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CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS, INTERESTS, AND THEIR ARTICULATION

AMONG THE ENGLISH WORKING CLASS, 1828-1831

Marc W. Steinberg

University of Michigan

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University of Michigan  
330 Packard Street  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS, INTERESTS, AND THEIR ARTICULATION  
AMONG THE ENGLISH WORKING CLASS, 1828-1831

by Marc W. Steinberg

Submitted to:

Prof. Charles Tilly  
Prof. William Gamson  
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## I. Introduction

The central objects of this study are to analyze the class consciousness of workers in early nineteenth-century England, to develop a means by which the writings and utterances of these workers can be tapped as indicators of their consciousness, and to explain its possible variation. To achieve this goal I will focus on the discourse of workers in class struggle in an attempt to elucidate the particular historical manifestations of working-class consciousness as it emerged in late regency England. Through an analysis of the texts of speeches and meetings, handbills and letters, and accounts of riots I will attempt to determine the content of this consciousness, gauge the extent to which there existed commonalities of understanding and vision among disparate working-class groups, and determine the forces that structured their class ideology.

While this study is motivated by both particular historical and sociological concerns, it does seek to address certain key problems that both disciplines hold in common. In addition, it is an attempt to demonstrate how historical study can enlighten sociological wisdom. Within the context of this study there are several key problems that permeate both fields which I will try to address.

The first problem concerns the nature of group interests, especially with regard to collective action. How the analyst perceives the way such interests are produced and articulated greatly determines his understanding of group behavior. Specifically, whether the analyst takes interests for granted or considers them problematic structures the entire analysis of group action. Michael Burawoy notes the problem succinctly when he observes,

... much of sociology takes interests as given. It is here that we encounter the problem of rationality and irrationality, logical and non-logical behavior, and interests real and false, short- and long-term, immediate and fundamental, arising out of some discrepancy between actual and postulated behavior. Where interests are taken as given, ideology becomes a resource that people manipulate

to advance their 'interests' or a cement that contains conflict or minimizes strain. On the other hand, where interests are not imputed, they are empirically discovered or determined in a tautological fashion after the event. ... **The problem is to explain interests in any given situation, not to describe them empirically** ((1979, p. 19)).

Charles Tilly suggests that the two major competing theories of collective action, the Millian and Marxian models, tend to infer interests in opposing fashions. While Millian theories suggest that we "infer the interest from the population's own utterances and actions," Marxian models "infer it from a general analysis of the connections between interest and social position" ((1978, p. 60)). To escape this 'ferocious dilemma' he suggests that we

(1) treat the relations of production as predictors of the interests that people will pursue on the average and in the long run, but (2) rely, as much as possible, on people's own articulation of their interests as an explanation of their behavior in the short run ((Ibid., p. 61)).

Tilly's scheme of judging interest formulation, while clarifying the concept of interest, does not wholly resolve all problems. One particular problem of special concern to this study is how the relations of production can serve as predictors of group interest. This problem is a general one within current Marxist literature, a literature that is anything but unified on the point. As Bertillon and Eyerman have recently suggested, differences within this literature have arisen from varying conceptions of the wedding of theory and practice ((p. 364)). The conceptualization of interests within recent structuralist writings currently popular with many scholars revolves around a 'scientifically' generated concept of objective interests. Among such theorists as Poulantzas and Wright class interest is seen as advantages that would be realized if the working class could cast back the veil of bourgeois mystification and scientifically view its position within society ((Wright, p. 89; Bertillon and Eyerman, p. 361, 370)). In this sense class interest is hypothetical, or as Bertillon and Eyerman label it promissory. Short of a true revolutionary situation developed class interests cannot be said to exist ((Wright, p. 91)).

This currently popular perspective suffers from several problems that make its application in research awkward, if not wholly untenable. First, in an attempt to create a science of class any analysis of subjective or articulated interests is relegated to at best a secondary status. As I have just noted in discussing Tilly's formulation a reliance on the actors' own articulations is necessary to understand and explain their behavior.

Second, given this predetermined definition of class interest, historical analysis of working-class collective action becomes an exercise in teleological criticism. With little regard to the context of the actions such an analysis can verge on becoming ahistorical. Workaday life struggles, created by the objective conditions of the current social relations of production, are thus belittled as the causes of valid and cogent current working-class interests which can serve as the basis for collective action. Finally, there is a peculiar circularity of argumentation to be found in such a formulation. While struggle leading to a revolutionary situation is said to enhance the working class's understanding of its position, such struggle is at the same time motivated by the very interests it is supposed to be illuminating ((Bertillon and Eyerman, p. 363)). In short, this conception of class interest seems to have little analytical utility, especially in terms of historical applications.

In this paper I shall be arguing for and illustrating a different conception of interest that combines the analysis of the subjective and objective aspects of group interest. Instead of emphasizing the contrasts between the two approaches I will show that the two aspects are highly complementary and part of a single analytic process. The linchpin of the argument will be to show how a Marxian analysis of objective (or structural) position can be used to interpret group articulations and thus produce a junction between the analysis of short- and long-term interests. By paying particular attention to the social relations of production, the communal context in

which such articulations take place, the fields of power that circumscribe the production of these articulations, and the processes of cultural production that help define the production of articulations, I will outline this analysis within a particular historical context.

A more particularized version of the problem of interests concerns the Marxian debate on the determinants and content of class consciousness. This debate has two principle facets. First, there is the debate over true and false consciousness. Heirs of the Leninist and Lukacsian traditions insist that the essential content of class consciousness is a priori determined by the dialectic nature of class struggle. For these theorists class consciousness is realized in revolutionary conflict and nursed to fruition by an enlightened vanguard party of the working class. In this view true (or revolutionary) working-class consciousness can only break the fetters of bourgeois domination when these conditions are met, and this occurs when the bourgeoisie, caught in the contradictory dialectics of the capitalist system, is forced into a crisis situation. Until this juncture workers labor under a state of 'false' or 'subjective' consciousness, shackled by mystification. (For a useful summary of the evolution of these ideas see Eyerman.) What is most important about this perspective is its emphasis on class consciousness as a thing, a tangible and potential set of ideas that form a unique determined ideology.

Opposing this deterministic approach are the humanistic Marxists. These theorists suggest that the complex interplay between base and superstructure leaves the content and the determinants of class consciousness problematic to the time and circumstances of its formulation and expression. A premium is placed on the particular historical conditions of class formation and conflict, the partial autonomy of people in making history rather than being solely a midwife, and the open-endedness of the historical process. These theorists reject notions of false

consciousness as being ahistorical. As E. P. Thompson suggests, the concept is at best

...a meaningless statement; at worst it is an absurd theoretical construction, which elitists, who know how history ought to have eventuated much better than the actors, shuffle endlessly around university tables.

A class cannot exist without a consciousness of some kind. If it does, then it is not, or not yet, a class; that is it is not even an 'it,' a historical entity of any kind. ... to say that a whole class has a false or true consciousness is historically without meaning ((1977, p. 10)).

The crucial aspect of this perspective is that class consciousness is viewed not as a thing, but as an open-ended process. Classes produce their consciousness as they make history, even if they cannot quite make history as they choose.

In this study I basically will side with the humanists, but suggest more attention needs to be paid to the structural determinants of class consciousness than humanists such as Thompson are wont to do. Through the analysis of workers' discourse I will attempt to show that working-class groups did have a conception of themselves as being structurally opposed to other groups, that they clearly articulated this consciousness in struggle, and that these conceptions and articulations were rooted in the particular historical circumstances of their struggles. By tying the workers' articulations to the conditions that structured their conflicts I will attempt to show the historical and structural groundings of their class consciousness without teleological trappings.

The analysis of this discourse brings attention to the second related facet of this debate, the interpretation of texts and other residues of cultural production. Since the abandonment of overly value-determined concepts of culture propagated by functionalists during the last several decades American sociologists have increasingly turned to their European counterparts for new modes of the analysis of culture. (For a review of this adoption see Petersen.) One of the dominant concerns of this literature is a debate among Marxist analysts on the criteria to be used for the analysis and evaluation of cultural products. Marx himself has precious little to say

concerning the concept directly, examining its aspects mostly through his analysis of consciousness ((Kloskowska, p. 8)). Thus the analysis of cultural production has given rise to an often long-winded and wide-ranging debate. The principal actors in this debate are the structuralists and the humanists. The structuralists, starting from Lenin's analysis of the 'two cultures,' insist that Marxist theory represents a systematic cultural and scientific achievement by which all other cultural products should be judged. They argue that since class antagonisms are reproduced as two spheres of culture -- a bourgeois reactionary culture and a democratic socialist one -- Marxist social theory, as the culmination of democratic socialist philosophy, should be the yardstick by which a cultural product is judged. (For a more complete historical analysis of Lenin's concept see Metscher.) As Richard Johnson notes, the structuralists

...tend to share a common mode of critique. The object is to show that a particular text is organized around definite propositions (a 'problematic'). Certain problematics are held to be inherently flawed, or 'not Marxist'. ... If such a tendency is present, the text as a whole is held to fail, flawed at its centre ((1979(a), p. 69)).

Thus the structuralists propose a very formalized concept of cultural analysis, one that emphasizes strict ideological comparison and critique based on a deterministic analysis of the social order.

The humanists reject such a form of analysis on the grounds that it raises Marxism to a theology of cultural form and practice. Instead they insist that the analysis of cultural production must take into account the complex interplay of base and superstructure as it is played out within a specific totality at a specific point in time. Rather than viewing cultural production from the perspective of formal ideology, they instead opt for the analysis of what Raymond Williams terms "structures of feeling" ((1977, p. 132)). Cultural production is viewed from the



perspective of practice, the social creation of meaning of lived experience. Rather than isolating its analysis in terms of ideology, they seek to understand cultural production as it coexists and interacts with other forms of social and material production. As Williams observes, "A Marxist cultural sociology is then recognizable, in its simplest outlines, in studies of different types of institution and formation in cultural production and distribution, and in the linking of these within whole social material processes" ((1977, p. 138)).

While the humanist perspective is in many ways superior to the structuralist, it too has drawbacks. As Alan Swingewood notes, the emphasis on the complex interplay of specific determinations surrounds the analyst in foggy notions from which he can draw no clear insights ((1977, p. 42-3)). In this analysis I will attempt to show how a selective drawing from the structuralist perspective with its emphasis on the institutional and structural determinants of ideology, combined with the humanist emphasis on the experiential nature of cultural production, yields fruitful insights that neither perspective by itself can generate. I will show how the structure of social relations limits the possibilities of cultural production, but at the same time how such production must be analysed in terms of the producers own experiences.

The final problem of concern to this study is methodological (though it of course has its theory laden aspects). It revolves around how some empirical measure of class consciousness can be devised. There are two interrelated issues here. First, just what is to be measured needs to be ferreted out. Most work on class consciousness in American sociology in the last quarter century has centered on survey research of social class identification. In these studies the conceptualization of the empirical measures used has, as Hazelrigg suggests, "seldom received anything beyond a loose and typically ambiguous description" ((p.220)). Because of this conceptual ambiguity many such studies have actually measured Weberian status

consciousness rather than the degree of Marxian class consciousness. This, by and large, has turned the study of class consciousness (in the Marxian sense) away from its central concerns, and has turned a potentially powerful variable into a less insightful social-psychological indicator.

Second, as Hazelrigg notes, another central problem with this approach is that semantic representations of class standing used by the investigator a priori are assumed to be summary representations of the respondent's own understanding of class structure and his position in it ((p.234-9)). This approach is dubious at best because it measures symbol usage with little appreciation of the symbols' meanings for the respondents. The contention in this study will be that class consciousness (in the Marxian sense) cannot be adequately measured without an understanding of the particular social relations of production in which an individual is immersed and his understanding of them. I will try to illustrate that the mapping of these relationships provides a framework for interpreting the worker's understanding of his position in the labor process. In addition, I will try to indicate how other forms of lived experience produced outside these immediate relationships can mediate the worker's perceptions. (For a parallel discussion to this analysis see Burawoy 1979, ch. 9.) While the method I will use will not be directly translatable into the terms of traditional survey research the results attained still should hold some consequence for how such investigators approach the measurement of class consciousness.

Finally, as I shall discuss in a subsequent section, this problem has kin in historical research. Historians of the working class face parallel problems in their attempts to unearth the degree of class consciousness of the working class at various points in history. This is particularly true for historians of nineteenth-century England. By neglecting a systematic treatment of the social relations of production these historians often produce hazy and ill-formed treatments of working-class

consciousness. As I shall demonstrate, a careful delineation of the workers' position in the social relations of production greatly clarifies our understanding of this class consciousness.

These then are the major problems faced by both sociologists and historians which will be considered in this analysis. While the utility of examining class consciousness in the late 1820's and early 1830's might seem obscure, two principal reasons can be suggested for using this period. First, the period represents a watershed in English political, economic, and social history. Caught in the squalls of controversy over political reform and the emergence of trade union organizations, and grappling with the growing pains of capitalist development, classes found themselves pitted against one another in an arena of novel controversy. The times were in fact ripe for the germination and development of working-class consciousness as they had never been before. Because of the growing rift between capital and labor the period should be fertile for the unearthing of such consciousness.

Second, as both Patricia Hollis ((1970)) and Gareth Stedman Jones ((1977)) have suggested, this time period also was pivotal in working-class critiques of the existing social order. As Jones proposes, the late twenties and early thirties "represented the decisive moment of theoretical innovation and revolutionary ambition in the formation of proletarian theory before 1850" ((Ibid., p. 10)). Since this was a critical period of reformulation some variation in the ways in which workers articulated their understandings of the conflicts in which they were engaged can be expected. This variation should facilitate the testing of the hypotheses concerning the determinants of class consciousness and the measuring of the effects of the social relations of production on the workers' experiential understanding of their world. In both these senses the period represents a fairly strong test case for the hypotheses.

## II. Basic Concepts: Class, Class Consciousness, Ideology, and Hegemony

Before moving to a discussion of the model to explain working-class consciousness in the early nineteenth century several basic explanatory concepts need to be specified. By precisely indicating the use of these concepts I will be able to clearly locate the model within the confines of present research and theory.

Following E. P. Thompson I will be viewing class as a process rather than a discrete structural object of analysis. As he proposes, "Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different (and usually opposed) to theirs" ((1966, p. 9)). However, unlike Thompson, I shall explicitly insist that this happening is at base determined by the position of groups in the social relations of production.

As I have noted, class consciousness too is a process rather than an object. Following Thompson it will be viewed as "the way these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, and institutional forms" ((1966, p. 10)). Viewed in these terms class consciousness is, in essence, both the practical consciousness of class and the experiential understanding of the social relationships in which a group is embedded ((R. Williams 1977, p. 44)). As Richard Price notes, the unfolding of this understanding in cultural production results from the interaction of three interrelated determinants.

The dynamics of class consciousness ... consist of the interaction between three levels of analysis and experience -- the historical baggage that is carried by the working class, the particular constructs of time within which it must operate (which includes the general level of critiques available to the working class and relationships to other classes) and the relationship these bear to specific experiences, both historical and contemporary, of the workplace ((p. 15)).

It will be shown that each of these three determinants bears on the way workers express their understanding of their position.

Since class consciousness is determined by the interaction of these three levels what will be analysed are particular cultural manifestations of this consciousness. In essence what will be decoded are bits and pieces of the ideological expressions that workers used to articulate their grievances. In this sense strands of ideology available to the working class will be used to measure their articulations, with the ideologies being taken as the cultural formulations of this consciousness. By comparing these articulations to the available ideological formulations both the commonalities and variations of the discourse used by different working-class groups will be noted.

In the voluminous writings on ideology since Marx at least four distinct (though not mutually exclusive) definitions of the concept can be discerned. Ideology can be conceived as,

- (i) class beliefs based on class interests,
- (ii) illusory beliefs based on false consciousness,
- (iii) the general process of producing meaning from lived experience,
- (iv) the manifestation of a belief system in discourse ((Giddens, p. 183; R. Williams 1977, p. 35; Lichteim, p. 178-9; see also Kain; Lichtman; Mellos; Seliger; Sprinzak; Swingewood 1975; Therborn)).

All but the second definition have some conceptual utility for this study.

What these definitions do not make clear, however, is the disorderly nature of ideologies at the level of lived experience. As Swingewood perceptively notes, "consciousness is riven with contradictions, and the ideologies which structure consciousness at the level of ordinary, everyday experience are quickly transformed from a formal coherence to a practical incoherence" ((1977, p. 83; see also Therborn,

p. 77)). This point is central to the analysis of workers' discourse because it cautions us not to expect neatly packaged sets of ideas, but instead loosely tied strands that capture only part of a formally defined class Weltanschauung. Further, since ideologies "are produced, conveyed, and received in particular materially circumscribed social situations," it can also be expected that some elements of these ideological strands will be residual from previous periods, and some will have no direct class foundation ((Therborn, p. 79-80)). Many disparate elements might have held some relevance to workers in their attempts to construct beliefs and articulations of their interests.

In sum, it should not be expected that manifestations of workers' ideologies in their discourse will be neatly bound, readily recognizable packages. Sometimes they will be loosely connected ideas partially shrouded by old wrapping, sometimes beliefs based on class interests ambiguously tangled with non-class ideas. Indeed, there is plenty in the historiography of working-class language and symbolism of this period to suggest that this was in fact the case for much of working-class cultural production ((Briggs 1976, 1979; Cole 1953; Hobsbawm 1959; Hollis 1970; Jones 1977; Thompson 1966; Vicinus)). In constructing the analysis of discourse these factors must be kept in mind.

The above discussion of the production and interpretation of ideology leads to the consideration of ruling class attempts to control it. The process by which this occurs is called hegemony, a concept developed by Antonio Gramsci which

...seems to mean a socio-political situation in (Gramsci's) terminology a 'moment,' in which the philosophy and practice of a society fuse or are in equilibrium; an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotations. An element of control, not necessarily conscious, is implied ((G. Williams, p. 587; see also Bates, Femia 1975, Mouffe, and Simon)).

Through this process the ruling class can neutralize class conflict and oppositional interest by mastering many forms of cultural production. Gramsci believed such a control process was possible precisely because, as I have noted, practical, experiential consciousness is fragmented and inconsistent ((Femia, p. 64)). Hegemony in the Gramscian sense is thus a type of moving equilibrium of social relations. It is important to note, however, that "while it is dominant, it is never either total or exclusive" ((R. Williams 1976, p. 113)). As Joseph Femia suggests, there is always the potential for the working class to break the chains of this ideological and cultural domination:

Lurking below the usually conforming surface are subversive beliefs and values, latent instincts of rebellion, which are sometimes translated into actual behavior. Thus the actions of workers and peasants, insofar as they deviate from conventional norms, form the raw material of an alternative culture ((1975, p. 43)).

The concept of hegemony is important to this study in two respects. First, it can provide an explanation for the lack of articulated class consciousness among certain working-class groups which might be studied. Simply because clearly voiced class based interests are not found does not mean that workers were purposefully and willfully accepting the interests of their superiors. Second, the literature on the growth of industrial production in England for this period suggests that capitalists made many repeated (if not well thought out) attempts to mold the consciousness of their workers so they would accept the work discipline and life style necessary for their new industrial order ((see for example Hammonds 1975; McKendrick 1961; Pollard 1963, 1964; C. Reid; D. Reid; Tholfsen 1949; E. P.Thompson 1974; F. M. L. Thompson 1980)). As Sidney Pollard has noted,

In their attempts to prevent 'idleness, extravagance, waste, and immorality,' employers were necessarily dealing with the workers both inside the factory and outside it. The efforts to reform the whole man were, therefore, particularly marked in factory towns and villages in which the total environment was under the control of a single employer ((1964, p. 267)).

Thus, the concept of hegemony can hold considerable explanatory power in the examination of the ways in which workers articulated their interests and concerns.

With the basic concepts outlined I now turn to specific historical arguments that have been made concerning the class consciousness of workers during the period of concern.

### **Thompson, Foster, and Musson: Three Interpretive Models**

It has been suggested previously that historical study can inform sociology. What needs to be demonstrated is how historical explanations frequently are theory laden with sociological models and why, for this reason, historical studies can provide both useful tests and models for sociological research. In addition, the following models will be used as guidelines for the development of this study's hypotheses, and conversely the results will be used to test their validity. Each of these interpretations finds analytical kin within current sociological theory: Thompson with humanistic Marxism, Foster with Leninist approaches, and Musson in a blend of Millian and functionalist approaches. In testing their interpretations this study thus also will be measuring how well these theories explain the nature of class consciousness during the period in question.

Just as all theorists of class must address Marx, all analysts of the early nineteenth-century working class must tackle E. P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class. Concentrating on the experiences of craftsmen, artisans, and outworkers Thompson seeks to trace the making of a common interest and consciousness among working-class groups between 1790 and 1830. As previously noted, Thompson uses a relativistic definition of class, viewing it as a fluid, historically grounded process. Class is a happening, a coalescence of experiential



understanding among structurally tied social groups. Class consciousness is the cultural realization of this understanding as it is produced and transformed in social relations. It is this happening that Thompson seeks to capture in a holistic vision of the events contained within it.

Starting with the sub-political traditions of what he elsewhere has termed the plebeian culture, Thompson traces the unfolding of class relations. For the author the traditional beliefs of the rights of 'free-born' Englishmen, the inheritance of popular crowd actions, and the traditions of religious dissent provide the fertile ground necessary for the genesis of a new class based order. His approach, however, is not a simple evolutionary account of class development. Rather, Thompson views this happening as a contrapuntal interplay among political agitation, religious fervor, and trade union activity, at times coordinated, often haphazard. From the oscillating series of events the old traditions of popular resistance were transformed into a new critique of a social order which itself was in a state of flux. The experiences of the early political unions, the 'chiliasm of despair' of working-class Methodism, and workers' collective actions such as Luddism and illegal trade union activity crystallized into a new radical political and social consciousness, matured in its vision and poised for working-class mass action of subsequent periods.

As final proof of this convergence of interests Thompson, in his concluding chapter, offers a panoramic vision of this radical culture and its foundations. Within these strands of history he isolates two aspects that are indicative of all workers' visions of their position.

The new class consciousness of working people may be viewed from two aspects. On the one hand, there was a consciousness of the identity of interests between working men of the most diverse occupations and levels of attainment, which was embodied in many institutional forms, and which was expressed on an unprecedented scale in the general unionism of 1830-4. This consciousness and these institutions were only to be found in fragmentary form in the England of 1780.

On the other hand, there was a consciousness of the identity of the interests of the working class, or 'productive classes,' as **against** those of other classes; and within this there was maturing the claim for an alternative system ((p.807)).

These assertions are backed by a guided tour through representative working-class writers, leaders, and inspirers. Through an examination of the organic intellectuals and other intelligensia drawn on by the working class, the radical culture of embattled workers is examined and distilled, and its resiliency and determination heralded. It is in these publicists of a new moral order and the battles fought under their banners that Thompson finds a new emerging class order.

Thompson's work, despite time and the critics, remains an enormous achievement in class analysis, and much of this work is predicated on his ideas. Nevertheless, from the perspective of this study he can be criticized on two accounts. First, if as Thompson insists, the ontological nature of class consciousness is to be uncovered in the sphere of cultural production, then it is not quite enough to rely on the most public intellectual representatives of such production as largely exemplary of the content of this consciousness. An appreciation of how the ideas of these public figures were harnessed, reproduced, and transformed by the working class through their own experiential understanding developed in struggle is also needed. Second, while Thompson traces the unfolding of this new class consciousness with enviable mastery, he is not very clear as to how the social relations of production played a determining role in this cultural production. Though he does draw a distinction between 'honourable' and 'dishonourable' labor, and details how the degradation of labor led to the changing of workers' consciousness, he does not explicitly delineate how changes in the social relations of production, in part, produced this transformation in understanding. His brief sketch of this deterioration (p. 258) is more a description of the correlates of these changes rather than an explanation of the changes themselves. This at times leads Thompson to compare trade groups

rather than comparing workers that were differently located in the structure of production. Nonetheless, these flaws are hardly damning for the work as a whole, and as Royden Harrison has observed, one does not read Thompson "for definitions, schema or pedantry of any sort," but for insight ((p.211)).

Whereas Thompson employs historically grounded suppositions to capture the rise of working-class consciousness John Foster, in his Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution, attempts a more deterministic account of its development within a Leninist framework. Using what Thompson has termed a 'Platonic' Marxism Foster charts the course of class struggle and development in three English towns -- Oldham, Northampton, and South Shields -- during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Concentrating on Oldham, Foster attempts to document how the internal contradictions of capitalist development in the cotton industry led to a series of deepening economic crises in the thirties and forties which ripped the fabric of bourgeois social control. This, he argues, allowed the temporary growth of an autonomous working-class movement. Following Leninist wisdom he seeks to show how this rupture permitted an intellectual and organizational vanguard among the working class to lead the workers to a deeper political and social awareness and a large-scale cultural transformation. This awakened a developed working-class consciousness among the cotton workers of Oldham.

For the purposes of this study it is Foster's definition and understanding of class consciousness that are crucial. His definition is synonymous with what can be termed revolutionary class consciousness, and this he proposes could only have been fostered by an entrenched and militant working-class vanguard. As he explains,

If Oldham's militancy was indeed of this nature- the result of a mass realization of demands for total change of the social system- then it could only have developed in very special circumstances; those in which the community's revolutionary vanguard was able to break out of its structural isolation, get access to labor as a whole, and convince people that radical political change

was the only solution to its problems ((p. 74)).

Previous to 1830 then, Foster suggests that nothing more than trade union consciousness existed among Oldham's working population (though the contents of this consciousness are never explicated). These sectional identities were the strains of consciousness that the working-class leadership molded into an ideology of mass political action. Vital to this process was the restructuring of cultural production, the reworking of the extant rhetoric of struggle, so as to unify immediate grievances with a general critique of the existing social order. As Foster proposes,

... for a movement to become radical, for dialectically new (and socially incompatible) ideas to be injected into it, these sectional identities have -- however imperceptibly -- to be broken down. It is in this crucial -- and usually unsuccessful -- process that language becomes so important. As Porshnev observes, it is language -- the particular social codes which determine which information is (or is not) acceptable -- which forms the key stone of any culture. Cause that to disintegrate and so will the larger culture ((p. 124)).

Without this hegemony, Foster suggests, the growth of class consciousness would have remained interminably stifled.

Foster's work has been criticized on a number of grounds (see for example Gray; Jones 1975; Musson 1976; Saville 1974; Thompson 1974), but there are two aspects of his analysis that are especially problematic in terms of this study. First, though Foster quotes Porshnev approvingly, he never provides the cutting edge of proof for his argument concerning language. As John Saville observes, "it is precisely the failure to define and then examine language and ideas that makes Foster's argument for a mass revolutionary consciousness in Oldham so unconvincing" ((1974, p. 240)). Second, because of the determinism of his framework Foster tries to map elements of the workers' ideology to a Leninist model of class consciousness; the reader is never given a coherent picture of what the workers' *Weltanschauung* was at the start of the period, nor into what it was supposedly transformed. Despite these problems, however, Foster's work is valuable in showing how the structure of the social relations of production could determine certain aspects of working-class consciousness.

In contrast to both Thompson and Foster lies the Whig or 'compartmentalist' school of historians who expend much of their scholarly energy attempting to dismantle Marxist approaches. As F. K. Donnelly suggests, certain affinities exist between the compartmentalist interpretation of collective action and the functionalist view of these phenomena. Both view large-scale conflict as an aberration of the normative social order and both see societal development as a gradual and progressive process ((p.230-4)). In addition, the compartmentalists have a parallel interpretation of interest generation with Millians in that they view interests in terms of short-term rationality and take behavior as a mirror of interests. Though there are many members of this school one of the most representative and prolific is A. E. Musson.

For Musson the history of the early nineteenth century is a complex series of events irreducible to the overarching generalizations of a Thompson or a Foster and largely unscintillating in character. Strip away the ephemeral (though fascinating) instances of large-scale political and social action, the much studied but little used ideologies of the radical intelligensia, and simplistic notions of growing solidarity, he says, and you are left with the really important stuff of working-class history. Shorn of these distractions the development of working-class consciousness can be found in the growth of the sectional trade union. Commenting on the history of trade unionism after the repeal of the Combination Laws (anti-union legislation), Musson asserts that there is

... plenty of evidence, especially in trade union records (where they have survived), to indicate that the (trade aspects) constituted the most essential, solid, and continuous features of trade unionism in the nineteenth century, i.e. patient organization, collective bargaining on wages, hours, apprentices, and working conditions, and arrangements of friendly benefits for unemployment, sickness, and death. The practical effects of ideology ... upon the actual organization and policies of most trade societies appear to have been very superficial ((1972, p. 29)).

Thus, the backbone of working-class organization and the focus of their struggles, far

from instilling a unified sense of class interest, largely preoccupied the worker with more "humdrum matters," questions that were hardly likely to encourage the development of a radical class based vision. Musson begrudgingly does concede that there was some growing sense of class solidarity. However, in the final analysis this commonality of interest was foetal in comparison to the matured economism of the working-class mind. As he carefully notes, "... although a general class consciousness was beginning to emerge, it was very shallow and vague, and the basic sectional and 'aristocratic' interests were usually predominant" ((1972, p. 19)).

One of the principle problems with Musson's work is his issue oriented approach to workers' consciousness. While his focus on the workaday problems has some validity, his piecemeal treatment of these concerns robs the reader of an appreciation of how workers understood their problems as a function of their position in society. Certainly workers must have developed a set of interests over such crucial issues as wages and working conditions, but the development of these views had to have been (in some senses) predicated on their understanding of their position vis-a-vis their employers, their community, and other classes in general. By deducing interests with this overly utilitarian perspective Musson loses sense of workers' ideologies and their overall (if fragmented) vision of the world. What this study will attempt to demonstrate is that such a utilitarian perspective can be useful, but only when it is circumscribed by a previous analysis of the development of class consciousness based on the social relations of production.

These then are the three perspectives that will be both used and tested in constructing this study's predictive model of working-class consciousness. Since all three perspectives are in some senses motivated by competing sociological perspectives this study will be able to test the validity of this body of wisdom as it applies to the period in question.

### III. Perspectives on the Model

Having reviewed previous historical research I now move on to the model that will be used in the analysis. In this section I will briefly sketch some of the theoretical and historical perspectives that inform the basic scheme of the model. Specifically, I will examine how it will be possible to tap the discourse of workers from extant texts to understand their class consciousness. Within this section there will be two central concerns: (1) what features embedded in the text provide the analyst with clues on the extent and kind of class consciousness, and (2) how can a model be structured to capture these clues?

In the analysis of the texts in the sample this study will be concentrating on the logic of the argument or position that workers articulate, rather than on the vocabulary or symbols they use for the conveyance of their message. While there has been valuable work done on the development of vocabulary (see for example Briggs 1974, 1979; and Cunningham) it is the contention here that such an emphasis can obscure as much as it can reveal in several respects. First, keying on words can lead analysts to attribute meanings to people's notions that they had no intent of conveying. Second, and relatedly, because the meaning of words is produced, reproduced, and often transformed in the act of cultural production, words as symbols have a plasticity of meaning that can make simple reified coding both errant and awkward. As John Mepham reminds us, " ... meaning is not a matter of words, images, phrases, etc. taken in isolation, but of an order of discourse and practices within which particular words, phrases, or images can take on a variety of meanings" ((p.165)). (For a non-Marxist discussion that parallels this line of reasoning see Dittmer.) To know what a worker meant when he used the term class, for example, the analyst first needs to have an appreciation of his understanding of how he fit

into the class based order in which he participated. Finally, the analyst needs to recognize that production of rhetoric and the meanings of symbols are themselves part and parcel of the hegemony that the ruling classes seek to exercise over their subordinates. In this sense a war of words is not just bantering and hot air; it can be a battle of cultural domination as well. Ruling class cultural production does not wholly determine that of the subordinate classes, but it can strongly mediate the ways in which it is organized and carried out. Specifically, in the cases this study will be examining, workers might have had few options but to express their grievances and interests using the meanings of symbols that were produced and maintained by the capitalists against whom they struggled. By concentrating on this social nomenclature this study thus possibly would be mistakenly identifying commonalities of understanding where in fact none such exist.

What this study will be searching for are the portrayal of their interests and the bases on which they are constructed. As I have suggested, such cultural production is intimately tied to other forms of social and material production, so that a model that predicts discourse, in part, on the basis of the social relations of production is needed. A model that allows for variance in discourse created by the fragmented nature of practical consciousness, workers' historical baggage, and the hegemony of the ruling class, however, also is required.

Given these constraints I propose a model representing a continuum of possible discourse, bounded on either end by two ideal types. The ideal types are developed from an understanding of the two predominant types of the social relations of production in which master and men labored: outwork and mill or shop work. Based on previous research on the ways workers in each system viewed their position and articulated their interests, ideal-type elements of the ideologies and positions that would be expected of workers under each regime in voicing their positions will be



constructed. Basically then the ideal types are constructed in response to the following question; all other conditions being equal, how would outworkers and mill workers conceptualize their class interests and how would these conceptualizations be framed? If workers in each system did in fact systematically differ in their views of the world then an analysis of the texts they have left behind should expose such differences.

Bounding the range of discourse in this fashion holds two advantages. First, such a model allows the analyst to understand how other conditions and situations could have influenced workers' articulations and perceptions. Thus, this study should be able to get a rough measure of how such variables as community culture, past experiences and patterns, strategic exigency, and ruling class hegemony might have influenced or mitigated this simple relationship. Second, it also gives the analyst an empirical picture of how workers in various combinations of conditions drew on the ideologies available to them to express their interests. By noting the various ways in which workers picked elements from the available ideologies the analyst can gain an understanding of which ideas were most central to their perceptions and why this was the case.

There are a variety of studies in the historiography of the working class of this period that give the proposed model both empirical and theoretical foundations. Several studies have shown that working-class groups adopted from current ideologies selectively on the basis of their position, perceived interests, and community culture ((Thompson 1966, p. 418; Behagg, p. 475)). Even the more coherent and most publicized ideologies, such as Owenism, were always molded and incorporated into distinct traditions and ideas indigenous to each working-class group or community ((J. F. C. Harrison, ch. 2; Musson 1958; Thompson 1966, p. 789)). In addition, a variety of studies have shown how the social relations of production, by structuring the

nature of conflict between capitalists and workers, also structured the workers' central interests and perceptions of their position. ((Briggs 1959; Cuca; Daniels 1929-30; Gadian; Haynes; Johnson 1979b; Jones 1975; Mee; Price; Prothero 1979; Reid; Tholfsen 1949; Thompson 1974)). For the outworkers the issues (besides piece rates) often concerned their thread bare but still formal control over part of the production process. They wished to preserve what little autonomy and security from capitalist control they had left, as the ability to control work pace and habits became increasingly undermined by the shop and mill. For the mill operative disputes over control had been transformed into struggles over work-discipline and the direct and total exploitation of the production system. Once caught in the web of absolute social control the mill worker often realized he had little to defend besides his own labor.

Finally, the Hollis and Jones studies referred to previously suggest a somewhat parallel interpretation of political rhetorics and ideologies. Both argue that there were in fact two radical rhetorics available in the working-class political culture, each rooted in a different (but not mutually exclusive) critical analysis of the social order. The 'old analysis' (as Hollis terms it) centered its denunciations on the aristocracy, monopoly, taxes, and church and government corruption. Within this critique was the notion that if such cancers as corruption and special (and decadent) interests could be purged from the body politic government could function in the best interests of all the people. The 'new analysis,' based in part on Ricardian socialism, took a different view of the problem. "Wealth was created by labor, property was created by law. The rich were powerful because they made the laws, they were rich. It was a closed magic circle of power and property, circumscribed by law" ((Hollis 1970, p. 249)). The analysis critiqued the current order with nascent but potent theories of underconsumption and a labor theory of value, but their solutions were

political as well as economic. "Because there was both a political and economic divide between the working classes and the rest of society; the enemies of the working class were those who both denied them the vote and who appropriated their labor" ((Ibid., p. 249)). Economic action needed to be wed with its political counterpart; without political power the working classes could expect only partial redress.

There is one further set of observations in the Hollis and Jones studies that bears directly on the analysis of discourse, i.e. considerations on the actual usage of these ideas. In practice the new analysis never wholly supplanted the old; instead both were used in various combinations in the practical articulation of working-class interests. As Hollis notes, "at best, working-class speeches and letters were a somewhat undigested mixture of both attacks" ((Ibid., p. 286)). Given this study's theoretical perspective on ideology and consciousness this is no surprise, but it does lend some empirical foundation to the model that has been proposed. Unfortunately, neither analyst presents a systematic treatment of the causes of these variations, though Jones provides a few all too brief tantalizing insights ((1977, p. 19-21)).

Having sketched the perspective this study will use in constructing a model of discourse I now turn to a sketch of the two ideal types this study will use in the textual analysis.

#### **IV. Two Models of Discourse: Artisanal and Operative**

The most basic dilemma for working-class groups and their leaders (self-proclaimed or otherwise) in creating a discourse of contention was producing a rhetoric that dovetailed with the lived experience of as many working-class groups as possible. As Jones observes for the political case,

Clearly any discussion of working-class theories of society and politics in this

period would have to consider how far they were able to articulate the diversity of forms of conflict engendered by the onset of industrial capitalism. For to be successful, that is, to embed itself in the assumptions of a politically active mass, a particular social and political (rhetoric) must possess sufficient purchase on the lived reality it purports to explain, to enable its potential recruits to think within its terms. It must be sufficiently broad and appropriate to enable its potential recruits to inhabit its language in confronting day-to-day problems of political and social experience, to elaborate tactics and slogans upon its basis, and to resist attempts of opposing social groups to encroach upon it, reinterpret it, or in extreme cases, replace it by a different language ((1977, p. 3)).

The rhetoric of labor struggle was plagued with parallel problems. The diversity of experience frequently meant that speaker or writer might draw from both ideal types of discourse if his intention was to communicate to a wide audience. Similarly, the communication of lived experience often motivated patchwork combinations. Thus, it should be expected that the discourse this study will be analysing often will contain tangled elements of both ideologies, produced in an argument that shows few outward signs of being a direct reflection of one or the other. For this reason this study will concentrate on the ideas and elements of each ideal type rather than the vehicles by which such ideas were transmitted.

### **(The Artisanal Discourse)**

In a sense the term artisanal is a misnomer, for the users of this discourse were mostly outworkers and degraded craftsmen. The term does, however, contain a measure of truth in that the ways in which these workers often framed and defined the issues they faced were in a revamped artisanal mode of consciousness. To a large extent this artisanal construction of reality was derived from the workers' still partially formal independent status. Since the outworker or degraded craftsman still maintained control over time and work discipline he could construct an interpretation of his situation in which he was a partially independent producer. To the extent that some outwork groups still owned the means of production (such as looms) that ownership might have influenced the social construction of reality.

The above statement is not meant to imply that these workers suffered from false consciousness. An artisanal consciousness and its attendant form of discourse could supply the degraded worker with a positive sense of his social position and social worth in the face of a sinking status and material position. In addition, the discourse was a package of language that, because of its roots in a traditional issue culture, could be used as a legitimate foundation for the assertion of rights and demands. Indeed, an artisanal discourse was almost certain to exact more sympathy from the master (and probably from the local authorities and the public) than a hardened operative rhetoric.

The consciousness and rhetoric of the truly privileged and skilled artisan was at variance with this outworker artisanal consciousness in at least two important respects. First, the elite of the privileged trades had a keener and more active sense of the hierarchical gradations of status in the trade. Second, artisans of 'honourable trades' had a more particularistic and detailed consciousness of the weight of custom and tradition, especially as they impinged on the daily social relations of production. (For a concise account of the 'respectable' artisans and the core values underpinning this group see Prothero 1979, p. 26-28.) In a sense, the outworker had taken these particular notions and refracted them to give moral and social validity more reflective of his own situation. Transforming tradition to meet the needs of the present, the outworker constructed a moral economy of labor that was a class based image of the world, though it had some formal trappings of the past contained in the historical baggage he carried with him.

The following outline of points of an artisanal discourse is a condensed and concretized scheme of how the outworkers framed the issues they faced. The list of points is by no means exhaustive. It concentrates on the workers' images of themselves qua workers, and on their relationship to their employer. Broader images

of the workers' place in the social and political structure are thus lacking to some extent.

### **(An Outline of Points of an Artisanal Discourse)**

#### A. Characterization of the worker and his social status

(1) The worker is member of the labouring poor, the lower classes of society. The labouring poor are part of the industrious classes of society, and they serve as the major producer of the material and social wealth of the community and the nation. The poor of the country are the strength of the country.

(2) As productive members of the community the worker has the basic rights and privileges of any free-born Englishman. More particularly, the worker has the right to "live by his own labor." The worker has a social right to receive (and demand) fair remuneration for his labor; enough so that he can provide a reasonable sustenance for himself and his family and a modicum of simple comfort.

(3) As a free-born Englishman and producer of wealth the worker has a right to expect that the community and the nation will be mindful of his right to independence by his own labor. Indeed, this watchfulness is beneficial to the community; when the worker prospers all members of the community prosper.

(4) As producers of the national wealth, the labouring poor can legitimately expect the nation, as represented by the government, will preserve their right to live by their own labour. The government, as an act of reciprocal duty, should ensure that workers have the means of consuming the products of their own labor before special interests are allowed to be pursued. It is also incumbent upon the government (local or national), if deemed necessary, to act as an impartial and reasoned arbiter in disputes between masters and men.

(5) Workers have a duty to themselves, their trade, and their community to be united. Unity among workers creates trade stability and helps ensure prosperity for all. Division among the workers only brings ruinous consequences for all.

#### B. Characterization of the master by the worker

(1) The status of the master in the community and society is determined by the degree to which he abides and acts by the moral precepts of community interest. Those that abide by such precepts are honorable members of the trade and the community. Those who seek to gain all advantages for themselves to the detriment of others are dishonorable, and their actions only serve to heap additional burdens on the laboring poor and the community.

(2) Manufacturers who act upon honorable principles should be permitted to acquire

and dispose of property as they see fit. The master has the right to better himself by his actions, so long as they are not injurious to the workers or the community.

(3) Honorable masters work within the interests of their trade. They discourage any changes in practice detrimental to the vitality of the trade. In addition, they assert and defend trade interest against their recalcitrant and dishonorable peers.

(4) Honorable manufacturers, who through no fault of their own experience distress in their trade, should expect the support of their workers and the community. They can expect that part of their burden will be shared by their workers so long as it is shared with due regard for the circumstances of all others.

(5) The honorable master does not seek to impress his interests on local and national authorities to obtain an advantage over the other parts of the trade and community. He adheres to all laws and traditions that govern the trade and maintain its interests and position. He should adhere to letter and spirit of law and custom equally with the worker.

(6) Dishonorable masters are those who are liable to abandon honorable principles in search of personal gain. They might at times support the workers' interests, but only if they perceive that their own interests are being served through such support.

### C. The relationship between worker and master

(1) Master and worker are engaged in a web of reciprocal duties and obligations, though the reciprocity is not egalitarian in nature. This web is constructed with the interests of both parties in mind, and is framed to be supportive of the vitality of the trade in general.

(2) Duties and obligations are based on the custom and tradition of the trade, and the basic rights of the basic rights of worker and master as Englishmen. Any redefinition of the web of reciprocity is done conjointly, in a rational manner, and for the interests of the trade.

(3) It is the duty of the master to remunerate the worker fairly for all work done. He must provide a living wage (as previously defined), and never take advantage of his power to impose fines and penalties for his own material gain.

(4) Masters have the authority to specify certain terms for the labor they contract, but they have the moral obligation of staying within law and custom. The master must respect the independent status of the worker and not seek to unjustly impinge on his control over time and work discipline involved in production (including the use of family labor).

(5) Masters have the obligation of paying agreed upon (statement) prices for all labor until a new price has been amicably agreed upon by both parties. Statement prices should be paid for all like goods, regardless of the method employed in producing them.

(6) Should the master contract with the worker in a fair and honorable manner the worker has the obligation to produce the best possible product within the period of time stated.

(7) It is the duty of the worker to protect the property and trade interests of the master, so long as the two have entered into an amicable and binding agreement.

(8) Masters and workers have an obligation to each other and to the trade to oppose all practices injurious to the trade. They have the duty of working together to prevent the introduction of shoddy goods or craftsmanship and the introduction of unfair trade into the country. In addition they have the obligation of monitoring and exercising their respective peers to ensure that all work is done according to the standards of the trade.

#### D. The logic of strikes and disputes

(1) Workers strike because of a serious or continuous breach of reciprocity by masters. Workers are forced into strikes; they do not enter into them indiscriminately to seek advantage.

(2) All disputes between workers and masters should be settled in a fair and reasoned manner. Strikes occur when masters violate this spirit of rationality.

(3) Strikes are carried out against dishonorable masters. Honorable masters should be protected from the strike if at all possible, and the reciprocal bonds between them and their workmen maintained.

(4) Strikes are carried out for the good of the trade, not solely for self interest. All honorable employers benefit from a strike since it is carried out to maintain the vitality of the trade. In this sense strikes are often initiated because masters are lax or reluctant to maintain trade discipline within their own ranks.

(5) In the redress of wrongs that are perpetrated against them workers should be able to turn to local or national authorities to help settle all disputes. Magistrates especially should be expected to administer all the laws of the community in a fair and judicious manner, with due respect for the position of the laboring poor.

(6) Strikes are in the interest of the community. When workers seek to defend their interests and material position they concomitantly try to preserve the vitality of the community since they are the major producers of all wealth. It is therefore in the interest of the community to support striking workers in their attempts to maintain or advance their position in the trade.

#### E. Other considerations of the worker's position and status

(1) Factory work is deleterious to the position of the worker and his or her family. Factories undermine the morality of the family economy, rob the worker of his independence, and provide no spiritual or material advantage to the worker or his or her family.

#### **(The Logic of the Operative's Discourse)**



The operative's discourse is one which clearly and readily recognizes central and enduring conflicts between all workers and capitalists. The operative is conscious of the fact that relations between worker and master are established and maintained on the basis of the economic (and social) power of each party. He also recognizes that his independence is a wholly collective one, in common with all members of the working classes.

The operative discourse is a rhetoric which has several variants ranging from general anti-capitalist critiques of present circumstances to more detailed visions of alternative non-capitalist systems. All variants of this discourse at heart contain some critique of the existing capitalist order accompanied by a biting awareness of the structural bases of power in society. Shorn of the formal independence of the outworker the mill or shop worker is faced with experiences that can create a new construction of reality. Immersed in social relations of production that give rise to frequent transparent conflict and a sense of total domination, the mill or shop workers developed through their trials and tribulations a discourse that spoke more directly to their sense of struggle than that of their outworker counterparts.

The term operative is used as a label not to solely conjure up the image of the factory worker, but to indicate that this form of discourse frames the worker as a link in the production process rather than a moderator of it. Thus given certain historical and situationally specific conditions this form of discourse might also be used by degraded outworkers.

### **(An Outline of Points of an Operative Discourse)**

#### A. Characterization of the worker and his social status

(1) The worker is a member of the working classes, a group that has at best a

marginal status within the present order of society. The working classes are the sole producers of wealth, although they are the most minor consumers. More particularly, they are the sole producers of national strength and power, though they are allowed no control over the power they generate.

(2) The working classes have no recognized rights or privileges as the society is presently constituted. The only rights the working classes can expect are those they gain and maintain through their own united actions.

(3) The working classes can expect no significant help from the government and their usual piecemeal reforms. While the working classes lack civic power they should not expect the government to represent their interests unless it is forced into this responsibility by working-class action.

(4) The working classes only real property and social leverage is their own labor. As their only real property labor must be vigorously protected from other classes who seek to control and debase it. The productive use of labor is presently monopolized by other classes.

(5) The working classes will be free and independent only when they have the power to withstand their degradation, and this is only achieved through class based mobilization. The independence of the working classes is a collective state, as likewise is their misery. The continuation of such misery can ultimately be traced to the working classes inertia to seek their own betterment. In this sense the struggle of workers in one trade should be recognized as an instance of the common struggle of all workers.

(6) Changes in the means of production are not intrinsically injurious to the position of the workers. Such changes (including new machinery and new forms of factory production) are only detrimental because they are brought about and controlled by capitalists.

#### B. Characterization of the master by the worker

(1) Manufacturers have interests that are fundamentally antithetical to those of the worker. Their goal is to accumulate wealth for their own interests, and they do this largely by robbing the worker of his only real property -- his labor.

(2) Manufacturers will take most any action to better themselves, whether or not it is in the legitimate interest of the trade, community, or nation. These actions are frequently given a cloak of legitimacy by the present laws and moral philosophy governing the nation, laws and ideas that camouflage the tyrannical nature of their actions.

(3) As manufacturers will stop at little to realize their interests they will continue to try to degrade the position of the worker and rob him of his property. No matter how bad the current situation is, it is always in the interest of the manufacturer to grind him down further.

(4) Power allies with power. Manufacturers are allied with all other spheres of power, and constantly try to influence those in government to act in their interests.

(5) The quest by manufacturers to accumulate wealth is destined to bring about the further concentration of that wealth. The battle over wealth will leave only the strongest and most ruthless in control.

### C. The relationship between the worker and the master

(1) Workers and masters struggle for power and position. They are engaged in an unequal war over the control of the workers' labor, with the masters having a structural advantage.

(2) Masters and workers are constantly engaged in collective struggles against one another. Masters are always trying to contain and prevent workers in their attempts to unite, knowing full well that workers can only effectively assert their rights collectively.

(3) As long as the working classes do not fight power with power their relationship with the masters will only continue to deteriorate. The expropriation of the workers' labor will only grow and the gap between the two will continue to widen.

(4) The only way for workers to counteract the power of manufacturers is with the power of numbers. The united numbers of a union of workers is the only way for operatives to correct the power imbalance.

### E. The logic of strikes and disputes

(1) Since workers are never fairly compensated for the products of their labor the only sure way that they can advance (or at least maintain) their own position is by striking. Wages and working conditions are determined by combination.

(2) Strikes are not only defensive weapons, but also the most effective offensive ones. As manufacturers never hesitate to take advantage of the workers, the workers should not hesitate to use this weapon when it can be employed effectively.

(3) Masters will use their entire repertoire of tricks and deceit to win the battle of the strike. Workers must thus be equally shrewd, and they must guard against attempts by masters to divide their own ranks with false promises and slander.

(4) Workers must be wary of the watchful eye and actions of the authorities. As allies of wealth the power of the law will be turned on workers with little hesitation. Tactics are quintessential to avoid the strong arm of the law.

(5) A successful strike by one group of workers is a blow struck for all. It is in the interests of all the working classes to support their fellow workers in their fights against manufacturers.

(6) Strikes are ultimately in the interests of the nation. Protecting the laborers' property preserves the health of society's institutions.

### F. Other considerations of the worker's position and status

(1) The current system of production is not only injurious to the worker but to society as well. The current structuring of the market, the factory system, and their ancillary features only lead to underconsumption.

These two crude outlines of the ideal types of discourse this study expects workers to draw on in articulating their grievances are at heart derived from an understanding of how workers within different social relations of production were likely to view their position. To understand how different regimes of labor made a difference in the consciousness of the worker and to detail what other factors were crucial in determining workers' discourse I now turn to a discussion of the key variables in discourse production.

## V. The Determinants of Class Consciousness and Discourse

The construction of class consciousness and the production of discourse originates with the social relations of production, but the determinants of both extend beyond this simple relation to include other factors of life. In this section I will examine the variables that were the major determinants of class consciousness and discourse production. Starting with the social relations of production and spanning outward to examine how wider spheres of power relations affected workers' consciousness and discourse a set of hypotheses and a simple model will be proposed that will be used in the analyses that follow. These hypotheses, while speaking to general determinants of class consciousness and discourse, will also be constructed for the particular historical context that will be analysed. Each hypothesis, however, while historically bound, contains implications for the study of class consciousness and discourse beyond the period of this analysis.

### A. Capitalization/Fragmentation

The logical starting point for a study of the articulation of class interests is the point of production. The social relations of production represent the focal point in

the germination of class interests and their generation. While there are several aspects to this set of relations, the one that is of greatest analytical value for this study is the control over the production process itself. One of the most enduring and intense conflicts in the development of industrial capitalism in England was the battle over the control, content, and pace of the production process.

As Marx informs us in Capital it is the usurpation of control of the labor process by capital through the fragmentation of the labor process and the mastery of time that marks the genesis of industrial capitalism ((1967 v. 1, p. 334-5, 360)). So long as the capitalist did not meddle with the content and pace of production his control was formal and not complete, and the worker still retained a measure of autonomy as in handicraft production ((Jones 1975, p. 49; see also Gartman, Marglin)). However, once this barrier is broken the formal independence of the worker is ruptured; content and pace, two of the last bastions of liberty, become fixtures of the work place. The worker is thus fully transformed into an appendage of the production process.

By the late twenties and early thirties in England (especially in the Midlands and the North) the uneven development of this process created, in a gross sense, two broad categories of workers, outworkers and supervised shop and mill workers. Although other statuses (such as skill level and wages) cross-cut these broad categories, this distinction remained paramount. As Thompson has noted "the exploitive relationship is more than the sum of grievances and mutual antagonisms" ((1966, p. 203)). The form of the exploitation weighed heavily in the formation and articulation of the interests of the worker against those of his employer. A number of studies of the labor aristocracy of the forties (in contrast to Hobsbawm's original and subsequent formulations of the concept) have, for example, noted that the more skilled trades jealously guarded their formal independence, and that this status was

the substantial motivating force in their drive for respectability ((see Behagg; C. Reid; McLennan; Tholfsen 1954)).

Stretching this analysis back a decade we can envision precisely why formal independence was a feature to highlight in the construction and articulation of interests. The pressing down of wages, the spread of piece rates, and the destruction of apprenticeship, were forces of capitalist development that few trade groups could avoid. However, many workers had steadfastly resisted the direct control of capitalists, preferring degraded and sweated outwork to the loss of control ((Morris 1980; R. Reid; E. P. Thompson 1974, p. 60)).

Whatever the collective response, the effect on the workaday consciousness of the worker and his perceptions of his groups interests should have manifested itself in his articulations. Specifically, I predict that the outworker would articulate his interests with an artisanal discourse while the shop or mill worker would express his with with an operative discourse. For the worker who retained a measure of autonomy (and viewed it as a fundamental right to be protected), an artisanal discourse reflected (and reinforced) his perceived rightful status as part of a productive and independent class of the community. Within this discourse lay a moral economy of labor that defined the normative relationship between worker and employer as contractual (though unequal), and thus recognized the formal autonomy of the worker. Claims of authority and autonomy were coupled in a self-legitimizing circle of logic that legitimated the independence of the worker. (For a parallel argument concerning labor agitation see Shorter and Tilly, p. 215-17).

Workers who labored under a fragmented and controlled regime of production, however, experienced a more constricted set of relations, relations that spoke to the control over the roots of the production process, labor. An operative discourse, with its emphasis on defending the most elementary working-class right -- control over

labor -- dovetailed neatly with the nature of the conflict between capitalists and their operatives ((Cuca, p. 249)). For the mill worker who had experienced the battle for control in the lock out or strike, a discourse highlighting the unequal and fundamental war mirrored his understanding of his basic dilemma.

Thus in the struggles over control in the production process two distinct (though not unrelated) types of conflict led to the production (and reproduction) of two different spheres of consciousness and discourse. Each discourse reflected a different distillation of workers' experiences.

#### B. Political geography of trade

So far this study has established how relations within the work place affect workers' formulations and articulations of their interests. The work place, however, is always situated in a larger environment that can in a variety of ways modify the singular effect of the social relations of production. As Thompson observes in his analysis of the working-class community the radicalism of workers, their activism, and the focus of both "bore a direct relationship to the structure of each community" ((1966, p. 611)). Under the label of community, of course, lie a wide variety of variables including industrial mix, homogeneity of the work force, social geography of the population, etc. Community in this sense is the confluence of all these variables as they impinge on the worker's experiential understanding of his life as a worker.

To distinguish partially the effects of the components of this confluence these variables will be divided into two groups, those that proximately affect the social relations of production and those that more generally affect the cultural and political production of groups within the area. Within the first group, the political geography of trade variables, are a set of variables that include industrial mix, the size, homogeneity and stability of the working population, and capital concentration within

the community. The relationship between some of these variables and the propensity for strike activity among workers' groups have been analysed elsewhere and are of tangential concern here ((see Shorter and Tilly, ch. 13)). Rather, what concerns this analysis is how this conjunction of variables, what Patrick Joyce terms the 'factory politics' of a community, affected the workers' perceptions of their role qua workers in the community ((Joyce 1975, 1980)).

From the workers' perspective the most odious arena for the staging of factory politics was probably the factory village or small town. The more capital control was concentrated in the hands of a few, the greater their opportunity to exercise control over their work force. In addition, the smaller the community the more likely this control would spill over into the more general aspects of community life. This opportunity to integrate workplace and community control was rarely ignored. As Pollard notes of these small towns industrial lords;

...the large majority began with the unspoken assumption that the works and profit-making drive behind it provided their own justification, and that the attached townships were appendages to be judged only as such. By the same token, the workers and their families were, initially, viewed as pliable material in the hands of the employer, 'hands' without brains, Pavlovian dogs without initiative or discretion ((1964, p. 525)).

This extension of control from the work place to the community more generally sharpened workers' consciousness of the nature and extent of employer control and the inherent conflict between worker and master. It thus should be expected that workers from such towns and villages who had experienced frequent conflict to be more likely to articulate their interests using an operative discourse. A discourse that emphasized class conflict and de-emphasized a communal and trade balance of interests was well suited for the small town lorded over by capitalists with a spirited volition to exert a communal presence. Conversely, the lack of such a presence is why it would be less likely to find such a discourse in a large poly-industrial town



with a less concentrated capital base. Rifts between large and small capital on ideological as well as economic grounds made such firm control a utopian wish rather than a possible achievement.

Similarly, these within- and between-trade differences in this mixed group of capitalists created differences in the structuring of relations between master and worker. This was partially a product of differences in the social relations of the work place; the experiences of working in a large factory versus a workshop of a few dozen hands were not immediately translatable ((see Gadian, p. 170)). In part, too, it was due to the possibility of a harmony of political interest between the petty capitalist and worker against the aristocrats of big capital, as was exemplified in the struggles over enfranchisement ((Briggs 1952; Gadian)). These twists in production and political experiences made a bluntly anti-capitalist rhetoric less likely and the use of a discourse that recognized a balance of conflict and interest somewhat more possible.

### C. Local Political Culture

All of the processes I have discussed previously were themselves immersed in the political culture of the community. I have already suggested how certain variables that define the structure of the community also help define the social relations of production. By opening the lens a little wider we can see how the political culture of a community helped structure the discourse and the consciousness of worker and master alike.

The political culture of the community was public theatre played out by the local authorities and conflict groups over whom they attempted to maintain control. As their locus was the theatre and counter-theatre of power it was also the focal point of the "institutionally negotiated process" of hegemony ((Eley and Nield, p.

269)). At points in time when masters, workers, and authorities conjoined to struggle over legitimate levels of control the daily reproduction of hegemony was most prey to disequilibrium. Both the content and structure of this hegemony were important factors in how workers perceived justice between masters and themselves and how they articulated these perceptions. How resilient this hegemony was to crisis and decay also had a crucial impact on how the experiences of the past, what has been termed historical baggage, were drawn upon in constructing an understanding of the present.

As Thompson and others have suggested, throughout the eighteenth century this hegemony was a balance of understanding between Justices (men usually of some substance), plebeians, and patricians, with the Justice being the touchstone of the legitimation process ((Thompson 1968, 1976, 1978)). The J. P. was not only given broad discretionary power over what constituted dangerous violations of the public order, he also formally held control over the setting of a broad spectrum of wages and prices ((Munger 1981(a) and (b); Morris 1980)). Within this delicate balance of coercion and consensus the Angst of plebeians and workers in "food riots, collective action against employers and other forms of gathering could frequently be viewed as defending the traditional order of things, of which the justices of the peace were a part" ((Munger(a), p. 115)).

By the early decades of the nineteenth century this balance had been shaken or altered in many parishes in England, especially in those where industrial capitalism was becoming the central dynamic of urban change. As manufacturer replaced gentleman at the bench, and as the gentleman Justice himself became increasingly ineffective and alienated because of new forms of class conflict, the balance of hegemony reproduced in the old triad was ruptured. As Derek Foster has suggested, with this shift in the bench, control of local power (and the social control of labor)

shifted in consequence ((D. Foster, p. 60)).

This was, however, a highly uneven process and political cultures that still maintained a balance of powers with the older (though transformed) players could be found throughout England. Even the usurpation of the bench by manufacturers in southeast Lancashire (the industrial heartland) was a slow and localized process ((D. Foster, op. cit)). Thus some variation in the content and structure of local political culture, how authority was wielded over masters and men, and how workers perceived their position within this structure should be expected. In those towns where there existed a hegemony legitimated by Justices detached from industrial capital and beholden to traditional arbitration processes to maintain a legitimate base of power, some version of the hegemony process that has been described previously could be played out. In these communities an artisanal discourse, which emphasized, the balance of interests within the community, was more closely attuned to this dynamic equilibrium of class and political relations. However, in those towns where manufacturers had usurped control of the roots of political power an operative discourse was better suited to articulate their experience of polarized class struggle. As Dutton and King have recently noted, it was to take several decades past the 1830's before major industrialists were able to successfully fuse economic and political power into a system of total domination within the community ((Dutton and King, op. cit.)).

#### D. Memory: The Historical Baggage of Experience

Up to now I have emphasized how position within contemporary structures of power determined interests and their articulation. As I have hinted in the discussion of community power, however, how these interests are played out in the theatre of conflict over time is also an important determinant of the consciousness of workers.

Historical baggage frames and informs an understanding of present experience. Not only the customs and traditions of trades, but the scars of contention as well served as cogent reminders of where the worker stood vis-a-vis his employer. A history of contention (or a lack of it), given other structural features that have been considered, had a definite role to play as a didactic influence in the development of class consciousness and the discourse used to articulate it. As Thompson observes in his discussion of eighteenth-century society;

People find themselves in a society structured in determined ways (crucially, but not exclusively, in productive relations), they experience exploitation (or the need to maintain power over those who exploit them), they identify points of antagonistic interest, they commence to struggle around these issues and in the process of struggling they discover themselves as classes, they come to know this discovery as class consciousness ((1978, p. 149)).

The struggle against exploitation was a learning experience, and it was in the realm of strike activity and related forms of contention that collective action could be most educational. In pitting themselves against their masters workers were able to obtain the clearest vision of how they stood in relation to capital. The power of impression was of course variable and depended not only on local labor processes, but also on how these could be integrated with other happenings, both local and national. In addition the impact of strike experiences was a product of the interaction between frequency, intensity, and the other characteristics of contention. One strike did not make a proletarian consciousness, nor did relatively limited though repeated skirmishes produce it. Nonetheless, repeated attempts to resist increasing or continuing subordination and domination could often have a cumulative impact on the workers' memory.

To the extent that these rifts between masters and men could reorient and animate the workers' understanding of the power relations in which they were immersed it should be expected that the use of an operative discourse was more

likely. Conversely, to the extent that their historical baggage did not contain such sustained memories of open conflict the use of a discourse that centered on endemic conflict was probably less likely.

#### E. Interacting Parties and Purposes: Discourse as Symbolic Capital and Resource

It is time finally to consider the role of socio-drama in collective action and discourse production. Having started at the nexus of possible conflict, the point of production, I have moved outward, specifying how more general and encompassing circles of power structured workers' perceptions and articulations. Now I shall consider how these overlapping circles of power coalesced in actual labor struggle, and how struggles themselves could have played a role in structuring workers' discourse. How these struggles patterned discourse can be judged best by examining how the participants in such actions and the strategic exigencies of the actors during different phases of collective action made discourse use a tactical question.

As I have noted in the introduction, recent theories of collective action within the resource mobilization perspective tend to bypass concerted study of interest formulation and concentrate on how interests are (or are not) realized. In addition, their intensified concern with material resources for mobilization has also led to a relative neglect of the role of symbolic resources (with a notable exception being Fireman and Gamson). The most obvious of such resources is of course language. Conversely, recent literature on symbolic politics and the social functions of political communication, while highlighting the importance of language, often fails to map out systematically how language is tied to other resources and to the structure of power within the political culture (see for example Bennett; Edelman; Mueller 1970, 1973).

To understand discourse as a tactical resource the dramaturgy of collective action needs to be recognized. As E. P. Thompson, John Brewer, and others have

suggested (in their studies of the late eighteenth century), relations between the rulers and the ruled are played out in the theatre and counter-theatre of politics ((Thompson 1978; Brewer 1978-79)). On a public stage, often through partially ritualized political actions, patricians and plebeians played out a set of power relations using symbolic politics defined by the prevailing hegemonic balance of power. As the century turned and the stability of this hegemony was disrupted in many parishes, plebeians themselves became script writers for an alternative theatre of politics of mass action ((Belchem 1978, 1981; Brewer 1978-79)). Regardless of the specific history of this transformation, what is crucial to understand is that power relations, their reproduction and redefinition, often were played out symbolically with discourse and other symbols which coherently (and frequently graphically) expressed the interests and potential actions of the group. Within this process of socio-drama also were claims and counterclaims to the allegiances of other actors of consequence within the community, as the major actors sought to structure a definition of the situation most favorable to the realization of their own interests.

To create allegiances, maintain or create group solidarity, or redefine boundaries of authority required more than oratorical persuasiveness. It also required a discourse or symbol system that had cogency and legitimacy for the others toward whom it was directed. On a theoretical level Pierre Bourdieu has persuasively expounded on this problem when he maintains:

Symbolic power- power to constitute the given by stating it, to show forth and gain credence, to confirm or transform the world view, and through it, action on the world, and hence the world itself, quasi-magical power which makes it possible to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained by (physical or economic) force, thanks to its specific mobilization effect- is only exerted insofar as it is recognized. ... This means that symbolic power does not lie in 'symbolic systems' in the form of an 'illocutionary force' but that it is defined by a determinate relationship between those who exercise power and those who undergo it, i.e. in the very structure of the field within which belief is produced and reproduced. The power of words and commands, the power to give orders and bring orders, lies in the belief in the legitimacy of words and of the person who utters them,

a belief which words themselves cannot produce ((1979, p. 83)).

The importance of discourse only can be understood as it reflects and refracts the fields of social and economic power in which it is used. "Discourse always owes its most important characteristics to the **linguistic production relations** within which it is produced. ... The structure of linguistic production relations depends on the symbolic power relation between the ... speakers, i.e. on the size of their respective capitals of authority (which is not reducible to specifically linguistic capital)" (emphasis in the original) ((Bourdieu 1977, p. 647-8)).

By accepting Bourdieu's metaphor of discourse as 'symbolic capital' we can understand how discourse could have been (and still can be) a valuable resource for collective action. Constructing group interests via a discourse constituted from the experiences of others aids those who wish to realize a set of interests to be more successful in constructing the alliances they need or maintaining group solidarity necessary to mobilize material resources. In the same sense the ineffective use of discourse, i.e. a rhetoric or set of symbols that does not have legitimacy within the current or traditional order of power relationships, can increase divisiveness or threat and possibly block the successful realization of interests. In either case discourse between and among groups in conflict situations becomes a possible tool of mobilization and action within the theatre and counter-theatre of power relations.

The value of discourse as a resource is of course bounded by the political theatre and varies according to the conditions of the conflict. With whom a conflict group interacts and at what point in the process this interaction occurs are two primary determinants of this utility. First, to the extent that there is a large disparity in the material and organizational resources of the groups in conflict symbolic resources become more valuable to the group(s) acting under the comparative disadvantage. In general, it would seem to hold that these resources vary in value as some inverse function of the availability of material and

organizational resources. The disadvantaged group might, on the one hand, use such resources in the absence of collective material goods and selective incentives to maintain solidarity among its members. On the other hand, the disadvantaged group might also use such symbolic resources to call legitimately on other actors within the community to contribute resources to them.

Second, the use of such resources is necessarily delimited by the ebb and flow of contention itself. Since the length of time and intensity of contention are two dimensions that determine the material and organizational resources that a group can depend on they also determine the strategic utility of symbolic resources. In general, the utility of symbolic resources peaks at major junctures of contention, especially when, because of changes in the actions of the participants, the flow of other resources becomes more tenuous. In addition, since symbolic resources are used to define (and more importantly redefine) the theatre of contention their utility is limited by the degree of variability such theatre generally permits. Rapid or constant redefinitions of power, rights, and obligations can have the adverse effect of dismantling group solidarity or alienating potential or current allies. There is in the long run, however, a limit to the substitution for material and organizational resources of symbolic ones. Group mobilization cannot be maintained over long periods of time with few material resources; group threat cannot be played out frequently with symbolic resources without material and organizational resources to transform the threat into action. In sum, some variability in the use of discourse among workers' groups as they played out their contention in the theatre of the community should be expected.

Within the context of the period we can see how these general considerations assumed more specific forms. First, even the most highly organized and materially secure labour groups and unions were usually grossly deficient in the material and



organizational resources necessary for protracted conflict ((Cole 1953)). Faced with such overwhelming disadvantages symbolic resources became crucial for maintaining group solidarity in a strike and seeking the support of other workers' groups and actors within the community. Particularly important in these situations (besides worker alliances) were those actors in the community from whom contentious workers could exact public sympathy and material aid. Petty bourgeois groups, such as shopkeepers, whose own position was often in some jeopardy, could lend a sympathetic ear to certain types of radical causes ((Nossiter 1972, 1975)). In addition, as I have noted, local magistrates (to the extent their interests were not directly tied to those of the manufacturers) were another group of import. To the extent that contentious workers could define the theatre of conflict in terms that were understandable, seemingly legitimate, and exacting of sympathy from others in the community workers could (and did) gain resourceful and influential allies. Finally, because of their relative dearth of resources, contentious workers were often forced to rely on symbolic resources to exert power necessary to resolve a dispute favourably. The veiled threat of tumult, riot, or the destruction of property could be used, depending on the circumstances, as a substitute for large-scale action when material and organizational resources were lacking. In these respects the discourse workers used had portentous consequences for the success of their struggles.

Given the strategic importance of discourse to workers several hypotheses concerning its variability can be proposed. First, to the extent workers sought strategic alliances with non-working-class actors within the community they moderated the militancy of their rhetoric. For working-class groups whose experience would lead them to use an artisanal discourse it should be expected that this discourse would play down those aspects that emphasized rights and the legitimacy to enforce rights, and accentuate those elements that emphasize the humility of the

disadvantaged and the moral economy of injustice. For those workers whose experience made an operative discourse cogent an increased use of an artisanal discourse in an attempt to avoid those elements of an operative discourse that emphasized class war should be expected.

Second, to the extent that workers were at a severe disadvantage in terms of material and organizational resources the use of symbolic resources to increase threat became one of few tactics available to workers. In these situations the militancy of discourse often should be related to the length of the contention. Workers using an artisanal discourse thus would be more likely to accentuate the elements of their discourse that emphasized the legitimacy of redress in the absence of cooperation. Workers using a predominately operative discourse could be expected to purge artisanal elements from their articulations in an effort to highlight class antagonism (and thus threat). Finally, variability in discourse partially depended on the extent to which a group in contention appealed to other workers groups for support. To the extent that these groups (especially those that used an operative discourse) pursued diffuse ties with a variety of groups an artisanal discourse might be most expedient. As I noted in the section on ideal-type discourses, the artisanal discourse was a more widely understood rhetoric, making it tactically more expedient in appeals to a diverse group of workers. To the extent, however, that the contentious workers appealed to other specific groups whose structural position and experiences reflected their own the use of a discourse that best emphasized commonalities in position and a converging solidarity in interests should be expected.

To recapitulate briefly, the hypotheses underlying this analysis can be summed up as follows:

- (1) The more fragmented the labor process and the more complete the immediate control over the workers in a labor process the more likely the workers will be to use an operative discourse. Workers working under relatively

unfragmented work regimes likely will use an artisanal discourse.

(2) The more concentrated the control of capital is within a town the more likely is the use of an operative discourse among workers. This is especially true of a small industrial town where the control of town industry by a small group of capitalists makes capital-labor antagonisms highly transparent. Where capital control is widely diffused, especially among a number of different trades, an artisanal discourse should be expected.

(3) In those towns where manufacturers had usurped control of the roots of political power from the old guard order an operative discourse was more likely. Without the traditions of paternalism of a more disinterested gentry the class nature of the politics of the community becomes more apparent. Where the old regime of power still existed an artisanal discourse was more likely.

(4) The greater the history of capital-labor conflict the more likely the use of an operative discourse. Conflict between these two groups deepens the understanding of the inherent contradictions between the two. Where capital-labor peace exists an artisanal discourse is more likely.

(5) Discourse should be viewed as a valuable resource for collective action and the fewer the material resources available to a contentious group the greater the value of such symbolic resources. To the extent that workers sought strategic alliances with non-working-class groups they should moderate the militancy of their rhetoric. In addition, to the extent that workers were at a large disadvantage in terms of material and organizational resources the use of symbolic resources to increase the level of threat should be more likely. Finally, to the extent that working-class groups wished to appeal to a wide spectrum of the working class the use of an artisanal discourse should be more likely.

In sum, while the structural position and experiences of workers can be seen as the primary factors in the formulation and articulation of interests, the strategic utility of discourse as a symbolic resource also must be recognized. Viewing contention as the playing out of a political theatre allows us to understand the ways in which language could not only structure the stage, but also the high drama of power and the final act of conflict. For these reasons, when discourse is analyzed the possibility that the ebb and flow of contention itself had some determinate impact on what was articulated needs to be kept in mind.

## V. Introduction to the Data Analysis

### **(Data and Data Collection)**

This analysis of workers' discourse is based on a sample of ninety-one separate texts from three sources. Texts were drawn from the files of the Great Britain Study (with articles from the London Times and Morning Chronicle), the working-class newspaper Voice of the People (published in 1831), and the Home Office papers series 40 on civil disturbances. Qualifications for inclusion in the sample are detailed in the methodological appendix. The texts collected were of three principle types: reports of workers' meetings, letters by workers (either to officials or papers), or handbills and leaflets.

Geographically the texts represent a variety of regions within England, including the London area, the Southwest, the Midlands, and the industrial Northwest (see map below). In all, thirty separate towns or parishes are represented. The bulk of the texts, however, are drawn from three specific regions: the Lancashire industrial region (including northern Cheshire), the knitting districts of the Midlands (principally southwestern Nottingham and western Leicester), and the east end of the London metropolis. Manufacturing areas conspicuously underrepresented in the sample include the manufacturing districts in the West Riding of Yorkshire, the wool cloth producing counties of the Southwest, East Anglia, and the heavy industry sections of the Midlands. There is thus a noticeable geographic bias in the sample, especially toward the Lancashire area.

As well as having these geographical biases the sample also is weighted disproportionately towards certain trades and occupational groups. Of those texts in which a trade or workers' group is mentioned specifically (roughly 80% of the sample population) 90% represent some facet of the textile industry. Within this group about



Figure 1: Number of Texts by Town, 1828-31

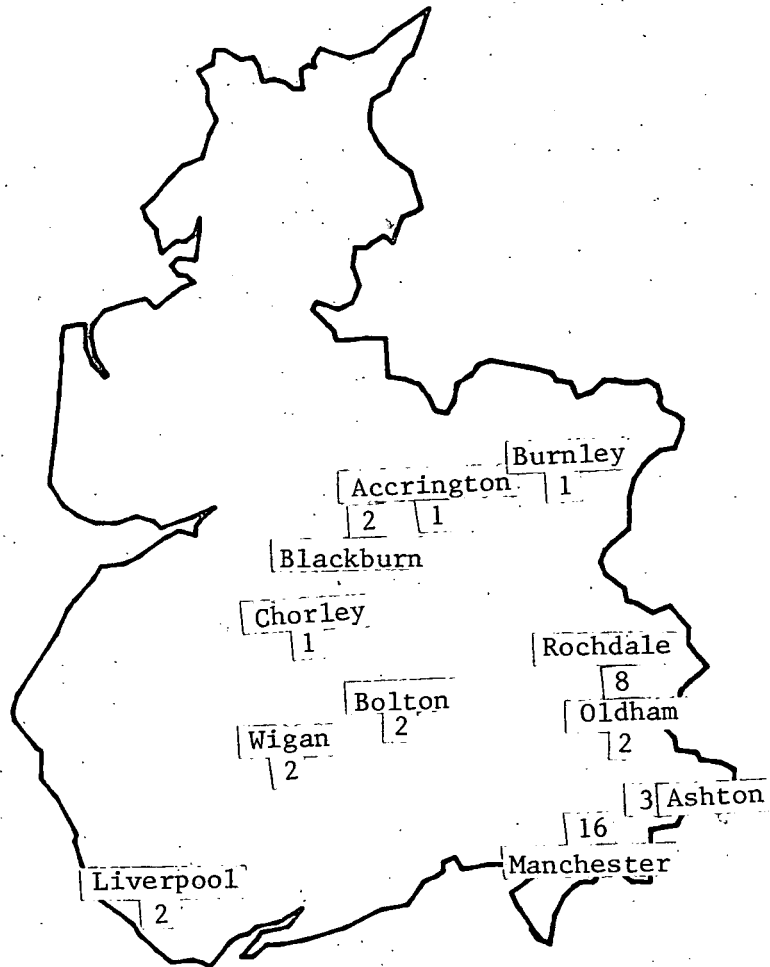


Figure 2: Number of Texts by Town for Lancashire County, 1828-31

70% are weavers or knitters of some sort, with the remainder in the textile trades representing ancillary aspects of cloth production such as spinning, printing, cutting, dyeing, or bleaching. Silk, wool, and cotton cloth production dominate this sub-sample, but linen and lace production are represented as well.

These biases, while an overrepresentation of particular trades and industries, however, do reflect roughly the levels of contention among the different trade groups in the most heavily sample regions (with the possible exception of pitmen and quarrymen). In this sense the sample is a better reflection of contentious workers' groups and trades than it is of trade and occupational groups as a whole. Analysis of the sample thus should provide a rough but reasonable overview of how workers in areas and trades of relatively high contention perceived and articulated their differences.

Data for the independent variables were collected from a variety of primary and secondary sources. The content and construction of these variables will be detailed in the statistical analysis section. Information on the social relations of production in various trades was collected from a number of contemporary and historical accounts and descriptions for each trade. Where a separate description in the historiography of trades was not available for a particular labor process Andrew Ure's Dictionary of Arts, Manufactures, and Mines (originally published in 1841) was used. Data on capital concentration and local trade dominance, and the character and structure of local institutions were drawn from individual histories, trade and topographical dictionaries, and parliamentary reports (with heavy use being made of Lewis's Topographical Dictionary of England ((1831)) and Baines's History and Directory ... of the County of Lancaster ((1825)) ).

In short, the data set has limitations in depth, coverage, and scope. Nevertheless, it provides enough material to roughly test the models using

comparative case studies or statistical manipulation.

Because of the unevenness of the data for the independent variables for the sample as a whole and the uneven quality of the textual material between the cases this study will employ two types of analysis. First, to exploit all of the historical data and textual material for the richest handful of cases this study will employ, to use Skocpol and Somers' burdensome terminology, micro-analytic comparative history ((Skocpol and Somers, p. 182)). By juxtaposing these cases with one another and comparing variations and similarities between processes and outcomes a metaphorical multi-variate analysis of the best documented cases can be attempted ((Skocpol and Somers, p. 182-183; Zelditch)). This type of analysis has the advantage of exploring the specific causal conjunctiveness of the independent variables for these cases ((Lafferty, p. 65-69)). However, this form of analysis has several disadvantages, including problems of control in comparisons and generalization ((Skocpol and Somers, p. 194-195)). To complement the comparative approach this study will use zero-order correlations and bivariate tabular analyses using all (or many) cases for a limited number of independent variables. These exercises will provide somewhat more generalizable tests of some of the hypotheses for which data were available for all (or nearly all) of the cases. By coupling these two approaches the study can hopefully exploit the extant information to its fullest extent.

## VI. The Case Studies

The following studies are strictly speaking, not wholly comparable units. The processes focused on in each of the studies are however parallel throughout. For each area this study will be analysing the articulation of class interests by particular groups or individuals and noting variations in the independent and dependent variables. While it will not be able to analyze the effects of all the independent variables fully



by employing the methods of difference and agreement, the study still will gain a great deal of information of the effects of many and note the variations. The strongest comparisons are those of variations in the social relations of production and of memory of past conflicts.

The four areas discussed below — the towns of Nottingham and Coventry, the parish of Spitalfields in London, and the cotton mill towns of southeast Lancashire -- comprise four of the most complete cases in the sample. They have collectively a combination of properties that make them especially suitable for analysis. First, they are in some senses the most reliable because they each have comparatively large numbers of texts for examination. Second, they are some of the most thoroughly documented areas for the period, so there is a relatively large body of material for comparison. Third, each area has a large dominant trade as its economic base, allowing us to avoid complex comparisons of highly poly-industrial areas that contained a wide range of groups.

In sum, the four studies below provide a set of well-grounded cases for comparative research. I now turn to Nottingham to examine the framework knitters of that town.

### **The Framework Knitters of Nottingham**

The town of Nottingham was a town of multiple distinctions in the early decades of the century. The major commercial center of the Midlands, it also was one of the largest industrial towns and one known for its turbulence as well. As the focal point of a large distribution network for the framework knitting industry it was the area's main commercial link to London. With a strong tradition of Dissent, a history of a contentious working class (with the latest major bout of contention being Luddism), and traditions of both popular and Whiggish radicalism it also was known

widely as a town where the liberty tree was a frequent object of great contention. As is detailed below this combination of attributes led framework knitters to articulate their class interests with an operative discourse in most instances. A fragmented and controlled work regime, a heritage of conflict, a lack of paternalism, coalesced to create an experience and an understanding of protracted class conflict.

In the late twenties and early thirties the framework knitting industry in Nottingham was in a state of flux. Three different systems of production (to be discussed in more detail below) coexisted in an uneven and slightly antagonistic fashion. The type of article produced and the preferred cloth varied by area (silk, cotton and worsted all being used), and the health of a given branch depended in part on the whimsical nature of fashion. Nevertheless, certain features of the trade were common to all branches, and despite other disparities they served to crystallize the plight of all workers providing the potential for large-scale collective action.

Characteristic of all branches of this period was a relatively high degree of capital concentration. In Nottingham the small independent producer had been squeezed out of existence in the early part of the century. Large manufacturers and warehousemen were the primary culprits, as they controlled the supply of raw materials and the distribution of finished goods ((Church 1966, p. 35)). In the Nottingham area the large firms dominated the trade, with two of the largest manufacturers, I.& R. Morley and Heard & Hurst, controlling together almost 5000 knitting frames, more frames than in the whole city proper ((Church 1966, p. 35; Erickson, p. 87)). By the early thirties these large capitalists and a few machine producers owned outright two-fifths of all frames connected with the Nottingham trade ((Church 1966, p. 29)). In part, due to the frequent and seemingly relentless bouts of depression the trade had experienced in the last few decades, the number of firms had been cut by more than half by the mid thirties. Paradoxically though, given

the relatively weak market, the number of frames continued to rise. Gone too were the halcyon days in which an industrious framework knitter himself, by his perseverance and sweat, could set up as a small master with his own shop. By the end of the thirties half of all hosiers had inherited their businesses from their fathers, and others who attempted entrance into the trade were petty capitalists whose families had been able to accumulate capital in a related textile industry or as purveyors of food and drink ((Erickson, p. 89, 91)). Many of the largest firms proudly pointed to heritages stretching back into the early eighteenth century. Those entrepreneurs who inherited or purchased a business did not have the workaday sense of the shop or of the activities of the workers. They carried a distance from and a lack of regard for the worker into the business that created increased friction and a growing class tension.

Also common to all branches of the trade in the city, as a result of this friction, was a fairly continuous and often turbulent history of strike activity and contention between masters and men, especially since the turn of the century. The history of the trade in these decades is pock-marked by strike activity, particularly after the mid-teens, when the framework knitters increasingly replaced or supplemented traditional petitioning and midnight sabotage with more organized action. From 1817-24 it was the plain cotton hose and two-needle branches that formed the bulkhead for strike activity, with strikes in all but two of these years ((Thomis 1969, p. 55-7)). Led by the long time organizer and radical Gravenor Henson throughout most of the period, the Nottingham framework knitters reached out to adjacent counties to create a well-organized, adequately financed network that progressively learned to exert its influence ((Church and Chapman; Thomis 1971; Thomis 1969, p. 55-7; E. P. Thompson 1966, p. 533-41, 574-5)).

A high level of mobilization for long strikes was not to be realized over the

course of the continuing struggles. The glutting of the market by petty capitalists eager for an easy investment, the changing nature of fashion, and frequent depressions sapped the unions ability to mobilize resources. With wages whittled prolonged resistance was difficult, especially during depressed periods when the master hosier had an ample back stock. Depressed conditions forced the cotton knitters to change their repertoire of strikes to more limited and less frequent forms of strike activity ((Thomis 1969, p. 68)). The somewhat better circumstances in the silk-knitting branch led these knitters to increase their strike activity; and while it dominated the trade in this respect until the mid thirties it could not replace the flirtations with the trade wide strikes of the teens and twenties ((Thomis 1969, p. 68)).

This frequent strike activity was didactic not only from an organizational perspective, it also made transparent the exact nature of the relationship between worker and master. The master hosiers became equally adept in their ability to organize a stiff resistance by the mid twenties. In addition, relations between the two groups had become attenuated because of the gentlemen hosiers occasional sympathetic promptings to strike (it was to the advantage of the large capitalists to stabilize prices) and their inability to control 'list prices' (wages) once the strike was carried out ((Church 1966, p. 48-50)). In both these respects the workers learned to cast a jaundiced eye towards their employers, large and small, and to dispense with the traditional distinction of honorability. By the early thirties the bifurcation of capital and labor clearly was visible. A petition commenting on the inactivity of parliament circulated in the city could assert boldly,

The war of labor against property has not yet commenced, but there arises a point where endurance reaches its utmost point. ... We have heard these things again and again along with millions of our fellow workmen besides, until we can no longer admit their validity; as we have learned by woeful experience, that they nothing more than that we should live contentedly in poverty, and

disgracefully in a workhouse, in order that the capitalists may inhabit palaces and live in luxury. Your petitioners ... have nothing but their labour which requires protection, and for it they demand protection, not as a favor but as a right ... a right due to them not less as citizens than as men. ((Quoted in Thomis 1969, p. 112))

The transparency of relations was nurtured in part by a relative inactivity of the municipal corporation responsible for maintaining the peace. This body, a small, closely-knit and essentially self-perpetuating group, seemed to exert their influence only erratically during the heyday of major strike activity. They invoked the union-busting combination laws sparingly during the first quarter of the century, preferring the somewhat less odious master and servant laws when prosecution was deemed necessary ((Thomis 1969, p. 64)). The entrenched corporate Whigs, who until the municipal reform of 1835 had a virtual lock on local power, usually favored a policy of non-interference so long as violence and property damaged was strictly avoided. Exactly why the magistracy behaved in this way is difficult to surmise, but several factors probably accounted for this political culture.

First, the corporate Whigs were heir to a tradition of radical eighteenth-century Whiggery, and though their politics moderated with their entrenchment this past had left its mark. As the council was dominated by a dozen families (who also controlled the three major Dissenting chapels) this political spirit had a favorable environment in which to survive ((Church 1966, p. 168)). Second, and rather surprisingly, the corporation was never dominated by master hosiers, who never numbered more than one-third of the town council ((Church 1966, p. 176)). The bulk of the incestuous ruling body consisted of shopkeepers, landlords, and a few professional men and gentlemen, many who thus had utilitarian motives for staying in the good graces of the populace. In addition, the constabulary appointed by the council was a part-time group that relied on a fees for service; its members thus had to seek other employment to supplement their civic salaries. So long as their wards were peaceful it was likely that their diligence was turned towards more private matters.

Finally, public opinion often was partial to the knitters' plight, especially given their increasingly pitiable condition as the years wore on ((Thomis 1969, p. 65)). Their condition engendered plenty of sympathy, as shown by the ease and frequency by which public subscriptions could be collected. Thus the political culture of the town allowed for the development of trade relations between masters and men less encumbered by traditional patterns of interference. The constant pitting of the two class groups against one another produced experiences by which the framework knitters were able to learn the fundamentals of labor struggle against entrenched and powerful capitalists.

While there was a measure of continuity in the history of collective action and politics among the framework knitters, there was also a curious diversity in the social relations of production that structured these events. Scanning the geography in and about the Nottingham sphere of influence it was easy to find the vestiges of an old system of production and the kernel of a new set of relations which was to lead to factory production. As one historian of the industry has remarked, "It is difficult to determine precisely where domestic production ended in the hosiery industry and where factory production began" ((D. M. Smith, p. 141)). During the period in question four distinct (though not unrelated) systems of production could be found in framework knitting, each having its own niche in the terrain of the trade. To add to the complexity of the situation the large master hosier could be, and frequently was, involved in all four systems in varying degrees ((Nelson, p. 470)).

In the small villages surrounding the city, where the ratio of population to frames was the highest, two forms of outwork predominated. The first, which was a residue of a previous era, was the traditional system of production. Under this regime the journeyman stockinger would travel to the warehouse (often in another town) once a week to deliver his finished goods, receive payment, and obtain new

orders. After financial matters were concluded, the goods inspected, and deductions made, the stockinger would receive a carefully weighed amount of thread with detailed instructions for more goods. He then would return to his cottage till the following week. Little control was exercised over the worker, and in the first couple of decades of the century when wages were comfortable the stockinger and his family would dispense with work on Sundays and perhaps an occasional St. Monday. Because of the independence this form of production allowed it was preferred as the "knitters' paradise," and it was looked upon enviously after it largely had been supplanted by other systems by the second quarter of the century ((Nelson, p. 470-2)).

The system that substantially had replaced this form of production in the villages by the mid-twenties was a putting out system that relied on the 'bag man' or bag hosier. The bag man had evolved from the village master hosier of the 18th century into a type of middleman or contractor serving as an intermediary between the master and the worker. The division of labor under this system was more differentiated, and the bag man usually would delegate the production of different types of articles to different workers depending on their skill ((Erickson, p. 84)). Being the marginal capitalist in the chain of production the bag man was the most affected by the continuing bouts of depression that the trade experienced; because of this work under his auspices was recognized as the most odious and hated kind ((Nelson, p. 477)). Since frequently he owned many of the frames upon which the work was done, the bag hosier engaged in an oppressive system of spreading small quantities of work among all his journeyman so that he could charge them full frame rent for the period ((Erickson, p. 85)).

Because of their need to meet their debts to the master hosiers the bagmen increasingly relied not only upon such tactics, but also were the first to spur wage reductions. As the trade grew worse they also relied more heavily on the oppressive

truck system (payment in goods and kind). The larger among them could command effective control of an entire village with such illicit practices. One such bag man, Willows, who controlled 150 frames in Arnold (a few miles to the north of Nottingham) also rented garden plots to his workers, two of his sons were village baker and shoemaker, his son-in-law was a local butcher and public house owner, and his wife a local dress and drape maker ((Erickson, p. 86)).

Though the larger master hosiers frequently grumbled about the bag men's dishonest practices and his ability to undercut them, by the mid-twenties many had established routinized agreements with these intermediaries because they could deliver goods at a lower price. In addition, since this relationship developed in part because of heavy debts the bag man owed to the hosier for the frames he had purchased, hosiers frequently were lax about disciplining these contractors when cries of oppression were raised by the workers ((Nelson, p. 476-7)). With bag men controlling half of the high quality trade and three-quarters of the low grade trade in the villages surrounding the city their influence exerted a debilitating regime over many frameworker knitters ((Church 1966, p. 38)). With wages constituting between 40-60% of the variable capital in production, and the incessant desire of the bag man to wring profits out of his workers, many framework knitters by the twenties had been reduced to a miserable pittance of their former existence ((D. M. Smith, p. 135)).

The remaining two systems of production were more characteristic of larger towns such as Nottingham and involved a more refined division of labour. In fact, in certain respects these systems of production come close to the division of labor of the factory system that was to supersede the workshop in the forties and fifties. The first system was an elaboration of the traditional putting-out system with a highly refined division of labor. It was used especially in the production of cheaper quality goods such as 'cut-ups' made on a wide frame (inferior goods whose pieces



were sown together instead of being knitted). Under this regime the production of a given piece of hose was divided into four separate processes — topping, middling, gusseting, and footing — with groups of framework knitters assigned to each task ((Nelson, p. 479)). The breaking down of the production process allowed the hosier to engage 'colts,' apprentice knitters who could master a portion of the knitting process more quickly than learning the whole process. The material advantage to the hosier was of course that he could reduce wages without having to worry about a corresponding drop in quality, while simultaneously increasing his output ((Nelson, p. 474)). Frameworker knitters would make regular trips to the warehouse, depositing their partially finished goods for inspection and receiving their new material upon which to work. At the same time the worker also could receive replacement parts for the small fixtures on his frame that had worn out. After the goods were weighed and inspected they were stored or passed on to the next man in the production chain. Embroidering, seaming (in the case of cut-ups) and dyeing were often separate processes performed at the warehouse. As the system evolved the former two processes became the purview of specialized groups of women workers ((Nelson, p. 474, 482)).

All that was lacking from the putting-out system to give it the aura of factory production was direct supervision, and this was rapidly introduced with the rise of the workshop. By the end of the first quarter of the century almost every town had some form of workshop production. This new arrangement grew out of the old bag man system, transforming the bag man into a direct supervisor. Under this system specialists were consolidated under one roof eliminating the losses in production time engendered by trips to the warehouse and waits for materials. As each piece was finished it could be inspected immediately by the supervisor; or in the event that the skill of the worker was trusted the piece could be passed on directly ((Nelson, p.

485)). This unified system of production not only increased productivity but also created a more regular and orderly work environment, discipline that the framework knitters met with grumbling disapprobation. Equally if not more insidious, however, were the additional deductions and room rent that the supervisor or hosier could exact to supplement his declining profit margin ((Nelson, p. 488)). The heavy toll these deductions exacted on the worker frequently created a debt relationship between himself and his master, assuring a cheap and continuous supply of labor ((Nelson, p. 490)). The framework knitter under this regime thus not only became a tool to the production process, but a slave to its economic system as well. Their bondage at that point was complete.

In toto, Nottingham in the late 1820's was an area where an operative discourse should be found. The experiences of the framework knitters in the shop and local political culture conjoined to make the workers well aware of the structural bases of their conflict. An analysis of the texts from the town shows that 60% of the texts are predominately operative and 30% predominantly artisanal. Several recurring themes stand out among these texts that seem to mark the framework knitters' perceptions. First, the texts show a firm sense of an intrinsically divisive set of interests pitting manufacturers against workers. This zero-sum game of interests is seen to be deep enough to motivate masters to splinter solidarity deliberately to hold workers at bay. Second, workers tend to portray this class split as a permanent and increasingly severe conflict. In this light conflict was open-ended and unbounded; manufacturers could and did band together with their eventual object being the transformation of workers into wage slaves. Third, the openness of the conflict necessitated the banding together of all workers to meet this threat. A union of workers was the only means by which workers could prevent manufacturers from appropriating their only remaining property, their labor. Finally, as the productive

heart of the society workers, by banding together, simply were protecting rights that were unequivocally theirs.

Many of these themes are highlighted in the following excerpt from speeches at a union meeting held in late August of 1831 during a period of growing union activity.

Mr. Lindley, who read the first resolution. After a few prefatory observations, the speaker said there were men in the country who objected to becoming members of the association, because they were already reduced so low that they could come no lower. They would find this, he was sure, an egregious mistake. Were greedy masters ever satisfied? **(Cries of "No, no, nor never will.")** No, they never would. They were everlastingly endeavouring to lay their paws upon them; but it was for them to say whether they would let them or not. Who were they, he would ask, that they stood there? Were they the paupers or beggars of the country? No! They were the men who upheld all- king, aristocracy, and everything. Why, then, should they appear in the attitude of beggars? **(Applause.)** If they were once gone, what would uphold the state, the church, and the taxes? The aristocracy were living in luxury out of the fruits of their labour, while they and their families were famishing. Was it not them who made the machines? who erected all the fine houses which they saw every where rising up in splendor? Was not the British navy the work of the labourers' hands? Nay the very arms which were placed in their hands for the destruction of their fellow creatures, were also the work of their hands. **(Cheers.)** He hoped they would soon see their own importance in society, which they could only secure but by union. Some might say what will union do for us? He would answer what had it done for Ireland? Did it not emancipate the Catholics? What had union done for America? Had it not won their independence; and established a republic? **(Cheers)** What had union done for Poland? It had enabled them to shake off the tyrant who oppressed them. Union, then, would do as much for them. **(Loud cheers.)** Mr. Lindley concluded by calling upon every man to unite; to become, if they were not, members of the National Association for the Protection of Labour, as the only thing that could either enable them to better their condition, or even remain where they were. **(Voice of the People, Aug. 20, 1831)**

In this text the themes of antithetical interests and the necessity of self-determination are expounded clearly. Both these arguments are represented in a majority of the texts produced by the framework knitters and their kindred workers. In addition, it seems fair to speculate that at least some of these themes were in concert with an increasing number of different trade groups within the town, for by the fall of that year the Nottingham branch of the N.A.P.L. was composed of no less

than 18 trades and was the largest contributor outside the cotton district of Lancashire ((Thomis 1969, p. 69-70)). For the next several years Nottingham remained fertile ground for union activity which was national in both organization and spirit ((Ibid., p. 70-71; Cole 1953, p. 68)).

Thus in Nottingham conditions were quite favorable for the growth of an operative discourse. In turning to the next case, Coventry, we find a conjunction of conditions that represent in several respects an inversion of Nottingham's characteristics, an inversion that helped structure a strikingly different set of class relations, interests, and articulations.

#### The Riband Weavers of Coventry

In the study of the Nottingham framework knitters it was shown how the combination of a fragmented production process, a lack of a paternalistic political culture, sharp distinctions between capital and labor, and a history of open class conflict combined to create an environment conducive to the development of an operative discourse. In Coventry, in some senses, an inversion of these processes is to be found. In this case we shall see how relatively low degrees of capital concentration and labor fragmentation in the dominant industry of ribbon weaving, coupled with the absence of a history of extended conflict, and a local political culture with strains of paternalism helped produce a situation in which workers viewed their grievances with an artisanal consciousness. Whereas in Nottingham firebrands were found who urged an open fight, in Coventry we shall find workers who still retained some sense of their position both as laborers and as small producers.

The ribbon weavers of Coventry provide, in many respects, a marked contrast to their Nottingham counterparts. These distinctions can be seen not only in the

organization of production, but in the social relations between masters and men and the political culture of the town. The differences not only colored the collective action in which workers engaged, but the whole tenor of life in the closely packed town.

Coventry in 1830 was basically a two trade town, depending for its livelihood on ribbon weaving and watch making, with the former exerting a predominant influence. In the town itself in 1830 there were 5,000 ribbon weavers out of a total population of 27,000. The city was the hub of the industry which employed both in and outside its boundaries as many as 30,000 people on 13,000 looms when trade was brisk ((Searby 1977(a), p. 200; Prest, p. 44)). The Coventry trade produced almost solely for the London market (the center of fashion), and concentrated on the production of middle and lower grades of fancy ribbons, as well as having a large portion of the plain ribbon trade as a staple. The trade, dependent on the whimsy and rythm of London fashion, was highly seasonal in nature, and the rythm of demand served to divide town weavers from their countryside counterparts.

Within the town limits, weavers were almost entirely males, and the trade was their (and their families') livelihood. The town weavers were generally the first engaged and the last to be laid off since they had superior skills and could operate the more complex Dutch engine and Jaquard looms. The countryside weavers, in complementary fashion, were predominantly female and they were engaged in ribbon weaving to supplement the incomes of their spouses (many of whom were colliers) ((Prest, p. 4-5, 64)). This group was mostly casual labor; they were hired out largely when trade was brisk, producing mostly plain ribbons on simple single-ribbon looms. Isolated from one another in small villages, lacking in internal trade discipline, and viewing their wages as supplemental income, the countryside weavers often would undercut the standard list prices for work paid in Coventry, causing rifts between the

two groups. In consequence the Coventry weavers were never very successful in organizing these outlying districts. During slack times they, on occasion, would try to prevent the farming out of work to the country villages which undermined their own position.

The structure of the trade within the town seems a curious anomaly as compared with other industrial towns. In fact, what little change had taken place during the early decades of the century ran counter to the pattern of change experienced by most textile centers. The basic organization of production remained almost wholly resilient to the force of time, with the division of labor having many of the features of a classic out-work system. The production of goods was the almost exclusive purview of the domestic work room, with only a few hundred of the most exploitable plain goods weavers being subjugated to the discipline of the workshop ((Prest, p. 44, 46; Searby 1973, p. 200, 216)). Women and children performed their traditional ancillary functions as the weavers' aids, and even the indenturing of children was carried on in its traditional manner well into the 19th century ((Prest, p. 65)).

Any attempt at refining the division of labor was strenuously resisted by the Coventry weavers. Because of their relatively favorable position in the trade, their organization, and their unremitting zeal, the basic organization of the trade did not alter fundamentally until the 1860's ((Prest, p. x; Searby 1973, p. 49; Searby 1977(a), p. 217)). In addition, because of the delicate nature of the silk used for ribbon weaving, few attempts were made to mechanize the trade. The only attempt to apply steam power to the weaving process was the introduction of a single steam engine in the workshop of a manufacturer named Beck; it was summarily destroyed by an angry mob soon after its installation in 1831.

Both the ranks of the masters and men were uniquely stratified within the town,

and as the years passed in the early part of the century these divisions either remained stable (in the case of the weavers) or increased (in the case of the masters). At the beginning of the century the trade had been dominated by a dozen established masters who conducted most of their business with the aid of undertakers who performed the same functions as the Nottingham bagmen. These masters made regular excursions to London to sell their stocks to the city wholesalers. However, during a boom period after the war these London wholesalers realized that they could purchase goods more cheaply by dealing directly in Coventry, and many set up offices in town. The reversal in trade policy caused an almost overnight expansion in the number of masters, with as many as fifty undertakers setting themselves up as small masters ((Prest, p. 50)). The result of the expansion was a two-tiered organization of masters. The established masters, heirs to tradition and with pretensions of gentility, tried to maintain paternalistic relations with their workers. In contrast, the small masters, trying to construct a business niche for themselves, were less deferential towards their laborers and more eager to gnaw away at traditional standards ((Prest, p. 51)).

Perhaps the most intriguing feature of the Coventry trade, however, was the organization of the weavers themselves, who were divided into three strata. At the apex, both in terms of influence as well as numbers, were the 'first hand' weavers whom Prest describes as "working men with bourgeois virtues" ((Prest, p. 52)). The first hand weavers dominated production, and many owned their own means of production. In the mid-thirties over 1100 of this group possessed at least two looms, and almost 700 owned one ((Searby 1973, p. 50)). In fact, as late as 1838 the first hands owned or hired over 80% of the looms within the town ((Ibid., p. 46)). In a sense these first hands were themselves petty, though marginal, capitalists, many of whom scrimped and saved while entertaining visions of themselves as small

manufacturers. Since the vast majority of the looms in the town were Dutch engine and Jacquard looms, which could produce multiple ribbons (usually 5 to 8 at a time), many first hands probably did accumulate a little capital. Few, however, could transform their dreams into reality.

Having multiple looms that produced multiple ribbons the first hand usually hired one or more journeymen to aid his family in production. These journeymen composed most of the remaining section of the labor force and were about two-thirds as numerous as their employers ((Prest, p. 53; Searby 1973, p. 50)). They were fully skilled weavers, having completed the traditional seven year apprenticeship in the trade, and do not seem to have been oppressively treated by the first hands. Many of the deductions imposed on the Nottingham framework knitters were extracted from the journeyman's wages, but even after such deductions the journeyman was able to earn about 70% of what the first hand made ((Searby 1973, p. 48, 50; Searby 1977(c), p. 763)). In addition, due to the relative prosperity of the trade, most second hands could expect upward mobility to first hand status by the time they were 35 ((Searby 1977(c), p. 762)).

The final (and by far the smallest) group was the workshop or factory weavers who numbered no more than several hundred in 1830. As I stated earlier, the abhorance of more disciplined divisions of labor than the predominant system made such labor anything but palatable, and those who possibly could avoid the regimentation did. Being an underclass of town weavers these workers seem to have had little influence and at best a minor role in weavers' organizations, though it is not clear whether they were actually socially isolated from the other two superior strata.

This layering of masters and men and the differentiation of status among the weavers themselves was important in dampening the possibilities of open class



antagonism. However, this peculiar stratification also was accompanied by an active, though perhaps not complete, paternalism between masters and men. There was throughout much of the thirties a moral economy of relations which prescribed the rights and responsibilities of both parties ((Prest, p. 54)). The more honorable large masters on occasion would support limited strike actions against their smaller recalcitrant peers, and the names of the dishonourable masters frequently were printed in the local press ((Prest, p. 58, 61)).

So successful was this reciprocal system of relations that the collective actions surrounding wage disputes largely had become routinized by the period in question. Almost yearly, during the time that trade was slack and the pressure for reduction was most acute, the weavers would call a public meeting to air their grievances. After their cause had been heard, a committee from their numbers, or one composed of the respectable inhabitants of the town, would proceed from one establishment to another urging masters to avoid reductions. Virtually always all but one or two of the smaller masters would adhere with little hesitation. In fact, masters and men routinely could meet to negotiate either a reduction or increase in the standard list, almost always avoiding an open and hostile clash ((Prest, p. 55, 59)). As a result the repertoire of collective action amongst the weavers virtually precluded any large-scale collective violence; they confined themselves to processions, placarding, meetings, limited strikes, and an occasional donkeying ((Searby 1977(a), p. 203)).

Coupled with this system of paternalistic relations was a political culture that could neatly complement it. This was so for several reasons. First, though the corporation government was a closed, corrupt, and essentially self-perpetuating council, its direct political influence in national politics was weak. This was because the town's charter mandated that only freemen who had served a traditional seven-year apprenticeship were eligible to vote for M. P.s ((Prest, p. 28)). Thus, corporate

power brokers were in effect dependent on the tradesmen of their town to do their political bidding in electing the right representatives, with both sides being acutely aware of their respective positions. If for nothing but utilitarian political motives, the corporation was a liberal contributor to public charities and a patron of many weavers' causes. The game was frequently played out in a standard ritual ((Prest, p. 53, 69)).

Second, the corporation was not dominated by manufacturers, but by professional men such as bankers and lawyers, and members of the gentry and landed aristocracy. As men of independent means it was easier for this group to take on paternalistic roles. Regardless of ease, it was certainly expedient as a theatrical facade to push into the background their corrupt practices. In addition, however, in a town so dominated by workers, public opinion was the frequent champion of their plight, and the weavers could generally find allies among shopkeepers and other tradesmen ((Prest, p. 36; Searby 1973, p. 49)). This balance of paternalism and group interest brought tradesmen and manufacturers together on a number of occasions to launch subscriptions for special strike funds to aid workers in their strikes against masters who attempted to undercut the standard list of prices ((Searby 1977(b), p. 347)). (Coventry, in fact had more endowed charities and more liberal relief programs than Nottingham. A hefty disbursement of 1700 pounds of private charity alone, mostly in cash, was dispersed in 1830 ((Searby 1977(b), p. 360; Searby 1977(c), p. 766)) ). For the sake of popularity coddling to the weavers' interests probably was a relatively small price to pay.

Finally, though the corporation had magisterial powers it was understaffed, had a relatively small constabulary, and was fearful of using military repression, believing that this was too volatile a force. Given this combination of factors the magistrates in their authoritative capacity had to use their roles with savvy; at times professions

of sympathy seemed most expedient. As Prest notes,

Until the police were organized in 1834, the magistrates had often to address crowds several thousands strong in person, to sympathize with them, and to persuade them to go home peacefully. ... In these circumstances there was a direct link between popular feeling and the government of the town, and the old corporation was more amenable to the wishes of the artisans than its oligarchical constitution would suggest. It was normal in 1830 for the magistrates to take the part of the weavers against their masters when they were being paid low wages provided the weavers kept the peace, or went no further than a little horseplay, their demonstrations were received with sympathy. ((Prest, p. 53, 54))

When the drama was played out with finesse it was carried out equally adroitly by the weavers. During the workshop burning of 1831 mentioned previously, the leaders of the weavers' committee themselves enrolled as special constables in order to preserve the peace and maintain the balance of paternalism ((Searby 1977(a), p. 223)).

Given this combination of trade paternalism, government partiality, and the system of production it should be anticipated that Coventry ribbon weavers used an artisanal discourse in their disputes. Their position and their interests within the trade and the town were maintained in part through a web of reciprocity; such rhetoric not only depicted their own view of the world, but the view from the top as well. An analysis of the half-dozen texts from the town shows them all to be predominantly artisanal, with several features being interwoven throughout the texts. Most striking of these characteristics is the deference voiced toward the magistracy and the honorable manufacturers. Speakers at weavers meetings frequently were careful to emphasize the legitimate boundaries of conflict. Additionally, a couple of texts in the sample illustrate that this deferential rhetoric was not an immutably fixed feature of the political landscape, but was reinforced and reproduced in interactions between workers, masters, and magistrates. In other words, the articulations of workers were stable in nature precisely because the socio-drama of

relations periodically reinforced the stability. The sample texts also show a recognition of trade and community interest. Workers claimed legitimacy for their actions as members of town and trade as well as their interests qua workers. Finally, several of the texts, reflecting the moral economy of relations between master and worker, distinguish between honorable and dishonorable manufacturers. In their articulations speakers frequently delineated where the boundaries of conflict lay and towards whom their ire was to be legitimately directed.

Several of these features are seen clearly in the following extract from a weavers' meeting in mid-August of 1829. Having suffered a 15% reduction in wages several months previously, some of the smaller masters, faced with increased competition from France, once again were making anxious stirrings for further reductions. The chair of the meeting, Adams, reflecting on their current status, analyses their plight and outlines their course of redress.

He (Adams) begged briefly to direct attention to the object of the meeting. Six weeks ago they were in a similar situation; a reduction was then effected by some individuals, others were of necessity obliged to follow, and the consequence was a general reduction of 15 per cent. in the price of weaving. To this the men agreed, in the hope that it would enable the masters to meet the competition into which they had been driven with the foreigners, and consequently afford them more employment; such, however, was unfortunately not the case, for a still greater reduction has now been proposed by some masters, which, if agreed to would reduce the weavers of Coventry to the same state of wretchedness and degradation to which the other manufacturing districts have been brought. To adopt means for the purpose of averting this reduction was the object for which they were assembled, and he trusted that they would take such steps as would ensure them the support of the intelligent and considerate manufacturers of the city; they should be prudent and peaceable, avoiding all disorder; they should be well convinced that by other means they would defeat the object in view. If oppressed it was not given to them to avenge their own wrongs; they should, and he hoped they would be peaceable. There was one thing to which he attributed the present attempt to reduce wages,- it was that of not having a standard list, by which all masters should pay. Some of the masters were apprehensive that others were getting their work made cheaper than they; and he thought the most advisable steps to be taken would be, to go around peaceably to the masters, and get them to sign a list which had been adopted (Times, Aug. 15, 1829)).

This meeting, as it turned out, was the initiating act in a new round of socio-

drama in which the magistrates as paternalistic mediators played out their role. Within several weeks, with the intercession of the magistrates, the reduction was forestalled and the grumblings of both men and masters were quieted ((Searby 1977(a), p. 205)).

In Coventry then we find a concatenation of conditions that fostered an artisanal discourse. Not only did these factors combine to favor this type of discourse, but their stability caused a crystallization of conditions that produced a ritual-like evenness in the workers' articulations. In turning to the next case, the silk weavers of Spitalfields, we shall see how the destruction of such a stable theatre of relations also increased the variance of the militancy of workers' discourse in the ebb and flow of contention.

### The Silk Weavers of Spitalfields

Spitalfields, a working-class district in the east of London inhabited by outworkers and laborers, holds several parallels to Coventry. The silk weavers (one of the most populous groups in the district), were as the ribbon weavers, outworkers who worked in domestic shops. As outworkers they still retained some autonomy, although unlike their Coventry counterparts there were clear distinctions between producers and those who controlled the production process. As in Coventry the production of cloth was controlled by a number of masters so that capital was not exceptionally concentrated (though the small master in Spitalfields was quickly succumbing to the trials of a depressed trade). Finally, in Spitalfields we also find a sustained period of capital-labor peace and some attempt by the powers that be to cultivate a paternalistic political culture. The Spitalfields weavers, however, were different in lacking a stable theatre of labor relations. Unlike the ribbon weavers the nature of the silk weavers' grievances, the parties with whom they contended, and

the point during contention at which interaction took place were variable determinants of the weavers' rhetoric. Contrasting Spitalfields, where questions of time and interaction were problematic, with Coventry, where they were much less so, should provide a rough measure of how utilitarian theories of collective action can facilitate the understanding of the articulation of group interests.

The Spitalfields silk weavers occupy a peculiar place in the historiography of nineteenth-century industrial relations. They are mentioned often as a prime example of the changing nature of British industry, yet they have received surprisingly little attention. To a great extent the paucity of available material on the weavers probably is due to the operation of the Spitalfields Acts, a series of legislation the first piece of which was passed by parliament in 1773. This legislation controlled the operations of the trade until its repeal in 1824. Up to this period the weavers were infamous for their contentous spirit; rioting and cloth slashing were standards part of their repertoire. For over 50 years these acts, purposefully designed to prevent such disturbances, legislated relations between masters and men. As a result, the Spitalfields trade experienced a stretch of labor peace that was virtually unheard of in other areas of the country. Quietude does not draw attention as easily, and it is probably for this reason that so little writing has been done on the weavers. Despite this the weavers' case is deserving of more scrutiny than it has received. They were among the last and most significant trade to see the legal protection of their status ravaged by the rising tide of political economy. Given the fact that many, if not the majority, of the Spitalfields weavers grew up under this sometime benevolent regime, knowing only the pitched battles between masters and men through their elders' reminiscences, their reaction to the repeal is of even more interest. To understand the weavers' response to the depression and reductions starting in 1828 it is necessary to understand the previous system under which they worked.

The Spitalfields Acts were created, in the words of Sir John Fielding, to provide "a radical cure for all tumultous assemblies from that quarter so disrespectful to the king and so disagreeable to the government" ((as quoted in Hammonds 1967, p. 210)). The weavers were indeed a spirited, cantankerous, and independent group who had little hesitation in using collective violence to uphold what they believed to be their rights as Englishmen. To stabilize relations between masters and men and in an effort to prevent any further recurrences of the riots of 1769, a series of acts was passed beginning in 1773 (and periodically added to till 1811) regulating many of the aspects of the trade. Perhaps most important among these regulations was the manner in which the wages of the weavers were set. Under the provisions of the act collective bargaining was mandated by requiring masters and men to appear before local magistrates with a list of prices for each area of the trade which the magistrates then declared as the standard list. Should the masters and men disagree the case went into arbitration before the magistrates. Largely ignorant of the technical matters involved, such arbitration was generally advantageous for the weavers, as the magistrates established wages almost wholly on the basis of the price of provisions ((Clapham, p. 460-1)). Since the masters who tried to undercut the standard list were subject to prosecution, the letter of the list was rarely violated. The sympathetic attitude of the magistrates coupled with their desire to keep the poor rates low transformed the weavers, in the words of the Hammonds, into "an aristocracy among wage earners" ((Hammonds 1967, p. 213)). It was not uncommon for them to earn between 16-18 s. a week (before reductions) by working a 12 to 14 hour day ((Select Comm. on Handloom Weavers Petitions 1834, hereafter S.C. 1834)). While the depression of 1816 initiated a long-term decline in the trade, the Acts still provided some buffer against rapid degradation.

In addition to the clauses regulating wages the acts also regulated how the

production of articles was carried out, putting restrictions on both masters and men. Under the act the weavers were required to accept work from only one master at a time, in an attempt to ensure prompt and regular completion of the master's orders. Weavers were also prevented from employing more than two apprentices at one time, and this provision probably prevented some of the better paid amongst them from establishing themselves as small masters ((Clapham, p. 461)). On the other side, masters who had articles produced within Spitalfields were prohibited from employing workers outside the area, thus preventing direct competition between the weavers in Spitalfields and those to the southwest.

Whether the acts were detrimental or beneficial to the Spitalfields trade was of course a hotly debated issue long after their repeal. During the drive for their abolition it was by and large the large city merchants, men who had little direct contact with the Spitalfields area, who pushed the cause. In contrast the small masters who lived in the parish favored the acts, believing they ensured "a state of quietude and repose" ((as quoted in McCann, p. 6)). Whatever the case might have been in regards to capital, the effects of the acts were on balance beneficial for the weavers. Having to worry little about trade relations the weavers turned their attention to a variety of leisure activities. During these years, for example, they founded a host of learned and literary societies including entomological, floricultural, mathematical, and historical societies ((Yeo and Thompson, p. 106; Hammonds 1967, p. 212)). An even more important by-product of the acts was the lack of interest that the weavers exhibited towards unionism. When, for example, it was proposed to the committee of engine silk weavers that they join the fight for the repeal of the Combination laws the society magnanimously resolved;

That protected as we have been for years under the salutary laws and wisdom of the legislature, and being completely unapprehensive of any sort of combination on our part, we cannot therefore take any sort of notice of the



invitation held by Mr Place.

When the resolution was proposed to the weavers meeting they exclaimed "The law, cling to the law, it will protect us" ((Warner, p. 513-14; see also Prothero 1979, p. 202)). (The silk weavers were entirely willing to lend support to the corn laws so long as the prohibition in the act against foreign wrought silk was maintained ((Prothero 1979, p. 220)).)

At the same time as complacency grew among the weavers a sense of paternalism grew among a number of the masters who controlled the trade. Partly spurred by an Anglican evangelism (which was becoming infectious among the London bourgeoisie), and partly by the waning but haunting remembrances of past outrages merchants, bankers, and other large businessmen established a presence with a series of charitable institutions. The soup kitchen, benevolent society, and other similar organizations actively came to the aid of the weavers when times were slack, offering food, money, and a heavy dose of religion. In 1812, for example, during a slack period in the trade, the soup society sold quarts for 1 d. to 7000 persons a day. Between 1812-14 the benevolent society made 155,140 visits, dispensing 23,437 pounds as well as some less appreciated spiritual advice ((McCann, p. 13-14, 26)). Charity and Sunday schools also were proliferated throughout the area, though they seem mostly to have attracted the interest of the more skilled workers ((Ibid., p. 6, 9, 11)). The weavers, especially in the plain trades, appreciated to some extent these efforts for what they were as attempts at social control. Yet as McCann has observed, the work of the bourgeoisie was not without its rewards in producing some complacency ((op. cit., p. 28-9)).

These attempts at social control occurred during a period when the trade generally was prospering, especially from 1815 to the time of the repeal ((Select Committee on the Silk Trade 1832, Q. 4163; hereafter S.C. 1832)). The two decades after 1811 saw the population of the Spitalfields and adjoining Bethnal Green parishes

increase rapidly from 59,000 to 90,000, with most of the surge coming in the latter ((McCann, p. 2)). Despite the political economists' ardent and optimistic predictions this was all to change after the repeal of the acts and reduction of tariffs, especially by 1828 when the trade started to languish into an extended depression ((S.C. 1832, Q. 8525)).

One aspect of the trade that was almost wholly untouched by repeal, however, was the system of production under which the weavers worked. Even after 1825 the factory system or workshop hardly encroached on the traditional putting-out system, with only two appearing through 1830 to produce low grade dress goods. As one manufacturer suggested, free trade had actually discouraged the development of factory production by bringing on a depression and thus discouraging capital investment ((Warner, p. 74; S.C. 1832, testimonies of William Brunskill (Q.676) and Ambrose Moore (Q.11172) )).

The putting-out process, to a large degree, had remained unchanged since the eighteenth century. None of the processing leading up to the weaving was done in Spitalfields, creating a fairly homogeneous labor force within the parish. Under this system work was regularly picked up and deposited at one of the local warehouses and the weavers were allowed a weekly wage draw debited to their accounts should their work take longer to complete than one week ((Warner, p. 68, 103)). Until mid-century many masters employed several hundred weavers and their families producing a wide variety of goods from plain gros de naples (a standard broad silk) to some of the most renowned fancy goods and tapestries in Europe ((Warner, p. 73)). Under this regime the production costs were deducted from the weaver's piece rate, so that his net wage was generally reduced by several shillings ((Warner, p. 102)). Though before the repeal of the acts most weavers owned their own looms, it is not clear to what extent this continued after 1825, since weavers were frequently forced to pawn

much of their property to stave off starvation ((McCann, p. 3; S.C. 1832, Q. 9983, 11282)).

Children were, of course, facilitators in the production process. They began learning quilling and other ancillary processes by the age of 6 or 7, and by the age of 13 were given training in the weaving of simple fabrics ((McCann, p. 3)). Most sons followed their fathers into the trade; and the bitter irony of the depression was that being too poor to pay for an apprenticeship in another trade many weavers' children probably were wed to poverty when they were introduced to the loom.

Weavers were, in sum, fairly content under the acts. Many owned the means of production, controlled the pace of their labor, often earned a respectable wage, and did not have to worry about protracted trade disputes. So long as they were peaceable and played according to the rules they could expect the sympathy of the magistrates and the assistance of local charities. Their most troublesome nemesis was the periodic bout of depression to which the trade fell prey. It was in some senses a golden age. Tarnished by the depression in the mid teens, it was finally and thoroughly transformed with the repeal of the acts and the opening up of ports to foreign goods.

To appreciate the weavers' perceptions of their condition when their activities are picked up in 1829 it is necessary to understand the rapidity of their downfall in the intervening years from 1825. Whether it was only foreign competition and the repeal of the acts or increased home competition from Lancashire is unclear. What is apparent is that the decline of both the weaver and the small master was both precipitous and ruthless in its steady progress. From mid-year of 1826 to mid-1829 the wages of the weavers dropped 30% (more in the fancy trades), and they continued to drop by another 20% by 1832 ((S.C. 1832, Q. 8349, 10876)). (Correspondingly the drop in the prices of provisions in the same period was only 7.5% ((S.C. 1832, Q.

9478)) ). Even these wages, however, were looked upon with envy by many weavers. By the beginning of 1829 fully 5,000 out of the 16,000 looms in Spitalfields were wholly out of employment ((S.C. 1832, Q. 5764, 8392)). In addition, half-work rapidly increased as conditions worsened, so that many weavers were earning a pittance of 4 1/2 s. per week ((Ibid. Q. 4062)). Finally, with the onslaught of fancy goods from France, the numbers of weavers producing such fabrics plummeted (from 4000 looms in 1826 to 300 in 1832) and those weavers were forced to work on coarser goods which required half the labor ((Ibid., Q446, 8439, 10752)).

As wages fell the number of weavers on the dole rapidly increased. The numbers in the dreaded workhouses increased by a third (721 to 1,029) from 1826-29, while during the same period the total under outdoor relief soared 860% (289 to 2487) ((S.C. 1832, Q. 8378)). If it were not for the pride of many weavers these figures surely would have been higher. Thus, by 1829 the weavers of Spitalfields had succumbed to a rapid degradation and severe demoralization. As one long-time master woefully remarked "they are not the respectable body, in any sense, that they once were" ((S.C. 1832, Q. 11280)); and Francis Place commenting on their condition observed "I can safely say that in intelligence, in form, in size, in cleanliness, they are far below every other trade in the metropolis. They are now what some of the other meaner trades were 40 years ago" ((as quoted in Prothero 1979, p. 210)).

The horrors of the depression were not reserved for the weavers alone, the smaller master too was its unwilling victim. These masters had supported the weavers in their campaign to retain the acts and prohibitions, believing it was such legislation in part that kept the trade bouyant and master-worker relations cordial. Fully cognizant of their inability to compete with the large city merchants because of their lack of capital, they viewed the coming of free trade with great trepidation. Their fears were born out fully in a brief period of time. While one year after the

repeal of prohibition there were 167 broadsilk manufacturers six years later their were only 79, 67 having failed and 17 having retired ((S.C. 1832, Q. 8445, 8447)). What business remained steadily percolated to the top, for it was the larger capitalists who could afford to produce high volumes of cheap goods to stay afloat ((Ibid., Q. 5770, 7701)). To many weavers the demise of the small master not only meant a shift in the source of their wages, it also sharply changed their social relations. Many of the silk manufacturers before the repeal had lived and conducted their business outside of the parish; in the mid-teens no more than 6% of the population of the area was petty-bourgeoisie ((McCann, p. 5)). The failure of the small master, who was most likely to reside in the parish, must have gone a long way toward widening the social and physical gap between masters and men.

This then was the sordid state from which the weavers tried to extricate themselves. It is exactly at this point, in a dialectic irony, that the half-century of labor peace became so crucial to their subsequent actions. For after so long a period of relative docility the current generation had little experience in mobilizing for labor struggle. Indeed the history of the weavers' actions is one of frenzied activity from 1825 to the end of the decade. In almost rapid-fire succession from one year to the next they tried a wide variety of actions, never sticking with any one in particular, yet returning to them all as each succeeding attempt failed. In 1825 they petitioned parliament against the repeal of prohibition. In the following year they formed a short-lived relief society, tried conciliation with masters and memorialized the royal family for patronage. Again in 1827 they petitioned parliament for wage protection and also engaged in a general strike to raise wages. Having lost the strike the weavers once more turned to petitioning parliament for wage fixing and also started a campaign for tariff protection in 1828. In 1829 they took up the almost moribund practice of destroying goods while still in the loom, and

in addition founded half a dozen co-operatives. Finally, in 1830 and 1831 they returned to seeking royal patronage, petitioning for relief through subsidized emigration to Australia, and building a union ((Prothero 1979, p. 211-12)). Needless to say, all these efforts met with failure.

The Spitalfields weavers thus provide a special opportunity to investigate how workers' rhetoric can vary given the phase of the collective action and the changing character of the parties involved. Given the other variables in the model -- basic outwork production, a history of labor peace, an attempt by the bourgeoisie and the magistrates at paternalistic social control -- we should expect an artisanal discourse. Within the framework of this discourse, however, the militancy and the specific content of the rhetoric should vary.

An analysis of a series of texts of meetings from contiguous collective actions in 1829 indeed shows that the militancy of the weavers' discourse experienced several shifts. In a series of meetings during the first quarter of the year, called to discuss the continuing trade depression, workers petitioned several branches of the government in an effort to win relief. The texts from these meetings are heavily artisanal in character, largely deferential towards the authorities, and involve several common themes. First, as one of their petitions declared, the lot of the poor was to "work or starve;" workers had to live by their labor which supported others. However, within the natural order of things workers were guaranteed a reasonable subsistence by those for whom they labored. Justice from the authorities meant above all the guarantee of a secure livelihood. Second, by opening British ports to foreign wrought silk the government had abrogated its responsibilities in this reciprocal arrangement, placing the principle of free trade ahead of the welfare of the working classes. In addition, the government had jeopardized the internal trade of the country for external relations.

Third, as the government initially was negligent, it was the right of the workers to be compensated for these actions. Exactly how they were to be compensated was within the purview of the authorities, and the onus of responsibility was on the authorities to render justice. Throughout the series of meetings the workers never threatened and indeed cautioned against collective violence. They never suggested any particular program of action, though they opined on one occasion that if the government did not provide redress they were not obliged to pay any taxes. However, the weavers' rhetoric was never militant; it always counseled legal redress. This might well have been the case because the weavers recognized that an increasing militancy in their discourse could prompt nervous magistrates to suppress their gatherings. In addition, the weavers might have been cautious not to alienate the local magistrates, several of whom had argued their case in front of a number of government committees.

The pleas and petitions of the weavers, despite their deferential tone, were coolly rebuffed by the government. The weavers, still searching for redress, turned their efforts toward the manufacturers. By the second quarter of the year the silk weavers sporadically renewed the tried and true practice of midnight skulking and the cutting silk in the loom, coupling this with the occasional harassment of a master in the streets. Because of the wary remonstrances of the magistrates the pace and scope of this activity did not escalate, but over the next month the militancy of their rhetoric did take a decided turn upward.

The arguments put forth by the weavers in some respects paralleled those that had been brought to bear on the government. Masters and men, while having competing interests, were bound in a reciprocity of trade interest. The masters had violated the spirit of the trade by not keeping their house in order; they lacked a uniform list of prices which ensured a living wage. If the masters had kept order

they could have made a reasonable profit and fairly remunerated the workers. It was thus the responsibility of the masters to correct the present crisis; if they failed the weavers were no longer responsible to heed their side of the obligation.

This last point was the key to the workers' position; unlike their petitions to the government it contained veiled threats of violence and destruction. Over a period of several days in early May, during which the journeymen amassed to articulate their grievances, the threat of property destruction became more central to their discourse. On May 6, after a series of public meetings, the weavers representatives proclaimed;

... there were, no doubt, many honorable men to be found at the meeting as manufacturers, but there were also among them many whose pledges and whose honour were so often forfeited, that any body of silk weavers would not place any reliance whatever upon them. He (Mr. Hunter) would recommend an immediate and amicable adjustment of all differences between them. The Frenchman was in their market, and it required a cordial co-operation of both to beat him out; and he well knew that, with protecting duty afforded by the government, the masters could, with safety to themselves, return to the book prices, and afterwards beat the foreigner. It was, no doubt, the duty of the masters to protect the journeymen, as it was the bounden duty of the journeymen to protect the property of the masters; and he and his brother colleagues would then go to the respective trade houses, and, as far as in them lay, prevent the further destruction of property ((Times, May 7, 1829)).

However, having failed to gain redress from the manufacturers, another public meeting was held soon after. The threat contained in their message this time was hardly concealed.

Mr. Ogle, one of the deputies, addressed the meeting. He observed, that it was the law of nations, wherever a flag of truce was sent by a belligerent, that during the negotiation hostilities should be suspended. The committee of masters had sent a flag of truce to them, and had proposed terms which would be laid before them. He hoped that all hostilities would cease till they found it useless to negotiate, and then they might "war to the knife" (immense uproar). ...

Mr. Ogle said, that the masters had determined to form a standing committee to negotiate with them on all occasions where the interests of either party were at stake. The masters had requested him to use all the influence he possessed with the journeymen to prevent a further destruction of their property. All he could do was to recommend it while the negotiation was pending.

Mr. Lazarus said that he was sure better terms might be obtained from the masters, if they persevered in their demands.

Mr. Yearly said, that if he were to propose to 13,000 weavers that they should accept the starvation prices which had been proposed by the masters, the



consequence would be, that the feelings of the weavers would be hardened up to such a pitch of frenzy, as to endanger the 100,000 pounds worth of property they had in their possession belonging to the masters...

Mr. Oliver said, that the greater portion of the distress was caused by masters underselling each other. Some of the masters could only give 4 1/2 d. a yard for silk, while other masters gave 9 d..

Mr Chadwick said, that the masters might be well assured that nothing short of the prices of 1824 would put an end to the hostilities between them and the journeyman weavers, and he knew very well they could afford to give those prices... ((Morning Chronicle, May 8, 1829)).

It is doubtful whether the weavers could have carried out a full-scale assault on the manufacturers' property for several reasons. For one, the extreme poverty of the workers mitigated against an extended work stoppage that such collective action would have entailed. Privately, the weavers must have been aware of this dilemma. For another, the scattering of looms throughout the parish in workers' homes and the relatively low level of organization among the weavers themselves made such a concerted threat unlikely. Finally, even if the workers had been more highly organized, repression by the local authorities likely would have been more than equally organized to effectively stifle any on-going large-scale collective action.

To the masters, however, who were largely physically and socially isolated from the journeymen, the threats were seen in a different light. As Warden, a member of the masters committee, explained after they had given in to the weavers' demands, "We had, through this committee, the infuriated multitude to reason with; and, with the multitude suffering, distress had banished reason" ((Times, May 12, 1829). The manufacturers thus allowed the weavers what Warden termed their "bloodless revolution;" from their vantage point in the more fashionable part of the town the weavers were an undifferentiated and threatening mass which was on the verge of being transformed into a mob.

The victory of the weavers, however, as the manufacturers had predicted, was short-lived. Smaller masters began undercutting the list; by the end of June the weavers were reduced to the same state of misery that had prompted the threats of

late April. The threats having failed Spitalfields experienced the first series of riots it had seen in many years. There does not seem to have been any wholesale destruction of silk, and if there was a secret organizing committee of pillagers it does not seem to have reached more than a highly selected group of journeymen. While the silk weavers might have expected the rioting to produce similar results as the threats of May, it only served to draw the ire of the masters, stiffen the punitive resolve of the magistrates and the Home Office, and bring a quick cessation to the philanthropic ventures that had kept many from utter starvation.

After the riots many of the weavers once again humbly turned to petitioning the government with a number of schemes including a plan for emigration and a wage protection plan. Their arguments were the same as those they had articulated several months previously. As one weaver, Robert Noquet, noted in launching a petition drive "... the operative classes were entitled to protection. The aristocracy, the commons, the landed and the funded interests were all protected, and none but the weakest of all were left unprotected" (Voice of the People, Jan. 29, 1831)). The militancy in their discourse was displaced by appeals to a fundamental sense of reciprocity; the threats of collective violence had passed with the riots.

The articulations of the Spitalfields weavers thus provide support for several of the hypotheses that have been stated. First, as in the case of Coventry, they provide confirmation of the hypotheses concerning the roots of an artisanal discourse. Second, and in contrast to Coventry, this case has shown how in the absence of a crystallized theatre of relations the militancy of discourse followed the ebb and flow of collective action. In this sense discourse was used by the weavers as a resource, one whose value could be especially important to a conflict group that had low levels of other types of resources. Finally, the actions of the weavers provide a keen illustration of how repertoires of language and action are reflections of experience,

built on accumulated understanding. In turning to the Lancashire cotton district, the heartland of the industrial revolution, we find the experience of factory work and discipline leading to a less protean, though still evolving language of conflict.

### The Cotton Operatives of Lancashire

The Lancashire cotton district has been singled out by most historians as the cradle of the industrial revolution. From 1750 to 1840 the southern half of the county was transformed from a secondary (though important) commercial center for wool and linen into an industrial region concentrating on the production of cotton textiles unparalleled in the world. Anchored by the burgeoning commercial and industrial cities of Liverpool and Manchester, mills and manufacturers sprang up throughout the region, abetted by plentiful supplies of water and coal, favorable climate, and an expanding labor force. As trade expanded and demand for cheap cotton grew, the production of goods transgressed the borders of the county proper and established footholds to the south in the county of Cheshire and west in the counties of Derby and Yorkshire (West Riding). Growth within the area was at times frenetic; while in the late eighteenth century Lancashire still had serious regional competition, by the 1830s it had totally dwarfed its competitors. By this period within the county were to be found 70% of all cotton textile factories, 75% of all horse power (24,218 b.h.p.), and 78% of all factory labor (137,352 persons) which engaged in the spinning and weaving of more than 250 million pounds of cotton imported to England ((Baines 1966, p. 367, 389)).

Within the confines of 1300 square miles had grown a 'workshop of the world,' an industrial infrastructure that was without parallel. Also within this region was an emerging proletariat equally unmatched in both its size and experience with this new industrial order. To speak of cotton operatives in one breath is to include a wide

array of occupations and trades. In general, most cotton operatives had experiences paralleling (and often surpassing) those of the Nottingham framework knitters. Labor fragmentation and discipline and a history of conflict were characteristic of many parts of the trade. Yet within the basic process of cotton cloth production there was a high degree of occupational specialization. Many branches of the trade, such as calico manufacture, also had occupations unique to the branch. In addition, this occupational specialization was accompanied by a relatively high degree of trade specialization within the industry itself. Given the vastness of the industry (some 646,000 workers according to Baines) each of the trades assumed a fairly significant importance. Contemporary observers of the industry were as prone to discuss branches as often as the industry as a whole. Each of these trades also were regionally specialized to a fairly high degree, with the southeast of the cotton district concentrating on finer cloths and their northeastern counterparts placing more of their capital in coarser goods.

Despite the diversity, and with some reservation (particularly concerning the handloom weavers), the cotton workers will be approached as a trade group. The reasons for this step of expediency are also those for expecting an operative discourse among most of the cotton workers.

In general, the cotton industry had been in the midst of increasing capital concentration since its boom in the late 18th century. In part, this was due to the increasing costs and initial capital outlays in buying the growing amount of equipment used to improve the production process. In part, this was also a function of the growing size of the production unit and the rationalization of the production process to increase control over it. Where at the turn of the century many of the steps in the production were often conducted under a handicraft regime, as the century advanced other forms of production encroached on these systems, increasing control

(and at times output) ((Chapman 1972, p. 23; Turnbull, p. 53, 61)). This was true in many parts of the production process; to remain or become competitive could mean substantial outlays of capital. The erection of a small spinning or weaving mill, for example, could cost the budding manufacturer 5000-6000 pounds ((S. D. Chapman 1979, p. 56)). Even if he was able to rent mill space (as many did), outlays for machinery could be substantial. From 1815 to 1836, for instance, the typical ratio of fixed to working capital increased from a high 50% to a striking 66% ((Gatrell, p. 103)). In addition, the enterprising capitalist who sought to start his firm with the aid of the local bank was expected to have one-third of the total capital in his pocket, a sum often exceeding 1000 pounds even for the smallest concerns. Any successful firm needed a substantial pool of liquid capital to weather hard times ((Gatrell, p. 125; Chapman 1979, p. 51-2)).

Paralleling this increase in capital were two related aspects of production common to most aspects of the industry. The first was the vertical integration of several processes under one roof, and the development of a continuous flow production process. In the newer factories, especially by the end of the 1820s, a number of processes such as carding, warping, and spinning were accomplished under one roof ((S. J. Chapman, p. 161)). This was even true of weaving, as weaving sheds increasingly became appendaged to spinning mills. After 1824 in Manchester, for instance, the increase in weaving was due almost wholly to such combined mills; by 1833 most of the mills in Manchester's neighbors of Stockport, Hyde, Staleybridge, and Oldham followed this pattern ((Bythell 1969, p. 33; S. D. Chapman 1972, p. 34; Rodgers, p. 148; R. Smith, p. 58; Taylor, p. 120)). The process of vertical integration could vary somewhat by branch, but in virtually all branches some form of combination had been gaining ground.

Not all branches of the cotton industry were witnessing the rapid demise of the

single-process mill and the rise of the gargantuan satanic factory. There were many hangers-on among the smaller manufacturers, especially to the north in the Rossendale Valley where weaving predominated, water was still the main source of power, and where many mills still could be found with 40 or fewer workers ((Taylor, p. 116; Rodgers, p. 138; Tupling, p. 206)). However, in the Manchester area where the extant information is most complete, there does seem to have been a tendency for the small firm to have been losing ground to its medium-sized counterpart ((Lloyd-Jones and Le-Roux, p. 77-8)). Regardless of firm size and industrial branch, the cotton industry was becoming increasingly forbidding territory for the small domestic master ((Gatrell, p. 125)).

With the exception of some of the smaller towns in the North and Northeast it seems reasonable to tackle the various branches as a whole, given their relatively high degree of capital concentration and increasing work discipline and labor fragmentation. These features also should have motivated the use of an operative discourse among this group of workers.

As has been suggested, the rise of the mill, especially the combined mill, had a powerful effect on the organization and social relations of production. The increased mechanization of production and the rise of continuous flow processing subjected many cotton workers to both stringent work discipline and the degradation of their labor.

The printers in the calico branch, to cite one branch, rapidly became appendages to a mechanized production process. Whereas before the advent of mechanization block printers were a relatively highly skilled group of artisans who could provide perhaps six pieces of cloth per day (under their own pace), the introduction of steam powered cylinder printing sounded the death knell of the skilled trade. The introduction of cylinder printing, bitterly opposed by journeymen block printers,

increased daily production by 100 times while at the same time opening the mill gates to a flood of less skilled apprenticed workers ((Turnbull, p. 69, 191)). At the same time machine printing served to depress the status and wages of many of the remaining block printers. Those workers in related processes, such as dyeing and bleaching, also felt the impact of this degradation and increased regimentation ((Ibid, p. 208)).

The implementation of new forms of organization had profound effects on the social relations of production. As was suggested earlier, a history of capital-labor conflict should also motivate the use of an operative discourse. Workers in the cotton industry's heartland certainly had a history of such contention after 1810 in both local and regional forms. Dyers, printers, spinners, and many other occupational groups periodically engaged in conflicts on the local level. The spinners were especially noteworthy for their efforts at regional turn-outs, such as the wide-scale strike of 1818 ((Hammonds 1967, p. 96, 104)).

Strike activity was relatively frequent for a number of connected reasons. First, mill and factory operatives, as Cuca has suggested, had greater opportunity to act together and create cohesive and better financed strike organizations ((Cuca, p. 244-5, 250)). Second, the declining profits of the trade (especially after 1815) and its competitiveness meant relatively frequent attempts on the part of the manufacturers to reduce wages in order to remain buoyant, attempts that could only be countered with increasingly militancy ((Collier, p. 5-6)). Third, many workers were faced with replacement by machinery after they had already been transformed into mill hands. Finally, given the opportunity of the mill hands, the frequent disputes between capital and labor, and the determination of capital to exercise control in all aspects of production, the manufacturers themselves made a variety of attempts early on to organize a stiff counter-resistance. Manufacturers' organizations had been formed in

reaction to large-scale strikes among the spinners and printers in many areas. On the local level such towns as Manchester, Bolton, Ashton, Oldham, and Preston all had witnessed master combinations to combat union activities ((Turnbull, p. 192; Hammonds 1967, p. 105; S. J. Chapman, p. 207)). These attempts by the masters only served to sharpen the antagonisms and transparency of relations between themselves and their work force, increasing the militancy of the latter group.

In sum, the organization and social relations of production in most branches of the cotton industry were fertile spawning grounds for open class antagonism and in turn the use of an operative discourse. This transformation was noted succinctly long ago by S. J. Chapman, when, commenting on the changing position of the cotton worker, he suggested,

In short the handicraftsman had been in a large sense a unit of production, and he was transformed ultimately into part of a larger unit. Hence while the earlier labor movements in Lancashire were aimed at "protecting the industry" and "fixing fair prices," the later ones, those formed among factory operatives, were organized in a new sense "against the masters." ((p. 193))

An analysis of texts from cotton towns of southeast Lancashire shows that roughly 60% are predominantly operative in character. That such a predominance of operative texts appears in the aggregate is fairly strong confirmation of the expectations of this study, for this diverse group of workers that produced the texts includes outworkers and craft workers who would be expected to use an artisanal discourse.

Regardless of the origin of the texts several common themes stand out. First and foremost is the conception that master and men were involved, as one Chorley operative noted, in an "unequal war" ((V of P, June 14, 1831)). The pitting of masters and men against one another is depicted as a protracted and fundamental social conflict, a zero-sum game in which a series of defeats was pushing workers to the brink of absolute poverty and subservience. Second, and equally important, this



war is cast in a distinctly national character and is between capital and labor in its general forms. Third, the nature of this protracted war demanded that workers, by their own national efforts, had to advance and protect their interests against those of capital. The themes of self-salvation and determination are strong throughout; workers could rely on no one, including the government, except themselves. Finally, related to the call for self-determination, was a strident sense of the urgency and immediacy of their mission. Many of the texts emphasize that workers had no time to lose in mobilizing against the onslaught of capitalist degradation.

Exemplary of these themes is the text of a mass meeting held in the small town of Accrington to discuss the prospects of unionization. Accrington was situated in the Rossendale valley, a textile area north of Manchester. The valley by the 1830s was dotted with dozens of spinning mills and printing and bleaching works, as well as supporting a considerable out-work trade in the weaving of coarser cotton fabrics ((Tupling, p. 205-8)). A number of the smaller towns in the valley were dominated by these large printing and bleaching establishments. The manufacturers who controlled these works were able to create a largely closed circle of power and petty despotism ((Ibid., p. 220)). The growth of several large print works in the early part of the century had turned several of these towns into hotbeds of labor disputes. As one historian of the area has noted, the capitalization of the valley created "a sharp cleavage ... between the employing and the employed classes" ((Tupling, p. 218-9; see also Turnbull, p. 193)).

Carrying this historical baggage several thousand people (many of them print workers) gathered to hear the themes of unionization and cooperation propounded during the afternoon of July 11, 1831. As can be seen below many of the themes just explicated are laid out boldly by the local speakers.

About half-past twelve o'clock Mr. Millar was called to the chair ... They

had all seen, that the efforts of individual trades had proved incompetent to prevent their wages from being taken from them by their more powerful employers. They had seen trade almost annihilated, and their last mouthful of bread taken by those whose palaces their industry raised; and, unless all were united- not in the way of individual trades, but as one great national union- they must not expect a termination to their wrongs and sufferings. They had nothing to expect from the government; and a national union, he would repeat, was the only remedy left to protect them against the encroachments which were every day being made upon them...

(Resolution) That it is the decided conviction of this meeting- a conviction corroborated by the universal misery now prevailing among the working classes, and by all past experiences- that reduction of wages is productive of no possible good, and inimical to the general interest of the country. That though the boroughmongers should be compelled to repeal the burthens, they have imposed upon the people, and all monopolies be (unreadable), the condition of the people will not be improved, so long as corresponding reduction is made in the wages of the working people. ...

Mr. Tagg rose to second the resolution, and said nothing was more calculated to ruin the nation than the reduction of wages; and it surprised him that those trades which had been so long united among themselves, had never formed a union of the whole for each others benefit. The masters were all united; the "fifty-two" of Ashton, had begun, and who, until they saw it, could tell what would be the end of it? The system which they had begun was fast extending. It had now reached the calico printers, but did anyone believe it would stop there? **Cheers.** ... The masters would never think their wages were too low to take more off; and, if they had but a penny a day, they would think a half-penny might be spared from it, with as much modesty as they were now taking away one-half the present earnings of the printers. Yes, they would continue to reduce them, and at last, have the effrontery to tell them to go back and lick the bone from which the dog had been turned away, to grumble when he was kicked, or groan when he was hurt. **(Tremendous cheering)** But yet, let them not apprehend the worst. They could not be hurt, unless their own black sheep hurt them, or unless they had the baseness to hurt one another. If one trade was reduced, it was a blow aimed at the whole; for the stone that one master flung at his men was picked up by another, and became the common instrument of the destruction of the whole. **Cheers** ... if the workman lost his wages, the butcher and all others with whom he dealt, lost half their custom. **(Loud cheers.)...**

The meeting was afterwards adressed very ably by Mr. Taylor, Mr. Cavanagh, and others, who commented in very strong terms upon the present reduction in the wages of the calico printers. The masters had, it was contended, told the house of commons, when they were endeavouring to procure the repeal of duty on printed calicoes, that the average wages of a journeyman printer amounted only to 7s. per week, and now those very men in the face of the admission were attempting to reduce them 50 per cent. lower, thus leaving to the starving printer the sum of 3s. 9d. a week for the support of himself and his family. ... The following resolutions were passed, in addition to two others, relative to the proposed reduction in the wages of the printers.

(Resolutions) That for the foregoing reasons, the people have no reason to expect relief from a retrenchment of the public expenditure- from the removals of the corn laws- the extinction of all existing monopolies, or any ministerial measure. The productive classes are imperatively called upon to originate, amongst themselves, some measure for the protection of their own interests, and

the amelioration of the present impoverished condition.

That to accomplish the purposes of the foregoing resolution, and to bring the power of the productive classes into full, complete, and beneficial operation, the people must be united, and form one great community, on the plan of the "National Association for the Protection of Labour." (Emphasis in the original.) ((V. of P., July 16, 1831))

Two points in particular are worth noting in the above passage that makes it a strong example of an operative discourse. First, the rhetoric is a strong example of anti-government discourse. The politics of trade and nation are bound together to produce a more unified critique of the social order, the role of power in maintaining and changing this order, and the need for a class organization. Second, the depiction of master-worker relations presents the struggle between the two as fundamental and enduring; it is clearly a protracted class conflict.

An examination of the other texts produced by the Lancashire cotton operatives provides additional support for the hypotheses concerning the social relations of production and past conflict. The growth of the industry over the decades had created conditions conducive to the growth of a new type of worker consciousness and discourse. As S. J. Chapman has observed, the element of time was propitious for their development. "About the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century a new type of operative was beginning to dominate working class thought- men who had been born into a factory system and bred up in it. A similar change was taking place in the ranks of the masters, both spinners and manufacturers" ((S. J. Chapman, p. 216)). In the workings of a generation a growing alienation of capital and labor had fostered a new tenor of relations. "Neither in the minds of the operatives after they had fought two or three battles with the new capitalists, nor in the minds of those who watched the conflicts, could much doubt remain that industrial arrangements had been cast in a new mold" ((Ibid., p. 211)). The themes of national self-determination, power fighting power, and the fundamental split between capital and labor, to cite a few elements of the discourse reviewed, echo Chapman's claim

that a new consciousness had emerged.

## VII. Summing up the Case Studies

Nottingham, Coventry, Spitalfields, and the Lancashire cotton district have provided four roughly comparable tests of the hypotheses on discourse use. Before turning to the full sample analysis I will take a final comparative overview of the evidence and the extent of support that these cases provide. A comparison of the effects of the independent variables is summarized in the table on the following page.

Comparing across areas varying degrees of support for the hypotheses are found. Relatively strong support is provided for the hypotheses concerning the labor process and history of conflict. Where the degree of capital concentration is relatively high and the control and fragmentation of the labor process fairly extensive, as in Nottingham and Lancashire, an artisanal discourse predominates. This is not the case in Coventry and Spitalfields, where the social relations of production are largely putting-out systems and capital control is more diffuse. Likewise, among the framework knitters and cotton operatives where there was an on-going history of master-worker conflict, workers most often used an operative discourse. Among the ribbon and silk weavers, however, where there were relatively long periods of labor peace (or a lack of protracted conflict), workers articulated their grievances within an artisanal framework.

Unfortunately, because of a lack of variation among the areas with respect to the political geography of trade, no real conclusions regarding this hypothesis can be reached. None of the areas that have been reviewed were small enough, nor so completely dominated by a handful of capitalists, to make a valid comparison. If more information could be gathered on one of the small mill towns in southeast Lancashire such a comparison could be made.

Table 1.: Discourse Usage in the Four Selected Regions by Four Independent Variables

Town or Region and Trade Group	High Task Fragmentation	High Capital Concentration	Strong Paternalism and Hegemony	Discourse as Variable Resource of Contention	Predominant Type of Discourse		Variations in Discourse Militancy in Collective Action
					Artisanal	Operative	
Nottingham Framework Knitters	+	+	0	0		+	0
Coventry Ribbon Weavers	0	0	+	0	+		0
Spitalfields Silk Weavers	0	0	+	+	+		+
Lancashire Cotton Workers	+	+	n.a.	n.a.		+	n.a.

+ = present

0 = absent

n.a. = information not available

While the local political culture hypothesis does not have as large a body of supporting evidence as the first two hypotheses, some support still can be found in the available evidence. It has been shown that in Nottingham the hands-off policies of the authorities and relative paucity of paternalistic action on the part of the manufacturers meant fewer constraints on the growth of an operative discourse. In Coventry, and to a slightly lesser extent in Spitalfields, the converse has been found. In Coventry routinized magisterial intervention and liberal relief of the poorer members of the community helped perpetuate a set of relationships that preserved and artisanal consciousness. In Spitalfields there was a somewhat different, though in many respects parallel, structure of relations and influence. As the investigation into this region has shown, the parish received a strong disequilibrating shock to the relatively stable hegemonic system that had kept the area subdued for a half-century. Yet without a new crystallized repertoire of action and relations authorities, masters, and weavers played out conflicts using elements of the old and largely moribund system of paternalism that had held fast for so many decades.

Finally, this study also has shown how the strategic exigencies of collective action could make discourse an important resource and its production non-routine. Variations in the militancy of the rhetoric of workers seeking redress was one of the principle means by which discourse could be utilized. In Spitalfields a long history of labor peace and protection left the weavers ill-prepared after the repeal of the Acts and protective tariffs in 1824. Lacking experience in mobilization, a strong organizational base from which to press their claims, and having little in the way of material resources (dependable or ephemeral) that could be mobilized, the rhetoric of the weavers became a major element in their search for redress. As the study of this case has revealed, the level of implied threat and depictions of their status and the crisis they faced changed in the weavers' discourse with the ebb and flow of

their collective actions. For their trade kin in Coventry, however, this was not the case. There the weavers followed a more scripted discourse. Given the formalized theatre of relations between masters and men the militancy and content of the rhetoric was much less strategically variable. (For the process of mediation and reconciliation to be carried through, however, the script did have to be followed). The Coventry ribbon weavers, bounded by a still on-going homeostasis of relations, did not have or need recourse to the use of rhetoric as a strategic resource in the manner of their Spitalfields counterparts.

The comparative analysis thus has established a measured degree of support for several of the hypotheses. The hypothesis concerning the system of labor relations and its effects on interests and their articulations has received the greatest body of support, while those for the remaining variables have received somewhat less substantive confirmation. To test all of these hypotheses with a larger data set I now turn to the full sample analysis.

### **VIII. Full Sample Analysis**

Turning to an analysis of all thirty cases another look at the hypotheses concerning the social relations of production, local political culture, and capital concentration will now be taken. An analysis of zero-order correlations between the independent and dependent variables, supplemented by simple bivariate tabular analysis, will be used to further investigate the relationships. While the sample size limits the analysis to bivariate relationships and makes controls problematic, it nonetheless allows a substantial and valuable preliminary insight into the forces that helped shape interest articulation. In addition, it can point toward more promising directions for more detailed and refined subsequent analyses. This section itself is divided into four parts. First, a brief description of the operationalized variables and

proxy measures used in the analysis is provided. Second, the hypotheses that are to be tested are reviewed. Third, the strength and direction of the bivariate relationships are examined. Finally, a last look is taken at an aberrant case that does not conform to the study's expectations to further clarify the problems still faced and to lay out avenues for additional research.

### **(Description of the Variables)**

In the comparative analysis discourse use was analysed by noting the types and characteristics of the perceptions of workers in their description of master and worker relations. Here a parallel operationalization will be used. Each text was coded as one of three types: predominantly operative, predominantly artisanal, or mixed on the basis of a coding scheme discussed in the methodological appendix. The mixed category is a residual one used to categorize texts that were too ambiguous for a clear classification and represents a small portion of the total sample (5.5%). Since the mixed group is so small in number, and does not add substantially to the analysis, these texts were dropped for the present analysis. Dropping the mixed cases makes the use of simple ratio feasible as a measure of the dependent variable: the ratio of predominantly artisanal texts to the total number of texts for each town.

Both direct and proxy measures were used for the operationalization of the independent variables. The degree of capital control of the labor process was measured by coding two dimensions of this process for each occupational group that produced a text. First, the typical labor process was characterized as fragmented (task) or relatively undifferentiated (unit). If workers labored under a work regime in which traditional handicraft processes of production had been subdivided further so that their function was to perform a task in a previously unified work process, their work process was coded as fragmented. Conversely, if workers performed under a



substantially unchanged handicraft process of production the work process was coded as undifferentiated.

Second, work discipline imposed by the production process itself was coded as being direct or indirect. If workers were arrayed in a production process of immediately linked tasks, as in factory production, the control was characterized as direct. If, however, the workers maintained control over the pace of the production process, as many outworkers did, control was characterized as indirect (i.e. the pace was indirectly controlled by the total time allotted for the completion of the process). Three other possible measures of the control of the labor process — whether there was or was not direct supervision of the labor process, whether the worker could control the labor process due to a monopoly on technical knowledge or experience, and whether workers performed for salaries or piece rates — were not compiled due to a lack of information or ambiguities in coding. For texts produced by mixed groups of workers, or where the occupation of the workers was ambiguous, the work process was coded as unclear. Since the proportion of such texts was fairly large (about 30%), each category of the first two work process variables was measured separately as the ratio of the category to the total number of groups or individuals producing texts for each town.

Reliable and uniform national data on the number of manufacturers in each town and the average number of employees per firm are not available until after the period under study ((Armstrong; Gatrell; Jenkins 1973)). To operationalize the political geography of trade variable two proxy measures thus were used. First, a proxy measure was developed for a sub-sample of 14 textile towns in the Lancashire cotton district. For each town the total number of firms involved in textile production (including ancillary processes) was compiled from Baines's commercial directory of the county for 1825. Divided by the population of each town in 1830,

this was taken as a proxy measure of the concentration of capital control of the town textile trade. Second, information on the size of the factory work forces and the number of factories for 15 towns (mostly in Lancashire) was extracted from Baines's volume on the history of cotton manufacture in Great Britain. This data set, a preliminary report of the 1834 survey of the factory inspectors (their first survey), while incomplete and considered quite unreliable by Jenkins and others, nonetheless provides us with the only available measure on the concentration of capital control in the labor market. For each of the 15 towns the average size of the factory work force was taken as a proxy measure for the variable.

To operationalize the local political culture variable several measures of local cultural institutions were compiled. Data were collected from several sources (including an 1833 parliamentary report on charitable and Sunday schools) on the number of free or partially subsidized day schools, the number of churches (by sect), and the number of Sunday schools (by sect) as well as the attendance figures for each type of institution. As institutions largely dominated by the middle and upper classes their number and the extent of participation in them should provide a rough indication of bourgeois hegemony. Following Thompson (1966, p. 375-400) and Lacqueur (ch. 6 and 7), Methodist institutions were isolated as the best indicators of this hegemony. These institutions had much higher rates of working-class participation than other churches and tended to be somewhat more oligarchically controlled by middle-class church members than other dissenting sects (with a couple exceptions). The total number of each type of institution for each town was normed by the town population to create one set of proxy measures and average attendances for each by town were created to form a second set. In addition, the data for Methodist institutions were normed by the corresponding institutional total to create a third set of variables. Finally, because of the importance of the Anglican church

among the bourgeoisie and the governing powers, measures were developed for its institutions in parallel fashion.

This data set will provide a first test of several hypotheses and should lead to a fuller understanding of the additional material that will need to be collected for further more refined research. After reviewing the results below these paths for further data collection will be discussed and the more promising avenues for further exploration will be indicated.

### **(Outline of the Hypotheses)**

The hypotheses to be tested in this section are outlined below. Though many are substantively identical to those in the previous discussion, the particulars of several differ from previous constructions because of the characteristics of the data set.

The first set of hypotheses concerns the social relations of production. In the initial discussion of the forces that determine discourse use two aspects of these relations were outlined as key variables: the fragmentation of the labor process and the type of control imposed on the worker by the process. To briefly reiterate, there should be a positive relationship between the degree of fragmentation of the labor process and the predominance of an operative discourse. To the extent that older handicraft processes were broken down into more discrete and degraded tasks workers should have been more likely to view themselves as pawns of capital and less likely to see themselves as quasi-independent craftsmen. Similarly, to the extent that work discipline was directly imposed by the labor process an operative discourse should predominate. While sweated outworkers could maintain some semblance of control over the pace of work (and thus see themselves as formally independent of their employers), this was unlikely in the case of mill and workshop workers who

were controlled by the processes in which they were engaged.

The next set of hypotheses concerns the political geography of trade and is applicable to the sub-sample of towns in Lancashire for which a count of textile related firms is available. In towns where the ratio of firms to population was high (a proxy measure of the concentration of capital control within the town) an artisanal discourse should predominate. In these areas the probability of high fragmentation of work within the workshop or regime of labor was lower, the workaday relationship between the small master and the worker was more likely to be partially intact, and the capitalist was less likely to appear as a monolithic force bent on the subjugation of the worker. Conversely, in those towns where a relatively small number of firms exercised control over the labor force the relations between masters and men should have been considerably more charged to produce the use of an operative discourse. Control of the labor force was clearly exercised by a small number of capitalists and thus not shrouded by a complex web of small employers and marginal capitalists.

The final set of hypotheses deal with the relationship between institutional hegemony and discourse use. As I have maintained throughout, conceptions and articulations of class interests were as much a product of the larger set of relations within the community as the immediate structure of relations of the work place. More specifically, it has been argued that the articulation of class interest was inextricably bound to the larger activities of cultural production through which the working class defined its place in the community and its relations to other groups and spheres of power. Much, perhaps most, of this production transpired outside the walls of formal institutions (see Johnson (c), *op. cit.*). Yet the influence of such institutions should not be discounted wholly on this basis. (Further, it is precisely these informal processes of cultural production that most readily defy quantification.)

Thus, here the focus will be on two institutions common to all areas that could

exert a modicum of influence in working-class life: the school and the church. The charity school in particular, in its day and Sunday forms, was one of the few institutionalized means by which middle-class leaders, under the transparent guise of philanthropic concern, could seek to mold the working class of all ages into model and pliant citizens ((Joyce 1975, p. 547-8; S. D. Chapman 1962, p. 36)). (As Malcolm Dick observes of the Sunday schools of this period, "Generally Sunday schools were evangelical and conservative institutions, promoted and staffed by individuals from social classes which were higher than those of the scholars who attended them, and espousing an ideology which attacked the allegedly depraved behavior and radical inclinations of the poor" ((p. 36)).) In addition, the charity school offered a commodity that was highly valued by many a working-class family -- formal instruction in reading (and possibly writing) -- and thus they might suffer through the pap of indoctrination to obtain 'really useful knowledge.'

The church, in a more limited fashion, could operate equally well as a place of hegemonic influence (though this varied by zeal of the middle classes of each sect). The relationship here is somewhat more questionable because, as middle-class reformers so frequently lamented, church attendance among the working class was modest at best, especially in the larger metropolitan areas ((Gay, p. 58)). While working-class attendance lagged, however, churches still could be seen as important centers of middle-class proselytization and missionary work, a duty that was often emphasized among middle-class faithfuls (see for example Seed). Thus, even if the churches were not attended faithfully by large numbers of the working class, they nonetheless served as a clearing house for middle-class influence, and such data can serve as a proxy measure of middle-class hegemony.

For these reasons normed measures of the number of free or partially subsidized schools, the number of Sunday schools, and the number of churches in each town are

used. The relationship between these institutions and discourse use should reflect the hegemony of the middle classes in the public sphere. The thicker the layer of such middle-class institutions that blanketed a town, the larger the infrastructure that could be used to exert hegemonic control in cultural production. Thus, those towns with a high density of such institutions should be towns in which an artisanal discourse predominates, reflecting this hegemony. In those towns with a low density of such institutions middle-class incursions into working-class cultural production should be less likely, and thus an operative discourse should predominate.

Several ~~measures~~ measures of the number and influence of Methodist and Anglican Sunday schools and churches also are employed. Methodist Sunday schools have been singled out because most (excepting the Primitives and one or two other sects) prohibited or restricted the teaching of reading and writing, and thus parents who sent their children to them did so more for the religious education than for practical didactics ((Laqueur, p. 142-44)). Thus, in towns dominated by Methodist Sunday schools we should find a lower percentage of operative discourse reflective of the Methodist Weltanschauung (the "chiliasm of despair") that E. P. Thompson claims could color many aspects of working-class thought. Similarly, in those towns where Methodist influence was weak an operative discourse is more likely to predominate.

Along similar lines, this relationship between institutional strength and discourse use also might have been true in those towns where Anglican Sunday schools predominated. As the Methodists, the Anglicans were more restrictive on the time allotted to practical instruction than other sects ((Laqueur, p. 105)). In addition, while many Anglican schools did obtain a measure of independence from direct clerical control and supervision, they nonetheless emphasized a set program of study, placing greater emphasis on catechisms and other forms of standard religious indoctrination than in Dissenting Sunday schools. Thus, parallel to the argument

concerning the Methodists, towns in which Anglican institutions dominated should be towns that were less likely to have a high percentage of operative discourse.

If such expectations hold true for the school data they also should have some validity for the churches themselves. Those towns with a high proportion of churches of the two sects should have a predominance of artisanal discourse reflecting this institutional hegemony. Towns in which these sects had only a small foothold should have a high proportion of operative discourse, reflecting the absence of a strong middle-class hegemonic force.

The concentration on Anglican church influence is more questionable in this case because of its unpopularity and its inability (or indifference) to deal with social concerns of the working class ((Ward 1972, p. 206-8)). However, the church was in the middle of an enormous 15 million-pound revitalization and reconstruction program during the period, and was making more serious attempts to recruit those from the lower ranks. Finally, and most basically, the Church was the religious arm of the government; to the extent that its middle- and upper-class disciples could exercise influence on working-class groups we can expect this influence to reflect on the discourse of labor disputes.

### **(Results)**

The results of the correlation analysis appear in table 2 (following page). The correlations for each set of variables will be discussed and the most promising relations further explicated with the aid of bivariate contingency tables.

Correlations between the work process variables (Task/Unit, Direct/Indirect) and the discourse variable (Langprop) show fairly strong support for these hypotheses. There are both reasonably strong and statistically significant relationships in the expected directions between the type of production process and the work discipline imposed by the process and the type of discourse used. (The relationships between

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of All Variables Used in Full Sample Analysis

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.	19.	20.
1. langprop																				
2. task%tot	<b>-.34**</b> (30)																			
3. unit%tot	<b>.49*</b> (30)	<b>-.45*</b> (30)																		
4. direct%tot	<b>-.23</b> (30)	<b>.80*</b> (30)	.19 (30)																	
5. indirect%tot	<b>.42*</b> (30)	<b>-.32**</b> (30)	<b>.81*</b> (30)	<b>-.45*</b> (30)																
6. unclear%tot	<b>-.49*</b> (30)	<b>.45*</b> (30)	<b>1.0*</b> (30)	.19 (30)	<b>-.81*</b> (30)															
7. wrkrs/fac	<b>-.20</b> (15)	<b>.34</b> (15)	<b>.30</b> (15)	<b>.50**</b> (15)	<b>.09</b> (15)	<b>-.30</b> (15)														
8. wrkrs/1000	<b>.10</b> (15)	<b>.45**</b> (15)	<b>.45**</b> (15)	<b>.71*</b> (15)	<b>.09</b> (15)	<b>-.45**</b> (15)	<b>.44**</b> (15)													
9. firms/1000	<b>.42</b> (14)	<b>-.22</b> (14)	<b>.18</b> (14)	<b>.21</b> (14)	<b>-.28</b> (14)	<b>-.18</b> (14)	<b>.10</b> (13)	<b>.13</b> (13)												
10. chrchs/1000	<b>-.14</b> (30)	<b>.11</b> (30)	<b>-.14</b> (30)	<b>.03</b> (30)	<b>-.07</b> (30)	<b>.14</b> (30)	<b>-.24</b> (15)	<b>-.19</b> (15)	<b>-.16</b> (14)											
11. snscs/1000	<b>-.24</b> (30)	<b>.03</b> (30)	<b>-.24</b> (30)	<b>.04</b> (30)	<b>-.26</b> (30)	<b>.24</b> (30)	<b>-.31</b> (15)	<b>.04</b> (15)	<b>.06</b> (14)	<b>-.04</b> (30)										
12. mtch/1000	<b>.09</b> (30)	<b>.18</b> (30)	<b>.05</b> (30)	<b>.06</b> (30)	<b>.17</b> (30)	<b>-.05</b> (30)	<b>.09</b> (15)	<b>.35</b> (15)	<b>-.36</b> (14)	<b>.83*</b> (30)	<b>-.14</b> (30)									
13. freesch/1000	<b>-.00</b> (30)	<b>-.32**</b> (30)	<b>-.00</b> (30)	<b>-.28</b> (30)	<b>-.03</b> (30)	<b>.00</b> (30)	<b>-.43</b> (15)	<b>-.17</b> (15)	<b>-.03</b> (14)	<b>-.06</b> (30)	<b>.52*</b> (30)	<b>-.12</b> (30)								
14. mtssa/mtss	<b>.14</b> (30)	<b>-.02</b> (30)	<b>.23</b> (30)	<b>.05</b> (30)	<b>.27</b> (30)	<b>-.23</b> (30)	<b>.07</b> (15)	<b>.36</b> (15)	<b>.13</b> (14)	<b>.29</b> (30)	<b>-.19</b> (30)	<b>.46*</b> (30)	<b>-.18</b> (30)							
15. mtch%totch	<b>.02</b> (30)	<b>.36**</b> (30)	<b>.12</b> (30)	<b>.15</b> (30)	<b>.24</b> (30)	<b>-.12</b> (30)	<b>.33</b> (15)	<b>.51**</b> (15)	<b>-.48**</b> (14)	<b>.38*</b> (30)	<b>-.20</b> (30)	<b>.77*</b> (30)	<b>-.37*</b> (30)	<b>.53*</b> (30)						
16. mtss%totss	<b>.09</b> (30)	<b>.01</b> (30)	<b>.08</b> (30)	<b>-.06</b> (30)	<b>.15</b> (30)	<b>-.08</b> (30)	<b>.03</b> (15)	<b>.20</b> (15)	<b>-.11</b> (14)	<b>.41*</b> (30)	<b>.01</b> (30)	<b>.47*</b> (30)	<b>-.07</b> (30)	<b>.71*</b> (30)	<b>.50*</b> (30)					
17. mtssa/tssa	<b>.13</b> (30)	<b>-.05</b> (30)	<b>.26</b> (30)	<b>-.15</b> (30)	<b>.37*</b> (30)	<b>-.26</b> (30)	<b>.07</b> (15)	<b>.29</b> (15)	<b>-.14</b> (14)	<b>.47*</b> (30)	<b>.01</b> (30)	<b>.59*</b> (30)	<b>-.02</b> (30)	<b>.78*</b> (30)	<b>.55*</b> (30)	<b>.83*</b> (30)				
18. angch/1000	<b>-.20</b> (30)	<b>-.12</b> (30)	<b>-.09</b> (30)	<b>-.10</b> (30)	<b>-.11</b> (30)	<b>.09</b> (30)	<b>-.12</b> (15)	<b>-.21</b> (15)	<b>.00</b> (14)	<b>.23</b> (30)	<b>.27</b> (30)	<b>.02</b> (30)	<b>.05</b> (30)	<b>.06</b> (30)	<b>-.06</b> (30)	<b>.41*</b> (30)	<b>-.24</b> (30)			
19. angch%totch	<b>.26</b> (30)	<b>-.29</b> (30)	<b>.19</b> (30)	<b>-.33**</b> (30)	<b>.25</b> (30)	<b>-.19</b> (30)	<b>-.36</b> (15)	<b>-.29</b> (15)	<b>.24</b> (14)	<b>-.18</b> (30)	<b>.04</b> (30)	<b>.09</b> (30)	<b>.18</b> (30)	<b>.05</b> (30)	<b>.02</b> (30)	<b>-.09</b> (30)	<b>-.10</b> (30)	<b>-.28**</b> (30)		
20. angss/totss	<b>-.16</b> (30)	<b>-.17</b> (30)	<b>-.25</b> (30)	<b>-.29</b> (30)	<b>-.14</b> (30)	<b>.25</b> (30)	<b>-.42</b> (15)	<b>-.15</b> (15)	<b>.38</b> (14)	<b>-.29</b> (30)	<b>.29</b> (30)	<b>-.36**</b> (30)	<b>.17</b> (30)	<b>-.04</b> (30)	<b>-.39*</b> (30)	<b>-.29</b> (30)	<b>-.27</b> (30)	<b>-.02</b> (30)	<b>.23</b> (30)	

\* = p < .05

\*\* = p < .10

All n's in parentheses

Bolded numbers for correlations between dependent and independent variables

Variable labels explained in accompanying Table 2.1



Table 2.1: Glossary of Variable Labels

<u>Label</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
v.1 Langprop	Proportion of groups in each town that used a predominantly artisanal discourse.
v.2 Task%tot	Proportion of groups in each town that worked under relatively fragmented labor process.
v.3 Unit%tot	Proportion of groups in each town that worked under relatively undifferentiated labor processes.
v.4 Direct%tot	Proportion of groups in each town that worked under labor processes with direct and immediate supervision and discipline.
v.5 Indirect%tot	Proportion of groups in each town that worked under labor processes with indirect and non-immediate supervision and discipline.
v.6 Unclear	Proportion of groups in each town that worked under unclear or unknown labor processes.
v.7 Wrk/fac	Number of workers per textile mill, as given for a sub-sample of towns from Baines's <u>History of Cotton Manufacture</u> .
v.8 Wrk/1000	Number of mill workers per thousand population, as derived from Baines (above) and the 1830 census figures.
v.9 Firms/1000	Number of textile firms per thousand population, derived for a sub-sample of Lancashire towns from Baines's <u>History, Directory, and Gazetteer ... of Lancaster</u> and the 1830 census.
v.10 Chrch/1000	Number of churches (all sects) per thousand population for each town, derived from Lewis's <u>Topographical Dictionary</u> and the 1830 census.
v.11 Sncs/1000	Number of Sunday schools (all sects) per thousand population for each town, derived from the <u>Parliamentary Report on Charity Schools</u> and the 1830 census.
v.12 Mthch/1000	Number of Methodist churches (all sects) per thousand population for each town, as derived from Lewis and the 1830 census.
v.13 Freesch/1000	Number of free or partially subsidized day and evening schools per thousand population for each town, derived from the Par. Rep. and the 1830 census.

- v.14 Mtssa/mtss Average attendance per Methodist Sunday school for each town, derived from Par. Rep.
- v.15 Mtch%ttch Methodist churches as a percentage of total churches for each town, derived from Lewis.
- v.16 Mtss/ttss Methodist Sunday schools as a percentage of total Sunday schools for each town, from Par. Rep.
- v.17 Mssa%ttssa Average Methodist Sunday school attendance as a percentage of total Sunday school attendance for each town, derived from Par. Rep.
- v.18 Angch/1000 Number of Anglican churches per thousand population for each town, as derived from Lewis and the 1830 census.
- v.19 Angch%ttch Anglican churches as a percentage of total churches for each town, as derived from Lewis.
- v.20 Angss%ttss Anglican Sunday schools as a percentage of total Sunday schools for each town, as derived from Par. Rep.

discourse and high fragmentation and direct work discipline are not significant due to the high percentage of mixed or ambiguous groups and individuals that produced predominantly operative texts, as seen in the correlation between the percentage of unclear groups and individuals (Unclear) and discourse use). Tables 3 (below) further examine the strongest relationships.

Table 3 shows the percentage of artisanal discourse cross-tabulated with three variables concerning the social relations of production: the fragmentation of the labor process, the type of work control (direct or indirect) imposed by the labor process, and a measure of those cases that are unclear on these two dimensions. The table shows that towns with a low percentage of recorded groups that labored under relatively undifferentiated labor processes were much more likely to be towns where there was a low proportion of artisanal texts (as indicated by the 43% difference). Conversely, it shows that those towns with a high proportion of recorded groups that worked in relatively undifferentiated labor processes were also much more likely to be the towns where there was a high percentage of predominantly artisanal discourse (difference= 43%).

Table 3 reveals a similar relationship between discourse and the percentage of workers that did not have work discipline imposed directly by the labor process. On the one hand, the table shows that towns with a relatively low percentage of recorded groups that worked under a labor regime that created little direct work discipline were more likely to have a low percentage of artisanal discourse (difference= 36.5%). On the other hand, towns with a high proportion of recorded groups engaged in such a work process were more likely to have a high percentage of artisanal discourse (difference= 36.5%).

Finally table 3 looks at the relationship between discourse usage and the percentage of recorded groups or individuals whose work regime is unclear. The table

TABLE 3: Proportion of Towns with a High Percentage of Artisanal Discourse by Three Work Process Variables

<u>Independent Variable</u>	<u>% of Towns with High % Artisanal Discourse</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Fisher's Exact Prob.</u>	<u>Tau</u>
Proportion workers' groups in each town in unfragmented labor processes:			.02	.12
Low	90.9	19		
High	57.9	11		
Proportion workers' groups working under indirect control:			.06	.12
Low	88.9	21		
High	52.4	9		
Proportion workers' groups in unclear labor regimes:			.05	.15
Low	100.0	6		
High	54.2	24		

shows that towns with a high percentage of unclear cases were much more likely to have a low proportion of artisanal discourse and those with a low percentage of unclear cases were more likely to have a higher proportion of artisanal discourse (differences of 45.8% in each case). While a straightforward interpretation of this result is not possible the relationship may well be a result of the types of meetings and individuals that fell predominantly under the unclear category. Typically the meetings were large union gatherings with militant speakers designed to stimulate and attract the uncommitted to the union cause. They usually were orchestrated by the more militant branches of the union movement, often the cotton spinners, and frequently also included a speaker who heralded the cause of radical politics (perhaps to broaden the appeal of the gathering). The speakers themselves, however, often were not identified with a particular branch or trade (at least not in the accounts) and this probably was simply a simple tactic on the part of the organizers to keep the appeal of the gathering as broad as possible. Thus, many such speakers probably were cotton spinners or similar factory operatives, though it is impossible to tell from the accounts. As for the individuals who produced texts, it is likely that many of them as well were factory workers. Often they labeled themselves as "operatives" or "cotton workers," descriptions sufficiently ambiguous to defy firm codification. Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that most of the unclear cases would fall into the high fragmentation and direct work discipline categories if further information were available.

That the social relations of production shaped the articulation of class interest also can be tentatively shown by examining the relationship between the number of firms within each town and the predominant type of discourse used by recorded workers' groups. The correlation between the number of firms per thousand population for the sub-sample of Lancashire towns and artisanal discourse is relatively strong

(.42) and in the expected direction (though significant only at  $p = .13$ ). A further analysis of this relationship in table 4 provides a modicum of additional support (though with such a small sample size caution remains a byword).

While the sample is too small to provide any substantive evidence (and the empty cell confounds interpretations of measures of relationship) the results are suggestive. The table shows that towns that had a relatively high number of textile firms per 1000 population were much more likely to be towns in which an artisanal discourse was used than those towns with a low ratio. Additionally, those towns where the ratio was low were much more likely to witness the use of an operative discourse than in those towns where the ratio of firms to population was high (with a difference of 50% in both cases).

Correlations between each of the church and school variables and the discourse variable are presented in table 2. In general they show suggestive, but not solid, support for the hypotheses outlined above. The correlations for the general church and Sunday school variables in particular show virtually no support for the hypotheses concerning general institutional hegemony. The correlation for the number of free schools variable (.20) while higher provides suggestive, but still not firm, support for a link between middle-class cultural domination and the use of an artisanal rather than an operative discourse. The correlations for the Methodist variables parallel the free school variable in magnitude and support, with the highest correlation being attained by the Sunday school attendance at Methodist churches as a proportion of the total Sunday school attendance for each town (.18).

Curiously, while the Anglican variables are of the same order of magnitude, all variables but one, the ratio of Anglican churches to total churches, are negatively rather than positively associated with the discourse variable. Possibly, because the Church symbolized much that was repugnant in established society to the working

Table 4: Percentage of Towns with a High Proportion of Groups Using an Artisanal Discourse by Degree of Capital Concentration per Town

<u>Independent Variable</u>	<u>% of Towns with High % Artisanal Discourse</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Fisher's Exact Prob.</u>	<u>Tau</u>
Proportion of towns with a high degree of capital concentration			.13	.22
Low	50.0	10		
High	100.0	4		

class, its greater presence within a town only served to increase divisiveness except where there was little institutional choice. This is suggested by the correlations with variables 18 and 19, which are of similar magnitude, but are in different directions. Further research along these lines, however, is needed however to go beyond ponderous speculations to firmer conclusions.

Rather than abandoning any notion of cultural hegemony, what this initial investigation suggests is that better measures of this process are needed. As was noted, the church was not one of the more central institutions in working-class cultural production. In further research we need to go deeper into those rituals and rounds of life that were more central to working-class existence, such as the pub, the fair, etc., to see how middle class elements could have exerted control over working-class cultural production (see for example Brewer 1978-79).

In sum, this data analysis has provided additional limited support for some of the hypotheses while suggesting greater investigation is needed overall. It has suggested most clearly that an important relationship existed between the social relations of production and the ways in which working-class groups articulated their interests. It also has hinted at a relationship between capital concentration and these articulations. Finally, the analysis has shown a need for better information on bourgeois incursions into working-class cultural production. To reach a further inkling as to why some of the expected relationships in the sample were not stronger I now turn to the examination of an aberrant case.

### **(Looking at an Outlier)**

The analysis of the aggregate data has provided a modicum of additional support for some of the hypotheses, but the evidence is far from overwhelming not to beg further consideration. A brief look at the possible reasons for why the analysis has



not produced stronger results is in order. The already noted caveats concerning sample size and statistical controls aside, why certain towns within the sample, the outliers, did not conform to expectations needs to be examined. By briefly reviewing the case of Belper, a smaller knitting and cotton town in the county of Derbyshire, we will be able to further understand the shortcomings of the analysis and the additional avenues needed for further refinement.

Belper is one of the towns in the sample that seems to confound the analysis. A small town in terms of population and area (it had about 8,000 people in 1830) it was dominated by several large spinning and knitting manufacturers and secondarily had the remnants of several handicraft trades such as nailing. Relative to other towns in the sample Belper thus had a fairly proletarianized labor force. Yet the text from Belper, far from mirroring these social relations of production in an operative discourse, conforms more to an artisanal ideal type. The relative dominance of bourgeois social and religious institutions partially used to explain this form of rhetoric provides little additional insight. Compared to other towns in the sample, Belper stands in the middle of the pack in terms of the number of schools and religious institutions per 1000, and at the bottom in terms of the predominance of Methodist institutions. Clearly these data by themselves are not sufficiently explanatory and a more refined analysis is warranted.

Perhaps the most overriding explanation for the absence of an operative discourse is the fact that the large factories of Belper, and thus a large part of the towns work force, were controlled by one of the great cotton manufacturing families of the era, the Strutts. The Strutts, as many of the great families of the period, were deeply interested in setting up well regulated paternalistic communities. Through this community control they sought to ensure a well regimented labor force as well as the moral improvement of their workers ((Harrison, p. 156)). To this end

they provided a wide array of facilities for their work force including housing, schools, churches, a library, a sick club, a cooperative store, a mechanics' institution, a swimming bath, and a dancing hall ((Hammomds 1968, p. 42; Harrison, p. 156)). In addition to these facilities the Strutts organized and orchestrated great festivities to mark holidays and events of national significance ((Fitton and Wadsworth, p. 258-60)).

Coupled with this web of arrangements for social improvement was the well organized work discipline of the factories. The usual wide array of fines was imposed on all workers as well of the forfeiture of quarterly gift money (one sixth of three months wages) that could occur in the event of misconduct or leave without notice. The Strutts also agreed on a pact with all neighboring factory masters to exclude those from hire who could not provide a satisfactory testimonial from their previous employer ((Fitton and Wadsworth, p. 232-40)). Through these and other mechanisms the Strutts sought to ensure a disciplined work force and a small labor turnover.

The Strutt family thus had a de facto degree of control in Belper that must have seemed quite enviable to most other factory masters. They were the major rentiers, the chief tenders of provisions, and the principle financiers and administrators of most social institutions. On the surface an argument could be made that the social control of the Strutts in Belper created a hegemony complete enough in its various aspects so that the Strutts really did achieve the morally proper community they envisioned.

While it is possible that the content and tone of workers' discourse and the relative labor peace experienced by the Strutts was due to the successful implementation of such policies, such an explanation must be treated with a measure of skepticism. Workers in Belper had corresponded with the United Committee of Framework Knitters during the era of Luddism; no fewer than four separate societies

contributed to the coffers of the National Association for the Protection of Labour in 1830 ((Thompson 1966, p. 536; Cole 1953, p. 32)) These flirtations with such paragons of working-class unionism hardly are indicative of a complete and largely successful paternalistic control.

A seemingly more convincing explanation is that in a small town so dominated by one family, even the more bitter and hell-bent malcontents had to moderate their public actions and language carefully for fear of relatively quick and successful suppression. The Strutts, as the Ashworths and other great cotton families of the day, were stalwart liberal Whigs. As Fitton and Wadsworth note, they opposed Peel's factory act on the standard grounds that it interfered with the operations of free trade ((p. 189)). While they make no mention of the Strutt's attitudes towards trade unions, it is reasonable to suppose that the family repugnantly looked down upon them as a hinderance to the operation of a productive society. If such was the case, then workers so dependent on their employer likely had to be careful in toeing the line of moderation and propriety for fear that their voices and schemes otherwise would excite the wrath of their masters. If this was the case it calls into question the simple relationship posited between the use of an operative discourse and capital concentration, suggesting that availability of repression needs to be taken into account as a mediating force.

The case of Belper suggests that if we are to understand the production of workers' discourse, a further honing of our micro-analytic tools, or at least a more complete and varied collection of data at the aggregate level, is necessary. As I have emphasized throughout, an analysis of discourse production is always in part an analysis of socio-drama. To understand such socio-drama careful scrutiny of the backdrop is vital. Thus, to the extent that the results from the aggregate data analysis have been modest, this can be subscribed partially to the inability to obtain

good measures of the broad outlines of this backdrop. In part, too, it stems from the inability of such analysis to tap the nuances that help shape the process of dramaturgy. Short of producing more varied case studies, what is called for is additional data that will provide a better sense of how this drama is structured. In the concluding section of this part of the analysis I now turn briefly to some suggestions in this light, as well as to more general suggestions of the expansion of the data set as a whole.

#### **(Suggestion for Further Data)**

Two major problems will be discussed in this section. First I turn to the general question of expansion of the data on discourse, the dependent variable. Second I shall suggest several additional sources that can be tapped to create a better and more complete set of predictors of discourse use.

Two of the principle problems with the aggregate data analysis throughout have been the small sample size in general and the relatively small number of texts available for most of the towns included in the sample. Short of archival work in local areas three other sources might be used to expand the collection of texts. First, a systematic sifting of workers' petitions to parliament and other governmental bodies might be attempted. While such documents have the drawback of being constructed in a highly formalized and moderated discourse they could nonetheless provide some additional insight as to how workers formulated and articulated their problems.

Second, given the recent surge in the reprinting of old texts and pamphlets in collections, these volumes too can be exploited. While these are more carefully sculpted tracts than by and large are to be found in the current data set, they have the advantage of presenting a thicker description of working-class ideas. The

disadvantages of this material might be their relatively small numbers, the possibility of more generally political and less directly labor oriented discussions, and the fact that many such tracts were printed for regional or national audiences and thus are not trade or locally specific.

Third, and perhaps most promising, is the relatively wide array of unstamped periodicals and papers published by working-class groups throughout the late 20's and early 30's. A number of these unstamped, such as the Trades Free Press or the United Trades Co-operative Journal, have the advantage of specific labor orientations and appeal to specific trade groups. In addition many are regionally specific, and though many emanate from London, a fair number were also based in the industrial provinces (especially Lancashire, Yorkshire West Riding, and Cheshire), thus providing more inclusive coverage of manufacturing towns.

The problems such periodicals present are several fold. First, as most of the unstamped, the majority were published for brief periods. Second and relatedly, the brief periods of publication and limited circulations make accessibility problematic. Finally, a number of such periodicals are thematic, such as the British Labourer's Protector and Factory Child's Friend, which deals almost exclusively with Sadler's and Oastler's attempts to pass the Ten Hours Act, or the spate of regional trade journals that deal largely with the question of cooperation. Despite these disadvantages the unstamped press represents possibly the richest source of textual material which could be tapped for further research.

Having collected a wider base of textual material the next step is to expand and fill out the set of independent variables. Again, short of local archival work some of the data set might not be easily expandable for the period in question. As I have indicated, there is no accurate uniform body of data on the number of firms, their size, or employment patterns in textile or other industries. Other possible

avenues of exploration for such data do exist, though their accessibility and utility are somewhat uncertain. S. D. Chapman, for instance, has suggested that insurance records can be exploited for information on fixed capital formation ((1971)). Such records would certainly present a biased picture, neglecting many of the smaller firms. Nonetheless, they could provide one of the clearer comparative pictures available for the textile industry. Parallel to Chapman's suggestion, it might be possible to tap bank records and order books from the larger machine and engine manufacturers (to the extent such documents still are extant) for particular localities. One additional avenue that may be promising in terms of the number of firms and related information is the directories and gazeteers similar to Baines' work used in the present analysis.

To complement the directories' information on social institutions several other sources could be surveyed. For further data on the nature and extent of charitable assistance the massive parliamentary report on the old Poor Law (particularly the "Answers to town queries") could be consulted. This material could be supplemented by extant reports of local benevolent societies to provide a more complete picture on the kinds and amounts of aid given by both private societies and local governments. Such local reports could also supplement the information on charity and Sunday schools already used for the analysis since no other parliamentary reports on educational or religious institutions are available for the period ((Cullen, p. 14)). In fact the paucity of parliamentary reports for these areas and the period makes reliance on private and local documents a necessity.

Gauging working-class independence from such charitable institutions and self-reliance within their communities could prove to be a considerably stickier affair. While such material could be valuable as a measure of the solidity and independence of working-class communities, no systematic accounting of such institutions is

available until relatively late in the century. Registration of friendly societies with the registrar for such organizations, for example, was voluntary. Gosden has suggested that many thousands over the years from the inception of the registrars office probably failed to notify the government ((Gosden, p. 13)). Likewise, parliamentary reports on friendly societies and other self-help organizations are grossly inadequate. Thus any data on working-class organizations necessary for further research may well have to be collected within the localities under study.

The final body of material that might be drawn on and used to supplement nation wide-studies is the various treatises and statistical accounts compiled by individual moral improvers and statistical pioneers of the late 20's and early 30's. While many of these treatises concentrated on aggregated national data, a few hearty souls, anticipating the work of the statistical societies in later years, compiled 'moral statistics' for individual towns or regions.

In sum, casting about for further data we find ourselves in much the same position as the political economists and moral improvers of the day. As they lamented then, there are no easily accessible, complete, and uniform bodies of social or industrial data from which to draw. While supplementing the body of texts could be accomplished by further foraging through the unstamped periodicals, the compilation of other information may well prove to be a much more complicated affair.

## IX. Conclusion

To conclude this study I will return to the central problems with which I began: those of interests, consciousness, their articulation, and the ways they can be measured. While this study has not solved these problems conclusively, it has provided some evidence and tentative answers necessary to their analysis and

resolution. Underlying the entire study have been three themes which are suggestive for this resolution, the themes of context, structure, and the centrality of discourse.

Central to all the problems is the question of context. In the initial discussion it was suggested that interests and consciousness can be understood and measured only with a proper appreciation of the context in which they are created and articulated. As Thompson notes "... history is a discipline of context and of process: every meaning is a meaning-in-context, and structures change while old forms may express new functions or old functions may find expression in new forms" ((Thompson 1977, p. 256)). The same can surely be said for the discipline of sociology; given the field's less veiled attempts to understand and explain the world in modeled forms it is of perhaps greater immediacy. An appreciation of context means an attention to the multiple factors that impinge on the experiences of individuals and groups as they produce meaning and sense of this lived experience.

Earlier I suggested that three broad factors need to be examined to understand the class consciousness of working class groups properly: their historical baggage, the particular constructs of time in which they live, and the forces within these constructs that bear on their interpretation of these experiences. The final category was expanded and explicated further in arguing that the social relations of the production process, the political geography of those relations, the local political culture in which they are played out, and the strategic exigencies of action for the maintenance and furtherance of these interests all play central roles in the development and reformulation of group interest and consciousness.

The preceding analyses suggest at the very least that none of these factors should be abandoned in attempts to understand and explain working-class interests and consciousness. In their inadequacies they possibly hint at other, perhaps equally important, factors in context. They also suggest that while the cradle of class



interest is the mode and social relations of production, such interests (and consciousness) germinate in the lived experience of these relations. Beyond the nasence of class structure lie the circumscribed spheres of power in which class is also experienced and through which working-class groups come to make sense of their lives and formulate their interests. Class always 'happens' in context.

In any given society in which social relations have been set in class ways, there is a cognitive organization of life which corresponds to the mode of production and the historically evolved class formations. This is the "commonsense of power"; it saturates everyday life; it is expressed more or less consciously in the overarching hegemony of the ruling class and its forms of ideological domination. The "theatre" of power is only one form of this domination.

But within and beneath this arch there are innumerable contexts and locations in which men and women, confronting the necessities of their existence, derive their own values and create their own culture intrinsic to their mode of life. ((E. P. Thompson 1977, p. 265))

In adopting this framework I am in essence changing one of the problems of interest from a question of time to a question of the context of that time. Such polarities as long- versus short-term, illusory versus promissory, or economism versus classism have little analytical utility once the context of experience and action is brought center-stage. As Berger and Offe have recently noted, Millian models tend to ignore questions of the context of interest generation altogether in their analytic agenda ((op. cit.)). As a result the understanding of the dynamics of interest formulation and class consciousness become severely limited to one context of choice.

One strain of currently popular Marxian analysis, however, does no better. From the preceding analyses we can see that judging interests and consciousness in terms of their illusory or promissory character would ignore the substance of the experiences of the working class groups that framed their concept of class interest.

In parallel fashion, the historical analyses of both Foster and Musson also fall short in their understandings of the generation of working-class consciousness in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. While the preceding analyses clearly have

shown that the articulated interests of workers were produced from the perspective of working-class subordination, they provide no hints of the revolutionary class consciousness that is so central in Foster's search for a working-class revolutionary Weltanschauung. To speak of the potential revolutionary class consciousness of the Spitalfield weavers, or even the cotton spinners of south-east Lancashire, is to speak in tongues.

What we have seen instead in the variations of the discourse of the groups that have been analysed is the production and growth among certain trade groups of new forms of a radical working-class critique of the social order. As Jones ((1977)) has suggested, this critique, built on the foundations of older ideologies, had its limitations. To the extent that the analyses have illuminated this emerging ideological structure they also show that Musson's analysis is severely limited in its concern for the immediacy of issues. The discourse we have examined certainly has shown that workers usually framed their grievances with elements of more encompassing ideologies. Musson's 'humdrum' issues of workers' struggles, far from wading in a shallow consciousness, were steeped in working-class ideologies which brought structure to their grievances and which made them interpretable to a variety of trade groups.

If, however, Thompson and the humanists fare best in the analysis, their position remains by no means pristine. What the preceding analyses show perhaps most clearly is that the organization of production was the most powerful determinant of the working-class articulations studied. The evidence stands in contrast to Thompson's assertions that "... it is impossible to give any theoretical priority" to the economic over the cultural and "that 'in the last instance' determination may equally well work its way through cultural as well as economic forms" ((1977, p. 265)). Similar assertions by Williams and other like-minded humanists only lead us sloshing about in

morasses of "complex interplays" which they vaguely describe. The studies above have to the contrary shown that experience, after all, is structured, and that workers' experiential understanding of their labor foremost is structured by the social organization of that process. More tentatively, this study has indicated that class power is diffused through other social structures; to understand the consciousness of workers we need to understand the proximate influence of these structures on workers' experiences. Careful study of the experiences of working-class groups can reveal the proximity of these structures and the variable role they play in framing these experiences.

In the final analysis, however, to understand how social structure impinges on and affects consciousness we need to study not the structures themselves but the acts that reflect awareness of them: the socio-drama of action, the cultural production and appropriation of symbols, and the discourse used to describe such structures. To understand actors' interests we need to start with their articulations. As Marx long ago noted, "Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical, real consciousness" ((Marx and Engels, p. 49; see also Wilkie)). Starting with the analysis of the structures in which discourse production takes place, and moving to an analysis of the socio-drama of the action in which it is produced, discourse can reveal a great deal about consciousness. The socio-drama of collective action is after all purposeful in its attempts to reveal the interests of the actors. As Wolf Lepenies suggests, "communication and interaction rituals are part of the mechanisms which mediate between the economically-determined class situation and the forms of culture and ways of life developed by (a) particular class" ((p. 493)).

In addition, this study tentatively has suggested that present theories of collective action can add to our understanding of the use of discourse in the articulation of interests. As Hugh Duncan notes of one the of the highest forms of

socio-drama,

From a sociological view, the drama of community is a drama of authority, a struggle by those in power, or those seeking power, to control symbols that are already powerful, or to create new symbols that will make orderly relationships that cannot be orderly through the use of traditional or sacred symbols. ((p. 64)).

The relationship between resource mobilization theory and the analysis of discourse thus is mutually informative. By understanding the ways in which discourse itself is a strategic resource in collective action we gain a keener appreciation of the finer points of discourse use and production. By putting the study of cultural production on par with material production and action, and in linking the two, the interests of all can be served best.

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This bibliography is divided into two parts. Part I lists theoretical, sociological and methodological works used in the preparation and writing of the study. Part II lists all historical works, i.e. works that discuss both issues of data and substantive subjects.

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