley, for example, envisioned a weaving together of the inalienable homestead and some of the most important characteristics of the phalanx:

Suppose one hundred families, all believers in the system of Association, resolve to seek a home in the West. They will send a few of their number in advance to make observations and purchase land. Then they will go on and build temporary habitations and clear

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 2 October 1846.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25 September 1846, 26 March 1847 and 2 April 1847.

⁹⁵ See ROZWENC, *Cooperatives*, for this development. From early 1846 the *Voice* carried regular announcements of protective union meetings in towns throughout New England. For instance, in early 1846 "a number of the workmen and women of Lowell met for the purpose of organizing a 'protective Union'". *Voice of Industry*, 2 January 1846.

⁹⁶ *Massachusetts Archives*, 1847, No. 12232.

⁹⁷ See *Voice of Industry*, 9 July 1847 and subsequent July issues of the *Voice*.

⁹⁸ Swift mentions that John Allen and Lewis Ryckman were involved in the formation of the NEWA "which sought specifically to secure by legislation a ten-hour working day". SWIFT, *Brook Farm*, p. 112. See also *The Condition of Labor* (Boston, 1847). This pamphlet was presented to the LRL in January 1847 by an Associationist, one "Mr. Hosmer", probably Charles Hosmer, a one-time Brook Farm resident. SWIFT, *Brook Farm*, p. 119. Hosmer was very sympathetic to all measures suggested at the January meeting as means for ameliorating the worker's condition from the ten-hour day to the inalienable homestead and free trade. After urging these measures he also pointed towards protective union as cooperative experiments which could help to usher in a society of mutuality instead of the present one of competition, want and degradation.

⁹⁹ *The Harbinger*, 11 September 1847.

the land, getting at first only a subsistence. By and by they erect a permanent, fire-proof, unitary building large enough to accommodate the whole Association, and combining the highest degree of convenience, economy and beauty... All will then work for each and each for all. All Children will be guaranteed an *integral education*, and both study and labor will be rendered *attractive*.¹⁰⁰

As for protective unions, *The Harbinger* by 1847 was heartily endorsing them:

We rejoice in their prosperity. It is a favorable omen that they have been welcomed with such eagerness by those of the working classes, who have families to support... In this way, a complete system of Guaranteeism may be established, which will demonstrate to every one the advantages of combination, and prepare the way for the general introduction of the Associated order, on a scale of sufficient magnitude to do justice to the subject.¹⁰¹

Some Associationists, like Allen and Ryckman, became active in National Reform.¹⁰² Others, like John Orvis, a Brook Farm resident who served as a lecturer for Association and as editor of the *Voice* in its last days in 1848, devoted time to the protective union movement.¹⁰³ Similarly, National Reformers, who demanded the ten-hour day in their Industrial Reform Pledge, finally endorsed protective unions at their June 1847 Industrial Congress.¹⁰⁴

Although the Manchester and Dover female reform associations were active and vocal in the conventions of the LRL throughout 1847, the LFLRA, already in late 1846, was failing. In September 1846 Bagley was not present at the meeting which created the LRL; instead she was attending the American Union of Associationists' convention in Boston.¹⁰⁵ Stone presented the LFLRA report. Long range and reformist in tone, without any mention of specific programmes to improve immediately the operatives' position in the factory or in the boarding house, the report lacked the fighting spirit which had been characteristic of the association in the past:

It will not be expected by this Convention, that in the three short months, any great or important changes should have occurred in our humble Association. All truly noble and beneficial reforms have ever moved with slow, but sure and permanent steps.¹⁰⁶

In January 1847 the LFLRA gave up its ownership of the *Voice* press.¹⁰⁷ In the same month it transformed itself into the "Lowell Female Industrial Reform and

¹⁰⁰ *Voice of Industry*, 9 April 1847.

¹⁰¹ *The Harbinger*, 16 October 1847.

¹⁰² Allen served on the standing committee of the Massachusetts Auxiliary National and State Reform Association in 1847 (*Voice of Industry*, 16 October 1846). Ryckman lectured for National Reform (ZAHLE, *Eastern Workingmen*, p. 46).

¹⁰³ *The Harbinger*, 7 August 1847, *Voice of Industry*, 5 November 1846, Rozwenc, *Cooperatives*, p. 52. Rozwenc mentions that Orvis became a lecturer for the Sovereigns of Industry, a cooperative society of the 1870s, in his later career (p. 121).

¹⁰⁴ *Voice of Industry*, 25 June 1847.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 18 September 1846. This is the last mention of Bagley in relation to the labour-reform movement. In February 1846 she had been chosen to serve as Lowell's first telegraph operator. Evidently involvement in her new job kept her too busy to continue with her reform activities. See Madeleine B. STERN, "America's First Woman Telegrapher: Sarah G. Bagley", in *We the Women* (New York, 1963), pp. 79-94.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 2 October 1846.

¹⁰⁷ Young returned to the editorial chair, assisted this time by Eastman from Manchester. They ran the paper henceforth as an "individual affair" though the *Voice* continued to be captioned "Organ of the New England Labor Reform League" until September 1847, when the editorship of the *Voice* switched to D. H. Jaques, a Lowell Associationist, at which time the caption was changed to "An Organ of the People" (*ibid.*, 12 February 1847 and 3 September 1847).

Mutual Aid Society". This association was dedicated to "the diffusion of correct principles and useful practical knowledge among its members" as well as to "the relieving and aiding of all who may be sick, or in want of the comforts and necessities of life, or standing in need of the counsels and sympathies of true and benevolent hearts".¹⁰⁸ Article Two of the new society's constitution set forth an interpretation of the theory of self-help which was particularly designed to prove relevant to women. It was the intention of the society:

to encourage and assist each other in self-culture, intellectual and moral, that we may be fitted for and occupy that station in society, which the truly good and useful ever should. That we may know and respect our own individual rights and privileges as females, and be prepared, understandingly, to maintain and enjoy them, irrespective of concentrated wealth or aristocratic usages of an anti-republican state of society.¹⁰⁹

The members established two charitable committees as well as a sick fund. Mary Emerson was elected President, and Stone was, predictably, chosen Secretary.

Not much is known of the Mutual Aid Society's activities subsequent to its formation, although weekly announcements appeared in the *Voice* throughout 1847 regarding regular meeting place and time. Emerson, the President, was also Secretary of the Lowell Union of Associationists.¹¹⁰ This is not surprising. One form of "partial association" according to the Associationist doctrine of Guaranteeism was the mutual aid society.¹¹¹ No doubt the Lowell Union helped to convince key members in the LFLRA that mutual aid was consistent with their reform goals.¹¹² The constitution of the new society was sprinkled with Associationist language and goals. For instance, in addition to the goal of "self-culture" the aim of "rendering... Industry honourable and attractive" was mentioned.¹¹³ The officers may have felt that a self-help oriented society would be more appealing to Lowell operatives than the more general reform association had been. Membership in the LFLRA never exceeded 500; over 7,000 women toiled as operatives in the Lowell mills in these years.

Even though the LFLRA, in being absorbed, disappeared, there are a few signs that some of the women involved in the Mutual Aid Society did not neglect other avenues of reform. In August 1847 Emerson, as Secretary of the Lowell Union of Associationists, reported: "Some of our best members are so much engaged in the 'Protective Union,' and other *primary* branches of Reform, as to prevent their doing as much as their noble hearts dictate."¹¹⁴ Unfortunately Emerson does not reveal who the members were though she reported there were both female and male members, "mostly operatives and mechanics".¹¹⁵ Active membership declined

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 8 January 1847.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12 March 1847. The Lowell Union was an auxiliary of the American Union of Associationists whose President in 1847 was Horace Greeley.

¹¹¹ *The Harbinger*, 11 September 1847 and ROZWENC, *Cooperatives*, p. 4.

¹¹² Several LFLRA members, including Bagley and Stone, attended meetings of the American Union of Associationists. See for instance, *Voice of Industry*, 18 September 1846.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 8 January 1847.

¹¹⁴ *The Harbinger*, 7 August 1847. My emphasis. The Lowell Union had helped the LFLRA found the Industrial Reform Lyceum in 1846. In spring 1847 the Lowell Union sponsored a lecture series — "Lectures for the People" — whose speakers included Horace Greeley, W. H. Channing and Albert Brisbane (*Voice of Industry*, 3 April 1847, 9 April 1847 and 16 April 1847).

¹¹⁵ *Voice of Industry*, 29 May and 7 August 1847.

from a high of eighty in 1846 to thirty by August 1847; during this period one-third of the membership had left Lowell.¹¹⁶

It is likely that membership in the Mutual Aid Society was also down by the end of 1847. For increasingly at this time, native New England women were being replaced in the mills by the more desperate Irish, who as recent immigrants to America had no choice but to accept abject work conditions. The New England women remaining in the factories were "daughters of poverty" who probably preferred employment, even with long hours and several looms to tend, to the risks involved in labour-reform activity.¹¹⁷

The labour-reform cause among other workers faded quickly after the dénouement of the LFLRA, as the proceedings of the last two meetings of the LRL in 1848 indicate. In January 1848 and in March 1848 the LRL met and passed resolutions similar to those adopted in the enthusiastic 1847 meetings. Only a few women attended. Protective Unionists were in the majority although land reformers and working-class proponents of the ten-hour day like John Cluer attended.¹¹⁸ It is unclear how many mechanics came to these meetings; the new editors of the *Voice*, Associationists John Orvis and D. H. Jaques, indicated that worker support was minimal despite the presence of protective unionists.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the New Hampshire ten-hour law was a dead-letter; corporations forced workers to sign "special contracts" for longer working days on pain of dismissal. Without the issue of the ten-hour day to rally all workers and reformers under one banner, the various groups within the LRL began splitting off into their respective parent organizations, particularly the National Reform Association and the Workingmen's Protective Union.¹²⁰ At the March meeting of the LRL the small group of delegates present, which included Stone and Emerson, heard only two general resolutions dealing with bettering workers' rights and conditions of labour. Stone, always intent upon finding the silver lining, reported: "Although our numbers were small, still we felt to thank God, and take courage, for the true spirit was with us... Adjourned, *sine die*."¹²¹ The heady, hopeful days of the 1840s labour-reform movement among New England workers and reformers were at an end.

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From 1845 to 1848 working-class and middle-class people came together under the banner of a labour-reform movement not only to register their disapproval of poor working conditions but also to express their disapproval of the institutional and class structures of an emerging industrial capitalist society. As workers, Land Reformers, or Associationists they demanded a more equitable distribution of the means of production; they based their desire for new property arrangements

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ See Tom DUBLIN's insightful study of Lowell mill workers in the period between 1830 and 1860, *Women at Work* (New York, 1979).

¹¹⁸ Most offices were now held by protective unionists. See proceedings of these two meetings, *ibid.*, 28 January 1848 and 31 March 1848.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 January 1848.

¹²⁰ By April 1848 the *Voice* listed fifty-two protective union branches throughout New England. *Ibid.*, 14 April 1848.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 31 March 1848.

upon the notion that the “producer” was entitled to a just share of the wealth which he or she produced. Land Reform in seeking the reorganization of only the agrarian means of production was perhaps more “backward-looking” than Association which dimly recognized that industrial capitalism was here to stay and had to be accommodated. Moreover, Association, more than Land Reform, adapted itself to working-class demands for a better standard of living when it endorsed and promoted the co-operative movement. Indeed, as Edwin Rozwenc points out, Association doubtless helped to shape the course of the cooperative movement by making workers in the 1840s “association conscious”.¹²²

The “solutions” — shorter work day, free land for actual settlers, phalanx living, cooperatives — although partial and incapable of producing significant social change, represented a “reform” mentality which infected workers and non-workers alike. Certain skilled male workers returned to craft unionism and bread-and-butter issues in the 1850s, but the labour-reform mentality, or the desire to reconstitute capitalist institutions so as to secure to labour a larger share of the wealth which it produced, did not disappear. As David Montgomery’s remarkable study of the labour movement in the Reconstruction years demonstrates, workers, aided at times by “middle-class reformers”, continued to demand more than the bread-and-butter goals so applauded in the traditional interpretation of the labour movement.¹²³ It is a mistake to look primarily for the development of a unilineal trade-union movement in the nineteenth century. The labour movement was a much broader and richer entity; to slight its reform vision is to distort the past.

¹²² ROZWENC, *Cooperatives*, p. 117.

¹²³ See David MONTGOMERY, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872* (New York, 1967).