

## CHAPTER 2

### Labor in Colonial America

Throughout the Colonial period the free workers were the least numerous and the least important section of American labor. In Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia at the time of the Revolution probably three out of four persons were or had been indentured servants, and about one out of six of the three million colonists were Negro slaves. Less than forty thousand Negroes lived in the North. In at least five southern colonies, Negroes equaled or outnumbered the white population.

#### SLAVES AND INDENTURED SERVANTS

On the tobacco, rice, and indigo plantations of the South (cotton and sugar did not become important until about a half-century later), slavery displaced the indenture system fairly early. Planters discovered that a slave—a worker for life, whose children became the property of the master—was a more profitable investment than a servant who left after his period of indenture was up. Moreover, a master could often hire out idle slaves. Slave maintenance was less than half that of the indentured servant, a fact that made slavery a labor system desirable to both southern planters and northern merchants.

Slavery, however, did not develop at once in Colonial America. The first Negroes came as indentured servants, and as their indentures ended they were freed. Not until the 1660's did enslavement begin. Between 1664 and 1682 slave codes in many colonies transformed the Negro servant into a slave.\* Negro children were legally declared the property of the owners of their mothers. Slaves were forbidden to meet together,

\*In Colonial New England, however, Negroes occupied a dual status since the law regarded them as both property and persons. (See Lorenzo J. Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England, 1620 to 1776*, New York, 1943, p. 167.)

to own or bears arms, to leave their master's plantations without written permission, to testify against a white man. If a Negro slave struck a white person, he received forty lashes regardless of whose fault it was, whereas a master's killing a slave was not a crime, it being assumed that no master would kill his slave "except in self-defense."<sup>1</sup> When a Maryland master, in 1656, killed a slave by pouring hot lead over him, he was acquitted on the ground that the slave was "incorrigible"; and when, in 1735, John Van Zandt of New York whipped a slave to death, the coroner's jury concluded that the death was due to the "visitation of God."<sup>2</sup>

The thousands of indentured servants who came to America to escape poverty and persecution at home frequently found "worse plagues than those . . . left behind."<sup>3</sup> Their lot was hardly better than that of the Negro slave; indeed, some observers believed it to be worse. For while a master found it necessary to take care of his slaves, who were property for life, he knew that indentured servants would leave in a few years. And he was under no obligation if these servants left his employ crippled and disabled from hard work and brutal punishment.

To be sure, the law sometimes provided that "if any man smite out the eye or tooth of his man servant or maid servant, or otherwise maim or much disfigure him, he shall let them go free from his service." But this was cold comfort, for the servant knew that should he prefer charges he himself was subject to punishment if he failed to prove his case before a court dominated by the masters. In New York, for example, a servant who could not substantiate his complaint was "enjoynd and ordered to serve . . . six months time gratis Extraordinary for every such undue Complaint."<sup>4</sup>

Like the indentured servant, apprentices—children and adolescents bound out to virtual slavery for a number of years—also had much to complain of. Although they were supposed to be taught a trade, the frequent complaints registered in court records indicate that only too many masters kept their apprentices ignorant of the trade, at the same time beating them "in a most cruel and immoderate manner without any just reason for the same," fed them on "morsels of coarse bread," and generally "deprived [them] of the common necessaries and conveniences of Life."<sup>5</sup>

Unfree workers in Colonial America groaned "beneath a worse than Egyptian bondage." One contemporary observed that indentured servants and Negro slaves had "neither convenient food to eat or proper raiment to put on, notwithstanding most of the comforts [the wealthy] enjoyed were solely owing to their indefatigable labors."<sup>6</sup> Little wonder so many of them ran away from their masters. Despite the vigorous efforts of planters and merchants to keep them apart, white servants and Negro

slaves often fled together from common oppression to seek a common freedom. One notice which appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of September 10, 1747, read: "Ran away from the Subscriber—A White Man and a Negro, it is supposed they are gone together." Another notice in the issue of October 8, 1747, read: "There went away with Ann Wainwright, White Servant, a Negro slave Woman belonging to June Bailard."

Runaway servants who were captured were severely whipped, often branded with the letter R, and they were always forced to serve extra time—sometimes as much as two years for each offense. The General Assembly of Maryland even passed an act in 1641 making it a felony punishable with death for a servant to run away from his master "with intent to convey himself out of the province."<sup>7</sup>

But severe punishment did not halt the escapes. Court records tell the stories of people like Isaac Robinson of Massachusetts, who was brutally whipped dozens of times "for running away from his master very often and enticing others to run away," \* and of Francis Bates, who was severely punished for repeatedly "provoking his fellow servants" to escape.<sup>8</sup>

Instead of running away, unfree workers often rose up in organized revolt. More than forty slave plots were discovered in Colonial America. In some of them Negro slaves and white indentured servants had formed common plans. The Charleston plot of 1730 was so extensive that a contemporary observed: "Had not an over-ruling Providence discovered their Intrigue, we had all been in blood." Nine years later, on the Stone plantation, near Charleston, more than two hundred slaves revolted. Before they were overtaken and massacred, they had burned houses and crops, and killed several slave owners, sparing one who had been good to his slaves.<sup>9</sup>

Not all slave revolts occurred in the South. In New York City, in 1712, twenty-three armed slaves revolted against "hard usage . . . received from their masters." The revolt was crushed but a correspondent to the *New York Gazette* of March 18, 1734, warned the slaveowners that "had it not been for His Majesties Garrison, that city in all likelihood had been reduced to ashes, and the greatest part of its inhabitants murdered."

The severe whippings given to the runaways were as nothing com-

\* Robinson could be considered as one of the earliest labor organizers in America. Another was Sam, a Negro slave in Maryland, who was convicted in 1688 of having "several times endeavored to promote a Negro insurrection in this colony." (*William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine*, Vol. X, Jan., 1902, p. 177.)

Not only did organized mass desertions of bound servants occur frequently in Colonial America, but there are even numerous records of strikes conducted by these unfree workers in protest against working conditions. (See Richard B. Morris, *Government and Labor in Early America*, New York, 1946, pp. 167-74.)

pared to the savage punishment suffered by those who took part in slave insurrections. A woman slave was burned at the stake in Jamaica, Long Island, in 1708, for plotting a revolt. As the flames slowly consumed her, a horn filled with water was placed within reach of her mouth and then taken away, again and again "as a terror to others." Of the execution of twenty-one slaves captured in the New York uprising of 1712, Governor Hunter wrote: "Some were burnt, others hanged, one broken on the wheels, and one hung alive in chains in the town, so that there has been the most exemplary punishment that could be possibly thought of."<sup>10</sup>

Brutality did not end the dangers of slave insurrections, and some concessions were granted, such as better food, clothes, and treatment for slaves. In the North, where slavery had never been very profitable, fear of Negro slaves mounted, and proposals were made to replace slaves by free workers.

#### EMERGENCE OF WAGE EARNERS

It was in the seaport towns and the cities that a free laboring class emerged. For a long time the economic life of Boston, Philadelphia, and New York was geared to the shipping industry. At first English and Dutch vessels carried most of the Colonial commerce but it was not long before the colonists were building their own ships. A demand was thus created for carpenters, smiths, joiners, shipwrights, caulkers, ropemakers, sailmakers, and other artisans and laborers. As early as 1685 William Penn observed that in Philadelphia "there inhabits most sorts of useful tradesmen as Carpenters, Joyners, Bricklayers, Masons, Plumbers, Smiths, Glaziers, Taylors, Shoemakers, Butchers, Bakers, Brewers, Glovers, Tanners, Felmongers, Wheelwrights, Millrights, Shiprights, Boatrights, Ropemakers, Saylmakers, Blockmakers, Turners, etc." Two years later a French visitor to Boston noted that "there are here craftsmen of every kind, and particularly carpenters for the building of ships."<sup>11</sup>

As trade and commerce expanded and wealth increased, skilled craftsmen in the luxury field also made their appearance—silversmiths, goldsmiths, watchmakers, and jewelers. In 1720, New York had thirteen silversmiths, four watchmakers, two goldsmiths, and one jeweler.

In the beginning few artisans and craftsmen were wage earners. In the larger towns they produced articles in their own homes which were frequently small shops as well and here their wives and children would sell their goods. Another type of craftsman was the traveling artisan, mason, carpenter, shoemaker, or candle-maker who carried his tools with him and stopped at farmhouses to work up raw material supplied by the farmers. He was paid in money or in corn or wheat. Much of the

labor in blacksmithing, carpentry, weaving and shoemaking in the colonies was performed by these itinerant workers.\*

As the population grew, many traveling artisans settled down, usually in small villages, rented or built their own home, and opened a workshop in one of the rooms. When the farmer who lived nearby came to town to sell his produce, he would buy articles difficult to manufacture at home.

As the demand for commodities grew, the artisan shopkeeper found that his own labor could not supply the market. For ten or twenty pounds (fifty to a hundred dollars) he could buy an indentured servant, usually a skilled worker, who would work for seven years for food, lodging, and an occasional suit of clothes. Of the 1,838 indentured servants who came to Philadelphia in April, June, and July of 1709, 56 were bakers, 87 masons, 124 carpenters, 68 shoemakers, 99 tailors, 29 butchers, 45 millers, 14 tanners, seven stocking menders, six barbers, four locksmiths, 95 cloth and linen weavers, 82 coopers, 13 saddlers, two glass blowers, three hatters, eight lime-burners, two engravers, three brickmakers, two silversmiths, 48 blacksmiths, three plotters, six turners.<sup>12</sup>

Negro slaves were also used as skilled workers in the Colonial shops, generally hired by the month or the year. But the demand for free workers grew. However valuable the indentured servants and slaves were on plantations and farms where the work was done all the year they were not so profitable as the free worker in the shops and mills where the work was seasonal. A servant or slave had to be clothed, fed, and sheltered during the slack season, but a free worker could simply be given notice that he was no longer needed. When a servant or slave ran away, the master lost a considerable investment. As Adam Smith observed, in his *Wealth of Nations*, "at Boston, New York and Philadelphia . . . the work done by freemen comes cheaper in the end than that performed by slaves."<sup>13</sup>

By 1715, Colonial newspapers were carrying want-ads for scores of different types of free workers, ranging from watchmakers to furriers. An employment bureau, set up in New York in 1770, informed master craftsmen "that they may be supplied with journeymen by applying to Mr. Couters at the sign of the Three Lyons near the North Church

\* Nevertheless, opportunities for itinerant workers remained limited for many years, since each household in the countryside was almost a factory in miniature. Each farmer was his own carpenter, blacksmith, shoemaker, and a dozen other craftsmen rolled into one. Governor Moore of New York reported as late as 1767 that in most farm houses in the colony clothing was "manufactured for the use of the Family, without the least design of sending any of it to market, . . . for every home swarms with children who are set to work so soon as they are able to spin and card." (E. B. O'Callaghan, Ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, Albany, 1856, Vol. VII, p. 888.)

where there is a House of Call opened and all journeymen are desired to call there for work." <sup>14</sup> Thus a wage-earning class came into existence in Colonial America, its numbers increasing through the expiration of the indentures and through the immigration of free workers. The skilled workers were known as journeymen, artificers, handicraftsmen, artisans and mechanics; unskilled workers were common laborers or ditchers and diggers.

Ship-building, brewing, flour milling, cooperage or barrel-making, tanning, saddlery, and iron-making were the chief Colonial industries sufficiently developed to require a number of workers. Each furnace in the New England and the middle colonies employed eight or nine men, besides wood-cutters, coalers, carters, and other common laborers. Ship-building was undoubtedly the most important industry in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Newport, and Charleston. In 1720 Boston had fourteen shipyards, which produced annually about two hundred ships; in 1712 Newport had more than a dozen, and in 1718 Philadelphia had at least ten. They provided employment for many workers, skilled and unskilled alike. It is estimated, for example, that in 1713, there were at least 3,500 sailors in the port of Boston and Salem alone. By the eve of the Revolution, lumber mills and iron works were employing large groups of workers, and many workers were employed as weavers, shoemakers and cabinet makers in large shops in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. <sup>15</sup>

The typical Colonial shop, however, did not have many workers, partly because the English government limited the number. In 1750, such a shop would consist of a master craftsman, who was the owner and employer, two or three journeymen, and a similar number of apprentices. The master craftsman still worked side by side with his wage workers. He provided the capital and the raw material and sold the finished articles.

#### LABOR CONDITIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

In any analysis of labor conditions in Colonial America one must constantly remember that the scarcity of labor "assured the workman of a higher standard of living than was obtainable by a person of similar employment in England or on the Continent." One student of the subject has estimated that the "colonial workman commanded real wages which exceeded by from 30 to 100 per cent the wages of a contemporary English workman." <sup>16</sup> Skilled craftsmen were imported from Europe throughout the entire Colonial period, and to induce them to emigrate Colonial industrialists were willing to offer extremely attractive conditions.

Available surveys of wages in the various trades in Colonial America are entirely too lacking in comprehensiveness to permit any thorough

general conclusions. A few statistics may be cited. In 1630, wages of carpenters in Massachusetts were approximately twenty-three cents a day with board, or thirty-three cents without board, those of laborers with board were as low as eleven cents a day, while those of bricklayers and masons in 1672 were twenty-two cents a day with board. A carpenter in 1770 earned about 50 cents a day; a butcher 30 cents; a shoemaker 70 cents; a laborer 21 cents. The general wage was about two dollars a week. Unquestionably, some of these workers were able to supplement their income through subsistence farming.<sup>17</sup>

However, all was not milk and honey in the life of a Colonial wage-earner. During unemployment periods, the Colonial worker was often unable to keep his children from starving and himself from jail. In 1737, the lieutenant-governor of New York observed that many workers in the colony were "reduced to poverty from want of employ." And in Colonial New Jersey, so many workers were unemployed in 1765 that the Provincial legislature had to appropriate 200 pounds to be used in buying grain for the more distressed families.<sup>18</sup>

High prices and currency fluctuations often reduced real wages. When prices fell the workers did not benefit because many Colonial courts ordered them "to be content to abate their wages according to the fall of the commodities." When prices went up the courts fixed maximum rates and fined workers heavily when they sought or received wages above the rates.\* A court record in New England reads: "William Dixie paid 3s fine for taking 3s per day; James Smith fined 2s, John Stone and Jno Sibley 3s each for taking excessive wages."<sup>19</sup> This action, employers argued, was necessary "to save the American Workingman from himself." One American employer remarked in 1769: "It is certain that high wages more frequently make labouring people miserable; they too commonly employ their spare time and cash, in debauching their morals and ruining their health."<sup>20</sup>

In order to keep wages down, manufacturers often employed Negro slaves. Unable to halt this practice, white workers in the South began to emigrate to the northern colonies. But the same competition faced the workers in the North. The free mechanics of Philadelphia in 1707 protested the "Want of Employment and Lowness of wages occasioned by the Number of *Negroes* . . . hired out to work by the day."<sup>21</sup> Thirty years later free workers in New York protested the "pernicious practice of breeding slaves to trade," which forced the free worker to leave for other colonies.<sup>22</sup>

\* While most wage control legislation in Colonial times failed owing to labor scarcity and inability to get workers to stay on the job, demands for such laws were made throughout the period. In almost all cases where such legislation existed, the worker and not the master was prosecuted.

Another competitor was the half farmer-half artisan who came to the towns during the winter and returned to the farm in time for the spring planting. A mechanic in New York wrote in 1757: "A Farmer ought to employ himself in his proper occupation without meddling with Smiths, Masons, Carpenters, Coopers, or any other mechanical Arts, except making and mending his Plow, Harrow, or any other utensil for farming."<sup>23</sup>

The workers had still to learn that these problems of growing capitalism could only be met by limiting the working day through the power of trade unions, by resolutely fighting for higher wages and better working conditions. Class lines were still fluid in early America. The master craftsman still worked at his bench; often he and his workers co-operated in fighting the big merchants who refused to abide by established standards. Skilled workers could become master craftsmen, and unskilled workers could move to other places or become farmers.

Even so, labor organization did take place in Colonial America.\* The Journeymen Caulkers of Boston issued a joint statement in 1741 stating that they would no longer accept payment for their work in notes on shops for money and goods, a practice which had "greatly impoverished themselves and their families." For the future, they continued, they would receive and take "no other pay for their service than good lawful publick bills of credit."<sup>24</sup> "This good and commendable example," the *Boston Weekly News-Letter* of February 12, 1741, remarked, "will soon be follow'd by Numbers of other Artificers and Tradesmen."

The following advertisement in the *New York Weekly Journal* of January 28, 1734, indicates that maid servants were organizing to improve their working conditions:

"Here are many women in this Town that these hard Times intend to go to Service, but as it is proper the World should know our Terms, we think it reasonable we should not be beat by our Mistrisses Husband[s], they being too strong, and perhaps may do tender women Mischief. If any Ladies want Servants, and will engage for their Husbands, they shall be soon supplied."

The closest thing to trade unions before the Revolution were the benevolent societies for masters, journeymen and apprentices, formed in

\* There were even a few guilds in Colonial America, the best known of them being the Carpenters' Company of Philadelphia, founded in 1724. Although these Colonial craft guilds sought to follow the practices of the European guilds by regulating their respective industries, determining wages, hours, and conditions of labor, and inspecting the workmanship and the quality of materials, they were not very successful. Workers in Colonial America were too widely scattered to be regulated and supervised by a guild. Usually, only masters belonged to these guilds.



a few leading towns. Generally their purpose was that of "assisting such of their members as should by accident be in need of support, or the widows and minor children of the members." They paid sick benefits, provided funds for indigent members, occasionally loaned money, and provided "strong boxes" for savings. They did not usually deal with questions of wages, hours, or conditions of labor. But the benevolent society of house painters of New York in 1767 did petition the Board of Councillors to prevent master craftsmen from importing mechanics from neighboring colonies, paying them less money and thereby lowering wages in New York City. Before the benevolent society was formed such petitions were regularly ignored. When the Board of Councillors received this petition a committee was appointed at once and ordered to report "with all possible speed."<sup>25</sup>

A few strikes were called in Colonial times.\* In 1684 the truckmen employed by the municipal government of New York refused to move dirt from the streets until the price per load was increased. The strikers were "Suspended and Discharged" "for not obeying the Command and doing their Dutyes as becomes them in their Places." A week later the carters asked to be returned to their jobs. They were ordered to conform to certain "Laws and Orders established," and to pay a fine of six shillings each. About a century later, in 1770, the coopers of New York determined "not to sell casks except in accordance with the rates established." The coopers were tried and convicted of a conspiracy to restrain trade, and ordered to pay fifty shillings "to the church or pious uses." Those who worked for the city were dismissed.<sup>26</sup>

The same city government had been kinder years before in 1758 when the powerful shipping merchants had combined to lower the wage scale for ship carpenters, able seamen, and laborers. Six years later a colony-wide employers' association was set up in New York City. Each member agreed not to "receive in his Service" any workers who could not pro-

\* These were not really strikes of workers against employers, but protests of master craftsmen against prices fixed by local authorities. John R. Commons and Associates state that the Philadelphia printers' strike of 1786 was the first authentic labor strike in American history. (*History of Labor in the United States*, New York, 1918, Vol. I, p. 25.) Richard B. Morris indicates, however, that there may even have been a strike of journeymen tailors in New York in 1768. ("Criminal Conspiracy and Early Labor Combinations in New York," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. LII, March, 1937, p. 77.) The twenty journeymen tailors announced on March 31, 1768, that they would work in families at "three Shillings and Six Pence per Day" with "Diet." (See *New York Journal*, April 7, 1768.)

An extremely interesting report in the *Charleston Gazette* of October 29, 1763, announced that Negro chimney sweepers "had the insolence, by a combination amongst themselves, to raise the usual prices, and to refuse doing their work, unless their exorbitant demands are complied with."

duce "a Recommendation in writing, from the Master, or Mistress, whom they last served in this Colony."<sup>27</sup> No fines were imposed upon these employers nor were they prosecuted for conspiracy.

In 1746 a number of Savannah carpenters went on strike. Immediately the trustees of the colony invoked a parliamentary statute to suppress the strike. The report of their action, dated December 29, 1746, read in part:

"An Advertisement being read, sign'd by several Carpenters at Savannah and stuck up at several Places in the said Town, whereby they have combin'd and resolved not to work below particular Prices Specified therein

"Ordered

"That the Act of Parliament Intituled. . . be sent over to the President and Assistants, with orders for them to apprise the People of the Consequences of the said Act, and to put the same in force."<sup>28</sup>

### STRUGGLES FOR DEMOCRACY

During the seventeenth century in some of the colonies, the common man, slaves and indentured servants excepted, had been able to vote. During the following century, property qualifications for voting were introduced disenfranchising the poor. In Pennsylvania the right to vote in 1750 depended upon the ownership of 50 pounds of "lawful money" or 50 acres of land. As a result, only 8 per cent of the rural population could vote and only 2 per cent of the population of Philadelphia. Suffrage in New Jersey was restricted to freeholders who owned at least 100 acres of land, and in South Carolina to those who owned "a settled plantation" or one hundred acres of unsettled land. Josiah Quincy, the Massachusetts lawyer, said of the South Carolina Assembly: "'Tis true that they have a house of Assembly: but who do they represent? The laborer, the mechanic, the tradesman, the farmer, husbandman or yeoman? No the representatives are almost if not wholly rich planters."<sup>29</sup>

Resentment grew among the masses who had not come to America to be deprived of their vote, taxed to support an established church in whose doctrines they did not believe, robbed of the chance to buy land by speculators and landed gentry who seized and held vast estates, imprisoned if they fell into debt, forced to dress in common clothes to distinguish them from the upper classes, and in general treated as if they had been destined to live in abject poverty and ignorance. Nor were they loth to express their resentment. Riots often took place on election days, when small shopkeepers, artisans, and laborers would march to the polls armed with sticks and stones and demand the ballot. These demonstrations were supplemented by literary protests in prose and verse, such as:

*Now the pleasant time approaches;  
Gentlemen do ride in coaches,  
But poor men they don't regard,  
That to maintain them labour hard.*<sup>30</sup>

Two incidents in Massachusetts revealed that the common people were not going to cringe before the ruling classes. In 1667, Emanuel Downing, a ship-carpenter, was arrested in Essex County for having "uttered diverse seditious & dangerous speeches of a Very high nature against the Crown and dignity of our Sovereigns Lord King Charles the Second," such as the statement that "he cared not more for him [the King] than any other man."<sup>31</sup> Also, there is the better known case of Governor Joseph Dudley of Massachusetts who one wintry day in 1705 came upon some carters on the road to Boston. He haughtily ordered them out of the way to permit his carriage to pass. But the carters refused, and one of them told the Governor: "I am as good flesh and blood as you, . . . you may go out of the way."<sup>32</sup> The carters were arrested and later released, but in all aristocratic circles the incident was discussed. The lower classes, went the common lament, were getting out of hand. But this outcry was moderate indeed compared with the shrieks of the aristocrats when the lower classes rose up in revolt with the aim of ending the "insolent domination in a few, a very few, opulent families."

Virginia experienced a revolt in 1646, led by Nathaniel Bacon, against the planter aristocracy. The rebellion, said the report of the King's investigators, sprang "from the poverty and uneasyness of some of the meanest whose discontent renders them easier to be misled." Bacon's army was described by a contemporary as "Rabble of the basest sort of people, whose condition was such, as by a change could not admit of worse." He was shocked to hear them talk "of sharing men's estates among themselves."

Bacon died suddenly of fever, but before the rebellion was drowned in blood by Governor Berkeley it had gained a number of democratic rights for the people. The statute preventing propertyless freemen from electing members to the House of Burgesses was repealed. Freeholders and freemen of every parish gained the right to elect the vestries of the church.

None of these democratic reforms remained after the revolt was crushed, yet their memories lived on. Bacon was truly the "Torchbearer of the Revolution," and for generations after any leader of the common people was called a "Baconist."<sup>33</sup>

One such Baconist was Jacob Leisler who in 1689 led the people of New York City against the mercantile aristocracy, captured the Fort, and overthrew the government. City artisans and laborers, classified by

Governor Bellomont as "the scum of the people, Taylours and others scandalous persons," formed the majority of Leisler's party. Before the movement was defeated, several important democratic rights were won. A committee of safety was elected by the people, free men who owned no property were given voting rights, and representatives to the Colonial government were elected by all voters.<sup>34</sup>

Although Leisler's regime was overthrown, a number of the democratic advances made during the rebellion continued. Suffrage in New York City remained more liberal than in other colonies before the Revolution. About 10 per cent of the total white population of New York City possessed the right to vote. Although the government was controlled by merchants, crown officers, lawyers and landowners, the opportunity existed for the political movement of the artisans.

This opportunity did come during the aldermanic campaign of 1734, when the Court Party representing Governor Cosby and the merchants was determined to retain control of the city government by re-electing their aldermen and councilmen. Arrayed against them was the Popular Party supported by the artisans and aided by John Peter Zenger's *New York Journal*. In a handbill distributed by the Popular Party during the campaign, the workingmen of New York were urged "to chuse no courtiers or trimmers; or any of that vain tribe that are more fond of a *Feather* in their Hats, than the true interest of the *City*. Nor to chuse any *dependents* on them." It reminded the voters that "*A poor honest man* [is] preferable to a rich knave." Towards the end of the campaign, the workingmen were rallied to the polls by this song:

*Our Country's Rights we will defend,  
Like brave and honest men,  
We voted right and there's an end  
And so we'll do again.*<sup>35</sup>

The election was a triumph for the Popular Party. John Fred, laborer; Johannes Burger, bricklayer; William Roome, painter; Henry Bogart, baker; and other artisans were elected to the common council, which by 1735 the Popular Party completely controlled. Governor Cosby complained to the Lords of Trade in London of the "mised populace in this city," and another conservative said that the city was "entirely at the Beck of the Faction and for the most part men of the Low Class."<sup>36</sup>

Infuriated by the victory of the people, Governor Cosby took action against John Peter Zenger. The songs, ballads, and several issues of the *Journal* were condemned by the Governor's Council and the Supreme Court. Zenger himself was arrested on a charge of seditious libel. He was defended by the eighty-eight year old prominent lawyer, Andrew Hamilton of Philadelphia, without fee or reward. Stressing the issue of

a free press, Hamilton said: "the Question before the Court . . . is not of small nor private Concern, it is not the Cause of a poor Printer, nor of *New York* alone. . . . It is the Cause of Liberty; and I make no Doubt that your upright Conduct this Day, will not only entitle you to the Love and Esteem of your Fellow-Citizens; but every Man, who prefers Freedom to a Life of Slavery will bless and honor You. . . ." <sup>37</sup>

The verdict was "not guilty" and the precedent of a free press had been established in America.

Later the conservatives in New York regained control of the city government, but the rich and the "well-born" in Colonial America never recovered from the panic created by the political upsurge of the people of New York City. Their fright became greater when in 1740 a struggle began between the aristocrats and the people of Massachusetts. The frightening fact was that the farmers and artisans were marching together against the hated creditors who were sending Colonial silver to Europe and refusing to accept payment of debts in paper money. The mercantile aristocrats were denounced as "gripping and merciless usurers" who "heaped up Vast Estates" by exploiting the poor. Hard-pressed farmers and town mechanics urged the establishment of a "Land Bank" that would issue paper money.

To the mercantile aristocrats in Boston it was clear that "fundamentally the struggle was to decide whether the common people or wealthy gentry were henceforth to control the public life of the colony." Naturally they fought the Land Bank proposal, and when the bank was agreed to by the Colonial Assembly, they turned to the King and Parliament. The British government dissolved the Land Bank.<sup>38</sup>

In no colony, therefore, were the common people able to limit the power of the upper classes. Every movement to restore the democratic rights of the lower classes and to achieve others had been crushed, some with the timely assistance of the British King and Parliament. Yet the triumph of the landed, professional, and mercantile aristocracy was only temporary. In these struggles urban workers and artisans and country farmers forged a significant alliance. They were to utilize this alliance during the American Revolution, when, by uniting their struggle for greater freedom at home with the movement for independence, they fought for and won a more democratic regime in America.