Study of some phases of the historiography of the Jacksonian period

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A STUDY OF SOME PHASES OF THE HISTORIOGRAPHY
OF THE JACKSONIAN PERIOD

by

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CHAPTER I
SOME HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE JACKSONIAN PERIOD UNTIL 1945

I

"The true point of view in the history of our nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West."¹ The growth of the West, according to Frederick Jackson Turner, not only is vital to the understanding of democratic America; but is specifically contributed to the triumph of Andrew Jackson in the presidential election of 1828.

Turner's argument revolves around three aspects: namely, the philosophy and practices of individualism, the evolution of political democracy and the development of sectionalism.

A. Stark individualism and love of equality were the characteristics of the Western settlers. It was not only a society in which the love of equality was dominant; it was also a competitive society. A man was deemed a man if he could survive the struggle for existence, irrespective of his social background; and the land was so abundant that every man might attain a position of economic independence. Political equality was thus based upon a real equality, free from the influence of European ideas and institutions. "It sought rather to express itself by choosing a man of the

people, than by the formation of elaborate governmental institutions." Because of these elements of individualistic competition, leadership easily developed. And after the war of 1812, Andrew Jackson became the leader of the American people. He became the hero of the Mississippi Valley, the symbol of their vague aspirations.

B. The irrepressible desire of the common man for political self-expression led to many radical changes in political concept and practice in these years. A natural result was the liberation of the suffrage. The new Western regions came into the Union as self-expressed democracies. Few states held out against this trend; in most, all adult white males were given the right to vote; and everywhere, too, the principle was rapidly being accepted that representation should be based upon population and not upon property. This marked a revolt, characteristic of the period, against the idea that property alone entitled a person to voting or office holding. By 1830 only a few states held to the old practice. Indeed, the principle of popular election was even applied to the judges of the state courts.

While the vote passed down to the people, the population in the West was also rapidly increasing. The United

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\(^2\) Ibid., p. 254.
States, in 1830, had a population of nearly thirteen millions. In 1800 only about one twentieth of the American people lived west of the Alleghenies; but when Jackson was inaugurated President, one third of the populace already lived in that region; so that the West by 1829 contained almost twice as many people as it had at the beginning of the century. This Western migration, of monumental consequence, increased the number of states from thirteen to twenty one. By 1829 the entire domain east of the Mississippi River had been carved into states except for Michigan, Wisconsin, and Florida; and beyond that river Louisiana and Missouri had won acceptance as members of the Union.

C. Turner's philosophy of sectionalism, as applied particularly to the period of 1830-1850, is best summed up in his own words:

Each section had its own interest and worked to make it effective in the entire United States. Within each section there were varied regions. . . . These regions limited sectional unanimity, especially in Presidential elections.

The American statesmen of the years between 1830 and 1850, at least, were, on the whole, representative of the sections from which they came, authentic exponents of these sections' fundamental traits and ideals; but they were more than this, for they had, also, to deal with the nation.

However, political leadership and political parties, while acting as elastic bands to hold the sections together, broke down in times of stress.

When measures of importance arose, party lines usually gave way to sectional divisions. Even at such times, party served as a moderating influence, forcing the adjustment and compromise between the sections in the policies of the leaders.4

Whether proclaiming a sectional or a national philosophy (says Turner), the leaders, in effect, were thinking in terms of their own section. Jackson expressed the attitude of the West; Calhoun voiced the interests of the Southeast; and Webster, the so-called Apostle of Nationalism, had his philosophy deeply shaped by New England sectional interests.

By 1828 the West had achieved such power that it was able to persuade the politicians to nominate a presidential candidate who could represent their ideas, as against the candidate (Adams) whose strength lay in the East. In order to understand the means by which Jackson won the presidency, Turner draws a distinction between the "Jackson men" and the "Jacksonian Democrats."5 The former included not only the trans-Alleghany followers of Old Hickory and kindred people of Pennsylvania, but also the tidewater aristocracy of the Southern seaboard. The latter, however, was based primarily

4Ibid., pp. 380-381.
5Ibid., p. 24.
upon the characteristics of the back country. The Southern vote to support Jackson was sizable. The leaders of the South, John Taylor and his followers, responding to the general democratic call, threw their forces to Jackson in order to defeat the combined forces of Adams of New England, and Clay of the Kentucky and Ohio Valleys. They expected to use Jackson to destroy the nationalistic policy of Clay—as embodied in the "American System" of protective tariffs and internal improvements—as well as to uphold slavery in the South. The Southern leaders were soon disillusioned. They had miscalculated the tempo of the time by failing to recognize Western self-consciousness and its determination to carry its own ideas into the conduct of the government. These ideas were, in reality, in conflict with those of the seaboard Southern states.

In the election of 1828 Jackson secured 178 electoral votes against 83 for Adams, and a popular vote of 647,000 against Adams's 508,000. Taken together, the traditionally Democratic portions of New York, practically all of Pennsylvania, the South Atlantic and South Central states (except Kentucky), and the almost unbroken area of Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri, voted for Jackson; New England and groups of counties which had followed the leadership of Clay, in Kentucky, Ohio and Virginia voted for Adams.6

6Ibid., pp. 28-30.
An eminent historian, Edward Channing, has emphasized that a "solid South" had elected a "Southern" slaveholder and cotton planter; aided by the Democracy of Pennsylvania and New York, it was primarily the South that had gained victory for Jackson. With this interpretation Turner does not agree. He admits that "if one conceives of the 'West' of that time as limited to Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, with their twenty four electoral votes, the 'West' could not have elected Jackson." But, according to his research, the South Atlantic and the South Central states were at that time separate sections, and upcountry and tidewater South Atlantic were far from "solid." Moreover, Delaware gave its votes to Adams, and Maryland was divided. What Turner means by the "West" of the time were, thus, those states of Kentucky, Missouri, Indiana, Illinois and Ohio of the Northwest, and Mississippi, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Alabama of the Southwest. They gave the election to Jackson. The result showed that an agricultural society, strongest in the regions of rural isolation rather than in the area of greater density of population and of greater wealth, had triumphed,

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for the first time, over the conservative, industrial, commercial, and manufacturing society of the New England type.9

II

While the frontier was generally accepted as vital in its contribution to Jacksonian Democracy, the impact of labor on the politics of that period has never been neglected by historians of nineteenth century America.

John R. Commons, commenting on the labor problems of the eighteen twenties, asserts:

The decreasing bargaining power of mechanics, resulting from the revolution in the means of marketing the product, coupled with the horrors of the depression, was doubtless sufficient to account for a labor movement. Though the movement derived its main motive from economic conditions, it was shaped principally by the political and social conditions of the time.10

Even Frederick J. Turner himself would not deny the fact that "about the time of triumphant Jacksonian Democracy, around 1830, labor became increasingly self-conscious and strikes were more frequently in evidence." The labor organizations "adopted their policy of giving their vote to

9Ibid.

whatever candidates would pledge themselves to support the working class.  

In her analysis of the presidential election of 1828, Florence Weston shared the same idea that both major parties attempted to win over the workingmen. The workingmen, she states, generally preferred Jackson's party. The Administration party (Adams), particularly in the Northeast where the industrial classes predominated, viewed disparagingly the mechanics and apprentices, and were blind to the importance of gaining their favor or were too aristocratic to seek it. The Jacksonians, on the other hand, took up labor's cause with pride and allied themselves strongly with the labor movement during the very years of its inception. The workingmen's party put forward no candidates in national elections; instead, workers cast their votes for Jackson.

In order to understand the conditions against which the labor movement was directed, it is necessary to consider the changed circumstances of the life of the common man in the new industrial centers of the East since the opening years of the nineteenth century.

Prior to the introduction of the factory system, manufacturing in America had been carried out under the so-called "domestic system." The master workman, bringing

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11Turner, United States, p. 123.

together journeymen and apprentices for work on common projects or joint enterprises and paying them wages, had not created an employer-employee relationship in any modern sense. There was no real differentiation between the interests of the journeymen and those of the masters who labored side by side with them.

But with the application of machinery at the turn of the nineteenth century, the situation of the workingman changed radically. Entrepreneurs, seeking to reduce costs in meeting the highly competitive conditions of new world business, began to hold down wages, lengthen working hours, and tap new sources of cheap labor. Under these circumstances, the skilled workers found themselves fighting a defensive war against the mounting resources of the employers. The various labor organizations which originated during the early nineteenth century sought to safeguard the status of the skilled workers. Carpenters, painters, shoemakers, shipwrights and weavers were the first to organize. They were, in fact the real union pioneers, and succeeded in maintaining active societies throughout the first twenty years of the nineteenth century.

Early evidence of unrest appears in the extensive circulation, in the spring of 1827, of a pamphlet containing "a general view of the evils under which the working people are laboring and plan for their efficient removal."13

13Commons, Labor, p. 186.
Apparently stimulated by this statement, 600 journeymen carpenters of Philadelphia went on strike in June, 1827, for a ten-hour day working schedule. Soon bricklayers, painters, glaziers and other groups became interested in the struggle of the carpenters. They joined together to form a central organization for national aid and protection in similar disputes. In the latter half of 1827, therefore, there was formed the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations. All workingmen were invited to join and "those trades who are as yet destitute of trade societies" were urged to "organize and send their delegates as soon as possible."\(^{14}\)

The immediate object of the Association was:

\begin{quote}
To avert, if possible, the desolating evils which must inevitably arise from a depreciation of the intrinsic value of human labor; to raise the mechanical and productive classes to that condition of true independence and equality; to promote, equally, the happiness, prosperity and welfare of the whole community ... and to assist ... in establishing a just balance of power, both mental, moral, political and scientific, between all the various classes and individuals which constitute society at large.\(^{15}\)
\end{quote}

Such were the ambitious purposes of the first city central labor union.

In July, 1828, in urging its members to nominate candidates to represent the interest of the working classes

\(^{14}\textit{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 190}.\)

\(^{15}\textit{Ibid.}\)
in the city council and the state legislature, the Association in Philadelphia broke fresh ground for labor and inaugurated what was to become a widespread political movement of workingmen's parties. It soon spread to other towns in Pennsylvania; to New York where wide popular support developed; to upstate New York, and to Massachusetts and other parts of New England. Indeed, workingmen's political parties spread as far as Ohio.

Politicians of both Republican and Democratic parties soon made valiant efforts to divert this labor movement into their respective parties. The meeting at the Northern Liberties, Philadelphia, was thrown into a state of confusion by a bitter speech charging both the chairman and the secretary with working for the Administration. The discussion which ensued showed much difference of opinion among those assembled, and the meeting was pacified only when a request was made that all Jackson men remain behind after the others left. Those who were present endorsed Jackson as their candidate in the forthcoming election. Suspicion was not lacking that both the Adams and the Jackson men were intruders, who did not wish the laborites to organize a separate party.

16 Ibid., p. 191.
17 Ibid., pp. 195-196.
These developments were the first expression of the awakening forces of the laboring classes in the twenties.

III

In his book, The Age of Jackson, published in 1945, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. claims that:

Jacksonian Democracy, which has always appeared an obvious example of Western influence in American government, is not so pat a case as some have thought; that its development was shaped much more by reasoned and systematic notions about society than has been generally recognized; that many of its beliefs and motives came rather from the East and South than the West.  

His is the strongest statement yet made that a substantial movement of Eastern laboring classes, led and inspired by the radical anti-capitalistic elements among Jackson's supporters, became a significant part of the great Jacksonian Revolution.

In support of his theme Schlesinger first places strong emphasis on the transformation of social philosophy as a consequence of the industrial revolution in the eighteen twenties. Because of this revolution the working classes were becoming conscious of a common plight which required unity for defense. Then, he points out the specific problems produced by the "American System" as the background of this

18 Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson, (Boston, 1945), x. Hereafter cited as Schlesinger, Jackson.
social unrest. Finally, he explores the activities of the various leading Jacksonian men to corroborate his argument. Taken together, as the author reiterates time and again, the Jacksonian period was a struggle between the "producing" and "non-producing" classes—the farmers and laborers, on the one hand, and the business community on the other. The basic Jacksonian ideas came naturally enough from the East, which best understood the nature of business power, and reacted sharply against it.19

In the early days of the republic, Alexander Hamilton had already developed a political philosophy of the new industrialism. No society, Hamilton believed, could succeed "which did not unite the interest and credit of rich individuals with those of the state."20 The Report on Manufacture was the first expression of an industrial vision for the American future. Jefferson who looked upon urban labor with mistrust and abhorrence failed to recognize the direction of this bustling nation. His very notion that the land be kept free from the corruption of industrialism was, however, betrayed by his own favorite measure, the Embargo Act of 1807, which helped encourage the growth of manufactures along the Atlantic coast. This growth marked the advent of the factory system in American history; and while

20Quoted from Schlesinger, Jackson, p. 24.
manufacturing was conducted only in scattered districts and upon a comparatively small scale as measured by modern standards, it profoundly influenced the lives of the working classes immediately concerned.

Henry Clay carried the Federalist program a step further by announcing a new scheme—the "American System." It was mainly based upon the assumption of Hamilton's funding plan in order to keep the national debt from extinction: the debt made the bank indispensable as a financial agent, and the tariff indispensable as a source of revenue. "While it certainly did not violate principles of political equality, yet its tendency was widely felt to be destructive of economic equality. It was thus more abhorred by the dispossessed classes of the East ... than it was by the West, where classes hardly existed." 21

With the extension of suffrage during the twenties, 22 coupled with the impact of new industrialism in the Northern and Middle states, the old ideas inexorably crumbled away. The workingmen, shut off from the rest of society, began to develop a sense of class-consciousness. They held conventions, published addresses, founded newspapers and trade

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21 Schlesinger, Jackson, pp. 57-58.

22 Of the industrial states of this period, Massachusetts granted the suffrage in 1820, and New York in 1832, while in Pennsylvania, the constitution of 1870 had already extended the right of suffrage to all those who paid any kind of state or county tax. See Commons, Labor, p. 176.
unions. Their main effort was to vindicate their social status, to regain a feeling of self-respect and security. Thus their demand centered around popular education; abolition of imprisonment for debt; the compulsory militia system which penalized the rich for non-attendance with a fine, and the poor with imprisonment; the banking system which offered the workingman none of the advantage of credit but, instead, frequently caused him to be paid his wages in depreciated banknotes. After Jackson became President, the labor movement reached its climax. "Jacksonian speeches roused it, much Jacksonian legislation was based on it, the Jacksonian press appealed to it." The laboring men began slowly to turn to him as their leader, and his party as their party.

"The driving energy of Jacksonian democracy, like that of any aggressive reform movement, came from a small group of men, joined together ... to transform the existing order." This small group, later known as the "Kitchen Cabinet," consisted mostly of literary men and ex-journalists who had hitherto been denied the privileges to which they felt their abilities and energies entitled them. Amos Kendall, ex-journalist and hard-money devotee, who had long been imbued with socialistic thought, now became the

23 Schlesinger, Jackson, p. 379.
24 Ibid., p. 67.
President's top brain truster. As described by one of the contemporary writers, Kendall was "supposed to be the moving spring of the administration, the thinker, the planner, and the doer." In fact, he was one of the few schemers of the Bank war and the eventual veto. On the labor issue his position was crystal clear. "Those who produced all wealth," he declared, "are themselves left poor. They see principalities extending and palaces built around them, without being aware that the entire expense is a tax upon themselves." In support of Jackson's second term, he made one of his rare public speeches to the Central Hickory Club in December, 1832, part of which directly addressed itself to the dilemma of New England labor. In that speech, Kendall concisely criticized the effects of manufacturing monopolies upon the states in which they were located.

To further analyze the new souls in the Jacksonian movement, Schlesinger traces the activities of the respective labor leaders in two Atlantic states, Massachusetts and New York. In both states the banking system was firmly entrenched, manufacturing had gained a strong hold, and financial, industrial and commercial groups were active in politics.

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25 Ibid., p. 72.
26 Ibid., pp. 80, 98, 100.
27 Requoted from Schlesinger, Jackson, p. 306.
In Massachusetts an attempt to bring about a broader political organization of workers was made in 1832 with the formation of the New England Association of Farmers, Mechanics and Workingmen. The success won by this group in local elections inspired the nomination of Samuel Cleson Allen (an ex-National Republican) for governor. The New England Association urged the working classes to rally in support of the Democrats. Here, it can be seen that it was the Democrats who most directly supported labor aims. When Jackson launched his war against the United States Bank, vigorously attacking monopoly and special privileges on a score of fronts, artisans, mechanics and laborers naturally rallied behind him.

The twists and turns of politics in the 1830's are one thing, however, and another is the steady growth of progressive principles and the practical achievement of the reforms the workers sought. Among their leaders Seth Luther was the most colorful. "With a cud of tobacco generally in his mouth, and cherishing a bitter passion for the working classes," he had long engaged in the labor movement and shared the general range of workingmen's notions. His chief interest was the promotion of manual labor education. Social inequality, he argued, was "produced and sustained by AVARICE

\[\text{28Requoted from } \text{ibid.}, \text{ p. 149.}\]
and was to be cured by education, especially by the establishment of manual-labor schools."^29

For Theodore Sedgwick, a newly converted radical and free trader by profession, the essence of reform was the destruction of monopolies. Between 1836 and 1839 he published three bulky volumes on Public and Private Economy, in which flow his hatred of the monied class and sympathy for the common man.

Throughout these turbulent years of social unrest, Massachusetts was as yet a conservative state, predominantly controlled by the Whig Republicans. But the great social uproar had gradually caused many old Federalists to side with the Democrats for reforms. The apostasies of Allen and Sedgwick were of such nature.

In 1834 another young and aggressive leader, George Bancroft, took steps to repudiate his past link with the conservatives and cast his lot with the workingmen. One of the nineteenth century's greatest historians, he deplored the fate of political liberty when it was not founded on economic liberty. "The feud between the capitalist and the laborer, the house of Have and the house of Want, is as old as social union, and can never be entirely quieted."^30

29 Requouted from ibid., p. 150.
30 Requouted from ibid., p. 163.
For a moment, Bancroft had become the conscience of the Democratic Party in Massachusetts, crystallizing the impulses of reform so long ignored.

The rise of the radical wing, reinforced by such strong and popular characters as Bancroft, Sedgwick and Allen, gave the Democratic Party a new substantial force. A Whig paper in 1834 noted that "Working-menism and Jacksonianism would turn out to be identical. Every day's development goes to confirm this belief ... the large majority of the prominent Working men are avowed Jackson Men." If this was not always true, it was sufficiently close to the mark to suggest that the victories won by the advance of Jacksonian democracy were in many instances victories that owed a great deal to the worker's support.

In New York labor grievances were similar to those in Massachusetts, though the former was the traditional home of the Albany Regency that always favored labor reforms. But the New York movement was much more an urban affair because of the comparative prosperity of the farmers.

Four outstanding leaders stood out for their influence on the New York labor party. In the earliest stage, the party was largely under the control of Thomas Skidmore, a machinist by trade, who had been instrumental in persuading the workers to broaden their program as a means of coercing

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31 Requoted from ibid., p. 157.
their aristocratic oppressors into obtaining the ten-hour day. Wholly self-educated, he was a violent, fanatical devotee of the worker's cause and had developed an agrarian philosophy that questioned the entire basis of existing property rights. His views were shortly set forth in a formidable treatise which he comprehensively entitled *The Right of Men to Property*. Skidmore specifically proposed that all debts and property claims should be at once cancelled. After such a communistic division of property, the maintenance of equality would be assured by doing away with all inheritance.

A second leader, who accepted at least in part the Skidmore program but was to be far more influential in the workingmen's movement in these and later years, was George Henry Evans. A printer by trade, he founded the *Working Man's Advocate*, perhaps the most important labor journal of the day. The organ for the New York party, it turned out a continuous stream of articles and editorials promoting the worker's interests. In 1822, Colonel Richard Johnson proposed a bill in the Senate calling for the abolition of imprisonment for debt. But for some years, it failed of passage. Now, Evans, with the weapon of the *Advocate* and backed by the Owenites, continued to push the Johnson program through. Finally, in 1832, the bill passed both the Houses and became law. Evans was also noted for his anti-clerical attitudes. Not only did he constantly attack the
church, but he believed that the Anti-Masonic party was the Christian party in disguise, "the most dangerous secret society that ever existed in the country." Later through the Advocate he contributed much to the program of federal grant of lands to the Eastern workingmen. Indeed, the passage of the Homestead Act of 1862, though passed after his death, is Evans' proudest claim.

As if such leadership were not enough to condemn the workingmen's party in the eyes of all conservatives, it was further "damned" by the participation in its activities of another brace of radical reformers: Robert Dale Owen and Frances Wright. Having recently moved to New York from the cooperative community at New Harmony, Indiana, where Robert Owen had attempted to put into practice his socialistic program for replacing the factory system, these two naturally seized upon the workingmen's movement as a medium for promoting their own particular brand of reform. They had founded a paper, the Free Enquirer, to publish their ideas and it was soon campaigning vigorously in support of the new labor party.

Robert D. Owen believed strongly in a more equitable distribution of wealth, was opposed to organized religion,

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32 Requoted from ibid., p. 138.
33 Ibid., p. 182.
and advocated more liberal divorce laws, but his primary interest was in free, public education.

Frances Wright was at once the most zealous, the most colorful and, in the eyes of contemporaries, the most dangerous of these reformers associated with the New York workingmen's party. Of Scottish origin, tall, slender, with wavy chestnut hair, she completely dazzled workingmen's audiences. Wherever she went, she fomented the seed of social revolution. She pointed out four basic evils which contributed to the present crisis: technological improvements, the banking system and paper money, the professional aristocracy and, most fundamental, a false system of education. The only salvation, according to her scheme, was the state guardianship of free education for all children, thus to eliminate class prejudices at the beginning.34

Later, during the Bank War, the workingmen again found two other dauntless leaders, William C. Bryant and William Leggett; both fought against the grant of special privileges. They felt all business, including banking, should be thrown open to universal competition.

Toward the end of 1833 the rapid growth and development of individual trade societies led naturally to the movement for closer cooperation in promoting their common aims. A successful carpenters' strike in the spring of 1833

34Ibid., p. 183.
led to the formation of a General Trade Union. In 1834, encouraged by the flurry of labor organization throughout the East, the General Trade Union issued a manifesto calling for a national organization. Through five hot August days, thirty earnest men were gathered in New York to form the National Trade Union. Hence, the labor movement in politics gradually declined. The rise and fall of Loco Focos and the depression of 1837 marked the end of labor's venture into the political arena. This occurred just about the time when Jackson's second administration ended.

CHAPTER II
ATTACKS ON ARTHUR SCHLESINGER, JR.'S
THE AGE OF JACKSON

Since The Age of Jackson by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. was published in 1945, criticisms of it have multiplied. While some agree with this thesis but point out that he has slurred over certain crucial facts, others bluntly reject the authenticity of his daring historical hypothesis.

I
In an essay entitled "Public Policy and National Bank," Bray Hammond generally agrees with Schlesinger's view that Jacksonian Democracy reflected Eastern as well as frontier influences, but notes that he has erred in associating the Eastern influence with labor alone and not with business enterprise. To be sure, both had grievances. The panic of 1837 had a calamitous effect on the business community no less than it did on labor. For a period, the middle class entrepreneurs—who wanted business democratized, and thus espoused laissez faire—joined Jackson to fight for decentralizing the existing Hamiltonian social order. The downfall of the Second Bank of the United States meant that

free enterprise won over monopoly. The world of business, in the age of Jackson, had become the stronghold of America's new rugged individualism. Thus Hammond's critique proposes a serious modification of the interpretation by Schlesinger.

II

A greater part of Schlesinger's book deals with the individual personalities of certain social reformers in the Jacksonian era. Their activities and influences, Schlesinger assumes, were decisive in formulating the character of this labor movement. But, is this assumption true? In other words, were these reformers really radical, and their theories anti-capitalistic? Were the workingmen's movements and parties of the period truly movements of the wage-earners? Joseph Dorfman, professor of economics at Columbia University, answers these questions in the negative. According to his findings, even the terminologies which Schlesinger applies are misused.²

Theodore Sedgwick, cited by Schlesinger as the champion of the labor class, was actually a covetous merchant who adamantly opposed any anti-capitalistic schemes. In his much lauded volume, Public and Private Economy, he urged maintenance of the status quo of the current social hierarchy.

The emancipation of the proletariat, according to his ideas, could only be achieved through strict abstinence and frugality.

Theophilus Fisk, newspaper editor and considered by Schlesinger as a leader of anti-capitalistic forces, held that debt itself was the great curse. He felt that imprudent debtors were unfit to exercise the right of suffrage. Fisk's psychology, according to Dorfman, was much more that of a businessman than a radical leader. As a businessman, he could hardly be anti-capitalistic. In the case of William Leggett, the New York journalist whom Schlesinger cites, his attitude toward the laboring classes was even more obvious. Leggett was fundamentally opposed to a general labor union. He thought it would threaten the regular economic life of society and thus create anarchy and social disorder.

In Philadelphia, in 1829, a group of workingmen according to Schlesinger, called a meeting and petitioned the state legislature not to charter additional banks. The petition states that the banks had created a chaotic situation in which the livelihood of the laboring classes was badly threatened because of the excessive issuance of paper money. Condy Raguet and William Gouge, two eminent Jacksonian economists, are believed to be the authors of the petition. Raguet was originally a merchant and editor of the *Free Trade Advocate*, but became a state senator in 1820.
Dorfman points out that Raguet had seldom expressed his opinion in favor of the workingmen. In the *Free Trade Advocate* he once declared that to reduce working hours or to raise wages would contradict "the great principle of nature called the law of competition." Gouge took the same attitude toward labor. His theory of the ills of society was similar to social Darwinism of a later period: that under the principle of competition only the fittest can survive. The laborers who could not make their own salvation had to depend upon others for means of both subsistence and employment.

Of the other so-called Jacksonian labor leaders, Dorfman holds that they were not anti-capitalistic in substance nor radical in nature. Frances Wright was but a strict Malthusian; James Ronaldson, long time leader of a "labor union," was a stockholder and extremely wealthy employer; Thomas Skidmore, a leader of the New York workingmen's party, was an advocate of the protective tariff, which was hardly Jacksonian.

Schlesinger points out, as an indication of anti-capitalism, that the workingmen's parties espoused the abolition of imprisonment for debt. But imprisonment for debt was, nevertheless, as Dorfman states, not an exclusive condemnation of the poor only; it was also inflicted upon

unfortunate businessmen in time of stress. Satirically
enough, Daniel Webster, the so-called arch foe of the
Jacksonian laborites, was the president of the Boston chap-
ter of the debtor's relief organization.

Dorfman concludes that Jacksonian radicalism was
indeed a movement of monetary reform. But, "the purpose of
the monetary reform was not to help labor, but to create
better business conditions and remove panics."\(^4\) As to the
name "workingmen," says Dorfman, it was used at that time
to include "not merely manual labor, but every man who
earned his bread by useful exertion, whether mental or
physical."\(^5\) The so-called radical movement was by no means
anti-capitalistic but, to a certain extent, anti-aristo-
ocratic. The whole movement was based upon two elements,
humanitarian and business, with the latter of course playing
the vital role. Of all the factions that constituted the
Jacksonian "workingmen," it would seem that the wage earners
were the least favored. For, as best explained by one of
the top Jacksonian economists, Churchill C. Cambreleng,
"labor solicits no particular privileges--it asks only for a
sound currency."\(^6\) Furthermore, and of most importance, there
was a general impression that a united labor front would

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\(^4\)Ibid., p. 304.
\(^5\)Ibid., p. 305.
\(^6\)Ibid., p. 304.
constitute a great menace to the rapidly emerging laissez faire economy.

In short, the most that can be said for the Jacksonian movement's being anti-capitalistic, is presumably that it opposed the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, and the manipulation of political power by special privileges.

III

Thus far the argument has been that most of the active leaders of the workingmen's parties in the Jacksonian movement were neither radical nor pro-labor. This still leaves unanswered the question of whether the Eastern laborer aligned himself with the Jacksonians, as Schlesinger has alleged. According to Schlesinger, it was this support which was instrumental in explaining the success of the Democratic party from 1828 to 1840.

William A. Sullivan has presented the story of labor and politics in the city of Philadelphia, and Edward Pessen in the city of Boston; both want to ascertain to what extent labor supported Andrew Jackson and/or the Democratic party.

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To begin his analysis, Sullivan points out certain facts regarding the complicated political situation then existing in that city. The old Federalist party, which had disappeared in national politics and practically so in state politics, was still active in strictly local affairs. The Democratic party had split into two factions, one known as the Administrative or Adams party and the other as the Jackson party. After Jackson's victory in 1828, the anti-Jackson sentiment was absorbed into an anti-Sutherland movement. This branch of the Democratic party was comparatively weak and frequently fused with the Federal, or as it was later called, the Whig party. Local contests were generally between a fusion ticket put up by the Federalist and anti-Jackson or anti-Sutherland men, and the Jackson or Sutherland wing of the Democratic party. When the workingmen's party was organized, in July, 1828, the Federalist party was in control of the city, and the Jackson party had secured control of the county.

From the beginning the new movement was obliged to fight for its existence against the machinations of professional politicians who tried either to obtain control of the meetings or to break them up. The efforts of the Democratic party, which claimed a sort of proprietary

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9Joel B. Sutherland was a local political leader in Philadelphia, a strong supporter of Andrew Jackson.
interest in the workingmen, were directed primarily toward splitting the new party into factions. The Federalists, on the other hand, were trying hard to use the workingmen's movement for their own advancement.

Early in April, 1828, the *Mechanics' Free Press*, the main organ through which labor expressed its view, had warned that:

> At present our danger is from our old master, the Democrats, for as most of us are deserters from their ranks, they view us with the same sensation as the mighty lord would the revolt of his vessels: there cannot be so much danger from the Federalists as, generally speaking, we were never inclined to trust them.¹⁰

The national triumph of Jackson in 1828 was also reflected in the local elections of Philadelphia; every candidate of the Democratic party was swept into office. But this success, according to Sullivan, can hardly be ascribed to the influence and the efforts of the workingmen's party. Although the Jacksonians nominated three workingmen's candidates for the City Assembly and twelve for the Common Council, the workingmen's strength was relatively weak in that year. Of a total one thousand vote majority which the Democrats won over their opponents in the city, the workingmen's party strength amounted to only 314.¹¹

¹⁰Requoted from Sullivan, "Did Labor Support Jackson?" p. 571.

The year of 1829, however, was a turning point for the workingmen's party. "The balance of power," as the Mechanics' Free Press declared "has at length got into the hands of the working people, where it properly belongs, and it will be used, in future, for the general weal." In January, 1829, the Workingmen's Republican Political Association was organized. This Association appears to have united with the anti-Sutherland faction and perhaps also with the Federalist party in putting up "the People's Ticket" in opposition to the Sutherland forces. According to the Press's report, this ticket won by an overwhelming majority.

Prior to the city's general election in the fall of that year, the workingmen, in order to prove their non-partisanship, made their nomination before either of the other parties had acted. Out of thirty-two candidates on the city tickets nine were also named by the Federal party and only three by the Democratic party. In the county, out of nine workingmen's candidates for the senate and assembly, three were endorsed by the combined anti-Sutherland and Federal parties, and none by the Democratic party. The election returns showed that the workingmen's party was able to muster an average of 860 votes to sweep every Democrat

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12 Ibid., p. 572.
13 This information is from Commons, Labor, p. 200. It is included here to better explain Sullivan's essay.
into the City Assembly, though Jackson's men retained a small majority in the Select Council.\(^{14}\)

Soon after the nomination of 1829, dissension began to take place in the ranks of the workingmen. A group of so-called "Democratic Workingmen" seceded from the movement and endorsed the regular Democratic candidates. Afterward there appears to have been closer affiliation of the workingmen's party with the amalgamated Federal and anti-Sutherland factions.\(^{15}\)

In the following year, the workingmen's party attempted to further consolidate its influence in Philadelphia. However, it was by and large destroyed by the worker's inability to play the political game on the one hand, and the intrigues of party politicians on the other. In the state election, out of thirty-three candidates put up by the city convention, seven were on the Democratic ticket, twelve on the Federal ticket, and one on both. In the Congressional election the party nominated Stephen Simpson, the candidate of the Federal party, against Sutherland for senator.\(^{16}\)

The result of the election of 1830 saw a general triumph of the Democrats, who "carried the Senator and eight members of

\(^{14}\)Sullivan, "Did Labor Support Jackson?" p. 572.
\(^{15}\)Commons, Labor, p. 204.
\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 211.
the Assembly, over the united forces of Federalism and Workeyism.\(^{17}\)

In the fall election of 1831 the workingmen definitely lost their balance of power. This was the last year in which the workingmen's party ever nominated a ticket, and nothing further is known of the political movement which originated in the carpenters' strike of 1827.

Sullivan has singled out three factors which led to the downfall of the workingmen's party in Philadelphia, which also serves to support the argument given by Dorfman that the interests of the workingmen did not at all bear any Jacksonian label.

1. During the four years of its existence the workingmen's party nominated and supported approximately one hundred candidates for the city elective offices. An analysis of these candidates, however, reveals their occupations as: ten workingmen, twenty-three professional men, fifty-three merchants and business men, eleven gentlemen, and three for whom no occupation was recorded.\(^{18}\) This heterogeneous body of representatives could hardly solve any working-class problems in the interests of the workers.

2. The first city wide labor association was a loose organization in which there was probably no sense of class

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\(^{17}\)Sullivan, "Did Labor Support Jackson?", p. 574.

\(^{18}\)Ibid., p. 575.
consciousness as well as *esprit de corps* among the workers themselves. As a result, it was easy for them to become the prey of politicians who took advantage of the movement for their own benefit. Moreover, they were too dependent upon their fellow laborers as friends. The situation is best illustrated by the Mechanics' Free Press:

... The mechanics will find in time that many of their own class are their worst enemies. Some young mechanics are actuated by this idea of setting up their businesses and living on the profits arising out of the labor of others, and this will make them try to defeat every measure calculated to better the hard conditions of that class generally. 19

3. The role of the employers accounted for the decrease of labor strength. Philadelphia was the home of the Second Bank with which all the businessmen had to associate. The workers, in order to gain their daily bread, had to listen to whatever their employer said and vote whenever their employer dictated. This particular situation had been pointed out by the *Pennsylvanian*, a Jacksonian paper:

... among the cruel acts resorted to by the Bank of the United States, to carry on a ruthless and traitorous warfare against the mechanics and workingmen, was that of sending agents around to all the large manufacturers to urge them to discharge their hands, draw in their business, and thus force the workingmen of the country to come around and support the bank of their votes. ... 20


No matter what may have caused the failure of the workingmen's party, one thing is certain according to Sullivan: The Democrats were incapable of holding the votes of labor.

IV

To supplement Sullivan's attack on Schlesinger's thesis, Edward Pessen draws another picture of the city of Boston. Boston was a key urban center in the East where over 10,000 workers were engaged in manufacturing enterprises during the Jacksonian period.

Assuming that Boston's workingmen's party had never constituted an important faction and, avoiding the enigma of whether it was or was not composed of laborers, Pessen deals mainly with ward voting records rather than with the positions and platforms of the alleged workingmen's party.

In order to demonstrate how workers voted, Pessen employs a method of dividing the assessed valuation of property in each ward by the population of each ward. He assumes the lowest per capita figures as the working-class wards. Based upon this tabulation, he has readily arrived at the conclusion that Boston's laborers were overwhelmingly pro-Whig.

A brief summary of his findings for the entire period from 1828 to 1836 follows:
In the 1828 presidential election workingmen split their votes, 21 per cent for Jackson and 79 per cent for the Whig candidates. In only one working-class ward did the former receive slightly more than one-third of the total votes.

The state election of 1829 saw much political machinations among the Jacksonians. Even by nominating such a strong and influential character as David Henshaw, who controlled the strategic area of the Port of Boston, the Democratic party was unable to beat the Whigs for the governorship.

In July, 1830, the workingmen's party emerged in Boston. Its first attempt in December of that year to elect candidates for the offices of mayor and aldermen resulted in utter defeat. The following spring a full workingmen's party ticket for city offices received only 100 votes out of a total of 3,066 cast. Incidentally, analysis of workingmen's party candidates reveals that a great majority were of the wealthier classes. This is sufficient evidence, to Pessen, that the workingmen's party did not represent the interests of the workingmen.

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In two gubernatorial elections in 1831\(^{22}\) the Democrats were again deserted by labor. Apparently harassed by this situation, David Henshaw, now the sole Democratic leader in Boston, charged that Boston's workingmen were the enemies of Democracy.

The Bank veto was the major issue of the presidential election of 1832. Analysis of the Boston vote indicates an increase in favor of the Democratic party. This is to be explained, in part, by workingmen's opposition to the Second Bank. Nevertheless, despite this issue, 73 per cent of the total vote was in favor of the Whigs. The gubernatorial election of 1834 indicated gains of the Democratic ticket in the poorer wards. However, it was still the Whigs who swept the votes. Indeed, it was not until the presidential election of 1836 that the Democrats captured three out of five working-class wards.

Several conclusions are derived by Pessen. First, Jackson, throughout his two terms as president, was never supported at the polls by the workingmen. Secondly, Boston was predominantly a Whig city in which the Whig-influenced merchants played an important part in dictating the votes of their employees. Thirdly, the Democratic party in Boston had, from the beginning, been controlled by non-Jacksonian

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\(^{22}\)A state law passed after the April election had taken place, designating November as the new date for the state election. See \textit{ibid.}
conservatives of Henshaw's custom ring. Finally, it was not the urban workers but the rural farmers who gave their support to Jackson's candidates.

V

Some critics have concluded that most of the Jacksonian leaders were neither radical nor pro-labor and their alleged parties really middle class (Dorfman); or that the workingmen did not vote for Jackson (Sullivan and Pessen). None has analyzed Andrew Jackson himself. Was Jackson a real saviour of the toiling classes? This is the topic that Richard B. Morris has brought to light recently. His essay is significantly called "Andrew Jackson, Strikebreaker."23 In it he compares Jackson to a labor prosecutor; and the period as "an age of triumphant exploitation" rather than one of "triumphant liberalism."24 His essay deals with the labor dispute on the Chesapeake and Ohio canal in Maryland in 1834.

On January 18, 1834, a conflict developed between some local laborers and mechanics, and the Irish workers engaged on the Chesapeake and Ohio canal. The Hagerstown Torchlight attributed the cause of the difficulty to "either


24 Ibid., p. 68.
the suspension of work, or of payment, on one or more
sections of the canal." Nile's Weekly Register laid the
cause of the outrage to "dissatisfaction about their pay."
Thomas F. Purcell, resident engineer for the canal company,
ascribed this dispute to a struggle over the closed shop. Bloodshed followed as the conflict gradually developed to
such an extent that each party had assembled several hundred
men armed with weapons. The riot was not stopped until four
days later when the county militia was dispatched to the
scene. Purcell then reported, after a temporary cessation
of hostilities, that "so deeply rooted is the hatred of the
one party to the other, that I cannot flatter myself that it
will be of long continuance."26

Alert over this situation, the local authorities
submitted a request on January 28 to Annapolis for help. In
response, the Maryland legislature passed two separate
resolutions: one, in the name of the Governor, James Thomas,
calling upon the President for military aid; and the other
authorizing the Governor to use state militia for immediate
suppression of any further riot. The President's approval
of the request for federal troops came unusually fast; they
were dispatched to Maryland the next day, January 29. The
promptness in action on the part of Jackson on this occasion
has been surmised as a step toward aiding his old friend,

25 Ibid., p. 55.
26 Requoted from Ibid., p. 59.
John H. Eaton, former Secretary of War and one of the original members of the "Kitchen Cabinet," who had now become the new president of the canal company.

Eaton wrote to the directors of the company on January 31:

The turning off from the works any large number of hands, must necessarily bring about riotous feelings; and even riotous action. While the United States troops are in the neighbourhood, a dismissal may be made without these apprehensions. ... 27

In view of this correspondence, the presidential action may have more significance as a matter of personal concern than for the purpose of maintaining the local peace.

Morris points out, also, that the company was then in poor financial plight. To lay off the contracted laborers under normal conditions would cause the company additional expenses. As Eaton asserted, "we have at all times a right to control bad conduct and bad actions on our works." 28 In other words, he would use the riot as a pretext for straightening up his company's budget on the one hand; and use the presence of federal troops as a coercive power to suppress labor on the other.

When, in February, 1835, laborers on another section of the canal went on strike for higher wages, the troops,

27 Requoted from ibid., p. 62.
28 Requoted from ibid., p. 65.
still stationed at a nearby area, forced the strikers back to work.

Several conclusions may be derived, according to Morris. First, Andrew Jackson was the first President to send federal troops to stop a labor strike which was strictly local and had neither violated the federal law nor endangered national security. Secondly, because of this unprecedented action, Jackson cannot be called the champion of labor. Finally, though granting his hard money policy which would appeal to the laboring classes, the fact that he acted as a strikebreaker indicates he was really a protector of the capitalist class.29

29 The working classes were opposed to the common practise of banks issuing huge amounts of paper money which quickly depreciated in value. Many times they received their wages in this type of currency. Hence, they were for a hard money policy.
CHAPTER III
COMMENTS AND CRITICISMS OF THE CONTROVERSY

American historians are fond of comparing two eras of the past. They are the period of Andrew Jackson and the period of Franklin Roosevelt, both reflecting symbols of an age, of flux and democratic impulse. The voice of the people is usually discordant, but here were two of the very few men in America who have been unmistakably acclaimed by the voice of the people. There can be arguments about whether the people were right or wrong, but there can be no argument about the men whom they wanted as President.

On the day of Jackson's inaugural, March 4, 1829, the White House was invaded by a multitude of "all ages, colors, and conditions," who "stood on chairs in their muddy boots, fought for the refreshments, and trod glass and porcelain underfoot."\(^1\) But, who were those people who stormed the Presidential Palace? Historians have never ceased to interpret the characteristics of this period. Among the various studies,\(^2\) the one given in The Age of Jackson by Arthur M. Schlesinger has won the most admiration and, indeed, stirred up the most controversy. His thesis places a great deal of emphasis on the anti-capitalistic laboring forces in the

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\(^2\)See Chapter I.
East as the mainspring of Jackson's triumph from 1828 to 1836. Contradictory essays soon appeared after its publication in 1945 which have apparently refuted this contention.

I

Joseph Dorfman's "The Jackson Wage-Earner Thesis" has been, thus far, the most important critique of the Schlesinger thesis. His main criticism of The Age of Jackson is that the Jacksonian period is to be explained as a period of "class conflict between great capitalists on the one side and a mass of propertyless wage-earners on the other." Upon this basis, Schlesinger has drawn a comparison of the Jacksonian period to Roosevelt's New Deal: both opposed economic royalism. Dorfman's critique, outlined in Chapter II of this paper, denies the class conflict and social cleavage which he feels Schlesinger emphasizes.

Arthur Schlesinger has rebutted this criticism. According to him, The Age of Jackson, while admitting the existence of class consciousness, does not argue that there was a class conflict in the Jacksonian period. It does, however, argue that there was a struggle of non-business groups against business domination of the government.  


The Jacksonians were convinced of the relation between economic diversity and political freedom. So strong was this conviction that their aim, akin to the New Deal, "was to preserve capitalism and keep government out of the hands of the capitalists." George Bancroft, for example, declared: "We must protect these merchants, but not governed by them." To the Jacksonians, the dawning of capitalism in the wake of industrialisation was an ineradicable and even useful part of the economic landscape. The specific problem, however, was "to control the power of the capitalist groups, mainly Eastern, for the benefit of non-capitalist groups, farmers and laboring men, East, West and South." In short, Dorfman has misread the thesis of the book.

The nature of the Jacksonian Revolution sharply distinguishes the Jacksonians from socialists—Utopians or Marxists—who aim at destroying the capitalist system.

Dorfman also argues that "Jackson, no more than Jefferson, thought of himself as the champion of the wage-earner." His use of this comparison seems to imply that Jackson, like Jefferson, also viewed urban laborers as

5 Schlesinger, Jackson, pp. 338-339.
6 Ibid., p. 339.
7 Ibid., p. 307.
"sores" to the state and the "doom" of democracy. According to Dorfman, the Jacksonian movement was not at all liberal, if compared to the present-day liberalism which associates with a large wage-earner class and resorts to a broadening rather than a narrowing of the economic functions of government. These interpretations, made to invalidate Schlesinger's emphasis of the radical nature of Jacksonianism, deserve attention.

The question of whether or not Jackson exclusively sided with labor will be discussed later in this chapter. But, one thing must be pointed out. Although Jackson inherited much of Jeffersonianism, he himself was not a strict Jeffersonian follower; at least he avoided Jefferson's dislike of the industrial worker. The point is made in The Age of Jackson that "the Jeffersonian inheritance was strengthened by the infusion of fresh influences: notably the anti-monopolistic ... and the pro-labor tradition(s)."9 In 1833 Jackson inspected the mills of Lowell and meticulously inquired about hours, wages and production. Observers reported that "the subject of domestic manufactures had previously engaged his attentive observation."10 His allusions to the "producing classes" always included the working men of the cities.

9Schlesinger, Jackson, p. 308.
10Ibid., p. 311.
The Jeffersonian age consisted largely of an agricultural society wherein the farm remained the basic center of American life. Its tradition was essentially an effort to restrict the power of the state on the one hand, and—in the face of physical expansion—to assert and maintain the old American ideals of individualism on the other. "Those who labor in the earth," Jefferson had said, "are the chosen people of God, if He had a chosen people;" the American dream required that the land be kept free from the corruption of industrialism. The Jacksonian age certainly reflected a good deal more than the rational libertarianism of the old Jeffersonian Republicans. Boldly, Jacksonians accepted the rising tide of industrialism, the impact of which was never seriously felt in previous administrations. In the process of readjustment, the Jacksonians modified and expanded most of the Jeffersonian tenets and traditional social heritages. They demanded economic equality, in addition to political equality, and human rights to counterweigh property rights. Labor they regarded as the source of all wealth. But government, by granting special privileges—by bank charters, tariffs, and internal improvements—had raised up a privileged class and enabled this class to exploit the wealth of the laboring part of the community.

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11 Requoted from *ibid.*, p. 311.
Jackson, in spite of the Jeffersonian inhibitions, was forced to adopt a strong government policy to check the rampant concentration of wealth and to restore the conditions of competition. The age of Jackson was one of reform, one that undertook to better the conditions of the individual not only in a political sense but also in an economic sense. By destroying monopolies, Jackson hoped to preserve liberty and democracy in a period of transition.

Dorfman has commented that many supporters of the "working classes" were not themselves either "workingmen" or "radical," and that relatively few bona fide "workingmen" were found in the anti-business forces. From these facts Dorfman has concluded that Jackson's "labor movement" was not "anti-capitalistic" but "anti-aristocratic." To this comment, Schlesinger replies that he had used the term "anti-capitalistic" only in the sense of opposing capitalists in their attempts to control the government. Further, he agrees that the word "workingmen" cannot be explained as having included laborers alone.12

Thus, part of the disagreement here is largely one of semantics. Schlesinger assumes that the "radical" force which constituted the Jacksonian Revolution was none other than the class of Eastern workingmen, which he has vaguely identified as "labor." However, Dorfman and other

commentators attribute the same idea to the efforts of another group of people, which they have vaguely identified as "business." Neither Dorfman nor Schlesinger attempt to define the meaning of terms such as "labor," "workingmen," "radical" and so forth, for the period under discussion.

Schlesinger states in The Age of Jackson, for example:

National allegiances were vague. ... National political organizations, such as they were, made only sporadic appeals to the laboring classes. For most of these years, the cultivation of the awakening class consciousness was left to the intellectuals. ...

The absence of direction was less important than the presence of discontent. The working classes in the North were rendered explosive by a variety of broad frustrations and particular grievances, all of which stemmed from the American System. ... 

Here, in two adjoining paragraphs, stand two similar and distinct terms: "laboring classes" and "working class"--obviously intended to mean the same class of people. But Schlesinger nowhere explains the early nineteenth century meaning of these terms. Dorfman has, on the other hand, at least attempted to give a partial conception of the meaning of "workingmen" as part of his attacks on the Schlesinger thesis. His explanation that "only the lazy idlers were not honest workingmen," however, seems too broad to determine

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13 Schlesinger, Jackson, p. 33.

the actual composition of the workingmen. This lack of definitions for certain pivotal terms bears important consequences on historical research. It leads to confusion rather than clarity.

II

"Did Labor Support Andrew Jackson? The Boston Story" by Edward Pessen, and "Did Labor Support Andrew Jackson?" by William Sullivan, both suggest a method in the use of election returns to measure the attitude of the populace toward Jackson and his Democratic party. Pessen has given us the election returns for all the presidential and state gubernatorial elections in Boston for the entire period 1828 to 1836, and Sullivan has presented the labor vote in Philadelphia for approximately the same period. Since the latter does not provide any actual figures, discussion will be directed to Pessen's alone.

The method Pessen has employed is to divide the electoral wards of Boston according to population and assessed valuation, and assume those wards with the lowest per capita figures were the working class wards. Then, by comparing the votes received, he has discovered that in no election did the working class wards in the city vote consistently for Jackson. There is no doubt that votes (in an honest election, with a secret ballot) can best reflect the opinion of the populace, but only if the statistics are
used correctly. Unfortunately, Pessen has not subjected his raw data to statistical analysis. Robert Bower has done it for him.15

Since Boston was a predominantly pro-Whig city, the use of raw overall statistics, or the derivation of results from a perusal of these statistics, would be improper; indeed, it leads to specious conclusions. A sounder way of evaluating the workingmen's strength (still using Pessen's division of wards by assessed valuation) should take into consideration the relative size of the vote in correlation with the socio-economic factors of the wards concerned. Bower has applied this easy statistical method. The election returns in Boston from 1828 to 1836, including the three presidential elections, according to Bower, clearly point out that there was a general tendency of the working class wards to give more support to Jackson and/or his Democratic party.

To facilitate discussion two tables showing the correlation coefficients, obtained from Pessen's raw data, for both the presidential and the state gubernatorial elections for the period 1828 to 1836 are listed below:16


16 Ibid., pp. 442-443.
The first table indicates a slight increase of correlation for the presidential elections of 1828 and 1832; then a significant rise in the correlation figure in 1836. The second table shows that there was a steadily increasing correlation from .30 for the election of 1829 to .70 for that of 1835. Thus, analysis of the vote indicates that there was a distinct trend toward voting Democratic in the working class wards, even though Boston was then the stronghold of the Whig party. By this evidence, therefore, Bower cannot agree with Pessen's conclusion that "Andrew Jackson ... was not supported at the polls by the workingmen, and it was not
until the mid-thirties, at the very end of his second term, that his party was able to win a small majority in any of the working class wards."¹⁷

III

Richard B. Morris, in his analysis of a single labor incident on the Chesapeake and Ohio canal for which President Jackson called out federal troops, has drawn certain presumptions which, however, do not necessarily warrant his conclusion that Jackson was not a friend of labor but a protector of business.

The facts, used by Morris, are rather scarce, inaccurate, obscure, and sometimes contradictory. For example, in reporting the cause of labor dispute, Niles' Weekly Register records that "the cause of the outrage is supposed to be some dissatisfaction about pay." The Hagerstown Torchlight attributes "the cause of the difficulty" to "either the suspension of work, or of payment, on one or more sections of the canal." Neither paper seems to have ascertained the real causes of the dispute. Yet, when quoting the source from the Register, Morris has sloughed off the words "supposed to be," and arbitrarily compared the incident to a "labor grievance," "jurisdictional strike," or conflict for a "closed shop."¹⁸


Thus, it is surprising that the subsequent peace agreement made between the two contending parties contains no reference to wage, hour, or other economic grievances which would nominally constitute a labor strike. The agreement reads:

We agree ... that we will not ... interrupt any person engaged on the canal, for ... a local difference or national prejudice, and that we will use our influence to destroy all these matters of difference growing out of this distinction of parties. ...19

Indeed, it is quite clear that there is no evidence whatsoever contained in this agreement, which would support Morris's contention that it is "perfectly clear" that the conflict was "provoked by serious labor grievances."20

Indeed, it seems probable that the dispute was the result of either irresponsible gang riots or more probably ethnic feuding between two antagonistic groups. The Irish laborers came from a land where sectional feuds were traditional. It would be a rather commonplace occurrence if one group of them should establish a sphere of interest against the other strictly on an ethnic basis. But this action can hardly be explained, as Morris tries to do, as being absolutely motivated by economic grievances which would justify a normal strike.

19Ibid., p. 58.
20Ibid., p. 54.
Following this interpretation, Morris concludes his article with these remarks:

But this much is clear, Jackson's action should remove any lingering doubt about his concern with the problems of industrial labor. ... Perhaps the workmen of Jackson's own day had a clearer knowledge of this fact than later historians who painted the President as the darling of the "toiling class."  

What Morris has stated here amounts to this: Because of Jackson's action of sending in federal troops to suppress a labor disturbance, all the workers then necessarily perceived him as a strikebreaker. As a strikebreaker, Jackson is necessarily antagonistic to the working class. This is not a sound deduction. A person who, for example, advocates birth control is not necessarily anti-Catholic. What was the reaction of labor as a result of Jackson's being a strikebreaker? Any statement about the worker's image of Jackson must be based upon empirical rather than logic grounds. Morris has not produced any data to support his contention.

IV

Since the publication of Schlesinger's *The Age of Jackson*, a tremendous interest has been aroused in that era of American history. One would think that this new interest, coupled with new data, would result in a better

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understanding of the relation of Eastern labor to the rampant democratic upheaval in the course of the first half of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, however, this is not so.

Several reasons contribute to and serve to explain this failure to obtain clarity. The most salient ones are: (1) the lack of definition in regard to the pivotal terms under discussion, such as "labor" and "business;" (2) hard crystallization of the lines of interpretation, i. e., either violently pro or anti Schlesinger; (3) the use of faulty or inadequate method of historical analysis, as pointed out in Bower's critique of Pessen.

If these obstacles were removed, possibly new interpretation of the Jacksonian era might emerge, which has this hypothesis: The Jacksonian period is one in which a portion of the business community allied with the Eastern laborers in their common struggle against the domination of the monopolistic groups in government. It is interesting that a non-professional historian, Bray Hammond, has adopted this sensible concept.

Bray Hammond has pointed out:

There was no more important factor in the Jacksonian movement than the democratization of business, which ceased henceforth to be a métier of predominantly mercantile, exclusive group, or commercial aristocracy, as it was
in the days of Hamilton, and became an interest of common man. This process of democratization went hand in hand with the rise of laissez-faire. 22

The eighteen-twenties were a decade of discontent, born in depression and shaken by bursts of violence and threats of rebellion. The depression of 1819 made people desperate. Farmers, especially those on worn-out lands, found themselves poorer at the end of a year of labor than at the beginning. Workingmen suffered wage cuts and unemployment, small businessmen found it increasingly difficult to maintain their old independence and security; in countless cases they lost their homes on mortgage foreclosures or were thrown into jail for debt. The unfocused disquietude of the multitudes, who had been left behind in the race for wealth, was turning into active resentment.

Jackson's mandate was to restrict the menacing construction of federal and corporate power, and restore the wholesome rule of "public opinion and the interests of trade." 23 There were two Jacksonian goals: a laissez-faire movement in the economic realm, and a campaign of the poor and propertyless classes against the rich and privileged classes in the social realm.

22 Hammond, "Bank," p. 82.

Among all the exclusive privileged monopolies in the country, the Bank of the United States was the largest, the best-known and the most powerful. It was castigated by farmers and workers as well as the shopkeepers. One certain accomplishment of Jackson's war on the Bank was to discharge the aggressions of citizens who felt injured by economic privileges.

In his Bank Veto message Jackson declares:

It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes. Distinctions in society will always exist under every just government. Equality of talents, of education, or of wealth cannot be produced by human institutions. In the full enjoyment of the gifts of Heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue, every man is equally entitled to protection by law; ...24

What is demanded here is equality before the law, the restriction of government to the function of guaranteeing equal protection of its citizens. Its aim is not to throttle but to liberate business, to open every possible pathway for the creative enterprise of the people.

Jackson's hard money policy appealed not only to the workingmen, but benefited the small businessmen as well. Hammond has pointed out that the panic of 1837 was equally calamitous to businessmen as well as to laborers.25

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In other words, for a period both the middle class entrepreneurs and the farmers and the workers united behind Jackson. Although "the honeymoon was brief," Hammond continues, "it had separated the corporate form of organization from monopoly ... and ... made banking a form of business free and open to all."  

Dorfman, in his critique of *The Age of Jackson*, asserts that abolition of imprisonment for debt was not an exclusive demand of labor; it was also desired by business circles of the time. He employs this evidence to refute Schlesinger's emphasis on labor alone. But Dorfman fails to see that a given reform may be functional for more than one group; it may, under given conditions, be functional at the same time for two groups nominally conceived as having antithetical interests. This would tend to confirm Bray Hammond's view.  

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B. PERIODICALS


C. UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL

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