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Eight Hours, Greenbacks and "Chinamen": Wendell Phillips, Ira Steward, and the Fate of Labor Reform in Massachusetts

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In 1872, "Anniversary Week," as the annual May convention season was known in Boston, gave the public a demonstration of the continuing strength of reform in the city that was the cradle of abolition. Competing for halls, celebrity speakers, and newsprint columns that week were suffragists, the Massachusetts Temperance Alliance, Unitarians, Universalists, evangelists and tract peddlers, the New England Female Moral Reform Society, the YMCA, the Seaman's Friend Society, the Children's Mission, and a half dozen others, but not lost amidst this clubbing frenzy were the labor reformers who attracted much attention to themselves by ripping their movement apart. In an incident that the Boston *Globe* politely referred to as "a little unpleasantness," the two epitomes of New England's labor reformers, Ira Steward and Wendell Phillips, turned a labor convention into a hot shouting match and put an end to their nearly decade-long collaboration that briefly transcended both class and party.

The first convention of the newly founded Massachusetts Labor Union proceeded along the usual course and had carried on longer than the eight-hour day that was one of the group's chief planks when the last speaker of the evening, Wendell Phillips, ascended to the podium. By this time the hall that earlier that morning had been filled by well-dressed gentlemen and ladies was packed by the after-work addition of "rough yeomanry, with shaggy brows and beards, hard hands and bronzed faces, or tradesmen with pallid cheeks, thin legs and stooping shoulders." This crowd gave Phillips an enthusiastic cheer that set a far different tone from the polite and subdued applause of the morning. Phillips did not deliver a full lecture that night—his speeches normally took several hours and commanded fees exceeding the monthly income of most of the workers in the room, including a skilled machinist such as Steward—but instead took the liberty of enlarging upon the resolutions proposed by the delegated committee, and that was when the "unpleasantness" began.[1]

The last resolution that Phillips read out addressed the controversy that had recently erupted in the press over the conduct of the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor (BSL), the nation's first such agency, that Phillips and the Eight Hour League had lobbied the General Court to found three years earlier. Echoing the recent barrage of criticism that had been leveled against the BSL in the press, Phillips stated his "grave objections to the manner in which the Labor Bureau of this State has been managed,"

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[1]Boston *Globe*, May 30, 1872; *Commonwealth*, June 1, 1872; *New York Herald*, May 29, 1872.

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George E. McNeill

but defended the bureau's purpose and praised its director, the educational reformer Henry Kimble Oliver. He concluded, "we hope he [Oliver] may be retained at his post, and allowed to call to his assistance parties who have the confidence and respect of the labor movement." This brought Ira Steward to his feet in a "words-run-mad" defense of his friend and president of the Eight Hour League, George McNeill, who happened to be the unnamed BSL assistant that Phillips alluded to. Phillips was soon forced to condemn McNeill by name for giving "undue prominence to the eight-hour idea" in the BSL's latest annual report. In a moment "dignity and even decency were forgotten" and "personal recrimination became rife." Steward later admitted that he lost control and behaved ungentlemanly, but dismissed decorum and good manners as qualities of "tories and the nobility," not workingmen like himself. Phillips, for his part, "mortified" his listeners with his "rude speech" and as he left the hall "spitefully" tore the Eight Hour League poster off the wall.[2]

In the wake of these events both rival labor reform organizations slipped into decline. Phillips' Massachusetts's Labor Union was short lived and didn't survive the year, though Phillips remained a popular speaker before labor crowds for years to come. Ira Steward's Boston Eight Hour League likewise shrank to a handful of eight-hour die-hards. Though Steward would later argue that purging Phillips was necessary to attract labor support, in the months after the "unpleasantness" of Anniversary Week Steward found himself ostracized by Boston's trade union movement. When union officials convened to make preparations for an upcoming July Fourth "eight-hour" parade, they argued for an hour and took "two or three votes" before they could agree to admit Steward to their meeting.[3] By the Fall of 1872, labor reformers publicly complained that divisiveness in their ranks was weakening the movement. "The real

[2] *Ibid.*; Steward's self-defense is found in *Commonwealth*, June 22, 1872; on Steward's manners see E. H. Rogers Papers, microfilm edition (frame 00386).

[3] *New York Herald*, June 10, 1872. Boston *Globe*, June 1, 1872.

progress of Labor Reform," declared the Labor Reform State Committee, a group representing the most recent attempt at reorganizing the labor reform coalition, "is of course retarded by the separate action of numberless knots of well meaning reformers who are opposed to each other."[4] Less than a year after the expulsion of Phillips the editors of Boston's labor paper pondered, "We are asked if this august body [the Eight Hour League] is extinct. We do not know." And in what must have been an indictment of Steward and the eight-hour leadership, they continued, "If it be, we should be glad to hear that some judicious friends of the working-men had taken up the question of the hours of labor, in connection with labor arbitration, cooperation, and other questions that, removed from the hands of professional agitators, become easier of solution." By the mid-1870s Ira Steward sadly reported that "the most of our few are dispirited" and were like "the forlorn hope of a besieged fort."[5]

Such was the inglorious ending of what had begun as one of the most promising cross-class labor reform coalitions of the Reconstruction era.

* * * * * *

The building of Massachusetts's coalition of workers and elite reformers was not an easy or inevitable achievement. At the outset of William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist campaign in the 1830s, both the movement for the immediate emancipation of slaves and that of workers striving to retain their artisans' independence against the encroachment of industrialization were often deeply suspicious of one another. Early in their careers such leading abolitionists as Phillips and Garrison expressed their faith in marketplace competition and even praised poverty for the rigorous discipline it enforced. "Poverty," Phillips explained, "is the spur that wins the race."[6]

Likewise, labor leaders often dismissed elite abolitionists as sentimental philanthropists who overlooked the oppression of workers upon their own doorstep in their eagerness to uplift the distant slave. For their part elite abolitionists accused labor spokesmen of racism and ignorance and objected to any comparison between the condition of blacks in slavery and the problems of northern workers.

But while the political and ideological distance between the leaders of the early abolitionist crusade and radical workers was daunting, it proved surmountable. Indeed, over the course of the next 30 years abolitionists and workers would draw more closely together in their outlooks until, by the immediate post-war years, these two former antagonists had joined forces within several grand labor coalitions. By the late 1860s, nearly every surviving abolitionist leader had endorsed the labor movement's central demand: the legislated reduction of hours in the working day. Even leaders who seemed least sympathetic to labor's demands in the 1830s, such as Garrison, Henry Ward

[4] *The Trades Journal and Financial Record* (Boston), Oct. 5, 1872.

[5] *Trades Journal and Financial Record* (Boston), Jan. 25, 1873. This paper was the successor to the Boston *American Workman*; Ira Steward to Friederick Sorge, n.d. (probably 1876), Ira Steward Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

[6] See Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse, 1830–1844* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1933); Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815–1860* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 27–29; Jonathan A. Glickstein, "Poverty is not Slavery: American Abolitionists and the Competitive Labor Market," in Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman, eds. *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 195–206; James Brewer Steward, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976), 35. Phillips' quote can be found in Glickstein, "Poverty is Not Slavery," 200.

Beecher, and Lydia Maria Child, came around after the war and publicly supported the labor reform movement. After the war it was widely recognized that labor's closest allies outside of the ranks of workers were the men and women who had formerly fought for the emancipation of slaves.[7]

Such labor reform coalitions did not arise by themselves but were consciously constructed by the labor leaders of the period. In Massachusetts much of the credit for building the labor reform coalition that was the Eight Hour League goes to Ira Steward, a laborer's son who was apprenticed to the machinist's trade while in his teens. Young Steward was not long at his bench before he chaffed under the bit of his 12-hour days and devoted himself to the cause of shorter hours. He was active in the 10 hour movement of the 1850s, writing letters to the labor press condemning a society where "thousands of human beings … are virtually dragged from their beds at early dawn and compelled to toil until the shade of the setting sun has spread upon the earth." In those years Steward's ideological struggle was not with government or society but often with elements of his own labor movement, some of whose trade unions were resistant to the idea of a legislated limitation on the working day, fearing that a shorter day meant a shorter pay envelope. But, in 1863, as a delegate to the International Machinists and Blacksmiths Union (IMBU), then convening in Boston, Steward scored his first victory when the union endorsed his resolution on shorter hours. Not only did the IMBU agree with Steward that "the most important change to us as working men, to which all else is subordinate, is a permanent reduction to **eight** of the hours exacted for each day's work," it even budgeted $400 to advance the shorter hours cause and gave Steward the job as paid organizer of the effort.[8]

Freed from his daily toil as a machinist by the IMBU, Steward devoted all his efforts toward establishing the eight-hour day. What Steward aimed for was broadening the movement to include the many middle-class reformers of New England. The IMBU even endorsed such a strategy—part of the eight-hour resolution that Steward succeeded in passing included a passage that recognized that an eight-hour law could not be passed without help from many reform allies and pledged to "use all the machinery of agitation, whether it be among those of the religious, political, reformatory or moneyed enterprises of the day …" It was clear to these labor leaders that former abolitionists and other middle-class reformers had the organizational experience, the money, and the influence in the state and federal governments that could make their crusade a success.[9]

In early 1864, as the first step in cobbling together such an alliance, Steward approached one of Massachusetts's most well-known abolitionists, Wendell Phillips, and solicited his advice on the best way to fashion an eight-hour appeal that would attract middle-class reformers. The two were no strangers. Abolitionism and the

[7]See Timothy Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International: Marxism and the American Reform Tradition, 1848–1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), chapt. 1. For an excellent review of recent historiography on abolition and labor see Herbert Shapiro, "Labor and Antislavery: Reflections on the Literature," *Nature, Society and Thought*, 2 (1989), 471–490.

[8]Hyman Kuritz, "Ira Steward and the Eight Hour Day," *Science and Society*, 20 (1956), 410; Dorothy W. Douglass, "Ira Steward on Consumption and Unemployment," *Journal of Political Economy*, 40 (Aug. 1932), 532; Philip S. Foner and Brewster Chamberlin, eds., *Friedrich A. Sorge's Labor Movement in the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 101–102.

[9] John R. Commons, Ulrich B. Phillips, Eugene A. Gilmore, Helen L. Sumner, and John B. Andrews, eds., *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society* (Cleveland: The A.H. Clark Co., 1910–11), vol. 9, 279.

Wendell Phillips

antebellum 10-hour movement were intertwined. Steward was an ardent abolitionist and it was alleged by some of his associates that he had fought in bleeding Kansas. Steward's right-hand man, George McNeill, whom Steward described as his most likeminded ally and referred to as a "walking convention … when you hear him talk you can be sure that he represents a number of us in one," was present at an abolitionist meeting with Phillips in the 1840s that was broken up by a violent mob of "well dressed young aristocrats."[10] Certainly, by 1859 Steward and Phillips were well acquainted with one another, as Steward respectfully criticized Phillips' interpretation of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* in the pages of the flagship journal of abolition, the *Liberator*.[11]

Phillips responded warmly to Steward's request for aid and advised Steward that in order to recruit more of his fellow reformers he should take an "unequivocal position" against strikes. Steward agreed, saying, "We have learned to *hate* strikes." Steward and

[10]Steward to Sorge, Mar. 13, 1876, Ira Steward Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin. For details of McNeill's life and legacy, see Gary M. Fink, *Biographical Dictionary of American Labor* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 384; Robert R. Montgomery, " 'To Fight This Thing Till I Die': The Career of George Edwin McNeill," in Ronald C. Kent, *et al*, eds., *Culture, Gender, Race, and U.S. Labor History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 3–23.

[11]See Montgomery, 'To Fight This Thing Till I Die': The Career of George Edwin McNeill," 5; *Liberator*, Mar. 4, 1859.

his fellow organizers were grateful for Phillips' help; as they told him after asking him for a loan to buy office furnishings, "we feel strong only in your *counsel*!!!"[12]

The problem of tailoring the justifications for labor reform to more elite audiences led Steward to a consumer emphasis. He bounced one idea off Phillips that he thought would appeal to a broad range of reformers. "[I]s the following sound?" he asked of Phillips: "The Labor Reform Movement means *the Discharge of all useless Middle Men and the Abolition of all Useless Working Hours.*" The problem, he explained, was that the system paid "two, three, or five *middle* men to do *one's* work," and he gave the example of Boston where there were some 80 coal dealers who each exacted their pound of flesh from the public when a single agent would have sufficed. Steward estimated the cost to the Boston public of these excess numbers of middlemen at running to some $5,000,000 per year. Phillips, no economist himself, must have agreed that this was a promising line of argument for before long Mary Steward, Ira's wife, was hard at work combing through the Boston City Directory compiling a table of the numbers of people working in each occupational category in the city so as to better nail down Steward's $5,000,000 estimate of economic waste.[13]

Steward, like Phillips, wondered how to appeal to those reform elements that were traditionally least interested in labor reform. To gain ammunition for them, Steward toured some of the "vilest places" in Boston, and recommended that Phillips go there too, for its "sights were a text [for] that class of Temperance reformers, who ignore the *poverty* and *labor* side of the story."[14]

In return, Steward offered Phillips advice on attracting workers to the Republican Party and to the project of Reconstruction. Steward warned Phillips that the Democrats were planning to seize the upcoming 1867 Chicago Workingmen's Convention as a platform to launch their campaign. Steward advised that "the Republicans *could* prick [their] … bubble by giving the 8 hour system to the Government workshops before the close of the Winter Congress." On another occasion, Steward advised Phillips that the best way to sell workers on Radical Reconstruction was to emphasize that without it there would be continued southern unrest and occupation, both of which would result in their taxes being raised. "Workingmen appealed to in the name of higher taxes," recommended Steward from experience, "are quite impressible I find."[15]

By the summer of 1864, the planning was done and the actual work of building an eight-hour coalition was begun. Steward, along with his union partner, Charles W. Livermore, drafted a circular letter that ran under a headline incorporating both labor and consumer themes: "LABOR REFORM MOVEMENT! THE DISCHARGE OF ALL USELESS MIDDLE MEN, and the ABOLITION OF ALL USELESS HOURS!" In this circular's salutation, the goal of building a cross-class coalition was made clear. The circular was aimed for "distribution among Union Men and to **all** who are in favor of the Social Elevation of the Great Producing Classes."[16]

Soon Steward undertook to craft a set of resolutions that would appeal to both workers and reformers. Gathering together a group of reformers at his hometown of Hopedale Modern Age, a utopian community founded by the Universalist theologian

[12]Steward to Phillips, n.d., in the Crawford Blagden Collection of the Phillips Papers, Houghton Library, Boston (herafter cited as Phillips Papers). Many thanks to David Zonderman for calling my attention to this set of invaluable letters.

[13]*Ibid.*

[14]Steward to Phillips, Phillips Papers, July 20, 1867.

[15]*Ibid.*; Steward to Phillips, Phillips Papers, n.d.

[16]Steward to Phillips, Phillips Papers, July 20, 1867.

and abolitionist Adin Ballou, Steward tried out some of his draft resolutions in a speech that emphasized the continuity of the abolitionist and reform tradition. Steward criticized those reformers who remained silent on the hours issue by comparing them to the reformers of the American Tract Society who had remained silent during the fight for abolition, and to the Hungarian patriot, Louis Kossuth, who answered Garrison's plea to join the fight against slavery by saying that he would leave this issue up to "those who are interested." Such fence-sitters were "moral hermits" who "want to make money, go and come, and receive the advantages of society, without taking certain disagreeable responsibilities." In considering the problem of these silent reformers and moral hermits, Steward revealed one crucial reason why the voices of the abolitionists and other leading reformers, of middle-class allies generally, were so crucial to his strategy of winning the eight-hour reform. Speaking directly to the fence-sitters, Steward explained, "This is our plan—to appeal to all good men and women, who, by their moral power will bayonet you up to the dreaded speaking point, when you, in your turn, will be shocked at the shameful silence of others." Who else carried more moral power than the religious and social leaders of the crusade against slavery? Securing the moral voice of men like Garrison and Phillips was one of the linchpins of Steward's long-term strategy for social change.[17]

In November of 1865, Steward issued a call for a mass meeting to discuss the eight-hour demand. The response was overwhelming and far exceeded his expectations. In spite of the rain that night, Faneuil Hall in Boston could not accommodate all who arrived, and hundreds were turned away. Five hundred workers from Charlestown paraded to the hall carrying "transparencies and mottoes." A cornet band entertained the audience with popular songs from the balcony. Along with the multitude of workingmen who filled the hall, several hundred women packed into the balcony.[18]

Steward's strategy of appealing to the abolitionist reformers was evident at the Faneuil Hall rally. The keynote speaker was, of course, Wendell Phillips. Steward introduced a set of resolutions that bridged the reform and working-class communities. In the first resolution, the purpose of limiting the work day to eight hours was explained. Rather than relying on the bread-and-butter rationales for eight hours such as the trade unions of the day offered, Steward emphasized the cultural and moral aspects of the reform. Two years before, when Steward drafted a set of eight-hour resolutions for his Machinist's and Blacksmith's Union, there was only one purpose given, namely that "a Reduction of Hours is an Increase of Wages." But here, in the presence of Wendell Phillips, the purpose was far more universal. The "next great step" for America, offered Steward, harkening back to the short-hour themes first voiced in the Jacksonian era, was the passage of laws that would prevent capital from depriving workers of "the time and opportunity necessary to study the institutions of his country, or the great questions of the age." Steward crafted his phrases to link the eight-hour struggle with the great crusade for emancipation that came before it. The adoption of an eight-hour system in the federal workshops and naval yards, said one resolution, "would be of as much significance to the Labor Reform movement as was the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia to emancipation in 1863." Another resolution heralded emancipation and the recent Union victory in language far in advance of what was to be found in most of the union halls and labor papers of the day; the resolution declared that the assembly "rejoice that the rebel aristocracy of the South has been

[17]Boston *Daily Evening Voice*, Aug. 4, 1865.
[18]Boston *Daily Evening Voice*, Nov. 3, 1865.

crushed, that we rejoice that beneath the glorious shadow of our victorious flag men of every clime, lineage and color are recognized as free." Even in the one resolution that argued the case for eight hours from a wages point of view, the concerns of the middle-class consumer were also assured. Eight hours was the only reform in which the wages of the laborer could be raised "without increasing the price of the article produced." Rather, in a bit of economic legerdemain, the cost would be borne completely by the employer: "this increase in the laborer's wages will be at the expense of the vast wealth of the individual capitalist, and not at the expense of the laboring consumer."[19]

The State Convention of the Grand Eight Hour League of Massachusetts followed the Fanueil Hall rally in the spring of 1866. An impressive total of 14 local eight-hour societies were represented. Angered at the Massachusetts legislature's refusal to pass their eight-hour bill, the league redoubled their efforts and established a special fundraising committee whose goal was raising $5000 for a new short-hours campaign. This money was earmarked for building the cross-class alliance between Massachusetts's working men and women with former abolitionists and middle-class reformers that Steward had envisioned. As the convention put it, these funds would be used to "convince thousands of leading minds that the Eight Hour Cry means more of Wealth, Health, Education, Morals and Reform, than they first imagined." The sorts of people that the campaign hoped to attract were those "fair, disinterested, and influential persons who only need to be convinced of the soundness of our claims to cause them to become at once our most valuable allies."[20]

Steward's efforts to attract reformers had paid off. The list of major contributors to the eight-hour campaign swelled with the names of former middle-class abolitionists. Gerrit Smith wrote to Steward objecting that his eight-hour idea did not go far enough as an eight-hour law was only a "temporary" expedient. Rather, Smith believed that six hours should be the proper standard of the working day. He enclosed $20 all the same, a gesture he continued annually for many years. Other prominent abolitionists such as Benjamin Butler, Rev. Edward Everett Hale, Dr. Dio Lewis, Josiah Abbott, Rufus Wyman, and Ezra Heywood all offered their support to the eight-hour campaign. William Lloyd Garrison placed himself on public record in support of the eight-hour campaign and the League behind it. He sent a letter explaining his endorsement of the campaign along with his contribution. Within his testimonial can be glimpsed the old universal reform sentiment that animated so much of antebellum reform:

> The same principle which has led me to abhor and oppose the unequaled oppression of the black laborers of the South, instinctively leads me to feel an interest in whatever is proposed to be done to improve the condition and abridge the toil of the white laborers of the North—or, rather, of all overtasked working classes . . [21]

Though the eight-hour coalition's primary demand was bottled up in the legislature, its political fortunes remained promising. Edward H. Rogers, a longtime eight-hour spokesman, was sent to the legislature by his fellow workers at the Charleston Navy

[19]Commons, *Documentary History*, vol. 9, 280, 304–305; Boston *Daily Evening Voice*, Nov. 3, 1865.

[20]Susan M. Kingsbury, *et al.*, *Labor Laws and Their Enforcement: With Special Reference to Massachusetts* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911), 101; Boston *Weekly Voice*, May 3, 1866.

[21]David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862–1872* (1967; reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 123–124; *Fincher's Trades' Review*, May 12, 1866; Boston *Daily Evening Voice*, May 2, 1866.

Yard. The treasurer of its recent fund drive campaign, James M. Stone, a veteran of the antebellum 10-hour movement and a member of the legislature from Charleston, was elected to the powerful position of speaker. In 1867, the legislature approved an eight-hour league petition calling for the creation of a Bureau of Statistics of Labor. Wendell Phillips exerted his considerable influence in the Republican Party to secure the appointment to the BSL of Henry K. Oliver, a respected educational reformer, and the eight-hour league's own George McNeill as his assistant. Oliver had made a mark in labor reform circles as an eight-hour advocate who resigned his commission as the state's first appointed school constable, whose charge included the supervision of child labor in the state's factories out of protest at the inadequacy of the laws he was pledged to enforce.[22]

Though the Grand Eight Hour League, the statewide coalition the two men had founded, fell to pieces in 1867 after the failure of an eight-hour law in the legislature, the relationship between Steward and Phillips remained close. Little time was lost before the two activists reorganized the movement locally as the Boston Eight Hour League and continued their efforts to win a legally restricted work day. After Phillips addressed a Massachusetts legislative committee considering an eight-hour bill, Steward described his speech as "the most important contribution to the subject [of labor] which has ever been made." In an uncharacteristic moment of humility, Steward gave all the credit for the recent successes of the national Eight-Hour Movement, including the winning of the eight-hour day for all federal employees, to Phillips. "But for his [Phillips'] influence in our behalf, Congress would have waited several years longer before we could have brought power enough to bear to secure the Eight Hour Law."[23]

Elite former abolitionists continued to take an even more active role in the movement: Rev. J.T. Sargent, William Channing, and Aaron Powell, noted leaders of the National Anti-Slavery Society, were all elected vice-presidents of the Eight Hour League.[24] Not long afterwards, Eight Hour League president George McNeill "congratulated the workingmen upon the espousal of their cause by so many veterans of the anti-slavery movement."[25]

By the end of the 1860s, abolitionist participation in labor reform was widely recognized. *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly* observed that it was "Mr. Wendell Phillips and his late anti-slavery coadjutors" who were giving their attention to the eight-hour law. Theodore Tilton's reform paper, the *Independent*, reflecting on the legacy of abolitionism, noted that abolitionists, "in digging at the root of the slavery question … mellowed the soil for a score of other great reforms," among which he counted "the hours of labor."[26]

Massachusett's labor reformers reaped the fruits of their steadily broadening base of support in the Fall 1869 elections. With little preparation the labor reform ticket won

[22]Kingsbury, *et al.*, 96–97, 102–103; Jesse H. Jones, "Henry Kimble Oliver, A Memorial," *Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor*, 1886, 14–24; Edward Rogers Papers, Unpublished Autobiography (frames 00371–00372, 00391); see also, "The Labor Movement Past and Present," Boston *Globe*, June 15, 1872.

[23]George E. McNeill, ed., *The Labor Movement: The Problem of To-Day* (Boston, 1887), 139; *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (hereafter referred to as *NASS*), Apr. 17, 1869.

[24]*NASS*, Feb. 20, 1869.

[25]*American Workman*, Boston, May 28, 1870.

[26]*Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*, May 28, 1870; New York *Independent*, Apr. 21, 1870. Tilden's paper was not consistent in its endorsement of labor issues. At other times the aging "Iron Law of Wages" theory was endorsed: "Combinations of workingmen, trades' unions, and protective associations cannot successfully defy the great law of supply and demand" (New York *Independent*, Mar. 3, 1870).

a surprising 10% of the state's total votes and elected more than 20 of their candidates to state office. The following year Wendell Phillips was nominated the labor party's candidate for governor and stood upon an even firmer labor platform than the previous statewide race had proclaimed. Though he made little dent in the Republican control of the state, Phillips' campaign achieved one of the original goals of the movement—it succeeded in uniting labor party voters, temperance reformers, and women suffragists behind his candidacy. That year Phillips increased the labor party's statewide poll from 13,000 to 22,000 votes. Phillips' ability to bring together these varied constituencies was the key to the party's success and in following years, after Phillips stepped out of the electoral spotlight, the labor party declined.

In 1871 labor's candidate for governor, Edwin M. Chamberlin, swung only 6848 votes to its column. Wendell Phillips' candidacy proved the high-water mark of the labor reform movement in Massachusetts. The following year the partnership between Steward and Phillips dissolved in anger.[27]

The rise and fall of this labor reform coalition is but an extended footnote in the history of reform. The breakup of this coalition in 1872 is significant less for the damage it did to the progress of the labor movement in Massachusetts, though this was considerable, than in what it reveals about the tensions that existed within the cross-class reform coalitions of the Reconstruction Era. The falling-out between Phillips and Steward was emblematic of a pattern of schism throughout labor reform organizations at that time. Between the fall of 1871 and the spring of 1872, the two most ambitious national labor coalitions of the era, the National Labor Union and the International Workingmen's Association, each suffered acrimonious internal splits and began their rapid slide toward history's dustbin.

In explaining these divisions, the consensus among labor historians has been to emphasize the class conflicts that divided elite "sentimental reformers" from the "genuinely working class movement" they could not stomach. In the case of the break-up of the Boston Eight Hour League, the personalities of the leaders at the center of the dispute, one a Boston Brahmin, the other a self-taught machinist, seem a clear example of such class animosities at work. But class identity itself cannot be the cause of these breakups, for if class differences alone were enough to split these movements, then how was it that these unlikely allies came together in the first place? Rather, the schisms within these labor reform organizations arose from differing ideologies, agendas, and philosophies of reform, not the class character of the reformers themselves. Of course, the possibility remains that the lines of class and of ideology ran together; however, such coherence cannot be presumed but must be based on a close analysis of the philosophies and viewpoints of all the parties involved. In the case of the International Workingmen's Association, I have argued elsewhere that the source of the split that destroyed the First International originated in the deeper historical and philosophical differences that separated the American radical tradition from that of immigrant Marxists.[28] The IWA tore along an ethno-cultural and philosophical seam that ran between the Marxists' materialist reductionism and the Yankee reformers' moralistic universalism. A similar geometry structured the ideological faultlines that underlay the rift in Boston's labor reform movement.

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[27]Commons, *History of Labour in the United States*, vol. 2, 142–143; Irving H. Bartlett, *Wendell Phillips: Brahmin Radical* (1961; reprint, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 351–355; Oscar Sherwin, *Prophet of Liberty: The Life and Times of Wendell Phillips* (1958; reprint, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 597.

[28]Timothy Messer-Kruse, *passim*.

As was the case for the IWA, the first draft of the history of this episode was written by partisans of one faction, and subsequent accounts were written based on the authority of those early interpretations. Subsequently, historians have not been particularly evenhanded in their treatment of Wendell Phillips and have tended to simplify the complex ideological conflicts that tore apart the labor reform movement into a one-dimensional conflict between "genuine" workers and elite "sentimental reformers."

One of the first historians of the rise and fall of labor reform in the 1870s was the man who led the putsch against the Yankee Internationals, Friedrich A. Sorge. Sorge argued that Phillips was the cause of the breakup in Boston, but couldn't decide whether Phillips did so because he was a political opportunist, or a gullible faddist who continually latched onto the latest reform panacea. Phillips either was "sent" by "bourgeois legislators" to "wreck the bureau's administration," a task he did for his own partisan political advantage, or he abandoned his eight-hour friends for a new panacea, finance reform, which Sorge described as "the solution to the labor problem by the issuing of paper money."[29] Several decades later labor historian John B. Andrew, one of the team of scholars contributing to John R. Commons's magisterial *History of Labor In The United States*, echoed Sorge's less conspiratorial theory and wrote that by 1872 Phillips had drifted away from the eight-hour demand and into a "broader programme, with money reform at the head of the list." Phillip Foner's *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* revived Sorge's original charges and wrote:

> The split occurred over the eight-hour question. Steward regarded it as the only question of significance to labor, and he particularly opposed the currency issue. Wendell Phillips, influenced by the writings of Edward Kellogg, was moving more and more toward currency reform. When he insisted that the platform of the Labor Party lead off with a demand for a new monetary system, the eight-hour advocates walked out and set up their own organization.[30]

This analysis survived the paradigm shift that occurred within labor history in the 1960s as a new social emphasis reinvigorated the field. "New" labor historians such as David Montgomery followed "Old" labor historians in painting Wendell Phillips as a "sentimental reformer" who shifted his allegiance from the "genuinely working-class" eight-hour men to the currency reformers and conducted a "merciless and unabating disparagement of both the [Massachusetts Labor] bureau and the Eight Hour League."[31]

Why does everyone pick on Wendell Phillips?[32] Upon what evidence have scholars assumed that it was Phillips whose outlook changed and triggered the meltdown of

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[29]*Friedrich A. Sorge's "Labor Movement in the United States,"* 130. Sorge's and Phillip Foner's charge that Phillips was out to get the eight-hour men for partisan political advantage has no basis in fact. Phillips was no machine Republican. He often advised voters to cast their ballots against the party. As late as November 1871, Phillips advised Boston's black voters to punish the Republicans for having treated them with contempt in local affairs by voting the Democratic ticket (*Boston Post*, Nov. 7, 1871).

[30]Commons, *History of Labour in the United States*, vol. 2, 143; Phillip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1947), vol. 1, 426.

[31]David Montgomery, 413–414.

[32]Phillips' own biographers have generally followed Andrews' and Commons' authority and cast blame upon Phillips' alleged backsliding from labor issues to monetary reform. Oscar Sherwin in his *Prophet of Liberty*, explained the conflict between Steward's Labor Union and Phillips' Eight Hour League as arising from Steward's eight-hour "monomania" and Phillips' infatuation with "money reform" (Commons, *History of Labour in the United States*, vol. 2, 143; Sherwin, 633). Likewise, Irving Bartlett, in *Wendell Phillips*, traces Phillips' ostracism from the eight-hour men as stemming from his drifting into greenbackism (359).

labor reform in the spring of 1872? The factual basis upon which Commons and Andrews and all other historians who have followed in their footsteps have made their judgments about Wendell Phillips is, astonishingly, but a single source—a polemical letter written by Ira Steward himself in the heat of factional battle.[33] In this revealing letter Steward does not even mention the issue of currency reform, nor does he claim it as the substance of Phillips' heresy. Rather, Steward condemns Phillips for distracting workers from the true cause of reduced hours by his advocacy of "corporation dividends, Chinese custom-houses, the national banking system, and the attacks upon the Bureau of Statistics of Labor." Which one of these deviations from the eight-hour ideal was most galling to him, Steward did not say, though, of these, the Chinese Question and the controversy surrounding the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics, which were both related to the question of Chinese immigration and legal equality, were the only ones he mentioned more than once.[34] Assuming for a moment that Steward is correct and the cause of the rift was Phillips' own apostasy from the principles of the Eight Hour League, the question then is, on what particular issues did Phillips change his public position and when did this change occur?

The first thing that becomes immediately apparent when reviewing Phillips' public record, is that at the time of the breakup of the Eight Hour League, Phillips was no greenbacker. Indeed, his views on finance and banking were far to the left of the greenbackers themselves. The year before Phillips' and Steward's alliance soured, their positions on financial questions were very much in synch; indeed, at that time, Phillips was condemned by greenbackers as an opponent of financial reform. In June 1871, Phillips delivered a roster of resolutions before the Eight Hour League (Phillips was usually entrusted with the task of preparing and reporting the League's resolutions prior to 1872) and later was harshly criticized by currency reform advocates who darkly hinted that Phillips was in league with the "money power."[35] A St. Louis greenbacker wrote to the *Workingman's Advocate*, a labor paper that campaigned for monetary reform, saying that "Phillips is a repudiator of our financial platform and we cannot support him."[36]

However, in the spring of 1872 financial topics began to creep into Phillips' speeches. This is one likely source of historical confusion surrounding Phillips' views in 1872. But addressing issues of banking and interest is not necessarily the same thing as advocating monetary reform. In fact, Phillips' evolving views of banking and interest propelled him far to the left of most greenbackers of the period.

Phillips first began including references to banking and finance in his speeches and writing early in 1872. In mid-February he wrote a letter to the business-oriented *Boston*

The only exception to this trend is James Brewer Stewart's unique explanation in *Wendell Phillips: Liberty's Hero* that Phillips repudiated Steward because his wife, Anne, put her foot down and ordered him to quit labor politics, 301–302. Anne's disapproval didn't deter Phillips from addressing a meeting of Boston's union leaders several weeks after the Massachusetts Labor Union convention (Boston *Globe*, June 19, 1872).

[33]Scholars have generally cited two primary sources, letters from Ira Steward to the *Commonwealth* for June 29, 1872 and to *Equity* (Boston) of June 1874. The *Equity* letter does not specifically deal with the events of 1872, but is merely an example of Steward's continuing hostility to currency and financial schemes two years later; cf. Phillip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, vol. 1, 554, n. 44.

[34]*Commonwealth* (Boston), June 29, 1872.

[35]On Phillips' preparation of resolutions see *Boston Eight Hour League: Its Objects and Work: Annual Report of the President …* (Boston Eight Hour League: Boston, 1872), 3; *Workingman's Advocate*, June 17, 1871; *New York World*, June 1, 1871.

[36]*Workingman's Advocate*, July 8, 1871.

Advertiser criticizing its position on banking reform. He railed against private banks, noting that their profits "come finally out of the labor of the nation"—indeed, banks "sit like an incubus on it." His solution was typically sweeping and revolutionary: "abolish all the national banks and bring the government face to face with the borrower." In other words, nationalize the nation's banking system.[37]

All through that spring of 1872, Phillips avoided any discussion of greenbacks or other currency schemes. He raised his plan to nationalize the banks again and again, eventually simplifying it to the slogan of having the government "give us money at 3 per cent". Even before greenback audiences, Phillips did not broach the issue of currency but stuck to his radical plan of bank nationalization. On April 18th, 1872, Wendell Phillips addressed a massive assembly of the largest labor union in the state, a union of shoemakers known as the Knights of St. Crispin, who were widely known as the most staunch supporters of greenbackism in the state. Before the Crispins, Phillips touted his bank nationalization scheme. More importantly, in contrast to the tendency of greenbackers of the era, Phillips did not present his plan as a panacea or even recommend it on its economic merits alone, but urged its adoption as a step toward unifying the working class in its political struggle with capital:[38]

> We have thirty-eight one-horse legislatures in this country, and we have got a man like Tom Scott, with $350,000,000 in his hands, and if he walks through the States they have no power at all … Now there is nothing but the rallying of men against money that can contest with that power. Rally industrially, if you will, rally for eight hours, for a little division of the profits, for co-operation; rally for such a banking power in the government as would give us money at 3 per cent; only organize and stand together. (Applause.) Claim something together and all at once; let the nation hear a united demand from the laboring voice, and then, when you have got that, go to another; but get a something.[39]

Later that spring, when he was denounced by Ira Steward and the eight-hour men, Wendell Phillips had not yet begun to advocate greenback schemes as the solution to labor's plight. Phillips delivered his first speech that supported Edward Kellog's "greenback" currency plan, before the American Social Science Association in Boston on March 3, 1875, three years *after* his schism with Steward.[40] Rather, in May 1872, Phillips stood upon a platform of labor issues that included only two interrelated financial planks—one advocated the nationalization of the banking system and the other supported the restriction of interest rates to two or three percent that would result

[37]*Boston Advertiser*, Feb. 12, 1872.

[38]The working class of Massachusetts was badly divided over the currency issue. Textile operatives were against it, shoemakers were for it. Of all the unions in the state it was the Crispins who were the most ardent supporters of currency and banking reform. See Commons, *History of Labour in the United States*, vol. 2, 139–140.

[39]*Boston Advertiser*, April 19, 1872.

[40]Lorenzo Sears, *Wendell Phillips: Orator and Agitator* (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1909), 301. Just about the same time that Phillips drifted off into Greenbackism, Steward moved toward the idea as well. When labor reformers met in convention in the fall of 1874 there was "keen disappointment" due to a puny turnout of near 30 people. In spite of this, or, perhaps, because of the few in attendance, the eight-hour men were in control: George McNeill was elected president and Ira Steward was appointed to the committee on resolutions. Somehow, in spite of the eight-hour men's control of the assembly, Steward's committee included in its platform demands for a "circulating medium issued directly to the people" and planks in favor of land reform, improved public schools and free halls (*Equity* (Boston), September 1874, 44–45).

from nationalization. Neither of these either ranked very high on the group's agenda, appearing as points six and seven on the MLU program, nor were they at all representative of the Greenback Movement, which at that time was focused on inflating the money supply through bond issues and paper currency, rather than using federal powers to take over banks and legislate interest rates. At the time Phillips is labeled a greenbacker by most labor historians his highest priorities were encouraging all workers to organize, supporting their right to strike, advocating the formation of producer cooperatives, reducing the hours in the working day and using state power to force corporations to share half of their profits with their employees.[41] At his next labor meeting held just two weeks later, Phillips mentioned nothing of financial theories and merely compared the labor movement to the abolitionist cause of old.[42] Phillips' activities that spring hardly constitute a significant "drift" towards monetary reform.

If Phillips did not drift into the greenbackers' camp, as later historians have argued, were there other issues that he adopted that provoked the conflict? Luckily, if there were other ways in which Phillips deviated from the eight-hour line the time frame in which they must have occurred can be established with some accuracy. In his recriminatory letter to the Boston *Commonwealth*, Steward off-handedly mentioned that the bad blood between Phillips and the League predated the conventions of Anniversary Week: "… the Eight Hour League voted, a few weeks ago, April 18th, not to invite him [Phillips] to speak at its Third Annual Convention, because he no longer represented its views."[43] Unfortunately, no minutes or accounts of that meeting survive to detail what the source of Phillips' censure was. On the other end of the timeline George McNeill, president of the League, had nothing but praise for Phillips in his annual report of the League's work that he published four months earlier in January: "… I have the pleasure of recording the names of the following gentlemen, who have in the past contributed towards our Conventions. Foremost among them is the name of one who, to his contributions of money, has lent the greater contribution of his voice—Wendell Phillips."[44] If it is true that the split was the product of Phillips' drift away from the program of the Eight Hour League it must have been a rapid slide, for before the middle of April 1872 there were no indications of any earlier animosity between Phillips and the Eight Hour League.

Knowing the time frame within which the rift between Phillips and the eight-hour men grew, it should, in theory, be possible to identify the wedge issues that cleaved the labor reform coalition apart. When all the public statements of both Phillips and the eight-hour men are carefully compared a number of differences become apparent. One obvious candidate is the issue that brought the convention of the Massachusetts Labor

[41]Sherwin, 627–628; Irwin Unger, *The Greenback Era: A Social and Political History of American Finance, 1865–1879* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 97–119; Boston *Globe*, May 30, 1872. Phillips' call for the "abolition of interest" appeared in the context of a wholesale attack upon capitalism itself: "The system and structure of which allows the one man to be worth millions … while his thousands of employees don't know where their bread is coming from came from hell … The cornerstones of this movement are cooperation and the abolition of interest. The wages system never produces the best results. The wages laborer won't work more than fifty or sixty per cent of what he can—he'd be a fool if he did, he would introduce cooperation, and test it by making corporations divide profits between stockholders and employees. There must be no such thing as a wage slave or a capital tyrant" (*Boston Globe*, May 30, 1872). The *New York World* (May 30, 1872) had a slightly different and more condensed summary of Phillips' remarks though they did not differ in any essentials from the *Globe*'s account.

[42]Boston *Globe*, June 19, 1872.

[43]*Commonwealth*, June 29, 1872.

[44]Boston Eight Hour League, *Annual Report of the President* (Boston, 1872), 12.

Union to a screaming end—Phillips' criticism of the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics (MBLS). While there can be no doubt that by anniversary week of 1872 Phillips and Steward had arrived at opposite views of the MBLS, this issue cannot have been the source of their discord. The MBLS report that Phillips criticized was not released until the fourth week in April, a fortnight after the Eight Hour League censured Phillips.[45] Phillips could not have even read, much less taken a public stand on a document that was not yet published.[46] Phillips did not begin his labor apostasy by criticizing the MBLS, though this issue would later become the conduit through which a more fundamental, philosophical conflict would be channeled.

If there was but one issue that proved the gravestone of labor reform in Boston, the most likely candidate is not greenbackism, or the leadership of the BLS, or even the eight-hour day itself, but the so-called Chinese Question. Within the broad array of radical measures that Wendell Phillips stood for in 1872, the one that most separated him from his working-class constituency, and the only issue whose novel appearance coincided with Phillips' expulsion from Steward's Eight Hour League, was his call to treat the Chinese immigrant equally with immigrants from all other nations.

By the 1870s, Ira Steward's economic ideas had turned him into a Sinophobe. Lurking in the background of Steward's writings was a deep concern at the prospect of the introduction of Chinese workers into American industrial society. Steward's fear of the coming of the Chinese was intrinsically linked with his understanding of the economics of wages, hours, and even of history and human progress itself. Well before the presence of Chinese workers became an issue east of the Mississippi in the summer of 1870 (when 75 Chinese workmen were brought from San Francisco to break a strike of shoemakers in North Adams, Massachusetts), Steward had already published essays conflating the eight-hour-day demand, a cultural theory of wages, and a racist vision of the Chinese character.

Again and again, Steward turned to China to illustrate his innovative economic theories. Before a meeting of carpenters in 1869, Steward spoke at length on the danger of "cheap labor, such as that performed by the coolies," showing in his usual way how it was "dearest in the end."[47] Even before the first Chinese workers stepped off the train in North Adams, Steward began to draw his metaphor in more lurid tones. "A peasant of the Celestial Empire can live on rats," he wrote in the *American Workman*, "and his wages are gauged accordingly; but a Man accustomed to beefsteak, succeeds in getting work enough to buy it."[48]

As time went on, Steward's attacks on the Chinese became ever more shrill, culminating in his tract, "The Power of the Cheaper Over the Dearer," a work that he envisioned as the beginning of a book which would present his ideas of political economy to the world in a more systematic fashion. In it he began by illustrating how "cheap men" undermine a nation's march forward in history. His example, of course, was China, where sedan chairs were the primary mode of transportation since men were cheaper than horses, and where thousands of men hauled water up from a mine because they were collectively cheaper than a steam pump. Indeed, as China's economy

[45]The first references to the MBLS report appeared in the *Boston Advertiser* on April 29, 1872. Phillips was censured on April 18, 1872.

[46]For an account of the MBLS controversy, see James Leiby, *Carroll Wright and Labor Reform: The Origins of Labor Statistics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 59–62.

[47]*American Workman*, Sept. 25, 1869.

[48]*American Workman*, July 31, 1869; Steward again used the "cheap labor"/"Coolie" illustration before Boston's Carpenters and Joiners, *American Workman*, Sept. 25, 1869.

was undermined by the cheapness of its men, so also were its national genius and character stunted:

> With such petty productions, small houses and vessels, and very few novelties or wonders in engineering, the Chinese have very little use for mathematics. And without mathematics they cannot have astronomy and without astronomy they must be narrow and superstitious, just the condition to invite the iron handed despotism of an Emperor. The people who dig the least iron out of the earth, will have the most iron put into their government.[49]

Such a state of affairs was deplorable enough for the Chinese people themselves, but its effects were felt around the globe. "Thus it is that not many silver table knives and forks can be used on one side of the world, as long as the people on the other side are eating with *chop sticks*!" The millennium awaited the day when "chop sticks are driven out of the world."[50]

From Steward's viewpoint, Chinese immigrants threatened the entire movement for eight hours because their "cheapness" was the product of their race and culture, qualities that were not easily changed by additional leisure. As long as Chinese, who were so far behind the white American worker in terms of their wants and desires, stood available for capitalists to employ in place of expensive white laborers, the struggle for eight hours would be lost.

Steward's theoretical linkage of eight-hour economics and race was given a powerful boost by the sudden attention given to the issue of Chinese immigration with the arrival of 73 Chinese from San Francisco to work at a shoe factory in North Adams, Massachusetts in 1870.[51] In the wake of the coming of the first group of Chinese workers to Massachusetts, mass protest meetings were held in Boston and New York. At Boston's Tremont Temple the cream of Massachusetts's trade union movement gathered in outrage over the arrival of the Chinese to the Commonwealth. The meeting was advertised, according to one report, by a large "rude" picture posted at the entrance of the building that featured a "swift-footed celestial with five of [his] favorite rats on his shoulder, and his braided pigtail trailing far in the rear." Practically the entire executive committee of the Boston Eight Hour League showed up, including president George McNeill, vice-presidents E.H. Rogers and William McLaughlin, secretaries Ransom Pratt and Eleanor Rockwood, as well as its delegate to the NLU, Charles McLean. Resolutions were adopted decrying this plot of capital to reduce American workers to the "Chinese standard of rice and rats." McNeill, an invited speaker, returned to the idea that what was important was not the supply of and demand for workers, but their standard of living. "Every seventy-five Chinamen brought here threw a hundred and twenty-five men out of employment," he claimed, "on account of the limited number of their needs." The success of the labor movement depended upon getting workingmen to cooperate, McNeill went on, but the "Chinamen made it impossible to cooperate."[52]

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[49]Ira Steward, "The Power of the Cheaper Over the Dearer," 15–16, in the Ira Steward Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

[50]*Ibid.*, 22.

[51]For details of the North Adams controversy see Frederick Rudolph, "Chinamen in Yankeedom: Anti-Unionism in Massachusetts in 1870," *American Historical Review*, 53 (1947), 1–29; Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785–1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), Chapt. 8; Gunter Barth, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850–1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 198–202.

[52]*Daily Advertiser* (Boston), June 30, 1870; Boston *Investigator*, July 6, 1870.

The fact that the presence of Chinese workers in Massachusetts was of special concern to Steward was amply illustrated by the amount of the space devoted to the issue in the Massachusetts's Bureau of Labor Reports that the eight-hour men authored. Though not at the helm of the Bureau, George McNeill, along with Steward's energetic wife Mary, whom he hired as his assistant, quickly took over most of the work from the ostensible head of the Bureau, General Henry K. Oliver, a man with little knowledge or experience in labor issues.[53] The Bureau's early reports bear Steward and McNeill's stamp on nearly every page. These reports were distributed widely, both directly and through reprinting in the labor press. Even read on the floor of Congress, they became one of the most important means of propagating the message of eight hours and danger of Chinese cheap labor throughout the nation.[54]

A major portion of the Bureau's second annual report (1871) was devoted to the introduction of the Chinese into North Adams. Scores of testimonials were collected from displaced workers, townspeople, the foreman and factory owner, though no Chinese were interviewed. In conclusion, McNeill and the director of the Bureau, General Henry K. Oliver, spoke of the Chinese and repeated an aphorism that Steward had earlier coined, "cheap labor is the dearest, for it makes everything poor in quality and dear in price." The presence of Chinese was not just a threat to the Crispins, but to the entire economy of the state:

> Our visit to Mr. Sampson's establishment at North Adams, where Chinese coolie laborers are employed at shoemaking, convinced us of this fact. We found there seventy-three men, clad in cotton cloth, with cheap Chinese hats and shoes. Their dining-tables were made of pine boards, without covering; their chairs were wooden benches, their sleeping places bunks … with thin mattresses and scant bedding … for their table cutlery, a pair of chopsticks for each; what tea they took, being taken in the same rice bowl. Now, what industrial production is stimulated by such a laboring population? The woolen and cotton mills of Lowell and Lawrence, of Fall River and Salisbury, the cutlery establishments of Shelburne Falls, the furniture factories of Essex and Worcester counties … nay more, the authors, the publishers, the newspapers, the expressmen, the railroads, yea all the varied industries of the Commonwealth, would be brought to ruin … (by) this cheap and ignorant labor.

Indeed, these "submissive and docile … Asiatics" would never rise to the level of the native workingmen who had risen in will and intelligence to organize for their mutual protection. Rather they were "quietly managed, and controlled with perfect ease." Consequently, the arrival of the Chinese, "by bringing down the standard of daily living," would only substitute their "unthinking and imbecile poverty" for the "spirit of independence, now wakened into quicker life by increased intelligence" among the workingmen of Massachusetts.[55] In the following year's report, McNeill and Oliver distilled their critique of the Chinese to this: "Cheap labor means China, with her

[53]Mary Steward performed most of the tedious statistical collecting, collating, and computing, and, for her first year, putting in her long hours without pay. Biographical details and eulogies of Mary Steward can be found in the *Labor Standard* (New York), Mar. 3, 1878.

[54]Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor: An Autobiography* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1925), vol. 1, 480.

[55]"Second Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor" (Massachusetts House Document #150, 1871), 555–557.

millions of poor, with her stunted growth and inferior race. Dear labor means America with her free and intelligent citizens …"[56]

In the face of this rising tide of labor nativism, Phillips and fellow elite reformers stuck by their equalitarian principles, and denounced what they perceived as bigotry within the labor movement and worried that such a development could derail their recently won civil rights campaigns. Charles Sumner and Wendell Phillips railed against the movement to place Chinese immigrants in a second-class position. Abolitionist journals denounced the movement and drew the analogy between the status of blacks and that of the Chinese.[57] Black newspapers saw in the Chinese a reflection of their own struggle, and supported their equal rights and called for a color-blind immigration policy.[58] The sentiment of such egalitarian-minded leaders was expressed by William Everett when he asked his audience at an Independence Day celebration:

> Have you so poorly learned the Declaration that you are going at this hour to take up the old cries of "race," and "America for the Americans?" Good Heavens! Ten years ago the North rose against the oppression of the African—swore there should be no distinction of color … and now comes the Mongolian, and asks to do the very thing you want done, and some of the very men who have declaimed loudest against distinction of race and color talk about degradation from the contact …[59]

Ezra Heywood's Labor Reform League, an early foe of Steward's, was more clear than any trade union group or journal in its support of the Chinese: "[We regard] as morally indefensible the special legislative and class devices which aim, by arbitrary power, to … exclude the Chinamen and other destitute competitors …" Elite reformer Theodore Tilton praised "the Chinese immigrants who bring their prudence, thrift, industry, and cultured simplicity of mind to this country to pick up the crumbs which drop from our industrial feast, and yet have been beaten and butchered with a barbarity unworthy of a race of savages …"[60]

Like the evangelical missionaries of their age, many social reformers held their own chauvinistic stereotypes, but they did not believe that the pejorative qualities they

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[56]"Third Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor" (Massachusetts Senate Document #180, 1872), 536.

[57]See, for example, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, May 29, July 17, 1869; also Frederick Douglass to Charles Sumner, July 6, 1870, Frederick Douglass Papers.

[58]Andrew Gyory, in his "Rolling in the Dirt: The Origins of the Chinese-Exclusion Act and the Politics of Racism, 1870–1882" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1991), asserts that "Black working-class and political organizations, from the 15th Amendment Club in Cincinnati to the National Labor Bureau of Colored Men in Washington, took the identical pro-immigration, anti-importation stance" (72). This is not the full story. In 1871 the Lincoln Memorial Club of Cincinnati, composed of "prominent colored citizens," stood and offered a toast to the "Heathen Chinese—'Thou shalt not oppress the stranger, for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of bondage'" (*New Era* (Washington, DC), March 2, 1871). San Francisco's only African-American newspaper, *The Elevator*, was a lonely voice of support for the Chinese in that city when it editorialized on July 8, 1870, "We believe with Senator Schurz that the excitement about Chinese immigration is needless. We fear no deluge of Chinamen." In 1870 black abolitionist Frederick Douglass wrote to Charles Sumner praising him for his opposition to closing the doors of immigration to the Chinese: "Upon the Chinese question I rejoice to see you in the right place, far in the advance and the country as usual behind you. A bitter contest, I fear, is before us on this question. Prejudice, pride of race, narrow views of political economy, are on one, humanity, civilization and social policy are on the other" (Douglass to Sumner, July 6, 1870, Frederick Douglass Papers (microfilm edition), Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

[59]*Commonwealth* (Boston), July 9, 1870.

[60]*The Banner of Light*, Feb. 25, 1871; *The Golden Age*, Nov. 4, 1871.

sometimes attributed to the Chinese were essential and fundamental. Their faith in their own cultural superiority led them to trust that the Chinese would, in time, become like themselves. Julia Ward Howe, editor of the suffragist *Womans Journal*, expressed the reformers' common faith in the redemptive power of American circumstances well: "Foreigners among us, so far, show a remarkable capacity for becoming Americans. This is because our institutions correspond to human needs, and encourage human activity. We see no reason why the Chinese should not, in time, make an excellent American. Treat him like an American, and he will soon become one … let the land of his adoption become a candidate for his regard by her scrupulous and render administration of his rights, and a generation not remote from the present will smile at the remembrance of the present inconvenient clause in Chinese-American contracts."[61]

Steward's racial economics placed him at odds not only with reformers whose roots extended deep into the early abolitionist era, but also clashed with the egalitarian principles of his own youth. Steward had lived for a time at Hopedale, Adin Ballou's Christian perfectionist community, and he was rumored to have gone west in the 1850s to battle for a free Kansas. Throughout his life Steward praised the abolitionist struggle, condemned slavery, and saw his own crusade as but the continuation of anti-slavery principles. Likewise, his great success in Boston was due to the support of a community of former abolitionists whose vision of freedom and liberty included welcoming the suffering immigrants of all nations. Racist immigration restriction contradicted not only his allies but his own earlier ideological commitments.[62]

In all his writings, Steward attempted to maintain the lofty color-blind vision of his abolitionist past. In his "Power of the Cheaper Over the Dearer," the lesson he draws from the drag placed upon the progress of the "civilized" nations by "half civilizations" and "barbarians" was that "the time has fully arrived, when political economy must begin with the idea that our country is the world, and our countrymen are all mankind!" In fact, Chinese immigration was a kind of divine retribution for the sins of the nation:

> The misery and terrors that Chinamen have already inflicted upon Western America, are the moral … judgment that has already begun to fall upon the world's highest civilization, as a retribution and punishment for forgetting the brotherhood of the entire human race.[63]

In the Eight Hour League's early years, Steward was little troubled by the internal conflict between his egalitarian commitments and his wage theories and, during this time, reached a compromise with his abolitionist allies. While in coalition with Phillips and other radical abolitionists, the platform of the labor reform groups in which Steward and his fellow eight-hour men were active maintained the subtle distinction between "importation" and "free" immigration by condemning the former and accepting the latter. Such a distinction cloaked the anti-Chinese cause as a call for the abolition of servitude rather than for nativist exclusion. Indeed, Charles McLean, one of Ira Steward's associates in the Boston Eight Hour League, offered a resolution on contract labor at the NLU convention of 1870 that specifically combated the racist direction of the assembly in welcoming "every man, every race, and every creed … to

[61] *Womans Journal*, July 30, 1870.

[62] Steward signed several letters from "Hopedale" and "Hopedale Modern Age": *Liberator*, Mar. 4, 1854; *Daily Evening Voice*, Aug. 4, 1865.

[63] *Ibid.*, 26, 32.

our shores" while denouncing "the right of capital to … import human freight for the express purpose of lessening wages." McLean's resolution was quickly tabled.[64] But as time went on, especially after Wendell Phillips and his fellow universalistic reformers split off from the Eight Hour League, such hair-splitting was less scrupulously observed.

With Phillips and the other civil libertarian-minded reformers gone, the Eight Hour League was freed to follow its own light unhindered by the niceties of compromise language. It soon abandoned all pretense of opposition to "importation" and "slavery" in Asian guise and simply called for any and all policies that would keep the Chinese out.[65] It officially encouraged all workers to study the May Day speech of U.S. Senator Aaron Sargent that called for a total ban on Chinese immigration and repeated labor's theories of cheap labor.[66] It even counted workers lucky for having suffered through several years of industrial stagnation, for this sluggishness in the economy was all that had "saved New England from a large influx of Chinamen, and the most deadly competition of cheap labor ever visited upon Christendom."[67] Apparently, the specter of Chinese workers was enough to jar Steward and his fellow "eight-hour men" out of their famed "monomania." The hardening lines of race and racial consciousness had separated not only workers of different hues, but reformers of different stripes.

Whereas before North Adams it was possible for the eight-hour men to argue that they continued to honor the highest egalitarian and republican values and were only opposed to importation—which was, they argued, but another form of slavery—such claims rang hollow afterwards. For it was well known that the laborers brought to North Adams were not imported from abroad (even Oliver and McNeill substantiated this fact during their investigations) but were recruited over a period of months from all parts of California. One of the few remaining organs of the abolitionist tradition in Boston called the cry against the "coolie" as being "utterly absurd":

> the [Chinese] applicants came from every quarter, precisely as they would to a similar advertisement anywhere. They were contracted with individually, and for three years, but no part of their wages goes to any other person. The San Francisco firm was recompensed for its assistance in obtaining them precisely as any intelligence office would be … the North Adams shoemakers belong to the self-electing class of workmen and contractors; they had been in California for months or years, and probably were some of those discharged on the completion of the heavy railroad work of last year.[68]

In the end, the Chinese issue drove a wedge between many of the leaders of the labor movement and the former leaders of the abolitionist crusade who had continued their

[64]*Workingman's Journal* (Columbus, Kansas), Sept. 2, 1870. Andrew Gyory accepts at face value labor reform leaders' justifications for racial exclusion when it came to the Chinese. For an extended commentary on Gyory's revisionist thesis, see my forthcoming article "Cheap Labor and Cheap Men: Race and the Concept of 'Cheap Labor' and American Labor Historians."

[65]In the Eight Hour League's phrasing, "(that) all treaties and intercourse with other nations, and national and local legislation should proceed with reference to the broad moral and natural causes that increase the price of human labor everywhere."

[66]*Congressional Record*, vol. 4, part 3 (44th Congress, 1st. session), May 1, 1876, 2850–2858.

[67]"Resolutions of the Boston Eight Hour League, May 31, 1876," broadside in the J.P. McDonnell Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, MSS 8A, Box 1.

[68]*Commonwealth*, July 2, 1870. Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, in *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), explodes the "coolie myth." Tsai points out that though U.S. merchants and shippers were involved in the horrendous "coolie" slave traffic between South China and Latin America, the U.S. had, "to all intents and purposes, prohibited coolie immigration; it allowed

struggles after the war by embracing the cause of the worker. In New York, the Chinese issue was one clear area of ideological disagreement between the Yankee sections of the International Workingmen's Association and the German immigrant Marxists who were willing to scuttle internationalist principles for the sake of ingratiating themselves with an increasingly exclusionary trade union movement.[69] On the issue of the Chinese, Steward quickly found himself at odds with his most famous and influential convert to the cause of eight hours, Wendell Phillips. Since Appomattox, Phillips had increasingly devoted himself to the cause of labor while maintaining his commitments to civil rights. As anti-Chinese sentiment grew within the Massachusetts labor movement after the North Adams episode, Phillips attempted to find a position that would satisfy both agendas.

Phillips never shied away from unpopular positions, even before audiences that he knew to be hostile. If not immune to criticism, he had certainly been so well inoculated through past experience that he no longer took any notice. In 1869, Phillips introduced the question of the Chinese before a convention of the New England Reform League by calling for the extension of Fifteenth Amendment voting rights to the resident Chinese. He warned that:

> The question of the Chinese as laborers and voters [was] looming up in the immediate future, and there was likely to be a controversy as violent as there was on the negro question, and unless the laboring masses were educated beforehand, there would be as many battles fought as there were over the negro.[70]

His speech drew fire from unnamed members of the coalition and from the *Workingman's Advocate*, one of the most influential labor newspapers in the nation, which ridiculed Phillips, calling his proposal for Chinese voting rights a "calamity may God in His kind providence avert."[71] But this was before the Chinese issue flared up so dramatically after the arrival of Chinese workers in North Adams. In 1872, Phillips did not even have to go this far to so offend his eight-hour league allies as to get himself tossed off their bandwagon. In the face of the increasing popularity of the anti-Chinese movement, Phillips fell back and merely attempted to deflect the question of the Chinese from its exclusionary, racist, and anti-civil libertarian direction.

On the afternoon of April 18, 1872, Phillips addressed the International Grand Lodge of the Knights of St. Crispin, the backbone of the labor movement in Massachu-

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only free and voluntary immigrants from China." He concludes, "The Chinese emigration to California was free and voluntary, confined to independent immigrants who paid their own passage money and were in a condition to look to their arrangements" (6–8). Kil Young Zo, in "Chinese Emigration Into the United States, 1850–1880" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1971), similarly finds that "despite the coolie image of the Chinese held by the American public, the fact is that the Chinese came here as freemen, not as involuntary quasi-slaves, as they were generally taken for in nineteenth century America." Such research findings are hardly new; as early as 1909, Professor Mary Roberts Coolidge of Stanford University wrote: "For more than fifty years the word 'coolie' has been used in the United States to designate a Chinese laborer, the term from long misuse having taken on the color of vague discredit or opprobrium. In its larger sense it is employed to designate some sort of contract laborer, but it is oftener used to convey the idea of servitude, slavery or peonage. Yet the history of the term gives no sanction for such usage, and the manner in which these laborers came to America shows that they were all perfectly free immigrants, at the very worst coming on money borrowed at a high rate of interest." Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1909), 41.

[69]See Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International*, *passim*.

[70]*American Workman*, June 12, 1869.

[71]*Ibid.*

setts. His speech that day covered many topics, labor issues, current politics, temperance, corruption in government, none of it particularly novel for Phillips except for his new twist on Chinese immigration. Before his labor audience, Phillips chose his words well: "Let the Chinaman come—bring him by the millions … [but] let no Chinese shoes come into the North Adams market duty free any more than into the city of New York." Though some of his friends worried that Phillips was backsliding on the issue (the radically egalitarian spiritualist journal *Banner of Light* expressed concern that he had chosen to keep the Chinese question an "unaccented syllable"), it was clear that what he was attempting to do was to misdirect labor's attention away from the Chinese workers and to the goods they produced and the employers who hired them.[72] In a follow-up letter to the editor of the elite *Boston Advertiser*, Phillips made this clear: "Whatever I do with those goods will have no effect on the immigrant. His wages are fixed by contract. My tax will affect only his employer."[73] It was a clever move, even if Phillips' slogan of "no cheap goods" had little chance of catching on with a labor movement by now well plied with the slogan of "no cheap men."

Phillips' speech to the Crispins profoundly upset his eight-hour allies. Later that same day, the Boston Eight Hour League voted not to invite Phillips to speak at its upcoming convention as they had customarily done for many years, because "he no longer represented its views." Phillips had paid the price for refusing to reduce his platform to short hours alone or to bend his egalitarian principles to discriminate against a group of workers because of their race.[74] Ira Steward put his finger squarely on these differences when he later defended the League's censure of Phillips on the grounds that they could not tolerate his views of the Chinese:

> When we say to certain organizations, Please allow Labor a hearing on your platform, we receive the reply, "Oh, yes, Labor is represented; we have invited Mr. Phillips"; and in due season we must answer for the absurdity of a "little custom-house around Mr. Sampson's Chinese shoe-factory" as a serious and practicable remedy, or some other expedient not so easily described.[75]

Clearly, the Chinese issue goes further in explaining the ideological cleavages between Steward and Phillips than does the Greenback issue. But even beyond this divisive issue, there existed a deeper and more irreconcilable conflict that framed each side's vision of reform so differently that further disagreements were almost assured. The great divide between the eight-hour men and Boston's larger reform community was not the issue of greenbacks, banks, or Chinese workers, but was the irresolvable collision of universal and reductionist philosophies. Like the Marxist faction in the First International with whom they were allied, Steward and his eight-hour men's emphasis on their fundamental demand had moved them beyond the realm of ideals and into the world of hard-nosed tactical calculations. To Phillips and those who guided their actions by a rigid moral yardstick, there was never a question of allowing expediency to compromise a principle. Since these universalistic reformers viewed the world as a place where each principle motivated its own category of reform there was little sense in

[72] *The Golden Age* (New York), Apr. 27, 1872; *Boston Advertiser*, Apr. 19, 1872; *Banner of Light* (Boston), May 11, 1872.

[73] *Boston Advertiser*, Apr. 22, 1872.

[74] According to Steward, the Eight Hour League censured Phillips on April 18, 1872 (*Commonwealth*, June 29, 1872). Phillips gave his address to the Crispins on the same day (*Weekly American Workman*, Apr. 27, 1872). According to press reports, the Boston Eight Hour League's meetings were held in the evenings and Phillips' speech was in the afternoon (*Boston Advertiser*, Apr. 19, 1872).

[75] *Commonwealth*, June 29, 1872.

compromising a principle in the short run in order to fulfill it in the long term. As F.A. Hinckley, a labor reformer who presided at one of the early MLU meetings wrote, "The question to be asked concerning any proposed measure is not, is it good policy, is it prudent, will it get votes, are the people ready for it—but is it right, is it just, is it true?"[76] But for the eight-hour men, whose ends were infinite but whose means were unified, that moral compass no longer guided action, politics did.[77]

Phillips was not the only party to this controversy whose views had evolved since the labor reform coalition had been founded half a dozen years before. While Phillips tacked his sails on the Chinese issue and borrowed a page or two from his socialist friends in the Yankee sections of the International Workingmen's Association, Steward and the other eight-hour men had been steadily refining their view of the eight-hour demand in such a way as to place them outside of the philosophical framework of the American reform tradition. When the eight-hour men began their crusade they claimed a particular importance for the eight-hour demand alongside a panoply of kindred reforms. George McNeill recalled that in its first years, "regular meetings of the League discussions upon Poverty, the cause and cure of Intemperance, Wages, Co-operation, Women's Work, Suffrage, Finance, etc. followed each other interspersed by essays and poems by the members."[78] Over time, however, the eight-hour men moved to limit discussion of other reforms and came to argue that the eight-hour demand was not a "kindred" reform but was fundamental to all others. By the spring of 1872, Ira Steward condemned those "who propose[d] a broad and comprehensive view of the [labor] problem." In a heated debate over the question of how inclusive of other reforms, such as temperance and women's suffrage, the Eight Hour League should be, George McNeill stated that "no true labor reformer could have more than one idea. The man of one idea had all the rest; the man of many ideas had really none. The demand of the times in grappling with the Labor question was for men of one idea."[79]

After the breakup of the Eight Hour League, Steward's thinking became increasingly rigid, dividing the world between "financial or political and economical or industrial labor reform" or between "goodies" and those few who had "arrived at the right theory of the philosophy of the labor movement." So exacting were Steward's ideological standards that by the late 1870s he could count only three other men (McNeill, Gunton, and Sorge) who had "arrived to the right theory of the philosophy of the labor movement."[80] In this his thinking and movement strategies closely paralleled that of the German Marxists in New York who were at that very same time struggling to oust their own broad-minded Yankee radicals. Sorge justified his own factionalism by arguing that ideological purity was more important than building a large coalition: "Fellow-workmen! Keep our standard pure & our ranks clean! Never mind the small number! No great work was ever begun by a majority!"[81] This justification for Marxist orthodoxy was the same logic that undergirded Steward's eight-hour "monomania". It is only

[76]Frederick A. Hinckley, *The Just Demand of Labor: A More Equal Distribution of Wealth* (Boston: n.p., 1871), 1.

[77]For more on the character and philosophy of universal reform, see David Brion Davis, ed., *Antebellum Reform* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 1–3; C.S. Griffin, *The Ferment of Reform, 1830–1860* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1967), 2–5; Walters, *American Reformers*, *passim*.

[78]George McNeill, "To the Members of the Boston Eight Hour League" (n.p., 1872).

[79]*Weekly American Workman* (Boston), Dec. 31, 1870.

[80]Steward to Sorge, Mar. 1, 1877, Ira Steward Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

[81]Sorge to the British Federation, May 9, 1873, in Samuel Bernstein, ed., *Papers of the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association, New York, 1872–1876*, (Milano: Felltrinelli Editore, 1961), 74.

fitting, then, that in 1876 Steward proposed to Sorge that they organize a convention of "we who are for economical or industrial labor reform pure & simple …"[82]

Though neither faction survived for long as an independent entity, in their separate records can be measured the breadth of this philosophical gulf. Phillips, upon hearing of his censure, revived a moribund labor reform group, the Massachusetts Labor Union, that had held a few public meetings years earlier. Modeled on the International Workingmen's Association (Phillips gave the First International his highest praise in his recent speech before the Crispins, "I say God speed, God speed to that or any similar movement"), it followed a traditional reform model of universal scope.[83] It was, the organizers boasted, a labor reform association "so broad, so comprehensive, so catholic as to be capable of including all workmen and their friends and of reaching all difficulties in the controversy of labor versus capital." So inclusive was the plan of organization that the organizers decided not to elect a president but to call a chairman from the floor at each meeting so as to give to as many participants as possible the experience of conducting a meeting. As in the successful labor coalitions of previous years, invitations were sent out to the pillars of Radical Republicanism, Senator Charles Sumner, Representative George Frisbee Hoar, and General Benjamin Butler, as well as to the leaders of the antebellum reform movement, as well as Aaron M. Powell, editor of the National Standard (successor to the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*). Though the MLU's founders were mostly professionals—the first meetings were presided over by Edward M. Chamberlain, a graduate of Yale who went on to practice law when not agitating in the cause of labor, and F.A. Hinckley, an economist of some renown who the year before had argued with Steward and McNeill over the merits of women's suffrage—the organization courted the representatives of bona fide labor unions by offering them seats as vice-presidents. On its first day of proceedings the MLU had 15 such vice-presidents, a remarkable demonstration of trade union support for Phillips' coalition. Notably absent from the rostrum at the founding convention were Boston's leading greenbackers, Col. William B. Greene and Ezra Heywood.[84]

In contrast, the cleansed Eight Hour League firmly controlled its agenda and energetically limited discussion to the eight-hour demand, tactical means of obtaining it, and the Stewardian economics behind it. The Eight Hour League's convention followed that of the Massachusetts Labor Union by one day. George McNeill, who held the chairmanship, and Steward, who headed the resolutions committee, maintained a firm grip on the reins. One of the chief orders of business of its few delegates was the public denunciation of Wendell Phillips. Ira Steward must have spent a busy and sleepless night working out his plan, for when the convention opened and he was named chair of the resolutions committee, it took about "one minute" before Steward read out a long series of resolutions. A few delegates were not so easily driven, however, and stood to raise other issues. A small-town minister called attention to the evils of opium, tobacco, and alcohol but Steward cut him off and told him that this was an

[82]Steward to Sorge, Dec. 4, 1876; Steward to Sorge, Mar. 1, 1877, Steward Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin. So focused were the eight-hour men that Steward even criticized Sorge's "Declaration of Principles" for being "defective," labelling half of it as "flummery" (Steward to Sorge, Mar. 14, n.d.).

[83]*The Golden Age* (New York), Apr. 27, 1872; *Boston Advertiser*, Apr. 19, 1872; *Banner of Light* (Boston), May 11, 1872. By December of 1872, Phillips was still close to the Yankee Internationals. Phillips sent a letter of support to a meeting raising funds for the widows and orphans of the Paris Commune presided over by Theodore Banks, one of the leaders of Yankee Section 9 (*The New York Times*, Dec. 15, 1872).

[84]*Commonwealth*, May 11, 1872; *Boston Globe*, May 30, 1872; *New York World*, May 30, 1872.

eight-hour convention and not an anti-tobacco convention. J. H. Coker, a black man, interjected the issue of race and condemned the group for inviting him to come to the convention but then excluding him from their trade unions and "secret leagues." Coker's objection was ignored and the convention quickly marched on. Except for the land reformist lyrics of a song sung by the Hutchinson family, no topics but the eight-hour question and the heresy of Wendell Phillips were allowed to air that day.

Likewise, after the more universalistic reformers left their eight-hour coalition, Steward and his men lost interest in sponsoring the construction of a "Free Hall for Working Men and Women" which, according to the plans they had laid out months before the split, was to be "a place where the Labor Problem could be discussed with freedom …" Before a year had passed since the breakup, the project had passed completely into the hands of universalistic labor reformers of the Massachusetts Labor Union and the New England Labor Reform League who carried forward the plan to open the hall to "others upon any reform subject."[85]

The labor reform movement in Massachusetts may have failed to establish a permanent labor voice in the statehouse or win effective eight-hour legislation, but its legacy proved lasting and powerful in unexpected ways. Steward's eight-hour economics proved to be an enduring contribution to labor thought, but not in the ways Steward would have expected. While Steward's writings on political economics were quickly forgotten his theories of the relationship between race and wages became the primary justification for the labor movement's nativism. Both Terence Powderly, leader of the Knights of Labor, and Samuel Gompers, head of the AFL, expressed their opposition to Chinese immigration in the Stewardian language of the inherent "cheapness" of Chinese workers. Even into the 20th century, these ideas were still prominent in the American labor movement. In 1905 Samuel Gompers took the lead, publishing his pamphlet, "Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion: Meat vs. Rice, American Manhood Against Asiatic Coolieism, Which Shall Survive?" Asked Gompers rhetorically: "Are the hundreds of thousands of our citizens to be deprived of employment to make room for this Asiatic coolie, and the standard of living of our entire laboring class to be so reduced as to meet his murderous competition?"[86]

When Steward died in 1883 his ideological baton was picked up by his fellow eight-hour men, George McNeill and George Gunton, two men who kept alive not only the eight-hour crusade, but carried forward the lessons they had learned in the factional infighting within the Boston labor reform community. Both men eventually became advocates for the AFL's brand of exclusionary and apolitical trade unionism. McNeill served a short stint as president of the Marxist International Labor Union, edited a

[85]None of the names of the four eight-hour men whose names appeared on the letter of appeal for funds for the hall in 1871 appear on the list of sponsors or organizers for the same hall in 1873. By 1873, of the 19 sponsors listed in the pamphlet, four were members of Boston's International Workingmen's Association, five were dismissed by Steward as "goodies," and four were organizers of the MLU. See the pamphlets entitled, "Head Quarters Labor Movement in Massachusetts," May 30, 1872; "Free Hall for Working-Men and Working-Women," n.d., both in the Boston Public Library (9331–8574–a2 to a4). Also, "Boston Eight Hour League: Its Object and Work, Annual Report of the President," Boston, 1872, in Joseph P. McDonnell Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

[86]Samuel Gompers and Frank Morrison, "Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion: Meat vs. Rice; American Manhood Against Asiatic Coolieism; Which Shall Survive?" (Washington, DC, 1902—also published in Senate Document No. 137, 57th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, DC, 1902), 23–24; see also A. Furuseth and Thomas F. Tracy, "The New Chinese Exclusion Law," *American Federationist*, vol. 9, no. 6 (1902) 275–296; *Machinists Monthly Journal* (Washington, DC), Jan. 1902, 1–3; Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, vol. 1, 216–217.

short-lived labor paper in Boston, the *Labor Leader*, and played a role in leading the trade union movement out of the Knights of Labor. He spent his last years as a paid official of the AFL.[87] George Gunton went on to be an influential labor newspaper editor, a pamphleteer for the AFL's eight-hour campaigns in the 1880s, and finally abandoned the labor movement completely, finding financial success as an author and corporate shill in his old age.[88]

Ultimately, Phillips was ostracized not for any one thing he said, or any one difference he had with Steward, but because he refused to narrow his vision of reform. Phillips' record through the spring of 1872 was not of a man abandoning one reform idea for another, but of a man heaping ever more reforms onto an already overflowing plate. Steward and his eight-hour men moved in the opposite direction and transformed an eight-hour demand that had pulled together a broad coalition of reformers into a narrow economistic justification for "pure and simple" trade unionism. In the end, Ira Steward and his eight-hour compatriots did not accomplish their original goal of leading reformers "beyond equality" and toward class emancipation because the reductionist means they adopted to do so ultimately set these principles against one another.

[87]Gary M. Fink, *Biographical Dictionary of American Labor* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 384; Montgomery, " 'To Fight This Thing Till I Die': The Career of George Edwin McNeill," 3–23.

[88]George Gunton, *The Economic and Social Importance of the Eight-Hour Movement*, "AFL Eight-Hour Series," No. 2 (Washington DC, 1889); Mark Koerner, "The Menace of Labor: Anti-Union Thought in the Progressive Era, 1901–1917" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1995).