

STATEMENT
of the
Boston Mechanics' and Laborers' Mutual Benefit Association
on the formation of its Cooperative Society, 1845¹

____ Excerpt ____

Sir: The undersigned, citizens of Boston, composing a committee of the “Boston Mechanics’ and Laborers’ Mutual Benefit Association”, respectfully solicit your earnest attention to the numerous evils resulting from the absence of an efficient lien law for the protection of mechanics and laborers from the rapacity of unprincipled contractors. . . .

It is our belief that the same causes of evil and suffering are operative in this country, that, in the Old World, are developed to giant magnitude, and are crushing the producers of wealth to the very dust, and that unless a speedy change can be effected in our social condition the time is not far distant when the laborers of the United States will be as dependent, as oppressed, and as wretched as are their brethren in Europe. Here, as there, the soil, motive power, and machinery are monopolized by the idle few; all the sources of wealth, all the instrumentalities of life, and even the right and privilege of industry are taken away from the people. Monopoly has laid its ruthless hands upon labor itself, and forced the sale of the muscles and skill of the toiling many, and under the specious name of “wages” is robbing them of the fruits of their industry. Universal monopoly is the bane of labor not less in America than in Europe. . . .

The remedy lies in a radical change of principle and policy. Our isolated position and interests, and our antisocial habits, must be abandoned. The Money-power must be superseded by the Man-power. Universal monopoly must give place to Societary ownership, occupancy, and use. . . . The direction and profits of industry must be kept in the hands of the producers. Laborers must own their own shops and factories, work their own stock, sell their own merchandise, and enjoy the fruits of their own toil. Our Lowells must be owned by the artisans who build them, and the operatives who run the machinery and do all the work. And the dividend, instead of being given to the idle parasites of a distant city, should be shared among those who perform the labor. Our Lynns² must give the fortunes made by the dealer and employer, to those who use the awl and work the material.

¹ published as a one-page pamphlet; in the collections of Hegley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

² Lynn, Massachusetts, known as “Shoe City,” was a center of U.S. shoe manufacturing.