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THE POLITICS OF TRADE UNIONISM IN A SWEATED INDUSTRY:
BOOT AND SHOEMAKERS IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY LONDON

by
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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Centre for the Study of Social History,
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SUMMARY

The thesis examines the changing character of London boot and shoemakers' trade unionism through a period (c. 1870-95) when the gradual mechanization of the provincial industry and the growth of American competition forced an intensification of the division of labour and an increase in sweating. It is concerned with the rise of a new unionist movement as a response to these pressures and to the labour aristocratic trade union leadership's inability to deal effectively with the problems of the less skilled London shoemaker.

Chapters 1 - 4 describe the development of the London boot and shoemaking industry and its trade unionism down to the mid-1880s. Chapters 5 - 10 describe the breakdown of the old division of labour through the decade which culminated in the 1895 lock-out and its consequences for trade unionism and industrial relations. The final chapter assesses the political radicalism of London shoemakers through the nineteenth century.

The conclusions argue that fundamental changes within the division of labour in the shoemaking industry through the late nineteenth century produced a more militant trade unionism in the process of struggle for control over the new mode of production. Employers' attempts to force through these changes through arbitration and conciliation structures were accommodated by the labour aristocratic trade union leadership. This produced a new unionist movement of resistance whose leadership was socialist and which drew its support from the less skilled London shoemakers. The movement failed to achieve its objectives of greater workers' control of the means of production because the employers launched a successful counter-offensive which culminated in the lock-out of 1895. As a result, the more militant consciousness developed by London shoemakers through the new unionist period became modified into a more cautious labourism which has typified shoemakers' trade unionism throughout the twentieth century. Ultimately, the boot and shoemakers' experience must be seen as one small component of the development of a reformist working class consciousness in late nineteenth century Britain.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<u>B.S.T.J.</u>	The Boot and Shoe Trades' Journal
<u>S.L.R.</u>	The Shoe and Leather Record
<u>National Union G.R.</u>	National Amalgamated Union of Operative Boot and Shoe Rivetters and Finishers, Quarterly Reports
<u>F.R.</u>	National Amalgamated Union of Operative Boot and Shoe Rivetters and Finishers/National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, Monthly Reports.
<u>P.P.</u>	Parliamentary Papers

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During the decade that this thesis has been in preparation I have incurred a vast number of debts, not all of which I shall recall here. My apologies and thanks to those omitted. Those who remain are listed in an approximate, although not immutable, reverse order of gratitude. Raphael Samuel first suggested the topic to me and pointed me early in the direction of the sources. I have benefited since from conversations with Mike Shepherd, Richard Price and Keith Brooker. I have seen an awful lot of students pass through the Centre for the Study of Social History while I have been attached to it, but most notably I shall remember exchanging mental and material notes with Alan Campbell, David Englander, John Field, Bill Lancaster, Laurence Marlow, Takeo Matsumura, Andy Whitehead and Jonathan Zeitlin. Bill Fishman has always been generous with his time and advice and if I have seen too little of him recently it has been because I have had to sacrifice the delights of the cafeteria at the British Museum Newspaper Library, Colindale for the tyranny of the typewriter. The librarians at that esteemed institution have always been helpful as have those at every other place of research I have had to visit. Richard Storey and Janet Druker of the Modern Records Centre in the University of Warwick deserve a special mention, as do the staff of the N.U.F.L.A.T. headquarters, the Grange, Earle Barton, Northamptonshire, who made my several visits both productive and enjoyable. Birmingham Education Authority helped ease the financial pain of the fees and granted me an invaluable term's study leave in 1979. My present Head of Department at St. Albans' College, Oliver Marston, has shown great consideration in his timetabling arrangements. John Cumber wrote an extremely useful critical report of an early draft of the thesis. Royden Harrison jointly supervised me until his retirement in 1982 and I have become a better historian, whatever that might amount to, for

his scholarship, wisdom and kindness. Tony Mason's qualities as a research supervisor are too numerous to list here and I would not want to embarrass his natural modesty. Instead, I will select just one that has been of importance to me. The lot of a part-time Ph.D. student is often a difficult one that requires persistence and mental stamina above all else. He has never failed to keep me motivated through his constant reassurance and down-to-earth advice, all delivered with that sardonic wit which those who know him well come to appreciate as more stimulating than standard forms of discourse. He might have made a reasonable captain of England with considerably more skill. Well, I have "bashed on" and I hope I have "got there in the end." Finally, in co-habiting with both me and the London bootmakers for an inordinately long time my wife, Lynne, has provided the greatest encouragement of all.

DECLARATION

This thesis uses some material, in revised form, from my M.A. thesis which was accepted by the University of Warwick in October 1974, full details of which can be found in the bibliography.

DEDICATION

This thesis is respectfully dedicated to the memory of Lilian Sophia Griffiths, (1896-1978), daughter of a bootmaker, wife of a tailor, mother of ten and member of the Hackney working class.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study in the changing relationship between the division of labour and trade unionist practice in late nineteenth century society. It is concerned with a work-group, boot and shoemakers, who were particularly subjected to such changes in the three decades before 1900. The choice of London as the area of study has been dictated, largely, by the turbulence of its response. The boot and shoemakers of the capital generated a militancy that was second to none within their trade union in their efforts to control their working lives. It is the causes and particular characteristics of this militancy that this study sets out to explain.

Traditionally, London bootmaking had been an outwork industry performed by workers in their own homes or in the home workshops of small masters. Manufacturers gave out the raw materials to the workers in the various divisions of labour. From the early nineteenth century, the bespoke market had begun to give way to a cheaper, ready-made one based upon rising standards of living and the development of mass consumption. Further subdivisions appeared within the ready-made trade between those working for the better class market and those in the sweated sector, often called before the later nineteenth century the 'slop' market. The defining features of sweated work were poor quality of materials and craftsmanship, low wages, long hours, cramped and unhealthy working conditions, the absence of trade unionism, and, from the 1880s particularly, an oversupply of labour aggravated by immigration. Sweated workers were held in a measure of contempt by those in the better class trade who, working to trade union imposed wage statements themselves, regarded the sweated as unorganisable and subversive of craft standards. Because the sweated lived as they worked, in insanitary backstreet hovels, they were also seen as subversive of standards of life in general. They offended the cultural pride of the artisan.

2.

Because of the publicity given to sweating in the 1880s and 1890s it is often forgotten that the division of labour in the London bootmaking industry had a long history. It had proved remarkably resistant to major technical innovation. Contemporary writers of the 1880s and 1890s often omitted to mention, for their own partisan reasons,¹ that Mayhew had used the concept of sweating in the 1840s. Nor were the declining artisans and impoverished 'slap' workers so vividly described in his articles for The Morning Chronicle come only recently upon bad times.² Sweating is a concept that has confused as much as clarified historical understanding largely because of the vain search of the Select Committee of 1888 for some unique characteristic that would explain its status as an aberration within the British economy. Recent work has shown that it is best applied generally to the low wage outwork industries that were a necessary part of capitalist development in Britain.³

Sweated bootmakers made almost no impact upon trade unionism before the 1880s, but, from the period of the new unionist revival, organised rapidly. An explanation of this change rests, partly, upon the intensification of the division of labour which was London's response to the twin assault of provincial mechanisation and American industrialisation. Employers judged that the option of going over to full-scale, factory production in the capital would prove too expensive. So, instead, they tightened the screw upon the sweated worker who was weak and unorganised. This forced him from the hole into which he had been driven and towards trade unionism, where he found a second battle to be fought. The

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1. For example, anti-semitic writers such as Arnold White thought that the chances of ending Jewish immigration would be improved if sweating was assumed to be contemporaneous with their arrival.
 2. Reprinted in Eileen Yao and E.P. Thompson (ed.), The Unknown Mayhew (1971), pp. 228 - 280.
 3. Duncan Bythell, The Sweated Trades: Outwork in Nineteenth Century Britain (1978).

organisation of sweated bootmakers can only be fully intelligible when seen against the history of the statement workers' domination of trade unionism and neglect of the less skilled. Throughout the nineteenth century, London boot and shoe workers were stratified according to their possession, or otherwise, of skill. Their capacity to organise themselves into trade unions mirrored this stratification of work and it had led, by the 1870s, to a labour aristocracy of statement workers dominating these organisations.

The concept of a labour aristocracy has been much wrestled over by the present generation of labour historians. Can it explain the failure of the British working class to attain a revolutionary class consciousness during the period of industrialisation, as Marx and Engels suggested? Was an elite stratum of better paid labour aristocrats bought off by the profits of imperialism and used as agents of social control by the ruling classes?⁴ The debate has now become a good deal more sophisticated. Those who insist upon the continuing validity of the concept have investigated the means by which the labour aristocracy could become accommodated to bourgeois ideology at a cultural level⁵, or the manner in which a degree of cultural emulation could be made compatible with an independent, artisanal consciousness.⁶ Others would prefer to reject the concept altogether in favour of examining the way in which the employing class saturated all aspects of working class

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4. The argument of Lenin in Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916), now regarded as a gross over-simplification by most Marxists. The touchpaper of the modern debate was E.J. Hobsbawm, The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain, in Labouring Men (1964), but originally published in 1954. More recently, John Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution (1974), has been the most influential re-working of the Leninist school.
 5. R.G. Gray, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh (Oxford, 1976), and The Labour Aristocracy in the Victorian Class Structure, in F. Parkin (ed.), Studies in Class Structure (1974).
 6. Geoffrey Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Mid-Victorian Society (1978). See also his The Labour Aristocracy and its Values: A study of mid-Victorian Kentish London, Victorian Studies, March 1976.

life with its paternalistic values, bringing about deference and dependence.⁷

Richard Price has seen fit to remind us that "Like any other kind of history the history of labour is impregnated with contradiction and ambiguity."⁸ Matsumura has also found such characteristics essential to an understanding of the aristocratic behaviour of the flint glassmakers.⁹ If these are rather obvious points, then they have often been overlooked. The history of the statement aristocracy found among London bootmakers is similarly impregnated with contradiction and ambiguity for, like the flint glassmakers, they combined conservative behaviour within the workplace and trade union with a more progressive attitude at the levels of community and class politics.

One of the contradictions of the exclusive trade unionism of the 'new model' period was that it brought about precisely that which it was intent upon preventing: the organisation of the unskilled. The new unionism is a neglected development in labour history. Most of the attention it has received has concentrated upon the supposedly unskilled and previously unorganised such as dock labourers, gas workers or matchgirls.¹⁰ But its influence was wider than this and extended into the better organised trades such as boot and shoemaking. Here, it took the form of a socialist challenge

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7. Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics: the culture of the factory in later Victorian England (Brighton, 1980). Another leading rejectionist is H.F. Moorhouse whose most important contribution has been The Marxist Theory of the Labour Aristocracy, Social History, vol. 3, no. 1, Jan. 1978.
 8. Richard Price, Masters, Unions and Men: work control in building and the rise of labour, 1830 - 1914 (Cambridge, 1980), p.18.
 9. Takeo Matsumura, The flint glassmakers in the classic age of the labour aristocracy, 1850 - 1880 (University of Warwick, Ph.D., 1976), shortly to be published by Manchester University Press.
 10. John Lovell, Stevedores and Dockers: A Study in Trade Unionism in the Port of London, 1870 - 1914 (1965); E.J. Hobsbawm, British Gas Workers, 1873 - 1914, in Labouring Men (1964); Roy Bean, Aspects of the New Unionism in Liverpool, 1884 - 91, in H.R. Hinks (ed.), Building the Union (1973), and The Liverpool Dock Strike of 1890, International Review of Social History, vol. XVIII, 1973.

to the incumbent radical, Liberal leadership.¹¹ The new unionists saw trades unions as weapons of class struggle for the entire transformation of society. This was in stark contrast to the radical view which saw them as no more than agencies of collective bargaining within an accepted capitalist economy.

But, the origins of the new unionism can only superficially be sought in the neglect shown by the labour aristocracy towards the unskilled. More fundamentally, it was changes in the mode of production in shoemaking that confronted the radical Union leadership with a struggle they proved incapable of winning. New unionism came about as an attempt to strengthen resistance and to counteract employers' imposition of structures for the containment of trade unionism. Boards of arbitration and conciliation had been implemented, with trade union consent and co-operation, to allow for an uninterrupted flow of production in the face of rising labour militancy. As Price has argued:

"The point is that these kinds of issues opened the space into which socialism could enter as a means of comprehending what was going on and to become a vocabulary of change But in the 1890s socialist sentiment developed most strongly in those trades where the struggle for control over the labour process was sharpest - as a glance at the early affiliations to the L.R.C. will reveal. At a more local level, this may explain the willing reception of socialist advisers to the new unionism, and it certainly can have been no coincidence that the centres of socialist strength and rank and file militancy in boot and shoe were exactly those centres where changes in the labour process were most evident."¹

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11. I understand by the term 'new unionism' an attitude which led, logically, towards the organisation of the entire working class in order to improve its bargaining position vis a vis the employing class. This does not, necessarily, make it socialist. It was the case, however, that the leaders of this movement among London bootmakers were socialists, although all of their followers were not.
12. R. Price, *The labour process and labour history*, Social History, vol. 8, no. 1, Jan. 1983, p.69.

In his History of N.U.B.S.O., Alan Fox treats the rise of the new unionism rather differently. It is seen rather like a cancerous growth within an otherwise healthy body politic, non-malignant but in need of excision. The new unionists are presented as wrackers, intent upon destroying the progressive institutions of collective bargaining, boards of conciliation and arbitration. The new unionism becomes a politics of irrationality. Against this, it is contended below that a detailed empirical investigation into the workings of arbitration and conciliation points towards an alternative interpretation of new unionist behaviour. This is that the new unionists were justified in arguing that conciliation and arbitration could not work to the satisfaction of both sides within a capitalist system. Hence, it insists upon the legitimacy and rationality of rank and file dissent within the London bootmakers' union.

It may be that Fox would now accept many of these revisions, for he has abandoned the ground he occupied in 1958 in favour of more radical terrain.¹³ Nevertheless, because his more recent work has been concerned with industrial sociology rather than labour history, the History of N.U.B.S.O. stands intact on the bookshelves, an unrevised and fading monument to a lost union.¹⁴

One of the most important advances made in recent labour historiography has been to place the history of trades unionism within a wider social history of class relations. One result of this in the writing of trade union history has been a greater concentration upon rank and file opinion and activity.

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13. The best statement of Fox's current position is, Beyond Contracts Work. Power and Trade Relations (1974). This is informed by a radical pluralist perspective, rather than a Marxist one, in which the main cause of low-trust relations is seen as bureaucratic industrialisation.
14. N.U.B.S.O. has now merged into the National Union of Footwear, Leather and Allied Trades.

This history refuses to celebrate progress by inches, such as the evolutionary development of collective bargaining, which Stedman Jones has caricatured as "a sort of plebian variant of the whig theory of history."¹⁵ Instead, it is concerned to balance these 'achievements' against rank and file criticism that demanded more militant policies. This is the approach adopted here.

A proper analysis of tensions within any trade union cannot proceed without the foundation of a social history of the local community. Crossick is surely correct to remind us "that if we wish to explain and study human behaviour, we must at some point attend to the level at which people experience their lives."¹⁶ A London bootmaker's attitude towards work was determined not only by the quality of his relations with his employer but, also, by the kind of community within which he and his family lived out their lives. As the changing division of labour eroded craft standards and, therefore, work satisfaction he adopted an increasingly instrumental view which placed a premium upon material conditions of life. If these rewards provided no substantial compensation alienation, with all its consequences, was bound to set in. While making no claim to be a comprehensive social history of the London bootmaker's community this study does attend to some of the more important social determinants of consciousness beyond work.

Its central concern remains with the labour process. The main argument depends upon explaining variations in trade union consciousness through changes within the division of labour. This has led inevitably to consideration of the wider question of the limits of trade union consciousness in bringing about socialist change. James Hinton has convincingly shown how technological change involving the erosion of skill, status and security within a work-group

15. Gareth Stedman Jones, *History: the Poverty of Empiricism*, in Robin Blackburn (ed.), *Ideology in Social Science* (1972), p.107.

16. Crossick, *An Artisan Elite*, pp. 18-19.

can, under certain conditions, promote a revolutionary trade union consciousness.¹⁷ He has, thus, placed himself in the optimistic school of thought.¹⁸ But, it is not only from within a declining labour aristocracy that such a perspective may emerge. Faced with increased exploitation on the part of capital and an intransigent craft consciousness of skilled workers, sweated workers may be driven to socialism in a similar fashion. Through the 1890s sweated bootmakers became increasingly conscious, not only of the attempts of capital to further subordinate them, but also of their relative deprivation in comparison with other workers.¹⁹ And, they held this grievance against more privileged sub-groups within their own trade rather than other work-groups.

The thesis is arranged in the following way. The first four chapters provide the necessary background to the great ten-year crisis of the London boot and shoemaking industry which culminated in the national lock-out in 1895. They describe the principal economic and social pressures operating upon the London trade from the 1850s to the 1880s and the response of boot and shoemakers in forming early trade unions and in setting up collective bargaining machinery. Chapters five to ten deal with that decade of crisis, itself. They describe the final breakdown of the old division of labour and the profound effects this had upon trade unionism and industrial relations. Chapter eleven explores a theme which is implicit throughout the entire thesis but requires a more discrete and explicit treatment. Hence, the extent to which London can be said to have contributed to the tradition of the radical shoemaker is discussed in this penultimate chapter. The final, concluding chapter addresses the central problem of the thesis: the effect of changes within the division of labour upon trade unionism.

17. James Minton, The First Shop Stewards' Movement (1973).

18. Richard Hyman, Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unions (1971) is a good introduction to this debate with a sound historical dimension.

19. This is an application of the argument of W.G. Sumner, Relative Deprivation and Social Justice (1966).

The first twenty years of national trade unionism in London (1874 - 95) corresponds almost exactly with the period known in economic history as the Great Depression. The usefulness of this concept for the purposes of historical analysis has been cast in doubt²⁰ and it is, at least, misleading at the most general of levels. For example, generations of students must have been puzzled at being encouraged to seek the origins of the new unionism in the economic revival of the late 1880s, well before the Great Depression notionally ended. While it is not the purpose of this study to enter into the debate over how depressions should, or should not, be measured the evidence gathered for the London boot and shoemaking industry does support the view that there was a serious economic downturn between the late 1870s and the late 1880s. This was punctuated by a brief revival, corresponding with the growth of the new unionism, before a renewed downturn set in by the end of 1891. This impression has been gleaned from trade journals and union branch reports. It would have been most useful to have found sources yielding information on rates of profit and unemployment from which some causal judgements could have been offered. Unfortunately, no firms' records have been discovered and the trade unions did not keep unemployment statistics. For the economic history of the shoemaking industry I have drawn with much profit upon the work of Professor Church and Dr. Head.²¹

Other desirable fields of research have had to be sacrificed in the interests of length and manageability. Census material for 1881 is now available and it would be possible to examine from this patterns of street

20. S.B. Saul, The Myth of the Great Depression (1969).

21. R.A. Church, The Effect of the American Export Invasion on the British Boot and Shoe Industry, 1885 - 1914, Journal of Economic History, 2, 1968; Labour Supply and Innovation, 1800 - 60; the Boot and Shoe Industry, Business History, vol. 12, 1970; P. Head, Boots and Shoes, in D. Aldcroft (ed.), The Development of British Industry and Foreign Competition, 1875 - 1914 (1968).

residence, family size and age structure in more detail than has been done. An examination of parish registers might have yielded interesting information on marriage, class and occupation.²² Oral history has gone largely untapped with one notable exception,²³ but there has been some good oral work on East London published recently.²⁴

To what has been said already on the absence of certain types of sources two further points should be added. Firstly, no local records of the London branches of N.U.B.S.O. have survived, so it is impossible to enter local trade union politics through this door. All we have are the local branch reports published monthly in the National Union's journal, and these are no more than brief summaries of affairs. Secondly, a complete study of London boot and shoemakers' trade unionism will never be possible unless the records of the Amalgamated Society of Boot and Shoemakers survive.²⁵ This seems unlikely. It has resulted in this thesis attending much more to the history of boot and shoemakers in the machine-sewn trade than to that of the hand-sewn craftsmen.

On the positive side, however, the trade journals, trade union and political press, N.U.B.S.O. records and parliamentary papers have proved particularly revealing sources. Special mention ought to be made of The Boot and Shoe Trades' Journal which is a publication of major importance for the history of the industry, yet has been far from fully exploited in the official history of N.U.B.S.O.

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22. Hugh Meleod, Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City (1974) is a model study for London districts in this respect.
23. Mrs. Lillian Griffiths, born the daughter of a Hackney bootmaker in 1896, who provided me with many interesting memories of her father, family and club life in the district. She died in 1978.
24. Arthur Newton, Years of Change (1974); Raphael Samuel, East End Underworld: Chapters in the Life of Arthur Harding (1981); Jerry White, Rothschild Buildings: Life in an East End Tenement Block, 1887 - 1920 (1980).
25. See my research note, The Early History of the Amalgamated Society of Boot and Shoemakers, Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, no. 39, Autumn 1979.

CHAPTER ONETHE IMPLICATIONS OF ECONOMIC CHANGEI. The traditional division of labour

Until the second half of the nineteenth century the boot and shoe industry in England remained a small-scale, traditional outwork trade located in London, a few provincial towns and their village networks. Even by the year of the Great Exhibition, when Britain ostentatiously displayed the symbols of her industrial supremacy to the world's admirers, it has been estimated that the industry exported no more than five per cent of its total output.¹ Indigenous population growth had been enough to support the industry's early expansion (the population of England and Wales had risen from 7½ to 18 million between 1811 and 1851).

From mid-century the imperial markets of Australasia, South Africa, the West and East Indies, and South American markets such as Brazil, began to be opened up.² But, it was not until the very end of the century that the European market, vigorously competed for by the Americans, was substantially penetrated. By 1914 11% of British exports in boots and shoes were going to the markets of France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Italy.³ The technological innovation which sustained the competitive position of the export trade had been given initial impetus by the threat of an import invasion by cheaper, better made American goods. By 1902 the value of all imported American boots and shoes came to exceed that of European for the first time.⁴ Some technological innovation had preceded the main period of American competition for British entrepreneurs had been aware since the 1850s of the superior technology across the Atlantic, and had been keen to emulate it. Before the late 1890s, however, implementation was uneven and diverse. Part of the explanation for this lies in the nature of the traditional handicraftsmanship which must now be described.

1. Church, Labour Supply and Innovation, p.25.

2. Need, Boots and Shoes, op.cit., p.160

3. ibid., p.161

4. ibid., pp.161-62

For generations the making of boots and shoes had been divided into three basic processes which were originally performed by a craftsman working at home with his family. These were 'clicking', 'closing' and 'making'. Clicking consisted of the cutting out of the uppers and of any stiffeners needed for toe and heel. As the most skilled process of the three it was also the best paid. A clicker's skill was judged according to the number of quality uppers he could extract from a single hide of leather. Requiring considerable mental planning and manual dexterity it was the last of the divisions of labour to be mechanised. As one clicker told the Royal Commission on Labour in 1892:

"I do not think you will ever get machinery in our trade until you can grow all the animals of one size, with just the same blemishes. They have tried it. They have got clicking machines, but they have never answered the purpose yet."⁵

Clickers had always been the elite of the workforce often working in a room behind the retail outlet of their employer. In London, before the 1890s, they were the only shoeworkers who consistently plied their trade outside the home. They were to prove particularly resistant to a trade unionism which was having to adapt to the disappearance of the small, master bootmaker as a mass market for cheap, ready-made goods developed. Not until 1892 did the National Union of Clickers and Rough Stuff Cutters, organised from London by G.E. Green since 1889, amalgamate its 1,650 members with the National Union of Boot and Shoe Rivetters and Finishers. They had decided, by then, that strength in numbers was the only way to resist the influx of boy labour, the great curse of their branch of the trade.⁶

5. P.P.1892. xxxvi Royal Commission on Labour, Group C, p.147

6. Ibid.

In London in the 1880s a good clicker could earn 30-35s. for a 54 hour week of 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ days. An inquiry undertaken in October, 1886 found London clickers to be earning an average of 31s. 5d. per week compared with 24s. 9d. for Northampton, 24s. 6d. for Leicester and 24s. 5d. for Scotland.⁷ Clickers had traditionally been paid by the piece, but as other shoemakers changed over to weekly paid factory work so pressure was exerted upon him to conform. Where factory working had become the norm clickers would probably occupy a separate room. In London they continued to work on the premises of the manufacturer who put out the other branches of work. By the end of the 1890s they had become the last shoeworkers to make the transition to machinery.⁸

Rough stuff cutting was harder but less skilled work than clicking. While the clicker cut out the uppers from patterns of his own design the rough stuff cutter cut out the sole and heel. By the 1880s his task had become mechanised, even in London, and his use of the pressing machine earned for him the new technical designation of 'presser'. His earnings in the London trade of the 1880s could vary from 16 - 28s. per week, but were always lower than those of the clicker with whom he shared the workshop. The inquiry of 1886 found London clickers to be averaging 21s. 11d. per week compared with 21s. 1s. for Leicester and 20s. 6d. for Northampton.⁹

7. P.P. 1893-94, LXXXIII, pt. ii; General Report on the Wages of the Manual Labour Classes in the United Kingdom, p.106. The sample taken for London was rather small, 34. The method of arriving at average weekly wages was crude: the figures collected for the week in October, 1886 was multiplied by 52. This took no account of seasonality, for example.

8. Head, *op.cit.*, p.164.

9. P.P. 1893-94, LXXXIII, pt. ii; p.106. Scots pressmen averaged more than London at 24s. 5d. per week but the sample taken was only 6 compared with 11 for London, 62 for Leicester and 29 for Northampton.

Closing consisted of the preparation, fitting together and sewing of the various sections of the upper that had been cut out by the clicker. The application of technology came very early in the form of the Singer sewing machine which began to be introduced from the 1850s. It was responsible for two major strikes in that decade, at Stafford and Northampton. It further refined the closing branch into two sub-processes, fitting and machining. Two fitters preparing and positioning the cut pieces were often required to keep pace with a single machinist. Closers could work either on the employers' premises or at home, depending on the prevailing mode of production. They were almost exclusively female and in London the women closers were also exclusively non-unionist. Responsibility for this lay mainly with the unions who tended to ignore casual and low-paid workers. Yet, closing was far from being an unskilled task and required more manual dexterity than the finishing work performed mostly by men.

The great bulk of London closing work was sub-contracted by a manufacturer to a female sweater working at home. Only the best class of work was closed on the manufacturer's premises. Machines were occasionally owned by closers but more often rented. Wages were divided in a similar way to those of finishers: one half for the machinist and one quarter each for her fitters. As wages in this branch were low this left the fitter with a pittance. Fifteen shillings a week was estimated as an average for machinists in 1887, so this left the fitter with 7s. 6d.¹⁰ During his investigations David Schloss even discovered a machinist who had worked a full week for 6s. 7d.¹¹ As a result fitters were almost always teenaged girls. One effect of mechanisation had been to reduce the amount of even younger child labour:

10. P.P. 1888. XXVI: Annual Report of H.R. Child Inspector of Factories and Workshops for 1886 - 87, p.102.

11. David Schloss, Bootmaking, in C. Booth (ed.), Life and Labour of the People in London, 1891 edition, vol. 1., p.262.

"The introduction of the sewing machine seems to have considerably affected the employment of children in the boot trade, by enabling two or three machinists, of 14 or 16 years old, with the aid of one little girl of 9 or 10 to do as much 'stabbing' as 30 children would have done under the old system."¹²

The introduction of machinery into London clothing in the late 1850s and early 1860s did not result in the work moving into factories. Garret masters rented the new machines from manufacturers and, like those who worked for Hickson's of Smithfield, would employ a dozen or so women on three or four sewing machines in home workshops.¹³ London manufacturers would not necessarily give out their work locally, however. Hickson's, for example, found it profitable to send some of their work to Garret masters in Northampton where they tended to reduce costs by employing more women and machines in larger workshops.

An insight into working conditions in a typical London home workshop can be gained from this description given by a Mrs. Porter who took out work from Hickson's to her home off the City Road. There, she employed thirteen women and girls on five machines in a single room of twelve feet by ten by nine that had only two windows providing ventilation. The machinists worked a twelve hour day, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., which was shorter than many finishing sweatshops demanded. Mrs. Porter's daughter, who was only 20, had left a factory to work for her mother because she had been required to work a fourteen hour day. The work had left her with recurring headaches and trembling hands that prevented her from writing.¹⁴ Despite the fact that making a workshop of the home created such unhealthy conditions many closers still preferred it to factory work. Mrs. Rabbits of Newington Butts spoke for many when she stated

12. P.P. 1864. XIII: Second Report of the Commissioners on Children's Employment, p.84.

13. Ibid., p.164.

14. Ibid., p.165

that "they should prefer to be at home, because they should not be tied to fixed hours of work, and because they could cook their dinners more comfortably..."¹⁵ The spirit of the domestic system was still alive in the London of the 1860s. A quarter of a century later, when Schloss visited the East End clovers, he found conditions that had hardly changed. Women still machined long hours for low wages in "ordinary dwelling-houses (not erected with a view to being used for manufacturing purposes) scattered through Bethnal Green, Hoxton, Hackney and other parts of our district."¹⁶

Making consisted of four basic sub-processes. Firstly, lasting was the attachment of the upper to the insole by pinning and stretching it over the last. Secondly, there was the sewing of the welt, the long strip which circumferenced the insole, leaving a flat, hollow space over it into which scraps of leather were inserted. This was called bottom filling. Thirdly, there was the attachment of the outer sole and the heel. Fourthly, the finishing of the boot or shoe included the paring and knifing of the edges of the soles and heels, bevelling the waists, scouring the bottom sole and heel, inking and burnishing, and other minor processes designed to improve the final appearance. The first three processes would be performed by the lester, the fourth, only, by the finisher.

Welt sewing was the first of the lester's tasks to be successfully mechanised. The Goodyear welt sewing machine and chain stitcher had been introduced by 1872 and this was followed by more sophisticated lasting machines in the early 1880s.¹⁷ By 1892 a welt guide had been developed for attachment to the Blake sewing machine. This enabled the easy fixing of the welt after the sewing of the upper to the insole.¹⁸

15. *Ibid.*

16. Schloss, *op.cit.* p.264

17. Head, *op.cit.* pp. 163-64

18. B.S.T.C. 21 May, 1892

Finishing was the least skilful of the four making sub-processes and had been further simplified in London by an intensified division of labour. This was the infamous 'team system' in which a master sweater performed the knifing (the most difficult task) while three or four 'greeners'¹⁹ would be put to the more menial tasks previously described. Because of its relative simplicity newly arrived Jewish immigrants found it easy to move into the finishing branch of the trade. Only knifing required any small period of training. Consequently, the finisher's trade status was much lower than that of the laster who rarely employed more than one assistant (perhaps his son) and frowned upon the sweated labour of the team system. Jewish lasters were scarce, indeed Schloss suggested that London lasters were almost exclusively provincial men who had migrated to the capital.²⁰ This was something of an exaggeration by the time he was writing but had been a more prominent feature of the early nineteenth century economy, before the decline of tramping.²¹ There were sufficient Jewish lasters, however, to form a small society. English lasters formed the backbone of the National Union's London branches.

19. Untrained new arrivals into the trade.

20. Schloss, *op.cit.*, p.268.

21. See the frequent migrations of John Brown between Cambridge and London, for example. Nicholas Mansfield, John Brown: a Shoemaker in Place's London, *History Workshop Journal*, 8, 1979.

II. Mechanisation, competition and market changes

In a persuasive article Raphael Samuel has recently reminded us of the dangers of generalising too widely from the successful mechanisations of the staple industries of the industrial revolution.²² He demonstrates the persistence of outwork on a wide scale in the late nineteenth century and these findings have been given more substantial support by the work of Bythell.²³ Samuel attributes a good deal of the blame for the exaggeration of the extent to which some industries had become mechanised to misleading reports in trades journals. He indicts The Boot and Shoe Trades' Journal as a case in point:

"..... to read it in the 1870s is to have the impression of an industry on the very edge of automation rather than one in which domestic outwork was still, in the leading centre of manufacture, a major part of the productive process."²⁴

While accepting Samuel's substantive point the reputation of The B.S.T.J. must be rescued from this calumny. It did spend much time on advocating the merits of mechanisation, but most noticeably from the 1890s not the 1870s. It had not been founded until March of 1878 (as The Boot and Shoemaker) which left it with little time for exaggeration in the 1870s. It was the great crisis in industrial relations of the early 1890s, a struggle for control of a changing means of production, which raised the Journal's voice in anger against a resistant trade unionism.²⁵

22. Raphael Samuel, The Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in mid-Victorian Britain, M.M.J., No. 3, Spring 1977.

23. D. Bythell, The Sweated Trades' Outwork in Nineteenth Century Britain (1978).

24. Samuel, op.cit. p.14. It is unclear which centre of manufacture he is referring to as he gives no criteria of assessment, e.g. value of production, numbers employed.

25. Indeed, in the late 1880s, it had spent much time discussing the problem of sweated outwork, particularly in London. From 1886 the Journal was subjected to its own form of competition in the shape of the Shoe and Leather Record which increased its need for relevance and accuracy in order to survive.

English entrepreneurs in the boot and shoe industry wished to accelerate the pace of mechanisation in the 1890s because of a twin threat of American competition. Firstly, as has already been shown, American exports were penetrating not only the overseas market but the domestic market, also. Secondly, American capital goods exports had invaded the British market, too. Through the late 1880s the market for American machinery had been pioneered by such companies as the English and American Machinery Co. (founded in 1885) which imported from the U.S.A. Lasting machinery was, thus, brought into a market which had been supplied with tops closed by the Singer Co. of New York's machines since the 1860s. Only Pearson and Bannion of Leicester supplied British made machinery to the home market. The adoption of American machinery gave rise to a close study of the industry's productive techniques and their gradual adoption.²⁶

The mechanisation of the American boot and shoe industry had occurred several decades earlier than in Britain. In the late eighteenth century the industry had been carried on in small out-houses which were no more than extensions of the home. The industrial unit was based upon the family with the addition of journeymen and apprentices who sometimes lived in. The finished product was sold directly to the shopkeeper but, in an effort to expand production to meet rising domestic demand, shopkeepers had begun to organise production on their own premises. Two early periods of swift growth, 1830-36 and 1845-50, established "the hand-powered factory",²⁷ and the application of machinery from the 1850s transformed this into a fully developed factory system. Once under way mechanisation, like the British experience in cotton, took on an accelerated logic:

26. Church, The Effect of the American Export Invasion ..., pp.235-37

27. The phrase is borrowed from Bythell, op.cit.

"The ever finer divisions and the new high-speed machines imparted a revolutionary dynamic to the industry. As speed and efficiency increased in one branch of production, other branches strained to catch up, and to restore equilibrium it was necessary for the whole industry to move at a much faster pace..... By 1880 every operation except cutting uppers and lasting had been brought up to the faster pace by the invention of new machines."²⁸

It has been suggested that mechanisation in the British boot and shoe industry was retarded by the great variety of styles made because this made the introduction of standardised machinery less economical.²⁹ Equally important must have been the comparative costs of labour and capital intensive modes of production, and the supply of labour. In London a surplus of labour acted to keep the price down and provided a disincentive to mechanisation. This was also true of the East Midlands where declining framework knitters joined those agricultural labourers who had already taken the road to 'shoetown'. Yet, mechanisation in the British industry began first in the East Midlands because of the lower cost of renting or buying factory space. Such costs in London erected a considerable barrier to mechanisation and resulted, in combination with the labour surplus, in the intensification of the existing division of labour. When this failed to keep all firms competitive migration was increasingly the preferred solution.

A final factor which differed between the American and British shoemaking industries was the maturity and strength of their respective labour movements. Shoemakers both sides of the Atlantic opposed the cultural destruction of the factory system. In America the major battles had been fought by the 1860s and the employers had successfully imposed the new industrial system. In Britain

28. Alan Dawley, Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn (1975), pp. 93-94, from which this account of the American shoemaking industry in Massachusetts is taken.

29. Church, The Effect of the American Export Invasion pp. 231-32.

the retarding factors discussed above delayed the conflict until the 1890s, by which time the employers were confronted by a powerful trade union which they had, hitherto, lacked the organisation to defeat. By that time, however, the superior competitive position of American capital forced them to act.

Four years before they did so by locking-out the workforce in 1895 an early warning had been sounded to trade unionists to desist from opposing machinery. Instead they were encouraged to strive for the "unfailing success in the New World."³⁰ This involved acceptance of the day work system in factories with its clocking-in and clocking-out.³¹ So compelling had grown the need for mechanisation that the full weight of capitalist morality began to be brought before its detractors:

"If it is true to say that the man who makes two blades of grass grow where one had grown before is a benefactor to his species, it is equally true to say that a manufacturer benefits his kind if, by his ingenuity, he can produce two pairs of boots at the cost of one. In both cases something that is needed by man is brought better within man's reach. The utilization of machinery may, therefore, be almost described as a duty which is owing to society, and the man who tries to retard its adoption are not only blind to their own interest, but are guilty of a social crime."³²

By 1892 hand-riveted work seemed destined to be replaced by machine-sewn in the near future but much remained to be done in completing the mechanisation of the lasting department and in bringing finishing into line.³³ In London finishing had proved particularly susceptible to the sub-division of labour and there appeared no reason to doubt machinery's capacity to adopt these tasks:³⁴

30. B.S.T.J.: 31 Jan., 1891

31. B.L.R.: 19 Jan., 1894

32. ibid.: 19 Feb., 1892

33. B.S.T.J.: 2 Jan., 1892

34. There was every incentive to mechanise finishing where lasting was already performed inside the factory. Where this had not been done, and where a surplus of cheap labour existed (as in the sweated London trade), the incentive was minimal.

"The process of lasting bids fair, by the aid of lasting machinery, to be split up into a dozen distinct processes, and the same courses must be followed in the process of finishing. Paring, breasting, scouring, colouring, edge setting, heel burnishing, bottom buffing, and "balling off" - which are generally regarded as the work of one man, must soon become distinct processes, performed by different hands and appliances. Rounding, undersoles, skiving, stiffeners, lasting over, filling up bottoms, laying on soles, raising channels, levelling bottoms, and building heels, are also designed to be performed in successive stages by separate persons."³⁵

Because the British boot and shoe industry served, primarily, its own home market it benefited particularly from the coming of mass consumption in the late nineteenth century.³⁶ Rising real incomes combined with population growth to produce a greater demand for clothing as for many other commodities. The effect upon the boot and shoe industry was to divert production away from the high-cost bespoke trade towards production of cheaper, ready-made goods which working people could afford. This was, essentially, a new market for the working class had, previously, worn mostly second-hand boots and shoes purchased from street dealers called 'translators'. The creation of a ready-made market provided every incentive to expand production, through mechanisation or other means. Between 1880 and 1914 mechanisation in the boot and shoe industry provided both the defence against American invasion of the home market and the means of expanding the export trade.³⁷ American imports first became a matter of great concern in the early 1890s, and particularly from 1894.³⁸ The Boot and Shoe Trades' Journal expressed its concern at the decline in exports, aggravated by an increase in imports, in October of that year. Its explanation of the contracting market placed the blame firmly at the feet of the consumer and the trade unionist. Under-consumption and the

35. *Ibid.* 23 April, 1892

36. *Sythell, op.cit.* pp. 195-96

37. *Ibid.* p. 198

38. Church, The Effect of the American Export Invasion, p.237.

demands of labour making employers uncompetitive were the roots of the problem, not the mythical over-production.³⁹ Appendix I shows the trend of imports and exports for the period 1885-1900. It will be seen that imports were contained at a slow rate of growth through the 1890s. It took until 1959 for them to exceed exports in number.⁴⁰

III. The structure of the London trade before the late nineteenth century

So far this chapter has discussed the broad economic forces making for change across the boot and shoemaking industry in the late nineteenth century. Each area responded differently, however, to the imperatives set up by these forces, according to its own distinctive economic and social characteristics. A manufacturer's propensity to mechanise production, for example, was determined by the balance of his costs. The cost and availability of factory space, the cost and supply of labour were both vital factors, as were the state of organisation of labour and its attitude towards technical change. Structural changes within the local economy proceeded according to the different balances achieved between these variables. In London the economic imperatives of the late nineteenth century were blunted by the defensive resilience of an ancient trade structure.

In a letter discussing the increasing division of labour in boot and shoemaking The B.S.T.J. wrote in 1892: "The man who could years ago cut, close and make is now rather an object of curiosity than an agent of utility."⁴¹ In London that complete shoemaker had hardly existed for 150 years for the division of labour, described at the beginning of this chapter, had been in operation some half-century before Adam Smith extolled its virtues in The Wealth of Nations (1776).

39. B.S.T.J.:i 13 Oct., 1894.

40. Ibid., op.cit., p.184.

41. B.S.T.J.:i 23 April, 1892

In the early eighteenth century London boot and shoemaking was dominated by master tradesmen working from retail shops. They gave out work to journeymen makers, and to closers who were often the wives and daughters of the journeymen. The master bootmaker would perform the clicking himself or, if he was prosperous, would employ a clicker to work at the back of his shop. This was the respectable portion of the trade producing bespoke and ready-made goods for the best market, and it had hardly changed in its intense craft pride when George Howell recalled the trade of his youth:

"Every portion was done by hand. The trained eye alone shaped the boot in so far as the sole was concerned, the last giving only such shape as suited the foot. In looking at a boot you forget the last; you took in only the shape of the sole from toe to heel. The edges then had to be pared ... The slightest scratch lessened its value ... It was an art as well as a craft, and the dons of the trade were not a little proud of their performances. The top boots and Wellingtons of that day were often highly artistic, especially the closing in the uppers ... and few, perhaps, remain who could undertake to make a pair of bespoke boots by hand that should be at all equal to those of 50 or 60 years ago."⁴²

It was this craft pride which the unrespectable garret masters, working and living in single rooms with their families and 'apprentices', offended. In 1738 the master bootmakers had made an unsuccessful attempt to prevent curriers and leather cutters from supplying these garret masters with their raw materials for, as they had probably served no apprenticeship, they were insufficiently skilled to do the cutting themselves.⁴³

The unrespectable trade survived all attempts at suffocation and expanded in the early years of the nineteenth century on the strength of government contracts. These were put out from the large warehouses of

42. George Howell, *Shop Life Sixty Years Ago* (c. 1900). Quoted in Stan Shipley, *Metropolitan Friendly Societies in the 1820s* (University of Warwick, M.A., 1975), p.28.

43. M.D. George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (1925), p.196 ff., from which this account of the 18th century trade is taken.

manufacturers who, if the price of the London garret master was not right, would send the work into the country. The garret master was, thus, forced to sweat his family and any young boys he could obtain cheap from the parish.⁴⁴

An employer described this degraded existence in 1838:

"..... I never knew a dozen steady men among them in my life ... Their families are in a filthy, abominable state, all in dirt and wretched. Many of them, instead of having lawful married wives, keep women whom they call tacks ... A man will send out his coat from the tap-room to pawn, or even his shoes, in order to get money to keep up the fuddle."⁴⁵

***"⁴⁶

That one-time London artisan Francis Place attributed the proliferation of unrespectable behaviour among shoemakers to the economic organisation of the trade. Firstly, he correctly pointed to the degradation of family life caused by making a workshop of the home. Secondly, he blamed the sub-division of labour for creating an uneven pattern of work. A maker might be delayed by work arriving late from the closer, or closers by similar delays on the part of the clicker. The accumulated frustrations might then find their recourse in drinking.⁴⁷ This would further reduce his level of earnings which were already lower than many other artisanal trades not in decline.

44. Jorwerth Prothero, Artisans and Politics in early Nineteenth Century London John Cast and his Times (1979), pp. 44-45.

45. 'Fuddle' meant taking a short holiday from work, normally for the purpose of an extended bout of drinking. The shoemaker would use his small savings until they ran out and might be away from home for a few days. The word 'fuddle' was also used in the Lanarkshire mines to denote the pay received for a piece-load, measured against the quantity of drink it would purchase (Alan Campbell, Honourable Men and Degraded Slaves: A social history of trade unionism in the Lanarkshire coalfield, 1775 - 1874, with particular reference to the Coatbridge and Larkhall districts University of Warwick, Ph.D., 1976).

46. Quoted in M.D. George, op.cit. p.199

47. Ibid. p.200.

It would be a mistake, however, to attribute heavy drinking only to the unrespectable outworker for it could be found in respectable quarters, too. One of Mayhew's interviewees started work at the West End shop of Hoby's in 1815 at the rate of £3 per week. He found that:

"The bootmen then at Mr. Hoby's were all respectable men; they were like gentlemen smoking their pipes, in their frilled shirts, like gentlemen - all but the drunkards."⁴⁸

Jim Saunders' family had worked for the exclusive West End firm of John Lobb for at least two generations when he was interviewed in the early 1970s. His grandfather, a highly skilled man and a staunch trade unionist, had told him how common it was, in his day, for men 'to go on the fuddle'.⁴⁹ It would seem that drinking or its absence, is not a good indicator of respectability among shoemakers for its uses ranged from the miserable escapism of the 'lumpen proletariat' to the independent assertiveness of the artisan.

If the unrespectable trade had thrived in the early years of the nineteenth century this had not been at the expense of its better quality neighbour. The unprecedented inflation of the war years had resulted in corresponding wage demands which seem to have been met more often than not.⁵⁰ Journeymen working in the respectable trade came to organise the friendly societies of the metropolis by the 1820s.⁵¹ The most prominent of these was William Viells, a West End ladies' shoemaker, who co-operated with John Gast to defeat the unfavourable Friendly Societies Bill in 1828.⁵²

Shoemakers such as Viells may have served an apprenticeship when they had entered the trade. By the end of the wars, however, it had almost disappeared. John Brown arrived in London in 1811 after leaving a master who

48. Yao and Thompson (ed.), *op.cit.* p.241.

49. Brian Dobbs, *The Last Shoemaker First: The Colourful Story of John Lobb, The St. James' Bootmakers (1972)*, p.5.

50. Prothero, *op.cit.* p.41.

51. Shipley, *op.cit.* p.183.

52. *ibid.* pp.103-04; Prothero, *op.cit.* chapter 12.

had neglected to honour the terms of indenture. He continued to learn the man's trade by sharing lodgings with other outworkers in the City, eventually becoming a skilled and well-paid shoemaker.⁵³ The period after 1815 was for most shoemakers in the respectable trade one of constant retreat, however. If they managed to hold their own during times of expansion each depression saw them take one step backwards. Warehouses selling cheap goods from garret masters in London or Northampton multiplied, letting into the trade increasing numbers of the unskilled who aggravated the now constant problem of a labour surplus.⁵⁴

The growth of a genuine, cheap ready-made market among the working class of London resulted in a shift in the geographical concentration of production towards the east of the city. The 'slop' trade, as the unrespectable trade came to be known by mid-century, supplied its own, local market and grew up upon the garret master tradition. "But it was to dwarf the productive capacity of the old, small-scale outwork through further accentuation of the division of labour. This involved an increasingly ruthless exploitation of the labour surplus."

In Mayhew's interviews, conducted in early 1850, the concern of the more skilled workers at the spread of the slop trade is evident. So substantial and distinct had the slop trade become that Mayhew devotes a separate section to it. One respondent went as far as suggesting that the ever-increasing number of "inferior employers" constituted an "illegal trade".⁵⁵ An "intelligent member of the West-end trade" thought that, although both cheap French imports and the exploitation of child labour in Northampton were both competitive problems for London, the most important pressure upon wages came from over-competition among employers.⁵⁶ A West-end saw round maker

53. Mansfield, op.cit., p.130.

54. Prothero, op.cit., pp.212-13.

55. Yeo and Thompson (ed.), op.cit., p.234

56. Ibid., p.240

attributed his decline in wages (from 32s. in 1836 to 24s. in 1850) to French competition and "more sloop shops."⁵⁷ De-skilling, the over-supply of labour and undercutting, provincial competition had, of course, posed problems for the London trade since the early nineteenth century. The 'free trade budgets' of Peel's government between 1841 and 1846 served to aggravate these. After the 1842 budget, and before the repeal of the Corn Laws, London boot and shoemakers agitated for an end to 'one-sided free trade', which admitted foreign manufactured goods but not cheap corn and timber. It drove many into the Chartist movement.⁵⁸ Cheap bread, by the 1850s, severely balanced the issue a little more evenly for the importation of French boots and shoes caused the English workman to work harder by imitating the intricate embellishments of the French styles. In the expansive age of free trade he seems to have met the challenge reasonably well. "Thousands of ladies' French shoes, that never saw France, are made at this end of the town, and worn by the first ladies in the land."⁵⁹

Most bootmakers escaped the demands of greater skill, however, for the sloop market cared little for things French. The ranks of these bootmakers continued to be diluted by all sorts and conditions of men: milkmen, glaziers, lawyers' clerks, linen drapers, and many others who sought in the relatively unskilled sloop trade refuge from unemployment. Through Bethnal Green, Whitechapel and Spitalfields small chamber masters sprung up like wild mushrooms through the late 1840s; here today and sometimes gone tomorrow. In Bethnal Green there existed an organised market in child labour twice a week to meet their needs. Round the warehouses of the East End roamed these chamber masters, who made not to contract but 'on spec', hawking their wares and undercutting each other through the miserable daily grind of scratching a subsistence living.⁶⁰

57. *Ibid.*, p.249.

58. Prothero, *op.cit.*, p.325.

59. Yeo and Thompson (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.256. See also p.246.

60. *Ibid.*, pp.254-79.

Sweating firms such as A.W. Flatau and Co. of Finsbury bought in much of this slop work. These few details taken from a brief history of the firm serve as a rarely discovered example of the operation of such a concern. It is clear that although Flatau's dealt in much sweated work they also made better-quality goods, for they won a medal at the French Trade Exhibition in 1839. They were also early users of the Blake Sole Sewer (shortly after 1859) and had become sufficiently mechanised by 1900 to move from Finsbury to new premises in Tottenham Hale. From the 1850s the firm had developed a considerable export trade with Australia, eventually becoming responsible for 75% of that country's imported boots and shoes. They were badly hit, however, by the commercial crisis which struck Australia in 1893 and this forced them to expand their domestic market by opening retail shops. By 1914 their export trade had recovered sufficiently for them to be sending goods to most European countries and to the U.S.A. The war again hit their overseas trade and forced them to resort once more to domestic retailing. Some compensation had been gained by supplying the armies of France, Italy, Serbia, and the colonies, in addition to those of Great Britain. (They had also supplied the French armies during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71).⁶¹

Thomas Pocock and Sons of South London competed in the same ready-made market as Flatau's but made consistently better-quality work; they were not known as sweaters. Unfortunately, no information has been found as to the kind of markets they served, at home or abroad. Like Flatau's they had been founded in the years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars and continued to be a family firm through the nineteenth century. They also developed a chain of retail shops.⁶²

61. A.W. Flatau and Co. Ltd., Henry Playfair Ltd., Metropolitan Boot Co. Ltd., Foundation and History, 120 Years (1948).

62. Shoe and Leather News, 4 Oct., 1962, 'Pocock's 1815-1962 (special feature pamphlet). Thomas Pocock senior, the founder of the firm, had married into the famous Northampton shoemaking family of Gutch (See, R.A. Church Gutch and Sons, Journal of the British Boot and Shoe Institution, Oct. 1957). He also became a philanthropist through establishing the Royal Blind Pensioners Fund in 1863. This society delivered pensions by hand all over the country in order that the monthly visit should act as a social occasion for the recipients.

The third firm's history which can be used to illustrate the different branches of the London trade is that of John Lobb. This was a very different business to that of Flatau and Pocock as it operated within the top class bespoke market of the West End. Lobb had left his native Cornwall intent upon plying his trade in the best London shops but, on being refused work by Thomas's of St. James's then the most respected firm in the bespoke trade, he emigrated to Australia in the 1860s. He returned to London in 1866, after obtaining recognition for his work at an international exhibition held in Australia, and set up on his own at 296, Regent Street. By 1880 he had achieved his ambition of rivalling the firm that had once rejected him by opening his second shop at 29, St. James's Street. Today, the reputation of the firm as bespoke shoemakers, and their collection of lasts, is international and they have kept alive the outwork tradition that has died in all the other branches of the trade. Outworking-shoemakers like Billy Bower, who was first employed by Lobb's in 1892 and worked for them for over sixty years, became antiquarian oddities in the London economy of the twentieth century.⁶³

IV. The structure of the London trade in the late nineteenth century

Within the domestic market, particularly, the London industry, in this period, came under increasing competition from the provinces. In Leicester and Northampton the fact that labour costs, rents and other overheads were lower provided a greater incentive to mechanise. Such decisions were never obvious ones, however, for the existence of a highly-developed village outwork industry in the immediate vicinities of these towns enabled cheap production without responsibility for labour discipline. For any manufacturer the taking indoors of the making process required a substantial capital outlay upon which he was unlikely to receive a compensating return for some time. In addition, there was the social problem of organising and disciplining a rural labour

63. Dobbs, op.cit., p.17.

force not easily persuaded into relinquishing the long cherished freedom of the outwork system. Transforming the mode of production proved a slow and uneven process but, by the 1880s, there were enough capitalists beginning to show rewards to place severe competitive pressure upon those who had been more conservative.

The economy of East London had been in a state of transition since the 1860s. Silk-weaving, the old, staple industry of Bethnal Green and Spitalfields, was undergoing an irreversible decline and was dealt a terminal blow by the free trade treaty with France of 1860. Bootmakers, cabinet makers and tailors, already firmly established by that date, moved into the vacated industrial premises and the clack of the loom was gradually silenced. From the 1880s Spitalfields became the refuge of a new group of immigrants whose poverty exacerbated the decline of a once prosperous district:

"Jewish Spitalfields assumed the gloomy somnolence of a city of dreadful night The once splendid three storeyed dwellings of Huguenot silk merchants had been sub-divided into lodging rooms and/or workshops, all reduced to a condition where decay and foul sanitation were commonplace."⁶⁴

The collapse of the Thames shipbuilding industry in 1867 further aggravated an already serious casual labour problem.⁶⁵

Thus, the principal industries of East London were over-supplied long before the arrival of the immigrants of the 1880s, and none more so than boot and shoemaking. The response of that local industry to increased competition, first from the provinces, later from abroad, was not to transfer production from home workshop to factory, for London costs precluded this as a solution. Instead, the existing division of labour was intensified in a ruthless attempt to remain competitive. These were the economic origins of what became known as the sweating system in the boot and shoemaking industry in the late nineteenth century.

64. William J. Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicalism, 1875-1914* (1975), p.51.

65. S. Pollard, *The Decline of Shipbuilding on the Thames*, *Economic History Review*, 2, vol. 3, 1950-51.

Some prescient manufacturers gave up the struggle early and migrated to the provinces; the wage structure the London bootmaking trade certainly provided them with every incentive to do this. By the mid-1870s wages in the better class, ready-made trade were regulated by the statement system; a method of payment more generalised than the old shop statements. The first and second class statements had been imposed by the local trade unions in 1872 and 1875, respectively, and maintained the privileged wage position of their members by a system of restrictive classification.⁶⁶ In the 1860s and 1870s the best boots were made of glace kid leather and, to satisfy the dictates of fashion, normally contained considerable embellishments. If manufacturers wished to make boots from leathers not legislated for in the statements then this could only be done with the agreement of the unions. Similar agreement had to be reached on the inclusion of new embellishments. Thus, the statements were restrictive in so far as they prevented the introduction of new work by employers without union consent. Their function is obvious: they gave the unions considerable control over the nature of the work produced and the rates paid for it.

By the early 1880s, however, the statements of the 1870s were becoming increasingly obsolete as the structure of the market changed. The cheap ready-made trade expanded rapidly at the expense of the better class, ready-made and the bespoke. Glace kid leather was no longer the prized material it had once been, and many imitations invaded the market. Fashion, too, changed; the new mass market was cultivated with embellishments and the better quality goods became plainer. Such changes began to undermine the statement worker's privileged position and he began to look around desperately for some means of preservation. As he could not control demand, nor effect the changes in fashion, he clung conservatively to the source of his old privileges and in

66. A term used in the trade to describe the principles upon which the statements had been drawn up.

Canute-like rebellion against the market, permitted new work to be introduced only at statement prices. From being originally a rate for the job, the statements had become a rate for the man. Stripped of the former exclusiveness of his materials, and denuded of much of his skill by an intensified division of labour, the statement worker reached for his last remaining shield: organisational capacity. The trade union would protect him from the market forces which threatened to cast him down to the levels of ordinary men.

In a stimulating recent study Charles More has drawn the distinction in late nineteenth century industry between genuine skill and socially constructed skill. The former he defines as "... some combination of manual skill and knowledge, not necessarily very considerable, which is useful to industry"; the latter is the "attribution to workers of labels denoting them as skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled, together with the differentiation of wages and status which usually accompanies such labelling."⁶⁷ Statement bootmakers in London were losing their genuine skill and were embarking upon a process of socially constructing skill through clinging to the old structures of work. This did not happen in quite the same way in the other boot and shoemaking areas because the systems of classifying work were so various and complex.⁶⁸ The London bootmaking experience was more similar to 'the capturing of the machine' in engineering by which "fitters and turners maintained their level of wages relative to other groups even though the work they were engaged on was relatively less skilled than before, and could have been performed by workers paid at lower rates."⁶⁹ The engineers' victory in this respect was short-lived, however, when compared to the degree of craft regulation exerted by the

67. Charles More, Skill and the English Working Class, 1870-1914 (1980), p.16.

68. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O., pp. 62-63, for examples.

69. More, op.cit. p.16.

compositors over their changing technology.⁷⁰ The bootmakers' rearguard action was equally short-lived.

Thus, the aristocracy of labour found in the ready-made bootmaking industry in London was an essentially localised phenomenon in decline by the 1880s. Its economic base had been its greater degree of skill in relation to the rest of the workforce, and, upon this, it had built a trade union organisation which could defend its interests within the market. The trade union was to be the vehicle which undertook the journey from genuine to socially-constructed skill. In arguing for the primacy of economic factors this analysis lends support to Hobsbawm's emphasis upon the level and regularity of earnings as the first determinants of a labour aristocracy.⁷¹ This is in no way designed to minimise the importance of a cultural analysis of labour aristocracy which I would see as a complementary, rather than an alternative, method. The focus of this study is, primarily, upon the work-class and its industrial relations, but, where possible, evidence drawn from the wider cultural experience of boot and shoemakers has been offered in support of the main arguments.

This study also seeks to correct, through attending to local differences, crude national generalisations about labour aristocracy in boot and shoemaking of the sort perpetrated by Pelling. He mistakenly assumes that the Amalgamated Union of hand craftsmen collapsed altogether in the 1870s, and that this undermined any basis for the development of a labour aristocracy.⁷² A reading of the Webbs' 'History of Trade Unionism' should have corrected this error. In fact, the Amalgamated did not collapse at all after it ceded most of its

70. Jonathan Zeitlin, Craft control and the division of labour: engineers and compositors in Britain, 1890-1930, Cambridge Journal of Economics, 1979, 3, pp.263-74.

71. Hobsbawm, The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain.

72. Henry Pelling, The Concept of a Labour Aristocracy, in Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain (1968), p.49.

ready-made members to the National Union in 1874. On the contrary, it survived very well as a result of its willingness to accept technical change and its non-sectarian behaviour towards the offspring of that change, the National Union.⁷³ Pelling's account suffers from a too homogeneous view of boot and shoemakers. If a labour aristocracy exists at all, he assumes, then surely it is to be found with the traditional hand craftsmen. In fact, the bespoke and ready-made are best viewed as separate markets (although there was some overlap) within which the workforces had little contact with each other. A labour aristocracy might develop in either but not in relation to each other.

Having described the statement sector of the trade it must be said that, even by 1890, only a minority of firms in the London trade observed any statement at all. David Schloss estimated that there were about 40 statement firms, 15 paying to the first class and 25 to the second, with another 6 paying intermediate rates between the two.⁷⁴ These figures are approximately supported by evidence from the trade journals. In addition to the 6 additional firms mentioned by Schloss there were a few others producing statement quality work who agreed with the unions to pay at, or about, statement rates. Lilley and Skinner's were such a firm, and they shared the great concern of the statement manufacturers, proper, over the undercutting practices of the sweated trade. They argued that if there could not be total freedom from the restrictions of the statement system, then complete adherence to it by all firms making the same quality work was the only guarantee of fair competition.

Between the statement and sweated trade was the intermediate⁷⁵ stratum of work. It was by far the largest of the three strata; within it over 300

73. The Amalgamated maintained an independent existence until the 1950s, when it merged with U.S.D.A.W. This is a remarkable persistence. (I am grateful to Ms. C. Coates, Librarian to the T.U.C., for this information).

74. Schloss, *op.cit.*, pp.300-01.

75. I am using intermediate in the same sense as Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O., p.107.

firms⁷⁶ (in the late 1880s) produced work ranging from second-class statement quality, at the top end, to sweated, at the bottom. The S.L.R. thought that the vast majority of firms in the intermediate sector paid to their own shop statement, approved by the unions. But, these shop statements were frequently dishonoured when trade slackened and, in the majority of cases, should only be assumed to apply in the busy seasons.

The lowest class of work was that performed in the sweated sector. This was the late nineteenth century inheritor of the earlier 'unrespectable' and 'slop' traditions. There is scarcely more than a title to separate them in structure for the sweated trade continued to be organised on the putting-out system. The volume of goods produced was greater, however, by the late nineteenth century. An impression of this expansion can be gained from Appendix III. The essential difference between the sweated trade and its predecessors was that, from the 1880s, it became heavily supplied by Jewish, immigrant labour. Sweated work, by whatever name, had always undercut the lowest part of the work immediately above it, but it became a different, more sensitive issue when this was also a matter of Jews undercutting Englishmen. The greatest insecurity was expressed by those English bootmakers who worked laterally with, or just above, the immigrant workforce.

Analyses of precisely what constituted sweated labour, and recommendations as to how to effect its swift removal, were hardly lacking in the late 1880s and early 1890s. As Bythell has rightly observed:

76. This estimate is based upon the recognition in the trade journals that there were about 40 sweating manufacturers. If these are added to the 40 statement manufacturers and the total deducted from the generally agreed figure of 400 firms for the whole of the ready-made trade, one is left with 320.

"Sweating' became a social problem in the late nineteenth century precisely because it combined low pay and long hours in a world where average real incomes had risen and where the shorter working day of nine or ten hours had become almost universal."⁷⁷

Yet, there was no universal solution to the problem of sweated labour precisely because it had no common cause. It is true that all sweated industries depended upon the availability of cheap labour, and that competition within the labour force acted as a major impediment to trade union growth - one obvious means of remedying low wages and poor working conditions. But, the circumstances through which that labour surplus had been created differed, not only from industry to industry, but within industries. In boot and shoemaking London's surplus labour problem had been created by a combination of industrial decline, population growth and immigration. In Leicester, however, immigration was scarcely a factor, and only the decline of the framework knitters was significant apart from population growth. In Northampton the local economy was different again, and rural-urban migration was a major supplier of labour to the town in the form of landworkers.

However, investigations such as the Lords' Committee on Sweating proceeded on the assumption that an element of common causation must exist. They believed that some structural economic defect must account for the fact that sweated workers were working long hours in poor conditions for very low wages. Sweated labour was treated as an aberration within an otherwise healthy capitalist economy, instead of as an integral, and perfectly intelligible, part of it.

This argument can be further clarified by a more detailed analysis of the division of labour within the London bootmaking industry. By the 1880s the change in comparative costs with the provinces meant that an intensification of the division of labour was the only viable solution. This tendency combined with an increasing supply of labour to produce additional pressure

77. Sythell, op.cit., p.150.

upon wage rates, and wages were already under constant pressure due to the system of sub-contracting. This resulted in what Hobbsawm has described as "a co-exploitation of labour" which he integrates within the development of the capitalist economy as follows:

"Capitalism in its early stages expands, and to some extent operates, not so much by directly subordinating large bodies of workers to employers, but by sub-contracting exploitation and management. The characteristic structure of an archaic industry is one in which all grades except the lowest labourers contain men and women who have some sort of 'profit incentive' ... Such a labyrinth of inter-locking sub-contracts had certain advantages. It enabled small-scale enterprises to expand operations without raising unmanageably great masses of circulating capital, it provided incentives to all groups of workers worth humouring, and it enabled industry to meet sharp fluctuations in demand without having to carry a permanent burden of overhead expenditure."⁷⁸

This model is a useful one, and although not directly applicable in every way to the late nineteenth century London bootmaking industry, two points may be made from it. Firstly, co-exploitation reduced costs in the form of fixed capital, rents and wages at a time when cost reduction was essential in order to remain competitive with provincial industry. Secondly, when the capitalist sub-contracted work he also sub-contracted responsibility for labour discipline. The master sweater, in control of the workshop, absorbed this responsibility under the minimum of profit incentive. As incentives fell even further through the 1880s master sweaters rejected this sub-contracted function by forming their own trade union. In 1888 Charles Solomon, secretary of this union, estimated that wages had fallen by 30-40% in the last three or four years.⁷⁹ By 1890 the master sweaters' union decided upon a complete solution of the contradiction of its position. Increasingly squeezed and played-off against each other by manufacturers, they identified with the sweated and joined the movement to abolish sub-contracting through indoor working.

78. Hobbsawm, The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain, pp.297-98.

79. P.P. 1888, XX; Select Committee on the Sweating System, p.69.

Co-exploitation through sub-contracting was used in many other industries apart from boot and shoemaking, of course. The "butty system" in the mines is well known, and other forms operated in engineering and the building trades. In building Price has concluded that the presence of a great reserve pool of labour that could be hired and fired at will accentuated fluctuations within an industry that already suffered from uneven employment patterns.⁸⁰ "The ineluctable logic of sub-contracting was to subvert and to continually depress reasonable standards of working conditions."⁸¹ These things were also true of boot and shoemaking, but sub-contracting here brought one further disadvantage. However arduous the conditions of labour miners, engineers and builders did not return at the end of the day to a home taken over by the tools and materials of their trades. Workers in the outwork trades did, and the invasion of the home by the visible symbols of their exploited labour was a constant humiliation to them.

The system of sub-contracting from wholesale manufacturer to master sweater was further complicated by the existence of factors. These middlemen made nothing but lived by putting out to the lowest bidder and then selling to manufacturers from their accumulated warehouse supply. Dealings between factors and manufacturers were hardly ever in the complete commodity. For example, the manufacturer could buy in from the factor closed tops or cut soles. He might also use the factor to put out his own work to the sweated trade, perhaps to avoid his own statement. It was also possible for manufacturers to buy in work which their own statement might prevent them from making, and then to sell it to the retail trade. Factors, themselves, were often ex-manufacturers who had been forced out of production for one reason or another.

80. Price, Masters, Unions and Men, p.26.

81. ibid., p.30.

The commodity most commonly produced by the London ready-made trade was women's boots. Children's boots and shoes were the next most common. Slippers were also produced, along with light shoes called saw-rouns because the sole sawing continued around the heel. The latter were often called turn-shoes because the stitching of upper to sole (lasting) was done inside out and then reversed for finishing. This kind of work was specialised, however, and it must be remembered that most footwear in the nineteenth century was boots, which were more durable and protective in an era when conditions under foot were somewhat less solid and hygienic than they are today. Shoes were generally regarded as very lightweight dresswear and were, thus, seldom worn by the working classes. Men's boots were little made in London but tended to be produced in the East Midlands with the exception of bespoke work which was done by the 'men's men' of the West End. The East End industry mostly served its own, local market which demanded the cheapest work.

The bootmaking trade was seasonal which meant that only a few at the best end of the market enjoyed regularity of earnings. The pattern of seasonality is clearly shown by the table below. It is taken from some rare and invaluable evidence of the business transactions of twelve unnamed firms found in the Booth Collection.

Table 1: Seasonality in the London Boot and Shoemaking Industry (Oct. 1885 - Sept. 1886).

	<u>Date of</u> <u>busiest</u> <u>week</u>	<u>Date of</u> <u>slackest</u> <u>week</u>	<u>Nos. employed</u> <u>busiest week(A)</u>	<u>Nos. employed</u> <u>slackest week(B)</u>	<u>(B) as a</u> <u>% of (A)</u>
Firm 2	4 April	8 August	33	24	72.72
Firm 3	27 June	14 November	70	27	38.57
Firm 4	22 May	4 December	67	34	50.75
Firm 6	10 October	- April	37	32	86.49
Firm 7	10 April	17 April	95	90	94.74
Firm 8	23 May	26 December	43	32	74.42
Firm 9	24 October	2 January	25	15	60.00
Firm 12	23 May	22 August	4	4	100.00

Source: Booth Collection: A.19, p.203.

From the information contained in Table I, which was only supplied by eight of the twelve firms, some suggestions about seasonality and regularity of employment can be made. Firstly, the busiest period of trade was around Easter (April) and early summer (May and June); closely followed by autumn (October). We know from information in the trade journals that new styles were brought onto the market at these times to try to capture the anticipated trade. The autumn rush, unlike the other two, catered more for the coming winter's needs. (The bespoke trade, more than the ready made, was tied to the itinerary of the upper classes 'coming up to town' and 'going down to the country'). The slackest periods were through the mid-winter months (November - January), and at the end of the Easter and summer seasons (April and August). The mean for the percentage of the labour force shed in the slackest week compared with the busiest week is 26.54. Thus, one in four bootmakers might expect to be thrown upon the casual labour market during the slackest periods, and this takes no account of possible causes of unemployment other than seasonality. The precariousness of a bootmaker's livelihood is further illustrated by Table II, below.

[illegible]

These occupations have been selected from a much longer list as representative of groups from the lower middle class down to the lower working class. The following points can be made about the comparative position of boot and shoemakers. Firstly, the percentage of bootmakers who have suffered some degree of unemployment in the four south parties (42.6%) ranks exactly mid-way in the list of occupations. They fared worse than the lower middle-class groups and shopworkers, printers and engineers, but better than cabinet makers, painters, labourers and dockers. However, if one turns to those who remained in work then boot and shoemakers' pattern of work is highly irregular. Only

painters had a smaller percentage of their sample working regularly, and no group had a higher percentage of its employed working irregularly. Too much cannot be claimed for such a limited survey, but such evidence is extremely rare and it does tend to confirm the impression given by other sources that boot and shoemakers ranked towards the bottom of the artisan class by the late nineteenth century.⁸²

If a bootmaker were laid off in the summer months he might always take a working holiday in the hop fields of Kent. 'Dovetailing' in a companion trade such as harness making was another possibility. But these were limited opportunities. Through the worst winter months, November to February, he was faced with his slackest time of the year, for the light women's boots which were his staple trade had little winter demand. So, many found themselves joining the casual labour queue outside the dock gates on freezing winter mornings. The Select Committee on Sweating were given much evidence of bootmakers having to turn to dock labour.⁸³ G.E. Green, secretary of the clickers' union thought that it was the recent immigration that was forcing bootmakers into becoming dock labourers.⁸⁴ Ben Tillett was still a member of the bootmakers' union when he founded the Tea Operatives' and General Labourers' Union, although he was working, at the time, in the Monument ware-house near London Bridge.⁸⁵ John Burns was never more than an honorary docker but he too had trained as a bootmaker before becoming an apprentice engineer.⁸⁶

82. Crossick, *An Artisan Elite*, chap. 6.

83. P.P. 1888, XXI: Select Committee on Sweating, p.472.

84. P.P. 1892, XXVI: Royal Commission on Labour, Group C, p.151.

85. Ben Tillett, *Memories and Reflections* (1931), p.94.

86. Kenneth D. Brown, *John Burns* (1977), p.7. Burns had trained as a rivetter with Wilson's of Wandsworth.

Seasonality was aggravated by the over-supply of labour. Manufacturers, knowing full well that orders could be placed with the minimum of notice, declined to make for stock during periods of low demand. The risk-taking component of entrepreneurship could be reduced to the minimum under such conditions. John Day⁸⁷ thought that London manufacturers were becoming cautious to the extreme when he reminded his readers that, "within reasonable limits speculation is the soul of business."⁸⁸

Because work was so keenly competed for bribery of the foreman at the wicket⁸⁹ was commonplace. But, it was only the larger sweating masters who could afford this, and they were already favoured by manufacturers because their size enabled them to work more cheaply. Others were quite likely to suffer the same fate as one poor wretch interviewed by the S.L.R. during its special investigation into the sweating system:

" This morning I went in to shop, and he make me stand outside for two hours; not in the passage, but outside in the cold street. I was shivering all over with the cold. Then my husband came to look for me, and I went home to the children; and he had to wait in the street; and he came home four hours after I first went to shop."

" Then," said the man, "they gave me out some work that must be in in the morning, or else they say they will give me the sack. So that often, after wasting my time in the day, we have to work all night."

" And," broke in the woman, "they speak to us like dogs. They swear at us and call us bad names."⁹⁰

Many firms issued printed rules to employees imposing fines and deductions for the most trivial offences. One Finsbury firm, for example, fined its workers 1s. for not returning work on the day promised, 3d. per pair for all work not tied together properly, and 3d. for defacing walls or writing over bills stuck there.⁹¹ The latter offences must have been a great temptation to those who had been waiting four hours for work to be given out.

87. Editor of The Shoe and Leather Record.

88. S.L.R.: 5 June, 1886.

89. The gate at the warehouse from which work was given out.

90. S.L.R.: 7 April, 1886.

91. Ibid.: 21 April, 1886.

Such privately imposed contracts proved restrictive enough from the workers' point of view, but employers had not scrupled to invoke the law when it could be turned to their advantage over small matters. George Odger provided evidence as to how the Master and Servant Laws had been used against him in this way. Having to be away on trade union business for about a week Odger went to explain his forthcoming absence to his employer, who then asked Odger to take some work with him and to complete it when he could. Returning after seven days Odger received an ultimatum to return the completed work within the legally stipulated time of eight days or face prosecution. He was then forced to work all night after having spent the whole of the previous day on union business. Odger argued for abolition of the laws not only because they discriminated against the workman⁹² but, also, because employers breached them so regularly that they were virtually inoperative. He gave as a further example the practice by which employers might give out soles nine or ten days after the uppers.⁹³ In the meantime a bootmaker would be forced to seek some work elsewhere, but was still legally bound to return work within eight days. Although actual prosecutions occurred infrequently he thought the law was used to "terrify" workmen, as it had been with him.⁹⁴

The patient outworker also had to tolerate charitable deductions from his wages. One victim reported that in lieu of work valued at 15s. he had received 13s. cash and two tickets for the chest hospital.⁹⁵ (He said that if he dared to complain he would certainly be sacked). Just as common were weekly deductions designed to prevent a worker from moving to another employer. These

92. Who was subject to prosecution under the criminal law (and, thus, possible imprisonment) for breach of contract, while employers only to the civil law. This was reformed in 1875 by the Employers' and Workmen Act.

93. Odger worked in the bespoke ladies' trade.

94. P.P. 1866, XIII; Select Committee on Contracts between Master and Servant, pp. 81-86.

95. S.L.B.: 21 April, 1885.

would be taken during the busy season and returned during the slack, when there was no chance of the employee being able to find alternative work. If he or she did leave during the busy season then the sum was forfeitable. It was the worst sweating masters, such as Lion Bros. of Finsbury, who made most use of this practice because they were most likely to lose labour. In 1888 they had been taken to court by a finisher to whom they owed 12s. in wages, but the practice was upheld. The S.L.R. then ran a campaign against the firm which led to a question being asked in the House of Commons. In reply, the Attorney General said that he thought the practice of doubtful legality, but, as the S.L.R. sardonically commented, it was few working men who could afford to test it.

There were only a few ways in which the shoemaker could 'get some of his own back.' The most common seems to have been simple stealing, for the trade journals and union reports are full of descriptions of wanted men who had made off with work. Organised firms were indemnified against such losses by the unions, however. 'Killing a pair' was a more subtle dishonesty and amounted to delaying the return of work for so long that the employer eventually forgot about it.⁹⁶ It was unlikely that many employers were beset with such short memories. Another common craft practice, used by men seeking work, was imposture. They would take a sample of work made by a better craftsman than themselves to an employer in the hope of being taken on. Jim Saunders' grandfather had vivid memories of this practice in his day:

"Some fine pairs, until they were too familiar not to be recognised, did service all over the West End as examples of the work of many a different pair of hands."⁹⁷

In the absence of firms' records it has been difficult to make authoritative statements about such important matters as rates of profit,

96. Dobbs, op. cit., pp.56-57.

97. ibid., p.55.

wages, size of the industrial unit and the comparative composition of the labour force. What evidence that has been collected is stronger for the period after 1880 than before, and relies, principally, upon the major surveys undertaken by Booth and Mayhew, or upon the published statements of people actually working in the trade or with a good knowledge of it, e.g. as can be found in parliamentary inquiries or the trade journals. Any conclusions offered must, therefore, be tentative ones.

Booth, in the research done in the early 1890s for the 1902 edition of Life and Labour ..., estimated that there were ten employees to every employer in the London boot and shoemaking industry. The average for the 32 trades selected was 14.84,⁹⁸ which confirms the impression given by other sources that small-scale enterprise was the norm. In the Booth Collection there is a much more detailed description of the accounts of twelve unnamed firms for the year preceding 1st October, 1886. This has been revised and presented as Appendix II.⁹⁹

The sample is a highly selective and often incomplete one. It is particularly distorted by the inclusion of a number of large and medium sized firms but only a few smaller ones which, according to Booth's wider findings, were typical of the London industry. The larger firms employed a higher proportion of their labour indoors, and the particularly high figure of 71.6% of all workers working indoors is caused by their presence in the sample. Other anomalies include: the high wage figure for outdoor machine closers (53s. 11d.), the well-paid position of finishers (who were earning more than clickers), and the extremely badly-paid position of saw-round makers (who were worse paid than boys). Despite this the description of the labour force does give a reasonably clear impression of which types of workers worked outdoors and which indoors. Machine and hand closers, rivetters, finishers, binders

98. C. Booth, op.cit. (1902 ed.), 2nd series, vol.5, p.56.

99. Booth Collection: A.19, p.203.

and trimmers, and hand-sawn and saw-round workers fell mainly into the first category; clickers, rough stuff cutters, and lasters into the second. Another clearly discernible correlation is between outwork and piece payment. Only lasters combined indoor working with piece payment to a considerable degree, although among the 59.7% of finishers working indoors many retained piece payment, also. Some outworkers, such as binders and saw-round makers, had gone over to weekly wages. From this incomplete and very restricted sample it would appear that traditional outworkers, such as lasters and finishers, are found working inside the "hand-powered factory"¹⁰⁰ to a greater degree than one might expect from consulting other sources of a more impressionistic nature.¹⁰¹ It is likely that where this had occurred by 1890 it was the larger manufacturers who had led the way.

It has been argued that the structure of the local economy within which the London bootmaker worked in the late Victorian and Edwardian period was determined by the nature of state legislative intervention.¹⁰² In this view central importance is placed upon the stimulus given to small, workshop production and the outwork system by the various factory and workshop acts passed during the period. In so doing it under-estimates the effects of market forces, such as renting and labour costs, but it does, nevertheless, further explain the persistence of sweated, workshop labour by adding a dimension that has hardly been attended to previously.

The stimulus given to small, workshop production by the 1867 Act was clearly understood by Captain C. Patrick, the Assistant Inspector of Factories for London, in his evidence to the Parliamentary Commissioners in 1876:

100. Bythell, op.cit. p.184.

101. Trade Journals and Union reports, for example.

102. James A. Schiechen, *State Reform and the Local Economy: An Aspect of Industrialization in Late Victorian and Edwardian London*, E.H.R., 2. XXVIII, Vol. 3, 1975.

"I will tell you how I think this system (outwork) has arisen within the last year, it is to avoid coming under the rules of the Factory Act. By employing a certain number, above 50, they would come under the Factory Act; their work increasing they would come under that Act if they had this labour done at their own workshops, and therefore they sent it out in order to keep their number under 50, and so it is done by the people in their own private dwellings."¹⁰³

The problem, in fact, reached back to the 1867 Factory Act which defined a workshop as a place of employment containing fewer than fifty people and a factory as one containing more than fifty. Workshops were allowed longer opening hours than factories and had fewer restrictions placed upon their employment of child labour. A new Act in 1878 was designed to eradicate the flaws described in Patrick's evidence by changing the definition of a workshop to a place of work using only hand power. But, it still left workshops with considerable advantages over factories. They were difficult to inspect because a warrant had to be obtained from a J.P. or the Secretary of State. Working hours were more flexible than in factories and permission to work overtime was so commonly given that evasion became easy. The employment and exploitation of child labour was encouraged by the fact that ages and physical fitness of children did not need to be registered. Finally, workshops that employed only women were entirely exempt from the Act, thus promoting the substitution of female for male labour.¹⁰⁴ For all these reasons inspection was minimal and ineffective before the 1890s.

A further reason was the enormous geographical area allocated to the factory inspectors. In 1888 J.B. Lakeman and his assistant, Birtwhistle, were responsible for the whole of North London and its home counties; their area of responsibility stretched from Wapping in the east, across to

103. P.P. 1876, XXX; Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the working of the Factory and Workshops Acts with a view to their Consolidation and Amendment, p.986.

104. Schmiedchen, op.cit., pp.419-20.

Rickmanworth and Tring in West Hertfordshire.¹⁰⁵ This did not deter the Select Committee on the Sweating System from recommending an extension of the law to all workshops.¹⁰⁶ As a result an Act of 1891 not only placed all workshops under inspection, whosoever they employed, but also made them liable to produce lists of outworkers, if required. Lakeman welcomed the extension of regulation to the home and publicised the requirements of the new act widely, probably to anticipate pleas of ignorance.¹⁰⁷ Within a short time, however, he came to recognise the deficiencies of this act, too. It required a list of outworkers only from those in charge of workshops and factories, so that shrewd master sweaters without such registered premises could continue to evade. Even within the regulated workshops work was given to employees to take home as 'overtime', out of sight of the law.¹⁰⁸

Still, the 1891 Act represented a great advance in the enforcement of the law relating to hours of work and working conditions. Until 1895 the sanitary condition of workplaces was the responsibility of local inspectors under the control of the local authorities. A combination of factors, including understaffing and a disinterest in public health which had typified the behaviour of public authorities since before the Act of 1848, had resulted in uneven standards of inspection. In 1895 the local authorities were made responsible to the Secretary of State and this resulted in a more conscientious enforcement of the sanitary law. Schmieschen argues that it also caused a re-introduction of outwork as small, workshop employers declined to make the necessary improvements to their premises.¹⁰⁹ In the shoemaking industry he attributes the return to outwork after 1895 to the more rigid inspection standards.¹¹⁰

105. P.P. 1888. XX; Select Committee on Sweating, p.50.

106. B.S.T.J.: 31 May, 1890 for a discussion of the Committee's report and recommendations.

107. S.L.R.: 16 Sept., 1892.

108. B.S.T.J.: 25 August, 1894.

109. Schmieschen, op.cit., pp. 423-24.

110. The return to outwork is supported by the findings of Jerry White for Stepney where the proportion of bootmakers employed at home increased from 30.9% to 31.7% of the workforce, 1901-1911. This was also through a period when the workforce declined from 5,623 to 3,516. (J. White, op.cit., p.199.)

No doubt this had an effect, but the major reason for the return to outwork after 1895 was the employers' victory in the lock-out of that year. This enabled the sweaters, who had never wanted the extra overheads incurred from workshops, to abandon them, and the many who had never opened workshops to continue as before. Consequently, Schmichen goes too far in attributing the structure of the local economy almost entirely to state intervention. The persistence of outwork in boot and shoemaking has to also take account of costs in relation to provincial and foreign competition, and the balance of industrial power.

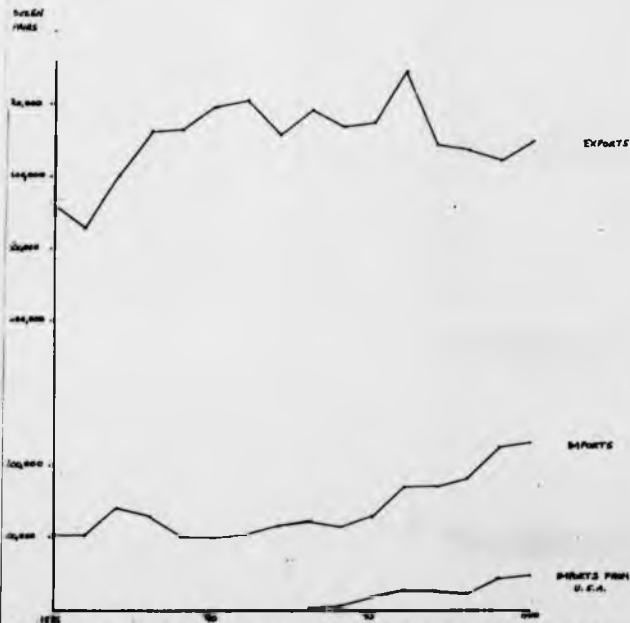
This chapter has been concerned with the effects of national economic changes in the boot and shoemaking industry upon the London trade. General economic forces which affected the whole industry could not leave London untouched, but the specific form of adaptation that occurred there took place within an ancient division of labour. This involved more than just a mode of production for the integration of work and home over a long historical period had created a way of life that, despite its many disadvantages, was not easily susceptible to fundamental revision. The dynamic of a mechanised factory system had met its greatest challenge in the defensive economic culture of the London bootmaking industry. And behind it there lay a complex of social supports which often defied understanding, let alone reform.

CHAPTER ONEAPPENDIX I(A)IMPORTS AND EXPORTS OF LEATHER BOOTS AND SHOES TO AND FROM U.K., 1885 - 1900
(STATISTICS)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>EXPORTS</u> <u>(DOZEN PAIRS, ALL MARKETS)</u>	<u>IMPORTS</u> <u>(DOZEN PAIRS, ALL SOURCES)</u>	<u>IMPORTS</u> <u>FROM U.S.A.</u>
1885	560,309	102,783	
1886	530,357	103,541	
1887	602,716	140,945	
1888	661,907	129,980	
1889	665,909	100,195	
1890	695,802	99,613	
1891	706,517	102,082	
1892	659,911	118,386	
1893	693,049	122,219	2,098
1894	668,536	115,429	5,018
1895	674,620	132,058	18,956
1896	745,018	172,840	25,908
1897	642,264	174,662	24,119
1898	638,920	182,261	21,416
1899	603,498	224,751	42,984
1900	630,244	233,668	47,607

SOURCE: R.A. Church; The Effect of the American Export Invasion on the British Boot and Shoe Industry, 1885 - 1914, Journal of Economic History, vol. 2, 1968, pp. 224-5.

CHAPTER ONE, APPENDIX T(b)

IMPORTS AND EXPORTS OF LENSES FROM AND TO THE
EGAN U.K., 1885-1900

Source: Church, The Export of Lenses from the United Kingdom, 1885-1900.

CHAPTER ONE, APPENDIX II : Employment patterns and wages

Type of worker	Firm On Ist October, 1886	1		2		3		4		5		6		1
		Nos. Employed	Average Wage	N. E.	A. W.	N. E.	A. W.	N. E.	A. W.	N. E.	A. W.	N. E.	A. W.	
Clickers		9	35/-	2	30/-	4	31/-	2	30/-	12	30/-	3	3	1
Rough Stuff Cutters		3	32/-											
Kip & lining cutters				1	10/-	2	10/-	1	-					
Pressmen				2	25/-	2	25/-	2	20/-	4	20/-	3	2	2
Sole Sewers						1	40/-			2	30/-			
Last Makers		4	32/-											
Lasters				1	22/-	16	P	10	P					
Closers (indoors)		60	27/-											
Machine closers (outdoors)						6	P			15	P			
Hand Closers (outdoors)				2	8/-									
Stitchers [W]		6	21/-											
Fitters (women & girls)		8												
Machinists [W]						9	-							
Riveters				1	14/-					18	-	-	30	
Makers		168	23/-											
Repairers		12	23/-											
Finishers				1	35/-	14	P	14	-	15	P	-	40	
Binders & Trimmers [W]				2	21/-				11	7/9	P			
Hand-sewn Stitchers														
Sew Round Makers				12	7/-					16	P			
Packers										1	15/-	1	28	
Boys		10	7/-	1	5/-			2	6/-			1	17	
Total Employed		272		25	5/-		31		100		8			
Weekly Hours Worked		53	58.5	56		-			52		52			
Total Annual Wages		£16,517		£1,300		£2,801		£3,517		£4,080		-		

* Average taken where more than one rate given.

[W] Women workers, where specified.

P Incalculable due to piece-rate returns.

Source: B

24 and wages of 12 London Docking Firms, 1885-86.

5	6		7	8		9	10		11	12		Totals	
	A	N		A	N		A	N		A	N	A	N
	W	E		W	E		W	E		W	E	W	E
	30/-	3	30/-	5	40/-	2	30/-	5	30/-	4	22/6	1	40/-
												7	20/6
			2	24/-	1	8/-		1	16/-	9	30/-	17	22/1
20/-	3	20/-	2	30/-								15	20/7
30/-			1	50/-				1	20/-			5	30/-
												4	32/-
			21	30/-			12	20/-		1	25/-	51	28/11
												60	27/-
P			4	60/-				5	40/-			30	53/11
			-	10/-	9	-						11	8/-
												6	21/6
			5	100/-	6	18/-						9	15/8
			5	12/6	3	18/-	1	14/-				3	10/-
										2	16/6	20	14/4
- -			30/-									19	16/-
												168	23/-
												12	23/-
i	P	-	40/-	16	30/-			12	27/6			72	32/6
	796		2	-	2	10/-		2	14/-			25	8/11
			10	21/-				1	P			11	21/-
	P				3	P		1	P			32	7/-
i	15/-	1	28/6	2	35/6			1	40/-			5	30/11
		1	17/-					1	6/-			15	7/8
50	8		78		24	1		42	13		4	652	
52	52		56					56	50		60	54	8
6,080	-		£2,799		£1,936		£906	-		-	£278		

Source: Booth Collection: A.19, p.203.

bookmark firms, 1885-86

9		10		11		12		Totals		Number Working Outdoors	Percent of all in group	Number on piecework	Percent of all in group
N.	A.	N.	A.	N.	A.	N.	A.	N.	A.				
E	W	E	W	E	W	E	W	E	W				
		5	30+			1	40+	45	31/10	0	0	0	0
				4	22/6			7	20/6	0	0	0	0
		1	16+	9	30+			17	23/1	0	0	0	0
								15	24/7	0	0	0	0
								5	34+	0	0	0	0
		1	20+					4	32/-	0	0	0	0
								12	24/-	0	0	38	62.3
								60	27/-	0	0	0	0
		5	40+					30	53/11	30	100	30	100
								11	8/-	11	100	9	81.8
								6	20/6	0	0	0	0
								9	15/8	0	0	0	0
								3	10/-	0	0	0	0
		1	14/-			2	16/6	20	14/4	9	45	9	45
								19	16/-	18	94.7	18	94.7
								168	23/-	0	0	0	0
								12	23/-	0	0	0	0
		12	27/6					72	32/6	29	40.3	71	98.6
		2	14/-					25	8/11	25	100	6	24.0
		1	P					11	24/-	11	100	11	100
		1	P					32	7/-	32	100	20	62.5
		1	40+					5	30/11	5	100	0	0
		1	6/-					15	7/8	15	100	0	0
1		42		13		4		652		185	28.4	212	32.5
		56		50		60		548					
£906		-		-		£278							



FIG. 2 - 1860

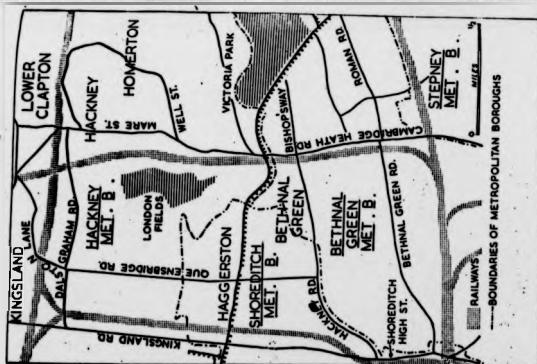


FIG. 3



FIG. 4 - 1951



FIG. 3 - 1901

Source : P.O. Hall, The East London Footwear Industry, an Industrial Quarter in Decline, East London Papers, V, 1, April 1962.

CHAPTER TWO

DECLINING ARTISANS AND SWEATED IMMIGRANTS

I. Geographical distribution, stratification and status

The purpose of this part of the chapter is to provide some basic information on the position of boot and shoemakers within the working class of late nineteenth century London. It is concerned, therefore, with such matters as their size as an occupational group, the type of district in which they lived and worked, and their conditions of life compared with other occupational groups with whom they closely resided.

TABLE I

A Numerical Comparison of Selected Occupational Groups in London, 1861 - 1891
(over 10 years of age).

Occupation	1861				1891				1861 - 1891	
	Males	% of London's working pop.	Females	%	Males	%	Females	%	Males	Females
Occupation	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	% increase	
Clerical	31,333	3.21	-	-	86,446	5.70	6,950	0.40	+175.89	-
Retail & Distribution	97,686	9.99	16,953	1.46	142,051	9.37	35,526	2.04	+ 45.41	+109.55
Building	81,446	8.33	224	0.02	116,374	7.68	417	0.02	+ 42.88	+ 56.16
Wood & Furniture	49,021	5.02	8,894	0.77	61,879	4.08	11,330	0.65	+ 26.22	+ 27.43
Metal & Engineering	46,738	4.78	1,131	0.10	63,001	4.16	1,803	0.10	+ 34.79	+ 59.41
Shipbuilding	10,296	1.05	37	0.00	7,432	0.49	43	0.00	- 27.82	+ 16.21
Printing & Paper	23,832	2.44	6,310	0.54	48,405	3.19	22,215	1.28	+103.10	+252.06
Leather & Hides	11,826	1.21	2,088	0.18	15,219	1.00	4,397	0.25	+ 28.69	+110.58
Food & Drink Manuf.	14,578	1.49	2,024	0.17	18,322	1.21	11,360	0.65	+ 25.68	+461.26
Textile Manufacture	14,268	1.46	12,948	1.11	8,124	0.54	10,519	0.60	- 43.07	- 18.76
Clothing Trade	30,618	3.13	107,689	9.25	37,654	2.49	129,404	7.44	+ 22.97	+ 20.16
Boot & Shoe Trade	33,591	3.44	9,199	0.79	31,462	2.08	7,527	0.43	- 6.34	- 18.18

SOURCE: G. Stedman Jones, Outcast London, pp. 358, 359, 361.

Table I (above) shows the decline of boot and shoemaking within the late nineteenth century London economy. The reasons for its gradual decline in competitiveness and migration have been discussed in the previous chapter. Compared with the dramatic collapse of both the textile (mainly silk-weaving) and shipbuilding industries the reduction in the boot and shoemaking labour force appears less serious, but the yardsticks of the wood and furniture and clothing trades are more appropriate. These were similar outwork and small workshop trades and both underwent expansion at the same time as boot and shoemaking was contracting. It is unlikely that a decrease in the workforce was matched by a decrease in production through the period 1861 - 91, however. (The statistics are not available to prove this.) It is more likely that the intensification of the division of labour which took place increased productivity to the extent that labour costs could be saved. There was certainly no shortage in the supply of labour, so this can be eliminated as a possible explanation of the decreased workforce. Because the London labour market was over-supplied with ready-made bootmakers it must be assumed that any labour shed was done voluntarily by employers.

Although boot and shoemakers were found in all the five census divisions of London, most lived and worked in the North East and inner south of the city. It was the cheaper trade of the East End that experienced most growth as the better-quality trade declined in the City and West End. By 1891 the East End contained nearly twice as many shoeworkers as any other division (see below).

TABLE II

Location of boot and shoemakers by division, 1861 - 91 (per cent).

	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
<u>1861</u>	11.18	16.84	17.06	28.78	23.30
<u>1891</u>	10.41	23.03	4.49	41.72	20.34

SOURCE: Calculated from G. Stedman Jones, Outcast London, pp. 362-69.

The North London trade also enjoyed a greater share of the labour force by 1891. Most of this went to Hackney which was an adjacent district to those in the East End and manufactured the better class, ready-made work. It accounted for almost half of those involved in the N. London industry.¹

TABLE III

Total numbers (adults and children) dependent upon boot and shoemaking in London (1891)

<u>Registration Districts:</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%age of dependent in E. London</u>	<u>%age of dependent in London</u>
<u>East London</u>			
Poplar	3,654	10.08	3.78
Mile End Old Town & Stepney	4,853	13.39	5.02
St. Georges-in-the-East & Whitechapel	7,654	21.12	7.92
Bethnal Green	12,222	33.73	12.65
Shoreditch	7,854	21.67	8.13
<u>Totals: East London</u>	<u>36,237</u>		<u>37.51</u>
<u>North London</u>			
	<u>No.</u>	<u>%age of dependent in N. London</u>	<u>%age of dependent in London</u>
Hackney	10,547	45.69	10.92
Islington	4,622	20.02	4.78
St. Pancras	3,895	16.87	4.03
Marylebone & Hampstead	4,019	17.41	4.16
<u>Totals: North London</u>	<u>23,083</u>		<u>23.89</u>
<u>West London</u>			
	<u>No.</u>	<u>%age of dependent in W. London</u>	<u>%age of dependent in London</u>
Paddington	1,581	17.25	1.64
St. Georges, Manover Sq.	1,317	14.37	1.36
Kensington	2,070	22.59	2.14
Chelsea	1,634	17.83	1.69
Fulham	2,561	27.95	2.65
<u>Totals: West London</u>	<u>9,163</u>		<u>9.48</u>
<u>Central London</u>			
	<u>No.</u>	<u>%age of dependent in C. London</u>	<u>%age of dependent in London</u>
City	657	10.23	0.68
Holborn	2,870	44.71	2.97
Strand, Westminster &) St. Giles)	2,892	45.05	2.99
<u>Totals: Central London</u>	<u>6,419</u>		<u>6.64</u>

1. See Table III.

TABLE III (cont.)

<u>South London</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>% of dependant in S. London</u>	<u>% of dependant in London</u>
Woolwich	967	4.45	1.00
Greenwich	1,666	7.67	1.72
St. Olave, Southwark	1,619	7.46	1.68
Camberwell	3,910	18.01	4.05
Lewisham	1,190	5.48	1.23
St. Saviour, Southwark	5,199	23.94	5.38
Lambeth	3,478	16.02	3.59
Wandsworth	3,683	16.96	3.81
<u>Totals: South London</u>	<u>21,712</u>		<u>22.46</u>

SOURCE: C. Booth, Life and Labour of the People in London (1902 ed.), 1st Series, Vol. III, p.480.

The slight decline in importance of the West London trade may be explained by the decline in hand-sawn work. But this was nothing compared with the collapse of the industry in Central London which had lost nearly three-quarters of its labour force over the thirty year period. The decline of the hand-sawn trade is only a partial explanation of this drastic disappearance. Large areas of Central London, such as the infamous rookeries in the Holborn area, were being cleared for urban development. The building of Farringdon Street, through the most densely packed area of the City, is estimated to have displaced some 20,000 inhabitants. Clerkenwell and Finsbury, as well as Shoreditch, Bethnal Green and Whitechapel, were all cleared to make way for the railway in the 1850s and 1860s. To the north and east of the City, offices and warehouses were replacing residential accommodation; to the south, warehouses were being constructed to support the dock development that had begun before 1850.² It is probable that some who were displaced in western central areas, such as Holborn, moved into western districts, such as Paddington, Chelsea, Kensington and Fulham; thus explaining the persistence of the west through a period of decline in the hand-sawn trade. More, from districts to the east of the City, must have drifted into the East End proper.

2. Gareth Stedman Jones, Outcast London (Oxford, 1971), pp.163-67.

South London was also slightly less important as a bootmaking area by 1891, although it experienced only a marginal decline compared with central districts. Most of its workforce resided in the westerly districts of Wandsworth, Lambeth and Southwark (St. Saviour) which together accounted for 56.92% of all those dependent upon the industry in S. London.³ The two parishes of Southwark formed the heart of the industry (with 31.4% of all S. London dependants), but the western parish of St. Saviour contained over three times the number of St. Olave's. Camberwell was the most important of the S.E. districts, followed by Lewisham, Greenwich and Woolwich. The last two fell within the area of 'Kentish London' where traditional crafts such as bootmaking were being replaced by engineering and shipbuilding in the forty years before 1880.⁴

Because of the growing importance of the East London trade a more detailed analysis has been done of its boot and shoemaking districts. It is, however, unhelpful to follow only the registration districts of East London proper for this purpose,⁵ as it was a ready-made trade which stretched across N.E. London. Consequently, it has been found more helpful to follow the district classification of Booth's poverty map of the area (Appendix A). In this way it is easier to comprehend the stratification of the trade, from the inner areas close to the Thames to the N.E. suburbs. Booth's analysis of poverty within these areas provides an invaluable guide to the various levels of boot and shoeworkers to be found there and to their living and working conditions.

Bethnal Green was the heart of the bootmaking community. More people were dependent upon the industry than in any other district in London, and only Hackney approached it in importance.⁶ (Bethnal Green corresponds to district 56 on Booth's poverty map⁷). It contained great poverty, ranking third among

3. See Table III.

4. Crossick, *An Artisan Elite*, p.45.

5. Poplar, Mile End Old Town and Stepney, Whitechapel & St. George-in-the-East, Bethnal Green, and Shoreditch.

6. See Table III.

7. Numerical references to the poverty map will be given in brackets in the text.

all London districts.⁸ Poverty was greatest in the western area, part of which included the sweated trade of Spitalfields, where it reached 58.7% of the population. Here, bootmakers competed with those engaged in the furniture trades for single room dwellings in substantial houses which had once been occupied by silk-weavers. Many Polish Jews had moved into the area through the 1880s.

Moving from south to north Bethnal Green poverty decreased and the 'respectability' of bootmakers improved. In the Green Street area they co-resided with 'orderly' occupational groups such as cabinet makers, tradesmen and even some clerks. Old Bethnal Green Road and its neighbouring thoroughfares were the most prosperous and, here, small workshop extensions could be seen in many gardens. The percentage of the population in poverty fell to 37.5%.⁹

Bethnal Green was a microcosm of the bootmaking community because it encapsulated, more than any other district, the diversity of trade structure. In the North East the skilled statement worker inhabited the surrounds of Victoria Park, while in the South West the immigrant 'greener' crawled home to his over-crowded and insanitary room after a working day that might have extended to fourteen or fifteen hours. In between were the intermediate workers lacking the status of working to a statement but a cut above the degradation of the sweated trade.

Socially, the population of Bethnal Green was both more stable and homogeneous than many working class districts of London. McLeod has found that the children of skilled workers inter-married across occupational groups much more frequently than in the typical South London working class district of Lewisham.¹⁰ In other respects Bethnal Green followed the norm for working class communities. People married younger than for London as a whole and, as a partial consequence

8. Booth, Life and Labour (1902 ed.), 1st Series, Vol. II, Appendix, Table III.

9. ibid., Vol. II, Appendix, pp.24-25.

10. McLeod, op.cit. p.3.

of this, the birth rate was higher.¹¹ The christenings and marriages of these children were more likely to take place in a Nonconformist, rather than an Anglican, church, although most residents of the district were indifferent to any religion.¹²

The population had grown steadily through the second half of the nineteenth century, reaching 130,000 in 1901. But it was levelling off by then for it had grown by 2.36% in the period 1881 - 1901 compared with 41.11% between 1851 - 1881.¹³ As with all similar areas house building failed to keep pace with the needs of the growing population.¹⁴ Much of the fall in house building in the late nineteenth century can be attributed to the clearance schemes undertaken for the railway line running into Liverpool Street station. These were continuing as late as 1886 - 7.¹⁵ From October, 1890 the London County Council began clearance of some of the worst slum areas of the district which brought further problems of adjustment.¹⁶

To the north of Bethnal Green lies the south-western part of Hackney known as Haggerston (60). It contained a lower proportion of its population in poverty than its southern neighbour, 36.9% compared with 44.6%. E. Haggerston was dominated by the Imperial Gas Works in the region of which lived 'many poor, rough, shifty people, especially near the canal.' The western half was less poor. Bootmakers were to be found all over the district but they were stratified occupationally more from south to north. The more skilled statement workers lived in the north, along Mare Street and on the north side of Hackney Road, and they

11. The proportion of married people under 21 for Bethnal Green (1881) was 13.0% (males) and 33.7% females compared with 5.3% and 18.3% for London as a whole. (Report of an inquiry held by Messrs. D. Cubitt Nichols and Shirley F. Murphy as to the immediate Sanitary Requirements of the Parish of St. Matthew, Bethnal Green: P.P., 1888, LXXXI).

12. McLeod, loc.cit.

13. ibid. p.101.

14. The increase of 18.62% for the 1860s was down to a minimal 4.4% by the 1870s.

15. Report by Cubitt Nichols and Murphy, op.cit.

16. B.S.T.J.; 1 Nov., 1890.

tended to decline into the intermediate trade in the areas that bordered Bethnal Green. In the north they co-existed with artisans in trades such as building and furniture making; in the south with less skilled wood workers and unskilled labourers.¹⁷

Lying directly to the north of Haggerston, London Fields (65) was a more prosperous and respectable part of Hackney. This was particularly so of the eastern sector, which contained the Fields themselves, and was bounded by Mare Street to the east and the Regent's Canal to the south. To the west of the Fields the lower middle classes (small employers, clerks and travellers) frequently kept servants, while bootmakers and other artisans inhabited the housing in the immediate vicinity of the Fields. The overall poverty rate was low, compared with Haggerston and Bethnal Green, at 28%. To the north lay the comfortably off district of De Beauvoir Town with its social mix of the semi-professional classes and upper artisans; to the west the socially similar districts of Dalston and Kingsland. London Fields was the nucleus of the respectable Hackney bootmaking community and the statement workers developed it as the centre of trade union activity. Mass meetings were held on the Fields, themselves, branch meetings of London Metro. (the founding London branch of the National Union) in the United Radical Club, Key Street or the Borough of Hackney Club, Haggerston Road, and the branch executive met at the 'Cherry Tree Tavern', Kingsland Road, on the western perimeter of the district.¹⁸

Situated to the north west of Bethnal Green, but separated from it by the densely packed Columbia Market area, Hoxton (62 and 63) rivalled the former district in its poverty rate.¹⁹ Most of the bootmakers lived in the area immediately to the west of the Kingsland Road which divided them from the rather more respectable quarters of Haggerston. The occupational structure of Hoxton was quite varied and bootmakers co-existed with many in the furniture trades

17. Booth, *loc.cit.* p.26.

18. B.S.T.J. S.L.R. M.R.S. *passim*.

19. 44.4% compared with 44.6%.

and a great many unskilled labourers of different types.²⁰

Shoreditch (61) lies to the north and west of Bethnal Green and approximates to what Booth described as the Great Eastern Street district. However, the Columbia Market area (61d) is better considered a part of Bethnal Green. Taking the whole district, 39.9% were found to be in poverty, but there were wide differences within the sub-districts. Both the northernmost and southernmost sub-districts (61c and 61a) contained populations of which more than half were in poverty.²¹ Bootmakers were not to be found so much in these areas as in the more prosperous central area (where only 26.6% of the furniture makers, tailors, bootmakers, et.al. were in poverty), and in the north eastern, Columbia Market area (where the poverty rate was higher at 38.1% among those involved in similar trades). If the Columbia Market is excluded from Shoreditch then most Shoreditch bootmakers can be said to have resided in an area that enjoyed much better conditions of life than neighbouring Bethnal Green.

Whitechapel and St. George's-in-the-East were the most southerly of the major bootmaking districts. (71, 72 and 73). Taken together the average poverty rate for the area is 42.7%, which is almost as high as that for Bethnal Green. If the districts are taken separately, however, as they are by Booth, then the parish of St. George's, at 48.9%, actually exceeds it. This places it equal first with Holborn as the poorest district in London.²² The south western and western sector of the district (71) had fewest in poverty (32.5%), and within this area the western enclave which bordered onto Aldgate and the City had more than three-quarters of its people above the poverty line.²³ Apart from St. George's it was the district immediately to the south of Bethnal Green (72) which contributed most to Whitechapel's poverty. It was into this area that the majority of the Jewish immigrants came in the 1880s to take up

20. Booth, loc.cit., p.26.

21. 54.5% and 51.9% respectively.

22. Booth, loc.cit., Appendix, Table III.

23. 75.9%.

tailoring or bootmaking.²⁴ Their impact upon the sweated trade is examined in more detail in the final section of this chapter.

To the east of Whitechapel bootmaking tended to fade away as a major occupation, although nearly a quarter²⁵ of all East London bootmakers and their dependants lived in the districts of Mile End Old Town, Stepney and Poplar. But they were greatly outnumbered by dockers, unskilled labourers (many of whom were Irish), tailors and others.²⁶

It has been argued that the social conditions of boot and shoemakers varied considerably according to the stratum of the trade in which they worked and the district in which they resided. Overall, however, when compared with other similar occupations, boot and shoemakers in late nineteenth century London emerge as a lower attitudinal group. Crossick has found that in Kentish London (1854 - 72) they were more commonly pauperised than similar, small-scale craftsmen such as tailors, masons, coopers, wheelwrights and sawyers. They were institutionalised in workhouses more frequently than these other groups.²⁷ An analysis of wage rates persuaded Crossick to rank shoemakers only on the third level of labour aristocracy, along with building workers. They looked upwards to the lower engineers and tailors on the second level, and could hardly catch sight of the large-scale shipbuilders, elite engineers, precision metal workers, coach-builders and watermen on the first.²⁸

24. Booth, *loc.cit.*, pp.29-30.

25. 23.47%. (see Table 111).

26. Booth, *loc.cit.*, pp.30-33.

27. Crossick, *An Artisan Elite*, p.113. The ratings for the respective occupations are: shoemakers 103, tailors 80, masons 75, coopers and wheelwrights 67, bakers 65, sawyers 60. "An index of 100 would mean that the observed frequency exactly coincided with what the size of an occupation in the workforce at large could lead one to expect ..."
(pp.112-13).

28. *ibid.*, p.120.

Using information gathered for the whole of London for a slightly later period (1891) by Booth, Crossick's findings can be confirmed. (See table below). Firstly, this shows that boot and shoemakers were more frequently institutionalised than lower middle-class groups such as shopkeepers or clerks, but less frequently than unskilled manual groups such as street sellers or general labourers. This is, of course, what one would expect to find. Secondly, and less obviously, boot and shoemakers were more frequently institutionalised than any of the other artisanal groups, even the other staple trades of the East End cabinet making and tailoring. The explanation of this probably lies in the greater proportion of outwork performed in bootmaking. Outwork undoubtedly worsened the social condition of the worker. Making a workshop of the home, especially when conditions went unregulated by law, made the working environment more unhealthy and dangerous. It reduced normal family living space. It enabled the sweating of children. It lengthened the working day forcing the outworker to 'shop' for his work from the warehouse where he was frequently kept waiting for hours irrespective of the weather. Finally, it promoted an industrial isolation which, when combined with the extreme competition caused by a surplus supply of labour, discouraged the development of trade unionism.

TABLE IV

Institutionalisation of boot and shoemakers compared with other selected groups in London (1891).

Occupation	Total nos. employed (over 20 yrs.)	Inmates of workhouses, casual wards, infirmaries	Inmates of hospitals	Inmates of lunatic asylums	Inmates of prisons	Total in occup. institutionalised
Street sellers	11,064	821 (7.4%)*	39 (0.35%)	19 (0.17%)	83 (0.75%)	962 (8.7%)
Dock and wharf service, and labour; coal porters, gas-workers; ware-housemen; messengers and general labourers	145,028	5,740 (3.96%)	422 (0.29%)	178 (0.12%)	989 (0.68%)	7,329 (5.05%)
Boot and shoemakers	24,055	886 (3.7%)	64 (0.27%)	26 (0.11%)	108 (0.45%)	1,084 (4.51%)
Tailors	34,887	869 (2.5%)	76 (0.22%)	24 (0.07%)	134 (0.38%)	1,103 (3.17%)
Cabinet makers and other wood-workers	45,910	1,040 (2.27%)	113 (0.27%)	41 (0.09%)	95 (0.21%)	1,299 (2.83%)
Gold and silver; watches and instruments	19,343	198 (1.02%)	24 (0.12%)	13 (0.07%)	36 (0.19%)	271 (1.40%)
Small shop-keepers	24,628	196 (0.8%)	50 (0.2%)	23 (0.09%)	132 (0.54%)	401 (1.63%)
Clerks	81,753	511 (0.6%)	127 (0.16%)	135 (0.17%)	129 (0.16%)	902 (1.10%)
Public services; professional	164,361	661 (0.4%)	246 (0.15%)	454 (0.28%)	124 (0.08%)	1,485 (0.91%)

* Percentages in brackets are of the total numbers employed (over 20 years) in occupation.

SOURCE: C. Booth, Life and Labour of the People of London (1902 ed.), Second Series, Vol. 4, pp. 303 and 307.

11. The deterioration of housing

The kind of accommodation that people live in is one of the commonest means by which they attempt to measure the quality of their lives. Standard of housing has also been used by generations of sociologists as one criterion of class placement. Housing matters because it determines the quality of a person's subjective existence and contributes towards that person's status within society at large. An instrumental view of work will value the job according to the degree of material consumption that wage rewards are able to support. If wages only purchase a reducing material existence then wage militancy is likely to be the result. It can be demonstrated for housing, more than for any other aspect of bootmakers' social conditions in the late nineteenth century, that a substantial deterioration took place. It must, therefore, be counted as one important reason why they were prepared to struggle so fiercely for improved working conditions and against making a workshop of their homes.

Housing in London in the late nineteenth century was more expensive than anywhere else in the country. Both in real terms and as a proportion of his income the working class tenant in the capital paid higher rent. Booth thought that rent accounted for perhaps twenty per cent of all working class expenditure in London in the 1890s.²⁹ If provincial rents were approximately double those in the countryside, then London's were triple. Yet, a typical agricultural labourer from North Essex could expect to double his real income on moving to London such was the compensating increase in wages.³⁰ If this was a route to improvement taken by many rural labourers, the Londoner would have equally benefited from a move to the provinces, for while wage differentials were narrowing between them in the last quarter of the nineteenth century rent differentials remained largely unchanged.³¹ But few did. In bootmaking it was London capital rather than labour that migrated.

29. E.H. Hunt, Regional Wage Variations in Britain, 1850 - 1914 (Oxford, 1973), p.87 ff.

30. Ibid., pp.90-91.

31. Ibid., p.146f.

Dear housing, particularly in central London, had two sorts of repercussions upon the worker. Most frequently he economised on space and crowded his family into fewer and smaller rooms. Occasionally, he moved further from the centre and walked in or, even less frequently, took the train. The constraints of a working life compelled the first solution more often than not, as one East End factory worker explained in 1865:

"I am a working man. I go to my factory every morning at six, and I leave it every night at the same hour. I require, on the average, eight hours' sleep, which leaves four hours for recreation and improvement. I have lived at many places in the outskirts, according as my work has shifted, but generally I find myself at Mile End. I always live near the factory where I work, and so do all my mates, no matter how small, dirty and dear the houses may be one or two of my uncles have tried the plan of living a few miles out, and walking to business in the morning, like the clerks do in the city. It don't do - I suppose because they have not been used to it from boys; perhaps walking exercises at five in the morning don't suit men who are hard at work with their bodies all day. As to railways and omnibuses, they cost money, and we don't understand them, except on holidays, when we have got our best clothes on."³²

The few that did move from an inner area such as Bethnal Green to a suburb such as Walthamstow sometimes made the return journey once their children had grown

up.³³

Victorian London had become increasingly segregated and privatised in its patterns of residential development³⁴ and by the later nineteenth century the East End assumed the shape of a working class city in itself. Neglected, often beyond repair, the houses of many of the poorest parts of the city deteriorated at a rate at which the activities of philanthropic societies such

32. John Hollingshead, *Today's Essays and miscellanies*, II (1865), p.306. Quoted in M.J. Dyos and D. Reader, *Slums and Suburbs*, in M.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (ed.), *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, Vol. II, *Shapes on the Ground/A Change of Accent* (1973), p.368.

33. Booth (1902 ed.), *op.cit.*, 1st Series, Vol. I, p.258.

34. D.J. Olesen, *Victorian London: Specialization, Segregation and Privacy*, *Victorian Studies*, Vol. XVII, no. 3, March 1974.

as the Peabody Trust could not keep pace.³⁵ By 1891 overcrowding in London had reached almost double the national average for England and Wales³⁶, by which time the public's attention had only just been awakened to the social effects of poor quality housing. Permissive legislation had been ineffective. It took three years for the first site in Whitechapel to be cleared under the powers conferred by the Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings' Act of 1875,³⁷ although about a quarter of the notorious Flower and Dean Street rookery had also been demolished by 1883.³⁸ From about this time the propaganda of writers such as George R. Sims and, particularly, Andrew Mearns began to shock the public. In his pamphlet 'The Bitter Cry of Outcast London' Mearns did not flinch from relating the incidence of sexual depravity, such as incest, to poor housing conditions.³⁹ Such shocking revelations were responsible for increased religious interest in the slums and the appointment of the Royal Commission on Housing which reported in 1884-85.

The reduction in housing space during the forty years before the 1880s can be seen from the table below, for certain selected London districts.

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35. Anthony S. Wohl, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, *Int. Rev. of Soc. Hist.*, Vol. XIII, 1968, estimates that the sum achievement of all philanthropic housing bodies to 1884 was to house only 32,435 people. For the work of the Peabody Trust see J.N. Tern, *The Peabody Donation Fund: The Role of a Housing Society in the Nineteenth Century*, *Victorian Studies*, Vol. X, no. 1, Sept. 1966. For the work of the Four Per Cent Industrial Dwellings Co. (founded 1884) see Jerry White, *op.cit.*, chap. 1.
36. E.H. Hunt, *British Labour History* (1981), p.96. 19.7% in London compared with 11.2%.
37. Tern, *op.cit.*, p.28.
38. Jerry White, *op.cit.*, p.13.
39. Wohl, *op.cit.*, p.208. Perhaps Mearns had learnt from the reaction of the House of Lords to the report on the coal mines in 1842 which suggested that mere revelation of poor conditions was not enough to win reform; sexual promiscuity had to be also proven.

TABLE V.

Reduction in housing in selected London districts, 1841 - 81

District	Houses per acre					Percentage Reduction 1841 - 81
	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	
St. Giles	23.41	21.97	21.99	20.80	17.12	26.87
Holborn	30.09	28.75	26.99	24.83	20.13	33.10
Strand	22.17	20.16	18.80	16.06	10.98	50.47
City	24.20	22.15	20.27	14.11	9.61	60.29
Shoreditch	35.32	35.79	35.36	25.29	21.72	38.42
Bethnal Green	28.40	28.92	28.72	27.38	25.61	9.82
Whitechapel	24.24	24.94	24.46	23.36	20.74	14.44
Southwark	21.65	20.53	19.51	15.18	13.60	37.18
Lambeth	22.69	21.91	21.79	21.53	18.90	16.70
Pancreas	14.33	17.76	18.40	16.32	13.86	3.28

SOURCE: calculated from G. Stedman Jones, Outcast London, p.232.

It can be seen that it was the central and inner central areas that were most affected by the reduction in housing supply through the period. Of the districts where boot and shoemakers resided in substantial numbers the City and Holborn were worst affected in the central area, Southwark in the south, and Shoreditch in the east. Bethnal Green and Whitechapel lost a smaller proportion of houses but were still faced with the problem of accommodating more in less. Greater competition resulted in greater overcrowding and higher rents. The fact that rents increased as a proportion of workmen's earnings, over a similar period, can be seen from the table below.

TABLE VI.

Comparison of rents as a proportion of wages for selected occupational groups, 1848 - 87, St. George's-in-the-East.

Occupation	1848			1887		
	Average Weekly Wage	Average Weekly Rent	%age of wage paid in rent	Average Weekly Wage	Average Weekly Rent	%age of wage paid in rent
Labourers and dockers	15s 7d	3s 3d	20.8	21s 2d	5s 4d	25.2
Shoemakers	17s 5d	3s 6d	20.1	21s 0d	6s 2d	29.4
Tailors	21s 6d	3s 8d	17.0	22s 7d	6s 9d	29.9
Bricklayers	23s 8d	3s 9d	15.8	31s 1d	6s 6d	20.9
Coopers	25s 5d	3s 8d	14.4	27s 0d	6s 7d	24.4

SOURCE: calculated from G. Stedman Jones, Outcast London, p.216. 40

It can be seen that all the occupational groups have become worse off by the later date in that they were paying a higher proportion of their wages in rent. Tailors were worst off, paying 12.9% more of their wages in rent in 1887 than in 1848, followed by coopers (10.0%), shoemakers (8.3%), bricklayers (5.1%), and labourers and dockers (4.4%). There are a number of points to be made about the comparative position of shoemakers. Firstly, in terms of absolute wages, they have slipped from bottom but one to bottom of the group. Secondly, like all the other groups, they are worse off by 1887 in paying a higher proportion of their wages in rent. Thirdly, the proportion of their wages going in rent remains the second highest within the groups (although by 1887 they have tailors below them rather than labourers and dockers). Fourthly, these findings are representative only of the poorest grade of sweated shoemaker who resided in St. George's.

Booth calculated that boot and shoemakers were among the most crowded of occupational groups in London.⁴¹ 51.3% of them were over-crowded compared with 48.6% of tailors, 44.5% of machinists, 36.2% of hatters, and 15.7% of drapers and silk mercers.⁴² How can this greater degree of over-crowding among boot and shoemakers be explained?

Before answering this it must be admitted that over-crowding is not always an indicator of poverty. As Booth pointed out there was greater over-crowding in central London, because of high rents, but less poverty.⁴³ But, as has already been shown, less than 5% of London's boot and shoemakers lived in the central districts in 1891,⁴⁴ compared with about 7% of those working in

40. Taken from F.P., 1887, LXXI; Statements of Men Living in Certain Selected Districts of London. The reliability of the evidence given to this survey has been re-established by M.J. Cullen. Int. Rev. of Soc. Hist., vol. XX, 1975.

41. The crowded were "... those whose house accommodation is limited to one room for each two or more persons". (Booth, 1902 ed., 2nd Ser., vol. 5, p.14).

42. Booth, op.cit., 1st Ser., vol. 3, p.7.

43. Ibid., p.24.

44. See Table II.

the clothing and wood and furniture trades.⁴⁵ Neither can large family size serve as an explanation for that of boot and shoemakers was not significantly different from similar occupational groups.⁴⁶ The explanation may again lie in the fact that boot and shoemaking, unlike many of the other trades with which it has been compared, was largely performed by outwork. As bootmakers were forced to make a workshop of their homes so the tendency for workers outside of the family to live in was increased. This was particularly prevalent among the sweated Jewish finishers who would arrive ahead of their families and often sleep on the floor of their master's workshop-cum-home. Such conditions were increasingly common through the 1880s and added to the sense of degradation of an already declining trade.

III. The impact of Jewish immigration

On the 1st March, 1881 Alexander II, Tsar of all the Russias, was riding through St. Petersburg in his carriage after attending a military parade. He was protected from his people by the largest police force in the world. There were not enough of them. A bomb, thrown by a member of the revolutionary terrorist group the People's Will, blew his carriage to bits. Alexander stepped out, apparently unhurt, whereupon a second bomb landed and blew him to bits. He lingered in mutilated condition for another hour.⁴⁷ It is doubtful if many of the Jews who lived within the Pale of Settlement lost much sleep over these events in the capital for the dead Tsar had reversed the concessions of the early part of his reign after the Polish rebellion of 1863.⁴⁸ They received an unjust punishment again in 1881. Hordes of drunken hooligans, members of the anti-semitic Holy League, descended upon the Jewish settlements in a

45. Calculated from Stedman Jones, Outcast London, pp.366-67.

46. Booth, op.cit. (1902 ed.), 2nd Ser., Vol. 5, p.38. Boot and shoemakers' average (1891) was 4.56 compared with 4.67 for cabinet-makers, 4.42 for tailors.

47. Hugh Seton-Watson, The Decline of Imperial Russia, 1855 - 1914 (1952), p.73.

48. J.N. Westwood, Endurance and Endeavour: Russian History, 1812 - 1971 (Oxford, 1973), p.128.

frenzy of misplaced fury. Many were killed or injured, women were raped and buildings raised to the ground as the local police looked on. The new Tsar, Alexander III, unlike his minister Pobedonostsev who supported the Holy League, employed more subtle means of making a Jew's life unbearable and his son, Nicholas II (1894 - 1917) more than maintained the family tradition.⁴⁹ Not surprisingly, those Jews who could escape frequently did. About 120,000 entered Britain between 1880 and 1914.⁵⁰, and these were just the tip of the iceberg as far more went to North and South America.⁵¹ For the purposes of this study the decade of the 1880s is most significant and the table below compares immigration during that period with the 1870s.

TABLE VII.

Immigration into the United Kingdom. 1871 - 91No. of foreigners enumerated in U.K.

Country of birth	1871	1881	-	1891	Increase Nos.	1871-81 Percent	Increase, Nos.	1881-91 Percent
France	19,618	16,194		22,475	-3,424	- 17.45	6,281	38.78
German Empire	35,141	40,371		53,591	5,230	14.68	13,220	32.75
Russia (including Russian Poland)	9,974	15,271		47,695	5,297	53.10	32,424	212.32

SOURCE: P.P. 1894. LXVIII: Board of Trade, Report on the Volume and Effects of Recent Immigration from Eastern Europe into the United Kingdom, p.16.

Immigrants from Russia and Poland represented the greater part of the increase through the period, the 1880s being a decade of much heavier immigration. The vast majority of these would have been Jews fleeing religious persecution although the official statistics do not register people according to religion. Germany continued to supply a steadily increasing number of immigrants. The French figures are included for further comparison. Despite the heavy immigration of 1880s compared with the previous decade there were still only 5.8 foreigners per 1,000 inhabitants of the U.K. by 1891.

49. *ibid.*, pp.128-132.

50. Hunt, British Labour History, pp.176-77.

51. Westwood, op.cit., p.130.

TABLE VIIIDistribution of Foreigners 1881 and 1891

Town	Total no. of foreigners		Germans		Russians		Russian (Poles)	
	1881	1891	1881	1891	1881	1891	1881	1891
London	60252	95053	21920	26920	1778	12034	6931	14708
Manchester	2805	8941	691	1321	126	3379	762	1701
Leeds	2134	5927	310	581	342	3120	1046	1420
Birmingham	1153	1966	295	442	60	266	164	378

(Source as Table VII, p.19.)

Table VIII shows the relative concentration of immigration upon London. From 1881-91 London contained approximately half of the total number of immigrants of the U.K. and Wales, although its increase during the decade was proportionally less than the provinces combined.

TABLE IX

Numbers of Russians/Russian Poles in London Districts.
1881 and 1891

Registration District	Total Population		Russians and Russian Poles					
	1881	1891	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
Whitechapel	71363	74462	5293	2858	2435	13538	7257	6281
St. George's-in-the-East	47157	45795	566	353	213	4873	2748	2225
Mile End Old Town	105613	107592	893	522	371	3440	1572	1572
Bethnal Green	126961	129132	254	156	98	970	428	428
Westminster	46549	37312	194	136	58	713	296	296
City of London	51405	38320	465	269	196	480	199	199

(Source as above, p.20).

TABLE 8

Showing the total number of foreigners, and of Russians and Russian Poles residing in certain registration districts of London, and the percentage they bore to the total population of those districts (from 1891 Census).

DISTRICT	Total born in foreign countries			No. born in Russia			No. born in R. Poland			Total no. born in Russia and R. Poland				
	Males	Fe-males	Total	Males	Fe-males	Total	Males	Fe-males	Total	Males	Fe-males	Total		
			%age of pop.									%age of pop.		
Whitechapel 1	9729	8232	17961	24.13	3497	2870	6367	3760	3411	7171	7257	6281	13538	18.18
St. George's -in-the-East 2	4229	3204	7433	16.23	1116	808	1924	1632	1417	3049	2748	2225	4973	10.86
Stepney 3	899	294	1193	2.08	23	9	32	29	17	46	52	26	78	.14
Mile End Old Town 4	3176	2521	5697	5.30	726	562	1288	1142	1010	2152	1868	1572	3440	3.20
Poplar 5	1423	495	1918	1.15	67	7	74	18	16	34	85	23	108	.06
Shoreditch 6	1104	551	1655	1.33	42	26	68	64	32	96	106	58	164	.13
Bethnal Green 7	1057	739	1796	1.39	271	189	460	271	239	510	542	428	970	.75
Hackney 8	1725	1198	2923	1.27	147	98	245	85	65	150	232	163	395	.17
TOTALS	23342	17234	40576	4.34	5089	4569	10458	7001	6207	13208	12890	10776	23666	2.53

77.

1. Including: Spitalfields, Mile End New Town, Whitechapel Church, Goodman's Fields, Aldgate.
2. Including: St. George's North, St. John, St. George's-in-the-East.
3. Including: Shadwell, Hactliff, Lambhouse.
4. Including: Mile End Old Town, Western and Eastern.
5. Including: Bow, Bromley, Poplar.
6. Including: Shoreditch, South, Hoxton New Town, Hoxton Old Town, Haggerston.
7. Including: Bethnal Green North, South and East.
8. Including: Stoke Newington, Stearnford Hill, West Hackney, Hackney, South Hackney.

(Source as above). Appendix I, p. 136.

Table IX illustrates two main points. Firstly, it shows the concentration of foreigners in East London generally when compared with certain western and Central districts. Secondly, it shows that, within East London itself, the concentration is most noticeable in the districts of Whitechapel, St. George's-in-the-East and Mile End Old Town. Very few foreigners lived in the districts of Bethnal Green, Hackney or Shoreditch which contained a higher proportion of artisans.

Table X expands the analysis of East London districts and calculates the proportion of Russian and Polish immigrants compared with other foreigners and English born residents. Of the total population only 4.34% (40,576) were foreign born. Second generation immigrants, i.e. those born in East London of foreign born parents, are impossible to calculate, but these would be a small proportion of those coming in during the period 1871 - 91. Whitechapel emerges as the immigrant ghetto, yet still less than a quarter of its inhabitants (24.13%) were foreign born. Of the other districts, only in St. George's does the foreign born population reach double figures as a proportion of the total. In the more artisanal districts it does not even reach 1.5% of the total. 'The Alien Invasion' is, thus, shown to be a mythical creation of those 'neurotic and hysterical journalists' criticised by Ben Tillet in his autobiography,⁵² who were responsible for such enterprises as the short-lived, anti-semitic newspaper *The Briton*.⁵³ From the pens of scaremongers such as Arnold White came the more serious and 'scholarly' diatribes. In fact, East London's Jews in the late nineteenth century, like many immigrant groups before and since, were more conspicuous than particularly numerous.

52. Tillet, *op.cit.* p.92.

53. 30 April - 4 June, 1887. The identity of the principal writer, one 'A.B.' is a mystery but it may have been Lewis Lyons, a Jewish tailor and anti-sweating agitator, who was prepared to whip-up anti-Semitic feeling in order to restrict immigration. This, he thought, would ease the sweating problem.

The new Jewish arrivals of the late nineteenth century settled in a city that had provided a refuge for many such exoduses. In the 1750s a smaller group of Ashkenazim from Poland and Germany joined the Sephardim who were long-established in London. The Ashkenazim were poorer brethren and settled in Houndsditch, Whitechapel, Spitalfields and Mile End.⁵⁴ Spitalfields, in particular, had become a traditional immigrant area. Before the Jews spread themselves through the local tailoring and bootmaking trades the Huguenot refugees had established the silk-weaving industry there. More widely dispersed, but most conspicuous in Whitechapel, were the Irish whose number increased considerably after the famine of 1845-46.

Some of the leading members of the richer, Sephardite community in London worked hard to anglicise and make respectable the poor immigrant. Wealthy families such as the Rothschilds, the Montefiores, the Mocattas and the Samuels took a direct interest in the social welfare of Whitechapel through institutions which, while encouraging religious orthodoxy, worked for the social assimilation of the Jew within the wider community. Most controversial of these, because of its function in relieving poverty, was the Jewish Board of Guardians.

The Board had been founded in 1859 to propagate the Jewish version of the social gospel of the English middle classes, self-help.⁵⁵ Financed by rich patrons it had initially provided loans to tailoresses to enable them to buy their own sewing-machines, and rented out tools to bootmakers and other workers who could not afford to purchase them.⁵⁶ By the 1880s it had extended its activities to the giving of out-relief but, such was the volume of

54. George Rude, Hanoverian London, 1714 - 1808 (1971), p.7.

55. Asa Briggs, Samuel Smiles and the Gospel of Self-Help, in Victorian People (1955).

56. Laurie Magnum, The Jewish Board of Guardians and the Men who Made It (1909), pp. 28-31.

criticism from those who considered that all such payments directly encouraged immigration, that strict limitations upon applications were imposed. No assistance was given to any person until he or she had been a resident in London for at least six months. Rarely would the Board deviate from this rule, even in cases of great hardship. Lieb Kram, a 28 year old bootmaker from Lithuania, was robbed of his few possessions on his way to London from the coast by a man promising to teach him English and find him work. On being asked whether he had applied to the Board, he replied:

"The relief we had from the board of guardians was the sum of 10s. on my wife's confinement, but after this misfortune happened, I applied to the board to be either sent home or sent to America to some friends, but they spoke to me so harshly and it affected me so much that I left the place crying."⁵⁷

Applications to the Board for relief reached a maximum, for the 1880s, in 1886, when the figure was around 3,500. The vast majority of the new applicants were Poles and Russians. By trade bootmakers were outnumbered only by tailors in making applications through the 1880s, as is illustrated below.

TABLE XI

Applications for relief to the Jewish Board of Guardians ('82 - '87)

<u>Trade</u>	<u>Year</u>					
	<u>1882</u>	<u>1883</u>	<u>1884</u>	<u>1885</u>	<u>1886</u>	<u>1887</u>
Boot and shoe-makers	187	178	180	262	337	258
Tailors	415	488	461	647	939	692

SOURCES: P.P. 1888, XX; S.C. Sweating, p.526.

P.P. 1888, XI; S.C. Emigration and Immigration, Appendix 14, p.290.

Very few of the Jewish poor applied for relief to their local poor law unions, preferring their own Board of Guardians. This is shown by the comparative figures below for the union of Whitechapel, the area of greatest Jewish settlement.

57. P.P. 1888, XI; Select Committee on Emigration and Immigration, p.80.

TABLE XIIThe relief of poverty by the Whitechapel Union 1887 and 1892A. Birthplaces of claimants

<u>1887</u>	<u>In workhouse</u>	<u>In infirmary</u>	<u>In receipt of medical relief</u>	<u>Total</u>
England, Ireland or Scotland	275	528	32	835
Foreign country	2	21	27	50
<u>1892</u>				
England, Ireland or Scotland	281	544	11	836
Foreign country	2	16	11	29

B. Country of origin of foreign born claimants

<u>1887</u>	<u>Poland</u>	<u>Germany</u>	<u>Russia</u>	<u>Holland</u>	<u>U.S.A.</u>
In workhouse	-	2	-	-	-
In infirmary	2	11	5	2	1
In receipt of medical relief	17	5	1	3	1
Totals	19	18	6	5	2
<u>1892</u>					
In workhouse	-	-	2	-	-
In infirmary	4	6	5	-	-
In receipt of medical relief	6	1	4	-	-
Totals	10	7	11	-	-

SOURCE: Whitechapel Union. Report of the Guardians and Abstract of the Union Accounts for the year ended Lady-day, 1892, pp. ix-x.

In addition to illustrating the comparative scarcity of applications by the foreign born for poor relief, these figures also indicate the predominance of Eastern and Central European immigrants among the foreign born claimants. The poor law unions did not record people by religion but it seems reasonable to assume that the vast majority of Russian and Polish foreign born were Jews fleeing from persecution. This would not apply as strongly to the Germans, although anti-Semitism was a powerful social force in that country in the late nineteenth century.

Those Jews who had not fulfilled the six month residential qualification of the Jewish Board of Guardians, but who required relief, could obtain it from the Russo-Jewish Conjoint Committee if they could prove that they had been victims of persecution in Russia. This body had been set up to administer public funds collected after the passing of the May Laws of 1882,⁵⁸ which had followed the pogroms of the previous year. Its functions were clearly defined: to relieve distress by grants, loans, emigration or repatriation; to help find work for immigrants outside of the congested areas of East London through establishing a location and information bureau; the anglicisation of immigrants through free English educational classes (relief was sometimes dependant upon attending these); and the subsidising of institutions which assisted refugees. Between them in 1891 the Jewish Board of Guardians and the Russo-Jewish Conjoint Committee relieved 5,340 applicants. This amounted to 23.3% of all the Russians and Poles living in the East London districts of Whitechapel, St. George's-in-the-East, Mile End Old Town and Bethnal Green. This is only an approximate estimate of Jewish application for poor relief because the Board relieved outside of these districts, and not all Russians and Poles living in East London were Jews. Yet, the vast majority of them were, and most Jews making claims lived in East London, so the estimate is probably reasonably accurate. If it is possible to conclude that less than a quarter of all Jews living in East London applied for poor relief during 1891 then this remains a much higher figure than for non-Jews. The Census records 60,924 inhabitants of Whitechapel who were not of Russian or Polish birth in 1891. The Whitechapel Union relieved 836 people of English, Irish or Scots birth between mid-1891 and mid-1892. Thus, approximately, 1.37% of the non-Jewish population may be said to have applied for poor relief.

58. These laws made illegal any new Jewish settlement in rural areas but, in practice, many old rural Jews were expelled. (Seton-Watson, op.cit. p.159).

The Jewish Board of Guardians was heir to a long tradition of almshouse work by wealthy London Jews. This had established the Jewish Bread, Meat and Coal Society (1879), the Norwood Jewish Orphanage (1795), the Jewish Blind Society (1819), the Society for Relieving the Aged Needy of the Jewish Faith (1829), and the Spitalfields' Soup Kitchen (1854).⁵⁹ The Jewish community had enveloped itself within a culture of self-help. Within this the Jewish Board can be seen as a parallel attempt to provide for its poor the same measure of social insurance enjoyed by the Gentile population through its poor law. Although this was also open to the Jew, in theory, in practice he preferred his own. Arnold White noted this Jewish independence when he commented that "each immigrant foreign Jew settling in this country joins a community proudly separate, racially distinct, and existing preferentially aloof."⁶⁰ The increasing concentration of immigration upon the well-established Jewish areas did place certain strains upon social relations. Many of these, it should be said, were manufactured by the attitudes of anti-Semites such as White who resented Jewish cultural independence. The leaders of the Jewish community did respond to such pressures, however, by trying to diversify the close-knit ghetto culture of Whitechapel.

By the late 1880s Yiddish had replaced English as the first language in many of the narrow alleyways of Spitalfields and in the tenement blocks which adjoined the main thoroughfares of the Commercial and Whitechapel roads. If the Jew threatened to become a social introvert it was because he had, close at hand, all the prevailing institutions of his culture: synagogues, Jewish working men's clubs, and kosher butchers. If without sustenance, he could always obtain something hot at the Jewish soup kitchen, and if, on falling ill, he was fortunate enough to be taken into the London Hospital, in the Whitechapel

59. Chaim Bermant, Point of Arrival (1975), p.133.

60. Quoted in Bermant, op.cit., p.140.

Road, he would even be served kosher food there. In an effort to spread the Jew beyond Whitechapel Jewish institutions were planted further east; the Stepney Jewish School being an example. The evening classes of the Russo-Jewish Committee encouraged Jews to live and work further afield and taught them English to better prepare them. Such efforts met with little response while the poverty of the Jewish immigrant determined that he would cling, without confidence, to his small, known world. Only as he experienced upward social mobility through the twentieth century did the London Jew move, firstly to outer East London, then to the suburbs.

From within the heart of Jewish Spitalfields the Jews' Free School, in Bell Lane, was a powerful instrument of anglicisation. Its function was made more difficult by the fact that, in 1893, only 16.6% of the 3,582 children attending came from families of more than one generation of indigenoussness.⁶¹ Every child in the school was clothed and fed free by its wealthy patrons, and this created much competition for housing within the vicinity. Arthur Harding remembered how you could pick out Free School children instantly by their corduroy suits.⁶² If the child of a bootmaker or tailor was not accepted at the Free School, then the board schools of Berner and Hanbury streets were almost exclusively Jewish.

Jewish Free School children were an elite destined to avoid the arduous work in future life that was the fate of many of their peers. Just a few streets from where they learned their letters was the infamous 'hazer mark' (pig market) where master sweaters came to inspect prospective labour in the most humiliating and degrading fashion. Jewish bootfinishers would gather every Saturday morning near Black Lion Yard, a narrow alley that led into

61. P.P. 1894, LXVIII: Board of Trade: Reports on the Volume and Effects of Recent Immigration from Eastern Europe into the United Kingdom, p.38.

62. Samuel, East End Underworld, p.129.

Old Mantague Street, Spitalfields.⁶³ Isaac Stone, journalist and organizer of the first Jewish bootfinishers' union in 1886, described the scene for

The Polish Videli

" when you come to London, you will want to take a stroll on the Sabbath to the honoured spot which is called in (sic) everybody's lips the 'hazer merk'. And you will see the masters (you will recognize the dealers at once by their gross bellies) scurrying about like poisoned mice among the dishevelled men".⁶⁴

Just a short walk from Black Lion Yard was Petticoat Lane market which was an important retail outlet for boots. The pretentiously named 'translators' sold their re-conditioned second-hand footwear from the pavement. If possible the translation would be passed off as new, but it was rare that a soaking, the affixing of a new sole and heel, and a polish could achieve such deception. These men and women were often old shoemakers or repairers no longer able to ply their trade. A contemporary journalist has left us with a vivid account of one such translator at work on a Sunday morning which captures the character of the market well:

"... upon the ground lay scattered upon a limited area in the gutter about one hundred pairs of old boots and shoes tied in pairs of all imaginable shapes and qualities ... The footwear of the aristocrat and the plebeian had here found their common level - the gutter. Equality and fraternity reigned Beside them, and watching with a jealous eye of her treasures, stood an ancient dame, calling out, every and anon, 'Hoolby! Hoolby!' which cry I understood to be an invitation to the passers to do business. While looking around upon the miscellaneous host, almost wishing they could speak and tell their history, mentally asking 'whence are these?' there came to my mind the answer to the inquirer at Patmos, 'these are they that have passed through great tribulation.' And so they had, although their race was not yet run. Beside me stood a youth of the London Arab type, intently examining the heap. Looking at his feet and seeing his toes sticking through his boots, I soon discovered he was a potential buyer. The old lady quickly made the same

63. Fishman, op.cit., p.46.

64. Lloyd P. Gartner, The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870 - 1914 (1960). p.71

discovery, and, diving down, she picked up a pair of gloved leg, patent front, and brogue, laced boots of the finest make, but sadly worn. Handing them to the youth, she said, 'here's a pair will fit you,' and so they did excellently.

The price asked was 1s. The youth offered 9d., but at least a bargain was struck at 10d., the old lady declaring that that was the price she paid for them herself, putting the money in her pocket, and throwing up both hands, in the air, as if deploring the hardness of the times, and the headlessness of her customer, she continued to cry out, but more angrily than before, 'Hoolby! Hoolby!'⁶⁵

E.H. Hunt has followed Shirley Lerner in arguing that Jewish labour in late nineteenth century London was more notable for its poor working conditions than for its low wages.⁶⁶ Hunt claims that "... the widespread existence of significantly low wages, although often inferred, has never been established."⁶⁷ In the most recent study of the sweated trades, Bythell has accepted Hunt's conclusions for East London without question.⁶⁸ Information on wages in the boot and shoemaking industry is not plentiful and this is why "... the widespread existence of significantly low wages ... has never been established." The best of what is available, however, is to be found in the reports of the Select Committee on Sweating for the late 1880s,⁶⁹ a source which all these historians seem to have used but which fails to support their conclusions for the boot and shoemaking industry. Much of the evidence, although it is purely verbal and has to be taken on trust, suggests that very low wages were common, and it confirms the widespread existence of poor working conditions.

Samuel Wildman had been a teacher in Austria-Hungary before emigrating, and was active in helping found the International Journeymen Boot Finishers' Society, in 1886. He stated that they had formed the union because they had been working 18 - 20 hours per day for 30s. per week in the busy season, but

65. S.L.R.: 12 March, 1887.

66. Hunt, Regional Wage Variations, p.319. Shirley Lerner, The Impact of the Jewish Immigration of 1880 - 1914 on the London Clothing Industry and Trade Unions; Bull. of Soc. for Study of Lab. Hist., No. 12, Spring 1966, passim.

67. Ibid., p.315.

68. Bythell, op.cit., pp.146-48.

69. P.P. 1888, XX, XXI; 1890, XVII.

this could be averaged out at 15s. per week for the whole year. After ten years at finishing he could achieve this average, but the slowest workers could only make 10 - 11s. There were sometimes long periods through December and January when there was no work at all, and, even in the busier times manufacturers commonly kept back orders until late afternoon so that they could reduce the price if the work was not completed next morning. The union had had great difficulty in improving wages because master sweaters dismissed those joining, and there were so many men prepared to work under price.⁷⁰

Mayer Failwail had been a sugar baker in his home country but found it impossible to find Yiddish speaking sugar bakers in England. So, he was forced into boot finishing. As a greener he had paid a master 5s. premium to start him off, and then worked four weeks for nothing in order to learn the trade.⁷¹

Solomon Rosenberg, the first secretary of the International Journeymen, said that they had formed the union to demonstrate to the English workmen that they were not against them, and were willing to work as brothers with them. He revealed the poor diet of a sweated worker which could consist of coffee and bread for breakfast, the same for dinner (unless a man was particularly prosperous and could afford meat), and tea and bread for supper.⁷²

Solomon Baum was a master laster who was sacked for belonging to the masters' union. He had joined because he was working 16 - 18 hours per day, plus Sunday morning, and still could not afford to provide breakfast for himself by the end of the week. He thought that working conditions were better among the English workers in the Bethnal Green and Hackney roads, where they paid better wages, and where greeners were afraid to go.⁷³

70. p.p. 188B, XX; S.C. Sweating, p.60.

71. ibid.; p.62.

72. ibid.; pp. 79 - 90.

73. ibid.; pp. 91 - 94.

Charles Solomon was a master knifer and secretary of the Jewish Mutual Boot Finishers' and Lasters' Trade and Benefit Society. In his evidence he explained that the master sweaters had formed the union because they had come into conflict with the National Union over the low wages that they had been forced to accept. He thought that wages had been reduced by 30 - 40% in the past 3 - 4 years.⁷⁴

Arnold White's evidence was collected by a firm of solicitors to whom he paid £526 out of his own pocket. A convinced anti-immigrationist, he was anxious to present a case that would reveal Jewish labour in its worst possible light. He stated that greeners would often work 18 - 20 hours per day, taking their meals at their benches, in an attempt to earn enough money to bring over their families. Both he and Solomon pointed to the fact that the shaving machine had taken any real skill out of finishing,⁷⁵ and this further encouraged unscrupulous masters to bring over more immigrants. He was afraid that men working under such conditions were raw material for revolutionary propaganda.⁷⁶

This evidence suggests that not only was it common for Jewish finishers to earn between 10 - 15s. per week, but that even this very low rate was coming under increasing pressure from the late 1880s. Out of this had to be found approximately three times the rent of the N. Essex agricultural labourer who was, himself, earning about 11s. per week.⁷⁷ The sweated Jewish finisher was indisputably worse off as he might expect to pay 40 - 50% of his income in rent.

A number of those giving evidence to the Select Committee on Sweating mentioned the hostile response that Jews often received from English bootmakers. This hostility resulted in the immigrant shouldering blame that was not rightfully his. Hunt has estimated that, because Jewish immigration was so small (they never exceeded 2.5% of the London population before 1900) it had virtually no impact upon regional wage variations. The small impact that it did make was

74. *Ibid.*: pp.68 - 79.

75. An important example of mechanisation in the home workshop.

76. P.P. 1888, XX: S.C. Sweeting, pp. 35 - 55.

77. Hunt, *Regional Wage Variations*, pp. 90 - 91.

upon low-paying industries in areas such as London, where it tended to exacerbate the difference between the lower and higher paying trades. He concludes that:

"Despite the considerable attention they received one of the most remarkable aspects of Jewish immigration is how little it affected the rest of the community. The immigrants worked in a well-defined range of occupations, usually for Jewish masters, and often for markets created by Jewish enterprise. A cost-benefit analysis of the net economic effects of alien immigration before the First World War would probably discover no marked influence in either direction."⁷⁸

It is difficult to assess to what extent Jewish masters in bootmaking served their own markets, but the evidence for Flatau's previously cited, suggests that at least the larger firms sold more widely than that. Jewish enterprise may have expanded the sweated market but it certainly did not create it; it had existed since long before their arrival. On the wages front Jews only really competed in the sweated trade (as Baum's evidence above so graphically illustrates) and this left the intermediate and statement trades the preserves of the English bootmaker. Still, he was inclined to exaggerate the threat of the immigrant. Why was this?

White has argued that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian Jew was becoming proletarianised, and that this was the culmination of a steady decline in status through the century. First, he had been displaced by the rise of an indigenous petit-bourgeoisie from his role as independent master craftsmen. Then, as discriminatory laws forced him to become urbanised, he found himself competing as a wage labourer within a developing capitalist economy with urban Russian workers and migrant peasants. When the Jewish immigrants reached England, therefore, they wanted to do more than merely re-establish the way of life they had just abandoned, they "sought to re-establish the economic independence and security which they and their parents had lost in the Pale."⁷⁹

78. *Ibid.* p.322.

79. Jerry White, *op.cit.* p.252. The argument is taken from Abram Leon, *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation*, 1946 (New York, 1970), chapters V - VII.

This is too deliberate an analysis. There can be no doubt that Jews displayed a peculiar facility for establishing themselves quickly as small workshop masters in trades such as bootmaking. Some may have seen this as an attempt to re-capture a past independence, but setting up as a small master was comparatively easy in an outwork trade. The structure of the bootmaking trade facilitated 'penny capitalism' and this was more important than any pre-ordained social goal. Self-employment in a home workshop was hardly unique to Jewish bootmakers: the native lasters, particularly, had been so employed for generations. Neither should the degree of independence attained from such a mode of production be exaggerated. Jewish masters were only a little less sweated than their greeners, as the statements of the witnesses to the Select Committee on Sweating confirm.

The importance of this revised view is that the prejudices of English workers cannot be explained so easily by a Jewish tendency towards 'penny capitalism.' Until 1886, Jewish bootmakers did remain unorganised in a trade union, and they were regarded by many English unionists as unorganisable. The stereotype 'Jewish Economic Man' was diligent, docile and prepared to work any number of hours in order to accumulate sufficient capital to become self-employed. Under the outwork system little capital was required to set up on one's own and there existed a natural ladder of progression from greener learning the process of finishing, to journeyman finisher, and eventually to master knifer employing three or four greeners of one's own. The 1894 Board of Trade Report on Alien Immigration provides a good example of the way in which the myth of the unorganisable Jewish worker was perpetuated. The Jew, it argued, makes a distinction between industry, where he is economically competitive, and leisure, where his 'communitistic' instincts are exhibited, but more in a 'race patriotism' than in trade unionism. Mystified by the cultural segregation of the Jewish community, prone to emphasise differences rather than similarities, English parliamentarians and trade unionists, alike, too often

failed to isolate the real problems in organising the Jews: the cut-throat competition for work caused by the vicissitudes of the trade cycle and the over-supply of labour, the language and educational barrier, and plain anti-Semitism on the part of many English people.

The Jews were hardly without a collectivist component in their socio-political culture for intellectuals such as Aaron Lieberman, who had fled the attentions of the Tsarist secret police in the 1870s, had brought with them a libertarian socialism that was to re-vitalise Jewish working class politics in East London.⁸⁰ Gartner has described the radical shift in Jewish social thought by which the belief that the Jew could emancipate himself under reactionary regimes by demonstrating his enlightenment was abandoned.⁸¹ Such a break led to emigration. In the East End the radical immigrants founded the Berner Street Club (in Spitalfields), home of the International Working Men's Educational Association from 1885 - 92. Neither was it an isolated radicalism, for Engels, Eleanor Marx and William Morris were all regular visitors, although H.M. Hyndman kept his distance.

Through the 1880s the tailors, as well as the bootmakers, made pioneering efforts to organise into trade unions. In 1889, the tailors fought and won a great strike which the bootmakers learned much from when they, themselves, struck the following year. Such industrial militancy was favourably covered by the Yiddish-Socialist press such as the Arbeter Freint (Workers' Friend). This was run, from 1885 - 91, by Morris Winchevsky and a group of revolutionary socialists who had formerly been associated with the Polish Yidel. The more provocative members of this group alienated much potential support in the local community by blatantly flouting religious customs and traditions.⁸² Thus, the Jewish immigrants into the East End were not without a collectivist

80. Fishman, op.cit., p.32 and chapter 4.

81. Gartner, op.cit., p.41.

82. Fishman, op.cit., pp.155-56.

politics upon which trade unionism could be built. In struggling to create such organisations Jewish militants were subjected to all the same handicaps as their English counterparts, with the addition of the special problems peculiar to the immigrant community. They had begun to overcome some of these by the end of the 1880s, but English unionists' impatience was rooted in the belief that the London trade could not survive if progress was made only by inches.

There had been an abortive attempt to organise the Jews in 1883, in response to pressure from the London Metro. branch of the National Union. This short-lived union, which was meeting at the 'Angel and Crown' in Whitechapel in August, was composed of master sweaters and was reported as enrolling 200⁸³ members. Charles Freak, secretary of London Metro., had been involved in this initial unsuccessful attempt, and through the next four years worked consistently to revive it. In 1886 he helped found the International Journeymen Boot Finishers' Society along with such Jewish militants as Isaac Stone, Solomon Rosenberg and Samuel Wildman. As secretary of a branch which, because it was controlled by the statement aristocracy, cared little about the welfare of the sweated worker, Freak was in an ambivalent position. He had constantly to tread a middle path, for although he was convinced that the survival of trade unionism depended upon organising the sweated sector, he could not alienate those upon whom his position depended. The International Journeymen were a trade union of Jewish finishers who worked for master sweaters. Also in 1886, Charles Solomon helped found a new union of master sweaters, thus creating dual unionism within the Jewish sweated sector.⁸⁴ Yet, considerable co-operation took place between the two. This was based upon their identifying the manufacturer, not each other, as the class enemy. Gainer has concluded that neither of these organisations was "worth a tinker's curse"⁸⁵, but this is a harsh judgement. No membership figures are available for either until they

83. M.B.: August 1883. P.P. 1888, XX: S.C. Sweating, p.56.

84. S.L.B.: 12 June, 1886.

85. B. Gainer, The Alien Invasion (1972), p.31.

amalgamated with the National in 1890, but it is likely that combined membership was between two and three hundred in the late 1880s. Their influence spread far more widely and during the strike of 1890 Jewish solidarity was frequently praised by English unionists. The account of the strike in Chapter 6 reveals the Jews as often exceeding their English comrades' determination to force workshops upon the employers.

The organised Jewish finisher was, of course, very much in the minority. It was the vast mass of exploited labour working in tiny dens amidst the alleyways of Whitechapel and Spitalfields that English unionists identified as being a threat to their livelihoods. Here was a world which the factory inspector or trade union organiser rarely penetrated, a world in which the kill or be killed morality of the jungle predominated, a world in which the degenerate quality of social relationships and the filth of the environment robbed its inhabitants of the last shreds of dignity. The exploited Jew became doubly abused when English unionists too hastily condemned him for his own degradation. Was it not simply a matter of organising against the manufacturers who created the hell-holes? With no previous experience of trade unionism in the brutally authoritarian climate of Tsarist Russia the Jew stood amazed at the impudence of such suggestions and was wary of abusing the hospitality of a foreign land. The dwellings and workshops of Whitechapel were tiny, dark and insanitary, his wages were barely enough to keep off starvation, but at least when he closed the door after a day's work there was no chance of it being severed from its hinges by the sword of a zealot intent upon skewering him in the name of Christ.

The most common form of anti-Semitism exhibited by English trade unionists was of a simple economic variety. Leaders such as Fisk were at pains to stress that if only the Jew would act as a good English trade unionist then perfect co-operation was possible. As he became disillusioned through the years, however, Fisk began to wonder whether there was not something intrinsic within the Jewish personality that prevented him from behaving in a

socialistic manner. S.D.F. bootmakers, such as William Votier, also supported the limitation of immigration and were no more temperate in their condemnations of the Jewish sweaters than Frask. In fact, the Jewish bootmakers were left to defend themselves by the 1890s for, by then, all the English trade union leaders without exception, attacked them as an undesirable economic threat. That they remained united with the English workers in the London branches of the National Union is a credit to their tolerance and good sense.

It can be concluded that the main economic effect of the Jewish immigration of the 1880s upon the London boot and shoemaking industry was to add to the labour force at a time of recession. But immigrants worked almost exclusively in the sweated trade, so this effect fell upon only the lower-paid section of the trade. London employers attempted to remain competitive by intensifying the division of labour and, as more labour was required, immigrants provided it. The effect of their over-supplying the industry's needs was to force the price of labour down. In fact, immigration served to divert attention away from the real problems of the local industry: now it was going to respond to the long-term decline in competitiveness and to mechanisation. To this extent immigrants did become scapegoats for the degree of their penetration of the local industry never merited the attention it received.

The effect of immigration upon trade unionism was generally a negative one in that immigrants added to the ranks of those difficult to organise. This, however, need be only a short-term disadvantage which could be overcome once the immigrant became familiar with his new environment. Paradoxically, those immigrants who did turn to trade unionism early often became exceptionally militant. Primarily, this was due to the fact that they were the most exploited group of the labour force and theirs was, thus, a trade unionism of desperation. But, a few had placed their industrial activity within a wider context of libertarian socialism.

CHAPTER THREEEARLY TRADE UNIONISM1. Cordwainers, rivetters and finishers; divisions of labour and trade unions

It is an historical fact of the utmost irony that by the time the Amalgamated Society of Cordwainers established itself as the first successful national union of shoemakers in March, 1863 the technical base upon which it stood had almost been eroded. The use of the ancient name of cordwainer instead of shoemaker in its title indicated the predominance of a mentality of bygone times. Such nomenclature was singularly inappropriate in London where the complete shoemaker, or cordwainer, had almost disappeared amidst the division of labour described in Chapter One. Thus, the Amalgamated Society of Cordwainers could not be what it literally claimed to be if it was to assume a national organisation. It had to be flexible enough to include both complete hand-craftsmen and those numerous varieties of shoemakers working on the division of labour system.

National trade unionism was built upon long traditions of local and sectional organisation on the part of the 'honourable' or 'respectable' boot and shoemaker. In early nineteenth century London these craftsmen were divided into men's men and women's men, making men's and women's footwear. Both were well organised in defiance of the Combination Laws. In 1804, the men's men had divided into East and West sections and eight years later the women's men were reported as having fourteen divisions in London.¹ A measure of the tightness of organisation can be gained from the fact that when John Brown came to work as a man's man in London in 1811 he found it necessary to join the union as soon as he had obtained regular work.² Within a year he was caught up in a prolonged strike that caused him to temporarily desert the trade. The 1812 strike appears to have been unsuccessful for it resulted in a split

1. Prothero, Artisans and Politics, p.41.

2. Mansfield, op.cit., p.130.

between the City and West End shoemakers and the sending out of much work by London masters to Northampton.³ Yet, the ladies' shoemakers were still sufficiently well organised in 1813 to successfully prosecute a master for employing an 'illegal man.'⁴ This was no mean feat at a time when laissez-faire had almost completely cleared the legislative debris of the paternalist state.

Obtaining a precise picture of the working lives of these early trade unionists is difficult but certain things are clear. Firstly, they were skilled craftsmen in the better class trade as opposed to slop or (later) sweated workers. Secondly, these craftsmen were divided into complete shoemakers in the bespoke trade working mostly on the premises of a master, and those working in the best, ready-made trade who were mostly outworkers. The latter group consisted of clickers, working on the master's premises, closers, and makers, who both worked outdoors. Makers performed the lasting and finishing. If they had a family, a wife and children might be put to the finishing. John Brown seems to have carried out all the making himself in his lodgings during the last years of the French Wars.⁵ The division of labour was less accentuated in the better class trade because even finishing the best quality boots required a skilled hand. In the cheaper trade making was already being stratified into its more and less skilled branches and was carried out in separate home workshops by lasters and finishers. This was the great mass of unorganised labour despised by the artisan. At top and bottom points they worked for separate markets but in the middle their interests might meet and come into conflict. It was at such points that the imperative of trade union expansion was strongest.

The skilled City shoemakers were on strike again in 1825 and the statement rates won seem to have been retained until the 'Coronation strike' of 1838.

3. Yeo and Thompson (ed.), op.cit. pp.243-45.

4. Presumably one who had not served an apprenticeship. Prothero, op.cit. p.51.

5. Mansfield, op.cit. p.130.

The outcome of this conflict is unclear because Mayhew's informant said that while the strike was fairly successful, the masters partially succeeded in destroying the union.⁶ It is likely that the membership figure of 588 recorded by the London Eastern or City Society of Journeymen Boot and Shoemakers (for the men's branches) was taken before this strike.⁷ The West End men's men's society, which had seven divisions in 1850, claimed an even larger membership of 800 which had been held stable for three decades. The 1838 strike had enabled them to regain some of the ground lost in a dispute eight years before.⁸ In 1830 the West End shoemakers had been active in the trade union revival. They joined the G.N.C.T.U., demonstrated against the transportation of the Dorchester labourers,⁹ and became leading co-operators.¹⁰ (This interest in general unionism and co-operation was paralleled by the Northampton shoemakers¹¹).

It was the declining artisanal trades, beset by the problems of unemployment and a labour surplus, that were most attracted to co-operation in the early 1830s.¹² It was the same trades, including boot and shoemakers, who formed the basis of support for London Chartist.¹³ By 1844 London shoemakers were organised into two unions. The Cordwainers' General Mutual Assistance Association probably represented the women's men and made some efforts to organise the sweated trade. The Philanthropic Society of Boot and Shoemakers, on the other hand, was a more elitist body of men's men which opposed the 'Mutuals'.¹⁴ In April, 1845 the two unions made a short-lived attempt to join together as the Amalgamated Society of Cordwainers. This was the first recorded attempt at national unionism in the boot and shoe industry. In the

6. Yeo and Thompson (ed.), *op.cit.* p.246.

7. *Ibid.* p.228.

8. *Ibid.* p.234.

9. *Ibid.* pp.234-35.

10. Prothero, *op.cit.* p.241 ff.

11. M.J. Maynes, *Class and Class Conflict in the Early Nineteenth Century: Northampton Shoemakers and the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union, Literature and History*, No. 5, Spring 1977.

12. Prothero, *op.cit.* pp.251-52.

13. I.J. Prothero, *Chartism in London, Past and Present*, XLIV, 1969, passim.

14. Prothero, *London Chartist and the Trades, F.H.R.* 24, 1971, p.213.

first year 1,980 of its, 5,385 members came from the London branches,¹⁵ but it does not seem to have endured beyond the mid-1840s. Perhaps it perished in the depression of 1847-48 along with the last Chartist hopes.

By 1861, the West End men's men were organized into six lodges and the City men's men, known as the Reform Association, into four. There existed over a score of other local societies representing the ladies' trade, the strong trade and closers.¹⁶ In December of that year fifteen of these London societies amalgamated as the London United Societies of Cordwainers with G. Dodshon, formerly General Secretary of the West End men's men, as General Secretary.¹⁷ It was this organization which became the Amalgamated Society of Cordwainers in March, 1863, taking the same name as the failed union of 1845. The new Amalgamated had spread far beyond London and encompassed 4,300 members in 84 different societies in 1863.¹⁸

The full history of the Amalgamated awaits the discovery of the Union's Quarterly Reports, if they still exist.¹⁹ The Webbs used the Reports when researching their History of Trade Unionism and their notes, preserved in the Webb Collection, enable us to know something of the Amalgamated's history in the 1860s. Establishing the society as a national one was difficult, even London branches displayed a direct opposition to a leadership drawn from its own contingent. Within a few months one of the West End branches seceded, and this was followed by the West End No. 2 branch and the Marylebone branch in 1867. The next year, the City men's branch was scratched because a strike for a 10% advance involving 2,000 bootmakers had caused it to run into arrears. This action appears to have left the City branch very bitter for they joined with the Marylebone and West End No. 2 branches the following year in agitating

15. Webb Trade Union Collection, Section A, Vol. XXV, p.88.

16. United Kingdom First Annual Trades' Union Directory (1861, republished 1968), pp.42-45, 48-49.

17. Webb T.U. Coll..A.. Vol. XXV, p.96.

18. Ibid., p.98.

19. See, Thorn, op.cit., pp.23-26.

against the Amalgamated through the press. The secessionists claimed that there were as many societies outside of the Union as in it. The Amalgamated's own estimate for London was only eight societies with a total membership of 588. This was almost certainly an under-estimate, however, for it did not even include the City men's branch which had just seceded.²⁰ By 1874 reconciliation with the City and West End branches seems to have taken place for they both appear on the membership roll although Marylebone was still absent. In all, the fourteen London branches contributed 990 out of a total membership of 8,306.²¹ This figure was greatly reduced by the secession of the riveters and finishers in February, 1874, but the Amalgamated survived. In 1883 it still had a membership of 3,661, and although this declined through the 1880s, it recovered to 4,371 by 1892.²²

The National Union of Operative Boot and Shoe Riveters and Finishers was, essentially, born of changes within the division of labour in the making department. In the ready-made trade, by the 1870s, making had long been subdivided into lasting and finishing and in some regions, such as London, the two were performed by different classes of workers in separate home workshops. Hand lasting, by which the upper was attached to the insole and outsole by the use of a welt and hand stitching, proved both too expensive and time consuming for the cheaper, ready-made trade, however. Iron rivetting was the new method of attachment developed through the 1860s designed to solve these problems. The rivets were driven through the holes of a metal plate that held upper, insole and outer together. By the end of the century rivetting became widely mechanized but it remained a hand process performed by the laster until then in most regions. In this way the laster came to be known as a rivetter more often than not. The hand craftsmen of the Amalgamated, often referred to as stitchmen by the riveters, were increasingly appalled at a further division of

20. Webb T.U. Coll., A., Vol. XXV, pp. 103-08.

21. 47th Quarterly Report of the Amalgamated Cordwainers' Association, Feb. 1874.

22. Webb T.U. Coll., A., Vol. XXV, p.118.

labour that involved de-skilling. Riveters accused the stitchmen of running the Amalgamated's affairs to their own benefit on the subscriptions of riveters and finishers and this led to separation in early 1874.²³ The division did not quite take place along the lines of the bespoke and ready-made trades. The Amalgamated retained a good many members in the better class ready-made trade and continued to recruit such workers without discrimination. The National Union which emerged from the secession was, to begin with, one dominated by lasters in the better and medium quality ready-made trades. Finishers working for the same markets were recruited but lacked the status to achieve the same degree of influence.

II. The establishment of the statement system and confrontation with the labour laws.

The product of secession in the capital was the London Metropolitan branch, one of the twelve founding members of the new union. It was the smallest of the twelve, however, with only 45 members in June, 1874. Leicester, where many of lasters had gone into factories, dominated the membership with 1,397 out of a total of 2,104. It was to become the organisational centre of the Union. Of the remainder, Bristol, Glasgow, Stafford and Leeds were the largest branches.²⁴

Although the Amalgamated had set down firm roots in London before 1874, it had organised almost exclusively in the City and West End, and principally among the bespoke workers. Neither of the registered branches in the West had any members in February, 1874.²⁵ It is possible that a few local societies had survived independent of the Amalgamated, for in 1861 there had been branches of the strong society in St. George's-in-the-East, and an ordinary society of boot and shoemakers in Hackney.²⁶ The latter may even have contributed the first secretary of the new London Metro. branch, for James

23. Fox, *History of N.U.B.S.O.*, Chapters 1 and 2, for a much fuller account, which also deals with the personal politics involved.

24. National Union of Operative Boot and Shoe Riveters and Finishers. Quarterly Reports June 1874.

25. 47th Q.R. of Amalgamated, Feb., 1874.

26. U.K. First Annual T.W. Directory, pp. 42-45, 48-49.

Parkins lived at 32, Upton Road, in the heart of Hackney. Almost all of the other 44 members eligible to attend branch meetings²⁷ would have been drawn from the neighbouring vicinity. These men worked in the better quality ready-made trade and enjoyed organisational control of the branch from the outset.

Membership altered little in the first year of existence. The 45 members of June, 1874 became 70 by September, but declined to 54 by January, 1875, as the slackness of winter replaced the busy summer season.²⁸ London escaped any major strikes or lock-outs at a time when other branches were fighting to survive employers' attempts to smother the new union at birth. The Manchester shoemakers returned in June after being locked out for seventeen weeks and the branch survived with only 69 members.²⁹ The Dundee bootmakers were even less successful, and their branch disappeared after a long struggle against massive reductions of 25 - 70%.³⁰

Why had employers shown such a comparative lack of interest in the new union in London? Firstly, it is likely that the London Metric branch had been founded upon several already existing societies whose members worked for firms that had long been used to organised workers. Secondly, the numbers involved were, as yet, insignificant. Conflict with the employers was only to break out when the branch attempted to broaden its control by extending the statement system. In May, London had been singled out as an area in need of particular organisational effort, and a levy was taken from some of the larger branches for this purpose.³¹

The London first-class statement had been imposed by the Amalgamated upon about 25 employers in 1872. The discussion in Chapter One revealed its

27. These were held at the King of Prussia; Bevedere St., Hoxton.

28. National Union, Q.R.; June and Sept. 1874, Jan. 1875.

29. Ibid.; June and Sept., 1874.

30. Ibid.; June and Sept., 1874, Jan. and April, 1875.

31. Ibid.; July, 1875.

purpose as extending the frontiers of union control over the nature of the work produced by restricting employers in their use of materials and styles. In July, 1875, the City branch of the Amalgamated and London Metro. agreed upon a joint campaign to impose a second-class statement. If successful, this would extend regulation to all shops immediately below the first class where there existed enormous differences in rates paid for similar work.

The employers were notified at the beginning of July that the new list was to become effective from 1st August.³² It was immediately accepted by three employers who were almost certainly among the better payers who wished to see their undercutting rivals regulated.³³ But, the vast majority resisted, placed pressure upon those who had conceded to retract, and encouraged them to join an employers' association (a purely temporary affair that lasted only for the duration of the dispute). The unions then withdrew their members from the recalcitrant shops, and the employers responded by announcing that they would take on no men without a discharge certificate or a character from his previous employer. This effectively prevented the strikers from obtaining work elsewhere. The next stage in the escalation of the dispute proved to be the withdrawal of all unionists from shops deemed to be second class.³⁴ In early August, William Hammett and Washington Chapman, both of the City branch of the Amalgamated, reported to the London Trades' Council that 250 men were out, and that they expected the number to double within a week. They were granted credentials to solicit support from the London trades.³⁵

Thus, the numbers involved made the dispute a serious one even before the question of picketing arose. The new Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act had passed through Parliament by the end of August, 1875, and was to become

32. The Bee-Hive: 7 Aug., 1875.

33. National Union, Q.R.: Oct., 1875.

34. Leather Trades' Circular and Review: 9 Aug., 1875.

35. The Bee-Hive: 7 Aug., 1875.

law on 1st September, apparently unknown to many East End employers. Richard Crose, the Conservative Home Secretary responsible for it, thought that peaceful picketing had never been illegal under the old Criminal Law Amendment Act (1871),³⁶ but by the time that his own Act became law there should have been no doubt.

On 26th July, the Secretary of the Manufacturers' Association, C. Lorain, wrote to the strike committee demanding that the pickets be withdrawn from the firm of Solomon and Hooker before any negotiations could take place. This firm had already summonsed pickets for assaults upon their workmen.³⁷ At a meeting in Hackney a few days later, Hooker advocated the crushing of the union on the grounds that, by demanding an extension of their controls over the use of materials, they were behaving in an over-aggressive manner.³⁸ An attempt in August to follow the employers' earlier suggestion to put the matter to the two Liberal M.P.s. for Hackney failed,³⁹ and two hundred men were still out by the end of the month. The employers threatened to enlist the support of the first-class manufacturers.⁴⁰

On 17th August, the unions had won an unexpected victory when William Hunt came before the Worship Street magistrate, and was found not guilty of coercing Michael Solomon into "altering the mode of carrying on his business by molestation and obstruction."⁴¹ The pickets had forced Solomon into putting out his work secretly using young boys as intermediaries. Hunt had followed one of these children to find out where the strikebreaker was working, and the prosecution's case rested upon the assumption that, had he so discovered, intimidation would have followed. It was an ill-conceived prosecution which the magistrate was bound to dismiss. This was the first of several similar cases testing the extent of trade unionists' rights to picket in furtherance of industrial disputes.

36. W.W. Fraser, *Trade Unions and Society* (1974), p.195.

37. *Leather Trades Circular and Review*: 9 Aug., 1875.

38. *Ibid.*, and *St. Crispin*: 14 Aug., 1875.

39. *The Bee-Hive*: 14 Aug., 1875.

40. *Ibid.*: 21 Aug., 1875.

41. *St. Crispin*: 28 Aug., 1875.

They are of particular significance because of the change in the law that occurred in 1875 and they provide examples of the way in which a law that was much welcomed in theory by the trade union movement actually affected the practice of industrial relations in a local context.

Hunt's acquittal was celebrated by the London labour movement as an important victory because it followed the imprisonment of five cabinet makers, in May, for picketing. This prosecution had been carried out under the 1871 Act.⁴² Released after serving a month's imprisonment, one of them accompanied his general secretary to Hunt's hearing.⁴³ Capital and Labour, the journal of the National Federation of Associated Employers of Labour, did not share their enthusiasm at the verdict, arguing that it put workmen in constant fear of pickets.⁴⁴ Saint Crispin, the journal of the shoemaking trade, lamented the Government's weakness "which seems calculated to encourage any and every abominable freak the working classes think fit to indulge in."⁴⁵ Solomon's workmen were relieved of these fearful abominations when the pickets were removed in early October. The shop remained 'on block' which meant that unionists were supposed to boycott it. This did not prevent the intransigent employer from returning to the offensive by prosecuting another couple of pickets.⁴⁶

On the 23rd October, Bushby, the Worship Street magistrate, presided over his second case arising from the Solomon strike. A complicated series of cross-summonses had finally resulted in a charge of assault against two Hackney lasters, Michael Dillon and Jesse Browning. As the offences with which they were charged were alleged to have taken place on the evening of 27th August, both were charged under the 1871 Act, as the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act did not take effect until 1st September. Dillon and Browning were supposed to have assaulted two strikebreakers, the brothers Samuel and Peter Goode, in the 'Pritchard Arms', Hackney, after deliberately seeking them out.

42. The Bee-Hive: 8, 11, 29 May, 5 June, 1875.

43. Ibid.: 21 Aug., 1875.

44. Capital and Labour: 25 Aug., 1875.

45. St. Crispin: 28 Aug., 1875.

46. Ibid.: 30 Oct., 1875.

By the time that this case came to court the Solomon strike had become the cause of much anxiety. It had been made a test case by the employers, who were financing the prosecutions, and the unions were equally determined that the shop should not be lost to the second-class statement campaign. Several witnesses spoke of disturbances outside the factory in Seabright Street, Hackney, where mobs were alleged to have gathered, throwing stones and breaking windows. In his evidence, however, Inspector Glaess said that the only complaint received by the police had come from Solomon, himself.

Dillon had been a regular picket outside Solomon's, but Browning was not even a member of the union. He was one of several men 'picked up' by Dillon in the 'Durham Area' on the way to the 'Pritchard Area'. The prosecution was strengthened by its attempt to prove that the assaults had been planned. Matthews, an ex-policeman who had been in the 'Pritchard Area' at the time of the affray, gave evidence that Dillon had told him, earlier in the day, of his intention to bring down a lot of men "to pay" the strikebreakers. The defence responded by accusing Matthews of having a pecuniary interest in the conviction of the defendants, as the employers had offered a reward of £2 to anyone supplying evidence which might lead to it.

Bushby dispensed with the rights of labour at a stroke:

"The essence of natural right was that men should be free agents, and this trade quarrel was to prevent them selling their work on the best terms they could get. Could anything be more oppressive? The defendants and the men's union might think that they were asserting the rights of their craft, and that those who acted against them were traitors, but those who sought to violate the freedom of their fellow-men must expect to suffer the penalty."⁴⁷

47. Capital and Labour: 27 Oct., 1875, where the best account of the proceedings is to be found. But see also, St. Crispin. 30 Oct., 1875; Leather Trades' Circular and Review. 8 Nov., 1875; The Bee-Hive. 23. 30 October, 1875.

Thus, Solomon's refusal to admit defeat after the Hunt decision had eventually paid dividends. But, it had been the decision of the employers' association to throw its collective weight behind the prosecution that had proved crucial. They had judged wisely, for this time the evidence was much stronger and the local magistracy was in no danger of compromising its posture of impartiality by convicting. The verdict swung the balance of forces in the second-class statement campaign away from the unionists and, with the onset of winter, it was suspended. London Metro. claimed that eight shops had been forced to pay to the new statement by then. Solomon's, however, was still 'on black'.⁴⁸

Dillon and Browning's appeals were rejected on 27th January and they began their sentences in the Middlesex House of Correction. They were not forgotten for, on 1st March, Capital and Labour reproduced an amazing letter which it said had been received by an East End manufacturer (obviously Solomon). The letter was headed by a rough representation of a skeleton and, at the foot, the inscription was given a black border in the shape of a tombstone:

"We are far from being done with you or Good, Solomons. Your family need not be surprised to hear at any time that your brains have been blown out. We have sworn by all in heaven and hell that we will have your life and also goods, we have only been waiting for Browning and Dillon's time to expire for them to come out of prison. By God you shall know what it is to imprison Union men. Browning and Dillon shall have the satisfaction of looking upon your corpse and goods are long, we intend to watch you night and day till we get the opportunity to fire at either of you without being observed, so prepare for death! Union men are not to be trifled with:

48. National Union, Q.R.: Jan. 1876.

In Memory of
 PETER GOODE
 a despicable scab,
 Suffered by his brains being Blown out,
 February, 1876
 Thro' treachery to my fellow men
 I met with an untimely end.
 Notice.- My employer lies buried in the 1st Class ground,
 Murdered for encouraging Scabs like Me."⁴⁹

The letter is clearly a parody of the style of the 'illegal tradition' and resembles more the hand of a Luddite or a Swing rioter than a trade unionist of the 1870s. The suggestion of a secret oath, the threat to property, the repeated morbid concentration upon death were all summoned from a past when collective bargaining took place by riot or intimidation. Who wrote it? There would seem two leading contenders. It may have been written by one of the more militant trade unionists involved in the second class statement campaign, who was working out his frustrations by making threats he had no intention of keeping. Certainly, there was no attempt to injure either Solomon or Goode, and the letter should not be taken to be at all representative of the state of industrial relations. As yet, these did not border on such naked acts of violence. The other possibility is that the letter was fabricated, perhaps by Solomon, for the purpose of discrediting the trade unionist campaign. In favour of this hypothesis is the literary style, but it contains no spelling⁵⁰ or grammatical errors which were a common means of faking the hand of a working man. It is impossible to know for sure but the unauthentic nature of the letter points towards Solomon, who had already shown himself a determined adversary. He may well have feared a renewed attack by the unions as the spring trade drew near and decided to put them in a more vulnerable position. From the point of view of the unions, there was no reason to resort to the tactics of the 'dark

49. Capital and Labour: 1 March, 1876.

50. With the exception of Goode's name.

ages' for twenty two shops had accepted the second class statement by May, 1876. Predictably, Solomon's was not among them.⁵¹

A crucial struggle at the firm of Watts, through the summer of 1876, prevented the employer from breaking away from the statement, and this seems to have reconciled the remainder of the second class employers to their fate. The success of the campaign must have had much to do with the rise in London Metro.'s membership, from 107 in October, 1875 to 355 by July, 1876.⁵² In the following October, however, the struggle with the second class employers led to two more prosecutions which, through testing the supposed liberalism of the new labour laws, assumed a deep significance for all trade unionists.

The cases arose out of a strike at the firm of William Ayers of Hackney Road, who had been one of the last to submit to the second class statement in April, 1876. The following September he offered 15% reductions as trade was dull and he thought he could "do without society men altogether".⁵³ A strike ensued. On 18th September, Walter Baxter was on his way into the shop to take out work when he was apprehended by Edward Delworth, a London Metro. picket, who told him that a strike was in progress. The next day Delworth caught Baxter shopping again and this time, it was alleged, threatened to break his arm. He was overheard by Joseph Morgan, the manager of the shop. The same evening the two met again and Delworth told Baxter that he intended sending the branch secretary round to his house. On being cross-examined for the counsel for the defence during the magistrate's court proceedings, Baxter denied receiving money from his employer for bringing the case. He further denied that Ayers was paying the cost of the case, or that he had financed his (Baxter's) recent wedding. Hannay, the Worship Street magistrate, sent Delworth for trial at the Old Bailey charged with threatening Baxter "with a view to coercion".⁵⁴

51. National Union, G.R.: May, 1876.

52. From January, 1876 a new system of probationary membership was introduced by which new recruits were required to contribute for 6 months before becoming full, financial members. Thus, the July, 1876 figure is made up of 255 financial and 100 probationary members.

53. The Bee-Hive: 2 Dec., 1876.

54. Capital and Labour: 11 Oct., 1876.

At the same hearing Henry D. Richardson was also committed for trial on a charge of threatening to coerce Simon Lex. Richardson had been secretary of the London Metro. branch since July, 1875, when he had replaced John J. Brown. Since then he had built up a considerable respect from his fellow trade unionists. "All who have had the pleasure of Mr. Richardson's acquaintance know him to be one of the quietest, most careful and intelligent officers in connection with our Union," was the opinion of his colleagues.⁵⁵ The employers also recognized his integrity. R. Mountford, the chairman of their association, "expressed his deep felt regret at the serious position in which Mr. Richardson is placed," and this was endorsed by all present.⁵⁶ Thus, Richardson would seem an unlikely person to have threatened the life of Lex, or anyone else. Even the magistrate who committed him admitted that it was not a strong case.⁵⁷ In retrospect, it was probably a mistake for the Union to advise him to go for trial at the Central Criminal Court in preference to being tried by the magistrate.

Both men were found guilty on 27th October and, in varying degrees, both trials were scandalous. Richardson was sentenced to two months hard labour by Mr. Justice Lush, twice the term received by Delworth, on the grounds that he had exercised the greater irresponsibility as he was an older and more experienced trade unionist (Richardson was 28, Delworth 21). The outcry which followed was directed not only at the sentences, but also at the conduct of the trials which had been grossly irregular. The Union pointed out that, in Delworth's case, the prosecution and defence had produced one witness each, and the jury had accepted the evidence of the former (a convicted felon) against that of a man of unchallenged character. It was also unclear whether Delworth had been found guilty of threatening violence, or of merely calling Baxter a

55. National Union, Q.R. Nov. 1875.

56. The Bee-Hive 2 Dec., 1875.

57. Capital and Labour 11 Oct., 1875.

"scab". If the latter, "then the New Labour Laws place Unionists actually in a far worse position than they occupied under the late terrible Criminal Law Amendment Act ..."⁵⁸ A crucial irregularity occurred in the conduct of the trials. Having found him guilty, Delworth's jury recommended mercy on the grounds that he had been ill-advised, while Richardson's case was still continuing.⁵⁹ This probably prejudiced Richardson's trial for he later received a longer sentence. The Union protested bitterly that branch officers should not be held responsible, *de jure*, for the actions of their members.⁶⁰ No witnesses were produced to support the prosecution's case apart from Lex, himself.

London trade unionists were greatly angered by the decisions. The Bee-Hive published a long "appeal to fellow working men" from the defence committee set up to raise funds for the men's families. It described the long history of the strike and the way in which the employer had "by the aid of unscrupulous witnesses ... jeopardised the liberty of pickets." It reiterated the point already made by the Council of the National Union, that unionists should have no illusions about the real nature of the new labour legislation, "... these men are the first victims of the boasted boon to Unionists - the new Labour Laws."⁶¹

In the light of the judgements the Council raised several points of importance in relation to the picketing laws. Lush had stated that, although picketing was legal, "picketing and besetting with an intent to intimidate, either employees, or employers", was not. Therefore:

"Firstly, can the mere words used by a picket, 'informing a non-Unionist that if he continues to work for a shop on strike he will be considered a scab, black sheep, knobstick, blackleg, renegade, or any other offensive

58. National Union, Q.R.; July, 1876.

59. The Bee-Hive; 2 Dec., 1876.

60. National Union, Q.R.; Nov. 1876.

61. The Bee-Hive; 2 Dec., 1876.

terms constitute intimidation within the meaning of the Act of Parliament?' Secondly, whether the continued picketing of a shop on strike, say for several weeks or months could be construed into a charge of 'watching or besetting', with a view to intimidate, or injure an employer's business, if either threats or violence are used? Thirdly, Is it consistent with justice that an officer of a trade society should be held responsible and punished for the crime of another person, whom he, in the ordinary sense of his duty, has to visit as picket?"⁶²

To answer these questions it is necessary to investigate the origins and requirements of the 1875 Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act.

The history of trade unionism in the third quarter of the nineteenth century is deeply concerned with the struggle for legal recognition from the state, so the immunity won from criminal prosecution for conspiracy by the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act of 1875 is rightly seen by labour historians as a watershed in its development. The state had not been totally intransigent in its attitudes towards labour before 1875, but its behaviour had been inconsistent. Political parties, having gone through a traumatic period of re-definition after the momentous events of 1846, were often divided among themselves as to the future role of the working class in politics. The passing of the Second Reform Act was a unique event because, for the first time, a majority of both the major political parties declared themselves in favour of parliamentary reform. The enfranchisement of the borough householder provided considerable impetus towards reform of the labour laws, and within eight years of the 1867 Act the legal relationship of the working man to the institutions of his own creation was to undergo an equally fundamental transformation.

If governmental attitudes towards trade unionism attained a greater consistency after 1867 than those of the judiciary had long been clear. The legal history of trade unionism in the mid-nineteenth century is notable for the revision of statute-made law in the courts, where political expediency was

62. National Union, Q.R.; Nov., 1876.

rarely a primary consideration. Wedderburn has shown how the courts severely hindered the working of both the Molestation of Workmen Act (1859) and the Trade Union Act (1871).⁶³

The Molestation of Workmen Act had been passed after numerous judicial rulings had thrown into doubt, firstly, the legality of the threat to strike, and then the very act of striking, itself.⁶⁴ In an effort to restore part of the loss, the Act expressly excluded from criminal liability peaceful persuasion to quit work, provided it induced no breach of contract. In effect, it granted the right to picket peacefully, but this was of minimal benefit to trade unionists while prosecutions could continue for restraint of trade and conspiracy. Through the 1860s 'conspiratorial' prosecutions abounded against strikes designed to extend union organisation. Faced with a mounting pile of case-law, and increased pressure from the trade union movement since the recommendations of the Royal Commission of 1868, Gladstone's government enacted two important measures in 1871.

The Trade Union Act granted trade unions recognition in law, thus ending the long struggle for protection of funds. The Criminal Law Amendment Act was of less value. Although it attempted to make prosecution for the ambiguous 'threats', 'intimidation', 'molestation' and 'obstruction' only possible where the act committed was of a violent nature,⁶⁵ it simultaneously rendered illegal any meaningful supportive action such as picketing. In addition, while both acts helped remove liability for being in restraint of trade while on strike, neither did anything to remove the common law tort of conspiracy from the industrial relations arena. It was upon this grievance, and the doubtful legality of picketing, that the trade union movement concentrated its activity

63. K.W. Wedderburn, *The Worker and the Law* (1965), pp. 211-12.

64. In 1832 a threat to strike had been held to be molestation. In 1851, in *R. v. Ouffield* and *R. v. Rowlands*, a strike of Wolverhampton tin-plate workers had been held to be molestation and obstruction. See Wedderburn, p.211.

65. That is, one which would allow for a binding over to keep the peace.

during the years 1871 - 75. The longstanding demand for reform of the Master and Servant laws was a further plank of agitation.

At the 1874 General Election the T.U.C. attempted to force the issue by employing a 'test question' strategy. Dissatisfaction with the Liberal response was probably an important cause of the working class swing to the Conservatives, which saw them elected.⁶⁶ When the new government appeared to be dragging its feet, by appointing another Royal Commission, an increasingly militant T.U.C. refused to co-operate as they had agreed to in 1868. Richard Cross, the new Home Secretary, shrewdly detected the contracting realm of political possibilities, and the two acts which the Conservatives passed in 1875 went far beyond the recommendations of the 1868 Royal Commission. The manner in which the Employers' and Workmen Act reformed the old Master and Servant laws has been thoroughly dealt with by Daphne Simon.⁶⁷ A similar account of the origins and effects of the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act, however, still awaits its historian.⁶⁸ For the purposes of this study, a discussion of sections 3 and 7 is important.

The Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act of 1875 repealed the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1871, and section 3 gave the unions what they had long demanded: immunity from prosecution for criminal conspiracy when combining in furtherance of a trade dispute. The only exceptions were if the combination was, itself, in furtherance of a criminal purpose, or if the combination had been formed in the essential gas and water industries. Section 7 laid out the remaining offences that were still liable for criminal prosecution. It provided that:

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66. Paul Smith, Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform (1967), pp. 190-91, discusses the social composition of the Party's electoral support.
 67. D. Simon, Master and Servant, in J. Seville (ed.), Democracy and the Labour Movement (1954).
 68. R.V. Hedges and Allan Winterbottom, The Legal History of Trade Unionism (1930), is probably still the best summary.

"Every person who, with a view to compel any other person to abstain from doing or to do any other act which such other person has a legal right to do or abstain from doing, wrongfully and without legal authority -

- (1) uses violence to or intimidates such other person or his wife, or children, or injures his property; or
- (2) persistently follows such other person about from place to place; or
- (3) hides any tools, clothes, or other property owned or used by such other person, or deprives him of, or hinders him in the use thereof; or
- (4) watches or besets the house or other place where such other person resides, or works, or carries on business, or happens to be, or the approach to such a house or place; or
- (5) follows such other person with two or more other persons in a disorderly manner in or through any street or road; shall, on a conviction thereof by a court of summary jurisdiction, or on indictment as hereinafter mentioned, be either liable to pay a penalty not exceeding twenty pounds, or to be imprisoned for a term not exceeding three months, with or without hard labour."

It further provided that

"Attending at or near the house or place where a person resides or works or carries on business, or happens to be, or the approach to such a house or place, in order to merely obtain or communicate information shall not be deemed a watching and besetting within the meaning of this section."⁶⁹

The Act legalised peaceful picketing but within the confines of a rigid code of acceptable behaviour, for sections 1 - 5 legislated for almost every conceivable development of the peaceful picketing situation. Price has observed that the main differences in comparison with the 1871 Act are that the 'coercion' clause are replaced by a simple statement that any attempt to compel another not to do what he had a legal right to do is punishable, and that it becomes legal to watch or beset a house in order to obtain or communicate information. On the other hand, the molestation clauses, which were the real

69. Quoted in ibid. p.119.

limitations upon the effectiveness of picketing, remain very similar.⁷⁰ Amidst the euphoria which greeted the revocation of the conspiracy laws and the unequivocal legalisation of peaceful picketing there was a tendency to overlook the formidable range of weaponry that the law retained within its imprecise verbiage. Henry Richardson and Edward Delworth were among the first to be rudely awakened.

Once Richardson and Delworth had been found guilty it was clear that their offences fell within, at least, three sub-sections of section 7. Richardson could be said to have intimidated Lex, under sub-section 1; to have watched or beset the place at which he worked, under sub-section 4; and even to have persistently followed him from place to place, under sub-section 2, although this was more doubtful. The same sub-sections were equally applicable to Delworth, and in his case (as he met Baxter three times in two days) the applicability of sub-section 2 was far stronger. It might even be argued that the sentences were not excessive as the defendants' offences fell within three of the five sub-sections.

The lesson learned by trade unionists from these prosecutions was that the new act carried over much of the linguistic imprecision of previous legislation. This should not have surprised them because the English tradition of precedent had been founded upon the need for interpretation which was itself derived out of the need to clarify the many vaguenesses of the legislature. This situation placed much power in the hands of the judiciary whose social views determined that it was rarely used in the interests of the working class. In the 1870s it was possible for judges to retrieve in the courts a little of what had been conceded in parliament. What they could not do, however, was to ignore the spirit of the Act and, in particular, its unambiguous clauses, for this would have brought them into direct conflict with parliament.

70. Price, Masters, Unions and Men. p.128.

We are now in a position to answer the Union's original questions. Merely calling 'a scab a scab' was acceptable within the spirit of the Act; it was only a verbal threat of violence that could constitute intimidation. 'Watching and besetting' did not include peaceful picketing for the purpose of informing others that a shop was being struck; it was only threatening, or actual, violence in the process that was illegal. Thirdly, the question of whether an officer of the Union should be held responsible for the actions of other members proved largely a red-herring because Richardson's longer sentence could have been justified by the judge on the grounds that his intimidation was more serious (he was found guilty of threatening Lex's life, Delworth only of threatening physical injury). It was the laws of evidence that ensured their mutual convictions for they were undoubtedly found guilty without sufficient proof. An anti-trade union judge had been well supported by a propertied jury.

Richardson was released three days before Christmas in poor health. He was met by Delworth and a group of fifty trade unionists including three of the recently imprisoned cabinet makers, and other 'friends of labour' such as Charles Bradlaugh and Stewart Headlam. The families of the imprisoned men had been supported by the efforts of a special committee which had provided them with £4 per month each.⁷¹ At a special delegate meeting of the National Union, in July, 1877, a resolution from London Metro. was passed:

"to bring more forcibly to the notice of Parliamentary Committee and Delegates (of the next T.U.C.), the recent conviction of Messrs. Richardson and Delworth for intimidation and coercion, with a view to obtaining support in proving their innocence, or to obtain an alteration of the Labour Laws, or their definition, such as will prevent a repetition of so unjust a sentence."⁷²

It is obvious that the framers of this resolution were still uncertain as to precisely what had been responsible for the miscarriage of justice. Sedgwick, one of the shoemakers' delegates, went on to carry a resolution at the T.U.C.

71. National Union. Q.R.: Feb. 1877.

72. Ibid.: Aug. 1877.

in September which affirmed that the verdicts did not correspond with the evidence and that they were "at variance with the spirit of the Conspiracy Law."⁷³

The case of Richardson and Delworth illustrates that, even after the 1875 Act, the labour laws could be used by unscrupulous employers to obtain convictions of militant trade unionists. In so doing, however, William Ayers appears to have been in receipt of more than a little good fortune in the shape of overtly anti-trade union judges and juries. The prosecutions had arisen, initially, during a crucial stage of the second class statement campaign, but they do not appear to have significantly checked its progress. Certainly there was little further recourse to the law for the purpose of defeating trade unionism. On the other hand, there was probably little need to invoke it for trade unionists must have proceeded with extra caution after the convictions. This was precisely the atmosphere of industrial relations that the 1875 Act was designed to produce. Relations between trades unions, employers and the state were being formalised in order to incorporate unions within structures of collective bargaining that tightly defined their freedoms of action. Responsibility for industrial discipline was steadily offloaded from the law, itself, to the unions and employers in mutual negotiations.⁷⁴ Richardson and Delworth's case served to remind the unions that the perimeters of acceptable conduct had merely been extended, not removed altogether. They huffed and puffed but were not prepared to blow the house of formalised industrial relations down before the roof was even on.

73. The Bee-Hive; 29 Sept., 1877.

74. Price, op.cit., p.128.

III. Holding the line against depression

The economic depression began to affect the London boot and shoemaking industry profoundly from 1877. As the National Union did not keep unemployment statistics it is impossible to quantify its effects accurately, but an impressionistic account can be drawn from the Union's local branch reports and from local reports in the trade journals. Both these sources confirm a downturn in the industry's fortunes from early 1877. In London, in January, "many dismissals" were taking place, and, by May, it was "reported from all the manufacturing districts as the dulllest month that has happened for a long time".⁷⁵ In the East End, the City mission had been organising special 'hospitality' meetings for the worst sufferers, who were mostly costermongers.⁷⁶

The depression had serious implications for union strategy for, although numbers grew slowly, any action taken had to be defensive and consolidatory. At a Special Delegate Meeting in July, Thomas Smith, General Secretary of the National Union, condemned those branches who resisted all reductions 'whether they could win them or not.' A resolution was passed:

"to use all means of avoiding disputes, to avoid all irritating action, and to prevent the withdrawal of the men, except when absolutely necessary, and generally to act as quietly as possible in the present peculiar and exceptional state of trade."⁷⁷

It was difficult to sustain a policy of avoiding disputes, however, when, in a single month, employers made reductions in Kirkcaldy, Leeds, London, Leicester, Nottingham, Northampton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Plymouth and Worcester.⁷⁸ In December, 1877, London Metro. had been forced to scratch forty of its precious members because they had fallen more than thirteen weeks behind in the payment of their subscriptions. Yet, the pattern for the whole of 1877 was one of growth, despite the downturn in the economy.⁷⁹ This cannot be explained with great certainty, but it is likely that the success of the

75. Boot and Shoe Reporter: Jan. and May, 1877.

76. The Bee-Hive: 9 Dec., 1876.

77. National Union, O.R.: Aug. 1877.

78. Ibid.: Jan. 1878.

79. See Appendix B.

second class statement campaign, the year before, had extended the Union's reputation and organisational base. At this point in its development London Metro. was recruiting mostly statement workers, and they were less affected by unemployment than bootmakers working in the sweated trade.

In the West End, the hand craftsmen of the Amalgamated were also feeling the effects of depression. The long-term competition of the ready made statement trade and the short-term contraction of the market which accompanied the decline in economic activity combined to reduce many of them to a deplorable state by mid-1878. They concluded that attack might prove the best form of defence and began to 'operate upon' the low paying employers.⁸⁰

As the winter of 1878-79 set in unemployment everywhere multiplied, affecting every branch in the country. In Stafford, unemployed shoemakers were sweeping the snow from the streets at 2s. 6d. per day to prevent them from starving⁸¹; in Leicester, there were almost no spring orders to be made⁸²; in Bristol, it was 'exceedingly quiet'; and in Glasgow, 'very dull'.⁸³ Even in Northampton, where 1878 had been a better year than in other areas, 'nothing was being done'.⁸⁴ London suffered as much as most, and although the branch membership figures may be subject to error (due to the duplicity of the secretary) the 88 scratchings in January, 1879 is almost certainly reliable.⁸⁵ London complained constantly of a labour surplus, and there were two main causes which combined with cyclical unemployment to produce this. Firstly, boy labour had increased with the de-skilling that had occurred in the ready made trade. Despite the unions taking great pains to protect the adult labour force from this invasion, much of it was employed in unorganised, backstreet workshops and was, thus, impossible to control. Secondly, the capital received many tramping shoemakers every year, and although the

80. Boot and Shoemaker: 2 Nov., 1878. Boot and Shoe Trades' Chronicle: 1 Aug., 1878, for condition of hand-sawn shoemakers.

81. Boot and Shoemaker: 18 Jan., 1879.

82. Ibid.: 1 Feb., 1879.

83. Ibid.: 25 Jan., 1879.

84. Ibid.: 11 Jan., 1879.

85. Ibid.: Jan., 1879

publication of trade information for all areas in the Union reports and trade journals provided an invaluable service, the unorganised and unorganisable still came.

In such circumstances trade unions were faced with a struggle for survival on a national scale, and although they had anticipated that employers would shed labour, they had under-estimated the size of the reduction and the strain which the ensuing conflicts would place upon their resources. At one stage, in January, 1879, the National Union had been supporting about 700 men on strike or locked-out out of a total membership of only some 4,000.⁸⁶

The depressed winter of 1878-79 threatened the recently established second class statement. In February, Watts of Hoxton broke away from it, replacing his unionists with unorganised labour who were required to sign a form of 'document'.⁸⁷ He was temporarily successful, until the busy season again forced him rates up, but this substitution of non-unionist labour sufficiently disturbed the Amalgamated and National unions into launching a new organising campaign.⁸⁸ By May, it had begun to reap rewards in the form of advances at several shops, including that of Lorkin, upon whom the second class statement was imposed for the first time.⁸⁹ But the summer revival brought only brief respite from the rigours of depression, and was, itself, moderated by an influx of locked-out Dublin shoemakers.

London Metro. weathered the economic storms of 1879 while undergoing an internal crisis of leadership. Some time in the first half of the year Henry Richardson had ceased to be branch secretary and was replaced by William Hunt.⁹⁰ By the end of the year Richardson had left the Union,⁹¹ possibly because he

86. Ibid.: Feb., 1879.

87. Boot and Shoemaker: 15 Feb., 1879.

88. N.U.: April, 1879.

89. Ibid.: May, 1879.

90. Ibid.: June, 1879.

91. Ibid.: Dec., 1879.

had accepted some form of managerial post, but he rejoined the branch in April, 1882.⁹² His successor's term of office was abruptly terminated in September, 1879 when he was discovered to have embezzled funds.⁹³ He had been signing membership cards without entering payments in the branch ledger when collecting subscriptions, and this accounts for the peculiar look of the membership figures for late 1878 and early 1879.⁹⁴ George Sedgwick, who had replaced Smith as General Secretary in June, 1878, was forced to spend a week in London sorting out the books. Between August and November, 1879 the registered probationary membership increased from 25 to 331, and this shows that Hunt had been taking subscriptions from these members without registering them. The affair was bound to shake the confidence of the branch in its leadership.⁹⁵

The Hunt affair demanded that greater care be taken in the selection of branch officials. The appointment of Charles Freak to the secretaryship, in the autumn of 1879, showed that the lesson had been learned. Freak was then 32 and lived just off the Hackney Road,⁹⁶ in the same district as Richardson. He became renowned for his blunt style of oratory (used frequently through the 1880s to castigate the non-unionised Jews), and he was instantly recognisable as he strode purposefully along the Hackney Road, by his bushy black beard. Freak's imposing personality, and particularly his insistence on speaking his mind at all times, won him great respect among East London boot-makers. For his part, Freak earned their respect for he was an honest, sincere and hardworking trade unionist who did a great deal to further the interests of his members. In 1892, he moved from the branch secretaryship to the presidency,

92. *Ibid.*: April, 1882. Richardson was working as European Manager, for Baxter, Stoner, and Schenkelberger of Boston in the early 1890s. He was also, the employers arbitrator to the Northampton Board of Conciliation and Arbitration, and joint-examiner for the City and Guilds technical examinations. (BSTJ: 20 and 27 June, 1891).

93. *M.R.*: Sept., 1879.

94. *Ibid.*: Nov., 1879.

95. *Ibid.*: 1 Oct., 1879. Wanted notices describing Hunt as "5ft. 6ins., stoutish, with a moustache," appeared in the Monthly Reports for several months. It is not reported when, or if, he was eventually apprehended.

96. At 193, Scawfell St.

and in the same year was elected a Progressive member of the L.C.C. for N.E. Bethnal Green. Seven years later, he was elevated to the Presidency of the National Union, which required him to leave the East End for Leicester. In 1900, he was sent as a delegate to the founding conference of the Labour Representation Committee. He died in office, in Leicester, in 1910, at the age of 63.⁹⁷

Freak is, in many ways, thoroughly representative of the orthodox trade unionism of his age. Born just one year before the final climax of Chartism at Kennington Common, he never flirted with the insurrectionary socialism of Harney or Jones, nor with the co-operative idealism of O'Brien, both of which were minority currents in the labour movement of his early manhood. Instead, he developed through radical liberalism to a pragmatic labourism which saw state intervention as the means by which improved living standards could be achieved for working people. While this route had taken him into the L.R.C. by 1900, he remained adamantly opposed to the more intense class politics of the S.D.F. His vision was composed not so much of a classless society as one in which a measure of fairer competition existed between classes. He trusted that the state was capable of removing the worst social discriminations and that this would produce a more genuine meritocracy.

The collapse of employment, again, in the winter of 1879-80 proved even more serious than that of the previous year, and was anticipated by another employer attempting to break away from the second class statement.⁹⁸ By December, "the manufacturers of the east were declaring that they had never experienced worse times"⁹⁹, while the workmen saw only "the employers swamping down on us and trying to starve us out of existence."¹⁰⁰ The effect of a contracting market and constricted profit margins upon employers was to

97. Fifty Years: Being the History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, 1874 - 1924 (1924). D.76.

98. M.R. 1 Nov., 1879. The dispute was at Lion, Lion and Son of Chiswell St., Finsbury.

99. Boot and Shoemaker 6 Dec., 1879.

100. M.R. 1 Jan., 1880.

cause them to re-examine the economics of their business. The first class employers confronted the unions over the expansion of the categories of work in an attempt to penetrate the cheaper market. This affected only London, but on a national basis, the employers moved for an increase in prices to compensate for the falling away of demand.

The first class statement dispute assumed serious proportions in January, 1880, with a lock-out at the firm of Silverthorn and Green. By mutual agreement, the first class manufacturers had made work below their statement since it was first drawn up in 1872. In Stafford, a similar agreement was in force with respect to comparable work. The London employers complained, however, that the Stafford agreement was more flexible, and placed them in an uncompetitive position. As a result, they wanted to reduce the classifications of some of the more popular work in order to produce it more cheaply. For example, they wanted ladies' balmoral and button boots produced at below the second class. Secondly, they wanted the removal of certain restrictions upon the use of materials. For example, levant could not be used on work below the second class. Finally, they wanted a modification on the payment of some extras. For example, an extra had to be paid on boots with heels higher than 5½ inches, and it was proposed to raise this to 6.¹⁰¹ The first class employers found themselves in the predicament of being bound by a statement which was increasingly irrelevant to the changed market structure. The best market had contracted, the cheaper expanded, and the best employers felt that they had to cross the frontier if they were to survive. To them, the attachment of the unions to the statement was like the imposition of a straight-jacket upon a sane man. Even in the well unionised first class trade, employers could be undersold by unorganised firms making equivalent work. Consequently, the first class employers asked that, if they could not be free of all restrictions, then let there be

101. B.S.T.: 17 Jan., 1880.

straight-jackets for all. This proved a cause of severe embarrassment to trade unions, as yet, incapable of imposing universal regulation.

The employers' demands were fiercely resisted by the men and, by the end of January, this had resulted in a lock-out. The unions' concept of progress consisted of the lower paying shops being forced upwards, and they opposed any downwards levelling as being tantamount to reductions.¹⁰² For them, defence of the statement was defence of the union rate for the job. If the former skills of the job had been eroded, the statement worker was not prepared to assume responsibility by relinquishing his rate. In addition, he clung to the statement as the symbol of his craft pride, the offspring of his trade unionism. He was unwilling to see it violated by the market, or by the inroads of machinery, or by a concept of progress that had no place within his defensive mentality. If this was a perfectly intelligible craft conservatism, its implications for the statement worker's relations with both his employer and lower grade workmen led in the direction of conflict. For, not only had he posed himself directly against the political economy of his employer, but he had also distanced himself from the bootmaker in the cheaper market. He, too, could be defined as enemy, undercutting the statement trade by his less skilled labour, without union organisation, and working in conditions unfit for human habitation. Many statement workers felt the sweating bootmaker was unworthy of being extended the cultural attributes of the artisan. Not until the socialist bootmakers attained influence in the late 1880s was this divisive radical individualism challenged by a politics of class unity.

Despite the gulf that existed between the first class statement workers and their employers, it was widely recognised that the imminence of the spring season would ensure a swift settlement. On 15th January, the men met at the Haggerston Road Club and made the single concession of allowing ladies' balmoral and button boots to be made as thirds.¹⁰³ The conduct of the dispute

102. M.B. 1 Jan., 1880.

103. B.S.J. 1 31 Jan., 1880.

had been impeccable. The B.S.T.U. reported that, although all the shops were picketed, "in no single instance has any disturbance taken place."¹⁰⁴ By late February, the manufacturers agreed to re-open their shops after a joint committee had been set up to revise the statement.¹⁰⁵ This revised statement came into effect from the 8th March and although no precise details are available it would seem that each side made only minor concessions. While retaining the substance and principle of the statement,¹⁰⁶ the settlement's major defect was revealed by a dispute which broke out in October. A first class manufacturer unsuccessfully attempted to break away from the statement because, he claimed, the unions' inability to enforce it widely enough placed him in an uncompetitive position. This put the unions in the contradictory situation of striking an employer with whom they had considerable sympathy, for the National Union had admitted in April:

"If we do not fight sometimes to make low wage employers pay more money, other employers would be forced to reduce their wages, hence the necessity of our always being on the alert, for it is only by attacking these shops that we can maintain a fair rate of wages on the better shops."¹⁰⁷

Protests as to the ineffectiveness of trade unionism were frequently voiced by employers in an attempt to reform a system which they claimed was crippling them.

The second class statement had also been seriously challenged during the winter, most notably at Lion, Lion and Sons, where the employers had renounced union rates in November, 1879. Between then, and February, 1880, the shop had been worked, predominantly, by Jewish finishers, while blocked by the National Union. In late February, it was thought that the matter had been resolved by the Jews paying their 'whitewash' money and joining the Union.¹⁰⁸ But they still refused to strike, the picketing was intensified, and on the 4th March

104. *ibid.*

105. *ibid.* ; 28 Feb., 1880.

106. *ibid.* ; 13 March, 1880.

107. *M.R.* : April, 1880.

108. 'Whitewash' money was a practice rather similar to the Roman Catholic Church's system of indulgences. A 'sach' could be absolved of his 'sin' by financially compensating the Union.

Charles Frask appeared at Clerkenwell Magistrates' Court charged with intimidating one Solomon Solomons.¹⁰⁹ He was committed for trial but, on 8th April, the prosecution withdrew the case.¹¹⁰ No further details are given in the report, but it is likely that the firm had brought the prosecution merely to frighten the Union. Having made their point, and with little evidence with which to secure a conviction, they then withdrew.

The 'advancement,' the manufacturers' campaign for an increase in prices, began in Leeds sometime in late 1879, or early 1880. The first reported meeting of London manufacturers took place on 20th January,¹¹¹ and it concerned itself with the rise in the wholesale price of leather that had taken place in the previous twelve months. A move to achieve unified action through association was opposed by a sweating employer despite the fact that he thought that increases of the order of 15 - 20% were needed.¹¹² In Northampton, increases of 7½ - 15% were agreed upon, and in Leeds the figure was even higher at 25 - 30%.¹¹³

These meetings often presented a mere facade of unity and a closer examination of the divisions in London illustrates this. The better class manufacturers frequently accused those in the cheaper trade of undercutting them through sweating their workers, yet, they themselves, rarely used other economies to compete. For example, at one meeting, it was stated that the support of the larger manufacturers could not be relied upon because, in the past, they had shown themselves willing to resort to unscrupulous competition. Their practice was to buy in large quantities of leather while the price was low and hold it in stock until prices rose. They could then undercut their rivals who could not afford to buy for stock by selling at below the market

109. B.S.T.J.: 13 March, 1880.

110. Ibid.: 17 April, 1880.

111. At the Approach Tavern, Cambridge Heath Road, Bethnal Green.

112. B.S.T.J.: 24 Jan., 1880.

113. Ibid.: 7 Feb., 1880.

price, while still making a profit.¹¹⁴ At the other end of the market, the sweeter took his economies out of the labour force, as his size prevented him from obtaining the benefits of capital accumulation. Such problems are intrinsic to the economics of capitalist competition, but they acted as an insuperable barrier to unity among employers. Yet, there were those, like Alfred Pocock, who endeavoured to rise above them. He believed an association was essential in order to organise joint action against the outright swindlers who contaminated their trade, "men whose sole object is to make a fortune quickly ... those who never intend to pay their creditors,"¹¹⁵ was how another source described them.

The first class statement dispute proved an embarrassment to the advance movement because the case for increased prices was weakened by the apparent attempt to reduce wages. In order that their case should be fully explained to the public a fund was established by the employers for advertising in the daily newspapers.¹¹⁶ The advance movement is a good indicator of the seriousness of the depression in the boot and shoe industry. Cost reduction would have been an infinitely preferable course to an increase in prices, which risked a further contraction in demand. The fact that the latter alternative was adopted shows how little there was left to take out of the workmen. In London, reducing labour costs was becoming an increasingly perilous solution to trade union organisation grew. At meeting after meeting speakers stressed that there was to be 'no interference with the labour question' while the continuing first class statement dispute gave the lie to such public utterances. Fortunately for them, the employers' embarrassment was not prolonged beyond the settlement of the dispute in late February.

114. Ibid.

115. Ibid. 28 Feb., 1880, leader 'Union and Prices.'

116. Ibid.

While the spring and summer trade of 1880 was an improvement upon that of the previous year, it hardly promised a real revival. By August, London Metro. had to scratch defaulting members, and provincial workmen on the tramp could find no work in the capital.¹¹⁷ By winter, the familiar round of reductions and disputes had replaced the short-lived optimism of the summer.¹¹⁸ Branch membership held up through an exceptionally difficult year, however, and was a little higher in January, 1881 than a year before. But, turnover was very high, and it was estimated in March, 1881 that if all who had joined had remained then membership would have been around 1,000.¹¹⁹ There are other indications that the branch was making progress. In February, a new division was opened in Green Street, Bethnal Green, and by the summer, the transformation of a £100 debt into a £200 surplus provided for a more generous death benefit.¹²⁰

IV. The extension of the frontiers of control

London Metro. took advantage of the lifting depression, in the summer of 1881, by forwarding a resolution to the Council for the abolition of payments for cardboard, gas and shop rents. Cardboard was used in the sweated trade as a substitute for leather in the composition of the inner sole, and many manufacturers expected the workmen to find the costs. Gas was used to light shops in the winter and, also, provided a little welcome heating. The fact that most workshops were ill-ventilated helped create a working environment that was hardly conducive to either good health or clear minds. Shop rent was the East End equivalent of the West End practice of renting one's bench, except that the East End bootmaker seldom had a bench to call his own. The Council were reluctant to finance such a campaign because they felt that the weak state of the Union limited action to defensive resistance against reductions.¹²¹

117. M.B., Aug., 1880.

118. Lion resurrected his old practice of binding workmen for twelve months during the slack season by insisting upon 6d. per week 'good faith money.'

119. M.B., March, 1881.

120. £5 on the death of a member and £2 on the death of a member's wife (a clear indication of the sexual composition of the membership).

121. M.B., July, 1881.

The Council's caution made little impact upon the branch which declared its intention to act, not only over the issues of cardboard, gas and shop rent, but also to extend the second class statement.¹²² This made a deep impression upon the employers who responded to this latest assertion of trade union power by calling a meeting¹²³ at which a committee of twelve was delegated to draw up the rules of an association.¹²⁴ The B.S.T.J. was confident that on this occasion, the London manufacturers could put the abortive attempt of the previous year behind them and follow the provincial example of association. The tasks of the new body ought to be:

1. The labour question and a uniform statement.
2. Action in opening up new, particularly foreign markets.
3. Action on the problem of fraudulent dealing.¹²⁵

While the employers in the statement trade were taking the most significant step in their history to that date, the sweaters at Lion, Lion and Sor, had provoked a dispute with their clickers that led to London Metro. embarking upon a third campaign. Lion's clickers had joined the branch as the result of their dispute and the shop was picketed. Lion, again, resorted to the law and had eight of the pickets prosecuted.¹²⁶ The strike had broken out over Lion's system of 'task' payment, which required clickers to complete a minimum amount of work in a week (or sometimes a day). The firm were notoriously bad payers¹²⁷ and had attempted to avoid payment by claiming that the tasks had not been performed. They refused to negotiate with the Union who claimed that hired 'bullies' had been sent to provoke the pickets. The Union's demand, as always in such disputes, was the replacement of task payments by piecework. The firm dropped the prosecutions in December, just as they had dropped that of Freak in April of the previous year.¹²⁸

122. Ibid.

123. At the Agricultural Hall, in early October.

124. B.S.T.J. 8 Oct., 1881.

125. Ibid. 15 Oct., 1881, leader 'A Bundle of Sticks.'

126. Ibid. Oct., 1881.

127. They had just received their fifteenth summons for wages due to a workman (Capital and Labour 9 Nov., 1881).

128. Capital and Labour 14 Dec., 1881.

This dispute is a good illustration of the importance of the method of payment to the distribution of power within the workplace. Employers strove to obtain weekly wages for factory workers because this gave the employer greater control over the pace of production. The Union accused the employers of using weekly wages to increase productivity at the expense of the worker. This conflict escalated through the 1880s and 1890s as it was an integral part of the transition to machine-powered factory production, and it culminated in the national lock-out of 1895. The Lion's strike did not involve the machinery question, but task payment provided employers with similar controls over the productivity of labour to those of weekly wages. All employers were concerned to increase such controls, but those such as Lion's engendered hostility from within their own ranks because of their complete lack of conciliatory method. Among the better employers there did exist a code of acceptable behaviour which was based upon shared norms about negotiation and fair competition. Sweating manufacturers could afford no such morality for, living on the margin of existence, they survived only by cutting the throats of workmen and 'brother' manufacturers, alike.

The first meeting of the new London Manufacturers' Association was held in the Council chambers of the Shoreditch Town Hall on 16th March, 1882. Thomas Lilley, shortly to become Treasurer of the Association, saw its main purpose as achieving 'a closer union between capital and labour' through arbitration, and protecting members against fraudulent dealers through a Trade Protection Society. James Branch thought that the knowledge that 200 shops could be closed upon those advocating 'unjust strikes' would have a sobering effect. Branch was not normally a militant but he had just had a new shop statement imposed upon him.¹²⁹ The annual subscription was set at 10s., to encourage the sweaters to join, a point that was missed by the trade press when they criticised it as being too low.¹³⁰

129. *B.S.T.J.*: 24 Sept., 1881. See also, 10 Sept., 1881.

130. *Ibid.*: 25 March, 1882.

The Association's first major task was to confront the dual assault of the Union on cardboard, gas and shop rent payments, and the second class statement. On the former issue, London Metro. had submitted a successful resolution to the Union membership in July, 1881, and intended to use the favourable spring trade of 1882 to impose it. The process of revising the second class statement had also been underway since the previous year. The abolition of gas and shop rent payments affected directly only those who worked on the employers' premises. These were mainly clickers and rough -stuff cutters, a few closers and lasters, and a very few finishers. Bottom-filling, in which the cardboard was used, was normally performed as part of the insole cutting function of the rough -stuff cutter, unless a factory was so highly specialised that it could afford to employ separate bottom-fillers. Thus, the branch leadership was asking for a united campaign over disparate issues that affected sectional interests. But, it was confident that the solidarity with the clickers, displayed during the Lion's strike of the previous year, could be repeated.¹³¹

The dual campaign began on the same day, 27th March. Fifty concessions on gas, cardboard and shop rent payments were claimed during the first day, and many offers of compromises rejected by the Union. Simultaneously, the revised second class statement had been imposed upon four manufacturers.¹³² The following day, Lilley, on behalf of the Association, offered to concede cardboard payments only, but this was rejected by both the unions. Instead, it was agreed to suspend the campaign until the employers could appoint a committee to discuss the matter.¹³³ By this time, the men had been withdrawn from all shops still charging shop rent, and, after their meeting on 28th March, the employers locked these men out of all associated shops. The unions responded by cancelling their agreement not to act on the second class statement and struck

131. *M.B.* 1 Jan., 1882.

132. *B.S.T.J.* 1 April, 1882. The manufacturers were Bateman (Coldsmith's Row), John Branch (Roman Rd.), Unger (Hackney R.I.), and Escott Bros. (London Fields).

133. *ibid.*

all shops resisting. In a few days the conflict had deepened immeasurably.

By the second week in April, the unions had almost won the gas and shop rent issues. Only intransigents like Jacob Flatau still resisted. Consequently, the second class statement became the single bone of contention. Lilley accused the unions of demanding 15% increases, but this did not deter James Branch from urging a meeting.¹³⁴ The meeting began on the 12th April and extended into the next two days. During the course of the discussions the unions accepted nine out of the employers' eleven suggestions for revising their statement and offered a compromise by which it was to be accepted by only six more manufacturers. But, they refused to move on the old bug-bear of restrictive classification and insisted that glace kid leather should not be used in seconds work. It was decided to call a mass meeting at which the employers would be permitted to put their case.

Three or four hundred attended it at the Loyal United Friends' Hall, Banner Street, St. Luke's, to hear James Branch put the manufacturers' case on glace kid. It was an important issue which struck at the root of the statement worker's self-esteem. Branch argued that glace kid was no longer the prized material it had once been. Its quality varied so enormously that it ought not to be reserved exclusively for the first class work. But, the meeting was anxious. If they allowed glace kid work to be made outside of the first class statement, how long would it be before all first class work was downgraded? To the men it seemed the first step towards a general re-classification that would amount to comprehensive wage reductions. The employers' request was decisively defeated by 213 votes to 118.¹³⁵

After this clear expression of the feelings of the statement workers negotiations were placed in the hands of two London investigators, Coyne of the National Union and Buckley of the Amalgamated. By the 24th April, a settlement had been reached that was a virtual replica of the outcome of the

134. Ibid.: 8 April, 1882.

135. Ibid.: 22 April, 1882.

negotiations ten days before. While the unions accepted most of the employers' revisions to the new statement, the employers were forced to concede that glaze kid would not be used outside of the first class sector. The employers specified nine firms who would accept the statement and agreed to 'invite' twenty more to do so.¹³⁶ In fact, only 22 employers were paying to it in May, but by June the number was 27 and had risen to 32 by August.¹³⁷ This August figure was ten more than had agreed to pay to the old second class statement in 1876. Of that original 22 only 4 re-appear in the new list of 1882. What had happened to the remaining 18? Some may have ceased to trade, although this was less likely to happen among statement firms than among the 'mushroom manufacturers'.¹³⁸ in the cheaper market. It is more likely that many of the old second class statement firms had been allowed to decline gently into the intermediate trade provided they continue to pay close to second class rates. If this was the case, then the estimate of the number of firms falling into a loosely defined second class sector increases to around 50.¹³⁹ Flatlau's of Ropemaker Street appeared in none of these lists and was the only firm, in June, 1882, that was still refusing to concede gas and shop rent payments.¹⁴⁰

Trade unionists expressed considerable satisfaction at the settlements achieved in the summer of 1882.¹⁴¹ The 32 firms paying to the second class statement by August was three more than the number originally agreed with the Association. Although numerous concessions had been made on prices in the statement, the glaze kid issue had been won and, thus, the principle of restrictive classification firmly preserved. The employers had swiftly conceded cardboard payments for the publicising of its widespread use to pad-out

136. *Ibid.*: 29 April, 1882.

137. *G.R.*: May - Aug., 1882. The 32 firms were those of Unger, Jas. Branch, John Branch, Britten and Tripp, Potter, Pike, King, Bateman, Escott, Sandie, Palliser, Knowles, Greenwood, Booth, Turner, Parrier, Archer, Wheatcroft, Watts, Burrows, Larkin, Cross, Gill, Jones, Geo. Hollingberry, Wells, Furse, Chas. Hollingberry, Wm. Hollingberry, Davis, Garritty and Fenn.

138. So called because of their tendency to spring up like mushrooms. They were often picked-off as quickly!

139. *National Union, G.R.*: May, 1876. *G.R.*: Aug. 1882.

140. *G.R.*: June, 1882.

141. *Ibid.*

insolent had done their trade no good. The concession of gas and shop rent payments quickly followed. As the busy season died, there were a few attempts to restore such charges, and some employers began to turn their men out at dusk if they refused to pay for the gas.¹⁴² Similarly, the winter also witnessed struggles to prevent some employers from breaking away from the second class statement. But, these were perennial problems which trade unionists were well used to encountering, and they did not alter the fact that, by mid-1882, the statement trade stood upon firmer foundations than ever before. The campaign and settlements of the summer of 1882 had laid down important precedents which were not to be easily reversed, and it is difficult to escape the conclusion that they furthered the interests of trade unionists most.

A major cause of this had been that the organisation of labour had shown itself to be more extensive than that of capital. In July, the London Association had declared its intention to extend its organisation nationally, but this was greeted with great scepticism by provincial manufacturers. Many of them had associated long before London, where internecine struggles were notorious, and provincial manufacturers had well noted that London's attempts at association tended to accompany local struggles of their own. Consequently, the effort foundered. This was a particular disappointment to employers such as Lilley and Flatau, who wished to develop national links because they had factories in several different areas.¹⁴³

The Association receded into a long period of inactivity following the settlements of 1882. No general meeting took place between March, 1882 and June, 1883. Thomas Lilley's opinion that it was in no position to speak for the whole trade (expressed in April, 1883)¹⁴⁴ suggests that it had been unable to recruit beyond the statement employers. By the time the first general meeting for fifteen months took place in June, 1883, some further progress had been made, however. Firstly, a number of leather merchants had joined and had become so

142. *Ibid.*: Oct., 1882.

143. Both had factories in Northampton, as well as London, and Lilley had a further interest in Bristol.

144. *B.S.T.J.*: 21 April, 1883.

influential as to constitute two thirds of the committee.¹⁴⁵ Secondly, a few provincial manufacturers keen to develop London connections, such as M.P. Manfield, had also joined. The Association had been officially incorporated as a non-profit making organisation, under the Companies' Act, on 22nd September, 1882.¹⁴⁶

By September, 1883 it was rumoured that the Association was about to take action in 'remedying some anomalies existing in the second class statement.'¹⁴⁷ Several disputes that had occurred the previous winter¹⁴⁸ extended into the summer and indicate that at least a minority of manufacturers were dissatisfied with it. The trade press had begun to stir up the old hornet's nest of restrictive wages' statements, again, in October,¹⁴⁹ and by the end of the month the employers had drawn up a revised list. The unions refused to discuss it because they were convinced that it contained substantial reductions.¹⁵⁰ A correspondent of the B.S.T.J. anticipated one of the manufacturers' arguments when he pointed out that the decline of Stafford since the arbitration reductions of 1878 contradicted the orthodoxy that decreased wage costs increased trade.¹⁵¹

The refusal of negotiations prompted the employers to suggest arbitration by a pair of independents. London Metro., no doubt frustrated at the breakdown of an agreement so recently won, referred the matter to the Council. Receiving no quick reply, the employers posted a revised statement in several shops on 17th December, but, when this caused an immediate withdrawal of labour, it was cancelled.¹⁵²

145. As a result, the title of the organisation had been changed to 'The Boot and Shoe Manufacturers' Association and Leather Trades' Protection Society.'

146. B.S.T.J.: 7 July, 1883.

147. Ibid.: 1 Sept., 1883.

148. Such as the one at Bateman and Watts, for example. (B.S.T.J.: 23 June, 17 Nov., 1883. M.R.: July, Aug., 1883).

149. B.S.T.J.: 20 Oct., 1883.

150. Ibid.: 3 and 17 Nov., 1883.

151. Ibid.: 17 Nov., 1883.

152. M.R.: Dec., 1883. B.S.T.J.: 22 Dec., 1883.

Two conclusions may be drawn from the breakdown of the second class statement by the end of 1883. Firstly, despite a partial revival in the local economy, manufacturers still felt the need to reduce costs. Having unilaterally raised prices in 1880, it was again labour costs that came under pressure. Statement manufacturers in particular argued the necessity of such measures to arrest the continuing decline in demand for their goods. Secondly, it confirms the view that the balance of the 1882 settlement lay in the men's favour. They had expressed satisfaction with it at the time, and the initiative for revision now came entirely from the employers. Faced with a contracting market, the second class manufacturers were forced into attempting to retrieve the lost ground of 1882.

CHAPTER FOURTHE CONTAINMENT OF CONFLICT IN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS1. Arbitration, conciliation and theories of industrial conflict.

On 15th January, 1890 a joint conference of London employers and trade union delegates met at the Sayd's Hotel, Finsbury to discuss the crisis that had arisen in industrial relations. It was decided that the best solution would be the adoption of the principle of arbitration and the provision of workshops for the men.¹ These recommendations were put to trade unionists on 20th January, at the Shoreditch Town Hall, and were spoken for by Kenneth McCrae, General Secretary of the Amalgamated, Edward Kell, President of the National Union, and, Charles Freak, President of the London Metro. branch. These illustrious advocates had little difficulty in carrying the workshops' resolution, but arbitration was decisively rejected. When Kell asked them what they had to fear, a bootmaker replied from the floor in a single word: "Stafford!" Joseph Stacey, of the South London branch of the National Union, developed the objection. Arbitration, he argued, had too often gone against the men, not only in Stafford in 1877 but, also, in Leeds in 1881. The Leeds men had been forced to labour under the weight of 20% reductions since their arbitration award.² These two experiences had deeply marked the boot and shoemaker's view of boards of arbitration and conciliation. In London, they were frequently quoted as evidence of the fact that such arrangements operated in the employers' favour. The failure of a London Board of Conciliation to implement a minimum statement in 1884 had further disillusioned the rank and file. These three formative experiences are considered, after the following theoretical discussion, in an attempt to establish how justified accusations of bias were.

Most of the last three decades of the nineteenth century were years of economic depression and the boards of conciliation and arbitration which had grown up in the rather different climate of the 1860s were forced to adapt

1. S.L.B. 18 Jan., 1890.
 2. B.S.F.J. 1 March, 1890.

accordingly. Initially, they had been the product of organisational growth on the part of both capital and labour. They reflected not so much a sudden injection of reason into industrial relations (as liberal ideology would have it), but a positive reaction, on the part of employers, to technological change. In a number of industries, hosiery from the 1850s, building from the 1860s, and shoemaking from the 1870s, employers developed a vested interest in finding a means of conducting industrial relations that enabled expensive machinery to be kept in operation.³

Many trade union leaders had leapt at the opportunity offered by employers to proceed from a period of autonomous regulation to one of formalising the structures of industrial relations.⁴ In return for employers' recognition of the rights of collective bargaining, trade union leaders assumed responsibility for disciplining their membership into acceptance of the political economy of conciliation. In time of depression this entailed the application of a sliding-scale theory to ensure a 'fair' distribution of the necessary cuts in living standards. Boards around the country became pivots to determine shifts in the equilibrium between employers and workers. As adverse wage awards multiplied unofficial strikes increased. The miners were the prime victims of sliding-scale theory and unofficial strikes occurred in protest in both Wales and Northumberland in 1875.⁵ Such militancy was encouraged, on the one hand, by the consistently downward drift of wage awards⁶ and on the other by the employers' tendency to side-track the conciliation process if it did not produce what they wanted. In effect, arbitration boards operating upon sliding-scale theory disarmed trade unions as potential weapons of class struggle. Instead, they became industrial policemen disciplining the rank and file on behalf of the board.

3. W.L. Allen, *The Origins of Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration*, *Int. Rev. of Soc. Hist.* IX, 1964, p.244, upon which much of this section is based.

4. Price, *Workers, Unions and Men*, chap. 3.

5. Allen, *op.cit.* p.250.

6. Only 9 out of 61 arbitration awards granted advances between 1873-96. (J.M. Porter, *Wage Bargaining under Conciliation Agreements, 1860 - 1914*, *E.H.R.* XXIII, 3, 1970, p.465.)

The pluralist position on the functioning of arbitration, as advocated by Porter for example,⁷ rejects the general view of the conflict school that arbitration acted as a more effective container of trade unionism than the 'document', lock-outs or legislation. Porter argues that, while arbitration and conciliation arrangements did impose considerable restrictions upon unions when more militant policies might have been more rewarding, nevertheless they did provide some real gains. Arbitrators in boot and shoe, hosiery, lace, cotton, iron and coal were most influenced by downward price trends, and they "had no alternative but to award reductions."⁸ In this way the reputation of arbitration suffered because of its need to operate within the economic circumstances of the Great Depression.

There are two criticisms, at least, that can be made of this approach. The first one is one of omission. Porter never seriously considers Allen's argument that employers took the initiative over arbitration and conciliation arrangements because of changing technological requirements. Boards were not conceived by employers as forums in which to work out some rational and reasonable *via media*, but as instruments to maintain the rate of profit through minimal disruption of the work routine. This is why there was so much rank and file dissent towards arbitration in the shoemaking industry and, as Brooker has said,⁹ Porter fails to summon this evidence because it does not fit easily with a picture of gradualist progress towards 'rational' industrial relations structures. Secondly, the pluralist approach has a tendency to de-humanise arbitration procedures and to imbue them with a sense of economic inevitability. Thus, arbitration becomes the victim of economic depression and arbitrators have no choice but to award reductions. Arbitration and arbitrators were not trapped by the confines of the times so much as carefully managed and selected to produce predictable

7. Porter, *op.cit.* See also, The Northampton Boot and Shoe Arbitration Board before 1914, *Northants Past and Present* VI, No. 2., 1979. This has been replied to by Keith Brooker, 'The Northampton Shoemakers' Reaction to Industrialisation: Some Thoughts', *Northants P & P.* VI, 1980, who points out that Porter's implicit favouring of the pluralist view leads him to neglect the importance of rank and file dissent towards arbitration.

8. Porter, *Wage Bargaining*, p.465.

9. Brooker, *op.cit.* p.151.

decisions that were made to appear inevitable. But, alternatives were put forward by trade unionists who refused to accept responsibility for the depression. The reasons for their rejection have to be sought in the extent to which the employers' political economy controlled the arbitration process.

11. The Stafford arbitration award of 1877.

Stafford is the oldest shoemaking centre in England, the trade dating from the fifteenth century.¹⁰ By the end of the eighteenth century, when Sheridan coined his famous aphorism 'May the trade of Stafford be trod under foot by all the world,' it was still the only large centre. Until the 1850s all the branches of the trade were carried on by hand labour, but then the introduction of a closing machine caused a major crisis in the town's industrial relations. The closing had been traditionally performed by the wives and daughters of the shoemakers working at home, but in 1855 the firm of Edwin Bostock introduced a machine. Convinced that this would swiftly turn the women into factory workers, the Stafford shoemakers struck in defence of the old domestic system. They were afraid that instead of "sitting on the adjoining doorsteps and gossiping as they plied the busy needle", the female closers would be transformed into "clog wearing factory girls."¹¹ This initial opposition appears to have been successful, and Bostock was forced to transfer his 'infernal machine' to his Norwich factory.¹²

A similar attempt to introduce machine-closing was made in Northampton, in late 1857, resulting in a two year picket of the two manufacturers concerned. A year later, Bostock and another manufacturer, William Wynne, began to give out machine closed tops, again, in Stafford. Both were struck immediately. The Stafford employers responded by uniting with those of Northampton on the machine issue, and, in the early months of 1859, it was estimated that 1,500 men from

10. Victorie County History of Stafford (Oxford, 1967), Vol. II, p.230.

11. B.S.L.J., 3 Nov., 1883, 'The Trade of Stafford, Past, Present and Future,' by an old resident, no. 1.

12. Church, Labour Supply and Innovation, pp. 31 - 32.

Northampton and another 500 men from Stafford had come out, many going on the tramp. They were finally defeated by July, when the best they could obtain was an increase in piece-rates all round as the price of accepting mechanisation.¹³

Thus, by the 1860s, Stafford had begun to develop into a factory town and, as the employers took the closers inside, a further incentive was provided to take in other processes. By 1864, it was reported that, although home-work survived, there were almost no small manufacturers left. Edwin Bostock estimated that 1,000 women were working in factories, some 200 of them in his own.¹⁴ Another informant confirmed that at least one of the fears of the fathers who had struck in 1855 and 1858 had been realised. Foremen were seducing factory girls.¹⁵

As Leicester, with its concentration upon the cheaper market, surpassed Stafford in importance through the last third of the nineteenth century, so labour was attracted away from the old centre. Those who remained scorned the low quality workmanship of Leicester, "insinuating that Leicester boot manufacturers only make boots for the purpose of wearing out the stockings which are manufactured by their townsmen in the hosiery business."¹⁶ Stafford's competitive position was further worsened by restricting itself to the production of women's goods of medium quality, only.

Trade unionism was firmly rooted in the town by the 1870s. Immediately prior to the secession of the riveters and finishers in 1874, the Amalgamated branch in Stafford was the third largest in the country with 592 members. Only London and Leicester, both having much larger labour forces, were bigger.¹⁷ The new union quickly put down strong roots in the town, and, by September, 1874, it had the second largest in the country at 290 members.¹⁸ In the immediate wake

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 32 - 37.

14. *P.P.* 1864, *XXI*, Second Report of the Commissioners on Children's Employment, p.173.

15. *Ibid.* I p.174.

16. *B.S.T.J.*, 10 Nov., 1883, 'The Trade of Stafford', no. 2.

17. *Amalgamated Q.R.*, Feb. 1874.

18. *National Union Q.R.*, Sept. 1874.

of secession relations between the two unions were bad. They failed to lend each other support, even over issues of mutual interest.¹⁹

The first serious effects of depression were felt in early 1876 when the employers attempted reductions on the town's uniform statement. A serious strike had broken out at the firm of Pitt, over the employment of non-unionists at below union rates,²⁰ and this escalated into a six day lock-out of all Stafford shoe-makers in March. The employers' refusal of arbitration convinced the Union that "they had resolved to strike a blow at the very heart of our Union, and crush it out of existence if possible."²¹ Eventually, however, arbitration was agreed to and, by early April, had produced a settlement. The most important items were the agreement to set up a Board of Arbitration and a commitment, by the National Union, not to coerce non-unionists into joining.²² But, this agreement was a mere pause in the struggle, for worsening economic circumstances were shortly to cause employers to make further revisions upon the statement. The unions were in an even weaker position from which to resist.

In January, 1877 the employers informed the unions of their wish to re-introduce a fifth boot. No such work had been made in Stafford since 1873. The unions were rightly suspicious of the employers' intentions and predicted, with great foresight, that a fifth boot would never actually be made. Instead, if the employers' demands were granted, they expected to see a downwards classification in all grades, so that fourths work would become fifths and the first class would disappear to become seconds.²³ Despite these fears, the unions were in no position to resist the arbitration of Matthea Blakiston, the Town Clerk. As they claimed afterwards that his award did not correspond with the balance of the evidence a detailed investigation of the proceedings is required.

19. ibid. An example is the strike at the firm of Day over apprentice labour.

20. Stafford Advertiser: 18 March, 1876. St. Crispin: 25 March, 1876.

National Union, O.R.: April, 1876.

21. National Union, O.R.: April, 1876.

22. St. Crispin: 22 April, 1876. Stafford Advertiser: 8 April, 1876.

23. Stafford Advertiser: 27 Jan., 1877.

H.B. Livingston, one of the town's leading employers and a local councillor, put the employers' case. For the two unions, Thomas Smith, General Secretary of the National, was the advocate. Livingston's opening submission argued generally for greater freedom from restrictions. Smith pointed to the constant erosion of rates over recent years to support his case that the manufacturers did not need a fifths boot. He argued that much that had previously been made in the first three classes was now made as fourths. If measured by profits made and numbers employed, he thought the town's trade had improved since 1873. But he could not support this with any convincing evidence.²⁴

At a later hearing, Smith criticised the employers for refusing to allow their accounts books to be examined. He offered to produce Alexander MacDonald, the town's M.P., who was prepared to testify that this was common practice in arbitration cases. It was declined. Smith next attempted to disprove Livingston's argument, that Stafford's trade had deteriorated in the past six months, by reciting the trade reports from the Boot and Shoe Reporter. While these did indicate a temporary improvement between January and March, 1877,²⁵ depression was soon to return. George Sedgwick, the National Union's agent, gave evidence comparing the state of trade in other towns with Stafford. William Count and Martin Leader compared it with Bristol and Leicester respectively. Sedgwick thought that wages in Birmingham were 20% higher than in Stafford and stated that he had, himself, left Stafford some years before for that reason.²⁶

At the final hearing, George Thomas gave evidence of the London first class manufacturers' views of the Stafford statement. He thought that, although more restrictions operated in the capital, the overall quality of Stafford work was higher. Livingston produced a number of manufacturers and leather merchants who testified to their trade having declined. Others claimed to have lost much trade

24. ibid.: 3 Feb., 1877.

25. They ranged from "slack" (Jan.) to "recovered from depression" (March).

26. Stafford Chronicle: 10 Feb., 1877. Stafford Advertiser: 10 Feb., 1877.

by the abolition of the fifth boot. All this evidence, however, was purely hearsay, and neither side produced any conclusive written documentation. Smith pressed for evidence of the number of orders employers had in hand to test their claim that recent lay-offs were the result of a slackness. He suspected that they were merely trying to create an appearance of depression that would strengthen their case. Livingston refused access to any such evidence.²⁷

Blakiston took over a month to reach a decision, not finally announcing his award until 19th April. The substance of it was that the employers were granted their re-classification on the grounds that the exclusion of the fifth boot had cost them the loss of many orders. A gesture was made to the unions in not accepting the employers' wages list. Instead, the list in operation before the fifth boot was excluded in 1873 was re-introduced. His hope that the re-introduction of the fifth boot would create more work for the poorer shoemaker was sadly naive, for the fifth boot was never made.²⁸

The National Union was appalled at the award and complained that the employers had offered almost no written evidence in support of their case. The little that had been produced amounted to letters from travellers and agents. In fact, Blakiston had been obliged to disregard the whole of the employers' first day's submission on the grounds that it was insufficiently evidenced. Eventually, he did obtain access to the books of several employers, but it is impossible to know whether this was sufficient for his purpose. That he chose to examine the books of only seven firms does not appear to have been entirely the fault of the employers, although their initial reticence may have limited his enthusiasm. His own feeling of being unable to cope with more work, and his lack of knowledge of the trade, were probably more responsible for the paucity of his investigations.²⁹ This is not to underestimate the magnitude

27. Stafford Advertiser: 17 Feb., 1877.

28. Ibid. 21 April, 1877. Stafford Chronicle: 21 April, 1877.

29. Stafford Chronicle: 7 April, 1877. Blakiston claimed that an investigation of the books of more than 7 firms would require the services of a professional accountant.

of the task, for detailed examination of the accounts of seven firms over a number of years was time-consuming and skilled work. But, when the likelihoods of thousands of people at a time of impending depression were at stake, something more thorough than a sampling survey was required.

The Union representatives felt that they had made out the best evidenced case. Firstly, they argued that their demands for evidence from the employers, while clearly stated, had not been met. Secondly, they considered their own evidence to have been more comprehensive. Finally, they argued that at no time had they procrastinated to the same degree as the employers over producing evidence. While a reading of the reports of the proceedings generally confirms these claims this is not to conclude that the unions' case was well put.

Yet, Blakiston's award favoured the employers. Why was this so? The most likely answer is that he thought that he had found economic proof of their arguments in the firms' accounts. It is impossible to be certain of this, but it does seem that Blakiston was more willing to trust the employers' judgement than that of trade unionists. In his occupation as Town Clerk of Stafford he had frequent contact with shoe manufacturers who were well represented on the Town Council. In 1877, three of the eight vacant seats were won by shoe manufacturers³⁰ and the following year another two were elected.³¹ On both occasions no other occupation was as well represented. Blakiston merely shared the political economy of the class to whom he was scribe. His assumption that a fifth's boot would expand the town's trade and benefit the lower class workman was sadly wrong. The unions were proved totally correct in their argument that it would never be made and would only result in general reductions.

The National Union expressed both surprise and regret at the decision. "We have no doubt that the unsatisfactory termination of the first case will have the effect of retarding the growth of the principle of arbitration in our Union."³²

30. Stafford Chronicle: 3 Nov. and 8 Dec., 1877. They were R. Butler, J. Podmore and F. Marson.

31. Ibid.: 26 Oct., 1878. They were J.W. Harrison and Z. Anderson.

32. National Union. Q.R.: May, 1877.

Yet, the councils of both unions must share the blame for the selection of a referee whom they considered had not behaved as a genuine neutral. In partial mitigation, the seriousness of the depression had limited their options. But, the award given by Blakiston was the result of a theory of industrial relations which saw arbitration as a via media between conflicting economic interests and which de-personalised the institution. The cost of this error was exacted from the shoemakers of Stafford in the years that followed.

These shoemakers did not take the decision submissively. At a meeting on 23rd April they unanimously rejected the award, against the advice of Thomas Smith and the local executive of the National Union.³³ They were, thus, forced back to the Board, where a few minor concessions were won. In this form, the settlement was accepted on 11th May for, as the executive of the National Union rightly stated, by that time there was no alternative but a renewed strike that shoemakers were in no position to undertake.³⁴

The 1877 arbitration award in the Stafford shoemaking industry caused a serious deterioration in the quality of industrial relations. The struggle spilled over into the political arena when, in October, 1877, Henry Livingston became the victim of a shoemakers' promise. Standing for both East and West wards, in an attempt to retain his seat on the Town Council, he was returned for neither.³⁵ By September, 1878 arbitration and conciliation arrangements had broken down completely with the men's withdrawal from the Board.³⁶ This provided the employers with the opportunity to further revise the statement the following year. By that time, in the opinion of a correspondent of one of the local newspapers, "... the men of Stafford have been reduced on average for the last four years about 10 per cent yearly."³⁷

33. Stafford Advertiser: 28 April, 1877.

34. Stafford Chronicle: 19 May, 1877.

35. Ibid.: 27 Oct. and 3 Nov. 1877.

36. Boot and Shoemaker: 21 Sept., 1878. M.B.: Sept., 1878.

37. Stafford Chronicle: 26 April, 1879.

III. The Leeds arbitration award of 1881.

Unlike Stafford, boot and shoemaking was a relatively new industry in Leeds in the late nineteenth century. John Blakey and other witnesses before the 1881 arbitration proceedings said that manufacture had been going on there for about thirty years.³⁸ In fact, the hand-sewn trade had existed since long before that, although Leeds had never been a major centre of it. The ready made trade had undergone a great expansion with the adoption of rivetted work from the late 1850s. Firms such as Stead and Simpson had grown prosperous as a result of this trade after experiencing some early opposition from the hand-sewn shoemakers.³⁹ John Blakey's firm had been the greatest innovators with machinery. By the early 1890s they had been using finishing and paring machines for soles and heels for over a decade, and had also introduced a lasting machine.⁴⁰ There is no record of resistance to machinery to compare with that of Stafford or Northampton. This is probably due to that quality of work made in Leeds and the level of trade union organisation. Leeds produced low quality, men's boots for the slop market, and it had benefited from the expansion in this market which had so damaged the trade of the better quality areas. Hand sewing survived in Leeds in the slipper trade, but this was of secondary importance to the rivetted work. Leeds, like East London, had experienced an influx of Jewish immigrants in the 1880s and 1890s whom many blamed for the low wages prevailing in its sweated industries.⁴¹ In all, about 2,700 people were estimated as working in the Leeds shoemaking industry in 1881.⁴²

Industrial relations in the Leeds industry in the 1870s had shown some of the turbulence of Stafford. In April, 1876 a general lock-out over the introduction of healing machinery had been averted only by the men accepting 25% wage

38. B.S.L.J.: 26 March, 1881.

39. Ibid.: 9 May, 1891, 'The History of the Boot and Shoe Trade of Leeds, From 1840 to 1890,' by W. Noble.

40. Ibid.: 27 June, 1891.

41. Robert H. Sherard, The White Slaves of England (1904), p.112.

42. B.S.L.J.: 26 March, 1881. These consisted of 1,000 rivetters, 700 finishers, 600 machinists and fitters (closers), 300 clickers, and 100 pressmen.

reductions for the machine work.⁴³ The unions do not seem to have been able to use the Board of Arbitration, which had been set up in 1875, to moderate these cuts.⁴⁴ Certainly, the membership figures show the branch to have been in too weak a position to resist such reductions through industrial action (see Appendix I).

The effects of depression bit more deeply when, in March, 1878, the employers moved for a further revision of the statement. By taking the matter to the Board, the unions were only able to moderate the cuts to 5%. Yet, the executive of the National Union thought this proved the benefits of conciliation.⁴⁵ Not all were agreed, for, as one report put it, "In consequence of the scarcity of orders the wages of most of the operatives must be already at a very low ebb, and they can ill afford a further reduction."⁴⁶ Consequently, in October, the unions submitted a new statement that would have retrieved the 5% reductions of March "owing to trade having returned to its normal course."⁴⁷ Although the unions were willing to negotiate through the Board, and "The Committee has been very careful not to put upon the new statement anything which can be very objectionable to the employers,"⁴⁸ the latter would brook no compromise. They declared that:

".... while trade all over the United Kingdom is paralysed, and notices of reductions and stoppages of work reach us from all quarters, higher wages cannot be given and ought not to be asked for; and that should the demand be pressed, we are prepared to resist it to the utmost."⁴⁹

The demand was not pressed. It was withdrawn, nominally, until the spring, but never re-surfaced.⁵⁰ This capitulation to the moral economy of their employers by the shoemakers of Leeds was caused by their extremely weak state of

43. National Union, G.R.: April, 1876.

44. Webb T.U. Collection: A., Vol. XXIV, p.413.

45. Boot and Shoe Trades' Chronicle: 1 March and 1 April, 1878. Boot and Shoe Reporter: 20 March, 1878. M.R.: March, April, 1878.

46. Boot and Shoe Trades' Chronicle: 1 March, 1878.

47. Ibid.: 15 Oct., 1878. See also, Boot and Shoe Trade Reporter: 21 Oct., 1878.

48. M.R.: Oct., 1878.

49. Capital and Labour: 23 Oct., 1878. Boot and Shoe Reporter: 20 Nov., 1878.

50. M.R.: Nov., 1878.

trade union organisation. Not until 1881 did branch membership of the National Union show any sign of crawling out of the trough it had been in since mid-1876. (See Appendix I).

It was impossible to sustain effective organization when firms were going bankrupt and throwing out 200 - 300 workers at a time. When this happened at the firm of Sykes and Linley, the workforce of 300 arrived to demand wages due to them and threw out a creditor who was attempting to take possession. Only the arrival of the police prevented them from taking their wages in kind. Even after that, the factory remained picketted.⁵¹ The National Union, in fact, compared the year 1879 in Leeds unfavourably with the depression of 1848,⁵² and in such conditions many were quick to condemn trade union organisation as a farce.⁵³ It was all the local branch could do to prevent the unemployed from going to Dublin to "scab" upon the lock-out, there.

Thus, dependant upon the mass, cheap market, Leeds felt the effects of depression as intensely as any shoemaking centre. It is easy to understand why the advances' movement emanated from that city.⁵⁴ But, higher prices left the workmen no more secure, for in June, 1880 they had to resist an attempt to re-impose the employers' proposed statement of March, 1878.⁵⁵ By January, 1881 the employers felt sufficiently well prepared to make another collective attempt at reductions. After a lock-out at the firm of Lowley, they presented a new statement containing 25% reductions on finishing rates. The National Union was in no doubt about the gravity of these proposals, nor that the state of organisation was so poor that serious resistance could not be offered:

"This is the most serious reduction that has ever been offered in this town, and if it does not teach the great non-union element a lesson, we think there is nothing that will."⁵⁶

51. Ibid., 1 April, 1879. Boot and Shoemaker: 29 March, 1879.

52. M.R.: June, 1879.

53. Ibid.: May, 1879.

54. See pp.126-8.

55. M.R.: June, 1880.

56. Ibid.: Feb., 1881.

The employers supported their proposals by arguing that finishing rates in Leeds were higher than in many other comparable towns. The unions responded by pointing out that the strong, cheap work made there was more difficult to work with. But, they were forced by market conditions to abandon any ideas of strike action and take the reductions to the Board.⁵⁷ When it became deadlocked, after a five hour meeting, the services of an umpire had to be summoned. John Holmes of Roundhay agreed to perform the task. He had once been a shoe manufacturer, but had sold that business to become a draper. In 1881 he was 66 years old, and was, no doubt, acceptable to the unions as umpire because of his lifetime's support of the adult education movement.⁵⁸

The arbitration proceedings took place over five days between 21st and 28th March⁵⁹ at the 'Golden Lion' Hotel, Briggate. Reports of them are even more detailed than for Stafford in 1877, for the B.S.T.J. reported them and the final award verbatim. Comprehensive coverage was also given in the local press. Much of the technical information submitted was contradictory, as it was offered in support of either side's case. As at Stafford, there was also a great deal of personal, unsubstantiated opinion which passed for evidence. An assessment of the fairness of the award can only turn on a consideration of the more reliable evidence, the degree of persuasion with which each side argued its case, and the extent to which the referee conducted the proceedings impartially.

The staple trade of Leeds was in men's strong boots, and several witnesses suggested that the city was steadily losing this trade to rival centres such as Glasgow, Maybole, Norwich, Northampton, London and Barnsley.⁶⁰ Although the unions would not accept that Leeds had lost as much of its strong trade as the employers claimed, they did agree that the prosperity of the local industry had been retarded by a failure to penetrate the lighter market. This was dominated

57. Leeds Mercury: 19 Feb., 1881. B.S.T.J.: 26 Feb., 1881.

58. B.S.T.J.: 27 June, 1891, and 2 June, 1894 (obituary).

59. The 25th, 26th and 27th were rest days.

60. B.S.T.J.: 26 March, 1881. See evidence of Gardner and Risington on 22 March.

by the towns, and some of the villages, of Northamptonshire, particularly Northampton, itself, and Kettering. (The strong trade was located in villages such as Raunds). When questions were asked as to why Leeds had been unable to expand its trade, Northampton inevitably became the yardstick of comparison.

Conducting the case for the employers, Raywood produced samples from a number of Northampton and Kettering houses which, he claimed, proved that equivalent work was produced cheaper than in Leeds. Holmes was impressed by this evidence and took no pains to discover whether, or not, the selected samples had been taken from low paying shops. Northampton rates for equivalent work were unlikely to have been lower than in Leeds if only because the quality of workmanship was higher. This was testified to by several different people. John Blakey, a Leeds manufacturer, thought "the Northampton men were shoe makers which many of the Leeds men were not," and stated that Northampton goods were better finished.⁶¹ Rimington also thought the finishing superior at Northampton. Furthermore, in a leader in April, the B.S.T.J. attributed the seriousness of the depression in Leeds to the low quality of workmanship there.⁶²

The unions contended that the materials used in Leeds were more difficult to manipulate than those used in Northampton, and that this should be taken account of in piece rates. An additional grievance was the way in which machinery was used in finishing. According to Blakey, Leeds manufacturers had been using paring machines (on the edges of the sole) for 14 or 15 years. This work was performed on the factory premises before being given out for finishing. Since its introduction, employers had made reductions from the finishing piece rates for the paring no longer performed by the finisher. The men objected to the system on a number of counts. Firstly, they claimed that the paring deductions were exorbitant. Secondly, that the work was too often given out badly pared. Thirdly, that it was sometimes not pared at all. Given this

61. Ibid.; 26 March, 1881.

62. Ibid.; 23 April, 1881, 'Leeds: Its Wages Dispute and its Work.'

unsatisfactory state of affairs they would have liked to have removed the paring arrangement altogether.⁶³

The unions' case against the need for reductions rested upon one, central argument. This was that the stagnation of the Leeds trade was due, not to high wages preventing it from competing successfully with other centres, but to the general economic depression being felt throughout industry. The slump in the local coal and iron industries had particularly affected demand for boots and shoes, they argued. The onus, then, fell upon the unions to prove that Leeds' rates were not higher than elsewhere, and they chose to do this by producing wages' statements from other areas. Statements were produced from Kettering (four), Daventry (two), Maybole (two), Higham Ferrers, Barnsley, Glasgow, Manchester and Leicester (one each). It was a random and unrepresentative collection, for neither of the two least-named areas produced comparable work, and the Manchester list had been drawn up as long ago as 1874. In addition, they were all shop statements, so it was as easy for the unions to take evidence from high paying shops in other areas as for the employers to take it from low paying.⁶⁴ As with the employers, many of the witnesses called by the unions gave personal and unsubstantiated opinions, and this evidence was, thus, of no real use. But, if the quality of the unions' evidence was little better than that of the employers, then that of their economic argument certainly was. In insisting upon the inter-relationship of the local industries, and in placing shoemaking within the context of the wider economy, they had produced the most serious explanation offered throughout of the condition of the industry.

The presentation of the unions' case had been severely impeded by an early ruling of the referees. John Judge, secretary of the Leeds branch of the National Union, wanted to present evidence on wage rates outside of the finishing sector. He contended that, if some other areas did pay below the Leeds finishing

63. *ibid.*: 26 March, 1881.

64. *ibid.*: 2 April, 1881.

rates, they often paid above for other tasks, such as rivetting. He insisted upon the necessity of submitting this evidence because the employers argued that it was the overall cost of labour that was rendering them uncompetitive, not merely finishing rates. The referee, however, declined to allow any evidence other than on finishing rates, giving as his reason that it was these that had originally caused the dispute. Thus, Holmes had allowed the employers to bet on a wicket of their own choosing, for it is clear that they regarded a rigid adherence to finishing rates as the best means of presenting their case. The unions were so upset by this ruling that when an attempt to reverse it failed, they almost withdrew from the proceedings.⁶⁵

There are other examples of the referee making important decisions which strengthened the employers' case. For example, when Judge asked Mabane, a manufacturer, what evidence he had for saying that he had lost trade to Northampton because of high prices in Leeds, the latter replied that a customer had told him so. Judge questioned the evidence as hearsay, but Holmes allowed it to stand.⁶⁶ It is in Holmes' awarding statement, however, that his partisanship can be most clearly detected:

"I am bound to say that these representations of the employers were both credibly and substantially borne out by the evidence of the witnesses, by documents, and by lists of prices produced in the case on behalf of the workers, I am still unable to see the force of some of their positions - and arguments, accidental, social and domestic - as against the economic facts and figures brought out by the employers."⁶⁷

These remarks are not an accurate summary of the proceedings, as reported in the trade press. They give an inaccurate impression of the weight of the evidence lying on the side of the employers, and give no credit to the unions' economic arguments. The employers are presented as being in command of 'facts

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Ibid.*: 26 March, 1881.

67. *Ibid.*: 23 April, 1881.

and figures'; the men of 'accidental' arguments, inappropriate for solving the real problems of the industry. The implication is that the unions did not understand the economics of the industry, the logic of which decreed that, when markets and profit margins contracted, it was the workers who must foot the bill. It was a political economy that assumed the shape of 'the natural order of things.' But, against the immutable laws of the capitalist market, the union representatives offered no clear alternative. Trapped within the same framework of assumption, they were unable to question the inevitability of the trade cycle, and could only posit a greater equality of sacrifice. Disarmed by the ravages of depression, they were too weak even to impose this limited strategy, and were forced into acceptance of the solutions of their employers.

Yet, Holmes had a reputation for being "a man of independent position and philanthropic views,"⁶⁸ so he awarded the employers, not their full demands, but only 15% reductions. This was, however, sufficient to place the shoemakers of Leeds in a desperate position and, on 12th April, the Leeds Mercury reported, in error, that they had struck against the award. In fact, they had struck against the employers' habit of not paying the work properly, while still making the full reduction, and Judge was able to quote the referee's precise words in defending the men's actions. Holmes had "urged them to put their work into the hands of the finishers in a better state in future than they had done in the past."⁶⁹ No doubt he choked on them as he saw them used to justify strike action.

Leeds shoemaker trade unionists felt deeply betrayed by the arbitration award of 1881. While emphasising that they would accept it, they could not refrain from seeking a little retribution by sorting out a long held grudge. Shortly, they were to add another task which they claimed the employers were

68. Ibid.

69. Leeds Mercury: 13 April, 1881.

neglecting to their lists the breasting of heels.⁷⁰ Holmes complained that the unions were in violation of the first rule of conciliation by striking before referring the matter to the Board,⁷¹ but still conceded them a breasting allowance of 1½d. - 3d. per dozen.⁷² This was to be the unions' last appearance before withdrawing from the Board in May.⁷³ With its conciliatory usage of understatement the National Union added, "The new list of wages has caused a great amount of uneasiness and dissatisfaction amongst the finishers"⁷⁴

So, as in Stafford in 1877, the first experience of arbitration in the Leeds trade had led to a deterioration in industrial relations and a swift breakdown of conciliation arrangements. Far from acting as means of re-conciliation, arbitration had begun to appear, to trade unionists, an institution weighted heavily in favour of the employers. Yet, in agreeing to the selection of referees who were likely to have more sympathy with the latter's position, they had partly contributed to their own misfortune. Such errors of judgement helped mature shoemakers' future perceptions of industrial relations practice. These early experiences of arbitration began to crystallise the pattern and balance of local class power and, in such, they provided the raw material out of which a socialist analysis of arbitration and conciliation was constructed through the 1880s. The most articulate expression of such an analysis appeared in London where the conciliation proceedings which followed the minimum statement strike of 1884 provided further grist to the socialist mill.

70. Leeds Times: 23 April, 1881.

71. Leeds Mercury: 16 April, 1881.

72. S.S.T.J.: 30 April, 1881.

73. Ibid.: May, 1881.

74. Ibid.: June, 1881.

IV. The London minimum statement strike of 1884.

The initiative taken by the second class manufacturers of London to revise their statement had run into difficulties by early 1884. The employers insisted upon direct reductions which the unions refused to negotiate over. Angered by what they considered an affront on the part of the men, the employers distanced themselves from the possibility of conciliation. At a meeting of the Association, in mid-January, a motion to lock-out was proposed but found no seconder. The National Union's suggestion for relieving competitive pressure upon the second class employers was to apply the statement more widely.

James Branch, for one, thought a lock-out was imminent,⁷⁵ and this view was given further confirmation when both unions terminated correspondence with Louis Berghthell, secretary to the Manufacturers' Association, on the possibilities of arbitration. In this atmosphere of impending confrontation the London Manufacturers' Association elected to open negotiations with other districts with a view to forming a national federation. In the event of a strike or lock-out, London manufacturers were anxious to prevent provincial competitors from poaching their markets or employing emigrant labour. For their part, provincial manufacturers were sure to treat this suggested federation with cynicism for, although the London Association opened its membership to all areas, it had made little actual effort to extend beyond the capital while its own trade had been secure.

From within the gathering crisis the B.S.T.U. took an initiative designed to defuse the situation by floating the idea of a minimum statement. A similar suggestion had emanated from union circles as an alternative to the more provocative extension of the second class statement. The fact that it would do nothing to remedy the grievances of the second class manufacturers merely indicates the extent to which the unions had taken hold of the situation in the absence of any real employer unity. If implemented, the proposal would

75. B.S.T.U.: 19 Jan., 1884.

constitute a revolutionary change in regulating the great mass of sweated and semi-sweated work below the second class statement for the first time. For the trade unions, however, there were certain dangers remaining. How low could they go in setting such a statement? Would the abominably low wages of the sweated sector not drag it below the bounds of acceptability to the intermediate worker? Confident that, despite these problems, a minimum statement provided the better solution, it was unilaterally declared to come into force from 17th March, and a mass meeting called to rubber-stamp the decision.

The tone of this meeting was aggressively militant. Two thousand boot-makers packed the Shoreditch Town Hall, with the employers, to whom it had been thrown open, seated on the platform. Speakers enthusiastically addressed themselves to the evils of the sweated trade which, they argued, could be eradicated by applying a minimum statement. Freak emphasised the assistance it would give to statement employers in regulating undercutting competition. He urged them to obviate the need for coercion by electing delegates for the purpose of negotiation. Washington Chapman saw the statement as a means of preventing manufacturers from turning factors and undercutting the second class statement by buying in at 10% below that statement's prices. Nicholas Coyns, of the South London branch of the National Union, emphasised the urgency of stopping the spread of 'mushroom manufacturers', the small, sweating chamber masters who found it so easy to set up with the minimum of capital under the outwork system.⁷⁶

The employers did not meet until the day the strike commenced, 17th March. Two hard-liners, Salomon and Bambridge, argued for rejection of the statement, irrespective of its merits, as a legitimate protest against the insults and dictates of the unions. Further, they accused James Branch, who had attended the union meeting as one of the employers' representatives, of collaborating with the unions in drawing up the statement. Branch denied this wild accusation, but

76. ibid. 22 March, 1884.

he did propose consideration of the minimum statement. This was defeated. This exchange illustrates the mistrust present which made the attainment of unity so difficult. Statement employers, such as Branch, would benefit from any statement that brought their low-paying competitors closer to their own rates. Therefore, they were unlikely to shed many tears at the prospect of such sweaters being struck for this purpose. Bambridge and Solomon detected and resented this complacency. The uncompromising attitude of the unions had forced the employers into a swiftly assumed, but purely temporary, unity. Its selective policy of only striking the low-paying shops, however, created divisions which threatened to shatter the facade. Ultimately, Thomas Lilley managed to paper over the cracks by proposing that members engage no new workers for a period of twenty one days. This minimum commitment on the part of those whose shops had not been struck was carried against attempts to lock-out.

By late March the unions, having made their point, sued for peace, but the employers, still smarting from the loss of the profitable Easter trade, showed no inclination to negotiate. On the contrary, those manufacturers who had accepted the minimum statement were pressurised by the Association to renounce it, and many of those still resisting were known to be extending their credit with leather merchants. In the face of such determination, the unions requested pecuniary support from their fraternal organisations in the capital to enable them to continue the struggle. Men were being sent to Leicester with good possibilities of finding work which demonstrated that the attempt to prevent such an occurrence through national federation had collapsed. At the end of the first week of the strike the non-unionists were continuing to give loyal support despite the fact that the unions could make no financial provision for them.

The conflict between the statement and sweating employers came to a head at a meeting on 25th March. Bambridge again proposed the rejection of the minimum statement and went on to make some foolish and damaging remarks about the unions. Comparing favourably the wages earned by non-statement workers with those of

artisans in other trades, he deplored the men's ingratitude in organising a rebellion against the hands that fed them. This did untold damage to the prospect of a settlement and brought forth a storm of indignant protest at this archaic version of the relationship between master and man. J.W. Buckley, secretary of the South London branch of the Amalgamated, complained to the B.S.T.J.:

"What a sense of justice is conveyed in these words. It is the doctrine of the slave owner, and will be viewed with contempt by all impartial men, work-men or employers."⁷⁷

Bambridge was later forced to withdraw his remarks.

At the meeting, James Branch again argued the case of the statement manufacturers. His view, that they should elect a committee to discuss the statement with the men, prevailed due to the support of many small manufacturers. By that time they were faced with the choice of discussing an unpalatable statement or probable insolvency.

A further consideration of those who voted in favour of discussions must have been the solidarity of the strike. There is some evidence that the Jewish non-unionists in Spitalfields were conscientiously pursuing those still at work. This account is from James Griffiths, a small manufacturer who worked in Hanbury Street:

"The Jewish finishers went round to the sweating shops and two of the leaders went in and spoke to the men at work, pointing out to them the injustice being done to the Christians by their remaining at work. In most cases the workmen came and swelled the numbers outside, and, towards the afternoon, the crowd must have numbered a thousand. I questioned the leaders, but could not find that any of them were unionists. These men know nothing of 'statements', being mostly foreigners; they know only they have been getting starvation wages and think by striking they will better their condition. What disturbance took place was caused by the master sweaters infuriated at the loss of their men, and, in consequence, knowing not how to control themselves Workmen will believe that employers are

77. Ibid.: 5 April, 1884.

serious when they put down the sweating system, provide better workshops, consider other grievances, and talk less about organising a rebellion against the hands that feed them. Such language would have been more appropriate in the mouth of a Southern slave owner of the past, than of an employer in a free country today."⁷⁸

The "infuriated sweaters" were working for Jacob Flatau who had complained, at the manufacturers' meeting of the 25th, of workmen having their homes broken into, their furniture smashed, and their wives and daughters maltreated by unionists. His account had been given support elsewhere,⁷⁹ but Griffiths' version places the blame firmly at the door of sweaters, like Flatau, who paid only lip-service to the Association's declared aim to abolish the system upon which they had grown fat. It was employers such as Flatau, Cambridge and Salomon who would hold out indefinitely against a minimum statement that would rob them of their 'freedom' to exploit an unorganised labour surplus, and prevent them from undercutting their competitors with, as one authority described them, "boots fit only to fill coal pits."⁸⁰ Such outbreaks of violence were untypical of the conduct of the strike, however.

Despite the fact that neither the statement shops, nor those that had agreed to pay to the new minimum statement had been struck, the number of men estimated to have been out, by late April, was between four and five thousand.⁸¹ But, the implications of the strike were felt more widely, as one local source reported:

"The number of men who went out on strike is four thousand and as the strikers formed by no means the whole of the staffs of the factories affected, as many more operatives were prevented from earning their normal wages. When the number of women and children dependant upon this large body of workers are also computed, it will be seen that at a moderate estimate twenty five thousand people have been directly affected by the strike."⁸²

78. Ibid.

79. East London Leader; 29 March, 1884. Jewish Chronicle; 18 April, 1884.

80. B.S.T.J.; 23 Feb., 1884.

81. This was approximately half the number who were to strike in 1890 when virtually the entire labour force came out.

82. Hackney and Kingsland Gazette; 23 April, 1884.

This was a far more accurate estimate than that of Justice, which claimed that 25,000 were actually out on strike!⁸³

As the strike was prolonged, and distress worsened, the Reverend Fleming Williams, Congregationalist Minister of the Old Street Tabernacle, decided to intervene. He announced his abhorrence at the sweating system and his consequent sympathy with the men, which may explain why he was refused admittance to the employers' meeting of 25th March. The following day he opened the Tabernacle to a union meeting which was attended by J.A. Picton, the eminent Radical who was considering standing for Tower Hamlets at the next election, Edward Kell and William Inskip, President and Treasurer of the National Union, and, most significantly, George Shipton, secretary of the London Trades' Council. Both the National Union and the L.T.C. had decided upon executive intervention, and this marked the beginning of the end of the dispute.

James Branch was, again, present to put the views of the liberal wing of the Association. He rejected, he said, the views of those masters who objected to the minimum statement on the grounds that it interfered with their right to fix the wages of those who worked for them. Such insistence upon individual rights had to give way to social needs, which (as a loyal Benthamite) he defined as being the greatest good of the greatest number. He defended the right of both sides to organise, not to fight each other, but to preserve a balance of power. Branch's conception of industrial relations, with organisation acting rather like a nuclear deterrent, was quite probably shared by many of the trades unionists present. The Association's decision to send him had been a wise one, and it indicates that the statement employers who controlled it were ready for a settlement.

On 27th March, the men's strike committee went to Finsbury Circus in an attempt to convene a meeting with the employers. After keeping them waiting for so long that Picton had to leave to keep another appointment, the employers

83. Justice: 29 March, 1884.

delivered a deliberate snub to the trade unionists by agreeing to meet only the Reverends Williams and Roberts. It was they who had to put the men's case. They were prepared to resume work at once at the old rates provided the employers would agree to an arbitration committee of twelve-a-side to formulate a statement, this committee to sit daily for the purpose of bringing the statement into force by the fourth week in April. The employers agreed to discussions on "the basis of a permanent reconciliation", but they could not "... recommend a statement for the whole of London."⁸⁴ Having seen the dispute escalate from second class to a minimum statement, the employers were anxious to contain any future negotiations. The statement manufacturers on the executive of the Association would make no commitments on behalf of the sweating masters, and were refusing to attempt to do so.

Kell promised the men, at the Haggerston Road Club, that he would seek a further meeting with the employers, but this proved to be no more than a three hour acrimonious exchange and was totally unproductive. The employers still refused to commit themselves to a statement. Their strategy was to impose the maximum delay in an attempt to drain the resources of the unions. This is apparent from a report of a resolution passed at a meeting on 17th March:

"A resolution was passed asking the manufacturers who paid the first and second class statements not to give employment to any fresh hands for a period of three weeks, by which time it was believed that the strain upon the resources of the men's Union would have proved too heavy for it."⁸⁵

By early April the allotted time-span had elapsed and the employers were more ready to negotiate with trade unionists whose growing hunger, they anticipated, would prove corrective of their militancy.

There were further pressures which caused the employers to move for a settlement. Firstly, Leicester threatened to attract not only London's labour supply, but also its markets. Secondly, an increasing number of smaller

84. B.S.T.J.: 5 April, 1884.

85. Hackney and Kingsland Gazette: 23 April, 1884.

manufacturers were capitulating as the strike dragged on, just as James Branch had predicted they would. It was a puzzle to many why the statement employers had put up any resistance to a minimum statement that was to their benefit. Thomas Lilley clarified this. The real issue, he thought, was not whether manufacturers would pay a fair wage, or not, but whether they would place themselves in the grasp of the Union. For the statement employers, holding back the frontiers of union power had assumed top priority, and it overrode any coincidental mutual interest between themselves and the unions over the regulation of the sweated trade.

At an initial meeting between employers and union representatives, on 8th April, the mood was conciliatory. James Branch even declared himself in favour of a minimum statement. George Shipton could not resist a little militant bluff, however. If the employers opposed arbitration as a means of settlement, he threatened to "... appeal to the trade unions of the whole country to help in the matter ...".⁸⁶

When the employers met again on 10th it was reported that "a more conciliatory tone pervaded."⁸⁷ A request from Shipton, that they receive a deputation from the Trades' Council, met with an offer of a meeting on 17th which was couched in "very courteous terms."⁸⁸ On the day before this meeting was due to take place, the unions employed a highly intelligent tactic. In an effort to strengthen their negotiating hand through an expression of continued militant solidarity, they called a mass meeting in Victoria Park. Over a thousand attended to hear Frank give a particularly rousing speech aimed at restoring a measure of dignity to bootmakers who could, by that time, barely support themselves and their families. Chapman urged them to stand out for the statement and nothing less. When a leather merchant urged an immediate, unconditional return to work, a voice from the floor retorted that they had stood for five weeks and they were prepared to stand for five weeks longer.⁸⁹

86. Labour Standard; 12 April, 1884.

87. B.S.T.J.; 19 April, 1884.

88. Labour Standard; 26 April, 1884.

89. B.S.T.J.; 19 April, 1884.

The Trades' Council met the employers the following day with this wave of artificial militancy at their backs. Terms of settlement were agreed, approved by a full delegate meeting of the Trades' Council on 18th, and put before the men at the Haggerston Road Club on 19th.⁹⁰ Given the divisions in the employers' ranks, the delegation had never seriously considered that they would be persuaded into accepting a minimum statement, so they settled for a looser agreement. This was in two parts. Firstly, a commitment to discuss ground work prices, generally, was given. Secondly, a Court of Arbitration and Conciliation was to be established to which all future disputed matters would be referred.⁹¹

From the unions' point of view, this represented something of a salvage operation, but this was necessary as the balance of power had swung steadily in the employers' favour. An eleventh hour bluff had won a late compromise, and even though this fell well short of their aims the unions had shown a willingness to fight on a scale never previously experienced in the London trade. That made a deep impression upon the employers who were forced to recognise the growth of trade union power through formalising collective bargaining. The Board of Arbitration and Conciliation that emerged was only the third of its kind in the boot and shoe industry, coming after those in Stafford (1877) and Leeds (1881).

The settlement was not readily accepted by London bootmakers. In the end, Freck's reluctant acceptance and the weight of the Trades' Council's recommendation decided the issue against considerable opposition. A return to work took place on Monday, 21st April. Long and tortuous negotiations were about to begin on the problem of sweated wages in the London trade, for the 1884 strike was to prove to be no more than the opening flourish in a struggle that was to dog trade unionists for the next decade.

90. Labour Standard; 26 April, 1884.

91. E.S.T.J.; 26 April, 1884.

V. The first experience of conciliation in London.

The decision to establish the formal machinery of arbitration and conciliation constituted a radical innovation in the industrial relations of the London trade. From the employers' side it indicated that the liberals, such as Lilley and Branch, had won the argument against those who would have denied the unions the right of collective bargaining on behalf of their members. For these liberals, it was not only the growth of trade unionism, but the intersecting interests of manufacturers, also, which made a structure for the containment of conflict vital. From the unions' point of view, both councils relished the opportunity of formal recognition which a Board thrust upon them. The Council of the National Union, which had been dominated from its inception by radical liberals, was greatly disturbed by the prospect of any prolonged London militancy if only because big strikes did nothing to improve Union funds.⁹²

The greatest gain from the strike had been the increase in membership. London Metro. had grown from 1,279 in January, 1884 to 2,336 in June. The drain of the strike upon branch funds had been offset a little by contributions from other branches, and from other unions. Another pleasing feature of the dispute "was the firm manner in which the non-unionists stood out with the unionists ..."⁹³ Nevertheless, the Council left no doubt that the financial resources of the branch precluded any prospect of renewed militancy:

"We hope in the interest of all concerned, that the future proceedings of the selected representatives may be of such a nature as to effectively prohibit the necessity of action of a like character being resorted to."⁹⁴

The implication for strategy was abundantly clear. Conciliation must be adopted.

92. M.B.: Aug. 1884. The minimum statement strike had cost £429 5s. 6d., which constituted 87% of all London expenses for the first six months of 1884.

93. *ibid.*: June, 1884.

94. *ibid.*: April, 1884.

The first meeting of the new London Board, which took place on May Day, was an administrative one. It was decided that the method of arbitration would involve each side nominating one independent who, on failing to agree, would nominate a final umpire.

At several early meetings progress was impaired by the employers' refusal to draw up a statement. Their delegates argued that they were only empowered to draw up a list of wages, something less than a statement because it could not be universally applied across the London trade. It was obvious that they felt powerless to compel those manufacturers who did not accept the Board's jurisdiction to conform. But the Council of the National Union seemed unable to comprehend this for they interpreted the employers' behaviour as being akin to a semantic quibble.⁹⁵

The employers' delegates were forced to return to their members to request further powers to negotiate a settlement. Lilley explained that unless discussion was broadened, to consider ground work prices for every type of boot, plus extras, then the Board would disintegrate. Confronted with these alternatives, additional powers were granted, but not without protest. Delegates were instructed to make no concessions to the men over embellishments that were the result of entrepreneurial ingenuity rather than extra labour. Complaints were voiced that the men's delegation was dominated by statement workers. One manufacturer (from the nature of his complaint a sweater) actually called for the resignation of the delegation on the grounds that they were prepared to grant any price for boots they did not make themselves.⁹⁶

Despite the new powers of the employers' delegates, the next series of meetings fared little better. The acquisition of Fleming Williams as chairman, an attempt to resolve the differences over ground work prices, moderated the discourse but only prolonged the irreconcilability. Even the trade press abandoned its posture of impartiality and apportioned blame in its frustration with the failure of the much heralded experiment in conciliation:

95. *Ibid.*; May, 1884.

96. *B.S.T.C.*; 17 May, 1884. This showed that it was not only the men's side that represented the statement trade.

"Were it not for the indefatigable efforts of the Rev. Fleming Williams it is doubtful whether the Board which is now trying to settle the London wages question would hold together at least one of the men's representatives has developed an obstructive talent that would be highly useful to an Irish M.P., but which is out of place at an Arbitration Board."⁹⁷

It was not to hold together for much longer.

By 22nd May both sides acknowledged a deadlock beyond which it seemed impossible to progress. In despair, Freak suggested to the employers that they draw up a final statement of what they were prepared to offer and present it to the men. This was done the following day, but the men were surprised to find that a third class, not a minimum, statement was presented. Lilley explained that the cheapest work presented insurmountable difficulties in drawing up a minimum statement, so they had presented a third class with the proviso that any disputed work that did not fall within it could be considered by the Board, later.⁹⁸ He was being as honest as he could in the circumstances. He could not openly admit that he thought the sweating manufacturers would ignore any minimum statement drawn up by the Board. Neither was he prepared to ally with the unions in a crusade against the sweaters that would have irreparably damaged the Association. He attempted to sell the idea to Freak with the argument that, although some shops would obviously pay below a third class statement, eighty per cent would adhere to it or pay above. Nicholas Coyne voiced his concerns, which were shortly to become commonplace. He wanted guarantees that no employer paying above the new statement would reduce to it, and he insisted that it should be a minimum statement. But, Lilley refused to call it such, and made it clear that this was to be the final offer.

Nevertheless, the following day, Freak still managed to get further amendments accepted before the union representatives finally agreed to recommend the new statement to the membership. It was far from being the minimum statement

97. Ibid., 24 May, 1884.

98. Ibid., 31 May, 1884.

for which they had struck, and it still left unregulated the lowest class of sweated work, but it would regulate the great layer of intermediate work above the sweated but below the second class. Great resentment was felt at the freedom that remained to the worst sweating manufacturers, for it was this group within the Association that had opposed a minimum statement most strongly, and that had, with a third class statement, maintained their position. The statement manufacturers had been unable to force a minimum statement upon them and their third class compromise was a clear announcement that they would accept no further responsibility.

This state of affairs was a disappointment to the unions for, as Freak explained to the Sixth Conference of the National Union in June, they had been led to expect that the better class employers would support a minimum statement. This speech explains the degree of mutual suspicion and mistrust that existed during the Board's negotiations.

"We believed when we submitted the minimum statement that it fairly represented the difficulties of the case, and we also believed that it would be supported by a section of the employers who had even urged us on to issue it. The result was a strike and the Union had to support a thousand non-society men, who lived five weeks on 4s. a week. They were pretty tough boys and I am proud of them ... The statement that we procured is not all that could be desired, but it had laid down the principle of a statement in many shops which would not previously recognise such a thing. We have now 2,000 men on the London books, all paying members."⁹⁹

The Union meeting to consider the third class statement, called at the Old Street Tabernacle for 17th June, was of vital importance in determining the direction of Union policy over the next few years. From an early stage it was clear that there was strong opposition to the statement. Fleming Williams, who chaired the meeting, assured it that the trade union delegates to the Board had behaved honourably. Thomas tried to dispel the fear that wages in some shops

99. Ibid.: 7 June, 1884. (My emphasis).

would be reduced. Chapman could not put his case audibly as he was interrupted by shouts of "send it back." Speaking from the gallery, a finisher named E. Hovey put the opposition case. He argued that the statement under consideration represented reductions of twenty per cent, in some cases, on the minimum statement they had presented, and he repeated the fear that employers currently paying above would reduce to the new rates. "I think there is no man," he concluded "who has paid his contribution to the Union as I have done for years, and who has like a man remained out on strike for five weeks, who can accept this statement."

Hovey must have worked for a non-statement shop because he had been out on strike. But, as he held the new statement in such contempt, it must have been one paying rates close to the second class. In this respect, his reaction to the statement was exactly the same as that of a statement worker: he feared a downwards levelling. The union officials dismissed such fears as irrational, as there would be a clear clause in the agreement that prevented such reductions. But, Hovey and his supporters knew full well that Union control over the non-statement trade was limited and they had no confidence that any such clause could be universally applied.

The chairman eventually lost control of the meeting, the statement workers taking over and passing a resolution to reject the statement in its existing form. In an editorial lamenting the meeting's decision to overturn the recommendations of its delegates the B.S.T.U. criticised the statement workers for rejecting a statement that would have benefited their lower paid brethren. It claimed that the meeting had been unusually packed with statement workers to the exclusion of those whom the statement would have assisted. Eight years later Thomas Lilley was still able to confirm this interpretation of the 17th June meeting, and Charles Freak agreed with him.

"It was an improvement to a great many, but I may say that what I may call the aristocracy of the workmen belong to the Trades' Union, and those men were receiving perhaps a higher rate of wages, and their influence was brought very strongly to bear, and in consequence those who received the lowest rate of wages were simply left out in the cold."¹⁰⁰

The decision of the 17th June meeting to reject the third class statement was a triumph for the statement aristocracy's sectional interpretation of trade unionism. Putting their largely groundless fears, that the new statement would erode their own privileged position, before the interest of the intermediate trade, they had obstructed a measure that would have been beneficial to the non-statement worker. But, as yet, their victory was not secure, for the union officials were determined to have one, last try at winning acceptance.

A second meeting was called under the pretence of deciding which parts of the statement were, or were not, acceptable. It was plain to all, however, that the union leaders would make a last attempt to foist the statement upon a reluctant statement aristocracy. Stacey had the entire minutes of the Board read to the meeting in order to dispel the idea that there had been a 'sell-out', while Thomas further reassured the meeting that there would be no reductions. In reply, Hovey laid down the revisions that would make the statement acceptable to them: certain extras were to be increased and reductions decreased, the statement was to be a minimum, not a third class one, and no employer paying above it was to reduce to it.¹⁰¹

The employers were bound to reject amendments that so radically revised the terms of settlement, and they were pleased to cede the initiative to the men, for the time being, confident that the options open to them were very limited. As Lilley put it, either they must continue working at the old rates, or go on strike again. The latter alternative was hardly likely to be supported by the trade union leadership as it favoured a settlement upon the terms offered.¹⁰²

100. P.P. 1693-94. XXXIV: Royal Commission on Labour, Group C, p.530.

101. B.S.T.J. 1: 28 June, 188-.

102. ibid.

Once their amended minimum statement had been rejected by the employers, the statement aristocracy called for a strike, to begin on 7th July. This divided the leadership of the trade unions, Chapman supporting the call on behalf of the Amalgamated but Freak opposing it for the National. What the statement aristocracy called a minimum statement was, in fact, pitched at a higher level than the third class statement recently offered by the employers. There was no possibility, therefore, that it would be accepted by the employers, or that the councils of the two unions would be prepared to strike for it. Hovey and his supporters must have realised this. They were merely acting out a pretence at militancy designed to assuage criticisms that they had ignored the non-statement worker. The councils did, of course, refuse a strike, and as the men went to work as normal on 7th July, Hovey and the statement aristocracy prepared to effect the final round of their strategical defence of the London statements.

A final meeting to decide the issue was called for 17th July at the Waggon Road Club. Trade unionists in the local bootmaking industry were in disarray and the employers, no doubt, drew a little consolation from the inter-necine struggles that were coming to resemble their own. In the interim, the union officials collected information designed to salvage the reputation of what had become increasingly known as the 'employers' statement' among the workforce. The positive nature of their findings surprised even themselves and, armed with this weighty cudgel, they embarked upon their final attempt to save the 1884 settlement.

An early deserter was recruited when Chapman, obviously under instructions from his council to provoke no more speculation about strike action, announced his return to the third class statement fold. But, it soon emerged that, if they could not have their own way, then the statement aristocracy were not prepared to have the third class statement either. Arbitration was denounced as an ineffective means of settling disputes before Hovey launched into an onslaught upon the leadership of the recent struggle. Accusing them of 'bad generalship' and a willingness, in the wake of defeat, to accept miserable compromises, he proposed the abandonment of the campaign for the season.

Freak rose angrily to defend the leadership against these accusations of betrayal. He was on the horns of a dilemma. Personally, he wanted to see the extension of the statement system and, through it, of organisation down the trade. But, this vision was not shared by the statement aristocracy to whom he owed his position. To his credit, he spurned the consequences and spoke his mind:

"To say that your representatives have sold you is to perpetrate a diabolical libel. No one can rightly charge me with inconsistency ... One speaker has spoken disparagingly of the men who work at the non-statement shops, and yet three parts of the men on the books work at non-union shops, and, although they have not perhaps the ability to work at better shops, I still hold that they are really worthy of consideration. If we are to raise the men outside the union we must show our sympathy with them."¹⁰³

Freak's understanding of the way in which trade unionism must respond to a changing division of labour was far more profound than that of the statement aristocracy, whose only tactic was to shield themselves from harsh new realities. Freak, however, had long ago perceived that de-skilling caused by the intensified sub-division of labour of the team system (itself made necessary by technical innovation elsewhere) had eroded the craftsman's organisational base. It made no sense to try to preserve organisational privileges that no longer had a craft base upon which to stand. Consequently, Freak wanted a trade union branch of all boot and shoemakers irrespective of whether they were statement or sweated workers, Gentiles or Jews. If such were achieved it would necessitate a uniform statement which would take account of the structure of the market, but would impose a comprehensive list of prices for all types of goods that a manufacturer might wish to make.

The final rejection of the third class statement seemed to bode ill for the future of conciliation in the London industry. One extreme advocate of the

103. ibid.: 26 July, 1884.

employers' cause decided that, in the future, "only brute force can decide the issue", ¹⁰⁴ while even the purportedly impartial B.S.T.J. abandoned all faith in the trade unions as consistent and reliable bargaining agencies. It eventually reached similar pessimistic conclusions for the future by concluding that "... there is nothing left for employers but to prepare to meet unreasoned-out demands when next made, by other means than negotiation"¹⁰⁵

Thus, nothing positive came out of the first experience of conciliation in London. This was due to sectional divisions within the ranks of both trade unionists and employers which prevented either agreeing upon mutually acceptable solutions. The Board's agreed solution of a third class statement represented the interests of statement employers and non-statement workers according to the non-statement employers and statement workers. As a result both of these latter groups did their best to have it overturned, and the statement workers, in particular, played a vital role in achieving this. Neither within the ranks of trade unionists nor employers did a sufficiently collectivist consciousness exist out of which a settlement might have emerged. It was not only trust relations ¹⁰⁶ between the conflicting parties that had reached a low point but, also, those within their own organisations. The Board of Conciliation and Arbitration could never meet the idealists' aspirations in such a situation and merely became the instrument by which some sectional groups sought to impose their solutions upon others who opposed them.

VI. Conclusions.

The most obvious similarity between the proceedings at Stafford (1877), Leeds (1881) and London (1884) is that, in each case, arbitration or conciliation failed to achieve what its champions hoped for it: a resolution of industrial conflict through mutually acceptable compromise. Because of this the liberal idealist position, which saw arbitration and conciliation as a *via media*, lost

104. Shoe and Leather Trades' Chronicle; 15 July, 1884.

105. B.S.T.J. 1 26 July, 1884.

106. Prof. Beyond Contracts: Work, Power and Trust Relations. employs this concept.

credibility. That this occurred was hardly surprising, for the task allotted to Boards was an impossible one and reflected an utopian view of industrial relations. Instead, arbitration and conciliation procedures became institutions to be captured; they became formalised arenas of conflict between self-interested parties, and their decisions reflected this. They became structures within which to contain industrial relations in that conflict was abstracted from the shop-floor and carried on by delegation. But this implosion of struggle constantly threatened to mushroom-out into the real world and occasionally did.

Stafford and Leeds are both simpler cases to analyse than London. In the former cases arbitration contained industrial conflict by inflicting the kind of defeat upon the workers that might otherwise have occurred as the result of a strike or lock-out. Arbitration represented the imposition of the political economy of the employers upon the workers and, thus, gained no respect from the latter. Most manufacturers thought this a small price to pay to ensure the continuity of production which they were confident the awards would bring.

London is a more complicated case and differs from Stafford and Leeds in a number of respects. In the capital, conciliation procedures did not result in arbitration. London's trade unionists would do all they could to avoid it after the Stafford and Leeds' experiences. Rather, conciliation produced proposals that favoured specific groups of both employers and workers as against other groups. This was a reflection of the complex web of inter-secting industrial interests present. But, the recommendations of the conciliation board were defeated by organised trade union power (however selfishly used), and this was completely unlike the experiences in Stafford and Leeds. Ironically, the rejected proposals would have benefited most of London's bootmakers. The ability to resist conciliation proposals indicates the greater strength of trade union power in London by 1884. It would have been more difficult to offer such resistance in the worse economic circumstances of the late 1870s. Despite these

differences there was also an important similarity in that no major industrial conflict occurred in London for another six years after 1884. London's manufacturers were provided with an essential continuity of production through a period of intense competition with provincial rivals.

These three experiences of arbitration and conciliation, between 1877 and 1884, exploded the myth that they were the solution to the problem of industrial conflict in the boot and shoemaking industry. For their part, London's trade unionists were too wise, by 1884, to offer up their livelihoods to an arbitrator, and afterwards many viewed the Board of Conciliation with equal suspicion. Conciliation was far from dead and buried, by then, but it was beginning to be exposed for what it was: a man-made and, therefore, fallible institution. Certainly, by January of 1890, that bootmaker in the Shoreditch Town Hall had reached the end of this journey of enlightenment, and he encapsulated all he had learned in his single word interjection. Those around him knew precisely what he meant by "Stafford!", and shuddered. The practice of arbitration and conciliation in the trade had taught some hard lessons.

CHAPTER 8APPENDIX I.Membership of the Leeds and Stafford branches of National Union, 1874-81.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Month</u>	<u>Leeds</u>		<u>Stafford</u>	
		<u>Full</u>	<u>Probationary</u>	<u>Full</u>	<u>Probationary</u>
1874	June	116	-	294	-
	Sept.	128	-	290	-
1875	Jan.	86	-	284	-
	April	79	-	260	-
	July	97	-	300	-
	Oct.	89	-	267	-
1876	Jan.	219	43	262	-
	April	236	39	270	297
	July	295	-	445	25
	Oct.	262	37	445	26
1877	Feb.	244	61	369	12
	May	253	97	320	33
	Aug.	227	29	330	33
1878	March	172	27	304	5
	Sept.	174	200	288	-
1879	Feb.	260	100	255	58
	Aug.	197	20	255	67
	Nov.	150	90	222	62
	Dec.	145	100	218	62
1880	Jan.	144	100	215	60
	Feb.	144	100	202	60
	Mar.	144	100	195	60
	April	142	100	192	55
	May	148	100	193	55
	June	145	80	191	50
	July	146	110	189	50
	Aug.	158	180	166	52
	Sept.	159	240	181	60
	Oct.	162	300	178	64
	Nov.	163	360	169	72
	Dec.	167	400	159	72
1881	Jan.	171	400	159	54
	Feb.	205	350	161	54
	March	231	350	162	52
	April	263	300	153	61
	May	291	250	157	60
	June	304	250	161	57
	July	309	200	163	62
	Aug.	No Returns	-	163	60
	Sept.	327	200	162	120
	Oct.	330	200	165	155
	Nov.	350	200	165	170
	Dec.	561	439	166	170

CHAPTER FIVE.

"A HOUSE UPON QUICKSAND": WAGE STATEMENTS AND THE SWEATED TRADE.

"The problem of putting the London wages system upon a rational basis cannot be contemplated until the sweating system is abolished. To erect a wages system over this uncontrolled layer would be like erecting a house upon quicksand."¹

1. Stagnation in the face of depression.

The minimum statement strike, and the threat to re-open the wages' question in the spring, affected trade in the autumn of 1884.² By October, there were so many disputes pending that the Manufacturers' Association officially requested the re-convening of the Conciliation Board. Union delegates were sent but with very restricted powers that allowed for no discussion of reductions.³ Through the winter the employers prepared for the expected spring attack by establishing a strike fund that was principally for the protection of weaker members. They were deeply concerned that the threat of further strikes was taking orders away from the capital.⁴ The first class manufacturers acted promptly to retrieve the situation by involving the unions in negotiations for the revision of the first class statement. For their part, the unions were only too willing to take the opportunity of averting another showdown. The negotiations were prolonged through the busy summer season and into the autumn. By October, 1885 the unions had granted considerable revisions of the statement, allowing some second and third class work to be made by first class manufacturers, and the new statement was approved by the membership by the end of the month.⁵ Thus, the best part of a year had been spent bargaining about the wage rates of a couple of hundred first class workers, and any opportunity to exploit the busy season to the benefit of the non-statement trade had been lost for another year.

1. S.L.R.: 31 March, 1888.

2. B.S.T.J.: 20 Sept., 1884.

3. Ibid.: 29 Nov. & 6 Dec., 1884.

4. Ibid.: 10 Jan., 1885.

5. Ibid.: 3 Oct., 1885.

The winter of 1885-86 was an exceptionally hard one for bootmakers in London, as the depression of 1882-86 reached its nadir in these months. From mid-1886, a mild recovery set in which culminated in the relative prosperity of the years 1889-90.⁶ To aggravate an already serious unemployment problem, temperatures in the month of February, 1886 were the coldest recorded for thirty years.⁷ In the docks, for example, it was estimated that two-thirds of the labour force of 60,000 were either unemployed or on short-time.⁸ The National Union found it impossible to keep accurate unemployment records, but bootmakers must have been suffering their share of such hardship. Certainly, there is evidence to suggest that trade in London had reached its lowest point for many years.⁹

The Social Democratic Federation, which had been founded in 1884, was devoting much of its activity to the unemployed, and at least one member of the shoemaking profession appreciated the injection of socialist ideology into such a severe economic crisis might produce a socially dynamic fusion:

"Already the workmen are turning their eyes from legitimate agitation and are looking to another quarter, the quarter to which the Chartists looked — revolution. Even now the teachers of the doctrine of Socialism have taken their stand and are drawing men around them who are disgusted with the present state of things. It lies in a higher power to say whether history will repeat itself, and whether Chartist riots shall again appear under the name of Socialism My answer to the question what is to be done is, 'Our present system must be reformed or revolution must come'... All along the line, from the sweater's den to the first class statement shops, the cry is going forth, 'Who will come and help us?' and we can only echo saying, 'Will it be the revolutionist or the reformer?'"¹⁰

The Chartist riots did appear again in the capital, between 6th and 10th February, but this time under the name of Employment rather than Socialism. A meeting of the unemployed in Trafalgar Square developed into a riot through the

6. Helen Merrell Lynd, England in the Eighteen Eighties (Oxford, 1945), p.114.

7. Stedman Jones, Outcast London, p.291.

8. Lynd, *op.cit.*, p.57.

9. B.S.T., 2 Jan., 1886.

10. Ibid., 5 Dec., 1885.

West End in which all the clubs along one side of St. James's Street received broken windows, and Piccadilly was partially looted. The Times thought it the greatest threat to property since 1832. Amidst dense fog, on 9th and 10th, the rumour of a revolutionary mob persisted. In South London, 10,000 were supposed to be marching either to Clapham Common or the City. In Whitechapel, it was expected that a mob would appear along Commercial Road, and in Bethnal Green, along Green Street. No such mobs materialised, but the episode remained the most serious demonstration of working class popular protest since the reform riots of 1867.¹¹ Neither were the disturbances limited to London, for in Leicester striking hosiery workers rioted for their own reasons and the trouble threatened to spread to the bootmakers.¹²

In London, the rioting had a profound effect upon middle class consciousness. It is well known that the Mansion House Relief Fund for the unemployed doubled overnight, but less so is the establishment in the East End, in March, of the Labour Aid Society. This appears to have been started by a group of "influential gentlemen", including the local boot manufacturer, James Branch, for the purpose of assisting the "unskilled but honest". These were composed, principally, of seamstresses who were supplied with sewing machines in their homes, without deposit and at a cheap rate.¹³

Throughout the bootmaking industry interest and concern for the sweated trade was re-kindled. T.S. Niere gave a paper to the Association on the subject which was serialised by the B.S.T.J. Its main proposals were in favour of factory working and the registration of all workshops containing three or more people. The sweated, themselves, were showing increasing signs of frustration at paper remedies that never achieved fruition. By mid-1886, the non-statement bootmaker had gained nothing from the previous two years of collective bargaining which had concerned themselves solely with the privileges of the statement aristocracy.

11. Stedman Jones, Outcast London, pp. 291-54. For the 1867 reform riots see Royden Harrison, Before the Socialists (1965), chap. 3.

12. B.S.T.J.: 20 Feb., 1886.

13. Ibid.: 27 March, 1886.

The Jews' response was to begin to organise separately, and their first strike took place in May, 1886. For the sweated English worker his weapon of advancement was already in existence. It remained to wrench control of it from the jealous hands of the statement aristocracy.

The first battle of the newly formed Jewish Master Sweaters' Society was against the firm of Lion, Lion and Son of Finsbury. The union had been formed after a series of meetings at the 'Blue Anchor' in Whitechapel and was reported as having over three hundred members by June, 1886. Its major aim was the establishment of a common statement among the shops paying the lowest rates.¹⁴ The strike had broken out in early May when Lion's refused increases and involved over a hundred finishers. Ironically, it was five Gentile sweating masters who were the first to attempt to break the strike by taking work out from the shop. (It was this class of master who were often so quick to criticise Jewish undercutting). Others were canvassed as to the possibility of breaking the union at birth through a unified lock-out, but this met with little response. At this point, the Manufacturers' Association intervened and J.A. Craig, the new secretary, advised the membership against engaging any new hands for the duration of the strike. But, this also failed and it must have played an important part in the strikers winning of their demands by June. It had been a most orderly strike during which the leaders of the Jewish union had behaved in a conciliatory fashion at all times.¹⁵ Even the trade press were generally sympathetic and hoped that success would provide the confidence for further organisation.¹⁶ The strike marked the point at which the sweated worker began to take the first steps towards expanding the structure of trade unionism in the London boot and shoe-making industry.

14. S.L.R.: 12 June, 1886.

15. Ibid., for a full account of the strike and an interview with its leaders.

16. B.S.T.C.: 22 May, 1886.

II. Internal conflict over Union policy.

The National Union's biennial conference, held in Bristol, in June, 1886, proved of great importance because it revealed serious divisions over future policy between the Council and certain of the local branches. Firstly, London Metro. was in the vanguard of opposition to the Council's policy on arbitration. Secondly, through debating other issues, it became apparent that there was serious disagreement over the fundamental question of a trade union's primary obligation.

The debate on conciliation and arbitration was opened by a Bristol delegate who was concerned at the amount of the Union's income being taken up by industrial disputes. He moved the implementation of rule 15 which required every branch to endeavour to form boards of conciliation and arbitration.

Charles Freak opposed this position. While supporting conciliation boards, he declared himself against arbitration on the grounds that it did not play the neutral role that employers claimed for it. This was a significant shift in his position for after the 1864 strike he had supported both conciliation and arbitration. Among the London membership there had occurred a coincidental amalgamation of interest in opposing arbitration. The statement aristocracy feared that any arbitrator might decide that the statement system was unfair, both to manufacturers subjected to it and to the great mass of workers unable to avail themselves of its privileges. The socialists opposed arbitration on the grounds that past experience had shown that, far from performing a neutral role, it favoured the employers. The arbitration awards at Stafford and Leeds in 1877 and 1881 were brought forward as evidence, and the failure of the 1884 conciliation attempt in London further underwrote their argument.

A delegate from Leeds lent weight to the anti arbitration camp, and another from Northampton disapproved of conciliation because employers did not act according to the principle. Against this, George Sedgwick, attending his last

conference as General Secretary,¹⁷ praised the work of the Leicester Board which he thought "has been one of the grandest barriers against encroachment by employers." Nevertheless, he realised the motion was doomed, and it was withdrawn before it could be defeated.

The debate is important for its revelation of widespread rank and file opposition to arbitration, for the Council were unable to win confirmation for a rule which they considered to be of great value. In the cases of London and Leeds, opposition arose out of disillusionment with the working of local boards as instruments of collective bargaining. Nationally, Fox is probably correct in his view that "Collective bargaining (in the 1870s and '60s) almost certainly helped to limit wage reductions during the off season periods,"¹⁸ but this was a purely negative achievement. However, it was an achievement which pragmatic union leaders like Sedgwick held in high regard, for they were much more practised than the average rank and file member in the possibilities of wage bargaining during recessions. Ultimately, the extent to which a local board could be made to work to the workmen's satisfaction depended upon the strength of organisation as much as economic conditions. The threat of bringing the local industry to a standstill was rarely put into effect, but it had occasionally to be flourished.

The next issue over which the Council suffered defeat was their proposal to reduce sick payments. Freak again led the opposition, arguing that, if passed, it would sound the death-knell of his branch. The motion was comfortably defeated, as was a second that proposed a smaller reduction. It was a victory for those who believed that a trade union's strength lay, primarily, in the size of its membership rather than its bank balance.

Joseph Stacey introduced the singularly London grievance of manufacturers moving to Northampton in order to produce more cheaply by moving "That a better

17. He was shortly to take up a factory inspectorate.

18. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O. p.73.

system of legislation be adopted in reference to wages paid in new firms starting and branch shops." Freak thought that the least that could be expected was that when a new branch was started in a town then it ought to pay the highest wages prevailing there. Stacey went even further and moved that a national minimum statement be drawn up. The Council must have recoiled in horror at the prospect of national wages bargaining initiated by the highest paid workers in the country: the London statement aristocracy. For a moment, the nightmarish vision of a national lock-out and imminent bankruptcy stalked the conference chamber. There was no possibility that this would be accepted by the other branches, but the debate does indicate the degree of concern in London over manufacturers removing to Northampton.

Perhaps out of annoyance at their defeat, the London branches initiated a debate on the seat of government. Since the Union's inception, the Council had been drawn from the Leicester branch and located there. Now, London suggested that this be changed to a rotating system by which the seat should move from area to area, starting in the capital. Because, at that time, most members of the executive still gave their services part-time, it had not been possible to introduce a system of open election. This did not, eventually, come until 1890, when five members of the executive came to be elected by equal electoral districts, and a further three by vote of all Union members.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, the debate proved to be somewhat acrimonious. Aspersions were cast as to London's capabilities in handling Union affairs and the proposal was easily defeated.

The 1886 Conference had proved a particularly divisive one with the London branches emerging as a direct opposition to the Leicester leadership. At the heart of this conflict lay a fundamental disagreement over policies. London's attitudes towards arbitration, the single most important of these, were determined by the rank and file feeling in the capital. It had become apparent that this feeling was in stark contrast to the advice of the Lib-Lab dominated

19. Sydney and Beatrice Webb, Industrial Democracy (1913 ed.), p.47.

Leicester Council. For their part, the Council saw London unionists as reckless and irresponsible militants who, if given their head, would squander all the hard won advances of a decade of organisation by leading the Union into a disastrous confrontation with the employers.

London's opposition to arbitration was based, in the first instance, upon recent experience of its operation within the shoemaking industry. But this experience had begun to be illuminated by socialist theory that saw arbitration as a system designed to be manipulated by employers. Furthermore, shoemakers could look beyond their own industry for examples of worker opposition to arbitration, some of which stretched back to the early 1870s. In the Nottingham lace industry in 1873 the trade union had abandoned arbitration and conciliation completely after a series of reductions had been awarded. Among the Northumberland colliers, in 1875, adverse arbitration awards even caused a breakaway trade union to be formed.²⁰ Nothing quite so serious had occurred in shoemaking, but the revolt of the London statement aristocracy against the three class statement of 1884 had divided the brand. In addition, both the Stafford and Leeds shoemakers withdrew from their Boards after their adverse arbitration awards.

Opponents of arbitration within the shoemakers' unions had become fully aware, by the mid-1880s, of the emasculating potential of boards of conciliation and arbitration. They could be shown to have operated against the interests of trade unionists on most occasions. With the socialist revival of the late 1880s, industrial politics became more class conscious. Leaders of trade unions who preferred sitting down with employers to militant action risked having their credibility questioned. To accept arbitration and conciliation as a via media was, for the socialists, to accept the ideology of the employing class, and so questions began to be asked as to whose side certain of the old guard of union leaders were really on. This was a radical transformation in the way that

20. Allen, The Origins of Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration, p.251.

working men perceived the collective bargaining process, and sometimes, it ignored the fact that a few employers²¹ were genuinely committed to arbitration out of principle, irrespective of economic conditions.²² Nevertheless, such individual exceptions were insufficient, they felt, to undermine their general theory.

III. Provincial competitions: the challenge from Northampton

In the autumn of 1886 reports that more London manufacturers had set up factories in Northampton, Colchester and Norwich²³ confirmed the worst fears of London trade unionists. Yet, their determination to preserve the statements did not falter, and in September, the newly established firm of Watkins and Fields (of Kings Cross) became the first addition to the ranks of the first class manufacturers since the statement had been established in 1872.²⁴

The winter of 1886-87 was, again, a hard one in London, but membership of London Metro. did not quite plummet to the depths of the previous winter (see Appendix B). Retailers in the East End complained of lack of orders due to the vast numbers who were either partially or unemployed.²⁵ Given the severity of the depression, it was hardly surprising that J.A. Craig could report to the annual meeting of the Association that there had been no labour disputes in 1886 serious enough to merit the intervention of the Board.²⁶ Neither depression, nor relatively peaceful industrial relations inclined the unions to move from the principle of restrictive classification, however. The second class manufacturers were refused permission to make a seconds glaze kid shoe. Glaze kid had formerly been an exclusively first class material but had become commonly used in the non-statement trade. Within the controlled statement sector, however, it was still restricted to the first class work. As one trade journal pointed out, the unions' decision merely ensured that the cheaper glaze kid work was restricted to the non-statement houses.²⁷

21. David Dale in ironmaking, for example.

22. Allen, *op.cit.*, p.247.

23. *M.R.*; Oct., 1886.

24. *Ibid.*; Sept., 1886. *S.L.R.*; 25 Sept., 1886.

25. *S.L.R.*; 13 Nov., 1886.

26. *Ibid.*; 5 Feb., 1887.

27. *Ibid.*; 19 Feb., 1887.

Such decisions increased the possibility of London manufacturers removing to the provinces in order to escape restrictive classification, broaden their production and reduce costs by freeing themselves of the high rates of the London statements. London unionists were increasingly angered by the inability of the Northampton branch, in particular, to enforce Union policy of forcing migrating manufacturers to pay the highest prevailing rates in their new centre.²⁸ In January, a visit by Frank and Charles Morrison (President of London Metro.) confirmed that migrating manufacturers were able to pay below the average Northampton rates. They also discovered that firms, such as that of James Branch, were sending work from London to be made up in Northampton. John Naddy was typical of the type of employer who was receiving such work in that he worked to no statement and had an entirely non-union labour force.²⁹ London Metro. exerted pressure upon the Council to act. The latter recognised that the strength of the London case was directly attributable to the weakness of trade unionism in Northampton and they decided to utilise a growing militancy to extend organisation in the town.

The Northampton industry was torn by strikes through the summer of 1887. In late July, the lasters and finishers of the firm of Cove and West struck against the refusal of the employers to accept a revised statement which, the men claimed, had been made essential by the introduction of new classes of work. The strikers numbered about eighty and it was apparent to both sides that the future balance of industrial power in the Northampton trade depended upon the outcome. "There is no doubt that should the strikers obtain what they ask for, their example will be followed by the men generally in the other factories of the town."³⁰ The National Union had decided to gamble the immediate future of trade unionism in Northampton upon the outcome of the strike. Unfortunately, for them, Messrs. Cove and West were to display an intransigence rarely equalled in the history of the shoemaking industry.

28. M.R.: Jan., 1887.

29. Ibid.: May, 1887.

30. S.L.R.: 30 July, 1887.

From the outset the employers' behaviour was anachronistic. They continually dismissed the union officials as "outside bodies" and insisted that the dispute was entirely a matter for settlement between themselves and their workmen. So untainted were Cove and West by nineteenth century industrial liberalism that they had not even joined the Manufacturers' Association and this prevented the Board, revived in 1885 after two years of slumber, from conciliating. By October, however, they agreed to join in order to permit negotiations to get under way.³¹ These foundered upon the old London rock of restrictive classification, the work at issue being a fifth boot which the men wanted as little of as possible. For their part, the employers treated it as a life or death matter for, they argued, their survival depended upon access to the cheaper market. Some observers detected the influence of a "foreign element" subversively propagating its "pestilential form of restriction."³² From quite another quarter, however, a further London Unionist had advised the workmen of Northampton to see the strike as a first attempt to "emancipate themselves from the thralldom of the capitalists."³³ By late November, the employers had issued an ultimatum that they would lock-out if their new statement for the whole town were not accepted. The union did not wait for it to expire. By 26th, 2,000 unionists had come out with as many non-unionists following them. Few members were reported to be flocking in by the day.³⁴

These events had been watched closely by London employers and unionists, alike. James Branch had factories in both towns and it must have come as more of a disappointment than a surprise that his London workmen were withdrawn in sympathy with those in Northampton. It indicates, also, how closely tied the fortunes of the two towns had become. Ironically, it was this new escalation of the dispute by the Union that produced the origins of a settlement. Branch called

31. Jeffrey H. Porter, *The Northampton Arbitration Board and the Shoe Industry Dispute of 1887*, *Northants Past and Present*, Vol. IV, No. 3., 1966, pp. 149-50.

32. *S.L.R.*: 29 Oct., 1887. Euphemistic language for the influence of the London statement aristocracy.

33. Porter, *loc.cit.* p.150.

34. *S.L.R.*: 26 Nov., 1887.

a meeting of his London workers at which he explained that, reluctantly, he had to stand by the Manufacturers' Association's decisions in Northampton. Fleming Williams attended this meeting and, given his well known interest in the industry's social relations, accepted an invitation to go to Northampton to mediate.³⁵

Williams arrived in Northampton to find that, despite the Board being deadlocked, a desire existed on both sides to conclude a dispute that had raged for fully six months. Many of the strikers had been suffering great hardship for many weeks, and the employers' ranks were steadily beginning to crack. The agreement which Williams helped conclude was in four main parts.

1. A uniform statement.
2. A Board of Arbitration and Conciliation to which all disputed questions were to be submitted.
3. A case of samples to be submitted for the guidance of the Board. (This was important to the workmen as it prevented any arbitrary classification of new classes of work).
4. Unrestricted freedom in the use of materials. (This was a major concession by the men).

London unionists expressed little pleasure at the settlement. The latitude allowed for the unrestricted use of materials was abhorred and there was no guarantee that the new wage rates introduced by the uniform statement would discourage manufacturers from migrating. The terms were in no way a panacea for the problems of the London trade which was increasingly forced into seeking its own, internal means of salvation.

While events in Northampton were drawing to their climax, militancy in London had also been escalating. London Metro. announced its intention to impose the first class statement upon two manufacturers whom, they considered, had "sufficiently advanced to the position of wealth, at the expense of labour."

35. ibid.; 24 Dec., 1887.

Further, they had decided that the time had arrived "when labour shall share in that wealth so accumulated."³⁶ The manufacturers went unnamed and the S.L.R. mockingly refused to disclose their identity ".... so that there may be no general swoop upon their accumulated wealth by the inhabitants of the East End ... it would be unkind to let the world at large know too readily where to find the first victims of the New Socialism."³⁷ The attack did not materialise as the Council's refusal to finance a strike enabled the employers to contain the situation through conciliation.

While the S.L.R. is, of course, correct to emphasise the new, socialist rhetoric pervading this resolution, it is doubtful if the socialists were, as yet, a force to be reckoned with in the London Metro. branch. The phrasing of the resolution must have owed something to their influence, but the growing militancy of London bootmakers was due more, at this stage, to the conflicts encapsulated in the Northampton struggle. The assessment that the socialists were still relatively weak in the branch is supported by the nature of the action proposed: an extension of the first class statement, rather than the regulation of the non-statement sector.

Fox mistakes the rise of the intermediate, non-statement worker to prominence in the London Metro. branch. He writes:

"The publicity of the London Metro. grievance against Northampton and the growing public concern with the sweating system were now causing the less fortunate workers of this intermediate group to examine their own position and take the necessary steps. The Metro. branch showed a steady rise in membership from about 1,300 in January, 1887 (taking financial and probationary members together), to about 1,800 in December, 1888".³⁸

He goes on to suggest that it was these new members ".... who now began to make their voices heard at Union meetings", and he quotes the S.L.R.'s report of a conference at the 'Cherry Tree Tavern', in February, 1888, at which men working

36. ibid.: 17 Sept., 1887.

37. ibid.

38. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.C. p.107.

at the third and fourth class shops took a more active part than they had ever done before. Fox has rightly assessed the composition of the new membership, for with the statement aristocracy already in the branch and the Jews organising separately it must have come from the ranks of the intermediate, English workers. He is in error, however, in suggesting that there occurred "a steady rise in membership" from January, 1887 until December, 1888, for there was no significant growth in numbers until after March, 1888. In January, 1887 there were 1,349 financial and probationary members of the London Metro. branch. By December of that year there were, in fact, 22 fewer at 1,327.³⁹ During the course of the year, the January figure had been exceeded only once, in August.⁴⁰ Far from there being a "steady rise" in membership through 1887, the year had been one of stagnation and even slight decline. The initial period of rapid expansion did not begin until March, 1888 (1,431 members), rising steadily to 1,828 members by December, 1888. The rate of growth declined through 1889, the membership in December being only 1,971. It then rose rapidly again through the build-up to the 1890 strike and reached almost 3,000 during the strike month of April, itself.⁴¹

In the light of this it is necessary to re-assess the rise of the non-statement worker and the new militancy. If the membership did not start to expand until March, 1888, then neither the 'new socialist' resolution of September, 1887, nor the outcome of the 'Cherry Tree' Conference of February, 1888 can be explained in terms of large numbers of non-statement workers introducing socialist politics into the branch. All that can be said is that, in late 1887 and early 1888, a small vanguard of socialist bootmakers were just beginning to articulate their challenge to the branch leadership. They could not have obtained any substantial rank and file base until later in 1888, and even this tended to stagnate through 1889, before it expanded again, this time very rapidly, with the growing militancy of the early months of 1890.

39. *Ibid.* Jan. and Dec., 1887.

40. *Ibid.* Aug., 1887.

41. *Ibid.* Jan., 1887 - April, 1890.

The pattern of expanding membership discussed above diverts us a little from the central problem of the relationship between the London industry and the provinces. A significant number of London manufacturers had decided that removal or putting-out work to the provinces was a preferable strategy to that of internal reform of the London trade. This marked a crucial escalation in the struggle for there could, now, be no solution acceptable to trade unionists that did not involve the regulation of other areas. London's struggles had exploded and sent a host of fiery satellites into orbit.

IV. The eruption of the sweating question.

Employers and workmen drew different lessons from the struggle in Northampton. Those employers who had not abandoned hope of internal reform grasped at the example of a uniform statement being drawn up by conciliation, and adopted this formula as the panacea for the ills of the London trade. The workmen were unconvinced of the universal applicability of the Northampton settlement and, as with the employers, remained divided over the desirability of both a uniform statement and the use of conciliation as a means to its achievement. Yet, the Northampton experience had impressed upon all the absolute urgency of dealing, somehow, with the wages' question. During 1888 the plight of the sweated worker burst upon the public consciousness, through the investigations of Parliament and the press, and this added momentum to the campaign of the non-statement bootmakers. But, the festering mass of exploited labour revealed by these surveys was reduced to increasing exasperation by the continued inability of all parties to deal effectively with the problem.

Early in 1888, possibly as a result of the Northampton settlement, negotiations began on the resurrection of the London Board of Conciliation and Arbitration.⁴² Despite the fact that Frank spoke in favour of the Board, (having changed his mind since the 1886 Conference) the membership rejected

42. S.L.B.: 14 Jan., 1888.

the proposal by a clear 12 to 1 majority.⁴³ Instead, London Metro. decided upon an organising campaign in support of their renewed demand for a minimum statement. It was for this purpose that the shops' delegates' conferences, at which the non-statement workers began to assert their presence, were called. Yet, there is still much evidence to show that the statement aristocracy remained in control of London Metro. throughout 1888.⁴⁴

The purpose of the shops' delegates' conferences was to collect information on wages across the trade, and this made the participation of the non-statement workers essential. The consensus of opinion was that they should move for a minimum statement.⁴⁵ The employers, however, were thinking on an altogether grander scale. James Branch recommended to the annual meeting of the Association a national wages' statement,⁴⁶ the reasoning behind which the B.S.T.J. had already explained:

"The differences in wages between London and Northampton in the men's trade, and London and Leicester in the ladies', are such as to make it all but impossible for statement paying houses in the Metropolis to compete with their provincial rivals upon the relative merits of their respective manufacturers."⁴⁷

To the difference in wage rates Northampton now also enjoyed the further competitive advantage of having no restrictive classification.

The employers declined to discuss the Union proposal for a minimum statement without a prior arbitration agreement. Branch's argument for a national wages' statement had not been adopted and, instead, the employers wanted a uniform statement for London based on Northampton rates. To the unions, this was tantamount to suggesting direct reductions, and it was particularly aggravating at a time when employers were moving to Northampton at an increasing rate.⁴⁸

43. ibid. 1 11 Feb., 1888.

44. For example, the second class statement had been imposed upon Chambers of Cronal St., Hoxton in February.

45. S.L.R. 10 March, 1888.

46. B.S.T.J. 3 March, 1888.

47. ibid. 1 21 Jan., 1888.

48. M.R. 1 March, 1888.

London's relations with Northampton were further debated at the National Union's biennial conference at Norwich, in June. Stacey proposed that any firm opening a branch shop, with the intention of getting their work done cheaper, should be treated as having made direct reductions. Thomas Horobin predicted that, if adopted, this resolution would lead to a battle that would cost the Union £5,000. It was withdrawn. London delegates could take little pleasure in Kell's statement that the recent strike had doubled the Northampton membership for, to them, the newly unionised shoemakers were still working for a pittance.⁴⁹

An attempt to re-open the arbitration question in London failed when the men greeted James Branch's pleas with hisses, groans, laughter and "much uproar."⁵⁰ After such an humiliating rebuke the possibility of a lock-out seemed even greater.

The Jewish bootmakers made considerable organisational advances during the first half of 1888. From March, this part of the trade began to come under close public scrutiny with the appointment of a Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Sweating System. By that time, the International Journeymen's Foot Finishers' Society had been in existence about fifteen months,⁵¹ organising itself independently from the master sweaters. For most of this time Solomon Rosenberg had been its secretary.⁵² From his evidence to the Select Committee we know that membership of the Society was small, perhaps about one hundred. But, by June of 1888, they had made sufficient progress to require a bigger clubroom for their meetings, and the recruitment of some Gentile bootmakers necessitated the dropping of the word 'Jewish' from their title.⁵³

The first reported meeting of the International Journeymen took place at the Jewish Club, Princess Street, Whitechapel on 1st April, 1888. A member of

49. S.L.B.: 2 June, 1888.

50. *Ibid.*: 9 June, 1888.

51. P.P. 1888, XX; S.C. Sweating, pp. 83 and 89.

52. *Ibid.*: p. 83.

53. S.L.B.: 23 June, 1888.

Parliament, almost certainly Samuel Montagu, had written to promise financial support for their attempt to obtain better terms from the masters. But, there was some disagreement as to who the primary enemy was, for some present astutely recommended the manufacturer as the main culprit.⁵⁴ The Society's most consistent demand in the next two years was for indoor working as a means of abolishing the master sweater. Only when the master sweaters came to accept that their economic role was redundant was substantial co-operation between the two possible. Through the late 1880s, both unions remained weak and both were heavily reliant upon the patronage of wealthy sympathisers and the support of the Gentile unions.

The first serious clash between the two Jewish unions came in April. As the master sweaters were about to meet the sweating manufacturers to draw up a uniform statement for the sweated trade, the International Journeymen cut the ground from under them by demanding the complete abolition of the large sweater. Lord Rothschild was said to be prepared to put the case of the sweated finisher to the Sweating Committee and it was agreed that he should be asked to recommend the placing of all workshops under the Factory Act, and a shortening of the hours of labour.⁵⁵

Charles Freak acknowledged the attempts of the Journeymen to organise by agreeing to chair meetings. The support of Henry Newman, an Aldersgate merchant, was also recruited and he became Honorary President. Despite the welcome patronage of wealthy persons, he emphasised the need for self-reliance, and he particularly urged the abolition of the large sweaters who were responsible for "taking the bread out of the mouths of English workmen."⁵⁶

Sweating manufacturers also came under fire in June. Joseph Nathan and E.L. Lion received demands for advances, Joseph Flatau was having a new statement prepared for him, and Krémblar was persuaded to take back two dismissed unionists when his shop was totally struck and his house surrounded by angry

54. *Ibid.*: 7 April, 1888.

55. *Ibid.*: 5 May, 1888.

56. *Ibid.*: 12 May, 1888.

pickets.⁵⁷ Other manufacturers had been approached with a view to eliminating the master sweater by taking finishers onto the premises. Lion, Lion and Co. were the first to realise the potential profitability of this scheme for the sweater's former profit could be divided between manufacturers and indoor workers. They made provision for fifty indoor finishers.

Jacob Flatau had also been having discussions with the International Journeymen on the possibility of taking lasters and finishers indoors. An agreement, that the master sweater's premium would be divided equally between manufacturer and workmen, had just been reached when a strike broke out over a separate issue, Flatau's rejection of a revised statement. Fearing that their time was nigh, the master sweaters then broke the strike by taking the jobs which had been originally intended for the journeymen. The fact that two London Metro. members had come out with the Jewish Journeymen was sufficient reason for the branch to initiate a picket on the shop. Pressure was exerted upon the Jewish Masters' Society who expelled all members working for Flatau's. But some journeymen were also creeping back and their union complained that this was only happening because they were without strike pay. Nevertheless, a request to London Metro. for financial assistance was refused, whereupon the International Journeymen considered the strike over and returned to work. London Metro. considered otherwise, however, and the episode remained a very sore point between the unions for some time to come.⁵⁸

The central concern of the statement workers continued to be competition from Northampton. The London Metro. executive, against their better judgement, had been forced to go to Northampton and insist that the London first class statement be imposed upon all firms removing there. Northampton union officials were unsympathetic, as were the Northampton workers of London-based firms who were summoned to a meeting by the delegation. Refusing to accept defeat, the

57. *Ibid.*: 2 June, 1888.

58. *Ibid.*: 1 June, 1888.

London officials then called a mass meeting of all the town's shoemakers. The outcome of this was influenced by a telegram from the Council of the National Union informing the meeting that it would accept no responsibility for any decision by Northampton to press for wages above its statement. A general resolution of support for London was narrowly passed, but it committed Northampton unionists to nothing specific. The whole affair further illustrates that the statement aristocracy were still able to dictate London Metro. policy in the summer of 1888.⁵⁹

The failure to win any solid support from Northampton persuaded the statement aristocracy into concessions to the employers.⁶⁰ The statement workers were not, yet, prepared to concede the uniform statement that the employers wanted. Instead, they offered to negotiate a statement that would run from the first class work to that immediately below the second, that is the 'third class' work that had been the subject of negotiation in 1884. The fact that the sweated sector was to be excluded from these negotiations provided a further illustration of the statement aristocracy's continued direction of policy. They saw their offer as a minimum concession through which to keep the first and second class statements intact. As an irate correspondent to a trade journal noted:

"I would ask by whom is the present agitation inspired and embittered? Is it not by a few who feel chagrined? They use phrases of 'brotherhood', 'common interest', and such like, when, all the time, their only aim is to vainly use the resources of the trades' organisation to keep in existence certain exclusive privileges to which the great bulk of their fellows cannot aspire; and the men who advocate the true Unionist principles at their meetings of 'the greatest good of the greatest number' are dubbed traitors to the cause."⁶¹

The commitment to something resembling a uniform statement was welcomed by the employers. However, great concern was expressed by the better class manufacturers that it should be extended to incorporate the sweated trade. For

59. S.L.R.: 28 July, 1888.

60. B.S.T.J.: 4 Aug., 1888.

61. S.L.R.: 4 Aug., 1888.

their part, the sweated manufacturers showed no interest. They stayed away from a meeting called by the employers in early October, and declined to serve on the conciliation board set up to discuss the statement. The sweaters were defending their freedom of operation, but both the better class employers and the International Journeymen were determined to see them regulated.⁶²

Afraid that the sweated trade was to be ignored, the International Journeymen expressed their support for the movement afoot. Henry Newman urged that this must be left in no doubt because, at the moment, the English unionists planned to ignore the sweated trade because they thought the Jews would not stand by them. Solomon Rosenberg requested that the statement be extended to the sweated trade and that the International Journeymen be given representation on the Board.⁶³ Freak agreed to such representation, but was not prepared to accept anybody working for Flatau as a delegate, because the National Union still regarded them as strikebreakers. Even if they accepted these terms, Freak was prepared to give no guarantees to the Jewish finishers about including the sweated trade for, although he would personally have liked to see it regulated, the statement aristocracy feared that its inclusion would drag all rates above it downwards. For them, the sweated trade was an illegitimate sector for which they were prepared to accept no responsibility.

The employers were anxious to have representatives of the non-unionists present during negotiations over the composition of the Board. Freak resisted this, recognising it for what it was: an attempt to ensure that the new statement would be pitched at a lower level through the inclusion of low paid, non-unionists. He said as much at a union meeting, shortly afterwards. Arguing that the new statement should run from the first class to the minimum of 1884, he accused the employers of trying to call in the unorganised in order to drag them down even lower, "... we will not have the 2^d. place kid of the Flatau's,

62. *Ibid.*; 13 Oct., 1885.

63. *Ibid.*; 3 Nov., 1885.

the Lions and the Apples flaunted in our faces."⁶⁴

Freak's position was unanimously upheld and, despite the omission of the sweated trade, it constituted the most radical programme of reform the London bootmaking trade unions had ever produced. The hope for the sweated sector was that it would, eventually, be dragged up to the third class level, rather than the other way round. The Jewish unions supported the programme in the hope that it might, somehow, do them some good. With a united and increasingly militant workforce behind them, the union delegates again embarked upon the old ship conciliation in the hope that it would, not again, leak, keel over or sail round in circles. It took a second defeat of pragmatism to convince large numbers of London bootmakers to abandon this discredited vessel in favour of a socialist alternative whose captains insisted that victory could only be won by the outright defeat of those with whom they had previously parleyed.

V. The second experience of conciliation in London.

So, after twelve months of negotiations about negotiations, the union delegates walked into a quiet dining room of the Sayd's Hotel, Finsbury Square, on the afternoon of the last day of 1888 and seated themselves opposite their employers. A familiar face, Thomas Lilley's was absent ill, and the unions were, after all, without a representative of the International Journeymen, although the Jewish masters had sent Charles Solomon.

In his absence, Lilley had sent a letter which provides a concise summary of the problems facing the Board. The London trade, he wrote, was unique in its mixture of high class and common work and, thus, required great diversities of skill. The chief obstacle, he envisaged, was the dispute over whether the statement was to be comprehensive, or not. If it was not a statement to which every London employer was compelled to work, then the sweating problem would remain to subvert their efforts. The point had been equally well made by John Day, editor of the S.L.R. in the quotation that opens this chapter.

64. Ibid.: 15 Dec., 1888.

At the first meeting the union delegates resisted an attempt by the employers to commit the Board to drawing up a "comprehensive" statement. At the second they were forced to defend the old system of classification by quality of materials used, against the employers' wish to make the amount of labour embodied the criterion of wage assessment. The advantage of the old system to the statement worker was that it guaranteed him high rates through restricting certain materials to use in the statement trade, although this exclusiveness was being undermined. If the amount of labour time spent on a boot, with additional premiums for extras, was to become the new yardstick, then the statement bootmaker would be reduced to making his living in the same way as common workmen. This offended his notion of artisanship.

The men further objected to a system of classification by samples, probably because they feared it would reduce the chance of swaying classification disputes in their own favour. In Northampton, the men had demanded samples to prevent the employers from arbitrarily introducing new work under price, but the statement worker in London, given the strength of his unions, felt no such need.

At the third meeting the men conceded standard samples provided each was accompanied by a written description. Presumably, this was to ensure against the samples being tampered with. The discussion turned again to the principles of piece assessment, the men displaying uncompromising hostility to a proposal "that classification should recognise the degree of workmanship, and generally the quality of material." On the question of extras, the men forced payment where extra labour or extra skill were involved.⁶⁵

Discussion reached the very basics of minimum wage rates at the fourth meeting. On the cheapest work, there seemed an insurmountable gap between the 4d. per pair making and the 3d. finishing offered by the employers, and the 6d. and 5½d. demanded by the men. Lilley warned against driving the commonest work out of London and, thereby, creating unemployment among unskilled bootmakers.

65. Ibid.: 12 Jan., 1889.

The negotiations were becoming increasingly deadlocked. Nothing was accomplished at the fifth meeting as the promised samples failed to materialise from the employers. At the sixth, tempers frayed when the employers refused to move from their ground work prices. Stacey and Chapman's insistence "that in their experience they had never known a shop pay so little",⁶⁶ only confirmed that it had been a long time since they had walked through Spitalfields. Freak, with his experience of the sweated trade, should have known better than to suggest an adjournment for the purpose of a wages' investigation, for his confidence that it would confirm the men's position was totally misplaced.

William Hoffman, a journalist on the S.L.R. with a known sympathy for the sweated worker, was commissioned to make an independent survey of London wages. He reported back to the Board that he had found 26 factories in the City, Whitechapel, Mile End, Bethnal Green, Hackney, London Fields, and Old Ford that made the common work in dispute, and in many below 4d. per pair (he must have been referring to making prices) was being paid. It was a shattering blow to the unions' case, but one that they had laid themselves open to by remaining so ill-informed on the piece-rates of the sweated sector. The employers were not slow to make capital out of this confirmation of their case, yet the union delegates still refused to accept sweated wages as a basis for a uniform London statement. The Board's efforts had come to a halt. There was no more than a glimmer of a hope in the agreement that the employers would draw up a statement separately and present it for the men's consideration.⁶⁷

Negotiations had broken down because of a fundamental disagreement over what type of statement was required. The unionists had never wanted to include the sweated trade in any settlement, but the employers insisted upon it. The fact that neither side would move from these positions was the major cause of the deadlock. Hoffman's survey shows that the men's minimum prices were pitched at

66. Ibid.: 2 Feb., 1889.

67. S.L.R.: 9 Feb., 1889.

a much higher level than those prevailing in the sweated sector. Their refusal to deviate from them demonstrates that protection of the first and second class statements from erosion from below was still their primary consideration. For this they stood condemned by sweated workers and statement employers, alike.

The response of a correspondent of the S.L.R. was typical:

"Sir, perhaps the most marvellous aspect of this question is the fact that so large a majority of workmen of London (for the most part non-unionist) should allow themselves to be bamboozled out of an advance of wages by the first and second class workmen. Nothing is more clear or incapable of contradiction than that the statement drafted by the employers offered to about 70 per cent of the workmen of London about 25 per cent advance of wages above that they now receive. This had never been seriously denied, and yet a small clique of Trade Unionists are working the whole of the labour question to their own advantage."⁶⁸

This was a shrewd analysis. Simpler minds reduced the problem to the obstinacy of both sets of delegates in refusing to compromise:

"I have watched with great interest, week by week, the reports of the sittings of the representatives of employers and workmen trying to compile a London Wages Statement, and it seems to me at the end of their sitting they are no more forward than they were when they commenced. It reminds me very much of two men holding two quite different opinions on religion or politics, and after discussing the subject, and abusing each other some two or three hours, the one says to the other, well that's your way of thinking, I shall still hold after all that my opinion is right."⁶⁹

Whichever explanation was preferred, the reputation of conciliation boards had suffered another grievous blow.

Throughout the negotiations, the employers had refused to be bound by any previous statements, but in the immediate aftermath, they intimated to the unions that they would try to fix the bottom rates as near to the 1884 minimum as possible.⁷⁰ This became common knowledge when Stacey announced it to a

68. S.L.R.: 18 May, 1889.

69. S.L.R.: 9 Feb., 1889.

70. S.L.R.: 12 March, 1889.

union meeting at the end of February and, as a result, expectations of a settlement were raised. Fressk firmly resisted all speculation as to whether the Council would support a strike as hypothetical, but Chapman offered a pessimistic forecast.⁷¹ A delay of a further month exhausted the union's patience and Stacey informed Craig that, if their statement did not appear quickly, the unions would produce one of their own.⁷² This ultimatum was accompanied by a warning to James Branch against sending any more work to Northampton.⁷³

When the employers' statement finally appeared, on 8th April, the men were astounded to find that there was no change in the prices offered for the common work that had been in dispute. Stacey felt that Craig had deceived him by building optimism as to a settlement. Fressk was agreed that the wages proposed were unacceptable.⁷⁴

The unions carried out their threat of drawing up their own statement, but this was, predictably, rejected by the employers in no uncertain terms:

".... the prices embodied in your amendments would considerably raise the wages on all classes of work in London and are a distinct advance upon those asked for by the workmen's delegates at the joint board meetings. The Draft Statement, as amended, also contains more harmful restrictions than any previous document. Further, the manufacturers' delegates are of the opinion that the adoption of any statement at all like the one submitted by you would result in the total destruction of the boot trade in London."⁷⁵

A hardening of the Association's attitudes became apparent when they made another attempt to federate with provincial associations. It was a repeat of their behaviour in 1884 when they, again, felt that a strike was near. It was met with the usual cynically, cool response from the provinces. However, the

71. Ibid.: 2 March, 1889.

72. B.S.T.J.: 30 March, 1889.

73. B.R.: 1 March, 1889.

74. S.L.B.: 13 April, 1889.

75. B.S.T.J.: 11 May, 1889.

employers' commitment to conciliation and arbitration had not weakened as a result of the breakdown in negotiations. They seemed to believe that if only they could force the unions into accepting an arbitrator their case would be upheld.⁷⁶

Having reached what they, and most others in the trade, considered to be an impasse, the men's committee resigned. This concerned the trade press who were afraid, along with the employers, that this might let in the militants.⁷⁷ London Metro's executive expected a strike in the near future and urged "... all our members to put themselves in a financial position, as it is impossible that this shall end here; we must by some means or other, raise the prices of the low paying shops."⁷⁸ Further discussion was, however, postponed for the summer season. But, all concerned recognised that, with the chill of autumn, it was sure to return.⁷⁹

Thus, by mid-1889, the London wages problem had come to seem an intractable one to many. At the centre of this intractability lay the complex web of divided interests which prevented statement and sweating trades from agreeing common solutions. Employers and workers were almost as strongly divided among themselves as against each other. As conciliation repeatedly failed to reconcile, so the most abused party, the sweating worker, was increasingly inclined towards an offensive strategy. But, his wrath was turned upon sweating employers and statement workers in equal measure as each refused to countenance change. Out of these central conflicts ran various tangential threads which complicated a solution. London employers, Northampton and London bootmakers were locked in a vicious triangle of exploitation and recrimination. The London Metro. leadership jostled to push the Leicester Council from its conciliatory perch, while treading carefully to parry a mounting challenge from within its own branch membership.

76. S.L.R.: 18 May, 1889.

77. S.S.T.J.: 15 June, 1889.

78. S.L.R.: June, 1889.

79. S.L.R.: July, 1889.

CHAPTER SIXTHE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW UNIONISMI. Economic revival and new unionist growth.

The bargaining position of trade unions in 1889 was strengthened by a genuine improvement in the economy. At the height of the summer trade it was reported that "The first half of the year has closed with the best six months' trade that has been experienced in the boot and shoe industries for many years."¹ In April, London Metro. branch membership passed 1,900 for the first time since the strike of 1884, and, by December, was only 29 short of 2,000.²

1889 was also the year in which the new unionism made a tremendous impact. In London, in 1888, pioneering strikes of the unskilled had been fought by the gasworkers and the Bryant and May matchgirls, but it was the dock strike of August and May, 1889 that made the greatest impression upon the public consciousness and provided the maximum exposure for the socialist politics of its leaders. After the successes of 1888, the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League had devoted great energy to the East End which ".... was pinpointed as a pioneering centre for the development of the new unionism."³ As the dockers received their tanner in September, the Jewish tailors began a grueling, but successful, strike. Bootmakers surveyed this explosion of militant trade unionism and compared it with their own recent failures at collective bargaining through conciliation. As they listened to the socialists' injection of class theory into industrial relations analysis, the message seemed to be clear: abandon the failed methods of the past and fight the class struggle.

The dock strike of 1889 did not last long enough to seriously affect supplies to the boot and shoemaking industry.⁴ Its influence was greater in the

1. B.S.T.J.: 29 June, 1889.

2. B.S.T.J.: April and Dec., 1889.

3. Fishman, op.cit., p.169.

4. B.S.T.J.: 31 Aug., 1889.

field of industrial relations. Stedman Jones has argued that the middle class reaction to the strike was one of relief. Their fears that the unemployment riots of the middle years of the decade would be repeated were not borne out by the orderly conduct of the dispute. It was a strange dialectic that resulted in a socialist leadership mollifying the inflamed property consciousness of the middle class.⁵ Yet, mention of class appeasement should not obscure the many protestations that such conflicts were allowed to happen at all. "The state of affairs in the labour market affords one very striking lesson, the necessity to be prepared to meet these contingencies by establishing tribunals of arbitration - the only means of justly dealing with all questions of strife between capital and labour."⁶ Through 1888 and 1889 the working class of London had begun to question the state of the relationship between capital and labour most radically, while employers sought safety valves for these mounting class tensions.

II. The movement for indoor working.

In the wake of the dockers' struggle, the bootmakers turned their attention even more earnestly than before to the sweating problem. Proposals for its abolition abounded and the debate provided a good opportunity for Jewish and Gentile trade unionists to seek closer co-operation. The Jewish finishers particularly resented the role played by the large sweaters for they no longer laboured, but merely shopped the work and supervised the dens. It was decided in October that, in future, all masters would be required to do their own knitting. The master sweaters' union agreed because they were reconciled to their own eventual extermination as a work group. One of their members, Solomon Baum, favoured emulating the Jewish tailors who, in September, had successfully struck for a written 10½ hour agreement. Another suggestion, for indoor working, was shortly to be put at the forefront of the campaign for trade reform.⁷

5. Stedman Jones, Outcast London. chap. 7.

6. B.S.T.J. 1: 31 Aug., 1889.

7. S.L.R. 1: 19 Oct., 1889.

The statement workers were still arguing their case vehemently, but were encountering increasing opposition at union meetings from those who thought that the sweated trade ought to take priority. For the statement aristocracy Chapman favoured an extension of the second class statement to combat those firms who were undercutting the second class trade. Non-statement workers, however, were opposed to such partial solutions and began to argue for a uniform statement.⁸

At a joint meeting on 17th October the anti-sweating movement took a significant turn. It had begun with Frank proposing that the abolition of the master sweater be afforded priority. The Jews opposed this in favour of campaigning for a 10½ hour day as a first step towards indoor working. Hugh Childs, a finisher speaking from the floor, then proposed an amendment that caught the imagination of the meeting. It went further than any previous resolution and possessed the additional merit of being specific in its plan of action. It read:

"That we, the Trades' Unionists of Lastrars and Finishers, have no other assistant except our own son. We also demand workshops, on or off the premises, to be supplied by the employers on or before March 24th, 1890. If this not to be conceded then we turn out against the existing evil of making workshops of our own homes, and parade and ask the public to support us in our right."

He explained that the six month period would allow the Jews time to learn the additional skills that indoor working, by abolishing the team system, would require of them. He thought that they ought to be prepared to proceed with or without union support and he predicted that they would receive as much public support as the dockers. He sat down to great cheers and other speakers reiterated his determination to proceed with or without official support. One reminded that it was a Union rule to provide decent workshops, yet nothing had been done. Another suggestion that all Jewish and Gentile unions be merged was greeted with equal enthusiasm.

8. Ibid.

Freak opposed Child's amendment with characteristic frankness, but unwisely deviated from the issue and indulged in personal invective. He condemned it as "a death and damnation policy" which would reduce shoemakers to beggars on the streets. It was being proposed by reckless militants who had made no proper assessment of the consequences of such a major strike. He failed miserably to save his resolution and Child's amendment was easily carried by 212 votes to 97. The militants had won the first round of a long and arduous battle against the branch leadership.⁹

From this point the new unionist challenge seemed to stalk the branch leadership wherever it turned. The firm of Pearson and Bennion were producing second class goods at below statement prices by the use of boy labour on machinery.¹⁰ At a meeting called to consider a course of action Freak was attacked from the floor for failing to present the issues properly:

"Employers are introducing machinery for their own interests and workers have to protect themselves against this.... It is time they (the branch executive) did something to maintain our wages for which we pay weekly contributions to the Union ... We should protest at the use of machinery to make a paradise on earth for capitalists while creating the very opposite for workers."¹¹

The socialism which informed the politics of the bootmaker new unionists is evident in such statements. They had moved to the next level of attack, which was to explain the employers' dominant position within the industry in terms of an inactive branch leadership which lacked the class consciousness necessary to rectify the imbalance of power.

The Council of the National Union had endorsed the workshope's resolution, realising that to do otherwise would invite rank and file revolt. But, they had objected to fixing a precise date of turn-out. In a cunning move, designed

9. B.S.L.J. and S.L.R.: 26 Oct., 1889.

10. S.L.R.: 2 Nov., 1889.

11. Ibid.: 16 Nov., 1889.

to provide maximum opportunity for the new unionists to be defeated, they had further instructed each of the London secretaries to call a meeting to endorse the workshops' resolution. Yet a further mass meeting of the entire London trade was, then, to be called to inform it of the decision.¹²

At this point an application by C. Silverthorne, a first class manufacturer, to be permitted to make second class work also had a catalytic effect upon the wages' question. Silverthorne's threat to leave London if concessions were not granted made his a test case which would stand as policy for the remainder of the statement trade. The statement aristocracy, for whom Chapman and, to a lesser extent, Frank acted as spokesman, defended the statements as they stood and favoured the placing of further restrictions upon Northampton. The non-statement workers, however, wanted a fundamental revision of the wages' structure through the introduction of a uniform statement.

At a meeting on 14th November, Chapman argued that any uniform statement would result in the reduction of the first class rates. The non-statement workers present wanted none of his exclusive trade unionism and expressed their desire for a more militant policy by calling for John Burns. A speaker from the floor, who was sick of coming to meetings and hearing the first and second class statements discussed, put their case:

"I work in a non-statement shop, what about the thousands situated as I am, who are faced with annual reductions? I object to the insinuation that non-statement men are not interested in unionism. They are not interested in the first and second class statements. Draw up a uniform statement and see how fast the non-statement men turn out."¹³

A more articulate expression of the allied trade union practice that drove the non-statement worker towards the new unionism is not to be found. But, there was still insufficient support at this meeting for the inclusion of a uniform statement in the programme of reform.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*; 23 Nov., 1889.

By a accidental amalgamation of interest the statement employers also wanted a uniform statement because it would provide them with the freedom to manufacture all classes of work. For the non-statement worker, however, the greatest benefit would be the establishment of a minimum wage which would put an end to sweating. And, for the socialists among them, this was just part of a spiralling struggle which revolved outwards to challenge the statement aristocracy's control of the union and beyond into concepts of general unionism. Thus, for the statement employers, a uniform statement was an end in itself, while for the new unionists among the non-statement workers in particular it was merely a beginning.

Thomas Lilley recognised that it was those "who are what might be aptly termed the aristocracy of the workmen" who presented the greatest obstacle to the formulation of a uniform statement. At the Association's annual general meeting he quoted with approval Frederic Harrison's favourable opinion of the new unionism. The former chairman of the Paddington Liberal Association¹⁴ had come to sympathise with the new unionism because it paid attention to "the most wretched", and it was their wages that he wanted raised to a level nearer those he paid.¹⁵ While the new unionists' uniform statement would have achieved this it was accompanied by a militant class consciousness that Lilley's liberalism found repugnant.

The all-London meeting of trade unionists, which drew over a thousand workmen to the Key Street Club, presented a united front to the employers. Frank accepted his previous defeat and spoke militantly in favour of indoor working. He found no difficulty in carrying out the democratically decided policy of the branch despite the fact that he had not, personally, supported it. Hugh Childs shrewdly amended his resolution to allow the Council to decide the date by which workshops should be provided, although 24th March was still recommended. Designed

14. Shoe and Leather Trades Chronicle: 15 March, 1885, a biographical sketch of Thomas Lilley.

15. Lilley was not an officially recognised statement manufacturer, although he paid to second class rates.

to secure the Council's support this intelligent piece of diplomacy could not have gone unappreciated by Edward Kell, who was present.¹⁶

The Jewish unions pledged their support for the workshops movement but, afraid that the wages of the sweated worker might again be overlooked, they resolved also in favour of a minimum statement for the low paying shops. In addition, the Jewish 'greener' was apprehensive that indoor working would require of him greater skill than the team system. Although the Jewish unions gave assurances that the team system would be retained in the transitionary period, many 'greeners' continued to oppose indoor working for fear of losing their jobs.

The Jewish resolution in favour of a minimum statement had been made necessary by the failure of the new unionists to add a uniform statement to London Metro.'s reform programme. The South London branch of the National Union had no such hesitation in supporting a uniform statement, although the Council appears to have resisted their pressure to make it official policy.¹⁷

By the new year a joint manifesto, agreed by all seven societies representing London boot and shoemakers,¹⁸ was presented to the employers. Its five demands were:

- (i) Free workshops for all leathers and finishers unless they be so incapacitated that they cannot leave home.
- (ii) Finishing to be divided into knifing and finishing, and the same rate paid for each (a concession to the Jewish 'greeners').
- (iii) Facilities to be provided for Jews to work on Sundays.
- (iv) Weekly wages "to allow machinery to assert itself."
- (v) One boy per five men to be allowed, equally distributed throughout the trade.¹⁹

16. S.L.R.: 14 Dec., 1889.

17. R.R.: Dec., 1889.

18. These, with the names of the respective secretaries, were: London Metro. branch of the National Union (C. Freak), City branch of the Amalgamated (W. Chapman), London South branch of the N.U. (F. Wilson), Jewish Master Finishers (C. Solomon), International Journeymen Boot Finishers (S. Rosenberg), Jewish Leathers (S. Levy), London South Branch of the Amalgamated (J. Buckley).

19. B.S.T.J. and S.L.R.: 4 Jan., 1890.

The fourth and fifth clauses of the manifesto represented London's attempt to tackle difficult problems that had plagued the unions for some time. With the introduction of evermore sophisticated lasting and finishing machinery, the National Union had decided in 1889 to go over to a system of day or weekly wages. This was to admit that the opposition to such wage payments, put up in the early 1880s, had failed. By exchanging piece for day wages the unions had relinquished a good deal of control over the rate of production and it was now open to employers to force productivity increases without a corresponding rise in labour costs. The National Union had considered transferring piece-work to machine production but had abandoned the idea due to variation in the efficiency of machinery from area to area. "In such a context it seemed safer to fix a uniform day wage which would serve as a defence line for all the workers of the district, and round which the whole branch, if necessary, could rally."²⁰ Lasting and finishing machinery had not been widely introduced in London, where most of this work was still taken out, but the introduction of indoor working would provide a stimulus to employers to mechanise.

The co-existence of both hand and machine labour made the employment of boys a difficult problem. Although apprenticeship had long died in boot and shoe-making many still employed boy assistants. This was particularly the case with those bootmakers who worked at home with their sons, and this was an established trade custom with which the unions were reluctant to interfere. However, many employers began to substitute boys for men on machinery and it was this dilution of labour to which the unions objected most strongly. No official policy was developed until the 1890s but, in London, the fifth clause of the manifesto was designed to guard against dilution in workshops while not offending those bootmakers who might wish to bring their sons, for example, inside with them.

20. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O., p.135.

The employers' response to the unions' manifesto was to call a joint conference in a last ditch attempt to find a settlement. This appeared to have been achieved when the conference agreed that workshops would be provided by 25th June and that arbitration would be re-instituted for the future. In agreeing to the latter the union delegates may have been influenced by the fact that a lock-out of Bristol shoemakers had recently ended in the re-establishment of an arbitration board to draw up a uniform statement.²¹

These recommendations were put to a mass meeting of trade unionists at the Shoreditch Town Hall on 20th February and there was widespread confidence that they would be accepted.²² The anti-arbitrationists, however, had organised exceptionally well, distributing handbills to the bootmakers as they entered and placing the handbills in strategic positions about the hall. The meeting was to be ".... the biggest and most excited since the days of the minus statement."²³

Kenneth McCrae, General Secretary of the Amalgamated, and Edward Kell put the case for accepting the conference resolutions and both received an extremely rough ride. When Kell asked them what they had to fear from the proposals a voice from the floor replied "Stafford!" Kell attempted to placate them by arguing that the Leicester Board had prevented 25% reductions, but when he went on to ask why it was that London did not have the membership of Leicester, another voice found an alternative explanation to the one he was implying: "you have no Petticoat Lane in Leicester!"

Joseph Stacey proved an influential recruit to the anti-arbitration camp. He, too, argued that both the Stafford and Leeds arbitrations had gone against the men, and the Leeds shoemakers had been forced to labour under 20% reductions for ten years. Neither were the Northampton shoemakers happy with their board, he thought. His amendment, in support of workshops but excluding all reference to arbitration, was seconded by William Votier, a member of the S.O.F. who was

21. B.S.T.J.: 18 Jan., 1890.

22. Ibid.: 15 Feb., 1890.

23. S.L.R.: 1 March, 1890.

beginning to establish for himself a reputation as a champion of the non-statement worker.²⁴ Freak asked them to give arbitration a fair trial but, probably because he realised it was a lost cause, his speech was decidedly low-key. It made no impression and a second amendment, in support of Stacey's, was carried pledging strike action from 25th March if workshops had not been provided. It was noted that "The Jews seemed to occupy all the front seats, and, to the evident surprise of the Union officials seemed all to vote for the amendment." This was the first indication of a growing Jewish militancy on the workshop question.²⁵

The meeting had been a great triumph for those favouring militant policies who had demonstrated that they could win majority support at a mass meeting. The new unionists were an important contingent, but not all of this majority, for opposition to arbitration drew in many bootmakers who would not have ascribed to socialist or even new unionist views. The astute tactics of Childs in ensuring Council support for the strike must have been influential in winning over many of the Jews, and others. The trade press refused to admit that the official union leadership was losing control and persisted with its conspiratorial theorising. For them, the majority had been misled and would, even now, welcome an opportunity to reverse their decision.²⁶ The last hope for those who opposed a strike was that the councils of the unions would refuse to sanction it.

The outcome of the mass union meeting failed to move the Association from its commitment to arbitration. James Branch thought that the men's rejection of it would alienate them from other societies. His brother, John, explained that, while they still had every confidence in the official leaders, the unofficial leaders were behaving as if a strike was positively desirable.²⁷

But, the unofficial leadership had won the support of the rank and file. Even the S.L.R. recommended the official leadership to call the men out when

24. B.S.T.J.: 1 March, 1890.

25. ibid.

26. S.L.R.: 1 March, 1890.

27. ibid.

the time came, rather than leave them to their own devices. "The former course will only mean a strike; the other might mean a riot."²⁸ The degree of support for the anti-arbitrationists is further illustrated by the fact that Stacey and Votier topped the poll for delegates to the National Conference in May.²⁹ Fox's analysis of the rank and file revolt against the official leadership focuses upon "a small minority of socialist leaders" who found it easy "to gather behind them all the diverse and discontented elements" and uniting "them in a rejection of arbitration." He has further argued that "In seeking to persuade the London workers to accept arbitration (and thus achieve indoor working without a strike) the official leaders were now up against a most unholy alliance".³⁰ This concept of an "unholy alliance" merits critical examination.

The first component was the statement aristocracy who opposed both arbitration and indoor working on the grounds that either might erode their privileges. As their vision of future trade unionism was poles apart from that of the socialist new unionists, and they only lent support on the single issue of opposition to arbitration, they cannot accurately be described as being in alliance with them. There was, rather, a coincidence of interest around that one point.

The second component were the sweating masters and some greeners "who, seeing that the manufacturers were making arbitration a condition of indoor working, voted against arbitration as an indirect way of fighting indoor work." It might be thought that this was a remarkably sophisticated strategy for men whose "leaders cut a pathetic figure", who possessed "only the most imperfect grasp of the language", who were "struggling to keep their feet in a society of which they knew little and an industry of which they knew even less", and who "found it difficult to understand the sequence of events."³¹ In fact, this is an inadequate assessment of the position of the Jewish workers for a distinction

28. Ibid. 18 March, 1890.

29. Ibid. 18 March, 1890.

30. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O. p.114.

31. Ibid. 1 p.109.

needs to be made between those who were unionised and those who were not. The leaders of the Jewish masters' union certainly understood the "sequence of events" sufficiently well to join the National Union in March, 1890 and, thus, avail themselves of some protection.³² They realised only too well that the imminence of indoor working numbered their days, and it was only the non-unionist sweaters who behaved in the way that Fox describes. The same applies to the greeners. The unionised, and therefore more class conscious, shed their inhibitions about indoor working, while the non-unionists behaved more conservatively. During the strike English trade unionists singled out the Jews on a number of occasions, not for their deceitfulness, but for their loyalty to the strike's aims.

The third component were of English outworkers "who were prepared to vote against arbitration to sabotage if possible the campaign for indoor working." In behaving in a similar way to the statement aristocracy, these non-unionists were also giving support of a negative kind on a single issue, and were certainly not the allies of the new unionists over indoor working.

Finally, there were "the 'New-Unionists-cum-Socialists' and their followers who opposed arbitration on grounds of principle as being a form of compromise with the class enemy." Again, this is an inadequate generalisation for the vast majority of non-statement workers who supported the socialists' interpretation of the practice of arbitration were not possessed of such a clearly articulated ideology. Most understood that arbitration had delayed a solution to the wages question and opposed it for this reason.

Thus, the "unholy alliance" can be seen to be an unhelpful concept which confuses an understanding of the militants' support. The vast majority of this came from non-statement bootmakers who, while rejecting arbitration, supported indoor working and a uniform statement (although the latter had not been included

32. M.R.: March, 1890.

in the manifesto). Any other groups usually gave negative support on single items and should not be counted as being in any sort of meaningful alliance with the militants. The latter had won this support from the non-statement worker by a positive presentation of alternative policies which seemed to base future strategy upon an accurate interpretation of the failings of the past. The rank and file movement can, thus, be seen to be classically new unionist in that it was a struggle of the less skilled against the neglect and condescension of the skilled.

The determination of the International Journeymen to fight for indoor working survived a loss of nerve on the part of their secretary who, fearing a defeat in the forthcoming strike, began to call for arbitration. He was duly censured at the next union meeting for he had no mandate for this course of action.³³ Rosenberg was a reluctant militant and further doubt is cast upon his character by an incident in December, 1891, when he was accused of embezzling £55 worth of union funds.³⁴

The Council of the National Union asserted its control over events in late March with an astute, three point programme that one critic described as "a crafty move."³⁵ The first point was that no men were to be withdrawn from factories where workshops had already been promised. Secondly, no action was to be taken against employers who gave a written guarantee that they would find workshops by a given date, to be arranged with the branch committee. Thirdly, in all disputes respecting the classification of uppers, or in cases of wage advances, any disputed issues should be referred to a Board of Arbitration. The first two points were cleverly designed to split the more intransigent, sweating manufacturers from the body of better class employers. This was recognised by the B.S.T.U. which commented upon the ingenuity of the document, and thought that

33. S.L.R.; 22 March, 1890.

34. Fishman, op.cit., pp.207-08. Rosenberg's nickname was "Moisha".

35. S.L.R.; 22 March, 1890.

".... it would be difficult to devise a scheme which would disintegrate the manufacturers' union more easily than the acceptance of these conditions."³⁶

The third point, of course, was designed to allay fears among the union membership that arbitration would lead to wage reductions by removing such issues from the agenda. In intervening, thus, the Council had to take into consideration that a vote of the whole Union had pledged financial support to London, and it was, therefore, in no position to wash its hand of the matter however much it might dislike the militants' stance.³⁷ For their part, the militants wisely adopted a low profile until the strike commenced and lent tacit support to the belief that it was the Council that now called the London tune.

Predictably, the Association rejected the Council's new proposals on 24th March, and two days later held a council of war at the Shoreditch Town Hall. James Branch was soundly defeated in his attempt to obtain an eleventh hour acceptance of the union terms. The employers had, at last, accepted the inevitability of confrontation, but were far from happy with the degree of unity within their ranks.³⁸ The deadline of midnight, 30th March expired quietly and from the morning of the 31st over 10,000 London boot and shoemakers had embarked upon the greatest struggle in their history to date.

III. The London bootmakers' strike of 1890.

The National Federation of All Trades and Industries is a labour organisation that has received no attention in the published work of historians of the new unionism. It is an important influence within the London labour movement because it attempted to divert strategy away from electoral politics towards general unionism³⁹ in a way that has been described as anticipating syndicalism.⁴⁰

36. B.S.T.J.: 22 March, 1890.

37. *Ibid.*: 18 March, 1890.

38. *Ibid.*: 29 March, 1890.

39. In the John Burns' Collection, County Hall Members' Library, there is a pamphlet 'Song of Victory and a Labour Federation Song' written by Frederick Robinson and undated (but probably Sept., 1890) commemorating the dock strike and urging "one giant labour band."

40. Bob Baldwin, in an unpublished paper given to the Lambeth History Workshop Conference, June, 1981. I am grateful to Bill Lancaster for drawing my attention to this important work.

N.F.A.T.I. emerged out of a W. London engineers' strike in the second half of 1889 and was organised by John E. Williams and a group of S.D.F. members assisted by comrades from the Hammersmith branch of the Socialist League. Williams became its Chief Organiser and John Burns its General Secretary. Through 1890 N.F.A.T.I. attempted to establish a base in the East End labour movement by participating in struggles such as the bootmakers' strike.

Williams was by far the most active of the N.F.A.T.I. executive in the events of 1890. Beginning his working life as a dock labourer, he graduated to the S.D.F. by way of Fanianism, Communism and the Magna Charta Association⁴¹ in the 1870s. He had been one of the original signatories of the manifesto 'Socialism Made Plain' (1883) which broke the Democratic Federation, as it then was, from radicalism and set it in the direction of Marxian socialism.⁴² In February, 1887 Williams was arrested with Burns, Hyndman, Champion and others after the unemployed riots, but was acquitted for lack of evidence.⁴³ The previous year he had stood as S.D.F. candidate for Hampstead, fought no campaign, and polled only 27 votes.⁴⁴ Williams is probably typical of the sort of experienced militant who composed the executive of N.F.A.T.I., and on his fortieth birthday in 1894, Justice paid him this compliment:

"It is now thirteen years since John Williams joined our organisation, and when the history of the body comes to be written, it will certainly appear that no one has had more imprisonment, more kicks and cuffs from the police, or has done more for his class by teaching, organisation and agitation than has indefatigable and plucky little John E. Williams."⁴⁵

Socialist bootmakers who worked within N.F.A.T.I. included Votier, Bentley, Jewers and Childs. The first was certainly a member of the S.D.F. and the others probably so. Rank and file bootmakers lent strong support to these

41. Formed to support the cause of the Tichborne Claimant in the 1870s. See John Saville, Background to the Socialist Revival, Bulletin of Soc. for Study of Lab. Hist. II, 1965.

42. Stan Shipley, Club Life and Socialism in Mid-Victorian London (Oxford, 1971), p.4.

43. H. Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party (Oxford, 1954), p.43.

44. Ibid. p.40.

45. Justice: 10 Feb., 1894.

alternative leaders during the 1890 strike and to their more general policy of an Eight Hours Demonstration on 4th May, 1890. The trade union activities of the S.D.F. leaders of N.F.A.T.I. stand in vivid contrast to the views of Hyndman on the essential futility of such working class organisations.

Two days before the strike was due to begin N.F.A.T.I. called a meeting of bootmakers on London Fields. John Bentley chaired it, and expressed his disgust at the clickers' refusal to support the strike unless they received strike pay from the National Union. Williams spoke against arbitration and Votier, urging the need for national federation, thought the chances of winning were good as the employers were falling out among themselves.⁴⁶ Another source estimated that 97 out of 400 manufacturers had conceded by the end of the first week in April.⁴⁷ Neither were the bootmakers the only major group of workers involved in industrial action for the miners had called a national strike for the end of March. The East End tailors were also threatening to strike against the masters' breaking of the agreement of the previous year.⁴⁸

By 1 p.m. on the first day of the strike 100 manufacturers had notified the Union of their acceptance of their terms. Statement manufacturers, including the brothers Branch, were well represented among them, and it was clear that few of these employers were prepared to lose markets on behalf of the sweaters. The Jewish bootmakers had shown great enthusiasm for the strike, many of them turning out early and leaving work unfinished. The International Journeymen were being financed by wealthy Jews through David Schloss.⁴⁹ Thomas Horobin had been dispatched by the National Union's Council as strike investigator and sat regularly with the strike committee. His influence is evident in the decision to grant all manufacturers applying for an extension another fourteen days to provide workshops.

46. Borough of Hackney Standard: 5 April, 1890. See also, Hackney and Kingsland Gazette: 31 March, 1890 and Leather Trades' Circular and Review (weekly edition): 1 April, 1890.

47. Commonweal: 5 April, 1890.

48. Ibid.: 1 March, 1890.

49. S.L.R.: 5 April, 1890.

The Association expressed concern at the number of members submitting and, in an attempt to restore a semblance of unity, it was agreed not to employ any fresh hands during the course of the strike.⁵⁰ By the second day of the strike the number of submissions had risen to 140, but many of the additions were very small employers working with a lester and a couple of finishers. Picketing was strong and those returning to work for those who had agreed to find workshops were given an exemption ticket to keep them out of trouble. The first defections from the ranks of the first class manufacturers were Silverthorne and Jones Turner, and as the latter was ".... one of the largest in the trade" this was a considerable blow to the Association.

The Jews were being encouraged by local personalities such as Lewis Lyons, the radical tailors' leader. On hearing that many Jews were refusing to return to masters who had promised workshops, he urged greater discipline upon them. Many Jews seemed prepared to stand out until every workshop was erected. Not only were they picketing the warehouses, but the masters' homes as well, and others could be found 'on the prowl' looking for strike breakers with baskets.⁵² Involvement with N.F.A.T.I. directed much Jewish militancy towards those tactics which most impressed the public consciousness. At the forefront of the mass processions and the meetings Votier, Jews and the other socialists could always be found advocating Anglo-Jewish comradeship.

Picketing was not only strong but well informed. When one manufacturer summoned two police inspectors to move on the pickets, the latter produced a card provided by the Union containing the clauses of the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act pertaining to picketing. This was sufficient to get rid of the policemen.⁵³ The general conduct of the strike earned the praise of the trade press for "the very sound advice imparted by the men's leaders, and,

50. B.S.T.J.: 5 April, 1890.

51. The Times: 2 April, 1890.

52. B.S.T.J.: 5 April, 1890.

53. Ibid.: 12 April, 1890.

above all, the very temperate utterances of Massara, Freak and Horobin⁵⁴ Votier and Jewers went unmentioned, but it was they who led a procession of several thousands through the City and back which merited "a word of praise ... for the orderly manner in which they proceeded ..."⁵⁵ The example of the dockers had not been lost upon the bootmakers.

The main problem posed in financing the strike was what to do about the non-unionists.⁵⁶ While he was not prepared to defend the irresponsibility of these men in not joining a union, Votier still favoured assisting them. His first reason was humanitarian: wives and children should not be made to suffer for the mistakes of others. The second was tactical: if help was not extended to them it would be easier for employers to force them back to work.⁵⁷ As a result of these arguments a Ways and Means Committee was elected for the purpose of financing the non-unionists. It was to work tirelessly on their behalf and, in so doing, it came to represent an alternative strike leadership.

The Easter weekend of 1890 saw no pause in strike agitation. Numerous meetings were held in Victoria Park on Easter Sunday⁵⁸ and, on the Monday, the Ways and Means Committee took the opportunity of organising a thousand strong procession to appeal to the public. On the way from the East End to Clerkenwell Green "men were to be seen running here and there with collection boxes, anxious that no person should pass them by without having a chance to contribute ..."⁵⁹

Once arrived on the Green, Jewers made an important speech.

"I want us all federated as one great body; I mean the dustman, carpenter, bricklayer, and every man who works for his living, so that when those engaged in one particular industry are on strike, the men in the other industries can support them. Our old sectional trade unionism has proved

54. Ibid.: 19 April, 1890.

55. Ibid.

56. Full members of the National Union, i.e. those who had paid 26 or more weekly subscriptions, received 12s. per week strike pay; probationary members, i.e. those who had paid between 13 and 26 subscriptions, received 6s.

57. B.S.T.J.: 12 April, 1890.

58. People's Press: 12 April, 1890. S.L.R.: 12 April, 1890.

59. B.S.T.J.: 12 April, 1890.

a great failure. We have seen that with the gas stokers' strike and with the Silvertown strike. I hope you all see the necessity of joining the National Federation of All Trades and Industries."⁶⁰

A simpler statement of N.F.A.T.I.'s interpretation of the new unionism can hardly be found. The militants' control of the Ways and Means Committee provided them with a vast audience for their politics because they were responsible for organising meetings and processions in aid of the non-unionists. The processions had become daily and, complete with bands and banners, were an ideal propagandist activity. It had become customary when passing the Finabury factories of the sweaters Flatau and Lion to walk by slowly, cap in hand, as the band struck up the Dead March in 'Saul'.⁶¹ "The new trades' unionism of dragging the men through the gutter with flags and drums," as Kenneth McCree had decried it at the Shoreditch Town Hall in February, was leaving an indelible impression upon the public consciousness. There were few Londoners in the affected districts, in April, 1890, who did not realise that the bootmakers were on strike.

The International Journeymen had been able to pay the Jewish finishers 10s. strike pay in the first week, which may have been as much as some of them earned. The tiny Jewish Leathers' Society, however, had no reserves and was forced to amalgamate with the Journeymen. The latter had been far more active in their support for non-unionists than the masters' society, which had become the London East branch of the National Union. From the 'White Hart' in Commercial Road new ideas for raising money flowed, including letters to the London newspapers appealing for support.⁶² Votier and Bentley, in their anxiety to fuse a symbiotic relationship, were fulsome in their praise of Jewish solidarity, but even a reading of less partisan sources leaves the same impression.

60. ibid.

61. S.L.R.: 12 April, 1890.

62. S.S.T.J.: 12 April, 1890.

Although reports that all the first class firms had given in by the second week in April were wildly optimistic,⁶³ their numbers were steadily increasing. Some were expressing an indifference to arbitration,⁶⁴ while most did not share the fears of the sweaters that indoor working, by denying the finisher familial assistance, would lead to demands for higher wages. Statement workers had less need to sweat their families as they did not survive on the margin of existence.

Craig was instructed by the Association to conduct a detailed survey into which manufacturers had conceded. There were 300 members of the Association and 185 manufacturers on the unions' list of concessions. Of this 185, 93 were not members, and 45 of this 93 were not even in the trade directory. After deducting false entries he estimated that 75 members had conceded, 20 of these being statement firms. Great contempt was shown for the type of manufacturer the unions often claimed as victims. These ranged from one man whose four sons had struck him, to another who was busily converting his fowlhouse into a workshop.⁶⁵ While this was amusing propaganda, it could not conceal the fact that defections were increasing from an Association that had scarcely been watertight from the start.

Despite these fissures the Association gave the unions no hope of a general capitulation and this forced them into planning for a longer campaign. The National Union financed members to go on the tramp and granted £100 to the non-unionists. On their behalf, Votier, Jewers and Freshney composed an official delegation to the London Trades Council and were granted credentials to appeal to the other affiliated societies.⁶⁶

The Ways and Means Committee had dire need of such supplementary sources of support for the National Union's £100 donation had boosted their funds to only

63. Commonweal: 12 April, 1890.

64. Hackney and Kingland Gazette: 7 April, 1890.

65. B.S.T.J.: 12 April, 1890.

66. Hackney and Kingland Gazette: 14 April, 1890. See also, B.S.T.J.: 19 April, 1890.

£130. A preferential system had to be adopted by which support went, firstly, to those who had paid a month's contribution to the Union and, secondly, to those who had performed picket duty. In the latter case, only the confirmation of a shop's president that the duty had been completed would qualify the claimant for payment. The Committee realised long before the gathering of a thousand expectants on London Fields that the majority would have to be satisfied with a pittance, and that this threatened a disturbance. It was Votier who performed the thankless task of telling the gathered throng that 2s. 6d. was all that could be offered to them. The anticipated explosion was contained but, later in the day, one Committee member was assaulted as he left The London Fields Radical Club.⁶⁷ At a meeting in Victoria Park the following day (13th April) Fearn made a point of praising the work of the Ways and Means Committee and expressed his confidence in more funds being available for the non-unionists once the appeal to the other unions had met with a response.⁶⁸ This sent the huge crowd away in a more optimistic mood.⁶⁹

When the two week extension, granted to some manufacturers on 31st March, expired on 14th April, a number of them applied for a further fortnight's grace. The decision by the strike committee to grant their request was "unfavourably discussed by groups of strikers in the streets."⁷⁰ The Jews were the most militant in their condemnation of this leniency and many refused to take work out for another fortnight.⁷¹ With funds nearly exhausted, real hunger was fast becoming the locomotive of their discontent.

By the third week of the strike the conflict had become concentrated north of the Thames, for the South London manufacturers had swiftly agreed to the unionists' terms.⁷² In the North, an end to the strike seemed nearer when the remaining five second class statement manufacturers conceded in the middle of the

67. B.S.T.J.: 19 April, 1890.

68. Ibid.

69. S.L.R.: 19 April, 1890, estimated the size at 6,000. The Leather Trades' Circular and Review (weekly edition); 15 April, 1890, estimated 8,000.

70. S.L.R.: 19 April, 1890.

71. Ibid.

72. B.S.T.J.: 19 April, 1890.

third week. Those statement manufacturers continuing to lock-out were then faced with the prospect of losing markets, perhaps irretrievably, to this group.⁷³

Freak expressed a greater confidence in imminent victory at a meeting in Christ Church Hall, Spitalfields designed to placate the escalating militancy of the Jews. Donations from other unions were flowing in, he told them, and one from the dockers was expected any day, as Tom Mann was collecting among them. Votier also appreciated that daily concessions put them close to total victory. In an effort to ensure that the forthcoming negotiations kept the interests of the non-statement workers in sharp focus, he now called for a mass meeting to consider the current position. He must have hoped that such a meeting would provide an unequivocal set of demands from which the official leaders would be unable to deviate.⁷⁴

The resignation of the remaining statement manufacturers sent the Association in search of negotiations. On 16th April they offered to find workshops in return for the unions' accepting arbitration and a uniform statement for all work outside the statement sector.⁷⁵ Such an offer was possible because of the withdrawal of the statement manufacturers, but it was also likely to appeal to official leaders concerned to preserve the privileges of the statement aristocracy. The union leadership accepted the bait and began negotiations the following day. In accordance with previous policy, arbitration was accepted by the unions on all points except direct reductions. The Board of Conciliation and Arbitration was to consist of seven representatives each drawn from the employers and unions. William Hoffman and Kenneth McCree were agreed upon as arbitrators, and they chose Alfred Dead, an Oxford Street leather merchant, as umpire. This agreement, which officially ended the strike, had been reached by the employers and union representatives within twenty four hours of the former's original offer.

73. The Times: 16 April, 1890.

74. B.S.Y.J.: 19 April, 1890.

75. Ibid.

The Ways and Means Committee led the opposition to the terms of settlement receiving support, in particular, from their constituency of non-unionists.⁷⁶ Votier's complaints were directed not only at the failure to consult the membership over the terms, but also at the commitment to arbitration. He advised continuing the strike against the official leadership's recommendations.

The Jews were in the vanguard of the opposition movement, criticising their official leaders for "selling them" and resolving to accept arbitration only if workshops were made ready immediately.⁷⁷ One sympathetic journal reported:

"The Jewish workmen are not satisfied with this arrangement. They say the sweaters have only agreed to these terms to tide the busy season over and that after Whitsuntide they will have the men at their mercy and will then break their word. They have some reason for this suspicion, as the sweated tailors were treated in a very similar fashion"⁷⁸

The Jews' objections were firmly rooted in historical experience and one boot-maker expressed their sense of betrayal by the Gentile unionists when he told a meeting at the Berner Street Club, ".... we are being left in the dark by the other men, which I consider shameful considering the manner in which the Jews have stood by their colours."⁷⁹ The terms of settlement had provided for workshops "at the earliest possible date" and this, for the Jews and other oppositionists, was playing into the employers' hands.

A last attempt to oppose the settlement was made by the militants at a meeting in Victoria Park on 20th April. Freak argued for collaboration with the better paying manufacturers against the sweaters, which had always been his policy. Votier complained again about the lack of consultation and demanded a mass meeting to decide the issue. He argued that the terms were tantamount to accepting arbitration on the workshops question, and implicitly accused Freak of behaving like an infallible Pope. Tom Mann, who was chairing the meeting,

76. ibid.: 26 April, 1890.

77. The Times: 21 April, 1890.

78. Commonweal: 26 April, 1890.

79. Eastern Post and City Chronicle: 26 April, 1890.

took the side of the official leadership and successfully engineered a vote of confidence in their behaviour. He condemned the militants as ".... a small cantankerous section" trying to "... put fat in the fire." His stand is probably best understood in terms of his position on the London Trades' Council where he was dependent upon the support of trade unionists like Freak if he was to supplant George Shipton and his group.⁸⁰

The militants remained to hold their own meeting with a much reduced audience to hear Votier bitterly criticise Mann's partiality in the chair.⁸¹ Their differences serve as a further example of the ill-co-ordination of much of the S.D.F.'s industrial politics for they were both members of that organisation. But, even if a meeting had been called, it was unlikely that the decision to return to work would have been reversed for strike weariness had set in. Yet, if the militants were to have any chance of carrying their policies it depended upon mobilising the non-unionists. They realised that Freak's collaborationist policy made a full exploitation of the employers' weakness unlikely in the extreme.

Despite their growing influence among the rank and file, the militants could still be out-manoeuvred because they held no official positions within the trade unions. Both in agreeing to the employers' convocation of settlement negotiations, and in having the resulting terms confirmed, Freak and the official leaders had exploited to the maximum their delegated responsibility. If the militants had won any sort of victory it was not in the content of the terms, but in their creation of a constituency of support from which they could challenge the policies of the statement aristocracy in the future.⁸² This had been derived from their untiring work among the non-statement bootmakers during the strikes.

80. London Trades' Council, 1860 - 1950, *a History* (1950). pp. 70 - 75. I am grateful to Royden Harrison for suggesting this explanation.

81. S.L.R. and B.S.T.J.: 26 April, 1890.

82. For the statement aristocracy the terms constituted a successful rearguard action because they removed the first and second class statements entirely from the forthcoming negotiations.

Fox concludes that the settlement was ".... an attempt by branch leaders with rapidly waning powers to impose a rational system of industrial relations upon a situation which did not yet permit of a rational solution. As such it was bound to fail."⁸³ This view ignores the experiences in Stafford, Leeds and London (described in Chapter Four) which engendered arbitration and conciliation. In their deep suspicion of arbitration bootmakers saw themselves as rationally interpreting the past experience of industrial relations in their trade. If this does not subscribe to the pluralist view that arbitration constitutes a desirable means of resolving industrial conflict, then this can hardly be held against them in the light of the evidence presented here.

An assessment of the remainder of the settlement has to take further account of the complex web of convergent and divergent interests. The workshop commitment would, almost without exception, benefit the bootmaker by improving his conditions of work. By bringing together previously disparate workers it would also make trade union organisation easier. On the other hand, the bootmaker would be subjected to a more direct discipline that would include a stricter regulation of the working day. Sweating manufacturers were less prepared to find the capital costs of erecting workshops and, for them, the open ended time-scale allowed for erection provided a useful means of delay. Not possessing sufficient surplus capital to innovate with machinery they did not consider this possible benefit of indoor working. For the wealthier capitalist, however, this proved a more tangible attraction. In addition these employers saw workshops as the price to be paid for the benefits of arbitration, even if the unions had been able to exclude wage reductions from its purview.

A uniform statement for the non-statement trade had been forced upon the sweating employers by the statement manufacturers' abandonment of the struggle. The former had only accepted it under coercion and considerable doubt remained as to whether they would honour it in practice. If pitched high enough it

83. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O., p.116.

would benefit the non-statement worker and, also, the statement manufacturer whose non-statement competitors would be forced to pay higher rates. For their part, the statement aristocracy had, yet again, preserved their privileged position by maintaining their statements intact and non-negotiable. This determined that the conflict between this group and the new unionists would continue. The employers were in a similar state of internecine conflict. The Association had become a rump of non-statement employers who were forced into negotiating a uniform statement that most of them wanted no part of. Those employers with the most liberal attitudes towards trade unionism had withdrawn from the arbitration and conciliation process. Thus, because important groups of both employers and workmen rejected parts of the 1890 settlement as acting against their interests the negotiations designed to implement it became, at best, a charade and, at worst, an open battleground.

CHAPTER SEVENTHE THIRD EXPERIENCE OF CONCILIATIONI. Sew-round workers and the new unionism.

By the summer of 1890 agitation for a revision of wages among sew-round shoemakers had been quietly mounting for some twelve months.¹ The apparent success of the machine sewn workers, however, provided it with renewed impetus and focused it upon the demand for a uniform statement.² The bootmakers who had struck work in April, 1890 and won a pledge of workshops and a uniform, third class statement worked in the machine-sewn branch of the trade. They were engaged upon the lasting and finishing of uppers (to soles) that had already been closed by women machinists. Sew-round workers worked on a different division of labour and product. They made shoes, not boots, of a lightweight quality completely by hand. After being hand-closed, the upper was stitched to the sole with both pieces of leather turned inside-out, so that the stitching was concealed. Hence, this type of work was often referred to as "turn-shoes".

Sew-round work had a long tradition in the City and East End and, as with machine-sewn work, varied greatly in quality. From the 1840s, however, the better class City work had begun to decline, aggravated by an abundant use of boy labour. Undercutting chamber masters proliferated like wild mushrooms in the damp.³ By the 1890s the sew-round product had changed from dress shoes to slippers. This reflected a decline in the level of skill and even the few Charles IX dress shoes that were still made were held in contempt by good judges.⁴ Demand for sew-round work was concentrated in the summer and autumn months and by Christmas many were forced to search for work in other branches of the trade or leave it altogether. But the labour flow was not exclusively one way for during the busy season the sew-round trade could find itself invaded by lasters and finishers from the machine-sewn.

1. S.L.R.: 5 July, 1890.

2. S.S.F.: 11 21 June, 1890.

3. Vao and Thompson (ed.), op.cit., pp.251-2.

4. S.L.R.: 12 July, 1890.

Better class saw-round shoemakers in the City were organised by the Amalgamated and enjoyed a similar status to the hand-sewn men working for the few high-class City shops. In the East End, however, the quality of the work was equivalent to that of the sweated, machine-sewn trade. A great many of the workers were Jewish immigrants, few of whom were organised. It can be seen, therefore, that a parallel stratification of work and of trade unionism existed to that found in the machine-sewn trade.

Washington Chapman, secretary of the City of London branch of the Amalgamated, led the agitation. He justified their demands for increases by arguing that even the saw-round shoemakers of Southport earned 3s. per dozen for work that fetched no more than 1s.6d. in London. East London had surpassed Manchester and Norwich in importance and become the largest saw-round centre in the country, yet it was the worst paid. Although great concern was expressed at the level of East End wages compared with the City and West End, the Jewish saw-round workers of the East showed no interest in the Amalgamated's early efforts.⁵ When the uniform statement was presented to the employers in early August there were complaints that it regulated only the best class work,⁶ but it is difficult to know whether this was a cause or a result of the Jews' lack of interest in its preparation. Chapman's reputation in the machine-sewn trade as the staunch defender of the statement worker suggests the former as the more likely explanation. Once presented, however, some Jews pledged support for the statement, probably in the hope that it would somehow assist in forcing their own wages upwards,⁷ and this must have influenced the employers' offer of negotiations.⁸ Their other principal consideration was that the statement had been presented in the middle of the profitable summer trade.

The employers' offer was dependent upon the establishment of a formal Board of Arbitration and Conciliation. The Union's rejection of this mode of settle-

5. B.S.Y.J.: 5 July, 1890.
August, 1890.

8. Ibid.: 16 August, 1890.

ment, which they justified in the light of similar, unsuccessful attempts in the machine-sewn trade, could thus appear as a rejection of negotiations at all. Instead of formal conciliation the Union favoured negotiations by post. The employers were to send their proposed alterations to the statement for the men's perusal. Branch was aware that, whatever course of action was adopted, they should be seen to act quickly, for there existed a suspicion among the men that the employers were content to delay matters beyond the busy season. While the need for a declaration of good faith was accepted, the main objection to the men's statement was that it was not comprehensive. It ignored the cheaper trade.⁹ The pattern of divided interests already described for the machine-sewn trade can be seen to be duplicated in the sew-round. The trade union represented the interests of the better paid workers to the neglect of the rest. The better paying employers wanted a statement that would force their sweating competitors to pay higher wages. Moreover, the Amalgamated's allegiance to the principle of restrictive classification was at least as strong as that of the National Union. Coupled with their rejection of arbitration this was enough for one critic to complain about a contradiction in trade union behaviour:

"But the workmen are Tory in trade, however socialistic they may be in politics, and are always afraid of the principle of equality and of arbitration."¹⁰

At the heart of the men's resistance to a Board lay the fear that arbitration, if accepted, would act against them. While the employers saw in a Board a guarantee of continuity of production, they were also confident that it would, in general, uphold their point of view. When the union compromised, by agreeing to send a committee to discuss a way out of the impasse, they were at pains to stress that this should not be interpreted as a delegation to a Board.¹¹ James Branch, for one, appreciated why the men would not commit themselves to arbitration before they knew the structure of the employers' ideal statements:

9. B.S.T.J.; 16 August, 1890.

10. S.L.R.; 23 August, 1890.

11. B.S.T.J.; 23 August, 1890.

"He said what they would have to come to was, were they determined to formulate a comprehensive statement which shall include all the work made in London, if so the men would not meet them."¹²

Chapman was no more inclined to allow the erosion of the better paid sew-round worker's differentials than he was those of the statement worker in the machine-sewn trade. It was up to James Branch to attempt something on behalf of the sweated. But, when he successfully moved that 7d. per pair be conceded for the commonest work it was greeted with consternation by the few sweating employers present at the meeting.¹³ As in the machine-sewn trade they had no enthusiasm for the prospect of a uniform statement that threatened their freedom to sweat.

The unionists were fully cognizant of this obstruction which was well publicised in the trade press. The B.S.T.U. unhesitatingly condemned the thirty or so manufacturers who had declined to attend any of the Association's meetings¹⁴ as betokening "very little but selfishness or a feeling of a desire to ignore the men's request."¹⁵ Frustrated by the divisions within the employers' ranks, which they felt would only prolong the deadlock, the union declared a strike from 8th September if their statement was not accepted. In his speech in support of the strike resolution Chapman showed how deeply events in the sew-round trade had been influenced by the experiences of the machine-sewn bootmakers:

"The manufacturers (in the machine-sewn trade) agreed last May to compile a statement, and what was their answer to the question? They had met once and got through one class of work. If they went on at that rate when would they get the statement? That gave them a fair idea of what the sew-round manufacturers would do with their statement."¹⁶

Threat produced dividends where persuasion had failed and Chapman was swiftly informed that the employers had drawn up a draft statement.

12. Ibid.: 30 August, 1890.

13. Ibid.

14. 53 had been invited.

15. B.S.T.U.: 6 Sept., 1890.

16. Ibid.

The manufacturers raised three main objections to the men's statement.

Firstly, by stopping at the third class, it excluded a large proportion of the low-priced work made in London. Secondly, the prices included for extras were out of all proportion to the amount of extra work to be performed. Thirdly, insufficient account was taken of the tasks performed for the shoemaker by the manufacturer before the former received the raw materials. Machinery was increasingly used in the preparation of the soles and bottom-stuff which, the manufacturers argued, made the shoemakers' lives easier. Some employers provided grindery as well. Consequently, the employers' revisions took account of all these points, but their inclusion of a fourths' class of work altered the principle upon which the men's statement had been drawn up. The revisions were to be put to the men with the proviso that any disputed matters must be referred to a Board of Conciliation and Arbitration.¹⁷

The employers' statement was taken directly from their meeting, on the evening of 4th September, to the London Fields Radical Club, where the men were in session themselves. Chapman, aggrieved that his speech had been interrupted by a messenger, read out the statement which was treated by the audience with contempt and derision. Craig's arrival, shortly afterwards, did nothing to assuage their feelings and the meeting held to the decision to impose their statement after 8th September.¹⁸

The indeterminate beginning to the strike indicated that the union leadership were hoping for a quick settlement. Although the men were instructed not to take out work after the 8th they were allowed to finish any in progress at that time. Despite the fact that taking out large quantities in the few days before the 8th had been discouraged, it was reported that large numbers of men had enough to last them a week.¹⁹ Uncertainty was increased by the fact that

17. ibid.: 13 September, 1890.

18. S.L.R.: 13 Sept., 1890.

19. B.S.T.J.: 13 Sept., 1890.

the Council of the Amalgamated, the main union involved, had given no official approval for the strike to commence. It later emerged that their reluctance arose out of their disapproval of the opposition of local leaders such as Chapman to arbitration. On the other hand, the National Union was giving strike pay to its members.²⁰ But, the Amalgamated were in no position to directly oppose the strike as a vote of the membership had supported the London men. This persuaded the Council to appoint the secretary of the West End Women's section (Lemon) as investigator.²¹

By the end of the first week the employers appeared to be standing firm with only four manufacturers out of a total of over fifty having submitted. This may have persuaded union leaders to attend an unsuccessful conference with the employers on the 12th. Pressure was being exerted upon Chapman to accept arbitration by the general secretary of the Amalgamated, Kenneth McCrea. He publicly differed with him at a union meeting on the 16th when he argued for acceptance of the employers' terms, a uniform statement and all disputed points to go before a Board.²² Three days later the Council met ".... and passed a series of resolutions to the effect that the strike should never have been called, and that the men were to agree to the establishment of a joint board of conciliation and arbitration."²³ This signalled the beginning of the end of the strike.

The local leaders had organised the strike badly from the outset by permitting many manufacturers to continue working. These were known to be "working furiously" and selling their surplus to those who had been struck.²⁴ Benjamin Fleck²⁵ made other criticisms of the union leadership. For him, in rejecting arbitration, the union leaders had gone in search of the fame of John Burns. Perhaps they, too aspired after wax models at 'Madam Tiosorts' and their old

20. *Ibid.*

21. *S.L.R.*: 13 Sept., 1890.

22. *Ibid.*: 20 Sept., 1890.

23. *B.S.T.J.*: 27 Sept., 1890.

24. *S.L.R.*: 27 Sept., 1890.

25. An invention of the *S.L.R.* to provide a vehicle for its numerous criticisms of the union leadership in London.

straw hats fetching auction prices of £50. Indeed, as Benjamin asked of the editor of the S.L.R., ".... did you ever know of a man whose figure was sent to Madam Topsy or whose hat was sold for £50 because he had led men to arbitration?"²⁶ Beneath the veneer of sarcasm lay the quite serious fear that even old radicals like Chapman were becoming infected by the politics of the new unionists. But, if the Benjamin Flacks had dug a little deeper into the character of the wily old fox, Chapman, they would have found his opposition to arbitration to have been tactical, not the dogma of the neophyte.

The basis of a settlement was prepared by the representatives of the two sides between 22nd and 24th September. It was agreed that all statement prices in dispute were to be referred to arbitration.²⁷ At a meeting on the 25th, however, further opposition was expressed to immediate arbitration and Chapman's suggestion, that the men's committee make one, final attempt to resolve the disputed points with the employers, was accepted.²⁸ Lemon, anticipating opposition to the principle of arbitration, had actually brought with him ballot papers for an on-the-spot vote.²⁹ Despite the fact that they had had to concede arbitration, the union leaders had maintained an important principle in excluding the lowest paid work from the new statement.³⁰ All the outstanding points were resolved the next day except the allowances for machinery, which were to go before the Board. Lemon expressed his dissatisfaction with the statement but thought it the best they could obtain until they were better organised. Chapman got nearer to the truth in his view that they could have got a better statement had they not given away arbitration so early in the game.³¹ This statement reveals his opposition to arbitration to have been a tactical ploy. Had the Council not panicked at the prospect of a costly strike so early in the proceedings a better settlement might have been achieved. The deviousness of Chapman had

26. S.L.R.: 27 Sept., 1890.

27. B.S.Y.J.: 27 Sept., 1890.

28. Ibid.: 4 Oct., 1890.

29. S.L.R.: 4 Oct., 1890.

30. B.S.Y.J.: 4 Oct., 1890.

31. Ibid.

certainly fooled one trade journal, at least, who held him entirely responsible for the disputes:

".... the fact is Mr. Chapman on his own showing hates arbitration ... in fact, it is not too much to say that, had it not been for Mr. Washington Chapman and his uncompromising hostility to the principle of arbitration, it is very probable that no strike in the London saw-round trade would have ever taken place."³²

Chapman had opposed arbitration in the machine-sawn trade because he realised it was likely to erode the privileges of the statement worker. He entertained the same fears on behalf of the better paid saw-round workers who did not want to see a uniform statement that, they anticipated, would drag them down. No doubt Chapman would have liked to have won the exclusion from arbitration for this group that he had achieved for the statement workers. But, he recognised that the state of organisation was weaker and this meant that eventually conciliation and arbitration would have to be conceded to the employers. The point was to extract the maximum concessions before it was adopted and then to limit its application to as narrow a range of work as possible. Then, while sweaters and the sweated fought among themselves inside and outside the chambers of conciliation, the better class shoemakers could prosper in peace.

If some union leaders were dissatisfied with the new statement it was still estimated, by one source, to have provided increases of between 5% and 15%.³³ This general impression is confirmed by another local newspaper which thought that the price paid by the men for their increases was recognised by all to be the acceptance of arbitration and conciliation.³⁴ At its height the strike had involved a withdrawal of labour by 2,000 saw-round shoemakers,³⁵ about a fifth of the number that had come out during the machine-sawn strike. All of this 2,000 had returned by 3rd October.³⁶

32. S.L.A.: 11 Oct., 1890.

33. E. Post and City Chronicle: 27 Sept., 1890.

34. Hackney and King'sland Gazette: 29 Sept., 1890.

35. E. Post and City Chronicle: 27 Sept., 1890.

36. Ibid.: 4 Oct., 1890.

The influence of the new unionism upon the sew-round shoemakers had been both vicarious and misconstrued. Despite his opposition to arbitration, Chapman was not its agent and suggestions that he was indicate the degree of paranoia present in some quarters. Indeed, there was no parallel rank and file movement challenging Chapman that bears comparison with the one with which Charles Freak was wrestling in 1890. If Chapman was relatively secure, so too was the authority of the Amalgamated's Council among the sew-round workers. It had taken no great struggle on their part to overcome opposition in London to a settlement that involved acceptance of arbitration and conciliation. The comparative strength of executive leadership among the sew-round workers seems fairly easily explained by their weaker organisation. The Amalgamated had not extended its base significantly into the awated (mainly Jewish) sector whose disparate workers were unable to produce any real challenge to craft control. Thus, the influence of the new unionism had been to demonstrate by example in the machine-sewn trade what might be possible in the sew-round. Just as the new unionists at a national level were to move some of the older from their postures of complacency and caution, so within specific work groups the same process was activated.

II. The provision of workshops and uniform statements.

The London Board of Conciliation and Arbitration, which had been born of the 1890 settlement in the machine-sewn trade, began work at a furious pace. In the course of four meetings, between 17th and 22nd April, 1890, it dealt with the cases of 138 manufacturers who were required to erect workshops. A further dozen were referred to the arbitrators, but each side was keen to make as little use of them as possible.³⁷

The return to work had taken place on Monday, 22nd April amidst some confusion. Many bootmakers, uncertain as to the course of events, had called at the offices of the strike committee for enlightenment. There, they might have found Votier and a delegation from the London Fields Radical Club haranguing

37. S.L.R.: 26 April, 1890.

the official leadership for not calling a mass meeting before ordering a return to work. Freck was still prepared to call one, if instructed by the strike committee, but not at the insistence of the new unionists. He declared his contempt for "men who loved agitation better than work, and who endeavoured to sow distrust against popularly elected and responsible leaders, who had given the best part of their lives to the solution of labour questions." Morabin, however, refused to countenance any such meeting.³⁸

Many Jewish finishers, members of the International Journeymen, opposed a return to work because they disliked the latitude allowed over workshop erection dates. They were prepared to remain out until every workshop was completed, and were inclined to blame the Jewish Masters' Union (recently amalgamated with the National) for making peace prematurely. The journeymen's militancy was undermined by the fact that, as sweated workers, they were easily replaceable. During the strike several of the bigger sweatshops had introduced machinery (it is unclear in exactly which branches) to reduce their dependence upon increasingly unreliable labour, and it was anticipated that this trend would intensify.³⁹ As the Jewish finishers steadily returned in the weeks after the settlement relations with their old master knifers continued very bad. Both knifers and finishers now worked together in workshops provided by the manufacturer, but, because the Jews had followed such a rigid sub-division of labour, knifing and finishing continued to be separate tasks. Among English finishers knifing was considered a part of the finishers's task. Jewish knifers and finishers clashed among themselves over their rightful proportion of the piece-rates: the latter demanded $\frac{4}{5}$ while the former were only prepared to concede $\frac{3}{4}$. The dispute caused several union meetings to erupt into violence,⁴⁰ and if a resolution was found it was achieved without recourse to the Board.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. After one a finisher named Green was taken to hospital and had eight stitches inserted in an eye (S.L.R. 24 May, 1890).

Yet, support for workshops among the Jews was by no means unanimous, and the lasters and finishers working for Flatau were a case in point. Their willingness to continue outdoor working was the reason why the firm delayed giving an erection date to the Board. Realising that the unions had no control over Flatau's workers, Freak threatened to block the supply of uppers to the firm by persuading the clickers' union to 'black' it.⁴¹ Other manufacturers unable to persuade their workers to move indoors were reported as leaving London⁴², which was the ultimate irony from the unions' point of view. The regularising of working hours implied by indoor working presented the Jews with the religious problem of sabbath observance. The English bootmaker's five and a half day week ended at lunchtime on Saturday which coincided with the Jewish sabbath. Employers were reluctant to open their workshops on Sundays for Jews only and, in any case, this would have offended Christian sabbatarians. Neither would the unions permit the taking home of work by the Jews for, as the Chief Rabbi Dr. Hermann Adler said, that would constitute the thin end of the wedge. It was decided that the most practicable solution was to permit Jews to work extra hours during the week in order to compensate for their absence on Saturdays.⁴³

One of the most important questions for the unions was the location of workshops. Some employers found it impossible to extend their warehouses to incorporate workshops and, in such cases, the unions refused to allow the shopping of work by the men between warehouse and workshop. The treatment of bootmakers at the wicket-gate, under the outwork system, had long been a cause for complaint. As Washington Chapman reminded the employers, not only was much time wasted when men were kept waiting for long periods, but ill-health was often incurred through exposure to bad weather. Consequently, the unions insisted that work must be given to the men on the premises on which it was made up. A further

41. S.L.R.: 3 May, 1890.

42. ~~1890~~

43. B.S.T.J.: 3 May, 1890.

consideration was that if men were allowed to walk the streets with work it would be more difficult to detect those who were still working to the outwork system.⁴⁴

Very rare exceptions were made either to this rule or to the principle of indoor working in general. Leniency was exercised in the case of S.C. Kaufman of Mars St., however, when it was found that after the construction of what was admitted by all to be an excellent workshop at the back of his warehouse, it could only be reached by a three hundred yard circuitous walk.⁴⁵ Permits were also given to the physically disabled to allow them to continue working at home, but Fieak detected some abuse of this concession:

"He knew men a few weeks ago who would have indignantly resented being classed as either 'old' or 'crippled', but they now came to the Cherry Tree for permits to work outdoors, very aged and very, very bad in health."⁴⁶

Neither were all workshops of the quality of Kaufman's and complaints were made that some employers were asking men to work in rooms that were no more than "four bare walls and a ceiling."⁴⁷ The Board insisted upon the full implementation of the terms of settlement which required workshops to be fully fitted with benches.

The earnest endeavours of the Board in its first few weeks of existence should not be allowed to disguise the considerable opposition that remained to indoor working, both from employers and workmen. A few of the worst sweaters, such as Franklin, Flatau and Pash, resisted the workshop instruction and were blocked by the Board for their pains. In an unprecedented demonstration of solidarity with like-minded workmen, and against other manufacturers, the employers on the Board agreed to absorb the men withdrawn from the blocked shops.⁴⁸ Other sweaters certainly gave promises of workshops which they had no intention of keeping. A common tactic of the Jewish sweaters was to present indoor working as subversive of religious customs by exemplifying the sabbath observance question.⁴⁹

44. S.L.R., 13 May, 1890.

45. ibid., 24 May, 1890.

46. ibid., 10 May, 1890.

47. ibid., 13 May, 1890.

48. ibid.

49. B.S.T., 10 May, 1890.

Such arguments fell upon receptive ears when they reached greeners dreading the unknown demands of indoor working upon their negligible skills. Many of these men were known to be leaving employers as they built workshops and moving to those with later completion dates. As one commentator noted, this practice punished those who had most readily complied with the Board's requirements to the benefit of those who had not.⁵⁰

The winning of a workshop agreement in London made a deep impact upon National Union policies for, Thomas Morabin argued, if it could be obtained in the highest rented city in the country then there was no excuse for not obtaining similar agreements in the provinces. This tended to ignore the fact that in the E. Midlands towns, such as Leicester and Northampton, much factory work already existed. His remarks would have been better directed, with greater specificity, at the minority of outworkers who survived in these towns and at those working in the extensive village industry of the surrounding counties. It was to such areas as these that London lost some industry as a result of indoor working.

London delegates to the 1890 conference of the National Union explained some of the secondary benefits of indoor working. Particular emphasis was placed upon the opportunities for co-operation that would be afforded. Regular working hours would prevent those who had previously taken out enough work to occupy two men from robbing others of their right to work. The Union had consistently opposed overtime when work was scarce but it had proved impossible to control under the outwork system. Given the special racial problems of the London industry, votaries looked forward to greater mixing and a better understanding between Jews and Gentiles. While the conference accepted the desirability of indoor working for all areas, it was agreed to proceed cautiously by only extending the movement to Leicester, the largest employer, in the first instance.⁵¹

50. Sol. 14 June, 1890.

51. M.R. 1 June, 1890.

Much of this self-congratulation was premature, however, for evasion of the London agreement was mounting by the week. Freak had gone as far as condemning those moving from shop to shop to avoid indoor working as 'scabs', although they were doing nothing that was strictly illegal. Other examples of worker relations within the factories made Votier's hopes of co-operation appear wildly optimistic. When one second class finisher took his legally indentured apprentice inside with him his shopmates voted the apprentice out, presumably as a protest against boy labour. It left the finisher in a dubious legal position which was said to be causing him concern.⁵² At E. Cohen's hatchets were not buried and the men refused to work with two old outworkers who had not come out during the strike. This caused an unofficial strike. At Fleury's the new work-discipline was slow in asserting itself: the men broke all the windows of the workshop "because they thought they were going to have new ones put in", and then stole tools and boots.⁵³

Some cynicism on the part of bootmakers as to the likely success of indoor working was permissible given the intention of many sweaters to sabotage it. The latter had agreed to erect workshops confident that the agreement would break down before they were required to fulfil their promise. Meanwhile, they continued to give work out abetted by a growing number of workers who were equally pessimistic about the survival of the agreement.⁵⁴ Among such people the collapse of indoor working became a self-fulfilling prophecy. The continuance of outdoor working provoked justified protests from those employers who had gone to the expense of erecting workshops and were finding difficulty in filling them. Confidence in the ability of the unions to enforce their side of the bargain had begun to wane.⁵⁵

Since engineering their own exclusion from the provisions of the strike settlement, the statement manufacturers had remained estranged from the rest of

52. S.L.B.: 26 April, 1890.

53. ~~1890~~: 7 June, 1890.

54. ~~1890~~: 28 June, 1890.

55. B.S.T.J.: 28 June, 1890.

the employers. The latter re-affirmed their determination to exclude the statement manufacturers from the Association by refusing to countenance representation on their behalf on the permanent Board that was elected at the end of June. A small contingent of 'doves', led by Alexander Lion, which had wanted to make its peace with the statement employers was reprimanded by 38 votes to 10.

The permanent Board met for the first time on 3rd July to the accompaniment of a cacophony of complaints about breaches of indoor working. Lion, Lion and Sona's indoor workers had just struck against the continuance of giving out and Rosenberg had had to work very hard to get them to return.⁵⁶ At a union meeting on 10th July, Votier announced that he "had found work being carted away in grossness by Jewish workmen," but, at the same time, he deprecated the harassment of Jewish indoor workers by some English workers.⁵⁷ A manufacturer who had erected a workshop in good faith complained that he had lost workers to another who continued to give out work despite having a newly built workshop himself.⁵⁸ The culprit may well have been Lion, Lion and Sona, again.

The mounting evidence of violations of the indoor working agreement drew from Freak a firm reiteration of his confidence in the employers' delegates' good faith.⁵⁹ But, at the same time, he regretted their failure to reach a compromise with the statement employers, many of whom he knew to be favourable to the men's demands.⁶⁰ To impress upon the employers their determination to make the Board succeed, the Union delegates agreed to make illegal any strike in which the disputed issue had not first been referred to the Board.⁶¹ In agreeing to become the Board's policemen the union representatives had bitten off more than they could chew for the rising tide of unofficial militancy was shortly to overwhelm them.

56. S.L.R.: 5 July, 1890.

57. *Ibid.*: 19 July, 1890.

58. *Ibid.*: 12 July, 1890.

59. B.S.T.J.: 19 July, 1890.

60. S.L.R.: 19 July, 1890.

61. B.S.T.J.: 19 July, 1890.

As the employers' delegates could only attend the Board for two hours per week, a period condemned as grossly inadequate by the trade press and unions, it was decided to expedite matters by asking the employers to draw up a statement for presentation to the men.⁶² This left Board meetings free to deal with the numerous disputes arising from the continuance of outdoor labour.

The biggest offender was Franklin of White Lion Street who was blocked by the Board for refusing to abide by the agreement. When the employer finally agreed to cease giving out he did so only on the understanding that the Board acted against others who also continued to make use of outdoor labour. This provoked Charles Solomon into accusing Apfel, Solomon and M.L. Lion, the Chairman of the Board, of being among the other saboteurs.⁶³ This bombshell was put aside until Lion could appear personally at the next meeting. Then, despite the fact that Solomon claimed to have seen hampers delivered to his shop early in the morning, Lion denied the charge.⁶⁴ His complaint that "not one of the manufacturers present had seen fit to say a word in his defence" suggests that the accusations were true. The others may also have been unwilling to become pots that called the kettle black. The union delegates let the matter rest for the moment but the proceedings continued in an atmosphere of deep pessimism and farcical unreality. Lion had become the Emperor in the fairy tale who, entering the court naked, insisted upon the splendour of his new set of clothes. The union delegates were reduced to the role of deferential courtiers distorting their perception of reality for fear that authority would collapse.⁶⁵

Votier stripped away the temporary charade at the next Board meeting on 2nd September. He added to the charges already laid against Lion those of using too many boys and of making men shop a distance of over three-quarters of a mile. Lion refused to accept the union ratio of one boy per five men employed which he was correct in saying had not been a part of the 1890 settlement, although it had been included in the union manifesto of January, 1890.⁶⁶ The policy of the

62. Ibid.: 2 Aug., 1890.

63. Ibid.: 23 Aug., 1890.

64. Ibid.: 30 Aug., 1890.

65. Hans Christian Andersen, *The Emperor's New Clothes*.

66. S.L.R.: 6 Sept., 1890.

National Union was to permit each local branch to decide the exact ratio that was acceptable.⁶⁷ A.J. Lion, probably a close relative of Michel, was also accused of continuing to give out, and this was a further embarrassment as he had taken a leading role in setting the Board up.

Reluctance to work indoors and indiscipline once there were, no doubt contributory factors to such evasions of the agreement. Evidence of the inability of some bootmakers to adapt to the new discipline of the workshop is supplied by a manufacturer who had begun paying his workmen twice a week. He found that all his finishers stayed away from work after the first payment had been received on the Wednesday. It is impossible to assess how widespread such occurrences were, but there is no doubt that the unions had accepted responsibility for them:

"The incident only shows how impossible it is to create a sudden revolution in men's habits. All the same, we must again point out to the officers of the union that they have a moral duty to perform in assisting the manufacturers who are being thus inconvenienced by a change which the union, as an organization, has brought about, but which many of its members practically refuse to recognise."⁶⁸

The restriction of boy labour was an issue of the utmost importance to the unions because of its effects upon adult wages and unemployment. Fresk considered the excessive use of boys as being tantamount to sweating; while Votier, admitting that the 1890 agreement contained no definite statement on the matter, wanted a ratio of one to five. This was firmly resisted by the employers who complained that they had to compete with areas where there were no restrictions. The best they could offer was a ratio of one boy to two men. Even this would have been a considerable bettering of the position in those shops known to Votier where four or five boys were used for every man. Having failed to reach agreement, and with the completion of the manufacturers' new draft statement taking precedence, the matter was postponed until the new year.⁶⁹

67. Fox, *History of N.U.B.S.O.*, p.135.

68. *S.L.B.* 13 Sept., 1890.

69. *B.S.T.O.* 4, 18 and 25 Oct., 1890.

The manufacturers' statement was greeted with a chorus of criticisms from the unions, trade press and statement manufacturers (outside of the Association). The B.S.T.J. accused the sweating manufacturers of a lack of sincerity, of failing to take the matter seriously, and of concentrating so heavily upon the lowest grades of work that the prices proposed were a disgrace to the trade. In its view, the draft statement had so damaged the national credibility of the Association that no other association would dream of amalgamating with it.⁷⁰ The S.L.R. condemned it in similar terms as "a foolish and mischievous attempt to deal with a serious question."⁷¹ Freak thought that it could only serve as a minimum statement if alterations were made, and then a new, third class list would have to be compiled above it. His original hope, expressed before the 1890 strike, that a comprehensive statement for the entire London trade would be drawn up now lay in ruins. They had ended up with an apology for this that excluded not only the entire statement trade, but the intermediate as well.

On rejecting the employers' statement the men agreed to compile their own and this was presented to the Board on 18th November. It is reproduced in detail in Appendix I and only its principal differences from the employers' version will be discussed here. The employers had wanted ten grades of classification for the purposes of payment, which would have allowed a fifth grade boot to be made from some of the cheaper materials, and in one case even a sixth. The fact that they suggested a fifth boot in the highly prized glaze kid leather greatly offended the unions' principle of restrictive classification. The men's revised statement reduced the number of classificatory grades from ten to seven, which meant that there would be nothing lower than a fourth class boot in any material. This increased the rates for many goods by eliminating the lowest prices: 4½d. and 4d. for leathers, and 4d. and 3½d. for finishers. Also, the rate of payment (category) for many classes of work was moved up on the men's statement, e.g. seconds glove kid, which was moved a category closer to the

70. Ibid.; 8 Nov., 1890.

71. S.L.R.; 1 Nov., 1890.

first class work, or canvas work where all the grades were moved up.

Appendix II compares the difference in the manufacturers and men's lists. The pattern in the first and second class columns is explained by the fact that the manufacturers represented in the Association after the 1890 strike were working in the sweated sector and made goods from low quality materials. Hence, they were not concerned to reduce better class work to a level that would be unacceptable to the unions. In the first and second class columns there is a tendency for the differential to increase the lower the quality of materials. In the third class column it may be assumed that those goods which the employers wished to make a thirds class in were among the most popular lines. The willingness of the men to make low category goods from poor materials peters out at the fourth class.

Discussion on how to reconcile the two statements continued through November and December. An effort to accelerate the speed of negotiations by reducing the size of the Board from sixteen to eight was resisted by Votier and Mulligan, presumably because they feared the new unionists might be among those excluded.⁷² The Jews complained that they had not been consulted at all over the men's statement.⁷³ Persistent allegations that Jacob Flatau was still giving out work forced his resignation from the chair of the Association in early December, and this appeared to bode ill for the prospects of a settlement.⁷⁴

Additional pressure was placed upon the Board by the knowledge that other areas, such as Birmingham, were likely to adopt any agreed statement as a precedent for their own demands. The S.L.R. urged that standard samples should be used as a further guarantee to the men against reductions.⁷⁵ (This had been done in Northampton in 1887). As the negotiations reached this delicate stage the National Union employed a clever, forcing tactic; they called a series of meetings of London shops' delegates with a view to improving organisation.⁷⁶

72. B.S.T.J.: 29 Nov., 1890.

73. ibid.

74. ibid.: 6 Dec., 1890.

75. S.L.R.: 29 Nov., 1890.

76. ibid.: 22 Nov., 1890.

At one of these, in early December, a member of the London Metro. executive recommended all who were in arrears to pay their subscriptions "to prepare for what seemed at present an unavoidable strike or turn-out, because of the difficulties involved by the statement question."⁷⁷

This bluff met with success as two meetings on 9th and 16th December made appreciable progress. This increased momentum was sustained and even increased as three meetings in the last eight days of 1890 culminated in an agreement. Against most expectations, Michel Lion's anxiety that they would have to begin the new year without a new statement had been relieved.⁷⁸

A comparison of the final settlement with the previous proposals of both sides reveals that, where a price was disputed, the men's price prevailed on twenty-two occasions against the employers' nine. But, this must be weighed against the fact that the employers forced the inclusion of seven classes of goods against the original wishes of the men. Although, in most cases, they had to pay above their initial offer for these cheaper lines, as a result they were provided with a much broader base in the cheaper market. The employers' other major concession had been to permit the removal of canvas work from the statement.

Surveying the statement from the rather wider standpoint of industrial relations London Metro. argued that greater security for both parties would result. "It will give the employers confidence to invest their capital without fear of a strike, and secure the men against a lock-out."⁷⁹ But, such hopes seemed too optimistic while so much dissidence remained in both camps. London Metro. had begun its shops' delegates' meetings, in part, to overcome the growing disenchantment with indoor working.⁸⁰ Among the employers represented within the Association a contingent had proved consistently intractable over workshops and there was no reason to expect that they would receive the new statement with any greater enthusiasm.

77. B.S.T.J.; 6 Dec., 1890.

78. Ibid.; 3 Jan., 1891.

79. M.R.; Dec., 1890.

80. M.R.; Oct., 1890.

The new statement regulating women's work was to come into effect from 23rd March and one objective source estimated that it provided for increases of the order of 40%.⁸¹ In the interim, negotiations continued for the purpose of drawing up a girls' statement. The manufacturers' proposals were based upon the Norwich statement which was 25% below London rates.⁸² By mid-February, the deadlock was such that Fræk suggested putting the whole matter to arbitration.⁸³ He was not prepared to accept a difference of ½d. per pair between girls' and women's work as, he argued, such a large gap existed nowhere else in the country. Votier was not prepared to accept Norwich prices in the more prosperous London market within which a bootmakers' costs were higher.⁸⁴ The meeting of 17th February was described as the "... most unhappy and profitless of the whole series",⁸⁵ and, by 3rd March, "Excitement and a desire to fight prevailed"⁸⁶ It had taken just two months for the euphoria which greeted the surprise agreement on a women's statement to give way to fatalistic predictions that a new strike was just around the corner. At this point, the men's delegates saved the situation from slipping over the precipice by offering to accept a reduction of ½d. per pair on the women's statement for girls' work. The employers welcomed the compromise and it was this deal that was presented to a mass meeting at the Shoreditch Town Hall on 12th March.⁸⁷

Opposition to the new statement came from two groups of bootmakers: the statement workers and those sweated workers who followed the new unionists. The first, who were the majority of the opposition at the meeting, opposed on the grounds that employers paying above the new rates might reduce to them. The second argued that the statement was pitched too low and objected in particular to the compromise that had taken ½d. off groundwork prices. As the leading new

81. B.S.T.J.; 21 March, 1891.

82. Ibid.; 31 Jan., 1891.

83. Ibid.; 14 Feb., 1891.

84. Ibid.; 28 Feb., 1891.

85. Ibid.; 20 Feb., 1891.

86. B.S.T.J.; 7 March, 1891.

87. Ibid.; 14 March, 1891.

unionist Votier was in an ambivalent position as he was also a member of the committee that had negotiated the statement. It was the first instance of his official role coming into conflict with the unofficial one that had brought him to prominence.

Freak recommended that the new statement be worked out for a trial period of six months, although he was confident that, in the end, it would prove superior to the women's statement. His comments upon the improved relations between Jewish and Gentile unions were probably meant to imply that the continuance of this desirable state of affairs depended upon acceptance of the new statement. Votier defended the committee's labours: "... they had not worked for the aristocracy, but for the men." He condemned those statement workers who were intent upon opposing the statement for selfish reasons as some of the worst firms would be annihilated by it. His estimate that it would bring increases of 20 - 40% was more moderate than the figures of 25 - 70% given by Warren.

The socialist opposition was led by Lewis who made a remarkable and informative intervention:

"... a young man ascended the platform, and in cultured language that at once obtained astonished silence he spoke in opposition to the adoption of the statement. His closing remarks, that he had thrown aside the advantages of his education to become a finisher, in order to help them to a better condition of things, and that he was prepared to give his life in their interests, and a short poetic peroration caught fire with the meeting, and loud and repeated cheers greeted him as he returned to the body of the hall."⁸⁸

The essence of Lewis's stanzas was that there was a bright star on the horizon. But, he had not finished, there. Solomon's plea in Yiddish for Jewish acceptance was interrupted when he strode to the front of the platform, stretched out his hands, and asked them if they were going to listen to such rubbish.⁸⁹ After another speech urging acceptance he had to be led back to his seat after making another attempt to mount the platform.

88. S.L.R. 1 20 March, 1891.

89. It is not recorded whether Lewis understood Yiddish, but it must be counted unlikely!

Lewis's social origins are of interest as he was a member of the S.D.F. (He was to be arrested at the World's End in January, 1892 defending free speech.⁹⁰). Despite Hyndman's contempt for trade unionism, it would appear that not all educated members withdrew from the mainstream of the labour movement. It suggests that some local branches had decided to 'plant' non-working class militants into trade unions to assist the struggle for control. On this particular occasion, however, their policy was defeated and the new statement accepted by a large majority.⁹¹ They could hardly have expected differently for all interested parties, employers, unionists and the trade press, were agreed that the statement was a considerable advance. Given this, the ultra-left opposition had been reduced to objecting to any examples of compromise with the class enemy, such as the 1d. concession on groundwork prices. This was a thin disguise for their deeper antagonism to the politics of the branch leadership which now included one of their own number in Votier. For his part, Votier, himself, was only a few months on from attacking another fellow S.D.F. member, Tom Mann, for collaborating with the branch leadership by ending the 1890 strike. The co-ordination of strategy was a concept alien to the S.D.F. in East London trade union politics and this must have done untold damage to their reputation among the local working class.

The main impediment to the proper implementation of the new statements was the absence of standard samples, which invited classification disputes. Some employers used this situation to avoid implementing the statement; others were more honest and openly rejected it. But just as many problems were caused by a simple failure to understand the requirements of the statements. Jowers, one of the S.D.F. bootmakers had warned that they would be too complicated at the union meeting the previous week⁹² and, sure enough, the Union offices at the 'Cherry Tree' were invaded by inquirers.⁹³ This confusion is an illustration

90. Justice; 9 Jan., 1892.

91. S.S.T.J.; 21 March, 1891.

92. Ibid.; 22 March, 1891.

93. S.L.R.; 27 March, 1891.

of the fact that, without standard samples, definitions of work had become largely arbitrary.

The dozen or so shops that were struck in the first week of the new statements was fewer than many expected. The S.L.R. was at pains to scotch a rumour that a group of forty Jewish manufacturers had united to repudiate the statements.⁹⁴ A more imminent threat was that posed by two employers who had taken the occasion of the introduction of the new statements to break away from indoor working. Franklin and another manufacturer were advertising in the press for non-unionised, outdoor finishers. That move was not following their example seemed much to do with the efforts of the local rabbinate who had persuaded some of the worst sweaters to accept the settlement.⁹⁵ In so doing, they had partially redeemed their behaviour of the previous year when David Schloss had noted that, "Our clergy ... worked against the strike."⁹⁶

III. Rank and file protest at the working of conciliation.

While the Board struggled to implement the new wages arrangements for the non-statement trade a further crisis broke over it in the form of an unofficial strike at the firm of J. Fursess. The strikers had withdrawn their labour some eight months after first referring the matter to the Board. Their grievance was that, while masters at the firm received the second class statement, the finishers did not. It was claimed that Fursess's was the only London firm where this was the case.

The finishers at Fursess's had revolted against the slowness with which the Board had dealt with their dispute. Although they aspired to be statement workers, they gained gratuitous support from differently situated bootmakers who objected, for one reason or another, to the Board's behaviour. These included anti-arbitrationists, those who wished to wreck the settlement and return to indoor working (the sweated), and statement workers who feared that the growth

94. ibid.

95. ibid.

96. Webb T.U. Coll.: A, vol XXIV, item 5, p.435.

of the new statements into a comprehensive, uniform one (as Fress predicted) would erode their differentials. For all these reasons rank and file discontent over the nature of trade union participation on the Board had flourished. Within a week or so of the Fursse's strike beginning the rank and file revolt was sufficiently well organised to call together a meeting which made demands upon the Union leadership. The degree of organisation was almost certainly grafted upon the strike; it had not instigated it. Collections for the strikers were well subscribed to, despite the disapproval of the National Union.

It was instantly recognised that upon the Union's ability to contain the Fursse's strike rested the future of conciliation in both London and the other, major boot and shoemaking areas:

"This is no small matter, but is in reality a test case as to whether the workmen are willing to act loyally in harmony with the manufacturers' body in the adjustment of all labour matters, or, at any rate, whether the National Union had the will and power to compel their refractory members to conform to the ruling of mutually elected boards. Whatever is now being done in London will, as a matter of principle, form a precedent for the other centres of the trade, and should the union prove unable to keep their rebellious subjects in order, there will be but a little chance either of permanently establishing the new condition of things in London, or closer union and co-operation between employers and labour associations throughout the country."⁹⁷

The militancy of the Fursse workers may have been encouraged by the relative weakness of the employers' association. Since the 1890 settlement it had been a rump of the lower paying manufacturers and, amongst these, there was virtually no unity. Only a quarter of the total membership of around 200 had attended the annual general meeting of 1891, by which time it was estimated that there were as many employers outside the Association as in.⁹⁸ This, in the opinion of one observer, had greatly strengthened the power of labour in recent statement negotiations, but it was unlikely that they had been able to

97. S.L.R. 17 April, 1891.

98. Ibid. 10 April, 1891.

piece disputed work two categories above its justified level, as was also claimed.⁹⁹ In fact, it was reported to the Board that many employers were using the intervening period before samples were produced to pay what they liked. Others, such as Philip Whyl, continued to put work out, or, like F.W. Williams, were sending work to St. Albans to get it made up more cheaply. For organisational purposes, however, St. Albans fell within the London district of the National Union and was, therefore, expected to pay London rates. This was a bone of contention that continued to bedevil industrial relations in the years between 1891 and the year of the lock-outs 1895.¹⁰⁰

As the obduracy of the Furse strikers persisted into the middle of April, the employers' representatives to the Board demanded an initiative of the union officials. Freak had already bestowed upon the strikers "the contempt of the men of London" for their conduct. Only Votier pointed out that it was not the Furse's men, alone, who were violating the Board's rules: equally offensive were those numerous employers who continued to give out or pay below the statements. He spoke with authority for he had visited over 60 employers to impose the new statements by that time.¹⁰¹ One cause of Votier's over-work was the fact that Hemel Hempstead had joined St. Albans as a resort of cheap labour. S. Johnson of London was known to be sending work to Palmer's, there, where the men were engaged on yearly contracts at £2 for a 56-hour week.¹⁰²

The employers became increasingly incensed by the fact that the unions did nothing to prevent collections being taken for the strikers. Lion estimated that these must be providing between 17 and 20s. per week each and were coming from shops well known to the union officials. The latter were clearly anxious to avoid alienating rank and file members, many from the statement sector, who supported the strike. Lion went further. In an attempt to break the strike,

99. ibid.

100. B.S.T.J.; 11 April, 1891.

101. ibid.; 18 April, 1891.

102. N.R.; May, 1891.

he suggested that the unions agree to other manufacturers finishing Furse's work. Chapman and Votier firmly resisted such a course of action. The former was stung into implicit support for the strikers when he offered the view that Furse ought to be paying to the second class statement. As a leading spokesman for the statement worker Chapman could not allow himself to be manoeuvred into a position from which he would be seen to support the employers breaking a strike that was supported by many statement workers. Votier had no time for the privileged statement worker, but his class politics prevented him from adopting any collaborationist strategy with relish.¹⁰³

Freak's commitment to the principle of conciliation caused him to become the strongest union advocate of action by the Board against the strikers. But, even he adopted this course reluctantly, and as he did so his condemnations of the strikers for forcing such action became more vehement. They were selfish men who, in scorning the Board's jurisdiction in pursuit of their own ends, were placing the whole of the recent settlement - workshops and statements - in jeopardy.¹⁰⁴

Fifty-two shops' delegates attended an extremely well organised meeting in support of the strikers on 24th April. James O'Farrell chaired and Lewis, Jones and Dale all made speeches in varying degrees critical of the Board and the union representatives. The delegates called for a mass meeting to decide policy.¹⁰⁵ This open declaration of opposition to official union policy provoked speculation that the employers would respond with a lock-out. The diverse trade base of the opposition movement has already been noted, but one unexpected complication was that the Amalgamated had begun to make capital out of the crisis at the expense of the National Union. Amalgamated members were known to be strong in support of the strikers,¹⁰⁶ and this led to Freak calling for consultations between the two general secretaries (Inskip and McCrae) to resolve the problem.¹⁰⁷ Freak felt certain that Amalgamated members had entered

103. B.S.T.J.: 25 April, 1891.

104. S.L.R.: 24 April, 1891.

105. B.S.T.J.: 2 May, 1891 and S.L.R.: 1 May, 1891.

106. S.L.R.: 1 May, 1891.

107. Ibid.: 8 May, 1891.

recent meetings of the London branches of the National and disrupted them and this caused him to insist upon membership cards being checked in future.

The inability of the Union to end the strike resulted in Lion delivering an ultimatum at the next Board meeting. The Union was to be given twenty-four hours to settle the Fursse's strike (from 28th April); if they failed to do so then Fursse's work would be given out to other manufacturers. In the event of any sympathetic strike action a lock-out of all associated firms would be called. Salomon, with his customary belligerence, even called for the dissolution of the Board. Eventually, a compromise was reached by which the Union was given one more week to effect a settlement before Fursse's work was given to other manufacturers.¹⁰⁸

The Union responded by sending fourteen replacements into Fursse's. These men had to brave the daily crowd of about 200 that had been drawn to the shop as unofficial pickets. Despite the Association circulating a blacklist of the strikers, they had found temporary, alternative employment. When another attempt by Freak failed to get them back, Inskip decided to come down from Leicester, on 6th May. He was also concerned about the reported attempts by the Amalgamated to recruit disaffected National Union members. After a three-hour discussion the strikers voted by a narrow¹⁰⁹ majority to return the following day.¹¹⁰

The strike had acted as a catalyst for the accumulated discontents of several different types of London bootmakers. The Board was symbolic of what each objected to in the settlement and the Fursse's strike merely provided the occasion of their protest. For a militant leader like Votier it had involved the taking up of an ambivalent position. Having established his constituency of support by opposing arbitration, he was now forced, through his participation

108. B.S.T.J.: 2 May, 1891.

109. The B.S.T.J. gives the secret ballot as going 13-11 in favour of a return; the S.L.R. as 12-11 in favour with one abstention.

110. S.L.R.: 8 May, 1891 and B.S.T.J.: 9 May, 1891.

in the conciliatory procedure, to defend the Board's jurisdiction. To many who were frustrated at its slowness he appeared party to a sell-out. For his own part, he had learnt that conciliation could, sometimes, work in the men's favour, and he appreciated that continuing opposition to it was tantamount to throwing away all the benefits of the new statements. At the same time, his socialism led him instinctively away from active opposition to rank and file movements. He had become ensnared in the classic trap of the revolutionary trade unionist who takes up reformist methods.

The matter was far from settled by the return to work for it remained for the Board to decide whether, or not, Furse's finishers should be paid to the second class statement. The majority view among the employers on the Board was that it had no power to deal with any matter affecting the second class statement.¹¹¹ It must have come as a severe blow to those who had been brought to accept the Board's jurisdiction over the dispute that half its number now claimed to be powerless. Furse would have none of this after such a struggle. He argued that the Board must have powers to regulate manufacturers who observed no formal statement but produced work equivalent to the second class.¹¹² The fact that Furse's finishers accepted the new, minimum statement on returning to work did not resolve this difference in principle, although it proved a temporary ending to a very serious dispute.

111. This was because the 1st and 2nd class manufacturers had taken no part in the 1890 settlement which established the Board, leaving employers on it to be exclusively drawn from the non-statement trade.

112. B.S.T.J.: 30 May, 1891.

IV. The breakdown of the 1890 settlement.

This fundamental disagreement was just one of a number of serious problems that threatened the Board's existence by the summer of 1891. Not the least of these was that some of the men's delegates were increasingly resentful of each other. Votier and Freak had always had important political differences which affected their practice as trade unionists, but these had now fastened to the extent that Votier openly accused Freak of attempting to monopolise Board meetings in collaboration with M.L. Lion.¹¹³ Votier had been greatly irritated by visits made to the outlying Hertfordshire towns where he had found manufacturers such as Palmer continuing to sweat 'greeners' in competition with London. In condemning this he was, at least, supported by Freak who thought that, "It did not matter whether he sent it to Whitechapel, Hemel Hempstead or Jerusalem. Work ought to be finished where it was made."¹¹⁴ Moreover, many sweaters were still evading the new statement. Flatau dismissed a bootmaker of ten years' service for complaining about his interpretation of the new girls' statement,¹¹⁵ and the London Metro. branch provided a list of ten firms, which excluded those sending work to Hertfordshire, who continued to give out work.¹¹⁶ Freak's ire had been raised at Hemel Hempstead where "he was hooted by foreign greeners, whom he, described as being on bad terms with soap and water and needed fumigating."¹¹⁷ It was, thus, ironic that, shortly afterwards, he told an excursion of boot and shoemakers, celebrating the first anniversary of the abolition of sweating by a day trip to Buckhurst Hill in Epping Forest, that one of the greatest gains of the 1890 struggle had been the unity formed between Jewish and non-Jewish workers.¹¹⁸

Rank and file opposition to the Board thrived upon its failure to fully implement the settlement. As the number of manufacturers flouting its

113. Ibid.: 23 May, 1891.

114. S.L.B.: 5 June, 1891.

115. Ibid.

116. S.L.B.: July, 1891.

117. S.L.B.: 12 June, 1891.

118. Ibid.: 26 June, 1891.

authority increased so, too, did the incidence of unofficial strikes. The union delegates responded by seeking a showdown with their critics: they called a mass meeting for the 9th July (at the Shoreditch Town Hall) to which they intended to offer their resignations. In this way they sought a vote of confidence from the membership which would defeat the militants' challenge.

This meeting proved a triumph for the official leaders. Chapman, chairing, did not have to contend with a large audience and managed to exert a 'grip of iron' over the proceedings. The smaller attendance may have been the result of Freak's insistence that entry be on production of membership cards only, although it is uncertain whether the other unions made similar insistence. Freak defended the work of the Board in securing indoor working and pleaded with the Jews, in particular, not to blame the current slackness upon it because it was the result of trade recession. Votier lent lukewarm support. Although he reiterated his opposition to arbitration in principle, he was prepared to admit that, if it had not been accepted, then workshope could not have been won. This was a reversal of the position he had held in 1890 when he had been the leading critic of the official leadership's decision to concede arbitration as the price of indoor working. The passing of a year had brought him to a contradictory and untenable position of condemning arbitration in principle while admitting its benefits in fact. As a Marxist, he might have been wise to return to his mentor's advice on the essential unity of theory and practice before his credibility expired.

Lewis put the opposition's case and, in so doing, found himself in confrontation with his old ally, Votier. But, his argument was weak for he could not substantiate his claim that the new statements were a reduction, and he was forced to concentrate upon instances of employers breaking away from them in open rebellion. It could not be denied that their numbers were increasing as trade deteriorated. In the face of this he accused the official leaders of dilatoriness and of acting like the masters of the men instead of as their

servants. Dunn added that the Council (of the National Union) should have defended the Fursses's strikers against "the tyranny of the Board." Those anti-arbitrationists who were socialists had defined any participation on the Board as class collaboration, irrespective of the end product. Yet, at the same time, Lewis could advise against breaking it up at the time of bad trade.¹¹⁹ The inconsistency was easily detected and this sweeping application of class theory, with occasional practical deviation, must have lost the socialists support. Indeed, it is difficult to see what the actual differences in policy were which caused Lewis to regard Votier as the new bete noire.

The union delegates were re-elected by a very large majority. Why had there been such a decline in support for the anti-arbitrationist position by mid-1891? The deepening recession seems to have had the greatest impact. Although it had led to the re-introduction of sweated, outdoor labour,¹²⁰ most bootmakers saw the Board as the best defence in such circumstances. Many of the growing unemployed were drawn from the ranks of the less skilled, the strata which had previously given most support to the militants. It was these bootmakers who were probably absent in increasing numbers from union meetings. Secondly, the socialist, now unionists were a house divided. Votier stood condemned by Lewis and Dunn as a collaborator because of his inclination towards a defensive strategy of upholding the Board and the new statements.

The effect of recession upon the employers was to further reduce their willingness to adhere to the new statements. As sweaters like Greenwood and Weber successfully evaded for long periods, others were encouraged to adopt similar tactics. The unions complained that the employers had lost control of their membership at just the time that they had reasserted control over theirs. Behind this lay the unions' suspicion that the employers were deliberately

119. B.S.T.J.: 18 July, 1891.

120. A Jewish protest meeting, attended by over a thousand, took place on 4th July (B.S.T.J.: 11 July, 1891).

delaying the production of standard samples to provide greater leeway for evasion of the statements. Such matters had brought the Board to a point of crisis by the end of July.

At about this time two groups of employers began to organise themselves in opposition to the Board. The first, a group of about seventy who were outside of the Association, began to meet at the Morely Hall in Hackney. Their demand that the new statements be applied to all manufacturers below the second class reveals them to have been statement employers. The second were a group of sweaters, led by Weber, who were conferring over the Board's policy. The fact that Weber was a member of the Board gave rise to widespread rumour that he was about to lead a breakaway from the settlement.¹²¹ The Jewish bootmakers discussed such a possibility at a meeting on 9th August, and levelled two charges at their employers. Firstly, they accused them of withholding work in a deliberate attempt to intensify dissatisfaction with the Board. Secondly, they were charged with pressurising workers into signing a document declaring their willingness to return to outdoor working.¹²² Two days later the Board adjourned indefinitely after Lion admitted that he knew of 135 men currently working out of doors. As a final act of defiance the men refused to accept the umpire's decision on the Fursas's dispute: that the Board had no power to force an employer to pay to the first or second class statement if he had not previously done so. Freak was afraid that the adjournment would be followed by a massive breakaway from the settlement.¹²³

Many Jewish bootmakers were determined to prevent this and organised parades and meetings during the period of adjournment. A number of the worst sweaters had taken the opportunity to refuse the new statements and collections were being taken to support those locked-out.¹²⁴ By this time, Thomas Lilley and William Hicksen, representing the better Hackney manufacturers, had already

121. S.L.R.: 31 July, 1891.

122. Ibid.: 14 Aug., 1891.

123. B.S.T.J.: 15 Aug., 1891. S.L.R.: 14 Aug., 1891.

124. M.E.: Aug., 1891.

decided upon an intervention and were consulting with Inskip and McCree.¹²⁵

In the late summer of 1891, the rank and file movement in defiance of the 1890 settlement repeated some of the great demonstrations of the year before. But, this time, it was Lewis, not Votier, who led them. On 30th August, 1500 made their way from London Fields to Old Ford in an orderly fashion, and with only four constables and an inspector in attendance.¹²⁶ The following Sunday, however, the police interfered with the band, and this occasioned a letter to the Commissioner of Police enquiring whether boot and shoemakers did not have the same rights as salvationists. On the reply being in the affirmative the following week's demonstration was larger even than any of the previous year,¹²⁷ and the band was accompanied by three banners "... one of which represents a big boot lifting a supposed sweating employer up behind and through the streets." Fears expressed by one of the trade journals indicated that the activity was having its desired effects:

"This agitation tends to stir up and keep alive a fighting spirit which it is to be sincerely hoped will not be allowed to interfere with matters other than the stopping of outdoor labour."¹²⁸

Against this background of mounting pressure the Board resumed on 22nd September, after an adjournment of six weeks. The employers finally presented their standard samples which were rejected out of hand by the union delegates as being of statement, not uniform, quality. The employers had not selected samples from work that was actually being made for the market, but had had them specially made up. The employers tried to force a vote on acceptance, placing the men in a perilous position because if the vote were tied the matter would go to arbitration and, thus, beyond their control. Instead, they tried for an adjournment, and when this failed walked out of the meeting. The Board of 1890 was almost dead.¹²⁹

125. S.L.R.: 28 Aug., 1891.

126. B.S.T.L.: 5 Sept., 1891.

127. One estimate was 4,000 (M.R.: Sept., 1891).

128. S.L.R.: 18 Sept., 1891.

129. B.S.T.L.: 26 Sept., 1891.

Both of the major trade journals immediately called for a new Board which would represent the entire trade, and Thomas Lilley's name was well canvassed as a possible chairman.¹³⁰ Freak wrote to Craig, on 29th September, informing him that the men's delegates thought that Lion's opposition to standard samples made him unfit to continue as chairman. He omitted to mention that Lion was still suspected of giving out.¹³¹ As the Board met again, on 6th October, it did so against an escalation of rank and file pressure in the form of ever larger demonstrations through the streets of the East End.

Lion was confronted with the charge of evading the statement at the Board meeting on the 6th. He was accused of both giving out work and paying weekly wages to finishers as a means of evading the new piece rates. He denied both charges. The question of how the standard samples should be accepted was referred to the arbitrators.¹³²

Votier was not inclined to allow the matter of Lion's alleged misdemeanours to rest and he made it clear, through the trade press, that he would raise it again at the next Board meeting.¹³³ This caused the manufacturers' side to postpone the meeting scheduled for the second week in October.¹³⁴ The boot-makers working for Joseph Green (of Hackney Road) had suffered a recent reduction in wages, and when they heard that the Board was not to meet, perhaps assuming that it was at an end, they struck.

With the Board suspended, Green's men taking strike action and the anti-sweating demonstrations continuing to amplify the issues in dispute, industrial relations had reached the most acute crisis point since the strike of the previous year. The B.S.T.J. located the root of the problem:

"... had the Board taken a wider view of the requirements of the trade when the statement was compiled, and made it sufficiently comprehensive to include all classes of work, instead of vainly trying to stamp out

130. Ibid. S.L.R.: 25 Sept., 1891.

131. S.L.R.: 2 Oct., 1891.

132. B.S.T.J.: 10 Oct., 1891.

133. Ibid.: 17 Oct., 1891.

134. S.L.R.: 16 Oct., 1891.

certain descriptions of goods by making no provisions for them or imposing prohibitive wages, the present difficulty would not have occurred."¹³⁵

Put another way, it was a struggle to decide whether, or not the sweated trade would survive. Lion's attempt to change over to weekly wages for non-machine workers was one device being adopted to ensure that it did.

Many of the delegates attending the Association's emergency session on 19th October favoured an immediate lock-out. The author of one widely circulated manifesto advised seizing the time for profits would be more vulnerable come the prosperous spring season.¹³⁶ Such drastic action was avoided, however. Instead, a new set of delegates was elected, pledged to introduce standard samples by 9th November. Five of these eight delegates had served on the old Board, but Michel Lion was a notable absentee and Thomas Lilley a notable addition. The balance of power was moving back towards moderation and away from the sweaters. Lilley made it clear that he was committed to retaining workshops and that he attributed much of the blame for the breakdown in industrial relations to the delaying tactics of the employers' delegates in holding back standard samples.¹³⁷

These changes in personnel and attitude did not resolve the Green's dispute, however. When the Association decided to give Green's work to other manufacturers, the bootmakers refused to accept it and struck. The official leadership refused support for these strikes and watched, horrified at the rapid spread of unofficial action. The Association presented their ultimatum on 27th October: unless Green's and the other unofficial strikers returned within twenty-four hours, a general lock-out of all associated firms would commence from the 31st. There was no hope of retrieving the situation at such short notice. The lock-out began, throwing thousands of London bootmakers onto the streets for the second time in eighteen months.

135. B.S.T.O.: 17 Oct., 1891.

136. S.L.R.: 23 Oct., 1891.

137. B.S.T.O.: 24 Oct., 1891.

What had caused the breakdown of the 1890 settlement by November of 1891? Firstly, it had always been a partial agreement that excluded the statement trade. Statement workers opposed both a minimum statement and arbitration and conciliation out of fear of their own rates being levelled downwards. Secondly, even among those who were a party to the settlement, there were saboteurs determined to wreck it. The lowest paying sweating manufacturers wanted to preserve their freedom to undercut, old master sweaters who had been forced out of their home workshops into those of the manufacturer wanted to return to their 'penny-capitalism',¹³⁸ and 'greeneries', afraid of the intensified skill demands of the workshop, sought the sanctuary of finishing the knifer's work. Thirdly, the unions had been quite successful in using the Board to draw up new, minimum statements for women's and girls' work that, on the whole, favoured the workmen. These three factors, alone, made the survival of the settlement doubtful. The trade recession that began in 1891 sealed its fate. In an effort to reduce costs employers broke away from statements that were already pricing higher wages from them. Unemployment grew among bootmakers who blamed the Board for the consequences of poor trade. As a result financial membership of London Metro. declined by 18% in the year between July, 1891 and July, 1892.¹³⁹ Unofficial strikes broke out among workers who complained that the Board had ignored their grievances. The trade was in chaos and the employers decided that a short, sharp crack of the whip was the first step towards restoring order.

138. Samuel, The Workshop of the World.

139. See Appendix B.

CHAPTER 7.

APPENDIX I: THE LONDON WAGES STATEMENTS OF 1890.

The Manufacturers' Statement

	Class: A B C D E F G H I K										
	Lasters: 11d 10d 9d 8d 7d 6d 5d 5d 4d 4d 4d										
	Price	Finisher: 10d	9d	8d	7d	6d	5d	4d	3d	2d	1d
1. Glove kid		1st	2nd								
2. Glace kid		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th					
3. Patent calf		1st	2nd	3rd			4th				
4. Wax calf			1st	2nd	3rd						
5. Seal Franch Levant (Morocco)			1st	2nd							
6. Glove and Glace Lamb			1st	2nd							
7. Seal Levant			1st	2nd							
8. Calf Kid				1st	2nd						
9. Glace Goat			1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th			
10. Cordovan (incl. bellies & shanks)			1st	2nd	3rd						
11. Levant Goat			1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th				
12. Soft Alum Rock Kid			1st	2nd	3rd	4th					
13. Stuffs			1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th				
14. Satin Hide and Kip				1st	2nd	3rd					
15. Glove Hide				1st	2nd	3rd					
16. Glace Sheep				1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th			
17. All Patents (except Calf)				1st	2nd	3rd	4th				
18. Mock Kid				1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th			
19. Grain					1st	2nd					
20. Levant Kip and Hide					1st	2nd					
21. Sheep Levant							1st	2nd			
22. Canvas							1st	2nd	3rd	4th	

Source: B.S.T.J.: 1 Nov., 1890.

The Men's Statement

	Class: A B C D E F G						
	Lasters: 11d 10d 9d 8d 7d 6d 5d						
	Price	Finisher: 10d	9d	8d	7d	6d	5d
1. Glove Kid		1st	2nd				
2. Glace Kid		1st	2nd				
3. Patent Calf		1st	2nd				
4. Wax Calf			1st	2nd			
5. Morocco or Seal Levant			1st	2nd			
6. Glace Lamb			1st	2nd			
7. Glove Lamb			1st	2nd			
8. Glace Goat			1st	2nd			
9. Calf Kid			1st	2nd	3rd	4th	
10. Cordovan			1st	2nd	3rd	4th	
11. Levant Goat			1st	2nd	3rd	4th	
12. Smyrna Kid			1st	2nd	3rd	4th	
13. Stuffs			1st	2nd	3rd	4th	
14. Satin Hide			1st	2nd	3rd		
15. Glove Hide			1st	2nd	3rd		
16. Glace Sheep			1st	2nd	3rd		
17. All Patent (except Calf)			1st	2nd	3rd		
18. Mock Kid				1st	2nd	3rd	
19. Grain					1st	2nd	
20. Levant Kip and Hide					1st	2nd	
21. Sheep Levant					1st	2nd	3rd
22. Canvas					1st	2nd	3rd

Source: B.S.T.J.: 22 Nov., 1890.

CHAPTER 7.

APPENDIX I: THE LONDON WAGES STATEMENTS OF 1890 (cont.)

The Final Statement

Price -	Class:							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Finisher:	11d	10d	9d	8d	7d	6d	5d	4d
1. Glove Kid	1st	2nd						
2. Glace Kid	1st	2nd			3rd			
3. Patent Calf	1st	2nd	3rd					
4. Wax Calf	1st	2nd			3rd			
5. Real French straight grain and Levant morocco	1st	2nd						
6. Glove and Glace Lamb	1st	2nd						
7. Seal Levant	1st	2nd						
8. Calf Kid		1st	2nd	3rd	4th			
9. Glace Goat and Dongola		1st	2nd	3rd				
10. Cordovan (inc. ballies & shanks)		1st	2nd	3rd				
11. Levant and straight grain Goat		1st	2nd	3rd				
12. Soft Alum Mock Kid			1st	2nd	3rd			
13. Stuffs			1st	2nd		3rd		
14. Satin Hide and Kip			1st	2nd	3rd			
15. Glove Hide			1st	2nd	3rd			
16. Glace and straight grain Sheep			1st	2nd	3rd	4th		
17. All Patent (except Calf)			1st	2nd	3rd			
18. Mock Kid				1st	2nd		3rd	
19. Grain				1st	2nd	3rd		
20. Levant Kip and Hide				1st	2nd	3rd		
21. Sheep Levant				1st	2nd		3rd	

Source: B.S.T.J. 10 Jan., 1891.

CHAPTER 7.

APPENDIX 11: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MANUFACTURERS' AND MEN'S PRICES

(All differences are minus amounts unless otherwise stated).

	<u>1sts</u>	<u>2nds</u>	<u>3rds</u>	<u>4ths</u>
1. Glove Kid		1d/1d		
2. Glove Kid				
3. Patent Calf				
4. Wax Calf		+1d/+1d		
5. Morocco				
6. Glove Lamb				
7. Glove Lamb				
8. Calf Kid				-/+ $\frac{1}{2}$ d
9. Glove Goat				
10. Cordovan	1d/1d	1d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ d		
11. Levant Goat	1d/1d	1d/1d	1d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ c	$\frac{1}{2}$ d/-
12. Stuffs		1d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ d	1d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ d	$\frac{1}{2}$ d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ d
13. Satin Hide	1d/1d	1d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ d	1d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ c	
14. Glove Hide	1d/1d	1d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ d	1d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ c	
15. Glove Sheep	1d/1d	1d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ d	$\frac{1}{2}$ d/-	
16. All Patents	1d/1d	1d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ d	$\frac{1}{2}$ d/-	
17. Mock Kid	1d/1d	-/+ $\frac{1}{2}$ d		
18. Grain	1d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ d	1d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ d		
19. Levant Kip and Hide	1d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ d	1d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ d		
20. Sheep Levant	2d/1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d/1d		
21. Canvas	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d/1d	1d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ d	$\frac{1}{2}$ d/ $\frac{1}{2}$ c	

N.B. Seal Levant, Soft Alum Mock Kid and Smyrna Kid are omitted from
 comparisor as they do not appear in both lists.

sources: calculated from statements in Appendix I

CHAPTER EIGHTTHE LONDON REVOLT AGAINST ARBITRATION.I. The London lock-out of 1891.

The struggle of the union officials to save arbitration in the capital received some encouragement from a prior victory in Leicester. By the time the lock-out broke upon London Inskip had already brought the full weight of his authority to bear upon the militants, there, and had inflicted temporary defeat upon them.¹ While there is no evidence to suggest that the militant campaign was co-ordinated from centre to centre, they must have been perfectly aware of each other's activities. By the end of 1891, both the Union leadership and the trade press had come to regard the anti-arbitration movement as a national problem.

On 31 October, at the Great Assembly Hall in Mile End, the officials had made an unsuccessful, last-ditch effort to prevent the lock-out going ahead. Some 3,000 boot and shoemakers attended to hear Freak, Votier and Inskip, himself, condemn the Green's strike against the Board. But, the anti-arbitrationists were not without their articulate spokesman. Jewers and Dunn represented the S.D.F. and they were joined in their denunciations of the Board by Dale, a first class worker, and C. Gliddon, one of the Green's strikers. A good deal of invective was traded, much of it turned against Votier by the other new Unionists for, what they regarded as, his betrayal of the Green's men. A resolution as to whether the officers of the Union should be supported in their upholding of general law was lost by an estimate of 100 to 20,² but the number of votes recorded made a mockery of the size of the meeting. Few seemed to have followed the debate with much understanding amidst the wrangling, and some fighting, that took place.³ After the meeting, knots of men were to be seen congregated on Mile End Waste excitedly discussing matters and, no doubt, trying to piece together a coherent account of what had transpired.

1. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.D., pp. 173-4.

2. S.L.R.: 6 Nov., 1891.

3. S.S.T.J.: 7 Nov., 1891. S.L.R.: 7 Nov., 1891.

The vote had placed at risk the authority of the branch executive who refused to accept the decision of a few as a legitimate expression of the membership's feelings. Arrangements were put in hand for a ballot of the entire London membership, but, in the interim, the lock-out began. On the Sunday, 7-8,000 people marched from London Fields around the district for the purpose of 'serenading' the manufacturers. This kind of thing had been going on for several months. By Monday, many had enquired about lock-out pay and in the afternoon Votier told a meeting on London Fields that there would be none. This weakened the resolve of many to support the Green's strikers. The ballot took place the following evening.⁴

The employers had been less than unanimous in their decision to lock-out. This surprised few observers for the sweaters who still constituted the bulk of the membership rarely acted in the common interest. Some were bound to take advantage of the discomfort of their fellows, as they always did. Estimates of the number of firms locking-out varied widely from 76⁵ to 118,⁶ although the former is likely to be the more accurate. The number of workers affected was likely to be greater than the 5,000 estimated by the Eastern Arcus as all but the statement workers and those continuing to work for a sweater who had not locked-out were affected.

Just prior to the ballot, the anti-arbitrationists called a meeting on London Fields in an attempt to organise a 'no-vote.' Attendance was disappointing⁷ which suggests that morale among the locked-out was low. This was hardly surprising as official lock-out pay had been denied them, and an unofficial collection had only raised the equivalent of 8d. per man.⁸

In the event the ballot went comfortably in favour of the official leadership. The question put was: "Shall the Officers of the Union be supported in upholding General Law?" The answers are analysed below.

4. B.S.T.J.: 7 Nov., 1891.

5. S.L.R.: 30 Oct., 1891.

6. Eastern Arcus: 7 Nov., 1891.

7. Estimated at 350 by B.S.T.J.: 7 Nov., 1891.

8. S.L.R.: 6 Nov., 1891.

Table I: Ballot of London unions on upholding of general law (Nov. 1891).

Branches of the National Union	Yes	%agg	No	Total Voting	No. of finan- cial members in branch	Proportion of branch voting
L. Metro.	1,521	(82.04)	333	1,854	3,611	51.34%
S. London	318	(79.9)	80	398	450	88.44%
E. London	64	(44.76)	79	143	221	64.71%
City	16	(59.26)	11	27	173	15.61%
<u>Totals</u>	<u>1,919</u>	<u>(79.23)</u>	<u>503</u>	<u>2,422</u>	<u>4,455</u>	<u>54.37%</u>
Branches of the Amalgamated						
City Women's	185	(77.41)	54	239	-	-
West End	18	(78.26)	5	23	-	-
<u>Totals</u>	<u>203</u>	<u>(77.48)</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>262</u>		
Combined totals	2,122	(77.33)	622	2,744		

Source: B.S.T.J.; 7 Nov., 1891.

The question had been cleverly posed because it suggested that the fundamentals of trade unionism were at stake. On numerous occasions the official leaders had presented the choice as being between authority or anarchic chaos. Yet, because of the nature of the question, the vote could not be taken as one in favour of arbitration. No doubt many still agreed with Commonweal that: "The Arbitration Board has been a miserable swindle and had taken as long to come to a decision as the High Court of Chancery does to settle a law suit."⁹ But, the National Union executive thought it a victory over ".... irresponsible persons, whose aim appeared to be to obtain momentary popularity."¹⁰ This was, of course, code for Lewis, Jewers, Dunn and the other new unionists.

One disturbing revelation for the London Metro. leadership was that support was least forthcoming from the Jewish branches. Fewer than half of the Jewish finishers in the London East branch had supported the officials, and

9. Commonweal; 14 Nov., 1891.

10. M.R.; Nov., 1891.

even the old master sweaters in the City branch came well behind the two English branches. Some intimidation in favour of a 'no vote' had been reported from the Booth Street Hall in Spitalfields,¹¹ but there were other reasons why Jews might oppose the official leadership. Those who wanted to return to outdoor working might have seen a 'no vote' as one against the Board, arbitration and the 1890 settlement. But, it must be said that there were likely to be few such saboteurs actually inside the trade union branches. More numerous were the genuinely militant Jews who had been drawn to an anti-arbitrationist position by witnessing daily violations of the indoor working agreement.

The poll is the best available expression of popular feeling among boot and shoemakers at this time. Although the officials had won a vote of confidence by an approximate margin of 3½ to 1, the minority who continued to oppose them was substantial. Had the question posed been over the continuance of arbitration then their very majority would have been in doubt. A final point worth noting is that although the overall turnout of 54.37% may have disappointed democrats in the National Union it was a reasonable figure. Certainly, far fewer bothered to vote in elections for officials. It is extremely difficult to explain the differing turnouts between branches. The sheer size of the London Metro. branch may have affected the distribution and collection of voting papers, but, on the other hand, the very small City branch returned less than 16% of its votes. Master sweaters had always been reluctant unionists. It remains to see that the uneven response cannot be explained by the issue affecting branches disproportionately.

As a result of the vote, Inskip and the local leaders moved swiftly to bring about a settlement. They met the Green's strikers at the 'Royal Oak', Columbia Road on the Monday morning and the latter agreed to return to work. From there, the leaders moved on to a meeting with the employers in the after-

11. S.L.R.: 6 Nov., 1891.

noon. A settlement was drawn up without too much difficulty, but the unionists had to provide guarantees in the event of a similar problem arising in the future. Firstly, if any unionists struck against the Board's jurisdiction they were to be expelled if they had not returned within seven days. Secondly, the union was to replace the men, or they were to permit the work to be made up at another shop.¹² Such an agreement bound official trade unionists even more closely to the Board and drained them of a little more independence and flexibility.

The London leadership's justification of their settlement of the lock-out extended beyond the need to exert official over unofficial authority. They were inclined to see the ending of the dispute as preserving the indoor working agreement from the unscrupulous attack of the sweaters:

"No doubt many of our employers had prepared themselves for a long struggle in order to free themselves from the workshops, and once more to revert to sweating. In this we are glad to say they were foiled."¹³

The extent to which the membership accepted this analysis was put to an early test by the elections for National Union officers in early December. Freak was opposed for the Presidency of the branch by Bob Quick, a man, some said, as short of brains as he was of stature. He had risen to prominence during the Green's strike, and subsequent lock-out, as a defender of their cause, but, shortly after the lock-out began, was urging a compromise and return to work. He presented himself to the membership as the mouthpiece of all who were discontented with the official leadership. He was not associated with the new unionists and appears to have been little more than an extrovert independent anxious to carve out a career in union politics. As the only opposition he did receive 153 votes, but this left him well short of Freak's 552.

The elections for delegates to the Arbitration Board and London Trades' Council reveal more about the strength of new unionist opposition to the official leadership. On the Board, Lewis joined Votier, Freak and O'Grady and his

12. B.S.T.J.: 7 Nov., 1891.

13. M.H.: Nov., 1891.

opponents were quick to point to the anomaly of having one who was opposed to arbitration sitting there. His position was, in fact, identical to that of Votier's when he had first been elected. Lewis came fourth in the poll (291 votes), behind O'Grady (365), Votier (409) and Freak (471). Freak did not stand as a delegate to the Trades' Council and this let in O'Grady at the top of the poll (418), followed by Votier (403), Lewis (360), Morrison (204), Hilliard (189) and Brown (179).¹⁴ Of the last three, Morrison was a new unionist, Hilliard had supported the leadership against the Green's strikers, but Brown is an unknown quantity. Lewis's rise to prominence represents a considerable increase in new unionist influence. Despite their differences, he and Votier were still both members of the S.D.F.¹⁵ Yet, no other new unionists had managed to gain election to influential positions at a time when the movement was approaching the crest of its wave.

II. The reimposition of conciliatory authority.

The newly constituted, post lock-out Board was composed of a wider range of employers than the old. Thomas Lilley's presence as chairman was a clear indication that the intermediate trade was represented alongside the sweaters. The former chairman, Michel Lion, was finally discredited when a committee of enquiry found him guilty of evading the statement and the indoor working agreement.¹⁶ But, he was not expelled from the Association, as both the S.L.L.R. and Votier, for their different reasons, would have liked, and this was a gesture of conciliation to the sweaters.¹⁷ Votier's temper could not have been improved by the findings of another committee, of which he was a member, which found the Green's men's accusations that their employer had reduced were unfounded.¹⁸ The lock-out, ignited by this dispute, had been placed in a bitterly ironic context.

By far the most serious problem with which the New Board had to deal was that of payment by day or weekly wages. This method had replaced piece-rates in

14. B.S.T.J.: 12 Dec., 1891.

15. Votier was arrested a few days later defending free speech at the World's End.

16. B.S.T.J.: 28 Nov., 1891.

17. S.L.L.R.: 27 Nov., 1891. B.S.T.J.: 26 Dec., 1891.

18. B.S.T.J.: 28 Nov., 1891.

those firms that had gone over extensively to machinery. At first, the National Union had resisted such payment, but, at a special conference in 1889, had conceded the point. As one employer put it, "Humanity must make room for iron."¹⁹ Unionised humanity, however, was determined that weekly wages would not work to the detriment of the boot and shoemaker. In those areas where the new unionists were strong, in particular, branches worked to ensure that weekly wage statements retained as many of the old advantages of piece-work as possible. The fact that Freak raised the issue on the Board in December, 1891 indicates two points of importance. Firstly, machinery had begun to make late, but significant, inroads into London work patterns. Secondly, trade unionists were dissatisfied with the share of its rewards accruing to labour, for Freak had gone as far as moving the abolition of weekly wages.²⁰ His reason for doing this, he explained, was that certain employers were introducing weekly wages as a deliberate attempt to undermine the uniform statement (which was, of course, a piece-work one). The suggestion was that such employers were introducing weekly wages on hand-work. After Lilley resisted further discussion, Freak agreed to shelve the matter for the moment.²¹ But, the former's insistence that the issue had national implications and could only be resolved at that level, pointed firmly to the direction in which collective bargaining was proceeding. The advent of the employers' federation was forcing many issues, previously discussed at a local level, into a national arena. And, there was no doubt that the machinery question would continue to predominate, as the B.S.T.J.'s review of 1891 emphasised:

"Machinery, too has made a greater stride during the past year than in that before it. Welted boots continue to supersede machine-sewn, and have largely taken the place of hand-sewn goods. Machine-sewn have superseded rivetted, and standard screwed have replaced the rivetted work, and by a novel process are now made as flexible as sewn boots. In finishing machinery too much headway has been made, and there are few large and well

19. Fox, *History of N.U.B.S.C.*, p.131. See pp. 131-5 for the change in Union policy.

20. *B.S.T.J.*: 5 Dec., 1891.

21. *Ibid.*: 12 Dec., 1891.

appointed factories today that have not a partial or complete plant of machinery for finishing boots and shoes. Lasting machinery has perhaps been the least progressive, a fact which is not, however, due to the inability of the machines so much, we think, as to the prejudices of both employer and employed. But circumstances will force these appliances onward and next year we may be able to announce that they have found a place, and are considered indispensable in modern factories."²²

In the aftermath of the lock-out the priority of the newly constituted Board was to impose its authority upon the sweated trade. This was a formidable task, for it became clear in early 1892 that many manufacturers, who had previously paid above the uniform statement, were attempting to reduce to it. The unions had predicted this would happen. A dispute at the firm of J. Furse provides the best example of this practice. Furse appeared before the Board on 9 February to request permission to make goods to the uniform statement. He produced goods of a quality between the uniform and second class statements, but complained that he was suffering from the competition of the uniform statement shops.²³ In theory, Furse had no objection to Furse making uniform, as well as better quality goods, but, in practice, he feared that unscrupulous employers might reduce to paying uniform rates for better quality goods. Lilley defended Furse's right to make what goods he pleased to the point of threatening resignation from the Board.²⁴

At later meetings it became apparent that the union delegates were suspicious of Furse's motives. Votier clarified the matter by arguing that, "Some manufacturers were making trifling alterations in their old work and calling them new classes of work."²⁵ This put Lilley on the defensive for he admitted that, if this was true, then the practice constituted reductions and the Board was not in existence to sanction those.

Simultaneously, the Board was grappling with the problem of weekly wages.

22. Ibid.: 2 Jan., 1892.

23. Ibid.: 13 Feb., 1892.

24. S.L.R.: 12 Feb., 1892.

25. B.S.T.J.: 12 March, 1892.

On 17 January, seven 'foreign finishers' had struck Lion, Lion and Sons and were closely followed onto the street outside by their tool kits. The men, who complained that the firm's weekly wages were below the uniform statement, refused to accept dismissal and kept a vigil over their kits on the pavement outside the factory.²⁶ The City branch of the National were convinced that the employers were exploiting weekly wages in an attempt to work the men harder.²⁷ The Board were forced to pass a resolution in support of the National Union's view that weekly wages were appropriate, principally, where men worked on machinery. If they were adopted on hand-lasted and finished work, then they must be calculated on the basis of the uniform statement.²⁸ Many must have wondered what would be the next ploy used by the sweaters to undermine the statement.

III. The elevation of collective bargaining.

The National Union's conference of 1892 proved acrimonious and it emphasised the growing opposition of the London branches to the Council's leadership. This opposition was most forcibly voiced by Votier, and he was supported by like-minded militants from other centres.

The first contested issue was that of the parliamentary candidature. Votier spoke in favour of an independent candidate, but Inskip disagreed because he thought that both his own recent election as an alderman in Leicester and Frisk's to the L.C.C.²⁹ demonstrated the wisdom of seeking party support.³⁰ His plan possessed the additional advantage of obviating the need to support the prospective M.P., he argued. Inskip must have had it in mind to reach an agreement with the Liberals through which a candidate who could support himself would be selected, for it was most unlikely that the Liberals would finance a trade unionist if the Union, itself, was not prepared to.³¹ Nevertheless, Votier carried the day and the conference agreed to support an independent candidate to

26. S.L.B.: 25 Jan., 1892.

27. S.L.B.: Feb., 1892. See report of the London City branch.

28. S.S.T.J.: 19 March, 1892.

29. See Chapter 11.

30. He meant the Liberal Party, of course.

31. Local Liberal Associations were reluctant to adopt Labour candidates. See Kair Hardie's rejection by the Mid-Lanarkshire Liberal Association in 1888 (Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, p.65.)

the tune of £300 p.a. plus election expenses.³² This commitment did not prevent the candidate standing as a Liberal but the fact that he was to be financially independent gave him more weight in the arguments over policies. This must have proved a satisfying victory for Votier in his battle to break Union politics from the Liberal connection.

Votier also found himself opposed to Inskip over the question of a two-thirds salary increase for the General Secretary. Local branches had become apprehensive about losing his services through a failure to pay him enough,³³ after the former President, Edward Kell, had resigned to take up a managerial position with Haldenstein's of Leicester in July, 1890. He had ingratiated himself with the firm after investigating a dispute at their Norwich works and gave as his reason for leaving that the Union did not pay enough.³⁴ Votier was disgusted by what he considered to be a lack of loyalty on Kell's part. When an increase from £150 to £250 p.a. in the General Secretary's salary was moved, Votier and Freak amended it to £200 p.a., the latter "urging that with too high a remuneration the Secretary might lose touch with the workers and become something of an aristocrat."³⁵ On this occasion, he might have taken the words right out of Votier's mouth, an experience he generally tried to avoid. But, Inskip received his full increase by a narrow margin of 29 to 21.

The militants were similarly defeated on two further issues: the payment of time and a quarter for overtime, and the abolition of arbitration. Both defeats were eminently predictable. "Crispin, one of the London delegates, spoke against overtime, and his views were shared by many in the capital. He argued that there was no justification for overtime where unemployment persisted. Inskip and the Lib-Lab leadership regarded this view as a denial of the individual rights of the shoemaker, and their position prevailed. Secondly, there was no chance that an anti-arbitration motion would pass at a time when Inskip had just beaten back

32. B.S.T.J.: 11 June, 1892.

33. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O., p.181.

34. Ibid., p.168.

35. B.S.T.J.: 18 June, 1892.

opposition to it in Leicester³⁶ and when it had just been given a new lease of life in London by the re-arranged Board.

More important, in the immediate short-term, were the questions of working on machinery and of boy labour. Over the former, the Union made no essential change to the position adopted at the special delegate conference in 1889, the S.L.B. was delighted that the Union continued to "march with the times,"³⁷ and the B.S.T.J. that "the extreme and socialistic elements were unsuccessful in their efforts to carry any of their ill matured and wholly impractical schemes."³⁸

By the time that the Conference convened in June of 1892, the question of boy labour had become an extremely vexed one. In Northampton, the Union had demanded a ratio of five men to every boy in the clicking department. In addition, they presented a minimum day wage for clickers and insisted upon the classification of materials.³⁹ It was recognised that the Northampton demands were a test case, for if successful, there, the Union would go on to press their gains in other areas.⁴⁰ London watched with interest, for the Metropolitan branch would have dearly loved to move against those manufacturers sending work to provincial areas, such as Northampton, to get it made more cheaply. It was thought that "local unions will make an effort to kill the system by levelling up the wages paid in the districts affected."⁴¹

No decision on boy labour was taken at the National Union's conference, in early June. Recognising the discord that this, and other issues, was causing in industrial relations, the idea was floated of a central arbitration board to which all ineludible local issues could be referred.⁴² Such suggestions were to lead, shortly, to the establishment of a National Conference, the logical product of a situation in which local disputes were being elevated to a national importance. The formation of the Federation in 1891, to complement the two

36. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O., pp. 173-4.

37. S.L.B.: 17 June, 1892.

38. B.S.T.J.: 18 June, 1892.

39. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O., p.145. A fuller account than the summary offered here can be found on pp. 144-54.

40. B.S.T.J.: 4 June, 1892.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

national trade unions, had been recognition, by the employers, of this state of affairs. From this point the history of any one boot and shoemaking centre becomes inextricably bound up with a national momentum to an even greater extent than it had been before.⁴³

The National Union had selected Northampton as a test case because it was a low-wage centre.⁴⁴ When the employers failed to meet the Union's demands, about 800 shoemakers were withdrawn. The Federation had already decided to respond with a national lock-out when this occurred, and this was timed to begin on 29th June. London manufacturers had been firm in their support for those affected in Northampton from an early stage in the struggle.⁴⁵ At a Board meeting, on 27 June, Freak argued for every effort to be made to avoid the lock-out because the men would blame it on arbitration. Votier even tried to establish the illegality of extending the dispute beyond Northampton because it violated the local rules of arbitration and conciliation. He chose to ignore the fact that 'the rules' were in a state of transition. Certainly, the Federation lost no sleep over the morality of their actions, and Lilley, in defending the decision,⁴⁶ blamed the Union's policy of increasing restrictions.⁴⁷

Freak's emphasis was rather different when addressing London's trade unionists. He was at pains to defend the action of the Union in Northampton where, he claimed clikkers had been treated worse than lasters and finishers for years. The employers were using the federation (and the threat of a lock-out) to try to overawe the men, but he did not believe they would go ahead with the lock-out. This judgement was to be vindicated very shortly, but Freak's speech was interrupted by a thunderstorm which sent over a thousand bootmakers

43. Because of this it is useful to reiterate some differences in methodology between this work and that of Fox. Fox's history views developments very much from the standpoint of the Leicester Council in a traditionally institutional fashion. This study remains concerned with the way in which national collective bargaining combined with the local social history of London bootmakers to determine their behaviour as trade unionists.

44. B.S.T.J.: 25 June, 1892.

45. Ibid.

46. He had been one of 5 London manufacturers on the Federation's executive who had been a party to it. The others were James Branch, Hickson, Salomon and Barnes.

47. B.S.T.J.: 2 July, 1892.

scattering across London Fields.⁴⁸ Much depended upon the attempt to establish unity between Northampton's workers and those in other centres, for the Council had proposed that the first two weeks lock-out pay be foregone. In an impressive display of solidarity, the combined London branches supported this proposal by 961 votes to 423.⁴⁹ This proved a perfunctory exercise, for the lock-out was called off after the intervention of the Mayor of Leicester, Alderman Thomas Wright. The immediate terms of cancellation favoured the Union.⁵⁰

Wright's intervention propelled both sides towards accepting a National Conference to settle outstanding differences. This took place in Leicester, between 11 and 12 August, with Wright presiding over nine delegates from either side. In the event of a failure to agree, Sir Henry James, Q.C., Liberal-Unionist M.P. for Bury, had accepted a request from both sides to act as umpire.⁵¹ It is easy to see why James held attractions for both Liberal employers on the Federation and Liberal members of the Council. He had, originally, established himself as a sympathiser of trade unionism through involvement in the campaign to repeal the Criminal Law Amendment Act, that bete noire of 1871 that restricted the right to picket.⁵² He had been Attorney General in Gladstone's first two governments,⁵³ but had deserted him for Unionism in 1886, when he moved from Palmerston's old constituency of Taunton to Bury. He was made Baron James of Hereford in 1895.⁵⁴

From London, Charles Fieck travelled to represent the trade unionists, and Thomas Lilley the employers. A uniform meal hour and a fifty-four hour week for all centres was quickly agreed, but minimum wages for the Northampton clickers and pressmen took a little longer. Importantly, there was a further agreement to draw up a set of national rules that would prohibit a strike or lock-out

48. *Ibid.*

49. *S.L.R.*, 8 July, 1892.

50. Fox, *History of N.U.B.S.C.*, p.147.

51. *S.L.R.*, 20 Aug., 1892.

52. Fraser, *Trade Unions and Society*, p.193.

53. *Serving between 1873-4 and 1880-5.*

54. Fraser, *op.cit.*, p.261 ft.

without prior resort to conciliation and arbitration. Upon the boy labour question, however, there could be no agreement, and the matter had to be referred to James.⁵⁵ He decided that the ratio between boys and men should be 1 : 3.⁵⁶ It was the small towns, such as the Northamptonshire ones of Kettering and Rushden, that were most affected by this, for in the better unionised factory and workshop areas restrictions had already been imposed.⁵⁷

Evidence and opinion from London showed that the city's trade would be little affected. Fræk thought that it was only the clickers who were at all threatened by boy labour. This was supported by the results of a survey of 94 London firms presented by Lilley. The proportions of boys and youths to men in the respective departments was found to be: clickers 1½ 15. rough stuff cutters 1:6, lasters 1:59, finishers 1:55. James suggested to Lilley that, on this evidence, a restriction of 1:5 (which was what the Union wanted) would not damage the London manufacturers, but Lilley was not prepared to concede it. He argued that the cheaper manufacturers needed unrestricted boy labour, "... that if there was free trade in that question the boys would naturally get into the places where they were wanted, and the manufacturers who did not require them would not employ them."⁵⁸

Much praise was bestowed upon James for the diplomacy shown by him in not announcing the reasoning behind his award,⁵⁹ but his rationale can be elicited from his winding-up speech given at the conclusion of the hearing, but before he announced the award. The following extract provides both a useful insight into the political economy of the man who was umpire to the trade through a crucial period, and into the economic pressures acting upon the industry in 1892:

55. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O., pp. 148-51 and B.S.T.J., 20 Aug., 1892.

56. B.S.T.J., 13 Sept., 1892.

57. Ibid and Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O., p.152.

58. B.S.T.J., 127 Aug., 1892.

59. Ibid., 3 Sept., 1892.

".... I think it the duty of every citizen of this country, if he has the power of in any way contributing to relieve the difficulties that are existing among the industrial classes now, to do his best to render that assistance. There is no doubt a great problem that has been growing, and is growing, and will continue to grow, which springs probably from the national growth and increase of our population. Every year the addition to the population of this country is so great in the natural growth that the power of obtaining occupation by the different industrial classes is increasing in difficulty, and will have to be dealt with no doubt by what we call artificial assistance. The problem arising from the growth of population is also no doubt rendered more difficult by the immigration of foreigners into this country, and these two facts put together do present, as I have said, a problem which we have great difficulty in solving. Unfortunately, at the present time that problem is intensified by the fact that trade has a great many difficulties thrown in its way. They proceed from causes which members of the public know as well as we do; the depreciation in the price of silver affects many trades The closing of many markets, such as the South American markets, which are closed through the financial catastrophes that have occurred, and the artificial closing of markets effected by what we call the McKinley tariffs - all these are causes which have produced, not in the trade we have to deal with but in other trades, a great depression. Well, we must take these things to mind, and if we are to meet these difficulties and prevent foreign competition driving trade away from this country, those difficulties must be encountered by mutual concession on the part of those two bodies that form the industrial interest of this country"⁶⁰

This was a moderate economic statement which gave the unions some hope that the arbitration decisions of this man might be less partial than those of his predecessors. Problems were to be overcome by mutual concession, not by throwing trade unionists, alone, upon the dubious mercies of the market. Inskic, and the radical Liberal leadership of the National Union, could have found little with which to disagree in this philosophy, but for how long could it prevail against the build up of economic pressures that encouraged the arbitrary imposition of self-interest?

60. ibid.: 27 Aug, 1892.

IV. The erosion of conciliatory authority.

In London, the lock-out crisis had served to exacerbate industrial relations that were already strained by the sweaters' frequent violations of the minimum statement. Votier's criticisms of the employers' breach of local agreements in order to support the Federation found widespread sympathy. Freak, too, contrasted the employers' condemnations of the Green's strikers for breaking the local rules, the previous year, with their own willingness to do so.⁶¹ Votier pressed for guarantees concerning the future behaviour of the employers. They were not forthcoming.

The S.L.R. added to the employers' embarrassment by stating their dilemma with its customary bluntness. The 1890 London agreement required three months notice of a lock-out, but the founding of the Federation had fundamentally changed matters. In order to be able to support the Federation's decisions, unhindered, the Association should renounce the 1890 agreement.⁶² The fact that the employers' representatives on the Board avoided debate over the issue indicated their awareness of the contradiction under which they were operating.⁶³ Votier's frustration with this behaviour contributed to his resignation from the Board, but he had, also become disillusioned with its ability to control the sweaters.⁶⁴ In addition, he had been elected to the Council of the National Union for the No. 2 District, which covered the London and East Anglia areas,⁶⁵ and he may have felt that regular trips to and from Leicester would prevent him devoting sufficient time to Board work. Bob Quick was appointed to replace him until elections could be held.⁶⁶

Votier's disillusionment with the Board eventually led him to campaign for the ending of arbitration in London. In the shorter term, he concentrated upon

61. Ibid.: 9 July, 1892.

62. S.L.R.: 29 July, 1892.

63. See the Board meeting of 25 July when Votier raised the matter for the second time in three meetings and several employers did their utmost to avoid discussing it.

64. B.S.T.J.: 3 Sept., 1892.

65. B.S.T.J.: Aug., 1892. Votier defeated J. Mason (Norwich) and L.S. Levy (London City) for the Council place.

66. S.L.R.: 2 Sept., 1892.

the inability of the Board to control the sweaters. Three examples will suffice to illustrate the gravity of the situation by the end of 1892.

The first concerns union accusations that factors who were members of the Association were buying in goods from sweaters who were defying the Board. The employers' representatives simply denied that it was happening, and despite protests from the trade unionists, nothing was done.⁶⁷

The second concerns the behaviour of one of the employers on the Board, A. Salomon. In November of 1892 he unilaterally sacked 36 bootmakers with whom he was in dispute, refused to accept Votier as investigator on behalf of the Board,⁶⁸ unsuccessfully attempted to prosecute one of the dismissed workers for picketing,⁶⁹ and then resigned from the Board rather than allow his former employees an equal hearing.⁷⁰ The unsavoury affair destroyed confidence in the Board's authority, and Salomon had demonstrated that he was unconcerned about the prospect of operating in defiance of it.

Thirdly, we may take the dispute that broke out at Greenwood's of London Fields in the autumn of 1892.⁷¹ In October, massive demonstrations of 500 or more people were parading past the homes of the strike breakers, and one of the leaders was bound over to keep the peace for six months.⁷² The strike and demonstrations continued into February of 1893 when Greenwood prosecuted another group of demonstrators.⁷³ There are two points worth making, here. Firstly, manufacturers such as Greenwood seemed to be able to continue working quite successfully in defiance of the Board and trade unions for long periods of time. Secondly, this fact engendered considerable militancy among the rank and file bootmakers which was directed at the Board.

67. B.S.T.J.: 22 Oct., 1892.

68. Ibid.: 19 Nov., 1892.

69. S.L.R.: 16 Nov., 1892.

70. B.S.T.J.: 10 Dec., 1892.

71. The precise date and cause are uncertain.

72. S.L.R.: 21 Oct., 1892.

73. Hackney and Kingsland Gazette: 13 Feb., 1893.

The new Board's authority had been eroded remarkably quickly for, at the end of 1892, it was barely a year old. The explanation must lie, primarily, in worsening economic circumstances. In November, 1892 a dearth of orders was reported in the East End where under-employment was so serious that goods for the spring season had begun to be made three to four months in advance.⁷⁴ There was no improvement in December, for Christmas was always a slack time. Then, one opinion ventured was that:

"We have at length reached the end of a year which, by common consent, has been one of the most trying years for the shoe and leather trades within recent experience."⁷⁵

A further indicator of the severity of the recession is the pattern of trade union membership. Between January and December of 1892 only the London South branch, of the four London branches of the National Union, managed to prevent a catastrophic decline in membership.⁷⁶ Furthermore, 205 members had been scratched from London Metro. in November, 1892, a figure exceeded only by February, 1892 (252) for the two years of 1891 and 1892.⁷⁷ Almost all of these would have been bootmakers unable to maintain their subscriptions due to unemployment. London Metro. made available a special fund of £200 to relieve unemployed members, out of which loans of up to 10s. per week were given.⁷⁸ In such circumstances employers could pick and choose from a surplus labour supply, and if trade unions fought any battles it was wiser to do it among themselves.

74. B.S.T.J.: 12 and 19 Nov., 1892.

75. S.L.R.: 30 Dec., 1892.

76. London Metro. declined from 3,356 in Jan. to 2,631 in Dec., London East from 209 to 146, London City from 171 to 134, London South from 466 to 464. Even the last figures conceal the fact that London South's membership figures had risen to 509 in May, before declining. (M.R.: Jan. - Dec., 1892).

77. M.R.: Jan., 1891 - Dec., 1892.

78. B.S.T.J.: 24 Dec., 1892. A similar arrangement was adopted in Leicester where loans totalling £1,300 were made available. These included a £1,150 grant from central Union funds. Such relief was made necessary by the fact that there were 700 shoemakers totally unemployed and another 400 partially in December, 1892. (B.S.T.J.: 17 Dec., 1892).

V. London's rejection of arbitration and conciliation.

Many non-statement manufacturers had responded to falling profit margins by ignoring the uniform statement and reducing piece-rates. This solution was not open to statement manufacturers, however, for they had a more skilled, and better organised, labour force to deal with. Thus, it was through the official channels of communication that the Union received a request from the second class employers to make work below their statement. They argued that intermediate manufacturers often made work of a similar quality and, if they were to remain competitive, second class employers must be allowed access to this market.⁷⁹ It was a familiar argument which held much water, and the logic of it suggested the complete replacement of the existing statement system by a uniform statement to which all manufacturers could work. This was the statement worker's nightmare and he was hardly likely to accept it as union policy. As the S.L.R. put it, he would cling to his "paper fetish" even if its high prices, in fact, produced low average earnings.⁸⁰

"The second class London statement is no more suited to the requirements of the London shoe trade of today than any statement of piecework prices which might have been written in hieroglyphics at the time of the Pharaohs."⁸¹

A mass meeting, to consider the second class manufacturers' request, was called for the 26th January, 1893 at the Shoreditch Town Hall. Inskip, anxious to monitor the progress of the new unionists, attended but did not speak. Freak made a rather expedient, uncommitted speech which passed the decision over to the meeting with no recommendation. It is probable that the massed ranks of the statement workers dissuaded him from publicly advocating his preference for a uniform statement. His abdication left the way open for Votier to dominate the proceedings.

79. B.S.T.J.: 24 Dec., 1892.

80. S.L.R.: 16 Dec., 1892.

81. Ibid.: 3 Feb., 1893.

Votier's steadfast opposition to the employers' request was based upon the assumption that to concur would mark the beginning of a slippery, downwards slope along which piece-rates would be eroded. Instead, he suggested that the twenty to thirty third class manufacturers who were, currently, making goods comparable to the second class receive their rightful dues and be levelled upwards. Such a revision would make the second class manufacturers more competitive while benefiting third class bootmakers' piece-rates. It was an offensive strategy which, however popular, was unlikely to succeed in depressed economic conditions. But, the full blast of Votier's angry rhetoric made it appear more attainable in the heat of the moment:

"Englishmen were compelled to walk the streets whilst foreigners worked at any price. Though they had dispensed with the sweating system to a great extent, they had allowed the employer to become the sweeter, and his profits had increased."⁸²

This last assertion was untrue, but it sounded impressive within the argument and it got the resolution passed without a dissident. Deafening cheering followed for over a minute. Since leaving the compromising abode of the arbitration board, Votier had clearly determined upon retrieving as much of his old support as possible.

But, the product of vox populi's return to the fold appalled other observers. The S.L.R. commented upon the events at Shoreditch with an air of stunned disbelief that belied the fact that the result was much as expected:

"They (the second class manufacturers) ask to be relieved of their fetters, and for reply they are told that the Union will impose the same fetters upon other people so as to make the competition equal! This is the kind of logic which seems to find favour in the councils of British workmen. It is enough to make one despair for the future of one's country."⁸³

But, far worse was to come.

82. B.S.T.J.: 4 Feb., 1893.

83. S.L.R.: 3 Feb., 1893.

At a branch meeting in the first week of January, Votier had formally proposed that the London Metropolitan branch withdraw from the arbitration board.⁸⁴ All the other London branches of the National Union, and the City branch of the Amalgamated, followed this initiative and balloted their memberships. The polls produced a majority in favour of withdrawal. The results are presented below and provide a clear indication of where the opposition to arbitration was strongest.

Table II: Ballot of London unions on arbitration (Jan. 1893).

<u>Branch</u>	<u>Total Membership (January, 1893)</u>	<u>For Arbitration</u>	<u>%age of member- ship</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>%age of member- ship</u>
London Metro.)	2,891	233	8.06	489	16.91
Croydon*)					
St. Albans*)					
London East	149	38	25.50	5	3.36
London City	131	52	39.69	12	9.16
London South	452	88	19.47	67	14.82
City Women's (Amalgtd)	700	17	2.43	105	15.00
<u>Totals</u>	<u>4,323</u>	<u>455</u>	<u>10.53</u>	<u>716</u>	<u>16.63</u>

*Affiliates of London Metro.

Sources: S.L.R.: 10 Feb., 1893 and M.R.: Jan., 1893.

It can be seen that the branches most strongly opposed to arbitration were the largest ones: London Metro. and the City branch of the Amalgamated. London South was fairly evenly divided, but the two Jewish branches were firmly in favour of retaining the Board. But, the most significant factor was to be the 73% of all unionised bootmakers who did not vote. Both the Council of the National Union and the trade press were to exploit this to the full.

The high percentage of abstentions prevents the drawing of any firm conclusions, but a few tentative speculations can be offered. A first question might enquire as to who circulated the ballot papers? Inefficiency in this respect might account for the poor turn-out, but, on the other hand, this had never been high for similarly important votes. The Council, however, were prepared to use it as an excuse for refusing the result. Secondly, the strong

84. B.S.T.J.: 14 Jan., 1893.

support for arbitration among the Jewish branches is important. It dispels the idea that the finishers in the East branch were supporters of the new unionists. A few undoubtedly were, but the majority seem to have taken the advice of L.S. Levy, the City branch secretary, that arbitration was the best means of defending workshops. Neither does the behaviour of the old master sweetsters in the London City branch suggest that they were wreckers, anxious to bring down the Board, the 1890 settlement, and all in order to get back to their sweatshops. They had probably abandoned any hope of this by 1893 for, as Votier had said, sweating was now being performed by the employer in the workshop. Violating the statement and day wages were just a couple of tactics being adopted for this purpose.

The votes of 719 London bootmakers reverberated through the industry's factories and workshops, for it was widely appreciated that their decision to reject arbitration could precipitate a national lock-out. The days when such conflicts could be contained at a local level were long past. If a major centre such as London declared against arbitration, then it became a matter for negotiation at the highest level.

The B.S.T.J. was convinced that it knew who the culprits were. In a strident and pedantic polemic against the new unionists it accused the trade unionists of only being prepared to participate in arbitration and conciliation when it worked in their favour. It continued:

"But it has long been evident to ordinary observers on the Board, as well as to many outside, that there was an element in its constitution which entertained such a socialistic, or rather an unsocialistic, tendency, as to deny the right of any employer or capitalist a voice in his own business or in matters which concerned his welfare. This portion of the Board seemed possessed of an idea that the workmen alone were entitled to any of the benefits arising out of the conduct of a business, and that it was the sole duty of the capitalists to exist for the convenience and comfort of the working classes. These ideas, unfortunately so fascinating to the artisan classes, appeared to have spread amongst a very large

section of the Metropolitan shoemakers, who, failing to get their own way always on the Board favoured a proposition which was made to the effect that the men's side should withdraw from the Board for the simple reason that their way was not always the way of the other side."⁸⁵

This is, of course, less than fair to the new unionist case. By the time that Votier resigned from the Board, violations of the minimum statement were so frequent that it had become practically worthless as a defence. Yet, he had still been prepared to salvage something from it, until the threat of a national lock-out in the summer of 1892. From that time he considered himself to be participating in a farcical process. What was the point of sitting on a Board stripped of its authority, and which could be instantly suspended by the decision of the Federation? He was convinced that the non-statement bootmaker could gain nothing from such an arrangement. Rather than perpetuate the deception that the Board was still important, Votier decided to force the issue. Withdrawal would create a national crisis, thus illustrating the powerlessness of local boards, and the matter would have to be resolved at a national level. Power at this level was, therefore, essential, and this must have been Votier's reason for standing for the Council, to which he was elected in August, 1892. Once there, there can be no doubt, from some of the comments Inskip made about him, that he proved a constant thorn in the side through opposing moderate policies. It is probable that Votier had come round to the view that, because arbitration and conciliation had failed to settle the pressing issues, direct action was the bootmaker's only alternative. In the new circumstances of national collective bargaining, this was bound to result in a national lock-out. But, if the Union were to win such a struggle, then industrial power would be re-distributed much more favourably than arbitration could ever offer. There is a good deal of hypothesis involved in this, but in the absence of any clearer statements of strategic intent from the new unionists, it is one that could explain their behaviour in the early months of 1893. Furthermore, although it is somewhat

85. *Ibid.*; 25 Feb., 1893.

apocalyptic, it was by no means as irrational as sources such as the B.S.T.J. would have us believe.

51. The Council's counter-offensive.

After the withdrawal vote, O'Grady wrote to Craig giving the official three months' notice required by the local rules.⁸⁶ But, the Council of the National Union could not let matters rest there and, quoting the low poll in London, they declared their intention to call a further meeting of the London members to have the decision re-considered.⁸⁷ For the employers, Lilley had already stated his belief that the withdrawal was illegal, and W.C. Clark thought that some manufacturers would retaliate by withdrawing workshops.⁸⁸ So, the boot and shoemakers of London gathered again at the Shoreditch Town Hall, for the second time in six weeks, to hear from their executive council why the decision to abolish the arbitration board was unacceptable. Unexpectedly, that case was never put, because somebody turned the lights out!

The new unionists in the meeting were clearly aggrieved that it had been called at all, for they saw it as an executive manoeuvre to overturn a democratically taken decision. Immediately, they contested Judge's right to chair the meeting which would violate the London tradition of electing a chairman from the floor. (Judge, as President of the Union, was substituting for the indisposed Inskip). After trying, for a few minutes, to make himself heard above a beautifully orchestrated, deafening din, he declared the meeting closed. As few showed any sign of going home, the hall-keeper was summoned to the platform and instructed to turn the lights out. As the gas-lights dimmed, Judge repeated in his most sonorous tone that the meeting was most certainly closed, and the officials made their way from the platform.

The darkness failed to dim the enthusiasm of the new unionist leaders, who mounted the vacated platform and continued to hold their own meeting. After ten minutes, Freak returned, alone, to inform them that the lights would be turned

86. ibid.

87. B.S.T.J. Feb., 1893.

88. B.S.T.J. 4 March, 1893.

on for a further half-hour for them 'to talk among themselves'. This provoked a reminder that the room was paid for until eleven o'clock. He did not dispute the point, but merely asked them to leave in an orderly fashion.

Through the speakers at this unofficial meeting it is possible to identify the new unionist leaders who, now, led the opposition to the Council. Tom Dunn took the chair and Jewers and Fred Morrison joined him in criticising the Council. Smith moved a formal motion, which stung the Council badly, disapproving of their refusal to accept a chairman from the hall. Gliddon wondered whether they would have been so keen on a second vote if the issue had been a salary rise of one of the officials. Adams, also, felt that the Council were in need of a reminder that they were servants, not masters. Fenton, a member of the London Metro. executive, claimed to have seen the plans for the meeting at the Union offices, earlier in the day. He said that the Council had planned to take a show of hands first, then, if this failed to win a majority for arbitration, to organise another ballot immediately.⁸⁸ He, also, spoke in favour of state intervention to force employers to abide by arbitration awards.⁹⁰

The following evening, the Council 'crossed the water' to address the South London branch in York Street, Walworth. All the Council members present, except Votier, spoke in favour of arbitration, many citing the benefits gained from particular areas around the country. Votier took issue with Judge's view that the formation of a Board had led, directly, to an increase in union membership. Rather, he argued, it was indoor working that had made the boot-maker easier to organise. He failed to recall, however, that indoor working had been bought at the price of arbitration in the 1890 settlement. He criticised the Council for reversing the view that any local branch could withdraw from arbitration if they became dissatisfied with it. He, also, criticised James'

89. S.L.R.: 17 March, 1893.

90. S.S.T.J.: 18 March, 1893.

arbitration awards as being in opposition to the Union. In his rejection of arbitration, he was supported by E. Hovey, who had led the second class statement workers' campaign against the minimum statement of 1884. That co-incidence of interests between the new unionists and the second class statement workers, previously noted in 1890, had manifested itself, again.

This coalition of interests was successful in defeating the Council's motion in support of arbitration. Judge complained that only half of those present had voted (there were some 200 present), but before ballot papers could be given out the meeting dispersed, "without giving the usual votes of thanks."⁹¹ This frustrated ploy, on the part of the Council, lends weight to Fenton's claims of the previous night. The S.L.R. was convinced that the South London vote had been produced by "the howling lunacy" of the Shoreditch example, and asked "is mobocracy to triumph?" It predicted that a final struggle for supremacy would, now, take place within the National Union.⁹²

The venue for that struggle, although it was not to prove the final one, was Leicester, for it was there, on 17 April, that a Special Delegates Conference was called to decide the future of arbitration. The Council had little option but to move quickly as the employers pressed for action to be taken over the events in London.⁹³ Council members lauded the merits of arbitration wherever they spoke around the country, but a threat from Leicester shoemakers to withdraw from their Board undermined their efforts, somewhat.⁹⁴ In London, Freak's defence of arbitration was hardly strengthened by his revelation that Barnes, a Board member, was violating the 54-hour week rule in respect of his clickers.⁹⁵ But, at the same time, the Council was attempting to shift the blame for the breakdown of arbitration in London onto the new unionists, whom they accused of failing to defend the interests of the membership when they were elected to the Boards

91. Ibid.

92. S.L.R.: 17 March, 1893.

93. For example, J. Griffin Ward, President of the federation, wrote to Inskip on 13 March, four days after the Shoreditch debacle, asking for clarification (B.S.L.U.: 25 March, 1893).

94. B.S.L.U.: 25 March, 1893.

95. Ibid.: 1 April, 1893.

"We cannot too much impress upon members the necessity of appointing the best men of their Branch, irrespective of whether they work at one particular shop, or belong to any particular party."⁹⁶

The Leicester Conference, which began on 17 April and lasted for four days, proved a crushing defeat for the anti-arbitrationists. Dunn admitted later that they would have had a better chance if a vote of the whole Union had been taken. As it was, the 83 delegates elected from prominent officials in the branches came down, overwhelmingly, in favour of the Council's position.⁹⁷ Of the other London delegates, Ingham and Kemp opposed arbitration, along with Votier, who was present by virtue of being a Council member; while Rawlings, from South London, supported it. Freak had refused to be delegated as he refused to speak against arbitration.

The conference was riven with dissension throughout, some of which was actually within the London anti-arbitrationist camp. Votier condemned the conduct of the anti-arbitrationists at the recent Shoreditch meeting "as something which would be a disgrace to Hottentots and Zulus."⁹⁸ He was no kinder to his fellow Council members, whom he attacked for inviting the Mayor of Leicester and J. Griffin Ward to defend arbitration. He went on to accuse certain other delegates of being too drunk to perform their duty as tellers. Against Inskip's recommendation, he won a vote to collect money for the Hull dockers whose employers, he said, were trying to destroy their union. A vote of the National Union was to be taken on whether a contribution of £100 should be made to the dockers' cause.

Inskip was not a man to take all this lying down. At the heart of the London anti-arbitrationist movement he detected a nefarious conspiracy that had to be rooted out:

96. M.R.: April, 1893.

97. They decided by 74-9 that London's withdrawal from arbitration was illegal because it contravened the conditions of the national agreement. The 9 anti-arbitrationists were: W. Votier, T. Dunn, R. Ingham, M. Kemp (all London Metro.), T.F. Richards, E. Clarkesed, J.E. Barnes (all Leicester), R.W. Crew (Leeds), J. Bland (Northampton).

98. M.R.: April, 1893. The remark is interesting, also, because it shows that Votier's racism extended beyond the Jews.

"Plain speak was necessary at times, and he was bound to say that he believed amongst those who were fighting against Arbitration was a large number who were hoping for its abolition, so that they could go back and work in their slums."

The implication was that Votier was culpable because of his leadership of such a movement, and ought to face up to the possible consequences of his actions.

Inskip, then, spelt it out, so as to leave no-one in doubt:

"They had a most inconsistent member in Mr. Votier, who yet in other things had rendered material assistance. He hoped that Mr. Votier would, before that discussion closed, make it plain to the Conference what his future position was going to be. A man who sat on the Council month after month and opposed the policy which was adopted by the other seven members, needed to explain his conduct. He should either acquiesce in their policy or do the next best thing stand aside"

Votier counter-attacked at the Council's most sensitive point: intra-union democracy. He was trying to defend the rebellious image portrayed by Inskip by implying that any socialist worth his salt would oppose an unaccountable executive. He criticised the way in which the National Conference had been set up by decision of the Union conference, not by the vote of the membership. Union representatives to the National Conference were not even elected, but appointed by the Council (Votier, himself, had not been one of the chosen few). In defending his opposition to the London Arbitration Board, he reflected Inskip's attack from the sweating worker onto the sweating employer:

"One of the reasons why he was opposed to the present system of Arbitration Boards was because on the London Board they had, with one or two exceptions, the scum of London, who were never prepared to concede anything whether it was just or not."

These remarks show that, despite the addition to the Board of Thomas Lilley and one or two others, the sweaters still determined what was acceptable. While the statement employers remained beyond the arbitration and conciliation procedures, it was likely to remain so. Votier had clearly had quite enough of

horse-trading with 'the scum', and so had Ingham. He argued that it was impossible to apply arbitration to the third class manufacturers. They lived by screwing down Jew and Gentile, alike, and if they disagreed with the Board's decisions, they simply ignored them and withdrew.

Judge accused Ingham of missing the point: arbitration was nationally binding.⁹⁹ In debate it became apparent that, if the London branches did not accept this, then their only alternative was secession. Fox is wrong to leave the impression that this was the solution that Votier sought, if his position was defeated.¹⁰⁰ A few threats of secession were made in the heat of debate, but Votier's statement on the final day, made in reply to Inskip's challenge, clearly lays out his position. He said that he would abide by the democratic decision of the conference, but, if arbitration was accepted, he would put himself up for re-election. The result of an arbitration policy might be London's secession, but he would, personally, oppose that. He denied accusations that the opponents of arbitration wanted to break up the Union, they were merely trying to change its policy.

On that note, the massive vote in favour of arbitration was taken. Earlier in the conference, resolutions condemning the behaviour of the anti-arbitrationists at Sporeditch, and erasing their motion of censure against Judge,¹⁰¹ had both been passed by equally large majorities. This had put the writing on the wall for the new unionists. Now, their resounding defeat was complete. Whatever the feelings of the London rank and file, the decision of the Delegate Conference carried the official seal of authority. It hung round the necks of the London delegates like an albatross as they boarded the train for home.¹⁰²

The final scene of the London revolt against arbitration was enacted at the Mile End Assembly Hall on the last day of May, 1893, some five weeks after the

99. He meant that the rules of the National Conference now overruled any previous local agreements.

100. Fox, *History of N.U.B.S.O.* p.179.

101. For not allowing a chairman to be elected from the floor.

102. *B.S.O.* 22 and 29 April, 1893. *S.L.S.* 21 and 28 April, 1893.

P.R. 1 April, 1893.

Delegate Meeting. The Council's reception was almost as cold as it had been in March, but, at least on this occasion, the meeting was completed.

It was to be expected that the Council would receive a rough ride, but, so too did Votier. He was forced into condemning the bad behaviour that almost brought the meeting to an end before he had spoken. He then advised the meeting to accept the Delegate Conference's decision, whether they supported it or not, exactly as he had told that Conference he would do. His recommendation was greeted with shouts of, "Halloa, another one sold us."¹⁰³ But, he was exceeded in unpopularity by Rawlings who was accused of being in league with the General Secretary for supporting arbitration.

Jewers related the issue under discussion to the socialist political analysis of the new unionists. He argued that "as employers endeavoured to obtain as much work as possible for the minimum cost, and the men tried to get as much as possible for the work, it was impossible for employers and men to work amicably together." It was not noted how this view was received. Dunn criticised the composition of the delegates to the Special Conference, of which he was one. It was packed, he said, with branch secretaries and representatives to boards who often did not have to work under the decisions which they were responsible for taking. That was why he favoured a vote of all those who had to work under arbitration. In an attempt to discredit him, the B.S.T.U. pointed out that, as he was a statement worker, this would leave him without a vote. "It would be better if first and second class men allowed the men working under arbitration to conduct their own business."¹⁰⁴ The implication was that Dunn was a wrecker who was out to destroy arbitration in order to preserve the first and second class statements. All the evidence presented here runs contrary to this interpretation. It suggests that Dunn was a socialist who opposed arbitration from the standpoint of the class incompatibility which Jewers had expressed.

103. M.B. 1 May, 1893.

104. B.S.T.U. 10 June, 1893.

He was forced to shoulder the burden of being a good enough bootmaker to work in a statement shop.

When the vote of the meeting went against acceptance of the Delegate Conference's decision, Inskip was brought to pronounce excommunication upon the dissidents. The London branches would continue in their existing form and membership was open to all who were prepared to accept arbitration. Others "must take a course of their own." The fury of the long suffering non-statement worker was hurled at Inskip, and many bootmakers shouted out the names of employers who needed managers. Just the week before, Judge, the abused of Shore-ditch, had accepted a post with the Union Machinery Co. in Leicester.¹⁰⁵ But, to their credit, they left the hall in an orderly manner.

As the new unionists filed away from the Mile End Assembly Hall they must have reflected, in their desperate disappointment, what had brought them to this pass. Had they not won two majorities in five months against a continuance of arbitration? If so, then it had not been enough. In calling a Special Delegate Meeting, the Council had played its trump card for its residue of support lay in the local branch officers. In the small shoemaking communities of the East Midlands the pace of political change was much slower, and they remained unaffected by the new unionism. To change the binding nature of the Delegate Conference decision, the new unionists would have had to change the Union rules, and this required much more influence than they possessed at Executive level. Only Votier represented them on the Council, and they had not given him the support he deserved. Impatient at the lack of immediate results, his fellow ideologues in London had been too quick to define unavoidable compromise as class betrayal. Given the balance of forces, the struggle the new unionists had embarked upon was enormously difficult, but their chance of success was impaired by their failure to co-ordinate strategy.

¹⁰⁵. S.L.R.: 26 May, 1893.

The Council's re-imposition of arbitration set-back the London new unionists, but it did nothing to actually solve the problems that bedevilled the industry. It convinced nobody that the realisation of the 1890 settlement (of indoor working and a minimum statement) was any nearer. For two years between 1891-93 the Council and the London Metro. executive had kept the balloon of conciliatory authority in the air against all the odds. The capacity of any pressure group, such as the London new unionists, to determine the direction of local industrial relations was waning for other reasons, too. The national organisation of employers, which had resulted in the National Conference, had the effect of dragging all significant local disputes onto centre-stage, from where they were amplified across the industry. The National Union possessed the organisation to cope with such politics. If the new unionists wished to change the nature of its response to the employers, they would have to mount a challenge at national level that was backed by widespread support from the localities. The ill-co-ordinated parochialism displayed by the London new unionists down to 1893 did not suggest they were capable of this.

CHAPTER NINETHE COLLAPSE OF COLLECTIVE BARGAININGI. Patterns of conflict

After the apparent resolution of the arbitration crisis in London, boot and shoemakers enjoyed only six weeks of comparative tranquillity before a dispute in Bristol threatened a national lock-out for the second time in a year. In their Bristol firm of J. Smith, Lilley and Skinner had introduced the team-system on hand-work, paying the workers day rates. National Union policy was to accept day, or weekly, wages only for machine work. Inskip was sure that Lilley had introduced the change as a means of economy in the face of recession.¹ When the Union withdrew their members from Smith's, the Federation replied by calling a national lock-out from 22 July. At this point Sir Thomas Wright, the President of the National Conference, intervened to declare both sides in violation of the arbitration rules, and he ordered a return to work and a withdrawal of the lock-out notice. Both sides were content for the matter to go to arbitration.²

The issue disputed at Bristol in 1893 was not eventually resolved until the employers withdrew the team-system on hand-work in February, 1894. It should not have proved so cataclysmic for, as Fox has shown, the introduction of the team-system on hand-work almost always anticipated its use on machine-work.³ The episode served to emphasise the centralization of collective bargaining within the industry and the precariousness of the peace. Furthermore, in London, the affair had done nothing to enhance Thomas Lilley's standing with the unions as chairman of the Arbitration Board.⁴

The Board, itself, retreated into the looming shadow of recession during the second half of 1893. Held in abeyance during the arbitration crisis, it met for the first time in five months on 11 September, and then, on only five more occasions before the end of the year. Such reluctance to meet merely reflected

1. S.L.R.: 21 July, 1893.

2. B.S.F.J.: 22 July, 1893.

3. Fox, History of W.U.B.S.O., p.205.

4. S.L.R.: 21 July, 1893. Speaking in Bristol, on 17 July, Inskip expressed the view that Lilley's behaviour, there, contradicted his position in London.

the fact that it had lost confidence in its own authority.⁵

At the same time, unemployment in the London trade was growing. In September, London Metro. was obliged to issue a set of firm instructions designed to protect the membership, as far as possible, from the recession. They are presented below.

1. No man to work more than 54 hours per week. (To prevent overtime at a time of high unemployment).
2. No man to work other than on his employer's premises.
3. No day-worker or finisher to work for less than 30s. per week.
4. No day worker on wetted work to work for less than 35s. per week.
5. No piece-worker to work for less than the minimum statement.
6. No direct reductions to be submitted to under any circumstances.

From this, it is evident that the recession, and particularly the high level of unemployment, posed a serious threat to existing wage structures. Between July, 1893 and February, 1894, membership of the London Metro. branch declined from 2,72 to 2,492. During the latter month, 10 members were scratched because they had run into arrears,⁷ and the membership was the lowest that it had been since March, 1890.⁸ In September, 1893 Jowers led an unemployment demonstration to the Lord Mayor of London's chambers, where he claimed that the families of 5,000 unemployed boot and shoemakers, including his own, were faced with starvation. The figure was an exaggeration, as was his threat to commit suicide if he did not find work soon,⁹ but the episode further emphasises the gravity of the situation. The Council of the National Union were under pressure to respond and, in November, they had gone to great pains to explain why unemployment benefit could not be given to members as of right. Most importantly, existing funds would only have provided a pittance for each unemployed member, and

5. Its growing indecisiveness is best shown by the example of the 4 December meeting when 19 out of the 21 samples of work to be classified were sent to the arbitrator. (S.L.R.: 8 Dec., 1893).

6. S.L.R.: Sept., 1893.

7. *Ibid.*: July, 1893 - Feb., 1894.

8. *Ibid.*: March, 1890 - Feb., 1894.

9. S.L.R.: 29 Sept., 1893.

finances had to be preserved in the event of a national strike or lock-out occurring in the near future.¹⁰

Workers were not the only victims of the recession which accounted, also, for several sweating manufacturers. In December, 1893 the firm of A. Salomon was in the hands of the Official Receiver after fraudulently attempting to avoid payment of its creditors.¹¹ Salomon was a former member of the Board. In March, 1894 the firm of A.J. Lion was suspended after incurring debts of £10,000.¹² It was allowed to continue trading after paying creditors a settlement of 6s. in the pound.¹³ Their difficulties were attributed to indoor working, and to the minimum statement making it more difficult for them to compete in the common market. But, it was also noted that Lion's had been slow in re-organising their factory to allow for the introduction of machinery.¹⁴

It seems that, from the early 1890s, an increasing number of London manufacturers were introducing machinery. For a long time they had behaved more conservatively than their provincial rivals, but, after the workshop settlement of 1890 and the upsurge in labour militancy, it is likely that the larger capitalists led the way. It is impossible to know, from the sources available, how extensive such innovations were, but the growing concern of trade unionists and the growing interest of the trade press indicate that machinery was becoming a major issue by the end of 1894.¹⁵ For example, by February, 1894, a minimum wage of 30s. per week for lasters and finishers working on machinery was being discussed at Board level.¹⁶

Sweaters, with their preference for cheap, unskilled labour, were the most reluctant to incur the costs of mechanisation. The S.L.B. suggested that, by extinguishing the sweater, machinery might prove the guarantor of indoor workings

10. M.B.: Nov., 1893.

11. S.L.B.: 13 Oct. and 15 Dec., 1893.

12. ibid.: 6 April, 1894.

13. ibid.: 27 April, 1894.

14. ibid.: 23 March, 1894.

15. See Freak's remarks about the introduction of machinery at the Board meeting of 18 Dec., 1893 (B.S.T.J.: 23 Dec., 1893). Also, London Metro.'s instructions to members, above, indicate that machine workers on day wages were an important component of the membership.

16. B.S.T.J.: 17 Feb., 1894.

In the course of two or three years the working of the new machinery will be so improved and accelerated that those who employ it may, and we believe will, be able to defy the competition of those who employ foreigners working at their own houses, slave as they may. But we have not quite reached that stage of development.¹⁷

The London new unionists had been at the forefront of the agitation to secure maximum benefits for the workers from machinery. It was they, too, who were most strongly opposed to overtime and who led the campaign to have the 54 hour week fully implemented. But, Freak was, also, in the vanguard on this issue. He intensely disliked the scramble for work that took place during the busy season and entertained the rather simple hope that a 54 hour week would help spread employment more evenly over the year. He had said as much at the National Conference in February, 1894.¹⁸ For their part, the employers were beginning to regret their acceptance of the 54 hour week (at the National Conference, August 1892). They had assumed that averaging would take place throughout the year, and they had not envisaged that branches such as London Metro. would attempt to ban all overtime during the busy seasons.

At the National Union's Conference in May, 1894, however, London Metro. had the initiative seized from them by a Leicester delegate¹⁹ who successfully proposed an eight hour day (48 hour week) resolution. This was, later, consolidated by a London Metro. resolution banning systematic overtime.²⁰ The branch's strong stand against overtime was caused by the persistence of sweating homework. Freak announced to a meeting in Spitalfields, in late April, that he had almost abandoned hope in the Jewish workmen.²¹ But, it was short-sighted to place the blame, there, when firms such as W. Weber were still fostering out-work. This is clear from cases such as the one brought by Lakeman, the Factory Inspector, against Henry Wilkes for employing two boys after 8 p.m. in less than

17. S.L.B.: 20 April, 1894.

18. B.S.T.J.: 10 Feb., 1894.

19. Roper.

20. B.S.T.J.: 26 May, 1894.

21. 1610: 5 May, 1894.

the required amount of space.²² Although the firm denied it,²³ Lakeman claimed that Wilkes was working for Weber's, and he said that he had brought the case to drive the trade out of such filthy holes and into workshops, where fairer wages ought to prevail. Relations between Lakeman and local trade unionists were good and they co-operated closely in their efforts to have the Factory Acts extended to cover small workshops.

A resolution from London Metro., which illustrated the broad acceptance of socialistic principles within the branch, provoked a debate of great political importance for the Union. The resolution based itself upon the official policy of the T.U.C. It read:

"That the Parliamentary agent must accept loyally the resolution carried at the Belfast Trade Union Congress declaring for the collective ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, and that this be placed on his programme."

The acceptance of Conference of this policy was a major step forward for the socialists, but they failed to have it combined with independent labour representation. Even Freak clung to co-operation with the Liberals. But, the acceptance of the socialist pledge did lead to the resignation of Inskip as the Parliamentary candidate,²⁴ a decision which the S.S.T.U. took as a further indicator of the Union's decline into extremism.²⁵

A third issue of crucial importance for the London branches was that of arbitration. In an obvious attempt to deter another revolt of the kind that had occurred in London in 1893, the Council proposed that, in future, any branch rejecting the authority of the local board should, automatically, be expelled from the Union. Freak, on behalf of the London delegates, argued that each branch should be free to decide its own policy towards arbitration. But, if the Council's proposal was accepted, then any expelled branch should be entitled to take a proportion of Union funds with it. Strong support was lent by delegates

22. The case was brought in May, 1894. Wilkes worked at 8, Sly St., St. George-in-the-East.

23. S.L.R. 1 June, 1894.

24. He was, eventually, replaced by Freak who was, therefore, prepared to stand as a Lib-Lab. on a socialist programme.

25. S.S.T.U. 2 June, 1894.

from Bristol who accused West of England manufacturers of frequently disregarding awards. The Leicester branch was, also, opposed to arbitration, and had recently petitioned the Council in favour of a ballot of the entire membership on whether it should be continued with.²⁶ The Conference felt that the Council's motion was too extreme, and defeated it by 32 votes to 15.

A fourth matter that concerned London was the sending of work away from the metropolis to the smaller, cheaper centres of production. H. Payne proposed that a national uniform statement be adopted as the remedy. Although an affirmative vote was recorded, the whole business had been largely perfunctory for, as Freak pointed out, this had been Union policy for the past twenty years.²⁷ It had remained an unrealisable ideal.

This has been an abridged discussion of the Conference because only those matters directly involving London have been selected. However, these almost always proved the most contentious. It is evident that the Council's victory over the London branches, in 1893, had not been consolidated, for their policy on arbitration was defeated. In addition, the carrying of the collective ownership resolution and the ban on overtime were both achieved against the better judgement of Inskip and the Liberals. Employers, and their advocates in the trade press, could take little comfort from what had transpired at Edinburgh in May, 1894.

The next National Conference, at Leicester in July, saw a further deterioration in industrial relations. Most of the important issues, including those concerning a national minimum statement, a minimum wage for Northampton machine workers, and the rate of payment for young men between the ages of 18 and 20, were referred to the umpire.²⁸

In the spring of 1894, the London trade emerged gradually from the recession of the winter. Branch membership was, at worst, maintained and, at best, slightly increased. The clickers' branch finally achieved its own, separate arbitration

26. Ibid.: 7 April, 1894.

27. Ibid.: 26 May, 1894.

28. Ibid.: 30 June, 1894.

board in February, to which they intended to present a clickers' and pressmen's statement. But, as the City branch pointed out, revival brought its own problems, for it "... has ushered in a multitude of small manufacturers, who are at present uncontrollable. These men are evidently the instruments of unscrupulous factors"²⁹ These factors were noted by Charles Fieck as one of the main causes of the persistence of sweating, for they were buying in cheap uppers from Germany, then giving them out to small, chamber masters.³⁰ A further problem was that the employers were, again, encouraging overtime, and the local branches had a hard struggle to prevent some members from being seduced.³¹ By mid-summer, however, it was clear that the improvement had not been maintained. London Metro.'s estimate was that the industry was operating at half capacity, and, again, the Jews were singled out for blame.³² But, if economic pressures forced many Jews to sweat, their unions were engaged in a permanent struggle for solidarity. In August, the London East branch pledged support for a uniform minimum wage,³³ and it was assisting other Jewish workers, such as the fur-workers and tailors, in strengthening their organisations.³⁴

11. The Freshwater's strike at St. Albans

It has been argued, here, that industrial relations had deteriorated to a very low point by the middle of 1894; and, elsewhere, that only the persistence and sense of mission of Sir Thomas Wright, as President of the National Conference, prevented their complete collapse.³⁵ The issues dividing the two sides have been discussed and the manner in which the employers and trade press blamed the new unionists for their inadaptability described. But, this is still some way from concluding that, by the autumn of 1894, the employers had decided that a national conflict was inevitable and that it only remained to choose the moment.³⁶ There is no evidence that the employers welcomed the dispute at St.

29. M.R.: Feb., 1894.

30. S.L.R.: 27 April, 1894.

31. M.R.: April, 1894. See London Metro. No. 2 branch's report.

32. *Ibid.*: July, 1894.

33. B.S.T.O.: 25 Aug., 1894.

34. *Ibid.*: 18 Aug., 1894.

35. *Fax, History of R.U.B.S.O.* p.218.

36. *Ibid.* p.217.

Albans rather as the Austrian autocracy did the crisis with Serbia in July of 1914. The Freshwater's dispute escalated, gradually, into a national crisis because it embodied points of principle over which both sides were prepared to fight. Thus, the view that, "It contained nothing remarkable or unusual,"³⁷ misses the point. It was not remarkable, nor unusual issues that were likely to cause a strike or lock-out, at this stage. Issues of long contention, however, could act as the last straw upon the camel's back. It was because the Freshwater's strike had the effect of crystallising such issues that it, ultimately, provided the catalyst of the 1895 lock-out.

Freshwater had been a London employer before removing to St. Albans. In the time that he had been in the latter city he had never had an established system of work. Initially, he had paid weekly wages to hand workers, and had, probably, only got away with this because the boot and shoemakers were so poorly organised. Eventually, as the St. Albans branch of the National Union grew, it negotiated a piece-work statement with the employer. Although he agreed to this, Freshwater made deductions for shop rent and grindery which, the Union claimed, could take as much as 7s. per week off a man's wage.³⁸ Such deductions had long been abolished in the organised London shops and, as St. Albans was affiliated to the London Metro. branch, unionists agitated for their removal, there. This caused the employer to replace some of the old hand workers with machinery. As it did not oppose the introduction of machinery, the Union could not object on that score. Instead, they soon fell into dispute over the weekly wages Freshwater was prepared to pay his machine workers. He offered 28s. per week, but the men held out for 30s.³⁹ The latter figure was the rate that the London clickers were claiming at arbitration (and which they were awarded in late September), and the London branches wanted it extended to all shoemakers.⁴⁰ In this way, the

37. ibid.

38. ibid.; April, 1894.

39. B.S.L.J.: 22 Sept., 1894. See the account of the origins of the dispute given by Votier to a mass meeting in St. Albans on 15 Sept.

40. S.L.R.: 28 Sept., 1894.

Freshwater's dispute became a test-case for wage rates on machine work, an issue on which the National Conference had failed to agree in June. But, in London, it was also seen as a struggle to force up general wage rates and, as we shall see, one to validate the authority of the London branches within a radius of twenty miles of the capital. The Union insisted upon the last point because of the increasing number of London manufacturers removing to smaller towns, such as St. Albans and Hemel Hempstead, to reduce labour costs. Freshwater, himself, had done just this.⁴¹

The lasters and finishers at Freshwater's were withdrawn on 20 August and the clickers a week later.⁴² The Union did not consider itself in violation of the arbitration rules as Freshwater was a member of the London Association 'for trade protection purposes only', a second class form of membership which did not bring him under the jurisdiction of the Board.⁴³ The Union argued that Freshwater claimed full membership of the Association and, thus, of the Federation, only after the strike had begun.⁴⁴ There then followed a long period of postal negotiation between Inskip and Ward, President of the Federation, which failed to resolve the issue of the legality of the strike. The matter was, thus, put to arbitration. The employers' case depended upon proving that Freshwater had been a member of the Association before the strike began. Wright seems to have decided early on that the Union was in error and ordered them to lift the strike; an instruction that was ignored.⁴⁵

The prolonged correspondence between Inskip and Ward was fully published in the trade press. It led, eventually, to the London Association producing evidence that satisfied the Union that Freshwater had joined, as a full member, on 19 June, some two months before the strike began. While it was obvious that he had availed himself of this extra protection in anticipation of a strike,

41. B.S.T.J.: 22 Sept., 1894.

42. Ibid.: 1 Sept., 1894.

43. Ibid.: 6 Oct., 1894.

44. M.B.: Sept., 1894.

45. B.S.T.J.: 6 Oct., 1894.

there was nothing illegal in this. The Union had been badly deceived by Freshwater, and this is best illustrated by the following extract from Inskip's letter to Ward, of 2nd October. It should be remembered that it was written at a time when Inskip still thought that the Union had a legitimate case:

".... a system prevailed at St. Albans when piecework was in vogue of deducting from 3s. to 5s. per week for shop rent, light and findings; this was naturally objected to by the men, and as he persisted in it, a strike ensued. No question was then raised about arbitration, but after the men had been out some time this obnoxious system was withdrawn; consequently machinery was introduced, he threatening this as a penalty for the men having succeeded in removing this stoppage. To obtain his purpose he locked the men out, or suspended them for three weeks; this was to make them more amenable to his proposed offer. When the men presented themselves for work a number were picked out, who, if they worked 54 hours, could easily earn £2 and more; they were offered 28s. per week of 54 hours. Mr. Freak had several interviews with him over this, as the 28s. was his maximum as well as his minimum, Mr. Freak telling him that the men would be withdrawn unless the 30s. was paid; still there was no word of arbitration or belonging to the Federation. This went on until he (Freshwater) positively refused to negotiate any further - mark, refused - and the men were withdrawn. He at once commenced to scour the country for scabs, in which effort for the moment he was successful;⁴⁶ still no word of arbitration. The scabs found the position too warm, and left him; then, after seven weeks' struggle he approached the question of arbitration simply and solely because he was beaten."⁴⁷

From this it can be seen that Inskip was convinced he was dealing with an unscrupulous employer, prepared to violate the agreed procedures of arbitration and conciliation when it suited him. Freshwater had succeeded in having it both ways: non-membership of the Association before his workers were organised, and then the benefits of membership at short notice when threatened. It is important to bear in mind the deception of which Inskip had been a victim when considering his behaviour in later negotiations. If he was "carefully confusing the issues

46. For example, a notorious 'agent of free labour' named Lawrence obtained 8 from Colchester, although the local branch claimed to have persuaded more than this not to go. (M.R. 1 Sept., 1894).

47. B.S.F.J.: 6 Oct., 1894.

like the master tactician he was,⁴⁸ then he was merely reciprocating a little of the duplicitous behaviour recently practised upon him.

Wright was called upon to arbitrate on the question of whether Freshwater was, or was not, a fully paid-up member of the Federation. He took the employers' contention that Freshwater had always been a full member, and that there had been no extra payment on 19 June, largely at face value. By that time, the Union had greatly over-stretched its case for it was arguing that, as the dispute was pending before 19 June, Freshwater's membership should not be accepted for the purposes of the current dispute.⁴⁹

But, Inskip was not prepared to send the Freshwater's men back because he considered Wright's decision to have shown partiality towards the employers. His tactic was to make a settlement of the Freshwater's dispute dependent upon resolving one at the firm of Earle in Kinsland Road, Hackney. There, the Union claimed that the employer had introduced certain extras into his work without paying for them.⁵⁰ The men had struck and Earle had released them with non-unionists.⁵¹ For good measure, Inskip threw in further complaints that employers at Roshden, Higham Ferrers, Ilthorpe and Birmingham were refusing to implement minimum wage agreements.

Inskip's refusal to honour the arbitration award deeply offended Wright's sense of equality. The 'aimable knight' lacked the political acumen to perceive that the 'promoted master'⁵² was playing at brinkmanship. Inskip was not inclined to keep the Freshwater's men out for much longer at the risk of a national lock-out. But, when Inskip unwisely rubbed salt into the wounds by suggesting that his press statement overtly favoured the employers, Wright resigned.⁵³

48. Fox, *History of N.U.B.S.O.*, p.218. Inskip's handling of the dispute could hardly be described as "masterful", either, as the Union had struck Freshwater's believing the firm was unfederated.

49. *B.S.T.J.*: 20 Oct., 1894.

50. He had substituted brass for iron rivets and had introduced the embellishment of black waists.

51. *B.S.T.J.*: 2 Nov., 1894.

52. Both descriptions are John Day's, editor of the *S.L.*

53. *B.S.T.J.*: 27 Oct., 1894.

Four days after Wright's resignation,⁵⁴ the Union ordered the Freshwater's strikers back to work on the understanding that their grievances, and those of Earle's men, would be considered by the London Board as soon as possible. The Union also called for a National Conference on all outstanding issues in dispute.⁵⁵ While the S.L.R. called for a lock-out to teach the Union a belated lesson,⁵⁶ the B.S.T.J. more perceptively, urged better preparation on the part of the Federation.⁵⁷ Both, however, were agreed that the Union had scored a tactical victory. Some employers were inclined to agree with the S.L.R.'s opinion that this was because the arbitration rules robbed them of their freedom of action. The view of one Higham Ferrers' manufacturer must have been shared by many, and the Federation's executive was not so myopic as to ignore it:

"... the bulk of our manufacturers believe they can conduct their business with less interference from the Union when they are outside the Association, and the unfortunate consequence is our membership has dwindled down."⁵⁸

'The Phantom Federation', as Day had labelled it, must be seen to rise from the ashes.

III. 'The seven commandments.'

After Wright's resignation, the Federation considered arbitration through the National Conference to be in a state of suspension. For this, they blamed the Union's illegal behaviour over the St. Albans strike which they considered to be the latest instalment of the new unionists' encroachment upon the individual rights of employers. In this interpretation, moderate officials, such as Inskip, became the mere tools of the militants. The Federation determined to impose order where chaos reigned and, accordingly, it produced a blueprint for survival which became known as 'the seven commandments.' This is presented below.

1. That there shall be no advance or reduction of the present minimum rate of wages or piece-work statements, or alteration of the hours of labour applying to a town or district within two years of December 31st, 1894, or within two years of the date of any subsequent award.

54. Wright resigned on 17 October, 1894.

55. B.S.T.J.: 20 Oct., 1894.

56. S.L.R.: 5 Oct., 1894.

57. B.S.T.J.: 20 Oct., 1894.

58. Ibid.: 27 Oct., 1894.

2. That the present is not an opportune time for the introduction of piece-work in connection with lasting and finishing machinery. That whenever such time arrives the wage list shall be based on the average wages earned on day work and the time fairly occupied in each operation.
3. That every employer is entitled (a) to the fullest control over the management of his factory, and to make such regulations as he deems necessary for time-keeping and good order; (b) to pay either the recognised piece or day rates of wages; (c) to introduce machinery at any time without notice.
4. That there shall be no interference with the output from machine or hand labour by the Union or its officials, and instructions shall not be given by them to restrict the amount of work to be performed by workmen in connection therewith.
5. That every employer is entitled to have his work, or any part of it, made in any town or place, provided he pays (a) the recognised rate of wages of such town or place, or, if no rate of wages has been fixed, then (b) by such wages as may be fixed by mutual arrangement with his workpeople.
6. That each employer has the sole right to determine what workmen he shall employ.
7. That the statement of the secretary of an association or of a branch of the Union, shall be accepted on either side as evidence of membership for Federation purposes.⁵⁹

If the Union had accepted these proposals it would have been tantamount to going into voluntary liquidation, for the Federation was asserting arbitrary powers over all the important disputed issues. The first 'commandment' removed the Union's historical bargaining functions on wages and hours for a period of two years. Inskip appreciated that the employers were anxious to see through the transition from hand to machine labour without interference. The second prevented the Union from using the more beneficial piece-rate method of compiling wages in the two largest sectors of the trade, as they became mechanised. The third was a massive assertion of employers' rights that denied the worker any share in determining the fundamental conditions of his working existence. The fourth was a sweeping away of the ban on overtime and constituted a complete disregard, on

59. ibid.: 10 Nov., 1894.

the part of the Federation, for the unemployed. The fifth struck directly at high wage areas such as London, and was designed to reduce them to the levels of the provinces. The sixth would have ended the 'union shop.' The seventh had arisen out of the Freshwater's strike and would have allowed the Federation to rush to the protection of any manufacturer threatened with a strike. All that was required of them was to announce that the threatened employer was a member of the Federation. It provides a good example of the way in which the strike at St. Albans had acted as an accelerator of events.

With the National Conference suspended, there existed no medium through which the 'seven commandments' could be discussed. The Union had been asked to make its reply by 19 November, but Inskip's wily diplomacy soon made this impossible. Both sides seemed to be content to postpone the reckoning until the spring. One factor behind this was the illness of J.C. Ward, President of the Federation, which removed him from the negotiations in December. Bronchitis took him from Leicester to Hastings, and thence to Biarritz,⁶⁰ but the cure for shoemakers' ills had to be sought at home. The Council instructed local branches to elect, during the month of January, delegates to a Special Delegate meeting which would consider the employers' demands. In anticipation of the struggle ahead, they also advised a major recruiting drive.⁶¹ A national lock-out or strike of boot and shoemakers was not inevitable by the end of 1894, but only a brave man would have bet against it. The pertinent question was: could the good ship arbitration be salvaged once more, or had it been irretrievably stranded upon the rocks of class conflict?

Despite the suspension of the National Conference, local boards of arbitration continued to operate. But, they did so in a mood of growing pessimism brought on by a feeling that they were living on borrowed time. Men such as Lilley and Freak were placed in the absurd position of having to exchange their national negotiating hats for those of local board members in a pretence that

60. *Ibid.*: 8 and 22 Dec., 1894.

61. *M.R.*: 1 Dec., 1894.

business could go on as normal. The London employers suffered a setback when the appointed umpire, Sir Alfred Rollet, awarded the St. Albans men a minimum weekly wage of 29s. 6d., which was only 6d. below their asking rate.⁶² It was widely acknowledged that this was likely to prove a purely temporary gratification for St. Albans' shoemakers. J.A. Craig revealed the employers' contingency planning when he told a London newspaper that they possessed sufficient stock in hand to endure a three month strike.⁶³ Recession had delivered its customary bottleneck, providing the employers with ideal terrain upon which to take their stand.

It was at this inopportune time that the editor of the S.L.R., John Day, decided to aggravate matters by running an article on the prosperous state of the sweated trade in London.⁶⁴ It argued that the indoor working agreement of 1890 had failed in its purpose of abolishing the sweated trade. For a time, the unskilled greener had gone inside to better learn his trade, but he was increasingly using his new found knowledge to establish himself in a small workshop as a chamber master. The team system had been re-introduced and greeners were, again, working on it to undercut statement wages. All this was common knowledge, but the timing of the article served to further undermine the credibility of arbitration in the capital.

The crucial National Union Delegates' Meeting, which was to decide policy on the 'seven commandments', began at the Secular Hall, Leicester on 24 January. Inskip opened the proceedings with an important analysis of the 'seven commandments' that provides a perceptive appreciation of the Federation's underlying objectives. (The reader is referred to the description of the 'seven commandments' given on p. 313/4 above). He argued that although the first 'commandment' appeared to prevent reductions as well as increases, there was nothing to prevent an employer from laying off a man earning 30s. per week and replacing him with another at 28s. Furthermore, the clause preventing change in the hours of labour would

62. B.S.T.J.: 19 Jan., 1895.

63. S.L.R.: 11 Jan., 1895.

64. Ibid.: 25 Jan., 1895.

allow those towns that worked more than 54 hours per week to continue to do so for at least two years. The second would allow employers to calculate the average day-work earnings, from which piece-rates for machinery would be derived, upon the high average output of a pacemaker. This would ensure very low piece-rates and day wages because they would be based, not upon the output of a true average, but upon that of the most productive workers. The third would empower manufacturers to introduce, arbitrarily, the team system. The extent to which the Union abided by the fourth, he thought, depended upon the attitude adopted by the employers. The fifth gave the employers carte blanche to send work into the country to be made up at a cheaper rate than in the towns. The sixth would lead to the widespread adoption of the character note through which a troublesome workman could be denied employment. To the seventh 'commandment' Inskip offered no objection, although, as previously noted, it provided the unfederated employer with an extra line of defence.

The Council offered the Conference three possible counter-proposals. Firstly, they could reject the 'seven commandments' outright. Secondly, they could call for a conference of both sides with a view to renewing the National Conference. If this were unacceptable to the employers, then they could withdraw all their demands and delegate negotiating powers to the local boards. This third alternative was a contingency plan that exploited the fact that many employers had kept their local boards operating after the withdrawal from the National Conference.

The first counter-proposal was carried without contention. But, the second was opposed by the anti-arbitrationists, among whom London delegates were prominent. Lewis, who had recently retired from the London Board as a protest against the way arbitration was working there, took the lead. He argued that the London Board had been totally unable to enforce the rules and that this had caused the position of the workmen to actually worsen under indoor working. He proposed that the Union withdraw from all local boards as a protest against the employers' general behaviour. Payne, also from London, lent Lewis exaggerated

support. Arguing that indoor working could have been achieved but for arbitration, he further claimed that it had been responsible for losing 1,000 members in 24 years. He thought that they could regain these, and add another thousand, by rejecting arbitration. Two Bristol delegates, Dart and Vincent, also gave strong support to Lewis's proposal. The latter compared their position under arbitration to that of a mouse in the hands of a cat, and he thought that, as a result, "... the men were losing heart all along the line."

But, the London delegation was not united in rejecting arbitration for G.E. Green of the No. 2 branch (clickers) spoke forcibly in its defence. He offered concrete evidence in support of his argument, quoting the minimum wages of 30s. and 28s. achieved for clickers and pressmen and the principle of a week's notice as examples of benefits gained. The anti-arbitrationists might have wished that the experiences of the sweated had been as favourable. Daniel Stanton expressed the majority point of view on the Council when he blamed the Union representatives to the London Board for any failings that it might have had. The anti-arbitrationists ended the debate in a minority of 13 against 45.

In the light of this decision the third counter-proposal was also accepted. This provoked protests from London delegates representing the first and second class shops who feared that they would have arbitration foisted upon them, as a result. Votier, in a rare intervention on behalf of the statement workers, managed to have a decision on their position postponed until they could consult with the Cordwainers.⁶⁵

The victory of the pro-arbitrationists had the beneficial effect of improving the Union's public image, as the S.L.R. noted. "The Union is now able to pose before the public as an advocate of arbitration, while the Federation is made to appear as an opponent of the principle."⁶⁶ The vote of the whole Union, which was taken on the Conference decisions, only served to re-inforce this, for only three branches opposed the Council's proposals. Of these, the combined London branches

65. B.S.T.J.: 2 Feb., 1895.

66. S.L.R.: 1 Feb., 1895.

produced the most significant rejection. The Leicester and Bristol branches, where the anti-arbitrationists were also strong, actually produced small majorities in favour. The full returns are presented below (Table I p.320).

From these it can be seen that only about 15% of the membership voted. Only Nottingham had a higher proportion of its membership rejecting arbitration than London, but the branch was so small that this might be explained by the branch secretary being an anti-arbitrationist. Stafford's opposition may indicate that memories of the arbitration settlement of 1879 were still strong. The substantial minorities against in Leicester and Bristol can be explained by more recent disillusionments with the arbitration procedure. However, in all the other large urban centres, and the smaller ones, the Council had carried its proposals without difficulty.

The Federation replied to the Union's rejection of the 'seven commandments' by insisting that they were not negotiable. They refused to recall the National Conference, and, at a meeting of the Leicester Trade Protection Society on 19 February, Ward presented the Union with an ultimatum: withdraw or fight.⁶⁷ While the Federation was prepared to leave the local associations free to decide whether they continued with the local boards, this was still leagues away from the Union's alternative proposal of delegating all powers to them.⁶⁸

The Federation's firm line produced a limited amount of internal dissent. Certain unspecified secessions occurred in London,⁶⁹ while other manufacturers at Leeds and Rushden were, also, threatening to break away.⁷⁰ It was at Leicester, however, that matters finally reached a point of no return. Inskip threw down the gauntlet by demanding an end to the practice of sending work out in Leicester to be made up in the villages.⁷¹ The employers' side of the Leicester Board were bound to resist a demand that would set a precedent for all other areas. Simultaneously, to add fuel to the fire, the Union demanded a new walled

67. Ibid.: 22 Feb., 1895.

68. B.S.T.C.: 23 Feb., 1895.

69. S.L.R.: 1 March, 1895.

70. B.S.T.C.: 9 March, 1895.

71. Ibid.

Table I: Ballot of National Union on arbitration (Feb. 1895).

Branch	No. in favour of Executive's Proposals	No. against	Percentage For	Percent. Against
Aberdeen	25	0	100	0
Abroath	85	15	85	15
Bristol (2 branches)	165	115	59	41
Birmingham	76	0	100	0
Barnesley	46	0	100	0
Belfast	39	0	100	0
Bozsat	0	0	—	—
Bramley	155	0	100	0
Braintree	7	0	100	0
Cork	28	0	100	0
Colchester	45	0	100	0
Chesterfield	0	0	—	—
Crediton	21	0	100	0
Dundee	32	0	100	0
Dublin	80	0	100	0
Deventry	34	2	94	6
Derby	23	0	100	0
Desborough	59	3	95	5
Edinburgh	67	0	100	0
Enderby	0	0	—	—
Finedon	12	0	100	0
Glasgow (2 branches)	177	0	100	0
Halifax	18	0	100	0
Hackmondwike	125	0	100	0
Higham and Rushden	63	1	98	2
Hinckley	143	15	91	9
Harpole	23	0	100	0
Ipswich	38	0	100	0
Kettering (2 branches)	360	9	98	2
Kilmarnock	81	0	100	0
Kendal	123	0	100	0
Kingswood	84	12	87	13
Leicester (2 branches)	891	807	52	48
Leeds (2 branches)	216	1	99	1
London (5 branches)	212	801	21	79
Liverpool	24	1	96	4
Manchester	146	1	99	1
Maybole	165	0	100	0
Newcastle	72	2	97	3
Nottingham	1	27	4	96
Norwich (2 branches)	164	6	96	4
Northampton (3 branches)	478	38	93	7
Plymouth	0	0	—	—
Stafford	52	58	47	53
Stone	93	0	100	0
South Wigston	77	9	90	0
Street	15	0	100	0
Worcester	15	0	100	0
Wolverhampton	36	6	86	14
Wellingborough (2 branches)	91	5	95	5
Wollaston	10	0	100	0
5,042		1,930	72	28

Source: B.S.T.J.: 23 Feb., 1895.

statement for Northampton. The fact that the Union was prepared to take such initiatives at this time suggests that the Council had abandoned hope of a negotiated settlement. They had begun to lay down their markers for an agreement after the forthcoming dispute was over.

Both the major trade journals produced a conspiracy theory of trade union behaviour. The B.S.T.J. insisted that, "The manufacturers' quarrel is not with the men, but with the Union leaders"⁷² The S.L.R. agreed, but went further in imputing dark motives to the conspirators:

"The vast bulk of the men who will be affected, like those dependent upon them, are mere counters in a game which is being played by a handful of quasi-political, semi-socialistic agitators whose views, to put it mildly, do not square with common sense."⁷³

This was a short-sighted view which was reluctant to admit a genuine rank and file militancy into the causal analysis. But, it is only if this fact is accepted that the more aggressive behaviour of leaders such as Inskip, who had a history of moderation, can be explained. In the process of mediating rank and file opinion they could appear 'semi-socialistic'. A Northampton correspondent offered a useful corrective to the S.L.R.'s simplistic argument:

"We must make up our minds that we can no more ignore the fact that Socialism has spread among the operatives, and that it has a great power in shaping all their ideas in connection with labour matters. No content, no lasting peace, will be possible while the minds of the workers are opposed altogether to individualism. Let this be recognised by all those who are advising the manufacturers to give way. The old form of Trade Unionism is replaced by a bastard form of Socialism, half concealed, but still sufficiently recognisable. Our local Union officials are professed Socialists, and as such must always be opposed to individualism, and, therefore, to a chronic state of hostility to the manufacturers. The latter may well object to being made the subject to Socialist experiment. If Socialist or Collectivism is to come about, it must be applied equally all round, and to all industries

72. ibid.: 16 March, 1895.

73. S.L.R.: 8 March, 1895.

alike. When Socialistic Trades Unionists profess being in favour of arbitration and conciliation it means nothing more than their willingness to get, without any expenditure of their funds, all that they can wring from the Individualist."⁷⁴

There was, of course, a tendency on the parts of both the manufacturers and the trade press to exaggerate the socialist menace. But, it has been shown, here, that they were a not insignificant force in London in the 1890s, and other work in progress will argue a similar case for Northampton and Leicester.⁷⁵ Although there were probably fewer socialist branch leaders than the Northampton correspondent imagined, there were sufficient to force the liberals on the Council to adopt a collectivist stance. They had to be seen to fight for what the rank and file demanded: a fairer share of the profits of the machine age.

The collapse of collective bargaining, by March of 1895, cannot be attributed to any single cause, but the point of no return had been reached with the issuing of the 'seven commandments.' This had been the employers' response to, what they considered to have been, the Union's dishonourable behaviour in not initially accepting Wright's ruling over the Freshwater's dispute. For the Federation, Inskip and the other liberal leaders had become the puppets of the ~~the~~ unionists, who were prepared to manipulate or disregard arbitration rules to suit themselves. If the moderate leadership of the Union could not control its own militants, then the Federation must do it for them. It was to this end that the 'seven commandments' were issued, in the full knowledge that no self-respecting trade union leader, however moderate, could accept them in total. It was the employers' adamant refusal to negotiate on them that constituted a de facto suspension of the national conciliation and arbitration procedure, and which, thus, caused the lock-out of 1895.

74. Ibid.

75. See the forthcoming doctoral thesis of Keith Erooker (University of Hull) and W. Lancaster, From Radicalism to Socialism: The Leicester Working Class 1860 - 1906 (University of Warwick, Ph.D., 1983). The latter thesis has been completed too recently for comprehensive consideration in relation to this study.

CHAPTER TEN

THE LOCK-OUT OF 1895.

1. Introduction: the importance of the lock-out for labour history.

The 1895 lock-out in the boot and shoemaking industry deserves a much more important place in late nineteenth century, British labour history than historians, so far, have been prepared to afford it. One obvious reason for this neglect is its comparatively brief historiography. Until the early 1970s, little detailed research had been done into the history of the industry in local areas, and this left the general historian of trades unionism with only the massively ambitious over-views of Fox, or the Webbs, to turn to. Thus, historians such as Pelling, have been capable of ignoring the shoemakers' lock-out when inaccurately describing the engineers' in 1897-98 as the first major, national lock-out.¹ Although every shoemaking area in Britain was not affected in 1895, surely a dispute which threw out of work 46,000 people² merits the adjective major?

The Webbs correctly recognised the lock-out as being a struggle for control of a new means of production when they emphasised the significance of methods of payment on machinery as a cause. For them, "... piece-work is the only possible protection of the Standard Rate for men who are working machines of which the rate of speed is always being increased."³ But, as the men were as prepared as the employers to contradict themselves to ensure full benefits of the new machinery, conflict resulted. Each came to regard the other as a hypocrite with whom no meaningful negotiation was possible.

Brunner closely follows the Webbs' analysis, but prefers to look on the bright side and emphasise the positive value of the lock-out for future industrial relations. It was the first and last such national struggle within the industry⁴, which is sufficient evidence for her to argue that it ushered in an era of industrial peace.⁵ She agrees with the Webbs that it was not the introduction of machinery that was in dispute, but the conditions within which it would be

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1. H. Pelling, History of British Trade Unionism (1963), p.112.
 2. Elizabeth Brunner, The Origins of Industrial Peace: the Case of the British Boot and Shoe Industry, Oxford Economic Papers, Vol. 2, June 1949, p.257.
 3. S. and B. Webb, Industrial Democracy, pp. 398-9.
 4. This still holds for 1983.
 5. Brunner, op.cit.

operated. However, her view that the difficulties of an industry in transition were exacerbated by bad industrial relations⁶ is surely to approach the problem from the wrong end. It was largely the conditions of transition that determined the quality of industrial relations.

This remains so even if one accepts Fox's view that the employers were out to destroy the new unionists, although not the Union as such,⁷ for the new unionism was, partly, the child of economic change. But, we cannot be so sure about the employers' intentions. The conciliatory public statements of some during the lock-out (the evidence that Fox offers in support of his view), and their more moderate behaviour in the concluding settlement negotiations, does not prove their prior intentions. What was possible at the end may well have amounted to much less than they had hoped for. Taken at face value, the 'seven commandments' would suggest that they were out to destroy the Union. While it is not difficult to regard them as a bargaining counter, would the federation not have pressed home a full 7-0 victory if the Union's defence and the disposition of the referee had allowed?

In the broadest sense, the lock-out is important to labour history because it should be seen as an integral part of the employers' counter-offensive against the new unionism.⁸ This had certainly not been concluded by 1895, as the engineers' lock-out of 1897-8 reminds us. In that industry, control over a changing means of production was, also, at stake. As a response to foreign competition, employers had attempted to dilute skill on machinery, and to implement local dispute procedures that would prevent unofficial strikes.⁹ Like the boot and shoemakers, the engineers had used the economic revival of 1889-92 to claw back some of the losses of the depression. A group of new unionists promoted action on such issues as wages, the regulation of apprenticeship, machine manning, piece-work, overtime and the eight-hour day.¹⁰ Zeitlin argues that the engineers'

6. *Ibid.*, p.253.

7. Fox, *History of T.U.B.S.O.*, p.228.

8. For a summary see Pelling, *op.cit.*, pp. 109-14.

9. Zeitlin, *Craft control and the Division of Labour*, p.265.

10. Jonathan Zeitlin, *Craft Regulation and the Division of Labour: Engineers and Compositors in Britain, 1890 - 1914*, (University of Warwick, Ph.D., 1981) pp. 180-82.

lock-out should be seen as part of an employers' counter-offensive lasting from 1889 to Taff Vale.¹¹ That in the boot and shoe industry should be seen as a prior stage in this process; one that paved the way for further employers' successes and defeats for the new unionism, afterwards.

II. Narrative.

The Federation met on 6 March and declared a lock-out from the 16th. Notices to this effect appeared in all federated, and some non-federated, shops by the 9th.¹² The principal federated areas affected were Leicester, Northampton, London, Bristol, Leeds, Kingswood, Birmingham and Rushden, which accounted for some 40,000 workers. Unfederated areas that remained at work included the whole of Scotland, Stafford, Stone, Norwich, Uellingborough and Hinckley.¹³ In fact, hostilities began from 8 March when the Council called out all piece-workers in the knowledge that they could finish up more quickly than those on weekly wages. For this it was criticised, for depriving thousands of boot and shoe-makers of an extra week's pay, but, by the same token, it deprived many employers of an extra week's profit.¹⁴ In the case of the smaller firms, this might have made the difference between victory and defeat.

So, the first week of the dispute was, in fact, a strike rather than a lock-out. Last minute efforts by Sir Courtenay Boyle (President of the Board of Trade) to prevent the lock-out occurring were unsuccessful, as were those of M.P.s. such as Henry Labouchere who sat for shoemaking constituencies. The Federation doubted their impartiality, but even Inskip had decided that their intervention, at that stage, was pointless.¹⁵ Other observers were less conciliatory. John Day wrote a letter to the national press putting the blame for the dispute upon the Union's attitude towards arbitration. At the core of the breakdown in industrial relations, Day argued, lay the struggle for control over machinery, and British employers must be allowed the freedoms of their American counterparts. Sir Thomas

11. ibid. p.200.

12. B.S.T.J. 1 16 March, 1895.

13. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O. p.227.

14. B.S.T.J. 1 16 March, 1895.

15. S.L.R. 1 15 March, 1895.

Wright agreed with Inskip that any late intervention would prove futile, and he based his view upon his own variation of the conspiracy thesis. He claimed that the Union had been planning the conflict since November, 1894.¹⁶ His experiences during the Freshwater dispute coloured his appreciation of recent history.

The National Union placed the Council members in charge of the strike in their respective districts. This meant that Votier controlled matters in London and the Eastern counties. By 15 March, he had zealously withdrawn piece-workers from shops in Colchester, Ipswich and Norwich, as well as London.¹⁷ The Amalgamated were confident that only about 10% of their members would be affected. These were the minority of its members who worked on machines and their Union placed them on strike pay in support of the National Union's struggle.¹⁸ However, the vast majority of Amalgamated members worked for smaller, hand-sawn shops that were unfederated. For their part, the Federation only locked-out trade unionists.¹⁹ This enabled the smaller, non-unionised shops, who were most vulnerable, to continue working, and it is provided an inducement to unionists to leave their unions.

The Union's pre-emptive strike does not seem to have much aggravated the state of industrial relations in Leicester. All was reported as being very quiet and amicable as the men finished up at the leading firms. Alderman Lennard had even offered to lend his non-unionists money, to compensate for the absence of strike pay, but such charity seems to have been unusual among employers. In Norwich, 1,500 men had been withdrawn by the afternoon of the 12th, but many non-federated manufacturers remained at work. At Northampton, several manufacturers took no pains to conceal their anti-trade union views. William Hickson was President of the Northampton Association and had moved from London to avoid the statement. He had, then, moved his work into the country when a statement was imposed upon him in Northampton. He saw the crux of the dispute as being

16. Ibid.

17. Daily Chronicle: 15 March, 1895.

18. The Star: 11 March, 1895.

19. B.S.T.J.: 16 March, 1895.

machinery, and was prepared to deny the Union any rights over how it was used in the factories. A more conspiratorially minded employer, H. Wooding, thought the rank and file were being intimidated by trade unionists and that a blow needed to be struck against the latter. Solid support for the Federation was forthcoming from non-federated manufacturers in the surrounding Northamptonshire towns of Rushden and Kettering.²⁰

In London, the Union had withdrawn all piece-workers immediately after the lock-out notice was presented on 9 March. Totter was conducting affairs from the Kay Street Club from where he was in close touch with the shops' presidents.²¹ All employers not displaying lock-out notices were asked what they intended to do on the 15th; if the reply was to lock-out, then piece-workers were withdrawn immediately. Some employers responded to such action by locking-out weekly workers before the official starting date of 16 March. Furthermore, if a London firm with provincial branches was known to be locking-out in London, piece-workers were drawn off the provincial shops, as well.²² Britten and Bannister's shop in Ipswich and Lillo; and Skinner's in Norwich were typical victims.²³ In all, at least 1,500 London piece-workers struck before the lock-out began. Unionists who were not locked-out were levied 1s. per week for the duration of the dispute.²⁴

The London Association presented an impressive display of unity when it met on the 11th. Thomas Lilley thought that every centre was fully prepared to resist a 'Leicester tyranny' that intruded upon an employer's right to use his machinery without restriction.²⁵ It was widely recognised that the employers had stock-piled in preparation for the struggle, assisted by the fact that the spring season of 1895 had been late in starting. Only an exceptionally protracted struggle would see them run short.²⁶

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. The Star: 13 March, 1895.

23. S.L.R.: 15 March, 1895.

24. Ibid.

25. S.S.T.J.: 16 March, 1895.

26. Hackney and Kingsland Gazette: 15 March, 1895.

London's boot and shoemakers were prepared for the struggle ahead at the Shoreditch Town Hall, on 13 March. Freak's speech emphasised that machinery was at the heart of the conflict. Although his expression of surprise that London employers were prepared to join such a fight was purely rhetorical, it was true that many London manufacturers who did not use machinery were drawn in on behalf of others who did. Their affirmative response was less than altruistic, for they all knew that the factory was the future.

As strike organiser, it was Votier's burden to steer away from the general issues towards the practicalities of survival. His announcement that strike pay was to amount to only 10s. per week must have been greeted with disappointment, for 12s. had been the expected figure.²⁷

Thus, the lock-out began, officially, on Saturday, 16 March as an anti-climax. The B.S.T.C. estimated that some two hundred thousand men, women and children had been deprived of their livelihood, and that eighty per cent of all workers in the industry were affected.²⁸ Because of the numbers affected few expected the dispute to last beyond two months. For example, the Northampton Trades' Council requested that the Northamptonshire Militia, which incorporated eight to nine hundred shoemakers, be called out for its annual training in April rather than May because they did not want to have to take time off for drilling immediately after returning to work.²⁹

The official beginning of the lock-out released a flood of causal opinion that covered the entire spectrum of plausibility. In the realm of fantasy was the suggestion by a correspondent of the Eastern Argus that the lock-out was the work of foreign agents trying to ruin the home trade. In this view, all 'family men' were against the strike (as he wrongly termed the dispute), but they were being coerced by Union 'terrorists.'³⁰ Only a little less conspiratorial

27. B.S.T.C.: 16 March, 1895. Votier was meeting with the strike committee at the 'Duke of Wellington', Brunswick Road, Hackney. (S.L.B.: 15 March, 1895). The Kay St. Club seems to have been used only for larger meetings of shops' presidents.

28. B.S.T.C.: 23 March, 1895.

29. The Times: 16 March, 1895.

30. Eastern Argus: 23 March, 1895.

was the responsibility that Edward Kell placed upon the I.L.P. In a speech given to the annual dinner of the Leicester Tradesmen's Cricket Club, he boldly asserted that it was impossible to bring all men to a single level. It had always been the case that some men were bound to command, others to follow, he said, and if any Leicester shoemakers took to the streets to riotously propound these mistaken doctrines he would, as a magistrate of the borough, put his foot down at once.³¹

A more balanced liberal voice was that of the Daily Chronicle, assiduously searching for the elusive via media between the provocative extranists in either camp. In this view, failure to prevent the dispute was attributable to the inability of majority, centrist politics to maintain control over the minority belligerence of left and right.

"Of course, in this, as in all other labour disputes, there are those who are at once ready to put down the whole business to the innate perverseness of the British working man, egged on by the unscrupulous agitator — he, like the poor, is always with us. As a matter of fact the causes of the present dispute are manifold and complex

There has been all along a small section of the men who have never cordially accepted it (arbitration). To them the capitalist is ever the ravening beast, to be driven back by the iron bar of trade unionism, and with whom there must be no truce until your foot is upon his neck. On the other side is the larger minority of employers, to whom the idea of meeting the representatives of their employees round a table has ever been repulsive and disgraceful. To them the trade union is the creation of the paid agitator, to be flouted and disregarded at every possible opportunity. The great bulk of the members of the union and a very considerable section of the employers have cordially accepted arbitration, and done their best to carry it out. But, the two minorities have triumphed, much in the same way that two States eager and ready for peace, have been driven into war by the Jingo party in each."³²

Although the multi-causal nature of any historical event requires no reiteration, at the root of the 1895 lock-out was the struggle for control over a

31. B.S.T.J.: 23 March, 1895.

32. Daily Chronicle: 16 March, 1895.

changing means of production. Through the early 1890s, indoor working throughout the major shoemaking areas had increased employers' costs. They had responded by attempting to retrieve costs through increasing productivity and the pace of mechanisation. The Union had agreed too readily to the introduction of day wages on machinery and, on discovering that more labour was being extracted for the same wage return, they had begun to seek ways of reimposing greater job control.³³ Both sides had waded through the changing tides by trial and error, and had used conciliation to rectify their errors where possible. Few, on either side, who had participated in the process shared the ideological commitment to arbitration and conciliation expressed by the Daily Chronicle. Most had behaved self-interestedly in trying to extract the maximum gain for their own party. The polarisation between the two sides, which the Chronicle lamented, had been caused not by minority politics winning-out, but by mutual recognition that the likely rewards of the mode of production were too substantial to be left to the uncertainties of arbitration.

In the first week, the lock-out cost the National Union £1,400 in Leicester, £1,300 in Northampton, and £750 in London.³⁴ Full members received 10s. per week, probationary (13-26 weeks membership) only 5s.³⁵ The levy from those areas still in work brought in about £1,000 during the first week.³⁶

Among the locked-out in Leicester were 1,000 men, 13,000 of whom were unionists, and 9,000 women and children from shoemaking and dependant industries. Edward Kell's promise to maintain law and order was ready to be put into effect by police forces inside and outside the borough who were on standby. It was even rumoured that the 17th Lancers, stationed at Leeds, were on alert and ready to proceed to Leicester, if needed.³⁷ The chances that they would be were improved by those Leicester manufacturers reported to be parading their replacement workers

33. The Times: 18 March, 1895.

34. Ibid.: 16 March, 1895.

35. B.S.T.J.: 23 March, 1895.

36. Daily Graphic: 20 March, 1895.

37. B.S.T.J.: 23 March, 1895.

provocatively through the streets.³⁸ Others had no need to continue production because their warehouses were so full of stock that they had resorted to storing some of it in the premises of railway companies.³⁹ Such employers had no fear of a short lock-out which would kill two birds with one stone. It would discipline a recalcitrant labour force while easing the burden of over-production.

Of the 16,000 men, women and children thrown out of work in Northampton, only 4,850 were unionists in receipt of strike pay. A few of the locked-out were cycling around the surrounding villages to ensure the solidarity of the isolated, and poorly organised, rural shoemakers. A few disturbances had taken place in the town, for example at the factory of Simon Collier where a crowd of about a thousand had gathered to harass replacement workers. Window breaking at the homes of replacements had occurred at both Northampton and Kettering. At Rushden, Methodism proved a conciliator when the manufacturers consented to the use of the Old Independent Wesleyan Chapel as the union meeting place.⁴⁰ A major irritation for the Northampton members of the National Union was the decision of the Amalgamated Society not to support them.⁴¹ It is unclear, from the reports, as to whether cordwainers were actually doing the jobs of the locked-out, but this must be considered as unlikely. It is more probable that the situation resembled that in London, where only those Amalgamated members working in the machine-sewn trade were brought out. Hand-workers remained at work and were not regarded as disloyal, by the National Union, for doing so.

Leeds' unionists were expecting 1,000 to 1,200 to be locked-out by the second week of the dispute, but this was only about a fifth of the total labour force, including women and children, of 5,500. The local branch president committed the tactical error of admitting that, even with the support of other unions, the shoemakers would only be able to hold out for a maximum of six weeks. At Bristol and Kingswood, about fifty federated factories had ceased work. The police were in

38. Daily Chronicle: 20 March, 1895.

39. The Times: 16 March, 1895.

40. B.S.T.J.: 23 March, 1895.

41. The Times: 21 March, 1895.

close attendance over a 5,000 strong demonstration on 18th March, and through all this the Kingwood Board of Arbitration continued to meet!⁴²

In London, the lock-out was restricted, almost exclusively, to the North of the city. Within this area, it was estimated that two-thirds of the affected shops lay in the districts of Aldgate, Whitechapel, Mile End, Bethnal Green, Hackney, Dalston and the City.⁴³ During the first week of the dispute, about 110 federated shops out of an overall total of 350, federated and non-federated, locked-out.⁴⁴ There was less agreement on the numbers of workers affected, however. Estimates ranged from the 10,000 given by The Times⁴⁵ (which must have included many non-unionised women and children who had been laid-off, rather than locked-out), to the 2,200 of The Star⁴⁶ (which had wrongly assumed that if £1,100 had been paid in lock-out pay, then there must have been 2,200 members receiving 10s. each).⁴⁷ Perhaps the most accurate assessment was that made by the Bethnal Green News which claimed access to the lists of the Strike Committee. These revealed 5,000 unionists and 2,000 non-unionists locked-out by 20 March.⁴⁸ The numbers had been limited by the employers' decision to open their shops to non-unionists.⁴⁹ This was to the benefit of the non-statement manufacturers who were less dependent upon skilled, unionised labour.⁵⁰

Picketing was conducted with the utmost restraint,⁵¹ but this did not prevent the occasional disturbance. A disorderly scene took place in Whitechapel, on the morning of 20 March, when women seen carrying bundles of work away from shops were accosted. Other work was being sent from Bethnal Green to Norwich, where local unionists were exercising vigilance. A few agents of Leicester manufacturers were known to be touring the Jewish working men's clubs in London

42. B.S.T.J.: 23 March, 1895.

43. The Star: 20 March, 1895.

44. N.E. Leader: 23 March, 1895. The Star: 23 March, 1895.

45. The Times: 19 March, 1895.

46. The Star: 23 March, 1895.

47. In fact, many probationary members receiving only 5s. per week were included in the total.

48. Bethnal Green News: 23 March, 1895.

49. The Times: 19 March, 1895.

50. Daily Chronicle: 21 March, 1895.

51. N.E. Leader: 23 March, 1895.

looking for clickers and pressmen, but they had little success. From the country areas around the capital men arrived in response to advertisements, only to find their point of destination heavily picketed.⁵² Police interference with pickets at the firm of Franklin was the only reported case during the first week of the dispute, and there it had been at the instigation of an employer who was a long-standing opponent of trade unionism.⁵³

The local community responded in a number of positive ways to ease the distress of the locked-out bootmakers and their dependants. Following the practice of 1890, the London Metro. branch had established a Ways and Means Committee, and one of its fund-raising activities was to organise entertainments at the Sebright Hall, in Hackney. The proprietor placed the venue at the disposal of the Committee who engaged the services of the Footlights Dramatic Society.⁵⁴ The publican of the 'Good Intent', Moulton Street gave dinner to ninety of the locked-out, on 20 March, the men being "regaled with an ample supply of beef and pickles, bread and cheese, and beer."⁵⁵ Other publicans are likely to have treated their regulars similarly. Some shopkeepers were accepting food tickets, issued by the Union, which were redeemable at the end of the lock-out.⁵⁶

As it contained many of the poorest, sugarated bootmakers, the Jewish community was swiftly reduced to a state of penury. With its customary parsimony, the Jewish Board of Guardians refused any relief to the locked-out, a decision which the Chief Rabbi urged them to rescind as Passover approached.⁵⁷ With no work to go to the Jewish bootmakers gathered in their working men's club, where they were to be found silently pursuing a game of cards or dominoes.⁵⁸ Pressure upon Jews to return to work was greater because their resources were thinner, and many of their employers were unfederated and prepared to continue working. In such

52. Bethnal Green News: 23 March, 1895.

53. The Star: 21 March, 1895.

54. Ibid.: 20 March, 1895.

55. Eastern Argus: 23 March, 1895.

56. Daily Chronicle: 18 March, 1895.

57. Ibid.: 22 March, 1895.

58. Ibid.: 16 March, 1895.

circumstances, it must have been very pleasing for the Jewish unionists to be continuing to enrol new members. The National Union's records do not support the claim to have enrolled 200 new members at the International Hall, Aldgate, on 20 March, however.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the achievement of the London City branch went unrivalled by any of the others.

In the first week of the lock-out, the employers imposed a 'document' upon those willing to continue working, but Votier thought that this only had the effect of forcing many who had previously been reluctant to seek the sanctity of the Union.⁶⁰ There is little doubt that the Association's decision to re-open to non-unionists had been forced upon them by the knowledge that, otherwise, many manufacturers would breakaway. Their action limited the conflict to one between federated and unionised.

With the lock-out only a few days old, Henry Labouchere, the Liberal M.P. for Northampton, intervened by suggesting an independent board of five arbitrators. Ward's response was frosty for he distrusted Labouchere's motives. He asked him whether he really thought that the question of whether, or not, an employer should have control of his factory was a fit one for arbitration?⁶¹ He took exception to the wide terms of reference proposed by Labouchere for they would have given the board powers to arbitrate on any question submitted by the Union or Federation.

Asquith, the Home Secretary, lent implicit support to Labouchere's effort to propitiate the employers in a speech he made at Cambridge, the next day. He blamed "a certain fringe of disorderly and anarchical elements" within the Union for creating a situation in which it had become extremely difficult to submit the differences between the two sides to independent arbitration.⁶² This crumb of encouragement was enough to send Labouchere in search of the Home Secretary's

59. Bethnal Green News 23 March, 1895. Probationary membership of the London City branch rose only from 90 to 200 between March and April, 1895, while that of London East remained unchanged (M.R.: March and April, 1895).

60. N.E. Leader: 23 March, 1895.

61. B.S.T.C.: 23 March, 1895.

62. S.L.A.: 29 March, 1895.

official seal of approval for his scheme. This he received on 22 March when Asquith offered the opinion that it was difficult to conceive of a more competent tribunal than the one proposed.⁶³ Not all were agreed on this. The B.S.T.J., for example, argued, quite correctly, that none of the five nominees had any real knowledge of the boot and shoe industry.⁶⁴ Indeed, two of them, James and Rollit, had received much criticism for previous arbitration awards that they had made in the industry. The Federation, however, were not, yet, ready to accept any mediation, and Ward informed Labouchere accordingly on 25th.⁶⁵ On the same day, he had re-stated his conviction that the growth of socialism within the Union had to be reversed.⁶⁶ This objective met with Labouchere's firm disapprobation. He interpreted Ward's rejection of his peacemaking, on the grounds that he was a shoemakers' R.P., as a mere camouflage for his real intention of destroying the Union.⁶⁷ Still, Labouchere persisted, and he was reported as having unofficial negotiations with certain 'advisers of the boot operatives' on 26th.⁶⁸ It is unclear exactly who these people were, but they were certainly not members of the National Union's Council who had, by then, abandoned the hopes of a settlement they had previously invested in Labouchere's scheme.⁶⁹

In the provinces, many of the locked-out who were not in receipt of full union benefits were showing signs of distress, by the end of the second week. It was hard enough to keep a family on the full 10s. per week, yet in Leicester 2,000 were surviving on partial benefit of 4s. 6d. and many thousands more on hope, alone.⁷⁰ The effects of this desperation permeated the community. Shopkeepers, for example, were said to be competing ruinously for custom.⁷¹ In Bristol, some 400 non-unionists were thrown upon their own resources. At Northampton,

63. Ibid. Labouchere's five nominees were Childers, Sir Charles Dilke, Sir Henry James, A.J. Mundella and Sir A. Rollit.

64. B.S.T.J.: 30 March, 1895.

65. Ibid.

66. The Times: 25 March, 1895.

67. Ibid.: 27 and 30 March, 1895.

68. The Star: 28 March, 1895.

69. S.L.R.: 29 March, 1895.

70. The Times: 30 March, 1895.

71. Daily Graphic: 28 March, 1895. One was reported as offering $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. tea, 1lb. sugar and a large loaf of best bread for 7d.

frustration was boiling over into violence as assaults by pickets upon 'blacklegs' were reported (one involved a stoning), and work was being seized and destroyed.⁷²

Hardship was equally apparent among London's bootmakers, and it was this that caused Votier to advise an assembly of 3,000 on London Fields "to help themselves to other people's property if they were in sore straits." The Ways and Means Committee had managed to collect only £100 among the non-unionists, by 27 March.⁷³ In a further attempt to relieve suffering, men were dispatched to Staffordshire and Scotland, where the lock-out did not apply.⁷⁴ A few even went to Paris.⁷⁵ Although the London branches hoped to assist more of the non-unionists in the third week, they realised that it was impossible to satisfy all of the 800 who had applied for relief.⁷⁶ And this was just the tip of the iceberg for the Hackney vestry, alone, had received 2,000 applications for relief.⁷⁷ The Ways and Means Committee continued to collect among the public during processions,⁷⁸ and benefit concerts continued at the Sebright Hall,⁷⁹ but these were forlorn efforts. The employers' strategy of conducting a war of attrition was showing signs of success rather earlier than they had expected.

For its part, the Federation had achieved considerable solidarity by strengthening its vulnerabilities. The achilles' heel was the small manufacturer, largely unfederated and least able to withstand a long stoppage in production. Strong financial support was afforded, by the Federation, to such manufacturers.⁸⁰ But, fragile loyalties were easily attenuated by the slightest strain and, on 21 and 22 March, the London Association expelled ten members who had refused to act with it. Another, the statement manufacturer R. Bateman, resigned. By way of compensation, the Association claimed six new applications for membership and that a further six, non-federated manufacturers were acting with it.⁸¹ Many of the

72. B.S.T.J.: 30 March, 1895.

73. Ibid.

74. Norwich was also an unfederated area but no reference to the locked-out being sent there has been found.

75. Hackney and Kingsland Gazette: 27 March, 1895.

76. The Star: 30 March, 1895.

77. East London Advertiser: 30 March, 1895.

78. Ibid.

79. Eastern Argus: 30 March, 1895.

80. The Times: 30 March, 1895.

81. S.L.B.: 29 March, 1895.

larger manufacturers were confidently utilising the interlude provided by the lock-out to prepare their workshops for more sophisticated machinery.⁸²

The political motivations behind the lock-out had begun to create personal difficulties for certain of the more liberal employers. This is well illustrated in London by the dilemma of the second class manufacturer, James Branch. In February, 1895, he had been re-elected to the L.C.C. as a Progressive member for S.E. Bethnal Green. During the campaign he had successfully sought the votes of many working men by his support for labour causes. Now, his support for the lock-out caused many to denounce him as an hypocrite.⁸³ Branch defended his actions by attacking what he described as the Union's sabotage of the arbitration procedure. In particular, he singled out its defence of a statement system that he considered ruinous of industrial relations. Votier (who had been one of his most vocal critics) stood condemned as the chief saboteur, for Branch argued that if arbitration was to work at all, then it had to be conducted by those who believed in 'peaceful evolution', not by 'violent revolutionaries'.⁸⁴

If the ambivalence of Branch's position served to emphasise the contradictions of London Liberalism, there were those quick to point out that such contradictions were not the prerogative of Liberals from the employing class. In this view, Charles Freak was in the same, rudderless boat as James Branch.

"Which is the bigger fraud, the employer who takes action against the work-people outside, and yet poses as the Progressive champion of labour on the Council; or the Trade Union official who, if he is doing his duty is fighting the employers tooth and nail outside, and yet on the Council fraternises with them and their party?"⁸⁵

The pressing need to mechanise in the face of intensified American competition had forced Branch from his perch between capital and labour. He was in agreement with Ward's analysis that the growing influence of socialism within the Union impaired the prospect of achieving this.⁸⁶ In the pages of The Times,

82. S.S.T.: 30 March, 1895.

83. N.E. Leader: 23 March, 1895.

84. Ibid.: 30 March, 1895.

85. Justice: 23 March, 1895. Freak had also been elected as a Progressive, for N.E. Bethnal Green.

86. The Star: 6 April, 1895.

Ward, himself, expended much energy fending off Labouchere's attempts to mediate.⁸⁷ In this, he received the full support of the B.S.T.U. which cast doubt upon Labouchere's patriotism. He "is today the only man for whom the French press has a good word to say, it is not surprising to find him indirectly aiding the Americans in their competition with English manufacturers, by taking sides with the men in a blind and foolish struggle against machinery."⁸⁸

As the lock-out moved into a third week the incidence of violence increased. In Leicester, 1,200 non-unionists applied for bread tickets that were being distributed by the Union, but many were disappointed.⁸⁹ On 31 March, the Belgrave Rubber Co., which was replacing the locked-out with 'free labour', was stoned by an angry mob. In Bristol, another mob of about 100 had visited and stoned an unnamed manufacturer. At Wellingborough and Northampton, magistrates were accused of dealing too harshly with trade unionists brought before them. Of the major shoemaking areas outside London, only Kettering was free of disturbances.⁹⁰ In London, unionists and non-unionists were becoming involved in violent street confrontations,⁹¹ and several of the locked-out unsuccessfully sought to persuade the Hackney magistracy that they had been wrongly dismissed without a week's notice.⁹²

Labouchere was not the only Member of Parliament calling for mediation in the dispute. At a meeting of the Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union, in Victoria Park on 31 March, Keir Hardie, shortly to lose his seat at West Ham South in the General Election, argued for "the State to act the part of policeman and step in and say that the struggle should cease" Had there been a single federation of trades unions, he argued, no such lock-out would have resulted. Support was forthcoming from a host of labour and socialist leaders including Will

87. Fox, History of N.U.S.S.O., pp. 227-2, for a summary of these exchanges.

88. B.S.T.U. 6 April, 1895.

89. The Times, 5 April, 1895.

90. B.S.T.U. 6 April, 1895.

91. Le Argus, 6 April, 1895. See the prosecution of Charles and Rachel Greenberg, Le London Advertiser, 6 April, 1895, reports a case of intimidation, not actual violence.

92. B.S.T.U. 6 April, 1895. S.L.R. 5 April, 1895. Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 1 and 3 April, 1895.

Thorne, Edward Aveling, Ben Tillatt, George Lansbury and Pete Curran.⁹³ A few days later, the Board of Trade arranged a joint conference.

The London union leaders took the view that constant activity was the best means of maintaining enthusiasm, and so frequent meetings were arranged. These took the form of large gatherings on London Fields or in the Kay Street Club,⁹⁴ and of smaller, daily, open-air meetings in the affected areas of the East End.⁹⁵ Such collective activities were important because they provided a boost to morale, but also because they provided the leaders with an opportunity to scotch the constant rumours of exhausted funds.⁹⁶ The National Union had begun the struggle with total reserves of £63,000, but a third of this was legally confined to the sick-fund.⁹⁷ By the end of the third week only about £10,000 of the available two-thirds had been used.⁹⁸ While this indicated a high level of financial support from other unions, organisations and individuals, such contributions were bound to dry up as the dispute dragged on.⁹⁹

The Federation met in London on 29 March to demonstrate their formidable unity. Both Thomas Lilley and James Branch were at pains to dispel rumours that the London statement manufacturers were weakening in their allegiance to the Federation. Lilley anticipated Ward's later remarks when he regretted to see "that the solid party of workmen had been overthrown by a party of socialists." Ward reiterated these sentiments, but denied accusations that they were intent upon destroying trade unionism within the industry. It was only the "bastard trades' unionism", motivated by the socialist desire to take over and control their businesses, that they wished to eliminate.¹⁰⁰ In his pursuit of this noble cause Ward had been subjected to a constant barrage of threatening letters; a

93. Borough of Hackney Standard; 5 April, 1895.

94. B.S.T.J.; 6 April, 1895.

95. W.L. Leader; 6 April, 1895.

96. S.L.R.; 5 April, 1895. At a meeting on 1 April, Votier assured the audience that funds were available for 3 months, if needed.

97. E. Argus; 30 March, 1895.

98. E. London Advertiser; 6 April, 1895.

99. M.B.; April, 1895, lists contributions to the lock-out fund amounting to £981 9s. 10d. by the end of that month.

100. B.S.T.J.; 6 April, 1895.

recent one (from the East End) threatening to clear him out of the land of the living.¹⁰¹

With the failure of the independent initiative of Labouchere, the Government decided in favour of a direct intervention through the Board of Trade. Anticipating that the two sides were about to be brought together in this way, Asquith made a speech, at Nottingham on 3 April, expressing optimism at the prospect of a settlement. He was at pains to stress two points. Firstly, although he praised the orderliness of the conduct of the trade unionists, he issued a stern warning that the law would tolerate no degeneration into intimidation and violence. (He had nothing to say about the conduct, actual or potential, of the employers). Secondly, he extolled the virtues of arbitration as the only relevant philosophy of conflict resolution in the modern world.¹⁰²

The day after Asquith's speech the two sides met at the Board of Trade under the chairmanship of its President, Sir Courtenay Boyle. Both sides made concessions in order to provide a basis for discussion. For their part, the employers agreed to suspend the 'seven commandments' and to allow a free choice of discussion. As their response, the Union agreed to accept piecework statements on testing and finishing machinery, provided they were based upon the production of the 'average worker.' Employers were to be free to choose between piece or day work, but could only use one of these methods of production. Thirdly, Boyle was to investigate the possibility of financial guarantees being provided in the event of a settlement. This was a sufficiently vague commitment for the Union who were reluctant to provide them.¹⁰³

The conference failed to reach a settlement, ostensibly because the parties could not agree over country work: whether employers should have the freedom to send work from the towns to the villages in order to have it made up more cheaply.¹⁰⁴ In fact, neither side had come prepared to make major concessions.

101. S.L.S.: 5 April, 1895.

102. ibid.: 12 April, 1895.

103. B.S.T.J.: 13 April, 1895.

104. The Times: 10 April, 1895.

One report suggested that such was the hostility between the two parties that they had to be kept in separate rooms until the conference had begun. Nevertheless, both agreed to meet again.¹⁰⁵

The Union was being propelled towards a settlement by its increasing inability to cope with deepening distress. In Leicester, a mere £150 had been collected to satisfy the 1,600 applications received for relief from non-unionists.¹⁰⁶ The 'black-legs' at the Belgrave Rubber Company's shoeworks were incarcerated for twenty four hours per day by the angry vigil of pickets outside.¹⁰⁷ The relief committee at Kingwood (Bristol) was also unable to cope with the amount of distress,¹⁰⁸ and in Northampton the hungry were being warmed daily by 1,000 quarts of soup sent from London by Henry Labouchere.¹⁰⁹

The situation in London was no better. Despite collections at every meeting and demonstration, the Ways and Means Committee could not keep the wolf from the door of the non-unionist. The position of women workers was causing particular concern. Gertrude Tuckwell, secretary of the women's Trade Union League, took a leading role in obtaining relief for them and in trying to organise them for the future. In an appeal issued through the press¹¹⁰ she estimated that there were some 2,000 women laid off by the lock-out in London. The majority of these had been reduced to a state of destitution and single women were being turned out of their lodgings as a consequence.

Two examples illustrate the plight of women workers. The first is a married woman who had to keep her husband and five children who were between the ages of ten years and three months. Her husband had recently been ill with rheumatism which developed into rheumatic fever and gout. He tried to return to work too soon and developed an ulcerated ankle. He had been unemployed for four months before the lock-out, not because of the ankle, but because he had been displaced

105. B.S.T.: 13 April, 1895.

106. Ibid.

107. The Times: 13 April, 1895.

108. B.S.T.: 13 April, 1895.

109. The Times: 9 April, 1895.

110. Daily Chronicle: 9 April, 1895. Justice: 13 April, 1895.

by machinery. After that, his wife kept the family on her meagre earnings as a machinist. But, once the lock-out dried up her supply of homework she still had to find 7s. 6d. per week rent for their two rooms and 2s. 6d. per week for the sewing machine that lay idle in one of them. The rent had gone unpaid and the family were under notice to quit. But for the Ways and Means Committee, she said, they would have starved.

The second example is of a widow with four children to support. Before the lock-out she had been able to earn 12 - 15s. per week as a machinist and her eldest son added 8s. per week through his work as a painter. They were both locked-out, but still had to find 4s. per week rent and 2s. 6d. per week machine rent. The journalist who interviewed her found her on the verge of starvation.

"Her hollow cheeks, and outstanding bones which show hideously through the insufficient clothing are eloquent testimony to her needs, and no one who saw her would doubt for an instant that she speaks the truth when she says that she often feels she is giving her own life away when she hands the food to the little ones, unable to eat herself while they clamour for food."¹¹¹

Apart from its limited success in relieving the condition of the non-unionists, the Ways and Means Committee's activities were closely scrutinised from the Council's headquarters in Leicester. When the Daily Chronicle published a list of unions that had contributed to the Committee's funds, Inskip was provoked into a curt reminder that it was only empowered to collect for non-unionists and unemployed members.¹¹² He was clearly anxious to prevent an alternative, rank and file power base with independent finances developing in London, for this would limit the Executive's freedom of manoeuvre when the time came to make a settlement.

Another attempt at this was made at the Board of Trade on 11 April. The employers put forward a set of six proposals as an alternative to the 'seven commandments', but, in fact, they incorporated all but one of their previous demands. Restriction of output went unmentioned, but four new conditions were

111. The Star: 19 April, 1895.

112. Daily Chronicle: 11 and 12 April, 1895.

added. A disputed statement for welled work, which had recently been introduced in Northampton, was to be withdrawn. Secondly, all manufacturers in a centre were to be treated equally in respect of wages and conditions. This was an attempt to force into line the non-federated manufacturers who were constantly undercutting the better work. Thirdly, there was to be arbitration on all disputes over wages, hours or conditions. Finally, local boards were to be formed in all federated areas.¹¹³

The Union's rejection of such terms was eminently predictable. Votier was personally disgusted by what he considered a lack of seriousness on the employers' part. The Union sought an honourable settlement not one "which would deliver them bound hand and foot over to the employers, and which would make them the laughing stock of the trade union world."¹¹⁴ As his own spinner in the works, he had proposed that the employers find all grindery costs in the future, but, as he later admitted he did not expect to have it accepted and he was not prepared to break up the conference over the issue. Yet, the conference was in danger of breaking up. Two failures to achieve a settlement had strengthened the hand of the war party in the employers' camp. Their inclination towards a fight to the death was lent full support by the S.L.R. which was for "rubbing-out" the "semi-political, semi-socialistic, and wholly retrogressive Executives"¹¹⁵

By the end of the fifth week of the lock-out, the Council was in imminent danger of presiding over a bankrupt union. Consequently, they issued a desperate appeal to the trade union movement for donations or loans which would be repaid after the lock-out was over.¹¹⁶ Victory was within the Federation's grasp.

Patience was running out in Leicester where, on the night of 11 April, an unsuccessful attempt to burn down the Belgrave Rubber Works was made.¹¹⁷ The Times feared that such incidents were likely to increase as economic hardship

113. B.S.T.J.: 20 April, 1895.

114. N.E. Leader: 20 April, 1895.

115. S.L.R.: 19 April, 1895.

116. B.S.T.J.: 20 April, 1895.

117. Ibid.

compelled the drift back to work.¹¹⁸ Although the more prosperous of Leicester's shoemakers had not, yet, mortgaged all to the pawnbroker, many of the less fortunate had been forced to. On 16 April, the relief fund for Leicester's non-unionists ran out.¹¹⁹

The situation in London was not so serious, but was hardly satisfactory. The Ways and Means Committee still found some relief for the non-unionists, but £50 to share among all the women affected was grossly inadequate to meet existing needs. Still, some 3,000 of the locked-out were on a demonstration on Good Friday, 12 April, which ended at Peckham Rye.¹²⁰ One week later, representatives of the Federation and the Union met at the Board of Trade for their third and final attempt at a settlement.

The Conference began at three in the afternoon and continued until after nine in the evening.¹²¹ The two sides kept to different rooms and, speaking later at the opening of the corporation's electric light installation in Leicester, Boyle was of the opinion that this had reduced the 'electric flashes' to the occasional. His own role, in trotting back and forth between the two sides, had been one of a 'non-conductor.'¹²² If Boyle had prevented the sparks from flying, then what kind of settlement had his defusion produced?

III. The Settlement¹²³

The following remarks are offered by way of explanatory comments on the ten clauses of the settlement document.

1. Although the employers seemed to have lifted their absolute opposition to piecework on lasting and finishing machinery (expressed in the second of the 'seven commandments'), they retained the power to choose which method of production to use. Few, therefore, would use piecework, especially as they

118. *The Times*: 15 April, 1895, which thought that wives were beginning to play a significant role in persuading their husbands to return.

119. *Ibid.*: 16 April, 1895.

120. *B.S.T.J.*: 20 April, 1895.

121. *Daily Graphic*: 20 April, 1895.

122. *The Times*: 26 April, 1895.

123. See Appendix to Chapter 10 for verbatim details of the settlement.

also had the power to assess day wages upon the 'actual capacity of the average workman.' This mythical creature was too often actualised in the form of what the Union called a pacemaker. Thus, the Union had lost control over both the method and pace of production.

2. This was an application of the principles contained in 1. to the dispute at Northampton.
3. This provided for the mechanics of implementing the statements: through national and local committees or through the decision of an umpire, if necessary.
4. The local boards of arbitration were to be re-established, but with a view to imposing a greater measure of uniformity in their rules. This was an attempt to obtain greater consistency in working conditions across the country, for the lock-out had demonstrated that the age of local collective bargaining was over.
5. Much control was to be retained by the employers, however, that was not subject to negotiation through boards. Firstly, they reserved the right to appoint and dismiss workers at will. This would prove a useful weapon to turn against 'agitators.' Secondly, no board (which meant trade union) could prevent work from being sent from one district to another, unless the work in question had been the subject of an award in the first district. Thirdly, employers were to control time-keeping and to preserve order in the factory. Fox has, importantly, pointed to the fact that "The clause was later interpreted by many local Manufacturers' Associations to cover disputes arising from the tactics of pace-driving foremen".¹²⁴ Fourthly, employers were free to use either piecework or day labour on machinery and this opened up the possibility of using the team system that the Union so strongly objected to.

124. Fox, History of M.U.B.S.O., p.190.

6. This provided for a system of financial guarantees against either side breaking the agreement.
- 7, 8, 9 and 10. These clauses dealt, principally, with the implementation of new awards, sanctions against rule breakers and the provision of a referee and umpire. The ban on all strikes and lock-outs was to prove purely nominal.

It is best to compare this agreement, not with the original 'seven commandments', but with the more recent proposals presented by the employers in the middle of April. In comparison, the final agreement can be seen to incorporate all but one of these proposals: the two-year freeze on wages and working hours. However, the final document allowed the employers so much leeway over these things that this hardly mattered. From the employers' point of view, the final agreement was a comprehensive settlement which had required them to concede nothing of substance. By waging a patient war of attrition they had obtained better terms than many could have hoped for at the outset.

The terms of settlement cleared the way for the employers to embark upon unrestricted mechanization in the face of intensifying foreign competition. Ironically, by the turn of the century, British manufacturers were exporting fewer boots and shoes than in 1895 and imports continued unabated.¹²⁵ Through obtaining control over the new means of production the employers had struck a debilitating blow at trade unionism and a fatal one at the new unionism, in particular. Membership of the National Union declined from the 43,955 of 1894 to only 27,960 by 1900.¹²⁶ Votier disappeared from the scene within a year of the defeat and militants everywhere became a muted force.¹²⁷

The settlement seemed to sound the death knell for the London statements. The S.L.R. argued that clause one of the new agreement made all previous state-

125. Church, The Effect of the American Export Invasion, pp. 224-5.
Exports: 1895 = 674,620 dozen pairs; 1900 = 630,244 dozen pairs.
Imports: 1895 = 132,058 dozen pairs; 1900 = 233,668 dozen pairs.

126. Brunner, op.cit. p.250.

127. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O. pp. 239 - 41.

ments obsolete.¹²⁸ When questioned at a manufacturers' meeting on 22 April, however, Thomas Lilley attributed more importance to clause five which, he thought, would result in a single statement for London.¹²⁹ In fact, neither mentioned the London statements in particular, but both gave the employers sufficient control over the introduction of machinery and the method of working with it that they had no need to tolerate any kind of restrictive statement.

London boot and shoemakers were less than delighted with the terms. Although the leaders managed to scrape an affirmative vote at the Shoreditch Town Hall on 23 April, the meeting was a stormy one and the vote had to be taken twice. By the token of collective responsibility Votier was forced to join Freak's defence of the settlement. In so doing, he exaggeratedly claimed that it would be revealed as highly advantageous.¹³⁰ This was sheer moonshine, and Votier's credibility suffered accordingly. Within the year he was out of office, never to return.¹³¹ The employers had won the ultimate victory as the symbol of the new unionism was cast down by the votes of shoemakers become iconoclasts.

128. S.L.R. 1 26 April, 1895.

129. B.S.T.J. 1 27 April, 1895.

130. Ibid.

131. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O. p.240.

CHAPTER VII. APPENDIX I.

Terms of Settlement of 1895 Lock-Out.

TERMS OF SETTLEMENT.

Tux conference of representatives of the Boot and Shoe Manufacturers' Federation and the delegates of the Boot and Shoe Operatives' Union was resumed on Friday morning last at the office of the Board of Trade, Sir Courtenay Boyle presiding. The delegates sat from three o'clock in the afternoon until nine o'clock, when the following report was handed to the president:

"We, the undersigned representatives of the Federated Association of Boot and Shoe Manufacturers and the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, agree to the following terms of settlement of the dispute in the boot and shoe trade on behalf of those whom we represent—

PRACTICE STATEMENTS.

"1. This conference is of opinion that the placement statement or statements for lasting and finishing machine workers and those working in connection therewith are desirable. Such statements to be based on the actual capacity of the average workman. Any manufacturer to have the option of adopting piecework or continuing day work, it being understood that the whole of the operative working on any process shall be put on one or the other system, which shall not be changed oftener than once in six months. Hauling and sewing to be regarded as reported as separate processes.

"2. This conference is of opinion that a piecework statement for settled work at Northampton should be based on the principle laid down in the following resolution—viz: 'The statement shall be based on the actual capacity of the average workman.' Employers having the option as laid down in that resolution with regard to payment by the time or piece.

"3. That for the purpose of carrying into effect the last two resolutions joint committees be constituted as follows—(a) A joint committee of representatives of the employers and workmen, four of each, to determine the principle and method of arrangement and payment of each piecework statement for machine workers shall be formed, such committee to hold its first meeting on May 5, 1895, at Northampton for preliminary business; (b) Joint committees composed of representatives of employers and employed, four of each, to prepare statements for their respective localities in accordance with the principle laid down by the above joint committee—such committees to hold their first meetings with the least possible delay after the completion of the work of the above joint committee; (c) A joint committee to prepare a statement for settled work for Northampton composed of representatives of employers and employed, four of each, such committee to hold its first meeting on May 6, 1895, for preliminary business. Such committee shall take such evidence and obtain such information as they may think fit for the purpose, and such shall appoint an umpire to determine points on which they fail to agree. Failing agreement on the part of any of the committees as to the appointment of umpires, the appointment shall be made by the president of the Federation, and the general secretary of the Union, or if they fail to agree by Sir Henry James.

RULES OF ARRANGEMENT.

"4. That the various local boards of arbitration and conciliation, consisting of equal number of representatives of employers and workmen, be the district be immediately reconstituted and their rules be revised so far as necessary, with a view to greater uniformity, by a joint committee of representatives of employers and employed—four of each—to be appointed for it with the revised rules to be submitted to, and adopted by the local boards with or without amendments in matters of detail. Pending the completion of this revision the former rules be enforced; such questions of classification and other matters of local questions not involving matters of principle to be entertained in the meantime, with the revision of the question of a minimum wage for clickers and pressmen in centres where notices have already been given to local boards.

POWER OF ARBITRATION BOARDS.

"5. That such boards when reconstituted shall have full powers to settle all questions submitted to them concerning wages, hours of labour, and the conditions of employment of all classes of workmen represented therein within their districts which it is found impossible to settle in the first place mutually between the employers and employed, or secondarily, between their representatives subject to the following conditions:—(a) No board shall require the employer to employ any particular workman, or a workman to work for any particular employer, or shall entertain any questions relating to such matters except for the purpose of enabling a workman to clear his character. (b) No board shall claim jurisdiction over the conditions and terms of employment of workmen outside its district providing that no actual work was done in the district which has been subject to award in that district. (c) No board shall interfere with the right of an employer to make reasonable regulations for timekeeping and the preservation of order in his factory or workshop. (d) No board shall put restrictions on the introduction of machinery or the output thereon, or on the adoption of day or piecework wages by an employer in cases in which both systems have been mentioned, subject to the conditions prescribed in resolutions 2 and 3. No question referred to in sub-sections a, b, c, and d shall be made a matter of dispute by the Union.

FINANCIAL GUARANTEES.

"6. That it is desirable and necessary to provide financial guarantees for daily carrying out the provisions of this agreement and existing and future awards, agreements, decisions of boards, arbitrators, or umpires, so long as they do not contravene the provisions of this agreement, and that a scheme for the depositing of certain sums in the hands of trustees for the purpose.

REVISION OF BOARD RULES.

"7. That the committee entrusted with the revision of the rules of local arbitration boards be instructed to insert provisions—(a) To carry the last resolution into effect forthwith, if not agreed upon both sides the conditions and terms of the trade to be referred to and finally settled by Sir Henry James; (b) That in future all awards and decisions shall specify the date before which neither side shall be competent to reopen the question; (c) That where a minimum wage has been fixed and is in operation and a proposal is made to change it, the board or umpire in giving the decision shall award or take into consideration the length of time which has elapsed since the question was last determined, and the conditions existing at the two dates respectively. Notices already given by the Union for an advance on the minimum wage to clickers and pressmen shall be held to be good notice to the arbitration boards for the districts to which they refer, and shall be dealt with forthwith.

PROVISIONS AS TO STRIKES.

"8. No strike or lock-out shall be entered into on the part of any body of workmen, members of the National Federation, or any manufacturer represented on any local board of arbitration.

"9. That if any provision of this agreement or of an award, agreement, or decision be broken by any manufacturer or body of workmen of the Federation or the National Union, and the Federation or the National Union fail within 10 days after the infraction to send members to comply with the agreement, decision, or award, or to expel them from their organization, the Federation, or the National Union, shall be deemed to have broken the agreement, award, or decision.

REMARKS ON TERMS.

"10. That any question as to the interpretation of these terms of settlement be referred to Sir Courtenay Boyle, whose decision shall be final and binding on both parties. That Sir Henry James be requested to act as umpire to determine any other disputed points between the Federation and the National Union arising out of this agreement."

The following signed the agreement on behalf of the Federated Association of Boot and Shoe Manufacturers—J. GRIFFIN WAIN, president; W. HICCOCK, SECRETARY; LEWIS, THOMAS LILLIE.

On behalf of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, the following signed: W. B. HOWARD, president; DAVID STANTON, Wm. VOTTER, W. INYER, general secretary.

Chairman of Conference, Courtenay Boyle; H. Llewellyn Smith, secretary of conference; witness, Thomas Smith.

It is understood that work will be resumed as early as possible but not later than April 25.

Source : E.S.T.J.; 27 April, 1895.

CHAPTER ELEVENPOLITICAL SHOEMAKERS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY LONDONI. The Legend

Hobebaw and Scott have argued that "the political radicalism of nineteenth century shoemakers is proverbial."¹ Scanning a vast European and American literature, they isolate two principal origins of this reputation. The first is the legend of the pre-industrial, village shoemakers: craftsman, worker-intellectual and ideologist. The second is the prominence of the industrial shoemaker within the history of nineteenth century trades unionism and working class, political movements.

The sedentary and physically undemanding nature of the village shoemaker's work provided time for rumination, reading and radical contemplations upon the condition of the world. Importantly, there was no overseer to interrupt this pattern of intellectual development, for the village shoemaker was characterised by his economic independence. More than most artisans, he worked directly for his market with little intrusion from middlemen. If this market slackened, there was always cobbling (repairing) to turn to.

The legend of the radical, village shoemaker was bequeathed to his urban heir. As the centre of production began to pass to the workshops and factories of the towns the industrial shoemaker kept up the old customs. Without the time to read on the job, a boy or a retired soldier might be employed to read aloud in the workshop. Keeping abreast of politics required both literacy and articulacy, and these were the shoemaker's intellectual hallmarks. New entrants to the trade were encouraged to conform to the culture of the worker-intellectual, or were attracted because of it. The shoemaker continued to be found at the centre of urban, popular politics.²

1. E.J. Hobebaw and Joan Wallach Scott, Political Shoemakers, Past and Present, No. 89, Nov. 1980, p.86.

2. Ibid., p.98.

But the radicalism of the nineteenth century, industrial shoemaker was composed of far more than loyalty to tradition. Its causes lie, to a much greater extent, within the social relations resulting from shoemaking's peculiar mode of industrialisation. In the most general terms Mobbs and Scott are right in detecting an expanding but frequently pauperised labour force becoming attracted to increasingly sophisticated radical ideologies that eventually amounted to a critique of capitalism.³ But, more than many trades, shoemaking industrialized in a diverse and uneven fashion that confounds generalisation. The trade in London experienced neither a steady expansion in numbers through the nineteenth century,⁴ nor a uniform development from workshop to factory production. The London shoemaker remained in a semi-proletarianised condition which brought him the worst of both worlds. Proximity to the manufacturer's warehouse kept him on a tight leash that denied him the independence of the village craftsman but, at the same time, outwork denied him the collective, organisational base of the factory.

Trade union organisation can be seen as the most fundamental radical response that shoemakers in London made to their economic position. Primarily, this chapter looks beyond the trade union to supra-trade activity and attempts to determine under what circumstances shoemakers expressed their radicalism through other means. It draws heavily upon work done by other historians of working class movements in nineteenth century London and attempts to integrate this with some primary research into London shoemakers' political activities in the late nineteenth century.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-10.

4. Numbers of boot and shoemakers in London, 1831-91.

1831	1841	1861	1891
16,500	24,857	42,790	38,989

Sources: Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, p.342; David Goodway, *London Chartism, 1838-48* (Cambridge, 1982), p.16; Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, pp. 358-9, 362-3, 366-7. Unfortunately, the 1831 and 1841 census figures are for over 20s, 1861 and 1891 for over 10s, thus exaggerating the late 19th century growth.

II. 'The revolutionary period': from Cato Street to Chartist.

Stimulated by Government contracts, and having successfully combatted unprecedented inflation by vigorous strike action, shoemaking in London emerged from the French War in relatively prosperous condition.⁵ It was not to remain so, and the rapid proliferation of slop manufacturers caused skilled shoemakers like John Brown, returning from the War, to despair of their old trade.⁶ In such circumstances it is not surprising to find shoemakers prominent in the post-war reform agitation. A political union of London shoemakers was formed in November, 1819 to support it, by which time subscriptions within the trade for the victims of Peterloo had been circulating for some time.⁷ Even the Cato Street conspirators, who included a number of Spencean shoemakers,⁸ were not cast out as lepers. Two separate divisions of London shoemakers gave £50 each towards their defence, but this did not save them from the rope.⁹ John Brown describes the feelings of craft loyalty that were extended to Brunt, one of the executed conspirators; sentiments that were sharpened by the belief that the men had been the victims of an agent provocateur. "The repulsive wretch Edwards ... treacherous and cold blooded ... the chief instigator of the contemplated atrocities" was "soused with stinking water from shoemakers' shop tubs, as he sneaked through narrow courts and alleys."¹⁰

Cato Street's insurrectionary response was never quite repeated again in London, not even during the reform crisis of 1831-2 and the high points of Chartist in 1842 and 1848. Shoemakers did not forego militant activity, but it was kept within the boundaries of constitutionalism. Economic conditions continued to act as a major determinant of political behaviour and, for shoemakers, the 1820s were bad years. The depression which set in from 1826 affected them as

5. Prothero, op.cit., p.41.

6. Mansfield, op.cit., p.132.

7. Prothero, op.cit., p.124.

8. Hobbs and Scott, op.cit., p.90.

9. Prothero, op.cit., p.131.

10. Mansfield, op.cit., p.134.

such as other trades, but it was worsened by the steady de-skilling and pauperisation of the London industry. As unemployment rose casual labour in search of unskilled work swelled the reserve army available to the slop manufacturers. The craft base of the industry began to be eroded by the expansion of the slop market and apprenticeship, for so long the regulator of craft unionism, was swept away.¹¹ Allen Davenport, the Spencean shoemaker, was absolutely right when he argued that trade unionism could never successfully protect wages in conditions of labour surplus.¹² This did not prevent shoemakers from playing a leading role in the agitation to repeal the Combination Laws in 1824. Nearly a third of all the trade petitions received by Parliament were from their societies.¹³

Less well known is the campaign fought by the London trades against the Tory T.F. Courtenay's bill to restrict the autonomy of friendly societies.¹⁴ It was so successful that not only was Courtenay's bill defeated but, by 1829 the artisan trades had forced another upon the Government that gave almost complete control to the memberships.¹⁵ John East led the 'kill the bill' campaign between 1827-8, closely assisted by a shoemaker, William Vielle. Vielle was a West End 'ladies' man', with a reputation for being something of a scholar, perhaps because he claimed sympathy for the economics of J.R. McCulloch. This led him to support a tax upon machinery and the repeal of the Corn Laws, both of which he advocated through the radical press. But, when better economic conditions prevailed he was just as happy to keep the company of Francis Place and promote artisan respectability in coffee shops and reading rooms.¹⁶

11. Prothero, op.cit., p.210.

12. ibid., p.219.

13. ibid., p.176.

14. Shipley, Metropolitan Friendly Societies; Prothero, op.cit., chap. 12.

15. Prothero, op.cit., p.236.

16. Shipley, op.cit., pp.103-4. Prothero, op.cit., p.229.

Shoemakers' prominent role in the co-operative movement can be explained by the fact that it offered at once an escape from ".... the classic process of degradation of skilled artisans in the situation of labour surplus",¹⁷ and the permanent replacement of the capitalist system that was responsible for this state of affairs. This was no less true in Northampton than it was in London.¹⁸ Shoemakers played a leading role in the London Co-operative Trading Association set up in November, 1827 with William Lovett as one of the storekeepers.¹⁹ They were active, again, in the Owenite Labour Exchange in the Gray's Inn Road where a shoemaker, William Hears, was superintendent in 1833. The majority of deposits seem to have been from the unemployed.²⁰ Thomas Voak, of the ladies' shoemakers, was another leading co-operator and a committee member of the British Association for the Promotion of Co-operative Knowledge.²¹

Recourse to co-operation continued to be made in the 1840s but increasingly as a defensive measure to counter-act unemployment. The most successful example of this came in May, 1846 when a group of 'strong men', led by William Robson, established a co-operative shop in Drury Lane after being presented with the 'document'. Assisted by the National Association of United Trades, it prospered and moved to 11 Tottenham Court Road, as the 'Boot and Shoe Depot', by the end of the year. Other artisans: organ builders, tin plate workers, masons, carpenters and bookbinders, supported it by setting-up shoe clubs, and the concern was eventually taken over and run by the Christian Socialists.²²

Prothero has argued that it was the poorer skilled trades, such as shoe-making, that provided the basis of support for London Chartist.²³ Goodway draws

17. Prothero, *op.cit.* p.251.

18. Haynes, *Class and Class Conflict*, p.89.

19. Prothero, *op.cit.* p.241. Lovett was, of course, a cabinet-maker.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 251-2.

21. *Ibid.*, p.256.

22. Goodway, *op.cit.* p.156. Prothero, *London Chartism and the Trades*, p.216.

23. Chartism in London, P. and P., XLIV, 1959; *London Chartism and the Trades*.

less of a distinction and gives greater weight to the role played by the mere 'aristocratic' trades, such as the stonemasons, hatters, leather finishers, carvers and gilders.²⁴ Nevertheless, he does not deny the major contribution of shoemakers to the London movement. Only the stonemasons, of all working class trades, rank ahead of them in his index of Chartist participation.²⁵ In the years between the presentation of the first two petitions, "It was the shoemakers ... who went furthest as a trade to identify themselves with Chartism,"²⁶ and it was the West End Men's Men who took the lead in politicising the trade. On their initiative all the local shoemakers' unions, except the 'aristocratic' West End Women's Men, agreed to agitate for the Charter through their unions. The elite left the decision to individuals. For the rest, a clear recognition of the limits of trade union action was dawning. That could not deal completely with the problems of excessive competition, labour surplus and falling prices, so political action was certainly needed to counter-act those of corrupt legislation that supported monopolies, trade restrictions and overburdening taxation.²⁷

It was concerns such as these that drove shoemakers to Kennington Common on 10th April, 1848, but the sharp rise in unemployment acted as the last straw that could turn men into revolutionaries. Half of the City shoemakers were out of work in March, and it was probably one of them who told Mayhew, "I hate physical force and revolutions, but I went to Kennington Common on the 10th of April, knowing or carrying nothing what might happen."²⁸

The opposition of Chartists to the Anti-Corn Law League is well-known and London shoemakers seem to have followed this general suspicion of free trade. Many could remember the tariff reductions of 1826 resulting in wage cuts and one estimate of the further reductions of 1842 was of the order of 15%.²⁹ Cheap French imports were particularly blamed for this; the shoemakers' experience, thus, bore some similarity to that of the silk-weavers. Although masters and men united

24. Goodway, *op.cit.*, pp. 224-5.

25. *Ibid.*, p.16.

26. *Ibid.*, p.47.

27. *Ibid.*, p.48.

28. Yeo and Thompson (ed.); *op.cit.*, p.254. Also quoted in Goodway, p.76.

29. Yeo and Thompson (ed.); *op.cit.*, pp. 238-9.

in opposition to the 1842 tariff reductions this proved purely temporary for the shoemakers believed that "the shoe manufacturers supported the Anti-Corn Law League and merely wished to use the workers to pull down the aristocracy."³⁰ The masters could apparently differentiate between the political symbolism involved in repeal and the damaging effects of free trade upon their domestic market. The shoemakers, on the other hand, could see no point in cheaper bread if it only resulted in wage cuts, and the fact that the masters had retrieved their income tax payments in this way added to their case.³¹

A final important point to make about London shoemakers' Chartism is that it preceeded hand in hand with attempts to extend their trade unionism. In June of 1844 on the initiative of the aristocratic London Women's men, a supposedly national body calling itself the Cordwainers' General Mutual Assistance Association had been formed in Birmingham. But, the lower paid branches of the London trade condemned the fact that the executive had powers to control both the finances of local branches and the wages prevailing there. This was "class legislation with a vengeance." Accordingly, the City and West End men's men started up their more democratic Philanthropic Society of Boot and Shoemakers. A brief attempt to amalgamate, in April, 1845, threw up its first fissures within a few months, and by 1848 the remnants joined the National Association of United Trades. These more skilled London shoemakers may have provided the nucleus for the formation of the United Society of Cordwainers in 1862.³²

John Skelton was a member of the elitist West End ladies' shoemakers' society and a firm supporter of the 'Mutuals'. It is not surprising that we find him advocating O'Connor's Lend Plan as a means of redeploying surplus labour,³³ tactics the O'Brienites condemned as a retreat from the real issues. Another prominent shoemaker-author of the time, James Devlin, revealed the

30. Prethero, London Chartism and the Trades, p.208.

31. Yeo and Thompson (ed.), op.cit., p.249. Income tax had been introduced at a rate of 7d. in £1 on incomes above £150 by the 1842 budget.

32. Godway, op.cit., pp.165-9.

33. Prethero, London Chartism and the Trades, p.216.

source of the failure to combine as 'a most bitter spirit of mere partizanship' on the part of the aristocratic shoemakers. He urged 'those of the "ancient regimen" do away for the time with some of their men's lurking misgivings, and come and "confer" at least, with their fellow workmen of the altered system, and thus the closer to examine what in reality it is.'³⁴ The trade union divisions of the later part of the century, between statesmen and sweated workers, were clearly present in origin in the 1840s. But, these did not prevent either from supporting Chartism. It is likely, however, that the aristocratic shoemakers were attracted towards the moral force wing, and deviations like the Land Plan, while the more pauperised were driven, like the shoemaker on Kennington Common in 1848, towards physical force.

III. The later nineteenth century: radicalism and the socialist challenge. Culture and politics, c.1850-90.

In a provocative article that has only recently begun to be modified Stedman Jones has argued that the culture of the London working class, in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, lacked the political combativity of earlier generations.³⁵ Idealising the class consciousness of the Chartist years he sees their sons as retreating into an enclosed and defensive conservatism which accepted the capitalist order as permanent, was without a clear conception of the state, and constructed new unions and Labour Party, alike, not as deviations from this conservatism, but as a culmination of it. Stripped of a revolutionary politics, the working class consoled itself in leisure: in the spectacle of sport, in the hospitality of the pub, and in the jingoistic humour and amusements of the music hall. For this, the decline of the old, cohesive, artisanal culture is held responsible, under the impact, as it was, of provincial competition and an intensified division of labour.

34. Goodway, *op.cit.*, p.167.

35. Gareth Stedman Jones, Working Class Culture and Working Class Politics in London, 1870-1900: Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 4, 1974.

This is a demoralising picture of a defeated working class movement which becomes incorporated into the capitalist order after the failure of the last mass movement with revolutionary potential. Chartist independence, the last protest before the hatch of capitalism was battened down, becomes the watershed in the history of the industrial working class. After it, reformism took hold and revolutionary politics resurfaced only as an occasional aberration. The general contours of this argument cannot be disputed for the history of the late nineteenth century working class is reformist. But, within that reformist shell was contained a working class politics that exhibited both independence of bourgeois ideological control and the seeds of a socialist alternative. Artisan politics in late nineteenth century London was resistant to socialism, but it was not a conservative force because of that. The discussion of shoemakers' politics that follows attempts to establish the continuing vitality of this culture. The entry of the less skilled into active political participation presented a socialist challenge to the prevailing radical liberalism.

Crossick's study of artisans in mid-Victorian London³⁶ makes many fine discriminations about artisan ideology that throw into question some of Stedman Jones's generalisations. In particular, Crossick's exploration of the concept of independence among the artisans of Kentish London moves the argument away from the simple embourgeoisement intimations of 'respectability.' He insists that the formation and content of artisan ideology is not to be understood in terms of a direct imposition from the middle classes above them; in other words, straight social control theory.³⁷ Rather, he sees behavioural norms being received by the labour aristocracy after a social refraction had taken place. Elite working class

36. Crossick, *An Artisan Elite*.

37. Stedman Jones does not use the concept in 'Working Class Culture,' indeed he has criticised it elsewhere (in, *Class Expression versus Social Control*?, *M.W.J.*, no. 4, autumn 1977). But, at least one of his alternative explanations of working class passivity, the music hall's transmission of jingoism, has been questioned in its scope and content by Hugh Cunningham in, *The Language of Patriotism, 1750 - 1914*, *M.W.J.*, no. 12, autumn 1981, pp. 24-8.

groups accommodated these norms according to their own needs, but they did so in a way which preserved their distinctly proletarian status. The artisans of Kentish London did not become embourgeoisified, but laid down normative goals for the attainment of independent, respectable, working class status.

Independence formed the core of what these artisans understood as respectability. It meant, on the one hand, being free from dependence upon state institutions such as the poor law; and, on the other, from the patronage of the rich in the form of charity or through their control of friendly societies. But, independence was more than this for "... it was not just the negative freedom from charity and want, but the positive self-confidence (as well as capacity) that would allow a man to make real choices about his life"³⁸ These choices included where to live and which institutions to join.³⁹ At work, independence involved the accumulation of many hard-earned, craft rights, but, at the minimum, it meant the dignity of the craftsman and the freedom not to have to compete in the barbaric fashion of the dock labourer for casual employment. In the long-term, independence brought the capacity of upward social mobility and thrift ensured the steady improvement of material conditions. Here, the norms of petit-bourgeois and artisan touched, but it was a brief contact for the latter turned his capacity for independence towards the creation of specifically working class institutions.

Despite this considerable assertion of independence, the artisans of Kentish London had closer relations with the local bourgeoisie than those of North East London. In Kentish London artisans did actively seek the social approval of their 'superiors' for their associations, although denying them any organisational control. The discussion of the working men's club movement that follows argues that East London artisans wished to exclude the middle class completely. The *modus vivendi* of Kentish London was not replicated amidst the sharper class antagonisms of the East, where the typical labour aristocrat was not the highly

38. Crossick, *op.cit.*, pp.136-7

39. Crossick, *The Labour Aristocracy and its Values*, p.307.

paid engineer or shipbuilder, but the less privileged shoemaker, tailor or cabinet maker.

In politics, the predominance of the lesser artisan had assisted in producing a greater radicalism north of the Thames. The period from Chartist to the socialist revival of the late 1880s saw the geographical focus of artisan radicalism shift from west to east, but as late as the 1870s the declining craftsmen of the West End still retained a radical nucleus. The importance of this group is that, far from being a mere extension of the franchise agitation of the 1860s or the secularism of the 1860s and 1870s, it had retained a socialist, economic analysis of capitalism. The merit of Shipley's work⁴⁰ is that he demonstrates a continuity of socialist politics within the London labour movement from D'Brianite Chartism to the Marxism of the 1880s. The bearers of the ideology were few in number and limited in their influence, but the West London shoemakers, tailors and cabinet makers who sustained their socialism through the 1860s and 1870s acted as a vital bridge.

Shipley takes the view that, "The clubs were at once the mutual improvement societies of the metropolitan artisan, and a springboard for political agitation."⁴¹ Mutual improvement involved not only self-education, but also a variety of entertainments. The Kingsland Progressive Club was well known for its select dancing lessons which, no doubt, accounted for the popularity of holding balls after political meetings. Science education was an even more popular activity in the 1870s and this is a demonstration of the influence of the secularists in the clubs. This influence declined in the 1880s, however, as the secularists grew closer to the socialist organisations.⁴² In 1875, members of the Hoxton Club received a lecture on electricity and magnetism, and the 'young, good looking and brilliant' Mrs. Fenwick Miller provided her own attraction when she packed

40. Shipley, Club Life and Socialism.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

42. Laurence Marlow, London Working Men's Clubs: Some Aspects of their History, 1860 - 90 (University of Warwick, B.A., 1972), p. 30, from which most of this section on the E. London clubs is taken.

the Commonwealth Club in Bethnal Green Road to suffocation for her lecture on physiology. And, the audience at the Jewish Club, Hutchinson Street, Aldgate appeared wide awake all through the lecture on 'The Psychology of Sleep', in March, 1877.

West End clubland became the forum for a small group of artisan radicals in the 1870s. These men lived and worked in the Soho area and were probably members of the St. James's and Soho Club. Among them, shoemakers such as William Townshend, Charles Murray and William Morgan were prominent. Townshend, like Murray and his brother James, carried the theories of Brontë D'O'Brien beyond their mentor's death in 1864. Through the unemployment struggles of the later 1860s and the Manhood Suffrage League of the 1870s they insisted upon the centrality of the nationalisation of the land in socialist politics. All three of them became members of the S.D.F. in the 1880s and were frequent lecturers in the clubs. Charles Murray had been the delegate of the West End Boot Closers to the First International until it had ceased to meet in August, 1872. This branch of the Amalgamated Society of Cordwainers had affiliated to the International in 1869,⁴³ rather later than its sister branch, the West End Ladies' shoemakers, whose delegate, George Odger, was present at a meeting on 14 May when his branch requested a loan of £10 from the General Council.⁴⁴

William Morgan was an unemployed slipper maker⁴⁵ when he took over the 'Bull's Head Tavern', Crown Street in 1874, because he had been blacklisted by employers for trade union activism. He was, at that time, secretary of the West End women's No. 2 branch of the Amalgamated Cordwainers⁴⁶ (shortly to become the Amalgamated Society of Boot and Shoemakers). His house at 38, Warren Street, Fitzroy Square was but a short walk from the branch meeting place at the Duke of York, Upper Rathbone Place. Shipley estimates its size at 250, but this is an

43. Shipley, *Club Life*, p.19.

44. *Minute Book of the First International*. 1867, p.81.

45. Alfred Plummer, *Brontë D'O'Brien: a Political Biography* of Brontë D'O'Brien, 1804-64 (1971), p.270. See Appendix C, pp. 268-70 for political sketches of the Murrys.

46. 47th Quarterly Report of the Amalgamated Cordwainers' Association, 1874.

exaggeration for the No. 2 branch had only 77 members. There were, in fact, four separately organised branches of the West End Shoemakers in 1874 which together amounted to 324 members.⁴⁷ George Odger's society is likely to have been the larger no. 1 branch which had some 200 members and whose secretary in 1874 was James Cotton of 24, Gile Street, Fitzroy Square.

Morgan began Sunday evening political discussions at his 'pub' which eventually evolved into the Manhood Suffrage League, a neglected source of pre-S.D.F. socialism. He was also honorary chairman of the Labour Protection League, a militant general union particularly strong on the London waterfront. He had a long association with the sea, having previously been a boatswain in the Royal Navy.⁴⁸ His wife was one of the few women on the General Council of the First International. Hyndman had a high opinion of him, although this might not be the best recommendation.

The pursuit of cultural independence on the part of the East London artisan emerges clearly from Marlow's study of working men's clubs. An examination of the internal politics of club control and of attitudes towards drink reveals the constant tension in class relations through the 1870s and 1880s. Secondly, the political involvements of clubmen bring into question the view that working class political culture was passive and defeatist under the hegemony of metropolitan radicalism.

Brian Harrison has argued that the working man, in the late nineteenth century, was faced with a clear, cultural choice. Either he adopted the bourgeois norms of temperance society, mutual improvement and chapel, or he moved within the more proletarian orbit of 'pub' and music hall.⁴⁹ However, the working man's club, torn as it was between middle class patronage and working class membership, falls neatly into neither category. (The music hall became less proletarian as

47. *Ibid.*

48. Plummer, *Bronterre*, p.270.

49. Harrison, *Pubs*, p.161, in Dyos and Wolff, *op.cit.* vol. 1.

imperialism provoked an increasing jingoism⁵⁰). If London working men chose the 'pub' more frequently, then their loyalty was often strained by the Toryism of the landlord. Such political conflicts even resulted in occasional expulsions.⁵¹ Such tensions provided one motivation for the creation of cultural institutions within which the working man could enjoy autonomy. But, this impetus had to contend with the middle class desire to divert working class sociability along morally approved channels. Hence, Henry Solly and the founders of the Clubs 'and Institutes' Union of 1862 envisaged an agency which would wean the working man from the demon drink and imbue him with the temperant qualities of self-help.⁵² Some even attributed the urgency of the task to the fact that the consumption of "brain poison" was the main cause of the deterioration in class relations.⁵³

The founding of the Borough of Hackney Club in 1874⁵⁴ acted as a watershed. Although affiliated to the C.I.U., it possessed a strong, independent radical tendency which persuaded other, like-minded clubs to confront middle class patronage within the movement. Hackney, with its concentration of artisan shoemakers and others, was the centre of East End clubland. The Clifder Club, in Goldsmith's Row, produced the United Radical Club in 1884 and moved to Kay Street. These clubs were the cultural bastions of the Hackney artisan, the meeting places of shoemakers' trade unions and the upholders of metropolitan, radical liberalism. The committee rooms of the Borough of Hackney Club "were decorated with the portraits of Gladstone, Odger and Paine."⁵⁵ On political meeting nights, the hall would be packed with up to 500 people, and the club was reported as having a total membership of 800 shortly after its foundation.

The Borough of Hackney and the United Radical were only two of the more independent clubs formed in this period. Others included the Commonwealth in

50. J. Stedman Jones, Working Class Culture, pp. 494-5; Cunningham, op.cit., pp. 25-6.

51. Marlow, op.cit., p.15.

52. Ibid., p.7.

53. J.B. Brown, The Pig or the Sty: Drink and Poverty in Late Victorian England, Int. Rev. of Soc. Hist., Vol. XVIII, 1973, p.386.

54. Originally in Brunswick Rd., but shortly afterwards re-sited in Haggerston Rd.

55. Marlow, op.cit., p.8.

Bethnal Green Road and the Radical in Hoxton. In Tower Hamlets, two clubs emerged out of the division of the local Land and Labour League branches the Radical Association (1871) and the Radical Club (1875). Many others, often founded by immigrants, went unaffiliated to the C.I.U., but it was the group already mentioned which led the revolt against middle class control of the London club movement in the 1880s. The class conscious character of their radicalism is apparent from this description of a Sunday morning lecture at the United Radical Club in 1884:

"The sentiments of the audience might easily be gathered from the banners hung about the walls, bearing such mottoes as "Equality", "Defence not Defiance", and "Labour Conquers All."⁵⁶

Such politics could not be made compatible with those of the bourgeois paternalists who controlled the C.I.U. By the 1880s the clubs in the political vanguard, such as the Borough of Hackney and the United Radical, had graduated from a radical secularism to a socialism that saw working class parliamentary candidates as the only strategy for forcing further social reform and for defending free speech. Such a programme weakened the Liberal connection and illustrates the increasing realisation that Gladstonian Liberalism was equally incapable of solving the Irish and condition of England questions. Nevertheless, the importance of the clubs as registration centres for the Liberal vote was recognised and respected by the Party after the passing of the 1884 Reform Act.

The major explosion of club growth in London occurred between the years 1884-88. The Metropolitan Radical Federation was set up in 1885, on the initiative of the East End members, to organise the political work of the clubs, but even before this, clubmen such as Lowe of the Borough of Hackney, had secured election to the school Board.⁵⁷ In 1888, the M.R.F. combined with the Fabian Society, the S.O.F. and the London Secular Federation to run Progressive school board candidates on a programme of free education. The involvement of the clubs in local politics particularly indicates the influence of the Fabians within their walls.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-5.

57. *Ibid.* 2.

The spread of socialist politics through the clubs by the late 1880s revived the criticisms of lingering patronage. In 1888, the United Radical forced a vote on secession from the C.I.U., which it lost by 4,485 votes to 3,755. It is significant that the United Radical and Borough of Hackney clubs, between them, polled 3,250 (86.55%) of the pro-secessionist votes. Dorrell, the President of the United Radical, had led the secessionist struggle. Another leading member, Matthias, "a chartist veteran, who has fought in many a battle against privilege and tyranny", was prominent in the free speech agitation which followed the arrest of Jack Williams in Dod Street, Limehouse in 1885. The East End clubs put aside any political differences with the S.O.F. and rallied an impressive display of support at a meeting in Dod Street in December, which the police failed to disperse.

A study of the politics of metropolitan working men's clubs in the 1870s and 1880s can be used to question the view that working class politics underwent a serious retreat into a defensive conservatism. Down to 1890, at least, the clubs remained an energetic and progressive force and the fact that they increasingly took on entertainment, or for that matter educational, functions should not be allowed to conceal the fact.⁵⁸ Radical clubmen asserted a notable independence within their class institutions. In allying with the socialists in the struggle to defend free speech they went some way towards identifying the police as an agency of class oppression and state control. In December, 1887 Justice noted that despite the fact that the clubs were "composed of the aristocracy of labour", they expressed great sympathy with the unemployed struggles.⁵⁹ Paul Thompson has noted their constant interest in the other great issues of the 1880s: the Eastern Question, Ireland and Henry George's scheme for land reform.⁶⁰ As he points out, the consistently radical stances adopted over these issues must be clearly distinguished from those of official Liberalism. Radical clubmen were republican,

58. Stedman Jones uses this as an indicator of decline; Working Class Politics, p. 480.

59. Marlow, op.cit., p.65.

60. Paul Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour: the Struggle for London, 1885 - 1914 (1967), pp. 82-3.

secularist, and associated themselves with the tradition of Paine, Chartism and the Commune. It was an ideology between Liberalism and socialism, but closer to the latter, and which, in a later period, matured into what historians have tended to describe as labourism.

Socialism, Liberalism and electoral politics in the 1890s.

The failure of the Social Democratic Federation to establish itself as a viable alternative to metropolitan Liberalism in the 1890s has been much discussed.⁶¹ It ought not to obscure the fact, however, that, in the early 1890s, it presented the only organised challenge to the left of Liberalism at elections in East London. Among boot and shoemakers, it recruited a small elite of cadres whose political work in their trade union, in broader labour organisations, and at elections was unceasing. This activity won for them a political support in the local community that extended far beyond those who actually subscribed to Marxian socialism. The S.D.F.'s candidature in Bethnal Green North East at the 1892 general election illustrates the way in which it failed to make political capital out of the decline of Liberalism.

Between 1890 and 1892 the S.D.F. in East London mounted an oppositional campaign against the sitting M.P. for Bethnal Green North East, George Howell. Howell, a radical with a long history in the labour movement, had won the new seat in 1885 following the re-distribution measures of that year. Despite fighting on a programme which his biographer has described as 'rapid', because it had nothing to say on the crucial East End problems of housing and unemployment, Howell won a comfortable majority of 1,251 in a straight fight with the Conservative.⁶² He held the seat at the election of the following year that was caused by the rejection of Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill, and was prevailed upon to stand for a third term by the Bethnal Green Liberal Association at the 1892 contest. As early as July, 1890, however, the S.D.F. had decided to oppose

61. Most notably by P. Thompson, op.cit., chap. VI and Steadman Jones, Outcast London, chap. 19.

62. F.M. Lavanthal, Respectable Radical: George Howell and Victorian Working Class Politics (1971), p.205.

him with their own candidate, H.R. Taylor.⁶³ William Votier, who had been the leading rank and file militant during the 1890 bootmakers' strike, chaired a meeting at the Victoria Hall, Approach Road, Bethnal Green where he "made a really forcible survey of the situation, pointing out clearly, and he as an old radical, that the workers are sick of both political factions." Bentley, another bootmaker, moved Taylor's adoption, and Harry Quelch and Hyndman made further speeches.

The campaign launched, further public meetings were held through 1891. In Bonner Street, Bethnal Green, on 24 March, Taylor was listened to by F. Hammill, W. Steadman, and L. Lyons, amongst others.⁶⁴ On 30 May, Taylor attended a meeting of the Jewish social democrats at the 'White Hart', Greenfield Street, White-chapel, no doubt to preach to the converted.⁶⁵ On 13th October, Dorrell, the President of the United Radical Club, Key Street, announced that they had decided to drop Howell and endorse Taylor.⁶⁶

Through the winter of 1891-2 the London S.D.F. were combatting the forces of law and order, at the World's End, Chelsea, over the right of free speech. It proved a useful propagandist issue around which to rally wider sections of the labour movement. The arrests began in October, and every week until March of 1892 the crowds gathered to witness the spectacle of a new martyr sacrificed for the cause. In November, there had been some violence as the police moved through the large crowd to arrest John Moore. But, by the time Votier drew his straw, on 6 December, they were exercising greater restraint:

"There were the same crowds densely thronging the sacred spot, and the roads leading thereto, the same specimens of 'bluebottles', the same horse parades, but the madness of the police was for once tempered by discretion, probably by an order from headquarters to display a little more common sense in their actions."⁶⁷

63. Justice: 19 July, 1890.

64. Representing the engineers, barge builders and tailors, respectively.

65. Justice: 4 April, 1891.

66. Ibid.: 17 October, 1891.

67. Ibid.: 12 December, 1891. David Englander (ed.), The Diary of Fred Kneebly (Warwick, 1977), p.81, also notes that the police were less aggressive.

Votier was arrested as he was about "to assert the right of free speech, and to uphold the rights of the white man," before an estimated crowd of 1,500.⁶⁸ He was remanded for a week on £20 bail; several previous victims had been refused bail or had had a considerably higher surety demanded. On 3 January, William Lewis, London Metro. member, member of the United Radical Club, and of the S.O.F. became the next bootmaker to be arrested.⁶⁹ By March, the arrests had ceased and the S.O.F. were claiming a famous victory. It would have been reasonable for them to expect that their stance as champions of one of the oldest rights of the free-born Englishman might win them support at the forthcoming general election. If so, they were to be sadly disappointed.

Throughout the campaign Howell refused the challenge thrown out by the socialists to a public debate. Hyndman made such a challenge in March, claiming that "whatever that gentleman might have done for labour in the past, he was no friend of the toiler now."⁷⁰ In May, he turned down a further request from the socialists to debate his candidature at the Alliance Trade Club, Peter Street, Hackney.⁷¹ In the week before the election, Taylor held a couple of open-air meetings at which he tried to identify the Liberals as an anti-working class party. He accused them of supporting sweating employers, of opposing free speech and of manipulating the working class vote to obtain office.⁷² On 29 June, Howell's campaign had been ill-assisted by an attack made by some of his supporters upon Mrs. Taylor. Discovered sitting quietly in the audience of one of his election meetings, she was "roughly handled and finally thrown with considerable violence into the street."⁷³

In the end, Howell just managed to hold on to the seat, but it was the Conservatives, not the S.O.F., who benefited from disillusionment with his parliamentary performance. Howell polled 2,898 votes, Harry Marks (Conservative) 2,421, Taylor only 106, and R. Ballard (Independent) 83. His majority of 447 was

68. Hackney and King'sland Gazette: 9 Dec., 1891.

69. Justice: 9 Jan., 1892, where Lewis's first name is erroneously given as Thomas. See also, Hackney Mercury, 9 Jan., 1892.

70. Hackney Mercury: 12 March, 1892.

71. Hackney and King'sland Gazette: 2 May, 1892.

72. The Eastern Argus: 2 July, 1892.

73. ibid.

the lowest of all the successful Liberal candidates in the Bethnal Green, Hackney, Haggerston and Hoxton constituencies, and was only 75 more than in 1886, a year of sweeping Tory gains. For example, in the Bethnal Green S.W. constituency, which had a similar sized electorate to that in the N.E., E.W. Pickersgill had improved his majority from the 350 of 1886 to 1,035. All of the other successful liberals in these constituencies, with the exception of W.R. Cremer in Hoxton, had majorities of between 1,000 and 1,500. (Cremer's was not far behind at 921). Even if account is taken of S.D.F. and independent intervention in Bethnal Green N.E., Howell's majority would still not have approached those of his colleagues. Yet, when he had first been elected in 1885, he had been given the largest majority of the seven M.P.s elected for the N.E. London constituencies re-arranged the previous year. Bethnal Green N.E. had certainly declined as a Liberal stronghold under his tenancy, but it was not the socialists who gained from this demise. Ironically, it was the Conservatives who reaped the harvest from the seeds of discontent sown by their avowed class enemies.

The S.D.F.'s own explanation of Taylor's miserable showing depended upon tactical votings:

"Taylor's poll was certainly a disappointment and it was inexplicable how he could have polled so few. It is, however, an absolute fact that the overwhelming majority of those who voted for Howell would have preferred to have voted for Taylor, and only voted for Howell, of whom many expressed their detestation, in order to prevent the return of so loathsome a candidate as Marks."⁷⁴

This undistinguished foray into national politics may well have disillusioned the S.D.F. and forced them back upon their trade union, educational and local political work. Certainly, they did not oppose Howell again in 1895. In April, 1894 the Tower Hamlets branches ran Annie Thompson as a candidate for the School Board, and the following month Rose Jarvis was selected as candidate

74. Justice: 16 July, 1892. Marks was the Editor of the 'Financial News' and an anti-Semite. P. Thompson, op.cit., pp. 119-20, explains Taylor's defeat as a failure to unite the labour movement behind him, and contrasts his showing with the comparatively good one of the 6 SDF candidates at the 1892 LCC elections.

for the School Board elections in the Hackney division.⁷⁵ At a meeting at the United Radical Club, on 21 June, Jarvis was endorsed by the London Metro. branch of N.U.B.S.O., who listened to her explain the S.O.F.'s programme of compulsory, secular and free education, supported by free maintenance for those in need.⁷⁶ This is a further indication of the growing influence of the socialists, both in the clubs and the London Metro. branch, for they could have endorsed the Progressive candidates who eventually defeated the socialists.⁷⁷

Howell's tenure upon Bethnal Green N.E. came to an inglorious end when he lost the seat in 1895 to Mancherjee Merwanjee Shownagjee, an Anglo-Indian Conservative from Bombay, a barrister since 1885 whose family had been in government service.⁷⁸ Howell, himself, was very bitter after his defeat by 1,160 votes:

"After ten years' hard labour in Parliament, I was kicked out by a black man, a stranger from India, one not known in the constituency or in public life."⁷⁹

But for the colour of his conqueror's skin, his fate had been eminently predictable for some time.

The history of George Howell's representation of the constituency of Bethnal Green N.E. is largely untypical of that of Liberalism in the district in these years. A survey of the L.C.C. elections of 1892 and 1895 will illustrate this and the increasing involvement of representatives of the bootmaking industry in local politics.

At the second election for the London County Council in 1892 the local boot-making industry provided a candidate for both the N.E. and the S.W. divisions. Both James Branch, a manufacturer in the Bethnal Green road and a prominent non-

75. *ibid.*: 14 April and 12 May, 1894.

76. *ibid.*: 30 June, 1892.

77. *ibid.*: July - Dec., 1894, gives regular coverage of these campaigns.

78. *Hackney Mercury*: 4 May, 1894.

79. Laventhal, *op.cit.*, p.212.

conformist, and Charles Freak, secretary of the London Metropolitan branch, stood as Progressives. Branch had finished top of the poll in 1889,⁸⁰ but it was Freak's first election.

At two meetings, in January and May of 1892, Freak outlined the Progressive programme. Firstly, and the arrests at the World's End were turning minds to such matters, he stood for L.C.C. control of the police, a policy that Branch was also advocating at his meetings. Secondly, he was for the union rate in all trades, a policy occasioned by the vigorous anti-sweating campaign in the district. Thirdly he wanted an eight hour day to prevent unemployment caused by machinery, something that had become a pressing issue in Freak's own trade and was to lead to a national lock-out three years later. If necessary, he thought working hours should be reduced to below eight until all were absorbed for "nothing was more dangerous to society" than idleness. Fourthly, he favoured the control of certain essential services such as tramways, waterworks, gasworks, and docks. Fifthly, he stood for 'one man, one vote, and no man to have more than one.'⁸¹

Freak was an official candidate of the Bethnal Green Liberal and Radical Association, but there was a strong egalitarianism in his politics which was to take him into the L.R.C. by 1900. Defending himself against the ridicule of opponents who condemned his candidature for being dependant "upon the pence of the men", he admitted no shame and insisted upon assessment by merit, not by accidents of birth. In February, he had spoken critically of the political economy which defended freedom of contract "between a rich employer and a starving man." Yet, he also defended arbitration as a method of improving industrial relations, a view that had got him into much trouble with the socialist members of his own union branch.⁸²

Freak's fellow Progressive candidate in Bethnal Green N.E. was J.F. Torr, a barrister, and they were opposed by another barrister and a licensed victualler.⁸³

80. Hackney Express and Shoreditch Observer, 12 March, 1892.

81. Eastern Post and City Chronicle, 30 Jan. and 5 May, 1892.

82. Hackney and Kingsland Gazette, 24 Feb., 1892.

83. Ibid., 29 Feb., 1892.

This was illustrious company for a shoemaker to be keeping, so Freak must have welcomed the support of the Countess of Schach at least as much as that of the Working Men's Radical Association and the local temperance party.⁸⁴ Ultimately, the Progressives took 13 out of the 14 Council places for the seven Hackney, Haggerston, Hoxton and Bethnal Green seats. Freak topped his own poll and Branch was easily re-elected in Bethnal Green S.W.⁸⁵ We cannot know for sure how local boot and shoemakers voted, but it must be highly likely that Freak enjoyed their overwhelming confidence, as he did that of the United Radical Club, and, in this sense, he had proved a thoroughly sagacious choice on the part of the local Liberal Association.

Co-incidentally, the 1895 L.C.C. elections preceded the general election by only a few weeks in the same way that they had done in 1892. Anticipating the national swing, the Conservative forces standing under the Moderate banner gained ground. They took both the North Hackney seats, compared with only one in 1892,⁸⁶ and made deeper inroads in inner East London. In St. George's-in-the-East and Mile End they reversed the representation by taking both seats, and in White-chapel they took one of the two Progressive seats.⁸⁷ In Bethnal Green, Freak and Branch acquitted themselves pretty well against the unfavourable swing, both holding their seats comfortably with only marginally reduced majorities.⁸⁸ The fact that the outer-East London constituencies resisted the swing to the Conservatives more successfully than the inner ones reflects two things. Firstly, radical Liberalism was better organised in the artisan districts of the outer ring. Secondly, Conservative anti-Semites like Marks (who was returned for St. George's) were less successful in exploiting the immigration issue in these outer districts. But, it must be said that Freak was not slow to stress the need for immigration controls, whether to his fellow unionists, or to a wider political audience.

This discussion of electoral politics has shown that the socialism of the S.D.F. made little impact upon the position of radical Liberalism, even in the

84. *Ibid.*: 17 Feb., 1892.

85. *Ibid.*: 7 March, 1892.

86. *Ibid.*: 4 March, 1895.

87. *East London Advertiser*: 9 March and 12 March, 1895.

88. *Hackney and Kingsland Gazette*: 4 March, 1895.

exceptional circumstances of Bethnal Green North East. Boot and shoemakers were prominent in both socialist and radical Liberal politics, working through the classically proletarian institutions of trades unions and working men's clubs. But, the socialists placed much greater emphasis upon industrial politics where they obtained more influence. It is unlikely that many bootmakers were either consistently socialist or consistently radical, but were prepared to lend support to either, particularly in circumstances where they were not in direct competition with each other. Indeed, it was not always easy to distinguish between them. Freak, for example, stood as a Progressive on what constituted a democratic socialist programme in 1892 and 1895. Thus, radical Liberalism's political survival into the 1890s should not be taken to indicate that the working class of the capital had lapsed into a defeatist conservatism. The intervention of the class politics of the S.D.F. had the effect of driving radical Liberalism leftwards, through the adoption of working class candidates such as Freak. And that radical liberalism, because it was rooted in the trade unions and working men's clubs of North East London, contained both a strong egalitarianism and independence that was, eventually, to be taken into the Labour Party.

Shoemakers, socialism and the new unionism.

Before the late 1880s trade unionism in Britain had been dominated by an artisan pragmatism that made only respectful contact with the political world. Fifty years before, Owenism had tried, unsuccessfully, to move trade unionism towards centre stage; this were to be the harbingers of the co-operative, socialist millennium. Despite the crushing of Owenism in 1834 its ideology survived in diminished form. In London, it was carried through the succeeding decades by such men as Brontarra O'Brien and the West London artisans mentioned above, to be refurbished by the Marxism of the 1880s. In the early 1870s, the organised artisan had, briefly, felt the great, unskilled mass below him shudder from neglect and begin to organise. However, much of this momentum on the part of the agricultural labourers, gasworkers, and others, was lost in the whirlpool

of the Great Depression. The new unionism stands at the confluence of these two submerged currents within the nineteenth century, British labour movement. As a general unionism of the unskilled, it represents a re-forging of broken ideals in the unique economic and political climate of its time.

The fundamental task, as the new unionist shoemaker saw it, was to politicise trade unionism. This was to be achieved in two principal ways, one essentially revolutionary, the other reformist. The first was to draw his own trade union into a wider network of unions sharing militant aims. This was derived from the general unionism of the 1830s, for the aims were to be escalated from mere, economic ones to the socialist transformation of society. Secondly, within established unions, socialists needed a propagandist base from which to reveal the prevailing inadequacies of the Lib-Lab leaders. Consequently, they used the democratic procedures open to them to present their alternative politics.

New unionist shoemakers pursued the first of these aims, in the early 1890s, through the National Federation of All Trades and Industries. The role played by this organisation during the 1890 strike has already been described.⁸⁹ The socialist shoemakers connected with N.F.A.T.I. utilised the exposure provided by the strike to propagandise on behalf of the 'eight hours' demonstration in May, 1890. In helping to organise this demonstration N.F.A.T.I. worked very closely with other prominent socialists and trade unionists, and it is a good example of the kind of work they regarded as necessary to politicise the labour movement.

In May of 1888 the Bloomsbury branch of the Socialist League broke away to form the Bloomsbury Socialist Society. From that time Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling devoted their time to working in the radical clubs and trades unions of the East End.⁹⁰ With their assistance, the gasworkers, under Will Thorne, won the first major success of the new unionism. Inspired by this success, and later by those of the matchgirls and the dockers, Engels wrote to Sorge on 17 August, 1889:

89. In chapter 6, above.

90. E.P. Thompson, William Morris (1st ed., 1955), pp. 597-8.

"The Socialist League is no good at all. It consists wholly of anarchists, and Morris is their puppet. The plan is to get up agitation for the Eight Hour day in the democratic and radical clubs - our recruiting grounds here - and in the trade unions, and also organise a demonstration on May 1st, 1890."⁹¹

To this end, a Legal Eight Hours' Central Committee was set up.

The efforts of this Committee were so successful in the early months of 1890 that the London Trades' Council intervened for fear of being eclipsed. Tom Mann, by then a member of the executive, was instrumental in the decision to try to take over the organising of the demonstration. The Committee refused to allow this as they distrusted both Mann and the Council's secretary, George Shipton.⁹²

The disagreement flowed from different political aims. The L.T.C. were not prepared to demonstrate, specifically, in favour of a legal eight hour day. They preferred a looser demand supporting a general reduction in working hours. Engels doubted even their sincerity over this and suggested, tongue in cheek, that the only circumstances under which the craft unionists who controlled the L.T.C. would support an eight hour day would be if they were allowed to maintain the remainder of their average working day at overtime rates.⁹³ This would, of course, do nothing to create work for the unemployed. The L.T.C. went ahead and booked Hyde Park for the demonstration in an attempt to seize the leadership from the Central Committee. Further to this, they passed a resolution that only bona fide trade unions should compose the demonstration. "... the Council refused to accept Mrs. Aveling as a delegate because it said, she was no manual worker (which is not true), although its own President, Mr. Shipton, had not moved a finger in his own trade for fully fifteen years."⁹⁴

In order to support the international day of action the Central Committee had originally favoured May Day, itself, for the demonstration, and, for a time, it

91. Quoted in *ibid.*, p.553.

92. A.E.P. Duffy, *The Eight Hour Day Movement in Britain, 1885-93*, Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies, vol. XXVI, Sept. 1968, p.217.

93. F. Engels, *May 4th in London*, in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Articles on Britain* (Moscow, 1971), p.404.

94. *ibid.*, p.406.

looked as if this would irrevocably split the two organisations. The People's Press reported the disagreement as taking place between the London Trades' Council and the National Federation of All Trades and Industries.⁹⁵ The Times also reported N.F.A.T.I. as being one of the organising bodies.⁹⁶ It is clear from this that the Central Committee and N.F.A.T.I. were working hand in glove. Engels was greatly encouraged by the demonstration and he saw the Central Committee as being in the vanguard of coming struggles:

"The progress made in England these last 10-15 months is immense. Last May the eight hours working day would not have brought as many thousands into Hyde Park as we had hundreds of thousands. And the best of it is that the struggle preceding the demonstration has brought to life a representative body which will serve as the nucleus for the movement en dehors toute secte (regardless of sect), the Central Committee consisting of delegates of the Gas Workers, and numerous other Unions and therefore despised by the haughty Trades Council of the aristocracy of labour This Committee will continue to act and invite all other trade, political and socialist societies to send delegates, and gradually expand to a central body not only for the eight hours bill but for all other revindications (demands) It is the East End which now commands the movement and these fresh elements, unspoiled by the 'Great Liberal Party', show an intelligence such as - well, I cannot say better than such as we find in the equally unspoiled German workmen. They will not have any but Socialist leaders."⁹⁷

The Central Committee eventually agreed on 4 May as the date for the demonstration, but on reaching the Park the two groups held separate meetings. Engels, again, describes the scene:

".... the May 4th meeting was split into two parts. On one side were the conservative workers, whose horizon does not go beyond the wage labour system flanked by a narrow minded but ambitious socialist sect;⁹⁸ on the other side the great bulk of workers who had recently joined in the movement and who do not want to hear any more of the Manchesterians of the old trades unions and want to win their complete emancipation themselves"⁹⁹

95. People Press; 26 April, 1890.

96. The Times; 15 April, 1890.

97. Engels to Laura Lafergue, 10 May, 1890, in Frederick Engels/Paul and Laura Lafergue - Correspondence, vol. 2, 1887 - 90 (Moscow, 1960).

98. The S.D.F.

99. Engels, May 4th in London, pp.407-8.

But, the rest of his analysis was widely optimistic for he saw 4 May as the day on which the English proletariat finally threw off the chains of bourgeois hegemony and moved into the front line of the revolutionary struggle. Unfortunately, the English proletariat had flattered to deceive once again.

After the success of the 4 May demonstration the left-wing groups worked hard to try to transform the new unionist revival into something permanent. The anarchists around The Commonwealth had begun to use language which one historian of London socialism has described as "proto-syndicalist".¹⁰⁰ The following is a good example:

"We are of the opinion that the time has arrived when a convention of all trades and organisations should be held for the purpose of forming a Parliament of Labour, to arbitrate, govern, and act unitedly in all trade disputes and grievances.

Since the failure of certain recent important strikes owing to isolated action, and seeing the determined fighting attitude shown by companies and monopolies, the serious need for a Parliament of Labour must be clear to all; moreover, it is clear that although some concessions have been wrung from the employing class, they will endeavour, as they have done in the past, to use times of depression in trade against us. There are already signs of approaching depression, and our only hope of preventing reduction, and gaining further advantage from their weakness, lies in strongly united organisation of all workers."¹⁰¹

To this end, an abortive meeting was called at the Gye Street Working Men's Club, Vauxhall, on 22 June, which Aveling chaired. Its failure seems to have been caused by the preference shown by the Legal Eight Hours' Committee for parliamentary action of a more orthodox kind. The other main group present, the International Labour League and Federation, wanted to organise for a general strike.¹⁰² Some present said that they had never heard of the Federation and two women delegates, Miss Lupton and Mrs. Taylor (possibly the wife of H.R. Taylor) had "a tooth and nail combat."¹⁰³ The International Labour League had, in fact been founded in East London on 12 February, 1890, as an attempt to promote unity

100. Baldwin, *op.cit.*

101. The Commonwealth: 26 July, 1890.

102. Baldwin, *op.cit.*

103. People's Press: 28 June, 1890. H.R. Taylor was a member of the S.D.F. and his wife is likely, also, to have been.

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102. Baldwin, op.cit.

103. People's Press 28 June, 1890. H.R. Taylor was a member of the S.D.F. and his wife is likely, also, to have been.

and combination among workers of all nationalities. On 27 April, it merged with the Federation of East London Labour Unions, an organisation formed six months previously to combine the Jewish unions.¹⁰⁴ Despite its grandiose title, therefore, it seems to have drawn its support exclusively from the smaller Jewish societies of the East End. The composition of its Provisional Executive Committee confirms this. It was: M. Eagle (International Workmen's Educational Club), S. Fischbein (United Capmakers' Society), J. Land (International Labour League and Federation), S. Levy (Amalgamated Boot and Shoe Lasters' Society¹⁰⁵), M. Lightman (International Stick and Cane Dressers' Union), J. MacDonald (Amalgamated Society of Tailors and London Trades' Council), A. Siegal (Amalgamated Society of Tailors), J. Skitten (Vice-President, London Clothing Machinists' Union and Treasurer pro tem.), F. Gilles (Communist Working Men's Club, Hampstead and Joint Sec. pro tem.), F. Verhoeven (United Stick and Cane Dressers', Umbrella Makers' and Mounters' Trade Union and Joint Sec. pro tem.).¹⁰⁶

Three weeks later an organisation was set up, however, with the declared purpose of securing an eight hour day, and other measures, through the formation of "a distinct Labour Party." Although it called itself 'The Legal Eight Hours' and International Labour League', it does not seem to have included the International Labour League and Federation for none of the executive members of the latter organisation were on the executive body of the new one. The executive of the new body consisted of: Borgia (Finsbury Federation and Radical Clubs), Hadwen (N.F.A.T.I.), Curran (Woolwich Radical Club), Oliver and Ray (Gas Workers), Shaw Maxwell (Scottish Labour Party), Smith (Greenwich Cement Workers), Shaw (Wildmay Radical Club), Jackman (Star Radical Club), Dr. and Eleanor Marx Aveling, and McCossey, the secretary.¹⁰⁷

It is surprising that N.F.A.T.I. were still associating with this group for they were, shortly, to merge with the other body which, then, changed its name

104. ibid.: 7 June, 1890.

105. A small union of Jewish lasters who had formally been master sweepers.

106. The Commonwealth: 7 June, 1890.

107. People's Press: 19 July, 1890.

to the International Federation of All Trades' and Industries. The Legal Eight Hours' group continued as a mere rump of the one that had met at Gye Street on 22 June. The Marx Aveling connection probably brought in the gasworkers and the radical club representatives (even Pete Curran was a gasworker masquerading as a club delegate). Apart from them, only Shaw Maxwell had roots in the labour movement outside London. Thus, it is hardly surprising to find that "... the efforts of the group round Engels to establish a permanent party by broadening the Eight-Hours Committee met with no permanent success."¹⁰⁸

The International Federation of All Trades' and Industries also declined into obscurity by 1893. In a brief history it had moved from direct intervention in the struggles of the engineers of West London and the boot and shoemakers of the East, to marginal work among hairdressers and market gardeners. Jack Williams abandoned hopes of general unionism and returned to the unemployment struggles.¹⁰⁹

The May Day demonstrations survived the divisions within the London labour movement, although the L.T.C. had recovered the organisational initiative by 1892. The old N.F.A.T.I. activist, Votier, and Dorrell of the United Radical Club led a Hackney and Bethnal Green contingent to Hyde Park. But, it was Charles Freak, recently elected as a Progressive to the L.C.C., who made the headlines by predicting a bloodless revolution to improve the lot of the toiling classes.¹¹⁰ Fred Knee thought the day a "tremendous affair, half a million people there: a great success."¹¹¹ He had been on the organising committee which, from his descriptions, seems to have been plagued by the usual disagreements between the artisan leaders of the L.T.C. and the socialists. But, one comment of his epitomises the sectarianism which kept even the socialists apart and reveals the gulf between workers and intellectuals in the movement. "First, and I hope, last experience of Edward Aveling and Eleanor Marx."¹¹²

108. A.L. Morton and George Tate, The British Labour Movement (1956), p.197.

109. Baldwin, op.cit.

110. Eastern Post: 7 May, 1892.

111. Engländer, op.cit., p.89.

112. Ibid., p.87.

Attempts at general unionism on the part of new unionist, shoemakers in London made little impact because the new unionists lacked any authority through which to commit their trade union to such a strategy. In the early 1890s, only William Votier, of the London new unionists, achieved a position of national influence within N.U.B.S.O. An investigation of his brief career in national union politics reveals both the degree of support for new unionist policies and some of the dilemmas facing a revolutionary trade unionist who assumes official status.

Votier was elected to the Council of the National Union in August, 1892. Until 1888, the Council had been drawn exclusively from the branch constituting the seat of government, i.e. Leicester.¹¹³ Although convenient in a number of ways, the system incurred the opposition of many branches who wanted more direct participation in the Union's policy making. Consequently, a new method of election was devised by the 1888 Conference. The Council was enlarged from seven to eight members, five of whom were elected from regional divisions of the country (one of which was Leicester). The President and the Treasurer were to be voted on by the whole membership,¹¹⁴ but had to be nominated from a radius of five miles of the seat of government. The General Secretary was to continue to be nominated from any branch.¹¹⁵ Thus, Leicester was assured of at least three seats on the Council: their regional member, the President and Treasurer. If the General Secretary was also from Leicester, as Inskip was, they retained half of the representation.

In 1892, Votier stood as a candidate in the No. 2 District, which comprised London and East Anglia. He was opposed by J. Mason, secretary of the Norwich branch and a local councillor, and L.S. Levy, secretary of the London City branch.

113. This was not strictly true of the General Secretary who could be nominated from any branch. Once elected, however, he moved to Leicester and became part of its power clique. In the case of William Inskip (Gen. Sec., 1885 - 98); he was already a member of the Leicester branch and the Council when elected.

114. As they had been before.

115. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O., pp. 123-6.

Unlike his opponents, Votier held no branch office. His rise to prominence had been meteoric since the 1890 strike. He was, however, a member of the London Board of Arbitration and Conciliation from which he was, shortly to resign in protest at employers' violations of the London statement. At the recent conference of the National Union he had opposed the executive on a number of issues.¹¹⁶ It is unclear why Charles Fisk did not stand against Votier, but there are a number of possible explanations. Perhaps, he did not want to split the 'broad socialist' vote in London. Indeed, he ~~might~~ have lost if he had tried to, for Votier was at the height of his popularity. Perhaps, he gave priority to the crucial and delicate task of revising the London statement structure. Or, he may have been more interested in becoming the Union's Parliamentary Agent, for which he was defeated by Inskip,¹¹⁷ although this would not have precluded his being an executive member. The answer to the question, were it known, is likely to include all these reasons. In the event, Votier won easily. Too much should not be made of the socialist content of his vote, however, for regional and branch partisanship was almost certainly a more important factor. But, it can be reasonably assumed that his politics did count for something, both among those who were socialists and those who merely recognised a need to shake-up the Council. The voting is presented on page 383 where it is compared with that at the 1894 Council election.

A number of conclusions may be drawn from these figures. Most importantly, there is no significant decline in Votier's popularity between 1892 and 1894. The slight decline in his share of the poll in 1894 can be attributed to the intervention of the two extra candidates compared with 1892. In 1894, his vote in London Metro. and London South was practically identical, although it declined in London City.¹¹⁸ It also declined in Colchester and Ipswich, although the number of votes involved, there, are very small. In fact, the most remarkable

116. See Chapter nine, above.

117. *M.B.* 1 Aug., 1892.

118. No figures for the London East branch are given for either election and no explanation is offered by the Monthly Reports. It is hard to believe that not a single vote was cast by the branch which was almost twice the size of London City.

feature of the 1894 poll is how small it is compared with that of 1892 (6.82% turnout in the region compared with 14.94%). Furthermore, this occurred at a time when the trade was moving towards its greatest crisis, and it is difficult to find a convincing explanation for such apathy at this time.

The evidence presented here shows that there was no electoral dissatisfaction expressed at Votier's performance as a Council member between 1892 and 1894. The explanation of his defeat at the 1896 Council elections (beyond the scope of this study) must be sought in events occurring between 1894 and 1896. The lock-out of 1895 is the key to understanding the rejection of Votier, for he was made to pay the price of promising too much. He was seen as a collaborator who, having obtained a position of influence upon a ground-swell of rank and file militancy, had betrayed the trust invested in him by accepting a defeatist settlement. It was of no matter that his options had all been closed for the rank and file were not privy to the exhausted state of the Union's finances, and the Union were not likely to admit such humiliating subordination. The fact that the terms achieved were almost certainly the best that could have been gained in the circumstances could not save Votier because he, unlike the other leaders, had promised a new world and delivered a worse one. His fatal mistake had been to attempt to camouflage this fact, to dress defeat as victory, to invert reality. Failure was forgivable, deception was not. Fox's judgement on Votier is, thus, in need of, at least partial revision, for he argues that his period on the Council was one of unintelligent militancy and that he was eventually removed because of incompetence and the passing of the militant socialist mood amongst the rank and file.¹¹⁹ In fact, it is better to explain the outcome of the lock-out in terms of the balance of social relations produced by changes in the division of labour. If personal explanations must be resorted to, then Votier was no more unintelligent or incompetent than the rest of the Council who all accepted that a conflict could not be avoided. But, the socialist mood had not passed, like a ship in the night, rather it was precisely Votier's failure

119. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.U. pp. 239-40.

to deliver socialist policies that accounts for his downfall.

Between the two Council elections, Votier also stood for the General Presidency of the Union, in the summer of 1893. The election was occasioned by the resignation of John Judge who gave up the Presidency in May to work for the Union Boot and Shoe Machine Company in Leicester. In the first ballot Votier finished second of the ten candidates (805 votes), behind W.B. Hornridge (1,078 votes).¹²⁰ This qualified him to run off against Hornridge in the second ballot. The election became, therefore, a straight fight between radical Liberalism and socialism at a national level.

Hornridge had become a shoemaker in London in 1876, when he was 20. Before moving to Northampton, in 1889, he had served on the London Metro. branch committee. In Northampton, he earned a reputation as a fierce defender of arbitration, resigning the branch presidency over the issue in 1892. He never deviated from these convictions which flowed from his deep commitment to radical Liberalism and Non-conformity.¹²¹ Within the spectrum of Union politics, he presented a sharp contrast to Votier. The result of the election is presented below (p.384).

A number of conclusions may be drawn from these results. The first is that Votier and militant socialism were both massively rejected by a ratio greater than 2:1. It was a disappointing result for Votier for, of the previously important militant areas, he was able to win only London, Glasgow and Nottingham. Leicester rejected him by a single vote (if both branches are taken together) and Bristol by a much larger margin. Even within the London area two branches, London Metro. No. 1 (clickers) and London City (ex-master awesters), voted for Hornridge. In the other two London branches which voted for Votier, Hornridge picked up a substantial minority (perhaps as much because of his ex-London connections as his moderation). Votier failed to make similar inroads into the areas where Hornridge was strong, such as Northampton and Kettering.

120. M.B. July, 1893.

121. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.C. p.258.

TABLE I: Voting for the Council member for the N.U.B.S.O. District No. 2 (1892).

A. Total votes cast.

	<u>Braintree</u>	<u>Colchester</u>	<u>Ipswich</u>	<u>L.Metro.</u>	<u>L.South</u>	<u>L.City</u>	<u>Norwich</u>	<u>Total</u>
W. Votier	-	19	7	377	75	29	11	518
J. Mason	12	1	19	77	14	-	65	188
L.S. Levy	-	-	-	13	2	20	1	36
Total	12	20	26	467	91	49	77	704
%age of branch voting	-	15.87	-	15.11	17.95	31.82	9.24	14.94

B. Percentage of votes cast for each candidate.

	<u>Braintree</u>	<u>Colchester</u>	<u>Ipswich</u>	<u>L.Metro.</u>	<u>L.South</u>	<u>L.City</u>	<u>Norwich</u>	<u>Total</u>
W. Votier	-	95.00	26.92	80.73	82.42	59.18	14.29	69.81
J. Mason	100	5.00	73.08	16.49	15.38	-	83.33	25.34
L.S. Levy	-	-	-	2.78	2.20	40.82	1.30	4.85

Source: calculated from M.B. at July and August, 1893.

TABLE II: Voting for the Council member for the N.U.B.S.O. District No. 2 (1894).

A. Total votes cast.

	<u>Colchester</u>	<u>Ipswich</u>	<u>L.Metro.</u>	<u>L.South</u>	<u>L.City</u>	<u>Norwich</u>	<u>Total</u>
W. Votier	9	-	140	47	1	-	203
J. Mason	1	-	16	-	-	47	73
C. Tappin	-	3	9	-	27	-	39
J. Whitby	-	9	2	1	-	-	12
C. Ingram	1	-	7	2	-	-	10
Total	11	12	151	50	28	53	299
%age of branch voting	9.82	-	5.17	12.53	30.77	6.65	6.84

B. Percentage of votes cast for each candidate.

	<u>Colchester</u>	<u>Ipswich</u>	<u>L.Metro.</u>	<u>L.South</u>	<u>L.City</u>	<u>Norwich</u>	<u>Total</u>
W. Votier	81.82	-	80.46	83.93	3.70	11.32	60.78
J. Mason	9.09	-	9.20	10.71	-	88.68	21.86
C. Tappin	-	25.00	5.17	-	96.30	-	10.78
J. Whitby	-	75.00	1.15	1.79	-	-	3.59
C. Ingram	9.09	-	4.02	3.57	-	-	3.34

Source: calculated from M.B. at July and August, 1894.

TABLE III. Election for the General Presidency of N.U.B.S.O. (1893).

Branch	Hornidge	Votier	Branch	Hornidge	Votier
Aberdeen	6	4	Kendal	17	-
Arbroath	13	1	Kingswood	35	32
Bristol	70	33	Leicester	271	299
" No.2	6	2	" No.2	39	10
Birmingham	22	16	Leeds	31	21
Barnsley	11	2	" No. 2	7	3
Belfast	78	13	London Metro.	73	138
Boreat	28	-	" No. 2	25	15
Bramley	6	15	London South	32	65
Bradford	14	-	London City	23	3
Colchester	4	16	Manchester	75	23
Dundee	6	16	Maybole	72	6
Devontry	40	-	Newcastle	8	12
Derby	17	-	Nottingham	30	51
Glasgow	9	74	Norwich	18	23
" No.2	3	13	Northampton	310	63
Halifax	9	-	" No.2	51	2
Higham & Rushden	32	5	Plymouth	6	3
" No.2	17	-	Stafford	18	30
Hinckley	16	1	Stone	43	-
Harpole	31	-	S. Wigton	21	2
Ipswich	19	1	Worcester	3	7
Kettering	380	7	Wolverhampton	22	7
" No.2	67	-	Wellingboro'	67	3
Kilnarnock	-	10	Wollaston	4	-
Total				2,205	1,057

Sources: K.B.; August, 1893.

This election result provides the best evidence available for assessing the appeal of militant socialist policies within the Union in a year when they were at, or near, their most popular. It demonstrates that, although such policies were favoured by a substantial minority, they never came close to dominating the rank and file, who still preferred safe, radical liberals in senior positions. While militant socialists like Votier, and later Freddy Richards,¹²² could occasionally win election to the Council in the 1890s, they never had a serious hope of obtaining a majority. However, their intervention shifted the centre of gravity of Union politics leftwards and opened up the possibility of reformist, socialist policies being accepted. This is well illustrated by the debate over the programme of the Parliamentary Candidate, between 1892 and 1894, in which both Votier and Charles Fearn were prominent.

122. See ibid., pp. 333-9.

The decision to stand a Union candidate for election to Parliament was taken by the 1892 Conference. But, disagreement arose over whether he was to stand independently, or not, of the existing political parties, which effectively meant the Liberal Party. Inskip, an old Liberal, opposed independence, and pointed to Charles Frisk's recent election to the L.C.C. and his own election as an alderman of Leicester as evidence of the need for Liberal support. He also saw the cost of financing an independent candidate as prohibitive. Votier had been the proposer of the original motion in favour of independence, and he opposed Inskip because he believed that standing independently of the Liberals provided the only chance of advocating a socialist programme. He succeeded in winning the vote, and it was agreed that if elected, the independent candidate would be paid £300 p.a. in addition to election expenses.¹²³ It remained to decide what independence meant in terms of policies.

Despite his defeat, Inskip stood for, and was elected to, the Parliamentary Candidature. But, his programme met with only limited support among N.U.B.S.O. members in the Northampton constituency in which he was to stand. There was not a single socialist demand in it and it even rejected old age pensions in favour of a self-help made possible by higher wages. Although he later accepted old age pensions along with nationalization of the land, mines, quarries, telephones, and direct employment by the state and municipal authorities, he was sailing against a wind that would drive him further left than he was prepared to steer.¹²⁴

Inskip's candidature did not survive the next Union conference at Edinburgh in May, 1894. For tactical reasons this conference abandoned the policy of independence. It had become apparent that a N.U.B.S.O. candidate would not be elected for the second Northampton seat unless the Union agreed to support Henry Labouchere in the other. This they agreed to in return for a free run against the Conservative. If elected, the N.U.B.S.O. candidate would have been a Lib-Lab., but his independence was retained in so far as he was bound to support the policies

123. B.S.T.J. 11 June, 1892

124. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O., pp. 194-6.

imposed on him by Conference, not by the Liberals. In fact, the committee set up by Conference produced a socialist programme which included the nationalization of all the means of production and distribution as well as the land, graduated income tax, the eight hour day, old age pensions, state employment, abolition of the House of Lords, and Home Rule for Ireland as well as for Scotland, Wales and England.¹²⁵ Charles Freak had been one of the five members of this committee.¹²⁶ He had supported the Liberal connection at the Edinburgh Conference where he expressed the view that the need for an independent party of labour had diminished since 1892.¹²⁷ He clearly did not think that standing as a Liberal precluded the adoption of socialist policies and this appears to have been the dominant view among the left within the Union at this time.

Inskip had shown himself willing to take on board many new ideas in order to retain the candidature, but thoroughgoing socialism was too great a load for him to bear. His conscience could not circumnavigate the nationalization clause: "I am not in favour of a dead level for all until human nature is remodelled I believe in personal effort, and the encouragement of ability, thrift and industry"¹²⁸ Such sentiments met with the firm approbation of the B.S.T.U. which congratulated Inskip on ".... refusing to be the catspaw of a panel of men who, never having had, and who never would exert themselves to secure anything for themselves in this life, want to take away from those who have"¹²⁹ Inskip accepted the compliment without criticism of the calumny thrown at his colleagues. In fact, they gained a little satisfaction from the election of Freak to succeed Inskip as the Parliamentary Candidate.¹³⁰ But, Inskip had the last laugh for his disapproval combined with the paucity of Union funds after the lock-out prevented Freak from standing at all in 1895. In 1898, he was succeeded as the Parliamentary Agent by Freddy Richards who eventually won Wolverhampton West for the L.R.C. in 1906.¹³¹

125. B.S.T.U.; 26 May, 1894.

126. The others were Richards, Poulton, Woolley and Bradley.

127. B.S.T.U.; 26 May, 1894.

128. Ibid.; 2 June, 1894.

129. Ibid.

130. Ibid.; 25 Aug., 1894.

131. Fox, History of M.U.B.S.O., pp. 326 and 336.

To conclude, the impact of the new unionism upon London boot and shoemakers must be measured, firstly, by the success of the attempts at general unionism, and secondly, through Votier's influence on the Council between 1892 and 1896. General unionism failed because it was precipitous and ill co-ordinated. The new unionists attempted to win support for general unionism before they had achieved sufficient to control the London branches. Neither do they appear to have seen organisations such as N.F.A.T.I. as being dual unionist.

General unionism does not seem to have been an alternative to N.U.B.S.O., rather the new unionists increasingly worked to obtain influence within their trade union in order to convert it to more militant policies. This is confirmed by Votier's entry into national Union politics from 1892. It is possible that the failure of the attempts at general unionism, by then, had convinced him that such a strategy was necessary. Once on the Council, he achieved influence for new unionist policies and, as has been shown, managed to push the Union to the left of traditional radical liberalism, although not as far left as he would have liked. But, to attribute to him and other new unionists in the branches, the blame for the 1895 lock-out, as much of the trade press did, is to invert the problem. Their militancy should be seen as a symptom of changes occurring in the social relations of an industry undergoing fundamental change in its means of production.

Shoemakers and the politics of immigration.

Any assessment of the radicalism of shoemakers in late nineteenth century London must confront the problems of Jewish immigration and anti-Semitism. The involvement of shoemakers in the anti-immigration movement, in the early 1890s, is a useful episode to examine because it reveals the tensions present between Jewish and non-Jewish workers. The origins of this movement lay in the pattern of immigration described in Chapter Two. By the summer of 1891, however, shoemakers in particular could see that the agreement of 1890, by which the employers had committed themselves to provide workshops, was breaking down. Union officials laid the blame upon the sweating Jewish employers, who were evading the cost of erecting workshops by continuing to give out work. Secondly, they blamed

those Jewish bootmakers who were accommodating these employers because they feared that going into workshops would demand of them a higher level of skill than they had been used to on the outdoor team system.

In August, 1891, a deputation from the London branches of the National Union (led by Freak, but composed mainly of Jews) waited upon the East London M.P.s at Westminster to urge the exclusion of pauper aliens, whom they defined as those without much money or those incapable of earning a living at their trade. The deputation further complained of Jewish employers sabotaging the workshops' settlement, and Samuel Montagu, the member for Whitechapel, agreed to communicate with them in an effort to stop this.¹³² However, the result of these enquiries was that Montagu found no employers in breach of the agreement, and this could not have improved bootmakers' faith in parliamentary lobbying as an effective form of action.¹³³

By 1894, boot and shoemakers were again urging anti-immigration measures upon Parliament and, by the tone of Freak's speeches, attitudes had hardened. In April, he spoke of the Jews in a manner that substituted racial prejudice for history:

"They had been turned out of Russia and other countries, not so much on account of their religion as because they had shown they had no manhood and no principles. Continuing, he charged them with being the vagabonds of the earth, disunited and always working against everything noble and elevating. Again, he declared, they had proved a curse to the English workers, and even to their co-religionists and his audience applauded as if it was excellent to be stung with the bitterest sarcasm and attacked with the sharpest invective. Concluding, Mr. Freak declared that although it was degrading to have to appeal to the Government, they were compelled to take that course because the workers would not be true to themselves."¹³⁴

The campaign provoked a response in the form of Lord Salisbury's Aliens Bill, which was introduced as a private measure in July.¹³⁵ Designed to exclude 'dangerous aliens', for example anarchists as well as paupers, it did not survive

132. Eastern Post: 8 Aug., 1891. B.S.T.J.: 15 Aug., 1891.

133. B.S.T.J.: 22 Aug., 1891.

134. Eastern Post: 5 May, 1894.

135. Fishman, Op.cit., p.86.

a second reading.¹³⁶ This was no fault of the shoemakers' representatives at the T.U.C. who had successfully moved a resolution to prohibit the landing of all aliens who had no visible means of support. Some remarks of Freak's, that the East End Jews 'were perfectly hopeless from a trade union point of view', were taken exception to by a large meeting of 3,000 in Spitalfields in September.¹³⁷ The Jewish shoemakers accused Freak of a second error in becoming involved with the Association for the Prevention of the Immigration of Destitute Aliens, for it was a Conservative front. Its secretary, Hugh Brian, was also the Honorary Organiser of Conservative Associations.¹³⁸ Yetter, too, was keeping strange company, for he had also attended the Association's first meeting in June.¹³⁹ Amidst this wave of intolerance, only the anonymous author of the London Metro. branch report for July clung to the conviction that education must come before exclusion:

"These Russian and Polish Jews are as big a curse to the common shoe trade of London as the Chinamen were to California. They differ from other foreigners, because when men from the United Kingdom go abroad, or men from any other part of the world come here, they try to conform to the customs of the people with whom they make their home. Not so these men! We should have had every man indoors and the Statement thoroughly adhered to if it was not for the assistance these people have rendered. The shoe manufacturers of London generally admit this. Our hope, as at first, is that the energetic members of our Union will better themselves in educating these people to the true principles of Socialism. Actions speak, not words!"¹⁴⁰

By September, Freak was being forced to defend his position of support for the Association for the Prevention of the Immigration of Foreign (Destitute) Aliens¹⁴¹ at public meetings. Chairing a meeting at the Hackney Town Hall, he explained that it was only his experience in the boot trade, over the past ten years, that had caused him to renounce his long held radical belief in free emigration and immigration. He considered himself to have failed in teaching the foreign workmen 'the principles of manhood' and, now, exclusion remained the only

136. B.S.T.C.: 14 July, 1894.

137. *Ibid.*: 15 Sept., 1894.

138. *B.S.T.C.*: Oct., 1894.

139. *Ibid.*: June, 1894.

140. *Ibid.*: July, 1894.

141. The Association is referred to by both titles in different reports.

alternative. Votier, too, was unrepentant and moved a resolution in support of the Government legislating in favour of exclusion, while, at the same time, admitting that he had no faith in any Government! No doubt, his S.D.F. comrades present at the meeting were in full agreement. The attitude of the Socialist League anarchists, who were also present, was not revealed, but they were unlikely to have supported a measure such as Salisbury's that would have excluded other anarchists. When Freak refused to accept opposing motions, Guilleroff, President of the Ladies' Tailors and Mantle Makers' Society, burst onto the platform in defence of Jewish labour. Lewis Lyons, another tailor, accused the English unionists of identifying the wrong enemy. It was not the Jews who were ruining trade and cutting wages, but simply the capitalist. The meeting disagreed and carried Votier's resolution.¹⁴²

The most racist attacks upon the immigrant, during the campaign of 1894, came not from the ranks of the English workers, but from the owners of the press. In a scurrilously misrepresentative editorial, The Hackney Mercury is typical of this trend, and it was a newspaper widely read by shoemakers in the district. Lauding England's reputation as a free country, it saw no reason why this should turn it "into a workhouse for the reception of paupers from the whole universe." It chose to focus upon the supposed behaviour of immigrant Jews in particular:

"The well-known saying that 'cleanliness is next to godliness' does not by any means belong to their repertoire. They live in a manner disgraceful to human beings. They herd together in dens they render unfit for habitation, while their filthy habits are a constant source of danger, spreading disease broadcast over the land. Moreover, a large number of them are of a class who simply live by preying on their fellows. They recognise no law, no government, their hand is against every man, the sole aim of their life Anarchy."¹⁴³

Thus, the Jew stood condemned by a mouthpiece of Conservatism as filthy, lawless and revolutionary, all in deliberate defiance of English customs. In the face of such prejudices it is no wonder that they kept their own culture.

142. B.S.T.J.: 22 Sept., 1894. Hackney Mercury: 15 Sept., 1894.

143. Hackney Mercury: 15 Sept., 1894.

The anti-alien agitation of the early 1890s was unsuccessful in that it failed to produce legislation at that time. That had to wait until 1905 when the Aliens Act of that year became part of a comprehensive Conservative attack upon the ideology and practice of free trade.¹⁴⁴ In 1894-5 the Government would not legislate on the grounds of numbers, alone, because they were too insignificant. In any case, they accepted Rosebery's argument that Jewish pauperism fell mostly upon their own community.¹⁴⁵ It has been shown how the immigration issue induced a strange unity between left and right which was still evident at the 1895 General Election when the S.D.F. supported the Conservative candidate for Haggerston against the Liberal because of his immigration policy.¹⁴⁶

Within the shoemaking community the agitation seems to have been less divisive than it might have been. There is no evidence that sweated, Jewish workers were subjected to any form of harassment, except when they acted as strikebreakers. It is likely that many of the Jewish trade unionists accepted the case for limiting immigration; the fact that some were prepared to join parliamentary delegations suggests so. But, they were not prepared to be held up as scapegoats for all of the problems of the local industry, and it was on these occasions that they adopted their most intransigent stance.

Gartner has argued that many members of the S.D.F., the most important socialist group in London, were anti-Semitic.¹⁴⁷ Voter's behaviour in the early 1890s supports this view, and although Charles Freak was far from being an S.D.F. sympathiser his labourist politics found an equal place for anti-Semitism. Their prejudices arose out of a deep frustration at being unable to defeat the sweating system. It was directed at Jews, primarily, as sweated workers and sweating employers, rather than as a religious or ethnic group. At times of extreme pressure the first component was liable to merge with the second.

144. Elie Halevy, A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, Vol. 5. Imperialism and the Rise of Labour, 1895-1905. (1961 edition) pp. 371-5.

145. Fishman, op.cit., p.86.

146. Hackney Mercury; 13 April, 1895.

147. Gartner, op.cit., p.127.

In mitigation, there is much evidence that, despite their occasional anti-Semitic outbursts, the S.O.F. continued to work with, and on behalf of Jews. In October, 1891, Votier attended a meeting of the Journeymen Furriers in East London which was called to urge them to drop their racial prejudice (and, presumably, allow Jews to join). Harry Quelch, Fred Hamill and H.R. Taylor were all present.¹⁴⁸ The Whitechapel branch of the S.O.F. was in existence at least as early as May, 1891 and was almost exclusively Jewish.¹⁴⁹ By March, 1894 it had grown sufficiently in strength to be holding at least four street meetings a week, addressing the public in English, German and Yiddish.¹⁵⁰ And for those who required them there were even Hebrew translations of Lassalle and Bebel at the branch meeting place.¹⁵¹ Gartner is correct to say that the Socialist League anarchists made more direct contact with the radical Jews than the S.O.F., and Fishman has shown the popularity of libertarian socialism amongst them.¹⁵² But, it would be wrong to conclude that "the Social Democratic Federation was not neutral but negative towards the Jews."¹⁵³ At worst, they were guilty of ambivalence.

IV. Conclusions.

If previous chapters have demonstrated that London shoemakers were active trade unionists then the argument, here, has been that this was complemented by a wider and enthusiastic participation in working class political movements. The primary cause of the radicalism of London shoemakers in the nineteenth century was the state of economic transition that their industry was passing through.

In the early nineteenth century London shoemaking was experiencing fundamental structural change in that what had formerly been a craft market was being invaded by slip work. This produced a labour surplus because huge numbers of the

148. Justice; 17 Oct., 1891.

149. *Ibid.*; 30 May, 1891.

150. *Ibid.*; 17 March, 1894.

151. *Ibid.*; 24 March, 1894.

152. Fishman, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

153. Gartner, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

unskilled were turned into potential shoemakers. In such conditions trade unionism became harder to sustain. For example, controlled entry through apprenticeship disappeared. Other factors such as post-war readjustment, cyclical depression and free trade could, and did, worsen shoemakers' economic conditions. By the later part of the century the slump, or sweating, trade had become an established problem. Provincial industrialisation placing pressure upon London to intensify the division of labour became the new economic motivator of radicalism.

But these reasons do not explain why shoemakers often became politicians as well as trade unionists. The simple answer is that in the changing economic conditions described the weakness of trade unionism rendered it incapable of solving shoemakers' problems. Hence, many turned to co-operation, general unionism, Chartism, local or national electoral politics, or even revolutionary socialism as alternatives, but most often alternatives that were pursued in tandem with, not to the exclusion of, trade unionism.

The politics of the working men's clubs' movement can be seen as a continuation of the culture of Chartism, rather than a retreat from it, for the way in which it valued education and working class control over its own institutions. They acted as springboards for both trade unionist and political activity in the community. The roots of the socialist revival of the late 1880s lie not only in the changing mode of production that produced the new unionism, but also in the failure of radical Liberalism to deal with the general social problems of poverty and inequality. Radicalism's failure in this respect was as conspicuous within trades unions as it was throughout society. This failure impacted with the growing availability of socialist ideas through the founding of the S.D.F. and, to a lesser extent, the Fabian Society in the 1880s. Independent working class organisations, such as trades unions and working men's clubs, provided vehicles for the transmission of this alternative politics.

These conclusions are at variance with some of those reached by Hobsbawm and Scott. For example, they argue that "Among social historians the reputation of shoemakers as radicals is associated mostly with the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the period of transition to industrialism."¹⁵⁴ But, this confuses the periodisation of industrialisation in shoemaking compared with that of the staple industries of the industrial revolution. In shoemaking industrialisation did not begin until the 1850s, and even then not seriously until the 1870s and 1880s. By intensifying the exploitation of labour by capital it generated an urban shoemaker radicalism which superseded the old village intellectualism. Because it was forced into comprehending the changing forces of production it went beyond abstract assertions of the political rights of man to develop a class politics rooted in the social relations of workshop and factory.

Hobsbawm and Scott further argue that shoemakers' prominence in radical movements declined through the late nineteenth century as the centre of gravity of the labour movement shifted to the large-scale industries and public sector employment.¹⁵⁵ The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that they have been written off a little too soon. In London they were prominent in the politics of radical Liberalism and the working men's clubs, and in the S.D.F. Nor should their role in helping found the Labour Representation Committee (beyond the scope of this study) be understated. Charles Fisk was one of its original members, representing N.U.B.S.O., in 1900.¹⁵⁶ Another was Freddy Richards who won Wolverhampton West for it in 1906. More important than the roles played by these individuals was that played by many rank and file N.U.B.S.O. members in setting up Labour Party branches based upon their trade union. This occurred in Norwich¹⁵⁷ and although London was a little behind the provinces in this respect¹⁵⁸ Leicester's shoemakers returned Ramsay MacDonald for the L.R.C. in 1906.¹⁵⁹

154. Hobsbawm and Scott, *op.cit.*, p.105.

155. *Ibid.*, pp. 110-12.

156. Fox, *History of N.U.B.S.O.*, p.326.

157. *Ibid.*, p.327.

158. Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour*, pp. 263-4.

159. Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections*, pp. 210-11.

Radical political practice on the part of nineteenth century London shoemakers was a minority activity. Most of what has been written in this chapter concerns a small vanguard who made the news for one reason or another. As is always the case in working class history, the opinions and activities of the majority went unrecorded. And, if we are able to rescue fragments of the lives of that minority from what E.P. Thompson has memorably described as 'the enormous condescension of posterity' then it must also be admitted that their failures outweighed their successes. The sweating system persisted beyond the 1890s, the new unionism did not, shoemakers' efforts could not prevent parliamentary socialism from proceeding only at a snail's pace, and for those who desired it the proletarian revolution proved elusive in England. But out of this chequered history there emerges an heroic quality which enabled men and women to struggle against enormous odds and adverse forces that were beyond their complete understanding and control. They persisted in the hope, if not the confidence, that they could make a better world. It was this courage and determination that maintained shoemakers' radicalism as it was transformed through the nineteenth century and which has carried its reputation down to our own times.

CONCLUSION

At the time of writing¹ the National Union of the Footwear, Leather and Allied Trades has recently become one of the minority of affiliated trades unions to prefer the candidacy of Roy Hattersley to that of Neil Kinnock for the forthcoming election for the leadership of the Labour Party. Their decision is in perfect keeping with the Union's history of political moderation throughout the twentieth century.² The origins of this moderation stretch back to the conflicts which were fought out within the industry in the years before the great lock-out of 1895. The two decades before that event were crucial ones in determining whether the newly formed union was to proceed in opposition to, or in accommodation of, the capitalist system.

There are few visible signs remaining in London, today, that boot and shoemaking was ever an important industry. It has left no industrial archaeology and precious few memories of those nineteenth century years when it ranked as one of the most important centres of production. The disappearance has not been so complete in the East Midlands where the industry has survived on a much reduced scale. Yet, the London bootmaker had as much, if not more, influence over the direction of his union in the late nineteenth century than in any other centre. The economic causes of his militancy were unique to the industry in the capital and they converged with other social and political causes to produce a trade unionism that was consistently radical and, at times, socialist in inspiration. This militancy suffered a crushing defeat in 1895 which has deeply marked the character of shoemakers' trade unionism ever since. Since that lock-out there has been no dispute on such a national scale. In its immediate aftermath the new unionism perished and syndicalism made virtually no impact. Production left its eccentric home in London, almost completely, and consolidated itself to an even greater extent in the East Midlands, where the workforce could be

1. August, 1983.

2. N.U.F.L.A.T. now incorporates the old N.U.B.S.O.

increasingly recognised as the subordinate class of semi-skilled, machine minders the employers had long sought to create. Capital had won the struggle to control the division of labour in the factory. The new unionist period proved to be the last great expression of shoemaker militancy.

Since Marx, social historians have expended much effort in attempting to explain the reformist character of the British labour movement. This thesis is aimed at contributing a fraction more to that enterprise. It has focused upon a single work-group in a single city in an attempt to retrieve something of the consciousness of the rank and file bootmaker, for only if we attend time and again to historical experience at this level will it ever be possible to answer the wider question of why the British worker has been a member of a reformist, not a revolutionary, class.

Soon, we will have similar studies to this one for Northampton and Leicester which will broaden the picture nationally for boot and shoemakers.³ But, already in the last few years, there has been much excellent work done on the late nineteenth century labour movement which is helping towards a composite answer to the crucial historical questions of this period. It is hoped that this study will make a small contribution to the development of that picture, and so the following section compares some of its conclusions with those of other historians working in similar areas. The selected comparisons are with those work-groups that have been occasionally referred to throughout the thesis: flint glass makers, building workers, engineers and compositors.

The flint glass makers⁴ provide some vivid contrasts as well as similarities with the shoemakers' experience. The former were a 'high artisan' group untroubled by the introduction of machinery in the period 1850-80. They were protected in their labour aristocracy by a highly specialised consumer demand for their product which only the best bespoke shoemakers could rival and the

3. K. Brooker, University of Hull PH.D. forthcoming; W. Lancaster, *op.cit.*, University of Warwick PH.D., 1983, completed too recently for comprehensive consideration in this study.

4. Matsumura, *The flint glass makers*.

statement workers in the ready-made trade could not. But, like statement shoemakers, the flint glass makers exhibited an exclusive, not an incorporationist,⁵ attitude towards 'inferior' workers. They refused to amalgamate with other, lesser glass workers. Statement shoemakers could not prevent the less skilled from joining them but, while in theoretical union, they continued to advocate policies whose primary objective was the protection of their own privileged position.

Where the behaviour of the flint glass makers most closely resembles that of London's statement shoemakers is in the ambiguous roles played by each as one moves outwards from work-group, through community and into class.

"My contention is that as the concentric circle was expanding from the work-group to the factory, to the industry, to the local community, and then to class and society, the labour aristocracy tended to move from "conservative" to "progressive". At the point of production, more precisely, in the work-group, they were the most conservative towards any change of the existing custom and production process. They were the most discriminatory towards other less skilled workers in the workplace, because this was the economic basis on which the labour aristocracy could stand. Gradually, but not uninterrupted, as the circle was being expanded their attitudes began to change and at the widest circle - class society - in certain circumstances they might play a progressive role"⁶

At the outer points, statement shoemakers like flint glass makers were capable of playing a progressive social and political role that could bring benefits to the working class as a whole.

In his study of the building workers, Richard Price⁷ has identified a formalisation of industrial relations through the last three decades of the nineteenth century which is very similar to the experience of the boot and shoe-

5. I take this terminology from Royden Harrison's introduction to Divisions of Labour: Studies in Craft Regulation and Technical Innovation, 1850 - 1914 (forthcoming, 1984). I am grateful to the author for allowing me to read his introduction before publication.

6. Matsumura, op.cit. p.383.

7. Price, Masters, Unions and Men.

makers in that employers used arbitration and conciliation procedures to exert increased control over the labour process. Even before this masters had replaced piece payments by hourly rates in order to prevent the men from shortening the hours worked at their pleasure.⁸ This is directly comparable to shoemaking employers' successful replacement of piece by day (or weekly) wages on machine work. After 1895 they had the freedom to use either piece or day wages as they pleased on machine or hand work. In building, as in shoemaking, arbitration and conciliation procedures had recruited union leaders as policemen of rank and file militancy, thus providing the prerequisite for revolt. If the main thrust of builders' rank and file militancy came during the syndicalist period, shoemakers anticipated them in the new unionism. The builders' history during the late nineteenth century bears a notable resemblance to that of the shoemakers and the reasons are not hard to find. Small scale operators undercutting prices, sub-contracting and a complex stratification of labour were pre-conditions for conflict in both industries.

The engineers and composers can be used as our final comparative work groups.⁹ The 1898 engineers' lock-out had remarkably similar causes to that occurring three years earlier in boot and shoemaking. Employers needed to re-organise production to meet foreign competition and this involved the dilution of labour on machinery and the use of dispute procedures to ensure continuity of production.¹⁰ In engineering in the 1890s mechanization produced a tension between union executive and rank and file that resulted in a new unionist challenge to the official leadership.¹¹ As in shoemaking the rise of the new unionism convinced employers that a stand had to be made but, also like shoemaking, they overestimated the threat. The details of the 1898 settlement show that the engineers had suffered a similar defeat to that experienced by the shoemakers in 1895.¹²

8. Ibid., pp. 105-10.

9. Zeitlin, Craft Regulation and Craft Control.

10. Craft Control, p.265.

11. Craft Regulation, p.182.

12. Ibid., p.207.

But, they recovered rather better to resist further attempted encroachments upon craft control in the late 1890s.¹³

In the long term, neither the engineers nor the shoemakers retained the degree of craft control enjoyed by the compositors. The latter received the benefits of their product in a similar way to the flint glass makers. Newspapers were an intellectually perishable commodity and this enormously strengthened the bargaining position of all printers. Exceptionally strong trade unionism protected wage rates, limited the supply of labour, and maintained control over machinery.¹⁴ Profit margins made a difference, too. Because printing employers benefited greatly from new technology they were more ready to make wage concessions. It would be difficult to find a work-group whose experience differs more from that of the shoemakers and it is worth emphasising the three main factors that seem to have made the difference: the nature of the product, the absence of foreign competition, and the maintenance of craft control over machinery.

In his study of the engineers, Zeitlin employs a conceptual method that throws much light on rank and file movements. He argues that:

".... conflicts over the introduction of new technology can best be understood in terms of a triangular relationship between employers, union executives and rank and file so that pressure from below often placed significant constraints on the agreements which could be reached through collective bargaining."¹⁵

The triangular relationship method is a useful one because it allows us to see the new unionism in its dual role as a movement of resistance both to employers' encroachments upon control of the labour process and to union leaders' conciliatory responses to such extensions of employer power.

In a recent article, Price¹⁶ has dealt explicitly with the first of these conflicts while rather neglecting the second. He correctly identifies a cause of the new unionism in boot and shoemaking as an increased subordination of labour

13. Craft Control, pp. 270-1.

14. Ibid., pp. 217-9

15. Craft Regulation, p.173.

16. The labour process and labour history.

to capital. This involved fundamental change in the labour process. On the one hand, machine production in factories (in the E. Midlands) was matched by an intensification of the old division of labour in London. The former was accompanied by a substitution of day for piece rates; the latter by an extension of the team system. On the other hand, what Price terms formal subordination was increased by the imposition of arbitration and conciliation structures and a more constraining set of legal procedures. This study has shown that all this was underway by the 1870s, and well advanced by the 1880s, so Price is correct to conclude that, "The demands of the new unionism of 1888-90 may be seen as attempts to resist and control the increased subordination implied by changed working conditions."¹⁷ He is also correct in arguing that the new unionism was strongest where the struggle over the division of labour was most intense.

What needs to emerge more clearly from this analysis is the role that the trade union leadership played in bringing about the new unionism. It is implicit in Price's arguments that it did not resist very strongly the increased subordination that capital was imposing, and it has been shown in this study that union leaders were often accommodatory in their attitudes and complicit in the failures of arbitration and conciliation. It was the feeling on the part of some bootmakers that resistance needed strengthening that turned them towards the new unionism and, in the case of a few, towards a socialist analysis of industrial relations which, as Price notes, acted as a means of comprehension and a vocabulary of change. The new unionism was more than a revolt against employers grabbing the benefits of technical innovation. As its name implies, it was also a revolt against an old unionism which had neglected the semi and unskilled worker in the past and, through the 1880s, showed little inclination to change its ways. It was as much a movement of intra as inter-class struggle, and this is one reason why the concept of a labour aristocracy continues to be a relevant one.

17. Ibid., p. 58.

At its simplest it could be said that the existence of a labour aristocracy in London bootmaking was one cause of the new unionism. As they saw the gulf¹⁸ between themselves and the less respectable trade narrow, statement workers reverted to the social construction of skill. This was made necessary by the contraction of the statement market which was gradually rendering their skills redundant. Of course statement work continued to be made beyond the 1890s, but the point was that employers became desperate to broaden their base and extend into the cheaper trade. Statement workers' response to this pressure was to concede nothing. They continued to defend the old division of labour until the bitter end, even if this resulted in their actual earnings being less than those of a non-statement shoemaker.

Their behaviour towards those non-statement shoemakers was equally defensive, but, as More has noted, the formation of an all grades trade union such as N.U.B.S.O. had helped to undermine the exclusiveness of the labour aristocracy.¹⁹ N.U.B.S.O. had been founded as a union of shoemakers in the ready made, as opposed to the bespoke, trade. But, the ready made trade contained many different types of workers and its product varied enormously in both type and quality. In London in the 1870s it had been the ready made shoemakers working in the best quality market, some of whose work rivalled the bespoke trade, who had founded the London Metro. branch. Many of them were lasters. They could not prevent the intermediate and sweated workers from joining the branch in the 1880s - after all, this was only the equivalent of semi-skilled machine workers in the E. Midlands doing so - but they did not take kindly to it. They continued to see the union in London as existing to defend the position of statement shoemakers and they regarded non-statement members as interlopers. The result was that the less skilled came to demand nothing less than a re-definition of trade unionism.

18. Like most of the contributors to 'Divisions of Labour' I have found no real confirmation of Hobbesbaum's view that a gulf between 'labour aristocrats and plebians' continued to be sharply maintained in shoemaking.

19. Skill and the English Working Class, p.233.

Despite the efforts of S.O.F. shoemakers this re-definition never approached the attainment of a revolutionary consciousness. Indeed, militant shoemakers failed to mount an effective challenge to their own Union leadership, let alone to the state. A brief comparison with the rank and file engineers' movement studied by Hinton²⁰ will reveal some of the factors that were missing. Firstly, even if other conditions had lent themselves differently, shoemakers suffered from their marginality within the economy. They could never present the same kind of threat to the government of the state as, for example, the munitions workers could during the First World War. This means that not only could industrial action by shoemakers be easily contained but also that the action itself never raised political issues such as the class base of governmental and trade union power. Secondly, new unionist shoemakers lacked the support of their own labour aristocracy which was still fighting its isolated rearguard action in the 1890s. De-skilling had not proceeded far enough by that time for them to have abandoned their craft consciousness in favour of an all grades unity. Finally, the social crisis of the new unionist period was nothing like as profound as that of the period 190 - 16 which extended far beyond labour militancy into financial policy and social welfare, Irish Home Rule, female suffrage and eventually war. Although present in the 1890s these issues had not sharpened to the point of threatening a revolutionary conjuncture. A full assessment of the limits and potentialities of shoemakers' new unionism must await the completion of work on the other areas in which it was strong.

To say that shoemakers' new unionism was comparatively strong in London is to partially obscure the fact that trade unionism per se only ever enjoyed limited support from the rank and file. The archaic and fragmented industrial structure of the capital proved ever a difficult breeding ground. Many of the special social features of East London, in particular - the geographical dispersity of outwork, ethnic and cultural divisions, extremes of working class poverty - separated shoemakers more than they unified them. They acted as further divisive influences through a period when unity in the face of economic change was most needed.

20. First Shop Stewards' Movement.

Despite all these difficulties and comparative disadvantages there is a strong argument for saying that the new unionist movement among London shoemakers also suffered from the incapacity of its leaders, who were mainly members of the S.D.F. There is no evidence to suggest that the tactics of the militants in the major centres were at all linked. Rather the movement took a more spontaneous and localised form. Its impetus, in London, was derived from essentially economic grievances on the part of the non-statement worker and the failure of the recognised institutions of collective bargaining to deal satisfactorily with them. Similar discontents did arise in other centres but, in London, their precise articulation was determined by two, distinctly local factors: the existence of an elitist structure of trade unionism and the strong local presence of the S.D.F.

The socialism of the S.D.F. brought a rigorous theoretical analysis to bear upon a situation already teeming with spontaneous rank and file dissent. But, although it provided an articulate, determined and flamboyant leadership, the S.D.F. was lacking in the field of strategy. What the S.D.F. offered London shoemakers was a class analysis of industrial relations and an egalitarian analysis of trade unionism. The former resulted in an hostility towards arbitration; the latter in an hostility towards sectional trade unionism. But, militancy, in itself, proved insufficient without the degree of strategical organisation necessary to transform Union policy.

Without the availability of local branch records it is difficult to make confident judgements about the S.D.F.'s trade union work, but no evidence has been found in the sources used of any concerted effort to win local or national positions within the Union. Why might this have been? There may have been tensions between local and national leadership over the usefulness of extensive trade union work. Hyndman's views on this subject are well known and both John Burns and Tom Mann eventually left the S.D.F. because of his anti-trade unionism.²¹

21. Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour, p.104.

What is more certain is that tensions existed within the local S.O.F. between the more pragmatic style of Votier and the ultra-leftism of people like Lewis. While there must have been local members who shared Hyndman's scepticism about trade unionism there was also an ultra-left whose intransigence, at times, seemed prepared to turn industrial relations into something resembling Custer's last stand. There is quite a bit of evidence to suggest that the S.O.F. lacked an organised strategy. Only the precise reasons for this are uncertain.

What can be said with greater certainty is that the employers' presentation of the 1895 lock-out as a trade union conspiracy organised by militant socialists²² was a myth because the S.O.F., at least, were incapable of organising one. What the employers were, in fact, doing when they defined the struggle as one against socialism was recognising the arrival of a working class politics of industrialisation. In London, with its retarded pattern of economic development, that process still had some way to go in the 1890s, but socialism was beginning to bud nonetheless in the workshops of the shoemakers and tailors, on the waterfront and in the match factories and the gasworks.

The outcome of the lock-out was, of course, a severe setback both for trade unionism and for socialist industrial politics. The employers' counter-offensive against the new unionism had been well organised and massively effective. This had an emasculating effect upon the National Union. Through a period when other unions were increasing their membership it went into decline.²³ The lock-out cannot take all the blame for this for economic conditions and the pace of technological change also played their part. It was as much a psychological as an industrial defeat, and it only damaged, rather than destroyed, the new consciousness. This re-surfaced within a decade, but in its modified labourist expression that was, perhaps, the most significant long-term effect of the lock-out.

22. The I.L.P. were much stronger in Leicester than the S.O.F.

23. Fox, History of N.U.B.S.O., p.244.

Finally, it would seem necessary to try to place these changes in the political consciousness of shoemakers within the wider development of working class politics in the capital after 1895. The transition to labourism in London was a slow process compared with the provinces. The new unionism paid no swift political dividends. Keir Hardie's victory at West Ham South in 1892 proved a deceptive indicator for working class London did not swing markedly to the left in the decade after 1895. The Labour Party won only the South London seats of Deptford and Woolwich in 1906²⁴ and made no electoral impression upon working class East London before 1914.²⁵ Conservatism maintained a firm foothold in the East End and was generally the beneficiary of any dissatisfaction with Liberalism, as had been the case in Bethnal Green N.E. in 1895.²⁶

One important cause of the durability of Conservatism in E. London through the period was the dominance of the immigration issue in local politics. Even Jewish, Conservative M.P.s., such as F.W. Isaacson in Stepney, campaigned on a restrictionist platform in 1892 and 1895 without apparently losing support.²⁷ Of course, many of the Jews in E. London were unenfranchised because they were not naturalised citizens. But, even amongst those who did have the vote there was probably support for restrictions. Once a haven had been obtained for oneself and one's family the 'economic common-sense' of denying it to others became more persuasive. The S.D.F.'s opposition to immigration did nothing to distinguish Socialism from Conservatism.

But, these are only secondary explanations of why London took so long to develop an independent working class politics. It was the pattern of delayed and uneven industrialisation, as typified by the history of the boot and shoemakers, that provided the greatest impediment.²⁸ Party could not precede class and the development of working class consciousness had not reached anything resembling maturation amidst the industrial and ethnic divisions that typified the London of the 1890s.

24. Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, p.58.

25. Ibid., p.43.

26. When George Howell lost his seat (see Chapter 11).

27. Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, p.45.

28. Stedman Jones, Outcast London, pp. 348-9.

So, what had the S.D.F., with its shoemaker members, contributed towards the building of socialism in London in the long-term? It is difficult to disagree with Hobbes's judgement that, if they fell short of implanting a clearly articulated, revolutionary ideology, they did contribute a militant and intransigent tradition of class struggle.²⁹ This was an unequivocal rejection of the progressive, class alliance politics of radical liberalism and lay firmly in the independent tradition of Chartism. Within the limitations imposed by London's industrial structure in the late nineteenth century only a minority of militants took up, and carried through, this view of things. The struggle of the boot and shoemakers were just one set of formative episodes in the development of working class consciousness in London, but they played their part. William Votier would have expressed little pleasure at the labourism which developed in the capital between the wars, but it owed something to his efforts on behalf of his class. Yet, had he lived, it would surely have been Charles Freak who recognised best his own reflection in Herbert Morrison's spectacles.³⁰

29. Hobbes, Hyndman and the S.D.F. (in Labouring Men), p.236.

30. Freak died in office as General President of N.U.B.S.O. in 1910.

ORIGINAL IN COLOUR



APPENDIX A.

Map showing degrees of poverty in London in areas with about 30,000 inhabitants in each (compiled from information collected in 1889-1890).

Per cent of poverty

Key.

Under 10

Under 20

Under 30

Under 40

Under 50

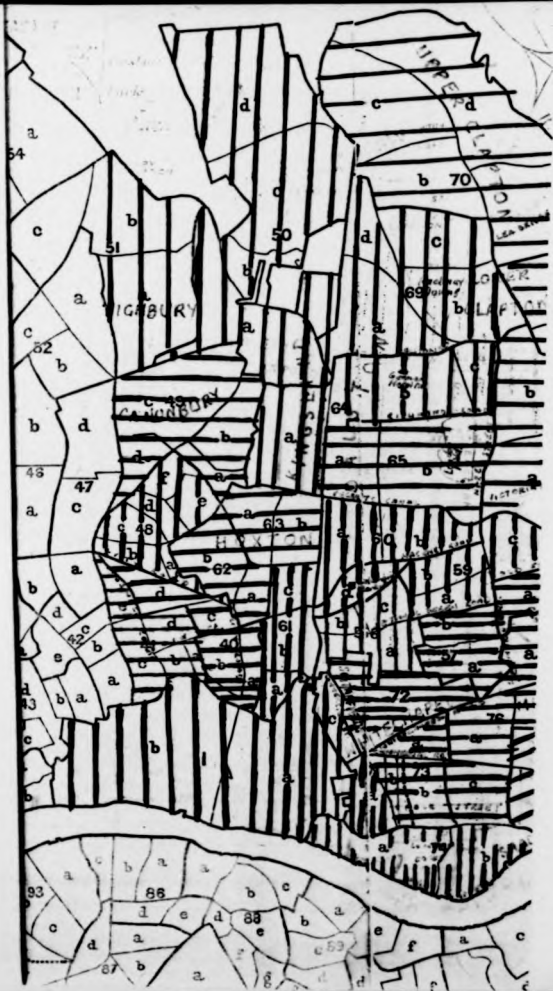
Under 60

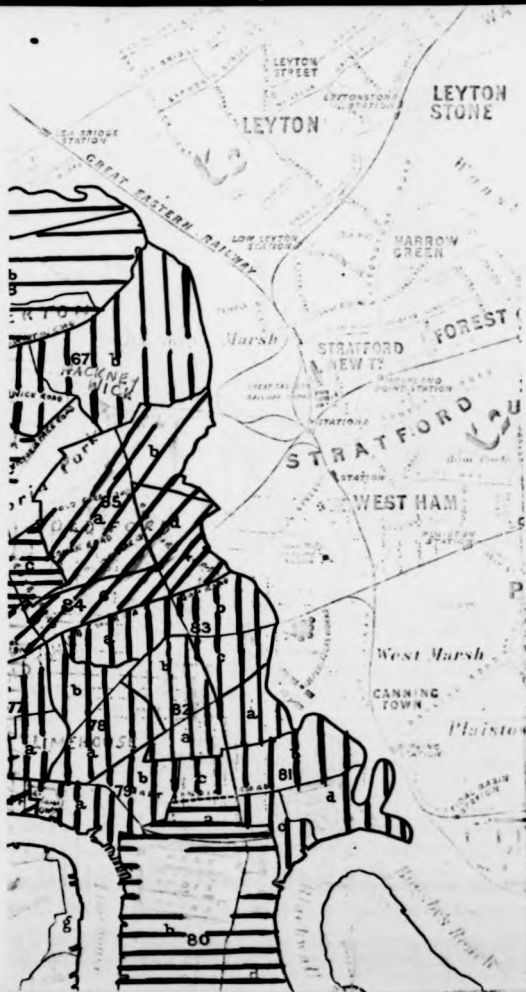
Under 70



Source : C. Booth, Labour and Life of the People in London (1891).

Vol II, Appendix, Map 1, London poverty by districts.





APPENDIX BMembership of the London branches of the National Union, 1874 - 95.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>MONTH</u>	<u>L. METRO.</u>	<u>L. SOUTH</u>	
1874	June	45		Probationary members in brackets
	Sept.	70		
1875	Jan.	54		
	April	118		
	July	146		
	Oct.	107	56	
1876	Jan.	200 (61)	67 (26)	
	April	255 (100)	59 (12)	
	July	313 (251)	49 (73)	
	Nov.	307 (100)	76 (5)	
1877	Feb.	272 (55)	55 (20)	
	May	281 (100)	69 (12)	
	Aug.	355 (166)	58 (6)	
1878	Mar.	444 (200)	62 (10)	
	Sept.	488 (100)	66 (10)	
1879	Feb.	254	40 (6)	
	Aug.	416 (25)	38 (16)	
	Nov.	336 (331)	36 (34)	
	Dec.	336 (331)	33 (41)	
1880	Jan.	354 (330)	53 (41)	
	Feb.	324 (350)	36 (38)	
	Mar.	316 (355)	33 (40)	
	Apr.	317 (365)	37 (44)	
	May	320 (383)	34 (50)	
	June	323 (385)	35 (50)	
	July	334 (390)	35 (56)	
	Aug.	347 (395)	34 (60)	
	Sept.	370 (400)	37 (60)	
	Oct.	360 (407)	42 (56)	
	Nov.	377 (420)	46 (60)	
1881	Dec.	379 (425)	48 (42)	
	Jan.	377 (430)	52 (44)	
	Feb.	349 (435)	53 (54)	
	Mar.	379 (430)	55 (46)	
	Apr.	408 (475)	54 (50)	
	May	445 (480)	56 (68)	
	June	441 (500)	55 (60)	
	July	482 (505)	53 (66)	
	Aug.	476 (510)	53 (69)	
	Sept.	479 (515)	54 (74)	
	Oct.	513 (500)	56 (70)	
	Nov.	529 (475)	57 (78)	
	Dec.	561 (439)	57 (70)	
1882	Jan.	552 (452)	65 (70)	
	Feb.	541 (460)	67 (75)	
	Mar.	585 (450)	68 (72)	
	Apr.	637 (500)	68 (78)	
	May	637 (500)	75 (75)	
	June	649 (500)	73 (80)	
	July	655 (510)	78 (107)	
	Aug.	635 (515)	79 (106)	
	Sept.	650 (520)	85 (110)	
	Oct.	677 (525)	91 (120)	
	Nov.	699 (526)	90 (125)	
	Dec.	791 (450)	94 (120)	

APPENDIX B (cont.)

YEAR	MONTH	L. METRO.	L. SOUTH
1883	Jan.	772 (300)	102 (111)
	Feb.	754 (301)	103 (117)
	Mar.	777 (391)	110 (130)
	Apr.	775 (400)	108 (138)
	May	795 (450)	110 (142)
	June	832 (475)	108 (102)
	July	845 (350)	109 (107)
	Aug.	813 (390)	109 (130)
	Sept.	797 (400)	111 (120)
	Oct.	798 (400)	112 (116)
	Nov.	832 (395)	111 (120)
	Dec.	865 (390)	124 (106)
1884	Jan.	879 (400)	123 (103)
	Feb.	851 (399)	116 (101)
	Mar.	897 (405)	126 (94)
	Apr.	922 (1,350)	122 (104)
	May	941 (1,400)	123 (130)
	June	931 (1,405)	128 (130)
	July	931 (1,500)	133 (140)
	Aug.	914 (1,200)	123 (130)
	Sept.	921 (1,100)	124 (110)
	Oct.	969 (900)	124 (106)
	Nov.	1,040 (800)	125 (99)
	Dec.	1,108 (500)	127 (99)
1885	Jan.	1,071 (400)	126 (103)
	Feb.	1,006 (300)	136 (108)
	Mar.	1,002 (400)	140 (104)
	Apr.	985 (450)	-
	May	1,001 (470)	140 (101)
	June	994 (480)	137 (101)
	July	956 (450)	129 (98)
	Aug.	935 (400)	129 (80)
	Sept.	853 (350)	128 (100)
	Oct.	840 (355)	139 (112)
	Nov.	832 (350)	138 (109)
	Dec.	854 (348)	142 (88)
1886	Jan.	851 (340)	140 (80)
	Feb.	734 (350)	138 (75)
	Mar.	747 (450)	126 (90)
	Apr.	752 (450)	126 (90)
	May	749 (500)	126 (88)
	June	739 (550)	-
	July	756 (550)	124 (70)
	Aug.	776 (550)	119 (-)
	Sept.	749 (550)	-
	Oct.	793 (540)	116 (80)
	Nov.	795 (547)	114 (80)
	Dec.	795 (541)	119 (74)
1887	Jan.	802 (547)	114 (60)
	Feb.	796 (525)	110 (60)
	Mar.	790 (500)	105 (70)
	Apr.	810 (505)	104 (60)
	May	819 (500)	102 (58)
	June	820 (500)	100 (58)

APPENDIX B (cont.)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>MONTH</u>	<u>L. METRO.</u>	<u>L. SOUTH</u>	<u>L. EAST</u>	<u>L. CITY</u>
1887	July	820 (500)	98 (60)		
	Aug.	824 (550)	93 (90)		
	Sept.	827 (500)	90 (90)		
	Oct.	833 (450)	87 (98)		
	Nov.	848 (450)	88 (110)		
1888	Dec.	877 (450)	96 (106)		
	Jan.	851 (450)	97 (105)		
	Feb.	865 (455)	96 (214)		
	Mar.	881 (550)	99 (187)		
	Apr.	913 (560)	97 (130)		
	May	931 (672)	99 (140)		
	June	959 (700)	108 (156)		
	July	978 (800)	110 (167)		
	Aug.	961 (805)	112 (160)		
	Sept.	1,013 (800)	124 (180)		
	Oct.	1,031 (795)	124 (180)		
	Nov.	1,030 (790)	132 (220)		
	Dec.	1,068 (760)	134 (230)		
1889	Jan.	1,069 (750)	136 (228)		
	Feb.	1,091 (749)	145 (240)		
	Mar.	1,146 (750)	151 (369)		
	Apr.	1,173 (755)	153 (400)		
	May	1,187 (760)	167 (390)		
	June	1,182 (750)	173 (225)		
	July	1,192 (755)	185 (260)		
	Aug.	1,189 (705)	190 (250)		
	Sept.	1,203 (700)	193 (257)		
	Oct.	1,214 (695)	200 (200)		
	Nov.	1,225 (700)	200 (250)		
	Dec.	1,266 (705)	200 (267)		
1890	Jan.	1,280 (710)	213 (230)	64 (67)	
	Feb.	1,312 (705)	318 (326)	67 (70)	
	Mar.	1,408 (1,000)	223 (226)	68 (100)	
	Apr.	1,505 (1,300)	225 (250)	78 (100)	
	May	1,573 (1,500)	222 (260)	79 (100)	
	June	1,632 (2,000)	230 (290)	79 (100)	
	July	1,678 (2,200)	247 (356)	85 (100)	
	Aug.	1,700 (1,350)	245 (360)	89 (100)	
	Sept.	-	-	-	
	Oct.	-	-	-	
	Nov.	-	-	-	
	Dec.	-	-	-	
1891	Jan.	2,623 (1,800)	326 (470)	170 (124)	201 (350)
	Feb.	2,925 (1,500)	360 (420)	189 (124)	201 (350)
	Mar.	3,362 (1,200)	370 (430)	241 (400)	225 (370)
	Apr.	3,477 (1,300)	404 (410)	267 (400)	253 (380)
	May	3,463 (1,300)	417 (420)	268 (400)	245 (375)
	June	3,647 (1,300)	422 (400)	262 (400)	222 (375)
	July	3,778 (1,300)	428 (398)	262 (400)	199 (375)
	Aug.	3,700 (1,300)	432 (390)	248 (400)	200 (350)
	Sept.	3,691 (1,300)	435 (380)	235 (400)	183 (350)
	Oct.	3,564 (1,300)	447 (378)	215 (400)	173 (360)
	Nov.	3,611 (1,300)	450 (310)	221 (400)	173 (350)
	Dec.	3,611 (1,300)	450 (310)	221 (400)	173 (350)

APPENDIX B (cont.)

YEAR	MONTH	L. RETRO. NO. 1	L. METRO. NO. 2	L. SOUTH	L. EAST	L. CITY
1892	Jan.	3,355 (1,300)		466 (324)	209 (400)	171 (330)
	Feb.	3,128 (1,300)		472 (330)	209 (400)	173 (300)
	Mar.	3,129 (644)		484 (330)	201 (400)	173 (300)
	Apr.	3,075 (644)		500 (330)	196 (400)	170 (300)
	May.	3,704 (1,000)		509 (346)	194 (400)	171 (300)
	June	3,142 (1,000)		507 (340)	186 (400)	162 (300)
	July	3,091 (1,000)		507 (355)	192 (400)	154 (300)
	Aug.	2,993 (1,000)		491 (300)	186 (140)	149 (300)
	Sept.	2,842 (1,000)		480 (310)	170 (140)	148 (300)
	Oct.	2,858 (1,000)		466 (300)	158 (140)	144 (300)
	Nov.	2,604 (1,000)	342 (500)	465 (310)	149 (140)	144 (300)
	Dec.	2,631 (1,000)	419 (47)	464 (300)	146 (140)	134 (300)
1893	Jan.	2,891 (1,000)	424 (52)	452 (240)	149 (140)	131 (300)
	Feb.	2,680 (1,000)	420 (113)	466 (250)	154 (134)	133 (300)
	Mar.	2,736 (1,000)	410 (165)	477 (240)	149 (130)	135 (300)
	Apr.	2,663 (972)	399 (191)	471 (250)	149 (127)	132 (150)
	May	2,739 (950)	412 (197)	474 (258)	154 (120)	137 (150)
	June	2,735 (950)	401 (204)	461 (270)	155 (120)	134 (140)
	July	2,720 (950)	396 (228)	456 (260)	167 (120)	135 (150)
	Aug.	2,675 (930)	394 (225)	461 (255)	166 (120)	126 (150)
	Sept.	2,634 (900)	387 (230)	460 (240)	155 (118)	117 (120)
	Oct.	2,611 (900)	394 (112)	453 (250)	150 (118)	110 (70)
	Nov.	2,566 (900)	397 (139)	451 (200)	156 (110)	110 (80)
	Dec.	2,590 (900)	390 (140)	445 (205)	157 (110)	106 (80)
1894	Jan.	2,574 (900)	386 (140)	439 (220)	164 (110)	108 (80)
	Feb.	2,492 (900)	391 (200)	439 (250)	164 (110)	100 (80)
	Mar.	2,540 (900)	397 (200)	446 (270)	162 (110)	162 (80)
	Apr.	2,520 (900)	400 (230)	446 (290)	161 (110)	-
	May	2,540 (900)	403 (230)	442 (310)	162 (110)	91 (100)
	June	2,530 (900)	398 (230)	448 (325)	160 (110)	91 (110)
	July	2,529 (900)	394 (230)	447 (320)	157 (110)	91 (110)
	Aug.	2,555 (900)	385 (200)	450 (320)	162 (110)	81 (110)
	Sept.	2,421 (870)	396 (200)	451 (310)	164 (100)	79 (80)
	Oct.	2,404 (850)	414 (200)	463 (308)	163 (100)	80 (80)
	Nov.	2,405 (800)	411 (200)	459 (300)	162 (98)	74 (80)
	Dec.	2,437 (760)	416 (200)	464 (300)	170 (90)	81 (80)
1895	Jan.	2,474 (750)	413 (150)	467 (296)	165 (90)	80 (44)
	Feb.	2,438 (730)	407 (200)	477 (290)	163 (80)	78 (60)
	Mar.	2,531 (700)	435 (200)	490 (240)	176 (80)	81 (90)
	Apr.	2,602 (700)	442 (250)	494 (250)	173 (80)	81 (200)
	May	2,675 (700)	443 (250)	506 (250)	167 (80)	79 (200)
	June	2,577 (700)	417 (230)	488 (210)	145 (76)	72 (200)
	July	2,459 (700)	420 (230)	455 (210)	145 (70)	60 (70)
	Dec.	2,278 (700)	379 (200)	403 (210)	142 (60)	34 (80)

APPENDIX C

"The smartest man that walked Haggerston": Lilian Griffith's memories of her father, George Wing (1858 - 99).

This transcript is a summary of the first part of a longer conversation with Lilian Griffiths (1896 - 1978) about working and family life in Hackney between the 1890s and the Second World War. It is in the possession of the author of this thesis.

George Wing was born about 1858 and came to work in London from his native Cambridgeshire as a young man. In the 1890s he was working as an out-door bootmaker at home in the Hertford Road area of Haggerston. He was described as being "his own master man", self-employed in so far as he probably worked for a manufacturer but in a shed at the back of the house.

He belonged to the Haggerston Road Radical Club where he often went with his wife for a drink. They were both very smart dressers and George, himself, was referred to as "the smartest man that walked Haggerston." At Christmas time the children in the family were taken to pantomimes at the Club.

George died in 1899, at the age of 41, from an illness contracted from the bootmakers' habit of holding their tacks in their mouths while working. (This confirms that George was a lester). His daughter thought that the rust from the tacks had "penetrated his bowels."

After her husband's death Mrs. Wing was forced to leave the family house and move in with a brother in the Hertford Road area with their eight children. All the six boys had been put to apprenticeships - a butcher, glass blower, two upholsterers, bottle packer, van-boy - and the two girls were put to box making. Later in life, when most of the children had married, Mrs. Wing "turned to drink."

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