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ABSTRACT

Degradation and Resegmentation: Social and
Technological Change in the East Midlands Hosiery Industry

Harriet Bradley

This thesis investigates the usefulness of Braverman's general theory of the labour process in the explanation of social and technological developments in the hosiery industry.

Critical accounts of Braverman's work are reviewed and used to construct a more adequate model of labour process change. In addition to the historical tendency to degradation, processes of re-skilling and retention of skills, referred to as 'resegmentation', are integral to the restructuring of the labour process. Many other types of management strategy are utilised in the workplace, though they do not necessarily involve the physical transformation of the labour process; these, referred to as 'local' strategies, may be of a pacificatory or a repressive kind. It is also necessary to consider gender relations as a determinant of the re-organisation of work and technological development. Finally, class relations at a macro level are also relevant to understanding changing workplace relations. All these aspects must be considered for a complete understanding of labour process change.

The model is used to study the development of the hosiery labour process between 1800 and 1960. Long-term processes of degradation and resegregation are discernible, in which the sexual division of labour has played a crucial part. A range of repressive strategies have been employed, while forms of paternalism and of joint consultation have been the dominant pacificatory strategies. Workplace relations over the period have moved from violent confrontation to peaceful collaboration, reflecting national trends to class pacification; major causes of this include the adoption of pacificatory strategies by employers and changes in the local working-class culture, community life and family relations. The extended model of labour process change, thus, makes possible the tracing of the various interlocking processes involved in social and technological change in industry.

DEGRADATION AND RESEGMENTATION:
SOCIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE IN
THE EAST MIDLANDS HOSIERY INDUSTRY 1800-1960

Harriet Katharine Bradley

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DECLARATION

No material contained within this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in the University of Durham or in any other university.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Acknowledgements	iv
List of Tables	vii
List of Abbreviations used in the Text	viii
Introduction	1
Chapter One Braverman and the Theory of the Labour Process	7
Chapter Two The English Working Class 1800-1914	30
Chapter Three Social Change in the Hosiery Industry: From Conflict to Co-operation	43
Chapter Four Degradation and Resegmentation in the Hosiery Labour Process	98
Chapter Five Repressive Management Strategies in the Hosiery Industry	158
Chapter Six Pacificatory Strategies: The Traditional Option - Paternalism	190
Chapter Seven Pacificatory Strategies: The Progressive Option - Joint Consultation	228
Chapter Eight Worker Responses: The Period of Confrontation	261
Chapter Nine Worker Responses: The Switch from Confrontation to Accommodation	307
Chapter Ten Gender Relations and the Labour Process	352
Conclusion	389
Appendix 1	400
Appendix 2	405
Bibliography	407

LIST OF TABLES

	<i>Page</i>	
Figure 3.1	Proportions of Men and Women Employed in Hosiery in the Three East Midland Counties 1851-1951	75
Figure 3.2	Membership of Local Unions 1914-1939	87
Figure 5.1	Forms of Employer Strategy Practised in the Hosiery Industry	169
Figure 5.2	Location of Hosiery Firms 1864-1957, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire	177
Figure 8.1	Number of Strikes in the East Midland Hosiery Industry 1800-1860	269
Figure 8.2	Recorded Whig and Tory Voters, Leicester Pollbooks 1832 and 1835	280
Figure 8.3	Reported Riots in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire 1750-1900, by Type	284
Figure 8.4	Reported Riots in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire 1750-1900, by Type and Place	285
Figure 9.1	a) Membership of LAHU 1885-1939 b) Total Numbers of Hosiery Workers, Leicester and Leicestershire	312
Figure 9.2	LAHU Stoppages and Strikes Selected Years 1895-1930	319
Figure 9.3	Progress of Leicester Co-operative Hosiery Manufacturing Society 1876-1898	327
Figure 9.4	Industrial Employment in Leicester 1851-1901	345
Figure 10.1	Employment in Hose Manufacture in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire 1841	358
Figure 10.2	Percentage of Women in Each Age Group in Paid Employment in Urban Areas 1891	377

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT

AC	Annual Conference
AGM	Annual General Meeting
ASE	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
COL	Cost of Living Bonus
CPF	Co-operative Production Federation
CWS	Co-operative Wholesale Society
DC	District Committee
GFTU	General Federation of Trade Unions
GNCTU	General National Consolidated Trades Union
HU	Hinckley Union
ILP	Independent Labour Party
JIC	Joint Industrial Council
LAHU	Leicester Amalgamated Hosiery Union
LCHMS	Leicester Co-operative Hosiery Manufacturing Society
LD	Leicester District
LHMA	Leicester Hosiery Manufacturers' Association
LRC	Labour Representation Committee
LRO	Leicester Records Office
MCHF	Midlands Counties Hosiery Federation
MDW	Measured Daywork
NAB	Nottingham Arbitration Board
NAPL	National Association for the Protection of Labour
NAT	National Arbitration Tribunal
NEC	National Executive Committee
NHF	National Hosiery Federation

NJIC	National Joint Industrial Council
NUBSO	National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives
NUHKW	National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers
NUHW	National Union of Hosiery Workers
PP	Parliamentary Papers
TUC	Trades Union Congress
VCH	Victoria County History
WTUL	Women's Trade Union League

INTRODUCTION

This study is based on materials gathered in an investigation of changing industrial relations and work organisation in the East Midlands hosiery industry between 1800 and 1960. Its object is twofold: first, to explain why, during that period, the prevailing pattern of industrial relations changed from one of conflict and hostility to one of co-operation and harmony; secondly, to consider the usefulness of a model of changing work organisation derived from the work of Braverman (1974) and other contributors to the 'labour process debate' in understanding the development of the hosiery labour process.

The first two chapters consider the strengths and limitations of Braverman's analysis of the degradation of the labour process, and the need to integrate it with some broader-based account of class relations. The remaining chapters attempt to apply a reworked version of the Braverman thesis to the hosiery case. Chapter 3 presents an historical overview of change in the industry. Chapter 4 (the key chapter in the study) examines processes of degradation and Chapters 5 to 7 deal with other aspects of employer strategy in the industry. Chapters 8 and 9 are concerned with the response of workers to those strategies, while Chapter 10 looks at the salience of the analysis of gender relations in understanding labour process development.

In more general terms, the focus of this study is on change and strategic choice. In investigating these, the major methodological assumption has been that actors' own accounts of their choices and actions must be taken seriously. Although such accounts may well suffer from some distortion, both in formulation, as actors seek to order and justify their



experiences, both to themselves and to their audiences, and in interpretation, as linguistic change and cultural transformation obscure the original meanings to the historian, nonetheless they provide the best starting-point for an understanding of action and choice. Distortions can be compensated for, in part, by accumulating a sufficient density of accounts of various phenomena, and it is also important to supplement such material with study of the resultant actions and their context. Distortion may also be reduced by balancing original accounts with the various second-order interpretations offered by observers and subsequently by historians and social scientists.

In line with this assumption, a considerable amount of primary material is presented in this study. Two major sources have been extensively drawn on for this data. The first is the series of Parliamentary reports dealing either wholly or in part with the hosiery industry, which were produced throughout the nineteenth century. Fortunately for the historian, the notoriety achieved by the industry in the first half of the century ensured that at least one such survey was carried out in every decade; the researcher is thus able to use the reports to build up a fairly complete picture of change over the century.

The limitations of Parliamentary papers as a source of data have been fairly well rehearsed.¹ Several factors may promote inaccuracies and distortions. Witnesses, being either selected by the interested parties, or self-selected on the base of commitment to a cause, may not be fully representative of the population under study. Some witnesses may have been intimidated or inhibited by the formality of the proceedings, resembling as they did a court or tribunal, while others were quite literally bribed or warned off. The questions asked were highly selective, reflecting the

1 See, for example, *Bythell* (1978), pp 22-24.

preoccupations of the investigators, and also middle-class preconceptions of what the working classes were like and should be like. Women were rarely interviewed, and if they were it was usually in connection with what were perceived as 'problems' of women's contemporary social roles (such as the effect of women's work on family life). Nevertheless, where the investigation was as comprehensive as that of the two great hosiery commissions of 1845 and 1854-5, and where the commissioners had the sympathetic skills of a good sociological researcher, extremely rich and wide-ranging material was collected. The 1845 Royal Commission on the framework knitters' condition, for example, presents us with a total picture of daily life in a declining industrial village community which can compare well, in its revelatory nature and in frankness of individual response, with the data collected in a piece of modern sociological field research.

The second major source was hosiery union records, which take over the narrative as the Parliamentary documents become sparser. Minute books of the Leicester Amalgamated Hosiery Union, dating from 1888 onwards, are held in the Leicester Records Office. These were consulted, along with records of the Hinckley Union from 1932 to 1944, and records of the National Union of Hosiery Workers and its Leicester district from 1945 to the present day. The early minute books in particular (from 1888-1926) provide very detailed accounts of many events, issues and disputes; their presentation of events contrasts markedly with the formal, bureaucratised style of the National Union's postwar records.

The use of these two resources as the major source of data means that there is an undoubted bias in the material presented towards accounts given by leaders, delegates and representatives on both workers' and employers'

sides. In terms of this study, however, I would argue that this is not a major handicap, as its focus is on strategic choices and, on the workers' side particularly, it is leaders and representatives who actually make these choices. As Hobsbawm has argued, the "bourgeoisie" (in this case the capitalist employers) "can make things happen as individuals or in small numbers" but the working class are unable to make things happen except where they combine to act collectively (Hobsbawm, 1984, p 26). However, the scope of the Parliamentary papers is wide enough to offer some accounts from the 'rank and file' of ordinary workers in the industry, and something at least of their contributions can be inferred from these, and from the other sources which have also been used in the study.

These other sources are varied, and include local histories and memoirs, civic and commercial publications, biographies, novels and poems written by hosiery operatives, factory histories and publicity material, along with a miscellany of documents, ranging from pamphlets to press cuttings to union handbills, held in the Leicester Records Office. Factory histories are particularly useful as a source of information on employers' policies and ideologies.¹ Some newspaper material is used, although there was not sufficient time available for a systematic newspaper search.

1 *Company records were another possible source of information, but consultation of various hosiery firms' records in Leicester Records Office proved to be of little use. Data contained in them were all of a purely financial nature (accounts, wage sheets, inventories, ownership deeds, etc.) and threw no light on workplace relations. Undoubtedly some of the larger companies have interesting records, but these have already been worked through by the authors of the various factory or company histories referred to in this study. The expenditure of time and effort required to gain access to other such records would have been too great to make such an endeavour worthwhile, in view of the mass of more immediately illuminating material which was readily available.*

Secondary sources have also provided invaluable material on many aspects of industrial relations. The problems faced by the hosiery industry between 1800 and 1850 have led many economic and social historians to study it. Among these works, I have found particularly useful the standard history of the industry by Wells (1935, 1972), the official history of the unions written by Gurnham (1976), and the excellent historical studies of Nottingham by Church (1966) and Thomis (1968, 1969) and of Leicester by Patterson (1954). The two contemporary histories of the hosiery industry by Henson, a union leader, and Felkin, a leading manufacturer, have, of course, been essential reading (Henson, 1831; Felkin, 1867). There is much less secondary material available for the twentieth century, but two sociological studies of contemporary hosiery factories by Westwood (1984) and Edwards and Scullion (1982) have been especially useful to me. To all these, and other, secondary accounts I am enormously indebted, even where I occasionally disagree with their interpretations.

Finally, although this study ends at 1960, I found it important to have some understanding and information concerning the contemporary situation in the industry, to provide comparisons with the past, and thereby to promote a fuller understanding of it. Various interviews and observations were carried out in the Leicester area. These included informal and formal talks with union officials, factory representatives, the union research officer and the secretary of the Employers' Association, attendance at the 1982 Annual Conference of the National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers, and visits to a couple of factories. More systematically, a series of interviews with 16 employers was carried out between 1982 and 1985. A sample of firms which could be traced back to at least

1960 was approached for interview, in order to provide some continuity of information: several of these were firms about which I had considerable information for the earlier period. Many of these firms had been established in the nineteenth century, and had records or documents dating from early in this century.

Clearly, to provide a comprehensive and satisfactory account of the current situation, in addition to the wide range of historical information provided here, would have been impossible within the scope of a single work. The interviews with employers, therefore, are not conceived of as an integral part of this study, but some material from them has been used here and there to point to some contrasts or continuities with the past, and to set the historical information in perspective.¹

The methodology employed for this study, then, has been eclectic, possibly resembling that of the social historian more fully than that of the industrial sociologist as traditionally conceived. However, I believe that the use of material from such a wide range of sources provides a sufficiently valid and comprehensive base on which to ground a sociological account of industrial change. The case for historically-grounded pieces of sociological work, so eloquently argued by Abrams (1982), is, I believe, generally accepted as proven. I hope that this piece of research may provide a positive example of the fruitfulness of the method and practice of historical sociology.

¹ See Appendix 1 for full methodological details of this interview schedule.

CHAPTER ONE

BRAVERMAN AND THE THEORY OF THE LABOUR PROCESSIntroduction

Part of the purpose of this thesis is to test the usefulness of the model of labour process development proposed by Harry Braverman (1974) in understanding technological change and work reorganisation in any concrete case. In succeeding chapters I seek to establish the relevance of his concept of 'degradation' of the labour process in explaining the changing organisation of production in the hosiery industry. This opening chapter is a brief examination of Braverman's work and that of some of his critics, and an account of the strengths, weaknesses and necessary limitations of Braverman's model.

Section 1 The Braverman Thesis

The impact of Braverman's 'Labor and Monopoly Capital' in the seventies was strong and widespread. In part, this derives from his insistence that analysis of class relations in contemporary societies should be linked to an analysis of relationships at the point of production, where, in Marx's words, away from the "noisy sphere" of the market, in the "hidden abode of production" the key to understanding the whole system of capitalist production would be found (Marx, 1976, pp 279-280). This was a useful corrective to the increasingly abstract and ahistorical analysis of class relations at the macro-level which had characterised British Marxism following the widespread adoption of an Althusserian 'problematic' in the 1960s. It enabled young Marxist researchers to turn their attention to empirical and historical studies of class relations at the point of

production in many industries. But the impact was also felt in non-Marxist industrial sociology, where researchers were equally responsive to the Braverman thesis, seeking to test it in empirical studies. This may have been due to the lack of major theoretical frameworks within this field of sociology which had tended to become narrowly empirical and statistical, restricted to testing hypotheses of the middle range. Such researchers have used the Braverman thesis rather differently from the Marxists, seeing it as an heuristic tool or ideal-type model against which to measure empirical events, rather than accepting it as a model of an underlying structural generating mechanism. Their work, in fact, has often been geared towards *disproving* the degradation thesis. Nevertheless, shared interest in the concept of degradation or 'deskilling' has promoted an extraordinary volume both of research and of debate between the two camps, and others.¹

The core of Braverman's 'rediscovery' of the concept of the labour process was a reformulation of Marx's original analysis, plus an attempt to make that analysis relevant to contemporary societies by considering developments since Marx's death. From Marx Braverman took three key ideas. The first was the analysis of the core elements of any human labour process: the instruments of labour, the object on which labour is performed (raw materials), purposeful human activity (the task) and, centrally, the preconception of the finished result, "What distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees" (Marx, 1976, p 284). In Marx's words,

¹ For example, an annual 'Labour Process Conference' is currently being organised by Aston University and UMIST.

In the labour process, therefore, man's activity, via the instruments of labour, effects an alteration in the object of labour which was intended from the outset.

(Marx, 1976, p 287)

The second key idea was that the special nature of the *capitalist* labour process, as a system of commodity production, was its duality in being simultaneously a labour process and a valorisation process. It produces both exchange and use values. Following from that, the third vital idea is the distinction between labour and labour power. The reason why capitalist production makes profit is because the commodity sold to the capitalist by the labourer is not a finite amount of labour but his or her *capacity* to perform labour, a commodity which is highly elastic. By maximising the amount of labour power contributed for a given sum, the capitalist increases profits: this is the mechanism of surplus value. However, at the same time an inevitable problem is posed for the capitalist as he endeavours to extract as much work as he can from a possibly reluctant worker. To rephrase this in the terminology of a later sociologist, the 'effort bargain' made between worker and employer, the amount of labour contributed for a given reward, remains intrinsically indeterminate (Baldamus, 1961). Where the conditions of work are experienced as alienating and degrading there is especially likely to be resistance to the pressure of the capitalist. Again putting it in Baldamus' terms, where traditional notions of what constitutes 'a fair day's work' or a 'fair day's pay' are infringed by demands for greater effort there is likely to be resistance. Thus the capitalist labour process inevitably presents to the capitalist a problem of control.

The remainder of the Braverman thesis on the labour process is an historical account of methods employed to minimise that problem. In

early capitalism, a solution was sought through methods of direct control or supervision, either by the entrepreneur himself or his delegates, such as foremen or subcontractors. There was no attempt to alter the pre-capitalist methods of organising production. In Marx's terminology, only 'formal' not 'real' control of the labour process is achieved. Braverman argues that this solution was inherently unstable, and thus entrepreneurs sought more effective methods to tighten control, culminating in the successful imposition of the methods advocated by F.W. Taylor, 'scientific management'. These essentially led to the restructuring of the labour process, by subdividing it into routine, simple tasks, and by taking the function of planning or preconception (the fourth element of the labour process) away from the workforce and giving it to the delegates of management: in Braverman's words, 'the separation of conception and execution' efficiently removed knowledge, and thus discretion and autonomy, from the workers, forcing them into accepting degraded jobs. By destroying the subjective involvement of workers and removing initiative from them, Taylorite control reduces them to a state of near mindless habituation, resigned to powerlessness. This process of 'degradation' is seen by Braverman as an uneven but inexorable one, which is currently reducing the previously high-status, white-collar jobs to the same level of subdivided imbecility. In the end, labour under capitalism will be reduced to a homogenised mass of 'proletarianised' unskilled workers.

The final sections of Braverman's book deal with the effects of this process on the class structure, both empirically and theoretically, and link it to the emergence of a new social formation, 'monopoly capitalism'. This need not concern us, since our focus is upon the process of degradation, that is the subdivision of work and the separation of conception

and execution, which together are usually referred to as 'deskilling'. This term, however, is not employed by Braverman. It is important to stress this, as it is a common misconception that Braverman is describing the taking away of *skills* from *people*; whereas in fact the core of his analysis is the degrading of *jobs* within the labour *process*. In line with his Marxist position, Braverman's concern is with structure rather than agency.

Section 2 The Critique of Braverman

Braverman's work has been submitted to a barrage of criticism. These criticisms have been well summarised by a number of commentators, and it would be repetitious to rehearse them all in full here.¹ However, it is worth briefly referring to some of the more trenchant criticisms, and also considering one or two alternative accounts of labour process development which have been offered as replacements.

Cochrane has pointed out that many of these criticisms can be arranged under two headings; one group relates to the conception of class and in particular to 'consciousness' and the other to the conceptualisation of control (Cochrane, 1982). To these we might add a third group, those dealing with the concept of skill.

Many of the criticisms concerning Braverman's conception of class arise from his own methodological assertion that his work will deal with the working class "as a class in itself, not as a class for itself" and that consequently there will be no discussion of it on "the level of its consciousness, organisation or activities" (Braverman, 1974, pp 26-7). As

¹ See, for example, Littler (1982); Burawoy (1978), and Thompson (1983).

Elger points out, this theoretical strategy is not a legitimate one, as objective and subjective dimensions of class are logically and historically interpenetrated (Elger, 1978). Braverman's device leads to an inadequate presentation of the working class as essentially passive, and thus there is no version offered of working-class agency. From there, it is easy to slide into a parallel conception of the capitalist class as unrestrictedly active in the imposition of their will: in Stark's words, a view of the "capitalist class as veritably omniscient and the working class as infinitely malleable" (Stark, 1980, p 92). Empirically, this leads to a near total neglect in Braverman's historical account of resistance by the working classes (and indeed by other groups), for example the resistance offered by trade unions both in Britain and America to Taylorism. This is undoubtedly a weakness in Braverman's work, since labour process transformation then becomes the one-sided imposition of capitalists and managers. As Stark correctly argues, the labour process, like any social structure, must be seen as the product of complex negotiations between the various parties involved.

The conceptualisation of class is also criticised on the grounds that Braverman takes a one-sided view of the labour/capital relationship, so crucial to his argument; correctly portraying it as antagonistic, he fails to see that it is also a relationship of mutual dependence.¹ A drive towards co-operation is thus structured into the labour process, as well as a drive towards conflict. The implications of this will be discussed more fully in the next section.

1 See Friedman (1977a) and Cressey and MacInnes (1980).

The other set of important criticisms deal with Braverman's analysis of the struggle for control. His account has been read (perhaps a little unfairly) as a simple unilinear model of change: there is a movement away from an idealised state of craft autonomy to the successful imposition of capitalist control by means of Taylorist techniques. Many have argued that, on the contrary, Taylorism existed more in theory than practice, and was only successfully introduced in a handful of firms.¹

Whether the Utopian state of craft control envisaged by Braverman ever really existed is still a matter for debate, as various historical researches have presented rather different findings.² This study will itself provide evidence of a kind of craft control grounded in the domestic system of production, although this operated within very strict limits and was constantly under pressure from the onset of capitalism. As for the importance of Taylorism, Littler is surely correct in seeing the contribution of Taylor himself as only one version of many forms of work reorganisation involving the fragmentation of tasks and concentration of technical knowledge in the hands of experts, which Littler describes as a general trend to 'rationalisation' (Littler, 1982).³ Such developments predated Taylor, and the predominance of his version is due to the fact that he produced a more precisely formulated and recorded account of it than that

1 For Edwards (1979) Taylorism is a failed strategy. See also Elger (1978) and Burawoy (1979).

2 For example, the studies of More (1980); Montgomery (1979); Clawson (1980) and Holbrook-Jones (1982) give different descriptions and interpretations of the extent and role of craft control in the engineering industry in Britain and America.

3 Exactly the same trend is discerned by Friedman (1955). Littler insists that it is important to distinguish between Taylorite and other forms of rationalisation, but in terms of a general trend I fail to see the need for this.

offered by other experimenters. Although they may go under other names, the principles elaborated by Taylor have been extensively applied throughout much of modern industry.

However, Littler's claim that Braverman overplays the role of scientific management, seeing it as a final solution to the problem of control, the 'ultimate panacea', is certainly legitimate. This leads Braverman to neglect other forms of management policy which seek to achieve the same end; much of the response to Braverman's work has taken the form of case studies investigating the role of other forms of management control strategy.¹ Many of these other strategies work to tighten control by apparently loosening it: in other words, they are concerned with the winning of the workers' consent rather than the restricting of their autonomy. This follows from the point already made, that the capital/labour relationship is not only antagonistic but interdependent: capital relies on labour to produce goods of good quality and at the required time, while labour depends on capital for its means of subsistence; thus a reasonable level of co-operation between the two may be expected and worked for (Cressey and MacInnes, 1979).

This literature on alternative strategies is dealt with more fully in Chapters 5 to 7. We may note here, however, one or two more theoretical aspects of this critique. Burawoy has argued that the economic determinism of Braverman's brand of Marxism has led him to neglect the political and ideological dimensions of control, which, claims Burawoy, operate even at the point of production. Rather than a version of the base/superstructure model, Burawoy wishes to develop a form of Marxism employing the notion of

1 For example, Edwards (1979); Friedman (1977a) and Gordon et al. (1982).

social totality, whereby at any given juncture economic, political and ideological aspects are complexly interrelated; thus, he argues, the role of trade unions and other grievance-settling institutions, along with the meaning systems through which people make sense of their jobs, have been neglected by Braverman (Burawoy, 1978, 1979). Littler and Salaman, on the other hand argue for consideration to be given to political and cultural elements *beyond* the point of production; they argue that external factors may have as much bearing on the struggle for control as workplace relations (Littler and Salaman, 1982).

Finally, much of the criticism of Braverman has centred on what is seen as an uncritical acceptance of the notion of 'skill'. What exactly is skill? Can it be measured? Did craft workers really possess more of it, and has it observably declined over time? It is claimed that Braverman ignores the fact that skill, rather than relating to the actual possession of technical accomplishments and knowledge, can be socially constructed by groups of powerfully organised workers, and also that he ignores the considerable degree of reskilling involved in labour process reorganisation (Wood, 1982).

Most of these criticisms seem to me ill-conceived since, as I have pointed out, Braverman does not himself use the term 'deskilling', so often used in the presentation of oversimplified, trivialised versions of his analysis; his work deals with the objective alteration of the constituents of tasks, not of changes in the accomplishments (whether real or socially constructed) of those who fulfil them. The strongest of these criticisms is that Braverman has ignored the way in which labour process restructuring involves not simply the creation of numerous degraded jobs but also of a few jobs requiring considerable expertise: machine and

computer maintenance jobs are classic examples. This factor, along with processes of 'social construction' by which degraded jobs retain their 'skilled' label, are issues investigated in Chapter 4; I shall refer to such processes as 'resegmentation', a tendency to which is consequent upon the process of degradation.

Some of Braverman's more ambitious critics have sought to replace his historical account with alternative versions. These alternatives are more fully considered in Chapter 5, but we may discuss them briefly here: they fall into two groups. One group proceed by the 'broadening out' of Braverman's analysis, extending the concept of control so that it no longer relates specifically to the labour/labour power problem but to more general management dilemmas. These include the securing of consent, and the analysis is often extended to consider relationships beyond the workplace.¹ The second group attempt to produce an alternative historical account of labour process change.² The latter tend to run into the same difficulty as Braverman, that of presenting a unilinear account, in which one type of control strategy emerges as supreme. Such accounts, though drawing attention to other important dimensions of industrial relations, do not avoid the oversimplifications of Braverman's version, while failing, unlike Braverman, to root themselves sufficiently in any account of the structural weaknesses inherent in labour process relations (see Chapter 5 for an exposition of this point).

1 See Gordon et al. (1982); Littler (1982).

2 See Edwards (1979) and Burawoy (1979). Friedman's account, considering a possible shift from management strategies of 'direct control' to ones of 'responsible autonomy' may refer similarly to an historical progression: if so this is a pity, since it detracts from the soundness of an otherwise admirable theoretical discussion (Friedman, 1977a). See Chapter 5.

In sum, both the criticisms of Braverman and the reformulations do one of two things. First, they involve a 'broadening out' of Braverman's original analysis, and by doing so tend to obscure and diminish the whole point of that original project. Braverman was not *trying* to provide either an exhaustive account of control strategies at work or an exhaustive account of all aspects of industrial relations in capitalist societies. His objective was both narrower and more precise: to construct a model of labour process change, demonstrating how, over time, the elements of the capitalist labour process have altered in one particular direction. In this way much of the critique simply misses the point, although the research produced as a result is, of course, entirely valid in its own right. Secondly, the critics seek to deny the validity of Braverman's attempt to construct a *general* theory of the labour process. In Littler's words, "there can be no study of *the* capitalist labour process" but only of distinct labour processes (Littler, 1972, p 37).

In the next section of this chapter I shall argue that it is worth retaining the narrower problematic originally offered by Braverman, and that this will, in fact, provide us with a valid general theory of the labour process, although I shall also argue that, for a complete understanding of empirical and historical events in any given labour process, it is also necessary to introduce some of the other elements presented by the critics as part of their broadening out of the Braverman thesis.¹

Section 3 Reconstituting Braverman

In order to reconstitute what is valuable in Braverman's analysis, it is necessary to return to his own source, Marx's writing in Capital Volume 1

1 For an elaboration of this and the next section see also Bradley (1983).

on the labour process. Braverman has picked out one essential element in emphasising the labour/labour power distinction. But careful reading of Marx reveals that in his analysis the labour process has not just a dual but a triple nature: the capitalist's aim

is to produce not only a use-value, but a commodity; not only use value but value; and not just value, but also surplus value.

(Marx, 1976, p 293: my emphases)

From this triple nature we can derive what I call the 'double indeterminacy of labour' (Bradley, 1983). The value/surplus value distinction corresponds to the labour/labour power distinction, from which stems, as Braverman has rightly emphasised, an inevitable source of tension. Within the basically antagonistic relations of capitalist production, conflict will continue to arise from the lack of specificity in the contract of exchange between employer and labourer. However, the other indeterminacy, that which arises from the use value/exchange value distinction is ignored by Braverman, while its significance is correctly grasped by Cressey and MacInnes (1980). While the capitalist seeks to reduce labour, in its exchange value capacity, to a mere 'factor of production', lacking subjectivity, disposeable, interchangeable with other units, his need to produce goods which have a use value and which will therefore be able to enter the market on favourable terms, pushes him into acknowledging the subjective needs of his workers and his dependence on them for the regular output of good-quality goods. To phrase this in a less abstract way, not only does the entrepreneur have a motive to continually press for more effort, so that the quantity of goods produced per worker, and thereby the profit, is increased, he also has a motive to ensure that the quality of the goods produced is high and that workers do not turn out substandard or faulty goods; to avoid time-loss, it is preferable to gain the workers' collabora-

tion in this project, rather than resorting to punishment after the event. Furthermore, even to maintain a steady output of effort from each worker demands some degree of their consent; pushed too far, a worker can always simply down tools, walk out, or throw the proverbial spanner in the works. This second indeterminacy of labour, then, entails the need for a co-operative element in an otherwise exploitative relationship. From Braverman's neglect of this aspect of Marx's analysis springs his neglect of consent-inducing strategies.

Thus far, however, the analysis we have pursued is merely a static one: at any given moment in any given labour process two structural dilemmas pose themselves, which may be addressed by any number of possible strategic solutions. If we wish to progress to a dynamic account of labour process development, we need to employ another of Marx's distinctions, that between 'formal' and 'real' subsumption of labour.

These concepts are much used in the critical literature, although they appear only by implication in Braverman's work¹ in the assertion that the capitalist at first only takes over the pre-capitalist labour process without altering it, and only later attempts to tighten his control by transforming it.² In the use of it by his critics, however, there is a departure from Marx's original meaning, signified by the tendency to refer to formal or real 'control' or 'subordination', rather than what seems a more satisfactory translation 'subsumption'. In this usage, the term is

1 As far as I can judge, Braverman did not have access to 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production', which has subsequently been published as Appendix to the Penguin edition of *Capital I* (Marx, 1976, pp 941-1084), where these concepts receive extended treatment.

2 The hosiery industry provides a classic example of this, as will be shown.

reduced to the vaguer notion of control (in all its ambiguity) or coercion over the workforce. It seems clear that Marx was actually referring to something much more specific, the taking over of the labour process or, more precisely, the taking up of labour *into* capital. Whereas 'formal subsumption' refers only to the legal possession of the means of production without alteration to pre-existing methods of work organisation, real subsumption refers to the "development of a specifically capitalist mode of production" which "revolutionises their actual mode of labour" (Marx, 1976, p 1021); this implies the absorbing of labour into capital, so that it loses the sense of its own separateness and identity and forfeits its independence and autonomy.

The essence of this conception was understood by Braverman, who described it as follows:

Not only is capital the property of the capitalist, but labour itself has become part of capital.

(Braverman, 1974, p 116)

In this way, the danger of the workforce reasserting itself against capital and attempting to regain possession of the means of production recedes as

Capital ... becomes a very mystic thing, since all of labour's productive forces appear to be due to capital rather than labour as such, and seem to issue from the work of capital itself.

(Marx, 1972, p 827)

Workers, both as individuals and as a group lose all sense of the labour process as arising out of their own productive power, so that

The social character of his labour confronts the worker as something not only alien but hostile and antagonistic when it appears before him objectified and personified in capital.

(Marx, 1976, p 1025)

The total achievement of real subsumption would entail the total obliteration of all space for the worker to exercise choice and initiative in the work task, and a loss of all autonomy. Men and women would become virtual automata, operated by the labour process.¹ As Braverman recognised, this theoretical ideal is unlikely to be attained in practice:

This displacement of labour as the subjective element of the process and its subordination as an objective element in a productive process now controlled by management is an ideal realised by capital only within definite limits.

(Braverman, 1974, p 171)

Attempts, like that of Holbrook-Jones (1982), to date the achievement of real control are thus misplaced. What we can do is to chart a slow but noticeable push in the historical development of labour processes towards this ultimate goal of real subsumption. This involves physical alterations in the elements of the labour process. The task (element one) becomes broken down and simplified, a process I call 'fragmentation'; the second and third elements, raw materials and instruments of labour, are transformed by mechanisation, automation and the increased application of science and technology; while the final element, the conception and planning, is removed from the worker and passed over to elite management or technical groups, a process I call 'preconceptualisation'.² These processes, fragmentation, automation and preconceptualisation, when put together constitute the process of degradation, in Braverman's term. As Marx put it, the achievement of real subsumption comes closer through "the co-operative division of labour within the workshop, the use of machinery, and in general the transformation of

1 *The fully automated factory might be seen as the ultimate phase of real subsumption.*

2 *I am indebted to the work of Hales (1980) for this term.*

work by the conscious use of the sciences" (Marx, 1976, p 1024). Although this development must be seen as proceeding unevenly, over a long period of time, and differently in each individual industry or occupation, it must also be seen as a general tendency, and thus the basis (the only one so far discerned) for a general theory of labour process change.¹

I wish, then, to retain from the analysis provided by Braverman (and by Marx) the key idea of degradation as a basis for theorisation of the labour process. I want, however, to detach this from the historical periodisation offered by Braverman, in particular from the link made between the shift from direct control to Taylorite control and the development of monopoly forms of capitalism in the late nineteenth century. Not only can this link not be sustained historically (as the hosiery case, like others, will suggest) but also there is no *logical* or *theoretical* basis for it in the analysis provided above. The most that can be said, I would argue, is that *empirically* the advent of monopoly corporations and multi-nationals may sometimes (but not inevitably) involve a move to tightened control and heightened labour process degradation. But, as I have argued above, the pace, path and timing of the degradation process varies greatly between and within industries and occupations, as historical work shows. The most we can claim for this tendency, then, is that it has to be apprehended at a very general level. Nonetheless, I would argue strongly that if we look at *any* single occupation or industry we shall be able to observe the working out of that tendency, however slow and uneven its trajectory.

1 Although Burawoy (1978) claims to offer an alternative 'general theory' within a Marxian framework, his analysis, I would argue, is confined to a static presentation of structural requirements. It is impossible logically to deduce a dynamic from his framework. See Chapter 5.

However, to avoid the one-sidedness of Braverman's account, the role of the workers as active agents must also be considered. Degradation does not proceed unchallenged and the imposition of the capitalist's will on the workforce is often resisted. This resistance leads to discernable counter-tendencies: the creation, and capture by powerful groups of workers, of new complex tasks (reskilling), the retention of old tasks and methods in the teeth of threatened changes, and the claim that degraded tasks still retain their old skill, and therefore their status and rewards (social construction of skill). These processes, which are inseparable (empirically) from those of degradation, I refer to as 'resegmentation', tending as they do to result in the formation of a hierarchy within the workforce. Chapter 4 presents an account of these joint processes in the case of the hosiery industry.

If the above provides a base for a general labour process theory, it is nonetheless true that this alone will not provide us with a complete framework for depicting the history of any concrete labour process. If we want to move beyond this relatively narrow framework, which is limited to the examination of the physical transformation of work, we must draw insights from the literature I have described as broadening out the Braverman thesis. In particular, there are three important respects in which the analysis of degradation and resegmentation must be supplemented with other material:

A) Not all management strategies involve the physical change of the labour process. Many strategies involve change, on the other hand, in its institutional surroundings (e.g. trade union procedures, welfare provisions, pay structures). Such strategies and the responses to them are of obvious interest and importance in influencing workplace relationships. Since they

involve the institutional context of work rather than the jobs themselves, and since in the main their effects are easily reversible, it is not possible to construct a general dynamic theory for these strategies which are best described as *local* rather than *global*. Their use will vary according to industry and locality. Many factors influence the choice of a particular strategy, for example the state of local labour markets, the composition of the workforce, or the political tradition in the industry or area. To find a way through the complexities which the empirical study of management strategies affords, it may be useful to categorise them in accordance with which of the two (static) structural dilemmas they address. What I call 'repressive' strategies address the labour/labour power indeterminacy; their aim is the removal of space and autonomy from the workers and the restriction of their initiative. What I call 'pacificatory' strategies address the interdependence/antagonism indeterminacy; their aim is to procure the consent and co-operation of the workers by yielding space and autonomy to them.¹ These strategies are discussed in Chapters 5-7.

B) As Littler and Salaman argue, class relations cannot be simply built up from the micro-analysis of workplace relations (Littler and Salaman, 1982). Changes in class relations at the national level, or the level of the whole economy, affect relations at the point of production as much as point of production relations affect global class relations. The way this dialectic impacts upon face-to-face relations between employers and workers is dealt with in Chapters 8 and 9. Since this necessarily involves moving outside the theoretical framework offered by labour process analysis, use

¹ *The repressive/pacificatory distinction echoes many similar distinctions: see for example, Pollard (1965); Burawoy (1979) and Friedman (1977a).*

has been made in this study of the historical literature on class relations in Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This literature is briefly assessed in Chapter 2.

C) Although this point has not hitherto been discussed in this chapter, another well-known hiatus in the original labour process literature is its inadequate treatment of gender issues. While Marxian theory presents labour as neutral, in any empirical case workplace relationships are strongly marked by gender differentiation. Rather than seeing this as merely part of the context of class relations, I shall argue that gender divisions have been an integral part of labour process development. The implications of this are discussed in Chapter 10.

Finally, two objections may be raised to what I have argued so far. First, it may be objected that my 'reworking' of the Braverman thesis departs so far from the original, and incorporates so much of what has been said in criticism of the original, as to make it virtually unrecognisable. Why retain any mention of Braverman's work at all? Certainly, the model I am proposing is in many ways a call for a clearer restatement of some of Marx's concepts than that provided by Braverman. However, the debt to Braverman that has to be acknowledged is his assertion of degradation as the key feature of capitalist labour process development; the centrality of the concept emerges more firmly in his account than in Marx's more diffuse and complicated arguments in 'Capital'. Secondly, following both Marx and Braverman, I am arguing for the viability of a *general* theory of the labour process. Many of Braverman's critics, whose work I am in other respects indebted to, reject the idea of a general labour process theory and indeed are highly sceptical of the existence of an empirically-observable process

of degradation.¹ Finally, the strength of the work of Marx and Braverman is that it grounds the analysis of change in the structural ambiguities inherent in capitalist work relations. This element is missing from the work of most of the other contributors to the 'labour process debate'²; it is reasserted in my model through the concept of the 'double indeterminacy' of labour.

Secondly, it may be argued that an alternative grounding for a general theory *does* exist. As many have pointed out, the capitalist economy is constructed on the base of a complex set of relationships, which cannot be reduced to those between capital and labour. The dynamic of capitalist development (or capital accumulation) proposed by Marx depends as much on competition between units of capital as on confrontation between capital and labour. As Littler has pointed out, surplus value has to be realised as well as appropriated; competition for markets and the manipulation of complex financial resources may play as much part in the decision-making processes of large enterprises as considerations of labour control.³ For example, the introduction of microelectronic technology in the 1980s may be designed to cut long-term capital costs as well as labour costs; or firms may adopt new technology primarily to introduce a new product on to the market.⁴ Does not the dynamic of competition, then, offer an alternative framework for investigating labour process change?

1 *Littler (1982); Wood (1982) and Penn (1985), for example.*

2 *There are two important exceptions to this stricture; one is the work of Cressey and MacInnes (1980) to which my reworked model owes an immense debt. Secondly, it seems to me that, although the framework and terminology of his work is so different, Baldamus' analysis of reward, effort and efficiency comes extraordinarily close in essence to the ideas of Marx and Braverman.*

3 *See Littler (1982) and Thompson (1983) who both make this point.*

4 *See also Bradley (1983).*

The answer to this question could be a tentative yes: competition generates a drive for efficiency and cost-cutting as confrontation generates a drive for control and acquiescence. The problem is, however, that the dynamics of confrontation and of competition are so complexly interwoven that it is almost impossible to separate them and analyse or observe discretely their transformative effects. In the hosiery industry in the domestic period, for example, the framework of cut and thrust competition between a large number of small firms all providing for essentially the same market provided the context for the cutting of labour costs by means of task degradation. Yet the same task degradation was also explicitly addressed to solving the array of control problems faced by the employers.¹ Imperatives of efficiency and control led to the same results; competition and confrontation, in other words, are the two faces on the same coin. Nevertheless, it appears logically possible that demands of competitive efficiency might at times exercise a distinct determining influence. Thus, a watertight account of labour process development must also address this issue, giving us a fourth area of consideration as follows:

D) The influence of competition between units of capital in the product market and shifts in the industrial structure of an industry may also have effects on labour process development.

Having said this, some qualifications must be made with regard to the historical case study which follows. My focus in the study is on relationships between employers and workers; although the industrial structure and competitive relations between the firms are touched upon in Chapter 3, which

¹ See Chapters 3 and 4 for a full account.

provides a broad overview of change in the industry, no separate chapter is devoted to these issues. Constraints of time and space would have made it impossible to research them out and report on them in the same kind of detail which has been devoted to the study of workplace relations.

However, there are some other reasons for my decision to concentrate on control. While employer/worker relations changed dramatically during the course of the period under study, the industrial structure and market divisions remained remarkably stable. Throughout the period the industry fell into two sectors: a small number of larger stable firms covered the quality end of the market, while a large number of small, unstable firms competed for the cheaper end. Both sectors had to be alive to shifts in the product market, owing to changes in fashion, but in an industry which, up to the 1950s, was still more labour-intensive than capital-intensive, most firms made flexibility of output a prime consideration. Adjusting machinery to produce different fabrics or garments was, from the beginning, an important part of the skilled knitter's craft.¹ Some firms chose to specialise in certain areas (fancy goods, children's wear), but again this pattern of specialisation remained stable over the period, with larger firms characteristically producing a wider range of goods.² Only around 1960 did any real change in the industrial structure occur, with the entry into the field of national conglomerates and a move towards concentration and mergers, with Courtaulds becoming the dominant pacemaker. The effects of this development, thus, lie outside the scope of this study.

1 See Chapter 4.

2 With regard to the local strategies discussed in Chapters 5-7, there was a tendency for larger firms, which were more concerned with quality goods, to choose pacificatory strategies and for smaller ones, more concerned with cutting prices, to choose repressive ones. But there was no absolute correspondence.

Relations between firms, then, remained stable over the period of study and therefore must be seen as less important in understanding the changes that occurred over that period than the shifting patterns of capital/labour relations. This is not to deny the salience of competition and cost-cutting as motives for change and where these have been deeply implicated in events (as in the case of 'cut-ups') I have made that clear in the text.¹ However, these inputs have made no difference to the *direction* of change. The effects of competition were to confirm the trend to degradation and resegmentation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that a reworked version of Braverman's thesis, involving a more precise use of some of Marx's concepts, provides the basis of a general dynamic theory of labour process development. The focus of such a theory, however, is narrow. The strength of Braverman's work is that it provides us with a universal model with which to study labour process change. Its limitation is that it leaves out, in so doing, many essential features of workplace relationships, which in their turn are involved in broader processes of social change. The role of competition and of alterations in the product market must be considered. Attention must also be given to gender relations, to more generalised management behaviour and to broader macro-level class relations, if we are fully to understand change in any particular industry. It is to the last of these that I now turn, before starting to investigate the applicability of the model to the hosiery case.

1 This is fully discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ENGLISH WORKING CLASS 1800-1914Introduction

In studying worker resistance to employer strategies in the hosiery industry, I quickly became aware of a marked shift from a state of violent industrial confrontation in the early part of the nineteenth century to a mood of industrial harmony and co-operation in the latter half of the century. The similarities between this and the pattern of class activity at the national level could not be overlooked. In seeking to make sense of this change, therefore, I was led to consider the range of explanations of changes in class action and class consciousness offered by social historians of the nineteenth century. These appeared, on the whole, more relevant to my problem than the more static analysis of class positions and the class structure offered by sociologists.¹ In Hobsbawm's words

Classes are never made in the sense of being finished or having acquired their definitive shape. They keep on changing.

(Hobsbawm, 1984, p 194)

It was this fluid dimension of class action I wished to investigate, and on which the historians' work threw illumination. Some of the more important historical studies are briefly reviewed here.

Section 1 The Making of the English Working Class

In general, there is a fairly clear accepted view of the development of the working classes in the nineteenth century. Between 1800 and 1850

¹ See Thompson, 1965 and 1968 (preface), for discussion of the dynamic as opposed to static analysis of class.

the experience of the new social and economic relations evolving with the growth of industrial capitalism, and in particular of the reorganisation of work, engendered a sense of a common interest among various sections of the labouring classes. Thus a unified, if not homogeneous, working class with a distinct consciousness emerged, which was drawn into increasingly militant forms of action, culminating in Chartism: this was "the heroic age of the English proletariat" (Anderson, 1964, p 33). The immediate failure of Chartism, however, led to the slow decline of this sense of unity and of any radical challenge to the status quo. Although there were sporadic outbursts of protest and unrest, in the main the working classes settled into an acceptance of the new order, and those institutions and forms of action which they developed from then on (trade unions, co-operatives, friendly societies, working men's clubs etc.) were content to work to provide a reasonable standard of living for working-class people within the system of industrial capitalism, rather than challenging the organisational premises of that system.

It is possible to modify this argument slightly, by pointing to the upsurge of industrial unrest in the 1880s and 1890s and the renewed interest in socialism in the early twentieth century.¹ Most, however, accept that some sort of significant shift occurred after 1850. In Nairn's words, after this period the working class "turned into an apparently docile class" which "embraced one species of reformism after another" (Nairn, 1972, p 188).

Developments in the 1800 to 1850 period have been most comprehensively dealt with in E.P. Thompson's authoritative study 'The Making of the English

1 *This line emerges, for example, in the work of Pelling (1963) and Burgess (1980).*

Working Class', which charts the emergence of a unified class identity and the vigour of the resulting class action. This is lent support by Foster's excellent local study of Oldham, which deals with the growth of a powerful radical class consciousness and politics in the area in the 1830-1850 period, leading to a virtual control by the radicals of the key local institutions, which in turn drastically challenged the rule of the authorities (Foster, 1974).¹

These two powerful and persuasive accounts have firmly established the view of the rise of working-class militancy during the 1800 to 1850 period as historical orthodoxy. Their view also receives support in the influential, if more schematic, sociological work of Anderson (1964) and Nairn (1972), although these writers apparently see no need to provide details of working-class political and industrial militancy during this period, taking it as read. For them, the later quiescence of the working class is, in terms of a Marxist problematic of capitalist development, the deviation from the norm, the phenomenon which needs to be explained.

Recently, this kind of work has been challenged by a group of historians, Neale (1981), Stedman Jones (1983) and Joyce (1984a). These historians question the interpretation of the early period offered by Thompson and Foster, and also the Marxist assumption that it is militancy rather than quiescence that is the 'normal' state. All three are interested in the linguistic dimensions of political and industrial conflicts of this period, and Neale and Stedman Jones draw on them to challenge established versions of the significance of Chartism. Thus, Stedman Jones wishes to interpret it as a purely political movement, the expression of longstanding

1 *A contemporary observer might, perhaps, note an intriguing parallel with Liverpool in 1985!*

political grievances, grievances which are expressed in political language using the traditional political concepts of 'justice', 'rights' and 'freedom', rather than in the language of class. Like Thompson, he links Chartism to earlier manifestations of British radicalism, but he departs from Thompson's argument in denying the link with economic experience; thus he refuses to see Chartism as a manifestation of any kind of emergent unified working-class consciousness in this period. In this, he echoes Neale who also refuses to accept the ideology of Owenism, Chartism and other working-class social and political movements as signs of a distinct working-class consciousness. This assertion of Neale's is based on the perhaps rather curious premise that unless class grievances are expressed in the terminology of exploitation and surplus value they cannot be seen as representing class consciousness in the Marxian sense. For example, he argues that, as the class of oppressors expressly mentioned in Owenite writings is often identified as the 'rich', the aristocracy, or the 'idle', the movement must be seen as a political rather than a class-based one. This, it seems to me, is far too limited a way to conceptualise class consciousness.¹

It is perhaps worth pointing out these historians are not in dispute with the *historical* and *empirical* findings of Thompson; their disagreement is with his interpretation of those findings, and springs from his attachment to a Marxist framework (however loose and unorthodox) and to the implications of such a framework. While it is unlikely that any of these writers would wish to entirely banish the concept of class from their work,

1 *These issues are further discussed in Chapter 8, which demonstrates that the 'oppressors' identified by the hosiery workers and East Midlands Chartists were in many cases the entrepreneurial class.*

they would dispute the connotations of the Marxian use of the concept, for example, the view of the working class as historic actor, the rooting of consciousness in the economic experience of exploitation, and the possible or inevitable advent of socialist revolution as a result of class conflict. It is these theoretical objections which lie at the root of their claim that the social unrest described by Thompson and Foster cannot be interpreted as evidence of class consciousness in the Marxian sense. From this point of view, too, the militancy of this period might be seen as the phenomenon in need of explaining rather than the later quiescence.

This reinterpretation, then, still leaves the empirical findings of Thompson and Foster untouched. As for the validity of the Marxist and non-Marxist interpretations, it appears unlikely that any further evidence remains to be discovered which could settle the case one way or another, since the disagreement hinges so centrally on the link between action and consciousness; how can we ever penetrate into the minds of long-dead weavers, shoemakers and stockingers who formed the mass of support for the great Chartist strikes? This problem for the historian remains intractable, and cannot, I believe, be solved by Stedman Jones' strategy of looking at written linguistic expressions in isolation from actions. In Chapter 8, however, I present some material on linguistic expressions offered by hosiery workers about their situation and the unrest it inspired which, taken together with accounts of their actions, will, I believe, lend support to the Thompson and Foster version rather than the reinterpretations.

Section 2 The Remaking of the English Working Class?

Although there may be disagreement as to whether it is the earlier militancy or the later quiescence which needs to be explained, there is no

dispute that some kind of significant change did take place after 1850. There is, however, widespread disagreement as to why that change occurred. A considerable range of explanations is offered, and some of the more notable are reviewed here.

One prevalent form of explanation is that which makes use of the concept of the 'labour aristocracy'. As classically formulated by Lenin, this involves the idea of an elite group of highly-paid, high-status workers who are isolated from the mass of the working-class, having been, as it were, 'bought off' by the capitalist class with some of the fruits of imperialist expansion. Many later historians and sociologists have argued for the existence of such a group, notably Hobsbawm (1964), Foster (1974) and Holbrook-Jones (1982): the latter two, in their studies of engineering, textiles and mining, basically endorse Lenin's line, and also make the point that these aristocratic groups were used by capital to discipline and control the rank and file in the workplace, acting as pace-makers in a redesigned labour process. These same men, Foster argues, also led the rank-and-file into a moderate form of politics.

Softer versions of this thesis are presented by Gray (1976) and Crossick (1976), who provide evidence for the existence of such a group in Edinburgh and Kent respectively. Neither have much to say about workplace relationships, conceptualising the group in basically socio-cultural terms. Gray claims that the Edinburgh labour aristocrats, who took the lead in various working-class institutions such as clubs, co-operatives, trade unions and the Labour Party, shared the cultural values and aspirations of the lower-middle class, and in some cases intermarried with them. Their especial importance was in steering working-class politics into the direction of reformist and accommodative 'Labourism' rather than revolutionary socialism.

Crossick, on the other hand, sees the group as rejecting links with the middle classes and clinging strongly to a traditional, if sectarian, working-class culture; it is thus difficult to see how, in his interpretation, the labour aristocracy could have acted as a pacificatory element in quite the way described by Lenin.

In fact, as Moorhouse's useful critical article shows, there are many problems with the labour aristocracy concept (Moorhouse, 1978). Despite the empirical evidence produced by Foster, Gray and Crossick, it is clear there were considerable local variations as to the nature and role of the labour aristocracy; indeed, in some places it may not have existed at all. More points to the lack of any clearly definable aristocratic group in several places, for example Birmingham, and I shall argue in Chapter 9 that the existence of such a group is dubious in the case of Leicester (More, 1980, p 235). Even where such a group did demonstrably exist, its presence is insufficient to account for the shift from militancy to quiescence, since, as Moorhouse argues, such groups of high-status and highly-skilled workers had existed long before 1860, and indeed before the industrial revolution. Nor is there any satisfactory evidence concerning the labour aristocrats' relationship with the mass of workers. The various versions either assume that the masses followed the aristocrats into moderation, or that, bereft of a potentially radical leadership, they drifted into powerless apathy. No evidence has been provided to demonstrate either of these possibilities. It is equally possible that the aristocracy may have followed the mass rather than the other way round.¹ As Moorhouse argues

1 See discussion in Chapter 9.

Is the labour aristocracy to be seen as a cause or as a consequence of the lack of a true class consciousness in the nineteenth century?

(Moorhouse, 1978, p 69)

Whether or not the labour aristocracy existed, the concept has little explanatory value in terms of the shift from militancy after 1850.

Rather than looking at the contribution of any social group, other commentators have concentrated, more fruitfully, on broader structural changes. One important group of explanations centre on the notion of 'incorporation', or 'accommodation'. It may be worth making such a terminological distinction, as these explanations have two different sets of connotations. In one case, the process of 'incorporation' is seen to involve the transmuting of a 'normal' militancy into quiescence by means of more or less conscious strategic actions, by both capitalists and various agencies of social control, which build the working-class (artificially) into the system. In the other view, which might be alternatively labelled as 'accommodation', quiescence is seen as normal, and the upsets of the 1800 to 1850 period as a temporary state resulting from the upheavals of the transformation from agrarian society to industrial capitalism; in the succeeding period, a legitimate place was provided for the working classes within the new system.¹

Burawoy's work provides a fairly classic example of the first approach (Burawoy, 1979). This idea is also used by Foster in conjunction with his discussion of the role of the labour aristocracy; the emergence of the aristocratic groups he sees as linked with a policy of 'liberalisation' by the authorities, which allowed the working-classes to take a legitimate part

1 *The classic version of this view is Smelser's 'Social Change and the Industrial Revolution' (1959).*

in the existing structure of politics and decision-making. At the same time far greater attention was paid to their material and social welfare needs. Thus the former radicals were coaxed into a new position of political moderation.

The incorporation/accommodation approach has been particularly popular with sociologists, rather than historians. The notion of the political and civic accommodation of the working class within capitalism is major strand in the work of Dahrendorf (1959), and, of course, of Marshall (1950). It finds perhaps its most persuasive exposition in the work of Bendix (1956) and Giddens (1973). Bendix's case is that unrest diminished once the dispossessed labouring classes had found a new role and social function within industrial capitalism, and Giddens argues that the unrest must be seen as a symptom of transition: once capitalism has matured, the working classes are securely integrated, socially and politically, into the system; the growth of citizen rights is seen as "a 'completion' or consolidation of capitalist development rather than an undermining of it" (Giddens, 1973, p 158).

Historians, perhaps predictably, seem to prefer a variant of this thesis which emphasises cultural change. The classic exegesis of this is Anderson's 'Origins of the Present Crisis' paper (Anderson, 1964), in which he argues that after 1850 the ruling alliance of landowners and bourgeoisie established a firm cultural hegemony over the working classes, drawing both on the longstanding traditions of deference to 'one's betters' and of hierarchy within British society, and on a newly elaborated ethos of nationalism which utilised a rhetoric of colonial expansion and British superiority; thus the working class became a 'corporate' class, unable to formulate an alternate social vision for itself.

Though Anderson's work has been highly influential, it is, by his own admission, little more than a 'crude schema' for an overview of class development, which provides little in the way of satisfactory evidence for the historical scenario it presents. In addition, this is patently a view from the top downwards: changes in ruling-class ideology are assessed, and the assumption made that they were successfully imposed on the working classes. Much more satisfactory accounts of cultural shifts over this period are provided by Hearn (1971) and Stedman Jones (1974), both of whom consider changes from the point of view of the working class.

Hearn's ambitious project, which draws on numerous empirical and theoretical studies by both historians and sociologists, centres on the crushing by the ruling classes of the indigenous cultural traditions of the labouring classes, and their replacement by an artificial, homogenised mass culture. This particularly involved the suppression of what he calls 'play', the imaginative creation of social alternatives, often based on Utopian versions of the past. Thus the likelihood of the working class developing an alternative socialist vision is severely diminished as capitalism matures.

More easily demonstrable, however, are the changes proposed in Stedman Jones' study of London; he looks at the emergence there of a distinct working-class culture, isolated and hermetic and resistant to middle-class values, but essentially accommodative, defensive and politically moderate, in contrast to its radical precursor.¹ Stedman Jones links these changes to changes in the nature of work experience; the increased polarisation of workplace and home, and the movement of the working classes into suburban housing, often far from the workplace, broke up old leisure patterns which revolved

¹ *This account is theoretically very close to Parkin's account of the formation of subordinate value systems (Parkin, 1972).*

around workplace cultures, and decentred work experience. Work and leisure are no longer integrated, work assumes a marginal significance, and family life becomes the dominant preoccupation.

Although Stedman Jones' study is limited to the London area, and although he makes no claim that its findings can be generalised, his argument seems to me to be powerful and well substantiated. His findings accord well with similar developments in the East Midlands area, and in Chapter 9 I shall hope to demonstrate the importance of the decline of work-based cultures in the example of the hosiery industry, and its influence on the decline in militancy of the hosiery workers.

Finally, many studies, rather than offering a holistic explanation of working-class quiescence in this period, trace the role of particular institutions in bringing about class pacification. For example, changing institutions of leisure, and the growth of mass education, are analysed in terms of increased social control and the decline of working-class radicalism.¹ Dahrendorf traces the influence of trade unions and procedures of 'institutionalisation of conflict' in diminishing conflict (Dahrendorf, 1959), while others might point to the role of the welfare state, or of the institutions of political democracy. Moorhouse suggests that study of the range of "agencies of political coercion and socialisation ... from family to the police force to compulsory education" would be more apt than a reliance on the concept of the labour aristocracy to explain the growing quiescence of the working classes (Moorhouse, 1978, p 73).

In the face of so many competing explanations, it is hard to resist the conclusion that Moorhouse must be right, and that only some kind of

¹ See, for example, Clarke et al. (1979); McCann (1977).

multifactoral approach will suffice to explain the changes that are documented in the study which follows. Of all the single explanations, Stedman Jones' seems to me the most applicable to the hosiery case. In Chapter 9, I consider the relevance of his work in the East Midlands' example, but also try to isolate some of the other institutional changes which I feel were instrumental in achieving working-class pacification.

Conclusion

Interpretations of working-class action and consciousness in the nineteenth century are many and varied, and no final consensus on the shift from militancy emerges. In Chapters 8 and 9, I investigate how class relations unfolded in a specific local context, drawing on some of the literature discussed here. My findings will, I believe, add support to Thompson's proposition that a strong working-class identity emerged in the 1800 to 1850 period. Explanations of subsequent changes must be more tentative: in Chapter 9, I try to trace out some of the most important contributory factors. Whatever the explanation, the shift from militancy to quiescence remains a notable phenomenon, as I hope to show in the overview of the history of the hosiery industry presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

"We are so undermined by one hand against the other, and one manufacturer against the other."

*Henry Boam, Derbyshire glove hand
(PP 1845 xv II q 4456)*

*"A weaver of 'Inckley sot in 'is frame,
'Is children stood mernfully by,
'Is wife pained with 'unger, nearly naked with shame,
As she 'opelessly gazed on the sky.
The tears rolling fast from 'er famishing eyes,
Proclaimed 'er from 'unger not free
And these are the words she breathed with a sigh:
'I weep poor 'Inckley for thee'."*

*Hinckley stockings' song
(Francis, 1930, p 129)*

*"Why, O ye rich, the toiling poor oppress
When all might prove such plenteous happiness?
Cease ... Cease! ere rendering their condition worse
Ye render Leicester's name a bye word and a curse!"*

*From 'The Spirit' by William Jones,
Leicester glove hand
(Jones, 1849, p 8)*

CHAPTER THREE

SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE HOSIERY INDUSTRY :
FROM CONFLICT TO CO-OPERATIONIntroduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of developments in the East Midlands hosiery industry between 1800 and 1960, thus providing a general context for the more specialised discussion of particular aspects of change in the following chapters. The chapter provides essential background information for the remainder of the thesis.

It is possible to discern three distinct stages in the development of the industry: the epoch of domestic production, the transition to factory production, and the period of modernisation. For narrative clarity, this chapter, and many subsequent ones, will be divided into sections dealing with each period separately.

The domestic system of production was well established in the East Midlands in the eighteenth century, but the period under study here, 1800 to 1850, was both the full flowering and the crisis of this particular system. Particularly after the Napoleonic Wars, slumps in demand, coupled with a chronic labour surplus, kept the majority of the workpeople in conditions of poverty and uncertainty, plagued by underemployment and periodic spells of unemployment. It was in this period that confrontative relations between employers and workpeople reached their peak. The 1845 Royal Commission's report on the conditions of the framework knitters might serve as an epitaph for these grim decades, with its graphic portrayal of suffering, despair and struggle.

The first experiments in factory organisation in the East Midlands occurred in the 1830s and 40s, but were not successful. By 1845, at least two factories had been successfully established, and by 1855 they were more numerous, but it was not until after the patenting of an improved steam-powered frame in 1864 (Cotton's Patent) and the passing of an Act of Parliament abolishing frame rents¹ in 1874 that the factory system really took off. By the 1890s the production of hosiery was essentially steam-powered and factory-based, but the hand-knitting and homeworking sections lingered on. An observer in 1900 was still able to say

The system of working at home, it will be seen, dies hard. It can hardly be doubted, however, that it is doomed to extinction ... the building of the great factories is significant ... of something like a social revolution.

(Thomas, 1900, p 23)

There are still references to small groups of hand workers as late as 1938 (LAHU A August 10th 1938).²

The transition period, then, was a long-drawn-out one. Dating its start must be somewhat arbitrary, but I have chosen to place it around 1855: in that year industry leaders N. Corah & Sons and Hine & Mundella were expanding their power-driven operations, and the report of the Truck Commission revealed that the switch to power was coming to be seen as inevitable; two years later the first trade union specifically for factory operatives was formed.

1 See pages 50, 69-72.

2 Two sets of Minute Books of the Leicester Amalgamated Hosiery Union are held in the Leicester Records Office, the Executive Committee Minutes, and the Shop and Trade Minutes. These are referred to throughout the text as LAHU A and LAHU B respectively.

Dating the advent of the period of modernisation again presents problems, but I have taken the First World War to be of crucial significance. The establishment of the National Joint Industrial Council (NJIC) in 1918 is a watershed for industrial development. Although this development was retarded by the interwar recessions, experiments in modernising both production and industrial organisation continued to be made. The Second World War provided the necessary forward push, and the National Union of Hosiery Workers¹ (NUHW) was formed in 1945 from an amalgamation of the local unions. By 1960, the point at which this study stops, the industry was fully modernised, efficient and prosperous, marked by unusually good industrial relations.

The survey undertaken here, then, stops at a time of relative stability. The following decades were to see the introduction of computers into the industry², the first ever general strike by the NUHKW, and the transformation of the industrial structure by processes of merger and takeover, commencing in the mid 60s³, an indication of the never-ending process of change and restructuration. However, the purpose of this chapter is to chart the climb to the peaceful plateau of the late 1950s.

Section 1 The Domestic System 1800-1855

The knitting frame was invented by the Reverend William Lee in 1589, and for the next two and a half centuries this machine was to be the cause

1 *Later National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers (NUHKW).*

2 *For example, Wolseys installed a computer in 1965 (Guardian, September 8th 1965) and in 1969 Byfords had a computer room in action at their Maltby branch factory, with electronically-controlled knitting machines producing men's sweaters, 16 at a time to total 30,000 a week (Byford, 1969).*

3 *See Smith (1969).*

of dispute and conflict: conflict over who had the right to operate it, whose property it was, and what rights its possession gave to the owner and the operator.

In the early seventeenth century, the frames were mainly operated in London. Gravenor Henson, knitter and first chronicler of the industry, tells of the formation in the 1620s¹ of a Trade Company by the London framework knitters to protect their craft, on the model of other guild societies (Henson, 1831, p 54). Attempts to get this Company ratified by Parliament at first failed, but finally a charter was granted in 1664, which, according to Henson gave the knitters "the most extraordinary powers". In this period, he calculates, there were altogether about 1250 knitters and 650 frames (two men were required to work each frame in these early days). Approximately 4-500 of these frames were in London, 100 in Nottingham and 50 in Leicester (Henson, 1831, pp 59-60).

The most crucial of the powers given to the Company were those relating to the control of entry and apprenticeship. The apprenticeship term was to be seven years, and only those who had served the term were entitled

1 *Exact dating of events in the earlier period (especially before 1800) is hard, as the sources are often inconsistent. This arises partly from the practice of early local historians, who tended to repeat without verification what their predecessors had said, sometimes quite literally word for word; for example, Felkin relied heavily on Henson's account of the early history of the industry (Felkin, 1867; Henson, 1831), while Nichols in his history of Leicester quotes an earlier historian, Throsby, verbatim on the hosiery industry (Nichols, 1815; Throsby, 1792). In view of this, I have tended to assume that the version written closest to the event is most accurate. Where there is significant disagreement I have indicated it.*

For the early period, the main sources I have used are as follows: on the hosiery industry Henson (1831) and the three accounts by Felkin (1845, 1867, 1877); on Leicester, Nichols (1795-1815) and Thompson (1871); on Nottingham Blackner (1815), Orange (1840), Bailey (1853), Wylie (1857) and Sutton (1850); for Derby Hutton (1817) and Glover (1831).

to work a frame. All entrants to the trade must join the Company or pay severe fines (£5 per week). Deputies elected by the officials were empowered with rights of search and seizure with regard to 'fraudulent' work, when they could "cut the same in pieces and fine the parties making them".¹ Another clause forbade the export of frames "the invention being purely English". Deputies were to be appointed to administer these rules in the outlying districts. Further by-laws, added in 1745, made clear that instruction was only to be given to "male children" or apprentices, although "widows, upon being admitted members, may exercise their trade during their widowhood".²

Unfortunately, despite this charter, the trade did not fall under the clauses of statute law; the Statute of the 5th Elizabeth 1563, which generally controlled the employment of apprentices, did not apply to frame-work knitting, predating as it did the existence of the frame. Thus the status of the charter was dubious, and the Company was soon struggling to enforce its clauses, especially those relating to apprenticeship. The by-laws stated that there should be three apprentices to each journeyman, but masters were soon taking on far greater numbers. It was over this issue that the first bout of framebreaking in the industry occurred, around 1710. According to Henson, nearly 100 frames were destroyed over three nights, and at least one offending master was "soundly beaten" (Henson, 1831, p 95).

It was this event which prompted the next crucial development, the shift to the East Midlands. Masters moved there to evade the power of the

1 See Chapter 4 for the tradition of opposition to 'fraudulent' work.

2 The full text of these charters is given in Henson, 1831, pp 79-83, 176-179.

Company, which they correctly predicted would have difficulty in enforcing its regulations outside of London. In 1723 the company prosecuted two Nottingham masters, one of whom was employing 49 apprentices, the other 23; the case was lost, and a final blow came in 1753 when a House of Commons Committee overrode the authority of the company, declaring its jurisdiction to be limited to 20 miles around London. From then on, the move to the East Midlands was precipitous.¹

When frames first arrived in that area in the seventeenth century there had been some initial resistance by local people, as many of them were then engaged in handknitting. In 1674, fearing the erosion of their livelihood, the Leicester woolcombers petitioned the Mayor against the Company, claiming that their trade "kept constantly at work about 2,000 poor people - men, women and children - of the town of Leicester and adjacent villages' (Thompson, 1849, p 431). When a man named Allsop started stocking manufacture in Leicester in 1680

He was obliged to perform his task secretly, and at night, in consequence of the violent feeling existing among the populace against the application of machinery to the weaving of stockings.

(Thompson, 1849, p 436)

However, a century later, the Leicester populace had accepted the new invention and framework knitting had become the town's staple industry. Throsby estimates that out of a population of 14,000, 6,000 were in some way involved in the industry: there were 70 hosiers and 3,000 frames (Throsby, 1792, pp 401-2). By the time Blackner carried out a census in 1812 there were, according to his calculations, 11,183 frames in Leicestershire, 9,285 in Nottinghamshire and 4,700 in Derbyshire (Blackner, 1815,

1 According to Felkin, in 1714 there were 600 frames in Leicester, 400 in Nottingham, in 1753 1,000 frames in Leicester and 1,500 in Nottingham and by 1782 there were 17,530 frames in the Midland counties (Felkin, 1845, p 4; 1867, p 117).

pp 238-240). In 1844 Felkin's similar survey recorded 20,861 frames in Leicestershire, 16,382 in Nottinghamshire and 6,797 in Derbyshire, out of a national total (including Ireland) of 48,482. Felkin estimated that over 100,000 people were employed in the industry (Felkin, 1845, pp 7, 34).

The production of hose in the new area was soon established on a 'putting out' or domestic basis. Merchant hosiers gave out raw materials from their warehouses, and the knitters or 'stockingers' produced the goods in their homes, or in small workshops. Initially, at least, men worked the frames, while wives and children did the preparatory and finishing tasks (winding, sewing, seaming), although by the 1840s a large proportion of frames were worked by women and children.¹ In this way, the industry did not remain for long as a system of petty commodity production, or a guild-type apprenticeship-based self-regulating system, but quickly became organised on a capitalist basis.² Certainly this was the case by 1800. The employers, or 'hosiers', invested considerable capital in warehouse space, raw materials and machinery; they not only controlled raw materials, the planning of production and marketing, but also the machinery, the frames, which were let out to the knitters in their homes,

1 See Chapters 3 and 10.

2 A comment of Blackner's seems to indicate that for a period production continued to be organised on guild lines. Of 1739 he says

At this period we find none ranked in the profession of hosier; consequently we have a right to conclude that the business of hosier had not then assumed a distinct shape; and also that every framework knitter disposed of his own goods

(Blackner, 1815, p 215)

Chambers, however, maintains that the 50 'manufacturers of hosiery' recorded in that year were probably hosiers (Chambers, 1966, p 122). Certainly, the apprenticeship system carried on through the eighteenth century, but declined relatively to family-based production.

and for which they paid rent. In the early days, some knitters owned and worked their own frames (although being dependent on the hosiers for materials and marketing), but this group rapidly declined. By 1845 it was common for hosiers or their agents to charge 'rent' on frames which actually belonged to the workmen themselves! Thomas Vernon of Hinckley admitted to charging 4d a week in such cases, as was 'customary' (PP 1845 xv I q 4424).¹

During the period under study, the institution of frame rent had become the key to relations in the industry. Especially during the period of stagnation which followed the Napoleonic Wars, the total stock of frames was too great for the market to bear, and the hosiers, seeking to maximise profits, spread their work out thinly over as large a number of frames as possible to ensure the maximum amount of frame rent: this would be paid even if the worker was only partly employed, and sometimes if he was sick, or had no work at all. The situation also provided a spur to the employment of boys or women in the frames: their output was less, but they still had to pay rent.²

In short, a major part of the profitability of the industry was now derived from possession of machinery, rather than production, a position perhaps unique among British industries. In the words of John Biggs, a leading Leicester hosier,

1 *Throughout the text, Parliamentary Papers are referred to as PP followed by their year, volume number, and part number where relevant. Page number (p) or number of minuted question (q) is given as appropriate.*

2 *This system is much discussed in the Parliamentary Reports of 1845 and 1854-5. See, for example, the evidence of James Jarvis and John Biggs (PP 1845 xv I pp 215-6, PP 1854-5 xiv pp 22-23).*

Profit is sought out of the tool, instead of profit upon the manufacture; the profit upon the manufacture is a secondary consideration.

*(PP 1854-5 xiv q 379)*¹

To make matters worse, the profitability of the frames, and the ease of investment in them, attracted speculative ownership. As Patterson notes, "butchers, bakers, publicans, gentleman's servants, women of various classes" and all sorts of other people were drawn into speculation, especially as the price of frames slumped (Patterson, 1954, p 43). The first frame brought to Hinckley cost £60, but by the beginning of the nineteenth century they cost £8-10, and by 1840 £4-5 or less. Second-hand frames were cheap, and they would last 100 to 150 years if serviced (Smith, 1965, p 5). The speculation in 'independent' frames, as they were called in the trade, aggravated the overstocking and competition in the industry.

Frame rent, thus, became increasingly the focus of the knitters' grievance, and played an ever more central part in the series of appeals made to Parliament over this period. Witnesses to the 1845 Commission were particularly aggrieved about the practice of charging full rent for part-time work ('the stint')², or when a frame was standing idle. There was considerable debate as to how widespread this practice was; while few hosiers would personally admit to it (John Cooke and William White were

1 *Estimates of the profitability of frame rents are somewhat at variance. Smith estimates that in mid-century the hosiers were making 60-80% profit on the original investment (Smith, 1965, p 22). Hosiers admitted to 5-10%, but this was almost certainly an underestimate (Bythell, 1978, p 87). Hosier Robert Walker claimed that he would make £101 profit in a 20 year period on frames originally worth £37 10s (PP 1854-5 xiv p 143).*

2 *One Shepshed knitter spoke of being on 'the stint' (a quota system spreading work over all of a hosier's employees) for three full years (PP 1845 xv I q 5607).*

two who did), many more were prepared to accuse others of it (PP 1845 xv I qq 7887, 7931, 8062)¹. The justification offered was that, without steady income from the frames, profits would be so negligible that they were forced to charge to survive; in addition they claimed that, without frame rents, knitters might use their frames to make up work for other hosiers.² Although many hosiers spoke against the practice, many others declared that the industry would collapse if it were made illegal.

The complexities of the system had been increased since around 1810 by the emergence of a tier of middlemen operating between hosiers and their employees.³ Few people now worked 'direct' to one of the merchant hosiers. These middlemen were of three types. The middleman pure merely acted to transport the yarn to the village knitters, and the finished goods back to the warehouses; they were essentially paid agents or managers of the hosiers, who claimed that without them the system was too inefficient, in view of the scattered locations in which the knitters worked.⁴ Increasingly, however, middlemen became involved in production itself. Men who got yarn, orders and sometimes frames from the hosiers, and then actually themselves hired knitters to make up the goods, were known as 'undertakers'. Those described as 'bag hosiers' or 'bagmen'

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- 1 See evidence of Henry Dorman (PP 1845 xv II q 904) and of Henry Mead, John Sketchley and Thomas Winters (PP 1854-5 xiv qq 3699, 4649, 4675, 4839) *inter alia*.
- 2 See, for example, PP 1845 xv I qq 886, 3677, 8044 II qq 480, 4507 .
- 3 Edward Allen, chairman of Leicester Poor Law Union, dated the advent of middlemen from 1816 (PP 1845 xv I q 552). They were apparently prevalent by 1819 (VCH, 1958, p 306).
- 4 According to the Victoria County History of Leicester, 118 villages and settlements in Leicestershire were producing hosiery in the late eighteenth century, and there were still 93 in the mid nineteenth century (VCH, 1955, p 3).

worked a similar system, but with more flexibility, in marketing to several warehouses from their own 'bag' of goods, and often using their own yarn, which was frequently embezzled yarn purchased from knitters.¹ Both these systems were in essence forms of subcontract², and these became the dominant forms of organisation by the 1840s. By 1841 Felkin estimated that half of wrought hose and three quarters of cut-up work was mediated through bag hosiers (PP 1841 (i) vii p 238).³

Middlemen, like frame rents, were objects of hatred among the work-people. 33 out of the 183 Leicestershire knitter witnesses to the 1845 Royal Commission made specific complaints against them, as opposed to 75 against frame rent, but clearly middlemen were associated with rent and other types of charges, such as 'standing charges' or 'shop charges' (covering the overheads of workshops) and 'taking in' charges (for transport costs), of which many complained.⁴ The knitters, who also had to pay for their own needles, candles for lighting, heating, soap or oil to make the yarn workable, and the work of someone to do winding and sewing if family members were not available, felt themselves enmeshed in a web of charges, many of which they complained they could not understand. For

1 See Chapter 4.

2 See Clawson (1980) and Littler (1982) for the prevalence of various forms of subcontracting in the early industrial period.

3 The two types of product are described on page 54. A lower estimate of middlemen's involvement was given by John Biggs in 1954; he believed that of 120 Leicester manufacturers only 40 used middlemen. However, these will inevitably have been the larger businesses, which may explain the apparent discrepancy. For example, more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the 2,700 frames owned by I. & R. Morley were worked through bagmen (PP 1854-5 xiv q 388; Bythell, 1978, p 85).

4 These figures are derived from a content analysis of the 183 interviews in the 1845 Royal Commission report with framework knitters from Leicester and Leicestershire. Since the questions were not standardised, this does not represent 'hard' statistical evidence, but it does provide a rough overall picture of the knitters' experience. See Appendix 2 for further details.

example, Henry Krause complained of an extra 3d weekly charge supposedly for tax, and Allen Tilley of a 9d charge referred to as 'compensation money' (PP 1845 xv I q 1246, II q 1597).

In terms of technological development, there were few major changes between 1800 and 1850. Felkin pays tribute to the fertility of imagination and invention of both masters and workmen in the industry¹; but most of these inventions were small adjustments or modifications, producing, for example, new stitches or utilising new types of raw material.² There was, however, one extremely significant change: this was the introduction of what were known as 'cutups', 'spurious goods', 'scissors work' or 'spider hose' (being purportedly full of holes!) These goods were produced on a wider type of frame; material was knitted up in a straight piece, not fashioned into a stocking shape or 'wrought' as on the traditional narrow frame. The hose were then cut out, stitched up and pulled into shape on a board.

These products earned the scorn of masters and workpeople alike³, but were, of course, the first step on the road to cheap mass production. They first began to appear in the 1790s, but do not seem to have become widespread until about 1812 (Patterson, 1954, p 57; Felkin, 1845, p 47). They were particularly popular in Leicestershire. They were quicker to make, requiring less skill, and 2-6 hose could be produced simultaneously.

1 See Felkin (1877) for a full account of patented inventions between 1750 and 1850.

2 The industry then, as now, was noted for the wide variety of products and processes involved. For example, in 1812 40 distinct fabrics were being knitted (Chapman, 1967, p 19).

3 The 1819 petition of the Leicester framework knitters was a joint petition with the hosiers against cutups, which they wanted made illegal.

In this way, they undercut the price of wrought hose. Smaller masters and middlemen, who competed for the cheaper end of the market, were particularly likely to be involved in the production of cutups, whereas larger manufacturers, who relied more on quality goods and dealt with established customers, were more likely to take the side of the workpeople in the campaign against them. Since pay for this work was higher, the unions were unable to prevent their members taking up employment on the wide frames, deplore them as they might.

The other important organisational change in this period was the tendency for workpeople to be gathered together in small workshops rather than in their homes. This was particularly true in towns. For example, of the 63 witnesses from Leicester in 1845, 40 worked in shops compared with 13 at home (11 gave no location). In the rest of the county only 20 out of 119 mentioned that they worked in a shop. The size of the shops in which these 83 knitters worked varied from 5 to 118 frames. Although they were sometimes quite large they were *not* organised on a factory basis. There were no set hours or regulations, and the workpeople chose their times as they would in their own homes, but clearly there was some saving in overheads for the middlemen who ran the shops, and benefits of easier co-ordination.¹

The organisation of the industry, then, meant that the labour of the producers had to support an unwieldy structure of profit-taking (hosiers, middlemen, independent investors). Ease of entry continued to generate unduly high levels of competition. The other side of the picture was the

1 *Conditions in the shops were often poor. According to one knitter*
The men are stived up in their frames ... It's actually
dreadful. It smells really disgusting when you go into
the shop.

(PP 1845 xv I q 1625)

overstocking of the labour market. There had been a steady inflow of agricultural labour, released from the land. Nichols, writing at the turn of the century, estimated that only a third or even a quarter of the agricultural hands employed 20 years earlier were still required (Nichols, 1798, Vol II, p 639). In temporary boom periods, such as the Napoleonic Wars, when government contracts pushed up demand and enrolment in the armed forces created a labour shortage, new entrants were attracted to the industry by ease of entry. After 1815 the market was flooded with returning soldiers. Finally, the majority of village knitters continued to bring up their children into the trade, partly because of the lack of other employment in the area, partly because children's labour pushed up family productivity¹, and partly, no doubt, because of attachment to the traditional lifestyle.²

Unchecked competition, stagnating demand, surplus of frames and surplus of labour combined to produce intensely depressed conditions between 1810 and 1855. Older people looked back with nostalgia to remembered 'Golden Ages', in the 1760s and between 1785 and 1810. In the former period it was claimed that "a flatness of trade was never known" and "surplus goods were laid by to meet the seasons" (Gardiner, 1838, Vol III, p 112). Knitters in those days combined agricultural work with production of hose, growing vegetables, brewing ale and keeping pigs and poultry (Jones, 1891, p 3). They were able to earn sufficient wages by working only three days a week in the frame. One witness in 1845 ruefully remembered the time when he earned as much himself in a week as four of his family now earned together (PP 1845 xv I q 3381). It was,

1 See Chapter 10.

2 See Patterson (1954, pp 49-50) for amplification of this point.

of course, easy to put a Utopian gloss on this past: one writer remembered Leicestershire as

The abode of health and competence: a temperate and unstrained industry diffused plenty through its towns and villages ... the advance of summer invited the peasant to a grateful change of labour, while the village poured forth its cheerful population to assist in preparing the tedded grass and reap the golden harvest.

(*Humanus*, 1820, p 17)

This is no doubt idealised. Nevertheless, there is no doubting the grim contrast presented by the period from 1810. In 1819 Nottingham knitters petitioning the Duke of Newcastle spoke of "pangs of hunger", of subsisting on bread, potatoes and salt, and "putting our children supperless to bed" (Aspinall, 1949, p 324). Their plight was to typify the next decades, as pay slumped, hours of work lengthened, while many experienced long spells without work or on the 'stint'.

It is hard to present an accurate picture of wages over the period as all payment was on a piece-rate basis, and there were great variations between branches and between individuals. The 183 (male) Leicestershire witnesses reported earnings in 1845 ranging between 3/- (net) and 20/- per week.¹ Deductions were also highly variable. Probably most paid between 1/- and 1/6 frame rent per week (ranges reported were from 9d to 5/-). The range of full charges reported by the sample was 2/6 to 8/6 weekly.² Women, old people and children usually earned less than adult males. Two hosiers reported in 1854 that wage-earners fell into three classes: hardworking skilled men (earning average £1), less responsible men (12/- to 15/-) and women, boys and old people (7/- to 10/-) (PP 1854-5

1 *Confusion is increased as it is often not made clear whether figures given represent net (after deductions) or gross wages.*

2 *Thomas Allsop of Hinckley reported that his house rent was 9d while his frame rent was 1/-! (PP 1845 xv I q 3797).*

xiv qq 7342, 7593). These were probably optimistic estimates. Some more precise figures, from individual wage-books, are lower. One hosier's book for the period 1794 to 1803 (a relatively prosperous time) recorded a gross average of 12/0½, and deductions of 1/11½, making clear earnings of 10/1 (PP 1812 ii, Appendix 4). It must be remembered, here, that women's wages could fall as low as 1/-. A survey done in 1843 by William Parkinson, a Derby knitter, of 759 frames (346 in use, 413 standing idle) revealed that individual's average weekly earnings varied from 15/- to 1/- (PP 1845 xv II q 3933). In the Leicestershire village of Earl Shilton the average earnings of 185 hands was calculated at 3/2½ net, while 13 hands working for Thomas Corah earned 5/7 net on average and 13 hands of the Biggs brothers 11/4 (PP 1845 xv I q 4964, PP 1854-5 xiv Appendix 2)¹.

Hours were similarly variable. The 1845 witnesses tended to claim to work from 5, 6 or 7 in the morning till 11 at night, or up to 16 or 17 hours daily. Lower estimates were 12-14 hours a day. Such hours might, however, be worked only 4 or 5 days a week, not every day.

With wages so low and erratic, the workpeople became used to diets lacking meat or cheese, consisting mainly of bread, potatoes and fat, with perhaps herrings or treacle, and tea. A Hinckley knitter described his "rice days" when the family consumed three pounds of boiled rice and 3d worth of bread (PP 1845 xv I q 3971). One family of six had not tasted meat more than three times in four years, while Thomas Brown reported living without cheese, butter and sugar for a year, with only chicory essence for breakfast (PP 1845 xv I 1343; Jones, 1891, p 6). Many at

1 *Average figures, like those provided by Thomis for 1792 (17/-) and 1829 (8/-) hide more than they reveal, in view of all these variations (Thomis, 1968, p 179).*

times came near starvation, as Thomas Cooper, the local Chartist leader recalled: mothers were so malnourished their milk dried up, and one man told Cooper

I wish they would hang me! I have lived on cold potatoes that were given me these two days, and this morning I've eaten a raw potato for sheer hunger.

(Cooper, 1872, pp 172-3)

Large sections of the populace were reduced to pauper status. Patterson calculates that in Leicester in 1847-8 1/4 to 1/3 of the town's population were on poor relief (Patterson, 1954, p 349). In country areas it could be worse: in Wigston, Leicestershire, in 1832 208 families were on permanent relief, and 150 more on intermittent relief, constituting nearly half the village (Hoskins, 1957, p 270). In 1841 in Hinckley one third of the framework knitters were unemployed, one third earning about 7/- to 8/- a week, and a third on the stint, earning only 4/- a week (Biggs, LRO). As two knitters wrote to a Nottingham newspaper in 1827

To give a picture of our real situation would stagger belief and were it possible to obtain a general knowledge of how many get on from day to day without money, credit, furniture, clothing etc. would be entirely astonishing and outrival the greatest romance.

(Thomis, 1969, p 25)

Poor diet, clothing and housing, combined with long hours of work in cramped conditions, took their toll on the health of the knitters, who were described as "an unhealthy and short-lived class" by one observer (Wylie, 1857, p 40). Felkin declared them to be "physically deteriorated ... mentally depressed, and too often morally debased" (PP 1841 (i) vii p 238). Diseases to which they were particularly prone included indigestion, spinal curvature, consumption, ruptures, debility and failing eyesight. The latter was particularly prevalent among glove hands, few of whom could continue in that branch after the age of 40 (PP 1843 xiv F

p 55-59). Pains in wrists, back, head and stomach were frequently complained of. Harriet Holland, aged 18, told the Children's Employment Commission of "violent pains in the head and side". Her eyes were "very much strained" and she occasionally saw black specks (PP 1843 xiv F p 91).

Thomas Kerry, a glove fingerer, reported

Sometimes, when I am at work, especially on colours, my head aches, at the back of my head, and I find that I can hardly bear myself.

(PP 1845 xv II q 307)

In such circumstances, observers were apt to ask why the knitters stayed in the trade. However, alternative employment in the area was scarce. Where alternatives were available people did move, mainly into the collieries, or back into agriculture. The Derby workpeople were the most fortunate, as the industrial structure there was more diversified. Already in 1817 people were leaving for silk mills (Hutton, 1817, p 157). In 1845 and 1854 it was reported that entrants into hosiery were fast dwindling as young people entered factories, collieries, brickyards, foundries and railway yards (PP 1845 xv II qq 3845, 3902; PP 1854-5 xiv qq 7527, 8052). William Mason, who had himself quitted knitting to work in a paint factory before ending as a scripture reader, reported that many were joining the police force (PP 1854-5 xiv q 9695). In Nottingham in the 1840s a short-lived boom in lace, 'twist-net fever', provided an opening of which many, including Gravenor Henson, took advantage. However opportunities were few, and the poor physique of the knitters disadvantaged them for other work. For example, it was claimed that when they were set to stonebreaking in the workhouse "their hands bled dreadfully", while if their hands became toughened they were unable to operate the frame successfully (PP 1845 xv I q 3679).

Many moved around the area seeking work. Thomas Greaves of Derby had travelled to Belper, Hinckley and Leicester to work, and Richard Harris, successful Leicester manufacturer, had worked in Nottingham when he was a knitter (PP 1854-5 xiv pp 471, 475; Lomas, 1855, p 16). John Rogers, a Nottingham manufacturer, described the stockingers as a "very migratory set ... they go from here to Leicestershire and from here to Derbyshire" (PP 1845 xv II q 1125). The other possibility was long-range migration. In 1824 it was noted that Nottingham people were going to France into the lace trade, and as late as 1863 a group of Nottingham knitters had an Emigration Association; 150 sailed to New Zealand under this scheme (PP 1824 v p 370; Church, 1966, p 155). Two Leicester Chartist leaders, blacklisted for their union activities, emigrated to the United States, as others had done before them (Patterson, 1954, p 387). Less dramatically, Redford documents a drift over the period from Nottingham to the Yorkshire textile areas, from Leicester to the coal and iron industries of the West Midlands. Such migration was not substantial, however, a phenomenon which Redford ascribes to the "mental obtuseness of the English peasantry" (Redford, 1964, pp 52, 95).

In times of severe hardship, appeals to the community might be the only hope. Samuel Mayfield of Mansfield explained "They must go to the parish, or begging or stealing or anything they can do". Others spoke of poaching, or travelling around begging for odd jobs to do. Friends and relatives might offer monetary support, and local ladies and gentlemen made charitable provision, sometimes of money and food, sometimes of work (PP 1845 xv I qq 3090, 7338, 7342; II qq 3135, 4440). Daniel Merrick, Leicester stockingers' leader, described poor families' struggles to survive in his fictionalised account of his experiences in the trade 'The Warp of Life'; "For clothing they were greatly dependent upon charitable

gifts from ladies and gentlemen in the neighbourhood", while used tea-leaves donated by the landlady of the local pub were a lifesaver (Merrick, 1876, p 7). One hosier confessed, "We never knew how they lived ... they must have been in pretty good credit in the villages" (PP 1845 xv I q 383). As a last resort, there was the hated workhouse; one man commented

The Bastille is not the worst place, bad as it is, that I have alighted on. There is some kind of meal there, but at home very often there is none.

(PP 1845 xv II q 3508)

Ultimately, though, there was little left for many but despair, Amos Foxon of Hinckley told the Commissioners

We are so helpless and so reduced that it is impossible for us to extricate ourselves from the thralldom; we have no means of helping ourselves; we are as fast as a fly in a spider's web.

(PP 1845 xv I q 4048)

Equally graphically, one village knitter described how

I have known the time when I could have stripped myself naked and commanded my own children to eat my flesh, they have been so hungry.

(PP 1845 xv I q 8313)

One man, stricken by debt, told how he went into the fields and attempted to eat grass:

But when I had got it into my mouth I could not get it down ... I got a cup of tea at one place, and a cup of tea at another.

(PP 1845 xv I q 6259)

In view of such distress, the framework knitters' early attempts at collective organisation should not surprise us. As early as 1752, journeyman knitters advertised in the Nottingham Journal, calling on their fellows "to form themselves into a community, and not to listen to their employers who pretended to be the workmen's friends ... to be of one mind for the general good" (Nottingham Journal, October 14th, 1752). Walton, in his

account of hosiery trade organisations, ascribes this to the reaction of discontented journeymen as capitalism tightened its grasp (Walton, 1952). The first more permanent association was the 'Stockingers' Association for Mutual Protection', founded around 1776 or 1777. It was successful enough to organise the first of many petitions to Parliament in 1778 and another in 1779, and was particularly effective in Nottingham (Henson, 1831, p 383-395).

Ad hoc meetings of knitters' societies and committees were common in the towns over the next thirty years, while village stockingers were more likely to form themselves into friendly societies. The next notable organisation, however, was the union instituted by Henson in Nottingham in 1813, which spread quickly to Derbyshire, and by 1814 was making progress in Leicester (Gurnham, 1976, p 7). Henson, whom Thomis describes as possibly the first full-time paid union official, was a man of notable ability and resource, but his union faced fierce opposition from the hosiers, leading to prosecutions under the Combinations Acts.¹ Two members were gaoled in Nottingham, along with four or five in Leicester. Despite this setback, organisation of the knitters continued, especially in Nottingham, often taking a complex and subterranean form, as various Home Office documents, reproduced in Aspinall's useful collection, show (Aspinall, 1949, Sections v, vi). In 1819 organisation returned to a more legitimate form, in the shape of the Leicester 'Seven Years' Union', established by a middle-class sympathiser, the radical Baptist minister, Robert Hall. Taking the outward form of a friendly society, it was financially supported by some of the Liberal Nonconformist hosiers. A similar association was formed in Nottingham in 1820.

1 See Thomis, 1968, p 181. Henson was paid 3 guineas a week. He had already run another short-lived union, in 1811-12.

These organisations were especially orientated towards appeals for legislative protection, manifesting, in Walton's view, "a nostalgic desire for the paternal protection of Parliament" (Walton, 1952, p 32): Henson's 1813 union was named the 'Society for Obtaining Parliamentary Relief and the Encouragement of Mechanics'. However, they also used the methods which were to be associated with the evolving trade unions: demonstrations, wage claims and strikes. Many strikes occurred in the three hosiery towns, Nottingham, Leicester and Derby, between 1813 and 1825.¹ A major general strike followed the repeal of the Combinations Acts in 1824, and lasted 18 weeks. This, along with another strike in 1825, exhausted union funds, and led to an eventual collapse in 1826.²

New attempts at organisation continued to be made, but the period between 1826 and 1855 was marked by the forming and reforming of temporary unions, often organising merely one branch or sector of the trade. The Sock and Top Branch, founded in 1830, was one of the strongest of these: the Glove Branch and the Drawer and Pantaloon Branch were also well organised (Gurnham, 1976, p 15; Wells, 1972, p 113). These fragmented unions were often formed for one specific objective (drawing up a petition, initiating a strike); despite the apparent lack of central organisation, strikes continued to be common (Felkin, 1877, p 32; Thomis, 1969, Chapter 4).³

1 See details in Chapter 8.

2 It had already survived one virtual collapse, and change of leadership in 1824.

3 See Chapter 8 for details.

To stress the sectional and transitory nature of the organisation in this period, as some have done¹ is in fact somewhat misleading. All through it, there were centripetal forces acting as strongly as centrifugal ones. Henson had been involved in 1829 in an early attempt to institute a locally-based general 'union of trades' (Thomis, 1969, p 69), and throughout the period there was a tendency for loose federations of the small local unions to meet together as the 'Three Counties Union'.² The high peak of these unifying drives was the involvement in the General Union movement of the early 30s. There were Leicester, Nottingham and Derby branches of the National Association for the Protection of Labour (NAPL) in 1831 and considerable involvement in the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union (GNCTU) in 1833, especially in Derby and Leicester.³

After the collapse of the GNCTU, it was the turn of Chartism to act as a unifying force. Working Men's Associations for the Charter were formed in Leicester in 1836 and Nottingham in 1838. Knitters were active among Chartist groups in Leicester, Nottingham and Loughborough, and Chartist activities continued intermittently until 1849; the movement provided a second organising focus for stockings' leaders who were also involved in various industrial activities, including the campaigns which led to the 1845 Royal Commission enquiry into the industry and the 1854-5 Truck Commission's investigations. Study of these various forms of activity reveals that the same names perpetually reoccur: Gravenor Henson,

1 See Gurnham, 1976, pp 12-17; Wells, 1972, pp 104-5. Leicester knitters' leader William Jackson described the 1826-33 period as one of bad organisation, but this view is no doubt coloured by his own fall from grace (under suspicion of malpractice) at this time (Jackson, 1833, pp 10-12).

2 For example in 1833, 1834, 1838, 1842 and 1843.

3 There were 61 GNCTU lodges in Leicester (Patterson, 1954, p 287).

George Kendall, Jonathan Barber in Nottingham, William Jackson, George Buckby and Thomas Winters in Leicester. Men of determination and resource, they threw themselves into each new working-class initiative as it emerged.

It might be possible to dismiss all this activity as a series of failed attempts to establish a permanent union. If, however, rather than taking the Webbs' definition of a trade union as "a continuous association of wage-earners" as the definitive one (Webb and Webb, 1894, p 1), we view early trade unionism as based in the spontaneous collectivism of people with shared work experience, in what Turner calls "the habit of association", it is clear that this habit was found in an extremely active form among this particular group of working people (Turner, 1962, p 86).¹

Predictably, employers' associations had a similar 'ad hoc' character. They were usually formed for a single purpose. Among the earliest must have been the committee formed in 1727 to combat embezzlement (Chambers, 1966, p 122). A Nottingham group active in 1772 had 70 members and in 1778 they quickly formed a counter-association in response to the knitters' union (Chapman, 1967, p 52; Henson, 1831, p 386). In 1792 there was a Leicester organisation against embezzlement which, according to the Victoria County History, had regular meetings (VCH, 1958, p 173). Similar combinations were later formed against Luddism (1811), legislative interference (1812), machinebreaking (1814) and wage demands (1825) (Thomis, 1969, p 42).

As Thomis says, these associations had no continuous existence. They inevitably failed once the task for which they had been constituted was complete, particularly in view of the climate of competition amongst the hosiers. Their attempts to get Parliamentary backing were more successful

1 *This issue is more fully discussed in Chapter 8. See also Price, 1980.*

than those of the knitters, for during the early period a number of measures were passed posing severe penalties for framebreaking and other acts of opposition.¹ However, not all their activities were in opposition to the workpeople. In 1819 masters and workpeople from Leicester organised a joint petition against cut-ups. In 1841 a meeting of the three counties' hosiers in Derby, to prepare for the visit of the Royal Commission, was given a sympathetic account by John Biggs, Leicester's leading hosier, of the sufferings of the Leicestershire hands. On the other hand, a committee of smaller masters managed to act together to defeat the Ticket Act, passed in 1846 after the Royal Commission report, which was designed to protect standards and prices by the marking of goods, and which larger owners might have supported.

On the whole, it can be stated that employers' organisations in this period took a defensive form. Offers from Leicester knitters to form a joint union in 1838 were completely disregarded.² It was claimed, moreover, that the hosiers were too divided among themselves to combine with any permanency. Attempts to maintain 'statements' (lists of prices mutually agreed by both sides) were perpetually jeopardised by the undercutting activities of the smaller hosiers.³ Competition continually acted to block concerted action by the hosiers.

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- 1 *The 1788 Act for Protecting Stocking Frames, Machinery etc. decreed that people refusing to yield up a rented frame should be fined, people stealing a frame gaoled, and people destroying a frame transported. During the Luddite period in 1812 the Act for Protecting Stocking and Lace Frames commuted the latter to the death penalty, but this was repealed in 1813.*
- 2 *See discussion in Chapter 7.*
- 3 *Statements were drawn up, for example, in 1787, 1790, 1817, 1819 and 1830 (Gurnham, 1976, Chapter 1; Patterson, 1954, Chapter VII).*

Such were the organisations which were ranged against each other in this period. Evidence to the Parliamentary enquiries from 1812 to 1854 reveals a steadily mounting feeling of hostility and anger on both sides. Employers resented what they saw as attempts to erode their individual rights and freedoms, were antagonised by the workpeople's defence of trade traditions, and blamed political agitators for the climate of unrest; while the workpeople and their leaders bitterly resented what they saw as the oppression of their masters and fiercely opposed what they saw as trade malpractices.¹

This opposition was active as well as verbal. Throughout this 55 year period, the workpeople used every means available to them to fight to better their condition. Petitions, demonstrations and strikes have been mentioned. Knitters were also involved in all the protest movements of the time: Luddism, Owenism, the Reform Movement, Chartism. Less dramatic means, such as experiments in co-operative production and appeals for bodies of arbitration were also employed.² But by none of these means could they remedy the two major ailments from which the industry was suffering: the competition between employers and the surplus of labour. Drastic change was needed to remove these ills.

Section 2 The Transition to Factory Production 1855-1914

The next thirty years were to bring the transformation of the old system, and the growth of a new factory industry with new machines; they also heralded changes in the industrial climate, which brought prosperity

1 *Evidence for these feelings is presented in Chapters 4 and 8.*

2 *See Chapter 8.*

to the towns of Leicester and Nottingham, and a vast improvement in the living and working conditions of the populace. Yet what strikes commentators now, as it did the contemporary observers, is the slow pace of that change.

A circular frame worked by steam power had been invented by Brunel as early as 1816, and in 1829 Warners of Loughborough were experimenting with a rotary steam-powered frame (Wells, 1972, pp 116-7).¹ Factory experiments had been tried in the East Midlands before 1845.² Yet in 1862 only 4,063 out of around 120,000 hosiery workers were covered by the Factory Acts, and in 1871 there were still only 74 factories in Leicester and Leicestershire (Gurnham, 1976, p 23; VCH, 1955, p 16). The factory system did not become fully established until the 1890s: in 1870 there had been 129 hosiery factories in Britain, employing 9,692 workers; by 1890 there were 24,858 employees in 257 factories, and by 1901 there were 38,549 workers in hosiery factories (Church, 1966, p 265).

Contemporary explanations for the continuation of the domestic system had tended to stress the difficulty of developing steam-powered machinery in an industry in which there was so much variety in process, product and material, and where adaptations dictated by changing fashions were so frequent. Many manufacturers believed mechanisation to be impossible. "Power cannot be applied" stated John Biggs in 1833 (PP 1833 xx C1 p 25). In 1845 the manager of a Belper firm reiterated

1 See pages 72-73 for explanation of the two types of frame.

2 According to Barnes, Haddens of Aberdeen had an experimental factory in 1811, with 20 steam-powered machines producing "all sorts of hosiery". Labour relations in the small Scottish sector of the industry were more cordial, so less resistance to change might be expected (Barnes, 1977, p 84).

Stockings cannot be made by power, and I believe they never will be ... A stocking is not merely a texture. It is a garment, and therefore you may as reasonably expect to weave a coat by steam.

(PP 1845 xv II q 4831)

In 1854 hosiers declared that only inferior goods could be made on the circular frames, now becoming common; all better classes of good must still be knitted on the handframe (PP 1845-5 xiv q 132). Even in 1871 the same idea was being aired by the manager of Hine and Mundella's factory in Nottingham, who claimed that power machinery made "much inferior work to the wrought hose" though he conceded that improvements were being made "almost daily" (PP 1871 xxxvi qq 41419, 41421).

The hosiers' other major problem was overcoming the workpeople's resistance to factory conditions. It was believed that they would not be prepared "to work by the bell and leave off by the bell" according to hosier Arthur Morley, who claimed the typical response was "No, I should not like that; it would break in upon my habits" (PP 1845 xv II q 6721). Another hosier explained to the Commissioners in 1845 how experiments in factory organisation had proved "a perfect failure" because the men would not submit to any restraint (PP 1845 xv II q 490). It was also believed that concentration of men in factories would increase industrial and political unrest. Workshops were described as "hotbeds of discontent" (PP 1845 xv II q 4831), and one hosier described how

One man leads another astray; many before entering large shops are very different men to what they are after they have been in a while, by reading bad books, inculcating bad principles.

(PP 1845 xv II q 1331)

More prosaically, another, John Rogers, complained of the expense involved in paying for large premises and for overseers (PP 1845 xv II q 1146). On the other hand, manufacturers spoke lyrically of the domestic system,

claiming that it increased the workpeople's "welfare and happiness" while the factory system threatened their "physical and moral welfare". Arthur Morley firmly declared that "the beauty of the stocking trade" was its domestic character (PP 1854-5 xiv qq 2345-6, 6567).¹

If all this was true, we must still concur with Chambers (1966), Gurnham (1976) and Bythell (1978) that the major obstacle to change was the profit still to be made out of the domestic system. Labour costs were cheap, labour was freely available, and too much was invested in frame-rent for the system to be easily dislodged. It is significant that not until after the abolition of frame-rent in 1874 did the factory system really begin to take off.²

As was indicated, the first factory experiments were spectacular failures. The Jarvis Brothers of Hinckley tried to run one containing 50 to 60 wide frames, with regular meal-times, twelve hours' work a day, and no ingress or egress during working hours. Dinner was provided, and the hosiers joined the workpeople in eating it. Men were allowed to employ their children as winders. However, the employees refused to keep regular hours; turnover was drastic, with men working a couple of days and then quitting, and the work was of poor quality. The knitters were unhappy

1 See Chapter 4 for substantiation of the hosiers' claims.

2 See Chambers, 1966, p 133; Gurnham, 1976, p 24; Bythell, 1978, Chapter 4 for fuller discussion of this. In addition to the abolition of rent, the continuing profitability of the system was also threatened by the Factory Acts of 1867 and 1878, and the Education Act of 1870, which promised to put limits on the use of child and female labour in the future. The significance of this can be gauged from the fact that, according to the Factory Commissioners, in 1843, 12,924 out of the approximate total of 28,000 employees in the industry were under 18 (PP 1843 xiv F p 13).

Because they could not go in and out as they pleased and have what holidays they pleased and go on just as they had been used to do, and were also subject, during after hours, to the ill-natured observations of the other workmen.

If not constantly under surveillance, they would "fill their pipes and jugs and all sorts of things" (PP 1845 xv I qq 3683-5).

Such early experiments, however, were not likely to succeed, for as the percipient manufacturer, Robert Walker, observed "in a factory where they do not use steam power you cannot enforce industry" (PP 1854-5 xiv q 2364). Only the use of power would force the workforce to accept the exigencies of continuous production.

The first successful factories opened in the 1840s. Thomas Collins' Leicester factory had 55 rotary machines, operated chiefly by girls aged 13 to 17, and employment there was sought after (PP 1845 xv I pp 76-8). John Cartwright in Loughborough operated his power factory successfully with "good picked men" (PP 1845 xv I q 8028). By 1854, Thomas Corah, whose firm had first invested in a steam engine sometime after 1845 (Jopp, 1965, pp 9, 11), was enthusing about his factory experiment: "Mr. Walker stated that he thought the system could not be carried out in the factories, but I know better". The machines cost £100 each, but "they work beautifully", and the hands had "nothing to do but to look at them". He agreed that, as yet, the machines could not be used for more intricate jobs, but as far as straightforward items were concerned "the circular machinery has completely undermined the wide machinery, and it will undermine it". The expense of the machinery and the necessity for it to be carefully looked after would, however, ensure that the new system was only slowly adopted, in his opinion (PP 1854-5 xiv pp 202-39). He was right!

Nonetheless, resistance was gradually wearing down. Hine and Mundella opened their first factory, a five-storey building, in 1851, and in 1855 Thomas Payne started up a steam-powered factory in Hinckley (Pickering, 1940, p 49). By 1863, five Leicester hosiery firms had opened factories, including the Biggs Brothers (Gurnham, 1976, p 22). By 1866, even the Morleys had a factory, despite Arthur Morley's earlier avowal that "anything that is old is likely to be more respectable than that which is new" (Chambers, 1966, p 124; Gurnham, 1976, p 23). These men were the leaders of the industry. Wherever they led, eventually the smaller firms must follow.

The perfection of what was to be the industry's staple machine, Cotton's Patent rotary machine, two years before the Morleys opened their factory, is significant. It was a notable advance on previous machines. The circular machines were essentially a modernised version of the wide frames: they produced tubes of fabric which were then ironed into shape. The earlier rotary machines, known also as 'flats', produced pieces of fabric which could be cut up and stitched, and thus also replaced wide frame production. As Corah had explained, these types of machines satisfactorily superceded the wide frames. Cotton's Patent was the first machine to produce fully-fashioned goods satisfactorily, thus replacing the old narrow or 'wrought' frames.

For the next period of its history, the industry assumed a dual structure. While factories proliferated, narrow frame production continued, especially in the country areas. In Nottingham in 1868 there were 12,000 rotaries, 15,000 circulars but still 40,000 narrow frames. Rotaries were operated by men only, but women worked with men on circulars (Felkin, 1877, p 43). Rotary operatives in this year earned 20/- to 35/-, but narrow frame

wages were much lower, ranging from 6/- to 24/-. Despite this incentive to switch to power, many older workpeople found it hard to adapt. In 1890 there were still 5,000 male handframe knitters in the Midland counties, as their representatives told the 1892 Labour Commission (PP 1892 xxxvi Pt 2 p 77).¹ Many of these men earned only 10/- to 12/- a week. Their comments to an observer, W.G. Jones, make pitiful reading. One lamented

We are superannuated men without a pension left to fight out a bitter existence.

Another explained "It's no use us old men going by steam", while a third wrote

*I found myself geting (sic) old and frames geting new ...
Hope now to finish my life without the papur's bage which is
the fatie of so many of my fellows.*

(Jones, 1891, pp 12-13)

A major change in this period was the increasing proportion of women employed in the industry (see Fig. 3.1). As the figure shows, this feminisation was substantial. In Leicester in 1851 there were 4,188 men recorded as working in hosiery and 1,979 women. By 1881 women had overtaken men, and by 1911 there were 12,117 women working in hosiery and only 3,610 men (Simmons, 1974, II, p 151). In 1897 women formed 75% of the total factory workforce (Church, 1966, p 278). They also continued to work in large numbers as outworkers. No accurate figures are available, but Wells estimates that in 1907 there were 25,000 women outworkers (Wells, 1972, p 157).

1 *They claimed to know nothing about numbers of women.*

Figure 3.1

Proportions of men and women employed in hosiery
in the three East Midland counties 1851-1951

	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Women as percentage of the total</u>
1851	32,818	23,547	56,365	41.8
1861	23,878	19,810	42,688	46.3
1871	21,908	17,825	39,733	44.5
1881	18,492	19,532	38,024	51.3
1891	17,395	25,296	42,691	59.4
1901	13,192	28,079	41,171	68.0
1911	14,163	35,316	49,479	71.4
1921	16,593	46,078	62,671	73.3
1931	21,217	55,349	76,566	72.2
1951	23,064	52,583	75,647	69.6

Source: D. Smith, *The East Midlands Industrial Area*, unpublished Ph.D. 1961 p 224 Table 32.

Two factors were involved in this development. First, as mechanisation increased the output of the individual knitter¹, the proportion of seamers, menders and other workers needed to finish the work (whose own technology altered little) was increased. In addition, factory expansion involved new finishing jobs, such as packaging, pressing, cutting, sorting and examining, which were taken on by females. The second factor was the attempt by manufacturers, especially in the country areas, to use female labour on the new knitting machines.² The fight against female substitution became the major preoccupation of male unionists in this period.

At the same time as the factory system was being developed, Nottingham and Leicester were both experiencing periods of boom and expansion. In Nottingham, from 1850 onwards, this centred on coalmining, engineering and brickmaking, while lace and hosiery were also attracting new investment.³ Later in the century new industries emerged, notable enterprises being Boots' chemicals, Players' tobacco and Raleigh cycles. In Leicester, expansion was on a narrower front, but the development of the elastic web and boot and shoe trades put an end to the town's dangerous dependency on hosiery as the single industry. Light engineering was a later development, in the 1890s. By 1871 footwear had outstripped hosiery as the town's major employer, and remained so till World War One. In both towns, growth and prosperity brought a corresponding expansion in the construction industry. These were quite literally boom towns. Between 1871 and 1901 the population of Leicester more than doubled. As Simmons says, "one may doubt if, in the

1 *In 1871 rotary machines were producing 10 stockings at once.*

2 *This is fully elaborated in Chapters 4 and 10.*

3 *One factory manager stated in 1871 "we are as busy as we can well be in the factories" (PP 1871 xxxvi q 41416).*

years 1860 to 1914, any large town in England grew and thrived more" (Simmons, 1974, II, pp 61, 151).

Increased general prosperity, plus greater opportunities for alternative employment, brought an improvement in the hosiery workers' (as they now came to be called) lot. As Felkin said

Their physical appearance is proportionally improved, and they are far better clothed ... They are now generally well favoured, stout and of respectable appearance.

(Felkin, 1867, p 555)

Another local historian, Read, describing Leicester in 1881 commented

The streets are crowded with thousands of bustling operatives, comfortably clad, cheerful of face, and not lean of figure, being in the enjoyment of remunerative wages.

(Read, 1881, p 269)

In 1887 the Nottingham Express described the local working classes as better fed and better housed; "Their wages are higher, they work fewer hours" (University of Nottingham Adult Education Dept, 1971, p 9).

In 1871 Mundella, leading Nottingham manufacturer, claimed that his rotary operatives could earn 5/- to 10/- per day, wages as good as in any trade in England (PP 1871 xxxvi q 4248). In 1880 average wages for male power operatives in Leicester were 30/- to 34/-, for Nottingham 35/- to 40/-. Lowest paid males were winders, averaging 8/-. In Leicester the highest female wages were 17/- to 19/- (for women knitters) while makers-up, seamers and menders earned 14/- to 16/-; in Nottingham women on the circulars earned 20/-, and up to 17/- was earned by the makers-up (PP 1887 lxxxix pp 131-133). The Royal Commission on Labour in 1893 reported that in Leicester female machinists were earning 14/- to 27/-,

linkers 15/- to 22/- and female knitters 10/- to 28/-. Lowest paid were cutters (4/- to 14/-) and seamers (11/- to 16/-)¹ (PP 1893-4 xxxvii p 160).

Women's lot was certainly improved by a wider choice of job and better wages. George Kendall, Nottingham union leader, spoke of their increased self-respect: "they would not do the work now which they used to do formerly". He considered their morals and education to have improved, while they had better wages and increased free time in the evenings (PP 1876 xxx p 400). They soon built up a reputation for appearance. A Nottingham manufacturer commented

Warehouse girls, either hosiery or lace, may generally be distinguished from others by their showy dress.

(PP 1863 xviii p 270)

A later observer described Leicester girls as

Beautifully clothed in quiet colours, their dresses simply and tastefully made, and their millinery expensive but not gaudy.

(Cooperative Congress, 1915, p 121)

The introduction of powered machinery introduced a new dimension to union organisation. The first power operatives' union was formed in Nottingham in 1857, the Circular Framework Knitters' Society. In 1865 the rotary operatives formed their own union. Mansfield knitters' union was started in 1861, and these all joined in a federation of 1866, the United Framework Knitters' Society. Leicester only sent one delegate to this federation, however, and continued its own organisation on a branch

1 *A definite pecking order had developed among female occupations. William Biggs told the Children's Employment Commission that "females in warehouses are considered superior to those who work in factories", while winding and seaming were considered "the two least respectable occupations in the town" (PP 1863 xviii p 290).*

basis until 1872, when the branch unions amalgamated to form the Leicester and Leicestershire Framework Knitters' Union. A growing problem was the split of interests between hand and power operatives. In 1871 the Nottingham hand workers found their own organisation, while in 1884 the Leicester power workers split off to form, in 1885, what was to be the most durable of the unions in the next 40 years, the Leicester Amalgamated Hosiery Union (LAHU). Four years later the unions came together to form the Midlands Counties Hosiery Federation, which, later changing its name to the National Hosiery Federation (NHF), remained as a loose alliance functioning right up to the formation of the National Union in 1945. Hinckley and Loughborough, which had some tradition of separate organisation, formed their own unions: Hinckley split off from Leicester in 1897. By the end of the period there were five major unions in the NHF: Leicester, Nottingham, Hinckley, Loughborough and Ilkeston.

The hand frame workers formed their own federation in 1889, with headquarters in Sutton, but this organisation slowly faded out. Two small women's unions, formed with assistance from the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL), the Seamers and Stitchers (1874) and the Menders (1875), flourished briefly, but declined in the 1880s. An attempt to reorganise a 'Women's Hosiery Union' in 1890 was not successful.¹

These new unions were far from being unions of the 'new model' type, like the Engineering Workers' Union, and further still from displaying the spirit of 'new unionism' associated with the general unions. Subscriptions were low, bureaucracy minimal, and local autonomy paramount. Essentially they clung to the old conservative craft ethos: their main

1 *For fuller details on all these unions see Gurnham (1976) Chapters 2 and 3.*

objectives were to monopolise skills and restrict entry. Such backward-looking policies were to hamper their progress in the prewar period.¹

Predictably, manufacturers' organisations lagged behind. In 1899 the Midland Counties Hosiery Manufacturers' Association was formed, but it had a shaky existence, and collapsed some time before the Second World War. In the early part of the century, only Leicester and Hinckley had functioning Manufacturers' Associations. However, some time earlier one of the most notable developments of the century in industry's history occurred, when union and employers' representatives came together in 1860 to form the Nottingham Board of Arbitration (NAB), one of the earliest of its kind, which functioned, at first successfully, then with growing difficulty as the unions quarrelled among themselves, until 1884, when it collapsed. The NAB represented the first major attempt to develop joint negotiation and bargaining procedures in the industry; it was spearheaded by the more progressive employers, whose ideas were perhaps too far ahead of those of the mass to prevail generally. A similar board was established at Leicester in 1866, but met with limited support from either side.²

Despite this joint venture, hostility between the two sides was not at an end. The climate of prosperity described above did not on its own bring peace to the industry. Indeed, the view painted by the civic chroniclers was somewhat too roseate. Whatever the general improvement in conditions, for individual working-class people problems remained. There were still many slums in Leicester in the 1890s (Barclay, 1934, p 124). Workers still had to work long hours, there was still the fear of losing

1 See Chapter 4.

2 A full discussion of the arbitration boards can be found in Chapter 7.

one's job, or of experiencing short-time working when the trade was suffering from one of its periodic recessions.¹ Despite the general expansion of trade and favourable state of the market, the industry remained highly competitive, with small firms still likely to operate price-cutting tendencies and push down wages. County knitters suffered particularly from this.

A knitter also faced the prospect of coming into work and finding 'his' frame gone², for there were three major problems faced by the unions in this period. First, there was a persistent anti-union feeling among employers, which led to many individual cases of victimisation. Secondly, many employers decided to move their frames and factories out to rural areas, where labour was cheaper and union control weaker. Allied to this was the already mentioned trend for manufacturers to employ more women, whose labour, once again, was cheaper. Struggles against these moves preoccupied union leaders throughout the period.³

The general picture, then, was still one of struggle, but there were some signs of shifts away from the confrontations of the past. Some progressive employers were beginning to appreciate the value of encouraging union organisation, and of co-operation with unions to increase the efficiency of production.⁴ Others, more old-fashioned and still resistant to unions, did, however, show a genuine concern for the well-being of their

1 *For instance, in 1897 the union Secretary went to Newcastle to investigate job possibilities there for his members, and in 1905 there were reports of many members in "straitened circumstances". One man with 8 children was living on 14/- a week (LAHU A March 17th 1897, August 25th 1905).*

2 *See, for example, LAHU A January 22nd 1896.*

3 *See Chapter 5.*

4 *See Chapter 7.*

workpeople: a strong tradition of factory paternalism was developed in this period.¹ Union leaders, too, began to display a more accommodative approach. Just as their predecessors espoused Chartism and Owenism, the new leaders espoused the Labour Party and the co-operative movement, but rarely did their visions of the future produce the violent verbal and physical confrontations that had characterised the domestic period.²

Section 3 Modernisation 1914-1960

While the preceding period was one of considerable change, the story of the industry during the modernisation period is one of consolidation rather than transformation. Having so late experienced its first, the industry was not yet ready for a 'second industrial revolution'.³ This marks it out from earlier mechanised industries, such as engineering and cotton textiles, which underwent considerable technical change during this period. Holbrook-Jones' study is one of many which deal with the imposition of Taylorist techniques and other forms of rationalisation in these industries from the 1880s onward (Holbrook-Jones, 1982).⁴ This is not to say that there were no changes at all in hosiery production, but they were both gradual and minimal in impact compared with the changes of the preceding period. Arguably, it is only in the 1980s, with the introduction of electronic technology into the industry, that a 'second industrial revolution' is being experienced.

1 See Chapter 6.

2 There were exceptions to this, notably the violent hosiery strike in Leicester in 1886. See Chapter 9 for prolonged discussion.

3 See Friedmann, 1955.

4 See also Friedmann, 1955; Littler, 1982.

What technological development there was in the period chiefly involved modification or improvement of existing machines and processes. There were still two major types of machine, the flat or fully-fashioned, and the circular, producing tubes of material. A third type of knitting machine, the warp machine, was developed in the 1930s, but this is used mainly in the production of synthetic fabrics, and forms a fairly discrete branch of the industry. Improvements were basically of three kinds: machines got faster, more automated and more versatile, while remaining, as Anderson says, basically the same as the nineteenth century machines (Anderson, 1978, p 73). For example, flat machines used to manufacture stockings were improved as follows: finer gauges were developed, 28 stocking legs could be made at once on machines developed in the 1950s, and the machines were much faster (Wells, 1972, p 172). These improvements were all concerned with increasing output. Smith provides some interesting comparisons: a skilled handknitter could produce 60 loops a minute, a skilled framework knitter 54,000 loops a minute and a girl in charge of 8 automatic hose machines in 1929 435,000 loops a minute (Smith, 1965, p 31). As the machines became more efficient and automated, workpeople would be required to supervise a greater number of machines. In the 1890s unions fought to retain the rule of one machine per operative, but by 1946 one man was expected to tend 12 seamless hose machines (Board of Trade, 1946, p 18).¹

New fabrics were developed in this period (rayon in the 1920s, nylon from 1938) which boosted the industry's output level, and led to new products. 1907 to 1924 saw an expansion in the fancy goods sector, and

¹ *Sock knitters today oversee 18 or more machines.*

in the 1950s knitwear was the growth area. But none of these developments led to major upheavals in work organisation.

Historians of the industry have paid less attention to technological development in the subsidiary 'female' jobs. Many of these, however, changed little since the introduction of the sewing machine in the 1850s. Two other specialist machines had also been introduced in the nineteenth century, the linking machine in 1858 and the overlocker in 1887: linking involves closing toes by joining loops together and, in the case of nylon stockings, is a highly demanding and skilled job; overlocking is trimming and sewing over a raw edge to prevent fraying, and was necessary to obtain a satisfactory seam on garments cut from fabric produced on circulars. These jobs are thus extensions of the old hand jobs of seaming and stitching. They remained fairly stable after the introduction of the machines, and the finishing sector overall remained highly labour-intensive by comparison with the knitting sector.

In terms of work organisation, too, the period saw continuation of existing trends rather than changes. The continuing feminisation of the industry was perhaps the most notable feature. Before 1914 women in Leicester had worked on most machines, apart from Cotton's Patents; during the war they were taken on to all machines, but under strict regulations. Many operatives continued to be anxious to preserve the monopoly of men in certain jobs. There were protests throughout the war over this issue. For example, at Walker's factory in the village of Fleckney, men consistently opposed women's employment on Cotton's Patents, arguing in favour of the practice of 'coupling' (one man to two machines), a practice which the unions, however, regarded as much more potentially dangerous as a precedent (LAHU A October 23rd 1915). Agreements with

employers offered the unions protection for established practices: women were to be employed only where men were unavailable, had to be "physically fit" to operate the machines, were to be paid male rates and would only be employed for the duration of the war (LAHU A December 8th 1915).¹

However, in the interwar period many employers returned to their policy of attempting more permanent female substitution, although this practice was perhaps less widespread than formerly. The Second World War essentially brought an end to this. Tight rules on labour substitution were approved by the NJIC, and put into practice by local committees. For example, the 1939 agreement between the Hinckley Union and the local Manufacturers' Association read as follows:

*The substitution of female for male labour (if such becomes necessary) only to be made through the committee. In all such cases of substitution, the same to be for the duration of the war only.*²

After the war, women were to be found performing knitting operations on some of the smaller machines, but the continuation after the war of a three-shift system meant that they were effectively debarred from operating machines in certain sectors, such as fully fashioned.³ Growing numbers of women, however, were needed for finishing operations⁴ and shortage of female labour characterised the industry from 1945 to 1960.

1 *These matters are explored in detail in Chapters 4 and 10.*

2 *Text from Hinckley Union Minute Books in Leicester Records Office.*

3 *The roles of the shift system and of other factors which helped dissuade the employers from their female substitution policies are fully discussed in Chapter 4.*

4 *"Seventy different people have some small part to play in making one pair of Montfort Half Hose"*

(Newby, Groves and Makin, 1938)

The national upheavals of this period affected conditions in the industry, and this was a time of greater fluctuations than the preceding period. One notable change, however, was that, after the formation of the NJIC in 1918, pay and conditions in the industry became much more inextricably linked with the success of union organisation. These two facets will thus be considered together in the next few pages.

Despite the disruptions and shortages caused by the First World War, on balance the experience was a positive one for the hosiery operatives. The war boosted production as Government contracts multiplied. Strengthened by the demand for their labour, the unions succeeded in obtaining a Cost of Living (COL) bonus for their members. The first bonus agreements were made by individual local unions with their employers, Hinckley and Leicester being the first to gain them in 1915 (Gurnham, 1976, p 76). Subsequently the unions worked jointly as a federation to negotiate further bonuses on the basis of the Munitions of War legislation of 1915. Three bonus awards were obtained through arbitration, and a fourth was added in December 1918, soon after the formation of the NJIC. This body was also used by the unions to secure overtime pay agreements and a 48-hour week, although attempts to establish a holiday-with-pay scheme failed.

The war was thus a beneficial time for union organisation, and there were dramatic rises in membership, especially among women, as Fig. 3.2 shows. In 1914 the membership of the five unions was 5,917, with Nottingham crumbling to only 505. By 1919 the figure was 21,444. Nottingham had increased membership nearly tenfold, though LAHU remained the largest union.

The increases in membership can be explained partly by the improved bargaining position of the unions, partly by the growing respectability of

Figure 3.2

Membership of local unions, 1914 to 1939

	<u>Leicester</u>	<u>Loughborough</u>	<u>Hinckley</u>	<u>Ilkeston</u>	<u>Nottingham</u>	<u>Total</u>
1914	3,400	160	950	902	505	5,917
1915	3,418	174	1,050	1,402	592	6,636
1916	4,239	180	1,400	2,012	1,025	8,856
1917	4,000	270	1,410	2,110	1,025	8,815
1918	5,800	1,010	2,020	5,500	3,465	17,795
1919	6,800	1,304	2,200	6,040	5,100	21,444
1921	12,000	1,500	3,100	7,600	7,400	31,600
1927	8,000	600	3,400	3,200	-	-
1933	7,000	500	3,400	3,000	2,000	15,900
1939	8,000	400	6,000	4,000	2,000	20,400

Source: R. Gurnham, The Hosiery Unions 1776-1976, 1976, pp 74, 103

Figures are from the records of the General Federation of Trade Unions, and are only approximations. Comparison with figures in the LAHU minutes (unfortunately not offered on a regular basis) indicates that they are probably underestimates. They should be used only as a guide to *relative* changes over the period.

unionism, as unions became directly involved in negotiation with the Government in matters of national welfare.¹ Above all, the attraction of the COL bonus was crucial. As Jabez Chaplin, LAHU secretary, explained:

Many of our members were not trade unionists, but bonus members - our membership went up as the bonus rose, and fell as the bonus fell.

(LAHU B February 16th 1922)

The most important long-term effect of the war, however, was the stimulus given to collective bargaining procedures. Although the Government had taken the lead, the attitude of employers was becoming much more favourable to trade unionism. By 1929, Horace Moulden, Chaplin's successor, was able to say:

We have reached the stage where it is being more universally recognised that organised labour not only has the right to regulate for better conditions and wages, but also it has a legitimate claim to a voice in the making of the policy of industry.

(LAHU B July 2nd 1929)

In Nottingham, too, the Chamber of Commerce acknowledged the rights of organised labour and it was reported that "real co-operation" was being shown between the two sides (Walton, 1962, p 76). This attitudinal shift was best exemplified by the successful establishment of the NJIC in August 1918, on the lines of Whitley Council recommendations; this body has been continuously active from that time to the present day, even surviving the troubled period of the 1930s depression.²

In fact, the post-war slump was not felt as severely in the East Midlands as elsewhere.³ Nevertheless it provided considerable problems

1 *The increases reflect national patterns of increased membership during the war.*

2 *See Chapter 7 for a full account of the NJIC.*

3 *See Gurnham, 1976, p 100, for figures comparing unemployment in hosiery with that in other industries. It was consistently lower, though it peaked in 1931 at 18.8%.*

for the industry. From 1920 onwards trade fell away, with rising unemployment and cuts in the COL bonus, and the unions' financial resources were severely stretched. From 1923 to 1926 unemployment in hosiery averaged 8.4% a year (Walton, 1962, p 92). Most unions were forced to suspend their newly-established unemployment benefits. For example, LAHU did so in April 1921, with 4-500 members having been reported out of work the previous December (LAHU A April 20th 1921).

As a result, membership slumped dramatically in the first postwar years, and continued to fall through the interwar period (see Fig. 3.2), although employment in the industry actually continued to rise, from 90,000 in the early 20s to 120,000 in 1939. Only the Hinckley Union, helped by the development of the seamless rayon hose industry which was centred on the town, grew during the period, nearly doubling in size between 1921 and 1939 (Gurnham, 1976, pp 99, 103).

Employers responded to declining union strength by reverting to their old policies, such as female substitution and victimisation. "A number of manufacturers were dismissing people for very trivial things" it was noted by LAHU on April 20th 1921. Employers quickly found excuses for pruning down on surplus labour and it seemed that the old competitive climate would re-emerge. However, NJIC agreements served to keep wages reasonably stable for those who retained their jobs. Average wages (for both sexes) were 35/- in 1924 and 37/10 in 1935, sinking little below these levels in the intervening years (Gurnham, 1976, p 104). It was reported in the 1930s that male knitters were averaging 80/- for a 48-hour week, while their Japanese counterparts earned 11/7 for 78 hours' work (Walton, 1962, p 111). Wages of different groups still varied greatly, as figures given by Wells for Nottingham in 1934 show. Male knitters were earning

from £2 8s to £8, according to type of machine and product. Women on automatic seamless hose earned from £2 10s to £3, while women machinists earned £1 15s to £3 and menders £1 10s to £2. Rates in the villages and even in Leicester could be lower (Wells, 1935, p 236). Despite these variations, it is clear that unemployment or short working were greater problems than wage levels at this time.

The Second World War once again brought disruption to the industry.

As Towles of Loughborough recorded in their 50-year Souvenir:

Employees left the firm in their hundreds to go into munitions and war work, and the business was completely disorganised. The worst hit division of all was the finishing department. Young girls could not be employed, as they went either into the forces or the munitions factories.

(Towles, 1956)

The industry was among the first to be subjected to the policy of concentration, to free both labour and factory space for war production. In 1941 400 factories were either closed down or reallocated, and production was packed into the remaining buildings, where the evicted firms had to share space with the selected 'nucleus' firms (Gurnham, 1976, p 129). Even so, the labour shortage worsened and by 1942, as production of utility goods was running into problems, the Board of Trade scheduled the industry under the Essential Works Order (making it illegal for workers to leave the industry without official permission, but at the same time establishing a guaranteed minimum wage).

In all these arrangements there was close co-operation between unions and employers. Employers struggling to maintain production levels needed the unions' help, and once again the unions experienced an upsurge in their prestige and bargaining power. They took advantage of this to reopen the holiday-with-pay campaign in 1942. Meanwhile, with COL bonuses renegotiated,

wages were rising; Gurnham suggests this represented a rise in *real* earnings: the average male rate rose 35.1% between 1939 and 1944, the female rate 55.9%, and the juvenile rate a staggering 75%, as demand for young people to replace leavers grew (Gurnham, 1976, pp 135-6). Finally in 1945 the first minimum wage agreement in the industry was made with NJIC, after an appeal to the National Arbitration Tribunal (NAT).

This time round, the end of the war brought no erosion of the unions' improved position. First, their ability to maintain the gains they had made was strengthened by the amalgamation of the five NHF unions to form the National Union of Hosiery Workers (NUHW) in 1945. Previously this move had been strongly resisted by the Hinckley and Nottingham Unions, although Moulden of LAHU had always campaigned for it. The reluctant unions changed their minds during the war, in the face of twin threats: the expressed intention of the general unions to step up efforts to organise hosiery workers (especially women), and the expansion of the 'new' hosiery areas in the South and North, where labour was largely unorganised. Attempts to organise these new entrants before the war had led to two fierce and prolonged strikes, one at Elstree in 1936 and one at Bear Brand, Liverpool, in 1939. The latter, lasting nearly a year and ending in defeat, had cost the unions dearly. Obviously local unions were ill-equipped for such struggles; only a nationally-based union would have sufficient resources to tackle them.

The union's position was also favoured by the continuation of the labour shortage after the war. In 1946 a Working Party set up by the Board of Trade reported chronic shortages in all branches, especially among women. It was estimated that male labour would return to its pre-war level by March 1947, but female labour would not do so until December 1952. Over

50% of operatives had quit during the war, especially in Leicester and Nottingham, because of the "counter attractions offered by other forms of employment", especially, among women, the lure of non-manual jobs (Board of Trade, 1946, pp 94, 98).

A Leicester Corporation handbook of about the same date gives a fuller account of why female employment in the town had dropped by 42% while in light engineering female labour had expanded by 325%. Women had grown accustomed to the "highly-organised welfare systems of the munitions factories" and found life in the engineering works "more congenial" than hosiery work, which was "highly concentrated and involved considerable strain" (Leicester Corporation, undated, circa 1946, pp 35-6).

Various strategies were adopted in response. The Board of Trade report recommended the espousal of 'human relations' type policies, personnel and welfare services, joint committees, canteen facilities and so forth. Many companies, however, saw the need for more direct action. They built new factories in areas where there was an untapped pool of female labour, especially in mining or agricultural areas. Towles moved their factory from Loughborough to Coalville in 1946. Picks built factories in the Leicestershire villages of Huncote and Hugglescote. Others moved further afield: Corahs started several branches outside Leicestershire, Byfords started branches in Maltby, Yorkshire and Immingham, Lincolnshire, while Johnson and Barnes reported that their Barnsley factory attracted mainly miners' daughters, "a keen and willing source of labour".¹ Another option was to increase outwork operations. Picks described how in 1947 one

¹ *This information is taken from the factory histories and souvenirs issued by the firms concerned.*

of their ex-employees suggested "gathering Coalville girls to do hand-stitching"; the suggestion was taken up, and the woman acted as agent, distributing work to the girls' homes (Pick, 1956, p 37). Finally, the larger and more progressive firms such as Corahs initiated training schemes, aimed at procuring the right type of female labour. Linkers, for example, were desperately needed, and it was estimated that only 1 in 10 would return to her job after the war (Scott and Lynton, 1952; King, 1948).

The labour shortages benefited the workpeople, especially as industrial reconstruction and consumer expansion got under way. The Leicester Corporation handbook referred to above recorded the comments of a Daily Mail reporter in 1946: Leicester was "probably the most consistently lucky town in Europe"; during the preceding month, there had not been one woman on the unemployment register, and only 200 men out of a population of 263,000. In the past month, 250,000 people had visited the 30 cinemas, 4 theatres and 20 dancehalls in the city and spent £16,000 on the tote at the greyhound stadium:

You walk through Leicester and sense the spirit of a town that is quietly doing well. Shops and markets are crowded with neatly-dressed people; queues wait to put their money in the Post Office and the banks are busy.

(Leicester Corporation, undated, pp 33, 37)

The boom and demand for labour continued through the 40s and 50s. Between 1946 and 1951 average wages in hosiery rose 50%, to £8 17s 8d for men, £4 13s 6d for women (Gurnham, 1976, p 158).¹ By 1955 they had reached £12 6s 3d for men, £5 18s 11d for women (Wells, 1972, p 214).

1 *Respectively 10th and 13th in the wages 'league table'.*

Temporarily, at least, competition in the industry had been brought under control, and workers and employers prospered alike.

The story of organisation through this period, then, is one of consolidation and stabilisation; despite the setbacks of the interwar period the unions, apart from the Nottingham Union which came to the brink of collapse, kept themselves afloat. The co-operative links manufactured by the NHF and strengthened by the formation of the NJIC in the First World War helped to secure their stability. The 1945 amalgamation established permanent and modern union organisation in the industry; in the next six years union membership nearly doubled, rising from 22,430 to 40,539 (Gurnham, 1976, p 161). Similarly, the existence of the NJIC at least served to keep employers liaising, even where local manufacturers' organisations were not vigorous.

The establishment of the NJIC as a permanent negotiating body marked a substantial improvement in industrial relations in the industry, especially after 1946. Already by 1937 the President of the Nottingham Chamber of Commerce was saying

In the East Midlands, employers and employed had a far better working relationship than in practically any other part of the country.

(Walton, 1962, p 90)

The progress of this co-operative mood is nicely symbolised in an account given of the changing position of the leading union activist in a large Leicester company:

At the start of the war, she led an increasingly militant struggle between workers and management, with hardly a week in which she was not directly involved in some conflict. Three years later she was also a training instructress and had been elected to one of the highest positions in the national trade union. As she herself put it, 'Some union people don't seem to realise that there is an alternative to continued conflict between management and workers in industry,

that one can look at problems without thinking of two sides all the time'.

(Scott and Lynton, 1952, p 143)

In those three years, after an initially aggressive confrontation with the employers over the first National Agreement and the promise of what would have been the first national strike for over a century, the union, under pressure from the NAT, had settled into an accommodative relationship within the NJIC; in the 1950s it was often held up as a model of industrial harmony, good sense and 'responsible unionism'. When the secretary of the NUHKW's Leicester District wrote to an employer in 1967

I should tell you that my union is a non-militant organisation, and we have written into our agreement for the Hosiery and Knitwear trade an understanding to refer any differences that we may have to arbitration.

(NUHKW NEC Minutes, October 20th 1967)

this was not merely window-dressing. Things had come a long way since 1845.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to present a reasonably full account of 'the facts' concerning technological and organisational change in the industry, the resulting conditions faced by the workpeople, and the accompanying changes in union and employer organisation. As far as possible, I have attempted to document these changes through using the accounts of those involved as well as by use of statistical and other information provided by secondary commentators. This reflects a belief that 'facts' are not unproblematic: witness, for example, the debates over such issues as pay levels and the profitability of frame rents, the disagreements, to be discussed in later chapters, about skill levels and the extent of female

employment.¹ Although inevitably the 'facts' I have presented here have been selected, I hope to have provided the reader with sufficient material to allow him or her to begin to formulate a personal interpretation of the events recorded. This has been particularly necessary in this chapter (although the other chapters will likewise draw heavily on participants' accounts) since the succeeding chapters represent, in effect, a series of interpretative glosses on some of the key aspects of the social developments which have been outlined in this chapter.

1 See discussion in Chapters 4 and 10.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Let us support our trade and keep out others that would it invade."

*Banner at Derby strikers' demonstration
(Pioneer, February 22nd 1834)*

*"Six Minutes only late each day
Throws three whole days a year away!"*

*Notice on door of Pasolds Hosiery Factory
(Pasold, 1977, p 15)*

"To secure complete organisation of all workpeople in the hosiery industry, to regulate the relationships between employee and employer in respect of rates and conditions of employment ..."

Objectives of NUHW, Rulebook 1946

CHAPTER FOUR

DEGRADATION AND RESEGMENTATION IN THE HOSIERY LABOUR PROCESSIntroduction

According to Marx, the labour process, as we have seen, has four discrete elements: the task, instruments of labour, raw materials and preconception. Under the domestic system of production in hosiery the merchant hosiers had legal or formal control over elements two and three, but minimal control over the task, and thus essentially over the preconception of the task (planning). This obviously impeded their attempts to plan production adequately. Since raw materials and instruments of labour had to be handed over to the knitters, their *actual* possession and control, in their own home environments, of these items, posed limitations to the *legal* possession and control of them by the hosiers. The structure of control relationships under the domestic system was, therefore, deeply flawed; there was no correspondence between legal and real control. The scene was set, then, for a struggle between the two sides, as hosiers attempted to tighten up these loopholes, and knitters sought to gain advantage from their strategic position of possession.

The story of the industry's development is one of tightening control by employers, both formal and real, although, as has been argued in Chapter 1, real control can never be complete. In this chapter I shall trace the development of those types of control strategies I have characterised as the core of the 'degradation' process: fragmentation, automation and pre-conceptualisation. The variety of other contingent control strategies practised by the manufacturers will be considered in the subsequent chapters.

As Marglin has argued, formal control is only really secured when production moves into the factory (Marglin, 1974). This was certainly the case here, but even before the move into the factory, processes of degradation had been instituted. As these tended to involve the substitution of female for male labour, resistance to them was marked, and eventually resulted in processes of resegmentation. Although I am arguing that it is useful to look at the hosiery labour process in terms of degradation, it must be noted that the timing and order of these events is different from that described by Braverman, Clawson and others. There was no crucial period of Taylorisation in the 1880s; an attempt to introduce the Bedaux system in the 1930s met with limited success, and other rationalisation schemes were introduced in a piecemeal way between 1930 and 1960. In sum, processes of degradation were implemented slowly. They coincided, crucially, with the switch to factory production, and thus occurred simultaneously with a deepening of 'direct control'. In part, this illustrates the point made in Chapter 1, that degradation must be viewed as a long-term dynamic, and that we cannot use the concept to construct an invariable historical typology of control strategies. In part, it points to the existence of a process of dualisation, which has been noted, for example, by Edwards (1979), but the significance of which has, I suggest, been underplayed: in the hosiery case, this dualisation involved the handling of different types of labour, male and female, in different ways. This is one of the ways in which gender issues are deeply implicated in the analysis of labour process development.

Section 1 The Domestic System

When the Framework Knitters' Company lost its tenuous hold over the industry in the eighteenth century, hosiery production became, as it were, 'up for grabs'. The actions of the merchant hosiers rapidly forced out the smaller artisan-producers and debased the apprenticeship system, but in gaining a virtual monopoly over the instruments of labour they laid the basis for an institutionalised struggle for control.

The weakness of the system was that stocking frames and yarn were taken into the privacy of the operatives' homes. Hosiers expressed the problem bluntly. "As long as the frames are lent out we have no control over the workmen" said one, while another spoke of having no control

Either as to time or whether the produce is brought to me or sent to another, the workmen being totally wide of our influence in those matters.

(PP 1854-5 xiv qq 1807, 4128)

In 1845 Joseph Biggs complained about the impossibility of controlling the supplies of yarn, and, thence, the output of goods:

Workmen have such ingenious ways of tormenting you into a larger supply of yarn. There is scarcely a hand that does not retain more in his hands than he really wants. He alleges that work remains behind; that it is in some process of finishing, or that there is some reason or other why he cannot bring it.

(PP 1845 xv I q 899)

There were complaints that knitters would leave a master's service without notice, that they would only perform certain types of work. John Rogers, a hosier whose evidence in 1845 constituted a particularly virulent attack on the operatives, grumbled that, although it was "vain" for a knitter to refuse to produce anything but white cotton goods, "that runs through all their maxims": he elaborated

They are so perfectly independent of you that you have no control over them ... when they have got your work they can do just as they like with it ... They work at home, and work when they like, and do what they like, and come in when they like.

(PP 1845 xv II q 1123)

Habits, he claimed, were learned young, and teenagers soon began to appreciate the pleasure of being one's own master.

Above all, it was the irregularity of working hours that irritated the hosiers. Patterns of work activity among the stockings were those described by E.P. Thompson in his work on pre-industrial labour rhythms, "alternate bouts of intense labour and of idleness" (Thompson, 1967, p 73). The knitters kept not only 'St. Monday', but also St. Tuesday and bits of St. Wednesday and St. Saturday as well, so the hosiers claimed. Another habit was to spend a week in 'play' or drinking, and then to "work till they almost kill themselves for a week". Similarly, it was reported, they "will work all night sometimes and play all the day" (PP 1845 xv I qq 289, 3731). Holidays, wakes and local races produced slack periods in both preceding and succeeding weeks. The knitters would also break off work whenever they felt like it, at dinnertime perhaps, or if anything exciting happened in the neighbourhood. Hosier James Allen complained that they

Will not work if there is anything going on; they will be off to cricket or to a footrace or anything rather than work.

and Thomas Payne of Hinckley confirmed

If hounds come through the village or anything of that sort occurs, he can run after them.

(PP 1854-5 xiv qq 5844, 7057)

Finally, it was still common, especially in the villages, to retain the eighteenth-century practice of taking off time during harvest, or for other agricultural chores. As John Rogers commented, "they are stockings



today, and labourers tomorrow, and something else another day" (PP 1845 xv II q 1130).

There was disagreement as to how widespread these patterns of behaviour were, and also as to their cause. Knitter Edward Sansome claimed to the Factory Commission in 1833 that Monday and Saturday holidays were kept by necessity not choice, as in slack times hosiers deliberately created delays in giving out yarn and taking in the finished goods. Another union leader, Thomas Winters, reiterated the point in 1854; the habit had originated in the lack of work available on Mondays and had then become institutionalised (PP 1833 xx C2 p 10, PP 1854-5 xiv q 4851). However John Biggs' response to Sansome's claim, that the habit was voluntary and was "an old custom" in the trade, must carry more weight, in view of the extensive evidence provided by Thompson and others of the nationwide prevalence of the St. Monday habit (PP 1833 xx C2 p 11).¹ One hosier claimed that only half his hands appeared on Mondays, and many others spoke of there being two classes of hands, the "steady and industrious" and the "idle and dissolute".²

Framework knitters themselves admitted to the habit (PP 1845 xv I q 1567 II q 4015). An interesting comment, however, came from Edward Nicholson, a witness called by hosier Thomas Corah to represent the "respectable" hands. He believed that the reports of irregularity were much exaggerated:

1 See Thompson, 1967; Pollard, 1965; Brown, 1977. Interestingly, Joseph Biggs reported exactly the same behaviour among Saxon knitters in Chemnitz; "I think it is the case with the handloom weaving always; there is an impatience of regular labour" (PP 1845 xv I q 949).

2 See, for example, PP 1845 xv I q 2884, II qq 1649, 1656.

The framework knitters have got the reputation of playing on Mondays and Tuesdays, but that is a great mistake, it is only what people like to say of them ... they are as industrious a class of men as there is in the country ... but they have got a bad name.

The knitters themselves, he added, had helped to foster this distorted view (PP 1854-5 xiv qq 8788-91).

An interesting aspect of the dispute is the easy equation made by the hosiers and others (clerical gentlemen well to the fore) between irregular working hours and "idle or dissolute" behaviour, such as drinking. Irregular hours obviously presented the hosiers with a production problem, but their objections were frequently couched in terms which moved the debate to a moral plane: at stake, it seems, was not just a local difficulty of work organisation, but a global issue, the attempt by one social stratum to impose a new set of norms and values, a new moral order, on another.¹ What is strange is how little explicit moral defence of the old customs came from the stockingers. Edward Nicholson was an exception when he explained

Framework knitting is a caged thing ... A man is not an idle man because he looks out of doors a little.

(PP 1854-5 xiv q 8793)²

Yet it is clear that irregular working was the very kernel of the spirit of independence which was so vital a component of the knitters' culture:

We work, however, when we please; each man has full liberty to earn what he likes, and how he likes, and when he likes; we have no factory-bell; it is our only blessing

1 See Thompson, 1967; Bauman, 1982.

2 The same point was echoed by a local historian writing much later about the life of knitter poet, Robert Millhouse, who refused not only to work but even to read on Mondays: "These idle Mondays spent in sauntering were in fact a physical necessity to a man confined for so many hours daily in a cramped position" (Millhouse, 1881, p xi).

said Edward Sansome, confirming the ironic verdict of hosiery manager J.W. Hancock:

Their notions of liberty and equality have nothing in common with regular hours of work, and the freedom to quit their trade or to obey the bell.

(PP 1833 xxx C2 p 10, PP 1845 xv II q 4831)

As was indicated in Chapter 3, this tradition of independence was a major impediment to early attempts at imposing factory discipline. At the Jarvis Brothers' factory

They would laugh at us, and say they did not like being obliged to work and being shut up so that they could not see anything that occurred in the course of the day; they preferred working at a less price at home ... They preferred their liberty.

(PP 1845 xv I q 3736)

The organisation of the domestic system, then, made it difficult for the employers to control quantity and quality of output. However, despite their complaints, most of the time the boot was on the other foot. While irregular working was a nuisance when demand was high, in the more frequent periods of slump, it was not much of a problem for the hosiers, who always tended to overstocking; while, on the other hand, the fragmentation of the workforce implied in the system meant that the hosier could negotiate (or tried to do so) a separate contract with each household. Indeed, the 'right' to do this was a matter of strong commitment on their part; hosiers in 1812 opposed the principle of 'statements' (publicly agreed price lists) on these grounds. One considered it "a violation of the right which every man possesses of preserving the secrecy of his contracts in business" and another declared that hosiers were "entitled to make a private agreement with our workmen". John Nixon, a hosier particularly opposed to trade unions, even announced that if statements

were made legally binding it would be tantamount to putting him

Completely into the power of my workmen, to put a penalty upon me every day of my life.

(PP 1812 II pp 68, 87, 93)

The knitters' vulnerability to the lowering of prices and loss of employment was, therefore, extreme.¹ The only way to protect themselves was by developing collectively-based forms of resistance. These characteristically had three objectives, the control of entry and apprenticeship, the monopolisation of skill and the collective enforcement of trade rules and practices, the former strategies being deeply rooted in the remembered guild organisation of the past, the latter looking forward to the modern activities of trade unions.

An apprenticeship system continued in the industry, but it was essentially ineffective in controlling entry.² Figures given by Nichols of hosiery employment in Hinckley show the effect of a boom period (the 1780s). In 1778 there were 864 frames, with 194 apprentices and 137 knitters' sons and daughters operating in the trade. By 1791 there were 1,023 frames, 251 apprentices and 160 knitters' children (Nichols, 1811, p 679). At such times masters were motivated to take on recruits in greater numbers than the trade could eventually support, and apparently there was no lack of people wishing to be taken on. Knitter Thomas Large reported in 1812 that young men such as gentlemen's servants would pay five to ten guineas to gain quick access to the less skilled types of work,

1 *This is, of course, one reason why the masters opposed men owning and working their own machines.*

2 *Originally the trade had had its own tradition of apprenticeship rituals, like those in other trades. Bailey describes the practice of 'mainspring ringing' on expiry of apprenticeship, although it had fallen into extinction by the 1850s (Bailey, 1853, p 56).*

being then able to invest their savings in purchase of frames (PP 1812 II p 19). Later in the century it was considerably cheaper to be 'put on', costing about £1 as opposed to apprenticeship fees of £5-20 in other trades (PP 1845 xv II q 1837).

There were some attempts early in the century to control the system, notably the prosecution in 1807 of a hosier, Payne, under the old Company apprenticeship regulations. The knitters were led in this by Gravenor Henson, who also tried to revive the Company at this time. Journeymen were charged £1 13s 6d for admission (Thompson, 1968, p 582). Henson had a strong nostalgic leaning towards Guild organisation. He saw the existence of trade companies as guaranteeing "the two inestimable blessings, moderate wages and regular employment", while also acting as watchdogs against fraud and moderators of competition (Henson, 1831, pp 232-3). He was swimming against the growing tide of laissez-faire, however, and this campaign failed dismally, as had an attempt in the 1790s to check the use of non-indentured labour by offering rewards to informers (Patterson, 1954, p 512). By 1812 it was estimated that 2/3 of those currently working in the trade were 'colts' (improperly trained entrants), or had themselves been trained by colts. It was claimed that such workmen were incompetent to do good quality work, and passed on imperfect skills to others (PP 1812 II p 33). With the growth of 'cut-ups' the lower skill levels of these people did not, however, prevent them getting jobs.

The knitters regretted their inability to protect themselves by restricting entry, although their habit of employing their own children was a large part of the problem. Benjamin Humphries, secretary of the Nottingham Glove Branch, spoke of their failure to emulate other trades in regulating apprenticeship, and Samuel Winters believed

Provided we were constituted as a trade with proper regulations and enactments that we could protect ourselves and get the price for our labour.

(PP 1845 xv II qq 362, 1394)

This failure would have been less significant if it had been clear that they had specific scarce skills to protect. But the extent of those skills was debatable. While knitters claimed it to be a "genius" and one hosier noted "there is a great deal of art in qualifying a man to work" (PP 1818 v p 33), many hosiers believed that skill was negligible and easily-acquired. Thomas Corah claimed that "anyone" could work a narrow frame, and that children could make stockings effectively after three or four weeks, while John Rogers believed a child of ten could knit as well as a man (PP 1854-5 xiv qq 3119-21, PP 1845 xv II q 1131). More considered judgement was that teenagers could learn to knit in 3 to 6 months, on which basis Chapman has declared that the work should be classed as semi-skilled (Chapman, Introduction to Henson, 1970 edition p xix). However, Henson, among others, maintained that it took at least two years to learn the job properly (PP 1812 II pp 37-9). "A man cannot be considered to have learned his trade sufficiently until he is 22 or 23," said Samuel Parr of the fancy silk branch (PP 1845 xv II q 1526).

These disagreements stem from a distinction, not always clearly grasped, between being a competent operator and being a 'good' workman, a distinction reflected in the great differences in earnings and output between the workpeople. To do good, not just adequate, work, strength was needed, plus a good eye, careful attention to work, and, above all, experience. Felkin noted that the "art" was not difficult to acquire, but "the best fashioned work and all fancy work require a quick sight, a ready hand and retentive faculties" (PP 1845 xv II p 3). Glove branch witnesses pointed out that the strain on the eyes was such that men over

40 could not continue in this type of delicate work. Speed, too, was crucial. Felkin maintained that whereas Saxon hands only averaged 12-24 courses a minute, English hands averaged 24-42 (PP 1845 xv II p 3).

Henson supported this view, and his discussion of the superiority of British workmen points to another aspect of the knitters' craft, which was, in fact, the crucial element: the ability to maintain the frame which, he claimed, Saxon operatives lacked (PP 1812 II p 44).

Only skilled workmen were fully competent in this respect; they knew how to keep a frame in good order, repair it, make alterations demanded by specific tasks and ensure its output was top quality. Each machine when new was different, and might require as much as a week to get into good working order. "It is rough, and does not work correctly in every point," said one knitter, explaining that it must be adjusted to avoid the production of flawed goods (PP 1854-5 xiv q 9742). Once set up, it needed cleaning and servicing. One hosier commented

There be some little things that the men have put into them, that I cannot describe, to prevent cutting; they make the work a little safer and sounder by the machine.

(PP 1845 xv II q 1110)

J.T. Gent, in his fictional work on the hosiery trade, described the familiarity of each workman with his own frame, his ability to repair and alter it: "he is clever at expedients, and schemes many contrivances to assist in his work" (Gent, 1893, p 5). At the highest level, this led to the invention by the knitters of new techniques, processes and garments, which, claims Chapman, continually emanated from a "coterie of framesmiths and knitters" in intimate daily contact with each other (Chapman, 1967, p 187).

It was, then, the mechanic's skills, as opposed to the operative's, which really distinguished the accomplished knitter from the rest: women, young people and colts did not have these skills. Where women, for example, were employed in workshops, an overseer would be employed to keep their frames in trim. It was reported, too, that women, young people and old people caused more wear and tear to the frames than skilled men: Felkin described how one village knitter avoided this. In 50 years' work on a second-hand frame, this man had only paid £3 for repairs to it

Which he attributes to keeping it clean, working it steadily and not by fits and starts, finding repairs, and not being forced by the pressure of poverty to work it too rapidly.

(PP 1841 (I) vii p 232)

Such a competent mechanic, it might seem, would have something to bargain with, especially where these skills were combined with a steady character: "a good workman is a very good thing to an employer" admitted one hosier (PP 1845 xv II q 1656). That this was not the case indicates that, as will shortly be argued, a gradual degrading of tasks was already in progress. As Henson said, it only took a youth a few weeks to learn to make 'pieces' or cut-ups (PP 1812 II p 39). The skills that the best knitters undoubtedly possessed were, unfortunately for them, becoming obsolete and unwanted.

Their vulnerability in these areas meant that the most successful campaigns waged by the stockings were those centred on the third possible basis of control, collective organisation. This largely revolved around the attempt to get agreed 'statements' and to ensure that nobody worked for less. Statements were drawn up, for example, in 1817, 1819 and 1825, and in each case met with initial success, but the logic of capitalist competition soon acted to undermine them. The smaller hosiers had to push

down wages to stay in business, and the knitters' organisation was not solid enough, especially outside the towns, to ensure that men desperate for employment would not accept lowered rates. Belgrave knitter William Appleton described vividly what happened:

Other men who have been determined not to endure the suffering, have gone in a sneakish manner across the fields to Leicester, with a bag over their shoulder to fetch out a bit of work, and do it at an under price ... and kept it a profound secret. People have heard them at work in their shops and said 'So and So is at work, I believe they are working under price'.

(PP 1845 xv I q 3090)

The tight community control at play here might deter some, but the push of poverty was too great for others to resist.

This attempt to participate in controlling the industry was done in a weaker spirit than that described by Price in his account of control struggles in the building trade.¹ In the main, the knitters appear to have had little aspiration to establish a system of *unilateral* control, along the lines of guild regulation, as did the building operatives. From the 1820s on, their ambition seems to have been limited to developing a system of *joint* regulation, achieved through regular meetings and negotiations with masters.² John Columbello of Derby, for example, described how local knitters and hosiers were co-operating in seeking ways of regulating the trade and moderating competition (PP 1812 II p 34).

1 See Price, 1980, Chapter 2. A local contrast is provided by the allied trade of bleaching. In 1822 Basford bleachers proposed not just a statement, but rules regulating hours, overtime, holidays, unemployment pay and apprentices. Thomis comments that this represented the most ambitious programme advocated by a local group, since it demanded the right to regulate the employer in ways others had not dreamed of (Thomis, 1969, pp 57-8).

2 This spirit is exemplified by Henson, who switched (perhaps reluctantly) from advocating restoration of the Company to supporting arbitration bodies on the lines of Durkheimian 'corporations'.

Similarly, the 1819 Leicester petition against cut-ups was a joint venture, and the objective of the operatives, according to their leader William Jackson, was "the peace and harmony of all classes of society" (PP 1819 v p 41). In 1833, Edward Sansome of the Sock Branch reported that, after initial conflicts,

By means of our organisation we stop the spirit of competition of capitalists in our branch, and are thought none the worse of by our employers for doing so.

(PP 1833 xx C2 p 9)

However, the hostility generated by competition could at times push the workpeople into a tougher line, closer to the spirit of unilateral control. Thomas Winters, glove branch secretary in 1845, told the Royal Commission that the branch was seeking to maintain a statement, *not* one jointly negotiated, but one established by the workmen (PP 1845 xv I qq 97-8). This kind of defensive aggression reached its peak in the General Union period of the 1830s. Felkin gives this analysis of the famous Derby lock-out:

Both sides stated unhesitatingly in the first instance that it was a question to what extent the master should dictate, and the men submit to him, with regard to trade regulations; the men considered that they had a right to expect that some measure of consultation should be had with them in the general arrangements of the place, and the arrangements with regard to their position.

(PP 1856 xiii q 1095)

The masters' defence of their own perceived right to 'dictate' was vehement. James Rawson of Leicester, for example, writing to the Home Secretary in 1817 deplored the current 'statement' as an unwarrantable attempt at regulation by the operatives: "There was a rule presented by which every article was to be regulated and no workman was to make any goods but what was specified in this statement". This he interpreted as "making the hands completely masters of their employers" (Aspinall, 1949,

pp 241-2). When the hosiers repudiated the statement on these grounds, the warehouses were besieged by furious operatives. Such clashes were instrumental in prolonging the hostile struggle between the two sides.

When all else failed, the knitters had a final way to assert some degree of self-control, through individual acts of deceit or 'embezzlement'. Hosiers reported the range of available ruses. People might take yarn from one firm, work it up, and sell it to another firm offering better prices (PP 1845 xv II q 467). Yarn might simply be stolen, although this was dangerous unless done anonymously: "I have things constantly stolen out of my warehouse if my young men turn their backs" said hosier John Nixon (PP 1812 II p 92). More commonly, yarn was acquired as part of the 'wastage' involved in production. Goods might be handed in damp to the hosiers, appearing heavier than they really were, although knitters claimed this was only fair as yarn was often delivered to them damp.¹ Yarn might be adulterated with substances like fat, wax, soap or oil, which were anyway used to make it workable. Pickering describes the practice known as 'scotchmisting':

It was said that passing by a framework knitter's cottage, the familiar sound of 'sheet-y-boom-boom' of the frame was often accompanied by the sound of water being sprayed by the mouth over the finished goods, followed by a slatting on a chair back ... The surpluses of yarn procured by this simple if questionable device were known as 'pups'.

(Pickering, 1940, pp 41, 67)

Another ruse was to make up stockings on fewer needles and then stretch them.

Hosiers claimed that the resulting losses of yarn were substantial. Thomas Collins, for example, stated that over four years 3,400 lb. of his

¹ *Yarn was allocated, and stockings might be paid for, by weight.*

yarn had been embezzled; although he had brought several successful prosecutions, this had involved him in unnecessary time-loss and expense (PP 1845 xv I q 893). Another problem was that the existence of large amounts of 'Turkey stuff' or 'cabbage', as the illegal yarn was called, was another factor serving to depress prices. Bag hosiers in particular were said to rely heavily on purchases of embezzled yarn.¹

No doubt William Rogers was right when he asserted that the stockings were "trained up" to such fraudulent practices (PP 1845 xv II q 1142). But a poem reproduced in Sutton's 'Nottingham Datebook' demonstrates the pressures that pushed people into such illegality. Richard, the hero, kept waiting by his master Pennypoint, and with an empty larder at home, is told by "his haughtiness" that the stockings he has brought are "six nicks too slack" as well as being "dank as the devil" and marred by "splicing". Deduction or 'abatement' of 2/- for such faults, as Pennypoint demanded, was common practice. To fill the larder and appease Richard's wife

*There was but one way in the world to be taken:
A bundle of super by Madge was convey'd
To a jobbing retailer, well skill'd in the trade,
Who bought it; - but then what vexation appears
When old Pennypoint finds I've embezzled his wares!
To keep up my credit, and give him the bam,
We must e'en make it up with some remnants of sham;
'Tis but to repay, if you censure the trick,
Not a tenth of the injury done to poor Dick
And the maxim conjoins, upon equity's plan,
To return what is given, as far as we can:
Then where is the crime, on the nicest decision,
In bilking these coxcombs, these imps of derision?*

(Sutton, 1852 pp 93-4)

¹ See PP 1845 xv I qq 3195, 7178, PP 1854-5 xiv q 8009.

The domestic system, then, set parameters for such guerilla warfare between masters and workpeople. The hosiers' first resort was to use the law, both as individuals and collectively, against embezzlement and irregularities of output (see Chapter 3). But over the period they also attempted, more radically, to change the system of work organisation in order to tighten up control. There were two main strands to these efforts: the introduction of forms of direct control into the system, and the initiation of processes of task restructuring which would reduce dependency on those types of labour (i.e. skilled adult males) most likely to offer sustained resistance. It is interesting, in terms of the Braverman thesis, to see that these strategic options were being experimented with concurrently, although, as we shall see, it was not until the end of the period that the effective combination of the two brought a marked alteration of work organisation.

To try and regulate the quantity and quality of output, the hosiers saw the desirability of having some form of close supervision of work. This was done in two ways, although they notably overlapped. The first was to use middlemen as agents of control, and the second was to gather workpeople together under one roof. This, as indicated in Chapter 3, was done, with some success, through developing small workshops, or alternatively, with much less success, by adopting a factory-type system based on standardised hours.

As argued in the preceding chapter, the middleman system was essentially a form of subcontract, which the work of Littler and Clawson has shown to have been a very common substitute, in both Britain and America, for forms of direct control administered by the employer himself, or by foremen standing in for him; by shifting the focus of confrontation away

from the employer, the system is potentially less disruptive (Clawson, 1980; Littler, 1982). Thus, in hosiery, the large masters frequently disclaimed all knowledge of the practices and malpractices of the middlemen, and made it clear that they did not consider these their business. Such a system overcame the problem of co-ordinating the work of a very large number of workmen, with whom it was impossible to maintain face-to-face relationships.¹ In 1845 only Wards and Brettles, the two giant Belper firms, employed managers in the modern sense of departmental heads (Chambers, 1966, p 132). Others used middlemen to the same effect, as hosier T. Maccullum revealed in describing how in his factory he used a manager as

A kind of middleman ... He is responsible, just the same as a middleman ... he superintends the factory the same as he would do a large shop.

(PP 1854-5 xiv q 9993)

Hosiers sought out suitable workmen and promoted them for this job; as John Rogers explained, when they found "a steady man, and punctual" they increased the number of his frames, starting him on a middleman's career (PP 1845 xv II q 1126). Joseph Biggs declared that the middleman was selected as a

Man of character, whom we can trust with a larger amount of material. He is also a man of superior knowledge and skill and selected as such.

(PP 1845 xv I q 929)²

1 In 1854 Wards of Belper possessed 11,000 frames, the Biggs had in the past had 2-4,000 employees, though this was diminishing, Thomas Corah owned 2,000 frames and the Morleys 1,700 (PP 1854-5 xiv; Bythell, 1978, p 84).

2 Chambers, rightly I believe, sees the middleman system as a debased version of the master stockinger system (Chambers, 1966, p 126). However, witnesses in 1854 were firm in seeing a clear distinction between middlemen and a continuing class of master stockingers, employing 5 or 6 family members with perhaps a couple of journeymen (PP 1854-5 xiv qq 7812, 7827).

The system was open to much abuse. Clawson claims that in America the subcontract system was abolished because of the tendency of middlemen to milk too great a proportion of profits from it, to the detriment of both other parties (Clawson, 1980). In hosiery middlemen often paid lower prices to the men than the masters were paying and pocketed the remainder; William Elliott, for example, unashamedly admitted paying under list prices: "I make my own bargain" (PP 1845 xv I q 2868). They also tended to impose all sorts of extra charges and to demand 'abatements' for all sorts of minor impairments to the hose: dropped stitches, soiling, dampness, stockings being too small or too slack, and even for late delivery. The latter perhaps indicates that 'abatements' were in fact the equivalent to a disciplinary fine. Knitters told stories about the deliberate creation of reasons for such deductions; "They pull them and tousle them, till, in fact, I have had my work torn" said one, while another described how his master dropped ink accidentally on a pair of stockings and then "after a minute examination for ten minutes perhaps" found a tiny snare and made a deduction (PP 1845 xv I q 7736, PP 1812 II q 23). Most heartrending of all was the report by a local vicar of a desperately poor old man whose flawed stockings were "cut to pieces" before his eyes (PP 1860 xxii q 378).

Thus the system, while it may have eased the hosier's burden of quantity and quality control, served to increase hostility and ill-feeling. Less counterproductive was the workshop system which the operatives did not regard unfavourably, as long as they were allowed to come 'in their own time'. Hosier Henry Rawson believed that the shop system "makes a person's business more systematic and more easily managed". The master could keep an eye on the men's output, or employ a "curry-favour" to do so (PP 1845 xv I qq 306, 2938). According to William

Cummings, the resultant products were more uniform in quantity, more reliable in quality, and the system fostered a more efficient distribution of raw material (PP 1845 xv I qq 2380-1). However, the efficiency of the shop system was disputed. Some believed that workshops contributed to industrial unrest and were indeed "hotbeds of discontent" (PP 1845 xv II q 4831). Hosier Benjamin Elliott believed that if one man was disaffected it would spread to all the others, and many defenders of the domestic system felt that men were better motivated to do good work at home, identifying it with family interests: "When they are in a shop they care not one atom" (PP 1845 xv I q 2743, II 5377).

Although shops did help control the regularity of output, they did not solve the problem of irregular working hours. As described in Chapter 3, the attempts to impose regular hours through factory arrangements met at first with complete resistance from the operatives. This was apparently a sticking-point, and they were not to be budged. When the first successful factory experiments were reported, it is significant that they utilised the labour of women and young people, rather than adult males. Thomas Collins in 1845 spoke of employing mainly young women aged between 13 and 17 on his rotary machines. In this way he solved his control problems to his satisfaction, and clearly they had been considerable: he described his male outworkers as "so insolent and so saucy, no one knows how to deal with them; they have no gratitude about them". Formerly he had been unable to predict output whereas now "I can depend upon what goods I make. I know about what I shall have made every week". He felt less liable to being robbed of yarn, and the work produced was more uniform: "It is all done under my own eye and goes through my own hands" (PP 1845 xv I pp 76-8).

The use of female labour was encouraged by the fact that the machines used represented a new stage in task degradation. With such a machine, which made 3 to 6 stockings at once, a girl could produce 13 to 14 dozen a week, whereas a skilled man using a conventional frame could produce only 11 dozen. Collins claimed that a child of three would have sufficient strength to operate one:

You have nothing to do but to turn the treadle by the hand, and any boy or girl can turn these frames, if there is any-one to look after them to see that they work.

(VCH, 1955, p 15)

The advent of the factory system, then, should be seen as involving *both* a more successful application of direct control, *and* a further stage in task degradation, which had, in fact been under way for some time. The use of untrained labour, 'colts' and women, was in itself a form of degradation, involving both fragmentation of task and preconceptualisation, as these people were not capable of carrying out maintenance tasks, and would have to rely on a middleman or overlooker who monopolised the mechanic's functions within the knitting task. Colts and women, then, could never attain the same degree of autonomy and 'independence' as the skilled males, although within the domestic system husbands and parents supplied the requisite expertise and knowledge, thus retaining total control of the knitting task *within the family unit*. However, in general, the deliberate employment of such labour reduced the status of the work and weakened the bargaining power of the skilled operatives. This was recognised explicitly by hosier Nathan Hurst:

So many women and children work in these frames that it has a tendency to keep the price low. If it was a trade in which men only could work, and which required some apprenticeship and peculiar skill, like a carpenter or a joiner and so on, the price would be kept up better.

(PP 1845 xv II q 1082)

The introduction of cut-ups was also a move towards degradation. The task was simpler and more fragmented (cut-up stockings were often made in separate pieces on 2 or 3 separate machines). Although they were fiercely opposed, it is curious that the operatives failed to appreciate the real significance of this innovation: cut-ups were lower-quality goods, produced in greater bulk, by less skilled operatives. They represented intensification of output, degradation of the labour process, and the first move towards the techniques of mass production. Yet they were opposed not so much on those grounds, but because they were seen as 'spurious' or 'false'. "These stockings are complete rubbish; it is a mere deception on the public," Sansome told the 1833 commissioners (PP 1833 xx p 10). One knitter described them as "a disgrace to the makers, and a disgrace to the seller and ... upon the British Government", while another dismissed them as "not fit for hook rags" (PP 1845 xv I qq 6965, 7545). These attitudes clearly hark back to the early Company control of 'spurious' goods and production¹, and show how nostalgic were the ideals of the knitters, rooted in the values of a vanished (if ever really existent) producers' Utopia.

The key role of cut-ups was to undermine the necessity for technical expertise involved in the production of high-quality goods on the narrow-gauge frames. Manufacturers speaking in 1812 admitted their own lack of competence in these matters. John Parker confessed his inability to set up a frame, and explained that, as each machine was different, "I do not know the number of needles my workmen put in" (PP 1812 ii p 69). Thomas Nelson made even more explicit the element of discretion left to expert workmen:

1 See Chapter 3.

I am frequently obliged to leave it to the workmen how to make the thing I want, and cannot describe it to him perfectly.

(PP 1812 ii p 88)

Such comments confirm Braverman's view that lack of knowledge of production methods made masters dependent on their operatives' expertise. Cut-ups would put an end to all this. 'Alterations' and 'contrivances' were unnecessary for work on the 'spider' frames.

The machines in the factories extended the cut-up principle¹ and took degradation on a further step. By 1854 Collins was running his factory by steam, and was still employing "active girls and women" (PP 1854-5 xiv q 1410). John Biggs claimed that "one strong boy or girl" could do as much work on his rotary frames as six men on the old frames (Biggs, LRO). Thomas Corah was also using "young hands", including girls, in his factory. Two or three together tended each machine. He claimed that no "physical force" was required to operate them, and the operatives had merely to ensure that "the thing is going on rightly". He was also planning to get one of the new sewing machines, in order to get the seaming tasks done "wholesale". If his hands failed to keep regular hours they were fined (PP 1854-5 xiv pp 189, 201-2). The successful implementation of the factory system, then, involved not just tightened direct control, but was founded on a degraded version of the original knitting task.

The move to the factory, especially where it is linked with both increased direct control and task degradation, is integrally linked with the process of intensification, that is the compelling or inducing of workers to produce greater output for unchanged pay, thus readjusting the effort/reward bargain in favour of capital. Prior to the development of

1 See Chapter 3.

the factory system, the organisation of hosiery production had meant that the employers had only been able to achieve intensification by crude and explicit means: either by lowering piece rates, which usually promoted conflict and strikes, or by a disguised version of this, involving the fiddling of rates and tasks. Workers might be asked to do little 'extras', such as 'doubling' of feet or insertion of gussets, for no extra pay; they might be asked to make, say, 36 gauge work on 38 gauge frames, or hose described as 22 inch which actually measured 24 inches, practices known as 'working up the hill' or adding 'bump weight' (PP 1845 xv II qq 858, 1874). As one knitter succinctly explained, "We have been dropped, in an indirect way, many times, through changing the size and calling them by different names". This attempt to bamboozle the operatives by using "all the letters in the alphabet till we do not know what it is ... they have only named them in those ways to get the money" caused violent resentment, especially in Nottinghamshire (PP 1845 xv I q 6226, II q 4404). It was considered to be 'fraudulent' or dishonest behaviour, going against notions of fairness and justice. Acts such as these were particularly likely to inflame the feelings of the operatives, and resulted in bitter industrial and political struggles. The hostility and struggles which marked this period are dealt with in Chapter 8. In the meantime, it should be borne in mind that such conflicts inevitably slowed down the pace of development (and of degradation) in the industry, ensuring that each new move was seen as a threat and contested.

To summarise, the organisation of hosiery production in the domestic system was marked by structural weaknesses, and hosiers were unable to take a sufficiently firm hold of the system to ensure that it was carried on efficiently and profitably. The long struggle for control that ensued involved experiments with two types of control strategy by the hosiers, the implementation of direct control, largely through subcontract, and the

degradation of the productive task. The fact that the struggle was carried out on so many fronts may have inhibited the transformation of the labour process, as indeed did the very fact of those struggles, although we must remember that the alternative base for profit in the system (frame-rents) both increased the problem of competition in the industry and acted to retard change. When transformation of the labour process did finally occur, it was through the fusion of the two strategic impulses, heightened direct control and task degradation, as work was reorganised on a factory basis with new machinery. But the logic of the domestic system, by now deeply embedded and reflected in the values and ideas of both sides, was still working itself out, to such an extent that it was another forty years before the factory system completely superseded the domestic system. The story of that period and of the succeeding era, however, is of the logic of the new system, in its turn, working itself out and imposing itself on the lives of the participants.

Section 2 The transitional period

The factory system brought solutions to many of the problems experienced by hosiers under the domestic system, but did not, of course, solve all problems of control. As argued in Chapter 1, control is never ultimate, and the workplace remains a 'contested terrain'. During this period, in their attempts to tighten control, manufacturers proceeded along the same strategic lines. Rather than dramatic organisational change, this period was marked by the slow decline of the domestic system, accompanied by a gradual deepening of the degradation process, while at the same time direct control in the factory was pursued through the strict supervision exercised by foremen and forewomen.

In the hosiery case, there was no historical movement from direct control to degradation, along the lines proposed by Braverman, since both types of control strategy were jointly deployed in each period. In part this resulted from the fact that two different work environments evolved in the industry over the transitional period: that of the skilled male workers, who were largely machine-paced, and that of the 'semi-skilled' female workers, in which control was maintained by tight piece-rates and strict supervision.

Also in this period, processes of degradation were balanced by processes of resegmentation. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, adult males at first avoided the factories, and many older men never made the move into the new environment. However, high wages and improved conditions eventually attracted male workers to the factories. Once there, the men set about capturing the more important and highly paid jobs, although at first their efforts were hampered by the mass of employers who espoused combined policies of degradation and feminisation.

Within the factories, discipline was achieved much as elsewhere, through systems of fines and supervision by foremen and overlookers.¹ A report on women's employment carried out in the 1890s found that 18 hosiery firms fined late attenders, while 23 did not. In one factory, operatives were fined one penny for each five minutes late. Some fines were donated to charity (PP 1893-4 xxxvii Pt I pp 160-1, 168-9). The lack of fines in so many factories may indicate that discipline had been firmly established by this date. An indication of why may be found in an earlier statement by the large Derbyshire firm, Brettles, which in the 1860s had so many applicants for factory work that they could select "only those known to be respectable" (PP 1863 xviii p 281). A visitor to

1 See Pollard, 1965, Chapter 5; Brown, 1977, Chapter 4.

Morleys' factories in 1900 noted the firm discipline there, and commented "nor does this supervision seem irksome to the workers" (Thomas, 1900, p 24). In addition, fines were resented, and managements may have preferred not to antagonise the workforce by their use. For example, when a man at Picks factory was fined 3/6 for refusing to redo slack work, the whole workforce downed tools (LAHU A February 23rd 1897).

Several cases of resistance to supervision by foremen are recorded in the LAHU minutes.¹ In one interesting case women protested when their forewoman was dismissed, as they preferred her supervision to "the manager being over them" (LAHU A June 27th 1913). Reasons for struggle over discipline were quite wide-ranging. One firm, Ravens, locked out the whole of their seaming department for "noise and disorder". People were dismissed (though sometimes reinstated) for offences including lateness, refusal to work on Saturdays, presenting dirty work, stealing, singing and drinking.² The classic cause of dismissal was union membership, and LAHU minutes of this period deal with two notable cases, the dismissal of three young women from Buchlers' factory in 1910, and a dramatic struggle at Skevingtons in 1914, when the whole workforce was sacked.³

Although these examples concern the use of direct control over both sexes, the employment of foremen related particularly to the conditions of women's work. As before mentioned, where women were employed as knitters, supervisors were needed for machine maintenance; where, more

1 For example, see LAHU A July 18th 1900, May 10th 1905.

2 LAHU A December 12th 1895, March 4th, July 3rd 1896, May 5th 1897, March 21st, December 21st 1900, July 6th 1910.

3 See LAHU October 19th 1910, March 12th 1914. Fuller details can be found in Chapter 5.

characteristically, women were involved in finishing tasks, these were not, like knitting, machine-paced. In addition, many of these tasks were paid on day or 'set' rates rather than piece-rates (mending, cutting and folding, for example). In such jobs, therefore, supervision was needed to ensure work rates were maintained. A vivid account of how this was carried out is given in Picks' factory history, based on descriptions provided by old employees of the factory in the 1880s. Male workers knitted on the ground floor while girls "treadled sewing-machines and hand-sewed pockets" on the floor above. They worked from 8 till 7, cooking meals on a cast-iron stove in the middle of the floor:

Chatter helped them to forget if the gruel was thin. In working hours the 'Old Master' sat heavily by the stove, keeping them under the dominion of his eye, calling them to order if they whispered, yawned or dreamed of better things - or if their hair was straggling or ill-kept. He was a stickler for tidy hair.

(Pick, 1956, pp 10-1)

It was close, paternalistic supervision of this kind which led James Holmes, LAHU secretary, to declare in 1892 that overseers terrorised women to such an extent that they were unwilling to join the union (PP 1892 xxxvi Pt 2 p 60). The evidence of Osmond Tabberer to the same Royal Commission served to confirm Holmes' contention. His firm had moved out of Leicester, taken on women knitters instead of men, forbidden them to join the union and employed overlookers and managers to service the machines and to "look after the workpeople to see that they do their work" (PP 1892 xxxvi Pt 2 pp 95-7). Such women were presumably less likely than the men to develop the kind of resistant work culture described by Leicester knitter Thomas Barclay in his memoirs, in which joking, smoking, shouting and frequent rest breaks were allowed by the management, and where "manager and men talk to and chaff one another" (Barclay, 1934, pp 58-9).

In the meantime, the knitting task was still being subject to a process of degradation, although, as stated in Chapter 3, there were no drastic organisational and technological innovations subsequent to the move to the factory. Automation, fragmentation and preconceptualisation have occurred since then in a slow, piecemeal fashion. The new machines permitted two ways of organising the knitting task. One was to teach knitters the new mechanical skills and knowledge associated with the machines, and keep both task aspects integrated. The other was to split the task into two separate jobs, operative and mechanic, thus creating one semi-skilled and one highly-skilled job. Many manufacturers were attracted by the latter option, using women as operators and a few trusty males as mechanics. Typical of these was the firm of Pool, Lorrimer and Tabberer, referred to above. Their reason for moving out to the country was

They would not allow us to put a woman on, although a woman can work the machines by power just as well as a man; but of course when we moved to Foleshill we put women on to the machines and employed men to overlook them.

(PP 1892 xxxvi Pt 2 q 13771)

Samuel Bower, secretary of Nottingham Rotary Union, described the effect of such policies. The numbers of women on circular frames was increasing, he claimed, and many even operated Cotton's Patents, the heaviest machines. Asked whether women could satisfactorily work the latter, Bower replied

She can manage for the manufacturer's purpose, and that is to run down wages. They use her as a pretext. Of course, they have to have men to overlook the women.

(PP 1892 xxxvi Pt 2 qq 13012-14)

As indicated here, this period was one in which the final organisation of the knitting task remained indeterminate, as men struggled to

keep the two task aspects integrated and resist degradation. This is the process I have called 'resegmentation'. Despite men's initial resistance, they were drawn into factory work by good wages. As manufacturer A.J. Mundella explained

The young and the strong and the active men have got into rotary frames and better class frames and they are getting as good wages as in almost any trade in England.

(PP 1871 xxxvi q 42542, my emphasis)

In entering the factory sector the men were indeed determined to get the 'better class' jobs. Their policies were twofold, to try and maintain old skills (even if this meant a certain level of deception as to how much *real* 'skill' was needed) and to capture new ones. The attempt to retain monopoly of the old expertise, through claiming use of the 'better' frames was apparently more successful in Nottingham than in Leicester; there the men struggled throughout the period against feminisation and the related shift into the country villages. By 1913, LAHU secretary Jabez Chaplin lamented,

Men have nothing left now but Cotton's Patents and if the women are to have them, then the men are done.

(LAHU A November 12th 1913)

An interesting example of the way men created and captured new skills is the job called 'countering'. This consists of processing stockings after they have returned from the dyers: sorting them, folding them and packing them. These warehouse jobs were originally done by women¹, but a report by Joseph Morley in 1863 indicates the way things were to develop:

¹ See, for example, Cassell, 1873, p 63.

Part of the work often done by young females, as sorting and folding, is entrusted only to men who have had long training and have acquired a more accurate eye.

(PP 1863 xviii p 269)

It was claimed this was because the firm dealt only with the finest and best hosiery, but the practice was soon extended to all forms of counter-
ing. The skill was declared to reside in the ability to match pairs of stockings exactly. This, along with Cotton's Patents, became the most jealously guarded male skill up to 1960.

It may well be asked exactly *how* the men managed to resist the drive to feminisation, since it was clearly in capital's interest to cheapen labour costs in this way, and when so many employers favoured this policy. The answer seems to lie partly in the men's ability to organise collectively, and partly in a process of trade-off with the more enlightened employers, who ceased to practise this strategy. In the towns, the men fought hard against the employment of women. In 1871 there was a general strike at Nottingham over this issue. In Leicester, LAHU tried to operate a union shop policy, whereby factories using female labour on Cotton's Patents were blacklisted. Members were not allowed to work there, nor to work with any 'blacklegs' who had ever been employed in these factories. A particular struggle, for example, centred round the firm of Strettons, which persistently used women at lowered rates; their defaulting employees were blacked by the union.¹

However, these efforts might have come to nothing, if some employers had not been prepared to enter into some kind of alliance. This was particularly true of Nottingham, where unions and leading employers had negotiated a truce during the period when the NAB was functioning (1866-

¹ See, for example, LAHU A June 21st 1918.

1884). A.J. Mundella, the prime mover in establishing the Board, had clearly a cultural sympathy with the men (perhaps because he himself had started out as a stockinger) and stated in 1868 "It would be an awful thing to have only women and boys employed in a trade" (PP 1867-8 xxxix q 19477). The situation in Nottingham seems to have been easier than the Leicester situation during these decades, although it was not until such alliances became more permanently established, in the following period, that feminisation as a strategy died out.¹

As many have argued², 'skill' is an essentially problematic notion. Skill, it is argued, is as much a matter of social definition, as of the possession of expertise and technical knowledge. Conversely, if one accepts that there may be *some* technical base to the possession of a defined 'skill', it is clear that some skills are unacknowledged or downgraded. Thus Phillips and Taylor argue in their discussion of feminisation, "A new category of work was created which was classified as 'inferior' not merely by virtue of the skills required for it, but by virtue of the 'inferior' status of the women who came to perform it" (Phillips and Taylor, 1980, p 54). The hosiery case certainly confirms that, if not *wholly* socially constructed, 'skill' is clearly socially manipulated. The men were determined to retain their traditional craft status (though, as we have seen, that status had often been questioned in the domestic period) by affirming that the new machine jobs were as 'skilled' as the old. For example, Thomas Blandford, a union activist who became the manager of the

1 *Work being done at Loughborough University by Ian Henry indicates that working hours may also have been a factor. In Nottingham a split-shift system, inconvenient for women, was instituted.*

2 *See, for example, Wood, 1982, Introduction; Littler, 1982, Chapter 2; Phillips and Taylor, 1980.*

Leicester Co-operative Hosiery Society, claimed that in the old frames men used "their muscles more and their minds less" whereas new machinery was more complicated and "the pace more rapid, and the strain upon the worker's mind consequently greater and more constant".¹ Thus, he claimed, "The worker's calling still calls for ingenuity and individual effort" (Blandford and Newell, 1898, p 60). The 'still' perhaps gives away the defensive slant of his claim, although his verdict was confirmed by E.O. Greening, when he visited Wigston Hosiers, another producers' co-operative:

Some of the machines were very ingenious ... They required a high degree of skill in the workers who had care of them ... Some of the workers had quite mastered the principles on which the machines had been constructed to imitate human handiwork.

(Greening, 1921, p 101)

Greening's latter comment points to the importance of knowledge as a central facet of skill; these workers, perhaps, were anxious to keep integrated the operators' and the mechanics' skills. Littler, in his discussion of skill, emphasises the importance of this: skill has, he argues, three components: 'job knowledge', 'job autonomy' and an element of social construction (Littler, 1982, pp 8-9). Where the male knitters did succeed in acquiring knowledge of the working of powered machines, while maintaining some degree of autonomy through collective organisation, it could be argued that they had preserved some degree of real skill. In the context of degradation, whether the operator's required skills (dexterity, speed, concentration) are diminished or not is less significant than

1 *Observers habitually remarked on the speed of the machines. In 1921 it was reported "The size, speed and complicated character of the machines in use are calculated to bewilder one who looks upon them for the first time" (Leicester Corporation, 1921, p 41). There is a danger here, though, of simply equating speed and skill (see Westwood, 1984, p 46).*

whether important amounts of technical and practical knowledge are thereby removed from the workers.¹

Equally complex processes were at play where women's work was concerned. The majority of women, of course, were not employed as knitters, but as "auxiliary" workers, and sometimes "assisting a man with a machine to run on for him when he transfers to the frame" (PP 1892 xxxvi Pt 2 qq 13678-9). These definitions, given by hosier William Tyler, are important, as they show how in this period, as in the domestic system, women's work was contextualised as subsidiary and auxiliary to men's: they were *viewed* as men's assistants, and in line with this 'inferior status', following Phillips and Taylor's account, it was easy for their skills to be downgraded, an issue which will be discussed more fully in the next section.

During this period, then, the unionised men fought with some success to retain a position of privilege within the labour process. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the tactics they used to retain some measure of control bore evidence of being rooted in the struggles of earlier days. The main devices by which they tried to maintain their position were limitation of entry, safeguarding of 'custom and practice' (many of these customs showing traces of their domestic system origins) and the retention of some measure of joint control via the union shop policy.

There is considerable confusion surrounding the role of apprenticeship in this period, and events recorded in the LAHU minutes provide somewhat contradictory information. Evidently some sort of 'helper' system prevailed in the 1880s and 1890s. As Tyler indicated, 'helpers' might be women,

¹ See Cockburn, 1983, Chapter 4.

performing subsidiary jobs on the machines. In some cases these jobs appear to have been labelled 'women's jobs', for a dispute is recorded at Peggs factory over a man using his son as helper, when the rules stated that helpers must be girls (LAHU A December 18th 1915). On the other hand, Thomas Barclay recorded how in the 1860s he "managed to learn something of the hosiery trade through becoming a Rotary Hand's helper" (Barclay, 1934, p 15). Helpers appear to have been paid by the knitter so that this may be considered as yet another form of the sub-contract relationship. However, a great row broke out in 1910 at the large Corah factory when men on pant and shirt 'eight at once' machines tried to bring in helpers, on the grounds that it made their job easier, and increased output. The union firmly opposed this, as "it is not a custom, neither will it pay both the man and the firm". The secretary claimed that there was already "a sufficient number of youths and young men in the trade to supply all the demands for a long time to come" (LAHU A September 2nd, 16th, 21st, October 9th 1910). Although concessions were made to allow the men to employ sons (and in one case a daughter), provided the practice was confined to this type of machine and was not considered an established 'custom', the men continued to use non-family assistants, and were eventually expelled from LAHU.

Helpers, then, were evidently considered a threat to the trade, unless their employment was properly regulated. However, clearly some young men were being allowed in as apprentices. In 1914 LAHU minutes recorded a dispute over 'learners'' pay at Wills and Hutchinson. This firm wanted to start them at 7/- for a month; they would not move to full pay for six months, which the union argued was too long a period (LAHU A April 3rd 1914). What seems to have been happening over this period was that the union was trying to control entry by laying down

specific requirements for taking on new recruits, and that these varied from job to job. As we shall see, information on the third period supports this view. For example, the Board of Trade 1946 report states clearly that the only way into employment on Cotton's Patents is through an apprenticeship scheme (Board of Trade, 1946, p 43).

In a more general way, the men sought to retain some degree of control over the conditions in the industry by a defence of longstanding 'trade customs', what we should today refer to as 'custom and practice'. One interesting feature of this was the sense, which seems to have survived from the domestic period, that certain machines, and even certain tasks, were the property of individual workpeople. For example, a dispute arose at Morleys in 1896 when the workers claimed that when one man was absent another was employed in 'his' frame, and in the following year there was trouble at one firm over a foreman using a man's frame after he refused a particular job, while at another a girl was sacked for refusing to do "another's work" (LAHU A November 18th 1896, April 4th, December 8th 1897). In the same year, there was trouble when two men were asked to swap jobs. The minutes comment "If such a system as that was allowed, none of them would be safe" (LAHU A March 24th 1897). Presumably, such attitudes helped the workpeople to retain a sense of being in control of machines and tasks; they also reflect the fact that the capitalist labour process involves the ceding of 'actual possession' of the instruments of labour to the workforce.¹ But of course this is also a harking back to the domestic system: Johnson and Barnes' factory history refers to the

1 According to Westwood, women in a contemporary hosiery factory demonstrated a comparable attachment to "my machine" (Westwood, 1984, p 19).

practice prevalent in the early twentieth century of allowing a workman to rent floor space in a factory to run his own frames, commenting that this was

A concession perhaps to the hard-dying days of apparent independence when a knitter worked in his home and was a slave only to his own hours.

(Johnson and Barnes, 1951)

A similar move was the defence of piece-rates against 'set' wages. Since modern commentators on the industry have argued that piece-rates are a major way of maintaining management control (Brown, 1964; Edwards and Scullion, 1982), this may now seem strange, but to the knitters this was an important way to retain a degree of their own control over the task: how much and how hard to work. As the Victoria County History comments, "presumably the old independence of the industry remained in this preference for piecework" (VCH, 1958, p 311). This is reflected in the terminology used by LAHU, referring to set wages as working on 'the firm's time' while the pieceworker was on his or her 'own time'.¹ Firms especially attempted to introduce set wages for female workers, and in 1896 there was unanimous agreement that such attempts should be resisted as "if the set wage system is allowed, the others might as well look out for other jobs", while in 1914 a resolution affirmed support for members refusing to work with people brought in on set wages (LAHU A September 2nd 1896, October 10th 1914).

Finally, the union fought against changes in the allocation of work, and especially against intensification through increased workloads (responsibility for more machines). In 1892 Bower reported that men were

¹ For example, see LAHU A October 12th 1910. See also the analysis in Thompson, 1967, where similar terminology is noted.

being asked to work two or three machines, although in Leicester the union had managed to cling on to the 'one man, one machine' rule (PP 1892 xxxvi Pt 2 pp 52, 63). In 1896 there was a dispute at Ravens in Leicester when the manager declared that unless he was allowed to allocate two frames per woman he would stop two men on that type of work; the women had stuck to their single loads, and one man had indeed been sacked (LAHU A May 6th 1896). Allied to this, was the refusal to allow job content to be altered contrary to custom. For example in 1897 at one firm knitters were in dispute over their refusal to mend the sweaters they produced, and at another men objected at being asked to work "borders" (LAHU A January 6th, May 12th 1897).

To defend such 'customs' was to defend one's right to control over the work task: successful defence depended on the maintenance of union shop agreements in many firms. Thus, a central policy of LAHU throughout this period was to prevent members working with non-members. "Before a new hand starts to work, the collector must ask to see his card", the union declared (LAHU A May 4th 1910). Various disputes are recorded over the employment of non-members or over members falling into arrears and jeopardising solidarity.¹

Although in some respects these policies must be seen as retrogressive, trying to cling to old forms of organisation in a new and inappropriate setting, it can be argued they had important effects in maintaining unity and keeping up the ideal and spirit of craft organisation, however illusory this may have been. People were extremely anxious to avoid the stigma of

¹ For example, LAHU A September 8th 1897, July 20th 1900, September 17th 1913.

being labelled a 'scab'.¹ Although the picture presented by the LAHU records of this period is of defensive rather than offensive actions, it was these activities which laid the basis for a bargaining relationship with the employer in the succeeding period. Undoubtedly the local unions would have been more fruitfully employed in trying to build a modernised nationally-based single union; nevertheless, defence of the old customs kept craft identity alive, and may well have prevented the total feminisation of the industry.

Section 3 Modernisation

From 1914 on, the development of joint consultation procedures in the industry afforded union leaders a degree of joint control, and it was in this period that the processes of resegmentation were consolidated. While change and reorganisation continued to proceed gradually, there were some attempts at Taylorite innovation, but these were not carried out in a concerted fashion, and their cumulative effect was a gradual redefinition of tasks and intensification of effort, rather than a dramatic move to task degradation.

Direct control strategies also continued through this period. There was continued use of fines and strict supervision, and continued struggle against them. For example, in 1915 at Johnson and Barnes' factory in Kibworth, Leicestershire, the workpeople refused to clock in as a result of long-standing grievances about fines for lateness (LAHU A October 30th 1915). A dispute at Morleys in 1924 displays the continued concern of

1 *In one case men were reported as coming to blows after one called the other "scab etc."; "All this has been going on in public houses for some time and much ill-feeling is the result" (LAHU A December 1st 1897).*

management with irregular timekeeping: "It isn't fines we want, it's keeping time we desire" they claimed (LAHU B October 9th 1924). At 'Stitchco', clocking in and fines for lateness continued through the 1950s and were only stopped in 1960 (Westwood, 1984, p 17). Rows over foremen were recorded on several occasions in LAHU minutes¹ and the accounts of dismissals show a continued concern with producing an orderly work environment: dismissals are recorded for bad work, temporarily leaving the work station, bad language, "having a sleep and taking it easy", fighting, talking, gambling and creating litter.²

Direct control continued to involve women in particular. In 1931 it was recorded that at Corahs one manager was "bullying his girls and keeping them at work for hours on end when they had nothing to do" (LAHU A February 15th 1931). Two years before in a dispute at another Leicester firm the women alleged that "the manager's attitude towards them was tyrannical" (LAHU A May 1st 1929). Leicester women, remembering their work experiences in the first decades of the century, describe the strict discipline; one woman recalled being sent back to her bench when she left it to fetch a drink of water, and another how she was reprimanded for talking to her neighbours when working and thus moved "to be placed under the stern eye of the forelady".³ A comprehensive account of a manager's disciplinary struggles with the female workforce is given by Eric Pasold

1 See, for example, June 16th 1917, November 6th 1929.

2 See LAHU A October 26th 1917, August 18th 1920, December 17th 1924, March 16th, July 21st 1927, April 10th 1929, LAHU B March 29th 1920, HU November 23rd 1932, July 5th 1933.

3 From a collection of competition essays by pensioners describing their past lives, filed in LRO DE 1313.

in 'Ladybird, Ladybird', describing the establishment of a hosiery factory in the South of England (near Slough) in the 1930s.¹ He had difficulty in attracting girls to the job:

Those sent by the Labour Exchange don't want to work. They only make a show of taking the job and leave again after a day or two to go back on the dole.

If they stayed, it was difficult to instil them with "a sense of responsibility" and "regular work habits"; he had to provide strict supervision, either personally, or through forewomen:

As long as I helped with the cutting and watched the sewing machinists, checking the sleeves there, the pockets there ... and generally kept an eye on everything the shirts were all right, but whenever I was called away to the office, or to some other part of the factory, something went wrong.

(Pasold, 1977, pp 391-3)

That Pasold, along with owners and managers elsewhere, sought to control this irregularity by supervision, rather than technical innovation, is significant. If, as will be argued later, women's skills are downgraded, the possession of those skills cannot be viewed as a threat by management and yet it is clear that, especially among young women, indiscipline and irregularity of work are common. The solution in the hosiery industry has been to continue to subject women to constant surveillance, so that in effect a dualistic control structure has emerged in the modern period, as several researchers have reported (Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Strumik, 1978; Westwood, 1984). Thus Westwood describes how at 'Stitchco'

1 *Pasold revealingly explains that he chose not to manufacture in the Midlands because "the natives would, no doubt, want us to adopt their old-fashioned ways" (Pasold, 1977, p 275).*

The direct-control strategy was clearly in evidence ... among women, who were classified as semi-skilled workers, whereas the responsible-autonomy strategy was in evidence with the skilled male workers, the knitters.

Male workers were not subject to direct supervision; the women described them as "a law unto themselves. They don't have supervisors looking over them the whole time" (Westwood, 1984, pp 41, 60).

Exactly the same arrangement was reported by Strumik, describing the role of supervisors in the industry. With knitters, supervision appeared to be "general and not close". In contrast, supervisors in the making-up departments spent most of their time with their subordinates in inspection work:

Subordinates appeared to have less discretion in their work, while subordinates in the knitting departments appeared to have more discretion ... The knitters are seen as skilled craftsmen, who know their own machines better than anyone else. On the other hand, the making up work is largely repetitive.

(Strumik, 1978, pp 120-1)

Thus, with the knitters, supervisors would only intervene if anything went wrong, while the close supervision of women involved giving detailed instructions on how to perform the work.

Such accounts reveal the complex interplay of notions of skill, responsibility and control. I shall argue that such arrangements were the result of the truce achieved after World War Two between unions and employers, whereby knitters recaptured their skills, and managed to retain a degree of autonomy. The women, however, are still treated with 'low trust'¹ and submitted to close supervision.

¹ See Fox (1974) for the elaboration of a distinction between low and high trust situations at work.

The male 'skilled' workers, paradoxically, are thus more vulnerable to further degradation than the 'semi-skilled' women, as experience has shown. Cutting techniques have been mechanised, sewing-machines have become more sophisticated but on the whole the technology of female factory jobs in the twentieth century differs little from the nineteenth-century version.¹ Such work already often took the form of subdivided, routinised sewing tasks. A more drastic form of degradation, however, faced the knitters: the integration of technical and operative knowledge which characterised their tasks continued to be endangered (and continues so today).

As Chapter 3 records, the substitution of female labour for male in World War One, and also the initiating of coupling procedures (one man, one helper to two machines) was carried out under strict agreement between employers and unions.² However, the agreements were for the duration of the war only, and after the war some employers, particularly in Leicestershire, carried on with their policy of unregulated feminisation. For example, at a Bedworth factory, it was reported that women did everything except dyeing, including the male jobs of counterering and trimming (LAHU B May 14th 1923).³ What the manufacturers hoped to achieve by this policy is indicated by accounts of a Tottenham hosiery firm, Klingers, which the Midlands organisers visited:

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- 1 *An exception perhaps was the machine for 'linking' nylon stockings, the operation of which is discussed later.*
 - 2 *Similar agreements were attached to the other male monopoly, counter-ering: one firm's counterermen agreed to a dilution with 'lads' in a 5 to 1 ratio for the war period (LAHU A January 8th 1916).*
 - 3 *Resistance to female labour was stronger and more fully organised among the dyers and trimmers. Their records for May 22nd 1907 state "No female labour shall be allowed to be introduced into any branch of our trade".*

All the machines are worked by women, mechanics do all the altering and repairs etc. Girls straight from school are put with another female for two or three weeks, then put on a set of heads. Klinger is often in the factory, any person not suitable is dismissed at once. No week's notice.

In this factory, they claimed, girls worked a 49½ hour week for less than £2 (LAHU B November 3rd 1926).

The slide towards this kind of arrangement was halted by World War Two. Once again the unions concluded temporary substitution agreements with the employers, but at the end of the war the emergence of the National Union brought a new dimension. The NUHW appears to have been determined to resist feminisation. One of the original package of proposals for the first annual national agreement in 1946 was a clause demanding that "male persons only should operate knitting machines" (Leicester Mercury, May 13th 1946). This demand became obscured in the dispute over pay, limitation of hours and the abolition of night shifts, the latter being taken by NUHW as its main platform. This period of conflict, when a national strike was narrowly averted, was a crucial one for the union, as it marked a decisive (and reasonably successful) bid for joint control in the industry. As Horace Moulden, by now NUHW president, stated, "The issues were more fundamental than a mere wages question" (Leicester Mercury, May 31st 1946). Union leaders

Attached more importance to acknowledgement of their right to take part in the control of the industry's working hours and conditions than to matters arising from the divergence of opinion on the guaranteed rate and the minimum wage rate.

(Leicester Mail, May 30th 1946)

Moulden told a mass meeting of 1,200 hosiery workers in Leicester

We are fighting for a place in the sun ... We are fighting to establish negotiating machinery with the other side which will ensure that whatever decisions are made will be honoured throughout the whole of the trade throughout the whole country.

(Leicester Mail, June 1st 1946)

Although what the Leicester Mail labelled "the union's claim for participation in control of the industry" was resisted by the employers (Leicester Mail, June 22nd 1946), in the next ten years they seem in the main to have abandoned the feminisation strategy. It is difficult from the information available to reconstruct satisfactorily the motivation for this policy change. When Hinckley Union leader, Chamberlain, commented "*in the past* female labour was cheaper than men could compete with", he pointed to one key factor (Hinckley Times, December 13th 1946, my emphasis). With the postwar shortage of female labour and the pushing up of female minimum rates by NUHW, employing women was no longer so economically attractive. In addition, despite initial success by NUHW in restricting the three-shift system to the fully-fashioned sector¹, three shifts gradually became standard for knitting, and this has effectively operated to bar women from many knitting jobs.² But also important was the fact that, at the same time, trainee schemes were agreed by the NJIC for several key jobs, such as fully-fashioned knitting, seamless hose knitting and Cotton's Patents.³ These schemes, either explicitly or implicitly, were limited to males. For example, the seamless hose scheme, whereby a trainee would work for at least six weeks under a qualified knitter, applied solely to adult males under 45. The fully-fashioned scheme, involving four distinct statuses (probationer, trainee, improver, knitter) refers to "payment by the men to the boys". These exclusionary

1 In 1949, only 7 firms were granted a three-shift licence by the NJIC.

2 See Westwood, 1984, p 60 for confirmation: women explained that they would not wish to work awkward shift hours, even if legally permitted to do so.

3 Details of the schemes are in Board of Trade, 1946, and NEC reports to Annual Conference of NUHW, 1948-9.

schemes would have made it difficult for employers to recruit females without generating disputes. In the 1950 National Executive Committee's report to the Annual Conference there is mention of expenses and tool allowances for knitters both "males and females", but it is likely that by this date remaining female knitters were those taken on during the war who still retained their jobs.¹

This was not entirely the end of the feminisation strategy. There are odd references to female knitters in NUHW Leicester District Minutes up till 1960, including an objection registered on August 20th 1946 to women being trained as knitters. In addition, a crucial and revealing campaign was waged to keep counterwork a male monopoly. A resolution was passed in 1951, and reaffirmed in 1958, to the effect that the union should "endeavour to keep countering as a male job in the county of Leicester" (LD, June 25th 1951, January 15th 1958). However, five months later, six girls were working on the counter at Corahs (LD, June 2nd 1958). Smith describes the way this struggle was shaped: automatic machines for pairing were introduced to replace the element in the task which required the greatest skill and experience. The task was then subdivided into three operations, pairing, folding and packaging, with different workers used for each stage. Although the union resisted the change, because of its removal of skill, and the employment of women to do the new tasks, by 1962 it was forced to concede to women's employment and the triumph of automation (Smith, 1969, p 84). In short, this was a classic example of task

1 *Such women were mentioned as constituting the few exceptional female knitters by the Stitchco workers (Westwood, 1984, p 60). The only female knitters I traced in my interviews with managers were in two firms which worked a two-shift only system. In one case, they were described to me as being older women.*

degradation combined with feminisation. Interviews with managers in 1983-5 indicate that countering is currently a mixed job.

My interviews also show, as does the work of other researchers into the industry¹, that from the 1960s onward knitting has been retained as a virtual male monopoly. However, there still remains the possibility that the operative and mechanic functions of the knitting task may be separated in the future. In 1969, Smith suggested that a twofold structure of machine operators and specialist mechanics might soon emerge (Smith, 1969, p 29). In 1971, it was noted that "the care of modern knitting machines is an engineering task" (Briscoe, 1971, p 175). This point was made by several managers interviewed in 1983-5. One at least was considering the option of employing a handful of engineering maintenance workers, and using unskilled married workers as operatives on the new computer-controlled knitting machines.² But at present many knitters still perform the integrated task.

The other major drive towards task degradation in the modernisation period was the attempt to introduce a more wholesale Taylorite reorganisation or rationalisation of the factory environment. The first example of this I have been able to trace was in 1920, when Mr. Palfreyman, of the fleecy fabric firm, Hall and Earl, was recorded as "putting his American ideas into operation" (LAHU A November 25th, 1920). This firm had a very bad industrial relations record, as did another similar firm, Swanns, which

1 Smith, 1969; Boraston et al., 1975; Strumik, 1978; Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Westwood, 1984.

2 Electronically-controlled machines are slowly being introduced into the industry in the 1980s. Their high cost, however, (over £10,000 per machine) puts them beyond the reach of the small firms which are still the majority in the industry.

initiated a similar rationalisation scheme in 1927-8. A handbill records

Many alterations have recently taken place in the works which in a number of instances have not resulted in benefits for the workers.

(LAHU B January 31st 1927)

At the end of the year Swanns shut down operations altogether as they wanted to reorganise their machinery "for more and cheaper production". When the workpeople returned they were asked to go on set wages, and work six machines instead of four (LAHU B February 16th 1928). A strike was called and meetings held with the Manufacturers' Association, but unfortunately the outcome is not recorded in the minutes. The worries facing LAHU at this time, however, are reflected in the following

We are still meeting with a great handicap through members accepting prices for new machinery and operations without consulting our office, and when these new operations become a common fashion throughout the industry we are in a quandary.

(LAHU B July 21st 1928)

In 1929 the union was concerned over the Anglo-Saxon Finishing Company, whose "business methods seem likely to upset all our trade union regulations" (LAHU A November 20th 1929). This firm was abandoning the use of males on counterwork and getting female menders to also do the countering task, an unusual example of reintegrating tasks in order to lower wages and break craft control. However, the major onslaught against rationalisation before World War Two was the battle against the introduction of the Bedaux system at Wolsey.

The Bedaux plan for Wolsey is fully described by Craig Littler in 'The Development of the Labour Process in Capitalist Societies' (Littler, 1982, pp 118-20).¹ The main features of the plan were as follows: for

1 Unfortunately LAHU minutes for 1931-5 are not available at the Leicester Records Office.

non-machine-paced tasks (female), direct and indirect labour were to be separated¹, knitters were to have heavier loads, manning levels would be reduced and instructions for all tasks were to be written on cards, including relevant B values (effort norms). Instructively, the Bedaux report referred to "very liberal piece-rates" having been common in Leicester in the past among men working in what were, essentially, degraded tasks, such as the operation of half-hose machines, which supports the account I have given of the resegmentation of the previous period. At the same time, surveillance and vetting of female workers were to be increased (Littler, 1982, pp 120-2).

The reaction of LAHU to these developments had initially been one of incomprehension and panic. There was a flurry of activity, as officers consulted with other unions with experience of Bedaux techniques, with the TUC and with Wolsey management (LAHU A December 10th, 31st 1930). Moulden and his executive struggled to comprehend the "complexities" of the system. A series of stoppages, go-slows and short strikes culminated in a sit-in at Wolsey's Coalville plant, and in December 1931 a full strike was called. After eight months a settlement was reached, whereby a diluted version of the scheme was adopted and applied under conditions of joint consultation.

Littler concludes that the strike ended in the "modified installation of the Bedaux, neo-Taylorite system" and that the efforts of the union to resist it were ambiguous and half-hearted:

1 *This meant that tasks of preparation and servicing would be performed by 'less skilled, cheaper' labour.*

Moulden ... accepted the given framework of capitalist and managerial power and had little conception that neo-Taylorite schemes would alter the structure of control over the labour process.

(Littler, 1982, p 128)

However, the event was definitely experienced by LAHU and its NHF allies as a victory (LAHU B March 22nd 1932). For a small union to have forced concessions from the giant Wolsey firm, receiving solid support from the other unions, was no mean feat at this date. Although Moulden did indeed have an accommodative approach to management¹, the behaviour of LAHU in this and the aforementioned cases seems to me to demonstrate that they were only too well aware of the implications of Taylorism in terms of the restructuring of control, and its threat to craft customs; LAHU objectives went far beyond the simple maintenance of existing wage rates, and involved the retention of customary manning levels and of elements of control over the performance and contents of task.

A similar approach was taken by NUHW in handling post-war rationalisation schemes. The Board of Trade 1946 report reflects the fashion for these schemes, in recommending time and motion study, "breaking down certain making-up processes" to allow the use of less skilled labour, and reducing the apprenticeship period by modern training methods (Board of Trade, 1946, pp 45, 65, 95). Union members, including Moulden, were included in the working party, but, despite the apparent lack of dissent to these suggestions, the joint monitoring which NUHW favoured in these cases is demonstrated in an interesting National Executive report for 1950. Nine firms were currently investigating rationalisation possibilities. Eight of these were doing so through joint consultation procedures, such

1 See Chapters 7 and 9.

as joint meetings, departmental committees, works councils and so forth. The principle had been agreed at the NJIC that

Before the introduction of any scheme involving changes in methods of production through Time and Motion study methods together with redeployment of labour, Joint Consultation shall take place between Management and Employees in order that the workers shall be fully informed.

This was not, as it may appear, merely lip-service to consultation, for in two cases schemes were scrapped, one being found "unacceptable" to the "girls"; in the other case a new rate-fixing system was accepted, but a redeployment scheme for seamless knitting was rejected because of union "apprehension" (NEC Report to NUHW Annual Conference, 1950, pp 17-18).

I am not claiming that the union was fully able to resist neo-Taylorite rationalisation schemes; but the evidence suggests that such schemes were introduced slowly, after considerable negotiating, and were applied piecemeal by individual firms. As a result, as the work of Westwood and Strumik shows, such schemes had limited detrimental effects on the position of the elite male knitters. It could, however, be argued that gains were made at the expense of the female operatives.

The whole question of skills and women's jobs is certainly more difficult to assess. In part this is because of ambiguity as to whether there were distinct skills possessed by women workers at any time in the industry's development. It was certainly clear that performance varied greatly between operatives. In 1892 William Tyler had spoken of good pay being attained by female "expert hands who have been at the work for a considerable time" (PP 1892 xxxvi Pt 2 p 90). In 1951 one firm made exactly the same point about seamers and linkers:

These quiet jobs are highly skilled, demanding sharp eyes and deft fingers - women's work. They become adept at them and earn good money.

(Johnson and Barnes, 1951)

In the intervening period, quite a myth had grown up about the 'inherited' or 'natural' talents of Midlands' operatives. Thus in the 1940s the Leicester Corporation Handbook stated

Skilled hosiery workers cannot be trained in a week or two, nor is there any other area of the country where girls and women have that intangible something which makes them not just operatives but good operatives. Employers have argued the pros and cons of heredity for years, but they are faced with the indisputable fact that in the Leicester area hosiery workers, particularly women, have nimble fingers, sure hands and adaptability.

(Leicester Corporation, undated, p 43)¹

The local tradition, for example, alleged that "either you are a born linker or you aren't", and also that girls with relatives in the trade were more likely to have it "in the blood" (King, 1948, p 379).

Such judgements often seem to reflect a concern with speed and experience rather than a precise technical competence or irreplaceable knowledge. Yet at least some of the female skills were considered by observers to involve levels of expertise which are hard to acquire, and which many may never master. The Board of Trade report acknowledged that in many female jobs in the industry skill levels were not reflected in relative earning capacity (Board of Trade, 1946, pp 51-3, 66). For example, glove fingering was a female job which it had proved impossible to train men to do adequately. The most notable example, though, was linking, which is fully discussed in studies by King and by Scott and Lynton. This job is

¹ *The same idea appears in Leicester Corporation, 1921 (p 43) and Byford, 1969.*

part of the finishing process for stockings and socks; it involves the closing of toes. The actual closing is done by machine, but the linker has to transfer or 'run on' the tiny loops of the stocking on to points on the machine, keeping them in correct sequence. It requires considerable expertise and experience to link the miniscule loops successfully. King describes the job as representing

A point in the process of production where ... the skill of the machine breaks down; the continuation of the flow then depends on a highly developed but narrowly delineated human skill, possessed by a special class of operatives who attain proficiency only after a long period of training.

It involved an eighteen-month to three-year training period, and nine out of ten recruits failed to master the skill (King, 1948, pp 122-3). Scott and Lynton, following King, see it as a skilled job, but one which was considered within the industry as involving a great deal of 'dexterity', rather than skill (Scott and Lynton, 1952, p 75).

It seems indisputable that linking is a job demanding attributes which few possess, yet it could be argued that there is a crucial difference between the skill of the linker and the skill of the knitter. The knitter's skill, at its highest, involves knowledge of the whole process of knitting and its technology; the linker's skill is that of the highly expert operative, and involves no understanding of the way the machinery works.¹ The difference lies in the possession of technical knowledge, and it is this, I have argued, which lies at the heart of the degradation

1 *One of the Stitchco women made clear to Westwood her awareness of women's exclusion from mechanical knowledge:*

They never train the girls for that kind of work. The men keep it to themselves. I would really like to know all about the technical side of things.

(Westwood, 1984, p 23)

struggle. The linker's skill is a dependent one. Yet even such dependent skills may be a source of bargaining power, for they are not easy to attain, and the wastage involved in getting recruits up to an acceptable standard is high. Pasold, for example, describes the high percentage of 'seconds' produced when he was striving to establish production with a largely unskilled labour force. Garments came out each slightly different, some with one short and one long leg (Pasold, 1977, p 326).

During the modernisation period, then, a truce between employers and unions brought a new structure of control to the industry, through modern procedures of collective bargaining and joint negotiation, which the knitters used to maintain their privileged position in the industry. This adoption of modern union procedures, however, did not entirely put an end to the more old-fashioned tactics of craft control.

The maintenance of control by the defence of apprenticeship and 'custom and practice' perhaps dwindled in importance in this period, but still remained a factor. Some of the postwar apprenticeship schemes have already been described. In the earlier years, too, attempts had been made to maintain such schemes. Wells describes the system operated by the Nottingham Union in 1935: no boys aged 14-19 were to be taken on without union consent, and numbers were to be limited to one per four men. No journeyman could take on an apprenticeship until he was 21, and the men paid the boys' wages out of their joint earnings. Similar rules applied to the Leicester Trimmers' Association (Wells, 1935, p 234).¹ The Hinckley

1 *Dyeing and trimming had always had a stronger craft tradition. Pasold observed that*

It was more of a craft than an industry. Dyers liked to shroud their activities in mystery. They passed their secret recipes on from father to son.

(Pasold, 1977, p 192)

Warehousemen's Association, formed in 1911, had established a five-year apprenticeship scheme (Pickering, 1940, p 116). LAHU apprenticeship rules seem to have been less coherent and more patchy, but their records cover two disputes over limitation of entry. In one case, a new apprenticeship procedure had been instituted by one firm for Cotton's Patents, which was stopped when only one boy had been recruited, as the union believed no new operatives were needed (LAHU A June 5th, 19th 1929). Secondly, there was a long negotiation with a firm in Rothley, near Leicester, where many young people were employed. The firm's workpeople had just joined the union, and a plan was adopted for a four-year transition scheme to union rules. No new helpers would be taken on, and at the end of the four years knitters would switch from set wages to union sanctioned piece-rates (LAHU A December 21st 1929).

Apprenticeship and entry limitation rules, as these examples show, were linked to key jobs, and must have helped to maintain the status of the knitters' elite until the postwar truce gave it confirmation.

The other major 'traditionalist' effort was the maintaining of agreed conditions and manning levels. Interestingly, a LAHU minute of 1918 records that "we cannot dictate as to what machines persons work" concerning a case of a woman being switched to a new job, which represents a climbing down from previous policy (LAHU A February 23rd 1918). However, the Board of Trade report testified to the efficacy of other aspects of union policy; the number of machines per operative was determined, it was stated, by "traditional practice" and "trade union agreements" (Board of Trade, 1946, p 44). The one man per machine rule had been preserved for Cotton's Patents.¹ Wells confirms that in 1935 manning

1 However, LAHU fears of the danger of permitting 'coupling' during the war had been justified; in 1919 it was reported that Walkers were continuing the practice at their Shepshed factory (LAHU B August 31st 1919).

levels in Nottingham were agreed by unions and employers: the rule was one man to six or eight machines on circulars, one to one on flats (Wells, 1935, p 235).

Controlling machine loads seems to have been the major area of endeavour, but one LAHU minute is revealing, showing that not only skilled men sought to maintain hard-won privileges. It was reported that Hinckley women were fighting "to have their custom continued" of starting work at nine a.m., not eight (LAHU B May 17th 1919).

There are also various ways in which workers can express their resistance to management control on an individual basis. Edwards and Scullion in their study of industrial conflict report that, in the hosiery factory they observed, resistance essentially took individual not collective forms. Notably, absenteeism and turnover rates were very high (Edwards and Scullion, 1982). This seems to have become the prevailing pattern after World War Two, and has characterised the industry ever since. Many of the managers interviewed in 1983-5 acknowledged high turnover rates, and three considered it a major problem.¹

Although under the factory system embezzlement ceased to be a major worry for management, theft cannot ever be totally eradicated. In 1952 Scott and Lynton reported that 'Acorn', one of the factories they studied, had sought to stop stealing by setting up a factory shop with cheap goods,

1 *Scott and Lynton report on the problem of turnover after the war (Scott and Lynton, 1952, p 75). Smith's survey carried out in 1964 indicated that 50% of firms had turnover levels of at least 20% per annum (Smith, 1969, p 97). Turnover during Westwood's study period at 'Stitchco' was 40% per year (Westwood, 1984, p 16). At Corahs, turnover has been as high as 50%. Edwards and Scullion recorded about 20% turnover at the hosiery factory they studied in 1978, and one manager I spoke to estimated his firm's turnover at from 20 to 25% (Edwards and Scullion, 1982, p 56).*

while in the 1980s Westwood's study of 'Stitchco' suggests that levels of stealing (cotton, clothes, needles, etc.) may be high (Scott and Lynton, 1952, p 142; Westwood, 1984, p 99). It seems likely that minor thefts and fiddles are viewed by workers as 'perks' of the job¹, as something they are entitled to by custom, if not by law. This attitude, clearly, was held by a woman fined in 1924 for 'notching a bit on' (recording more work done than she had actually produced). She claimed that this was common practice, but the minutes maintain a discreet silence as to the truth of her claim (LAHU A October 1st 1924)!

Finally, there is little information available on the incidence of output restriction in the industry. The issue is only referred to once in the union records, when in 1944 the Hinckley President was accused of inciting women workers to practise 'ca canny' (HU July 5th 1944). He took pains to deny it. Wells saw the limitation of workloads as in itself a kind of output restriction (Wells, 1935, p 235). That, of course, would not affect women workers, but King maintained that in the factory she studied after the war collective output norms were firmly specified and hostility shown to anyone who exceeded them (King, 1948, p 402). Her findings contradict those of Edwards and Scullion who claimed that in their studied factory there were no norms of output, and no attempt to control the setting of rates; workers responded in a competitive, individualistic way to the piece-rate system (Edwards and Scullion, 1982, pp 169-71). This, of course, concurs with the findings of Lupton (1963) and Cunnison (1966) that women workers do not attempt to practise this form of collective control. Certainly, managers in hosiery have manipulated

1 See, for example, Ditton, 1977.

piece-rates and other payment systems (such as Corahs' 'graded minutes' measured daywork scheme) to produce an individualistic approach to wage earning; nonetheless, it may well be, as has been suggested to me, that women take care to see that the initial rates are set at levels they consider 'fair'.

However that may be, it is clear that neither individual nor collective informal resistance of this kind was seen as much of a problem by management during the modernisation period. The ability of the industry to exploit the postwar consumer boom brought a share of prosperity to all within it. The truce established in 1946 was thus readily adhered to. For a time, at least, no major problems of control existed to push management into further attempts at restructuring the labour process.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have traced the complex interworkings of processes of degradation and resegmentation in the industry since 1800, and the strategies adopted, with varying success, by unions, to resist the erosion of their position and the loss of skill, knowledge and autonomy. I have described the evolution of a dualistic structure of control: direct control techniques have been used with the female majority, while the male elite have been allowed a considerable level of autonomy, within the constraints of machine pacing. There has always been the potential for the knitting task to be further degraded into a 'semi-skilled' task, subjected to direct control, but this has not yet occurred, because of the postwar truce; this heralded a long period of stability, during which the technological and organisational structure of the industry remained virtually unchanged.

My study, then, gives some support to the idea of a long-term tendency to 'deskilling', or degradation of the labour process, as described

by Braverman, but also shows how processes of resegmentation restrain that tendency. Also, I would argue that the opposition of 'direct control' and degradation is not supportable, logically or historically. In this industry the more degraded the job, the more subject to direct control.

However, as argued in Chapter 1, the processes of degradation and resegmentation do not exhaust the possibilities for control struggles in the workplace. Many other strategies have been employed in this industry, as in others, in the attempt to alter the effort/reward bargain in capital's favour, to heighten profits and efficiency, and to resist the demands of organised labour. These strategies will be dealt with in the next three chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

"We don't have union people at our firm, we have only got trimmers who belong to a union and we should not have them if we could get anyone else."

*Mr. Foster, Leicester hosiery employer
(LAHU A September 21st 1927)*

"In spite of our good intentions and the mutual good feeling between the union and the employers we are still looked upon in some quarters as veritable knights of evil."

*Horace Moulden, LAHU Secretary
(LAHU B January 19th 1929)*

"We took upon ourselves the role of Daniel entering the Lion's den by attempting to test the feeling of another great concern, the Hosiery Trust Ltd. ... Directly our identity was communicated to them, they clammed up like an oyster and would not reply to our phone call."

*Horace Moulden
(LAHU B January 19th 1929)*

CHAPTER FIVE

REPRESSIVE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN THE HOSIERY INDUSTRYIntroduction

One of the major criticisms of Braverman's 'Labor and Monopoly Capitalism' is that it presents a unilinear account of the development of management strategies, from ineffective primitive forms of control through to Taylorite control; this account ignores the existence of many other forms of control strategy used by management, and runs the danger of committing what Littler calls the 'panacea fallacy' (Littler, 1982, p 3), that is, seeing any single strategy as the ultimate cure for labour control problems. Several major contributors to the 'labour process debate' have tried to remedy this by providing alternative accounts of the historical development of control strategies, notably Friedman (1977a), Burawoy (1979) and Edwards (1979). In addition, many researchers within a different discipline and using a different perspective, that of the 'new social history', have given accounts of the variety of control strategies used in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, notably Pollard (1965), Nelson (1975) and Joyce (1980). Taken together, these studies provide ample proof of the existence of a wide repertoire of control strategies. I shall start this chapter with a brief survey of this literature, and, on the basis of this, attempt to construct a typology of strategies, categorising them as 'repressive' or 'pacificatory'. In the remainder of the chapter, I shall consider the chief forms of repressive strategy used by hosiery management, and in the following two chapters I shall consider the two most notable forms of pacificatory strategy prevalent in the industry, paternalism and joint consultation.

Section 1 Varieties of Control Strategy

Three of Braverman's critics, Burawoy, Edwards and Friedman, have developed alternative typologies of control strategy, with at least some suggestion of an historical shift from one type to the other. Thus, Burawoy outlines a move from 'despotic' to 'hegemonic' control, linked with the evolution of monopoly forms of capital. The 'securing and obscuring' of the extraction of surplus value is now achieved by mechanisms of control directed at 'manufacturing consent', notably by the development of internal labour markets and of the 'internal state' (collective bargaining, institutionalised grievance procedures, provision of industrial 'citizen' rights), and also by the elaboration of behavioural patterns which transform work into a game (the least convincingly demonstrated aspect of the argument) (Burawoy, 1979). Edwards also, like Braverman and Burawoy, links change to the development of monopoly capitalism: in his model, early forms of direct control are followed by an experimental period of 'failed strategies' (including Taylorism, narrowly defined by Edwards, and welfare paternalism), and then by two forms of structurally-based control, 'technical control' (by which he appears primarily to mean machine-pacing, although it clearly bears some resemblance to what Braverman labels 'scientific management'), and 'bureaucratic control' (close to what Burawoy labels internal labour markets, including promotion structures, hierarchies and long-service rewards) (Edwards, 1979). Finally, Friedman has contrasted what he calls 'direct control' (including not only coercive supervision but *also* Taylorism) with a growing tendency to invoke 'responsible autonomy' strategies. Here, direct control is loosened, either as a way to maintain

control, or to handle aggressive resistance to coercive techniques.¹ Responsible autonomy strategies, such as perks and rewards for merit, welfarism, participatory schemes and job enrichment programmes, are often used when dealing with groups of 'core' or primary labour, while secondary labour, especially where unorganised, is more likely to be subjected to direct control (Friedman, 1977a).

These three accounts have common features, in particular the contrasting of variously labelled coercive tactics with some kind of persuasive technique, again variously labelled; the latter relate to the need to procure co-operation from at least some sections of the labour force. This need, I have argued in Chapter 1, relates to what I have called the 'double indeterminacy' of the capitalist labour process. Capitalists need to overcome not only the indeterminacy created by the value/surplus value distinction but also the indeterminacy generated by the use/exchange distinction, the need for the co-operation of the workforce in order to produce good-quality goods which people want to use, when they want them.² Indisputably, Braverman has ignored this second aspect, and thus neglects the important area of consent-inducing strategies.

Although the authors of these studies have performed a valuable service in drawing attention to the issue of consent, I would argue that the historical accounts they present are no more credible than that of Braverman. They have replaced one unilinear account with models equally

1 See Goodrich (1975) and Cressey and MacInnes (1980) for similar arguments.

2 See Chapter 1 section 3. Also see Cressey and MacInnes (1980) for a very similar argument.

unilinear, and which, in addition, lack firm grounding in any analysis of the 'historical logic' of the development of the capitalist mode of production. Although Burawoy and Edwards try to do this by linking change to the development of monopoly structures, the accounts are not persuasive in terms of the historical timing of this shift, nor can there be any explanation for continuing tendencies of change. In all cases, what is essentially a static analytic distinction (between strategy types) has been projected erroneously into a dynamic historical distinction (between different epochs).¹ In fact, if we study different industries, regions and countries, it is possible to find examples of most types of strategy in *each* historical epoch, even if their precise forms have altered over time. This is not surprising if we see strategies as based on the two 'indeterminacies' or structural dilemmas mentioned above, as I have argued in Chapter 1 we should do: these indeterminacies have been inherent in capitalist production since its inception.

For example, paternalism as a consent-inducing strategy was practised in factory villages in the eighteenth century, in urban factories in the Victorian era, and is still a feature of many hosiery factories today.² Again, machine-paced 'technical control' was not merely a product of monopoly capitalism, epitomising itself in Fordist assembly-line production, but has been a continuous trend within capitalism. An inter-

1 *It is perhaps fair to say that Friedman's claim to be describing an historical tendency is tentative, and balanced by a suggestion that changes in economic climate may entail a shift away from responsible-autonomy strategies. Certainly, Friedman's model is the one to which the hosiery case most closely corresponds empirically, in terms of the dualistic structure of control described in Chapter 4. However, I would claim that Friedman pays insufficient attention to the long-term process of degradation.*

2 *See Chapter 6.*

esting paper by Bruland, for example, demonstrates how the inventions of the self-acting mule, the automatic woolcomber and the calico printer were all expressly developed to counter union power and unblock vital bottlenecks in production (Bruland, 1981).¹ In this respect, it is not helpful to describe strategies as 'failed' as Edwards has done. As Cohn argues in his study of railway construction, the fact that strategies have not survived into the twentieth century is no necessary proof of ineffectiveness (Cohn, 1981).² It may be that structural changes in society render them redundant (the welfare state replaces employer welfarism) or that their form modifies in response to structural change. For example, the switch from classic paternalism to neo-paternalism, which is described in Chapter 6, results both from the growth of state welfare and the decline of religious belief.

As I have argued in Chapter 1, it is only in the case of degradation processes that we can establish any kind of logic or tendency of historical development. Where other strategies are concerned, rather than developing historically-based typologies we are better advised to conceive of them in terms of a *repertoire* from which employers can select existing options to deal with specific problems. Strategic choices may then be made in terms of a variety of factors: composition of the labour force (sex, age, ethnic origin, skill levels etc.), size of enterprise, the state of the product and labour markets (both national and local), local political and industrial traditions, the precise problem faced, and the

1 See also Tufnel (1834) for confirmation of the view that control elements were acknowledged as a crucial part of the process of technical innovation in Britain.

2 Trucking, for example, which Cohn discusses, fell from use not because of ineffectiveness, but simply because it was made illegal.

employers' ideological commitments. In addition, as Tilly and Tilly point out, the fact of learning is important: people's choices are influenced by their own previous experience and that of others. As Tilly and Tilly put it

The first strike is a mystery, the second an outrage, the thousandth a problem to be dealt with

(Tilly and Tilly, 1981, p 19)¹

What has been successful once in a similar context is likely to be tried again, while less successful strategies may be ignored.

The repertoire available to employers is wide. Many other strategies, apart from those already dealt with, have been documented by sociologists and historians, and I shall refer briefly here to some of the major ones. Cohn, in an interesting essay, discusses the prevalence of what he calls 'extra-mural discipline', that is forms of work discipline external to the work situation, such as the use of truck (payment in goods) or of religious exhortation, which characterised railway construction, among other industries.² Hilton's earlier study had also indicated the pervasiveness of truck as a control device in many industries, including hosiery (Cohn, 1981; Hilton, 1960). Nelson's study of American management practice outlines a wide range of persuasive strategies, from welfarism, to company unions, to practice of industrial psychology (Nelson, 1975). Many of these are aspects of what is commonly labelled as paternalism, which is dealt with extensively in Chapter 6.

Another set of important strategies are those involving the manipulation of the labour market, in particular by creating divisions or

1 *I am also indebted to Tilly and Tilly for the concept of a 'repertoire' of forms of action.*

2 *Railway companies employed clergymen to instruct their employees.*

exploiting existing ones. Dubois (1981) and Gordon et al. (1982) give comprehensive accounts of such strategies in the French and American contexts. As Chapter 4 showed, the gender division has frequently been exploited by manufacturers. Many studies have demonstrated that the use of women as 'secondary' or casual labour or as part of a reserve army of labour has played a significant part in weakening worker solidarity and trade union power, and these issues are explored further in Chapter 10.¹ Another way to manipulate the labour market is by the device of relocation, or, in Lamphere's graphic phrase, 'runaway shop' (Lamphere, 1979, p 275): that is, the moving of machinery, departments, factories or even industries to areas where cheaper, more docile labour (notably women and agricultural workers) is available. Although relocation is most usually discussed in the context of the current world recession and the restructuring of the international division of labour, it has been a common practice for many years, as the hosiery example shows.

As noted before, machinery can be seen as a control mechanism,² as indeed can the factory system itself, as Marglin (1974) and Foucault (1977) have argued. Pay schemes, too, are used for control purposes; in particular, payment by results has provided a major solution to the labour/labour power indeterminacy, as employers seek to ensure they receive the measured amount of labour they consider their payment has purchased. The ability of well-organised work groups to collude in fiddling piecerates³ has led to

1 *For women as secondary labour see Edwards (1979); Stedman Jones (1971). For women as reserve army, see Beechey (1977); Bruegel (1979).*

2 *Mechanisation and technological innovation are, of course, part of the degradation process (see Chapter 1).*

3 *See Brown (1977).*

the elaboration of more complex pay schemes, often combining some elements of time-rate and piece-rate by means of a bonus system. The success of such schemes relates particularly to their ability to mask their control-orientated nature by their 'incentive' effects.

Finally, we should not ignore the role that ideological systems and values play in achieving control. For Pollard, nineteenth-century control strategies could be classified in terms of 'the stick', 'the carrot' and the work ethic (Pollard, 1965). Inculcating values of hard work, self-discipline and loyalty has been an important part of the control endeavour.¹ This has often been part of a wider ideological contest, in which both sides have used (at various times) handbills, advertisements, petitions, the press, books and the mass media to propagate their points of view and press for their validity. In the early nineteenth century, this propaganda war was a key part of the industrial struggle, as both sides sought to discredit the other, capturing public opinion and the support of key political groups..

Over time, then, employers and managers have had recourse to a formidable array of strategies and mechanisms of control. If it is impossible to construct an historically-based typology, must we abandon all attempt at sociological generalisation? The alternative, of course, is to view strategic choices as contingent, and simply to detail their historical and empirical usages, an approach exemplified, for example, by Nelson (1975), and, I would argue, by Gordon et al. (1982): despite their attempt to incorporate their account of labour process control with a four-

1 See Thompson (1967) and Bauman (1982).

stage model of capitalist development, the listing of strategic options in each period seems little more than fortuitous or conjunctural.¹ I believe, however, that a categorisation system can be developed, *not* on an historical basis but in terms of the double indeterminacy of labour: strategies can be classified according to which of the two structural dilemmas they address.² Thus, strategies addressing the labour/labour power indeterminacy can be labelled 'repressive' as they attempt to cut down the autonomy and free choices of workers, to prevent them manipulating the reward/effort bargain to their own advantage. Strategies addressing the use/exchange value indeterminacy can be labelled 'pacificatory' as they apparently broaden the scope for autonomy and choice, in order to appease workers and gain their co-operation.

In addition, strategies can be categorised in terms of their target groups. Strategies can be primarily aimed at the mass of workers, or alternatively at unions, an important distinction, but one not properly drawn out in the literature. Thus, for example, the early use of innovative machinery described by Bruland (1981) was a specific attempt to clamp down on union resistance. Paternalism, on the other hand, seeks characteristically to bypass the union, and to procure the consent of the workpeople to capitalist methods and objectives. Repressive strategies aimed at the unions seek to *exclude* them from the workplace. Pacificatory strategies aimed at the unions seek to *incorporate* them into the structure

1 See Bradley (1983).

2 Cressey and MacInnes have made the important point that strategies can combine coercive and consent-inducing elements, corresponding to capital's conflicting and contradictory objectives. However, it is still possible to see each strategy as slanted primarily to one or other dilemma.

of the enterprise, or of the capitalist production system as a whole. In acknowledging the vital nature of the workforce/union distinction, we are recognising that control has political as well as economic dimensions, a factor neglected, for example, by Braverman. Both of these elements, in turn, are linked to the ideological struggle: capitalists want to win hearts and minds, as well as to control and regulate bodies.

This way of categorising control strategies has strong resemblances to the distinction between coercive and consent-inducing strategies, which underlies so many typologies.¹ It has the additional advantage, however, of grounding that distinction in structural cruxes or dilemmas inherent in capitalist production relations.

Most of the strategic options I have been discussing here should, however, be carefully distinguished from the overall tendency to degradation described in the preceding chapters. They do not involve the material alteration or restructuring of the labour process *itself*, but rather the recasting of its institutional surroundings. In this respect, these strategies are more easily reversed, and thus less stable and enduring as features of work organisation than is the largely irreversible process of degradation.²

1 For example, those of Pollard (1965), Friedman (1977a) and Burawoy (1979).

2 The distinction I am making here is close to that implied by Edwards when he refers to the superiority of 'structural' controls, although I would not accept that what he labels 'bureaucratic' control has the same impermeability of status (Edwards, 1979).

Section 2 Strategies of repression and exclusion in the hosiery industry

Figure 5.1 represents the range of strategies and devices of control which have been employed in the hosiery industry over time, categorised in terms of strategic dilemma addressed and target group. Some have already been considered, and the remainder will be discussed here and in the two following chapters.

The major form of repressive strategy used in the industry has been strict supervision or 'driving control', which has already been dealt with in Chapter 4. Other widespread forms of repressive strategy have been the use of truck, of 'runaway shop' tactics, and the victimisation of union activists; I will discuss each of these in turn.

Payment in truck acted as a control strategy as it served to bind workers into a greater dependency on their employers, as Hilton (1960) and Cohn (1981) have argued. Where a backlog of debt had accumulated, it was difficult for the workpeople to leave their masters' employment. Even where there was no debt, the feeling of being linked to an employer not just through the wage system, but through the realisation of those wages in subsistence goods, seems to have produced a psychological dependence and an inability to challenge an employer's decisions or resist impositions. However, truck is also a means of increasing profits, which is why it became a major feature of the hosiery industry between 1800 and 1880, in much the same way as frame-renting did. By trucking, small masters and middlemen were enabled to undercut wage rates and still keep a profit margin, since they could recoup any losses by regaining the wages they paid in payment for goods, goods which they often priced above normal shop levels.¹

1 See *Aspinall, 1949, p 119, PP 1845 xv I q 7143.*

Figure 5.1

Forms of employer strategy practised in the hosiery industry

	<i>REPRESSIVE</i>	<i>PACIFICATORY</i>	
<i>AIMED AT WORKFORCE</i>	Factory System	Paternalism	
	Machine Control	Pseudo-paternalism	
	Framerents and charges	Neo-paternalism	
	Piecerates and payment systems	Pro-management propaganda	
	Supervision } Direct or		
	Fines } 'driving' control		
	Truck		
	Work ethic		
<i>AIMED AT UNION</i>	Repressive legislation	Arbitration and negotiation procedures	
	Anti-union combinations	Joint Committees	
	Victimisation	Neo-paternalism	
	Runaway shop	Co-operative/pluralist ideologies	
	Manipulation of labour market (e.g. use of secondary labour)		
	Paternalism		
	Pseudo-paternalism }		
	Anti-union propaganda		

Although a Truck Act of 1812 had declared the practice of payment in kind illegal, it was well established at that date and flourished subsequently. For example, in 1812 Edward Allen gave evidence of extensive personal experience of truck in the Sutton area (PP 1812 ii pp 30-1). In 1816 the indefatigable Henson brought two successful prosecutions under the Truck Act, but these and similar prosecutions did not deter the mass of truckmasters (Hammond and Hammond, 1979, p 191). In 1845 the practice was widespread in the villages, especially in North Nottinghamshire and South Leicestershire. It was claimed of masters in Skegby, Notts., for example, that "there is not one but trucks directly or indirectly" (PP 1845 xv II q 3507). It was not common in towns: of the 41 Leicestershire witnesses who claimed direct experience of truck, 33 were village knitters.

Payment was made in a variety of forms. Payment in groceries was common, chiefly in the form of loaves or flour, but also of sugar, soap, candles, bacon and beer. Some operatives had to take clothing, "pieces of calico or cotton handkerchiefs", especially, it was claimed, the younger operatives.¹ The effects on the local economy are nicely illustrated by George Kendall's account:

I used to pay my coalwoman with meat and I have paid my chimney sweeper with a pint of ale and the barber in the same way

(PP 1871 xxxvi q 40773)

Since trucking enabled bag hosiers and middlemen to undercut price levels, it is not surprising that the larger, more reputable firms were eager to help in campaigns against truck, while public opinion, too,

1 PP 1845 xv II qq 1704, 3315, 3395, 3507.

condemned the practice. In 1830 in Nottingham 8000 signatures were obtained in only four days for an anti-truck petition, including those of 100 manufacturers, several JPs and the Mayor (Thomis, 1969, p 107). In 1844 an Anti-Truck Committee was established in Leicester. Thomas Bell, its secretary, reported that many leading manufacturers were involved, but he also pointed out that these were the selfsame people who, quite knowingly, employed the trucking middlemen (PP 1845 xv I q 1910). The society offered £1 for information leading to prosecution, and some prosecutions followed. In Hinckley, Thomas Clewes reported, there had been 20 prosecutions since the preceding November, and trucking was no longer practised in the town (PP 1845 xv I q 3957). Elsewhere, however, operatives were said to be intimidated and too fearful to come forward lest they lost their jobs and even their houses, which in many cases were rented from the middlemen (PP 1845 xv I q 5011). One witness, asked why he submitted to truck, replied

If I did not submit to them, I must resist them, and then I should lose all my frames and my work.

(PP 1845 xv I q 6095)

Another told how after he gave evidence against two truckmasters nobody in his village would employ him, and a middleman himself confirmed that an extensive system of blacking was practised among village middlemen (PP 1845 xv II qq 1328, 3506).

For these reasons, Charles Voss, campaigning for the Anti-Truck Society around Leicestershire villages, got unfriendly responses. At Kibworth he was told they would not lay information, fearing "they should always have it dinged in their ears", and in Oadby they were burning an effigy of a villager who had acted as an informant. Although such behaviour led some employers to declare that many villagers preferred the

truck system, it seems more likely that it resulted from close village relationships, where community loyalties were stronger than trade loyalties, and where an act of betrayal against a community member, whatever its justification, threatened village solidarity. Thus Voss claimed that the villagers, although refusing to help, said that they hoped his campaign would succeed; but

They did not like the name of being informers, because they have been hissed at so much; that is by the truck-masters; they gave a treat to others to blackguard them.

(PP 1845 xv I qq 1821-24)

Some of the middlemen interviewed in 1845 quite openly admitted to trucking, although some claimed to have been falsely prosecuted by 'rascals' and agitators. Others maintained that it brought them no profit, and some that they had incurred heavy losses, as knitters failed to pay off their debts (PP 1845 xv I qq 5414, 7241, II qq 1543, 5405, 5557). William Cummings, for example, explained

I lost a deal of money by it ... I began to see that the men were masters. I had no control over them; they would be £4 or £5 in my debt.

(PP 1845 xv I q 2339)

But witnesses on the other side believed that, on the contrary, fortunes had been made through trucking (PP 1845 xv II q 858).

The effect of the Anti-Truck Society, and even more so of the arrival of the investigating Commissioners, seems largely to have been to drive the truck system underground. One knitter said it was now practised in "a low, cunning, undermining kind of way; it is not so public as it was" (PP 1845 xv I q 3089). 'Indirect trucking' meant that rather than being paid in goods, pressure was put on workpeople 'voluntarily' to exchange their wages for goods like flour and beer at shops kept either by the

master or, even more safely, by one of his relatives. William Spicer explained:

When we took in the first hose, he said 'ye know my rules' and so we did; if we did not go and lay out the best part of our money, we shouldn't have any work the next Saturday.

(PP 1845 xv I q 6233)

Others put it more subtly:

If they refuse to take the bread or other commodity the mistress waits for them ... says she, 'we do not compel any of our hands to take those things' ... She says, at the same time 'we have some to sell and it would be to our interest to dismiss the hands'.

(PP 1845 xv II q 1927)

One witness described how one Arnold truckmaster had relatives in the village who were respectively publican, baker, shoemaker, draper and butcher! It was hard to escape such a net (PP 1845 xv II q 1874).

Trucking, especially indirect trucking, was still prevalent in the 1850s and 1860s, although the NAB helped to suppress truck in the Nottingham district, putting pressure on manufacturers not to allow their middlemen to practise it (PP1867-8 xxxix q 19468). However, in 1871 the Truck Commission found that it persisted, although it was largely confined to the area around Sutton and Mansfield, plus a few scattered villages in Derbyshire and Leicestershire. The report estimated that 1,000 to 2,000 people fell under its influence. In such places it continued to be "the general custom to have flour where you work". One witness described how payment in beer had destroyed his marriage, and the Mansfield police superintendent confirmed that people were too frightened to lay information; he believed there were currently 20 truck shops in Sutton, but there had been only one prosecution during his term of office (PP 1871 xxxvi p xxx, qq 41237, 41363-70, 42454-76).

In Leicester truck had more or less disappeared, although one notorious and interesting case involved an attempt to introduce a form of truck into a factory. The firm, Odames, had instituted a banking system, lending money to workers for drink in advance of wages. This not only bound them in debt to the firm, but ensured working time was wasted in drinking, so that wages fell while Odames raked in the full level of shop charges. The example shows, of course, how closely frame-rent and charges and truck were linked (PP 1871 xxxvi q 41673-6).

This was recognised by the Truck Commission. After the proceedings (which were marked by high levels of bitterness, collapsing into accusations and counter-accusations of falsehood, bribery and intimidation, after an incident between masters and operatives at Derby station), it recommended the abolition of frame-rent, along with strengthened anti-truck legislation. The 1871 Payment of Wages (Hosiery) Bill outlawed frame-rent, thereby essentially sounding the death-knell of the domestic system, which in its turn put paid to trucking, though the practice lingered for a while in remote areas. The Commission on Women's Employment found in the 1890s that women outworkers were still being paid in truck: one seamer claimed to have worked for ten years for one firm without ever being paid in money (PP 1893-4 xxxvii Pt 1 pp 159-60).

Truck was a repressive strategy which exploited the low level of organisation and relative lack of 'spirit' of workpeople in the villages.¹ The policy of 'runaway shop' also exploited these weaknesses, although unlike truck it was specifically aimed at crushing attempts at union organisation among the workpeople.

¹ See PP 1845 xv I q 7478.

'Runaway shop' is a policy of moving an enterprise, or part of an enterprise to an area where cheaper and less organised labour is available. In hosiery, it was often used against the attempts of unions to maintain wage-levels which the manufacturers claimed they could not afford. It is not really surprising that this was such a common feature in the industry, since it had been originally established on the basis of a massive act of relocation, the move from London to the East Midlands to cut costs and break the power of the Company. Understandably manufacturers might return to this practice when in difficulties. Individual employers used the strategy when things got rough. Hosier Smith Churchill fled to Shepshed from Nottingham after his house was destroyed in the 1779 riots, and established a cotton mill there, and similarly John Heathcoat, following a Luddite attack on his factory at Loughborough in 1816, moved to Tiverton in Devon, and lived to a ripe old age surrounded, according to Felkin, by admiring workpeople (Lacey et al., 1969; Felkin, 1867, p 270).

Runaway shop tactics began to be used more systematically in the 1840s and 1850s, in response to the unions' use of strikes as a weapon. Francis Warner, a Leicester glove manufacturer, described how during a current strike frames were being sent into the country, especially to Loughborough, where the glove branch was unorganised (PP 1845 xv I q 2770). A knitter reported that during a strike at Derby in 1849 60 to 70 frames were sent away, and this led to the defeat of the strike (PP 1854-5 xiv q 8153). Hosiers were anyway attracted to the country where it was said that hands would work for less, as rents were lower, and many knitters still used the produce of gardens and allotments to help provide household subsistence needs. Samuel Tomlinson described a concerted attempt by Nottingham hosiers in the 1830s to shift production to Mansfield as wages were lower, but an alliance between the two groups of workpeople defeated

the campaign (PP 1845 xv II q 817). But in 1845 moves from Nottingham to Basford and Spondon were being reported (PP 1845 xv II qq 4109, 4112).

Relocation, however, really became a significant force in the 1870s and 1880s, when the two Nottingham Unions and the LAHU faced manufacturers with the prospect of a more formal and permanent union opposition. There was considerable anti-union feeling, and the result was a steady exodus from Nottingham and Leicester to unorganised country areas. Figure 5.2 shows the proportion of firms located in the town and the country areas, between 1864 and 1957. The sharp rise of number of firms in Leicester county areas in 1891 and 1899 indicates the extent of that exodus, though the effect is less marked for Nottingham. Percentage figures show the fall-off of firms located in the towns, again most marked in Leicester between 1891 and 1912, with a recovery in 1922.

Coalmining areas were especially attractive, with their lack of alternative employment for women. Moving to the country meant savings on rents and rates, as well as labour costs, and helped minimise industrial relations problems; with small-sized businesses, which characterised the industry, the move was not too laborious or expensive. Between 1879 and 1884, in particular, there was extensive movement of machinery to Arnold, Sutton, Mansfield, Heanor, Ruddington and Ilkeston from Nottingham; by 1908 only one fifth of all hosiery manufacture nationwide was carried out in Nottingham and Leicester (Church, 1966, pp 277-8). In 1892 it was reported that for the last 15 years one firm per year had been moving out of Leicester to the rural areas (Gurnham, 1976, p 51).

LAHU Minutes for June 3rd, 1908 record that 14 or 15 firms had left Leicester "altogether or partly so, because we have refused to compromise". The union's assertion that the move was to "be away from our dictates"

Figure 5.2

Location of Hosiery Firms 1864-1957. Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire

<u>Number in</u>	1864	1876	1881	1891	1899	1912	1922	1936	1957
Leicester	105	136	140	119	93	99	195	195	289
Leicestershire	38	65	63	93	138	124	155	171	233
Nottingham	68	77	69	85	70	62	80	75	115
Nottinghamshire	6	52	47	63	62	47	49	61	92
Total	217	230	319	360	363	332	479	502	729

Percentages of
firms in

Leicester	48.4	41.2	43.9	33.1	25.6	29.8	40.7	38.8	39.7
Nottingham	31.3	23.3	21.6	26.4	19.3	18.7	16.7	14.9	15.8

Percentage in
both towns

	79.7	64.5	65.5	59.5	44.9	48.5	57.4	53.7	55.5
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*Source: calculated from figures in D. Smith, The East Midlands Industrial Area
Unpublished Ph.D., 1961, Tables 31 and 52*

(figures for 1864-1936 obtained from Kelley's Directories, for 1957 from factory inspectors' records.)

receives confirmation from LAHU records of the 1886-1914 period: what Holmes described as a game of "shuttlecock and battledore - playing off town and county workers" was a major preoccupation for the officers, as it threatened to undermine any wage advances they made (LAHU A February 12th 1897, PP 1892 xxxvi Pt 2 p 57). As Chaplin explained, it was difficult to persuade members to stay with the union when they were unable to maintain wage lists

In consequence of so much country labour ... and also through girls going to this work straight from school, regardless of wages.

(LAHU A December 12th 1895)

Between 1895 and 1900 the union was involved in prolonged struggles with at least six of the major employers over the sending of frames to the county. This served as a disciplinary threat to individual members, and was also used to force workers to accept reductions on union-agreed prices. The union's policy was to compensate members whose frames were removed, but some workers wished to follow "their" frames into the villages, a response LAHU tried to discourage. In one case at least the employer himself forbade this, declaring triumphantly

I am afraid you would not work well together, you cannot follow them!

(LAHU A October 20th 1896, November 21st 1900)

Frames were often moved out one or two at a time, but sometimes there was a more dramatic confrontation. Such was the case with Rowleys factory, following a violent strike in Leicester in 1885:

To escape the anger of the mob, people engaged in the factory were forced to leave the premises concealed in large work hampers. The situation became worse ... and it was decided to establish the mill at Fleckney. This was built on Saddington Road and soon became known as Rowleys' Jail, owing to the fact that there were no windows to the

roadway, thus affording no provocation to the rioters.

(Badcock, 1980 p 30)

The machinery had been smuggled out from Leicester at night.

Another major confrontation was with Walkers, later to become Wolsey after an amalgamation in 1920. It was an extremely paternalistic firm, with a history of anti-union behaviour. In 1913 it started to move machinery to Derby, later shifting 16 or 17 Cotton's Patents to Shepshed. Finally in December a strike broke out over the moving of machinery, the refusal of seamers to accept a cut in piece-rates and the whole issue of union recognition. Walkers affirmed their refusal to join the Employers' Federation or to allow workers to belong to a union (LAHU A January 11th, December 10th 1913). The long and bitter strike ended in a sullen recognition of union rights, but in 1914 management at Walkers' Abbey Mill plant in Leicester were declaring "If the trade had beat them at Fleckney they would not do so in Leicester" (LAHU A December 13th 1914).

The growing rapprochement between workers and employers, under the influence of the NJIC, had some effect in diminishing anti-union feeling among the manufacturers, and after World War One runaway shop was less of a threat to the unions (see Figure 5.2). Chaplin announced in 1918 that the county factories were as anxious to fight for advances as the town factories (LAHU B February 5th 1918). However, individual employers still attempted relocation sporadically: for example, in 1922 Johnson and Barnes threatened to send linking work to a village called Stapleford to be done more cheaply, in 1928 Wolsey sent cardigans and pullovers to Shepshed for cheaper labour, in 1930 Myhills sacked all their linkers and sent work to the country, and in 1937 Rowleys "retaliated" against union action by moving machines from Fleckney to Hinckley (LAHU A May 13th 1922, March 28th 1928, April 9th 1930, March 17th 1937). In this period, too, expansion of

hosiery production in the 'new areas' occurred, involving the utilisation of non-union labour and low wages.¹ But after the formation of NUHW, the Hinckley Secretary, Chamberlain, was able to retort to an employer who was threatening to move away to where "he would be assisted instead of hindered" (knitters were on strike after the dismissal of four workmates) that

No matter what part of the country Mr. Simpson may move to, the National Union of Hosiery Workers will be there also!

(Leicester Mercury, 2nd October 1946)

Relocation strategies by the 1940s and 1950s had ceased to be concerned with control issues. Many factories in this era started up branch factories outside the Midlands: for example, Corahs, Byfords, and Johnson and Barnes built factories in parts of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, where there were plentiful supplies of 'green labour', especially the wives and daughters in mining and agricultural communities (Jopp, 1965, p 38; Byfords, 1969; Johnson and Barnes, 1951). These moves were necessitated by the post-war shortage; Byfords explained "We were obliged to go as far as Maltby in order to find more willing hands to make our products" (Byfords 1969). Relocation here was in no way an attempt to bring workers to heel or stamp out unionism.

Another major exclusionary tactic was the victimisation of noted union activists. In the early period, this was closely associated with the use of repressive legislation against unions, including prosecutions under the Combinations Acts and tightening up legislation protecting machinery to ward off Luddism.² As early as 1779 the leaders of the committee responsible for the petitions to Parliament were being victimised. One of

1 See Chapters 3 and 4.

2 See Chapter 3.

them, Caleb Herring, had to flee from Nottingham to Leicester, where the Mayor gave him protection (Henson, 1831, pp 414-69). Possibly the sympathy the stockings of this period received from some magistrates and members of the gentry pushed the hosiers into more informal means of persecution. Henson wrote

Every committee or active man amongst them was regarded as a turbulent dangerous instigator, whom it was necessary to watch and crush if possible.

(Thompson, 1968, p 556)

Coldham, the Nottingham Town Clerk, hired a spy to infiltrate radical and unionist circles in 1814, and in the same year a secret committee set up by the hosiers told the Home Secretary that they intended to "blackball" all strikers, since unions were "fatal to the true interests of hosiers and framework knitters" (Hammond and Hammond, 1979, p 191; Aspinall, 1949, p 178). Many hosiers became committed to the destruction of unions.

Leaders were obviously vulnerable. Gravenor Henson was among several imprisoned in the early years (for over a year, in his case). William Chawner and his father, who brought a test case against William Cummings in 1831 to establish whether the Truck Act would extend to frame rent, were subsequently victimised, as were several Chartist leaders: George Buckby and Joseph Elliott were blacklisted and forced to emigrate to America, John Sketchley of Hinckley was refused work by the leading manufacturer Thomas Payne, and in Nottingham knitters George Black and James Woodhouse lost their jobs, one becoming a lecturer and the other opening a co-operative store, with union support (Church, 1966, p 46; Patterson, 1954, p 387, PP 1854-5 xiv q 5854; Epstein, 1982, p 245). The hosiers expressed a naked hatred of the Chartist leaders: Buckby and Elliott were described as professional, paid agitators, Sketchley and his colleague Ginns as unwilling to work when they could "live without" and as being men "who endeavour to

make the stocking-makers dissatisfied with their masters", while a Nottingham hosier spoke of

Birken and his delegates, sitting as they do almost like a Parliament at the Rainbow and Dove.

(PP 1854-5 xiv qq 2281, 5983, 6191)

Anyone arousing the hosiers' displeasure risked rough treatment. Men were blacklisted for giving information on truck or patronising co-operative stores (PP 1871 xxxvi q 40844). Witnesses to the 1871 Truck Commission were labelled as "rogues, thieves and vagabonds" and "Mr. Mundella's tools" and were warned "We will serve them out after". It was easy for manufacturers to band together and pressurise their workpeople to stay away from committees and meetings and to refuse to sign petitions (PP 1854-5 xiv q 1721, PP 1871 xxxvi qq 42224-5).

From the 1880s onwards victimisation techniques were applied more generally to any union members, as part of the employers' anti-union campaigns in the factories. In 1892, Holmes held a meeting at Earl Shilton, after which eight men were locked out of their jobs, and twenty-one women who had joined up were sacked. Another firm had issued an anti-union document, which three men had agreed to sign (PP 1892 xxxvi Pt 2 p 56). LAHU Minutes of this period record many cases of victimisation, involving both men and women. Union members were dismissed, or threatened with dismissal, unless agreeing to give up membership; one activist was set up in a fish shop by the union, having, it was believed, "no hope of a job". Others were given inferior jobs, or put on short-time work while non-members worked full time. Many firms refused to allow canvassing or collecting on their premises.¹

1 LAHU A October 30th 1895, April 27th 1898, February 27th 1905, February 11th 1911, April 11th, July 22nd 1913, June 19th 1914.

Opposition to unions often reached fantastic heights. Ernest Walker declared "he would sooner die than have trade union interference" (LAHU A January 26th 1914). The cases of Buchlers, where two daughters of a well-known activist were blacklisted after trying to organise their workmates, and of Skevingtons, where the whole workforce were dismissed, were notable, and led to vigorous campaigns by the union. At Skevingtons, cards were laid on the table:

Mr. Skevington had made it absolutely clear that he's fighting trade unionism ... He will never employ trade unionists again ... He has not had control of his own place before and means to have it now - and he can't have that control he wants unless the workers are out of the union ... Since his people joined the union he could not control them, they did as they liked.

(LAHU A March 21st, April 1st, May 19th 1914)

These policies often had a powerful effect; in many cases where the union attempted to recruit, especially in the county, feelings of anxiety and fear were revealed. At Sileby, for example, the officers found

A feeling of mistrust amongst each other, wondering whether they should get the sack, if so would others do their work.

(LAHU A October 25th 1905)

LAHU acknowledged the validity of such doubts: there was a reluctance to accept single members at unorganised firms, for fear of the consequences (LAHU A June 15th 1910).

If anything, the situation deteriorated after World War One. Many firms refused to follow the NJIC in recognising unions as legitimate. The manager of one, Lawries, declared that neither the union or the NJIC meant anything to him: he could get on very well without them. It was reported that Hayes and Harrison had used "every means in their power to turn the people against the union". Towl and Cursley called their people together and told them that if they joined LAHU "there was no room for them", and

at Byfords "there was apparently an unusual amount of fear of the firm", prompting the verdict that to organise there would be a prohibitive task. Anti-union propoganda was used to good effect. It was noted in 1926 that "trade unionism is not wanted at the firms in the North" of Leicester, and in 1913 a man who met Chaplin "at the baths" told him that he and his workmates resented LAHU attempts to organise Rowleys: "They have got a good employer and don't want interfering with".¹

Similar problems faced the Hinckley Union, whose officers received "anything but a courteous reception" from managers. The foreman at Atkins (whose Chairman was President of the Manufacturers' Federation) declared that he preferred to negotiate with his own workpeople rather than the union representatives. It was the union's proud boast that in Hinckley 95% of hosiery workers were members, but they had problems in the surrounding villages. Firms there would do anything, including giving wage rises, to forestall unionism (HU November 9th 1932, June 21st 1933, April 18th 1939). Particularly sensational was the case of Woods, a factory with a history of anti-unionism, whose manager on one occasion led his workpeople out to break up a union meeting; they sang and chanted "We don't want to join the union" and "Down with the Labour Party", and Wood threatened to hit the Hinckley Union secretary. The union claimed that the employees' response resulted from intimidation, the firm having conducted indoctrinatory meetings, posted anti-union posters and issued threats. Many employees were young school-leavers, who would no doubt be susceptible to anti-union propoganda. The final irony was that Wood, like many Hinckley manufacturers, had risen from the ranks and was himself an ex-member of the Hinckley Union (Hinckley Tribune, June 25th, 26th 1936).

1 LAHU A May 16th 1913, September 29th 1928, February 13th 1929, September 17th 1930, LAHU B November 30th 1926, January 19th 1929.

After World War Two anti-union feeling muted, but did not disappear. Not all employers came to see unions as a good thing or even as acceptable, despite the industrial relations truce, and many continued quietly to practise exclusionary tactics. The NUHW had particular difficulty in organising the 'new areas', especially in the South. Harold Gibson, one of the national organisers, claimed that economic prosperity, lack of tradition, and identification as *factory* rather than *hosiery* workers led to disinterest and hostility in the London area, while his partner, Betty MacIntyre, spoke of employers in the Home Counties putting up wage rates to prove the union unnecessary (AC Reports 1950 p 32, 1952 p 39).

Leicester District records show that employer hostility continued in the East Midlands as well. Collectors were often victimised, and many firms succeeded in keeping the union out. In 1952 173 non-union firms were reported, and in 1958 17 factories refused permission for meetings, while 11 were described as "evasive" (LD April 7th, 17th 1952, June 2nd 1958, August 22nd 1960). In many other firms workers simply refused to join. Some of the ways in which such firms woo the workforce are discussed in Chapter 6. It is clear, however, that victimisation and anti-union propaganda had a lasting effect on the minds of the workpeople.

Finally, it is necessary to consider briefly the role of piece-rates, which I have tentatively categorised as a repressive strategy. For some commentators (Brown et al., 1964; Edwards and Scullion, 1982), piece-rates represent a key mechanism of control in the industry. Brown describes them as "the chief means of social control in the work situation" and asserts that married women were especially "effectively disciplined" by them, because of a greater need and desire for high wages than that of single girls (Brown et al., 1964, p 329). Wells also considers payment by

results to be a very effective way to achieve high output, although considering that payment schemes, while "doing much to assist the management in its control of a factory" must be accompanied by careful planning of work flows and task organisation, so that workers are seen to be getting "a square deal"; otherwise the schemes may be counter-productive (Wells, 1968, p 201, 1972, p 213). As well as encouraging effort, piece-rates seem in hosiery to have promoted an individualistic spirit among the workforce. It was for reasons like these that the Nottingham Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) declared that piecework was "the curse of every trade that had to do with it" (Ward, 1874, p 36). Employers I interviewed saw piece-rates as effective and necessary forms of discipline. "You can't do it any other way" said Manager C, while Manager P regretted the system but saw it as "practically inevitable" to get people to work hard in work of this kind. This accords with their own individualistic value system, whereby talent and hard work are seen as deserving extra rewards.

However, as Chapter 4 revealed, the idea of piece-rates appeals as much to the workforce as to the employers. It is believed in the industry that measured daywork (MDW) and mixed schemes (such as Corahs' 'graded minutes') are unpopular with workers. Westwood, describing 'Stitchco's MDW scheme, reports that the women disliked it believing that "you could see your children more" under the old piece-rate scheme, as workers could go home when work ran out (Westwood, 1984, p 43). Gurnham states that NUHKW now wishes to abolish piecework and move to MDW (Gurnham, 1976, p 195). This policy was confirmed to me by union officials, but any efforts they may have made in this direction have been singularly ineffectual. Piece-rates have become part of the culture of the hosiery industry, and workers, rightly or wrongly, prefer to retain a system which gives them, in King's phrase, "some semblance of independence" (King, 1948, p 378).

Conclusion

This chapter has described some of the more notable repressive and exclusionary strategies used by hosiery management. Truck is an interesting example of a control device which, once much used, has become redundant because of social development. The hostility it provoked among both workpeople and the general public caused it to be made illegal, but this alone was insufficient to destroy the practice until the ending of the domestic system made it impracticable. Truck as a control device depended upon the individualising and fragmenting of the workforce.

Runaway shop and victimisation, however, are practices still relevant today. Surprisingly, relocation policies have not been widely employed during the recession to push down wages, as might have been expected. Two factors may account for this. First, the strongly localistic orientations of East Midlands manufacturers may predispose them against moving too far afield. The reverse, of course, is true of firms taken over by national conglomerates, and, as we might expect, relocation strategies have been used by them. Courtaulds, for example, has dramatically reduced production levels in its British hosiery outlets, shedding 50% of jobs between 1975 and 1983, and in its own phrase has increased "sourcing from overseas", including countries such as Portugal and Tunisia (NUHKW Journal August 1983; Courtauld Annual Report 1982-3).¹ The other inhibitory factor is that in Leicester employers are able to tap a source of cheaper labour within the city itself: many smaller firms employ Asian labour at very low wage rates.

As long as there are unions, victimisation will continue. Since 1945 Midlands hosiery manufacturers have learned to live with the unions, but

1 82.4% of the remaining UK jobs were for women.

they do not all love them. Where the power balance shifts in the employers' favour, there is likely to be an upsurge of anti-union feeling; this example reminds us of the important role of ideologies and value commitments, which continue to play a part alongside more purely economic factors in influencing strategic choices.

CHAPTER SIX

"Tis that thou with love parental
 Dost to all they aid extend;
 Both the moral and the mental
 Owning thee their generous friend."

*William Jones, framework knitter
 (Tribute to Duke of Rutland, 1853)*

"Our number we count Seven Hundred or more,
 All cloathed and fed from his bountiful store,
 Then Envy don't flout us nor say any's poor.

*Ye Hungry and naked, all hither repair
 No longer in want don't remain in despair
 You'll meet with employment and each get a share.*

*Ye Crafts and Mechanics, if you will draw nigh
 No longer you need to lack an employ
 And each duly paid which is a great joy.*

*To our noble Master, a Bumper then fill
 The matchless inventor of this cotton mill,
 Each toss off his glass with a hearty goodwill."*

*Chorus of Sir Richard Arkwright's workers, 1778
 (Fitton and Wadsworth, 1958, p 100)*

"A common cause hath bound us
 In one rejoicing band -
 Hath mingled men and masters
 Wise Head and Working Hand."

*Ruth Wills, Corahs' employee
 ('The Warehouse Opening' 1868)*

CHAPTER SIX

PACIFICATORY STRATEGIES : THE TRADITIONAL OPTION - PATERNALISMIntroduction

The last two chapters have detailed the methods whereby hosiery manufacturers sought to impose work discipline on a workforce steeped in the traditions of craft independence and household autonomy, and to produce a new breed of obedient and hard-working labourers, fit servants to the new machines. However, power and authority are more effectively exercised on subjects who accept their legitimacy. Thus, wielders of economic power habitually strive to mould willing minds as well as non-resistant bodies. As argued in Chapter 1, under capitalism this relates specifically to the ambiguity of work relationships which are characterised both by antagonism and interdependence; management thus must have recourse to pacificatory as well as repressive strategies. The major form of pacificatory strategy employed in the hosiery industry in the nineteenth century was the use of a management style we may label as 'paternalism'.

There has been a longstanding tradition of paternalism in the East Midlands, and it is still common today. In this chapter I shall trace the development of this tradition, examine the changing forms that paternalism has taken between 1800 and 1960, and assess its effectiveness as a control strategy. As the concept of paternalism presents certain definitional problems, I shall start with a brief discussion of the literature concerning it.

Section 1 Conceptualisations of paternalism

The term paternalism has been much used by both social historians and sociologists. For example, Edwards and Scullion speak of a "paternalist/autocratic management style" in the hosiery factory they studied, and Westwood describes the Stitchco management as "paternalistic" (Edwards and Scullion, 1982, p 44; Westwood, 1984, p 1). However, the term is not always clearly defined, and there is a degree of imprecision in its use. Is paternalism essentially an ideology, or is there a distinct set of practices we can designate by the term? Is welfare provision the kernel of paternalism? Such uncertainties have led to disagreements over the prevalence of paternalism in various time periods. In this section I want to examine some of the more fully elaborated accounts of paternalism, in order to reach a more precise definition.

Roberts, in his authoritative study 'Paternalism in Early Victorian England', defines paternalism essentially as an ideology or vision of society, which had been in decline throughout the eighteenth century, but which was revived, to some extent consciously, to deal with the social dislocation brought about by the Industrial revolution. The paternalist vision, according to Roberts, is of an orderly, hierarchical, authoritarian society, characterised by a nexus of interdependent, organic social relationships, in which all have clearly-defined positions, with specified rights and duties. The duty of the rich is to guide, help and rule the poor, the duty of the poor to obey and offer deference (Roberts, 1978). In return, in J.S. Mill's classic statement, they will be "properly fed, clothed, housed, spiritually edified and innocently amused" (quoted Bendix, 1956, p 47). Such a vision was the inheritance of the old aristocratic feudal order. It was backward-looking, nostalgic for a largely

mythical 'Golden Age', deeply rooted in localism and custom, hostile to commercialism and asserted the importance of moral responsibility. In these respects, as the work of E.P. Thompson has so amply demonstrated, it found a response in the values of the dispossessed working classes as they struggled to defend traditions of craft and household autonomy against the inroads of the new entrepreneurial morality, individualistic utilitarianism and the political economy of the 'free' market.¹

This classic form of paternalism was enshrined in countryside relationships, as Roberts shows, but it was also adopted by certain industrialists, despite the apparent clash with the principles of political economy.² With regard to this, Roberts makes three important points. First, the paternalist vision was more suited to the rural than the urban environment, as the paternalist landlord or employer sought to deal with his workpeople as the 'whole man', on a social, moral and religious level, refusing to reduce the employer-worker bond to a purely economic one, limited to working hours. Second, the great paternalist practice which typified the early factory villages was financially impracticable for the majority of employers. Roberts calculates that only 40 out of 500 employers extant in the early Victorian period turned to paternalist techniques. Thirdly, in towns, paternalist provision tended to become generalised, aimed at the community as a whole, not merely at workpeople. Urban philanthropists endowed schools, chapels and libraries to be used

1 See Thompson, 1969, 1971, 1978; Bendix, 1956.

2 See Chapman, 1967, pp 195-9 for discussion of attempts by industrialists to combine public benevolence, radical politics and non-conformist devoutness with doctrinaire attachment to laissez-faire and ruthless business methods. See also Patterson, 1954, pp 384-5.

by everybody.¹ Again, such provision was beyond the resources of small and medium masters, such as were, for example, the majority of hosiers. Paternalism could only be the privilege of a successful business elite. All these factors, Roberts argues, led to a decline of paternalism in the 1850s when, in any case, a new social equilibrium was emerging.

For Roberts, then, paternalism was essentially a system of values, which in turn led to a particular pattern of social relationships, based round the exchange of deference for welfare provision. A similar view of paternalism at the societal level emerges from the work of Thompson.² An account tied much more specifically to industrial relations is given by Joyce in 'Work, Society and Politics', his study of Lancashire factory life, and this account disagrees fundamentally with that of Roberts in important respects. Joyce claims that, rather than dying out in the 1850s, paternalism was extended and strengthened at that time, as a response to the challenge and failure of Chartism (Joyce, 1980, p 54). It represented an attempt to recreate a sense of community in the bleak industrial landscape of urban Lancashire, and to attach workpeople to their employers by more than an economic dependence, playing on religion and on neighbourhood, family and patriotic loyalties. This was done by incorporating the family and community into factory life, through various means: family-based employment systems, welfare provision, making the factory a centre of recreational activity, and creating social rituals. Thus a whole mythology sprung up surrounding the employer's family, with elaborate celebrations serving as rites de passage.

1 *The cynic might point to the vote-catching potential of such charitable activity. Certainly a formidable number of philanthropic hosiers in Leicester and Nottingham became councillors and aldermen. In Leicester six of them became Mayors.*

2 *For example, Thompson, 1978.*

The resulting deference among workers, especially women, already habituated to patriarchal control in the home, was accompanied by a commitment to work as a positive good, and to individual masters who were considered good masters and who maintained close personal contacts with their workpeople. Thus, claims Joyce, "industrial paternalism was both pervasive and successful"; rather than the urban setting being antipathetic to paternalism, as Roberts argues, it becomes its "chief seat" in the late Victorian period (Joyce, 1980, pp 136, 154).

Joyce's view of paternalism roots it in social practices rather than ideology. Like Roberts, he sees these practices as involving the exchange of deference for welfare provision, but he extends this by noting the link between paternalism and the celebration of family and community (as opposed to class) relationships. He has been criticised for assuming, rather than demonstrating, the deferential response, as well as for generalising from the specific and possibly unique case of Lancashire¹; but, while accepting these criticisms, I hope to demonstrate that the hosiery case provides substantial support for his argument. In particular, Joyce should be applauded for drawing our attention to the family dimension in paternalism.

Both these accounts deal with Victorian England. Can it be argued that paternalism remains a feature of industrial life, or was it an historically unique phenomenon? As stated, industrial sociologists frequently use the word, while failing to define it: an exception is the work of Abercrombie and Hill (1976) who, rightly criticising the often unthinking

¹ In a subsequent paper, Joyce has himself admitted that the response and adaptation of workers to paternalism needs to be studied more closely (Joyce, 1984a, p 74).

use of the word by their fellows, seek to construct an ideal type of paternalism. The notion of the 'whole man' is again crucial in this model, and they see paternalism as a form of social organisation involving the ideology of personal care which goes beyond the cash nexus.

In this they agree with Newby, who argues, like Roberts, that paternalism is unlikely to outlast the earlier stages of industrial development, involving as it does the necessity for face-to-face, non-bureaucratic relationships. Increased enterprise size, too, is a threat to the continuation of paternalism. In the conditions of late capitalism, the factory-owner cannot influence the lives of workers once they leave the factory gates (Newby, 1977, pp 72-3).

Abercrombie and Hill, however, believe that a continuation of paternalism in an impersonal and institutionalised form is possible: the language of personal care can act successfully to conceal impersonal and collectivised relationships, and can even take an institutionalised form which goes beyond the level of any single firm. Japanese industrial relations are instanced as an example. Such situations may involve a contradiction, but it is one that has been embodied in industrial forms of paternalism from the start: the tension between the impersonal needs of the capitalist market and the desire for successful personal interaction in the enterprise.

Their stress on the 'whole man' leads Abercrombie and Hill to declare that most organisations (outside Japan) which are labelled paternalist on account of the ideology of their managements rarely fulfil the criteria they have laid down; relations in these firms do not go beyond the level of the cash nexus. Here, I contend, they are defining paternalism too narrowly. It is not necessary to interfere with the external lives of workers in order to practise a successful paternalism in the work sphere.

Following Abercrombie and Hill and Joyce rather than Roberts and Newby, I shall argue that paternalism continues well beyond the 1850s; unlike Abercrombie and Hill, I believe that paternalism is a useful label for a distinctive management style and practice still found in Britain. My definition of paternalism in many ways resembles that of Joyce. By paternalism, I mean a form of social relationship which emphasises the notion of personal care, and does so by transposing the idealised relationships of families and community into the factory. Paternalists seek to recreate in the employer/employee relationship the family relationship between father and child, and to constitute the factory as 'one big family'. Although this may well be accompanied by welfarist provision, I do not see this as the core of paternalist management. Such an approach is better labelled 'industrial welfarism' and can be practised by companies which are otherwise committed to a bureaucratic and impersonal style of management.¹

Although there has been a continuity of paternalism (as defined above) within the hosiery industry, its exact form has varied over the period, in response to the changing social context, as Roberts and Newby have confirmed. What I will call the 'classic paternalism' of the factory village dies away by the 1850s, to be succeeded by the muted version described by Roberts, which I shall call 'factory paternalism'. With the decline of face-to-face relationships paternalism again undergoes a change, and two new forms emerge which I label 'neo-paternalism' and 'pseudo-paternalism' (see Section 4).

¹ *Courtaulds would present a prime example in the textile sector.*

Finally, Fox (1964) has pointed to the link between paternalist practice and a unitarist ideology, that is the belief in the identity of interests of employers and employed. For Fox, traditional paternalism involves the commitment of both sides to unitarism, while what he labels 'modern' or 'sophisticated' paternalism involves unitarist views among workers while the management espouse a pluralist perspective. Such tight correspondences cannot, I think, be maintained. The work of Mann (1970) has shown how ideas and values, especially among subordinate strata, are riven with contradictions and inconsistencies. It is dangerous, then, to define social relations solely in terms of a directing ideology especially if that involves imputing shared values to a large and disparate body of people. However, there is a clear link, if not a correspondence, between paternalism and unitarism: paternalist practices are often used to 'sell' a unitarist line to workers, and paternalists (as will be demonstrated) often hold unitarist views. Unitarist ideology may also be internalised by the workforce, and this may be seen as another form of pacificatory strategy. It will be referred to in the following pages.

Section 2 Classic paternalism

When the factory owners turned to paternalism as a pacificatory strategy, they had two clear local traditions to draw upon: a tradition of aristocratic paternalism in the rural environment similar to that described by Roberts, and, in Derbyshire, some remarkable instances of successful factory village paternalism, such as the developments of Arkwright at Cromford, Hollins at Pleasley and Via Gellia, and the Strutts at Belper. Many of these cotton barons had links with hosiery beyond the supply of yarns. Some had been hosiers formerly, some were in partnership

with hosiers and some continued to employ framework knitters as out-workers, using their wives and children in the mills (Chapman, 1967, pp 161-2, 188). More importantly perhaps, these millowners, along with the landowners, had established a reputation for community involvement and philanthropy, which their would-be social and political successors sought to emulate.

Aristocratic patrons were frequently involved in providing back-up community help when the hosiery industry fell into recession. Local landowners, such as the Dukes of Newcastle, Rutland and Portland, Lady Byron and Earl Howe, aided destitute framework knitters in various ways. During the Luddite period, the Duke of Newcastle headed various charitable efforts in Nottingham along with a committee of hosiers and magistrates: an emigration scheme was started for 300 families to go to the Cape of Good Hope, £6-7,000 was collected in charitable donations, and men were provided with labouring work (Bailey, 1853, pp 309-10). Correspondence between Newcastle and the stockings refers to his role as their "friend" and "well-wisher" ... as long as they remained "patient under misfortunes" (Aspinall, 1949, p 326). To the Home Secretary Newcastle wrote that the crisis had been resolved because

The attention and kindness which has been shown to the lower by the higher orders here, has made a great impression on the minds of the former.

(Aspinall, 1949, p 327)

This did not, however, prevent the mob burning down his castle in 1831!

Earl Howe and Lady Byron were among many landowners who supplied land for allotments, supported village friendly societies and provided labouring work in times of need (PP 1845 xv I qq 4981, 7324, PP 1854-5 xiv q 1922). The Duke of Portland, who, according to Felkin, had always "shown great

desire to improve the social position of the stockings in his neighbourhood" had given 500-600 gardens for their use (Felkin, 1845, p 22). The Church was also involved: Moses Furlong, a Catholic curate in Loughborough, provided soup and bread daily for sixty stockings' children, while the Anglican vicar of Newton Linstead provided allotment land. Educational provision was also made: Lady Byron endowed schools in Market Bosworth and Newbold Verdon (PP 1845 xv I qq 3236, 7373, 7459, 7870).

The example of the aristocrats seems to have fired others to similar efforts. Thomis' studies of Nottingham note the "paternalist protection" afforded by the magistracy and corporation in the late eighteenth century, for example buying large stocks of butter to sell cheaply, providing loaves to the poor at Christmas and issuing food tickets in times of need (Thomis, 1968, p 81; 1969, p 59). There was widespread public support during the early period for the framework knitters' campaigns and sympathy for their plight. Magistrates, as well as regulating market activities in the towns, used their powers sparingly where the Combination Acts were concerned. As Thomis says, this reluctance to intervene in industrial disputes was partly the result of a desire to maintain law and order, but also reflects the widespread belief in a duty to support the poor (Thomis, 1968, p 81; 1969, pp 52, 65).

This spirit of aristocratic paternalism continued through the nineteenth century. A tribute to local social leaders in 1895 praised the philanthropic behaviour of the contemporary Dukes of Rutland and Portland, and spoke of local landowners as, although belonging to the "classes", nevertheless acknowledging their duty to the "masses":

Many of them act up to the belief that each class should promote the other's weal, the great man helping the poor and the poor man loving the great.

(Anon, 1895, p 65)

An important aspect of all this was the example it set to the emergent bourgeoisie. If local industrialists such as Samuel Morley, A.J. Mundella, the Corahs and the Atkins, wished to supplant the gentry as local leaders, they had to show they could fulfil their responsibilities. An even more spectacular example was set for them by the Derbyshire magnates. Their achievements have been fully documented in several valuable accounts, but will be briefly discussed here.¹

Abercrombie and Hill claim that early industrial paternalism was a response to problems of labour recruitment, underdeveloped labour markets and labour discipline. This was certainly the case for the East Midland spinning mills. As we have seen, workers in the traditional sector shunned the factories. For many, such as the Hollins and the Strutts, the solution was to use child labour, including pauper children.² The employment of children in turn raised further problems. Strutts' labour records between 1801 and 1804 afford a rare illumination into labour relations at this time: among the 1665 fines levied in these years were some for such heinous crimes as telling lies to Mr. Jedidiah, throwing bobbins, making T. Ride's nose bleed, riding on each other's backs, striking T. Hall with a brush, throwing water on Ann Gregory very frequently, throwing tea on Josh Bridnosh, and frightening S. Pearson with her ugly face! (Fitton and Wadsworth, 1958, p 236). In addition, there was a public relations problem, as the eyes of the world, and especially of government inspectors, turned to these new experiments in work organisation, showing concern over the well-being of these young workers. Scandals, such as that of Hollins' Walker children,

1 See Wells, 1968; Piggott, 1949, on Hollins; Fitton and Wadsworth, 1958, on the Strutts and the Arkwrights; and Chapman, 1967.

2 See Piggott, 1949, Chapter VI.

made window-dressing imperative.¹ All these pressures pushed the mill-owners towards paternalism.

To produce a suitable environment for children, and also to attract adult labour to the mills, a wealth of inducements and incentives were provided: cottages, allotments, schools, chapels, sick clubs and providential schemes were laid on in the villages. Whole families were employed within the mills (Chapman, 1967, p 166). Hollins, for example, was noted in 1843 as providing a children's playground with equipment for athletics for "both sexes and all ages", penny baths, a provident society, a Mechanics' Institute, a reading room and a farm shop (Wells, 1968, pp 68-71). Another feature was the lavish provision of feasts and entertainments to mark important events, such as coronations and military victories. For example the Whig and Unitarian Strutt family celebrated the passing of the Reform Bill with a party at their home at which 4,800 lbs of beef, 3,184 lbs of plum pudding, 7,000 penny loaves and 2,550 quarts of ale were consumed: entertainment was provided by the works' Musical Society (Fitton and Wadsworth, 1958, pp 259-60).

Regular festivities, such as works outings and annual balls, were particularly interesting strategically, as an attempt to make redundant the autonomous local festivals and wakes which urban employers so deprecated.² For example, at Arkwrights' there was established an annual 'candlelighting' festival, a parade round the village with music, dancing and gifts. Twice-yearly balls, one observer commented, made the workpeople "industrious and sober all the rest of the year" (Fitton and Wadsworth, 1958,

1 *This notorious case, involving the imprisoning of children for breach of contract, is described by Wells, 1968, and Piggott, 1949.*

2 *See Chapter 4.*

pp 99, 101). Arkwright's repertoire of paternalist devices especially demonstrated, in another observer's words, his "prudence and cunning": gifts were given to induce tradesmen to the area, good workers were marked with "distinguishing dress", "milch cows" donated to outstanding workmen, and a pub and market were provided, showing Arkwright's understanding of his workers' indigenous culture (Chapman, 1967, pp 160-2; Fitton and Wadsworth, 1958, pp 100-1).

One must not assume that such activity automatically evoked responses of deference and commitment. Strutts' records indicate a severe problem of labour turnover, running at 16% annually between 1805 and 1812 (Fitton and Wadsworth, 1958, p 240). Gardiner provides an amusing example of how paternalist policies could be counter-productive; John Strutt, to "give a higher taste" to the Belper workpeople, had formed a choir and band of over 40 workers. Such was its success that

The proficientes were liable to be enticed away and to commence as teachers of music. To remedy this, the members of the orchestra are bound to remain at the works for seven years.

(Gardiner, 1838, pp 512-3)

Nonetheless, evidence suggests a growing positive response to paternalism by at least some of the workpeople. There are many instances of tributes, expressing gratitude and affection. For example, on the occasion of William Hollins' marriage, his workpeople presented him with a silver salver and salts, with a letter praising his kindness. A later tribute to Edward Hollins in 1849 demonstrates both a deferential response and an acceptance of the unitarist viewpoint:

In you, sir, the master is blended with the friend ... You have laboured with unwearied energy in raising us in the scale of intelligence - in proving to us by personal argument that the interests of master and servant are identical - that class interests are opposed to the welfare of the community - and

that the prosperity of a nation must depend upon a harmonious union and reciprocity of interests between the sons of toil and the wealthy capitalists. But, sir, more than this, we have ever witnessed in you the tender sympathiser in affliction, the secret benefactor in seasons of distress, the anxious designer of our comforts, the encouraging enquirer into our wants.

(Wells, 1968, p 69)

If it is objected that this is the language of public rhetoric, a simpler, more modest tribute equally emphasises the daily success of the personal care ethic:

It was Mr. William himself who came round the mill almost daily ... If you had an idea for an improvement you could tell him so and hear what he thought of it ... The personal note was dominant.

(Wells, 1968, p 70)

Comments such as these are indicators of the success of paternalism in attaching to the firm a core group of loyal workers. Whatever contradictions and conflicts such public tributes may conceal, to observers the economic and social successes of the Arkwrights and the Strutts were good reasons for adopting their employment policies when faced with similar problems of labour recruitment and discipline.

Section 3 Factory Paternalism

Possibly the first factory paternalist in Leicestershire was John Heathcoat, whose Loughborough lace factory was attacked by Luddites. In 1813 he was noted as giving twenty guineas to his hands and five to their wives to "make merry" at Christmas. When he decamped to Tiverton after the attack he took with him many of his Leicestershire workpeople, and set up a paternalist regime there: Felkin reports that his workers "loved him like a father" (Thomis, 1968, p 132; Felkin, 1867, p 245).

When, much later, hosiery manufacturers built factories in Leicester and Nottingham, some of them, too, adopted the paternalist mould. Like the village paternalists they had worries over recruitment and discipline¹; they, too, had to handle a workforce which was seen as in need of protection (women and young children), they, too, faced moral panics, as scandals over prostitution and debauchery among factory girls succeeded to those over ill-treatment of pauper children, and they, too, wished to create a respectable public image for their enterprises, which would be consonant with the leading role they hoped to play in local political and social life. Paternalism, again, offered a solution to these problems.

Before the consolidation of the factory system, one or two large hosiery firms had already gained a reputation for charity and benevolence, notably the Morleys in Nottingham (who were to carry paternalism into their factories) and the Biggs brothers and Richard Harris, the major entrepreneurs in Leicester.² A commentator writing in 1891 described John Biggs as

A man of great abilities, generous and free-handed to a fault. His purse was ever open and he was a great friend to all in distress.

(Jones, 1891, p 10)

Anecdotes are then recounted of the personal help he gave to his workmen. Even Chartist Thomas Cooper, no friend to privilege, praised Biggs as an exemplary master affording "English treatment" and "real philanthropy" to his hands (Biggs LRO). Similarly, Harris' biographer described him as a "kind master and a real friend", and illustrative anecdotes tell of his concern over his operatives' wages and conditions, and of a "benevolent

1 See Chapters 3 and 4.

2 The Biggs failed to make the transfer to factory production successfully. Their business failed in 1861.

arrangement" to keep workers too old to adapt to new machines on their old-fashioned frames, thereby losing the firm money. At his funeral in 1854, among the 1,500-3,000 spectators were

Great numbers of operatives, besides those belonging to his own firm, who were drawn to the spot by respect.

(Lomas, 1855, pp 78-9, 173)

The charity of these great manufacturers and civic leaders was, however, directed more generally to the whole community. Factory paternalism in its subsequent form was a much more specifically control-oriented strategy, aimed at the problems listed above. Devices used by the hosiers in the 1880s and 1890s were strikingly similar to those of the classic paternalists, but on a less lavish scale. Even so, they required levels of expenditure which put them beyond the reach of small employers.¹

A first priority was to set up a tolerable factory environment. Lace and hosiery factories in Nottingham were equipped with dining-rooms, washing facilities, libraries and chapels (Church, 1966, pp 290-2). Samuel Morley's factories were described as clean, light, airy and well-ventilated, and workers always received the top current prices. Morleys also set up a pension scheme for long-serving workers, which cost the firm £2,000 per annum (Hodder, 1887, pp 140-2). Hine and Mundella's Nottingham Manufacturing Company (NMC) had by 1868 a benefit club, a sports club with facilities for skittles, draughts and bagatelle, brass bands and sports teams (Church, 1966, p 268). Walkers' hosiery factory in the Leicestershire village of Fleckney provided "good wages, clean working conditions, a Mission Hall and a fine recreation ground" (Badcock, 1980, p 35). Walkers

1 *Contrast with the analysis of Newby (1977) which ties paternalism to small firms.*

also endowed a hall and schools in Leicester (Wrights, 1888, p xxvii). Those setting up factories in the villages, such as Rowleys in Fleckney, and Morleys in Heanor, provided cottages for the workpeople (Thomas, 1900, p 44; Badcock, 1980, p 30).

Factory social rituals were also adopted, if on a more modest scale than the potlatches of the cotton magnates. Hine and Mundella instituted the practice of an annual factory excursion, as did other firms. One, Donningtons, arranged a weekend 'gypsy party' with tents, campfires, singing, dancing, dinner and a cricket match (Church, 1966, p 219). Similar outings were arranged by some of the larger Leicester firms (Lancaster, 1982, pp 115-6). Corahs of Leicester staged a series of spectacular parties to celebrate the extension of their premises in 1866, 1882 and 1886, with dancing, feasting and entertainments (Webb, 1948). More humbly, Nottingham hosier James Allen simply invited his knitters to tea at his warehouse (PP 1854-5 xiv q 7005).

Such entertainments altered in nature as cultural fashions changed. In 1907 the NMC gave a party when an employee at its Loughborough factory became the town's first Labour mayor. 750 employees were among the 900 guests at the town hall, and "a popular feature ... was a beauty contest among the girls employed by the company" (Deakin, 1979, p 102). Mundella must have turned in his grave!

Another Loughborough hosier, Warner, enlivened the annual flower show he held in his park with a hot air balloon (Wix et al., 1973). This must have been more exciting than the delights served up by Adams of Nottingham in the 1860s; every morning in a special room a clergyman delivered "a short and interesting sermon" before everybody entered upon their "secular

duties".¹ The same gentleman made visits to workers who were sick or "otherwise afflicted" (Felkin, 1867, p 555).

Describing these developments, Felkin, himself a manufacturer, makes explicit the connection with a unitarist stance:

Other houses are using various means having the same end in view. These are steps in the right direction, tending as they do to identify more clearly and plainly the true interests of the employers and employed.

(Felkin, 1867, p 555)

Samuel Morley had a similar policy and philosophy:

The fullest and freest fraternity was established between capital and labour, between master and workmen ... He always sought to make the interest of his workpeople identical with his own.

(Hodder, 1887, pp 142-3)

The use of the word 'fraternity' is significant. A key aspect of factory paternalism was encouragement of family links. Obviously, the domestic system had encouraged a work/family identification, and the parallels between family and employment relations had been drawn from early on. Robert Scott told the Committee on Artisans and Machinery how, before the advent of the Combinations Acts, "The man considered his master as his father, and the master considered his man as his child" (PP 1824 v p 368). Thomas Corah in his evidence in 1854 made repeated reference to the trade being "family work", having a "family connection", and this tradition carried itself into the factories (PP 1854-5 xiv q 2892; Cassells, 1873, p 63). Paternalists played up this aspect in their propaganda material, and encouraged a family recruitment policy, along with a linked

1 *At one lace factory in the 1890s which continued the morning service tradition, workers lost half an hour's wages for non-attendance!* (PP 1893-4 xxxvii Pt I p 169).

stress on long service, both of which policies emphasised notions of commitment and personal links within the factory. For example, a centenary publication by Halls of Earl Shilton, Leicestershire, details the tradition of family employment in the factory. A Mrs. Quining was among the sixteen original employees in 1882 and Charlie Quining, who worked there from 1917 to 1973, is said to often visit the factory to "see old friends", including, no doubt, the four family members still working for Halls. The grand-daughter of the firm's driver of the 1890s was working there in the 1970s.¹ These details, however, pale in comparison with the history of the Shipman family, employed by Atkins of Hinckley from 1844 on: twelve family members contributed a total of 377 years of service, including nine who served for over 25 years! Many similar "old families" and long-servers are mentioned in the firm's 150-year celebratory publication (Halls, 1982; Atkins, 1972).

In addition to fostering actual family links, paternalists drew upon the imagery of the family as the model for industrial relations. The ideal 'good master' was kind and stern, firm but fair, keeping a watchful eye on both the behaviour and the welfare of his workpeople, exactly mirroring the role of the Victorian paterfamilias. Thus, we are told of Samuel Morley that "beneath the somewhat stern exterior there dwelt a generously kind and loving heart" which extended "kind and even *fatherly* treatment" (Hodder, 1887, p 150, my emphasis). Similarly of Colonel Atkins we read that beneath "this almost Victorian military bearing" lay "a wonderfully understanding and sympathetic character" to which the workpeople responded

1 *Of a later driver, we are told that a primitive tachograph installed in his truck was a "paternal" not a "punitive" check (Halls, 1982, my emphasis).*

with "great affection"; while his Victorian father, Arthur Atkins, "beloved by his workpeople", advised them "as a father would a son" according to their tribute on his death (Atkins, 1972, pp 10, 19). The Leicester Chronicle, describing Corahs' 1866 fete, spoke of

The cordiality and good feeling which exists between employers and employed ... of that almost parental interest which the firm takes in their 'hands', and of the devoted attachment of the latter to the interests of those with whom they have been fortunate enough to secure an engagement.

(Webb, 1948, p 24)

In 1886 John Cooper, the current head of the firm, stated that

He looked upon all the workpeople as brothers and sisters and took it as a matter for congratulation that unity existed so much among them.

(Webb, 1948, p 48)

Corahs was the outstanding example of successful paternalism in the industry. After its early switch to steam power, the firm went from strength to strength, ousting Biggs as the major Leicester employer and perpetually extending the size and range of its operations. The firm was the first to instal electric light and to provide a week's paid holiday, in 1885 and 1883 respectively. Corahs provided treats and gifts for the "aged poor", built homes for old framework knitters and instituted a charitable fund in memory of a family member who died in World War One. Gold watches were presented to long-serving employees: in 1886 there were 170-80 who had served over ten years. On that occasion, a local newspaper described the operatives as "young men and women whose countenances beamed with intelligence and good humour", and praised the tastefulness of the women's dress: "of such a body of workpeople the firm ... may well be proud". It seems that the workpeople, in turn, were proud of the firm; among the decorations they made for the 1866 and 1886 festivities were mottoes such as "Success to the Firm", "May Unity ever exist between our

Employers and Employed" and "May commerce flourish and wealth increase, And Britons keep their homes in peace". A speech attacking trade unions was applauded at the 1866 ceremony:

They were all union men and women - that was they were strongly and kindly united - (hear, hear) to their kind and enterprising employers (loud cheers). He was glad to hear that was the only union, which they as men of common sense believed in.¹

A strand of anti-union practice and ideology was common among paternalist firms. The cases of Rowleys, Walkers and Byfords have already been referred to in Chapter 5. Walkers' paternalist wings extended as far as Hawick in Scotland, where Chaplin of LAHU was told when visiting the workers that "It's a good firm, considerate with their workpeople, pay old age pensions and maintain four cottages": Chaplin's curt reply was "History shows that some of the greatest thieves have been also very charitable men" (LAHU A December 15th 1913). Something of a feud had developed between Ernest Walker and the union leaders; in 1891 Holmes of LAHU went so far as to chase the firm to Nailsworth, Gloucestershire, where it had moved some machinery. The villagers, however, took Walkers' side, greeting Holmes with hostile jeers and howls. According to Holmes this was the result of Walkers' paternalism, blinding the workpeople with "benefactions of tracts, soup and blankets" (Lancaster, 1982, p 59). Those who joined the union were fined. Although Badcock claims that the 1886 strike in Fleckney destroyed for ever by its bitterness the "traditional friendship" of workers and masters (Badcock, 1980, p 34), Walkers clung to a paternalist style right up to the takeover of the firm (by then Wolsey) in 1967 by Courtaulds.

¹ *Material on Corahs comes from the interesting factory histories by Webb (1948) and Jopp (1965). See especially Webb pp 23-7, 46-8.*

Such paternalist firms presented the unions with some of their fiercest struggles. Atkins were involved in a long confrontation with the Hinckley Union in the 1930s (HU July 8th 1935). Chaplin's comment on a Wigston factory neatly encapsulates the problems the unions faced: "There's a family influence about the place that will not be helpful to us" (LAHU A May 19th 1920). However, there was not an automatic link between paternalism and exclusionary policies. Despite the earlier opposition of Corahs to unions, by 1886 the progressive John Cooper was making conciliatory speeches, supporting the spread of unionism, and in Nottingham the paternalist leaders Morley and Mundella took the same line. The contribution of these men will be dealt with in Chapter 7.

In the main, however, the exclusionary approach of firms like Walkers and Atkins seems to have been more common. As I tried to demonstrate in Chapter 5, exclusionary policies had some lasting effect. It is harder, perhaps, to assess the pacificatory effects of paternalism on the rank-and-file workers. We must beware of simply assuming, as does Joyce, that a deferential response was evoked, especially if we use the word deference in its strong sense, that is denote the acceptance by the workpeople of their own inferior status and of their superordinates' superiority and right to exercise authority.¹

Although it has been reported that in the 1920s Atkins' workpeople would doff their hats when they met their bosses in the streets, such customary trappings of deference may conceal a much more complex set of motivations.² Comments made by stockingers in 1845 shed a revealing

1 See the account of deferential working-class imagery in Lockwood, 1966.

2 See Newby, 1979, pp 110-12, for a similar view of the ambiguity of deferential behaviour.

light on such deferential demeanour. One knitter explained that, when taking work in to a master

If you do not bridle in, and be very mute, you suffer the worse: so that, while undergoing these hardships, you have to stand silent, for if you say anything it must be either 'Yes Sir' or 'No Sir'.

(PP 1845 xv I q 7736)

Another spoke of having to pray for work "for we more generally go like petitioners than defenders" (PP 1845 xv II q 359). The 'Framework Knitter' poem quoted from in Chapter 4 includes an instructive analogy in describing the same phenomenon:

*The word of command was brought forth to appear,
Which I quickly obeyed with great rev'rence and fear,
For we always assume the identical grace
That a culprit displays to a justice of peace.*

(Sutton, 1852, p 93)

In fact, I have found very scanty evidence of a true deferential acceptance of hierarchy on the part of the hosiery operatives. Occasional letters to masters and patrons are couched in the terminology of respect, awe and humility.¹ One 1845 witness spoke of how he and his fellows "looked up" to Richard Morley (PP 1845 xv II q 190). However, these few demonstrations of a deferential spirit are far outnumbered by statements manifesting a sense of injured human dignity, or pride in craft status and independence.² There is, however, considerable evidence of a positive response to paternalist management if we take deference in a rather weaker sense, to denote gratitude, affection, a sense of being looked after and of commitment to a 'good master'. Tributes of this kind were frequently paid to the paternalist employers, and are strikingly reminiscent of the

1 For example, see Aspinall, 1949, p 324; Pickering, 1940, p 119.

2 A sample of these can be found in Chapter 8.

tributes made to the classic paternalists of the earlier period. A selection are quoted here.

A letter from Thomas Bent, secretary of the Straight-down Hose Branch to John Biggs spoke of "deep and heartfelt thanks for your unbounded philanthropy and benevolence" and concluded with a hope that the letter would not be read as "flattery and ostentatious display, but as the homage of grateful hearts for benefits received" (Biggs LRO). When Samuel Morley lost his Parliamentary seat on a charge of election malpractice, he received an unsigned letter, along with a bible and hand-worked bookmark, from "the females in your employ" who spoke of their "great esteem" and "the great love and respect we feel towards you" (Hodder, 1887, pp 168-9). A funeral oration spoke of Morley's frequent presence in "very lowly gatherings and with very humble workers" whom he hoped to strengthen with "personal co-operation" as well as helping them with "some substantial donation" (Harrison, 1886). Numerous comments show that Mundella, "The Poor Man's Friend", was well thought of by his employees (Church, 1966, p 332). When Arthur Atkins died, 300 workpeople voluntarily attended his funeral, an event unprecedented in Hinckley; the newspaper tribute written by his operatives recorded that during his illness the constant enquiry had been "Have you heard how the Master is?", and the response to his death was "We had lost our best friend". Why? Atkins had cultivated philanthropy and a personal link with them:

If he met any of the workpeople he knew them, from the oldest to the youngest, and he never allowed them to pass without speaking in a kindly way to them.

(Atkins, 1972, p 10)

A portrait of Robert Walker was commissioned by his workpeople and presented to his sons in 1884 as a "mark of the esteem in which he was held by them as an employer" (Badcock, 1980, p 28).

Tributes to Corahs were numerous. A letter signed by seventeen employees, sent to Thomas Corah's widow in 1870, spoke of their cherishing his memory with

The greatest respect ... We remember that whenever we have met with him he always expressed great pleasure at the sight of old faces and we ever found him kind and friendly.

(Webb, 1948, p 32)

One of the seventeen was Ruth Wills, who had started work for the firm aged about ten, and subsequently wrote two volumes of poetry. An ode written by her for the 1866 "Warehouse Opening" demonstrates that she had internalised the unitarist viewpoint:

*Here may the hand that's willing
Find ever work to do,
Here may the earnest-hearted
Work on with purpose true.*

*May workers and employers
Each for the other care,
And in a generous spirit
Each other's burdens bear.*

(Webb, 1948, p 31)

Another poem, celebrating a day spent by the workpeople at the Corah family's Scraftoft Hall, expresses a similar idea:

*Still may they prosper, and we with them ever
In mutual dependence bravely strive,
And win our way through earnest true endeavour
To all the good that industry can give.*

(Wills, 1861, p 60)

The more intimate aspects of the paternalist personal-care ethic are symbolised by a poem "A Thank-Offering", recording the gift of "flowers in March" from John Cooper, her employer (Wills, 1868, p 104).

Another group of employees presented John Cooper with an illuminated address, expressing "sincere regard and respect for you" and trusting

That the good feeling which has hitherto existed (as evinced by the fact that no less than 90 of the present workpeople have been in the service of your firm for periods ranging from 20 to 40 years) may continue.

(Webb, 1948, p 50)

A simpler but eloquent tribute is the story of Amos Barton, a knitter who spent 54 of his 70 working years with the firm; formerly he had had three masters, two of whom he quit because of the low wages they paid.

At his death his son wrote

He has been drawing a pension of 10/- a week from the firm for a matter of twelve years, and I and the rest of the family wish you to accept our thanks for the same, as it has been a means of him enjoying his old age.

(Webb, 1948, p 76)

The successes of Corahs may be seen as a thorough vindication of paternalist management style. It seems that a considerable proportion of their workforce responded with gratitude, and with acceptance of the firm's values. It is notable that the paternalist firms (Corahs, Atkins, Walkers, Morley, NMC) were also the most economically successful in the industry: as opinion leaders, they set a tone and style which others might at least aspire to follow.

Section 4 Paternalism and modernisation

As has been indicated, the paternalist firms often continued their policies into the modernisation period. A tradition of paternalism had been set up, and while the firms retained, as most of them did, their pattern of family ownership and their pride in the established personal-care style of management, it tended to remain. This spirit is well summed up by Guy Paget, himself a member of one of Leicester's leading industrial families (in banking):

It is the family firm, often now in its third or fourth generation, which has enabled the personal touch to be maintained between employers and employed, so that the latter are far more than 'hands'; and this has helped to keep Leicester similarly free from the strikes which have been so rife elsewhere. A few years back I was talking to a middle-aged woman and asked her where she worked. She named the firm. 'Oh' said I 'I know Mr. So-and-So very well', mentioning the head of it. 'Isn't he a lovely gaffer' was her enthusiastic reply ... Walk through a factory with the head of it and notice how he addresses all and sundry by their Christian names, and makes familiar enquiries as to a mother's health or the progress of a wife with a new baby ... the value of such personal relationships needs no labouring.

(Paget and Irvine, 1950, p 162)

This personal rapport seems to have been particularly valued by female employees, as previously suggested. Some flavour of their response can be gained from the depositions of pensioners remembering their work lives, held in Leicester Record Office (LRO DE 1313). Mrs. Birkin of Barrow-on-Soar recalled that in the strictly-disciplined factory where she started work

The owner of the factory, a fine-looking gentleman, would visit once a week, and everywhere had to be cleaned; his wife often came too, we loved to see her, she would smile and talk to us as she moved down the alleys.

Apart from the deferential tone of the description, this seems to indicate that the workpeople felt drawn into the family life of the employer by his wife's presence; a similar impression is gained from Mrs. Dennis' recollections of her time at Chilprufe Mills¹:

Our boss was a real gentleman. In the Summer-time he would come round the factory, and all the shafting would be stopped and he would take about 36 girls to his big house and garden and we would go picking fruit. It was marvellous, very, very happy hours. I really enjoyed every minute of it.

1 *Chilprufe have now ceased to be a family firm, and their new management refused to let me interview them.*

At all holiday times wages were doubled and Chilprufe she erroneously recalls as being one of the first firms to have a works outing; 18 buses headed for Skegness.

Facilities provided by the paternalist firms show both continuity with the past and a response to a changing social environment. For example, by the early 1960s Corahs was offering its employees canteen facilities (from 1936), medical and dental services (from 1946), social clubs, sports facilities, an 'Evergreen Club' for pensioners, a chaplain, a manicure service, and various pension and sick pay schemes, including a long-service award scheme 'Security through Service' (Jopp, 1965, pp 57-8). 'Encore News', its house journal in the 1960s, makes mention of a suggestion scheme, a savings scheme and works advisory committees at the various branches. Parties emphasised the same themes of long-service and tradition, though sometimes tinged with traces of modernity. In 1965, 560 out of a possible 680 employees with 25 years' service attended a dinner at Leicester's De Montfort Hall. In the same year at an 150-year celebration for the firm, fourteen of the female workers danced the can-can, while the annual dance featured a Miss Corah competition!

Hollins, now Viyella International, revamped its labour policy in 1935, appointing a Welfare Officer: as well as welfare schemes, sporting and social clubs, pensions and long-service awards, it had a suggestion scheme, offering prizes of £1-25. A house magazine was instituted to improve communication, this being one way such firms attempted to get over the problem of increasing numbers of employees and maintain the personal link (Wells, 1968, pp 186, 239-30). Johnson and Barnes, a newer Leicester-shire firm which adopted the paternalist style, had in 1951 "bright and cheerful canteens", an on-site clinic and a pension scheme; 150 of their

current workforce had over 25 years' service with the firm (Johnson and Barnes, 1951).

With continued expansion, it was obviously hard to maintain the personal links with employees in the style of Arthur Atkins and Samuel Morley. Here, however, an institutionalised form of paternalism, as Abercrombie and Hill indicate, may evolve. The 'good master' gives way to the 'good firm'. Newby and Roberts in their accounts have overlooked this possibility and have thus underestimated the immense staying-power of paternalism once a tradition has been established. Only some major upheaval, in location perhaps, or more commonly in ownership, will rupture that tradition. For example, NMC passed out of the ownership of Mundella, and seems to have latterly abandoned the policy of progressive paternalism he established there. At two firms I visited which had recently been taken over by large corporations varied results were reported by the managers. In one case old traditions of family recruitment and keeping on 'policy cases' (old employees no longer able to achieve maximum productivity)¹ had been scrapped and a more ruthless dedication to profitability had been instituted. In the other case, it was reported that existing management staff who had been retained by the firm tried to preserve the old "family firm feeling" and "happy atmosphere".

If anything, the use of family symbolism became more marked as the personal bonds actually weakened. A Christmas message to Hollins' employees spoke of "our great and growing family" (Wells, 1968, p 230). Johnson and Barnes recorded

1 *Note the parallel with the policy of Robert Harris in the 1840s.*

A friendly atmosphere about the works ... fathers, sons and cousins chatting together and with older employees who were grown workmen when the others were children ... The indefinable sense that it is a family firm ... policies are probably formulated and decisions taken in the old-fashioned way.

(Johnson and Barnes, 1951)

A publicity handout for Corahs states "Above all Corah cares, as it has always cared ... The loyalty of our employees ... is handed down from father to son". Jopp in his history of 1965 explains the firm's success and ability to survive recessions in terms of "their employees' co-operation and goodwill" which firms that went under lacked. In 1965, he claimed, no other firm had so little sense of "We" and "They" or

So much of a feeling of progress towards a real industrial partnership ... The family atmosphere, and, indeed, the family link in its most literal sense has been preserved.

(Jopp, 1965, pp 14, 47, 54)

'Encore News' too, emphasises the family theme. Its pages give details of marriages, engagements and births among employees. Pictures of employees are supplemented with personal details, especially stressing family contacts. One woman is described as follows:

Very much a family woman, she has three sons, two grand-daughters and a grandson. Her home is her hobby, she takes a keen interest in this and her family.

The Chairman, in his 1966 Christmas message, re-emphasises the importance of

The homelife that begins and ends a day at work ... It is with our family that we renew our zest for life ... We give thanks for the joy of our family life.

Finally, Halls in their centenary brochure encapsulate the paternalist ethic

Hall and Son is still a family business. No small achievement in this age of merger and takeovers! But this family of ours extends beyond the Halls - father and sons - to include the generations of workpeople and customers to whose loyalty we owe the greater part of our success.

(Halls, 1982)

While stressing the continuities of paternalist practice and management style, I also want to make it clear that it modifies in form, in response to a changing social milieu. On that basis we might distinguish from the 'classic' or 'factory' versions two 'mutant' forms, which have evolved during the postwar period, 'neo-paternalism' and 'pseudo-paternalism'.

'Neo-paternalism' is the full flowering of the trends I have described in this section. The case of 'Chemco', described by Nichols and Beynon (1977) could stand as a model. This is an institutionalised version of paternalism which differs from the early forms in seeking to incorporate the union, rather than excluding it or making it redundant. In this, it resembles what Fox called 'sophisticated paternalism' (Fox, 1974).

Corahs as it is now is the single example of a neo-paternalist firm I have details of within the industry. In the 1880s its progressive head, John Cooper¹, started to promote union development in the industry. Since then the firm has, in the main, followed a policy of co-operating with the union. Jopp describes the firm's approach to unionism as "sensible": "Corahs encourage, but they do not compel, their employees to join, the appropriate union" (Jopp, 1965, p 57). Despite the lack of 'compulsion', union membership is notably high.² Currently Corahs pay the wages of two

1 John Cooper was the only nineteenth-century head of the firm who was not a family member. He was a protégé of Thomas Corah; his origins are obscure, but possibly having 'risen from the ranks' made him more sympathetic to workers' organisations.

2 92% in 1978.

full-time union representatives who have their own office and are welded into the personnel service of the firm. They deal with workers' personal problems, as well as union matters such as grading and pay adjustments and so on. Much of their attention apparently centres on the young women who represent something of a problem of management to the firm. Thus, paternalism continues to be associated with management of a female workforce which can be seen as still needing 'parental care'.¹

Neo-paternalism combines traditional welfarism with the incorporation of the union, building it, too, into the 'factory family' and allowing it to operate only within clearly specified limits.² Though it seems to work fairly well for Corahs³ it is too expensive a strategy for smaller firms, which predominate numerically in the industry, to adopt. Such firms, by contrast, practise what I call 'pseudo-paternalism'. Many are strongly opposed to unions, often refusing access to officials.⁴ Unable to afford welfarist provision, their personal-care strategy is limited to the attempt to recreate family patterns in the factory, by use of family symbolism, family recruitment, and in some cases an extremely genuine concern for employee well-being. Of one such firm, the local official in 1948 reluctantly confessed "The workers were so well looked after he had made no progress", while another told the union firmly in 1967 "The company is a family concern in which there is no place for a union" (LD October 25th

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- 1 *There are many very young girls in the industry. A 1964 study of 7 making-up departments found that 59% of single employees were aged 15-19 (about 1/4 of the whole female workforce) (Brown et al., 1964, p 27).*
- 2 *See Nichols and Beynon, 1977.*
- 3 *Leicester District minutes reveal that post-war industrial relations at Corahs have been by no means easy; nevertheless, the numerous small disputes that arise there are normally resolved with speed.*
- 4 *See Chapter 5.*

1948; NEC October 20th 1967). One manager I interviewed in 1984 described his firm as "a happy, friendly, family business"; he believed that many people preferred to seek out this sort of working atmosphere.

These small firms put stress on family ties. Many of them in the industry today are Asian-owned, utilising kin- and family-based recruitment networks. An important strand of the small firms' policy is allowing female workers flexible hours and time off to fit with family needs.¹ The factory representative of one such firm described to me the easy atmosphere in the factory, the good treatment and understanding of the boss towards his female employees. At this firm, the workers showed their gratitude by voluntarily waiving a union-agreed 15% pay rise. At least two other small firms reported the same occurrence in 1980 (Leicester Trader, March 12th 1980; Financial Times, April 18th 1980). Recession is seen as a joint problem for the 'factory family'.

Although evidence is still scanty, it may well be that this is the typical pattern of employment relations in the 1980s in small firms with largely female workforces. Evidence of similar patterns in firms within the garment industry is provided, for example, by Chapkis and Enloe (1983, pp 25-36, 107-13), Coyle (1984, Chapter 2) and Sharpe (1984, pp 60-2). Certainly 'pseudo-paternalism' is widespread in the contemporary hosiery industry.²

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- 1 *Large paternalist firms also practise this strategy. A study of one such firm in the 1960s revealed that, while only 7% of women worked part-time, 25% had 'concessions' from the firm, i.e. were allowed to start slightly later or change lunchbreak times to fit with domestic needs (University of Leicester Sociology Department, 1961).*
- 2 *Of the 16 firms in my sample, three had under 50 employees, two under 100. Four of these might have been described as 'pseudo-paternalist'. Three allowed the female employees flexible hours, as did the non-paternalist small firm. In 50% of the 16 firms family recruitment was, or had been, common.*

Conclusion

In the nineteenth century, paternalism was the main pacificatory strategy in the industry.¹ It was adopted to help labour recruitment and discipline, to encourage long-service and commitment, and to present an acceptable image to the public at a time when the industry was under considerable scrutiny. Once adopted, paternalism tends to endure unless some major upheaval breaks the continuity with tradition. It can be practised by both large and small firms, although the form and content of paternalist practice will vary between them.

Certain circumstances, present in the hosiery case, seem to foster paternalism. First, it is often adopted where the workforce is defined as in need of guidance and protection, and thus is commonly associated with the employment of women. Second, it is more likely to prosper where there is a continuance over time of a family firm structure. Ownership, in fact, seems to me a much more significant factor than size.² In family-owned firms, the idea of the family and the framework of paternal obligations and expectations has a more than merely symbolic importance. His own family's prospects will matter to the director as the workpeople's families do to them. Family priorities can then be transferred successfully to the industrial arena. Where family ownership is lost, the symbolism may still be used, but in a more manipulative fashion, and it may well lose its efficacy.³ Thirdly, paternalism is more likely to

1 *Other pacificatory strategies, such as worker participation or job enrichment schemes have been rare in the industry. I have come across two examples of profit-sharing schemes, but they are definitely the exception.*

2 *The non-paternalist small firm I visited (32 employees) was the only non-family-owned firm of the 5. It was owned by a holding company, the original family having pulled out.*

3 *Arguably, this has been the case at Corahs.*

persist where there is a strong link between an industry and the community. In such a context, industrial relations will be a matter of local public concern and debate. This was particularly the case in the hosiery villages, where paternalist power like that of Walkers was long hard to resist. Gurnham cites the examples of Pasolds at Langley, in Buckinghamshire.¹ Pasolds were violently anti-union and employed the whole paraphernalia of welfarist paternalism. An ex-employee recalled the "loyalty" between workers and management: "a sense of their common interest pervaded management-worker relations" (Gurnham, 1976, p 113). Close-knit village relations fostered such a spirit; but a town such as Leicester with a strong local tradition in a dominant industry, could equally nurture it. Here civic pride and identity may pressurise employers to consider their workpeople's welfare, and promote a sense of identification which overrides class interests. Thus, a local newspaper commented on the occasion of Corahs' 1886 festivities

Every Leicester man has reason to be proud of the Town whose merchants enunciate and act upon such principles.

(Webb, 1948, p 46)²

In his interesting and scholarly study of class politics in Leicester, Lancaster argues that paternalism, though attempted, was a failure. He claims that only Corahs succeeded in establishing a successful factory paternalist regime by 1885, and argues that paternalism failed because of the late persistence of the workshop system, and the resistance of a strongly independent craft-based work culture (Lancaster, 1982, pp 113, 120).

1 See Chapter 4.

2 The role of the local authorities in arbitration procedures will be dealt with in Chapter 7.

Although Lancaster is right to stress the persistence of traditional craft culture¹, I believe he seriously underestimates the significance of paternalism, for several reasons. First, while it may be true that in Leicester in the 1880s only Corahs had achieved a fully-established paternalist style, other firms in the region as a whole (in Nottingham, Hinckley and Fleckney) were adopting similar approaches, and, as I have argued, the influence of these major firms set a pattern which was later followed by other firms, such as Byfords, Halls, and Johnson and Barnes. A full-blown paternalism, being expensive, will only be feasible for a minority of firms, but these may exercise a pervasive and disproportionate influence on industrial life in the area, as happened in this case. Secondly, the focus of Lancaster's research, on radical and socialist politics, leads him to overestimate the influence of trade union activists. Certainly the leaders of LAHU, as I have shown, struggled against paternalism and resisted any kind of 'bourgeois hegemony'.² But paternalist practice is not directed at union leaders. Like many others, Lancaster has failed to note the vital distinction between unions and rank-and-file workers as targets of management strategy. Thirdly, Lancaster largely ignores the role of women workers, at whom paternalism is so often aimed, and who seem more responsive to it. Finally, Lancaster is using the term paternalism very much in the sense of welfare provision, and makes no reference to the important role of family symbolism.

I am not claiming that paternalist factory management resulted in the imposition of a cultural hegemony on the Leicester working classes. Studies have amply demonstrated the imperviousness of the working classes in the

1 See Chapters 4 and 8.

2 See also Chapter 8.

nineteenth century to bourgeois morality and the campaign for 'rational recreation'.¹ My argument is that paternalism achieved its limited objectives, that is the securing, among at least a section of the workforce, of responses of gratitude, commitment and acceptance of the management view of industrial relations, if not of deference. In doing so, it made a major contribution in shifting the tone of industrial relations in hosiery away from confrontation to co-operation.

1 See Bailey, 1978; Cunningham, 1980.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"That is the rock on which too many of the employers split, and so long as we wish to make a world to please ourselves and will not take it as we find it, I believe that we shall have these strikes and lockouts ... The Board is thoroughly convinced that in a free country where the workers and capitalists have a perfect right to enter into combinations, the simplest, most humane and rational method of settling all disputes betwixt employer and employed is arbitration and conciliation."

A.J. Mundella
(PP 1867-8 xxxix qq 19372-7)

"Their only object had been to bring together the employers and employees - believing that by the interchange of thoughtful opinion upon this important subject, a broader basis might be laid, and a truer recognition secured of the rights and responsibilities of capital and labour. He hoped that interest would not subside that night, but that some practical good would be the result ... in the formation of a union between 'capital and labour' to discuss trade questions, not in the storm of strikes, but in the calm harbour of industrial toil."

E. Killingley, Secretary of
Nottingham Liberal Society
(Ward, 1874, p 200)

CHAPTER SEVEN

PACIFICATORY STRATEGIES: THE PROGRESSIVE OPTION -
JOINT CONSULTATIONIntroduction

As a pacificatory system, paternalism could be described as backward-looking: it is an attempt to recreate and reaffirm traditional values and relationships. Other pacificatory strategies could be seen as more forward-looking, anticipating and creating new values and relationships. What I shall refer to in this chapter as 'joint consultation' has been the major progressive pacificatory strategy used by hosiery employers.

By joint consultation, I mean the whole array of negotiating practices, processes of consultation, arbitration and conciliation, along with the relevant institutions and services, which have come to typify post-war British industrial relations.¹ Such strategies work through and are directed at unions, rather than rank-and-file workers. In this, they are both pacificatory and incorporative, providing a role for trade unions within a harmonious model of industrial relations.

1 *This is a broader definition than that commonly found in industrial relations and industrial sociology texts, where the term is more narrowly used to refer to the type of committees recommended in the Whitley Report. I have used it more broadly to cover not just these, but the whole array of negotiating practices used in the industry: arbitration, conciliation, employee participation and, indeed, any centralised form of collective bargaining. I have chosen this term because the central characteristic of these strategies, in this industry, was talk, what A.J. Mundella called a "long jaw". The image of joint consultation is of men getting together round a table to talk things out sensibly and rationally. The more commonly-used term, 'participation', seems to me to convey too great a sense of active involvement. The more active forms of involvement in decision-making, such as appointment of worker directors, have not been tried in hosiery. The other alternative, 'industrial democracy', seems to me emotive and misleading; no privately-owned hosiery firm is anything like a democracy, in any meaningful sense of that word. The power imbalance is too great.*

Although joint consultation may be seen as an alternative to paternalism, it is in no way diametrically opposed to it. In fact, in the hosiery case, the initiators of joint consultation among the employers were often successful paternalists such as Mundella, Morley and Cooper.¹ Other paternalists, however, remained committed to an exclusionary approach; equally it would be possible to find examples of those who espouse joint consultation but do not combine it with paternalism towards their workers.

In this chapter I shall trace the history of joint consultation in the industry, concentrating particularly on two important institutions, the Nottingham Arbitration Board (NAB) and the National Joint Industrial Council (NJIC). I shall also consider the link of these with an ideology of industrial co-operation.

Section 1 Early Experiments in Joint Consultation

In his absorbing study of the building industry 'Masters, Men and Unions', Price claims that the development of institutionalised bargaining procedures and the modern industrial relations system represented a defeat for the workers, inhibiting the growth of a strong union and destroying the spirit of craft control. This, he argues, is because the new industrial relations were imposed by the masters on the men on terms which were beneficial to themselves, for example, by limiting bargaining relationships to what they defined as valid issues, such as pay and conditions, and excluding negotiation over issues they defined as illegitimate, such as issues of control. In this way, institutionalised bargaining produced the economic orientation characteristic of modern unions (Price, 1980).

1 See Chapter 6.

Although it may indeed be the case that institutionalised industrial relations did in the long term produce a more economic and accommodative unionism, thus fostering the incorporation of unions into capitalism, the hosiery case provides clear evidence that this was not achieved by employers imposing such a system on unwilling union leaders. On the contrary, many of the initiatives for joint consultation came from the workpeople, and they consistently supported joint consultation schemes through the period under study, while the majority of employers only slowly and reluctantly came to accept them. It is true that it was the initiative of progressive employers which led to the formation of arbitration boards in the 1860s, but when these collapsed it was the unions who campaigned for their revival. In fact, it could be argued that achieving joint control was the prime objective of the workforce in the early period.

Some of the early forms of joint action have already been mentioned. The most rudimentary form was the meeting of delegates from both sides to draw up joint statements. Some of these attempts were successful (the Hammonds claim that the 1787 statement was honoured for twenty years), but, as we have seen, the majority quickly fell into disarray (Hammonds, 1979, p 183). During the Luddite period, the Duke of Newcastle informed the Home Secretary that a "sort of negotiation" was going on between delegates of both sides, although the climate was hardly conducive to co-operation (Aspinall, 1949, p 116). On some occasions both sides did work together, but this was almost always on an ad hoc basis, when they perceived some course of action as in their common interest. The Derby alliance in 1812, the Leicester joint petition against cut-ups and the 1843 Anti-Truck Association have already been mentioned.¹ Other examples

1 See Chapters 4 and 5.

were the joint campaign against the employment of paupers as stocking-makers by the parish overseers in 1817, and a joint campaign in the related lace industry against foreign imports, led by Felkin and Henson in 1833 (Aspinall, 1949, p 235; Church, 1966, p 99).

But such campaigns were a far cry from the establishment of regular consultative procedures, and approaches by the operatives to their masters concerning such procedures were generally rejected. In 1823, Benjamin Taylor, Nottingham knitters' leader, addressed the hosiers in the Nottingham Review:

Call a meeting of your own body, and three of the most intelligent persons shall attend it on the part of the trade to consider the great claim of abuses.

(Church, 1966, p 50)

This met with no more enthusiastic response than did a similar appeal of the Leicester operatives in 1838, who declared they did not wish to start a union on "former principles" since such an organisation "must ever prove abortive" while the hosiers remained disunited and committed to principles of free competition, "that monster which has injured you and ruined us". Reminding the hosiers that they had never organised themselves except in *opposition* to the workpeople, they called on them to act "upon more enlightened principles, believing that the interests of employers and employed are identical". But this conciliatory language left the employers unmoved; only 6 attended the subsequent meeting, though 140 circulars had been sent out. The operatives had reluctantly to conclude that the manufacturers' indisposition to talk had "thrown them upon their own resources" (Wells, 1972, p 115).¹

1 *Richard Harris was one of the few hosiers who supported the scheme throughout. The men had proposed a committee of equal numbers from both sides, plus six arbiters, three chosen by each side. This plan the hosiers considered unworkable (Patterson, 1954, p 300).*

There are only two examples of a successful 'joint union' during this period. The first was a brief experiment in the bobbin-net trade in 1829, supported by Felkin, one of the few employers wholeheartedly to espouse the idea of arbitration. He claimed that 7/8 of the employers had agreed to support the scheme, which lasted ten months, and fizzled out because the trade position was "vastly improved". Felkin considered this body had tried to regulate conditions *too* vigorously, but nevertheless saw it as a successful pilot (PP 1856 xiii q 1125). A longer-lasting experiment was the Hinckley Joint Union, which lasted from about 1831 to 1838. This had financial support from local tradesmen and was managed by a committee of 21 principal townspeople (Wells, 1972, p 115).¹ The reasons for its collapse are not clear, but by 1845 Hinckley knitters' representatives were urging the establishment of a new joint union. One, John Brooks, alleged "We do not want to be arrayed against the masters, we want them to come and reason with us". A similar scheme had been suggested at a meeting in 1843 at the Hinckley Mechanics' Institute, which called for a "union of all classes" to promote peace while securing for the operative "the just price for his labour". The planned committee would consist of six operatives, three hosiers and three "gentlemen"; funds would come from middle-class subscribers and operatives' contributions. But this, too, failed to gain sufficient support (PP 1845 xv I qq 3837, 4049).

Despite the lack of response, the operatives continued to favour the joint union approach and gave support to Felkin in his campaigns for local arbitration boards to be set up on the model of the French *Conseils de Prudhommes*. Felkin spoke consistently in favour of these bodies in his

1 *Possibly this demonstrates the power of community spirit in a smaller town like Hinckley.*

evidence to various Parliamentary Commissions. In 1844 he conducted a survey of opinion on the issue: once again, most employers rejected the proposals, saying "It wouldn't work in England", but bodies of workmen welcomed them. For example, a Leicester meeting, claiming to represent 1800 hands, considered their situation such as "to call aloud for interference from some quarter or other" to protect them from the "mere whim or caprice" of two or three manufacturers. Other groups considered it essential that there should be equal numbers of representatives from both sides and criticised the French model as only men owning four looms could stand: in England, such men "are what we call middle masters". They suggested separate bodies for the three counties, demonstrating the strong local orientation of trade unionism in this era. A petition from the Leicester hands called for local boards to be established on these lines

Having for their object the conciliation of differences, the adjudication of small sums in dispute, and vindicating the law in local matters of trade.

(Felkin, 1845, pp 47-8, 1867, p 473)

Thomas Winters, a Leicester knitters' leader who later became Secretary of the National Association of United Trades and the Protection of Industry, was another determined advocate of arbitration boards. He reported that in 1849 the operatives had memorialised the Board of Trade on the issue, and that both in Nottingham and in Leicester they had drawn up draft constitutions. Strikes, he considered, were "equally injurious" to operatives and masters, and he described how one strike in Nottingham had been settled on his advice by setting up a temporary conciliation committee, consisting of a clergyman and "three or four other gentlemen"¹ (PP 1856 xiii qq 376, 466).

1 *The idea of "gentlemen" and local dignitaries such as magistrates acting as arbitrators seems to have appealed particularly to the knitters in rural areas, where there was a stronger response to traditional paternalism.*

Again in 1960 he reported that there were currently campaigns going on for arbitration in Leicester and Nottingham (PP 1860 xxii qq 364, 378). In 1854 John Sketchley, Hinckley knitters' leader, reported yet another attempt to establish a tripartite "committee of arbitration" which was rejected, yet again, by the employers (PP 1854-5 xiv q 3866).

However, by 1860 the Hinckley workpeople had gained an important ally, in the shape of John Atkins, who supported the idea of the boards, although expressing doubts as to whether many of his colleagues would agree. In his view anything was welcome that "would tend to better the relations between masters and men". He rejected the idea of each side choosing representatives from the other as this would tend to encourage the election of moderates, and he foresaw difficulties over finding a chairman: it must be someone who knew the trade (PP 1860 xxii qq 738-50, 783).

Such support from a manufacturer was rare; apart from Felkin and Harris, few helped the operatives to campaign for arbitration boards. It was noticeably the larger and more successful employers, such as the aforementioned, who supported the arbitration schemes; they stood to gain more than their smaller competitors from the stabilisation of prices. However, their motivation was not purely economic, for these men were the philanthropic leaders of the local communities: Felkin and Harris both became mayors, as did John Biggs, who is also recorded as favouring arbitration (Leicester Museums, undated). Other masters might give support in a less specific way. For example, Leicester union leaders spoke of some manufacturers "who have been our friends at all times" encouraging them in their union activities in 1819 and 1820 (PP 1824 v p 270). William Preston, praised by Thomas Winters as one of the best employers, is recorded as having taken the initiative in instituting "gatherings" which

During the last two years have been productive of so much good in removing the unhappy misunderstandings which have caused such acerbity and antagonism between employer and employed.

(Jones, 1853 p vii)

But these were the exceptions. The majority of hosiers opposed the idea of joint consultation. They did so, it was claimed, because they believed arbitration to be Utopian and impractical, because they felt it would lead to prying into their businesses and because it was "derogatory to their position and independence" (Felkin, 1867, pp 485-6). This last was linked to an ideological attachment to laissez-faire individualism. Mundella, describing his campaign for arbitration boards to the 1868 Trade Unions Commission, explained that

My obstacle ... wherever I go to get a board formed, is that masters have that old feudal notion they will deal with men one at a time ... The masters are, as a rule, opposed to any inroad upon their old-established notions; they have not yet realised the new order of things.

(PP 1867-8 xxxix qq 19474, 19480)

In addition to this conservatism, the Nottingham situation was impaired by the state of hostility and mutual distrust which prevailed as a result of the industrial conflicts of the past sixty years. Mundella told the Commission of this, describing the "bad" feeling held by some employers towards working people, and the reciprocal feeling that

It was impossible for a manufacturer to be a just and honest man ... He must be an oppressor from his position.¹

Hostility was enflamed by the war of propaganda:

Since I was a child, I do not know that I ever walked the streets without seeing some of those handbills.

1 Note that oppression is related by Mundella to the manufacturers' structural position (class), not to personal characteristics or ill disposition (see Chapter 8).

As a result, when he finally instituted the Nottingham Arbitration Board,

The men were very suspicious at first; indeed it is impossible to describe to you how suspiciously we looked at each other. Some of the manufacturers also deprecated our proceedings and said that we were degrading them and humiliating them.

(PP 1867-8 xxxix qq 19347, 19376-7, 19480, 19682, 19690)

This climate of hate was unlikely to promote a spirit of co-operation. However, the men, as Mundella affirmed, clung to the idea as a possibility; the majority of masters saw no reason to alter old habits.

Section 2 The Nottingham Arbitration Board

Mundella took over from Felkin as the major campaigner for institutions of joint consultation. In view of the climate described above, it is a remarkable tribute to his energy, persistence and high-standing that he succeeded in establishing the NAB in 1860. Following a series of four strikes in that year, with a lockout threatened in return, Mundella called a meeting of a dozen union representatives and two other leading hosiers; from this meeting sprang the NAB which stayed in existence until 1884.

The objectives of the NAB were, according to Mundella,

To arrange for a uniform rate of wages and to produce a good understanding between masters and workmen without strikes.¹

Trade was good at this time, and anxiety to avoid strikes must have motivated the previously reluctant employers in this attempt at arbitration. Originally the Board consisted of seven members from each side: numbers were later increased to nine, then ten. Workers proposed a manufacturer

¹ Details of the NAB throughout this section are taken from PP 1867-8 xxxix pp 73-83; Felkin, 1867, pp 483-9; Church, 1966, pp 269-7; Wells, 1972, Chapter 9.

as President (Mundella was inevitably elected), and manufacturers a workman as Vice-President. The workers' side was elected by ballot, organised by the unions, one representative coming from each branch. The union-linked nature of the scheme reflected the ideology of Mundella, who was firmly pro-union, and declared that the scheme would be inoperable without union co-operation. Meetings were quarterly, with provision for special meetings at seven days' notice. In 1886-7, for example, eight meetings were held. In that year seven of the employers were from Nottingham, one from Loughborough and two from Belper, covering the area represented by the Board.

Specific disputes and grievances were dealt with prior to the general meetings by a committee of enquiry, consisting of four members, annually elected. Mundella stated that the meetings were conducted in an "exceedingly informal way" and that workmen and manufacturers often sat intermingled. Originally the President had a casting vote, but on the two occasions Mundella used it it caused bitterness, so in 1864 voting was abolished. Decisions were to be obtained by reaching consensus, by what the operatives, according to Mundella, called "a long jaw". In 1870, however, a neutral referee was appointed, making the Board rather more like a body of arbitration in the modern sense than the joint consultative body it actually was. The men insisted, according to Mundella, on having a secretary of their own in attendance, to facilitate reporting back to the members. In Mundella's account of these arrangements, the noticeable thing is the flexibility with which this pioneer consultative body worked: it was not bound by its bureaucratic arrangements, and modifications were made to get the best possible degree of harmony in its functioning.

At first only half of Nottingham's forty hosiers joined it, but Mundella and the workmen gradually worked on the rest, so that by 1868 only

two or three stayed outside it. This was crucial to the Board's success; but even before 1868 it was apparently managing to get the hosiers to abide by its rulings. Its successes in this early period were considerable. It played a strong role in suppressing truck in Nottinghamshire¹, it helped achieve a reduction in frame-rent, and it stopped the practice of middlemen taking an extra charge as part of the rent. It ended the practice of paying wages late on Saturday or even on Sunday morning. To a large extent it succeeded in establishing agreed piece rates in most branches. There was also an immediate decline in strikes, although in the latter stages of the Board's existence this new industrial harmony somewhat collapsed.

There were also less tangible effects. In Mundella's opinion, at least, the NAB helped develop a conciliatory spirit between the two sides, putting an end to "chronic warfare ... betwixt labour and capital". It fostered "free and honest" exchange of views, which brought a greater understanding on both sides. For the operatives, it had been "a complete educational process", making them familiar with the "laws" of the trade and the requirements of supply and demand; trained in political economy, they could then appreciate the "justice" of the manufacturers' wages policies (Felkin, 1867, p 486; PP 1867-8 xxxix q 19358, 19377). The masters, for their part, were said to have learned to appreciate the workpeople's difficulties and struggles to earn a living, thus ceasing to "regard them as their natural enemy" (Felkin, 1867, p 486). In Mundella's view

The feeling at the present moment is more cordial and more loyal and friendly than I could ever have believed it possible ... We learn what the workman's position is and he learns what ours is.

(PP 1867-8 xxxix qq 19377, 19715)²

1 See Chapter 5.

2 These are, of course, the views of the Board's strongest advocates. But unfavourable comments on the Board are not reported.

Mundella's 1868 evidence provides some interesting examples of the type of issue the NAB handled, and illustrates the improved relationship between the two sides. Discussions were going on over hours: the operatives wished to reduce the working day from 14 to 10 hours, explaining to the hosiers the adverse effects of long hours (illness, exhaustion, exposure to gas and high temperatures). In another case, two manufacturers had been deputed to reason with a colleague threatening a price reduction. A wages claim had been received, signed by 800 of the Drawer, Pantaloon and Shirt Branch members, who expressed a belief in the NAB's "desire to promote our mental and social welfare". Recent resolutions passed by the workers' side had praised Samuel Morley's annuity scheme for "strengthening the hands of the Board in its efforts to promote a good understanding between employers and employed", and expressed sympathy for two hosiers whose factory had burned down.

Despite these initial successes, the NAB ran into trouble in the 1870s. The reasons for its decline and eventual demise are far from clear. In 1872, after dissension between the unions representing circular, rotary and hand-frame operatives, the latter two sections seceded. The hand-frame workers appear to have felt that the NAB paid insufficient attention to their special problems, and the rotary workers were angry about the rejection of a pay claim (Church, 1966, pp 275-6). Strikes which erupted during this period are also likely to have revived the employers' doubts as to the feasibility and efficacy of joint consultation. Mundella's departure to higher planes was without doubt another factor.¹ At the 1892 Labour Commission sessions, with Mundella now serving on the committee of enquiry,

¹ *Mundella was elected to Parliament in 1868, and gave up his manufacturing connections in 1871. The latest reference to him as President of the NAB I have traced is for 1867.*

both sides blamed the other for the collapse. Mundella ascribed it to the inter-union disputes, but the knitters' representatives, Samuel Bower and, more particularly, Bonser and Oscroft of the hand-frame section, were adamant that "it was broken up by the manufacturers; they smashed it up". All three regretted its decline and Bower described his efforts over the past three years to get it revived. Letters had been sent to employers, but only nine out of fifty had replied, with only one writing in favour and the other four firmly opposed (PP 1892 xxxvi pp 66, 88-9). Other campaigns to revive it were mounted by the workpeople in 1889 and 1894, but met with no success (Church, 1966, pp 278-9).

Church argues that the collapse was the inevitable result of market pressures in a highly competitive industry (Church, 1966, pp 276-7); certainly the centrifugal forces in the 1870s seem to have eventually outweighed the centripetal impetus provided by Mundella. Nonetheless, this early attempt at institutionalising collective bargaining procedures was influential, not only as a model for similar projects in other industries like boot and shoe, but also as a pattern for later developments in hosiery. Its effect upon the unions, and its role in tightening the employers' control are hard to assess. Church believes that it retarded union development and modernisation by keeping subscriptions low (members paid 1/- a year instead of 1/- a week), so that the unions could not develop upon 'new-model' lines, and by making them too reliant on the NAB in a period when, because of the favourable economic climate, they could have consolidated their bargaining strength and procedures in an autonomous fashion (Church, 1966, p 273). Bythell agrees, maintaining that by relying on the NAB rather than the unions to solve their problems the operatives were, in effect, accepting a pattern of industrial relations on the employers' terms (Bythell, 1978, p 211). Such interpretations would lend support to

the view that joint consultation acts to tighten employers' control, whether or not this result is consciously intended. Wells, however, believes that, far from weakening trade unionism, the NAB strengthened it, and helped to foster the development of the inter-union MCHF (Wells, 1972, p 140). Gurnham, too, rejects the argument that arbitration boards in general threatened union militancy by curbing development at a vital stage.¹ He argues that the hosiery unions were too weak to make any gains without the NAB's help (Gurnham, 1976, pp 28-9).

As Gurnham says, these assessments must remain essentially speculative, especially in an industry where unionism was comparatively weak. However, it is worth noting the case of Leicester, which provides us with a kind of counterfactual example. Here the Arbitration Board established in 1866 was notably less dominant and effective, while at the same time the Leicester operatives sustained the most successful union of this epoch in hosiery.² On the other hand, the development of a strong arbitration board in another Leicester industry, boot and shoe, arguably played a part in defusing a highly volatile and militant union tradition.³ Local observers noted the pacificatory role of the boot and shoe board.⁴

As Lancaster argues, since Mundella arbitration had come to bear a symbolic importance beyond its role as a device for settling disputes; it

1 See Price, 1980; Allen, 1964, for the view that arbitration boards acted to deradicalise unionism.

2 See Figure 3.2 for evidence of the subsequent weakness of the Nottingham Union.

3 See Goodman et al., 1977.

4 George Thorpe, a Leicester shoemaker, in an autobiographical statement, paid tribute to his fellows for "their outstanding and proud record of arbitration between master and man which has held the peace for them all this century" (Thorpe, LRO); while a local historian spoke of their board enabling employers and workers to co-exist peacefully for 40 years, holding it up as an example of how to settle disputes without resort to "the disastrous method of strike and lockout" (Waddington, 1931, pp. 115-6).

was part of a new political ideology (Lancaster, 1982, p 204). A sincere commitment to this essentially pluralist ideology would surely have consequences for trade union politics and strategies, but it remains uncertain how far that ideology *was* accepted by the unions, who still seemed reluctant to abandon the strike weapon in favour of compromise and an acceptance of mutual interests in capitalist development. What men like Mundella may have *hoped* to achieve by way of control may be illustrated by a comment from an observer who believed that arbitration boards

Would have the salutary effect of rendering nugatory the labours of those clever but unscrupulous adventurers who use their arts to misrepresent facts and inflame their fellow workmen against their masters.

(Nottingham Review, quoted Armytage, 1951, p 33)

The Leicester comparison is interesting. The Leicester board was not influential and rarely met.¹ John Lamb, secretary of the NAB, described the Leicester Board as "not a very lively thing", maintaining that it had not been well organised (PP 1871 xxxvi q 42520). Benjamin Wates, Leicester manufacturer, also had a low opinion of it, speaking of its "laxity and indifference"; he explained that it had faced a problem of deadlock, due to lack of an umpire (PP 1892 xxxvi p 51). Holmes described it as "in such a state of decomposition" that it had proved impossible to convene it as required. His explanation for this was that both sides had lost confidence in themselves and each other; but he also maintained that the board was redundant in Leicester, as relations between the two sides were "fairly friendly" so that if any dispute arose there was "no difficulty whatever" in the two sides meeting (PP 1892 xxxvi pp 53-4). This

1 *It did, however, have at least a list of members, nine manufacturers and nine workers, in 1888, including Daniel Merrick among the workmen (Wrights Directory, 1888).*

rosy picture of industrial relations was echoed by the Leicester Chamber of Commerce in 1911, when its yearbook spoke of the town's "remarkable immunity from serious industrial trouble" (Leicester Chamber of Commerce, 1911, p 35).

A rather different picture is gained from the LAHU minutes of industrial relations up to 1914, which might lead us to question Holmes' "official version" of things. A revealing discussion took place at the 1891 AGM, when a motion not to recognise the Arbitration Board was tabled, although it was then amended to allow recognition on condition that rule 9 was altered

To allow the Chairman to be elected from the workmen's side equally with the employers ... as the hosiery trade cannot recognise inequality where only equality ought to exist.

(LAHU A March 26th 1891)

This surely indicates not only a considerable opposition in the union to arbitration at any price, but also a stronger spirit of independence than displayed by the Nottingham operatives. As the early leaders of LAHU were a group of ILP socialists¹, Holmes, Chaplin, Barclay and Warner, it may be that there was some ideological resistance here to the notion of arbitration and the "political ideology" it represented. Warner, certainly, spoke against it at the AGM.

On the employers' side, John Cooper, the progressive opinion leader², shared Mundella's pro-union views, but did not display the same tenacious commitment to arbitration, although it is reported that in 1894 he organised a visit by the Lord Mayor of London

1 See Chapter 8.

2 See Chapter 6.

With a view to promote good will and friendly feelings between the hosiery workers and their employers, and further to consider the inauguration of a scheme whereby all disputes should be settled by arbitration.

(Webb, 1948, p 49)

On the whole, though, he concentrated his efforts on dealing with the union on an enterprise basis: as a result of the policy he initiated, Corahs could reasonably claim in 1910 that they had always tried to work with the union (LAHU A October 17th 1910). There was also a tendency in Leicester to use more ad hoc methods of arbitration in severe disputes. Mayors were called in as conciliators in disputes in 1886 and 1914, and at Wolsey in 1932 (PP 1892 xxxvi q 12713; LAHU A May 19th 1914; Littler, 1982, p 125). Industrial troubles were still seen as a problem for the *community*.

In relation to this, it should be emphasised that these moves, ambiguous and only partly successful as they were, towards joint consultation, took place in a general climate of debate, both local and national, about the handling of industrial relations, given the fact of a now fully legal and stabilising trade union movement. Nationally the official view is perhaps epitomised in this declaration by Factory Inspector, Alexander Redgrave:

The harmonious co-operation of employers of all classes and the increasing feeling that the interests of employers and employed are bound together have greatly contributed to this end ... The whole country is now of one mind ... Labour should be moderate, workrooms and factories should be made healthy ...

(PP 1871 xiv p 9)

A new creed of co-operation was being formulated, and Mundella was one of its prophets. Its ministrations were strongly felt in Nottingham and Leicester. An interesting document 'Capital and Labour' describes a series of meetings between trade union leaders and local employers,

organised by the Nottingham Liberal Club in 1874 to discuss industrial relations. Unfortunately no hosiery operatives were involved, but the ideas expressed no doubt held wider currency in the Nottingham manufacturing community. Manufacturers spoke of trade unions as a "necessity", of the "great benefit" they could offer to the community and nation, and of the desirability of forming a union of both capital and labour to further the "general welfare" of all classes (Ward, 1874, pp 107, 125, 200).

These views were not the norm in this period, as the last two chapters have shown, but the local men who voiced them were powerful community leaders. Mundella, Morley, Cooper and the Atkins were clever businessmen, who realised that the stabilisation of industrial relations was in the interest of their firms; but their lives also suggest a sincere commitment to promoting the well-being of the working classes. Mundella, for example, fought consistently not only for arbitration boards but also for legal recognition of trade union rights. It is hard to reject the verdict of his biographer, Armytage, that this was no simple move to incorporate the working classes, but a genuine collectivist altruism (Armytage, 1951, p 318). Morley, too, was a staunch advocate of arbitration and defender of trade unions, believing that "employers have often benefitted by their existence" (Hodder, 1887, pp 272, 300). John Cooper reversed Corahs' anti-union policy, speaking strongly in favour of unions in 1886:

The future was not far distant when the workpeople of the county would be sufficiently wise to form a strong union amongst themselves ... and he was quite sure that all of them - and he hoped they belonged to one or other of the unions in Leicester - would receive them with open arms.

(Webb, 1948, p 46)

Cooper believed that only strong unions could solve the problem of perpetual price undercutting by county manufacturers, and thenceforward Corahs

combined their paternalism with a positive attitude to unions.¹

As a result of the actions and statements of these men, there slowly came into being what the Victoria County History refers to as "a spirit of confidence between employer and employee" (VCH, 1955, p 19), although this spirit was still frail. The next period was to see its consolidation.

Section 3 Co-operation and Whitleyism

The war threw both sides willy-nilly into closer contact with each other, as work on government contracts got under way. The unions' first responses to their improved bargaining position were, however, not conciliatory but aggressive. In May 1915, backed by unprecedentedly strong rank-and-file support, LAHU threatened a strike unless war bonus was paid on contract work. The union had been advised that, despite wartime agreements, it would be legal to strike. The membership vehemently rejected all compromise, sticking to a demand for a penny in the shilling bonus. After Government intervention, settlement was reached with astonishing rapidity, and the union gained its demands. The resultant negotiating meeting was the first of many between the two sides during the next three years. Noting the presence of two manufacturers who employed non-union labour, LAHU leaders commented acidly, "We do not object to their presence, but we are a little surprised" (LAHU A June 2nd, 1915). The other unions all had similar successes (Gurnham, 1976, p 76).

This initial confrontation was the base for regular meetings of representatives of both sides. On December 5th, 1915, 25 manufacturers and 14 union representatives met to agree substitution rules; the meeting was

¹ See Chapter 6.

"harmonious", and LAHU noted the "fix" the employers were in, as the Government were pressing on them both to increase output and to release male labour for military service (LAHU A December 8th 1915). In the intervening months the unions had gained self-confidence from involvement in meetings with Government, and from the Government's call for TUC co-operation in the war effort. Further demands for increased bonus were met without the necessity for strike action by means of Government arbitration procedures, although the results were not perceived as wholly satisfactory by the unions.¹ However, the relatively smooth settlements may have convinced the manufacturers that arbitration was useful. In 1917 there was talk of establishing a joint consultation board, and in 1918 firmer moves were made to institute procedures in line with the Whitley recommendations. On one occasion Frank Moore, Secretary of Leicester Manufacturers' Association, approached Chaplin, saying that he considered it time that "labour and capital came closer together" and suggested working together for a national government (LAHU A July 28th 1917, March 8th 1918).

The first meeting of the National Joint Industrial Council (NJIC) was held on May 21st 1918. Prior to this, a meeting of 150 manufacturers had agreed to participate in the experiment. Their favourable response, according to Gurnham, reflects a change of heart over the war years. This was partly a reaction to increased union strength (membership had quadrupled over the war), partly to wartime conditions; increased contact with unions had led to better personal relationships. In addition, there was a desire

¹ *Bassford of the Nottingham Union shocked the respectable Chaplin by declaring that they should go to arbitration but "if it was against us we could refuse to abide by it"! (LAHU A April 7th 1917).*

to show the Government that the industry was capable of responsible self-government, thus assuring a return to autonomy (Gurnham, 1976, pp 84-5, 87). In these circumstances the larger, more progressive employers, such as Corahs and Atkins, were able to take the lead in pressing their colleagues into action, as Mundella had done in the 1860s.

The original NJIC consisted of 16 members from each side, representing Leicester, Nottingham, Hinckley, Mansfield, Loughborough and Sutton. As one would expect, the manufacturing representatives tended to be from the larger, more established firms: two of the Leicester members were J. Corah and Ernest Walker of Wolsey. Meetings were held quarterly. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman were to be from opposite sides. There would be no casting vote (Gurnham, 1976, pp 88-9). The objective was "to bring about a better understanding and as far as possible prevent strikes and lockouts in our trade".¹ By 1940 the objectives were stated in a more abstract way in the constitution:

To secure the highest possible measure of joint action between employers and workpeople for the development of the industry as a part of national life and for the improvement of the conditions of all employed in that industry.

In the intervening period the NJIC had been steadily active, and was considered to have been reasonably successful. The unions attempted to use it as a forum to gain greater recognition of their rights. At the second meeting, Chaplin raised the question of allowing facilities for collectors in factories (LAHU B October 10th 1918). The unions tried, with limited success, to get the manufacturers to endorse the principle of complete organisation. For example, a motion was raised at NJIC

1 Note the similarity to the stated objective of the NAB (p 236).

declaring that successful enforcement of agreements depended on both sides' organisations being as "numerically strong and fully representative as possible", and that it was in the "best interests of the industry" to persuade all employers and operatives to join their respective organisations. Although "useful discussion" followed, the manufacturers rejected the motion (LAHU A July 3rd, October 9th 1929, LAHU B July 2nd 1929). By 1940, however, the constitutional objectives of the NJIC had come to include a clause supporting measures designed to ensure that "all employers and workpeople are encouraged to join their respective associations".

In return, the unions seem to have espoused a policy of encouraging negotiation rather than strikes. In 1919, for example, Chaplin and LAHU campaigned fiercely for compulsory arbitration in the local dyers' strike. By 1927, LAHU was claiming that "the same risks of a long strike do not exist as they did before we had an industrial council" (LAHU A July 16th 1919, March 22nd 1927). Where bitter conflicts did arise, the NJIC was often asked to intervene. For example in a dispute at Lawries, a firm with a long history of low pay for women workers, the NJIC interceded and pledged "moral support" to LAHU (LAHU A October 10th 1928). Hinckley Union minutes also acknowledge NJIC help, for example in settling a strike in 1932; in 1938 the NJIC was investigating means of ensuring greater uniformity of rates in the Hinckley area (HU November 18th 1932, December 14th 1938).

Activities such as these seem to have convinced both sides that the NJIC was having a beneficial effect and should be continued. In the first year of its existence the LAHU AGM was told that it had already achieved some good results and "if rightly managed by both sides, much good must follow", a verdict repeated the following year (LAHU B October 29th 1918, February 28th 1919).

In 1922 the Chairman, a manufacturer, spoke of three requirements for its successful functioning: "courtesy and consideration" on both sides, no point scoring, and a realisation by employers that workers had "similar ambitions to their own", namely a desire for a share of the "amenities of life" and for security and comfort in old age, while workers must accept that firms had to operate under "stern economic laws" (LAHU B January 14th 1922). A sign that these conditions were being fulfilled was that the inflexible Ernest Walker conceded that "his views had been somewhat modified regarding trade unionism" as a result of his NJIC experience. In 1926, the Chairman acknowledged the help given by the unions to the employers in petitioning the Government for protectionist measures, and in 1927 the unions were campaigning for JICs to have statutory powers, a measure of their own commitment to joint consultation (LAHU B January 9th 1919, July 15th 1926, July 16th 1927).

Observers also registered favourable responses. In his 1940 history of Hinckley, Pickering, while acknowledging the NJIC's shortcomings, considered it had contributed much "useful work" and commented that

The seeds of collective bargaining sown one hundred years ago have borne fruit, resulting in the confidence that exists between the manufacturers and workers of Hinckley at the present time.

(Pickering, 1940, pp 114, 120)

In 1935 Wells believed that, though subjected to severe stress, "its continued success must be attributed largely to mutual goodwill" (Wells, 1935, p 242).¹ Thomas Morley, President of Leicester Manufacturers' Association, praised it in glowing terms, referring to the "splendid spirit of co-operation" between employers and employees. At the NJIC, he claimed

1 Wells' later verdict, in the 1972 revision of his text, was that regular NJIC meetings had helped foster "the generally good relations between management and labour that now exist" (Wells, 1972, p 212).

All matters of importance to the general benefit are freely and amicably discussed ... it is a tribute to the goodwill that prevails between the representatives of employers and employees that there has been no serious dispute in the trade for the past thirty years.

(Howes, 1927, p 312)

The formation of the NUHW in 1945 and the formulation of the first national agreement, despite the tensions involved¹, in the long run strengthened the NJIC. It is likely that the threat of the NUHW's new power, along with the fear of nationalisation and dislike of Government intervention, encouraged the employers to persevere with the NJIC. They were prepared to offer strengthened bargaining procedures and financial benefits if the union would give up its support for a Government-sponsored development council in the industry.

New conciliation procedures were laid down in 1949. A conciliation committee was to be established of three representatives from either side. Every effort was to be made to settle disputes by direct negotiation, but if that failed a meeting of local Manufacturers' Association and union representatives was to be called within seven days; if that failed, a conciliation meeting would be called in the next week. The 1949 constitution concluded

All disputes shall be settled by the constitutional machinery of the industry, and no stoppage of work, either of a partial or general nature, shall take place as the result of a dispute.

Not surprisingly, this virtual no-strike agreement was amended in 1950 to read that no stoppage should take place *until* the conciliation machinery was exhausted.

If the verdict of the conciliation committee was unanimous, the decision was binding; if not, it would be referred back to the NJIC. In

1 See Chapter 4.

1950, for example, five disputes were settled by unanimous decision (three in the workers' favour) and two referred back (AC Reports, 1949, pp 19-20; 1950, pp 7-12). Some disputes then proceeded to the National Arbitration Tribunal, though on several occasions it was noted that its lengthy procedures produced "a deep sense of frustration" among the membership (AC Report, 1952, p 53; NEC March 4th 1950).

Although it may seem strange that a union which had experienced such recent demonstrations of its own potential power¹ should submit with apparent eagerness to such restrictive agreements, it must be remembered that this awareness of strength was balanced by a much more longstanding awareness of weakness and insecurity. As Neale argues, it was often the weaker unions which persisted with Whitley arrangements after the war (Neale, 1983, p 53).

The part of the Whitley scheme relating to committees at factory level, however, was not adopted to a significant degree in the industry. There was a short period after the war, when the influence of Human Relations theory on personnel management was strong, when plant committees became fashionable. The 1950 Annual Conference Report, for example, records a dispute surrounding the Works Committee at Foister, Clay and Ward, where the firm were demanding a three-year service requirement for membership, and in the same year the report on innovation procedures² noted four firms setting up works committees, as well as one firm (possibly Corahs?) with a long-standing works advisory committee (AC Report 1950 pp 11, 17-8). Certainly Corahs had such committees in the 1950s and 1960s, although by 1971 they were declaring opposition to them, as they claimed

1 See Chapter 4.

2 See Chapter 4.

"existing arrangements" for representation and negotiation sufficient (LD February 23rd 1953, March 8th 1971). Hollins had established a works committee in 1946, and Wolsey instituted one after the Bedaux strike (Wells, 1968, p 230; Littler, 1982, p 126). There was also the curious case of Tylers of Leicester, who claimed to have anticipated Whitley by instituting a successful committee, although the workpeople "laughed" at the idea, telling LAHU they had never heard of it! (LAHU B March 25th 1918).

In the main, as Wells notes, these committees were initiated only by the larger firms, often as a means to improved communication; they were not always integrated, as recommended by Whitley, into the collective bargaining structure and workers were not elected to them through the union (Wells, 1935, p 242; Gurnham, 1976, p 91). Such schemes seem to have petered out in the 1950s and 1960s, and had little strong support from either side.¹ NEC minutes for 1968 record the lack of enthusiasm for shop committees (NEC July 17th 1968). Gurnham suggests that the moderate union leaders tended to associate them with left-wing policies and workers' control (Gurnham, 1976, p 929). In an industry with so many small firms, officials may have seen them as unnecessary, even as a threat to their own power. As Boraston et al note, NUHKW in the contemporary period is highly centralised with officials playing the major role, and shopfloor representatives having less significance (Boraston, 1975, pp 117-27).

1 A manager in 1983 said his firm had no shop committee as it was "not relevant to our problems", and would tend to attract "the wrong sort of people ... loudmouths, brainless". This firm was, however, experimenting with Japanese-style quality circles. These are also being instituted by Corahs, who had 11 QCs in 1984, with an increase to 20 scheduled (Knitting International, June 1985). Only 3 of the 16 sample firms had committees, including two recently "rationalised" firms.

Despite the shifting attitude to works committees, Corahs remains a prime example of a firm committed to the joint consultation principle at plant level. As described in Chapter 6, the firm cultivated a 'sensible' attitude to the union, developing an almost symbiotic relationship with it, whereby, in return for the representatives acting as an extension to the personnel department and helping to solve day-to-day problems, Corahs acts to ensure maximum union membership. In 1949, NUHW was being aided in a campaign for 100% union membership; there were only seven non-members. In 1953 the firm was providing an office for the two representatives and plans were afoot for granting check-off facilities (LD October 17th 1949, May 18th, June 15th 1953).¹ Although these arrangements did not lead to trouble-free workplace relations², conflict was channelled and confined in a way which avoided serious confrontation, and this pleased the union, which affirmed in 1939 that in every case where there had been a complaint "satisfaction had been received" (LAHU A August 30th 1939). An amusing example of this neo-paternalist industrial relations system in operation is described in Leicester District minutes for April 24th 1939:

The Manager stopped the plant for the Secretary to address the whole of the girls. After making it quite clear to the girls that curling pins were not to be worn at work, the girls accepted the situation.

In recompense the 'girls' got improved toilet facilities!

The importance of these developments between 1914 and 1950 cannot be overestimated. They completely transformed industrial relations: an industry once notorious for unrest and confrontations became a byword for

1 See also Chapter 6.

2 Leicester District minutes record, for example, 20 disputes there in 1946, 13 in 1953.

industrial harmony. In 1886 a hosiery buyer had written

While radical ruffianism is rampant in your midst, I cannot afford to risk my life in your disorderly town.

(Leicester Advertiser, February 20th 1886)

Whereas in 1955 the Leicester Mercury might justly proclaim

The hosiery industry in the present century has for the most part been peaceful and prosperous. There has been no strike of hosiery workers in the borough for over 40 years and good relations exist between management and employees.

(Leicester Mercury, March 8th 1955)

During this period not only was the machinery for modern industrial relations established with some rapidity, it was also used in practice as the key site of negotiation and dispute-settling. Shop stewards have played no notable part in bargaining in hosiery, as they have done in so many other areas of British industry.¹ Centralised national and district collective bargaining has been the major mechanism of industrial relations since World War Two.

I have spoken earlier of the postwar truce which established industrial relations on a peaceful basis. In many respects, however, this transcended a mere cessation of hostilities and involved a genuine commitment by leaders on both sides to the idea of industrial co-operation. As Gurnham notes, the postwar NUHW leaders believed in the principles of Whitleyism and prided themselves on friendly relations with the employers (Gurnham, 1976, pp 123, 159). The Board of Trade in 1946 commented that

Relations between managements and workpeople have been maintained on a high and cordial level: trade organisations on both sides have added to their sense of collective responsibility.

(Board of Trade, 1946, p 10)

¹ See for example Batstone et al., 1977; Hyman, 1979, for discussion of the dominant role of shop stewards in many industries.

Although the union at the 1947 Annual Conference accused the Board of Trade of presenting too rosy a picture, which, it was declared, rested solely on the restraint of the unions during the war in not pressing for wage claims, there is no doubt that the NUHW leaders took a pacificatory line. Horace Moulden, while LAHU Secretary, had declared his preference for peaceful negotiation rather than strikes (LAHU A July 21st 1937). Even his predecessor, Chaplin, a much more fiery character, had been described as "pre-eminently a peacemaker" and at his death in 1927 a series of tributes poured in from manufacturers, including one from Rowleys which described him as

One who realised, and strove to teach others to realise that the only way to restore prosperity to the industry was to bring about a mutual feeling of goodwill and confidence between employers and employed

while the LHMA declared that the manufacturers would "miss him more than they can say" (LAHU A November 11th 1919, September 3rd 1927).¹

Among the manufacturers, too, there was espousal of the tradition of co-operation instituted by Mundella. Johnson and Barnes' tribute to the "spiritual debt owing to the staff and workers" reflects the paternalist version of this tradition, while the managing director of Atkins summarised a prevailing mood:

We as an industry have a good record of labour relations and I see no reason why this should not be maintained.

(Johnson and Barnes, 1951; Atkins, 1972, p 50)

Organisational leaders on both sides committed to these principles set the style for the industry and built up close personal links, as the

¹ See Chapter 9 for an extended discussion of the role of moderate leaders.

Leicester District minutes of the 1950s show. On the retirement of Cook, Secretary of the LHMA, he sent a message thanking the Leicester Secretary and District Committee "for vital co-operation shown to him during the past three years"; fruit was sent by the DC to Cook's successor, Joseph, when he was confined to hospital; when the personnel manager of Pecks died, the DC placed on record its appreciation of his help and "enlightened approach" to labour problems (LD November 3rd 1952, January 10th 1955, January 9th 1956). Co-operation had replaced the confrontation of 1845.¹

Conclusion

While some manufacturers tried to keep workers in line and keep unions out, by employing repressive strategies, the pacificatory strategies of paternalism and joint consultation practised by some of the larger firms set a new style of industrial relations which came to typify the industry as a whole. These strategies were initiated by enlightened Victorian employers both to produce a more congenial and thus more effective working environment and also because of genuine beliefs in human rights and the possibility of class harmony. Their initiatives were eagerly taken up by union leaders who saw in joint consultation a means of retaining some measure of control amidst the anarchy of a free-market industry. In no way were they foisted with a system deliberately constructed to further the

1 *This is reflected today in management attitudes to NUHKW. Managers described it as "sensible", "very good union", "excellent" and the officers and representatives as "reasonable people", even in one case "too nice"! Six of the sample firms expressed attitudes towards it which could be characterised as strongly positive, seven appeared to regard it neutrally, and only three (including two very small firms) expressed negative feelings. While these expressions may not, of course, reflect real opinions in a sensitive area, they appear to indicate that acceptance of NUHKW is seen as the normal attitude in the industry.*

employers' interests. These new procedures were then institutionalised, and are viewed by most contemporary managers in a manner more pragmatic than idealistic. Just under half of the sample of managers expressed positive support for the NJIC¹ though the majority said they followed its rulings: several commented that "it made life easier", forestalling endless plant-level bargaining over rates. One who was less enthusiastic said it was not working so well at present and explained "the industry is very much individual".

This comment points to the limits of co-operation. As conflict remains endemic in capitalist industry, the pacificatory skin is thin, and can easily tear, especially if employers abandon their commitment to collective bargaining. Although the hosiery NJIC must be seen as one of the most successful in existence, that existence remains insecure. Three of the leading companies (Corahs, Courtaulds and NMC) have dropped out of it, conducting separate company agreements. The half-yearly national agreements ratified by the NJIC are difficult to enforce and are not maintained by many manufacturers who formally are pledged to support it, according to the LHMA Secretary.² The Leicester employers' apathy reached a peak in 1981, when the LHMA officially stopped advising its members to honour the agreement. Pressure from NUHKW brought them back into the fold in 1982, but many would endorse the LHMA Secretary's view that "marketplace determines wages, not collective bargaining". In turn, the union is becoming disillusioned with the NJIC. At the 1982 Conference, a motion deplored the "negative approach" of the manufacturers' side; and at one

1 *Three firms disregarded the NJIC. Seven approved of it. The rest had no comment to make on it.*

2 *From personal interview, 1983.*

NJIC meeting in that year a spontaneous demonstration of nearly 800 members protested at the attitude of the employers, who sought a reduction of wages. Thus the recession of the 1980s is putting strain on the fragile structure built up by progressive elements in past, more prosperous times, and exposing the weaknesses of the industrial truce.

Nevertheless, in the period under study, the initiation of joint consultative structures played an important part in the appeasement of the union and in the establishing, at times, of a genuine spirit of conciliation, at other times, of at least a truce between the combatants.

CHAPTER EIGHT

That his labour is free! ... Free! Can any chain be imagined more galling than such freedom? The knowledge in the sufferer's heart that he is accounted free must be his crown of thorns and accounts for a large part of that bitterness that pervades the working classes. Here, side by side, we have civil freedom and social bondage.

*J.W. Hancock, hosiery factory manager
(PP 1845 xv II q 4817)*

We need not go to the European continent to look for oppression, nor to the wilds of Africa to look for slavery - we have them both in the heart of British society! ... Why in the name of suffering humanity should their privations be rendered more keen? Oh ye oppressors! are tears and blood when coined into gold so precious? Are the low murmurings of discontent and the cries of the widow and the fatherless but as music in your ears?

*Hinckley Union Handbill 1859
(Pickering, 1940, p 101)*

*Say is it life? from year to year
Mid cares that come increasingly,
To plod the same dull round, and hear
The same dire din unceasingly?*

*From fevered sleep to rise each morn,
Retrace the scene of sorrow;
Retire at night pale, haggard, worn
Then breathe again each morrow
The same polluted atmosphere,
Uncleared by ventilation -
It is (if ye have ears to hear)
Terrestrial damnation! -
It is not life.*

*William Jones, framework knitter
(Jones, 1853, p 39)*

CHAPTER EIGHT

WORKER RESPONSES: THE PERIOD OF CONFRONTATIONIntroduction

Thus far the focus of this study has been on employer objectives, strategy and choices. However, I hope that, by describing the interaction between employers and workpeople and the negotiations consequent upon employers' strategic choices, I have avoided portraying the working people as purely passive, as Braverman has been accused of doing. Nonetheless, taking employer strategy as my starting point is indicative of my view of the employer/worker relationship; as I see it, the causal sequence is employer action, followed by worker response, with the final outcome a compromise (or even an unintended consequence) negotiated on the basis of the former positions. The privilege I accord to employers' actions relates to the ultimate power they hold over labour: the power of dismissal, or of closing down an enterprise. In this respect they are usually the initiators of change, and workers' actions must be seen as essentially *reactive*, a response to the employers' initial moves. It does not follow that such responses are inevitably *defensive*, rather than offensive, to use the distinction made by Price (1980), as I hope this chapter will show. Worker responses may sometimes take the form of attack, in the sense of attempting to go beyond the existing status quo.

Worker actions, therefore, are worthy of study both in respect of their role in influencing final outcomes, and also in their own right. Such study is necessary for an informed theoretical understanding of class formation, class consciousness and class action. In these two chapters I

examine worker responses in more detail.¹ Chapter 8 deals with worker actions between 1800 and 1860, a period I characterise as one of confrontation. Chapter 9 is intended to show how the processes of pacification described in Chapters 6 and 7 evoked a more accommodative response, which evolved gradually between 1860 and 1960.

Section 1 Worker collective actions 1800-1860

Worker actions in this period fall loosely into five categories: first, attempts to gain Parliamentary redress for grievances by means of appeals and petitions; secondly, the switch to trade union organisation and its characteristic weapon of strikes and stoppages; thirdly, attempts at co-operative production; fourthly, an involvement in more explicitly 'political' movements, such as Chartism, in an attempt to fight economic oppression, and finally, when any or all of these methods failed, a recourse to violence.

Full-scale petitions to Parliament were presented by the framework knitters in 1778, 1779, 1812, 1816, 1818, 1819, 1833, 1843 and 1854, the last but one leading to the Royal Commission of 1845.² The petitions sought Government 'interference' to regulate the trade in a variety of ways: eliminating truck, regulating or abolishing frame-rent, making 'cut-ups' illegal, reinstating the Charter and its apprenticeship controls, agreeing some system of 'tickets' or merchandise marks to standardise products, and regulating wage levels by the legal enforcement of 'state-

1 *Constraints of space forbid a thorough exploration of worker actions, which would fill a volume on their own. These two chapters are a summation, based on a much larger accumulation of material than can be presented in full here.*

2 *Knitter Benjamin Humphries claimed that 2/3 of all knitters had signed it (PP 1845 xv II q 350).*

ments'. In addition, the knitters were frequently involved in smaller-scale attempts to pressurise the authorities over various aspects of industrial organisation. For example, memorials were presented to the Board of Trade on cut-ups in 1827 and arbitration boards in 1849 (Patterson, 1954, p 177; PP 1856 xiii q 263). On one occasion men from the village of Hathern marched to London bearing a petition against cut-ups (PP 1854-5 xiv q 6253). Sometimes these campaigns involved considerable support from the employers, or even joint organisation: joint campaigns on truck were described in Chapter 5, and another example was the joint campaign against the export of machinery, run by Henson in 1833 (Felkin, 1867, p 352).

This strand of action can be seen as essentially backward-looking, in that it represented, as Walton argues, an evocation of the old Tory paternalist ethos, seeking the protection of the ruling classes who were considered responsible for the lower classes' welfare.¹ The outrage felt when the tenets of this 'moral economy'² were violated is demonstrated by the extraordinary scenes of violence which followed the rejection of the 1779 petition. The old moral order was only gradually being superseded, however, and in their campaigns the stockings often had support from its representatives, the clergy and local gentry, shocked by the apparently callous behaviour of the hosiers. But these attempts repeatedly failed, partly because of the stronger muscle of the hosiers in raising support within Parliament, but also because these demands for intervention and protection ran against the spirit of the times. Parliament was becoming steadily more committed to laissez-faire liberalism and non-intervention, and even an investigator as sympathetic and humane as Muggeridge, who

¹ See Walton, 1952, p 32, and also Chapter 6.

² See Thompson, 1971.

headed the 1845 Commission, believed that in the long run the 'laws' of supply and demand would inevitably lead to a fall-off in the supply of labour and a consequent stabilisation of the trade (PP 1845 xv pp 129-30).

When the petitions failed, the operatives' leaders turned to the more forward-looking techniques of trade unionism, using their 'societies' to put pressure directly on the manufacturers to maintain the statement prices, and using demonstrations and strikes, or the threat of them, to intensify the pressure.

The history of union organisation in this period was outlined in Chapter 3. As stated, there has been a tendency to portray these early, short-lived trade organisations as failures. Simmons, for example, describes them as "poorly organised", with insufficient funds.¹ Such judgements, however, spring from a restricted conception of what a trade union may, and ought to, look like, a conception circumscribed by the famous Webb definition of a union as a "continuous association of wage-earners" (Webb, 1894, p 1). There is no evidence that the pioneer unionists operated with such a definition of what they hoped to achieve, and thus it is more useful to view these fluid, ad-hoc organisations as extensions of work-groups, spontaneous expressions of a common work identity. In Price's phrase, such organisations were a "symbolic and practical expression of the collective cohesion of the work group" (Price, 1980, p 71). As Chartist knitter Henry Dorman explained, journeymen in the same branch when they got together "invariably talk of what work they are doing and what prices they are getting" (PP 1845 xv II q 919). It

¹ Simmons, 1974, Vol. I, p 136. See also, Head, 1960, Chapter 12; Wells, 1972, p 105, for similar judgements.

is no coincidence that early union meetings were so often held in pubs¹. Behind this "habit of association" lay the idea of common experience; Joseph Chawner, Leicester fancy branch secretary in 1845, explained that he spoke for the whole branch as "there is no difference; it is one general complaint" (PP 1845 xv I q 1731). With such homogeneity of experience it was easy to move to forms of collective organisation embodying, in Rev. Hall's words, the principle of "mutual assistance" (Humanus, 1821, p 119).

The details available about some of the unions demonstrate the principles behind them, and also help refute the charge of poor organisation. Indeed, to contemporary observers these "formidable societies", far from being poorly organised, seemed astonishingly and frighteningly effective, in their ability to monitor the movements "of all persons evidently acting in opposition to them", in their capacity to communicate with other unions in other areas, and in their strict control of strikes, involving daily mustering and parades to ensure all strikers kept out of work (Aspinall, 1949, pp 169-70, 241, 321).

These unions were based on a delegate system. In 1778, when funds were sought for the petition, "every street, lane and highway as well as each village had its collectors" (Henson, 1831, p 398). This was the ideal pattern followed by later unions. During the Combination Acts period, district delegates kept in touch with a central committee; working from a register of all frames and operatives they endeavoured to ensure that no frame was engaged on "fraudulent" work (Aspinall, 1949, p 241). Delegates also acted as convenors, informing those in their area

¹ See *Thomis, 1968, Chapter 10.*

when the secret meetings of this era were held (PP 1824 v p 263). When unions became legal, another duty of the delegates was to go round as deputations to the masters, trying to persuade them to pay statement prices and, in time of strikes, to visit workshops to rally support (PP 1845 xv I q 2359; PP 1867-8 xxxix q 19343).

Henson's 1812-14 union was a more elaborate affair, but still constructed on a delegate basis. At a conference in 1814 delegates from 33 different societies attended (Wells, 1972, p 97). Hall's Seven Years' Union in Leicester, which, like Henson's, had its constitution drafted upon legal advice, divided the town into 13 districts, each with treasurer and stewards, and the 1824 union which followed its collapse had a similar structure; in each case the man paid as secretary was to use his house as a 'house of call' (Patterson, 1954, pp 126, 135).

Thomas Winters provided some interesting details of the 1843 Glove Hands' Union. This had a committee of five, three of whom were elected one month, two the next; a secretary was elected monthly. Cheques issued for funds placed in the bank were cut in four and the pieces distributed to different individuals to guard against embezzlement or misuse of funds, a problem faced by some of the earlier unions (PP 1845 xv I q 97; Patterson, 1954, pp 136, 299). The rotation of officers served to share around the burden of responsibility and to prevent the emergence of any single individual as dominant; it was also a safeguard against allegations that 'paid agitators' were controlling the unions. Accusations of this kind were frequently made by the hosiers, against, for example, Buckby and Elliott, the organisers of the 1854 petition against frame-rents (PP 1854-5 xiv q 2281).¹

1 *Buckby himself conceded that he was "employed by the working man to agitate", but other knitters claimed that the sum paid to the two organisers was negligible (PP 1854-5 xiv pp 93, 318).*

These organisations were formed, then, on less institutional, less centralised, more democratic and more fluid principles than those envisaged by the Webbs. Inevitably this caused some problems. The unions were plagued by lack of funds, which were stretched to the limit by frequent strikes. Hall's Union, for example, had to pay out £6,000 during 1817 (Hammonds, 1979, p 201). Although this union, like others, was aided by donations from aristocratic and middle-class sympathisers, it could hardly cope with this demand. Smaller unions, such as those in villages, suffered even more from lack of funds. Knitter John Woodward explained graphically "sometimes there is a little union, but it gets smashed when they turn out" (PP 1845 xv I q 2054). Although unions like Henson's, or the 1819 Hinckley society whose handbill proposed that "separate Unions be formed in each Town and Village", attempted to organise the county operatives, the isolation and scattering of villages made this difficult (Pickering, 1940, p 115). It was more usual for village knitters to form friendly societies (VCH, 1955, p 14). Many of these were supported by local gentry or clergy. The 1833 rules of a society at Ratby village are probably typical. This society had 50 members, 29 men and 21 women; its committee was elected annually, and it paid unemployment and sickness benefits.¹ Although such societies existed for mutual insurance purposes and not to pursue industrial action, they would nevertheless provide an organisational infrastructure which could be activated when strike activity did spread to the country areas.

1 *Friendly societies seem to have differed from unions in including women. Evidence is scanty, but seems to suggest that most town unions did not organise women. Hall's Union (organised, anyway, on friendly society lines) and Winters' Glove Union were exceptions (Patterson, 1954, p 126; PP 1845 xv I q 97).*

Many of these unions received substantial support from the middle and upper classes; for example, Jackson's 1833 Leicester union backed by some enlightened hosiers, such as Richard Harris, and by local MPs, with Earl Howe as an aristocratic patron. This reflects the strong degree of sympathy for the knitters' plight shown by the local communities. Leicester delegates Rowlett and Thorpe, for example, described how the strike of 1818 had been funded by voluntary contributions, especially from aristocracy and gentry. Some of the larger manufacturers had supported them, and they had received aid from the parish authorities, from the theatres and from the clergy, both Anglican and Non-conformist, who prayed publicly for their success (PP 1824 v p 266). What made the mass of employers hostile to the unions, however, including at times even progressives like the Biggs brothers, was the frequency of strikes.

Figure 8.1 illustrates the incidence of strikes in this period. As can be seen, strikes were common from 1810 onwards: in peak decades such as the 20s and 40s the industry experienced a strike nearly every year. Many, especially in the early years, were general strikes; some involved a single branch, although other branches might give financial or practical support. For example, the 1845 glove hands' strike was backed by "the remainder (who conceive that we cannot do without them)", who struck in sympathy to help in "starving us into compliance" according to Joseph Biggs (PP 1845 xv I q 958).

Wells claims that the knitters were slow to learn the technique of striking on a rising market (Wells, 1972, p 92). Thomis, however, believes that the Nottingham strikers in 1813 had achieved some success by mastering what he calls "this novel tactic" (Thomis, 1968, p 184). Thomis' view is substantiated by the evidence of hosiers Warner and Hannay in 1845: in Hannay's words

Figure 8.1

Number of strikes in the East Midland Hosiery Industry 1800-1860¹

	<i>Nottingham</i>	<i>Leicester</i>	<i>Derby</i>	<i>Hinckley</i>	<i>Other</i> ²	<i>Total</i>
1800- 1810	1	-	-	-	-	1
1811- 1820	6	5	1	1	1	14
1821- 1830 ³	7	6	2	1	1	17
1831- 1840 ³	4	4	1	-	-	9
1841- 1850	5	7	1	2	1	16
1851- 1860	4	-	-	3	3	10
Total	27	22	5	7	6	67

1 This table is compiled on the basis of references to strikes found in a wide variety of sources during the course of the research. It does not, therefore, represent a statement of the total incidence of strikes but of reports of them. It is likely that it underrepresents strikes in the later period, especially as partial strikes, less likely to be reported, became more common.

2 Earl Shilton, Arnold, Sutton, Loughborough.

3 Figures for these two periods are almost certainly under-estimates. Felkin reports a series of short strikes which "succeeded each other almost every second year till 1833" (Felkin, 1877, p 32).

The men have always the wisdom to strike when they know the trade is best.

(PP 1845 xv I q 2768, II q 519)

Probably the major change over the period was the switch from general to partial strikes. General strikes were often on a scale which proved immensely costly; the 1819 strike involved 14,000 operatives in the three counties, and continued for nine weeks, in 1822 operatives were locked out for 28 weeks, and the traumatic 1824 strike, which caused the collapse of Hall's union, lasted 13 to 18 weeks in different counties. From 1824 the general strike faded out, though partial strikes, according to Felkin, continued to be very common. These sometimes involved many operatives, and might be of a particular branch, or against particular masters; for example, there were four strikes in Nottingham in 1827 against four of the principal hosiers. Thomas Winters even declared that in Leicestershire somebody was on strike each week in the year (PP 1845 xv II q 36; Thomis, 1969, p 68; PP 1856 xiii q 463). A clear statement of the rationale behind this tactical switch was provided by Robert Bindley of Leicester in 1871, describing a strike over shop charges at one factory:

When we have one or two in hand we can overcome them, but if we had the whole body coming with their capital against us at once we would have no chance.

(PP 1871 xxxvi q 41712)

The knitters had adopted the manufacturers' principle of 'divide-and-rule'!

Most strikes were over wages and charges, both when reductions were threatened or advances desired. An exception was a Derby strike, which occurred when the manufacturers wanted to terminate the practice of operatives marking their work with eyelet holes as a sign of quality, thus in one man's words "controlling the manufacturer" (PP 1845 xv II q 361). This is the only example I have found of a strike directly revolving on an issue

of control, although the struggle to maintain craft independence, described in Chapter 4, provides the context for all industrial struggles of this period. Strikes were tightly organised, with groups going round to 'turn out' the others. Daniel Merrick, Leicester leader, describes how, during the Chartist strikes, bands toured round workshops at meal-times or after work, using every means "to persuade or overawe them into compliance"; nightly progress meetings were held (Merrick, 1876, p 20). Edward Sansome, Leicester Sock Branch secretary, described how in 1830 the strikers paraded through Leicester with bands of musicians; in his words:

We stood out three weeks, lived on music and air, begged at the farmhouses and drank at the brooks.

(PP 1833 xx p 9)

They won an advance of 6d per dozen. Since strikes often depended on public donations, efforts were made to promote a good public image and avoid violence, especially in Leicester. Rowlett claimed of the 1818 strike:

Never was known, in the case of our country's history, so general a turnout and so peaceably conducted; no violence took place, nor was a pane of glass broken; though hundreds paraded the streets.

(PP 1824 v pp 236-7)

This was confirmed by some manufacturers, while the tributes of pamphleteers on the 1819 and 1825 strikes give a similar picture (Anon, 1825; Humanus, 1820, p 19).

Demonstrations and parades were aimed at stirring the public conscience. It was common for the knitters and their families to drag wagonloads of frames into the warehouses, dumping them there, or to draw empty wagons in the hope of getting them filled with food (Co-operative

Congress, 1915, p 102; Church, 1966, p 49). Sometimes these activities did spill over into violence. In 1825 a mob of 2,000 led by women attacked frames being taken to Nottingham and Hinckley at Wigston near Leicester; four arrests were made. Most violence was directed at blacklegs, 'knobsticks' or 'blacksheep' in the vernacular parlance. Frames belonging to village blacklegs were frequently attacked during the 1825 strike (Patterson, 1954, p 138). On occasions offenders were 'assed', paraded round set back to front on a donkey, a public humiliation no doubt designed 'pour encourager les autres' (PP 1845 xv II q 389; Church, 1966, p 48). Houses of all workpeople were systematically watched to spot any blacklegs at work, and then at night "all kinds of missiles" would be lobbed at their houses (Aspinall, 1949, p 354). The extent of such "outrages" is not clear. Only one 1845 witness claimed personal experience of victimisation, but, despite the reputation gained by the Leicester operatives for peaceable conduct, Thomas Winters in 1860 looked back to the 1810s as times when people "were led more by impulse" and as a result arrests for "outrage on persons or property" were quite common (PP 1845 xv I q 2244; PP 1860 xxii q 374).

Considerable disagreement existed among the participants as to the success or otherwise of strike tactics. In terms of immediate gains, the 1817, 1819 and 1821 strikes all resulted in price advances in Leicester, but the 1824 strike did not (Biggs, LRO). According to a Derbyshire knitter the 1819 strike brought a 20% price increase, maintained for a year, and in his area the 1824 strike gained a 30% advance, lasting for six months only (PP 1845 xv II q 3697). William Emmerson of Arnold considered the 1849 strike over bagmen's charges to be a victory, resulting in a drop from 6d to 4d, but Thomas Greaves saw the same strike as fatal

for Derby, leading to an adoption of 'runaway shop' tactics (PP 1854-5 xiv qq 7681, 8153).¹ William Hannay, hosier and JP, alleged that strikes frequently ended in victory for the workpeople, but that these victories were shortlived, a position, however, which contrasts with some of the more extreme pronouncements of his colleagues, who asserted that strikes never benefited the operatives; Thomas Corah, for example, stated "I never knew a turnout do any good in my life" (PP 1845 xv II qq 392, 519-21; PP 1854-5 xiv q 3310).

Whatever the truth of this, there was a growing tendency on both sides to see strikes as of doubtful value. By 1845, Felkin was stating that the operatives were less drawn than in the past to this particular method of seeking redress for grievances (PP 1845 xv II p 28). Some prominent leaders of the operatives, themselves earlier instigators of strikes, came to share his view. Thomas Winters by 1856 was calling strikes "equally injurious to the operatives and to the masters" and was, like Felkin, campaigning for arbitration, while Henson declared that despite his earlier strike involvement he had shifted to the policy "of endeavouring to bring both parties together" (PP 1856 xiii q 3766; Thomis, 1969, p 73). In this, they shared the opinion of local progressives among the clergy, who, while conceding the right of the working classes to strike, believed that strikes only aggravated class bitterness and in the long term led to greater oppression, "defeat and humiliation" of the workpeople (Lomas, 1855, p 67; Tower, 1869, p 18). A handbill from Hinckley in 1850 neatly encapsulates the evolving mood:

Strikes are undoubted evils and ought to be avoided as far as possible, but circumstances sometimes render them necessary.

1 See Chapter 5.

This raises some interesting questions about the status of strikes as a working-class weapon. Sociologists have tended to see them as the prime expression of industrial conflict, and use them as a measure of working-class militancy or class consciousness.¹ This in turn may lead to the judgement, in my view erroneous, that lack of strikes indicates lack of militancy. It might be more reasonable to accept the line of Henson and Winters, both champions of the working-class cause, that strikes involved so much financial risk and hardship that they should be used only as a last resort: thus avoidance of strikes does not *necessarily* imply a diminution of class identity or commitment. There was, however, in the course the knitters' leaders came to prefer, the resort to arbitration, a possibility of being co-opted into an acceptance of the manufacturers' beliefs about work organisation and class interests.²

As well as strikes, and the quest for joint regulation described in Chapter 7, the unions from time to time employed a third tactic: co-operative production. The Nottingham union made an attempt to finance the production of hose on a co-operative basis in 1814, and subsequently on a larger scale in 1817-8. In Leicester there were similar experiments in 1817 and in 1822-3. There was also a revival of this tactic in the GNCTU period (Wells, 1972, pp 98-9; Patterson, 1954, pp 121, 134, 288).

Three strands of motivation can be described in these attempts. First, the unions saw it as a logical extension of their policy of seeking employment for their members when out of work, on strike or blacklisted by manufacturers. This seems to have been a major objective of the 1817-8

1 See for example, Goldthorpe et al, 1968, p 72; Mann, 1973, Chapter 6.

2 See Chapter 7.

experiment. Secondly, there was a more ideological input, which rose from the strong local influence of Owenism. Co-operative societies were founded at Nottingham, Derby, Loughborough, Belper and Leicester in 1829. At the third conference of the co-operative movement, in 1832, it was reported that the Leicester 'Third Society' and the Loughborough group were engaged in the co-operative manufacture of stockings. The Leicester society had 103 members, funds of £233, and 12 members were involved in the stocking production, trading with Nottingham co-operators. John Skevington of Loughborough (later a Chartist leader) hoped that they "would speedily be independent of the control of capitalists and masters". The Leicester society had sent no delegate to the congress, explaining "every shilling we can spare is devoted to manufacture", but sent a message of support:

Through the media of the collective wisdom of these assemblies ... we expect the downfall of oppression ... As brethren we are bound in one common bond and we must not suffer that bond to be broken.

(Co-operative Congress, 1832, pp 50, 122-3)

The same beliefs inspired the Leicester GNCTU co-operative experiment in 1833-4, which produced hose and socks along with "beautiful white cotton gloves for the ladies in union ... the letter U in the middle of the hand". Goods were advertised in the GNCTU journal, the Pioneer, and exchanges were made with Nottingham (Pioneer, March 1st, 1834). The co-operative ideal continued into the Chartist era, when a co-operative store was opened in Nottingham by the victimised Chartist knitter, James Woodhouse (Epstein, 1982, p 245).

The Owenite belief that co-operative reorganisation of production would bring an end to the exploitation of labour by capital lay behind William Jackson's ambitious 1833 scheme for the acquisition of 500 to

2,000 frames to be worked co-operatively, producing an income of £2,000 per annum and providing a basis for regulation of the whole industry.

Jackson argued that as capital was "nothing more than the fruits of the industry of the working class collected together" the working class must combine to protect it:

Every man cannot become a separate capitalist as, if every man had the means of being an employer, there would be no workmen, but every man can become a joint capitalist.

The proceeds would be used "for the good of the whole body" (Jackson, 1833, pp 4-6).

Jackson's polemic clearly demonstrates an Owenite influence, as well as his own familiarity with Riccardian political economy, but arguably also his scheme owed something to the third motivating force, the drive for upward mobility among some of the 'respectable' artisans. This was the reason for the existence of 'frame clubs' in the early part of the century, whereby operatives clubbed together and bought up frames by "industrious and frugal means" (PP 1845 xv I pp 179-80). Similar aspirations may also have been involved in the co-operative allotment schemes which proliferated in the villages in the 1840s, such as the Artizans' and Labourers' Joint Stock Company of Mountsorrel, Leicestershire (PP 1845 xv I q 8196), although these, too, may have been influenced by Owenism and by O'Connor's Chartist land scheme. According to Dr. Wright Allen, agent for one such scheme, its original aims included employing men on strike on a temporary basis, but this was abandoned because of heavy costs (PP 1845 xv II p 135). This example shows, perhaps, how all three motives were intertwined, and, as we shall see, this was markedly the case in the late Victorian period.

These early schemes all failed for one reason or another. According to J.W. Hancock, manager of Wards of Belper, this was through "disunion, dishonesty and ignorance", though he personally espoused co-operation as a means of uniting labour and capital, and thought it would succeed if managed properly (PP 1845 xv II q 4894). Evidence of the problems faced by later co-operatives¹ suggests that lack of capital, poor management, insufficient co-ordination and failure to locate a market are likely to have jointly hampered these attempts. Certainly the GNCTU co-operatives failed to get enough orders, while Wells claims that the 1817-8 scheme never produced an output above £1,000 a week (Wells, 1972, p 99). But an important factor would have been the hosiers' opposition. Significantly, a meeting of hosiers in 1819, which agreed to support statement prices, laid down among conditions of settlement for the current strike that "stocking-makers do not manufacture for themselves" (PP 1845 xv II p 61). In such circumstances co-operative schemes were unlikely to flourish.

When these various types of union-based activity failed, the work-people often turned to political solutions. For example, after the collapse of the GNCTU the knitters' leaders invested most of their effort in the reform movement and Chartism, and union activity slumped; while the collapse of Chartism after 1845 brought a return to trade union tactics and Parliamentary appeals. Wells, thus, comments on the "unfailing vigour and resource" of the leaders:

Repelled at one point by the economic and political forces of oppression, they were ever willing to resume the struggle on some other front.

(Wells, 1972, pp 99-100)

1 See Chapter 9.

Wells' assessment, acknowledging the interlinking of economic and political grievances, seems more apt than Thomis' assertion that the Nottingham knitters never learned to use their political muscle, while their obsession with the economics of their situation blocked a firm political commitment (Thomis, 1969, pp 108-10). This verdict seems to depend upon a narrow equation of political action and party affiliation. The political activities of the knitters were mainly on the fringe of the party system, working as a pressure group attempting to influence established political groupings or being drawn into the great contemporary political movements like reformism and Chartism. Rightly, they retained some suspicion of the blandishments of the traditional parties:

To the working man we beg to say, do not be led astray by the tricks of any party

was the advice offered on one Hinckley handbill (Pickering, 1940, p 101). Yet at times they did become involved with more narrowly defined party politics.

On several occasions they offered their support to those, mainly the Whigs and the Radicals, but not always, who offered to promote their interests in Parliament. Thus, in 1778-9 the Nottingham stockings campaigned for the Whig, Abel Smith, who presented their petitions to Parliament; according to Henson, they had at this time "complete control" over returning the local MP (Henson, 1831, p 383). In 1798 a knitter stood as Radical candidate, and in 1802-3 the Nottingham operatives gave fairly strong support to the Whig, Birch, against the Tory, Coke¹ (Thomis, 1968, p 95, 1969, p 118). Electioneering propaganda for this campaign is interesting in demonstrating how strongly campaigns were directed at

¹ In 1802 knitters voted 524 for Birch, 279 for Coke, and in 1803 615 for Birch, 454 for Coke.

occupational groups.¹ Imagery from framework knitting was used by both parties: "May the frame of our British Constitution be kept clear from the Rust of Jacobinism"; "A recruit² given to the frame of our constitution"; "Frames, houses, farms are all commuted into instruments of compulsion in the iron hands of oppression", the posters claimed. A Whig squib exulted:

*The 'Sons of the Tredle' their virtue have shown
The men of the turnscrew have dar'd to make known
That oppression and Dan³ they will firmly oppose ...*

(Anon, 1803, pp 32, 120, 178, 181)

Analysis of the Leicester pollbooks shows an even stronger degree of support for Whig and Radical candidates. Fig 8.2 shows the considerable proportions of them who voted for Whig candidates in two elections. Particularly noticeable was the support given in a later election in 1857 to Sir Joshua Walmsley. Walmsley was an extreme Radical candidate, pledged to fight for their cause, in an election in which he and John Biggs stood against Richard Harris, reputedly popular with the working-class mass.⁴ 73.6% of the stockingers cast votes for Walmsley (62.1% voting for the pairing of the two Radical candidates, and 5.4% voting for Walmsley alone), as compared with 39.6% of the hosiers (only 0.7% voting for Walmsley alone). At an earlier election involving Walmsley (in 1847), it was reported that, at "mob meetings" held in the town, knitters' leader George Buckby had stated that six non-electors were strong enough to coerce an elector and prevent him voting for Walmsley's opponents (Biggs, LRO).

1 *Many knitters were enfranchised and constituted a significant part of the electorate. In 1857 they comprised 10% of the Leicester electorate, as compared with the hosiers' 4.3%.*

2 *Technical term for repair and maintenance of the frame.*

3 *Daniel Coke, Tory candidate.*

4 *See Chapter 6. Harris was a Whig, but a moderate. There was no Tory candidate.*

Figure 8.2
Recorded Whig and Tory voters, Leicester Pollbooks,
1832 and 1835

<i>1832</i>	<i>Whig</i>	<i>Tory</i>	<i>Mixed Votes²</i>	
Framework knitters ¹ (resident voters only)	75.5%	22%	2.5%	(N=355)
Framework knitters (including non-residents)	75.7%	21.3%	3%	(N=518)
Hosiers	63.5%	31.7%	4.8%	(N=167)
 <i>1835</i>				
Framework knitters (resident)	62.5%	37.5%	-	(N=452)
Framework knitters (including non-residents)	62%	38%	-	(N=471)
Hosiers	62%	38%	-	(N=155)

Source: calculated from Leicester Borough Pollbooks, 1832, 1835.

1 *The granting of suffrage to people living outside the borough was a great political scandal of these decades. It was largely the result of manoeuvring by the Tory Corporation officers, although, as these figures show, it did not always act to their advantage.*

2 *Voters who voted for one Tory, one Whig candidate.*

Such reports might be exaggerated, but certainly the knitters' leaders did try to marshall votes for the favoured candidates. More sociologically interesting, perhaps, is their involvement with extra-Parliamentary political movements which sought to change the existing political structure; since none of the parties (not even the Radicals) had been specifically formed to represent the political interests of the new - or old - working class groups, it is not surprising that the various reformist and radical movements attracted the support of the stockingers. The Reverend Becker, a Nottingham JP, was not alone in imputing Luddite disturbances to

Those Jacobinical principles with which the inferior orders have been sedulously inoculated by our Nottingham reformers.

(Aspinall, 1949, p 174)

At a later date, William Shaw and William Smith were among many manufacturers who lamented "the spirit of levelling and Chartism" among their operatives who

Wish to level everything; they do not care who they level, if they could raise themselves - they would level today and be levelled tomorrow.

(PP 1845 xv II qq 1331, 1665)

While the Reverend Furlong of Loughborough, a man sympathetic to working-class sufferings, reported the rapid coming together of numerous men

Ripe for rebellion, and ready to do anything injurious to the common wealth.

(PP 1845 xv I q 7877)

Leicester knitters were active in Hampden Clubs and in the reform movement (Thomis, 1969, p 199; Patterson, 1954, p 107, Chapter 10).

Doubtless a considerable proportion of the crowd in the 1831 reform riots (in which Nottingham Castle and Colwick Hall were burned and pillaged, accompanied by substantial other looting and destruction) were knitters.

Certainly Henson led the campaign for the release of those arrested: 17,000 signed the petition against their execution (compared with 9,000 who had signed the original reform petition) (Thomis, 1969, p 233). But the most extensive involvement of the stockings was in Chartism.

Simmons rightly points to the distinctive nature of Leicester Chartism as "fulfilment of the long, fruitless search for some effective way of expressing the peculiar misery of the hosiery workers" (Simmons, 1974, I, p 161). The excellent studies by Harrison (1959) and Epstein (1982) document the extent of the stockings' involvement in Chartism in Leicester and Nottingham respectively. In Nottingham, not only did the knitters predominate among the membership, but also many became leaders, such as George Kendall, Benjamin Humphries, George Black, James Woodhouse, Jacob Bostock, George Woodward, Thomas Emmerson and Jonathan Barber. Even some of the leaders who were apparently of lower-middle-class status were ex-stockings, such as Henry Dorman, who ran a Temperance hotel, or Elmer Rollett, newsagent. Of 176 Nottingham nominees to the Chartist National Council 34% were stockings, and 77.6% of Chartist members in Sutton and Mansfield were stockings (Epstein, 1982, pp 230-1).

No similarly detailed research into Chartist membership in Leicester has been carried out, but it is likely that the figures would be comparable, if not higher. Thomas Cooper's account of his Chartist activities in Leicester portrays his followers as largely knitters, and Daniel Merrick's novel about Leicester stockings confirms their role as a major element in the Chartist rank-and-file (Cooper, 1872; Merrick, 1876). Apart from Cooper himself, many of the local leaders had hosiery backgrounds: Swain, Finn, Buckby and Elliott in Leicester, Jarratt and Turner

in Loughborough, Ginns and Sketchley in Hinckley. An interesting document indicating the significance of Chartism to the rank-and-file is reproduced by Harrison: William Corah, glove-hand, wrote to his father during the 1842 Chartist strike as follows:

They assembled at night to the tune of 20,000 men or upwards, and swore by the ghost of many a murdered Englishman and English woman that they would work no more till the People's Charter becomes the charter of the land; they are assembled this moment in the marketplace, and before the day is over they mean to fetch the Bread and beef where it is to be had.

The letter, which opens with a line from William Jones' Chartist hymn 'Spread the Charter through the land', closes with the postscript "they are all Chartists here" (Harrison, 1959, p 113).

Involvement in such movements was possibly one of the factors encouraging the spill over into violence¹, which occurred at times when, ostensibly, all legitimate political and economic tactics had failed. Violent actions in which the hosiery operatives were involved can be grouped into four categories: full-scale rioting, which occurred, for example, after the rejection of the 1779 petition, machine-breaking, a sporadic occurrence in the industry which peaked as Luddism, acts of violence and intimidation against individuals, and more general criminal acts, such as looting, theft or poaching.

These apparently extreme forms of expressing economic grievances must be understood in a context where violence, if not exactly 'normal' or willingly condoned, was an accepted fact of economic and political life, and a well-known, often successful, way of seeking redress for grievances. Figures 8.3 and 8.4 give an indication of the prevalence of

1 *A local vicar's wife, Mary Kirby, wrote that the Chartist leaders' speeches were calculated to urge the crowd on to "acts of violence" (Kirby, 1887, p 49).*

Figure 8.3

Reported Riots in Leicestershire and
Nottinghamshire 1750-1900, by type¹

	<i>Food</i>	<i>Industrial</i>	<i>Political²</i>	<i>Other³</i>	<i>Total</i>
1750- 1799	23	11	9	11	54
1800- 1849	8	10	11	6	35
1850- 1900	1	4	7	2	14
Total	32	25	27	19	103

Source: *collated from a wide variety of sources.*

Figures represent reportage of riots rather than incidence. Since riots were easily identified by the reading of the riot act in the pre-1850 period, it is likely that this is a fairly comprehensive list of major public disturbances in the first two periods. In the final period it is likely that the extent of such disturbances is downplayed.

Including election riots, riots between rival political factors and riots arising from political movements.

Including enclosure riots, anti-military riots, riots against the police and Poor Law riots.

The great majority of these reported riots occurred in the period 1775-1799.

Figure 8.4

Reported Riots in Leicester and Nottingham 1750-1900, by type and place^{1,2}

	<u>Leicester</u>					<u>Nottingham</u>					<i>Grand Total</i>
	<i>Food</i>	<i>Indus-trial</i>	<i>Polit-ical</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Food</i>	<i>Indus-trial</i>	<i>Polit-ical</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>	
1750-1799	6	3	4	3	16	9	8	5	3	25	41
1800-1849	1	-	5	3	9	4	4	6	-	14	23
1850-1900	-	2	1	-	3	1	2	3	-	6	9
Total	7	5	10	6	28	14	14	14	3	45	73

1 See Note 1, Figure 8.3.

2 Riots in other places than Leicester and Nottingham:

Hinckley: 6 Food, 4 Industrial, 1 Political = 11

Loughborough: 2 Industrial, 2 Political = 4

Food riots at Barrow (2), Mountsorrel, Earl Shilton, Donington (all Leics.) = 5

Recruiting riots at Mansfield, Sutton (Notts.) = 2

Enclosure riots at Charnwood (Leics.) = 3

Miscellaneous riots at Ashby, Kibworth, Melton, Shepshed (all Leics.) and Arnold (Notts.) = 5

Total other places = 30

Total 73 + 30 = 103.

rioting in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire over the period 1750-1900. As shown, food riots were very common in the late eighteenth century and there had been established a tradition of taking to the streets to pressurise local authorities to act to remedy perceived social injustices.¹ In the food riots, as also in a series of enclosure riots in Leicester, the crowd often succeeded in getting its will enacted by the town authorities; also, after the 1787 riot in Leicester over the introduction of spinning machinery, the Corporation forbade the operation of such machinery within a 50-mile radius of the town. Violence at elections, which took a more ritualistic, even celebratory, form, had also become common during the eighteenth century. Thus models for violent collective action were freely available to the knitters when no legal means of redress was forthcoming. As figures 8.3 and 8.4 show, rioting had become a common feature of East Midlands public life, and although they were not quite so frequent during the first half of the nineteenth century as formerly, they did not significantly diminish until after 1850.

There were ten industrial riots between 1800 and 1849 (Fig. 8.3), four in Nottingham, two in Loughborough and four in Hinckley, apart from the Chartist riots (three in Leicester, two in Nottingham), which involved large numbers of knitters and were accompanied by strikes. Many of these started as demonstrations, which then developed into riots with stone-throwing, attacks on hosiers' property, clashes with police and militia and fights to free prisoners (often successful): some degenerated into general looting and damage. None reached the climactic scale of the 1779 Nottingham riots after the rejection of the petition; these lasted for nearly a week, while the mob, led initially by women and boys, attacked

1 See Thompson (1971).

homes of "obnoxious" hosiers (completely demolishing one), fired mills and warehouses and threw frames out of windows, then smashing them or tipping them down wells (Henson, 1831, pp 401-420). This riot, however, resembled later events in that damage was done to property but not to people. An interesting feature of many riots was that action triggered by one grievance spilled over into expressions of anger over others. For example, in a Hinckley riot of 1826, over wage cuts in the villages, the rioters, encountering the poor-rate collector, attacked him and seized his books, tearing them to shreds, and then pulled down the workhouse gates, expressing their hatred of the Poor Law; and in 1791 a disturbance springing from a strike led to a brawl with the regiment brought in to quell the riot, and anti-military feeling was demonstrated when the soldiers were pelted with the contents of chamberpots when they left the town! (Pickering, 1940, p 88; Blackner, 1815, p 386).

As stated, frame-breaking had been a long-standing feature of the industry. A riot in Leicester in the 1770s¹ involved the destruction of a wide frame which it was feared would bring redundancies. But, as Hobsbawm has argued, most frame-breaking was not a manifestation of hostility to machinery, but an early form of collective bargaining (Hobsbawm, 1964, pp 8-9). The Luddite activity of 1811-5 in Nottingham and parts of Leicestershire was resorted to by men who felt there was no other way to force hosiers to raise prices, accept apprenticeship controls and prohibit cut-ups. The Hammonds provide a comprehensive account of Nottingham Luddism which, they calculate, involved the destruction of over 1,000 frames (Hammonds, 1979, Chapter 9). One of the most striking aspects

1 *Thompson and Nicholls give different dates for this event.*

is the extraordinary degree of support accorded to the Luddites by the community, as manifested in the difficulty experienced by the authorities in getting information or making arrests, the huge and vengeful attendance at the funeral of the shot Luddite, John Wesley, and the gathering of an armed crowd in the court-room and the surrounding streets at the trial of two captured Luddites. Thomas Bailey personally witnessed this event

The excitement among the working classes, most of whom deeply sympathised with the Luddites in the objects of their associating, was most intense.

"Frantic vociferation" and "exultation" ensued when the court, perhaps unsurprisingly, acquitted the prisoners (Bailey, 1853, pp 247, 279-81).

A third form of violence was intimidation, threats and personal attacks on individuals arousing the hostility of the mass. The treatment of blacklegs has been described. Hosiers, too, were victimised. There were numerous cases of threatening letters, attacks on homes, carriages and warehouses, even one attempted assassination.¹ Finally, on some occasions it was claimed that hunger and anger drove men to crime, such as theft or poaching, the latter practised by James Hawker, stockinger and dubbed 'Poacher' as part of his war against the 'class' of oppressors (Hawker, 1904). Although this was essentially an individual response, it sometimes could take a collective form, for example in Hinckley in 1829, and during the Chartist period in Leicester, when gangs of men made frequent raids on shops or delivery waggons, as described by Merrick, who declared they would "never have stooped to such a crime unless compelled by stern necessity" (Merrick, 1876, p 32).

The picture of this period, then, is of men and women seeking to bring their grievances to public notice and gain redress for them using every

See Aspinall, 1949; Chapman, 1967; Hammonds, 1979.

means they could. Like Wells, Bythell commends the "vigour and versatility" of the knitters, as they acted "both politically ... and industrially" (Bythell, 1978, p 210). Patterson's judgement is more sombre:

Like animals on a treadmill, seeking escape, the men went round and round the circle of expedients already tried, resorting again to each in turn.

(Patterson, 1954, p 177)

But both correctly draw attention to the continuous shifting from political to economic tactics. Whether expression of versatility or of desperation, the significance of this is the way in which no sharp distinction was made by the stockingers between the economic and political aspects of their subordination. I shall return to this point in the following section.

Section 2 Collective action, class and identity

As stated in Chapter 2, the prevailing orthodoxy of the 'new' social history was that, during the first half of the nineteenth century, faced with the experience of industrialisation, urbanisation and the capitalist reorganisation of work - in short with proletarianisation - the working classes 'made' themselves, in terms of the development of a distinctive class identity, culture and awareness of shared interests.¹ In a seminal article 'The Language of Class', Asa Briggs traces the development in this period of the conceptualisation of two major classes, 'labour' and 'capital', in confrontation with each other, a conceptualisation which gave way in the late Victorian period to more complex imagery of endless gradations of

¹ See Hammonds, 1979; Thompson, 1968; Foster, 1974; Tilly and Tilly, 1981.

ranks, and of status groups within classes (Briggs, 1967). Recently, however, that orthodoxy has been challenged by what promises to become a new one, exemplified in the work of Stedman Jones, Joyce and Neale.

The challenge has two major strands. First, it is stated that, rather than economic experience leading to a collective identification in class terms, and thus to political action, existing political rhetoric, "the language of political rights", provided a frame for understanding economic experiences (Stedman Jones, 1983; Joyce, 1984b, p 229). Following from this, it is claimed that the identified enemy or oppressor was not an *economic* class of owners, but a *political* class of rulers, sometimes named as the 'rich' or the 'idle' classes in the terminology of Owenism (Joyce, 1984a, p 72, 1984b, p 230). In essence, this amounts to the claim that, in Owenite socialist thought and those circles influenced by it, capital equals *land* rather than capital equals *accumulated labour* and the means of production. On this basis, then, the existence of any real "working class consciousness" at this period is challenged.¹

As I argued in Chapter 2, this debate is somewhat less a disagreement about historical interpretation than one about the assumptions of Marxist theory, which I do not want to pursue here. What I do want to do in the remainder of this chapter is to provide some historical evidence which supports the position of Thompson rather than that of Stedman Jones and Neale. I believe that a clear sense of class identity did emerge in this region at this period, that it was based on economic experience even though it drew upon the "language of political rights", thus producing a system of class rather than populist meanings², and that the opposing class was

1 See Neale, 1981, pp 188-92.

2 See Joyce, 1984b, p 230.

clearly identified as the capitalist manufacturers. On the basis of this class identification, extensive industrial and political action, escalating to violence at times as described above, was seen as legitimate.

It became a commonplace during this period that the system of work organisation, and resulting collective organisation and action, had led to a chronic state of hostility between masters and operatives. In report after report witnesses from both sides testified to this hostility.¹ It was most strongly expressed in the statements of witnesses in 1845. Of the 183 Leicestershire knitter witnesses 32% made (unsolicited) comments which expressed hostility, bitterness and resentment towards their employers. These were quite apart from the routine expressions of suffering and poverty which characterise almost every statement; while only a handful of witnesses (10) made any comment indicating approval and commitment towards masters. Of these, the bulk were praises of individual masters seen as 'good' and thus possibly as exceptions. Hostility was more markedly expressed by town knitters (44% in Leicester, 46% in Loughborough, as opposed to 22% in Leicestershire): rural relationships still showed stronger traces of traditional paternalism, which may have inhibited the formation of new ideologies of class and exploitation; six out of the ten favourable comments came from here. Those who mentioned trade unions were also more likely to make hostile comments (54%)², but the figures suggest no significant link between

1 See for example, PP 1824 v pp 281, 368; PP 1845 xv I qq 1953-4, 2422, II q 1874; PP 1854-5 xiv q 8882; PP 1867-8 xxxix q 19341.

2 The total number is very small. Only 26 mentioned unions, which does not reflect the extent of membership: specific questions on unions were asked only of union secretaries.

location of work (home or workshop) and expression of hostility.¹

These depositions, and those of the Nottingham operatives, were often strongly worded. They made reference to the hosiers as "oppressors", "rogues", "tyrants", "villains" and "aggressors".² There was a sense of fierce indignity at being treated as "negroes", "slaves", "worse than beasts", "swine" and "dogs".³ Sometimes a religious note, characteristic of the knitters' culture, creeps in. William Thurman believed that masters would "go to hell for being oppressors", and Chartist George Kendall spoke of employers having no more compassion for the workpeople than "the lion has for the lamb" (PP 1845 xv I q 5625, II q 3414). Many statements pointed explicitly to the contrast between the economic conditions of the operatives and their "oppressors", identified clearly as the employers: masters and middlemen. Thomas Revil declared

I sometimes feel that I could wish I was out of the world when I see those middlemen ... walking about the streets with their canes in their hands, and me to be clothed in rags

while Joseph Chawner stated that employers

Live sumptuously everyday and take their rides up by train to London, and we poor creatures that make the work cannot take a ride from one village to another.

(PP 1845 xv I qq 720, 1722)

Samuel Kerr believed that the "working classes" were

Retrograding and their means getting more scanty and their deprivations larger while our manufacturers have been getting rich, adding land to land and house to house.

(PP 1845 xv II q 4988)

1 Of 40 Leicester knitters specifying that they worked in a shop 16 expressed hostility, as compared with 5 out of 13 working at home and 7 of the 21 specifying no location.

2 See PP 1845 xv I qq 5625, 6258, 7314, 7636, II 3430.

3 See PP 1845 xv I qq 678, 718, 3837, 3990, II q 4329.

They strongly rejected the hosiers' claims that trade recessions made them suffer too:

How can the trade be bad when the masters are accumulating fortune upon fortune, riches upon riches, lands upon lands, and buying whole estates?

(PP 1845 xv I q 7314)

Another statement confirmed that in Loughborough the manufacturers had accumulated "great capitals" (PP 1845 xv I q 7477). One or two witnesses also stated explicitly that it was not just a question of pernicious individuals: it was the whole system of competition which produced profits for masters and suffering for workpeople (PP 1845 xv I qq 433, 1732).

The most concise statement of this sense of class opposition came from John Middleton, who declared

The operatives are the working bees. We have filled your hives with honey, as far as it can be, and you will not let us even suck the combs.

(PP 1845 xv I q 6571)

Middleton's statement can be located in a well-developed strand of thought among the operatives' leaders which incorporated the idea of labour as the source of all wealth. As early as 1823, Henson wrote "The value of every article arises from the labour or skill bestowed upon it" (Thomis, 1969, p 112). William Jackson, as we have seen, used this analysis in explaining his 1833 co-operative scheme. Jonathan Barber, Chartist knitter, advised the working-classes to "produce wealth for themselves instead of for those who use it to oppress them" and referred to the working man as "the producer of all wealth" (Epstein, 1982, pp 257-8). The analysis was accepted by some employers. Thomas Woods explained that the radicalism and Chartism of the knitters sprung from the knowledge of:

A vast accumulation of comforts principally produced by themselves, of which, however, they have no sufficient share.

(PP 1845 xv I q 1953)

The idea was even celebrated in verse by William Jones:

*Let none then with averted eye,
 Contemptuous pass his toiling neighbour;
 There's not a blessing 'neath the sky
 But what springs from the hands of labour.
 Toil's hand, each hour, below, above,
 The stores of nature is unlocking:
 Prince Albert cannot make a glove -
 Nor Queen Victoria weave a stocking!*

(Jones, 1853, pp 191-2)

In view of the political enthusiasm of the time, it is not surprising that the leaders acquired these ideas, nor that they had widespread currency among the rank-and-file. Numerous observers noted the extremely vigorous political culture of the knitters and the political fervour of the Leicester and Nottingham communities at this time. Merrick and Gent both describe the political life of the stockings' workshops: groups clubbed together to buy newspapers (often the Northern Star), delegated a member or paid a boy to read it aloud while they worked; at tea-breaks, seated on boxes or in their frames they would debate the latest political news and ideas. Merrick describes how articles attacking the Chartist line were hissed and ceremonially burned (Merrick, 1876, pp 18, 22, 33; Gent, 1893, pp 2-6; Francis, 1930, p 121). A "noted reformer" is said to have declared that a visitor to Leicester might learn more about current political and religious debates "in one hour's conversation of starving stockings" than from "ten lectures of a university professor" (Jones, 1891, p 7). Such a workshop culture, free from the inhibiting presence of middle-class supervision, ensured that entrants to the trade would quickly learn the political vocabulary of the time, notably that of Owenism and Chartism. But their positive response to that vocabulary sprang from their own heartfelt experience of economic exploitation.

Thus the maintenance of craft culture was deeply interpenetrated with espousal of political radicalism. This point is emphasised by Lancaster in his study of Leicester political life: working-class organisation, and the associated resistance to the capitalist reorganisation of production (steam-powered machinery, factories etc.) as also to middle-class cultural indoctrination or hegemony, were, in his view, embedded in the deeply-rooted culture of craft independence, defensive and backward-looking as that culture may have been. Epstein makes similar points about Nottingham (Lancaster, 1982; Epstein, 1982). The significance of this is even greater when we consider that this occupational culture was itself deeply embedded in a broader working-class culture which was also strongly resistant to the erosion of traditional forms of leisure, family life and social interaction. It is quite fair to say that the East Midlands stockings lived together, worked together and played together.

This was facilitated by a high degree of industrial specialisation. It is estimated that in 1841 20-25% of Nottingham's population was dependent upon hosiery (Epstein, 1982, p 223). Census data indicates that in 1851 38.5% of industrial employment in Leicester was in hosiery; for the county as a whole the figure was 52.4% (Smith, 1961, Table 26; Lancaster, 1982, p 378). In many villages the whole community would feel an identification with the hosiery industry, and the occupational culture would be largely co-terminous with the traditional culture, with its distinctive patterns of frantic work alternating with "sprees" and pursuit of sports such as pigeonning and racing.¹

1 See Chapter 4.

This culture was not totally homogeneous. Like their masters, the stockings tended to see themselves as divided into two or three groups, which later would be labelled "respectable" and "rough".¹ The respectable were highly religious, literate, concerned with education, sober, sometimes committed to temperance. William Jones the poet was such a man, who deplored the "immoral" and drunken behaviour of some of his workmates (PP 1845 xv I q 289). Cooper's 'Shakespearian' Chartist group sang hymns and studied literature (Patterson, 1954, pp 318-9). Hinckley knitters' leaders seem to have been such a group. Their handbills were highly literate, illustrated with quotations from the classics and the bible, and imbued with a strong religious respect for the "all-seeing eye of Him with whom we all have to do" (Hinckley, LRO).

Merrick in 'The Warp of Life' describes the division in the workshops between these "intelligent" workers - often Baptists, Calvinists and Primitive Methodists - and the "ignorant" whom he labels "dog fanciers, prize fighters, runners and gamblers", whose chief delight was in "dogs and wild rabbits"; the hero of the novel drowns when he joins a group of these dissolutes on a "spree" of singing and pub-crawling (Merrick, 1876, pp 13, 34, 42). The bulk of the stockings probably preferred such traditional sports as rabbiting, coursing hares and foxes, football, cricket, cockfighting, racing and gambling to study and religion.

Another threat to working-class homogeneity was the level of upward mobility within the industry. The comparatively low cost of initial investment in frames, plus the masters' desire to 'promote' conscientious workmen into middlemen, enabled many to rise into the ranks of small masters. Inventions and improvements made to the frame also provided a channel of

1 See Chapter 4.

escape from proletarian labour.¹ There were several examples of knitters or knitters' sons becoming wealthy hosiers, such as Samuel Need and Samuel Unwin in Nottingham, Richard Harris in Leicester.² In 1844, 11 of Nottingham's leading hosiers were knitters' sons, although, as an interesting study by Erickson demonstrates, entry into this elite became harder as the factory system became more established (Thomis, 1969, p 11; Erickson, 1957). Nevertheless, the 1845 witnesses provided ample evidence of mobility at this period: Earl Shilton middlemen, Richard Wileman, William Cooper and Samuel Whiteman, had all started as stockings: Wileman now employed 400 hands. A Derbyshire knitter spoke of local bagmen, once knitters, who were now worth £2,000 or even £10,000. As Thomas Tillson explained

If they could raise three or four frames, they could set up for a master man, and shine, and go on as they liked.

(PP 1845 xv I qq 1134, 5236, 5399, 5484, II q 3634)

Possibly the dominance of the 'respectable' class of knitter in Leicester and Hinckley may have accounted for the more accommodative, less violent pattern of industrial relations in those towns as compared with Nottingham, where the record of rioting was highest (Fig. 8.4). Thomas Clewes of Hinckley, for example, declared that he and his friends as "public men" had tried to avoid all disturbances and to persuade their followers

Never to injure either life, limb or property in any shape, for it would only injure our cause.

(PP 1845 xv I q 3984)

1 See discussion in Chapman, 1967, pp 187-8 and also Jones, 1891, pp 9-10.

2 According to Lomas and Kirby, Harris for this reason was something of a working-class hero. Kirby described the cheering crowds who watched him as Mayor departing in court dress to meet the Queen at Belvoir Castle (Lomas, 1855, p 173; Kirby, 1887, p 51).

The concern with public image evinced here was combined with deep feelings of pride and respectability: Hinckley witnesses repeatedly stressed their desire to appear respectable, to maintain self-respect, manliness and dignity, whatever poverty and suffering they experienced.¹

However, neither high mobility chances nor the desire for respectability appears to have significantly impaired the knitters' sense of solidarity. Men who began to "shine" as small masters, as the use of that expression denotes, were seen as now belonging to another class.² William Richmond had failed to succeed as a middleman, in his own opinion, because "his conscience would not allow" him to charge frame-rent and exploit his former workmates, while William Mason refused a job offered him as "a sort of foreman and timekeeper" (PP 1854-5 xiv qq 5348-9, 9776). Such men felt strong loyalty to their class, and shared experience of deprivation kept most who remained operatives united, in a spirit epitomised by a Hinckley handbill of 1859:

Stand firm and united man to man and town to town, compact as a rock, doing your duty as men and as members of the trade.

(Pickering, 1940, p 101)

This sense of unity, encouraged by the leaders, was rooted in shared work experience and culture, in the local community and the family enterprise. Operatives and their families fought together to improve their living standards and defend their way of life.³ The most striking expression of this unity occurred in the GNCTU period. Leicester and Derby were particularly committed centres of General Union activity.

1 See, for example, PP 1845 xv I qq 3817, 3882, 3941.

2 See Chapter 4 p 115, Chapter 7, p 233.

3 See Chapter 10 for women's involvement.

There were 13 GNCTU lodges in Leicester, 17 in Nottingham and 15 in Derby (Cole, 1953, Appendix 4). The Pioneer provides a moving record of the attempts to maintain the 'spirit of union' by donations to the Derby strike over union recognition. For example, "a few poor framework-knitters of Anstey, whose average earnings are not worth more than from 6 to 8 shillings a week" sent £1 10s 2d to the "distressed and oppressed brothers" at Derby, and the "sisters of Earl Shilton" sent £3 4s, with their "brothers" contributing £13 19s 6½d. Belper members declared they would "prefer death than give up union". Ritual funerals were held for union members in Leicester, Hinckley and Burwell, moving occasions of great dignity, with parades of ceremonially dressed members, both male and female, singing hymns, which attracted large audiences (Pioneer, February 15th, 22nd, March 1st, 12th, 29th 1834).

These solemn funerals demonstrate the power of a sense of class dignity rooted in the local community and traditional culture, and, for once, cutting across sectional interests of different trades. These particular demonstrations of class solidarity, however, posed no threat to law and order, manifesting as they did the respectability and strong religious feeling which was a major element of local culture.¹ Not all demonstrations of class solidarity were so pacific, as the early part of this chapter showed. Why did they at times turn to violence?

Middle-class observers provided a variety of explanations for this. Economic factors were involved. For Lord Byron, the "absolute want" of the stockings and, for Felkin, their "hunger and misery" were the "sub-

1 *The 1851 Census of Religious Worship found religious attendance to be higher in Leicester than in any town of similar size, at 62%. Nottingham followed close behind with 57.7%. The national average for large towns was 49.7%.*

stratum" on which Luddism was based (Sutton, 1852, p 298; Felkin, 1867, p 239). Bailey put more stress on cultural factors, blaming the violence of the period on lack of education among the working classes and poor communication between classes; these had engendered the erroneous belief that wages could be regulated by "acts of violence" rather than the laws of supply and demand; the situation was now improving with improved education, a position shared by Thomas Winters (Bailey, 1853, p 102; PP 1860 xxii q 374). Others followed Reverend Becker¹ in blaming it on political agitators. Mary Kirby believed that Chartist leaders stirred the crowd to "acts of violence", and declared that agitators and radicals were "rife" in Leicester, while Arthur Morley spoke of the "same men" coming to lead any strike that broke out anywhere in the three counties (Kirby, 1887, pp 49-50; PP 1854-5 xiv qq 6855-6). Finally, there was a growing tendency to blame marginal groups of people, mainly "strangers" (i.e. anyone from outside town!), young people and the 'rough' element. Local historian James Orange, in his account of the Reform riots, claimed that the violence was caused by people coming in from the villages, and mobs of "disorderly youths, incited and assisted by ignorant and depraved adults", and declared that the Luddites were mainly youths aged 18-22; although in fact Bailey tells us that five of the executed Luddites were aged over 29, had wives, and three of them had five children apiece: they were men of "decent education ... respectable, well conducted" (Orange, 1840, pp 878, 888-9; Bailey, 1853, pp 291-2). James Hopkinson, a Nottingham cabinet-maker, recalling the riots in 1888 described the Reform rioters as "the dregs of society" (Hopkinson, 1888, p 12).

1 See p 281.

These explanations were linked to a growing tendency to condemn violence on moral grounds. Comments like that of Thomas Clewes, quoted above¹, show that working-class leaders sometimes came to share that view. But another strand of thought saw violence as justified and legitimate *under certain circumstances*. The stockingers told the Duke of Newcastle that "hungry men know no laws", and thus they could not answer for the consequences when their strike fund became exhausted; the Luddites declared "They would not starve whilst there was plenty in the land", and the 1831 rioters told witnesses "We may as well die where we are as go home and be starved" (Orange, 1840, p 876; Bailey, 1853, p 380; Aspinall, 1949, p 324).

This view, that deprivation beyond a certain level justified violence, could lead on to the idea that so, too, did oppression and injustice in general. In a row with the hosiers in 1799, knitters' representative Thomas Wright declared

When law and justice were denied, the people had a right to resort to the law of nature.

(Henson, 1831, p 406)

Thus, even the moderate Merrick in his account of Chartism spoke of how the provocative behaviour of the authorities turned a peaceful demonstration into a riot, thus using "brute force" to suppress "popular feeling": this, in his view, explained the further rioting, disturbance and crime that followed (Merrick, 1876, p 22). Chartist George Buckby told an enthusiastic audience in Leicester

I don't want to kill people, but I want to kill this horrid system which kills mothers ... We will use no more physical force than this - we go for our rights and we intend to have them.

(Buckby, LRO)

1 See p 297.

The fullest statement of these ideas comes from John Sketchley, Hinckley Chartist, looking back on his past in 1884 and explaining his involvement with storage of arms, drilling and military preparation:

As though the use of physical force could never be moral; or as though the moral and the legal were synonymous terms. The fact being that the legal and the moral are generally the very opposite of each other, while, as a rule, the quickest way to put an end to tyranny and oppression is the most moral and the most legitimate ... When force is used in defence of tyranny the people have a right to use force in defence of their liberties.

(Sketchley, 1884, pp 22, 26)

Sketchley's statement summates the circumstances in which violence becomes legitimate; where suffering was intolerable and "oppression" was experienced, violence was viewed as "moral", so long as it was used to defend or pursue the interest of a group, not for individual gain.¹ The group could be one's workmates, one's class or one's family: one witness explained

Men with large families are obliged to go out at night and do things they would not do ... They must have something to eat from somewhere.

(PP 1845 xv II q 1849)

Sketchley's explanation also demonstrates how, as I have argued, there was a considerable blurring in the stockingers' perception of economic and political grievances. The statement quoted above is couched, as are the others I have quoted, in the language of traditional politics: oppression, tyranny and 'natural law'. In this they are similar to the Northern Star passages analysed by Stedman Jones. In concluding from this that the grievances expressed are primarily political, Stedman Jones ignores

¹ Thus, 'Captain Ludd' severely and publicly disciplined some of his followers caught with some loot after a raid (Thompson, 1968, pp 607-8).

the way economic and political issues were fused in the thinking of groups of working people like the stockings; the motor factor which led them to support political movements was the experience of economic deprivation and struggles at work. When Chartism collapsed, Sketchley, like Barber, Kendall, Buckby and the others, returned to trade union activity: his statement to the 1854 Commission deals with the oppression of frame-rents and charges, dishonest hosiers and so forth. In furthering their economic cause, men like Sketchley drew on the political language that reading of the Northern Star and the Pioneer had made available to them, but, whatever solution they sought, their grievances were rooted in economic experience: the "system which kills mothers" referred to by Buckby was the competitive, profit-oriented capitalistic production of hose.

Conclusion

During this period, the operatives were driven by their shared experience of deprivation to act collectively for their perceived group interests. They used every available method, industrial and political, and at times resorted to a violence seen as legitimated by the oppression of their masters and of the political authorities. These forms of action were rooted in a collective identity, and in turn served to reinforce it; this common identity was one of occupation, of community and also one of class, grounded in the daily experience of their place in the system of profit-making, competition and deprivation, as I have argued in the preceding section.

On the basis of this collective identity, the operatives were able to formulate an account of their shared economic role and of oppression

by a class of profit-making employers. At times they made a link between their economic plight and their political disadvantages, seeking both economic and political change to bring redress for their sufferings. To express their grievances, they drew on the language to hand, predominantly that of the working-class press, which arose from a long tradition of popular protest and political radicalism. But their use of that language was firmly tied to a strongly contemporary and economic understanding of their situation.

Giddens and Mann have both argued that we should discern different levels of class consciousness. Giddens distinguishes between 'class awareness' (sense of differentiation), 'conflict consciousness' (perception of interests opposed to those of another class or classes) and 'revolutionary class consciousness' (recognition of the possibility of reorganising the social and political order through class action) (Giddens, 1973). Mann uses the terms 'class identity' and 'class opposition' for the first two dimensions, and then distinguishes between 'class totality' (whereby class becomes seen as the defining characteristic of the social order), and the conception of alternative forms of social organisation (Mann, 1973). Throughout the 1800-1850 period, the bulk of the operatives appeared to attain the two dimensions of class awareness and conflict consciousness; at times *some* of them moved beyond that to a critical consciousness linked to visions of an alternative, juster society and of other ways of organising the social production of goods.

Statements of their leaders reflect both these developments. Their words reveal their sense of class identity, deeply embedded in the local community and in the family-based system of production. In Chapter 10 I shall argue that, as these latter broke down, so too did the collective

sense of class identity begin to fragment. In the early period, however, the experience and activities of the operatives led them and their leaders to evolve a strongly critical view of the existing social structure, and towards visions, even if fragmentary and fleeting, of a better social order: usually these took the form of a projected ideal 'co-operative commonwealth', in which the divergent interests of labour and capital would be transformed into an harmonious whole.

Looking back at these events, an abiding impression is of the strength of these ideals and visions, which the continued experience of defeat and failure did not dim.¹ "Depend upon it, the day is coming", affirmed Buckby, while Jones wrote

*Yet courage, brothers, help is near,
The dawn of reason breaketh.*

Even in 1884 the unrepentant Sketchley spoke of his belief in an imminent "resurrection" of Chartism, which would

*Sweep away every form of tyranny and oppression ... and prepare
the way for the triumph of eternal justice and the brotherhood
of the human race.*

(Buckby, LRO; Jones, 1853, p 40; Sketchley, 1884, p 29)

¹ See, Houghton, 1957, for an extended discussion of this strand of unquenchable Utopian optimism in Victorian thought.

CHAPTER NINE

I believe in the solidarity of labour founded upon community and commonality of interests. The labourer's interest is one and undivided, and in that sense I believe in solidarity ... All the world over - or any other world, if there is one.

*James Holmes, LAHU Secretary
(PP 1892, xxxvi Pt 2 p 62)*

How slowly we move! Slavery, serfdom, Diggerism, Chartism, Socialism - how slowly we move! The slave - wage-slave or otherwise - does not know he is such ... If he learns that he is, and becomes a rebel, what support does he get from his fellow-slaves? Some are concentrated on 'the next world', saving their souls: some are absorbed by trivialities, Football, Cricket and Horse-racing ... and some are breaking their hearts and risking their health in desperate efforts to cease being proletaires and to rank themselves among the capitalists.

*Thomas Barclay, former LAHU President
(Barclay, 1934, p 59)*

Time was when our employers were our masters. They ordered our hours, wages, and conditions, and often with much severity, but a great change has taken place. We are no longer the poor pitiable creatures of bygone days. We demand the right to have a say on matters that concern us. So long as the workers stand together their right will be respected, but let us become careless and indifferent, then the old yoke of bondage may be placed upon us again.

*LAHU Handbill, 1919
(LAHU B August 20th 1919)*

He had the greatest respect and profoundest regard for the majority of the employers in the trade, and he thought that regard was reciprocated.

*Horace Moulden, LAHU Secretary
(Leicester Mercury 15th Nov 1938)*

CHAPTER NINE

WORKER RESPONSES: THE SWITCH FROM CONFRONTATION TO ACCOMMODATIONIntroduction

A new dawn was indeed on its way, even if not quite the one anticipated - or hoped for - by Buckby, Jones and Sketchley. As the factory system brought relative security and prosperity to the region's hosiery workers, there was a slow change in industrial relations away from the pattern of confrontation which had been established in the earlier period to one of accommodation.

These events in the East Midlands were, of course, not unlike those occurring elsewhere, as I indicated in Chapter 2. This was the period when, in Perry Anderson's words "the most insurgent working-class in Europe became the most numbed and docile" (Anderson, 1964, p 36). Changes in society at large, such as the granting of political concessions to the working classes, the stabilisation of a centralised trade-union pressure group and the growth of mass education, as well as improved pay and conditions at work, resulting from the mid-century economic boom, were bringing a new harmony into class relations nationwide.¹ But it is worthwhile considering exactly *how* that pacification took shape in the East Midlands.

I have already argued in Chapters 6 and 7 that the pacificatory strategies of employers, in the form of paternalism and joint consultation, had a major role to play in transforming industrial relations in hosiery. This experience of the proffered olive branch, along with the improvement in material conditions, was important in encouraging a spirit of industrial

1 See Chapter 2.

peace. However, we must beware of reading off worker responses automatically from the employers' initiatives, as I have argued Joyce does in his Lancashire study (Joyce, 1980). In this chapter, I shall first review the forms of collective action prevalent in this period, considering what changes occurred, and then assess how those changes contributed to the process of accommodation.

However, in studying this period, it is perhaps the continuities rather than the changes which strike the researcher; and it must be emphasised that, in the East Midlands case, the move to accommodation was slow and uneven. Class harmony did not arrive overnight.

Section 1 Forms of collective action 1860-1960

An immediate change from the preceding period was the virtual disappearance of the strategy of appealing to Parliament. There are several possible explanations for this. We could see it as an example of a 'failed strategy' in Edwards' term.¹ Certainly, the various appeals and petitions of the 1800-1860 period had met with little positive response, and possibly the operatives came to see them as a waste of time and energy; it could be argued that Chartism itself was the manifestation of a growing scepticism as to the 'protective' role Parliament was held to assume under the paternalist model. On the other hand, it could be argued that the strategy, rather than failing, simply became redundant.² In a new political and institutional context where local negotiating procedures, such as arbitration boards, were coming into being, there was no need to appeal to a

1 See Chapter 5, p 159.

2 See Chapter 5, p 162.

distant, centralised body, often considered to be ignorant of local conditions. At the national level, with the extension of suffrage and the growth of working-class political bodies (TUC and subsequently the Labour Party), representative democracy became an effective substitute for the more primitive democracy of the mass petition. Since I have already argued that the experience of failure had as yet apparently left undamaged the optimism of the knitters' leaders, I incline to the latter explanation, a position supported by the fact that, when appeals were no longer a major form of industrial collective action, the hosiery workers still occasionally resorted to them when no other form of action seemed appropriate for a particular purpose. The alacrity with which the leadership took up the Government's arbitration procedure in World War One, submitting to it regularly over bonus claims, seems evidence that the old faith in Government protection had never entirely died. In 1924, LAHU officials visited the Government to try to persuade them to take out more contract work, in 1926 they were involved jointly with the employers through the NJIC in a campaign for protective barriers for the industry, and in 1928 there was discussion over launching an appeal for the marking of imported hosiery (LAHU A August 27th 1924, June 6th 1928, LAHU B July 15th 1926). In 1933 there was a joint petition from employers and unions for controls over 'alien labour' (HU March 29th 1933).

The long-standing attachment to the idea of Government protection was also demonstrated in the early years of the national union. In 1947 NUHW wrote to the Board of Trade, expressing its desire for a Wages Council or some other body with statutory powers to enforce decisions, since long experience had shown that trade agreements were persistently violated by individual employers:

We cannot too strongly stress that the Hosiery Industry is made up of small units of private individuals, whose world all too often revolves within the walls of their own business, and nothing short of compulsory powers will ensure observation of any code of conduct or practice.

(AC Report 1947, p 18)

The 1946 NUHW rules included a clause "to ensure legal enforcement of agreements entered into between employers and unions". Despite opposition from militants like Chamberlain of the Hinckley Union, Moulden and his executive were prepared to give up the idea of Government control to procure the employers' assent to regular negotiating machinery, and this eventually happened (Leicester Mercury, 27th May, 1947). By 1969, the "legal enforcement" clause had disappeared from NUHKW rules. Nevertheless, the union still occasionally demonstrates a desire for Government protection, where this does not conflict with the employers' objectives, thus jeopardising the industrial truce.¹

In the main, however, there was a clear move away from this type of endeavour. The main thrust of policy from the 1870s onward was to improve on existing union organisation and establish it on a more stable and permanent basis. From this period, the major preoccupation of officers was the problem of achieving high levels of unionisation and of keeping members in once recruited, along with the organisation of certain groups considered by them to be less responsive to union principles, notably women. Organising the country workers also presented a problem before World War One.² Apart from other considerations, in days of limited transport services, it was difficult to visit scattered members in small villages. LAHU's constitution laid down that each village should receive

1 A case in point was the 1980-1 campaign (conducted jointly with the employers) for import controls, involving a series of demonstrations.

2 See Chapters 4 and 5.

at least one annual visit, but there were still occasional grumbles about neglect (LAHU A September 24th 1920, January 1st 1930). In fact, Holmes and Chaplin of LAHU spent much time and energy in visiting villages, sometimes by request, sometimes speculatively. Some meetings were successful, but many were poorly attended and failed to attract new members.

Membership figures for LAHU are shown in Figure 9.1, as well as census figures which indicate the potential numbers of members. It can be seen how proportionately low membership levels were. As the figures show, in 1913 there was an upsurge of interest in the union, and village members began to join in greater numbers. It is interesting that this recruitment boom preceded the war. However, the bargaining successes of the unions during the war served to attract many more recruits; by 1919 LAHU membership had trebled.¹ In December 1917, for example, Chaplin reported two to three hundred new members gained in one week although "nearly all seem to be thinking only of the war bonus", and in 1918 it was recorded that many young people had joined (LAHU A December 8th 1917, February 15th 1918). After the war membership fell away as the bonus declined, but county membership was never again such a problem for LAHU.²

Organising women, however, remained a long-term problem in the eyes of the officers. Without doubt, this was partly because there was no tradition of organising them. They had not been actively involved in the formal side of the early unions.³ In Nottingham, the circular union

1 *All the other unions also experienced a membership boom, some even more dramatically (see Gurnham, 1976, p 74).*

2 *The membership slump was also a result of the union being forced to stop paying unemployment benefit in 1921, although they started paying it again in 1922 at lower rates (LAHU B February 16th 1922).*

3 *See Chapter 8.*

Figure 9.1

a) Membership of LAHU 1885 to 1939¹

	Men		Women		Total
	Town	County	Town	County	
1885		600		800	1,400
1891					3,500
1893					3,860
1894					3,604
1895					3,386
1896					1,900 ²
1897					1,776
1898					1,734
1900					1,600
1908		593		807	1,400
1911		659		836	1,495
1912		760		1,223	1,983
1913(Apr)	596	267	1,329	316	2,508
1913(Jul)	628	517	1,650	605	3,400
1914	600	606	1,452	772	3,430
1915					4,417
1916					3,982
1917(Jul)					5,600
1917(Dec)					7,000
1918(May)		1,094		6,071	7,165
1918(Jul)					8,000
1919					12,000
1921		3,000		9,000	12,000
1925		1,704		6,809	8,513
1926					8,500
1933					7,000
1939					8,000

Source: Compiled from figures in Head (1960), Friedman (1977b), Gurnham (1976), LAHU minute books and PP 1899 xcii.

- 1 Many of these figures are obviously approximations. They are based either on minute book estimates or on returns made to the GFTU.
- 2 The early figures, especially the dramatic drop in 1896, reflect the success of the 1886 strike and the failure of the 1895 strike, and also the secession of the Loughborough and Hinckley branches in 1895 and 1897 respectively.

b) Total Numbers of Hosiery Workers, Leicester and Leicestershire

	Leicester		Leicestershire		Total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	
1881	3,391	5,308	6,013	8,913	23,625
1891	4,286	8,381	5,212	7,685	25,564
1901	3,282	9,107	4,239	9,230	25,858

Source: Census figures, from Friedman (1977b), p 170.

excluded women and the rotary union showed little interest in organising them. In 1892 its secretary, Bower, estimated that "the great bulk" of women were unorganised, probably only 400 out of an approximate 7,000 being in the unions; he explained that no attempt had been made to organise them before the past eighteen months (PP 1892 xxxvi Pt 2 pp 63, 66).

As Figure 9.1 indicates, the position was better in Leicester. The two all-female unions of the 1870s, the Menders and the Seamers & Stitchers, had established a base for organising women despite their eventual collapse.¹ The Seamers and Stitchers had achieved over 3,000 membership, although one of the organisers, Mrs. Fray, recounted that getting them together had involved "a deal of trouble" (PP 1876 xxx p 383). The earliest existing minute books, (from 1887 onwards) record attempts at organising women, including separate meetings for women's branches, although the male officers found it heavy going (LAHU A April 10th 1888). Progress was halting. In 1905 it was noted that, while the majority of male factory operatives were organised, only a small percentage of women were in LAHU (LAHU A July 5th 1905). The figures shown in Figure 9.1 somewhat belie that comment, however, and it appears that there was a tendency for officers to downgrade the actual level of women's employment. In general, Holmes and Chaplin had a poor view of women, complaining of their apathy and inactivity: Holmes complained that

It is impossible to get a woman to serve on the Executive Committee, so accustomed are they to have everything done for them.

(Gurnham, 1976, p 48)

There is an amusing account of a social held by the Ilkeston Union in 1923 when Chaplin was the guest speaker:

¹ See Chapter 3.

Probably some 7 or 800 were present, but it was clear from the start that the big majority had come for Dancing and Social Amusements, as the order during the speaking was very bad indeed, and it was most difficult to continue ... Most of them were young men and women whose object was pleasure.

(LAHU B April 20th 1923)

During the 1920s some signs of a more up-to-date approach to organising appeared. In 1921 the first collectors' conference was held (although only 124 out of an anticipated 200 turned up) and in 1923 a social was arranged at Shepshed (LAHU A October 19th 1921, April 18th 1923). In 1925 the idea of home visits was under consideration while in 1926 a joint campaign to recruit women was being conducted with the boot and shoe union (LAHU B April 18th 1925, June 10th 1926).

These new moves were consolidated with the arrival of Horace Moulden as LAHU's new leader in 1927. Socially progressive if politically moderate, Moulden was determined to modernise the union's approach and "keep in the van of progress". "Old customs" must be abandoned and the union should follow the example of successful unions like the transport workers who had "seen and met the needs of the social side". It was agreed that "trade unions functioning as purely such are failures, we have got to make it worthwhile for people to join" (LAHU B July 27th 1929, July 31st 1930).

Accordingly, Moulden started a campaign of visiting firms at dinner hour, chatting to workers and staging "impromptu" meetings; he continued the policy of holding socials and dances in the various localities, and running trips and meetings for collectors, such as the 1938 one to the Derbyshire Dales. In 1929 a 'Trade Union' week was staged, with meetings and talks (LAHU A February 6th, May 8th 1929, July 6th 1938; B July 2nd 1929).

Moulden gave particular attention to the issue of organising women. In 1928 two joint meetings were held with the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives (NUBSO), although one of these, an all-female dance, met with some opposition from the Executive Committee, who would have preferred it if "male friends" could attend.¹ In 1930 an unofficial women's committee was formed to "combat the continued backwardness of our women members in active participation".² It was hoped that a woman might be appointed to the Executive Committee³ (LAHU A November 25th, December 12th 1928; B January 19th 1929, July 31st 1930). The suggestion of appointing a special women's organiser was at first dismissed as too expensive, but with help from the GFTU a woman was appointed temporarily. Following the retirement of Bailey, joint secretary with Moulden, it was decided to appoint a full-time organiser in his place, and committee member Susan Bird was selected, despite some opposition on the grounds of her being not only a woman but a married woman (LAHU A January 16th, October 23rd 1929; B February 27th, August 28th 1934).

This long struggle to recruit members contrasts sharply with the position at Hinckley. In 1936 the union claimed that 95% of Hinckley hosiery workers were organised; there were, however, difficulties at nearby Nuneaton and Coventry, and in 1939 a campaign of leafleting, visiting and loudhailing was conducted in these towns (HU June 5th 1936, February 7th 1939). The anomalous success of the Hinckley union may have resulted from tightness of the community in this small town where hosiery remained the one major industry. For most districts, however, raising membership levels was the major problem until NUHW was formed.

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- 1 *Lizzie Willson of the Leicester NUBSO Women's Branch was not only a militant activist but a strong feminist, who at one time led a break-away women's union (Fox, 1958, p 309).*
 - 2 *A similar committee established in 1886 had been described by Chaplin as an "expensive farce" (Gurnham, 1976, p 48).*
 - 3 *By 1932 there were four women on the executive (LAHU B March 22nd 1932).*

Even then the problem remained. NUHW appointed three full-time organisers in the first four years, but though they met with some success they encountered resistance in the 'new' hosiery areas. All reported the difficulty of keeping up membership, once gained, and of establishing and keeping collectors in organised firms.¹ At local level recruitment remained an obsession. Leicester District minutes record numerous discussions about appointing collectors, falling membership and communication problems between officers and shopfloor workers.² It was calculated by one organiser that it was necessary to recruit 1,500 people a year merely to maintain membership on an even level, in an industry marked by high labour turnover, married women dropping in and out of the workforce and considerable switching between firms (LD October 9th 1972).

Apathy worried the District Committee just as it had the LAHU Executive. In 1925 only 22 members attended the LAHU AGM, the average for the past ten meetings having been 59 (LAHU B August 18th 1925). Thirty years later, the Leicester District was debating the same issue and running the familiar gamut of suggestions for remedying it: newsletters, more shopfloor visits by officials, educational activities, compensation for time spent on union business. One member criticised the NUHW as "the worst in the country as far as organisation was concerned" (LD April 16th 1956, AGM 1952).

This concentration on recruitment, though typical of institutionalised unions, did not indicate that from the 1880s a new type of bureaucratised structure had replaced the old spontaneously-run organisations. These

1 See AC reports 1948-51. By 1950, however, NUHW was organising 31.6% of workers in the industry, 32% of females and 30.5% of males. The figure stayed at around this level through the 1950s, but from 1964 a fairly steady rise in density of membership was experienced to reach 64% in 1978.

2 For example, reports in LD November 27th 1950, April 16th 1956.

locally-based unions hardly resembled the ASE and other "new model" unions. Until the 1890s the two Nottingham power unions had no paid officials. The 1875 rules of the Circular Union required all officers to be re-elected every three years (Gurnham, 1976, p 34). LAHU officers also changed frequently in the first few years of its existence, and when Holmes and later Chaplin became full-time salaried officials they continued to maintain extremely close contact with the membership; members came continually into the office with problems, and the officers went constantly into factories to negotiate and solve disputes. Having two secretaries acted, perhaps, as a check to empire-building on the part of the officials. It is noteworthy that Moulden, perhaps the first true bureaucrat in the history of the hosiery unions, instigated the abolition of the dual secretaryship, thus consolidating his own power (LAHU A October 6th 1930).

All three unions started their careers meeting in private houses, inns, coffee houses and clubs, like the earlier unions (Gurnham, 1976, p 35; LAHU A August 5th 1887). LAHU did have an office by 1896, although it was not until 1919 that a typist was hired (along with a table to put her typewriter on!) (LAHU A March 19th 1919). Holmes and Chaplin were experienced operatives, men firmly attached to the old trade traditions and wedded to the independent artisan ideal. In no sense had any social distance sprung up between them and their members.¹ The suggestion that a "college man" should be appointed as organiser met with short shrift from this proudly working-class group of men (LAHU B August 18th 1921).

The continuity with the old unions is also highlighted by the continued problem of embezzlement. LAHU minutes record several cases of collectors

¹ See Lane, 1974, Chapter 7 for discussion of the status gap which often arises between officials and rank-and-file.

absconding with funds.¹ The most spectacular cases involved officials. In 1897 Hartshorn, the man in charge of LAHU's Hinckley section², was sacked after pilfering funds to finance his drinking habits; sadly, Holmes himself was forced to resign in 1911, after the discovery that he had used at least £7,000 from union funds to finance property deals involving 192 houses (LAHU A February 27th 1897, August 14th 1911; Gurnham, 1976, p 65).³

The unions remained, then, small, informal, minimally bureaucratised and deeply local in orientation. Discussing amalgamation, for example, the local leaders in 1923 expressed strong reservations. Chaplin maintained that amalgamation would impede not enhance unity, and the Loughborough Secretary stated "they would never agree if local methods were to be surrendered" (LAHU B April 28th 1923). In contrast, the progressive Moulden firmly adhered to a policy of amalgamation, starting to campaign for it soon after his accession in 1928 and continuing to do so until 1946 (LAHU B July 21st 1928, July 27th 1929; Leicester Evening Mail February 9th 1939).

Moulden brought a new style of leadership to LAHU and was to carry it over into the new national union. The minutes change abruptly in style after his arrival: entries are briefer, more formal, and rows and disputes are no longer reported verbatim. As well as new organising tactics, he brought to LAHU a spirit of financial and tactical caution, a distrust of confrontation and a commitment to conciliatory policies.

This contrasts with the period of Holmes' and Chaplin's leadership, when the level of strikes was fairly high (see Fig. 9.2). The major pre-occupation of LAHU during their leadership, apart from improving membership,

1 14 cases are reported in the years I sampled between 1896 and 1930.

2 Hartshorn's behaviour was a contributory factor in the secession of Hinckley later that year.

3 He died shortly after of cancer.

Figure 9.2

LAHU stoppages and strikes, selected years 1895-1930¹a) Stoppages recorded in minutes for each year, selected years 1895-1930²

1895	2	1914	3	1922	1
1896	4	1915	3	1923	2
1897	4	1916	2	1924	1
1898	1	1917	7	1925	1
1900	3	1918	3	1926	0
1905	1	1919	2	1927	1
1910	2	1920	7	1928	1
1913	6	1921	1	1929	1
				1930	3

b) Stoppages in four-yearly periods 1895-8, 1915-29

1895-1898	11	1923-1926	4
1915-1918	15	1927-1930	6
1919-1922	11		

Source: LAHU Minute Books.

1 No systematic analysis was carried out for years 1901-4, 1906-9, 1911-2.

2 Most strikes are likely to have been recorded in the minutes, but very short ones may have been settled before minuting occurred, so that the actual occurrence of strikes may have been slightly higher.

was the maintenance of the tradition of craft independence.¹ The defence of wages was also, of course, a major issue; much time was spent in negotiation and discussion with employers, and strikes were also frequently used to combat threatened reductions. In almost every case, however, the method used by LAHU was the partial strike. There were general strikes in Leicester in 1886 and 1895, in Nottingham in 1896 and Hinckley in 1891.² Thereafter there was no general strike in Leicester until the successful 1915 strike for war bonus.

The events recorded in Fig. 9.2 might more aptly be labelled stoppages than strikes. Some were very brief, lasting only a couple of days. Others, such as the major strikes at Walkers in 1913 and Morleys in 1920, lasted many months. Of the 62 strikes recorded in Fig. 9.2, the causes of 50 are given in the minutes. 28 were over wages, mainly threatened reductions, although some concerned non-payment of war bonus, and a few, during the war, were for advances. 2 others basically concerned pay, one being over shift payments, the other lack of payment for a mending task. The other 20 cases covered a variety of grievances: 5 were over dismissals, 3 over foremen and fines, 2 over union recognition, 2 over employment of non-unionists and 1 over members in arrears on union dues. The remaining 7 essentially concerned work conditions: 2 over bad yarns, 2 over work organisation (one, in 1896, over management assuming the right to allocate machinery), 1 over the use of outworkers, 1 over an attempt to introduce day-rates and 1 over machines being placed too close together. A significant number, then, were not simply about rewards for effort but concerned control issues. The fact that control became a more explicit factor in causing strikes in this period than the

1 See Chapter 4.

2 Both the 1895 and 1896 strikes resulted in wage rises, but proved costly to the resources of the unions (Gurnham, 1976, pp 55-7).

preceding one¹ can be explained in terms of the introduction of the factory system which took away the control over conditions of work and work environment enjoyed by the domestic workers. The 8 strikes over discipline, 5 upholding union organisation and 7 over conditions are symptomatic of the struggle of the operatives to achieve a degree of control in the factory environment.

I have little information on strikes in the other areas over this period, but it is likely that they follow a similar pattern of short strikes against individual employers. Figures given by Phillips Bevan for the 1870s record 14 strikes in hosiery, including a Nottingham strike over the employment of women.² Another Nottingham strike lasted 14 weeks, involved 700 operatives and cost the employers £9,800 (Phillips Bevan, 1880, pp 38, 40, 49). Most were probably shorter. Hinckley Union minutes show exactly the same pattern of strikes over the same range of issues: pay, discipline and union recognition. In the final stages before the Second World War one new element crept in, the strike involving members in the 'new' areas; major strikes occurred at St. Albans (1930), Elstree (1936) and Bear Brand, Liverpool (1939). This last strike, lasting nine months, cost the unions over £7,000; the brunt was borne by Leicester, while Hinckley contributed £700 (HU December 6th 1939).

Not all strikes ended in defeat. The LAHU minutes record victories, great and small. Strikes over sackings and non-unionists were particularly likely to be settled in the union's favour. For example, sacked workpeople were reinstated at Corahs in 1913 and Krenton and Almond in 1917, and a non-unionist forced to leave Beehive in 1917 (LAHU A February 5th 1913,

1 See Chapter 8, p 270-71.

2 I have found no reference to any strikes during the 1860-70 period, when the influence of the NAB was at its height. Following Mundella's departure in 1871, that moderating influence declined.

April 17th, September 14th 1917). Threatened strikes over these issues were often avoided by quick settlements.¹ Some notable victories were gained, too, in longer disputes, such as the victory after a month's strike at Wills and Hutchinson in 1910, an advance gained at a newly organised village factory in 1913, and a strike over non-payment of bonus in 1917 (LAHU A September 26th 1910, May 25th 1913, December 8th 1917).

There were, however, some painful defeats. In 1900, men at Rowleys returned to work at old prices after a long strike, also accepting a set wages system, which incensed the officers so much that they expelled them from the union. At another strike in 1920 over wages, 20 out of 100 girls returned to work, arousing Chaplin's wrath:

A number of you have been mean and cowardly enough to go cringing into the boss and from what we have heard you have promised to leave the union ... I hope Myhill and Shortland will make you suffer ... He can grind you as he likes and serve you right, it's the worst case I have ever known.

(LAHU A March 28th, June 13th 1900, LAHU B July 30th 1920)

In the same year a long dispute with Morleys, over the sacking of 70 girls who had joined the union, also ended in defeat, because of the employment of blacklegs (LAHU A December 8th 1920).

Although victories possibly outweighed defeats in this period, the wariness about strikes that had evolved during the previous decades was still evinced by the leaders. Strikes continued to be seen as a necessary evil. Thus, disputatious winders at one firm were told

Under no consideration must strikes take place until every possible means has been tried to come to terms.

(LAHU A June 24th 1914)

¹ See LAHU A March 2nd 1921, June 28th 1922, for example.

Unofficial strikes were not popular with leaders (LAHU A February 5th 1913, November 27th 1915). Sometimes it was possible to use alternative tactics; for example, at one firm where the collector had been sacked men refused to work shifts rather than strike, and at another firm girls were told not to accept money for a disputed job unless the official union price was given (LAHU A November 10th 1897, August 19th 1914). Officials were cautious about entering on strikes they might lose: a strike at Sileby, a Leicestershire village, was avoided because the last attempted strike there had been a "costly failure", and at the onset of the postwar depression it was noted that

Nobody was satisfied with the employers' lists but everyone agreed that a strike would be useless at the present time.

(LAHU A October 13th 1905, B April 29th 1921)

Figure 9.2 shows the pattern of strike activity of LAHU up to 1930. Before the war strikes were fairly frequent, during the war they peaked, and from 1921 there was a clear decline. Undoubtedly a major cause of this decline was the establishment of the NJIC, which, like the NAB before it, was intended to replace strikes with negotiation, and which repeated some of the NAB's initial success. Another contributory factor was the rise to power of Moulden, who avowed his opposition to strikes more firmly than his predecessors had done, keeping the union on the path indicated by the NJIC. In 1928 he told the AGM that while there had been 16 disputes in his first half-year in office

In every instance we have avoided drastic action, although in two cases we came very near the mark.

(LAHU B July 21st 1928)

This set the tone for his secretaryship. Later in his career he told the executive that

If only the same results would accrue from the two methods ... negotiations should be put forward every time.

(LAHU A July 21st 1937)

In 1938 he told a packed mass meeting that he disliked using the strike weapon (Leicester Mercury November 15th 1938).

Although Moulden's moderate attitudes were not the initial cause of the decline of strikes, his espousal of arbitration procedures helped to maintain the new industrial harmony, and under his leadership NUHW started its career committed to settling disputes by conciliation procedure.¹ This did not entirely bring an end to strikes. For example in 1947, while three disputes had been brought to conciliation without strike action (in each case the union's claims being upheld), four strikes had occurred, three over dismissals, which then went to arbitration. Strikes, thus, continued to break out in difficult situations, especially over union recognition, where clearly NJIC procedures were inapplicable.² Nevertheless, NUHW upheld its cautious attitude to striking, despite its increased numerical strength and financial resources. There has only been one general strike in its history, in 1976.

Strike activities, then, showed some marked continuities with the pre-1860 period, although the espousal of arbitration by the manufacturers had an important effect in diminishing them. Another marked continuity, at least up to World War One, was the continued espousal of experiments in co-operative production.

Leicester in particular was a leading centre in the co-operative revival of the 1870s and 1880s. In terms of consumer co-operation, Acland and Jones calculated that in 1881 17.6% of the Leicestershire population,

1 See Chapter 7.

2 See AC Reports 1947, 1949, 1950.

15% of Nottinghamshire and 19.6% of Derbyshire were shareholders of the CWS; by 1891, this had increased to 26.3%, 20.4% and 36.9% respectively (Acland and Jones, 1884, p 31, 1898, p 35). Only five English counties showed higher levels of shareholding. In the field of producer co-operation, one third of the Co-operative Production Federation (CPF) co-ops were in the East Midlands. In 1898, there were nine producer co-ops in Leicester (four in boot and shoe where the independent artisan ideal was even stronger than in hosiery) (CPF, 1900, p 82). By 1927, there were three more boot and shoe co-ops. In hosiery, nine co-ops were formed in the East Midlands between 1850 and 1880, although the majority failed: these were in Leicester, Hinckley, Shepshed, Loughborough, Nottingham, Arnold, Mansfield and Ruddington; there was also one at Hawick (Jones, 1888, p 41, 1894, pp 371-4).

The Shepshed co-op, founded in 1881 struggled on until 1891 making a continual loss, and the Hinckley co-op, founded in 1884 with 90 members, was only making a profit of £30 by 1891. The only two really successful ones were the Leicester Co-operative Hosiery Manufacturing Society (LCHMS), founded in 1867, but reconstituted in 1876 with union backing, and the later Wigston Hosiers, formed in 1897.

The story of the LCHMS is instructive and rather tragic.¹ The first society, with 60 members, floundered, like its predecessors for lack of initial capital and commercial knowhow. In 1875, a LAHU general meeting voted to take it over. This decision was soon reversed, partly for ideological reasons and partly because the enterprise continued to make a loss. But a new committee was then formed, including Holmes and George Newell,

¹ *Material on LCHMS is taken from Blandford and Newell, 1898, and its own 1891 publication.*

at that time the LAHU secretary and a workmate of Thomas Barclay's at Corahs, who was subsequently appointed manager. From then on the co-op started to build itself up slowly but steadily, as is shown in Figure 9.3. By 1896 it had the 4th highest profit of the 84 extant societies. In 1898, all employees were reported as being shareholders: according to Newell, "Workers come here and do not go away" (Lloyd, 1898, p 116). The links with the union had been maintained, and union rates were paid; the co-operative sought to guarantee security of employment, and there was a profit-sharing scheme.

Visitors to LCHMS were favourably impressed. Beatrice Webb, later an implacable opponent of producer co-ops, commented on the "contented, happy faces, bright appearances and friendly manners" of the workpeople (Blandford and Newell, 1898, p 72). A journalist from the Workmen's Times, conducted round by Holmes, was told of a "great list of names" waiting to be "set on". It was described as a "comfortable shop", free from "humbug", and, because of the kindness and consideration of Newell, the workpeople "are quite a happy family". The regularity of employment contrasted with the seasonality of much hosiery work; production was for the CWS, so that there was always a stock of orders. The journalist was especially pleased to see the women singing at the work, which he considered an infallible sign that "the iron has not entered into the soul" (LCHMS, 1891, pp 10-2). This undoubted success story, however, came to an abrupt end when the co-operative was taken over by the CWS in 1904; shortly afterwards it was relocated by the CWS in Huthwaite, Derbyshire. With a profit of £3,875 in 1898 (see Figure 9.3), it is not surprising the CWS considered it a tasty morsel. Unfortunately the LCHMS's dependence on the CWS as a customer made it powerless in face of such attentions.

Figure 9.3

Progress of Leicester Co-operative Hosiery
Manufacturing Society, 1876-98

	<i>Loan/share Capital (£s)</i>	<i>Trade (£s)</i>	<i>Profits (£s)</i>	<i>No. of Employees</i>
1876	130	938	26	
1877	303			
1878				
1879		2,378		
1880				
1881	783			
1882		4,493	129	
1883		5,415		
1884		6,273	133	
1885	2,865			
1886	4,861	9,097	300	
1887		10,345		
1888				
1889	7,549			
1890	13,332	17,079		91
1891	14,349	21,440	628	100
1892			1,125	
1893	19,418		1,504	
1894			1,829	
1895			2,214	
1896	31,785	48,885	2,802	290
1897	39,808	53,595		
1898	43,032	57,753	3,875	

*Sources*¹: *Acland and Jones, 1884*
Blandford, 1892
Blandford and Newell, 1898
CPF, 1900
Jones, 1888, 1894
LCHMS, 1891
*Statistics of Co-operative
Societies, 1898*

1 There are some discrepancies in the figures given in these various sources. Where these occur, I have taken the figures from the most direct source.

Wigston Hosiers, set up with advice from Newell, was also a financial success, as described by Edward Greening in his history of it, 'A Democratic Co-partnership'. This also had union support, although the links were less direct. In 1914 LAHU took out £20 worth of shares, not because the co-op lacked capital, but to strengthen the bonds with trade unionism, and more shares were taken up in 1918 and 1920 (LAHU A June 19th 1914, March 8th 1918, September 1st 1920). At the 'coming of age' party, Chaplin, a guest speaker as current Mayor of Leicester, praised the "co-partnership solution for the problem of strikes and class bitterness"; there had never been a strike at the co-op¹ (Greening, 1921, p 120). Greening, describing the co-op as being under "a reign of industrial peace and content" applauded the "happy-looking" workpeople and the clean bright surroundings. He spoke to an audience of 100 shareholding workpeople, including many women, and complimented them on their intelligent understanding of the co-partnership ideal:

Men and women alike responded to the suggestion that the emancipation of the workers implied industry, thrift ... and sharing in responsibilities as well as sharing in profits.

(Greening, 1921, pp 101-2, 121)

The spirit of this enterprise was close to that of the Christian Socialist strand in co-operative thought, and it could be argued that, like others of its type and time, it was not very different from an ordinary joint stock company.² However, the stress on good employment conditions, security of employment and friendly, trusting management relations marked it out from the average hosiery factory of the 1920s.

1 He neglected to mention an incident in 1916 when the co-op had been reprimanded for having non-unionists on its committee! (LAHU A February 26th 1916).

2 This view is expressed, for example, in Kirkham's account of Equity Shoes, the most successful and long-running of the Leicester CPF co-ops (Kirkham, 1973).

Many union activists were strongly committed to the co-operative ideal. Early LAHU leaders, Holmes, Bindley and Newell were strongly in favour, as later was Chaplin. As Newell stated:

For some years before the starting of the above company efforts had been made by trade union officials to establish co-operative production. They saw that trade unions might help, but could not solve, the problem of labour and capital.

(LCHMS, 1891, p 1)

Bonser and Oscroft, Nottingham hand-frame leaders, spoke in 1892 of co-operative production as a possible solution to their problems, which they were currently considering, although it was difficult for the low-paid hand-workers to accumulate sufficient starting capital. In the same year LAHU, in addition to its involvement with LCHMS, had started a self-employment scheme to help unemployed older members (PP 1892 xxxvi Pt 2, pp 59, 88). Earlier, at the 'Capital and Labour' discussions many Nottingham labour leaders, from the ASE, the joiners, the carpenters and the stonemasons, for example, had spoken of co-operation as the way forward. One workman, Matthias Mather, saw it as the "only true solution" to the labour/capital conflict (Ward, 1874, p 51).¹

The motivations of these men were much the same as those of their predecessors, Henson, Jackson and Merrick²: the desire for security of employment and for social advancement through self-help, along with an ideological commitment to the notion of the 'co-operative commonwealth' whereby co-operative production was seen as the first step in the socialisation of production. Newell described the LCHMS as an attempt at "better organisation" of industry, where the old methods had led to unemployment,

1 *It is curious in view of the enthusiasm expressed, especially by the ASE, that co-operative production never flourished in Nottingham.*

2 *See Chapter 8.*

irregular employment and poverty for workpeople; the aim was to make the workers "partners in their own industry, citizens in an industrial community" (Blandford and Newell, 1898, pp 9, 11). These statements show how the desire for independence and security, and the ethic of self-help, were combined with a bolder view of a new social order, one we might perhaps describe as 'co-operative democratic' rather than 'socialist'.

This Utopian strand in the East Midlands' co-operators' thinking was epitomised by statements made at the Co-operative Congress held in Leicester in 1915. One local speaker defended local co-operators against the charge of being merely "a host of dividend hunters". They were seeking "a real genuine socialism that has been well tested and that gives overwhelming evidence of its practicability and beneficence". Co-operation would bring to an end the bitter struggles between capital and labour, and he believed that the experience of war was wakening in many people an interest in the "moral grandeur and economic liberality" of co-operation, in the "brotherhood of social helpfulness" and "an altruistic social environment"; so that the day was near when

Society shall have outgrown the old social and economic systems and be ready to acclaim the glorious advent of a co-operative commonwealth.

On a more mundane note, Chaplin told the congress that co-operation was the best of any industrial systems currently being practised (Co-operative Congress, 1915, pp 181-6, 224).

Not all the union radicals shared this viewpoint. What Newell described as "a minority" in LAHU had opposed co-operation "often and loud and strong", and succeeded in severing the union the LCHMS in 1877. This 'minority' believed co-operation to be "bad in theory and evil in practice" (Blandford and Newell, 1898, p 11). They were led by Barclay, perhaps the

most strongly socialist of the group, who may well have seen co-operation as a diversion from the true proletarian struggle.¹ If so, he was perhaps right, as co-ops obviously did not provide a lasting solution to the capital and labour problem.² It can be argued that the interest in co-operation diverted attention from other radical alternatives; however, this should not detract from the fact that the LAHU leaders espoused co-operation in the progressive and Utopian spirit of their predecessors.

If the use of partial strikes and the commitment to co-operation are signs of continuity between the factory and the pre-factory epochs, there is considerable discontinuity if we turn to political activities. This period was marked by a growing separation, in the leaders' minds, between the industrial and political spheres, in strong contrast to the shifting between political and industrial activities which was described in Chapter 8.

It would be too simplistic to interpret this purely in terms of the depoliticisation of the union leadership. The leaders of LAHU, as we have seen, were men committed to radical politics of various sorts - socialism, anarchism, co-operation - such as Holmes, Barclay, Warner, Newell and Bindley.³ Holmes and Barclay were founder members of the Leicester ILP in 1888, and Chaplin soon joined them. Holmes' monthly reports for LAHU are said to have been very "socialistic" in tone (Gurnham, 1976, p 45). Chaplin, with due permission from the members, was elected councillor for the Lib/Labs in 1898 (Howes, 1927, p 59; LAHU A June 30th 1897); he became an alderman in 1909, and Mayor in 1919, again with permission from the LAHU AGM. A TUC programme said of him that

1 See Lancaster, 1982, p 195.

2 The last reference I have found to Wigston Hosiers was in 1930. It does not exist now.

3 See Lancaster, 1982, for discussion of the political beliefs of these men.

*He joined the ranks of the rebels against a selfish capitalism
and the tyranny of the machine.*

(TUC, 1903, p 51)

Although I have no information on the political lives of leaders in other districts in the late nineteenth century, there is no indication in reports of MCHF meetings of serious political disagreements: certainly Chamberlain, who led the Hinckley Union in the 1930s and 1940s, was a militant Labour activist and councillor.

However, there are important changes to note, many of them relating to changes in the wider political context. The age of mass working-class movements was past, and the age of representative democracy was dawning. The hosiery unions sent delegates to the TUC, were actively involved in the GFTU, and had links with the local Trades' Councils: in Leicester, Merrick, Chaplin and four other LAHU activists were presidents of the Trades' Council between 1872 and 1921 (Leicester and District Trades' Council, 1930). Centralised pressure group action, rather than direct action, was the order of the day. There was also change in the political affiliations of the mass of workers. If LAHU's leaders inclined to socialism, there is no evidence that many of the rank-and-file did; they were no longer prepared to follow their leaders down the radical road.¹ In addition, there was a tendency over time for leaders to draw a more rigid distinction as to how much 'political' issues, whatever their own loyalties, were legitimate trade union business. In this sense, it could be said that they did slowly become, as unionists at least, 'depoliticised'. By 1949 the Leicester District Committee was complaining that the Trades' Council was a waste of time "as most of the discussions were centred on political arguments" (LD October 31st 1949).

1 See Lancaster, 1982, p 196.

Both these latter elements are nicely demonstrated in the saga surrounding the issue of affiliation to the Labour Party.¹ LAHU was originally affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), probably as a direct consequence of Holmes' and Chaplin's ILP involvements. In 1910 they were paying contributions to the LRC, while facing complaints about the use of union funds for political purposes. In 1913 £8 6s 8d was paid over to represent 2,000 members, but shortly afterwards, following the prosecution of other unions for misuse of funds, LAHU disaffiliated. A ballot was then held in 1914, resulting in 756 votes for affiliation, 961 against.² At the insistence of two strongly socialist committee members (Newcombe and Baum) another ballot was held, after a resolution was passed that

In view of the deplorable condition of the Working Classes due to unemployment, high cost of living etc., and the failure of our Capitalist government to remedy these evils ... the Hosiery Union should fall into line with other trade unions for the purpose of Political Action.

In 1921 the membership voted for affiliation by 2835 votes to 1778, but the ballot was declared invalid, and when it was repeated in 1922 affiliation was rejected by 2822 votes to 1253.³

The left-wingers continued to raise the issue, and when the NUHW was formed one of its objectives was "to promote political action through affiliation to the Labour Party".⁴ A ballot in 1948 again brought rejection, by 12,049 to 9,394. Another ballot in 1953 followed unsuccessful

1 The minutes give a sometimes confused picture on this issue. As far as I can ascertain, the main facts are as set out here.

2 3,500 papers had been sent out.

3 See LAHU A June 3rd, July 20th 1910, December 4th 1913, November 9th 1921, December 13th 1922; LAHU B June 28th 1921).

4 By 1969, this clause had disappeared from the rule-book.

attempts to explain the importance of affiliation to the membership: Leicester District Committee reported difficulty in putting across the "union's point of view" to members, and even to collectors; though the DC had itself voted 6 to 4 (with 3 abstentions) for affiliation, the ballot was again lost (LD October 15th 1951, October 5th, September 21st 1953). Other ballots have been held since¹, but the membership has continued to reject affiliation, and officials have come to see the ballots as detrimental to unity (LD March 19th 1959).

The ballot issue clearly demonstrates that the union leaders have consistently been more radical than the rank-and-file. Chaplin's role in this is also significant. Despite his ILP involvement, there was a rift between him and the Labour Party. This seems partly to have been due to his disapproval of their anti-war stance in World War One: a pronounced patriot, he was expelled from the local party, so that in 1919 he became the town's "first Labour Mayor" only in the more general sense (Gurnham, 1976, p 79). But his disagreements with the Party may have been more wholesale than this one issue, as the tone of his reports from TUC meetings in the 1920s suggests a suspicion of the Marxist or "red element" in the Party, and a growing anti-communist stance. He claimed he was proud to support a Labour Party as long as it was a "Trade Union party, not a society like the present Labour Party".² He told the left-wingers that he had no objection to the union taking part in politics, "we are compelled in self-defence to do so", but he could not "support the present so-called Labour Party which had altered its constitution to embrace anyone" (LAHU A

1 *The latest was in 1981, resulting in rejection by 17,054 to 13,414. Another is to be held in 1986.*

2 *At least one member agreed with him, arguing that "some were looking out for soft jobs and wanted the Working Man to pay for them" (LAHU B October 29th 1918).*

September 23rd 1925, LAHU B July 24th 1918, October 29th 1918). Chaplin seems to have drifted away from the original socialism he learned from Holmes and Barclay into a centrist position, which clearly reflects some idea that the furthering of the working man's interests through trade unionist pressure group activity should be kept separate from more generalised political activity.

A much more marked moderation, however, was shown by Moulden. Despite Chaplin's doubts about the Labour Party he remained attached to the Labour Movement in general; there was a strong tradition of support by LAHU under his leadership for strikes and similar activities. Chaplin made clear his strong support for the miners in 1926, and a total of over £500 was sent to them in the course of the strike (LAHU 1926, especially LAHU B August 24th). After Moulden's accession, many such appeals were rejected. Moulden seems to have had little interest in party politics, and rows broke out frequently between him and the socialist Newcombe over, for example, the lack of active support given to the Jarrow marchers on their way through Leicester (LD September 30th 1936). In comparison to Chaplin, Moulden seems to have espoused a narrowly sectarian and economic brand of trade unionism.

The formation of a 'left opposition' within the executive seems to have dated from around 1911, significantly following after the demise of the strongly socialist Holmes, and can be taken as a sign of the slowly growing moderacy of the leadership. It was led by Newcombe, of the large Johnson and Barnes factory at Kibworth, who had some substantial rank-and-file support. The group kept up pressure for more militant and politically-oriented policy. Newcombe had frequent clashes with Chaplin, accusing him of inactivity, spinelessness and collusion with the employers, claiming

to have heard "not once but a hundred times that Johnson's got Chaplin round his finger ends" (LAHU A July 9th, December 19th 1914). He succeeded in rousing the Kibworth workers to voice discontent with the leadership. Chaplin reported facing "complaints and suspicions" from them, and on another occasion "fault-finding and grumbling" (LAHU A October 13th 1915, April 8th 1916). In 1924 members grumbled "the committee are asleep and the officials dead"! (LAHU B January 10th 1924).

The left-wingers opposed the arbitration policies of the war period: Newcombe made his attitude to Whitleyism quite clear, when he told Chaplin it was a "step in the wrong direction", and that they would be better advised to appoint an organiser to "preach discontent and show that the capitalists are the workers' enemies" (LAHU B February 28th 1919). On one occasion they tried to change the rules so that the officials and Committee should be appointed by the trade meeting, not by ballot, on the grounds that "it would be more democratic"¹ (LAHU B April 7th 1917, LAHU B August 22nd 1922).

Moulden defeated two of the left opposition group, Newcombe and Black, in the 1927 election for Secretary, polling 2,222 votes to their 636 and 2,110 respectively. Black resigned, but Newcombe remained to be a thorn in Moulden's flesh. Vitriolic rows continued until Newcombe lost his job and resigned from the union in 1942, declaring that "more than one party" would be glad of his departure (LD January 29th 1942).²

1 *A statement that raises interesting questions about competing views of what "democracy" consists of, in light of Government policy on unions in the 1980s.*

2 *Not only moderate leaders faced such criticisms. Chamberlain, Labour Party activist of the Hinckley Union, was criticised by a member for conducting "a game of chess" with the employers' leader, using "delaying tactics", and warned that not only dockers could move against their leaders (HU April 4th 1947).*

After the formation of the National Union, left oppositional tactics were continued. A motion raised by the Nottingham delegation at the 1947 Annual Conference called for three-yearly ballots for President and Secretary. The proposer declared

There is a tendency for the trade union leader to become just another gaffer ... I want to get the trade union leaders on the same level as the workers.

*(Hinckley Times, May 30th 1947)*¹

Leicester District minutes record the activities of a group of Labour and Communist party militants on the DC, who agitated for political action and affiliation, support of left-wing causes, closer links with the shopfloor, educational programmes and so on. At the 1952 AGM members raised the issue of holding monthly branch meetings; an attempt to do so failed, as much through members' apathy as the officials' opposition (LD AGM 1952).

The declining radicalism of the mass of workers, shown in the ballot issue, is also reflected in the decline of violent activity during this period. Figure 8.3 indicates the decline of violent collective events after 1850. Although election disturbances continued late into the century (there were riots in Nottingham in 1870 and 1885) other forms of rioting declined sharply. Of the four industrial riots recorded in Figure 8.3, one only concerned hosiery. The others were two lacemakers' riots in Nottingham in 1865 and 1875 and a bricklayers' riot in Leicester in 1899. The last hosiery disturbance was occasioned by the 1886 strike in Leicester: a mob took to the streets, uttering threats and execrations against the employers, besieging factories and smashing windows. Women were said to be active among the rioters (Leicester Advertiser, February 13th 1886).

¹ *It was defeated.*

From then on, violence ceased to be a significant feature of the industrial scene. The only violent incidents occurred during strikes, when feelings against 'scabs' ran high, leading to confrontation on the street. For example, there were clashes between pickets and police in 1914, during the strike at Skevingtons over union recognition; six girls were prosecuted, for yelling "dirty scabs" at blacklegs, and in one case for physical assault. Women were often involved in picketing incidents, and during another strike at Bedworth, near Coventry, where there were several violent scenes, a woman was again prosecuted for assault (LAHU A April 24th 1914, LAHU B April 9th 1925). These incidents, however, were small-scale, and involved few people. They could hardly be seen as a major threat to public order, and it was no longer possible for the East Midlands to be seen as the site of "radical ruffianism".¹

Section 2 Pacification and the diminution of class identity

It might be argued that the deradicalisation of the hosiery workers and the decline of industrial violence occurred because the grievances which had inspired radicalism and violence had vanished; hosiery workers and their families no longer lived in poverty, and they were assured of reasonable wages and more secure employment. Yet study of LAHU minute books shows that grievances remained; unemployment was still a threat, especially in the twenties; there were still cases of low wages and poor conditions, especially among women workers; operatives could face dismissal, harsh discipline, and victimisation over union membership. However, these experiences no longer pushed them into the formulation of more radical demands. A working-class population notable for its volatility, interest

¹ See Chapter 7, p 255.

in politics, and outbreaks of unrest, was in process of becoming equally notable for its pacific industrial and social behaviour. This was not, after all, a period free from social unrest, but the industrial upheavals of World War One and the General Strike, for example, had little impact in the East Midlands.¹ What brought about this change?

Undoubtedly improved material conditions and the experience of prosperity had an important impact; but a simple equation between poverty and unrest, prosperity and harmony, cannot generally be made. Indeed, many have argued that it is in times of economic expansion, when rising expectations are generated and unfavourable comparisons with the improving lot of others drawn, that subordinate classes become sufficiently aware of injustices to organise and seek to change the status quo.² Material conditions cannot be ignored, but the role of perceptions and strategic choices must also be examined.

As argued in Chapter 7, I believe that a major factor in achieving class pacification was the changing behaviour of the employers. This chapter has pointed to many continuities between this period and the earlier one in terms of union policies and strategies: strikes remained frequent, organisation remained informal, and bureaucratisation and a spirit of moderacy among leaders only gradually made their appearance. Leaders continued to be involved in local radical politics and to hold visions of an alternative social order. Up till the twenties at least, the major change was the switch by the more progressive employers to acceptance of union rights and promotion of joint consultation; this

1 *There were some disturbances in Nottingham during the General Strike, and a few arrests were made, but the militants failed to persuade hosiery workers to stop work (British Gazette, May 10th 1926).*

2 *See the arguments of Moore, 1979, and Piven and Cloward, 1979, for example.*

tended to push union leaders into an accommodative response, not so much because of any instant conversion to an ideology of shared interests, but because it seemed the best way to promote their *members'* interests.

Naturally, hostility between the two sides did not completely vanish. There were continued instances of bitter fights between manufacturers and unions. Chaplin, despite his growing reputation as a peacemaker¹ could be irascible, obstinate and aggressive when his temper was roused. There was, for example, a series of furious confrontations between him and employer J. Morley during the 1921 strike, when threats and insults were exchanged between the two adversaries (LAHU B January 6th 1921). Another notable case was the confrontation between Chamberlain and Wood, a Nuneaton manufacturer: the protagonists nearly came to blows, while Wood marshalled a procession of his workpeople to bust up a union meeting, leading them in shouting anti-union and anti-Labour Party slogans (another example of the deradicalisation of the rank-and-file) (Hinckley Tribune, June 25th, 26th 1936). In individual disputes, feelings of hostility and bitterness were often aroused. Even Moulden was at times led to question the sincerity of the manufacturers: "We know the full measure of their insincerity as far as our labour problems are concerned" he declared during the 1946 National agreement negotiations; later he spoke of the employers' "deliberate attempt to place every obstacle in the way of organised labour taking its rightful place in the councils of industrial development" (Leicester Mail, June 1st 1946, AC Report 1947 p 20).

Nonetheless, as Chapter 7 showed, there was growing use by both sides of the language of 'conciliation', 'respect' and 'harmony'. The hostility engendered in disputes rarely became generalised into the class-based critique of the employers' behaviour that the 1845 witnesses' statements

¹ See comments in *Greening, 1921, p 120 and Armitage, 1933, p 101.*

had displayed.¹

The change in employer strategy was, then, a key factor, but other contributory factors must be considered, some of which have been dealt with in this chapter. The absorption of the leaders in the co-operative movement, progressive as it was, helped divert them from other kinds of radical endeavour, and in addition the co-operative ideal was explicitly opposed to strikes, seeing co-operation as a way to avoid them and to put an end to labour-capital confrontations and conflicts. Also important was the way in which definitions of the 'political' changed, so that it became more sharply identified with party politics; a clear divide was seen between what could legitimately be described as 'industrial relations' and political relations in general. Alongside this separation of the political and the economic, there was a growing tendency for the union leadership to espouse 'moderate' positions on the party political spectrum, and eventually even an 'apolitical' stance. However, to stress this growing moderation is *not* to accept the rank-and-filist thesis, that the mass of workers were 'sold out' by the growing conservatism and personal ambitions of their elected representatives. In the hosiery case, even the moderate leaders were often more politically radical than the mass of their followers: the Leicester operatives, for example, chose (if quite narrowly) to vote for Moulden in 1927, rather than his radical opponents. What, then, were the factors leading to the deradicalisation of the rank-and-file?

This question is not easily answered. One possible factor could be the growing feminisation of the workforce, which more or less coincided with the switch to accommodative responses. Certainly women in the industry, now in a majority, had always been excluded from many aspects of formal organisa-

1 See Chapter 8.

tion, though evidence suggests that in the preceding period they played an important, if supporting, role in many forms of political action (demonstrations, riots, Chartist parades etc). However, it can be argued that they filled this role by virtue of their *family* relation to the male knitters, for whom they often acted as subsidiary workers, so that their seaming and mending tasks would automatically be stopped if there was a strike.¹ In the 1880s, it was increasingly likely that female hosiery workers would have husbands and fathers in other industries, such as boot and shoe or engineering.² Indeed, by the 1950s it was common wisdom in Leicester that the 'typical' family consisted of wife and daughters in hosiery, husband and son in engineering, or possibly self-employed.³ Thus many of the female recruits in this period may have been detached from the traditions and history of the industry, and indeed might bring to the work quite different traditions learned from their families of origin.

However, not all hosiery workers are women. There were still sufficient male operatives to give a radical lead, had they so wished. The idea that women are less militant is used by contemporary officials to explain the union's moderate profile, but there is no real evidence to support this claim. Accounts of strikes in LAHU minutes show that on specific issues women were as militant as men. Since 1960, union density

1 See Chapter 10 and Bradley, 1986 .

2 Oslerad (1986) argues that from mid-century the pattern of wives and husbands working in the same industry was lost, and the shoe operatives commonly had wives employed in hosiery.

3 This idea, expressed to me by union officers, remains at the 'folkloric' level. I have no evidence to support it, though interesting data could clearly be obtained on the issue either by study of census returns or through research based round operatives' work and family histories.

has been higher among women than men, despite officials' beliefs: in 1978 68.9% of women were organised as opposed to 54.6% of men.

Two other factors seem to me at least as important as feminisation. One is the decline of the strongly political work culture described in Chapter 8. This was, of course, a markedly male culture, and feminisation may have hastened its decline. But also important was the growing split in working-class culture between work and leisure.¹ Chaplin, one of the last survivors of the old school, declared that he had never attended a football or cricket match in his life: what leisure time he had which was not absorbed by his political and union work was devoted to education ("books and music") and to the temperance cause, secularism and spiritualism (LAHU A November 5th 1919; Lancaster, 1982, p 161). By contrast, Barclay in the 1930s perceived the working man as "absorbed by trivialities, football, cricket and horse-racing" (Barclay, 1934, p 59).² Chaplin must have had little sympathy for the workers who threatened to leave LAHU because they (mistakenly) believed that an officer had criticised employers for giving workpeople time off to watch a Leicester/Newcastle football match. As he exhorted members on another occasion

Recreation and Amusements are all very well in their way but surely Labour questions 'the means by which we Live' should have some share of attention from every worker.

(LAHU A February 4th 1925, LAHU B February 20th 1933)

In actuality, work *was* assuming less importance in working people's lives than in the days when Holmes had explained that a substantial number of hosiery operatives "would sooner work than have a pension" (PP 1892 xxxvi

1 See Stedman Jones, 1974, and discussion in Chapter 2.

2 A similar lament had been earlier made by Thomas Cooper (Cooper, 1872, p 394).

Pt 2 p 58). The spread of mass culture, especially among young workers who, as we have seen, preferred dancing to political speeches, broke up the tight old industrial and political culture of the workshops.

Another related factor was the changing nature of working-class identity in this period. As I argued in Chapter 8, in earlier days, when a knitter took to the streets, he/she did so in the interests of his/her family, trade, community and class: family identity, occupational identity, community identity and class identity came together. From 1880 on, this was no longer the case. Although in the initial stages of factory organisation some family-based employment continued, this soon began to die out. Husbands and wives were less likely to work in the same industry. Also, with growing industrial diversification in the area, the identification between the community and the hosiery trade was weakened. This was especially true in Nottingham, but in Leicester, too, hosiery ceased to be the major form of industrial employment. Figure 9.4 shows the rise to dominance in Leicester of the boot and shoe industry, which had overtaken hosiery as major employer in 1871, setting up a situation in which men commonly worked in the shoe industry, with wives and daughters working in hosiery. In Nottingham, hosiery and lace were still the major employers of males in 1871, but by 1881 engineering and construction had started to dominate the male employment scene (Church, 1966, pp 236-7). Overall, the proportion of the population of the East Midlands employed in hosiery fell from 15% in 1851 to 6.5% in 1911 (Smith, 1961, Fig. 49). Family, community and occupational identity were thus split, and this produced a more fragmented, less definite sense of class experience and class interests.¹

1 *In Hinckley, however, industrial employment remain concentrated in hosiery: in 1964 26-30.9% of Hinckley males in paid employment worked in hosiery, and over 36% of women (Smith, 1969, Figs 18, 19). This may account for the much higher level of union membership in the town.*

Figure 9.4

Industrial Employment in Leicester 1851-1901

	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901
Percentage of industrial workers employed in hosiery	38.5	26.4	20.7	22.2	21.5	17.1
Percentage of industrial workers employed in footwear	6.2	10.9	21.6	33.4	41.0	36.8

Source: W. Lancaster, *Radicalism to Socialism: the Leicester Working Class 1860-1906*, unpublished PhD 1982 p 378.

In addition, as described in Chapter 6, a new kind of identity became available, that of member of the *factory* community, which the paternalist employers sought to oppose to class identity, playing at the same time on family and community loyalties. Although they did not meet with absolute success, it is probable that the "young men and women whose countenances beamed with intelligence and good humour" observed at Corahs' extension celebrations (Webb, 1948, p 24), formed part of the core of the new deradicalised Leicester working-class.

The notion of changing class identity seems to me a more useful way of understanding class pacification than the concept of the labour aristocracy¹ which seems largely inapplicable here. Although Hobsbawm cites male hosiery workers in the list of highly-paid workers he suggests formed the aristocracy, the knitters did not fill such a role in Leicester or in Nottingham in relation to other workers, although they could be seen as an aristocratic group within the industry.² Although in the 1880s and 1890s some knitters did earn, as Hobsbawm claims, 40/- to 45/-, as he himself argues "Workers who earned good but irregular or fluctuating wages were not normally regarded as labour aristocrats", and the knitters fell into precisely that category (Hobsbawm, 1964, pp 273, 286). Nor did these workers display any of the other characteristics associated with the labour aristocracy: they had no strong links with the middle class, nor do they seem to have aspired to middle-class status. On the contrary, during the pre-war period they were fighting to defend the old independent artisan status, as argued in Chapter 4.³ Nor can it be claimed that they acted

1 See Chapter 2.

2 Lancaster also argues that there was no clearly identifiable labour aristocracy in Leicester (Lancaster, 1982, p 112).

3 See also Lancaster, 1982.

to deradicalise the rest of the working-class, or to discipline and control them within the workplace, as pacemakers and setters, as alleged, for example, by Foster (1974) and Holbrook-Jones (1982), in their studies of textile and engineering workers. The knitters, in fact, remained firmly rooted in the wider working-class culture, and it is the changes in that wider culture which are reflected in their changing attitudes and practices, rather than the other way round.

Another commonly-argued position has been that of a growing fragmentation of the working-class into different competing status groups some time between 1860 and 1930, as is claimed, for example, in the work of Dahrendorf (1959), and Gordon et al (1982). Again, this does not apply in the hosiery case. It is true that sectional interests did cause conflicts at times between different occupational subgroupings¹, but as recounted in Chapter 3 sectionalism had been a feature of hosiery union organisation since the beginning of the nineteenth century; this was not a new development. Indeed, it could be argued that the consolidation of the factory system to some extent actually *diminished* sectionalism. Nor did sectionalism prevent operatives of all branches from working together in unity in times of crisis, as for example during the 1915 strike or the 1946 negotiations: on both these occasions, the degree of rank-and-file solidarity and militancy exceeded that of the surprised officials. At such times the force of the local working-class culture was to unify rather than to fragment.

Finally, an explanation popularly prevalent in Leicester, and offered by some observers² is that the high level of upward mobility chances in

1 Such conflicts are described, for example, in LAHU A October 1st 1930, May 25th 1944.

2 See Boraston, Clegg and Rimmer, 1975, p 119.

the industry promotes peaceful industrial relations, as a community like Hinckley, for example, is characterised by close relations between knitters and small employers (many of whom have risen from the ranks), who share the same social and cultural background. If this is true of Hinckley, it still will not serve overall to explain the development of the accommodative response. As demonstrated in Chapter 8, upward mobility had been common in the early period. Certainly, this continued to be the case: the Board of Trade reported the frequency with which operatives managed to accumulate the resources to become "neighbours and competitors of their former masters", and the Leicester Chamber of Commerce reported of Hinckley in 1960 that half the seamless hose factories had directors who had formerly been factory employees (Board of Trade, 1946, p 7; Leicester Chamber of Commerce, 1960, p 102). To take individual examples, Halls of Stoke Golding, Leicestershire, was formed in 1882 by an ex-foreman, Towles of Loughborough in 1906 by two young knitters from a Leicester firm, and large manufacturer F.A. Toone had started as an operative at the age of ten (Halls, 1982; Towles, 1956; Howes, 1927 p 93). However, just as in the earlier period, those who rose were seen as now being in a different class position, with different interests. Union activists promoted to management or supervisory posts left the union (LAHU A September 7th 1921; HU February 17th 1932). Men who rose to become owners were seen as employers and acted as such: the Nuneaton manufacturer, Wood, who displayed the strongest possible anti-union spirit, had, as we have seen, been a union member in the past.¹ Although friendly relationships between managers and workers are aimed for by many firms, of all sizes, these are more characteristically paternalist than egalitarian. Westwood's study of one such paternalist firm, for

1 See Chapter 5.

example, emphasises the social gulf between the 'girls' and the company-car owning management, middle and top level alike (Westwood, 1984).

Mobility continues to be a feature of this industry, but it affects only a few and has a limited effect on shopfloor relations.¹

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that there were marked continuities between forms of collective action practised in this and the earlier period. However, there was also a slow move to a more accommodative response to employer strategies. On the micro-level, major factors were the increasingly conciliatory approach of the employers, the channelling of radical visions into the co-operative movement and a tendency to separate political issues from industrial ones, leading in the long run to political moderacy among the leadership. On the macro-level, the deradicalisation of the mass of hosiery workers was related to cultural and social changes in working-class experience: the changing patterns of factory employment and the breaking up of family-based employment, the growth of the leisure culture, and alterations in the way working-class identity is constructed.

There is some similarity between my arguments and those of Dahrendorf in 'Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society', although, as I have

1 *My interviews confirmed that a clear sense of social distance is in most cases maintained between management and workers. Very few of the managers could have been mistaken for operatives, all displayed attitudes demonstrating their loyalty to 'capital', and three explicitly referred to the difficulty of relating personally to their female operatives, whom they clearly saw as creatures of a different species. Only in two very small firms (one with 11 employees, one with 35), both headed by ex-operatives, did a markedly different spirit seem to pertain. In both cases, the firms were non-unionised. This suggests that social mobility may foster closer manager/work relations, but at the same time will hamper accommodation with unions.*

ed, I believe that neither class fragmentation nor social mobility
 cially affected class consciousness in the late nineteenth century.
 the other hand, like Dahrendorf, I have stressed the importance of
 separation of political and economic spheres and of what he calls the
 stitutionalisation of conflict'. Where I differ from him is in denying
 t these structural changes *automatically* affect class action and con-
 ousness. It is not the mere fact of the institutionalisation of
 gaining and dispute-settling procedures which brings accommodative
 sponses: responses are mediated by how structural changes are perceived
 the involved parties. In this respect, the concept of *identity* forms
 crucial bridge between structural environment and actors' responses:
 e breakdown of the old 'stockingers'' identity is the key to under-
 anding the emergence of the accommodative response.

The exact relation between objective structural location (class
 membership) and class consciousness and action has long been recognised
 a problematic one. I am suggesting that the concept of identity can
 useful in understanding why in some cases class groupings move towards
 subjective appreciation of their class position and participate as a
 sult in class-based forms of action, and why in other cases they fail
 make the transition from class 'in itself' to class 'for itself'.
 entity is a crucial mediating factor between structural conditions and
 e development of a critical class consciousness.

CHAPTER TEN

"It's very hard work, Sir, but there's many has to do it"

*Sarah Mabe, knitter's wife
(PP 1863 xviii p 284)*

"I believe that a married woman that goes out to work has more spirit and energy than one that always stays at home; and when she does work and she has no lace work to do at home she can devote her time to her home and family."

*Harriet Ford, lace overlooker
(PP 1876 xxx p 411)*

"The women of Leicester have marked characteristics, too. They have been already described as well-dressed; they are clever and industrious, and cheerfully shoulder the work of a home and the work in the family as their allotted task ... Most return after marriage, often because of economic pressure, but often because they get there some kind of social life, pleasant occupation and cheerful company. 'It's too dozy at home' they declare."

*Co-operative Congress, (Leicester
1915, pp 119, 129)*

CHAPTER TEN

GENDER RELATIONS AND THE LABOUR PROCESSIntroduction

So far, the narrative focus of this study has been on the actions of groups of men: the employers and the union leaders and activists. This has inevitably been the case, since strategic choices with regard to political and industrial action in this period were, in the main, made by men not women. This does not mean that gender relations have had an insignificant role in the development of the hosiery labour process; I have already dealt with such important issues as the substitution of women for men, the feminisation of the industry, the family nature of production under the domestic system (Chapters 3 and 4), the use of paternalism where the labour force is predominantly female (Chapter 6), and the role of women in union organisation (Chapters 8 and 9). In this final chapter I shall give some further consideration to these and related issues in order to assess the significance of gender relations in labour process development.

Many of the initial contributors to the labour process debate¹ paid minimal attention to the role of women. Beechey argues that Braverman himself, although referring to the part played by women in the degradation process, has underestimated the importance of their role, tending to see them as a reserve source of labour to be drawn on in times of restructuring (Beechey, 1982).

1 For example, Burawoy, 1978; Cressey and MacInnes, 1980, and Stark, 1980.

This underestimation of women's role springs partly from the traditional bias in industrial sociology towards the study of groups of male workers¹, partly from the theoretical framework in which the labour process debate has evolved. For Braverman, as for Marx, labour (and capital) were neutral (or neuter) terms. Labour was not seen as intrinsically differentiated by gender. In the same way, conventional economic theory examines economic behaviour in terms of the actions of genderless individuals. Feminist sociologists, however, have argued that labour and labour power are not neutral but gendered. Hartmann, for example, has criticised the use of Marxist categories as they cannot tell us who fill the empty places: "Gender and racial hierarchies determine who fills the empty places" (Hartmann, 1979 , p 13). Similarly, Phillips and Taylor have argued that it is only on the most abstract level that capital/labour relations can be analysed apart from gender relations (Phillips and Taylor, 1980, p 88). In any concrete situation, capital is not sex-blind, but acts to confront groups of workers differentiated by gender, whose own actions in turn are largely affected by the gender hierarchies in which their lives are embedded; strategic choices on both sides take place in the context of pre-existing gender divisions in the family and in the workplace, which act to constrain these choices.

Consequently, as I have argued elsewhere, developments in the hosiery industry, such as attempts at female substitution, the reconstruction of the labour process with jobs redesigned specifically as 'female jobs', and the negotiations between employers and unions leading to male monopolisation of the highest-status, highest-paid jobs, cannot be seen as

1 See Brown, 1976; Thompson, 1983, pp 184-7; Dex, 1985.

contingent, but as systematic effects of the interaction of capitalist work organisation and patriarchal family relations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹ Although, following the argument of Phillips and Taylor, degradation and resegmentation processes might be analysed abstractly without reference to gender, in any real historical situation these processes are predicated upon existing gender relations; these, in the period under consideration, can be legitimately described as 'patriarchal', that is based on the principles of male authority over women, and the older male's authority over younger men and women.

This analysis has been taken one step further by Beechey. In an influential article (Beechey, 1977) she has argued that female labour power has a lower value than male, in that the cost of its reproduction is lower since women are at least partly supported by men. This explains the phenomenon, consistently observable in the hosiery case, of women being willing and able to work for a wage lower than that acceptable to men and defined as being the 'subsistence' wage. Such thinking, of course, leads us to consider the emergent social consensus on the desirability of the 'family wage'. The inevitability of at least *some* members of society being at least *partly* dependent on others (infants, old people for example) has led Humphries to declare that the family wage system is of benefit to the working-class, freeing them from dependence on state income maintenance (Humphries, 1977). Certainly, trade unions have argued in favour of it since the 1840s. However, in the context of dominant social expectations that male operatives will receive a family wage, employers are clearly enabled to pay women workers at below 'subsistence' level: in this context,

1 See discussion in Bradley, 1984, 1986.

at least, female labour power may indeed be considered to have lesser value than male. The problem with Beechey's conceptualisation, however, is that it is hard to argue for the lower value of female labour power as a *universal* phenomenon, without recourse to biological or physiological criteria, that is that women's physical subsistence needs are actually lower than men's, a position which seems to me suspect and difficult to substantiate. It seems more fruitful to follow Westwood's line, and argue that while

At the most abstract level labour power is not differentiated by gender, in the concrete historical case it is.

(Westwood, 1984, p 17)

In this chapter I shall briefly consider ways in which the hosiery labour process, as a "concrete historical case", was affected by gender relations. I shall look at the sexual division of labour, the importance of family requirements as influences on decision-making, and the influence of patriarchal family relationships in the workplace. I have dealt with these issues at some length in two previous papers (Bradley, 1984, 1986) which present a more fully detailed and illustrated account of historical developments in these areas. Here I shall more briefly summarise the relevant material and draw out its implications for labour process analysis.

Section 1 The Sexual Division of Labour

It is not easy to give an accurate picture of the sexual division of labour in the industry in the early part of the nineteenth century. Although there is a wealth of evidence provided by contemporary observers, much of it is impressionistic and contradictory. Official statistics are unreliable, because of the ambiguities involved in recording the occupations

of married women.¹ What follows is an attempt to outline changing patterns of female and male labour using the most reliable information available; as will be seen, one certain factor is that throughout the nineteenth century there were consistent attempts by employers to profit from the relative cheapness of female labour by employing women in tasks traditionally defined as male.²

The idealised version of the division of labour under the domestic system (the version employers had in mind when they referred to its "beauty" and "beneficial" effects as a "family work")³ was that the father should operate the frame, with wife and children performing subsidiary operations, usually the wife and girls seaming, stitching and mending, the boys winding.⁴ But departures from this 'norm' were common. The 1745 charter permitted widows "during their widowhood" to practise the "art" of knitting (Henson, 1831, pp 178-9). In fact many women other than widows knitted. According to Chapman, by 1778 girls were being apprenticed as well as boys (Chapman, 1967, p 39). Witnesses in 1845, however, maintained

1 See Alexander, 1975; Rushton, 1980, for discussion of the limitations of census material relating to women's employment.

2 Since this chapter was written, two accounts dealing in part or wholly with the same issues have been published. Osterud (1986) describes the sexual division of labour in the Leicester hosiery industry in similar terms to myself, stressing the importance of family traditions and definitions, although she tends to underplay the trend to de-segregation in the mid-nineteenth century, and thus the extent of competition between men and women for the same job. Rose (1986a) deals with hosiery as one example in her discussion of the significance of gender relations at work, and reaches many of the same conclusions as myself.

3 See, for example, PP 1845 xv II q 1125, PP 1854-5 xiv qq 2892, 6273, 6567.

4 Boys did sometimes do seaming and sewing jobs; for example, Joseph Marlow started work at four years old, seaming socks knitted by his uncle (Newby, Groves and Makin, 1938).

that in the early decades of the century there were relatively few women working frames. John Geary of Anstey, for example, who saw the practice as "detrimental to the trade" as well as "detrimental to domestic comfort" claimed that it started when the invention of spinning jennies took from women their previous (more socially acceptable) source of income, hand-spinning (PP 1845 xv I qq 3215-6). Another knitter claimed that in the past women had ceased work on marriage, while nowadays he had seen them working "with a baby sucking at the breast" (PP 1845 xv I q 5646). In 1819, manufacturer James Rawson stated that there were currently mainly men working as knitters, although he, in contradiction to other opinions, believed there had been more women formerly (PP 1819 v p 18).

The 1833 Factory Commission provides clear evidence that women, old and young, were working in the frame by that date. One witness set his daughter knitting when aged 11. This report also gives estimates provided by Felkin, of numbers employed in the industry: 13,000 men, 10,000 women and 10,000 children working frames, with 27,000 women and children performing finishing tasks (PP 1833 xx C1 pp 47, 51, 184, C2 p 8). These figures, which would indicate a highly feminised industry, must be viewed with some suspicion. A different picture is provided by 1841 Census returns for Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire, which show small proportions of females employed (see Figure 10.1). These, however, almost certainly under-represent women's participation, and are anyway of limited value as they do not specify the precise task performed. The total number of operatives recorded (approximately 28,000) is insufficient to account for the operation of the 37,243 frames which we know from Felkin's census (fairly reliably carried out) to have been in the two counties at that date.

Figure 10.1

Employment in hose manufacture in
Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire 1841

	<i>Males over 20</i>	<i>Males under 20</i>	<i>Females over 20</i>	<i>Females under 20</i>	<i>Total</i>
Leics	10,018	1,526	2,552	987	15,083
Notts	9,383	1,550	1,809	671	13,413

Source: Census Figures PP 1844 xxvii

A more accurate picture can be gained from the figures given for specific localities and employers in the 1845 and 1854-5 reports. For example, in 1845 in Enderby, Leicestershire, 26 frames were worked by men, 14 by women, at Littlethorpe, Leicestershire, 87 by men, 20 by women, and at Alfreton, Nottinghamshire, 104 by men, 40 by women (PP 1845 xv pp 102, 186). John Homer reported that of the 45 frames he owned two thirds were worked by women and children and W.H. Walker's list of wrought hose hands included 76 men and 46 women: in the 20-30 age-group there were 20 men, 17 women, an indication that feminisation was increasing (PP 1845 xv I pp 162-4, q 5419). In 1854, two middlemen owning respectively 100 and 106 frames employed respectively 68 and 66 women on them (PP 1854-5 xiv q 4923). These kinds of figures, showing that from one fifth to two thirds of frames were being worked by women and children, probably give an accurate impression of the situation in the country areas. There were probably fewer female knitters in the towns, where workshop organisation predominated, but here, too, the evidence is contradictory. William Jones reported that no women worked in his master's shop, stating "the women generally work at home", but another glove hand spoke of a "great many" women working in glove frames, some married but the majority

single, and in increasing numbers: he claimed that they *all* worked in shops (PP 1845 xv I qq 298, 1262-1266).

There was further subdivision in that female knitters were concentrated in certain branches, doing coarser, lighter, less well-paid work. Benjamin Elliott, middleman, explained that when he rented a fine-gauge frame to a man the worker would apply for a coarse frame for his wife (PP 1854-5 xiv q 7568). A witness from the thread piece branch claimed that this work was too heavy for "boys" or "weak persons"; he knew one woman on such a frame, but she could only equal half his output (PP 1845 xv II q 2319). W.H. Walker stated that women and children were "incompetent to work the heavier or more skilled machinery", so were concentrated in wrought hose, while males took the better-paid work in gloves and wide frames (PP 1845 xv I q 2831). However, some women did work in these branches. Women were reported working wide frames, and a Kibworth knitter declared that he and his thirteen-year-old daughter could do as much work on a wide frame as three adult males on narrow frames (PP 1845 xv I q 6779, II q 3317). Women working in gloves were described as "proficient", but not sufficiently so to keep the machinery in repair (PP 1845 xv I qq 186-8).

The reasons given for the exclusion of women from the better jobs were the "heaviness" of the machinery, skill requirements and the women's ignorance of mechanical matters¹, along with an assertion of the 'fitness' or 'suitability' of certain tasks for either sex. Muggeridge reflected this growing Victorian ideology on femininity and masculinity, when he condemned knitting as unhealthy for women, but praised seaming as "quite a woman's work" (PP 1854-5 xiv q 2723-4). Such arguments were less used by the workmen, who put more emphasis on the inefficiency of women: they

1 See, for example, PP 1845 xv I qq 3216-9.

imed that frames needed servicing more quickly when operated by women children, and that they performed all tasks more slowly (PP 1845 xv q 568, PP 1854-5 xiv q 9115).¹

Even here there was disagreement. One hosier explained

It does not follow that because they are women they are the worst hands; they make as good work, but their work is uncertain.

In other words, women's work was characteristically interrupted by domestic duties, and this accounted for their lower output and earnings (PP 1845 xv I q 7852, PP 1854-5 xiv qq 1883, 1892). Some manufacturers declared that women could equal two thirds of men's output or even, if uninterrupted, could equal it (PP 1845 xv I qq 3219, 3479).

The idea of women's inferior skill and lack of strength to work heavier machines, though echoed by commentators such as Wells (Wells, 1972, p 156) has to be seen as dubious. The deliberate policy of excluding women from the best jobs was clearly expressed in the statement of a Leicestershire knitter:

I should apply, of course, for the best work for my own hands, because I am the most expert in the business and if my wife worked she could not work above half her time ... They are not so much consequence as we, therefore it is in that way that we look out for the best jobs for ourselves.

(PP 1845 xv I q 3448)

If women were less 'expert' and lacking in mechanical knowledge, it was because men, anxious to preserve their superior position, kept them so. It is significant that in Hawick, Scotland, women from the beginning of the century worked every kind of machine, without this being seen as

See also discussion of skill in Chapter 4.

unsuitable: hosiery, in the Scottish context, was completely 'women's work'.¹

There was no uncertainty surrounding the manufacturer's motives for employing women in increasing numbers; as one hosier admitted, his fellows "set it to those who do the least work" since their "profit comes from the rent" (PP 1845 xv I q 3758).² Women's output was less in proportion to their fixed payments (frame-rent and shop charges), they would accept lower rates, and as was argued in Chapter 4 they were considered less of a control problem. Thus pioneers in mechanisation, such as Collins and Corah, were eager to use female labour on the new powered machines, leading one desperate male employee to declare "this female system was one of the greatest evils we had to labour under" (PP 1845 xv I q 2303). The threat of feminisation induced leaders like George Buckby and Thomas Winters to campaign for the 'family wage' (PP 1854-5 xiv qq 1522, 5156). In the main however, the male hosiery operatives were accustomed to their womenfolk working and were content to see their wives taking employment to contribute to the family budget.³ What they did not want was to compete with them for

1 *This is reflected in the 1841 census figures: female hosiery workers outnumbered men in Scotland by 3165 to 1778, whereas in England and Wales males outnumbered females by 7:2 (PP 1844 xxvii). Further confirmation of the ability of women to work all kinds of knitting machines comes from the study of America by Baker (1964) and the interesting work being done on the Canadian knitting industry by Joy Parr. In America women were originally excluded from operating powered machines, but by the 1960s there were more women knitters than men. Parr describes how in Canada in the 1930s women knitted on the day shift, men on night shift. Men, however, as in Britain, performed what I have called the 'integrated task', while women had to be assisted by 'fixers'. In examining the British case Parr interestingly suggests that the opinions of technicians may have confirmed the views on the suitability of certain jobs for men and women held by male workers and capitalists: technical handbooks, for example, would assign technologically-demanding jobs to men (Parr, 1986).*

2 *See also Chapters 3 and 4.*

3 *See arguments in Bradley, 1986.*

the same jobs, and it was that anxiety, and the desire to preserve the better-paid jobs as 'men's work' which marked the 1860-1914 period.

Again, ambiguity surrounds the early stages of the factory system. As we have seen¹, the earliest factories used female labour. But some commentators, both then and later, assumed that in the early factories men operated the knitting machines while women worked at finishing and at warehousing tasks, mirroring the idealised form of the division of labour under the domestic system²; others, however, described both men and women as operating machines.³ Wells asserts that rotary machines in particular required "considerable skill" to operate and that only men were able to produce sufficient output on them to repay the manufacturers' investments; this also required the working of double shifts. He argues that it was some time before a serious attempt was made to introduce women on power machines and that this only happened when machines became more automatic, calling for less skill (Wells, 1972, p 156).⁴

It is possible that in the 1860s and 1870s the men were able to use their superior mechanical expertise to gain a degree of monopoly on the less automatic machines. In this, the Nottingham men at least would have had the support of Mundella, who had firm beliefs as to what constituted women's work: it would be "awful" he declared, "to have only women and boys employed in a trade" (PP 1867-8 xxxix q 19477).

1 See Chapters 3 and 4.

2 See, for example, Phillips Bevan, 1877, p 106; Wells, 1972, p 156.

3 See Cassells, 1873, p 62; Francis, 1930, p 143. Francis erroneously believed that handframes were monopolised by men and that feminisation started with the introduction of power machines.

4 For example, the automatic seamless hose machine, much worked by women.

It is well documented, however, that by the 1880s and 1890s substantial attempts at female substitution were underway, especially in the country areas.¹ By this time, as Wells argues, trade union pressure had ensured that certain jobs were at least *seen* as 'men's work': attempts at feminisation "provoked strong resistance". Wells admits, however, thereby undermining his own previous arguments about skill requirements, that views of what constituted 'men's work' varied according to locality. Only in Nottingham did men seek to monopolise circulars, while in Hawick women were working all kinds of machines including the heavier Cotton's Patents. The physical makeup of women, then, can not be seen as a serious disqualification from any type of knitting task (Wells, 1972, p 157; LAHU B September 13th 1919).

The men's fight to retain their chosen jobs was described in Chapter 4. In 1888 LAHU resolved that jobs "as worked at present by men and women remain as they are", and that anyone infringing this rule should be expelled from the union (LAHU A March 16th 1888). They were favoured in their campaign by the factory legislation, which covered hosiery factories from the start, and barred women from working night shifts. However, widespread evasion prevented the legislation from being a completely effective barrier to women, as was reported by Holmes and Bower (PP 1892 xxxvi Pt 2 pp 58-9, 66-7). In 1900 the men of LAHU registered strong opposition to proposed changes to the Factory Acts which would have legalised the working of double shifts by young people and women (LAHU A March 21st 1900).

In terms of daytime working, the men's attempts were largely ineffectual. Some firms, such as Strettons, persistently used women on knitting machines, including Cotton's Patents (LAHU A February 11th 1911, November

1 See Chapter 4.

3rd 1920). During the First World War, men from the three Fleckney factories fought persistently against admitting women to Cotton's patents, even on the terms negotiated by the unions, but were forced in the end to accept the wartime dilution, on condition that one man supervised five frames operated by the women. In 1922 it was reported that 47 out of 140 Cotton's Patents surveyed in Leicester were still being worked by women (LAHU A December 11th 1915, March 4th 1917, July 12th 1922).

The arguments used against women's employment on 'male' tasks were mainly economic ones. The unions pointed to the erosion of agreed wage-levels (LAHU A February 11th 1911); but they also continued to use the suspect argument about physical aptitudes, and occasionally questioned the 'propriety' of women doing these tasks: "It isn't a proper thing to have a woman at such work" argued the countermen (LAHU A December 8th 1915, August 15th 1923).¹ The more politically militant the leaders, the more likely they were to resort to this type of patriarchal argument; Holmes attacked homework as "tending to turn the home into anything but a home" and Chamberlain stated firmly that both countering and knitting "are more suitable for men". The strong commitment of these men to the craft union ideal seems to have pushed them into a traditionalist patriarchalism (PP 1892 xxxvi Pt 2 p 55; Hinckley Times December 13th 1952).

Such views did not move the employers, who continued to exploit the potential of cheaper female labour², so that by 1931 a local observer commented that most hosiery machines merely required to be "minded" by

1 As late as 1952, objections were being made about the propriety of a woman working alone on a night shift with men (LD November 3rd 1952).

2 The customary level of pay for 'women's work' in the industry seems to have stayed stable, for most of its history, at about half the average male wage. See for example, VCH 1958 p 311; Wells, 1972, p 163 .

women, requiring "very little strength" to operate; in his view, hosiery was now largely a female industry (Waddington, 1931, p 108). The 1930 situation, in fact, reflected that of the 1850s, when William Biggs explained:

The stocking trade as it now exists ... can be so easily learned and carried on by women and children that it has ceased to be a fit business for men.

(Biggs, LRO)

During both wars, women demonstrated that their physique was no impediment to their employment on all types of machine. But after World War Two these combined processes of degradation and feminisation were halted. The Board of Trade 1946 Report gives an informative account of the sexual division of labour in the industry at this point, a crucial strategic juncture. Seamless and fully-fashioned stockings were knitted "principally" by men. Both women and men knitted socks, but although women achieved the same output as men *per machine* they normally only operated three quarters of the number of machines. New flat bar outer-wear machines were operated by men, but it was noted that women could operate them successfully, and women worked the hand version of this machine. Cotton's Patents and circulars were considered male preserves, but women and girls dominated in glove knitting on hand-operated narrow-width machines. These were said to require "close attention, good eyesight, and nimble fingers" and young girls of 16 were seen as the ideal recruits for this work. Interestingly, attempts to train men for this task had failed. The report commented that, whereas it had always been possible to find women to do 'men's work' it had been found "extremely difficult" to replace women with men in operations which were "traditionally female" (Board of Trade, 1946, pp 16-57).

In sum, women were operating the smaller, less advanced machines, even though, as with the glove knitting, these might require greater skill. This skill, however, was of the kind which, as Westwood among others argues, women are believed to possess 'naturally', and which is therefore seen as inferior to culturally-acquired male skills (Westwood, 1984, p 17). These skills were described by the report in terms of the "need for nimble fingers" and the "fineness" of much finishing and knitting work, which would ensure numerical female domination in the industry. The complexities of the social attitudes and relations involved were hinted at in the report, which commented that skill was often not reflected in relative earnings capacity, but at the same time argued that to employ "men at men's rates on women's work" would be too expensive. This makes clear the degree to which the division of labour in the industry had been structured on the basis of the socially-determined lower value of female labour power (Board of Trade, 1946, pp 66, 95, 98).

After the war the men, although eventually losing the battle to keep countering a male job, managed to ensure exclusive access for themselves to the major male knitting tasks.¹ They were helped in this by the introduction of the three-shift system in knitting, and by the more effective enforcement of protective legislation, but the negotiated truce between the unions and the employers was also, I believe, a major factor. Those women who had been knitters during the war did not immediately lose their jobs: in 1968, according to Wells, there were 9380 male and 4270 female knitters in the industry (Wells, 1972, p 204). However, by the time Westwood carried out her research there were no female knitters at the factory she studied, while my interviews revealed that only four out of

1 See Chapter 4.

sixteen firms employed a few women as knitters: significantly, three of these factories were on a two-shift-only system; government legislation now acts effectively to support the ideas of 'custom' and 'fitness' which both employers and workpeople employ in defending the current division of labour.¹

Currently the industry is at the beginning of a new wave of automation, as advanced electronic and computer-controlled technology penetrates not just knitting but finishing operations.² This is likely to pose a threat to the resegmented division of labour, especially as the NJIC truce has been weakened by the pressures of the recession. There may well be a new push towards feminisation; one employer I interviewed envisaged the future in terms of automatic machines worked by married women, now a preferred source of labour for many employers.³

It is clear, then, that processes of degradation and resegmentation were intimately involved with gender relations. Drives to feminisation, as employers sought to exploit low-valued female labour power, were succeeded by period when male resistance led to the resegmentation of tasks and a gender-based occupational segregation.⁴

1 *There is no evidence that women have sought to regain the knitting job from men, though women activists have always taken the lead in calling for equal pay principles and a due recognition of the value of 'female' skills (see Bradley, 1984; LD, 1959, 1963 AGMs).*

2 *See Knitting International, August 1985, pp 69-70.*

3 *For discussion of the significance of women's position in the recession, and their role in the restructuring of the economy, see, for example, Massey, 1983; Dex, 1985, Chap. 5; Seabrook, 1985, Chap. 5.*

4 *These historical swings to and from feminisation are noted by Walby who, however, explains the phenomenon in terms of switches of motivation in the relevant groups of males between capitalist rationality and patriarchy (Walby, 1983).*

It is worth considering some of the major frameworks employed to explain the position of women in the workforce in the light of the above account. Braverman himself saw women as an important source of the reserve army of labour, a position taken up and elaborated by Beechey (1977) and explored more critically by Bruegel (1979). But the claim that women represent a labour reservoir, to be pulled in and out of the labour force as capital's need for labour expands and contracts, does not find support from the hosiery case. As we have seen, women once pulled into jobs tended to stay in them until pushed out *not* by capital but by male labour. Nor is there any evidence that in times of recession it is women hosiery workers rather than men who lose jobs. The reserve army of labour thesis seems to me to rest on the proposition that jobs, like labour power, are neuter; in fact, as we have seen, as new jobs are created by the constant restructuring of the capitalist labour process they rapidly become sex-typed and associated with variably-valued male or female labour power. There can, then, be no simple substitution of women for men in sex-typed jobs, or vice versa: dilution or feminisation almost always involves the redesign of jobs.

In these respects, the hosiery case apparently gives more support to the analysis of Humphries, who seeks to reformulate the reserve army thesis, arguing that it is more apt to speak of a process of female proletarianisation or female substitution (Humphries, 1983). Women, by this argument, represent a preferred source of wage labour, an ideal proletariat, in that their labour power is of lower value and they offer less resistance to capitalist control than do men. The problem here is that these undoubtedly attractive (to capital) features of female labour are only made possible by the existence of an alternative proletariat: the higher-valued, more resistant men, who subsidise their dependent women and enable them to

work below subsistence rates. Thus the potential of female proletarianisation is inevitably limited; presumably if a state was reached in which all wage labour was female, current power relations between the sexes would be dramatically reversed. Possibilities of female substitution, then, remain within strict limits, and must be understood in terms of the shifting relations between male and female wage labourers.

Neither of the above theories take sufficient account of the phenomenon of gender-based occupational segregation; adequate recognition is not given to the fact that, in many cases, women do not take over the same jobs that men previously performed, but degraded and technologically-transformed versions of them. Occupational segregation impedes the easy exchanging of male and female labour. In this respect, the alternative perspective of dual or segmented labour market theory has more to offer. Edwards, for example, argues for the emergence of a dual market structure in the 1880s and 1890s, consisting of a core of well-paid skilled jobs filled by white adult males, alongside a secondary sector of poorly paid, unskilled jobs, filled by females, black workers, young people and other less powerful groups, who can be easily hired and fired (Edwards 1979). Superficially this appears to fit the hosiery case, in terms of the division of labour in the industry in the 1980s.¹ However, there are many discrepancies: in the first place, labour market dualisation appears to pre-date the 1880s; secondly, the thrust towards such a dual structure has not come from capital as much as from unionised male labour²; nor does dual labour market theory satisfactorily explain the persistent attempts

1 See, for example Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Westwood, 1984.

2 This point is made by Rubery in her useful critical survey of the first wave of dual and segmented labour market theory (Rubery, 1980). See also Hartmann, 1976.

of employers to erode the position of the primary 'core' workers by restructuring jobs and employing cheaper female labour. Again, it is inaccurate to see the female hosiery jobs as possessing all the characteristics of typical secondary jobs as outlined, for example, by Barron and Norris (1976). Although lower-paid than male jobs, these jobs require experience and training. They are not casualised jobs which can be filled at a moment's notice by untrained labour, and, in fact, since 1946 employers have complained almost consistently of a persistent shortage of skilled female labour rather than of male labour, the supply of which has tended to remain stable at the required levels.

All these three approaches, then, employing as they do the gender-blind categories of Marxism and economic theory, ignore the persistent realities of gender differentiation. An adequate explanation must take into account the relative values of male and female labour power and their effect on the behaviour of both capitalists and male labourers; it must also acknowledge the persistence, once instituted, of social definitions of 'men's' and 'women's work', sanctified by custom and tradition, and sanctioned by ideologies which identify idealised versions of masculine and feminine personalities.

Section 2 The Family Project and Family Motivation

Another way in which gender relations strongly influence workplace relations is in providing a source of motivation for work other than that of the maximising of an individual's own economic resources and rewards. As I have argued elsewhere (Bradley, 1986), nineteenth-century work relations can only be understood in terms of what I have called the 'family project', that is the concept of the family as a collective which

works together to promote its own survival, both as an *economic* and as an *emotional* entity. The labour of family members should be viewed as an essentially joint enterprise, not as a collection of unconnected activities pursued by individual members in furtherance of their separate interests. Family members' labour was deployed in a way likely to further the success of the unit as a whole, and, in the nineteenth-century context, the male head of household, in his role as patriarch, acted as co-ordinator and decision-maker for these various initiatives. As an Anstey knitter explained:

We consider every head of a family in our village to be the head of his work. We have always been very independent in that respect.

(PP 1845 xv I q 3149)¹

To be successful, the family project required considerable flexibility, both in terms of who was considered a member of the family unit, and of the variety of subsistence activities undertaken by it.² There was, for example, a wide range of possible household and work structures among hosiery workers under the domestic system, since, to function successfully, the family unit required sufficient labour to fulfil all the subsidiary tasks, as well as possibly to operate several machines. Knitters' households and work-groups often extended beyond the nuclear family, including

1 See also discussion of male authority in Rose, 1986a.

2 One of the best examples of this I have encountered outside of the hosiery industry is described in the autobiography of Fred Boughton, reproduced in John Burnett's collection of extracts from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century autobiographies. Boughton, born in 1897, was the son of a Forest of Dean miner. The miners supplemented their industrial earnings with a variety of agricultural and subsistence activities, and the boys were taught a wide variety of jobs in the home and outside, ranging from cooking and knitting to farmwork, quarrying and forestry. Boughton's father told him "I shall not leave you much money, but I will teach you every job, then you can always get work" (Burnett, 1982, pp 294-300).

parents on both sides, uncles, aunts, grown-up siblings, as well as non-family members such as lodgers, friends and neighbours. Two families might also share a house together.¹

As demonstrated by Levine's study (Levine, 1977), early marriage was common among the stockingers, who faced a dilemma: the young knitter needed the help of a wife and children to become a viable economic unit and secure his own independence from his parents, but raising a family meant more mouths to feed and more risk of starvation in times of un- or underemployment. Nonetheless, children were considered an asset, and several knitters spoke of adopting or looking after orphans when they had no children of their own.² Such relationships extended beyond mere economic convenience; one knitter said of his boy, whose progress on the frame was handicapped by a missing finger, that nevertheless "if he be a good boy, I mean to take care of him" (PP 1845 xv II q 1590). The importance of being in either a family or a household is epitomised in the simple declaration of Joseph Waplington: "I am a lodger, being a widower" (PP 1845 xv II q 4366).

The work of women and children was of vital importance in the knitting family. Knitting and finishing tasks were the core of family and household activity, but to ensure better chances of survival other tasks were undertaken.³ Many village knitters had gardens and allotments, kept pigs and hens and grew potatoes, or worked as labourers according to seasonal

1 *See, for example, PP 1845 xv I qq 4453, 5534, 6463, II qq 2825, 4831, PP 1854-5 xiv qq 3217, 8978. Further examples are provided in Levine, 1977.*

2 *See, for example, PP 1845 xv I q 3945, PP 1854-5 q 7981. This practice of adopting 'pseudo-kin' to procure sufficient family labour was also a feature of Japanese agrarian society (see Smith, 1959).*

3 *See also Chapter 3 and Bradley, 1986.*

demand. Children not required to help with hosiery production might be sent out as servants or, in rare cases, apprenticed to another trade, and young ones were involved in child care, many little girls being sent out to "nuss and seam". Not only girls were given this kind of employment: Thomas Wilcox reported that his daughter was a lace-runner, his elder son a winder, while his seven-year-old boy looked after the three smallest children (PP 1845 xv II q 4366).

Despite middle-class disapproval, the stockings considered it right to put children to work at an early age. "As soon as ever a female has judgement enough to know how to take a stitch to seam" she was put to work, explained one knitter; union leader Mrs. Fray considered it to be "a mother's duty" to teach girls to work "as early as possible after school hours" (PP 1845 xv I q 4804, PP 1876 xxx p 384). Mary Taylor of Nottingham paid her children a high compliment when she said "They are good children for work", and one father praised the allotment system on the grounds that it helped to train small children for "useful labour", doing tasks such as pulling up twitch grass and burning it rather than "lying about the streets" (PP 1833 xx Ci p 47, PP 1845 xv I q 6986).

Although children might be sent out to work, parents preferred to have them working in the home, partly for control reasons, no doubt. Mothers would rather teach daughters sewing skills than send them into service (PP 1845 xv II q 2961). In addition, it was believed that knitting skills were more quickly mastered by children who were "about the ground" than by "utter strangers". Children were supposed to pick up skills when they grew up in the work environment; they learned knitting sitting alongside their parents, being instructed in the simplest processes first, and then working up "by degrees" (PP 1845 xv II qq 1215, 1803, 1834).

From this family-based system of training has grown up both the popular belief that East Midlands people have a 'natural aptitude' for hosiery work and also the tradition of recruitment through the family which pertains in the industry. In the early factory days it was apparently not uncommon for the whole family to work in the same factory in different departments ("with one girl left at home to make the beds and cook the dinner"), and women were believed to prefer working in unhealthy workshops rather than in modern factories because there were often "family connexions" (Cassells, 1873, p 63; PP 1876 xxx q 7608). Although from the 1870s onward it became less common for husbands and wives both to work in the industry, family-based recruitment continued to be normal especially in the villages, with women finding jobs for their children in their own workplace.¹ Pick's factory history records a belief that this tradition was disrupted by World War Two; but during the 1950s and 1960s it seems to have been re-established to a considerable extent.²

The family, then, acted as a mutual aid group, using every resource to support its members; one knitter claimed that he could not have survived without the assistance received from "good relations and friends" (PP 1845 xv I q 7338). The phenomenon, though, should not be seen in purely economic terms, although signs of a rather repellent economic rationality sometimes *do* appear in male knitters' depositions, such as

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- 1 Hareven's interesting study "Family Time and Industrial Time" (1982) describes a very similar set-up in the American textile industry.
- 2 See Pick 1956, p 35 and also Chapter 6. 8 out of 16 in my interview sample said that family recruitment was common in their firms; in two additional cases it had been common in the past but had been scrapped as part of a general policy of rationalisation.

George Kendall's assertion that his consumptive wife, though formerly "a good stout able woman, and calculated to do household business for a large family", was now a "serious expense" keeping him "poor and badly off" (PP 1845 xv II q 3414). Expectations about a wife's contributions are revealed by comments like this, and that of Edward Nicholson:

*My wife winds a little sometimes, when she is in the humour
... she goes out of a day sometimes to wash and do those
sorts of things; my wife is an old woman.*

(PP 1854-5 xiv qq 8813, 8832)

But behind these statements lay a strong emotional attachment to family life, underpinning the stockingers' obstinate clinging to the domestic system. One knitter believed that a "steady man, if he had any spirit "loves his wife's company and that of his little children", while another expressed a typical abhorrence for the New Poor Law, claiming

*I would almost sooner choose the gaol than to have my wife
and children parted from me.*

(PP 1845 xv I qq 1779, 6961)

The family-based work system offered many attractions, at least in its idealised version: "it makes a very comfortable earning for the aggregate", enabling knitters to "live as a family", being "independent of anyone else" and enjoying family companionship and comfort (PP 1845 xv I q 8045, II q 1123).¹

As has been persistently argued in this study, old habits die hard. In 1910 Corahs' knitters were still trying to use sons (and daughters) as helpers, and in 1922 Kibworth schoolchildren were said to be spending dinner hours "running on" (loading the knitting frame) for their parents

1 *Studies by Rose of Arnold, Notts. and Sharpe of Calverton, Notts. and South Normanton, Derbyshire indicate that in country areas the family-based system continued into the 1880s and 1890s, possibly even into the early twentieth century (Rose, 1986b; Sharpe, 1986).*

and taking work to and from the factory for their mothers (LAHU A September 21st 1910, September 6th 1922). But the most powerful legacy was the tradition, still strong in the East Midlands, of women engaging in paid employment, including married women. Figure 10.2 shows the high proportion of women in the area in paid employment in 1891, compared with the national average. Leicester, in particular was high above the average in almost every age-group.¹

During the domestic period, stockings' wives worked from necessity, and it came to be seen as a woman's duty to contribute her share to the "common fund".² This duty was, it seems, willingly accepted: as one observer commented, "They are always anxious, if they can work a frame, to get into one" (PP 1845 xv II q 2022). The sense of duty and eagerness to work continued into the factory era, when it was acknowledged that women were prepared to break the law to work as many hours as possible. There are reports of them hiding in cellars, lavatories and in baskets to evade the factory inspector, and one knitter described how his daughter, like all her warehouse workmates, habitually brought work home illegally in the evenings to carry on with it after hours (PP 1845 xv I q 7680, PP 1892 xxxvi Pt 2 pp 58-9, 66-7). Women were said to have a sharper sense of "honour" and responsibility over maintaining their children than men, which led them to labour long hours in the local sweatshops. A Nottingham lace overlooker seems to have epitomised local attitudes when she declared:

I think married women should be left alone to act for themselves. I think if a woman is a thoughtful wife and mother

1 See Osterud, 1986, for other figures confirming this tendency.

2 See PP 1812 ii p 23; PP 1854-5 xiv q 6273; Nicholson, 1973, p 6.

Figure 10.2

Percentage of women in each age group
in paid employment in urban areas 1891

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Leicester</i>	<i>Nottingham</i>	<i>National Average</i>	<i>Lancashire Average</i>
10-15	27.9	23.2	16.3	25.9
16-20	89.7	82.7	68.6	79.6
21-25	75.1	70.8	57.8	65.8
26-35	47.5	43.9	33.0	40.6
36-45	34.8	34.7	25.0	31.1
46-55	31.2	35.3	25.3	29.6
56-65	29.0	33.5	24.4	26.9
65+	18.4	21.6	16.0	18.0
All ages	48.2	45.5	34.4	42.3

Source: PP 1894 lxxxix Pt II Statistics of Employment of Women and Children Appendix I.

NB Lancashire averages have been included for comparison, as Lancashire was another area of high female employment. The figures do not distinguish between married and single women and no reliable figures for married women's employment exist. The same report provides minimum estimates for the employment of married women in Leicester in 1881 and 1891, as follows:

Age group 20-25	1881 30.6%	1891 22.7%
Age group 26-45	1881 29.4%	1891 24.9%

she will know how best to arrange ... I believe a married woman that goes out to work has more spirit and energy than one that always stays at home.

(PP 1876 ~~xxx~~ pp 361, 378, 411)

A fascinating insight into such women's lives is provided by the autobiographical introduction to her own poems written by Ruth Wills, the poetess of Corahs. Her father was killed on army service, and her mother, left destitute, was forced to go out to work, leaving Ruth and her sister to "keep house" and "setting us our task work of seaming hose every morning". At eight Ruth was sent to work in a warehouse, working from 7 to 9 for 1/6d a week. A short period of unemployment followed, during which the girls were sent into the country to gather firewood, sustaining themselves by eating "tender shoots of the hawthorn and the honeyed petals of the red clover flower". Finally Ruth obtained her job at Corahs, where she was to spend the rest of her life; she commented that there were to be no more "delightful wanderings" in her life:

Henceforth it must be work, woman's work, dreary and monotonous sometimes, yet pleasant withal, as it rewarded me with the proud consciousness that I was not only able to eat my daily bread but to earn it.

There could hardly be a better gloss on women's work experience in the late nineteenth century (Wills, 1861, pp v-vii).

This tradition and spirit carried over into the twentieth century. Even when improved wages and employment conditions freed wives from the absolute necessity of working, they continued to do so, preferring the "social life, pleasant occupation and cheerful company" to "isolation at home". A commentator observed that in Leicester women cheerfully shouldered the burden of the work of a home together with work in a factory as being "their allotted task" (Co-operative Congress 1915 pp 119, 129). When confined to the home with young children they were able

to carry on with finishing tasks at home, and, although the male workers campaigned against outwork, manufacturers and women workers defended it against the charges of exploitation, claiming it was a convenience as much to women, who were paid the same rates as they would have received in the factory, as to manufacturers (Leicester Chamber of Commerce, 1911 p 57; Co-operative Congress 1915, p 119).

Since the industry had come to rely heavily on married women, they were able to fix hours to suit their domestic circumstances.¹ Hinckley women threatened to strike when their custom of going in at 9 in the morning, rather than 8, was challenged (LAHU B May 17th 1919). In such circumstances a marriage bar could hardly be operable, although apparently such a bar existed at a Yorkshire subsidiary to a large Leicester firm established after World War Two (Scott and Lynton, 1952, p 115). I have found only two references to Leicester factories attempting to ban married women (PP 1893-4 xxxvii Pt I p 167; LAHU A October 7th 1925). Although the issue was raised at times within the union by males and single women, LAHU officers rightly perceived it as such a "thorny question" that no official policy on married women's employment was formulated (LAHU A May 28th 1934, September 4th 1940, LAHU B April 16th 1921). Eventually the NUHW resolved that "other things being equal" there should be no discrimination between married and single employees in respect of short-time working and redundancies (AC Report, 1952 p 29).

In fact, the employment of married women became more fully established after World War Two. In 1901, there were 9910 single and 3969 married women in Leicester working in hosiery, textiles, tailoring and paper trades

1 See King, 1948, p 378; Wells, 1972, p 204.

(Black, 1983, p 229). By 1964, in the factory studied by Brown and associates, married women predominated over single by 725 to 535, and in the 1980s Westwood found that in the departments she studied 60% of the women were married, 20% having three or more children (Brown et al., 1964, p 27; Westwood, 1984, p 16). The continuation of the ethic formulated in the nineteenth century by women like Ruth Wills is exemplified by the comments made by a Leicester respondent of Sharpe quoted in 'Double Identity', her study of working women; a single mother working in a hosiery factory, she told Sharpe

*I've been brought up that work is your self-respect ...
I've always been brought up in a family where working is
a big thing.*

(Sharpe, 1984, pp 203, 218)

So far I have only dealt with the working classes, but family motivations and the 'family project' were important at all levels of the class structure. Women were involved in the activities of middlemen and truckers, helping deal with the workpeople, taking in goods and running truck shops (PP 1845 xv II q 1927). Those in this intermediate stratum sought, just as the working classes did, to increase family well-being by undertaking a variety of activities. One middleman, Ralph Ogden, for example, was also a shopkeeper, farmer, overseer, constable, assessor and tax collector! His brother helped him run the hosiery business (PP 1845 xv II p 307).

If we move up the strata again, family motivation assumes, if anything, greater importance, although the part played by women was very different. The 1844 census figures record 11 female hosiers in Nottingham, 11 in Leicester, out of a total of 672. A notable example was Ann Wood, head of the firm in which Robert Walker started his career. But such women were in a clear minority, as was Eliza Atkins, who joined

in the family business discussions as she cut out garments on the kitchen table, or Perry Gold Symington, of a Market Harborough firm, who became its extremely successful personnel manager in the 1890s (Atkins, 1972, p 4; Symingtons, 1956, p 37). Perry Symington's career was considered unusual, and Freer, in her fascinating study of Leicester business families, states that the group norms of this circle decreed the total exclusion of women from the world of business: their role was the cementing of alliances between the emergent bourgeois 'dynasties', through promoting social interaction and prudent marriages (Freer, 1975, pp 82, 351).

Freer's excellent study highlights the crucial importance of family motivation among the Leicester bourgeoisie. She argues that previous discussions of bourgeois motivation have been distorted, as historians were misled by the apparently individualist ideology of the early capitalists. In actuality, notions of kinship and inheritance were centrally important to Victorian businessmen, and decisions that might be highly irrational in terms of conventional economic theory might be taken in the interest of family needs. It was important to provide employment for family members, in the light of their talents and their desires. Many business families preferred to stay in partnerships, and there was a reluctance to let enterprises go public, as it was feared this would weaken family control. The importance placed by the entrepreneurs on families also encouraged them to espouse paternalist approaches, especially when faced with worker resistance. The patriarch's rule was unchallenged in the home, and "he made every attempt, although not always with success, to play a paternal role vis-a-vis his workpeople". In short, the system of production was, in Freer's view, as much a system of patriarchalism as of capitalism (Freer, 1976, pp 12, 17, 139, 218-20).

Freer's thesis is confirmed by factory histories, which emphasise the importance of family participation and family control.¹ Atkins' history recalls the reluctance felt by the family to allow the company to go public in 1950 (Atkins, 1972, p 31). Although Freer believes that the dynastic business structure started to break up in the twentieth century, small firms in particular are still run on the same family-based principles, as a recent study by Strumik shows, despite the penetration of conglomerate corporations which introduce new motivations in some sectors of the hosiery industry. Strumik found that of 97 small hosiery firms 45.4% were private family companies and only 24.6% were fully public companies or subsidiaries without any degree of family control. Many firms deliberately limited the size of their operations, fearing that any increase in size would entail the loss of personal control.² 10 of the chief executives Strumik interviewed believed it their duty to provide employment for family members, and decisions were taken in line with family needs and family labour supply (Strumik, 1978, pp 107, 129, 141-48).

The importance of these findings should not be underestimated. The old view that the integration of family and work was destroyed as the factory system replaced the domestic system is seen to be grossly oversimplified.³ As Freer argues

The fusion of the financial affairs of family and firm was not a characteristic of leading business families only. It was a feature of life at all levels of Leicester society.

(Freer, 1976, p 210)

1 See Pick, 1956; Byford, 1969; Atkins, 1972; Halls, 1982.

2 Two managers of small firms I interviewed made exactly the same point.

3 This view is expressed, for example, by Scott and Lynton (1952).

At all levels of the social hierarchy, family motivation provided an alternative basis for decision-making to conventional economic rationality. The significance of such 'irrationality' of motive, and its persistence long after the 'traditional' epoch, has been underestimated not only by Marx and Weber and the Utilitarian political economists, but also by many contemporary sociologists who have absorbed assumptions about actors and rationality from these influential sources.

Section 3 Patriarchy, Power and Gender Relations at Work

Finally, we must consider the way family power relationships were reflected in the workplace. At all levels of the class structure the nineteenth-century family was patriarchal, and work organisation hinged on this fact. As Arthur Morley explained, the hosier or middleman always conducted contractual dealings with the "master of the family" and as long as a son remained in his father's household the father alone was answerable to the employer (PP 1854-5 xiv qq 6529-30). The only exception was when the family had no "master": here a woman might fill the decision-making role, as in the case of Sarah Bryan, a widow who took over her husband's responsibility for five frames, three worked by male journeymen (including her son) (PP 1854-5 xiv pp 514-7). Most women, however, were used to male authority, and their greater subservience to control was one of the reasons employers favoured female labour. "The masters are very particular and the work" (seaming) "is sent back if not well done", one employer explained (O'Brien, undated, p 6). Another hosier reported that women could always be found, no matter how short the notice, to do large consignments of work; "They always get it done somehow, no-one knows how" (PP 1863 xviii p 211). The women were used to sitting up into the small hours as a result of their

husband's 'shacking' on Mondays and Tuesdays in order to finish the week's consignment.¹ This acceptance of hard work and long hours, however, should not simply be ascribed to female docility, but also to the sense of family duty which led mothers to risk their own health to maintain their children's.² Family motivation is here, too, a crucial determinant of the distinctive pattern of women's work behaviour.

The continuation of these patterns of behaviour can be seen, in the present context, in the sharp differentiation managers make between unmarried girls, seen as lazy, unreliable and irresponsible, and thus presenting considerable discipline problems, and married women, seen as docile, hard-working and responsible, and thus particularly responsive to strategies of paternalistic control.³

The development of behavioural differences between men and women is also fostered by physical separation within the factory. A Morning Chronicle correspondent in the 1840s reported that men worked on the top floor of Leicester workshops, women and children on the ground floor (Ginswick, 1983, p 168). This no doubt helped allay contemporary anxieties over sexual propriety, manifested in the fuss over the provision of separate lavatories for the two sexes (PP 1843 xiv f p 3). Physical segregation continued in the period of factory development. At Picks men knitted on the ground floor, while girls sewed on the floor above (Pick, 1956, p 10). In contemporary factories, too, women commonly work in separate departments, developing thereby a "woman's world", in Westwood's phrase (Westwood, 1984, p 16).

1 See Bradley, 1986.

2 Thane's work on working-class diets provides another demonstration of female altruism and the priority women gave to family well-being (Thane, 1978).

3 See also Chapter 4 and Westwood, 1984, p 28.

In such circumstances, it is not surprising that women, rather than participating in the male workshop culture, developed their own distinctive form of it. The feature which most struck early observers was the concern with clothes, "showy dress" and "millinery" (PP 1863 xviii p 270; Co-operative Congress, 1915, pp 121, 129). But, again, stress on femininity did not necessarily mean docility. Francis described the roughness of female factory workers in Hinckley: gin-drinking was common in factories, and when philanthropic middle-class ladies delivered improving talks to seamers' groups, they were subjected to rude comments and "facetious remarks" about their clothes (Francis, 1930, p 144). Picks' factory girls faced public disapproval when they "kicked up their heels to the barrel organ" in lunch-breaks, jostling pedestrians, and "sqawking and chattering like a flock of starlings" (Pick, 1956, p 13). Leicester factory culture in the 1900s was marked by sexual horseplay and flirtations, especially on works outings, and males venturing into female territory might get more than they bargained for! (Paton and Baldwin, 1948). A county worker, looking back to her early factory experience, recalled that new entrants were mercilessly teased over sexual matters, but also that life was lightened by "fat-ups", when the women shared sausage rolls and cream buns and sang songs together (Hind Leys Local History Group, 1982, pp 33-4). The female factory culture described by Westwood, with its sharing of food, its binges, its bawdy 'bride's rituals' and the stress on marriage and the family is the direct descendant of the earlier culture (Westwood, 1984, especially Chapters 5 and 6).

The development of these gender-specific factory cultures no doubt fostered the splits between male and female workers described in Chapter 9. Male union leaders never really achieved a sympathetic comprehension

of female behaviour without being patronising. For example, there are several references to union officers visiting the *fathers* of female workers in order to get them to persuade the girls to join the union (LAHU A September 2nd 1896; HU April 29th 1931). The group of girls who explained their failure to join LAHU in terms of "not being asked properly" were probably being quite accurate (LAHU A October 25th 1905). Little interest was shown in problems specific to women.¹ LAHU refused to take responsibility for absence from work during "confinements", and in two disputes involving the taking of handbags into the machine room and the wearing of curlers, union officials appear to have co-operated with management in persuading the women to abandon these practices (LAHU A January 22nd 1913, February 17th 1944, April 24th 1949).²

This tendency to separate development does not mean that women offered no help to men in their resistance to capitalist control. The history of the industry provides manifold examples of the involvement of women in industrial protest, especially in the domestic period. The accounts of O'Brien (undated) and Nicholson (1973) chart women's involvement in demonstrations, unemployment parades, strikes, political unions, Chartist meetings and so forth. East Midlands women could be notably militant: a local paper describing a Chartist rally spoke of "harpies ... whose oaths and blasphemy, groans and yells, really made us blush for the feminine sex" (Epstein, 1982, p 241). Women sometimes took the initiative

1 See Westwood, 1984, p 72, for discussion of this in the contemporary context.

2 Some male activists were more nakedly gynophobic. One Leicester man expressed fear of the DC becoming composed entirely of women. Female members did not point out how often it had been composed entirely of men! (LD December 18th 1922).

in commencing militant action. Nottingham women in 1839 instituted an 'exclusive dealing' tactic to foil the 'shopocracy', refusing to patronise any shops which refused to sign the Chartist petition (Nicholson, 1973, p 50). In 1843, striking lace-runners called on local male unionists to support them, reminding them that they fought for a common cause (PP 1843 xiv f 43). The determination of two young Leicester girls, the White sisters aged 16 and 19, to become union members led to a fierce campaign against the "Russian Tyranny" of Skevingtons in 1910 (LAHU A October 26th 1910). LAHU had some notable female activists, such as Miss Woolman of Corahs, collector for the union since its formation, and Mrs. Bird, the first women's organiser.

Nevertheless, women's impulses to resistance have to be weighed against family motivations, often more strongly developed in them than in men, and sharpened, as Westwood has shown, by a factory culture which emphasises the centrality of femininity and marriage in women's lives.

Conclusion

The argument of this chapter has been that gender relations have an important influence on workplace behaviour. Historically-defined differences between male and female labour power have meant that policies of feminisation have been an integral part of the degradation process in hosiery, while male reaction has resulted in the resegmentation of a strict gender-based division of labour. Men and women alike bring family experience into the workplace, and are motivated by family as well as economic interests, the significance of which has not yet been fully realised by sociologists. Everyday interactions between groups of workers and with management are also influenced by prevailing patterns of gender

relations in the family and at leisure. Gender divisions enter as much into work relations as they do into every other area of life in industrial societies.

CONCLUSION

In the Introduction to this thesis two questions were posed: first, how useful was Braverman's work on labour process development for the study of any real historical case, and second, in the particular case of the hosiery industry, why had there been a move from confrontational to co-operative labour relations in the period under study (1800 to 1960). This thesis has been an attempt to answer those two questions.

In Chapter 1, a reformulation of Braverman's theory was proposed. It was claimed that Braverman's key concept of degradation provided a base for a general theory of labour process development, specifying both the reasons for and the direction of change. The characteristic relations of capitalist production present a dilemma of control to employers. They seek to solve this by policing and constraining the subjectivity and autonomy of workers. This involves fragmenting and mechanising the labour process, and taking over from the workers the function of planning (pre-conceptualisation). Taken together, these moves constitute the process of 'degradation'. At the same time, some degree of consent on the part of the workforce is also imperative and this may generate a counter-tendency to concede a carefully selected degree of autonomy and subjective involvement to the workers, especially those judged to be particularly indispensable to production. This counter-tendency is reinforced by the actions of the workers themselves, who, being active subjects rather than passive recipients, can be expected to organise to resist degradation. Thus, the progress of degradation is often halting and impeded, its forms responding to the resistant pressure of the workforce. This counter-tendency I have called 'resegmentation'.

Although this analysis provides an account of core tendencies in labour process change, its focus is inevitably narrow, focusing on material alterations to the tasks and tools of labour. Thus it was argued that a complete historical account must also deal with other attendant aspects of change. 'Local' strategies of control are chosen by employers to address particular problems they face. These usually involve alterations not to the labour process itself (in Marx's precise definition), but to what I have called its institutional surroundings. They can be categorised as 'repressive' or 'pacificatory' according as to whether they attempt to restrict or concede autonomy and subjective involvement. Thus they, too, are linked to the structural dilemmas of capitalist production relations (the 'double indeterminacy of labour').

It is also necessary to look at some of the other social relationships in which the labour process is embedded and which provide its context. Broader class relations, gender relations and competitive relations between firms may all have a part to play in the development of workplace relationships. Thus, the analysis of degradation and resegmentation is only the *starting place* for the analysis of change at work. It is, as it were, the clew that leads through the complex maze of interconnecting relations in the midst of which patterns of working shift and evolve.

Chapter 4 looked at degradation and resegmentation in the hosiery industry. It was argued that a slow process of degradation was observable over the period under study. Elements of fragmentation and preconceptualisation had been introduced long before steam-powered machinery and the factory system were introduced. Action by organised male workers, however, had both slowed down the pace of change and also enabled them to remain in less degraded jobs as the move to the factory was consolidated.

However, Braverman's historical account of a shift from direct control to Taylorite degradation in the 1880s was rejected. In this particular case, rather, a dualisation of control was noted. Partly as a result of the resegmentation process, two very different work environments marked by different constellations of control strategy evolved to deal with two sectors of labour, distinguished by gender. Women, while performing fragmented and preconceptualised tasks, continued to be subjected to direct control; men were allowed more autonomy, performing tasks slightly less fragmented and preconceptualised, although subject to machine-pacing (mechanisation) to a higher degree than the tasks of the women.

This dualisation of control appears, at first sight, very similar to patterns described by the theorists of labour market segmentation, such as Barron and Norris (1976), Edwards (1979) and Kreckel (1980). Where my analysis departs from theirs is that these differentiated patterns are seen as arising from the interplay of relations within the *production process* itself; they then act to fragment the labour market, rather than the other way round. Workplace relations, themselves following divisions which occur within the family, structure the labour market, which then acts back on the workplace as labour market divisions themselves become institutionalised and sanctified by convention. Such patterns of dualisation are not unique to the hosiery industry, but have been noted in other industries where men and women work together, for example printing, tailoring, book-binding and clerical work.¹

In Chapters 5 to 7 the range of 'local' control strategies was considered. Dominant among repressive strategies used by hosiery employers were

¹ See Cockburn, 1983; Morris, 1986; Zimmeck, 1986 and Hunt, 1986.

the use of truck, relocation of plant, and the victimisation of union members. The chief pacificatory strategies were paternalism, especially effective with the female workforce, and the slow development of joint consultation procedures, which brought a kind of truce and harmony between the unionised male workers and their employers. Once again, a pattern of dualisation can be discerned.

The choice of these strategies, it was argued, was contingent upon the particular context, the traditions of the locality being especially significant in this case. Nonetheless, other studies might also show the central roles played elsewhere by paternalism and joint consultation in bringing peace to strife-torn industries, for example textiles (Joyce, 1980) and boot and shoe (Fox, 1958; Goodman et al., 1977).

Resistance and resegmentation had already been looked at in Chapter 4, but worker organisation and responses to employer action were considered in greater depth in Chapters 8 and 9. The earlier period, up till about 1860, was marked by almost continual opposition, more or less effective, to the repressive strategies of employers and by struggles to retain control. After 1860 the growing dominance of pacificatory strategies produced a less confrontational industrial climate, whereby, for example, moves to establish joint consultation procedures were often followed by a decrease in strikes. However, male workers continued to fight to hang on to some elements of traditional craft control, although it could be argued that this was at the expense of women workers' interests.

Chapter 10 picked up the theme of gender relations, which preceding chapters had already revealed to be of central importance in the analysis of control. Family relationships, it was argued, had a crucial influence on work relationships. Three particular aspects of this were considered:

the reproduction of family authority divisions in the sexual division of labour at work, the involvement of the family as a unit in production (which consequently affected local labour market conventions) and the differential relationship of men and women to managerial authority. All these factors were implicated in the dualisation of control, as gender segregation in the factory became more pronounced. In this way, gender relations impinge decisively on the work environment. This being the case, in any industry in which both sexes are employed, gender relations will have an important effect in influencing both the precise form that degradation takes and the choice of control strategies.¹

I hope that the above summary illustrates the way that the modified degradation model can be used in comprehending the way an individual labour process has developed. The researcher undertaking an historical study of this sort can find herself overwhelmed by the mass of detail, the sheer density of events and the complexity of the networks of relationships. Yet the *sociological* researcher cannot be content, as a historian might be, with merely charting the chronology and narrative of these events, complexities and inter-relationships. She must search for regularities, for viable generalisations, for signs of the impact of the social structure at the local and empirical level. The degradation model, thus, can be used as a pathfinder in locating regularities amid the welter and chaos of empirical events.

To say this is, however, to make only a limited claim for the status of this model. I have suggested that it can be used as a 'guide to study',

1 See, for example, Cockburn, 1983, 1985; Westwood, 1984 and John, 1986 for confirmation of this argument.

as Engels explained in later life that he and Marx had intended that the model of historical materialism set out in the Preface to 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy' should be used.¹ Such an approach seeks to move towards the observation of regularities and a general explanation, while respecting the complexities and irregularities of historical events. In this way, it bears some resemblance to the 'ideal type' model, whose use was formulated by Weber.² The Weberian ideal type was to be used as an heuristic tool, a yardstick by which to assess historical reality, to generate debate, throw up problems and promote the construction of further models. This study demonstrates how the degradation model can be used in both these ways and in so doing only confirms what has already been demonstrated. The proliferation of studies of the labour process and contributions to the 'labour process debate' is proof of exactly how powerful Braverman's model has been as a stimulant to historical study and a generator of debate and of new hypotheses. To claim this use for the model, then, is perhaps non-controversial. More controversial is the claim that I would also like to make that the model does relate to an underlying *real* tendency in labour process development. Under the ebb and flow of surface events, a steady current of degradation is empirically discernible. What I have offered in this study is, of course, one interpretation of a set of

1 "Our conception of history is above all a guide to study not a lever for construction" (Engels to Schmidt, 1980). The point is elaborated in a letter to Ernst in the same year: "The materialist method turns into its opposite if it is not taken as one's guiding principle in historical investigation but as a ready pattern according to which one shapes the facts of history to suit oneself". See also Marx to 'Otechestvenniye Zapiski' 1877, Engels to Bloch, 1890 (Marx and Engels, 1956, pp 379, 493, 496, 498-500).

2 See discussion in 'The Methodology of the Social Sciences', 1949, pp 90-101. Giddens (1973) suggests that the models of capitalism formulated by both Marx and Weber should be viewed as ideal types.

complex events. Many other interpretations, incorporating predictions from other models, are clearly possible; I have suggested in Chapter 1 that one such interpretation might centre on the concept of competition as a generative force. Nevertheless, I have yet to be convinced that any alternative interpretation or model would effectively invalidate the analysis of degradation I have offered.

To the second question posed in the Introduction, perhaps a more tentative answer must be given. I have already touched in the above discussion on some of the factors which contributed to this move from confrontation to co-operation; these are fully explored in Chapters 3, 8 and 9. In Chapter 2 a survey of the literature dealing with similar developments at the national level led to the conclusion that no single explanatory factor could be isolated to account for the change. Rather, an explanation in terms of a number of contributory factors must be developed. My study has investigated some key issues at the local level. Above all, within the workplace, the growing dominance of pacificatory strategies, as practised by a few key pace-setting opinion-leaders among the employers, can be seen to have engendered a more accommodative response from organised labour and to have induced a stronger sense of commitment to a firm among individual workers. But also of major importance were changes in the nature of working-class life and culture. The experience of family, work and community relationships in the early period had been tightly integrated; whole communities suffered or prospered according to the state of the hosiery trade. As the century progressed these spheres of experience diverged; consequently the integrative workshop culture, which had fostered the development of political awareness and oppositional ideas, gradually broke down, and workers experienced their jobs in a more

individualised way. In sum, working-class identity became more fragmented, leading to a decline of militant consciousness. At the same time, some of the collectivist and oppositional force of the hosiery workers was diverted into the co-operative movement, which ultimately proved a dead-end.

Gender relations also had a part to play: as the proportion of the workforce which was female increased militant solidarity became apparently harder to achieve.¹ The sense of common interests was lost as gender-based task segregation and labour market segmentation became institutionalised. Finally, it is indubitable that the growing prosperity of Leicester and its staple industries, culminating in the post-war boom of the 1950s, also played a part in the pacification of the workforce. Rather than giving privilege to any of these strands of explanation, it may be worth saying that all these would repay further discussion at the macro-level, particularly the more neglected issues of gender, employer strategy and the co-operative movement.

A final area which must be discussed is to what extent the findings of this study can be generalised to other industries. Without doubt, there are features of the hosiery industry which appear to make it atypical (the concentration in one locality, the important role of married women, the late move into the factories). It is therefore not sufficient to simply assume typicality. In Burawoy's 'Manufacturing Consent', the claim is made that the findings of the study can stand as valid for other industries because the workings of the capitalist system as a totality must equally be

1 *Interesting articles by Mappen, Bornat and Thom in Angela John's collection of essays 'Unequal Opportunities' start to confront the difficult task of explaining the phenomenon of women's apparent lack of commitment to the aims and practices of the trade union movement (John, 1986).*

demonstrated in each of the elements that go to make up that totality. To say this is to risk tautology, in that it assumes that the initial formulation of those workings was in fact correct. Equally unconvincing is the claim made by More in 'Skill and the English Working Class' that the findings of his study may well be generalisable because the engineering industry is somehow paradigmatic of British industry in general. That it is not so is clearly demonstrated by the obvious contrasts with the hosiery industry.

To pick up Burawoy's point in a more constructive way, if degradation *is* a tendency inherent in capitalist production relations, as I have claimed, then other studies should provide empirical support for my case, demonstrating similar (if not identical) patterns to those described above. There is a growing body of studies, large and small, which do provide such support, dealing with industries as diverse as printing and bookbinding, tailoring and garment-making, pottery, boot and shoe making, electrical goods, electro-communications, warehouse retailing, clerical work and chemical analysis.¹ Not all these studies are couched in a Bravermanian framework, but all show the development of an historical degradation tendency; the work of Cockburn, in particular, outlines developments in printing, garment-making and retailing in a way strikingly similar to my own analysis. Perhaps it is notable that in all these cases the employment

1 For printing and bookbinding, see Cockburn, 1983, Hunt, 1986; for tailoring and garment-making, see Morris, 1986, Cockburn, 1985; for pottery, see Jones, 1961, Sarsby, 1985; for boot and shoe, see Baker, 1964, Goodman et al., 1977; for electrical goods and electro-communications, see Baker, 1964, Game and Pringle, 1983, and Thompson and Bannon, 1985; for retailing, see Game and Pringle, 1983, Cockburn, 1985; for clerical work, see Crompton and Reid, 1982, Game and Pringle, 1983, Zimneck, 1986; for chemical analysis, see Garson, 1977. The list could be extended.

of women has played some part (often a major one) in the industry's development. The presence of women seems inextricably bound up with degradation, either because women are introduced into degraded jobs or because the presence of women makes it harder for unions to fight degradation. This does not mean, of course, that there has been no resistance to degradation in these areas; in many of them discernible processes of resegmentation are in play, as, for example, in the printing industry where compositors have put up a century-long fight to retain their skilled status (Cockburn, 1983). In many cases this leads to the kind of dualised control structure I have described above: Cockburn's recent study of warehousing provides a classic example (Cockburn, 1985).

In opposition, other studies have rejected the degradation process as being empirically unverifiable (for example More, 1980; Wood, 1982, especially papers by Jones, More and Penn, Penn, 1985). Notably these researchers have dealt with the more male-dominated traditional skilled industries, like textiles and engineering, with a longstanding history of efficient union organisation. It has been argued by More, for example, not only that men retained their skills but also that management actively participated in preservation of skills and opposed degradation. Possibly reappraisal of the current state of engineering might reveal a slightly less rosy picture¹, but, granted the accuracy of the studies mentioned above, it may be that the apparent discrepancy arises from the particular interpretation of the Braverman thesis employed in them. I would argue, for example, that the findings of More about the continuance of apprenticeship and skill could be

¹ Cockburn refers to the loss of craft skills in some areas of engineering in Chapter 5 of her recent book (Cockburn, 1985).

reinterpreted to be compatible with my account of resegmentation: a truce between an exceptionally strong union and progressive-minded employers may well have resulted in the preservation of skilled jobs for male unionists, although a substratum of unskilled jobs developed at the base of the industrial hierarchy.

In sum, there is a considerable body of evidence lending support to the case I have made. While each industry pursues its own unique pattern of development, there are clearly observable common patterns. Use of 'local' strategies of control will, of course, vary greatly between industries; and local labour markets will also be a source of variations within the constellation of class and gender relations at work, as will the nature of competitive interaction in industries with differing structures and operating within different market restraints. Therefore, while the *findings* of my study cannot be generalised in any straightforward sense, the *model* developed in this study can be fruitfully used in examining any industry or occupation. Whether or not common patterns will emerge from the bulk of such studies, as I have suggested may well be the case, is a matter for verification through further historical research.

APPENDIX 1

A series of interviews was carried out in Leicester between 1982 and 1985 with representatives of 16 hosiery manufacturing companies. In the majority of cases the interviews were with owner/managers or managing directors; in two cases I spoke to the son of the managing director. In three larger companies, one recently taken over by a large conglomerate, I spoke to other representatives of the company: the company secretary, the personnel manager and the plant production manager.

These interviews were part of a longer-running project to interview representatives from 53 Leicester firms which I have been able to trace back, with the aid of a list provided by the LHMA and of local directories, to at least 1960: of these 41 can be traced back to 1951, and some of them right back to the nineteenth century. It is thus possible to establish a continuity in the case of these with the period under study in this thesis. The sample was chosen for this reason. It represents then, to the best of my knowledge, a total population of such 'survivor' firms in Leicester (some survivors may be masked by change of names following takeovers or change of ownership, although there is some evidence that firms retain old names to trade on established customer loyalties). It does not, however, constitute a representative sample of all firms in Leicester in the 1980s; two groups of firms are not represented: what we might call 'mushroom' firms as opposed to 'survivors', that is small firms which start up to cash in on a new fashion trend but do not achieve stable existence, and immigrant-owned firms, which have made their influential appearance on the scene since 1960.

Of the target 53 firms 29 have been approached, by means first of a covering letter and then a personal telephone call: 8 firms refused to grant interviews and 5 had gone out of existence since the sample was selected (3 closed down, 2 moved from Leicester); this latter figure provides a good indication of the unstable and risky nature of the industry. 16 firms consented to be interviewed, representing 30% of the original target group. If constraints of time and place can be overcome, the remaining 24 firms will be approached in the next couple of years.

The interviews were conducted in a fairly informal and unstructured way. As some of the topics were of a fairly sensitive nature, I felt it best to be able to approach them in a circumspect way and to slide away from them if the response was very negative and the respondent appeared likely to 'clam up' as a result. An aide-memoire was used to ensure that similar material was covered sufficiently to permit coding and a certain amount of quantification. It was not, however, always possible or politic to cover all the areas on the aide-memoire, which is reproduced at the end of the appendix. The interviews were all conducted in the factory, which was not always conducive to good interviewing. In many cases there were frequent interruptions, both from visitors and from the telephone, and it was clear that the pressure of time was making itself felt. Many respondents told me on the telephone that they could allow me only a short period of time, as they were entirely responsible for the day-to-day management of the firm. As a result, the interviews are highly variable in terms of quality: their success seemed to depend very largely on the personality of the managers, although managers from large firms appeared, on the whole, to have more self-confidence and experience of dealing with outsiders, and thus to be more sympathetic to the interviewer.

The 16 interviews covered a range of types of firms, in terms of size, ownership, location in the city (including one firm which had moved out from Leicester to the country in the 1880s, as described in Chapter 5), range of products and length of existence. The first two factors have been treated as particularly important in this thesis in terms of variations in management strategy. Firms of all sizes were included, though the size structure of the interview sample does not correspond to the target sample, as firms with under 50 employees were underrepresented (see Fig. A). This is in part due to the difficulty of contacting small firms and also because the great proportion of the firms which had closed down were in this category.

Figure A: Size of Firms

<i>Size of Firm (no. of employees)</i>	<i>Target Group</i>	<i>Interview Sample</i>	<i>Refusals</i>	<i>Moved or Closed down</i>
0- 50	20 (38%)	4 (25%)	-	4
51-100	7 (13%)	2 (12.5%)	1	1
101-200	10 (19%)	4 (25%)	2	-
200-500	9 (17%)	4 (25%)	3	-
500+	7 (13%)	2 (12.5%)	2	-
TOTAL	53	16	8	5

Of the 16 firms 13 were private companies, of which 8 were described to me as 'family businesses'. 2 were now subsidiaries of large public companies, both being large textile groups, one of which is a textile industry leader. The final company was also a subsidiary; it was owned by a holding company, but I was unable to ascertain whether this was a private or public company. There is a certain reserve in the industry about financial dealings: several of the refusals came from companies which had recently

been taken over or were in a state of being taken over and which were apparently reluctant to have their affairs investigated. I have no information as to the ownership profile of the target group as a whole with which to compare these figures. My impression is that they slightly underplay the total extent of public ownership in the industry, while firmly reflecting the long tradition of private family ownership which is discussed in the thesis.

This sample, then, cannot claim to be totally representative of the target group in terms of these two variables. It does, however, include examples of each relevant type of firm, which, with such a small sample, may be more important than strict representativeness. I am fairly confident that my interviews cover the range of situations, practices and strategies to be found within the industry in Leicester at the current time.

Figure B: Interview Topics

- A. History of Firm: Founding date Size when founded Location of plant(s)
Subsequent relocations Shifts in ownership Original product(s) and techniques Memorable events
- B. Personal Involvement of Interviewee with the Firm: Present position
Career Memories
- C. Current State of Firm: Size No of branches Composition of workforce (age, sex, nationality) Changes over time in workforce composition Sexual division of labour Current products and processes Technology in use and innovations Plans for innovation Current ownership Recent changes
- D. Employment Policy: Hours Pay (knitters/machinists) Piece rates and attitudes to them Recruitment and selection of workers Training Skill requirements Turnover problems Long servers Inducements to long service Benefits Recent redundancies
- E. Labour Relations: Relations with union Organisation of union Disciplinary procedures Supervisory style Stoppages and strikes Bargaining and consultative arrangements Dealing with grievances Introduction of new technology Pay claims NJIC participation Opinion of NJIC Problems concerning women Problems concerning Asians Preference for either sex
- F. Marketing: Main customers Links with chain stores Other outlets New products Handling of competition Foreign competition

G. General: Greatest current problem Plans/aspirations Anticipated
changes in industry in next 10 years

(Although no direct questions were asked on the following three issues, I attempted to gain an impression about them from the whole course of the interview and how it was conducted: Paternalism General management style Informal/formal approach).

APPENDIX 2

In order to gain some rough quantitative material on the extent of discontent among framework-knitters in the nineteenth century, I carried out a content analysis on the framework-knitters' depositions to the 1845 Royal Commission on the Condition of the Framework Knitters. This was chosen because it contains the greatest volume of depositions, from the widest-ranging selection of witnesses, of any of the relevant Parliamentary Reports. For reasons of time, and because the focus of my study was on Leicester, only the Leicestershire depositions in Volume I of the report were analysed; Volume II deals with Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. There are 183 knitters' depositions in Volume I, 64 from Leicester, 10 from Hinckley, 13 from Loughborough and 96 from the Leicestershire villages.

These 183 statements vary greatly in length, detail, quality and range of topics addressed. The only information given in each and every statement was name, job and place of residence. Nevertheless, there was a tendency for a standard set of questions to be asked and thus it was possible to gain information from the majority of statements under the following headings: type of workplace (home, workshop or factory), charges, wages, hours worked, complaints made about conditions. A smaller proportion of statements also contained information which could be coded under the following headings: age, years spent in the trade, marital status, number of children, involvement of children in the trade, employer's name and status (middleman or proprietor), suggestions for improvements, experience of truck, membership of trade union.

When dealing with non-standardised interviews of this type, it is obviously difficult to garner material of a more subjective nature than the kind of information I have listed above. However, I also noted the occurrence

of expressions of hostility, or conversely of approval, made by the knitters concerning their present or past masters or concerning the class of hosiers and middlemen in general. The quality of these expressions may be judged from the selection given from them in Chapter 8: obviously, I selected the most vividly expressed from the sample, but I think they can fairly be said to represent the range of views aired in the statements.

It is hard to assess whether these 183 statements can be taken to represent adequately the experiences and opinions of the body of knitters as a whole. It is likely that there was a degree of self-selection among the witnesses. Some of them were union leaders, Chartists or other known activists. It is likely that those with the strongest opinions and who were most articulate and self-confident were chosen to put themselves forward to speak (although not all the statements demonstrate the above qualities). On the other hand, most witnesses came not as individuals but as representatives of different groups, delegates from trade unions, from particular branches or particular workshops. This was especially true of the village knitters who had been elected by village meetings to speak for the whole body, and who often presented material gathered by the group. In addition, most of the collated information is of a factual nature, which accords with the accounts given by contemporary observers and with other data gathered by historians. Thus I would argue that the picture of the knitters' conditions and experiences provided by the analysis is likely to be reasonably representative. The subjective material on opinions may be treated with a little more caution, but if we take into consideration that these delegates, if not typical as *personalities* of the knitter population as a whole, almost certainly acted as opinion leaders, it seems not unreasonable to let them speak for their fellows. At the very least, those opinions provide suggestive qualitative material to be read in conjunction with other evidence presented in the thesis.

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