

Meanwhile, by the 1830s, the progress of industrialization and urbanization had begun to generate a large laboring class in the United States. As household production was increasingly replaced by merchant-organized outwork and by factories, more and more Americans found themselves faced with the prospect of being permanent employees. Workers found this development disturbing, for it began to appear that Americans had thrown off rule by an aristocracy of birth only to replace it with an aristocracy of wealth (Document 10-9). In an effort to reverse what they described as their slide into "wage slavery," workers established workingmen's parties to agitate for such reforms as the ten-hour day; by the mid-1830s, many of these parties had allied with the Democrats.

The devastating depression following the financial panic of 1837 sent the early labor movement into reverse. Because it occurred on the Democrats' watch, and because the policies of Jackson and his successor, Martin Van Buren, could be blamed for it, the Whigs were provided a golden opportunity to gain power. Even though the party appealed chiefly to evangelicals and commercial interests, from the outset Whig politicians were eager to participate in the rough-and-tumble of mass politics (Document 10-10), competing with the Democrats for the workingman's vote (Document 10-11). In 1840 the Whigs turned the tables on the Democrats, successfully depicting Van Buren as an "aristocrat" and their own candidate, William Henry Harrison (of Virginia gentry background), as a log-cabin-dwelling, cider-swilling man of the people. With two parties now contending to be the "people's choice," mass party politics had arrived.

10-9 Address to the Working Men of New England (1832)

Seth Luther

Seth Luther (1817?–1846), who probably was born in Providence, Rhode Island, became a strong voice for workingmen in Jacksonian America. A carpenter by trade, Luther had little formal education, but he was an avid reader of newspapers and books and became a leading figure in the fight for the ten-hour day. In the following speech, delivered to a gathering of workingmen, Luther described an American System dedicated not to expanding manufactures (see Document 10-2) but to securing the equality of men.

Source: *The Globe* (Washington, DC), May 13, 1832.

I would ask if persons not possessing one hundred and thirty four dollars in soil, are permitted to address this meeting. If so, I wish to make a few remarks. This community seems to be divided into two parties. Not Jackson men and Clay men . . . but the Aristocracy and Democracy. The term Aristocracy denotes a privileged class. Although the Constitution of the United States acknowledges no hereditary right, yet there exists among us a class well deserving the name of Aristocrats. I will mention some of their privileges. . . . Sir, this aristocracy of wealth claims the right to shut up in the Cotton Mill the almost infant child for . . . 13 or 14 hours per diem, with only 20 or 30 minutes for each meal . . . thereby depriving them of the best of all earthly good, an education. . . . Sir, we are in favor of an American System that will benefit all interests. But we are not satisfied with *the* System, whatever it may be, which enables a favored few to accumulate mountains of wealth, at the expense of our dearest interests. . . . We hear the philanthropist moaning over the fate of the South-

ern slave, when there are thousands of children in this State as truly slaves as the blacks of the South. . . .

Sir, we find the aristocracy in all countries, using their efforts, either directly or indirectly, to hold the poorer classes in ignorance; that they may rivet the chains of oppression more effectually. Where, Sir, is the difference in the effect between Southern measures, and measures now practiced by the Manufacturer, to accomplish this dreadful object?

Much, Sir, have we heard respecting the happiness of a manufacturing population. The Hon. H[enry] Clay . . . draws a most beautiful picture. He has seen *one* Cotton Mill in Cincinnati. . . . He exclaims, "Tis a paradise!" — But . . . one of my friends remarked, if a *Cotton Mill* is paradise, it is "Paradise Lost." . . . [W]e would presume to advise the Hon. Senator from Kentucky to . . . see . . . instead of rosy cheeks, the *pale*, the *sickly*, the *haggard*, countenance of the ragged child from six to twelve years of age. Haggard from the worse than slavish confinement in the cotton mill.