

## Free and Unfree Labor: The Struggle Against Prison Contract Labor in Albany, New York, 1830-85\*

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In March 1877, in a spectacular move to break a long and bitter strike, John S. Perry, a leading stove founder in Albany, New York, arranged to have his stoves molded at Sing Sing prison. Perry's tactics, although immediately successful (the strike was broken), rekindled a political struggle against contract labor that continued until New York dropped the system seven years later. The importance of this issue to Albany workers led contemporary local historians to observe, "no one subject connected with labor has been more generally discussed" than that of the prison contract system [13, pp. 723-24].

Long-standing resentment against prison labor underlay Albany workers' reaction to Perry's Sing Sing contract. From the beginning of the state prison system in New York in 1796, penal authorities required convicts to labor. In theory, prison labor advanced inmates' reformation by inculcating proper work habits and, at the same time, made the prisons self-supporting.<sup>1</sup> Inevitably, free workers throughout the state denounced convict labor as unfair competition and an affront to the dignity presumably accorded their labor. The post-1877 efforts of Albany workers and others to abolish prison contract labor were, then, only the final phase of an almost century-long protest movement.

The dominant social values -- the community consciousness -- in many of the smaller cities and towns of 19th century America such as Albany, can best be described in terms of a "free labor ideology." Thoroughly middleclass, free labor adherents believed that continued social mobility would ensure the benefits of industrialism for all members of society. Distinctions between "employer" and "employed" and between "capital" and "labor" were not, therefore, considered fixed. Because members of every social class would presumably benefit from economic expansion, supporters of the free labor system insisted that a mutuality of interests prevailed among them. Capital and labor, when acting in concert, were part of an economic process that guaranteed prosperity for all.<sup>2</sup>

By the end of the Civil War, American workers, including many in Albany, had come to fear that industrialization threatened their position in society. Their dependence on the wage system as the sole arbiter of their livelihood made workers uneasy. In their determination to find an alternative to the further erosion of their well-being, workers were guided by a commonwealth ideology, looking to a cooperative rather than competitive future. Workers' commonwealth ideals, founded upon belief in economic as well as political democracy, embraced an egalitarian moral vision. By instituting such reforms as producers' cooperatives and the eight-hour day, workers intended to preserve the dignity and opportunities that America offered them.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the abolition of contract labor was neither the only nor the most important reform Albany workers struggled for in the 19th century. Still, the convict labor system was a constant irritant, and the movement to end it flared up repeatedly, albeit in different contexts. In the Jacksonian era, the 1830s and 1840s, workers opposed contract labor as part of a general attack in the name of "equal rights" on exclusive privilege and monopoly. Workers sought numerous reforms designed to keep open the avenues of social advance, including free public education and an end to imprisonment for debt. In contrast, during the 1860s, workers' antipathy to contract labor was shaped by their growing sense of proletarianization and class antagonism. Contract labor seemed to them to be further proof of employers' innate hostility and of the need, therefore, to make basic changes in the existing order. In both the Jacksonian years and the 1860s, as well as after 1877, the dynamic character of workers' antiprison labor efforts reflected their evolving consciousness.

The antiprison labor movement in Albany intensified after 1877, as the city's workers engaged in what they understood to be "class politics." In 1878 and again in 1882 they forged a labor party to elect officials to local and state government. But both these attempts by workers to exert independent political power met with little success, in part because an existing political party, the Democrats, tried to incorporate the workers' objections to contract labor into its own political agenda. As a result, labor leaders in Albany shifted gears. Workers now saw their grievances resolved through the major parties rather than through a newly organized workers' party. Moreover, they no longer perceived reform as requiring fundamental change in the social order. Albany's labor leaders came to define workers as an interest group, organized on behalf of limited reforms. Most important, Albany workers had adopted the free labor view that mutual interests unified the community.

## I.

The opening of Auburn prison in 1817 marks the real beginning of penal reform in New York. Under the "Auburn system," which was the model for later prisons, inmates spent the day working together in silence (congregate labor); at night they returned to their cells. The labor convicts performed depended for the most part on contracts prison authorities negotiated with private entrepreneurs. Under the contract system the merchant-manufacturers supplied the prison with the necessary raw materials and paid officials fixed fees for the inmates' labor. In return they received the right to market the finished goods. During the 1820s prisoners at Auburn worked at coopering, tailoring, shoemaking, weaving, toolmaking, and riflemaking; Sing Sing prisoners worked mostly at stonecutting. The 1830s saw the introduction of chain and lock making and of the production of silk hats [16, pp. 180-83].

The initial objections raised sporadically by workingmen in New York to prison labor became more insistent in the 1830s. Militant protest by workers throughout the state in 1833 and 1834 pushed the New York legislature to adopt some reforms. In April 1835 the state limited the number of convicts working in any one trade, restricted the items produced in the prisons to articles previously imported, and provided that contracts be let to the highest bidder after due public notice. But prison contractors and officials largely ignored these reforms, forcing workers to mount a new assault on the contract labor system in the 1840s. Reluctant to endanger potential profits from convict labor, the legislators made few changes; after nearly 10 years, the antiprison labor movement had won only minimal concessions [16, pp. 192-200].<sup>4</sup>

Jacksonian workers regarded any monopoly as theft, degrading their labor and robbing them of its just reward. Prison labor qualified as a monopoly in their view because the state by granting contractors an exclusive privilege gave them an unfair advantage. In sentiments expressed at an 1834 antiprison labor convention in Utica, New York, workers charged that contract labor was nothing less than the "war of the state upon the property and rights of honest and industrious mechanics" [15, p. 137]. Jacksonian workers assailed the "hordes of state prison contractors" who had created a "hydra of iniquity" [9, p. 131]. "Mechanics and citizens" at a prison labor protest rally in Albany in 1843 reaffirmed workers' conviction that society owed to them "its comforts, conveniences and improvements." Anything that tended to "cast reproach" or to diminish the "just reward" of honest labor should not be tolerated, let alone "inflicted" on workers by legal enactment [21, pp. 1-3]. Jacksonian workers organized against prison labor as they had

organized for free public education and against imprisonment for debt, as part of a campaign to secure equal opportunity and resist the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few.

## II.

Workers again moved vigorously against contract labor in 1864 when I. G. Johnson, a founder in Spuyten Duyvil just north of New York City, contracted to have his stoves molded at Sing Sing. Workers tried once more to change New York law so that convict labor would not compete with free labor. Not only did the legislature not act on their demands, but, in 1866, it empowered state prison inspectors to employ convicts at whatever labor would be most financially advantageous [11, pp. 449-57; and 17, p. 273].

As a result of the new law, state prison inspector Henry Barnum arranged with a New York City printing office to teach about 70 convicts at Sing Sing the printing trade. Printers and other workers throughout the state mobilized to have this contract abrogated and prohibit its renewal. Reportedly, some 200,000 mechanics petitioned the legislature either directly or through their unions for this reversal. And, in this case, their appeal was successful: the state legislature overruled Barnum and vacated the contract [17, p. 273; and 2, 29 July 1868].

In the 1860s New York workers echoed the sentiments of their Jacksonian forebears. Workers still spoke of the unjust competition facing honest laborers from a system that served "no interest but the contractors" [6, 7 October 1865]. But in their condemnation of prison contract labor in the 1860s, workers also expressed a sense of class more forcefully than they had before. According to *Fincher's Trades Review*, the most important workingmen's newspaper of the period, convict labor was further proof of the present order's inherent defects. The system was just another weapon of "capitalists and employers" in their war on labor, added evidence of "the unmeasurable depth to which capital would reduce labor." The contract system, which attempted "to class honest mechanics [with] assassins, thieves and burglars," signified just how far free workers' condition had deteriorated. A prison contract labor was a "provocation" that must, *Fincher's* insisted, "awaken the deepest feelings of hostility" [6, 8 October 1864].

Workers realized, however, that more than the demise of the prison contract labor system was needed to restore the dignity of their labor. As an alternative to the bleak future they foresaw, workers turned in the 1860s to securing such reforms as producers' cooperatives and the eight-hour day as well as the

end of prison contract labor. According to *Fincher's*, the "lesson" of prison labor was "the mercy we might expect should we fail to guard our rights with those potent weapons, co-operation and combination" [6, 8 October 1864].<sup>5</sup> And, just as workers would have to form cooperatives to ensure economic justice, they would have to join forces in a labor party to gain their full political rights. Thus William Sylvis, president of both the Iron Molder's National Union and the National Labor Union in the 1860s, saw the frustrating record of efforts to end the prison contract system as evidence of why workers had to forge a political movement of their own. Political demagogues might speak flatteringly of the dignity of labor, Sylvis explained, but only "the men who work," using their political power, could save labor from the degradation "which reckless legislation has fostered upon it" [24, pp. 413-17]. Contract labor, then, symbolized the danger to workers should they fail to understand that their class interests required political and economic action to reform the social order.

Despite a continued permissive policy on contract labor, by the mid-1870s the state prison system was not self-supporting. Consequently, many New Yorkers, including Governor Samuel Tilden, pressed for reform. In 1877 the legislature responded by appointing a commission to study ways to improve prison discipline and to administer the prisons better. Acting on a commission-sponsored recommendation, the legislature created the post of state superintendent of prisons. It specifically mandated Louis Pilsbury, the first superintendent, to make the prisons "more remunerative to the state" [20, p. 31; and 2, 20 February 1877].

One of Pilsbury's first acts as superintendent was to reach an agreement with John S. Perry to employ Sing Sing convicts at molding stoves. The original five-year contract called for 150 convicts to be employed and provided for an increase in that number "as circumstances warrant" [2, 21 May 1877]. Apparently both Pilsbury and Perry were confident of the future because the foundry constructed at Sing Sing could accommodate 300 molders as well as 500 laborers working in subsidiary branches of the trade. In fact, within two years about 80 percent of Sing Sing's 1,253 inmates worked for Perry [9, p. 181]. Given the size of this contract, it is no surprise that prison contract labor again became a matter of considerable and immediate importance to New York State workers in general and Albany workers in particular.

On the evening of 20 March 1878, Albany's workers gathered at Ames Hall to nominate a candidate for mayor and an entire Independent Labor Democratic ticket. Although its candidate lost the mayoral election, the party did succeed in making contract labor a pivotal issue in the campaign. Indeed, every Democratic ward committee as well as the party's candidate for mayor denounced

the contract system. Moreover, in an obvious appeal to the city's workers, many of whom were Irish, the Democrats nominated Michael N. Nolan, a leading brewer in the city, for mayor, and Nolan became Albany's first mayor of Irish descent. Nolan's cultural appeal to the same constituency as the labor party had undercut the workers' bid for independent power.<sup>6</sup>

In 1878 Albany's workers still suffered from the devastating impact that the 1870s depression had had on trade unions. But by the start of the new decade, as the economy recovered, the city's workers began rebuilding their organizations. The *Albany Argua* reported a resurgence of unions among many of the city's trades in late 1879 through 1880. Also at this time, Albany's iron molders struck briefly and raised their wages cut during the depression [2, 26 November 1879; and 30 December 1880].<sup>7</sup> In January 1882 the city's unions joined in reorganizing a city trades assembly "to promote the principle of trade unionism and benefit the working classes" [2, 24 January 1882]. Thus, in the 1880s, a rejuvenated labor movement in Albany would be able to act against prison contract labor.

In May 1882 the *Albany Evening Union (AEU)* began publication as a workingmen's newspaper. The *AEU* declared itself to be an independent voice and encouraged workers to serve their own interests by uniting behind "those journals whose voices speak to them and for them in tones which have no uncertain or false sound" [1, 20 November 1882]. Within a short time the city's trades assembly designated the *AEU* its official journal. Given its official status, an examination of the *AEU*'s editorials provides an invaluable guide to Albany workers' evolving consciousness in the 1880s.

The *AEU* identified the end of prison contract labor as the first principle in labor's platform [1, 4 October 1882]. And by 1882 the issue had once more become the focus of political interest. In March 1882 a New York City representative put before the legislature workers' demands for the abolition of contract labor or at least for rates of compensation to convicts equal to those of free labor. But the state assembly ignored a senate-passed bill to study the best way to end convict labor's competition with outside industries [17, pp. 276-77]. Once again, New York's political leaders rebuffed workers on the issue.

Their failure in 1882 to push state officials into decisive action on contract labor prompted workers in Albany once more to forge an independent labor party. In September Joseph Delehanty, one leader of a recent cotton spinners' strike in neighboring Cohoes, New York, called on rallying Albany workers "to give men power from your own ranks by the ballot box and send them to the legislative halls" [1, 19 September 1882]. Soon after this rally, the city's trades assembly met to discuss the formation

of a labor party. Their discussions led to a citizen's convention in October 1882. Besides trades assembly delegates, representatives from the Knights of Labor, from individual trade unions, and from such local reform groups as the greenbackers, antimonomopolists, and the citizen's association attended. The delegates adopted a platform corresponding to the broad reform interests of the groups represented at the convention: government control of communication and transportation; reservation of public lands for settlement (not one acre for railroads); introduction of factory inspectors; an end to the labor of children younger than 14; the government to issue legal tender directly to people, independent of banks; and, of course, the abolition of prison contract labor. The Citizen's Labor Party (CLP) that evolved from this convention nominated candidates for local and statewide offices [1, 5, 6, and 10 October 1882].<sup>8</sup>

The Citizen's Labor Party, like the *AEU*, wanted to wean workers from their devotion to the two major political parties in Albany. Workers needed to reject "old party leaders" and depend on new men whose experience, capacity, and integrity were not tainted by personal ambition. Such leaders could come only from the ranks of labor; professional men as a class were not sympathetic to and had no intercourse with workingmen [1, 6 October 1882]. The chairman of a large rally in Albany endorsing CLP candidates stated, "We must rise in our might and control our [political] machines which rule us" [1, 13 October 1882]. The CLP considered it axiomatic that for their reform platform to be successful, workers had to win some control over political institutions.

Despite the new party's high hopes, the CLP saw all but one of its candidates defeated in the November 1882 elections. Joseph Delehanty, who ran in the Fourth Assembly District with Democratic endorsement proved the exception. In the aftermath of the election, the *AEU* observed that "the important question they had hoped to decide yesterday was whether honest, respectable men, who owe their industry to their own patient toil and industry, should have a voice in the affairs of government or whether their wants and honest requests were to be ignored" [1, 8 November 1882]. That workers had no such voice yet meant only that the struggle would continue.

In January 1883 the *AEU* still seemed confident of workers' chances to secure their reform program.<sup>9</sup> But by February the *AEU* had abandoned the independent labor party movement. Although reaffirming its faith in political action, the newspaper announced that "the time is not yet ripe for the workingman to form a separate political party." It based this conclusion on a belief that far from eliciting public sympathy, the brief experiment with the CLP had shown that politically organized workers engendered "popular dislike and distrust" and aroused fears of "class

confrontations." "Thoughtful leaders," the *AEU* now asserted, recognized that labor's ends need not be gained in the United States by "intimidation" in the political process. The newspaper proposed that, instead of organizing a formal labor party, workers organize to support and vote for candidates, whatever their party affiliations, whose records indicated their sympathy with the "Councils of Labor" [1, 15 February 1883].<sup>10</sup> The *AEU* expressed optimistic faith that the democratic process would enable workers to secure a fair hearing and relief for their grievances.

The shift by Albany's labor movement away from a class-defined independence, as shown in the *AEU*'s repudiation of a labor party, reflects the evolution of workers' understanding of the prison contract labor issue. Spokesmen for the city's labor community no longer invoked contract labor, as they had in the 1860s, as a tool of capitalist against worker. Indeed, workers now claimed that their employers shared with them the need to overturn the contract system. At a "monster meeting" in March 1883, some 10,000 Albanians marched under banners reading "LABOR AND CAPITAL UNITE TO ABOLISH PRISON CONTRACTS." The *AEU* reported that nothing in the past 20 years had aroused so much antipathy as prison labor: "Merchants, mechanics, tradesmen and manufacturers, all joined in the monster turnout." The meeting passed resolutions identifying labor as the "foundation of all wealth, of individual happiness and national prosperity," and calling for an end to the contract system. One state senator told the participants that "capital and labor... were here assembled on a common basis, their interests in this question were identical." Other speakers, including some professional men--members of a "class" reputedly unsympathetic to workingmen -- similarly celebrated the mutual need of workers and employers to fight against prison contract labor [1, 7 March 1883].<sup>11</sup>

The real enemy of workers as well as of employers became simply the individual prison contractor. Perry's contract with Sing Sing, which enabled him to produce and sell stoves far more cheaply than other Albany founders, injured the other employers as well as their employees. Workers still had a vital interest in abolishing prison contract labor. But now workers considered their interests to be merged with those of the general community.

During the 1883 legislative session workers united behind a bill (introduced by Assemblyman Butts of Monroe County) that simply would have ended the contract system. But the senate instead passed a bill submitting the issue to a nonbinding popular referendum. Over workers' objections, the Butts bill was killed and the "submission bill" became law [2, 18 April and 8 May 1883].

In July 1883 John Parr, a former compositor with the *Argus* and a long-time member of the printers' union, assumed the *AEU*'s



editorship.<sup>12</sup> Parr stressed the benefit to workers of political organization. But when Parr referred to the "labor party" he meant only that workers had particular grievances. The failure of "remonstrance and petition" compelled workers to seek relief through "the recognized and legal coercion of the ballot box." Labor does great damage to itself, Parr asserted, by allowing "all sorts and conditions of political theories, utterly foreign to its purposes, to be engrafted upon its stock." Labor had to reject all such "political heresies. It is time for this thing to stop, and for the Labor Party pure, simple and unadulterated" [1, 22 August 1883].<sup>13</sup> Workers did not need to join movements whose purpose was to change the social order fundamentally. Labor could satisfy its legitimate claims through the political system as it then stood.

Rather than have workers organize an independent, class-based party, the *AEU* would have them follow a more traditional political path -- rewarding its friends and voting against its enemies. According to Parr, only by supporting "those who support us" could workers secure suitable legislation, such as a law abolishing prison contract labor [1, 24 September 1883]. The labor party, the *AEU* announced, "has come to stay; it is not for today nor for tomorrow, but it is, and will be a political factor until our grievances are considered, our wrongs righted, and prison contract labor a thing -- a dream of the past" [1, 31 October 1883].<sup>14</sup> Workers' politics in the future would be pressure group politics on behalf of their particular interests.

Just before the 1883 elections and referendum, delegations of workers in Albany attended the county conventions of the Republican and Democratic parties. In both cases, they asked party officials to support workers on the contract labor issue. In response, Albany's Democrats unanimously voted a resolution denouncing contract labor and providing ballots for its abolition at the polls [1, 13 October 1883].<sup>15</sup> The Republicans were apparently less receptive to the workers' overtures [1, 18 October 1883]. The *AEU* concluded that workers had to support the Democrats: "The Democratic party after all is the only hope of the workingmen, and we advise them to vote the ticket straight" [1, 1 November 1883].<sup>16</sup>

Election day November 1883 brought gratifying results for labor. The referendum vote throughout the state for abolition was 405,882 in favor, 266,966 against, a three to two majority. In Albany County the abolition majority was almost four to one, and in the city proper the difference in votes was nearly 10 to one [1, 10 November 1883; and 17, p. 279]. The *AEU* applauded the election results as evidence of workers' effectiveness when properly organized. Through judicious use of the ballot, workers could exert pressure on the political process. Their role in politics, the *AEU* maintained, was not to vie for power so as to

remake the system but to work for limited, albeit necessary, reforms.<sup>17</sup>

The New York legislature convened in 1884 knowing that the vast majority of the state's voters had supported an end to prison contract labor. Nevertheless, the legislators still equivocated; expressing concern over the burden a nonself-supporting prison system might place on taxpayers, they sought time to consider alternative systems. But the anticontract labor movement at last proved irresistible, and in the end, the legislators voted that no contract for convict labor would be renewed or extended and that no new contracts would be negotiated. However, because this action did not abolish existing contracts, the debate over the system lingered through the 1880s. Only in 1894, following an amendment to the state constitution, was prison contract labor finally eliminated as an issue for New York's -- and Albany's -- workers [17, pp. 28-94].<sup>18</sup>

Albany workers stood poised in 1884 with one foot in the future and one in the past. While articulating the emerging interest group ideas of Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labor, they reasserted basic 19th century free labor concepts, especially the mutuality of interests of capital and labor.<sup>19</sup> As significant as the prison contract labor issue was for Albany's workers, its demise would not alter the economic system, and they recognized and, in the end, accepted this fact. In contrast to their statements in the 1860s, the city's workers no longer spoke in terms of finding an alternative to their dependence on the wage system. They would remain organized, politically and in trade unions, but as a pressure group to win limited reforms. Moreover, as the *Albany Evening Union* did not fail to note, workers' interests were in harmony with those of the larger community. Thus, by the mid-1880s Albany workers had adopted the values that characterized the prevailing community consciousness.

#### NOTES

\*This article appears in an expanded version in [10].

1. On New York prisons, see [15; 16; and 22, Chs. 3, 4, and 10].

2. On free labor ideology, see [7, Ch. 1, and 19, pp. 30-31]. These ideas and movements are covered in much greater detail in [10].

3. In many ways the concept of a commonwealth ideology is a composite drawn from [4, 5, 8, 12, and 25]. Yet as workers searched for some independence from wages, they still recognized the legitimacy of private property. Although critical of the economic system, they did not abandon free labor principles

altogether. In [10, especially Chs. 2-4] I show how during the second half of the 19th century a dialectic emerges among Albany workers between free labor and commonwealth ideas.

4. See also [3, Vol. 1, pp. 369-70; 14, pp. 155-61; 17, Vol. 3, pp. 257-67; and 15, pp. 136-38, and 143-45].

5. In 1867 Albany's iron molders did open a cooperative foundry. The city's workers also actively supported the eight-hour movement. For example, in 1868 and 1872 employees at the repair shops of the New York Central Railroad in Albany struck in an effort to win the shortened workday. See [10, Ch. 3].

6. On the election, see [2, 14 September 1877; 28 March 1878; 30 March 1878; and 26 March 1878; and 23, pp. 400-406]. The workers' candidate for mayor came in second in this election. The third-place finisher was from a citizen's party (Republican-supported). Although this party did not address the prison contract labor issue, its nominee for mayor was an inspector at the Albany County Penitentiary.

7. There were 23 trade unions reported in Albany by 1883. See [1, 8 January 1883].

8. A CLP committee on resolutions and platform included representatives from the Knights of Labor; the trades assembly; the citizen's association; greenbackers; the stonemasons' union; the printers' union; the bricklayers', masons' and plasterers' union; and from several towns in Albany County.

9. Besides Delahanty, two other labor candidates -- from outside Albany -- were elected to the state assembly. The Democrats also, at least in their statewide platform, had supported prohibiting prison labor-free labor competition. Presumably, the time was ripe to abolish contract labor.

10. By rejecting an independent third party, the *AEU* appears to have accepted the prevailing free labor idea that any political party formed in the interests of one segment of the community encouraged class warfare. In the United States, political parties theoretically helped reconcile the interests of all members of the community.

11. There is some indication of the attitudes of Albany manufacturers to prison contract labor. Rathbone and Sard, another large foundry in Albany, was reported negotiating with Ohio authorities in 1877 to contract to have its stoves molded in that state's prisons, although nothing seems to have come of this plan [2, 26 March 1877]. Another founder, at a time when the molders' union was calling for a boycott of Perry's prison-made stoves, asked customers to compare his stoves, made by "HONEST SKILLED, FIRST-CLASS MECHANICS," with the stoves made by "THIEVES, MURDERERS AND OTHER CRIMINALS" [2, 2 April 1878].

12. Parr's views in his *AEU* editorials attest to Albany labor's continuing rejection of commonwealth precepts and acceptance of free labor ideas. Parr stated that strikes were a last

resort, one unions sought to avoid. The "main object" of unions, according to Parr, was "to meet capital on a reasonable basis, to study into the relative value of labor and capital, to ascertain what is fair and just to both and to arbitrate in a spirit of friendly feeling the right of both -- to bring the employers into harmony with the employees, and to develop the fact that their interests are identical and inseparable" [1, 14 September 1883].

13. Parr repeatedly attacked those workers who wanted to organize an independent party, calling them the "visionary element" and the "striking element" -- discontented radicals who cared nothing for workers. See [1, 8, and 20 October 1883].

14. Although the *AEU* had some reservations, it supported the Democratic candidate for district attorney because his stand on the submission bill showed him to be the workingman's friend.

15. Ballots on the submission bill were supplied by interested parties. The Democrats, by voting to provide antiprison labor ballots, were aiding the workers' cause. For their own part, to raise money to print ballots, Albany workers endorsed a State Workingmen's Assembly plan to collect 15 cents per union member; they also held a fund-raising picnic.

16. One can only speculate as to why workers' views shifted so much at this time. Two points might be made. First, the Democrats had for some time tried to accommodate workers on the prison labor issue. Second, more radical, albeit minority, elements persisted. For example, the *AEU* reported a struggle between a Knights of Labor faction and regular ticket supporters within the printers' union. What remains clear is that at least the labor leadership had rejected independent politics.

17. James Weinstein makes this general point about 19th century politics in [16].

18. The 1894 amendment took effect 1 January 1897.

19. The idea of pure and simple trade unionism did not, of course, first surface with Samuel Gompers. But the newly emerging AFL did most clearly articulate a pragmatic, job-conscious trade unionism. Gompers, after supporting Henry George in his 1886 New York City mayoral campaign, abandoned active politics altogether. Equally important, Gompers rejected the notion of mutuality of interests between employers and employees. Therefore, there are differences between his ideas and those of the *AEU*. See [18, pp. 47-48, and 58-74].

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