

## A Craft Workers' Manifesto (1827)

*While many Americans welcomed the material prosperity, advancements, and opportunities unleashed by the early stages of the Industrial Revolution in the United States—or what some historians have called a “market revolution” or “transition to capitalism”—for others, the early decades of the nineteenth century proved deeply unsettling. Urban artisans, in particular, often experienced a loss of independence and artistic meaning as the production process was increasingly subject to larger forces beyond their control. They formed trade unions in response. Trade unions, defined as groups of skilled workers who practiced a certain trade or craft, such as tailors, printers, and shoemakers, generally organized only to address a specific problem. However, in 1827—a date many historians identify as the birth of the U.S. labor movement—several Philadelphia trade unions banded together to form the Mechanics Union of Trade Associations, the first labor organization that united workers from different crafts. Although the formation of the union did not spur a major movement toward labor organization, many of the ideas put forth in the excerpt from the union’s preamble would resonate in subsequent labor movements.*

When the disposition and efforts of one part of mankind to oppress another, have become too manifest to be mistaken and too pernicious in their consequences to be endured, it has often been found necessary for those who feel aggrieved, to associate, for the purpose of affording to each other mutual protection from oppression.

We, the Journeymen Mechanics of the City and County of Philadelphia, conscious that our condition in society is lower than justice demands it should be, and feeling our inability, individually, to ward off from ourselves and families those numerous evils which result from an unequal and very excessive accumulation of wealth and power into the hands of a few, are desirous of forming an Association, which shall avert as much as possible those evils with which poverty and incessant toil have already inflicted, and which threaten ultimately to overwhelm and destroy us. And in order that our views may be properly understood, and the justness of our intention duly appreciated, we offer to the public the following summary of our reasons, principles, and objects...

As freemen and republicans, we feel it a duty incumbent on us to make known our sentiments fearlessly and faithfully on any subject connected with the general welfare, and we are prepared to maintain, that all who toil have a natural and unalienable right to reap the fruits of their own industry; and that they who by labour (the only source) are the authors of every comfort, convenience and luxury, are in justice entitled to an equal participation, not only in the meanest and the coarsest, but likewise the richest and the choicest of them all...

With respect to the relation existing between employers and the employed, we are prepared, we think, to demonstrate, that it is only through an extremely limited view of their real interests, that the former can be induced to attempt to depreciate the value of human labour. The workman is not more dependent upon his wages for the support of his family than they are on upon the various articles they fabricate or vend. If the mass of the people were enabled by their labour to procure for themselves and families a full and abundant supply of the comforts and conveniences of life, the consumption of articles, particularly of dwellings, furniture and clothing, would amount to at least twice the quantity it does at present, and of course the demand, by which alone employers are enabled either to subsist or accumulate, would likewise be increased in an equal proportion. Each would be enabled to effect twice the quantity of sales or loans which he can effect at present, and the whole industry of a people, consisting of their entire productive power, whether manual or scientific, together with all their capital, might be put into a full, healthful, and profitable action. The workman need not languish for want of employment, the vender for sales, nor the capitalist complain for want of profitable modes of investment...

No greater error exists in the world than the notion that society will be benefited by deprecating the value of human labour. Let this principle (as at this day in England) be carried towards its full extent, and it is in vain that scientific power shall pour forth its inexhaustible treasures of wealth upon the world. Its products will be amassed to glut the overflowing storehouses, and useless hoards of its insatiable monopolizers; while the mechanic and productive classes, who constitute the great mass of the population, and who have wielded power and labored in the production of this immense abundance, having no other resource for subsistence than what they derive from the miserable pittance, which they are compelled by competition to receive in exchange for their inestimable labour, must first begin to pine, languish, and suffer under its destructive and withering influence. But the evil stops not here. The middling classes next, venders of the products of human industry, will begin to experience its deleterious effects. The demand for their articles must necessarily cease from the forced inability of the people to consume: trade must in consequence languish, and losses and failures become the order of the day. At last the contagion will reach the capitalist, throned as he is, in the midst of his ill gotten abundance, and his capital, from the most evident and certain causes, will become useless, unemployed and stagnant, himself the trembling victim of continual alarms

from robberies, burnings, and murder, the unhappy and perhaps ill fated object of innumerable imprecations, insults and implacable hatred from the wronged, impoverished, and despairing multitude. The experience of the most commercial parts of the world sufficiently demonstrates that this is the natural, inevitable, and, shall we not say, righteous consequences of a principle, whose origin is injustice and an unrighteous depreciation of the value and abstraction of the products of human labour—a principle which in its ultimate effects, must be productive of universal ruin and misery, and destroy alike the happiness of every class and individual in society.

The real object, therefore, of this association, is to avert, if possible, the desolating evils which must inevitably arise from a depreciation of the intrinsic value of human labour; to raise the mechanical and productive classes to that condition of true independence and inequality which their practical skill and ingenuity, their immense ability to the nation and their growing intelligence are beginning imperiously to demand: to promote, equally, the happiness, prosperity and welfare of the whole community—to aid in conferring a due and full proportion of that invaluable promoter of happiness, leisure, upon all its useful members; and to assist, in conjunction with such other institutions of this nature as shall hereafter be formed throughout the union, 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.