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WOMEN WORKERS AND TRADE UNION
PARTICIPATION IN SCOTLAND 1919-1939

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A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the
Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Glasgow

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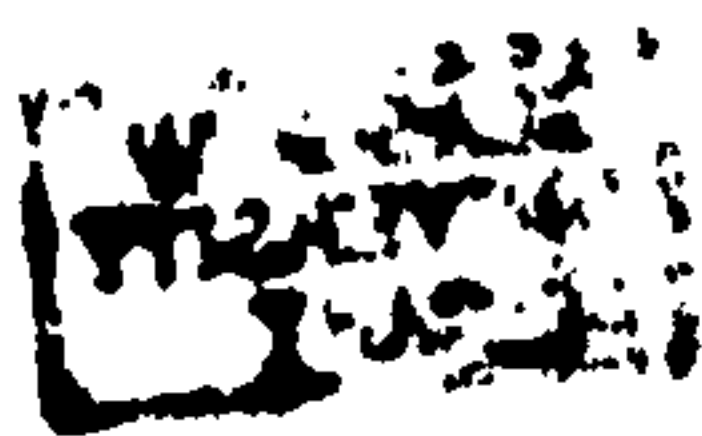
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SUMMARY

This thesis seeks to provide an assessment of women's work, their participation in the trade union movement and the extent of women's strike activity in Scotland in the period 1919-1939. It will highlight the position of women in the labour market, their continuing confinement to a narrow range of industries and occupations and the low paid and low status nature of their work. The weakness of trade union organisation among women workers in the inter-war period will be an important consideration. It will be shown that despite the massive influx of women in to the trade unions in the First World War and the attempts by trade unions and the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) to encourage greater numbers of women into the trade union movement, organisation among women in most industries remained weak throughout the entirety of the inter-war period. Therefore, this thesis will seek to offer a number of explanations for the lack of extensive trade union organisation among women during this period. These will include the occupational and industrial distribution of women workers, their low earnings, the impact of the depression, high unemployment and the failure of the General Strike. However, it will also be suggested that one of the reasons for the low level of trade union organisation among women may have been related to trade union policies and practices. The argument to be developed is that despite recruitment drives undertaken by trade unions and the STUC, trade unions themselves could often be very hostile to women workers and the failure to address issues of importance to women and the remoteness of the movement from the needs of potential women members could mean that there was very often little incentive for women to join trade unions.



In order to support this argument, it will be shown that trade unions employed exclusionary tactics either by limiting the entry of women into certain areas of work, attempting to exclude women from work altogether, via agreements with employers, or by excluding women from trade union membership. The strength of the view that women workers, especially married women, be prohibited from working in order to alleviate the high levels of unemployment among male workers, particularly in the 1930s, will be highlighted. It will be also be necessary to emphasise the ambiguous support for equal pay for women and the continuing strength of the commitment to the ideal of the family wage among trade unionists. A fundamental consideration of this thesis will be women's strike activity in the inter-war period. It will be shown that, despite the weakness of trade union organisation among women and the often unfavourable views expressed by trade unions on the issue of women and work, unorganised women workers, as well as those organised by trade unions, could embark on strike action in many sectors for a multiplicity of reasons. The argument to be advanced will be that women workers, irrespective of their domestic responsibilities, would protect their pay and conditions wherever possible despite the weakness of trade union organisation, their concentration in industries where trade unionism and militancy was weak and the low wage and low status nature of women's work.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AEU/ASE	-Amalgamated Engineering Union/Amalgamated Society of Engineers
AJSM	-Association of Jute Spinners and Manufacturers (Dundee)
AWCS	-Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries
CSA	-Clyde Shipbuilders Association
CSCA	-Civil Servants Clerical Association
DDJFWU	-Dundee and District Jute and Flax Workers' Union
ETS	-Edinburgh Typographical Society
NALGO	-National Association of Local Government Officers
NFGW	-National Federation of General Workers
NFWW	-National Federation of Women Workers
NUDAW	-National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers
NUDW	-National Union of Domestic Workers
NUGMW	-National Union of General and Municipal Workers
NUPBPW	-National Union of Printing, Bookbinding, Machine Ruling & Paper Workers
NUSEC	-National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship
NUWCM	-National Unemployed Workers Committee Movement
OWC	-STUC Organisation of Women Committee
RCA	-Railway Clerks Association
SUA	-Strathclyde University Archives
SUBC	-Scottish Union of Bakers and Confectioners
STA	-Scottish Typographical Association
STUC	-Scottish Trades Union Congress
SCWT	-Scottish Council for Women's Trades

- TGWU -Transport and General Workers’ Union
- TUC -Trades Union Congress
- UPOW -Union of Post Office Workers

INTRODUCTION

This thesis offers an examination of the experience of women workers in Scotland in the inter-war period and the focus will be working class women, their paid employment outside of the home, their participation in the trade union movement and the extent of their strike activity in Scotland in the period 1919-1939. The position of working class women in paid employment in Scotland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been the subject of several books, essay collections and unpublished theses within the last decade and this has reflected the growing interest in women's history in Scotland and the UK in general.¹ Nevertheless women's labour force participation in Scotland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has, until recent times, been largely overlooked in comparison to England and the study of women's history or feminist history has been slower to develop in Scotland than in England.² This has meant that the changes underway in the employment of working class women, (and middle class women), in Scotland in the inter-war period are still greatly under-researched and very little material has been published. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to gain a fuller picture of the experience of working class women in the labour market and their relation to the trade union movement and thereby contribute to their

¹ The most extensive survey of women's employment, trade union organisation and their involvement in strike activity during the late 19th and early 20th centuries is E Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland 1850-1914*, OUP, Oxford, 1991; Several collections of essays have also appeared including *Uncharted Lives: Extracts from Scottish Women's Experiences 1850-1982*, Glasgow Women's Studies Group, 1983 and E Gordon and E Breitenbach, (eds.), *The World is Ill Divided: Women's Work in Scotland in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, EUP, 1990. The latter collection provides studies of women's employment in a range of occupations such as bookbinding, agriculture, textiles, and domestic service. S Reynolds, *Britannica's Typesetters: Women Compositors in Edwardian Edinburgh*, EUP, Edinburgh, 1989, focuses on the printing trade, the development of trade union organisation, and the eventual exclusion of women from the trade. Several pamphlets, articles and a thesis have also appeared, for example, S Livingstone *Bonnie Fechtors: Women in Scotland 1900-1950*, Scottish Library Association, Motherwell, 1994; A J McIvor, 'Women and Work in the Twentieth Century' in A Dickson and J H Treble (eds.), *People and Society in Scotland, Vol. 3, 1914-1990*, John Donald, Edinburgh, 1992; L Jamieson, 'Limited Conventions: Working Class Mothers and Daughters in Urban Scotland c. 1890-1925', in J Lewis, *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850-1940*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986; G R Smith, *The Making of a Woman's Town: Household and Gender in Dundee, 1890-1940*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Stirling, 1996; D Cairns, *Women in the Clydeside Labour Movement, 1918-1939*, Unpublished M Phil Thesis, University of Strathclyde, 1996.

² Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 1; J McDermaid, 'Scottish Labour History: No Woman's Land?', *Labour History*

recovery from historical anonymity. In the UK, the inter-war period has been neglected by feminist historians and therefore, very few studies have been concerned solely with women's participation in the labour market³ and a great deal of the research carried out and which has been concerned with women workers in the first half of the twentieth century has focused on the employment of women during the two world wars and the effect of this massive increase in the use of female labour during these periods.⁴ Much less has been said about the experience of working class women in the aftermath of the great upheaval of war. A further important consideration of this thesis will be the extent to which women in Scotland participated in the trade union movement. Several UK studies have detailed the relationship between women workers and the trade union movement and the extent of trade union organisation among women in the inter-war period.⁵ However, the literature relating to Scotland is still quite limited and only a few studies have examined women's

Review, Vol. 58, 1, Spring, 1993, p. 52.

³ One of the most recent and extensive studies of women's employment in the inter-war period in the UK is M Glucksman, *Women Assemble: Women Workers in the New Industries in Inter-War Britain*, Routledge, London, 1990. The main concern of this study is the expansion in the use of semi-skilled women on assembly line work in the new industries in the South East and Midlands of England. Glucksman argues that it was these women engaged in assembly line work, (the most advanced of production techniques), in the main wealth producing industries who assumed a 'new and heightened significance within the industrial workforce.' (Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 3). Another study is D Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars 1919-1939*, Pandora, London, 1989, which devotes a chapter to women's employment.

⁴ Women's employment in the First World War continues to attract attention and the most recent volumes to appear are D Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls, Women Workers in World War One*, I B Taurus, London, 1998 and A Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War*, University of California Press, London, 1994; Earlier work includes G Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, Croom Helm, London, 1981; G Braybon and P Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars*, London, Pandora, 1987; P Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, Croom Helm, London, 1984; H R Higonnet, et. al., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, New Haven, Yale, 1987; A Marwick, *Women at War 1914-1918*, Fontana, London, 1977. Many other UK wide studies have also included an assessment of women's work in both world wars, nevertheless, little research has been carried out on women's work during this period in Scotland.

⁵ See for example, B Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*, Virago, London, 1984, (originally published in 1920); M Savage, 'Trade Unionism, Sex Segregation, and the State: Women's Employment in New Industries in Inter-War Britain', *Social History*, 13, 2, May 1988; S Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Unions*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1987; S Lewenhak, *Women and Trade Unions*, Benn, London, 1977; N Soldon, *Women in the British Trade Unions*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1978. These volumes, with the exception of Savage, all briefly consider trade union organisation among women in Scotland and the recruitment strategies adopted by trade unions to recruit women.

participation in the trade union movement during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁶ Additionally, while there is now evidence of women's strike activity in Scotland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,⁷ very little research has been undertaken to quantify strike activity among women in Scotland in the inter-war period⁸ and an examination of women's strike activity in the inter-war period will redress this.

Research undertaken on the relationship between women workers and the trade unions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has found that women in Scotland were on the margins of a trade union movement which represented male interests in the main and failed to address the problems of women's low wages and poor position in the labour market.⁹ Generally, women's waged labour was concentrated in a few sectors of economic activity and was characterised by low pay and poor working conditions. Women's work, as Gordon notes, could be tolerated by trade unions as long as it was confined to certain areas, did not encroach on the areas of men's work or undermine the right of men to work.¹⁰ This was coupled with the belief that women, especially married women should not work unless harsh economic conditions forced them to do so. However, fears that women workers would

⁶ The most extensive survey of women's participation in the trade union movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement*. Several articles have also appeared. See, S Lewenhak, 'Women in the Leadership of the STUC, 1897-1970', *Journal of the Scottish Labour History Society*, 7, July, 1973 which is concerned with women's representation at the STUC. An assessment of women's trade union membership in Scotland during the twentieth century is confined to E Breitenbach, *Women Workers in Scotland*, Pressgang, Glasgow, 1982 and E Breitenbach, 'A Comparative Study of the Women's Trade Union Conference and the Scottish Trade Union Conference', *Feminist Review*, 7, Spring 1981. These articles are concerned primarily with trade union organisation among women in the late twentieth century but briefly consider the position in the early twentieth century. McIvor, *op. cit.*, gives consideration to women's trade union organisation and the problems in organising women workers in the inter-war period.

⁷ Gordon, *Ibid.*

⁸ See for example, JD Young, *Women and Popular Struggles*, Mainstream, Edinburgh, 1985. This volume provides information on a very limited number of strikes in Scotland in the inter-war period. Smith, *Ibid.*, includes material on several strikes involving women in the Dundee jute trade between the wars. Some information can be gleaned from several other sources including Boston, *Ibid.* and Glasgow Labour History Workshop, *The Singer Strike, 1911*, Clydebank District Library, 1989.

⁹ Gordon, *pp.* 286-287.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

undercut male wages, that work was detrimental to the health of women and the family, combined with acute competition for jobs resulted in many trade unionists, particularly skilled men, wanting to exclude women from paid work.¹¹ Rather than considering how women's labour market position could be improved, trade unions, particularly craft unions, reacted to the threat of cheap female labour by attempting to exclude women from work and from trade union membership or at least control their entry to the labour market whenever they could, via agreements with employers.¹² The most notable examples of this took place in the printing and bookbinding trade unions.¹³ The trade union movement was committed to the family wage, the idea that a man's wage should be high enough to provide for a family and this reinforced the idea that men should have the first right to work, that women were dependants and their earnings were supplementary, even if they were often also breadwinners.¹⁴

It has been suggested that one outcome of the unfavourable treatment of women by trade unions was the weakness of trade union organisation among women.¹⁵ Nevertheless, in Scotland more women were drawn into the trade union movement during 1890-1914, due to the formation of unions for women and their recruitment by the general unions, but the vast majority of women were outside of the movement.¹⁶ However, the First World War drew many women into work and into the trade union movement for the first time. The impact of the upheaval of the war has prompted a great deal of debate among historians and there are

¹¹ See for example, Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement*, Reynolds, *Britannica's Typesetters*. For material on the UK see, S O Rose, 'Gender Antagonism and Class Conflict: Exclusionary Strategies of Male Trade Unionists in Nineteenth Century Britain', *Social History*, Vol. 13, 2, May 1988.

¹² Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80, p. 287.

¹³ See S Reynolds, 'Women in the Printing and Paper Trades in Edwardian Scotland', in E Gordon and E Breitenbach, *The World Is Ill Divided*, EUP, Edinburgh, 1990 and Reynolds, *Britannicas Typsetters*.

¹⁴ Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82, p. 286.

¹⁵ For example, see Lewenhak, *Women and Trades Unions*, and Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Unions*.

¹⁶ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 102, p. 212.

several interpretations of the effect of the war on women. The war has been viewed as a watershed, which broke down gender barriers, brought changes that outlasted the war and redirected the course of women's lives. Women became more assertive and new areas of work were opened up to them and they earned the vote as a direct result of their war work.¹⁷ In response, it has been argued more recently that the contribution women made during the war did not endure, that the war acknowledged that women were only emergency workers¹⁸ and did not bring about a profound changes in women's lives. It has been suggested that the war actually provoked a backlash¹⁹ against women workers and women in general and any of the change brought about by war was short lived as male hostility, as expressed through trade unions and employers, pushed women dilutees out of their new work.²⁰ In this period, trade unions were generally opposed to the large-scale introduction of female dilutees amid fears that female labour would permanently lower male wages and there is evidence of trade union hostility to women workers during the First World War.²¹ Nevertheless, the war gave an impetus to trade union organisation on a massive scale among women workers in the UK, particularly in the aftermath of the war. Therefore, it will be important to examine if the war had a profound effect on the working lives of Scottish women and to identify where there were changes, if any, and continuities in pre-war trends in women's employment. It will be necessary to consider if women's war time role and their increased trade union participation meant that there was a greater acceptance of women's work within the trade union

¹⁷ See, for example, A Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, The Bodley Head, London, 1965 and D Mitchell, *Women on the Warpath*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1966.

¹⁸ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*; Deborah Thom cited in J Humphries, 'Women and Paid Work', in J Purvis, *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945*, UCL, Press, London, 1995, p. 89.

¹⁹ See, for example, S Kingsley Kent, 'The Politics of Sexual Difference: World War One and the Demise of British Feminism', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 27, 1, 1988 and H L Smith, 'British Feminism in the 1920s', in H L Smith, (ed.), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, Edward Elgar, Hampshire, 1990.

²⁰ See, for example, Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* and Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*. Nevertheless, these accounts do recognise the more positive and liberating aspects of women's war work

²¹ Braybon *Ibid.*, and Braybon and Summerfield, *Ibid.*

movement and if their relationship to trade union movement improved. Furthermore, the question of whether the war had a long-term impact on women's trade union participation rates in the inter-war period or if the high levels of unemployment and economic depression of the inter-war years eroded this, will be considered in the following chapters.

Before examining trade union participation among women in Scotland in the inter-war period, chapter one will seek to provide an assessment of the changes in the pattern of women's employment in Scotland between the wars. It will be necessary, using statistical evidence, to identify the main areas of women's labour market activity and to highlight the changes underway in the employment of married and single women. An important dimension of this research will be a comparative perspective and this will take two forms. Firstly, the extent to which the Scottish experience followed the English experience and if there were systematic divergences. An important consideration will be the development of technologically advanced manufacturing industries which absorbed a great deal of female labour. However, these industries and the accompanying structural change were not a major feature of Scotland's economic development and were primarily confined to the Midlands and the south east of England. Secondly, there will be a consideration of the differing female labour markets in the Scottish regions and cities. Prior to the First World War, women were employed in a narrow range of industries and occupations, and were confined to work deemed to be unskilled or at best semi-skilled. However the war drew large numbers of female dilutees into new areas of work which 'offered an escape from jobs of badly paid drudgery.'²² Therefore, one aim of this chapter will be to consider if the sexual division of labour and the position of women workers in the labour force in Scotland before the war

²² Woollacott, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

was significantly changed by the exceptional circumstances of the war or if the sexual division of labour persisted into the inter-war period. Much of this chapter will consider the range of influences on the pattern of married and single women's employment. The 1930s, in particular was a time of depression and severe cyclical and structural unemployment and this raises questions about the effect of unemployment on the pattern of women's work in Scotland. Additionally, in the inter-war years, a woman's place, in terms of the dominant ideology, was still firmly in the home.²³ Therefore, the impact of this on married women workers will be addressed. The policies pursued by governments and employers in relation to women will also be considered as well as trade union agreements to limit the range of work available to women.

Despite the massive increase in trade union membership among women in the UK during the First World War chapter two will highlight the continuing low levels of trade union membership among women in Scotland and the intention of this chapter will be to speculate on some of the reasons why trade union organisation among women workers in the inter-war period was so weak. A number of explanations will be advanced to account for this position such as the impact of the depression, high unemployment and the General Strike. However, it will also be suggested that one of the reasons for the low level of trade union organisation among Scottish women may have been related to trade union policies and practices. Before discussing this question more fully in chapter four, chapter three will show that the trade union movement in Scotland, particularly the STUC Organisation of Women Committee and STUC affiliated trade unions, expressed a great deal of concern about the lack of extensive organisation among women and were extremely keen to extend female trade union

²³ Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

organisation. They sought to remedy this situation by employing a variety of recruitment strategies. The approaches they made to unorganised women workers will be critically assessed. The support women organisers derived from the rest of the trade union movement for their organising schemes will be discussed and it will be shown that women trade union organisers could not always win the support of trade unionists for their strategies to recruit more women into the movement.

The intention of chapter four will be to focus on trade union attitudes to women workers across a range of issues. Recent research has pointed to a backlash against women workers after the First World War and therefore, it will be necessary to consider the extent to which trade unions were part of this. This chapter will seek to highlight the exclusion of women, especially married women, from work and from trade union membership in several occupations, trade union collusion with employers to push women out of work and the emergence of the view that women workers especially married women, be prohibited from working in order to alleviate high levels of male unemployment. A subsidiary question will be the impact of the feminist movement and their demands on the trade union movement and the relationship of the trade union movement to feminism. It will be necessary to emphasise the often ambiguous support for equal pay for women and the continuing strength of the commitment to the ideal of the family wage among trade unionists. An additional concern will be to assess how far trade unions in Scotland took up and campaigned on issues of relevance to women workers. However, the argument to be developed is that despite trade union recruitment drives, trade unions themselves could often be very hostile to women workers and the failure to address issues of importance to women and the remoteness of the movement from the needs of potential women members could mean that there was very often little incentive for women to join trade unions.

Having considered the lack of trade union organisation among women in Scotland and the often unfavourable views expressed by trade unions on the issue of women and work, it will be shown in chapters five and six, that in the inter-war period, in a continuation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women employed in the textile and non-textile industries embarked on strike action on many occasions. The issues which brought women out on strike covered the range of traditional trade union concerns such as pay, working conditions, trade union recognition and solidarity issues. The argument to be advanced will be that despite low levels of trade union organisation, the low wage and low status nature of women's work, women workers, irrespective of their domestic responsibilities, like male workers, would protect their pay and conditions wherever possible and often resorted to strike action. Chapters five and six will attempt to draw out the comparisons between the incidence of Scottish women's strikes and those involving men and women in the UK. A subsidiary consideration will be the differences in the strike demands of women strikers employed in the textile and non-textile strikes. It will also be necessary to examine the support women workers received from trade unions when they went on strike, tensions between men and women while on strike, as well as the distinctive behaviour of women workers while on strike. Gordon has provided the evidence of women's militancy in the Scottish textiles industries, particularly the jute industry in Dundee, where women had a tradition of embarking on strike action during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁴ Therefore, research on women's strike activity during the inter-war period will help to determine how well this tradition held up as the textiles trades declined, particularly during the 1930s as large numbers of women were pushed out of work.

²⁴ Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 116- 136, pp. 169-211, pp. 237-260.

This thesis cannot be a complete history of women's work in Scotland in the inter-war period as the main concern will be the employment of working class women. The position of middle class women, who were a growing source of labour in this period, will not be considered. However, the participation of women in white-collar work will be assessed and some of these women workers would have formed part of the expanding lower middle class. Secondly, the majority of examples of women's work, in both the public and the private sector, and their trade union participation are drawn from the central belt of Scotland, the cities, particularly Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Dundee and to a lesser extent, the borders and the eastern counties of Scotland. This partly reflects the nature of the industrial structure, the concentration of women's employment and female trade union activity in these areas and the availability of the various sources used. In the absence of a large collection of material on Scottish women's work in the inter-war period, this thesis has been forced to draw on a diverse range of sources. The position of working class women within the domestic and the public sphere and the changes underway in the pattern of women's employment in Scotland received remarkably little attention from academics, social investigators or the government during the inter-war years. Nevertheless, using the material available, it is possible to piece together a picture of the position of women in the labour force and their involvement in the trade union movement and in strike activity. A wide range of trade union sources including minutes, journals and annual reports as well as material provided by the STUC such as conference reports and journals have been consulted and for comparative purposes, British TUC material has been utilised. Scottish trade union records, as well as being sparse and widely scattered are frequently inadequate, failing to provide information concerning the interests of their female membership, the extent of organisation among women or their

involvement in strikes, if any. Government reports and official statistics, particularly the Census of Population have been consulted, the latter in order to outline the changes in the pattern of women's employment. There are a number of well documented problems involved in the use of these documents, particularly the Census, which has failed to fully enumerate women's participation in paid employment and the problems in the use of the Census will be highlighted in chapter one. Employers' organisation reports, feminist journals and the records of voluntary groups have also been used. In the absence of official statistics on women's strike activity in Scotland between the wars, local and national newspapers have been used extensively to identify reports of women's strikes. To shed more light on women's work and trade unionism between the wars, these sources have been supplemented by interviews. In particular, interviews were conducted with a very small sample of working class women who were employed in a diversity of trades and who entered into employment in their teens in Glasgow and the West of Scotland during the late 1920s and 1930s. Therefore, by drawing on a wide range of the diverse sources that are available, this study will attempt to contribute to the growing body of work on women's history and more specifically the study of women in paid work and in the trade union movement in Scotland

CHAPTER ONE: THE PATTERN OF WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN SCOTLAND

This chapter will seek to identify and explain the extent and nature of women's employment in Scotland in the inter-war period. It is generally accepted that in the UK, the pattern of women's employment in the inter-war period underwent a transformation.¹ In particular, the UK experienced an expansion in the employment of women in the new, light industries producing consumer goods. This was coupled with an expansion in non-manual employment for women, such as office work and a gradual shift away from the traditional sources of employment for women which included textiles and clothing production, agriculture and domestic service. The purpose of this chapter is to consider the trends in the employment of Scottish women across a variety of occupational sectors and it will attempt to determine if the changes in women's employment experienced in the UK in the inter-war period were reflected in Scotland. Prior to the First World War, women workers in Scotland were largely segregated from their male colleagues. While there may have been local divergences, women were segregated both 'vertically', as the vast majority of working class women were largely excluded from the work considered to be more skilled and were confined to the poorest paid work and segregated 'horizontally' in that they were overwhelmingly concentrated in a few occupational sectors, (domestic service, clothing and textiles production). Therefore, consideration needs to be given to the extent to which women workers remained concentrated in the traditional areas of women's employment. The inter-war economy is characterised by depression and severe cyclical and structural unemployment, particularly in the 1930s, and the effect of mass unemployment on the pattern of women's employment in Scotland will be considered. The significance of marriage, age and geographical region in shaping the participation rates of married and single women in the Scottish labour market will also be examined. However, the

¹ J Lewis *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change*, Harvester, Wheatsheaf, London, 1984; Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 46-51.

effects of the expansion in women's work during the First World War on the position of women workers in the UK and Scotland are a necessary preliminary before determining the position of women in the labour force between the wars. Identifying the changes in the labour market in the Scotland in the inter-war period is dependent on the use of official statistics and before considering these questions, it is necessary to recognise the problems involved in the use of these sources.

Official statistics, especially the Census of Population and Ministry of Labour employment figures are unavoidable in determining the changing structure of women's employment in Scotland the inter-war period. Nevertheless, these statistics have to be approached with caution and the particular problems involved in the use of official statistics for working women have now been well documented by a number of historians including Glucksman, Gordon, Higgs and Roberts.² Much of the data presented in the Census is now regarded as being unreliable and difficult to interpret when considering women's participation in the labour market³ and this is especially true of the nineteenth century material which poses a number of problems for the historian. A number of criticisms have been made of the attempts to define and categorise the role of women in employment, and at home, through the use of official statistics. Feminist historians have argued that the Census defined women as dependants and classified them as such. For example, the Census classified women in terms of their husband's or father's employment such as 'wife of a farmer'. These classifications identified the assumptions made at the time about the position and role of women in society and underestimated their participation in the economy by ignoring and hiding their work. The nature of women's

² Glucksman, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39; Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-21; E Higgs, 'Women Occupations and Work in the Nineteenth Century Census', *History Workshop Journal*, 23, Spring 1987; E Roberts, *Women's Work, 1840-1940*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1988.

³ Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-20.

work, especially part-time, casual and seasonal employment, often carried out by married women and widows, reinforced the idea that women's work was of secondary importance. It is this work which is most likely to be omitted from the Census figures. Women's full-time employment in factories was also under-recorded but to a lesser extent.⁴ The problems involved in using the Census in the twentieth century cannot yet be fully appreciated as enumerators' returns are closed to public scrutiny for 100 years. However, it is very likely that the under-recording of part-time work, homework, casual and seasonal employment would have persisted.

The greatest obstacle for this survey is the lack of Census data for 1941 and this means that very little comparative work can be carried out between the 1920s and the 1940s. This is especially problematic as the most significant changes in women's employment in the UK occurred in the 1930s, particularly between 1932 and 1937.⁵ Statistics for this period are provided by the Ministry of Labour, but these do not include the work of uninsured workers including domestic servants, (a major source of employment for women in Scotland in the inter-war years), and the work of 14-16 year olds. Moreover, Ministry of Labour statistics are not directly comparable with Census figures.⁶ In addition to this, changes in the nature of the sub-classification of occupations occurred between the 1911 and 1951 Censuses and this can make direct comparisons difficult. This is especially true for the 1911 and 1921 Census where there are changes in almost all of the occupational classifications, especially textiles and commercial occupations. There are slight changes between the 1921 and 1931 Census, and the 1931 and 1951 Census, for example in the classification of metals, textiles, paper, printing,

⁴ Higgs, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁵ Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*

commercial and financial occupations. Changes in the age definition of economically active women further compounds the problem. In 1911 the age at which a female could be classed as gainfully occupied was 10, in 1921 this increased to 12 years and in 1931 to 14 years. Nevertheless, in the absence of comprehensive alternative sources the official statistics, whatever their limitations, remain the starting point for this study.

The employment of women expanded during the First World War as dilution⁷ allowed for the introduction of women into a variety of occupations requiring skill, dexterity and strength in the public and private sector. Women were drawn from the traditional women's industries such as textiles, domestic service and shop work and there was a great increase in the proportion of women employed in all occupations during 1914 and 1918. The numbers of women employed in industry, agriculture, transport, white-collar work and in the auxiliary forces, such as Voluntary Aid Detachment, which recruited many middle class girls, increased enormously. However, the numbers of women employed in iron and steel production, shipbuilding and marine engineering, on the railways and in gas, water and electricity supplies, remained small.⁸ This massive expansion in the use of female labour freed many women from low paid and low status domestic service and exposed them to the 'camaraderie' of large factories, higher wages, trade unionism and a wide range new of skills, previously denied to them.⁹ During the war many women (and men) had regular employment for the first time and opportunities for overtime,¹⁰ the worth of female labour received greater recognition and many women workers were 'openly in control of their own destinies' while husbands and fathers

⁷ Dilution involved the introduction of less skilled men and women into work formerly undertaken by workers of 'greater skill'. This was often accompanied by the simplification of machinery or the breaking up of a job into a number of simpler operations. (GDH Cole cited in Braybon and Summerfield, *op. cit.*, p. 37).

⁸ Thom, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

⁹ McIvor, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

¹⁰ P Thane, *The Foundations of the Welfare State*, Longman, London, 1982, p. 127.

were at war.¹¹ Some contemporary female commentators expected that women would maintain this new position in the labour market when war ended. Margaret Irwin,¹² secretary of the Scottish Council for Women's Trades, in her submission to the *Report of the Committee of Women in Industry* in 1919, believed that heavy war losses would result in a lack of skilled men to fill the positions they had vacated in 1914 and the nation would become far more dependent on women workers. She went as far as to claim that 'the labour of women and everything affecting their industrial conditions (would) attain a value and importance never previously reached.'¹³ Her contemporaries shared this view. Irene Andrews predicted that 'if the transition period after the war is safely passed, it appears that on the whole the war will have placed English working women on a new and higher plane.'¹⁴ In national publications such as *Common Cause* and *Woman Worker* it was hoped that increasing numbers of women in the UK would remain in new forms of work after the war. *Women's Industrial News* was less optimistic and anticipated that the cessation of hostilities would result in a bad period for labour, especially women's labour.¹⁵ The situation at the end of the war reflected this less favourable view and government attempts to deal with the post-war situation were chaotic. Promises to aid women by gradually releasing them from work were not fulfilled and munitions and engineering contracts were prematurely curtailed and women were laid off *en masse* from the occupations they had entered as dilutees.¹⁶ None of the recommendations in

¹¹ C Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939*, MUP, Manchester, 1988, p. 165.

¹² Margaret Irwin was best known for her work with the Scottish Council for Women's Trades (SCWT). This was a primarily middle class and philanthropic organisation which had focused on promoting legislation aimed at women and children, investigating and reporting on the conditions of their employment and encouraging women's trade unionism. (Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 217)

¹³ *The Report of the Committee on Women in Industry*, Cmd. 167, 1919, p. 18. (Hereafter referred to as Cmd. 167).

¹⁴ I O Andrews, *Economic Effects of the War Upon Women and Children in Great Britain*, OUP, New York, 1918, p. 176.

¹⁵ *Common Cause*, Journal of the National Union of Societies For Equal Citizenship (NUSEC), September 1915, p. 287; *Woman Worker*, December 1916, p. 9; *Women's Industrial News*, July 1917, No. 78, p. 6.

¹⁶ Braybon, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

the *Report of the Women's Employment Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction* that female dilutees be offered training schemes were carried out. The Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act, passed in 1918, also contributed to the removal of women from work and this legislation was the fulfilment of a government promise to the trade unions that the restrictive controls they had suspended to allow for dilution would be restored when war ended. The unions then acted quickly to remove women from war work.¹⁷ UK female employment statistics detail the extent to which women were removed from their wartime employment. In total, 775,000 women in industrial occupations were expelled from work.¹⁸

As the government intended, and under pressure from the Employment Exchanges, many women were forced back into the traditional women's industries or risked losing their unemployment benefits. In 1919, when unemployment among women war workers was widespread, unemployment policies discriminated against women and helped to push them out of the better forms of work they had entered during the war and onto the support of relatives or back into low paid employment. Not all women workers who had been thrown out of work could receive unemployment benefit and there were many exclusions. As a result there were marked reductions in the employment of women in the highly skilled and better-paid work.¹⁹ A lack of data makes it impossible to assess the immediate post-war employment situation in Scotland, but a brief survey of the views of employers in the private and public sector in the west of Scotland shows that they were largely determined to dismiss women from the work they had entered as dilutees. Both private and public sector employers expressed negative opinions about the performance of women in war work in *The Report of the Committee on*

¹⁷ Boston, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-135.

¹⁸ Drake, (1984), *op. cit.*, Table 3.

¹⁹ S Walby, *Patriarchy At Work: Patriarchal and Capitalist Relations in Employment*, Polity Press, Cambridge, pp. 157-158; P Summerfield, 'Women in the Two World Wars', *The Historian*, No. 23, 1989, p. 4.

Women in Industry, in 1919.²⁰ In the public sector, the Glasgow Corporation employed women in a wide range of activities. Corporation managers deemed that the performance of most female dilutees, some of whom were direct substitutes for male workers, had been inferior and upon the cessation of war they intended to discharge these women. Women's work had been commended in the lighting department, the electrical workshops and in the tramway garages. However, as tramway conductors, they were described as 'less courteous and attentive', they missed more fares, lost more tickets and cash, were less disciplined and 'they do not stick to their job'.²¹ A small number of female tram drivers 'did well' but most were inferior to their male counterparts and were more accident-prone.²² Women employed in the electrical department would only be retained in cleaning and clerical work. In the aeroplane workshops, women were described as having no 'aptitude for grasping methods and investigating principles behind their work.'²³ Some women did hold onto work as tramway workers, cleaners, clerks and as 'light labourers' in several Corporation departments after the war. Nevertheless, their numbers dwindled in the succeeding years.²⁴ Elsewhere in the public sector, post office managers in Glasgow claimed that the quality of work performed by women fell where 'initiative was required', the women also had a lesser 'sense of duty and moral

²⁰ Cmd., 167, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-24.

²¹ In a response to these criticisms, Margaret Irwin stated that 'it ought in fairness to the women to be borne in mind that they have been working under exceptional conditions...I should like to state...that while I have had ample opportunity for observing the work of the women conductors, I have met with no evidence of the discourtesy or disregard of the comfort of passengers and I am supported in this opinion by many other persons.' (Cmd., 167, *op. cit.*, p. 19).

²² This contradicts the opinion expressed on women tramway drivers by the tramways general manager in 1916 to *Common Cause*. According to the manager women were freer from accidents than male drivers. *Common Cause*, June 30, 1916, p. 152.

²³ Cmd. 167, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-24.

²⁴ In January 1922, the tramway dept. employed 286 female conductors. In 1919, 1,279 women had been employed in this work. During the war 4,821 women had been trained for this work. Around 230 women were retained in the lighting and gas depts., mainly as clerks, showroom attendants and labourers. By 1928 this figure had fallen to 110 women. By 1928, 412 women were retained in the tramways and bus depts. (*Glasgow Corporation Reports, 1921-1922*, Vol. 10, January 1922; November 1928).

responsibility'. After the war women would only be employed 'in simple routine work or sorting duties'.²⁵

Dilutees were similarly criticised by private sector engineering and shipbuilding employers in the west of Scotland. Government and employer association reports show that while a few firms praised women's work and intended to retain some women, most wanted either to dismiss women immediately from war work or gradually replace them with men in the immediate post-war years. Shipbuilding employers in particular had disapproved of the introduction of the female dilutees who entered into their businesses during the war.²⁶ *The Report of the Committee on Women in Industry*²⁷ shows that employers in the iron, steel and engineering sectors, remained largely opposed to the extension of women's work in the trade after the war. At the Lanarkshire Steel Co., women were not 'suitable' as labourers and the intention was to revert to male labour 'as soon as it is available.' At William Arrol, it was deemed that 'In the best interests of the women themselves it is desirable to replace them...with male labour.' Scotts Shipbuilding and Engineering Co. also wished to dispense with the small number of female dilutees. At engineers, Mavour and Coulson, women would not be retained as they were too expensive and more women than men were required to perform the same tasks. Locomotive engineers, Andrew and Barclay, stated that 'women have been of great service to us but not to such an extent that we would wish to continue them in our employment permanently.' Women's aptitude for training was also lower than boys. Managers at rangefinding factory, Barr and Stroud, considered that women's war work had been 'a sad necessity' and at Kilmarnock engineers, Dick, Kerr the employment of women was

²⁵ Cmd, 167, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

²⁶ Clyde Shipbuilders Association (CSA) records show that many members opposed the introduction of female labour into the trade. It was even suggested that foreign labour be imported to avoid using women who were viewed as being unsuitable for this work. (CSA, *Dilution of Labour in Shipyards*, March 1916).

²⁷ Cmd. 167, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-31.

deemed to have been a failure. The majority of these firms and others in the west of Scotland who had recruited women dilutees also declared that they would not employ women workers if equal pay was to be enforced following the war.²⁸ However, it appears that some women were retained in a small number of shipbuilding occupations after war. For example, 279 women were employed in shipbuilding and engineering occupations in 1911, this increased to 2,652 in 1921. Therefore, these figures would suggest that some women had retained work in these sectors after the war. However, by 1931 the number of women in this work had fallen to 1,419.²⁹

While employers could be negative about women workers, they often failed to take account of the fact that many women dilutees had little or no experience of work outside domestic service or had come from school or the home into war work. Many women combined both work and domestic responsibilities and often received inadequate training in their new positions. The temporary nature of this work would also have affected the extent to which women would learn new skills. As GDH Cole pointed out, women's labour 'usually failed to get a fair chance' and their failures had a greater impact than their successes. Employers frequently overlooked the fact that machinery had to be adapted to women's physique to maintain output and management failures were often blamed on women workers.³⁰ However, it has been argued, for example by McCalman, that if managers and employers had viewed women's labour as adequate substitutes for male workers, they would have been retained on the work they had entered as dilutees and employers would have taken the opportunity

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ C H Lee, *British Regional Employment Statistics*, CUP, Cambridge, 1979, Series B, County and Regional Employment.

³⁰ GDH Cole, *Trade Unionism and Munitions*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1923, p. 217.

presented to them to employ women workers at cheaper rates after the war.³¹ However, this argument presupposes that employers were always keen to maximise profits by employing cheaper female labour. Employers were also influenced by cultural definitions of the work that was deemed to be suitable for women and therefore, employers would not always choose to replace expensive male labour with cheaper female labour, even if women workers could do a job just as well as male workers. Nevertheless, the large numbers of women removed from war work in Scotland and the rest of the UK did not return to the home and they continued to seek employment and as Rowbotham³² points out, the capitalist economy needed women's labour power because there was no alternative supply of cheap, unskilled and non-unionised workers. For this reason, as the Census figures presented below on Table 1 indicate, the absolute level of women employed in Scotland rose throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The female participation rate rose very slowly in the period 1911-1931 and this reflected the UK trend. The percentage of women in the labour force in Scotland also rose very slowly in the period 1911-1951, but this also followed the trend in England and in Wales and this is shown on Table 2 below.

³¹ J McCalman, 'The Impact of the Great War on Female Employment in England', *Labour History*, November 1971 cited in Braybon, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

Table 1: The Number of Women and Workforce Participation Rate in Scotland and the UK, 1901- 1951, (in 000's)

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951
Total Female Population at Employable Age	1790.2	1931.6	1967.1	1909.5	2046.1
Total Employed	591.6	593.2	638.6	667.3	667.9
Participation Rate	33.0%	30.7%	32.5%	34.9%	32.6%
UK Participation Rate	na	35.3%	33.1%	34.2%	32.7%

Source: The Scottish data in this table, with the exception of the 1911 material, is from the *Census of Scotland* in McIvor, (1992), p. 139; the UK participation rate is from M Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1959*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1992, p 91; the 1911 material is my calculation from the census data. *NB* The data for 1911 is based upon a definition of economically active women over the age of 10, the 1921 is 12 and 1931 data is 14.

Table 2: Women as a Percentage of the Labour Force in Scotland and England and Wales, 1911-1951

	1911	1921	1931	1951
Scotland	28.7	29.1	29.9	30.2
England & Wales	29.7	29.5	29.7	30.8

Source: *Census of Scotland 1911-1951* and J Lewis, *Women in England, 1870-1950*, Wheatsheaf, 1984, Sussex, p. 147.

Economically active women in Scotland in the inter-war period were largely young and single. Almost 86% of women workers in 1931 were single, the equivalent percentage for England and Wales was lower, reflecting the higher percentage of married women in the labour force. This is shown on Table 3 below. In Scotland, the proportion of single women workers declined very slightly in the 1920s, prior to declining substantially between 1931 and 1951, following the trend in England and Wales. This decline was caused in part by the steep rise in the marriage rate³³ in Scotland, and in the rest of the UK, which underwent a temporary

³² S Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It*, Pluto Press, London, 1973, p. 128.

³³ Number of marriages per 1,000 unmarried women over the age of 15.

decline from 40.6 in 1921 to 34.9 in 1931, the result of losses sustained in the male population during the War, before rising steeply from the mid 1930s onwards to 45.5 in 1939. The low birth rate during the inter-war years also produced fewer teenage female workers. Almost two thirds of all single, married and widowed female workers in 1931 were aged 14 to 29. In comparison, male workers were more evenly spread across the age ranges and approximately 40% of male workers were between the ages of 14 to 29 and 45% of all male workers were within the age range 35 to 54. However, a substantial proportion of all women workers aged 35 to 54 were also in employment, particularly married women. Half of all married women workers were aged between 35 and 54 and many of these women would have returned to work after raising a family. More than two thirds of all single women workers were aged between 14-29, but large numbers of these women continued to be dependent on their earnings until retirement age and half of all single women aged 55-59 and 40% of single women aged 60-64 were recorded as economically active by the 1931 Census. Older women workers were severely disadvantaged in the labour market and they regularly encountered difficulties in securing employment and older single women found it harder than men of a similar age to find work. They were more likely to be unemployed than younger women, who with less work experience could be paid less. To combat these problems the Over Thirty Association was formed in the 1930s in the UK to aid both working and middle class women in their attempts to find employment.³⁴ The participation of widows in the labour force in Scotland continued to be higher than that of married women until the 1931 Census, shown on Table 3, and this is unsurprising given that widows were entirely dependent on their own earnings. However, the proportion of widows in the workforce actually declined in the 1920s even though the total number of widows had increased. Of all widows, the proportion in work declined from 21.4%

³⁴ A H Halsey, *Trends in British Society Since 1900*, Macmillan, London, 1972, p. 44; Lewis, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 152; Boston, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

in 1921 to 18.1% in 1931. One of the reasons for these falling participation rates was the introduction of the Widows Pension Act in 1925 which brought relief to many poor widows who had relied on employment to keep their children out of the poor law system.³⁵ Even so, widows remained a significant source of female labour and their participation in the workforce again increased following the Second World War.

Table 3: Female Employment in Scotland, England & Wales by Marital status, 1911-1951

Scotland	Married	Single	Widowed/Divorced
1911	5.3	87.3	7.4
1921	6.3	86.7	7.0
1931	8.5	85.9	5.6
1951	23.4	69.0	7.3
England and Wales	Married	Single	Widowed/Divorced
1911	14	77	9
1921	14	78	8
1931	16	77	7
1951	40	52	8

Source: *Census of Scotland* in McIvor, *op. cit.*, p142 and J Lewis, *Women in England, 1870-1950*, Wheatsheaf, Sussex, p. 152.

Table 4: Married Women in Employment in Scotland, 1911-1951, (as a Percentage of the total number of married women)

	1911	1921	1931	1951
Scotland	4.1	4.8	6.4	14.8

Source: *Census of Scotland 1911- 1951*

³⁵ M Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1959*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1992 p. 92.

The proportion of married women in the female labour force in Scotland underwent a slow but steady increase, from 5.3% in 1911 to 8.5% in 1931, shown on Tables 3 and 4. The proportion of all married women in employment also continued to rise. However, the figure for England and Wales in 1931 was higher at 10.4 increasing to 14.8. These Scottish participation rates are likely to have increased in the 1930s, but the absence of the 1941 Census means that it is impossible to identify any changes. These increases took place despite the assertion in the 1919 *Report of the Committee on Women in Industry*, that 'the employment of married women outside their homes is not to be encouraged'.³⁶ Chapter four will show in greater detail that the combination of a post-war press-led campaign, supported by parliament and male and female trade unionists, pressurised married women into returning to the 'domestic idyll'. Nevertheless, married women, like their single and widowed counterparts continued to provide an essential element in the workforce. The expansion in their participation in the labour force by 1951 reflected the growth of part-time work after the Second World War. Industry and government viewed this work as being suitable for married women who could remain in the labour force and still fulfil their responsibilities as wives and mothers.³⁷ Even so, their participation rates remained significantly lower than those of single and widowed women until 1951. This is shown on Table 3. Comparisons show that the proportion of married women in the labour force in Scotland was around half the level for England and Wales in the inter-war period. However, following the trend in England and Wales, the proportion of married women in the labour force increased in Scotland while the proportion of single women declined. The lower rate among married women in Scotland was the continuation of a trend which had its origins in the nineteenth century. As Gordon argues, the notion that non-working wives should be supported by a male breadwinner was accepted in

³⁶ Cmd. 167, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

³⁷ Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 46; Lewis, (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 152-153.

Scotland, but it is unlikely that lower participation rates among married women reflected a more pervasive ideology of domesticity than in England. She points out that married women would work in Scotland wherever there was a demand for their labour or restricted opportunities and low wages for male workers. Instead, the lack of opportunities for regular work for married women, especially in areas dominated by heavy industry, under-representation in official figures as well as social and cultural factors may have resulted in a lower participation rate.³⁸

In the inter-war period, married women in Scotland continued to seek work primarily to augment the family income. Feminist historians have shown that the concept of the 'family wage', the idea that a male breadwinner's income was sufficient to account for all family members, was unattainable for most working class families during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and only a minority of working class men ever earned enough to support their families without relying on contributions from other family members. Among those families who were unable to subsist on a male wage alone, married women were compelled to work and their labour market participation was dependent on the availability of work, local custom, industrial structure, family size, the age of their children and the level and regularity of their husbands wage.³⁹ By the inter-war period, there had been an improvement in the standard of living for working class families in some areas of Britain. Poverty levels had fallen in the UK in the inter-war period in comparison to the pre-First World War period, mainly as a result of increased real wages and falling birth rates. In the 1920s, the majority of male workers were

³⁸ Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-23.

³⁹ See S Alexander, A Davin, and Eve Hostettler, 'Labouring Women: A reply to Eric Hobsbawm', *History Workshop Journal*, 8, 1979; M Barratt and M McIntosh, 'The Family Wage: Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists', *Capital and Class*, 11, 1980; E Roberts, 'Women's Strategies, 1890-1940', in J Lewis, (ed.), *Labour and Love, Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850-1940*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986.

covered by health and unemployment insurance and the dole covered the worst excesses of poverty. In the 1930s, the Public Assistance Committee and the Unemployment Board helped to reduce acute poverty.⁴⁰ However, social investigations undertaken in a number of English towns and cities revealed that large numbers of working class families continued to live below the poverty line and the primary reason for this was low male wage levels, followed by unemployment.⁴¹ For example, Bowley's survey of English towns in 1921 estimated that only 41% of all working class families were dependent on a man's wage alone. Therefore, married women had no option but to contribute to the family income.⁴² In the regions of Britain, like Clydeside, where the old staple industries declined, married women may have sought employment in greater numbers in both the informal and formal economy. This would have been in response to a number of factors including short-time working, the irregular earnings of male workers and family poverty resulting from long term male unemployment. Unemployment levels were consistently higher in Scotland than in other areas of the UK during the inter-war period, with the exception of the North East of England during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Unemployment assistance payments averaged only 45%-66% of former wage levels and where unemployment was highest, local wage levels were pushed down. Families with dependent children in these circumstances found it difficult to remain above the poverty line and high unemployment levels in depressed areas of the UK, may have spurred married women, the young in particular, in to taking any job they could find.⁴³ As Mourby found in her study of the wives of the long term unemployed in Teeside, (like

⁴⁰ K Laybourn, *Britain on the Breadline*, Allan Sutton, Stroud, 1990, pp. 46- 48.

⁴¹ There appear to have been no such surveys undertaken in Scotland. However a study of York by Rowntree in 1936 found that more than 30% of the working class population lived in poverty. Other investigations, (using different definitions of poverty), carried out in the 1920s and 1930s in Bristol, Southampton and Merseyside found that 10-20% of working class families lived in poverty. (S Constantine, *Social Conditions in Britain 1918-1939*, Methuen, London, 1983, p. 21).

⁴² H Land, 'The Family Wage', *Feminist Review*, 6, 1980, p. 60.

⁴³ T C Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People, 1830-1950*, Fontana, London, 1987, p. 114; Constantine, *op. cit.*, p. 22; Beddoe, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

Clydeside this area was dominated by heavy industry), during the inter-war period, married women took in washing for wealthier families, others worked as seamstresses or went to work cleaning and washing as well as looking after the family finances. Some women also set up entrepreneurial schemes such as baking food to sell on the streets. Children also continued to support their families by finding casual employment.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, as Pedersen argues, most wives of unemployed men probably did not react to their husbands' unemployment by going out to work. She cites the work of Percy Ford who found, by analysing Unemployment Assistance Board (UAB) data in the late 1930s, that when a husband or father was made unemployed it was children rather than wives who were relied on to earn a wage and this was because in most areas of the UK there was little work available for married women. UAB regulations may have discouraged women from working as their income would count against their husbands insurance benefits, if these had been exhausted and he was receiving means tested benefit. Such women may also have turned down work fearing that it would undermine their husbands' status as breadwinner.⁴⁵ Pugh points out that extensive unemployment in the UK 'stiffened male antagonism' towards married and single women workers. While the attitudes of husbands, employers, trade unionists and governments to women workers differed, female workers were frequently viewed as preventing unemployed men from finding work and this may also have dissuaded many married women from seeking work.⁴⁶ However, in the inter-war period, substantial numbers of married women in Scotland would have sought work in response to low male wage levels and high unemployment and it is possible that much of this work would not have been recorded by the Census. This would have

⁴⁴ K Mourby, 'The Wives and Children of the Teeside Unemployed, 1919-1939', *Oral History*, 11, 2, 1983, pp. 56-59.

⁴⁵ S Pedersen, *Family Dependence and the Origin of the Welfare State: Britain and France*, CUP, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 311-312.

⁴⁶ Pugh, *op. cit.*, p. 90

been dependent on local unemployment levels and the work available for women. For example, Helen, a former cap maker in a clothing factory in Glasgow recalled that following her marriage in 1921 she found work as a shop cleaner in the city for a few hours during the week.⁴⁷ Nessie entered work in the mid 1920s as a domestic servant in an institution in Lesmahagow before her marriage and continued to work for three hours a day during the week in the 1930s as a “general worker” washing steps and porches, Hoovering, and cleaning bedrooms in private homes on the Southside of Glasgow.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, there appears to be little information on the position of married women in the informal economy in the inter-war period, but studies carried out in the early twentieth century into this work in Scotland found that married women were often employed on a temporary, seasonal or casual basis in homework making a variety of goods, employed as child minders or charwomen, taking in lodgers or washing and sewing clothes for other people.⁴⁹

Increasing labour market participation among married women may have mirrored greater opportunities for work, especially in the areas where the new industries expanded.⁵⁰ However, as will be shown below, these industries did not develop to any great extent in Scotland during this period. Nevertheless, it has been suggested by Davidoff and Westover that there may have been a partial shift away from the ideal of the non-working wife to the desirability of wage earning in the UK as a whole, particularly in the late inter-war period, especially among young married women and their husbands.⁵¹ However, as Roberts has argued, married women often preferred to have a reduced workload rather than earn extra income if their husbands wage

⁴⁷ Helen was born in 1900 in the Gorbals in Glasgow.

⁴⁸ Nessie, born in Canada in 1909 where her mother and father had been employed as domestic servants.

⁴⁹ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 22-23; Roberts, (1986), *op. cit.*, p. 231.

⁵⁰ Beddoe, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁵¹ L Davidoff and B Westover, ‘Women’s World in England 1880-1939’, in L Davidoff and B Westover, *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Worlds*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1986, p. 18.

was able to feed, clothe and house the family.⁵² Perhaps this is unsurprising, and as Ray Strachey⁵³ noted in 1934, 'even under the best of conditions it is not very easy to be a married woman worker, but as things are, it is intolerably hard.' Large numbers of married women were driven to seek 'low grade work' because of their financial needs and married women could frequently 'only obtain rates of pay which undercut other workers. She lives under such pressure and in such poverty that her sickness is unduly high and bit by bit she becomes an unsatisfactory worker...'⁵⁴ However, Roberts' suggestion that working class women who remained in the workforce following marriage were frequently viewed as 'drudges' rather than 'emancipated' women by their peers⁵⁵ may have been eroded to some extent towards the end of the inter-war period.

Increasing participation rates among married women in Scotland, may also have been influenced by changes in the birth rate and family size. Average family size⁵⁶ in Scotland fell from 3.02 in 1921 to 2.29 in 1941 and the crude birth rate per 1,000 population declined from 23 in 1921-1925 before falling steadily to 17.6 between 1936-1940.⁵⁷ The birth rate and average family size in Scotland were higher than in England and Wales but Scottish women were still completing families in a shorter space of time, allowing them, potentially, to find employment outside the home. However, negative social attitudes may have prevented many married women from finding work. Smaller family size also meant that children were more dependent on the parental home for longer and a mother would be required to concentrate

⁵² E Roberts cited in R E Pahl, *Divisions of Labour*, Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 76-77.

⁵³ Ray (Rachel) Strachey, was a prominent feminist, writer, novelist, suffragette and National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and NUSEC organiser, and she was a frequent commentator on the position of women in the workforce in the UK in the inter-war years. (B Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists Between the Wars*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987, pp. 158-166.)

⁵⁴ R Strachey 'Married Women and Work', *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 45, March 1934, p. 335.

⁵⁵ Roberts in Pahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

⁵⁶ For all women married women under the age of 45.

⁵⁷ Halsey, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

more attention upon them.⁵⁸ Childcare was imperative for married women with young children who wanted to work outside the home and a slight increase in the provision of nursery schools may have allowed more married women to grasp employment opportunities. Nurseries and crèches were provided by the Board of Education, the Ministry of Health, employers with a large female workforce, such as Dundee jute employers, and charitable and community groups. However, provision remained low and nurseries often failed to meet the needs of working women. Stigma frequently attached their use and places often existed only for the unmarried, deserted or widowed, who were considered to be working of necessity. Most working women with children would have continued to be dependent on relatives, neighbours and friends for child care and child care provided by other married women was commonplace in towns where there was a great demand for female labour, such as textile towns including Dundee.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, increasing labour market participation rates among married women in Scotland concealed their exclusion from work through the operation of a semi-official marriage bar that ensured that many married women found it impossible to continue working following marriage. Introduced in the late nineteenth century, the marriage bar became increasingly important in the inter-war years. There are several possible reasons for this. For example, in the inter-war period the idea that married women should be in the home was strengthened and there was a renewed emphasis on the traditional function of women as the manager of the household. There was much propaganda about the joys of domesticity and of being a housewife who could take pride and pleasure in the joys of the home and in buying consumer goods. Magazines, newspapers and a wide range of other material aimed at women

⁵⁸ Pugh, *op. cit.*, p. 91; Halsey, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁵⁹ U Brown and L Tait, *Working Miracles: Experiences of Jobs and Childcare*, Scottish Low Pay Unit, 1992, pp. 23-25; Summerfield, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 20; Roberts, (1986), *op. cit.*, p 234; Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

emphasised how important childcare and housework were for society. This was particularly useful in a period when unemployment levels were high.⁶⁰ The marriage bar was also imposed in response to the rising levels of unemployment in the inter-war period and during the depression, the removal of married women from work became more widespread.⁶¹ Furthermore, as will be shown more fully in chapter four, the idea that married women obtained jobs at the expense of unemployed men and single women and that it was unjust for two incomes to go into one home, flourished in the inter-war period. In 1922, the government introduced a statutory marriage bar to public service, which affected women teachers and civil servants and other public employees and married women were forced to resign from work on marriage unless their employer made a special case for them.⁶² The marriage bar continued to be a feature of women's occupations apart from the lowest paying, until post 1945. Many employers refused to hire either working or middle class women in factory and shop work as well as the 'white blouse' occupations such as teaching, civil service, post office and clerical work and even in some branches of the textile industries. This was, as Summerfield suggests, one of the most concrete ways in which the ideology of the male breadwinner and the female dependent was expressed.⁶³ It served to reinforce the idea that married women should not work, but as Giles notes, many married women did not want to continue working after marriage and viewed the marriage bar as 'common sense' and self evident that marriage meant

⁶⁰ Pugh, *op. cit.*, p. 83; Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 6; Braybon, *op. cit.*, pp. 220-222.

⁶¹ Walby, *op. cit.*, p. 171. After the First World War a great deal of concern was expressed at the high rate of infant mortality and the health of children. Attempts to improve health focused on the role of the mother and therefore, it followed through that women's prime responsibility was to the home and the care of infants. Birth rates were also falling in the inter-war period and this may also have contributed to the strengthening of the marriage bar as women were needed as mothers and housewives in order to bear children and replenish the generation depleted by the First World War. (Beddoe, *op. cit.*, p 4; J Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood*, Croom Helm London, 1980, p. 65).

⁶² J Hannam, 'Women and Politics', in J Purvis (ed.), *Women's History: Britain 1850-1945*, UCL, London, 1995, p. 240; O Banks, *The Politics of Feminism, 1918-1970*, Edward Elgar, Hampshire, 1993, pp. 73-74; Roberts, (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 7; Glucksman, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-23; Summerfield, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁶³ Summerfield, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 14.

becoming a full time housewife.⁶⁴ As Colina, a former domestic servant in a private house in Glasgow in 1930s, explained, the position adopted by herself and her friends in relation to work was:

I've got a job and I'm okay and I'm only in this job until I get married, which was a girl's attitude in those days. That's what was for you. You really weren't expected to be interested in a career or anything else. Your career was to get married and have kids and that was the attitude then.⁶⁵

This was, as Strachey observed, the 'stopgap' or 'meanwhile' attitude to work and one which was particularly evident among women employed where wage levels were not high and the chances of promotion were remote. Most working class women's occupations fell into these categories. As she noted, the idea of marriage and a 'nice little home' often appeared more attractive in comparison to remaining in a 'dismal' job even when the reality of being a housewife for many women was far from ideal and meant 'struggling against poverty, dirt, illness and disappointment'.⁶⁶ The social stigma that accompanied working after marriage could be considerable, even more so for those women who aspired to be middle class, such as those women employed in white-collar work. The marriage bar allowed for an artificially high labour turnover as women who married were expelled from work to make way for less experienced and lower paid younger women. However, the marriage bar was not imposed solely because it could be economically beneficial. Grint, citing the post office as an example, shows that post office management views on the employment of married women highlighted

⁶⁴ J Giles, 'A Home of One's Own: Women and Domesticity in England', 1918-1950, *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 16, 3, 1993, p. 242.

⁶⁵ Interview with Colina 1996, former Domestic Servant, Born Dalmaur, 1914. Her father had been employed as a shipyard boliermaker and her mother was a housewife.

⁶⁶ R Strachey, *Careers and Openings for Women*, Faber and Faber, London, 1937, p. 51, p. 57.

the combination of moral and patriarchal arguments against their employment. In their opinion married women:

would be diverted from their official work by their home attachments...the occurrence of confinements would or should cause prolonged absences: while the occasional absence would be caused by the occurrence of sickness in their families; and some gentlemen thought that the appearance of women in the family way would be undesirable.⁶⁷

In Scotland, the formal and informal marriage bar existed in a wide range of trades, but the following examples show that married women discharged from their work often formed a reserve army to be re-employed whenever necessary. In the Edinburgh laundries, married women were not employed by the 'best firms', except in holiday or rush periods. Such employers would always have a supply of cheap, trained married women employees when required and the outcome of this would be depressed wage levels in the trade. Employers often justified the dismissal of married women on the grounds that they were more expensive to employ and promote compared with younger, single women. Edinburgh laundry employers maintained that married women were less reliable than single women and the marriage bar was enforced to give other workers a greater chance of promotion. This arrangement apparently not only suited the employer but the married women too.⁶⁸ The marriage bar may have benefited some single women who wished to pursue a career, but the likelihood of large numbers of single women being promoted, who themselves were likely to leave work and get married

⁶⁷ K Grint, 'Equal Pay in the Post Office', *Sociology*, 22, 1988, p. 97.

⁶⁸ J Holford, *Reshaping Labour; Organisation Work and Politics, Edinburgh in the Great War and After*, Croom Helm, Kent 1988, p. 45; N Milnes, *A Study of Industrial Edinburgh, 1923-1934*, Vol. 1, PS King, London, p. 257.

would have been remote. At the North British Rubber Co. in Edinburgh, married women were expected to leave on marriage only to be re-employed as seasonal workers. The textile bleaching and dyeing firm, Pullars in Perth operated this policy and hundreds of women, most of whom were married, were re-employed at peak periods.⁶⁹ These are only a few examples and as the imposition of a marriage bar was at the discretion of individual employers this was likely to have been widespread.

Married women employed by the public sector could be dismissed from work by their employers, especially those women whose husbands were in employment. The Glasgow Corporation, like several other councils, including the London Corporation, barred married women from work. In 1921, a motion from Glasgow Councillor James Stewart proposed that:

the services of married women in the employment of the Corporation whose husbands are in regular employment be dispensed with forthright where suitable male or female employees can be got and that the services of any married woman whose husband is at present unemployed be dispensed with on her husband obtaining employment other than casual employment provided that for the purposes of this instruction women living apart from their husbands shall be regarded as unmarried.⁷⁰

There was some opposition to this within the Corporation but the motion was passed. In the early 1920s, married women workers dismissed from their positions by the Glasgow Corporation included three female doctors, school cleaners and charwomen whose husbands

⁶⁹ Holford, *op. cit.*, p. 77; *Perthshire Advertiser*, April 5, 8, 1933.

⁷⁰ *Glasgow Corporation Reports*, Vol. 10, August 16, 1921.

were considered to be able, financially to support their wives.⁷¹ The extent to which women at the Corporation opposed this policy is unknown, but the marriage bar imposed by the Corporation did meet with resistance and women's groups in Glasgow were infuriated by the Corporation's decision and sent a deputation to the Lord Provost to protest against this policy. The deputation included representatives from the Scottish Council for Women's Trades, the Women's Educational Association, the Women's Guild of Empire,⁷² the Glasgow Society for Equal Citizenship,⁷³ and the Glasgow Women's Citizens Association.⁷⁴ Mrs Fyfe, president of the latter organisation criticised the Corporation and argued that all Corporation workers whose partners also earned an income should be removed from work irrespective of sex or efficiency.⁷⁵ The decision by the Glasgow Corporation to remove married women from work was reported in *The Woman's Leader (Common Cause)*, who pointed out that this decision was supported by the Labour Party in the city even though they were opposed to employers inquiring into the private life of his or her employee.⁷⁶ In 1927, the Open Door Council⁷⁷ and the Equal Citizenship Society protested in Edinburgh against the dismissal of married women doctors from local authority employment.⁷⁸ In 1933, married women school cleaners in Perth with working husbands were also excluded from work. Only single women or women whose husbands were unemployed were to be considered for employment.⁷⁹ In the private sector, the Edinburgh printers would only employ married women in exceptional circumstances, furniture

⁷¹ TUC, Women In Industry, '*The Employment of Married Women*', c. 1922.

⁷² This may have been the Women's League of Empire, a patriotic organisation of working class women. (P Graves, *Labour Women: Women in British Working Class Politics*, CUP, Cambridge, 1994, p. 122).

⁷³ This was the Glasgow branch of NUSEC, the successor to NUWSS. It continued to campaign for equal pay, divorce law reform as well as equal voting rights for women. (J Liddington and J Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, Virago, London, 1978, pp. 258-259).

⁷⁴ This was a branch of NUSEC recruiting mainly working class women. (Graves, *op. cit.*, p 122).

⁷⁵ *Common Cause*, December 16, 1921, p. 546.

⁷⁶ J Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace*, Macmillan, London, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

⁷⁷ This was a Lady Rhondda led offshoot of NUSEC. It was established in 1926 to fight for equal economic opportunities for women and campaigned against sex based protective legislation. (Graves, *op. cit.*, p. 122).

⁷⁸ *Glasgow Herald*, July 19, 1927.

⁷⁹ *Perthshire Advertiser*, April 12, 1933.

manufacturers in Scotland did not usually employ married women with working husbands and preference was given to single women.⁸⁰ It seems that the Hawick Hosiery Employers, at least in the period immediately following the First World War, removed married women from work on the grounds that the 'Scottish workmen do not like their wives to go out to work' and they were convinced that 'the married women will in nearly all cases return home'.⁸¹ Employers in both the private and the public sector, such as local authorities, could also dismiss married women from work on the grounds that they were less efficient workers.⁸² As Strachey noted, married women workers could be perceived by employers as an 'insufficient lot' and as she suggested, the source of their inadequacy as workers was the strain of combining paid employment and domestic responsibilities and the high rates of sickness which stemmed from this.⁸³

Government legislation did little to impede the expulsion of married women from their work in both the private and public sector. The Sex Discrimination (Removal) Act in 1919 may have removed some of the barriers to the entry of middle class women into the professions but it was ineffectual in preventing the implementation of the marriage bar in the public sector and as Lewis points out, while married women were not disqualified from work they were not entitled to employment either. Additionally, the Married Women's Employment Bill in 1927 to prevent the dismissal of married women workers from the public services was not approved by the Conservative government.⁸⁴ Married women were also discriminated

⁸⁰ Milnes, *op. cit.*, p. 191; National Confederation of Employers Organisations, *Questionnaire on the Forty Hour Week and the Absorption of the Unemployed*, 1933.

⁸¹ Cmd., 167, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁸² Pugh, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁸³ Strachey, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

⁸⁴ Lewis, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 199; Pugh, *op. cit.*, p. 93. During debates in 1927 against the introduction of the Married Women's Employment Bill, there were expressions of revulsion from MP's at the 'travesty of nature' presented by working mothers and the possibility that a father might be at home looking after children. (J Lewis, 'Dealing With Dependency: State Practices and Social Realities 1870-1945', in J Lewis, (ed.), *Women's Welfare, Women's Rights*, Croom Helm, London, 1983, p. 24.

against through the workings of the Unemployment Insurance Acts throughout the inter-war period. This discouraged married women from working and encouraged them to seek financial support from their husbands rather than going out to work. There was much concern expressed at the rising number of married women claiming unemployment benefit as unemployment increased in the late 1920s, especially among female textile workers. The outcome of this was the Anomalies Act of 1931. This singled-out married women and ensured that married women were disqualified from receiving all benefits unless they could satisfy the Court of Referees that they had a 'reasonable expectation' of securing insurable employment, had not withdrawn from employment and that their chances of finding employment were not affected by their marriage. The outcome of this, in many areas of the UK, especially where married women were employed in textiles, was that married women were denied unemployment benefit more often than men were.⁸⁵ In Kirkcaldy, the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWCM)⁸⁶ branch committee in the town, dealt with many cases of married women, presumably from those women employed in textiles in the area, who had been denied unemployment benefit following the Anomalies Act in 1931. NUWCM legal teams would usually assist women in appealing against disqualification.⁸⁷ However, as will shown in chapter four, it was not only employers and the government who undermined married women's working opportunities. Scottish male and female trade unionists also held the view that, wherever possible, married women should be dependent on their husbands and on a number of occasions in the inter-war period, in response to high levels of male unemployment,

⁸⁵ Lewis, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 190; Banks, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁸⁶ NUWCM was launched by the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920 to organise the unemployed. It received little support from the established trade union movement and the Labour Party who did their best to isolate this organisation. (J Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990, p. 101).

⁸⁷ S Bruley, 'A Woman's Right to Work? The Role of Women in the Unemployed Movement Between the Wars', in S Oldfield, *This Working Day World: Women's Lives and Cultures in Britain, 1914-1945*, Taylor and Francis, London, 1994, p. 44.

successfully thwarted attempts by married women with working husbands to obtain employment.

Labour market participation rates in Scotland among both married and single women workers were heavily influenced by region. The differing regional distributions of industrial sectors, the availability of work, the social attitudes to women's work in different regions and male wage levels resulted in highly variable participation rates across the counties and cities. Table 5 below shows that the major Scottish cities enumerated higher proportions of women in employment than the combined figure for Scotland. Like the national trend the participation rate in the cities gradually increased between 1911-1931. The cities, with the exception of Dundee, employed roughly equal proportions of women, but the proportion of women employed in the various occupational sectors differed. Service sector work and domestic service dominated the female employment market in the cities, particularly Edinburgh, where there were more opportunities for work in the professions. A greater proportion of women in Edinburgh were employed in paper and printing and in commercial employment than the other Scottish cities. In Aberdeen there were greater opportunities for work in the professions than in Glasgow and in textiles production than in Edinburgh and Glasgow. However, in Glasgow, greater opportunities existed for work in a broader range of occupations particularly in the clothing, commercial sectors and food and drink.

Table 5: The Percentage of Women in Employment in the Scottish Cities, 1911-1951

	1911	1921	1931	1951
Aberdeen	32%	36%	38%.	33.2%
Dundee	49%	51%	55%	45.2%
Edinburgh	37%	40%	41%	36.8%
Glasgow	35%	36%	39%	38.8%
Scotland	30.7%	32.5%	34.9%	32.6%

Source: *Census of Scotland 1911-1951*

Women’s work in Dundee, by comparison, was heavily concentrated in textiles and there were few opportunities for employment in other forms of work. The high workforce participation rates among married and single women in Dundee in the inter-war period reflected the demand for cheap female labour in the jute trade. This pattern was well established, and as Gordon notes, women had provided almost a half of the labour force in the late nineteenth century earning the city the ‘nomenclature of a woman’s town.’ The restricted opportunities for male workers in Dundee and the low wages earned by men in the city forced large numbers women to seek employment in Dundee.⁸⁸ The effect of this was the ‘substantial reversal of male and female economic functions’ in Dundee, many men being dependent on the earnings of mothers, sisters and daughters.⁸⁹ In the counties, female labour force participation rates were uneven. Where textiles production dominated, participation rates were similar to the national average, for example in Roxburgh and Shetland, 39% and 33% of women were in employment in 1931, respectively. In contrast, where opportunities for work were limited, in Stirlingshire, Ross and Cromarty, Sutherlandshire and Banffshire, the proportion of employed women was considerably lower at around 25%. Participation rates

⁸⁸ Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.
⁸⁹ W M Walker, *Juteopolis: Dundee and it's Textile Workers, 1885-1923*, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1979, p. 40.

among married women followed a similar pattern. In the textile producing counties of Peebles, Selkirk and Angus, the average participation rate was higher than the national average at around 8% of all married women. Whereas, in West Lothian, Banff and Stirlingshire, less than 3% of all married women were recorded as being occupied by the Census, reflecting fewer opportunities for married women to work.

Table 6: The Percentage of Married Women in Employment in the Scottish Cities, 1911-1951

	1911	1921	1931	1951
Dundee	23.4	24	33	30.6
Glasgow	5.5	6.1	7.3	18.5
Edinburgh	5.1	5.6	7.3	17.6
Aberdeen	3	3.9	5.6	12.5
Scotland	4.1	4.8	6.4	14.8

Source: *Census of Scotland, 1911-1951*

The national participation rate for married women remained low, but the proportion of married women in employment in the Scottish cities expanded reflecting the Scottish trend. This increase was greatest between 1931-1951 and this is shown on Table 6. The percentage of married women in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen more than doubled during this period, apart from Dundee, which experienced a substantial decline in the participation rate of married women in this period. This reflected the decline in the number of married women employed in the Dundee jute trade, a major employer of married women, and the absence of other work for married women in the city. A number of towns in the West of Scotland enumerated surprisingly low numbers of married women workers. In Paisley, where textiles predominated, 8.5% of all married women were in employment, whereas in Coatbridge, Clydebank, Motherwell and Wishaw, the figure was less than 3%. The dominance of heavy industry in

these Clyde valley towns meant that there were fewer work opportunities for women in these towns.

Women's Occupations In Scotland In The Inter-War Period

Prior to the First World War married, single and widowed women alike in Scotland were largely confined to four industrial sectors, specifically domestic service, textiles, clothing and agriculture, but these sectors declined in importance as a source of work for women and the proportion of women employed in these sectors fell from 90% of all occupied women in 1851 to 65% in 1911. This was coupled with an expansion in the employment of women in office and shop work, food, drink, engineering and metals occupations. Nevertheless, as Gordon points out, the 'enduring feature of women's employment' was their confinement to a few traditional women's industries.⁹⁰ The vast majority of working class women were also employed in work deemed to be either unskilled or at best semi-skilled and in non-supervisory positions. This reflected the fact that women were often excluded from apprenticeships or training for skilled work by agreements between trade unions and employers, that women workers also lacked trade union strength to ensure that their work was deemed to be skilled and the all pervasive belief that women's work was, by definition, unskilled.⁹¹ As noted above, Scottish women were introduced to new forms of employment during the First World War, but they were largely removed from war work and returned either to the home or the traditional areas of women's work. However, the combination of technological change, deskilling and a more sophisticated division of labour between the wars allowed for a continued increase in the proportion of female workers in a wider range of occupations.⁹² Much of this expansion was

⁹⁰ Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-29.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

⁹² McIvor, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

experienced in typing, clerical work and commercial employment especially shop work, shown on Table 7 below, and this reflected the UK trend. As in the rest of the UK, the shift away from the traditional sectors of clothing, textiles and agriculture continued in the inter-war period, with the exception of domestic service which underwent a temporary increase. The percentage of Scottish women employed in these sectors fell to around 46% in 1921 and then to 40% of all occupied women at the 1931 Census and this was a considerable decline on the figure for 1911. In England and Wales, the percentage of women workers who continued to be employed in these industries was only slightly higher than the figure for Scotland. Without a Census for 1941 it is difficult to fully identify the decline in the employment of women in these sectors in the 1930s. Nevertheless, women's work in Scotland, as in England and Wales, remained heavily concentrated in the traditional areas of women's employment.

Table 7: The Number and Percentage of Women in the Principal Occupations in Scotland, 1911-1951

	1911	1921	1931	1951
Personal Service	166,578 (28)	168,149 (26.6)	194,999(29)	145,796 (21)
<i>Domestic Service</i>	<i>135,052 (23)</i>	<i>122, 248 (19.4)</i>	<i>138,679 (21)</i>	<i>73,278 (10.6)</i>
Commercial Shop Assistants	-	83,111 (13)	95,915 (14.4)	98,715 (14.3)
Textiles	115,369 (19.4)	92,407 (14.5)	81,668 (12.2)	53,688 (7.8)
Clerical, Typing	-	67,966 (10.5)	77,451 (11.6)	138,699 (20.1)
Clothing	73,393 (12.4)	53,967 (8.5)	39,102 (5.8)	37,154 (5.4)
Food, Drink, Tobacco	44,694 (7.5)	22,099 (3.4)	16,908 (2.5)	13,231 (1.9)
Agriculture	33,057 (5.6)	24,317 (3.9)	15,746 (2.4)	14,507 (2.1)
Professional	-	44,970 (7.3)	48,876 (7.3)	64,967 (9.7)
Warehousemen Storekeepers Packers	-	12,724 (2)	14,767 (2.2)	17,651(2.6)
Transport, Communications	-	11,047 (1.7)	13,308 (2)	18,731 (2.8)
Paper, Printing	28,926 (4.9)	16,713 (2.6)	14,804 (2.2)	12,204 (1.77)
Metals	2,535 (0.4)*	6,537 (1)	4,610 (0.7)	10,320 (1.5)

*CH Lee, British Regional Employment Statistics, CUP, 1979. Source: *Census of Scotland 1911-1951*

In the UK, much of the expansion in women’s work occurred in the new industries, where the increasing use of automatic methods of mass production created an expansion in semi-skilled work for women. As Glucksman points out, economic historians differ in their definition of the new industries and the contribution they made to economic recovery. She defines these industries as those which adopted mass production techniques and a new type of labour process, including those that manufactured entirely new products such as electrical goods and synthetic fibres, or those which applied mechanised production techniques to existing products, including clothing manufacture and food processing. Women did not work in all of the new industries or outnumber male workers, but were employed in the areas of

work deemed to be most suitable for women.⁹³ In the 'lighter' sections of the electrical engineering, electric lamp, battery, telephone and wireless making industries, women were excluded in the main from highly skilled work, as in the traditional areas of women's work, and they were deemed to be most suited to the processes considered to be of a 'simple' nature, requiring little training. They were also viewed as being more contented with 'monotonous' and repetitious work.⁹⁴ The expansion of the new industries was centred on the Midlands and South East of England and was not matched in Scotland, which remained heavily dependent on the staple industries. The outcome was a relatively slow growth in real income and persistently higher levels of unemployment in Scotland than in the UK. This lowered purchasing power and retarded the growth of the consumer goods industries which were dependent on domestic demand. Consequently, investors were not attracted to Scotland and there was an inability to secure a share in the new growth industries, particularly in the 1930s.⁹⁵ This meant that the contribution of the new industries to the Scottish economy was significantly lower than in the UK. For example, in 1935 in Scotland, the staple industries contributed 36.8% of the total net output of all Census of Production trades while the new industries contributed only 11%. The comparable figures for the UK were 21.0% for the new industries and 27.8% for the staple industries.⁹⁶

⁹³ Glucksman, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3, p 58, pp. 65-66, pp. 76-77; Savage, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

⁹⁴ Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 57; *A Study of the Factors Which Have Operated in the Past and Which are Operating Now to Determine the Distribution of Women in Industry*, Cmd 3508, 1930, p. 13. (Hereafter referred to as Cmd. 3508).

⁹⁵ A further suggestion was that the expansion of the new industries in central Scotland may have been hindered by poorer housing in Scotland than in England and this lowered the degree of mobility among workers in Scotland. It has also been suggested that the lack of a highly adaptive skilled workforce, financial institutions and entrepreneurship contributed to the inability to attract new industries. (CEV Leser, 'Scottish Industries in the Inter-War Period', *The Manchester School of Economics and Social Studies*, Vol. 18, 2, May 1950, p. 169; U. Wannop, 'Glasgow /Clydeside: A Century of Metropolitan Evolution', in G Gordon, (ed.), *Regional Cities in the UK, 1890-1980*, Harper and Row, London, 1986).

⁹⁶ NK Buxton, 'Economic Growth in Scotland Between the Wars, The Role of Production and Rationalisation', *Economic History Review*, 2nd Series, XXXIII, 4, 1980, p. 549; B Lenman, *An Economic History of Modern Scotland, 1660-1976*, Batsford, London, 1977, p. 225.

Nevertheless, new industries were not entirely absent from Scotland and surveys by academics between the wars recognised that, however limited, there had been some growth in the sectors considered to be 'light' or new industries.⁹⁷ For example, in Glasgow and the west of Scotland the clothing industry was transformed and huge mechanised factories, such as Wallace and Weir and the Kidmar Hosiery Co. employed hundreds of women. In food processing, manufacturers involved in the mass production of foodstuffs such as Creamola foods, Bilslands bakery and the City Bakeries in Glasgow and the Weston Biscuit Co. in Edinburgh, employed hundreds of workers in factories which had adopted new machinery such as conveyor belt systems. The expanding food canning industry in the west and north east of Scotland employed large numbers of women and introduced new processes in the inter-war period. Similarly, the rubber industry in the central belt, such as the North British Rubber Co. in Edinburgh, employed large numbers of women producing new types of consumer goods such as golf balls, shoes and hot water bottles, often using assembly line production.⁹⁸ However, if a comparison is made between the metals and electrical engineering sectors in Scotland and England and Wales using the Census, it can be shown that the changes in the pattern of women's employment in Scotland were not as significant as the changes occurring elsewhere in the UK. These industries failed to expand in Scotland to the same extent as they did in the Midlands and the South East of England. In the metals and engineering industries women were concentrated in a number of occupations, on the metals side of electrical engineering they were employed mainly in metal machining, pressing and stamping and soldering and brazing, on the electrical side they were employed as coil winders, instrument makers and assemblers or inspectors, viewers and testers.⁹⁹ A comparison of the number of

⁹⁷ For example, C A Oakley, *Scottish Industry Today*, The Moray Press, Edinburgh, 1937; Scottish Economic Committee, *Light Industries in Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1938.

⁹⁸ Oakley, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11, pp. 217-235; Milnes, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

⁹⁹ Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

women employed in several of these occupations in Scotland and England and Wales shows that Scottish women were less likely to be employed in this work. For example, as Table 8 below shows, only 1% of women in Scotland were employed as metal workers in 1921, whereas in England and Wales, 1.7% of all occupied women were employed in metals in 1921, or 96,120 women. In this sector, the number of female press workers and stampers in England and Wales was 31,425 (0.6% of occupied women) in 1931, up 9,000 on the 1921 figure. In Scotland only 0.04% of women were employed in this work.

Table 8: The Number and Percentage of Males and Females Employed in Metals and Electrical Apparatus Making In Scotland, 1921-1931

	1921		1931	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
Metals	6,537(1)	280,210(18)	4,610 (0.7)	189, 129 (12)
<i>Press Workers, Stampers</i>	43	152	308 (0.04)	250 (0.01)
Electrical Apparatus Making	314(0.04)	16,014 (1)	299 (0.04)	16,884 (1.1)
<i>Instrument Making, Assembling</i>	6	109	17	101
<i>Coil Winding</i>	69	315	108	269

Source: *Census of Scotland 1921-1931*

While the absolute numbers of women employed in Scotland were bound to be lower, the percentages show that proportionately fewer women were employed in these occupations. The number of women in electrical apparatus making in England and Wales more than doubled between 1921 and 1931 from 13,396 to 28,445 (0.5% of all occupied women). In Scotland, the number of women employed in this sector actually declined, as Table 8 shows. Of these workers, 8,871 (0.15% of all occupied women) were employed in instrument making and assembling in England and Wales in 1931. In Scotland, the figure for 1931 was just 17. Wide

disparities also existed in coil winding. In 1931, 5,687 women were employed in this occupation in England and Wales. Only 69 women worked in this occupation in Scotland. However, it is likely that significant increases occurred in the number of women employed in engineering and metals manufacture in the 1930s in Scotland. By 1951, there had been a significant expansion in the number of women employed in this sector (metals, engineering and allied trades), as shown on Table 7 above.¹⁰⁰ For example, between 1931 and 1951 the number of women employed in electrical engineering increased from 1,259 to 7,556. In the same period the number of women employed in instrument making increased from 748 to 3,307, while the number of women employed in metals manufacture and in the manufacture of other metal goods increased from 5,474 to 11,718.¹⁰¹ The overall expansion in the employment of women in the metals trades is shown on Table 7 above.

In Scotland in the inter-war period, there may have been some expansion in the type of work available for working class girls especially shop and clerical work, but in interviews conducted with women from working class backgrounds who joined the labour force in Glasgow in this period, there was a strong sense that they had very few opportunities in terms of the work available to them, (many male workers would also have been in this situation). They were largely dependent on what was available locally and secured employment via family contacts or through friends and relatives. For example, Helen, entered the labour force during the First World War, slightly outside the time period covered by this study, and found work sewing in a cap-making firm in Glasgow. She found this job only because she “knew a girl who worked there”.¹⁰² Margaret, began work in 1919 as a french polisher in Anderston

¹⁰⁰ Census of Population, 1931, Occupation Tables in Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 52; *Census of Scotland, 1921, 1931*; Scottish Economic Committee, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

¹⁰¹ Lee, *op. cit.*, Series B, County and Regional Employment, 1901-1971.

¹⁰² Helen, b. 1900 in the Gorbals in Glasgow. She left this work when she married at age 21, but she continued to work on and off as a shop cleaner following her marriage.

after briefly working as a domestic servant. Her options were limited and this was exacerbated by the fact that her father was unemployed and “no one was working in the house”.¹⁰³ Barbara began work in 1920 aged 14 and had “no option” but to get an apprenticeship as a tailoress at the same Glasgow tailoring firm which employed her uncle, who secured the job for her.¹⁰⁴ For Nessie, working as a domestic servant in a kitchen in an institution in Lesmahagow was the “only thing to do”.¹⁰⁵ Marion, from a large family, left school in 1927 and began work as a book pager in a bookbinding shop in Glasgow following a six month long stint in a chemist shop. As she recalled, “In these days it was very difficult, we had factories closing so I trod the streets and finally finished up getting a job in a bookbinders in Glassford Street.”¹⁰⁶ Similarly, when Rosa began work in 1935, her choices were limited to working in a biscuit factory or at Templetons carpet factory, but she eventually found work as a trainee in a small baker’s shop and as she recalled, “My mother had a big family, six girls and three boys and in those days you had to go and get whatever work was available and this job was advertised in a shop.”¹⁰⁷ Anna, started work in 1934 aged 15 as a messenger for a local fishmongers shop owned by the Scottish Wholesale Co-operative Society. She found this job via a friend and recalled that “it was the only thing I could get”.¹⁰⁸ In 1936, Margaret found work as a soft furnishing and carpet sewer at a firm in Jamaica Street, Glasgow and as she recalled, “at that time you really didn’t have a choice. I was very fortunate, a friend’s daughter spoke for me”.¹⁰⁹ Only two

¹⁰³ Margaret b. 1905 in Cowcaddens in Glasgow. Her father, an ex soldier, spent many of the inter-war years unemployed. She stopped working when she married at age 27 in 1932.

¹⁰⁴ Barbara, b. 1906 in Glasgow.

¹⁰⁵ Nessie, b. 1909, in Canada.

¹⁰⁶ Marion, b. 1914, in the Gorbals in Glasgow. She was one of ten children, three of whom died in infancy. Her father was employed as a dispatch clerk at John Menzies, her mother did not work, but took in washing to supplement the family income. She left the bookbinding trade to work at naval airforce base in Fife during the War before returning to the trade after the war.

¹⁰⁷ Rosa, b. 1921 in the Calton in Glasgow. Her father worked within the police force and her mother in a tobacco factory. She eventually left this work during the Second World War and was employed at Beardmores in Parkhead, before resuming her career in baking and catering work.

¹⁰⁸ Anna, b. 1919, in the Gorbals, her father was an invalid and her mother was employed as a cleaner by the post office. She left this work during the War and was employed at Rolls Royce before returning to the fish trade.

¹⁰⁹ Margaret, b. 1922, in Burnside. Her father was employed as a miner and her mother a saddler.

interviewees found work doing something they had actually wanted to do. Joyce began work in 1939 at a cap and tie factory in the Gorbals and unlike the other women she said, "I always wanted to be sewing".¹¹⁰ Isa, was able to complete her education and remained at high school until she was 16, before attending a commercial college for a year. She became a secretary at the Glasgow branch of NALGO in 1935 and she recognised that "I was fortunate in that my parents were far from well off but they were thrifty and so I had a choice."¹¹¹ The responses of the majority of these women correspond with other studies which have focused on the choices of work available for women in Scotland in the early part of the twentieth century. For example, Stephenson and Brown found that women in Stirlingshire, born between 1894 and 1926, frequently found work via family connections and work choices were dependent on the proximity of workplaces to the family home.¹¹² As Smyth shows, girls living in one industry towns in Scotland, such as textile towns, had even fewer choices.¹¹³

Irrespective of the occupation, women usually earned substantially less than men. This remained so throughout their working life in all but a few occupations. Clegg shows that the average earnings of women and girls in the UK in 1906 were 44% of the average earned by men and boys. In 1931, the comparable percentage was still only 48%. Clegg suggests that the main cause of this was a change in society towards 'greater egalitarianism and humanitarianism' and can also be attributed to increased productivity, the rise of the general unions, an increased density in trade union membership among women and declining skill and

¹¹⁰ Joyce, b. 1925, Cambuslang. Her father was employed as a steel worker and her mother a housewife.

¹¹¹ Isa, b. 1918, in Annathill, near Cumbernauld. Her father was a pit fireman and her mother a post office worker before marriage. She worked for NALGO until 1944, before eventually becoming a teacher.

¹¹² J D Stephenson and C G Brown, 'The View From the Workplace: Women's Memories of Work in Stirling c.1910-c.1950', in Gordon and Breitenbach (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹¹³ J J Smyth, 'Ye Never Got A Spell To Think About It: Young Women and Employment In the Inter-War Period: A Case Study of a Textile Village', in Gordon and Breitenbach, (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 95, p. 102.

sex differentials.¹¹⁴ Table 9 below, which cannot be comprehensive and omits the earnings of the unorganised and the poorest paid workers, details the extent of wage differentials between male and female workers based on trade union responses to a questionnaire on wage rates and working conditions in Edinburgh in 1926. Only female compositors earned anything approaching the earnings of their male counterparts, (the highest paid manual workers in the UK in this period),¹¹⁵ but even still their earnings were only 70% of those earned by male compositors.

Table 9: Male and Female Trade Union Wage Rates, Edinburgh Area, 1926, (Based on 48 Hour Week)

Occupation	Male Wage	Female Wage	Female Wage as % of Male Wage Rates
Compositors	77s 6d	54s 3d	70%
Bookbinders	77s 6d	34s	44%
Warehouse Assistants and Packers	58s	34s	59%
Shop Assistants	65s	40s	62%
Boot and Shoe Operatives	60s	36s	60%
Textile Workers	12s - 56s 6d*	12s - 32s*	57%
Sorting Clerks and Telegraphists	61s	16s - 33s*	54%

* The higher figures have been used to calculate percentages. **Source:** Edinburgh Trades Council, *Annual Report*, 1926.

In 1919 the War Cabinet Committee produced its Majority Report on Women in Industry and it was suggested that women should receive equal pay for equal work on similar jobs to men's where output was equivalent. Where jobs were subdivided, wages should be such that their cost to the employer did not drop. If employers maintained that women's work was less

¹¹⁴H A Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889, 1911-1933, Vol. II*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp. 560-563.

¹¹⁵J Zeitlin, 'Craft Control and the Division of Labour', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 3, 1979, p. 264.

efficient than men's, it was up to them to prove it. The government was urged to set an example with equal pay in its own departments as soon as possible. However, where women were employed on 'women's work', their wages were deemed to be less important and the committee recommended that these should be appropriate to the area, the food, clothing and transport needs of a single woman aged 18.¹¹⁶ In the inter-war period, the government viewed equal pay for women as being too expensive and would mean that employers would lose a cheap source of labour and a variety of arguments were advanced against equal pay for equal work. The claim that the country could not afford equal pay was a powerful argument. Philip Snowden, Labour Chancellor in 1924, maintained that equal pay was a 'very large expenditure (which) cannot be faced'. Another argument against equal pay was that male workers would claim higher wage rates to restore wage differentials. There were also concerns that equal pay would force many women out of work.¹¹⁷ As chapter four will show, many trade unionists supported equal pay for this very reason. Employers, among others, held the belief that female labour was inferior and that their productivity was lower where women were employed on the same work as men. Other reasons employers cited for not paying women equal pay was the lesser muscular strength of women workers, their higher rates of sickness and absenteeism and the high labour turnover caused by women leaving work to marry. Hence, they could be paid substantially lower wages. Equal pay legislation was obviously a serious threat to employers who viewed women as a source of cheap labour and unsurprisingly they were the most consistent and forceful opponents of equal pay.¹¹⁸ The discussions held by managers at the Glasgow Corporation on the issue of equal pay encapsulated the view that women workers were inferior in comparison with their male counterparts and were really not worth an

¹¹⁶ Braybon, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.

¹¹⁷ Banks, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-117.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*; Anthony, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

increased wage bill. In 1922, Councillor Turner put forward a motion recommending 'that where female employees are doing the same duties as male employees they be paid the same salaries or wages and war bonuses and overtime rates'. In the electricity department, managers deemed that this was impracticable as 'those females who are employed on work which could also be done by men are not capable of performing all the work which a man would be called upon to perform....The work asked of the women is suited to their physical capacity...'¹¹⁹ In the collectors department, equal pay could not be implemented as this would push the annual wage bill up from £910 to £1,458. The women employed in this department were described as 'second grade clerks'. In the cleansing department, women court sweepers, street sweepers and labourers could not be 'reckoned as on an equal footing with able bodied men so far as working capacity is concerned.' In the gas department, 40 women were employed as clerks, typists, and in a variety of other occupations, 18 of whom were employed on the same duties as male workers. Equal pay would push the wage bill up by £664 a year and would only 'result in dissatisfaction among the other females in the department.' Furthermore, women workers in this department, first employed during the war, were still regarded as 'temporary employees.'¹²⁰ Whatever the ability of women to do their jobs it is clear that the rationale behind the decision not to adopt a policy of equal pay for women was financially motivated.

Low female earnings among young female workers ensured that it was impossible for many young women to establish their own household and the majority of these workers remained with their parents into their twenties, usually until they married. As Jamieson has shown, young women workers frequently handed their earnings over to their parents to pay for their 'digs' and received pocket money in return. Therefore, earning an income was not always a

¹¹⁹ *Glasgow Corporation Reports*, Vol. 10, March 16, 1922.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

liberating experience.¹²¹ Most single women workers living alone could not eat, house and clothe themselves adequately on the wages they earned. However, women's wages were not calculated to 'render the recipient self sufficient' but were paid on the basis that a father or a husband's income would supplement them.¹²² Low earnings ensured that it was particularly difficult for women dependent on their own earnings, especially the large numbers of single women, widows and deserted wives, many of whom had their own dependants such as children or elderly parents, to attain an adequate standard of living.¹²³ However, despite low earnings, it is important to note that work, as Stephenson and Brown point out, allowed women and girls, particularly the single, some independence away from the family home and for married women, work could mean a break from domesticity. There were few opportunities for leisure pursuits for women away from the workplace and therefore, work could also allow for the development of companionships and for camaraderie.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, female earnings were almost always lower than men's, their disposable incomes were less than those of male workers of the same age¹²⁵ and apart from living in the parental home, the only other option for young working class girls was to live with, as Blythell describes, 'pseudo-parents' such as relatives, friends or domestic service employers.¹²⁶

In the inter-war period many young Scottish women continued to find work as domestic servants, one of the lowest paying occupations. The personal service sector remained the largest employer of women in Scotland in this period, as shown on Table 7. This sector

¹²¹ L Jamieson, 'Limited Resources and Limiting Conventions: Working Class Mothers and Daughters in Urban Scotland, c. 1890-1925', in J Lewis, (ed.), (1986), *op. cit.*, pp. 56-67.

¹²² T Wilson, *The Myriad faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 81.

¹²³ Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

¹²⁴ Stephenson and Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23, p. 26.

¹²⁵ Jamieson, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-67.

¹²⁶ D Blythell, 'Women in the Workforce', in P O'Brien and Roland Quinault, (eds.), *The Industrial Revolution and British Society*, CUP, Cambridge, 1993, p. 50.

covered a broad spectrum of occupations and the expansion in employment in this sector in the 1920s matched the trend in England and Wales. The majority of women workers in the service sector were employed as indoor domestic servants in private homes and institutions and the expansion in domestic service in the 1920s was the primary cause of the expansion in service sector employment. This mirrored the trend in England and Wales and was the impact of the depression years and government policies that forced many women back into domestic service. A smaller proportion of women in Scotland were employed in the service sector in comparison to England and Wales and with the exception of Lothian, the Scottish regions had service employment provisions below the UK average.¹²⁷ Between 1931 and 1951, the number of women enumerated by the Census as domestic servants almost halved and this emerges as one of the greatest changes in the Scottish female labour market in the first half of the twentieth century. A significant proportion of married women were employed in the service sector. Their employment expanded from almost 14,000, (34.6% of all occupied married women), in 1921, to around 19,700 (34.8%) in 1931. In contrast with single women, they were more likely to work as charwomen or office cleaners, reflecting the expansion in office work, rather than domestic servants and it is possible that the number of married women enumerated in this work by the Census was an underestimation given that charring was often undertaken on a temporary or occasional basis or whenever extra income was needed.¹²⁸ Married women gradually moved into laundry work and waitressing and their participation in domestic service, most likely as 'dailies' rather than live-in servants, increased in the 1920s¹²⁹ probably reflecting the relative lack of employment opportunities and the unpopularity of this work

¹²⁷ Particularly in domestic service, hotel, lodging, and laundry work. (C H Lee, 'Modern Economic Growth and Structural Change in Scotland: The Service Sector Reconsidered', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, Vol. 3, 3, 1983).

¹²⁸ T M McBride, *The Domestic Revolution: The Modernisation of Household Service in England and France, 1820-1920*, Croom Helm, London, 1976, p. 113.

¹²⁹ From approximately 4,000 women in 1921 to 6,000 women in 1931.

among younger, single women. Service sector workers were overwhelmingly female. More than 81% of workers in this sector and 97% of all domestic servants were female and more than 90% of laundry workers were women. By comparison, less than 1% of all male workers were employed as domestic servants and only 3% were in the service sector, chiefly as barmen, barbers, hotel keepers and publicans.¹³⁰

Table 10: The Number and Percentage of all Occupied Women Employed in the Personal Service Sector and Domestic Service in the Scottish Cities, 1911-1951

	1911	1921	1931	1951
Aberdeen	5,673 (25)	5,738 (23)	6,772 (25)	5,566 (21)
<i>domestic service</i>	4,272 (18.7)	3,748 (15)	4,347 (16)	2,519 (9.7)
Dundee	3,241 (9)	4,213 (11)	5,428 (13)	5,613 (16.5)
<i>domestic service</i>	2,229 (6.1)	2,545 (7)	3,127 (8)	2,302 (6.8)
Edinburgh	21,740 (39)	21,246 (30)	26,244 (33)	17,753 (23.7)
<i>domestic service</i>	17,035 (31)	14,284 (20)	17,114 (22)	7,739 (10.4)
Glasgow	23,376 (21)	28,160 (19)	38,697 (23)	30,239 (17.8)
<i>domestic service</i>	16,219 (14.5)	15,184 (10)	22,739 (14)	11,729 (6.9)
Scotland	166,578 (28)	172,454 (26.6)	194,999(29)	145,796 (21.2)
<i>domestic service</i>	135,052(22.7)	125,824(19.4)	138,679 (21)	73,278(10.6)
England & Wales	1,734,040 (36)	1,676,425 (33)	1,926,978 (34)	1,464,137 (23.3)
<i>domestic service</i>	1,335,358 (27.6)	1,148,698 (22.7)	1,332,224 (23.8)	723,574 (11.5)

Source: *Census of Scotland, 1911-1951*

¹³⁰ *Census of Scotland, 1931.*

Table 11: The Percentage of Married Women Workers Employed in the Personal Service Occupations 1911-1951

	1911	1921	1931	1941
Aberdeen	28.2	44.5	41.9	29.8
Dundee	3.4	7.1	7.8	18.4
Edinburgh	46.8	55	60	36.8
Glasgow	25.8	36.6	38	27.3
Scotland	21	34.5	34.8	28.6

Source: Census of Scotland 1911-1951

The greatest opportunities for work in the service sector for women existed in Edinburgh. Domestic service work existed for single women, and charring and office cleaning in the large commercial sector was available for married women and this is shown on Tables 10 and 11. This was a traditional feature of the female labour market in the city reflecting the prosperity of the sizeable middle class population. A smaller proportion of women were employed in the service sector in Aberdeen and Glasgow, whereas, in Dundee the proportion was extremely low suggesting a much smaller middle class population and the dominance of the jute industry. In Dundee, unlike the other Scottish Cities, employment in the service sector expanded between 1931 and 1951 and the proportion of married women in this sector more than doubled. This points to the decline of the Dundee jute industry and the narrow range of occupations open to women. However, it was in the counties, apart from those where other opportunities existed for work, that domestic service employment dominated the female employment market. For example, in Nairn, Wigtownshire, Argyll, Perthshire, Stirlingshire, Ayrshire and Angus between 25% and 50% of women were domestic servants in 1931. Rural women were also forced back into domestic service in the 1920s. In Shetland, for example, where textiles and agriculture dominated, the proportion of women in this work doubled from 10% to 20% between 1921 to 1931. This reflected the decline in the need for female labour to

work on crofts and in the herring trade, a substantial employer of women. Women were also leaving the Shetland isles to work in domestic service, (and shop work), in Edinburgh.¹³¹

However, the temporary expansion in the number of female domestic servants, scattered across boarding houses, hotels and other institutions, but mainly in private homes, concealed the fact that this work was increasingly viewed by young women as unattractive. This stemmed from poor working conditions, which improved only marginally in the inter-war period, and this work remained unregulated by government and changes in employer attitudes were slight. The 1919 Ministry of Reconstruction *Report of the Women's Advisory Committee on the Domestic Service Problem*, which appeared at a time when many former female war workers made it clear that they did not want to work as domestic servants, found that the loss of social status which accompanied the entry of women into domestic service, the distinctive dress, the lower quality of food given to servants, the long hours and the lack of companionship or a social life for the lone servant all contributed to the unpopularity of this work.¹³² In 1937, Beauchamp found that working conditions for many servants had not improved. As well as performing a wide range of tasks, wages were low, usually 15s. per week or less, hours were long, and servants often lived in poor accommodation.¹³³ It is unsurprising then that young women often 'preferred any kind of job in mill or factory or even a place with rock bottom wages at Woolworth's and freedom....to the best that domestic service could offer.'¹³⁴ However, there had been some advancement in working conditions by the 1930s

¹³¹ For more information on women's work in the Shetland Isles see BA Black, *The Impact of External Shocks Upon a Periphery Economy: War and Oil in Twentieth Century Shetland*, 1995, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow 1995, pp. 118-119.

¹³² P Taylor, 'Daughters and Mothers, Maids and Mistresses: Domestic Service Between the Wars', in J Clarke, C Critcher and R Johnson, *Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory*, Hutchinson, 1979, p. 121; Ministry of Reconstruction, *Report of the Women's Advisory Committee on the Domestic Service Problem*, Cmd., 67, 1919, pp. 22-23.

¹³³ J Beauchamp, *Women Who Work*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1937, pp. 73-76.

¹³⁴ L A Tilly and J W Scott, *Women, Work and Family*, Routledge, London, 1989, p. 154.

particularly for the increasing numbers of women employed on a daily basis rather than living in.¹³⁵ Servants were in a better position to demand set hours, a contract, cash instead of payments in kind and hourly pay rates instead of an annual sum. New labour saving devices in many homes and institutions also eased the burden of many servants.¹³⁶

Nevertheless, service became for many women a stepping stone to other work in factories, shops and offices¹³⁷ and was no longer the 'natural outlet' for women where alternative occupations existed. As Burnett argues, service became the 'refuge for the poor and ill-educated, for the over-large families.....and for the daughters of normally comfortable working class parents hit by depression and unemployment', particularly in the depressed areas of the UK.¹³⁸ The inter-war period also witnessed the cultivation of the idea that middle class women could become 'professional' housewives, running their own homes using domestic machinery and buying mass produced processed and convenience foods and rather than relying on live in servants these women could instead employ a daily cleaner. Performing domestic work was also no longer incompatible with being feminine.¹³⁹ The nature of domestic service may have gradually changed in the inter-war period and while middle class women often complained about the supposed lack of domestic servants or 'the servant problem', there was no great demise in domestic service employment. As Jamieson points out, the extent to which this work persisted in Scotland, particularly in the 1930s has been overlooked. Rural women, unlike urban women frequently had little chance of finding work in other sectors and domestic

¹³⁵ From the late nineteenth century onwards, middle class families gradually moved towards employing 'dailies' as opposed to live-in servants, reflecting, among a range of other factors, the higher cost of employing servants and declining birth rates. (McBride, *op. cit.*, p. 114).

¹³⁶ P Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Domestic Servant*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1975, p. 174; Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

¹³⁷ McIvor, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-147.

¹³⁸ J Burnett, *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People From the 1820's to the 1920s*, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1977, p. 141.

¹³⁹ Glucksman, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80, p. 239.

service was often the only option for rural women without a friend or relative in the city to 'speak for you' and provide accommodation.¹⁴⁰ While there may have been more scope for work outside of domestic service in the cities, many young women often had little option but to enter into service in private homes. As Colina, a former domestic servant explained, her employment options were limited and this was compounded by the fact that her father, a boilermaker on Clydeside, endured nine years of unemployment during the inter-war period. With the exception of domestic service, few other work opportunities existed in Dalmuir (Clydebank) and "you either went into a shop or Singers." She recognised that service was unpopular and "kind of looked down upon" and would have preferred to have been a nurse or a cook. Ill health forced her to leave Singers after a brief stay and against her mothers wishes she found work as a domestic servant via a labour exchange. She was employed by the widow, whom she described as a "lady about town", of a director of a well known Glasgow shipbuilding firm as the sole servant in a large flat in the west end of the city from the late 1920s until 1939. Her daily tasks encompassed making breakfast, lighting the coal fire, running the bath for her employer, preparing food, shopping, cleaning and brass and silver cleaning, all performed without the use of modern appliances and using salt as a cleaning agent. Her earnings were 10s. per week for the first five years. Contact with higher paid domestic servants she met led her to ask for a pay rise which she received. However, her experience of this work wasn't entirely dreadful as it was carried out under "nice conditions". She was also allowed to visit other domestic servants and travel with her employer to hired holiday homes in Ayrshire. As she described,

At 17 you're young and you're impressed. I learned a lot I got a taste for nice things

¹⁴⁰ Giles, *op. cit.*, p. 242; L Jamieson, 'Rural and Urban Women in Domestic Service', in Gordon and Breitenbach, (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 136-137.

which I probably would never have developed if I had stayed at home, because you know if you are working class you don't see things, I mean I saw things there and crystals and fancy dishes and her (employer) being dressed...so on the whole it was very good for me, my relationship with her was quite good, she could be hard but she could also be kind and although I say it myself I was a good worker and she knew that.¹⁴¹

Unlike many other domestic servants she ate the same food as her employer and she believed that, at work, when "things were bad at home actually I would be better fed". Of domestic service, Colina explained "I liked it until I got a boyfriend". Her employer banned his visits until they were engaged and her days off were severely restricted. Colina left following her marriage in 1939, declining a request from her employer that she remain at work.¹⁴² As Jamieson points out, while the experiences of servants varied, dependent on their position and the amount of contact they had with their employer, not all domestic service could be unpleasant, especially when servants perceived their employers as being 'nice people'. Many servants realised that they were in a subordinate position but there was also a sense among young women that they were receiving a training, learning skills and were in a position of responsibility. For many young women, domestic service employment was also the extension of the housework already demanded from them in their family homes.¹⁴³

Across the UK, the high levels of unemployment among men and women and declining opportunities for work in other sectors combined to push women, temporarily, back into

¹⁴¹ Interview with Colina, b. Dalmuir, 1914.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Jamieson, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-153.

domestic service. The desire to push women back into this work began early in the period. In January 1919, *Common Cause* noted that with the 'spirit among women war workers it seems disastrous that the only employment at present offered to them should be domestic service. Newspapers even go as far as to say it is the duty of munitions girls to go into domestic service.'¹⁴⁴ However, in the immediate post-war period, unemployed women in Glasgow, as in the rest of the UK, did not want to return to domestic service. For example, at the Govan employment exchange in January 1919, 900 unemployed women preferred not to take the available domestic service positions and the Govan Exchange found that this work was 'very unpopular'¹⁴⁵ and the 26,000 unemployed women in Glasgow in early 1919 refused to fill the available domestic service jobs.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, women were pushed back into this work by successive Conservative, Liberal and Labour governments alike and their policies 'amounted to compulsory domestic service for women.'¹⁴⁷ The benefits system worked to prevent women refusing domestic service work if offered at a labour exchange or risk losing unemployment benefit. Under the Unemployment Insurance Acts women could be required to train as domestic servants administered by the Central Committee on Women's Employment. Domestic servants were also uninsured and unable to claim unemployment benefit.¹⁴⁸ From the viewpoint of successive UK governments, the growth in the number of female domestic servants was desirable as unemployment levels were reduced and thereby state payments. Service also remained the only job for which a retraining scheme was offered to unemployed

¹⁴⁴ *Common Cause*, January 17, 1919, p. 475.

¹⁴⁵ Pugh, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

¹⁴⁶ *Glasgow Bulletin*, February 27, 1919.

¹⁴⁷ Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 245; S Lewenhak, *Women and Work*, Macmillan, London, 1980, p. 207.

¹⁴⁸ Lewis, (1983), *op. cit.*, p. 24-25.

women and the Ministry of Labour, under the Special areas and Improvement Act, transferred women out of the depressed areas and found them work as domestic servants.¹⁴⁹

In combination with the domestic service training centres in Scottish towns and cities, the Scottish Committee of the UK Central Committee on Women's Training and Employment,¹⁵⁰ which administered grants for training women, focused mainly on training unemployed girls for domestic service. By 1928, 5,000 unemployed girls aged 16 to 18, drawn mainly from mining areas had received 13 weeks of training in cookery, laundry work, housewifery and sewing for future domestic service employment in the UK and Canada. The voluntary group, the Scottish Council for Women's Trades (SCWT)¹⁵¹ went as far as to place unemployed girls from the west of Scotland into domestic service in rural areas. Work as 'kitchen lassies' in rural areas was unpopular and there were often hundreds of vacancies.¹⁵² In 1929, 1300 girls drawn mainly from poverty stricken, over-crowded homes, dependent on unemployment benefit and parish relief, had been placed in these positions where they received 'solid, practical training', in looking after poultry and milking and had benefited from 'wholesome food' and a 'healthy environment'. Those placed earned only one pound per month, rising to £36 per year, (the average wage for general domestic servants), from which the girls paid back

¹⁴⁹ Lewis, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 191; Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 246. In the 1930s under the Industrial Transference Board, domestic service training centres were set up in areas where labour could be trained and transferred to other areas. In Scotland, centres were established in Aberdeen, Glasgow, Arbroath, Cowdenbeath, Alexandria, Vale of Leven, Clydebank, Hamilton and Greenock and were targeted as areas where domestic labour could be trained. (Beddoe, *op. cit.*, p. 63).

¹⁵⁰ Established in the UK in 1914 as the Queen's Work for Women Fund, this committee was given the task of dealing with female unemployment after the war and ran three training schemes for women in teaching, midwifery and nursery nursing and cookery. The Home Crafts and Home Makers scheme trained women for domestic service who were required to give an undertaking that they would enter domestic service when training ended. (Braybon, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-222; Horn, *op. cit.*, p. 169).

¹⁵¹ In the inter-war period the SCWT seems to have moved away from its former role of publishing reports on women's work and working conditions, promoting legislation and trade union organisation to promoting the desirability of domestic service to young Scottish women. The organisation eventually disbanded in 1939.

¹⁵² Lewis, (1983), *op. cit.*, p. 25; *Glasgow Herald*, October 16, 1928; *The Scottish Farm Servant*, (Journal of the Scottish Farm Servants Union), January 1920, p. 134.

money received from the SCWT for the purchase of clothing. By 1938, 3,200 girls had been placed in domestic service work in farms in Scotland, Canada and Australia.¹⁵³ It appears that the only response to female unemployment was to push them into domestic service, but such voluntary schemes reflected the policies of inter-war governments who believed that moving stagnant pools of labour created by unemployment from depressed areas of the UK to more prosperous areas, would boost the economy and alleviate unemployment.¹⁵⁴

The City of Edinburgh Advisory Committee on Juvenile Employment¹⁵⁵ similarly attempted to make domestic service more appealing to girls. The growing unpopularity of this work in the city meant that by 1938, only 382 of 2,201 female school leavers passing through the labour exchanges in Edinburgh and Leith entered domestic service and this was of some concern to the committee. To make domestic service more inviting, the committee claimed that domestic service,

under modern conditions and under the guidance of a sympathetic and skilled mistress can prove a most satisfactory career for a girl. The initial wage compares favourably with factories or shops and if aptitude is shown rapid increase is assured. No other occupation affords the same opportunities of training in household management.¹⁵⁶

This work would not only be 'valuable for future life', (as housewives), but would 'provide a girl with the opportunity for a good start in life.' The committee concluded that the best way

¹⁵³ *Glasgow Herald*, January 30, 1929, April 9, 1938; Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, p. 110.

¹⁵⁴ GA Phillips and RT Maddock, *The Growth of the British Economy 1918-1968*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1973, p. 40.

¹⁵⁵ In the 1930s Bella Jobson, secretary of the Scottish Farm Servants' Union was a Scottish representative of the Advisory Committee on Juvenile Employment.

¹⁵⁶ The City of Edinburgh Advisory Committee on Juvenile Employment September, 1938 in National Union of Domestic Workers Collection.

to interest girls in service was to leaflet schools and provide training schemes where participants would be rewarded with a certificate and a badge.¹⁵⁷ It is unclear how successful the committee was in promoting this work, but it is likely that young female school leavers in Edinburgh, where there were opportunities for work in other sectors, like their counterparts in the rest of the UK, were moving away from domestic service as a source of employment preferring to find better paid work in factories, shops and offices. As Colina¹⁵⁸ explained, “Domestic service was the norm when I went into it but it wasn’t by the war (World War Two), girls wanted freedom.”¹⁵⁹ Government and voluntary schemes, to promote domestic work were an economically convenient method of reducing high levels of female unemployment and appear to have encountered little criticism. As Lewis points out, it was the poor working conditions of domestic service rather than the nature of the job which were criticised and the cultural and ideological supports for domestic service remained in place. Social scientists, ‘neutral’ social commentators and even middle class feminists saw nothing undesirable in women working as domestic servants.¹⁶⁰ Male and female trade unionists in the UK were also not opposed to large numbers of women working as domestic servants and were more concerned with improving working conditions and the status of domestic servants through training and trade union organisation rather than condemning the employment of large numbers of women in this work.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Colina.

¹⁵⁹ As a contemporary noted in 1939, insured occupations could offer unemployment benefit and a higher social status and he inquired, ‘Is it surprising that with modern education and the modern desire for independence and escape from the hitherto feudal conditions of domestic service the brighter girls should prefer to work behind the counter in the office or in the factory rather than go into service?’ (C S Myers, ‘The Servant Problem,’ *Occupational Psychology*, Vol. 13, 2, April 1939, p. 79).

¹⁶⁰ Braybon, *op. cit.*, p. 222; Lewis, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 191; Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

In contrast with domestic service employment, the employment of women in the textile industries in Scotland contracted during the entire inter-war period. This was the result of foreign competition, a fall in exports and the installation of modern machinery, all of which combined to close factories and led to the shedding of female labour.¹⁶¹ Despite this decline, textiles remained a substantial employer of women in Scotland and married women's employment in textiles production expanded in the 1920s. These trends are shown on Table 12 below. In the cities, large numbers of women continued to find employment in the textiles sector particularly in Dundee, but as Table 12 shows, the proportion of all women employed in textiles production, mainly jute, in the city fell from 69% in 1911 to 26% in 1951. The factors which contributed to the decline in jute production in Dundee included the depression, competition from India, modernisation and the introduction of modern spinning and weaving machinery. The high level of unemployment experienced by the predominantly female workforce led to the displacement of almost 8,000 female jute workers by the late 1930s.¹⁶² Women jute workers were also displaced by male workers and the number of female jute workers employed in Dundee fell further than the number of men employed in this industry. In 1924, 24,000 female spinners and weavers were employed, by 1939 this had fallen to 16,000, while in contrast, the number of male spinners and weavers fell from 11,000 in 1924 to 10,000 in 1939.¹⁶³ One of the reasons for this was the effect of 'protective' legislation which, as Walby notes 'fitted in with a constellation of other practices' to reduce the employment opportunities for women by, for example, preventing women from working at night. Protective legislation, which originated in the nineteenth century, placed restrictions on the work women could do in a wide range of trades and was grounded in the belief that women workers could

¹⁶¹ McIvor, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

¹⁶² Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 529; Lenman, *op. cit.*, pp. 219-220.

¹⁶³ W S Home, *The Dundee Textiles Industry: Decline and Diversification, 1960-1977*, AUP, 1982, p. 13; E A Maclean, *The Dundee Jute Industry During the Inter-War Period*, Unpublished MA Dissertation, University of St. Andrews, 1991, p. 23.

not be treated in the same way as men. As women workers were mostly young, worked until marriage, usually in unorganised trades, were less physically strong than men, had domestic responsibilities not shared by men and were likely to be mothers or potential mothers, it was believed that they needed greater protection from exploitation by employers and from work, such as night work, which would be detrimental to their health and family life. Additionally, it was believed, particularly among trade unionists, that protective legislation had improved women's status and spread the benefits of industrial protection to male workers.¹⁶⁴ In addition to night work, women workers could not be employed on Sundays and their hours of work were limited.¹⁶⁵ Therefore in Dundee, when the night shift was introduced into spinning mills, protective legislation meant that women spinners were displaced by men. This also took place in other textile trades in the UK, such as the cotton trade.¹⁶⁶ Protective legislation was generally supported by the labour movement and will be discussed further in chapter four. The depression and the high levels of unemployment among women jute workers was disastrous for Dundee women where few opportunities existed for other work. However, as Table 12 shows, the number of married women in textiles in Dundee actually expanded in the 1920s before declining in the 1930s. Married women were not restricted from working in the jute trade and they provided about 30% of all female textile workers in the city in 1931.

¹⁶⁴ Graves, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

¹⁶⁵ Cmd., 3508, *op. cit.*, 1930, p. 5.

Table 12: The Total Number of Women and Married Women Employed in the Textiles Sector in the Scottish Cities, 1911-1951, (as a percentage of all occupied women)

	1911	1921	1931	1951
Glasgow	12,936 (11.6)	10,641 (7)	9,133 (5.5)	6,220 (3.6)
<i>married women</i>	<i>1,189 (16.9)</i>	<i>1,253 (11.3)</i>	<i>1,293 (8.7)</i>	<i>2,020 (4.5)</i>
Edinburgh	1,888 (3.4)	1,460 (2)	1,136 (1.4)	763 (1)
<i>married women</i>	<i>16 (0.6)</i>	<i>103 (2.5)</i>	<i>74 (1.2)</i>	<i>226 (1.1)</i>
Dundee	25,363 (68.8)	22,969 (59)	21,932 (53)	8,758 (25.8)
<i>married women</i>	<i>5,808 (90)</i>	<i>6,080 (84)</i>	<i>8,584 (78)</i>	<i>4,636 (37.5)</i>
Aberdeen	3,308 (14.4)	2,829 (12)	2,274 (8.5)	1,351 (5.2)
<i>married women</i>	<i>63 (7.7)</i>	<i>85 (7.6)</i>	<i>180 (10)</i>	<i>412 (7.7)</i>
Scotland	115,369 (19.4)	93,943 (14.5)	81,668 (12)	53,688 (7.8)
<i>married women</i>	<i>11,423 (36)</i>	<i>10,587 (26.3)</i>	<i>14,717 (26)</i>	<i>17,244 (10.6)</i>

Source: *Census of Scotland, 1911-1951*

Female textile workers in Scotland continued to be concentrated in a narrow range of occupations. Between 85% and 90% of all winders, spinners, hosiery frame tenters and weavers in Scotland in 1931 were female. While there were local divergences in the work considered to be either ‘male’ or ‘female’, based on the customs of individual firms, the shortage or surplus of male labour, the availability of other forms of work and local trade union policy, skilled work was usually the preserve of male workers. In 1931, 74% of all textile workers in Scotland were female but 85% of all foremen and overlookers, were men. In the Dundee jute trade, women were employed on a wide range of tasks and men’s work, such as batching, in one establishment could be women’s work in another. However, women employed in jute mills and factories were generally confined to spinning, weaving and winding but not on the processes considered ‘men’s work’.¹⁶⁷ Men were not commonly employed as

¹⁶⁶ Walby, *op. cit.*, p. 179, p. 181.
¹⁶⁷ Cmd., 3508, *op. cit.*, 1930, p. 11.

spinners and were employed in small numbers with women in weaving and warping. Nevertheless, men were increasingly employed as spinners employed to do night shift work in the 1930s.

Women jute workers continued to be largely excluded from skilled work in supervisory and maintenance positions as foremen, who could hire and dismiss women workers, and from work setting and repairing the spinning machines and weaving looms as machine tuners, mechanics and tenters. Tenters, who maintained weavers' looms, also had the power to regulate the amount of work carried out by the weavers and their piecework earnings.¹⁶⁸ Women's wage rates in the jute industry in Dundee were not only low but were considerably lower than those paid to their male colleagues. The minimum wage during the inter-war period was between 25s. and 26s. per week, the male minimum was between 39s. and 43s.¹⁶⁹ In Glasgow, where the proportion of women employed in textiles was considerably smaller, cotton spinning and weaving and the associated industries of dyeing, bleaching and finishing scattered across the west of Scotland had dominated textile production. These industries declined following sustained foreign competition and the female workforce in the Glasgow cotton industry fell from almost 6,000 in 1921 to almost 3,500 in 1931. Only very specialised sectors of the industry survived such as the weaving of Muslins based in the east end of the city used for clothes and household goods, and in cotton spinning, the United Thread Mills in Paisley, continued to employ 10,000 workers, the majority of whom were women. The dyeing, bleaching and finishing trades collapsed during the slump in textiles and by the 1930s, only a small number of finishing mills remained, throwing many men and women out of work.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Drake, *op. cit.*, p. 130; Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 189; Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-148.

¹⁶⁹ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 95; *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, April 20, 1939.

¹⁷⁰ W R Scott and J Cunnison, *An Industrial Survey of the South west of Scotland*, HMSO, 1932, pp. 79-84; Lenman, *op. cit.*, p. 214; Z Grosicki, 'Textiles and Clothing', in J Cunnison and JBS Gillfillan, (eds.), *Third Statistical Account of Scotland: Glasgow*, 1955, p. 260.

The United Turkey Red Co. in the Vale of Leven, the centre of the dyeing and bleaching trade survived and the bulk of the 2,000-3,000 strong workforce were women. However, the workforce declined in the 1930s as the Turkey Red dyeing procedure disappeared and left many skills redundant.¹⁷¹

Not all textile industries declined and hosiery production in Glasgow and the west of Scotland underwent a rapid expansion in the 1920s. This industry attracted new capital and enterprise to become the second largest branch of the textile industry, employing one sixth of all insured male and female textile workers. In Scotland the numbers of women employed as hosiery frame tenters increased from 7,429 to 10,188 between 1921 and 1931. In the west of Scotland the number of female hosiery workers increased by one third, outnumbering male workers by 12 to 1 during 1923-1931, while in Glasgow the number of women employed as hosiery frame knitters more than doubled from 684 in 1921 to 1,547 in 1931. As in the jute trade women hosiery workers were excluded from a number of processes by employers and by trade union agreements with employers and tended to be concentrated in winding which required the 'nimbleness of fingers' and the making up of processes, deemed to be similar to 'ordinary sewing' and women were employed on work believed to require women's 'sharp eyes and deft fingers.' They were confined to work using lighter machinery which men would not use.¹⁷² While 86% of hosiery workers were females, they held fewer positions of authority and responsibility. They were not employed in dye houses and press shops and trade unions were opposed to the use of women in these trades. They were not employed in packing and folding, as overlookers, foremen or mechanics. Employers were also able to claim that a

¹⁷¹ S Macintyre, *Little Moscows: Communism and Working Class Militancy in the Inter-War Period*, Croom Helm, London, 1980, p. 113; Grosicki, *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Cmd 3508, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20; S Taylor, 'The Effect of Marriage and Job Possibilities for Women and the Ideology of the Home, Nottingham, 1890-1930', *Oral History*, Vol. 5, 2, Autumn, 1977, pp. 49-50.

woman worker did not 'look after her machine as well as a man and on the power frame requires more overlooking' and 'in some cases an extra mechanic is necessary.'¹⁷³ The employers' organisation, the Hawick Hosiery Manufactures, intended at the end of the First World War, to extend the practice of replacing women with men employed on power frames, as men were 'more able to do overtime'. The amount of overtime women could be employed to do was limited by protective legislation, and the men were more able to 'repair the machines and are less liable to illness.'¹⁷⁴

In Aberdeen, despite the decline, flax, hemp and woollen manufacture remained a significant source of employment for single and married women. A greater proportion of women were employed in textiles in Aberdeen than in Glasgow and Edinburgh where the small number of female textile workers were concentrated mainly in the hosiery sector. In the counties of Scotland, despite the decline in the textiles sector, large numbers of women continued to find employment in textiles in the counties. Outside Dundee, the highest concentrations of female textile workers remained in the south and east of Scotland. For example, textiles production employed half of all women workers in Selkirk and a quarter in Roxburgh, mainly in hosiery and in Clackmannanshire and Peebles, more than a third of women workers were employed mainly in wool production and in Shetland 40% of women were in textiles employment.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, with the exception of the hosiery trade in the west of Scotland, the textile industry had declined in importance as a source for female employment.

¹⁷³ H Bradley, *Men's Work Women's Work: A Sociological History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Employment*, Polity, Cambridge, p. 143.

¹⁷⁴ Cmd., 167, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

¹⁷⁵ Scott and Cunnison, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85; *Census of Scotland*, 1931.

The clothing trades in Scotland underwent a similar contraction in the inter-war period. Women were employed in a small range of occupations, principally as tailors, dress and blouse makers, sewers and milliners. Apart from tailoring work, and boot and shoe making, male workers were not generally employed in these occupations. Therefore, more than 65% of all clothing workers were women in 1931. Table 7 shows that the employment of women in this sector in Scotland declined considerably. The number of women employed in dress and blouse manufacture and millinery more than halved between 1911-1931. The number of married women clothing workers was low but their participation in this sector increased from 3% of all occupied married women in 1921 to 7% by 1931. The decline in the Glasgow clothing industry, the centre of clothing manufacture in Scotland, is shown on Table 13 below.

Table 13: The Number and Percentage of all Occupied Women Employed in the Clothing Sector in the Scottish Cities, 1911-1951

	1911	1921	1931	1951
Glasgow	20, 938 (18.8)	19,605 (13)	16,868 (10)	17,609 (8.5)
Edinburgh	7,466 (13.5)	5,777 (8)	3,776 (5)	2,439 (3.3)
Dundee	1,801 (4.8)	1,831 (5)	1,432 (3.5)	1,904 (5.6)
Aberdeen	3,075 (13.5)	2,140 (9)	1,443 (5.5)	970 (3.7)

Source: *Census of Scotland, 1911-1951*

Much of the decline in the employment of women in this sector in Scotland was the outcome of the transformation of the clothing industry in the UK from an industry based principally in small workshops to a factory industry producing ready made, light and easily washed clothes. By the 1930s, the mass production of clothes, the increased use of machinery and the subdivision of processes in factories, reduced the need for skilled workers, especially dressmakers, who were no longer as heavily relied on by middle class women. Despite this

decline there is some evidence that the number of processes on which women could be employed was extended. Some of these processes, once the preserve of male workers were now considered to be suitable for women, including pressing and cutting with electric knives and heavier work. Nevertheless, women in the clothing trades continued to be excluded from a wide range of tasks and, according to the national TUC Women's Advisory Committee in 1935, women were either excluded by trade union agreement or trade unions were opposed to the employment of women on up to 37 different tasks in the industry. Likewise, in 1930 a government report found that where skilled work continued to exist in high class tailoring, men had retained most of this work and the other processes were carried out by women.¹⁷⁶ However, Census figures are likely to have underestimated the number of women employed in the production of clothing as opportunities continued to exist for homeworkers in this sector. Homeworkers made low value consumer items, using materials supplied by an employer, at home, often on a temporary or casual basis. This work was largely performed by married women who either supplemented the insufficient or irregular earnings of their partners, or who were entirely reliant on their own earnings, such as women whose husbands were unemployed or ill. The small earnings from this work were therefore important for family livelihoods.¹⁷⁷ Homework had declined in importance as a source of work for women following the establishment of minimum wages from 1909 onwards and the 1911 Insurance Act. By the inter-war period mechanisation and changed trade conditions made homework inefficient. Employers either phased out or transferred many homework processes to factories, preferring to employ women in one place where they could be supervised and output regulated.¹⁷⁸ Many

¹⁷⁶ Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 89; Cmd, 3508, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12; TUC, Women in Industry, 'Processes Women Barred From', 1935.

¹⁷⁷ A Albert, 'Fit Work For Women: Sweated Workers in Glasgow', in Gordon and Breitenbach, (eds.), *op. cit.*, p 159, pp. 164-166; S Pennington and B Westover, *Homeworkers in England, 1850-1985*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1989, pp. 145-147.

¹⁷⁸ Lewis, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 58; Pennington and Westover, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-149; Albert, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

homeworking trades had either declined or disappeared altogether by the 1920s, but the opportunities for homework in the clothing trades, especially in tailoring increased in the 1920s, and remained the largest source of homework for women. During busy periods, clothing, lace making and net-making employers continued to rely on married women and *The Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops* for 1932 could state that homework was a 'great convenience' for women and 'many cases of hardship would be caused if it were abolished or unduly hampered by restriction.'¹⁷⁹ The mass unemployment during the depression, which meant that husbands and fathers could be out of work for years, may have forced many wives and daughters of the unemployed to fall back on homework. Even though the demand for homework is likely to have fallen away in the late 1930s when unemployment levels declined, the reliance on homework would have continued.¹⁸⁰

As Table 7 above shows, female employment in agriculture underwent a substantial decline between the wars. This was the continuation of a trend begun in the late nineteenth century. However, the Census may have underestimated the numbers of women working in this sector, particularly those employed as seasonal workers. Mechanisation of fieldwork and the transference of work to male workers may have contributed to this decline but agricultural work, characterised by heavy and rough work, poor pay, long hours, with little opportunity of any improvement made this work unappealing. The continuation of the family hiring system, whereby members of a family were hired together, the male workers securing the contract with the farmer, also prevented women from securing the full market value for their labour. Family togetherness remained important in the twentieth century as agriculture continued to rely on a

¹⁷⁹ *Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops*, Cmd. 4377, 1932.

¹⁸⁰ Pennington and Westover, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-149; Lewis, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 58.

large labour force¹⁸¹ and this system provided the necessary labour. Women hired in this way continued to be referred to as 'bondagers' and women were frequently scarce at hiring fairs.¹⁸² Female agricultural labour continued to be in great demand in the 1920s in Scotland and the shortage of women and Government concerns about this are highlighted in *The Report of the Committee on Women in Agriculture in Scotland* published in 1920. This Committee found examples of appalling working conditions. For example, women in Aberdeenshire could be found working more than 16 hours a day, with only alternate Sundays off. In order to retain women in agriculture, the Committee recommended that housing in rural Scotland be improved and wider educational and social opportunities provided.¹⁸³ However, even where there had been improvements in working conditions, for example, among byre women and dairy maids in the west of Scotland, women abandoned farm work wherever opportunities were available for work in other sectors.¹⁸⁴ While there was a sharp fall in the number of female agricultural workers, high unemployment may have temporarily forced unemployed women into this work. As in domestic service, there were attempts to push unemployed women into accepting farm work. In Kirkcaldy, unemployed female textile workers were obliged to accept work as potato pickers via the Labour Exchange in 1924. Those women who were unwilling or unable to accept this work risked losing their unemployment benefit and this policy may have been practised at other Scottish labour exchanges.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ In 1931 more than 180,00 men and women were employed in agricultural occupations, 9% of whom were women. (*Census of Scotland*, 1931),

¹⁸² Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22; Lewenhak, *op. cit.*, (1977), p. 186; B W Robertson, 'In Bondage: The Female Farm Worker in South West Scotland', in Gordon and Breitenbach, (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 159; *Scottish Farm Servant*, April 1924, pp. 15-16, May 1924, p. 32.

¹⁸³ The committee also suggested that the employment of married women in agricultural work be curtailed on the basis that they undermined their own health and that employment outside the home contributed to the neglect of home and children. (*Common Cause*, September 24, 1920, p. 735; *Glasgow Herald*, September 15, 1920).

¹⁸⁴ *Scottish Farm Servant*, January 1920, p. 134; December 1921, p. 406.

¹⁸⁵ Scottish Textile Workers Union, Kirkcaldy Branch, *Minutes*, November, 1924.

However, much of the decline in the traditional areas of women's employment was offset by the expansion in employment in shop work, clerical and typing work, as shown on Table 7 above. The commercial sector underwent a considerable expansion replacing textiles as the second largest source of employment for women, the vast majority of whom were employed as shop assistants. There was some expansion in the range of jobs available to women in shop work following the First World War, reflecting the importance of women in shop work during the war.¹⁸⁶ As Bradley notes, many women may have taken over many men's jobs during the First World War but conventional ideas about the sexual division of labour remained unchanged and the segregation of women in shop work persisted in the inter-war period.¹⁸⁷ For example, in Scotland in 1931, women remained confined primarily to selling textiles, clothing and food, particularly confectionery and to a lesser extent in boot and shoes, milk and dairy selling. However, male workers continued to dominate in shop work that involved a 'craft' element or where 'skill and knowledge' were required, particularly in meat, fish and grocery selling. Butchery and fish work was deemed to be particularly unpleasant work requiring strength even though, as Bradley points out, women were employed as fish gutters, (for example in Aberdeen), and they had always been employed to cut up meat and poultry on farms.¹⁸⁸ However, working class girls tended to regard shop work as a skilled job, particularly in comparison with domestic service. The pay was better, hours were shorter and there was a recognition that this work involved learning technical skills and how to show goods.¹⁸⁹ While female shop assistants could earn more than their counterparts in other trades, working hours were often very long. For example, shop assistants working in confectioners in Glasgow in the

¹⁸⁶ Bradley, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-183. In the distributive trades, including shop work, the number of women employed in this sector in Scotland underwent a massive increase from 58,718 in 1911 to 114,364 in 1921 reflecting the great increase in the use of women workers in shop work in particular. In 1931 this figure had risen to 127,692. (Lee, (1979), *op. cit.*, Series B, County and Regional Employment, 1901-1971).

¹⁸⁷ Bradley, *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Stevenson and Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

1920s worked from 8am-6pm on weekdays and up to 11pm on Saturday evenings, with a half-day off. In 1931, *The Select Committee on Shop Assistants* found that shop assistants in Edinburgh and Glasgow could be found working up to 70 hours per week in certain catering establishments and shops. The UK average was between 48 and 60 hours per week.¹⁹⁰ In 1936 working hours were officially reduced to a maximum of 48, but it is likely that these laws were flouted. However, as Simonton notes, many female shop workers opposed any reform and reductions in working hours fearing that they would be excluded from shift work and would lose access to the workplace.¹⁹¹ Shop work was the preserve of young single women. Almost 70% of shopworkers in Scotland in 1921 were under the age of 24, whereas, the comparable figure for textiles was only 35%. Almost 10% of all shop assistants were aged between 14 and 15, a considerably higher proportion than in other trades. There were few opportunities for promotion in shop work and older female shop workers lived in constant fear of dismissal. A young appearance was essential to remaining in work and youthfulness was often the determining factor in securing shop work. As a consequence, older women suffered high levels of unemployment.¹⁹² That less than 3% of shop assistants in Scotland in 1921 were married reflects the preference for the young and single. Where married and widowed women were employed in the commercial sector they tended to either own or manage wholesale or retail businesses.

A similar expansion had occurred in clerical work and typing. Women workers were ejected from clerical work to a lesser extent than women employed in other areas after the First World War and there was not a return to the pre-war position in this sector. Trade union

¹⁹⁰ Livingstone, (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 10; Beauchamp, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹⁹¹ D Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 254.

¹⁹² The Pilgrim Trust, *Men Without Work*, Cambridge, 1938, p. 251; Strachey, (1937), *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110; Beauchamp, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

organisation was weak in this sector and trade unions were not strong enough to be able to push women workers out.¹⁹³ However, in 1931 only 55% of all clerical workers and typists were women, substantially less than the proportion of women employed in the textiles or in the service sectors. Nevertheless, women predominated in typing work, for example, 26,503 women were employed as typists in 1931, whereas, the same occupation employed only 63 men. Among the Scottish cities, Edinburgh, with a larger professional sector, provided more opportunities for clerical and typing work, whereas a smaller proportion of women were employed in this work in Glasgow and Aberdeen. There were few opportunities for this work in Dundee reflecting a small professional sector. In clerical work, preference was given to young girls and the operation of the marriage bar forced many women to leave clerical work upon marriage. Less than 2% of all married women were employed in this sector in Scotland in 1931. Consequently, the female workforce in this sector was very young and 67% of all clerical workers were under the age of 24 in 1931. The depression of the 1930s further undermined the ability of older women clerical workers to retain their positions.¹⁹⁴

A gradual feminisation of clerical work combined with deskilling began in the late nineteenth century as offices were mechanised and this created a demand for working class female clerical workers. Typing and shorthand were viewed as work that was especially suited to women and the demand for women was sustained by the post-First World War expansion and amalgamations of commercial firms, banks, insurance companies and the post

¹⁹³ Walby, *op. cit.*, pp. 164- 66

¹⁹⁴ Strachey, (1937), *op. cit.*, pp. 116-117.

office.¹⁹⁵ Huge offices were created and cheap female workers combined with new machinery displaced male clerks.¹⁹⁶ It has been suggested that it was female clerical workers rather than engineering and munitions workers who retained the gains made during the First World War.¹⁹⁷ However, as Braverman points out, female clerical workers had 'little continuity with the small privileged clerical stratum of the past'¹⁹⁸ which had consisted mainly of middle class men and women employed before the war. It is true that some women office workers were better paid than factory and shop workers. For example, women under the age of 25 employed across the various areas of office work in the late 1920s earned on average between 35s. and 60s., typists earned between 20s. to 25s., but these incomes fell during the depression and starting rates for office girls were as low as 10s. to 12s. per week. By comparison, male clerks could earn up to 105s. per week. The higher earnings of female office workers could also be offset by increased expenditure on clothes, rent and fares.¹⁹⁹ Clerical work appears to have been little better than the alternatives offered to working class women and female clerks were usually allocated the areas of work considered the least skilled and unsuitable for men who usually held onto their privileged positions in the higher paid and status branches of clerical work. Women clerks and typists, were from the outset confined primarily to routine

¹⁹⁵ For example, the number of women employed as clerical workers in the public sector, particularly in the post office and the civil service increased from 1,013 in 1911 to 46,261 in 1921 reflecting the massive expansion in the employment of women clerical workers in Scotland in this sector during the war. In the same period the number of women employed in insurance, banking finance and business services increased from 637 to 7,642. More than 7,000 women continued to be employed in these occupations in 1931. (Lee, (1979), *op. cit.*, Series B County and Regional Employment, 1901-1971).

¹⁹⁶ J Lewis, 'Women Clerical Workers in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century', in Clarke, Crichton and Johnson, (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 28; Roberts, (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 38; Beauchamp, *op. cit.*, p. 56; As Summerfield (1984, *op. cit.*, p. 12), shows, women in white collar work, such as secretaries and other female office workers, were often attacked and blamed for undermining male employment. An article on women secretaries in *News Chronicle* in 1934 read 'Better Pay and Smarter Clothes for Women, Unemployment and Patched Pants For Men.'

¹⁹⁷ G Anderson, 'The White Blouse Revolution', in G Anderson, (ed.), *The White Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers Since 1870*, MUP, Manchester, p. 11.

¹⁹⁸ H Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1974, p. 296.

¹⁹⁹ Beauchamp, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

work, with no means of promotion and were effectively 'ghettoised' in their own departments and grades.²⁰⁰ As Anthony noted, in clerical work 'it is a matter of common observation that a disproportionate number of the females employed are in positions of lesser skill or trust.'²⁰¹ Another contemporary, Ray Strachey, described general clerical work as the lowest grade of secretarial work, a poorly paid and a dull occupation leading to nowhere and 'probably the worst opening any girl of 16 can accept'.²⁰²

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that there was a steady increase in the number of women employed in the inter-war period in Scotland and an increase in the percentage of all women in employment. Female participation rates and the percentage of women in the labour force in Scotland in the inter-war period corresponded well with the figures for England and Wales. As in England and Wales, the proportion of single Scottish women in the labour force declined while the proportion of married women in the labour force increased. Determining the extent to which married women participated in the workforce is difficult given that their casual and temporary work would not have been included in official statistics. However, the number of married women workers increased in the 1920s and the Census recorded a slow increase in the proportion of married women who worked in Scotland in the inter-war period. This is likely to have reflected a partial shift away from the idea that it was preferable that married women did not work combined with falls in the birth rate and family size. However, the proportion of all married women who worked in Scotland remained small and the Scottish figure, as in the pre- First World War period, was lower than in England and Wales and the differences only narrowed after the Second World War. Despite the expansion in married women's workforce participation in

²⁰⁰ Lewis, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 196-197; Summerfield, (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10; Walby, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

²⁰¹ S Anthony, *Women's Place In Industry and Home*, George Routledge, London, 1932, p. 17.

²⁰² Strachey, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

the inter-war period it has been shown that many married women who may have wanted to remain in work were hindered in their attempts to do so by the operation and the strengthening of the marriage bar. This was encouraged by patriarchal state policies that legitimised the marriage bar and encouraged the view, via unemployment legislation in particular, that married women, rather than work, should be supported by their husbands.

This chapter also shows that the idea that the First World War substantially altered women's experience of work in the post-war period seems to have been false, as in Scotland the war did not impact greatly on the range of work available for women. The war allowed for a temporary suspension of the definition of the work that was deemed to be suitable for women and would have broadened many women's experiences of work but the sexual division of labour which existed in the pre-war period was maintained throughout the inter-war period and there was no great change in women's working lives. Irrespective of how successfully women had performed new tasks during the war, women continued to be employed in a well-defined range of occupations, usually in 'women's work' considered to be unskilled. They were confined to the lowest paid work and employers were reluctant to pay women a wage approaching male wage levels or equal pay. The implementation of the Restoration of Pre-war Practices Act meant that the vast majority of working class women were pushed out of war work and back into the traditional occupations or were drawn into the areas of expansion in women's employment, such as shop, office work and the expanding service sector. As in the rest of the UK there was a continuation of the movement away from the traditional women's occupations, with the exception of domestic service. The First World War drew many women away from domestic service, but was a temporary phenomenon and employment in this sector actually underwent a resurgence in the 1920s. This reflected declining opportunities for work in other sectors and the strong government desire to push women into this work. However, in the locations where

the traditional industries had declined, as in the jute industry in Dundee, this had could have a devastating effect on women workers who had few opportunities for work in other sectors.

The choices of work available for working class girls in Scotland were restricted but the range of work for women was extended in the inter-war period, especially in clerical and retail sectors and in the professional sector for single middle class women. These changes were encouraged and accelerated by the war, particularly the movement of greater numbers of women into clerical and typing work, but the increasing use of female labour in these sectors had its origin before the First World War. Nevertheless, the majority of women in these sectors, like their counterparts employed in the traditional women's industries, were employed in the work considered less skilled and unsuitable for male workers and their earnings were not substantially higher than in the traditional areas of women's work. Changes in the range of employment available for women, particularly in the new industries, in the Midlands and the South East Of England evolved over a longer period in Scotland. However, where Scottish women may have found work in these industries, they too would have been confined to the lowest paid and lesser skilled work in the belief that women were most suited to monotonous work requiring little training and skill and were less capable of holding supervisory or managerial positions.

It is against this background of women's confinement to low paid work and work portrayed as low skilled that the position of women workers within the trade union movement in Scotland will be considered. The following chapter will consider how far the participation of women in the labour market reflected their participation in the trade union movement and if the differing employment structures in the counties and cities had an impact of this on women's trade unionism. Another consideration will be the extent to which the effect of structural

changes in the pattern of women's employment in Scotland and the long-term decline experienced in the traditional women's industries, in particular, affected the level of trade union organisation among women.

CHAPTER TWO: WOMEN AND TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP 1919-1939

Chapter one has identified the changes in the pattern of women's employment in Scotland in the inter-war period and highlighted the extent of the decline in the employment of women workers in the traditional industries, particularly the textiles industry. The aim of this chapter will be to identify a number of themes in relation to women workers and the trends in female trade union membership in the inter-war period and it will consider the effect of the changes in the pattern of women's employment on female trade union membership. The first consideration will be the effect of the First World War on trade union organisation among women in the UK. Female trade union membership during the war underwent a great expansion as women introduced to war work joined trade unions and, where possible, the extent to which this high level of female membership was maintained in the 1920s will be examined. The links between the level of female trade union membership and geographical location, differing employment structures across the cities and regions of Scotland and the nature and status of work will be addressed. The impact of the depression and effect of high unemployment levels on trade union participation among women workers, for example in textiles production, will also be determined. Where possible, the extent to which the Scottish pattern of female trade union membership reflected the national trends will be examined. Much of this chapter will deal with British wide trade union membership and this is due to the enormous difficulties in obtaining accurate disaggregated Scottish figures for trade union organisation among both male and female workers in the inter-war period. There are no reliable official figures for trade union membership for either male or female workers in Scotland either before or during the First World War or for the inter-war period and therefore, other sources including trade union records and Scottish and British Trades Union Congress Records are relied on for this information. However, before identifying and explaining the

extent of women's participation in trade unions in Scotland it is essential to provide an outline of the position of women in trade unions in the UK as a whole.

Women have been members of trade unions since at least the mid-nineteenth century but they were largely excluded from unions based on craft organisation. In Scotland, greater numbers of women were drawn into the trade union movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, most women workers remained unorganised.¹ In the UK, from the early twentieth century onwards, female trade union membership underwent a significant expansion growing by 159% in the period 1910-1933 in comparison with a 56% increase in male membership. However, it was dilution during the First World War, that allowed considerable numbers of women to participate in the trade union movement for the first time and female membership reached previously unattainable levels, rising from 437,000 in 1914 to 1,326,000 in 1919. This was due in part to a combination of a high demand for labour and high wages.² Much of this expansion was concentrated in the general labour unions, particularly the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW), the NUGMW and the Workers Union, a mixed union for semi-skilled workers in the engineering trade. Of the non-general unions, expansion was centred mainly in the textile and clothing unions.³ However, as Barbara Drake pointed out, within this general expansion trade union organisation among women often remained weak during the War. For example, on Clydeside, less than 40% of the women employed in engineering were unionised.⁴ She suggested that these organisation problems not only stemmed from the usual difficulties, such as the temporary nature of work, inability to pay

¹ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

² Breitenbach, (1982), *op. cit.*, p. 40; Clegg, *op. cit.*, p. 543; K Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism c. 1770-1990*, Alan Sutton, Gloucestershire, 1992, p. 122.

³ Drake, (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 237-239; H Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, Pelican, London, 1963, p. 129.

⁴ B Drake, *Women and the Engineering Trades*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1917, p. 128.

for efficient organisation and the lack of female volunteers to act as officials, but also from the inherent weakness of the women’s unions organising on the Clyde, particularly the NFWW. However, the principal problem was the failure of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, the most powerful union on the Clyde, to organise women in response to fears over the introduction of cheaper female labour and in the conviction that the presence of women in industry would be temporary. Instead the ASE formed an alliance with the NFWW.⁵ As Soldon notes, the ASE paid only lip service to the agreement with the NFWW to recruit women and the result of the recruitment attempts by the ASE were negligible as there was never any pressure on the union to recruit females in engineering work.⁶

In the inter-war period, the proportion of female trade union members, in relation to male union members, increased from 10.6 in 1911 to 15.1 in 1921 and to 16.4 in 1931. The proportion of all women workers who were trade union members also underwent a substantial increase and this is shown on Table 1 below.

Table 1: Male and Female Trade Union Density in Great Britain, 1911-1941

	1911	1921	1931	1941
Female	6.6	18.8	12.8	22.2
Male	24.5	46.3	29.5	42.4

Source: J Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950*, Sussex, Wheatsheaf, 1984.

However, the trajectory of female trade union membership in the inter-war period underwent a number of significant fluctuations and as with the period before the First World War, the majority of women workers remained outside the trade union movement. The figure

⁵ *Ibid.*
⁶ Soldon, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

for 1921, shows the enormous expansion in female trade union membership in the UK in the immediate post-war period. However, female trade union density was highest in 1920 at 24%, (1.34m women), while male trade union density was 55%, (7m men). These were the highest trade union densities for male and female workers until the Second World War. However, when the post-war boom which had contributed to this expansion ended in 1920, female trade union membership fell and the severe slump and long term unemployment which followed, contributed to a 37.6% fall in female trade union density between 1920-23.⁷ Female trade union density fell further in the 1920s,⁸ and the figure presented for 1931 on Table 1 shows the substantial decline in trade union density during this decade. Initially, in the 1930s female membership levels continued to fall. However, female trade union density was still higher in 1933 at 12% than in 1913 when the figure was 8%. By comparison, male trade union density actually declined in the same period from 29.6% to 27.4%.⁹ From the mid-1930s onwards, economic improvements and declining levels of unemployment among women workers were accompanied by increases in female trade union membership. Nevertheless, high levels of unemployment and two deep depressions resulted in lower female trade union density levels at the outset of the Second World War than had been achieved at the end of the First World War. In 1939 female trade union density was 16% compared with 23.7% in 1918, a membership fall of 26%.¹⁰ The enormous increase in female trade union density during the Second World War, when large numbers of female dilutees joined or re-joined trade unions, is shown in the figure for 1941 on Table 1.

⁷ Halsey, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-124.

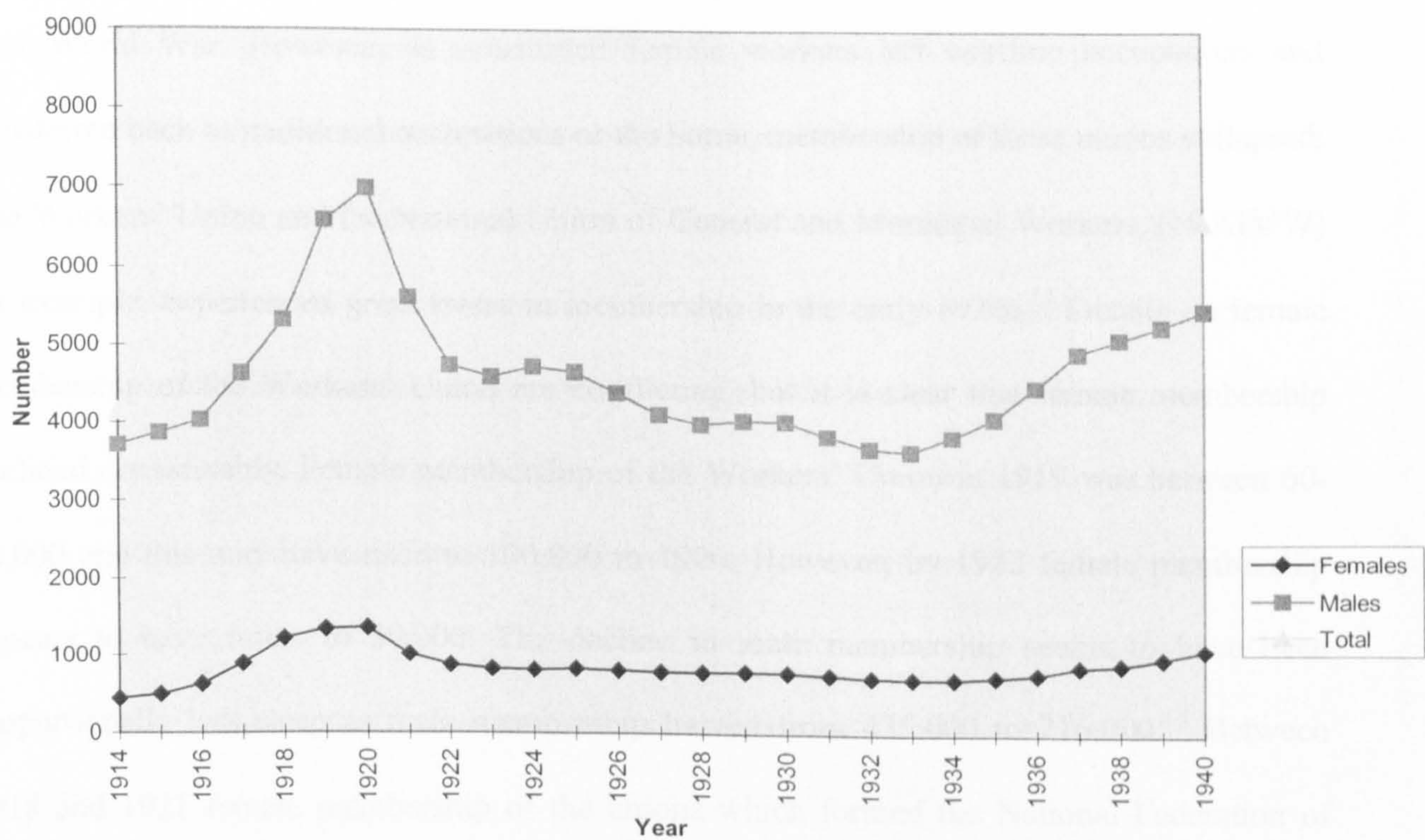
⁸ Not only were women leaving trade unions but the number of unions with female members also fell from 436 in 1922 to 375 unions by 1935. Much of this, however, would have been due to union amalgamations.

⁹ Or 390,000 female trade union members in 1913 and 731,000 in 1933, (Halsey, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-124).

¹⁰ Halsey, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-124; Soldon, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-147.

As Clegg argues, the inter-war period contained a unique cycle of growth and decline in trade union membership. Post-First World War decline in membership was greater than any other on record while recovery after 1933 was much less rapid than previous periods of growth. The explanation for this, he argues, was the fluctuation in the demand for labour that occurred in this period coupled with structural change in the UK economy.¹¹ The substantial decline in male and female trade union membership in the UK in the 1920s and then the subsequent recovery is shown on Table 2 below.

Table 2: Trade Union Membership in the United Kingdom
1914-1940 (in 000's)



Source: Adapted from A H Halsey (ed.), *Trends in British Society Since 1900*, Macmillan, London, 1972, pp. 122-123.

Clegg provides a useful indication of where membership losses were greatest amongst the largest national trade unions between 1920-23. He argues that while economic performance

¹¹ Clegg, *op. cit.*, p. 543.

and unemployment were the main explanatory variables underlying changes in trade union membership, this was also influenced by the former level of density and the length of time high density had been experienced. Therefore, trade union loyalty, could be sustained in some sectors, (boilermakers, railwaymen, miners), whilst in others where the economic circumstances may not have been as bad, (distributive workers), union membership fell. Those unions with the greatest loss of membership also tended to be those characterised by high levels of labour turnover.¹² Clegg however, fails to point out that the unions in which membership decline was greatest, precisely for the reasons he states, were the unions with large numbers of female members. The general unions, as already noted, expanded during the First World War. However, as substituted female workers left wartime occupations and transferred back to traditional occupations or the home, membership of these unions collapsed. The Workers' Union and the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, (NUGMW) for example, experienced great losses in membership in the early 1920s.¹³ Details on female membership of the Workers' Union are conflicting, but it is clear that female membership declined considerably. Female membership of the Workers' Union in 1919 was between 60-80,000 and this may have risen to 100,000 in 1920. However, by 1922 female membership appears to have fallen to 30,000. The decline in male membership seems to have been proportionally less steep as male membership halved from 435,000 to 216,000.¹⁴ Between 1918 and 1921 female membership of the unions which formed the National Federation of General Workers (NFGW)¹⁵ almost halved from a high point of 159,459 to 84,273. By

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 346-347.

¹³ Drake, (1984) *op. cit.*, p. 111.

¹⁴ National Federation of General Workers, *Annual Report*, 1921, p. 53.

¹⁵ This federation included eight unions 4 of which included female workers including NUGMW, National Amalgamated Union of Labour, the Workers' Union and the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU).

comparison, male membership fell from a high point of 1.15 million in 1920 to 728,587 in 1921. Therefore, the fall in women's membership of these unions was proportionally greater than the fall in male membership.¹⁶ In the Workers' Union *Annual Report* the period 1920-1923 was viewed as having been the 'most difficult period ever experienced by the whole trade union movement. Millions have been dispirited....but if we all set to work....eventually they will all come back and bring millions with them.'¹⁷

In the UK, the areas of work in which women had traditionally been organised underwent the greatest decline in trade union membership between the wars. Table 3 below shows that the number of women in textiles trade unions, especially cotton, declined drastically. These industries were hit particularly hard by economic conditions and the textile trades were in continuous decline in the inter-war period. As a consequence, women's trade union participation declined. However, despite the slump in these trades, the 'tradition of trade union organisation held to a remarkable degree'.¹⁸ Nevertheless, female trade union membership increased quite substantially between 1933 and 1939 in all of the sectors shown on Table 3 below, apart from cotton and distribution. Textile trade union membership also experienced a slight upturn in this period. The expansion in all of these sectors reflected economic growth, the fall in unemployment and the re-armament drive in the late 1930s.

¹⁶ NFGW, *Annual Report*, 1921, p. 53.

¹⁷ Workers' Union, *Annual Report*, 1923, p. 11.

¹⁸ Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, p. 216.

Table 3: Women's Trade Union Membership in the UK, 1918-39

	1918	1933	1939
Textiles	163,000	43,417	45,897
Cotton	260,000	149,264	109,000
Clothing	88,500	48,202	78,604
Distributive	62,000	58,800	54,119
Boot and Shoe	28,000	24,917	34,095
Printing, Bookbinding	54,000	29,296	39,191
Food, Drink, Tobacco	7,000	2,371	5,284
General, Municipal	216,000	-	43,321

Source: E Roberts, *Women's Work 1840-1940*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1988, p. 71.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE TRADE UNIONS IN SCOTLAND

The participation of women in the trade union movement in Scotland reflected many of the general UK trends. However, the Scottish experience was refracted through the pattern of Scottish industrial structure and economic change in the period. As a consequence the experience of Scottish women in the trade union movement has similarities with the UK experience but also dissimilarities. McIvor has described women's position in the trade union movement in Scotland in this period as 'extremely tenuous' as between the early 1920s and 1930s, women's trade union participation across Scotland fell by 40% from a density of 12% organised to just over 7%. As he notes, there was some recovery in the late 1930s and the number of trade unions in Scotland accepting women members increased up to the late 1920s and this reflects the national pattern.¹⁹ As there are no official figures for trade union membership for Scotland in the inter-war period this section has to rely on other sources.

¹⁹ McIvor, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

Trade union records of female membership have been used, but where the small number of trade unions did present female membership figures in their records these are often incomplete. Consequently, much of this section relies on trade union membership surveys undertaken every year by the STUC in the inter-war period, which are also incomplete.

The first ever STUC survey into female trade union membership in Scotland was undertaken in 1924²⁰ and this is reproduced on Tables 4 and 5 below. It found that men were more than twice as likely to be members of trade unions than women. According to this survey, 78,470 women were trade union members in Scotland, a trade union density of 12% and this female membership represented 24.2% of the entire membership of the STUC affiliated trade unions.²¹ By comparison 457,962 male workers were trade union members or a trade union density of 30%.²² However, as shown on Tables 4 and 5, female membership of trade unions varied across the regions and the cities of Scotland, reflecting the different regional industrial structures. Nevertheless, on the whole female trade union membership was weak in Scotland and only underwent an increase, according to STUC figures in the late 1930s. Table 4 below shows that women workers in Dundee were most likely to be members of a trade union, reflecting the high level of trade union membership among female jute workers in the city. In Dundee, 38% of all trade union members were female, whereas in Glasgow, only 14% of women workers were members of a trade union and only 12% of all trade union members in Glasgow were female. According to the STUC survey, trade union

²⁰ Report of the General Council on the Organisation and Extent of the Trade Union Movement in Scotland 1925, Parts I & II in STUC, *Annual Report*, 1925. The report accompanying the survey details the difficulties faced by the STUC in obtaining accurate information from the constituent trade unions. For example, separate male and female trade union membership figures were in many instances not kept by unions and only a small number of questionnaires sent to trade unions were fully completed. As the report states, the figures presented could not be regarded as exact.

²¹ McIvor, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

²² The figures for male and female trade union density for 1924 were calculated using the Census of Scotland for 1921.

participation among women in Edinburgh was greater than in Glasgow at 19% and 18% of all trade unionists in Edinburgh were females.

Table 4: The Number and Percentage of Male and Female Trade Union Members in the Scottish Cities, 1924

	Males	Females	Total	% Female *	% Male*
Glasgow	117,212	15,487	132,699	14	41
Edinburgh	38,282	8,298	46,580	19	38
Dundee	20,829	12,970	33,799	40	49
Aberdeen	17,540	2,372	19,912	14	46

*The percentages provided for female and male trade union membership were calculated using total employment figures for women in the cities and counties provided by the STUC. If the Census of Scotland for 1921 is used to calculate these percentages they are substantially lower for women and men. **Source:** Report of General Council Part 1: Extent and Structure of Trade Union Movement in Scotland, *28th Annual Report of the STUC*, 1925, p 35.

The higher figure for Edinburgh is surprising²³ given that a greater proportion of women were employed in domestic service in this city than in Glasgow, Aberdeen or Dundee and this was a sector of work where, as will be shown, there seems to have been little trade union penetration. Additionally, only three large companies existed in Edinburgh at this time and male and female workers were spread across many small employers, making organisation more difficult.²⁴ However, in Edinburgh a greater proportion of women were employed in the professions and in the paper and printing occupations, where as will be shown, trade union organisation among women workers seems to have been high. The lower figure for Glasgow may have been due to the fact that a higher proportion of women were employed in clerical

²³ As already noted, the STUC encountered many problems in recording trade union membership and these figures may be inaccurate.

²⁴ The North British Rubber Co. in the city was the largest industrial employer and the St. Cuthbert's Co-operative Association the largest single employer in the town. The third largest employer was a bread and biscuit manufacturer. All of these employers recruited large numbers of women workers. (Holford, *op. cit.*, p. 16.)

and shop work²⁵ than in Edinburgh and these areas of work were associated with low levels of trade union organisation.

The STUC also surveyed trade union membership in the Scottish counties. As the counties are grouped together, it is not possible to calculate the percentages for individual counties. Table 5 below shows that women were much more likely to be trade union members in the borders and the eastern counties of Scotland and this suggests that there was a correlation between higher levels of female trade union organisation and the employment of women in the textile sector. This survey found that 33% of women workers were union members in Selkirk, Peebles, Roxburgh and Berwickshire and that 38% of all trade unionists in these counties were women. Proportionately more women than men were union members in these counties and this is shown on Table 5. Between a third and a half of all women workers in these counties, with the exception of Berwickshire, were employed mainly in wool and hosiery production and were generally not employed in domestic service, where organisation seems to have been very weak.

²⁵ According to Glasgow Trades Council figures in 1924, 2,149 men and women were members of unions recruiting shop assistants in Glasgow. Using 1921 Census of Scotland occupation tables for male and females in Glasgow in shop work, this is a trade union participation rate of 7.3%.

Table 5: The Number and Percentage of Male and Female Trade Union Members in the Scottish Counties, 1924

	Males	Females	Total	% Female *	% Male*
1	6,603	4,026	10,629	33	27
2	36,246	3,663	39,909	29	61
3	10,003	5,504	15,537	26	19
4	41,809	6,031	47,810	24	47
5	7,796	2,284	10,080	18	13
6	32,119	3,335	35,454	16	37
7	117,264	11,710	128,974	14	38
8	3,964	1,008	4,972	11	13
9	8,295	1,782	10,077	10	13

*Percentages calculated using STUC provided figures for women employed in the counties.

Key to the Geographical Divisions

- 1. Roxburghshire, Selkirkshire, Peebleshire, Berwickshire
- 2. East, Mid and West Lothian
- 3. Perthshire, Forfarshire
- 4. Fifeshire, Clackmananshire, Kinrosshire
- 5. Nairnshire, Morayshire, Banffshire, Aberdeenshire, Kincardineshire
- 6. Dumbartonshire, Stirlingshire
- 7. Ayrshire, Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire
- 8. Wigtownshire, Kirkcudbrightshire
- 9. Bute, Aran, Argyllshire, Invernesshire, Ross & Cromarty, Sutherlandshire, Caithnesshire, Orkney & Shetland

Source: Report of the General Council Part 1: Extent and Structure of Trade Union Movement in Scotland, *28th Annual Report of the STUC*, 1925, p. 35.

According to this survey, higher levels of union participation among women occurred not only in the counties dominated by textiles employment and in the Lothians, 29% of women workers were organised. In these counties, women were employed in textiles only to a small extent and they were commonly employed in domestic service and agricultural occupations. They were also employed in significant numbers in shop work, paper and printing occupations and the professions. As trade union membership figures for this period are so imprecise, it is

virtually impossible to determine whether the presence of substantial numbers of women in agriculture in these counties contributed to a higher trade union participation rate than in other counties. The greatest post-First World War slump in union membership was in agriculture, but as Cole noted, the National Union of Agricultural Workers claimed to have a substantial male and female membership in Scotland into the 1920s.²⁶ In the majority of the counties with the third and fourth highest trade union participation rates among women, shown on Table 5, significant proportions of women were employed in textile production, particularly in Forfarshire and Clackmannanshire. Relatively few women in these two counties were employed in domestic service. The low trade union participation rates among women in the other counties, shown on Table 5, can perhaps be explained by the predominance of domestic service employment among women. In Nairnshire, Morayshire, Aberdeenshire, Banffshire and Kincardineshire this survey found that only 18% of women workers were organised. Large proportions of women were employed in domestic service in these counties. Similarly, in Dumbartonshire and Stirlingshire, women were spread across a wide range of occupations, but the greatest proportion of women were employed in domestic service.

Table 5 also shows that organisation among women in the west of Scotland was low. In Ayrshire, Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire, only 14% of women workers were organised and less than 10% of all trade unionists were female. This figure may hide great variations in trade union membership in these counties. In Paisley, Renfrewshire and the Irvine Valley towns in Ayrshire, where women were mainly employed in textiles, union participation may have been considerably higher than the combined figure for these counties suggests. As domestic service

²⁶ GDH Cole, *Organised Labour: An Introduction to Trade Unionism*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1924, p. 177; The Scottish Farm Servants' Union also had a male and female membership of 15,000 in 1924.

was not the only important source of employment for women in the west of Scotland, this cannot explain low trade union participation rates among women. Low levels of organisation among women could be a reflection of the industrial structure in the west of Scotland, which was based in the heavy industries and possibly a lack of suitable trade unions to recruit women in many areas of the west of Scotland. The counties where organisation among women was weakest were primarily rural and remote. Women in the rural counties, according to the census, were less likely to work than women elsewhere and more likely to be employed in domestic service. For example, in Wigtownshire and Kirkcudbrightshire, between a third and a half of all women were employed in this work in 1921. In the counties with the lowest union participation rates among women, between 33% and 44% of women workers were employed in domestic service, with the exception of Shetland. A substantial proportion of women in these counties were also employed in agriculture. Therefore, it is possible that the high concentration of women in domestic service and the isolated nature of work in domestic service and agriculture greatly undermined trade union organisation.

Overall, trade union participation among women workers in Scotland in the inter-war period was weak and there were a number of possible reasons for this. However, as McIvor points out, many of the problems involved in organising women were not unique to Scotland.²⁷ Part of the explanation for weak trade union organisation among women in the UK has rested on the occupational and industrial distribution of women workers. Women have largely been concentrated in the industries characterised by high labour turnover, low pay and were usually confined to semi and unskilled work. They have tended to be employed in small firms, (where employees usually have greater contact with employers); they were isolated from

²⁷ McIvor, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

other workers and spread across wide geographical areas, as in catering, domestic service, shop and clerical work. Women have also frequently been employed as temporary and casual workers and the unions, which have traditionally recruited women, and men, working in these sectors have also been weakened by high membership turnover reflecting high labour turnover. All of these factors made trade union organisation among women workers more problematic.²⁸ However, it is important to note that many of the factors that hindered organisation among women also affected the level of trade union participation among men employed in the same sectors and men and women joined trade unions according to the traditions of their industries. As Drake noted, the reticence among women to join trade unions in the areas of work they dominated was usually shared by men employed in the same semi-skilled and unskilled work.²⁹ MA Hamilton also recognised that 'very large numbers of women are in occupations in which organisation is weak among men. This is a cardinal point. It is often forgotten'. Women and men, as she noted, in 'the ill paid, irregular, casual and isolated kinds of work' were always more difficult to organise. However, this point was often ignored by trade unions who perceived women as being especially 'difficult to organise'.³⁰ As GDH Cole pointed out, the idea that women workers presented a 'special problem' for trade unions, that they were especially apathetic, less interested in improving working conditions and in joining trade unions than male workers was greatly exaggerated. As he noted, women could be organised into trade unions with success, as the war showed, and they were joining trade unions, in the 1920s, more readily than they had done before the war. Cole instead suggested that the greatest obstacle to improving trade union organisation among women workers was that they continued to be among the poorest paid of all workers.³¹

²⁸ R Brown, 'Women as Employees: Social Consciousness and Collective Action', in J. Siltanen and M. Stanworth, (eds.), *Women and the Public Sphere*, Hutchinson, London, 1984, pp. 70-71.

²⁹ Drake, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 198.

³⁰ M A Hamilton, *Women at Work*, Labour Book Service, London, 1941, p. 35.

³¹ Cole, (1924), *op. cit.*, p. 94.

The inability to pay trade union subscriptions, in particular, made trade union organisation difficult.³² While subscription rates were not high, in 1920 contributions were usually between 2d. and 1s. per week in the UK, these rates may have been high enough to dissuade the poorest paid women from joining. For example, in 1920, a female representative of the Shop Assistants' Union at the STUC claimed that the low earnings received by female shop workers, which could be as little as 10s. per week, made these women 'impossible to organise.'³³ As Drake argued, until 'women receive men's wages, then and not before, they will gain men's full strength in organisation.'³⁴ Many poorly paid women entirely dependent on their own earnings are likely to have been unable to afford to join a trade union. During the periods of high unemployment experienced in the inter-war period, more than a quarter of the workforce was out of a job in the early 1930s in Scotland in comparison to a fifth of the total workforce in the UK³⁵ and therefore, many working wives of unemployed men or women in families affected by unemployment may have been prevented from spending even very small amounts of money on trade union membership. It is also possible that many of those who could afford to pay weekly union contributions were unable to join a union or were prevented from fully participating in trade union activities, such as meetings and social gatherings which involved other expenses, because of financial restrictions.

In addition to low wages, another impediment to trade union organisation among women workers would have stemmed from their domestic responsibilities. As Glucksman notes, in the inter-war period, the reduction in family size and the birth rate, the state provision of gas, electricity and running water reduced the proportion of women's lives spent in domestic

³² McIvor, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

³³ Drake, (1984), *op. cit.*, Table II; STUC, *Annual Report*, 1920, p. 109.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

³⁵ Smout, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

labour.³⁶ However, few working class women in Scotland, (as in many other areas of the UK), had access to electricity and an array of household tasks continued to be performed without the use of labour saving devices solely by women and girls as men were usually exempt from performing all but a few household chores.³⁷ Macintyre highlights the extremely arduous nature of household chores performed by miners' wives in the Fife coalfields in 1930s. In addition to preparing meals and heating water for baths, women living in cramped accommodation, which required constant tidying, waged a constant battle against coal dust and smoke. They used coal stoves to heat water and cook and clothes and overalls were washed and dried daily by hand.³⁸ Therefore, women and girls who were in paid employment and who were also responsible for household chores, as well as rearing children, would have been presented with few opportunities to attend trade union meetings. Many women may have been reluctant to attend trade union meetings outside of working hours, usually held in the evenings, or take on extra responsibilities in addition to work and domestic responsibilities.³⁹ Many married women workers, particularly those with children, and who may have been unable to find suitable childcare, are also likely to have been prevented from joining trade unions in order to fulfil these responsibilities.⁴⁰ A substantial proportion of female trade union members

³⁶ Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

³⁷ A J McIvor, 'Gender Apartheid?: Women in Scottish Society', in TM Devine and RJ Finlay, (eds.), *Scotland in the 20th Century*, EUP, 1996, pp. 193-194.

³⁸ Macintyre, (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 138.

³⁹ As Leonora Eyles found in 1926, family responsibilities hindered women's capacity to unionise, she noted that 'Many times last year I went to meetings organised by trade union officials to ask women to join various trade unions; these women came in small numbers to the meeting place; sat down on a seat in weariness so profound that no propaganda could get into their heads; and all the time children played about the door calling, "Mum aren't you coming home? I want my tea"...They were utterly worn out.' L Eyles, *Women's Problems of Today*, The Labour Publishing Co., 1926, cited in Rowbowtham, (1973), *op. cit.*, p. 137.

⁴⁰ In more recent studies it has been found that women employed in manual and clerical work are more likely to be active trade union members if they are single, childless or if they have older children, such as teenagers, who do not need to rely on childcare (see V Beechey, *Unequal Work*, Verso, London, 1987, pp. 185-187.

are also likely to have been prevented from fully participating in trade union activities for these reasons.⁴¹

The nature and the status of work are an important stimulus to trade union organisation and domestic service provides an example of this. Large numbers of women were employed as domestic servants in Scotland, as in the rest of the UK, they were scattered between many employers, were poorly paid, worked long hours, they frequently worked alone and were subject to close supervision by employers. Servants employed in wealthy households often identified with the employer and their interests and they continued to be the 'most depressed section of working people.'⁴² When the National Union of Domestic Workers (NUDW) began organising female domestic workers in the late 1930s, mainly in the London area, they realised that their small number of members faced great difficulties in attending union meetings as it would be 'an exceptional employer who allows her employee to have a number of callers and the necessary time off for branch meetings.' The union proposed that the solution would be to maintain contact between members and head office by correspondence.⁴³ Therefore, a range of factors acted as a major impediment to organisation among domestic servants and these problems were compounded by the view within the trade union movement that it was futile to recruit domestic servants, that the problems involved in recruiting servants were too great and that recruitment drives were too expensive. In the UK, the NFWW, the domestic section of the Workers' Union and the Domestic Workers of Great Britain all recruited domestic servants. It is impossible to determine how many domestic servants were organised, but the latter

⁴¹ Domestic responsibilities, the inconvenience of the times and venues of trade union meetings continue to hinder the ability of potential women trade union members and existing female trade union members to be active in trade unions. (see D Sinclair, *Women and Trade Unionism: The Effect of Gender on the Propensity to Unionise and Participation in Trade Union Activities*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow, 1993, pp. 292-299).

⁴² Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, p. 181.

⁴³ NUDW, Organising Committee, c. 1938.

organisation had only a handful of members⁴⁴ and it would seem that domestic servants remained almost completely unorganised in the UK in the inter-war period. In the late 1930s, the British TUC General Council set up the National Union of Domestic Workers⁴⁵ to recruit servants and less than 1000 women in England and Scotland joined. The TUC recognised that many problems existed for domestic servants who wanted to join, but believed that the results obtained did not justify the work involved.⁴⁶ A similar position was adopted by the NUGMW and the TGWU, who concluded that there were too many problems to be overcome in recruiting servants and they preferred not to spend the time and money required.⁴⁷

In Scotland, domestic servant, Jessie Stephens attempted to organise servants in Glasgow in 1911, but no lasting organisation followed from this.⁴⁸ In the inter-war period, the large general unions may have recruited domestic servants in Scotland, but there is evidence that an Edinburgh based union, the National Domestic Union,⁴⁹ set up in 1919, and affiliated to the Restaurant and Hotel Employees Union, recruited servants and other service sector workers. However, according to Agnes Lumsden, general secretary of this union, in a letter to Walter Citrine, TUC General Secretary in 1938, they had great difficulties in recruiting women and she believed that the union would have been more successful had it not been for 'the

⁴⁴ Drake, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

⁴⁵ The aim of the union was to move domestic service away from the 'Edwardian age and conditions of life' and 'raise the status of the industry and enable it to take the place of importance which it ought to occupy in the national life, instead of being....the last resource of a girl who can obtain no other work.' The union was keen for the working conditions to be improved and the work of the domestic servant to be recognised as skilled work and one which required a long training. For example, a NUDW leaflet read 'Domestic service is a skilled job and one worth training for. You can learn the job of housekeeping just as the doctor learns his job of medicine and as the lawyer, the scientist, the architect and the actress learn their jobs. Yes it's a good job'. (NUDW, TUC, Publicity Dept. January 1938; NUDW, Leaflet, n.d. c.1930s).

⁴⁶ During the late 1930s, NUDW distributed leaflets, produced a charter and advertised in a wide variety of journals.

⁴⁷ NUDW, 'Organising Difficulties', 1931; Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, p. 207.

⁴⁸ Horn, (1975), *op. cit.*, p. 158. It seems that in the inter-war period Jessie Stephens may have become the secretary of the Domestic Workers' Union and campaigned for reductions in hours worked, adequate time off, regular meals and payment for overtime. (Alberti, *op. cit.*, p. 156).

⁴⁹ Unfortunately there appears no further information relating to the work of this union.

interference of the mixed unions in the past'.⁵⁰ It is possible that this statement refers to the criticism that the mixed unions, (NUGMW, Workers Union, TGWU), which organised both male and female workers, relegated both rank and file women and women officials to a lower priority than the male membership and leadership, that women were second class members, had played only a minor role in union affairs and that this had led to apathy among women members and the officials of these unions.⁵¹

In addition to the difficulties involved in recruiting domestic servants, the incalculable number of women who were not permanently in the workforce including seasonal and temporary workers, women who worked on a part-time basis, or women engaged in homework, isolated from other workers, would have had little or no opportunity to join a trade union. The Workers' Union *Record* reported that the women at the International Federation of Trade Union Women⁵² conference in 1927 resolved to organise and raise the wage levels among women homeworkers to those of factory workers. If any unions in the UK or Scotland attempted to do this is unclear.⁵³ A further impediment to trade union organisation among women was the transient nature of work. As Drake pointed out, few women expected to spend the whole of their lives working in industry and the belief that they would leave work upon marriage often meant that they gave little attention to trade unionism. As in the rest of the UK, the female workforce in Scotland, as chapter one has shown, was also very youthful and it was young workers in particular who were viewed as being the most difficult to organise.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Letter from Agnes Lumsden to Walter Citrine, January 18, 1938 in NUDW Collection.

⁵¹ Soldon, *op. cit.*, p. 106

⁵² Unfortunately there appears to be no information on the location of this conference or its participants.

⁵³ Workers Union, *Record*, September 1927, p. 15.

⁵⁴ Drake, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 201.

Another obstacle to female trade union organisation in the inter-war period in Scotland must also have included the defeat of the General Strike. The impact of the General Strike on trade union membership in Scotland among women cannot be quantified. However, as will be shown in chapter five, employers victimised and forced male and female employees to terminate union memberships. As the Edinburgh branch of Shop Assistants' Union pointed out in their *Annual Report* in 1926, 'the General Strike did not popularise the trade union movement amongst unorganised shop workers.' It hampered propaganda work and union membership among men and women fell away.⁵⁵ The victimisation of trade union members, both male and female, must also have dissuaded women from joining trade unions and the Singer sewing machine factory in Clydebank provides a good example of this. In the inter-war period a history of victimisations and sackings of trade union and political activists at the firm following a major strike in 1911 and the 1926 General Strike, meant that by the 1930s at Singer, as a former female employee recalled, "the union" had become "a dirty word".⁵⁶ It has also been suggested that state restrictions and protections on women's employment and especially the minimum wage regulation of the Trade Boards worked to convince many women that trade unionism provided no useful function.⁵⁷ For example, as Eleanor Stewart of the STUC found, the Trade Boards often gave women workers the impression that wages had been 'settled' and while it was unclear if the introduction of the Trade Boards had a negative or positive effect on trade union participation among women, Stewart maintained that in the sectors of women's work where trade unionism had been slight, this organisation had virtually disappeared upon the introduction of Trade Boards.⁵⁸ In addition to this, government legislation may have also discouraged women and men from joining trade unions, particularly

⁵⁵ National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks, (Shop Assistants' Union), Edinburgh Branch, *Annual Report*, 1926.

⁵⁶ Glasgow Labour History Workshop, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

⁵⁷ McIvor, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

⁵⁸ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1928, pp. 84-85.

the Trades Disputes and Trade Union Act in 1927 which curbed trade union powers, for example by preventing Civil Servants from joining TUC affiliated unions. As McIvor points out, many employers also pursued anti-trade union strategies to dissuade workers from joining a trade union. A number of large employers provided their workforce with various welfare schemes to undermine trade union membership and these included the Singer sewing machine factory in Clydebank and JP Coats,⁵⁹ the India Tyre Co in Renfrewshire⁶⁰ and various Dundee jute employers.⁶¹ Some of these schemes will be considered in greater detail in the following chapter.

In addition to domestic responsibilities, there were a number of other possible obstacles to trade union organisation among women workers. In the inter-war period, there was still a great deal of pressure on married women not to work and it is possible that many married women who would have preferred not to work and were perhaps embarrassed by their continuing presence in paid employment after marriage would not have wanted to highlight their presence in the labour force by joining a trade union. Furthermore, as Braybon notes, many men did not want their wives or girlfriends or daughters to be trade union members as union membership meant that women were 'trespassing on the serious world of male employment' and membership was symbolic of a commitment to work.⁶² Additionally, the attitude of trade unions and male trade union members, in particular, to the recruitment of women workers was crucial to the participation of women in trade unions. As Sharpe notes, trade unionism was frequently viewed as being part of the men's world and not a subject that women should be

⁵⁹ McIvor. (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 154.

⁶⁰ *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette*, May 21, 1938.

⁶¹ *Dundee Jute and Flax Workers' Union Guide*, (Hereafter referred to as DJFW Guide) September, October, 1923.

⁶² Braybon, *op. cit.*, p. 81. As Sinclair notes, the support, or lack of, from husbands for wives' trade union activities is still an important consideration when looking at the reasons why women do not join trade unions or take an active part in union activities, (Sinclair, *op. cit.*, p. 292).

particularly knowledgeable about and women workers have perceived trade unions as 'male oriented organisations' or clubs, (a perception which existed into the 1990's),⁶³ who failed to address issues of importance for women workers, treated women members as appendages to the trade union movement and who aimed at improving men's conditions of work and defending their own position and superior bargaining power.⁶⁴ In the inter-war period, the most obvious example of this was the trade union commitment to the concept of the family wage,⁶⁵ which was incompatible with demands for equal pay for women workers and this issue will be considered more fully in chapter four. In addition to this, male craft unions, most notably the AEU, continued to exclude women workers from its membership.

In Scotland, as McIvor argues, a significant factor in the low levels of trade union membership among women was the opposition and lack of sympathy from male trade unionists and union leaders as Scottish unions 'remained permeated with chauvinistic attitudes and patriarchal strategies', and female workers were rarely taken seriously as workers. He cites Aitken Ferguson of the Glasgow Trades Council who commented in 1925 that 'The attitude of unions.....to the question of women in industry was one of aloofness and disregard of the importance of organising.'⁶⁶ It is also possible that the very low levels of trade union membership among women in Glasgow and the west of Scotland, shown on Tables 4 and 5,

⁶³ For example, a female official of the GMB in Scotland could comment in the 1990s that the trade union movement is 'a man's world and that hasn't changed.' While a TGWU official could note in 1991 that 'the attitudes and behaviour of some male trade unionists can discourage women's participation.' (Sinclair, *op. cit.*, p. 292, p. 295).

⁶⁴ S Sharpe, *The Lives of Working Mothers*, Penguin, Middlesex, 1984, pp. 63-65, p. 68.

⁶⁵ As Barrett points out, by the 1980s the principle of the family wage was less secure and there was a realisation that it was increasingly incompatible with the demands for equal pay for women and irrelevant to the majority of families who could not live on a man's wage. However, trade unions were still defending an 'idealised and romanticised' notion of the working class family and the myth of men as breadwinners and women as dependants remained. M Barrett, 'Unity is Strength? Feminism and the Labour Movement', in J Siltanen and M Stanworth, (eds.), *Women and the Public Sphere*, Hutchinson, London, 1984, pp. 91-92.

⁶⁶ McIvor, (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 154.

stemmed from unfavourable attitudes among trade unionists on the need to incorporate women into the trade union movement and that these views may have been more pervasive in this part of Scotland, which was dominated by heavy industry. Marion, a former book pager and a branch official of the National Union of Printing, Bookbinding and Paper Workers (NUPBPW), involved in organising women in Glasgow highlighted the indifferent attitude of trade unions recruiting women book pagers and sewers and other women employed in bookbinding shops in the city in the 1930s. She explained that while “Employers could just play merry hell with the women in particular” the trade unions and male workers “never encouraged women” to join trade unions. While she “thoroughly enjoyed” being in the NUPBPW, she stated, “the only thing that I did resent was the fact that the males dominated the union.” Organising women into the union was problematic and she recalled that ‘it was very difficult to get women into trade unions at that time because we were coming through the period of the slump.’ The support of family members would have been important for young women who wanted to join a union and Marion came from a family of keen trade unionists particularly her father and sister and unlike the parents of other girls, her parents, particularly her mother “would never object to me joining a union.” While in her teens she and two equally young female colleagues, whose families were also involved in the trade union movement and the Independent Labour Party, organised the entire bookbinding shop where she worked, “we joined the union before anybody else in the factory”. However, support was not always forthcoming as “the unions before the war, before 1939 were a bit frowned upon, particularly for women. Women were not supposed to be in the unions you know.” However, Marion and her female colleagues at the bookbinding shop “continued a campaign and finally managed to get the place organised.” However, it was difficult to get women NUPBPW members into key positions in the union and as she recalled, “There was never a question of a woman taking the

chair. It was always a man who was the chairperson, a man who was the secretary, and that went on for a long time.”⁶⁷

Against this background, the attitude of the trade union movement to women workers will be further explored in chapter four and the following chapter will highlight the gross under-representation of women in the trade union movement who acted as officials in the movement. The under-representation of women in official positions must also have meant that there were fewer women for potential women trade union members and existing members to identify with and express concerns to. Nevertheless, as chapter three will show, the STUC attempted to increase the level of trade union organisation among women in the inter-war period and to encourage more women trade union members to become more active within their trade unions. The decline in trade union membership in the 1920s prompted the STUC to find new ways to shore up its membership figures and unorganised women were viewed as an area of untapped potential.⁶⁸ In 1926, the Women’s Advisory Committee was formed to promote the role of women in the trade union movement. The STUC Women’s Organising Committee used a number of strategies to encourage more women to join trade unions in Scotland and these will be examined in the following chapter.

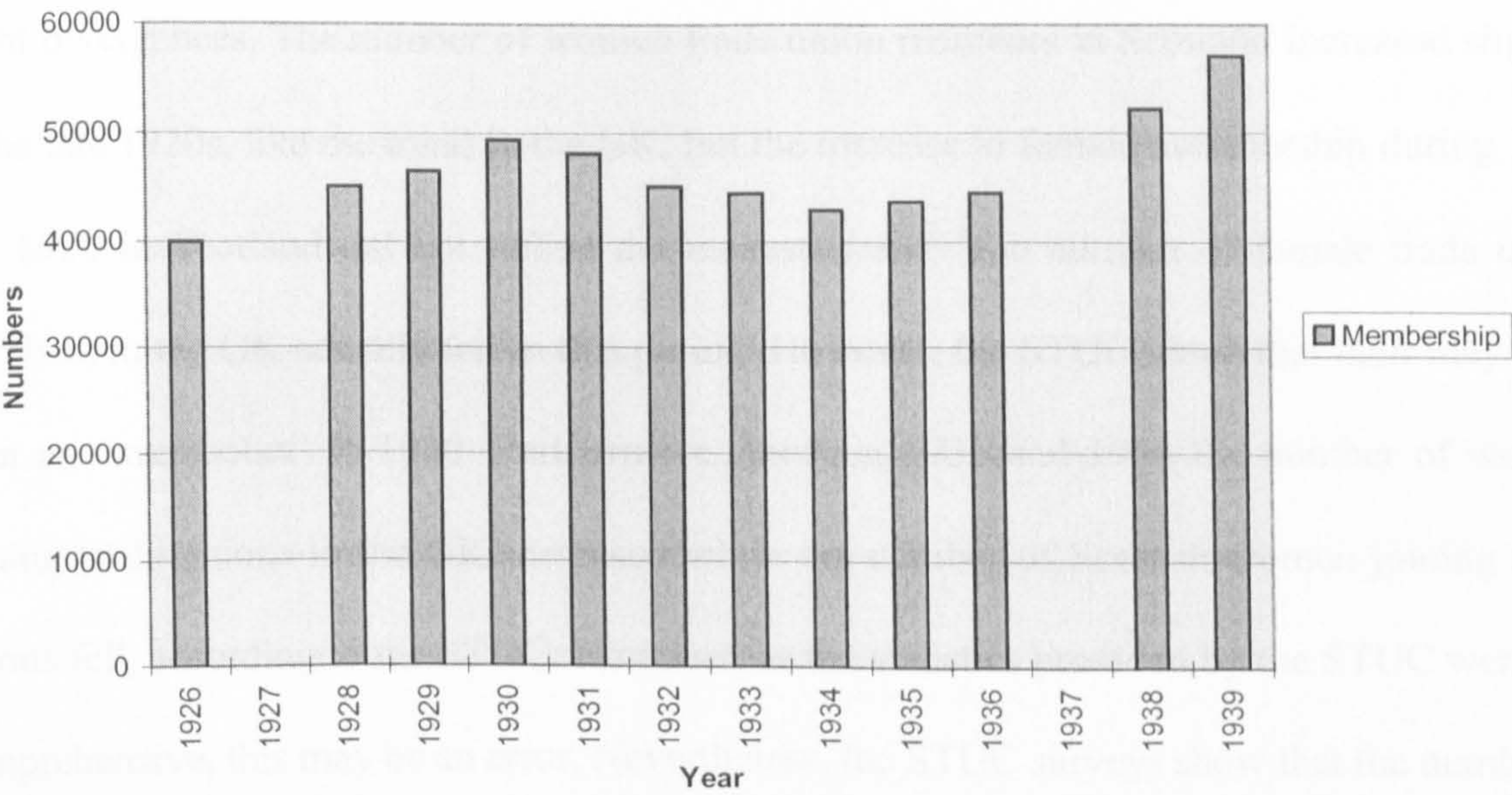
Another useful indication of women's trade union membership in Scotland is provided by figures compiled between 1926 and 1939 by the STUC Organisation of Women Committee. The 1926 survey found that 40,000 women were members of trade unions affiliated to the STUC and an additional 20,000 were members of unaffiliated unions. This is a considerable decline on the figure of 78,740 female trade union members in 1924. In 1939 the figure had

⁶⁷ Interview with Marion.

⁶⁸ K Aitken, *The Bairns O’ Adam, The Story of the STUC*, Polygon, Edinburgh, 1997, p. 131.

risen to 57,047 and this represented 8.5% of all female workers an increase on the 1931 figure of 7.2%. These figures are considerably lower than the figures for trade union density among women in 1931 and 1939 in the UK noted above. However, in 1939, as McIvor shows, the percentage of women in the membership of trade unions affiliated to the STUC had actually declined between 1923 and 1939. In 1939, women made up only 14.9% of the total membership of the STUC. This was a decline on the figure of 19.7% for 1931 and on the 1923-4 figure of 24.2%.⁶⁹

Table 6: Partial Survey of Female Trade Union Membership in Scotland 1926-1939



Source: Organisation of Women Committee, *STUC Annual Reports*, 1926-39. Figures do not exist for 1927 or 1937.

During the period 1926-1939, of 70 unions affiliated to the STUC, between 33 and 37 trade unions were included in the yearly surveys of female trade union membership. In 1926, 1928 and 1930, at least 20,000 female trade union members were omitted from the surveys as their

⁶⁹ McIvor, (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 161.

unions were not 'directly affected by the Committee's work'.⁷⁰ Therefore, as not all unions were included and only industrial group totals were surveyed, the figures collected by the STUC and presented in this chapter cannot be viewed as comprehensive. For example, in the period 1926 and 1932 it would seem that the number of women trade union members affiliated to the STUC increased, as shown on Table 6. However, in contrast, the total membership of the STUC had declined by almost 100,000 from 330,000 to 230,478 members in this same period. However, female trade union membership figures display a pattern that is consistent with the national figures, that is declining in the early 1930s before increasing up to the Second World War from the mid 1930s onwards and this is shown on Table 6 above. Nevertheless, while the Scottish trend broadly follows the national trend in trade union membership there are slight divergences. The number of women trade union members in Scotland increased slightly in the late 1920s, like the trend in the UK, but the increase in female membership during 1929 and 1930 in Scotland did not reflect the national trend. The number of female trade union members in the UK actually fell in this period. However, the STUC noted that there may have been an 'over count' in 1930. Furthermore, between 1933 and 1934 the number of women joining trade unions in the UK increased while the number of Scottish women joining trade unions fell, according to the STUC. However, as the statistics provided by the STUC were not comprehensive, this may be an error. Nevertheless, the STUC surveys show that the number of organised women in Scotland climbed from 1934 onwards, following the UK trend, increasing substantially during 1938 and 1939 when unemployment in Scotland fell to half the levels of unemployment experienced during the early 1930s, reflecting economic growth and in the late 1930s, increased military expenditure.

⁷⁰ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1927, p. 75; *Annual Report*, 1928, p. 76.

The STUC Organisation of Women Committee also undertook partial sectoral studies between 1928 and 1939. The industrial sectors covered by this survey, shown on Table 7 below, included textiles, boot and shoe, tailoring and the paper and printing occupations. Organisation among women was surveyed in the food and distributive sectors, employed mainly by the Co-operative societies and women classed as general workers, mainly textile workers, were also included. There is a miscellaneous category, but the occupations covered by this classification are unclear. Unfortunately, the survey provides no indication of the unions included or corresponding figures for male workers. It is also impossible to determine how accurate and complete these statistics are, but they remain one of the few sources of information on female trade union membership.

Table 7: Partial Survey of Female Trade Union Membership by Sector in Scotland, 1928- 1939

Year	Textiles Tailoring Boot Shoe	Food Distribution	Paper Printing	General Workers	Misc.
1928	24,753	10,456	-	-	-
1929	24,246	11,380	-	-	-
1930	23,831	12,037	5,516	6,000	-
1931	21,910	12,945	5,413	6,000	-
1932	19,474	13,145	5,492	5,250	-
1933	18,504	13,216	5,786	5,000	-
1934	17,458	13,555	5,609	4,850	-
1935	17,051	13,973	5,893	5,443	1,348
1936	17,062	14,429	5,967	5,488	1,625
1937	-	-	-	-	-
1938	16,585	17,083	6,253	9,962	9,962
1939	16,299	19,515	7,113	11,495	2,625

Source: STUC, *Annual Reports*, 1928-1939. Survey totals correspond with the total figures for female trade union membership in Scotland shown on Table 6 above

The industrial sectors covered by these surveys, with the exception of textiles, boot and shoe and tailoring, experienced an expansion in female union membership, shown on Table 7 above. This survey shows that the number of women in trade unions recruiting textile, boot, shoe and tailoring workers underwent a considerable decline, falling by almost 35% between 1928 and 1939. The greatest losses in union membership most probably occurred among women employed in textiles. As already noted, the textiles sector was an area of work with relatively high levels of female trade union membership, especially in the Borders and Dundee. However, as economic activity in this sector declined, the number of unionised women in this sector decreased. As McIvor notes, unemployment, employer and government pressures in the textiles sector had a disciplining effect at the point of production.⁷¹ This would have discouraged trade union participation among both male and female workers in the industry.

There is little information on the number of female members of individual textile trade unions in Scotland in the inter-war period. However, the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers' Union provides the best example of a textile trade union in decline. This would have been one of the biggest textile trade unions in Scotland in the 1920s with 20,000 male and female members, when the entire population of Dundee was only 170,000. Membership of this union underwent a tremendous expansion during the First World War from approximately 4,000 female members in 1914 to 15,000 female members in 1920, representing 75% of the total membership. As 23,000 women were employed in textiles, mainly jute production, in Dundee in 1921, this represented a substantial number of women trade union members and it would seem that 60% of all female jute workers were organised into this union at this time. However, female membership of this union declined, reflecting the high levels of unemployment and a

⁷¹ McIvor, (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 149.

reduction in the employment of women in the jute trade. By 1931, female membership had fallen to 9,835. During 1936 and 1937 female membership fell from 9,250 to 6,450. In 1938, female membership stood at around 6,300 and the following year the entire membership of the union had fallen to 3,500 members.⁷² This pattern was replicated in the other textile unions. For example, membership of the Newmilns and District Textile Workers Union,⁷³ which recruited lace and madras muslin workers in Ayrshire also declined. In 1920, membership stood at 4,000, 2,500 of whom were female. By the late 1920s, total membership had fallen to around 2,000 and union membership declined throughout the 1930s.⁷⁴ In view of the decline in union membership in these unions and the decline in the dyeing, bleaching and finishing trades, the large female membership of the Amalgamated Society of Dyers, Bleachers and Finishers is unlikely to have withstood the slump.⁷⁵ Comprehensive trade union membership figures do not exist for the many smaller textile trade unions recruiting in Scotland, but it is conceivable that they experienced a similar decline.⁷⁶ The general classification shown on Table 7 surveyed women employed primarily in textile production and the number of organised women in this sector increased considerably from 1936 onwards. This may signify some improvement in the fortunes of female trade union membership in textiles prior to the Second World War. This would follow the national trend in the textiles sector in the UK as shown on Table 3 above.

⁷²TUC, Women's Advisory Committee, Trade Union Membership Survey, c. January 1939; J T Ward, 'The Membership of Trade Unions', J M Jackson (ed.), *The City of Dundee: The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, Vol. 25, The Herald Press, Arbroath, 1979, p. 262.

⁷³ Later the Scottish Lace and Textile Workers Union. By the 1930s this union had become the main recruiter of textile workers in the Ayrshire. (WH Marwick, *A Short History of Labour in Scotland*, W & R Chambers, 1967, p. 93).

⁷⁴ Drake, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 134; A Marsh, V Ryan and J B Smethurst, *Historical Directory of Trade Unions*, Vol. 4, Scolar Press, Hampshire, 1994, p 361; Scottish Lace and Textile Workers Union, *Minutes*, October 1938.

⁷⁵ Half of the 9000 strong female membership in the UK in December 1918 were working in Scotland. (Drake, 1984, *op. cit.*, p. 134).

⁷⁶ For example, the total membership of the Arbroath Mill, Factory and Bleachfield Workers' Union

It is difficult to determine the extent of organisation among women clothing workers in Scotland using the figures collected by the STUC. Drake found that clothing unions in the garment making centres of Glasgow, Wigan, Leeds, Bristol and Manchester benefited greatly from the expansion in women's trade union membership during the First World War.⁷⁷ However, it appears that this was not sustained in the inter-war period and organisation among women clothing workers in Glasgow was weak. No separate membership figures exist for men and women, but it is known that up to 3,000 workers were members of tailoring and clothing unions in Glasgow in the 1920s.⁷⁸ Using the 1931 Census, this represents a male and female trade union density in the clothing trades in Glasgow of between 8% and 13%.⁷⁹ In the UK less than 7% of all clothing workers were organised into the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union in the early 1930s. However, female membership of the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union almost doubled during 1931 to 1938. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine if this expansion was matched in Scotland. Chapter three shows that this union made a number of attempts to organise women in Glasgow in the 1930s, but with limited success.⁸⁰

The majority of those female trade union members surveyed by the STUC in the food and distributive trades were employed by the Co-operative societies which operated a closed shop. In the UK, up to 95% of all Co-operative workers were in trade unions.⁸¹ The level of trade union participation among the large numbers of women employed in the private sector was not

slumped from 1,700 members in 1918 to 430 in 1923. (Marsh, et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 289).

⁷⁷ Drake, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 141.

⁷⁸ Glasgow Trades and Labour Council, *Annual Report*, 1925, 1926.

⁷⁹ In 1933, the British TUC found that 9% of all female clothing workers were in trade unions.

⁸⁰ Beauchamp, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁸¹ Beauchamp, *op. cit.*, p. 45. Most of these women would have been recruited by the Amalgamated Union of the Co-operative Employees or the Shop Assistants' Union. For example, the Edinburgh St. Cuthbert's branch of the latter union had a total male and female membership of more than 4,000. For more information on the St. Cuthbert's branch see R A Fox, 'History of Edinburgh Branch of the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants Warehousemen and Clarks St. Cuthbert's Branch', *Journal of the Scottish Labour History Society*, No 17, 1981.

surveyed. However, trade union penetration into private sector employment was traditionally limited and the 'genteel' nature of shop assistants, in particular, was noted as one of the reasons why made them difficult to unionise.⁸² A significant increase in the number of female trade union members in the period 1928-1939 is clearly visible. This is at odds with the UK trend in union membership in food and distributive work shown on Table 3 above, which declined in the 1920s, before increasing in the late 1930s. Female trade union membership among women in the paper and printing occupations, surveyed by the STUC, and shown on Table 7 above, underwent an increase, especially in the late 1930s. This trend matches the pattern in female organisation in this sector in the UK, shown on Table 3 above. Using the Census figure for 1931, it seems that female trade union density in the paper and printing sector was relatively high at around 37%. However, in the UK female trade union density among women paper and printing workers was 33% in the early 1930s⁸³ and therefore, the Scottish figure compares well with the UK figure. It is possible that the paper and printing survey would have included female bookbinders and other paper workers organised by the NUPBPW. This union seems to have been successful in recruiting women in Edinburgh in particular. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Women's Section of this union in the city claimed to have between 1,100-1,300 members.⁸⁴ If these figures are accurate, a significant proportion of the 3,300 women employed in printing and paper trades in Edinburgh in 1931 would have been organised. As Milnes noted in the mid-1930s, female paper and printing workers in Edinburgh, particularly those classed as semi-skilled were well organised.⁸⁵ Trade unionism among women in Glasgow in paper and printing appears to have

⁸² McIvor, (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁸³ Beauchamp, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁸⁴ National Union of Printing, Bookbinders, Machine Ruling and Paper Workers, (NUPBPW), Edinburgh Branch, Female Section, January 1930-February 1933.

⁸⁵ Milnes, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

been considerably weaker. Between 750 and 1000 women⁸⁶ were members of the various paper, printing and bookbinding unions affiliated to the Glasgow Trades Council in the early 1920s. This may only have been a trade union density of around 17%.⁸⁷

Female membership of paper and printing trade unions increased according to this survey. However, one area of printing work there was a definite decline in trade union organisation was among female compositors in Edinburgh. In 1920, all female compositors in the Scottish towns were members of the Female Section of the Scottish Typographical Association (STA), a virtual closed shop operating in the trade.⁸⁸ Women compositors had to join the STA and the union could limit employment in the trade to those who had completed an apprenticeship.⁸⁹ The number of female compositor members of the Women's Section of the STA declined from 450 members in 1920 to 181 in 1932. At the end of the Second World War, less than 86 women were members of the STA. This reflected the decline in the number of female compositors in the trade from 326 in 1921 to 202 in 1931, the outcome of an agreement between the printing employers and the Edinburgh Typographical Society (ETS) in 1910 which barred the introduction of new female apprentice compositors and ensured that all new keyboards of composing machines were to be operated by male union labour only until June 1916.⁹⁰ When this ban, supported by the Scottish labour movement, came to an end there was little attempt to recruit more female apprentices and the ban became in effect permanent. As women married, left work, retired or died the number of female compositors dwindled.⁹¹ The attempts by the ETS to exclude women from this work will be more fully discussed in chapter

⁸⁶ The figure for male workers was between 175-200 members. The majority of these women were members of the NUPBPW.

⁸⁷ Glasgow Trades and Labour Council, *Annual Reports*, 1921-1926.

⁸⁸ Reynolds, (1989), p. 116.

⁸⁹ C Crouch, *Trade Unions: The Logic of Collective Action*, Fontana, Glasgow, 1982, pp. 58-59.

⁹⁰ Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 85; p. 116. Census of Scotland, 1921, 1931.

⁹¹ Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 2, p. 123.

four. Nevertheless, Table 7 shows that the number of women in paper and printing unions in Scotland increased in the 1930s. This may have reflected the expanding female membership of the Auxiliary Section of the STA, formed in 1924 to recruit semi- or unskilled labour employed in the printing offices. The use of this labour, mainly machine assistants and feeders, had been extended as offices were mechanised and production methods changed. These workers were not granted full membership of the STA, which preferred to remain a craft union, but still recognise the 'labour necessary to the working of the machines', even though as Gillespie points out, many of the semi- or unskilled women workers were employed in work requiring four years worth of training.⁹² Membership levels of the Auxiliary Section of the STA are imprecise, but in June 1927 the Edinburgh branch reported that there were over 500 female members.⁹³ Later in the 1930s, female membership of the STA stood at around 1,700 members for the period 1931-38. If this figure is accurate, then the majority of these women would have been Auxiliary Section members.⁹⁴

These surveys omit women working in a wide variety of occupations, nor do they provide any indication of trade union membership among domestic servants or women working in the other service sector occupations. They omit trade union organisation among female clerical workers and among women employed in agriculture, the professions, in transport and communications and the new industries. However, women in these sectors were just as likely to be outside of the trade union movement as their counterparts in the traditional areas of women's employment. For example, in the mid 1930s only a tiny fraction of the 10,000

⁹² S Gillespie, *Scottish Typographical Association, A Hundred Years of Progress*, Robert Maclehose, Glasgow, 1953, pp. 147-148, p 203, p. 207.

⁹³ ETS, Edinburgh Branch, Female Auxiliary Section, *Minutes*, June, 1927.

⁹⁴ TUC, Women's Advisory Committee, Trade Union Membership Survey, c. January, 1939.

women clerical workers employed by the Glasgow Corporation were organised and the STUC and the National Union of Clerks in Scotland were especially anxious to organise female clerical workers.⁹⁵ Additionally, while relatively small numbers of women were employed in the new industries in Scotland it is likely that these women remained outside of the trade union movement. In the new industries, as Savage and Lewenhak point out, both male and female workers in the UK were inadequately unionised and many of the relevant unions were careless in incorporating women and some number did not admit women at all.⁹⁶ For example, in the engineering and metals sector only 2% of all women workers were organised into a trade union in 1931 in the UK.⁹⁷

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that female trade union membership in 1939 in the UK, despite the increase in organisation among women up to the Second World War, was significantly lower than it had been at the end of the First World War and that the vast majority of British women remained unorganised. However, trade union density during the inter-war period was still higher than it had been at any time before the First World War. The position in Scotland is obscured because of the lack of comprehensive data relating to female trade union membership in the inter-war period. However, it has been shown that in a continuation of the pre-First World War period, the majority of women workers in Scotland remained outside of the trade union movement. Female trade union organisation among women remained weak throughout most of the inter-war period and their trade union participation did not reflect their participation in the labour market. While little evidence can be provided of the expansion in women's trade union membership during the First World War in Scotland, the massive

⁹⁵ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1934, p. 76.

⁹⁶ Savage, *op. cit.*, p. 211; Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, p. 186.

⁹⁷ Beauchamp, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

expansion in organisation among women in the UK in this period would also have affected Scottish women workers. As in the rest of the UK, sustaining and encouraging trade union organisation among women workers in Scotland in the 1920s and 1930s was difficult. While the STUC figures used are not comprehensive and are likely to be inaccurate, it can be shown that trade union density among women in Scotland was lower than among women workers in the UK as a whole. Nevertheless, the pattern of trade union membership among women in Scotland broadly followed the national trends and from the mid- 1930s onwards, until the outbreak of the Second World War female trade union membership in Scotland seems to have increased as unemployment levels declined, and sectoral surveys indicate an increase in female trade union membership among women in Scotland, as in the rest of the UK. However, even in the late 1930s the percentage of women workers in the trade union movement remained low and the percentage of women in trade unions affiliated to the STUC had actually declined between the mid 1920s and late 1930s.

This chapter has offered a number of explanations for the low levels of trade union organisation among women in Scotland in the inter-war period. The key factors in undermining trade union participation among women included the high levels of unemployment and two deep depressions. As the example of the Dundee jute industry showed, the effect of the long term decline experienced in textiles production and high levels of unemployment among women in the industry seems to have contributed to the substantial decline in female trade union organisation in the 1930s. In addition to this, the heavy concentration of women workers in areas of employment, such as domestic service and shop work, mainly in private houses and small firms and in work characterised by high labour turnover, poor working conditions, low pay and long hours were also highlighted as obstacles to organisation. Other factors identified to explain the weakness of trade union organisation

among women included the competition to trade unions presented by large employers through welfare schemes, anti-labour legislation and the demoralising effect of the failure of the General Strike on the ability of trade unions to successfully organise women workers and the victimisation of trade unionists that followed. However, these factors undermined organisation among male workers as well as female workers and it has been suggested in this chapter that a number of other factors hindered organisation among women. In particular, the double burden of paid work and domestic responsibilities, the belief among many women that they were merely temporary workers *en route* to marriage and the overwhelming youthfulness of women workers. Low wage levels made it difficult for men and women to organise. However, women's wage levels were excessively low and were almost always substantially lower than those earned by male workers and it is possible that this acted as a major impediment to trade union organisation among women. It has also been noted that many men, and women, preferred that their female relatives should not join trade unions. In addition to this, the fairly unsympathetic views held by Scottish trade unionists when it came to the need to organise women workers have also been highlighted.

In the pre-First World War period, trade unions were one factor which contributed to the low levels of trade union organisation among women and it is possible that this continued to be the case in the inter-war period. Therefore, chapter four will consider in greater detail how far trade union attitudes remained a significant factor when constructing explanations for low levels of trade union membership among women workers in the inter-war period. However, before considering trade union attitudes to women workers, the following chapter will examine the response of the trade union movement to the low levels of trade union organisation among women in Scotland between the wars. The recognition that organisation among women was weak led individual trade unions and the STUC Organisation of Women

Committee, whose primary function was to promote the need for greater trade union organisation among women, to employ a number of different recruitment strategies throughout the late 1920s and 1930s. The following chapter will detail the strategies pursued by STUC and of affiliated trade unions and will consider the extent to which these organisations addressed issues of relevance to the women they were aiming to recruit and the success of their strategies, in the face of low and declining trade union membership. Nevertheless, declining membership is only part of the phenomenon. It may well be the case that decline quantitatively was made up for by a qualitative increase in the level of participation and the role that women workers fulfilled at a local and national level of the trade union movement and this will be considered in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: TRADE UNION AND STUC ORGANISING STRATEGIES

The previous chapter has shown that the number of women in Scotland who joined trade unions remained low and that their participation in the trade union movement in no way reflected their participation in the workforce. However, the Scottish trade union movement, particularly the Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC) and their Organisation of Women Committee developed a number of strategies to deal with the problem of weak trade union organisation among women. The Organisation of Women Committee attempted a succession of organising strategies in the inter-war period. These strategies included gathering information on the position of women in trade unions in Scotland, targeting the trade unions recruiting in areas where female membership was especially low and attempting to educate women on trade unionism either through visits to unemployed women at labour exchanges to convince them of the need to join a trade union when they resumed paid employment or through the distribution of leaflets. Trade Union Women's Groups were also formed in the cities to educate and train existing trade union members. The Organisation of Women Committee also endeavoured to build a stronger relationship with the women of the Labour Party, the Scottish Co-operative Women's Guild and a variety of women's organisations in order to educate these women on the need for themselves and their female relatives to be trade union members. This chapter will determine how successful these recruitment strategies were in incorporating women workers into trade unions. The reaction of the trade unions to these STUC recruitment drives, the influence of the STUC Women's Committee and the support received from the women of the Co-operative movement and the Labour Party will also be considered. The recruitment strategies employed by individual trade unions will be considered and for comparative purposes the activities of the British TUC Women's Advisory Committee will be examined.

Organising workers into trade unions has always been a difficult task but the organisation of women workers has been viewed as especially problematic. This stemmed from the popular conception of the role of women, which led even their fellow workers to believe that women were somehow out of place at work or were only temporary 'meantime' workers *en route* to marriage. Therefore, organisers of women faced a double problem; overcoming any general hostility to unions and the prejudices against women workers. The STUC Organisation of Women Committee was not the first body involved in recruiting women into trade unions in Scotland. Prior to the First World War a number of groups organised women workers. While not trade unions, the Women's Protective and Provident League, (Women's Trade Union League in England), and the Scottish Council for Women's Trades, had been responsible for co-ordinating, organising and promoting women's issues and encouraging trade union participation and attempting to establish female unions. The National Federation of Women Workers, a bona fide trade union, eventually took precedence over these groups.¹ Their work took place against the background of hostility from male trade unions some of which refused to accept female members. Nevertheless, these bodies achieved some success in raising women's awareness of the importance of trade union activity and their work contributed to the rise in female trade union membership in the UK.²

Chapter two has shown that women's membership of trade unions expanded during the First World War in the UK before falling away steadily from 1920 onwards. In Scotland the concern expressed at the low levels of trade union membership among women workers,

¹ Breitenbach, *op. cit.*, p. 41. The NFWW, merged with the NUGMW in 1920 and became a 'district' of this union. Thought to be beneficial by the leaders of the NFWW, this merger was a disaster for the women of the NFWW. The women failed to gain the backing of this large union and they were effectively silenced despite having been the most militant of the women's trade unions who supported many women's strikes. By 1930 the NUGMW did not even send one female representative to the TUC conference. The Women's Trade Union League was eventually absorbed into the TUC. (Boston, *op. cit.*, p. 150).

² There was a 300% increase in female trade union membership in the UK between 1892 to 1913.

(particularly evident in the 1924 STUC General Council survey on trade union membership which showed that less than one sixth of Scottish women workers were in a trade union), led the STUC General Council to recommend that in order to organise greater numbers of women workers an 'Organisation of Women Committee be set up to act as an Advisory Committee to the General Council'. In 1925 the STUC had agreed a resolution from William Shaw of the Glasgow Trades Council that:

all trade unions should be open to receive women on the same terms as men and that inside the unions they should be accorded equal privileges and responsibilities and that trade unionism should support with their whole strength the demand of women for equal pay for similar duties.³

At the 1926 STUC annual conference Mr T. Drummond of the General Council recognised the problems in organising women into trade unions but he believed that these could be overcome. It was therefore 'imperative that they should specialise in the organisation of women and it must be borne in mind that their organisation was for the special benefit of women workers themselves.'⁴ The proposals of the General Council would go 'a considerable length in advancing the prospects of a more satisfactory organisation among women workers.'⁵ At this conference 51 delegates, of whom 24 were women representing 27 unions, supported the creation of such a committee. The following year the Women's Advisory Committee or Organisation of Women Committee was set up as an advisory committee on women's issues to the General Council of the STUC. This Committee reported annually to the Annual

³ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1925, p. 170; Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, p. 194.

⁴ STUC, Organisation of Women Committee, (OWC), Annual Conference Reports, in STUC, *Annual Report*, 1926, p. 105. (Hereafter referred to as STUC, *Annual Report*).

⁵ *Ibid.*

Conference of Unions Catering for Women, the details of which were published in the report of the Organisation of Women Committee in the STUC *Annual Report*. Much of this was to build on the base created by the WTUL and the few surviving Women's Trades Council Committees.⁶ However, women's issues were not discussed at the STUC General Congress and the decisions made at the Annual Conference of Unions Catering for Women first had to be considered by the Organisation of Women Committee which then consulted the General Council. Additionally, when women delegates spoke at the STUC General Congress it was usually on issues that related to all workers and not on those directly relating to women.⁷ This seems to have been a very convoluted route between the Women's Committee and the STUC General Council. The issues relating to women workers were also not discussed at the main congress of the STUC and were instead confined to the women's conference. This meant that women's issues would have had a low profile at the main STUC conference at a time when it was important that all trade unionists be made aware of the need for increased trade union membership among women.

Women were first elected to the Committee by the male and female delegates attending the 1927 annual conference. The 55 delegates, 22 of whom were women, representing 31 unions, elected five women representatives. These women were drawn from a variety of industrial sectors and included Bella Jobson who represented the Scottish Farm Servants Union, Rachel Devine of the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers' Union, Martha Frew, Dunfermline Textile Workers' Union, Mary Alston, STA and Eleanor Stewart of the Workers' Union.⁸ The members of this Committee remained fairly constant throughout the inter-war period. Women

⁶Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, p. 194.

⁷Lewenhak, (1973), *op. cit.*, pp. 14-17.

⁸STUC, *Annual Report*, 1927, p. 45; Lewenhak, *Ibid.*

later elected to the Women's Committee included Betty Lamont of the Railway Clerks' Association (RCA), Agnes Gilroy of the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers (NUDAW) and Jenny Marchbank of the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union. However, until the early 1930s two male members of the STUC General Council, Joe Duncan and William Elger, acted as chairman and secretary of the Committee. As Lewenhak points out, the General Council exercised a great deal of control over the Women's Committee and both bodies shared the same secretary.⁹ Presumably, the male leadership of this committee, at the STUC General Council's instigation, was to keep control over women's issues. Joe Duncan and William Elger eventually voted to stop participating in the Organisation of Women Committee and perhaps this was because they realised that the women were capable of running the Women's Committee on their own.¹⁰ They were replaced by Bella Jobson¹¹ and Agnes Richmond¹² who were appointed chairwoman and secretary, respectively.¹³

Following its formation, the STUC Committee undertook a number of functions and this included the collection and collation of very basic statistical information on trade union branches with women members. As well as the partial surveys into women's trade union membership shown in chapter two, the Committee examined the extent to which trade unions overcame the difficulties in organising women and the organisational methods employed. This

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Bella Jobson was an official assistant secretary of the Scottish Farm Servants' Union and was later elected to the STUC General Council in 1933. In 1936 she became the chairman of the STUC General Council and President of the 1937 STUC General Congress. She also acted as Chairman of the Scottish Council of the Workers Educational Association and the Scottish Representative of the Advisory Council on Juvenile Employment and the Scottish National Development Council. (Lewenhak, (1973), *op. cit.*, p. 16).

¹² Agnes Richmond, whose father was the Scottish District Secretary of the United Patternmakers Association, became a member of the STUC clerical Staff in 1923. She was both the secretary to the General Secretary of the STUC and the secretary of the Organisation of Women Committee. (Lewenhak, (1973), *op. cit.*, p. 15).

¹³ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1935, p. 90.

was vital in determining where organisation problems existed and how best to deal with them. However, much of this work was difficult as unions were often unable to supply the Committee with the detailed information they required.¹⁴ In 1927, the Committee issued a questionnaire requesting that trade unions list their branches with women members, showing the level of female membership and the occupations of these members. Unions were asked to give details on their organising activities, the extent to which the problems in organising women had been overcome and the levels of contributions paid and benefits for members. In returns to the Committee the unions that responded cited a number of barriers to organisation particularly the effect of unemployment, short term working, the operation of the Trade Boards, the temporary nature of work for many women, the lack of parental interest in trade union affairs, the cost of compulsory insurance and the general lack of understanding about trade union work.¹⁵ However, as will be shown below, it was not until 1938 that a more comprehensive questionnaire was issued to trade unions.

Coupled with this questionnaire work, the Women's Committee met directly with trade unions throughout the inter-war period. This was one of the first recruiting strategies to emerge in the late 1920s and involved the identification of specific areas of women's work requiring greater trade union organisation. Detailed enquiries were undertaken by the Committee into several industries where women were poorly organised and railway carriage cleaning, railway catering work, hotel and laundry work, tailoring and garment work, dressmaking, passenger transport work and baking were the areas first identified in 1927 by the Committee as being in this position. Information was requested on the state of organisation among women from the unions recruiting these workers, and this was followed by meetings of the unions with the

¹⁴ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1927, p. 45; 1928, p. 76.

¹⁵ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1927, pp. 45-46.

Women's Committee.¹⁶ During 1927 and 1928 the secretary of the Committee held special meetings with trade union executives to discuss methods of organising women. Meetings were held with the TGWU to discuss the almost complete lack of unionisation and 'scandalously low earnings' among women bus conductors in the West of Scotland and Aberdeen. The large number of small firms employing female transport workers and the long hours worked by the women were blamed for the lack of organisation. The outcome was that the TGWU would report to the Committee on future organising activities. Meetings were also held with the Scottish Union of Bakers and Confectioners (SUBC) to discuss methods of organisation and union activities, the union 'expressed appreciation' for the assistance received from the Committee.¹⁷ In the early 1930s, the Committee again attempted to encourage the organisation of women in the baking trade and the SUBC was requested to supply information on organisation of women in the trade.¹⁸ However, only 307 women were members of this union by 1938.¹⁹ Nevertheless, as the following chapter will show, the SUBC was involved in well publicised attempts to exclude women from bakery work in Scotland during 1919 and 1920 and it may not be surprising that the women employed in the bakery trade were not persuaded to join this union in the 1930s.

In order to combat the continuing decline in trade union membership among female laundry workers, the Committee targeted six unions recruiting in this trade. These included the Laundry Workers' Union (the total male and female membership of this union in Scotland was 144 members in 1927),²⁰ the Workers' Union, the TGWU, the NUGMW, the Dyers and Bleachers' Society and the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union. The STUC believed that

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1928, p. 76.

¹⁸ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1931, p. 62.

¹⁹ TUC, Women's Advisory Committee, Trade Union Membership Survey, c. January, 1939.

²⁰ STUC, General Council, *Minutes*, April, 1927.

declining trade union membership was the outcome of the workings of the Laundry Trade Board and the idea among female laundry workers that wage rates had been 'settled'.²¹ Women employed as catering workers on the railways like other women in the catering trade were also found to be virtually unorganised.²² Five unions, (the National Union of Railwaymen, the TGWU, NUGMW, NUDAW, the Shop Assistants' Union and the Workers' Union), recruiting catering workers were targeted and meetings were held to encourage these unions to encourage greater organisation among these workers.²³ Unfortunately, the reports of the Committee provide no indication as to the success of the meetings with unions recruiting catering or laundry workers or the action taken to improve organisation in these trades. Nevertheless, the problems are clear and at least one trade union involved in the recruitment of female catering workers, the TGWU, objected to the interference of the STUC and was opposed to combining their recruitment drives with other trade unions. Mr. P Gillespie, a representative of this union and a member of the Joint Committee of Unions Organising Catering Staffs claimed that as his union had spent a considerable amount of money in organising workers they were 'not disposed to spend money to create organisation for somebody else to come in and scoop the pool.'²⁴ Perhaps this is to be expected given that all of these unions were competing for the same workers. As chapter two shows, the STUC had problems in gathering information on male and female trade union membership for their survey on union membership in 1924 as 'where two or more unions are catering for a class of membership a certain reluctance will be felt in supplying the information requested.'²⁵ There

²¹ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1928, p. 78.

²² STUC *Annual Report*, 1931, pp. 76-77. Miss I Davidson of the Shop Assistants' Union estimated that only 1 in every 1000 workers in the catering trade in Scotland in 1930 were in a trade union, (STUC, *Annual Report*, 1930, p. 80).

²³ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1931, pp. 62-63.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁵ STUC, Report of the General Council on Organisation and Extent and Structure of the Trade Union Movement in Scotland, Parts I and II, in STUC, *Annual Report*, 1924, p. 31.

were often disputes among trade unions on the issue of the 'poaching' of potential members by competing trade unions and disputes had occurred between several general and craft unions recruiting similar workers.²⁶ Many unions in Scotland aimed to recruit the same women workers and the problems associated with this, as *The Labour Standard* noted in 1925, was that 'the consequent overlapping competition for members and the division of forces means wasted efforts, reduced efficiency and weakness where there should be strength.'²⁷

Enquiries into the state of trade unionism among female textile workers were made in 1928.²⁸ However the Committee concluded that as the textile unions were not 'closely united' organising attempts were impractical.²⁹ A wide range of local, national and general unions were vying for women textile workers in Scotland between the wars³⁰ and the STUC General Council was keen for textile trade unions to amalgamate to make trade union organisation easier and meetings were held with the Scottish Council of Textile Trade Unions in 1929.³¹ However, few amalgamations seem to have taken place and despite falling memberships the small local textile trade unions continued to exist into the late 1930s, recruiting women alongside the general unions. Prior to the formation of the Organisation of Women Committee, attempts by the STUC to organise textile workers were beset with problems. The STUC approached textile trade unions in the early 1920s with the view to enlarging male and female membership. These attempts were hampered by poor replies to questionnaires sent to trade unions who were 'loath' to supply information on the extent of organisation in the trade.

²⁶ Cole, (1924), *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.

²⁷ *The Labour Standard*, October 10, 1925, p. 3.

²⁸ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1928, p. 76.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ The NUGMW, the Workers Union, National Federation of Women Workers and the TGWU, all recruited female textile workers in Scotland. Scottish textiles unions recruiting women included, Scottish Lace and Textile Workers Union, (Ayrshire), Scottish Textile Workers, (Kirkcaldy), General Textile Workers Union, Amalgamated Society of Dyers and Bleachers, Dundee Jute and Flax Workers Union, Dunfermline Textile Workers, Brechin Mill and Factory Operatives, Hawick Hosiery Union.

³¹ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1929, p. 80.

Therefore, without the necessary information the STUC could not continue with the recruitment campaign.³²

The Women's Committee continued to approach and meet with trade unions recruiting in areas where female trade union organisation was weak into the 1930s, particularly in hosiery and cinema employment.³³ Unorganised women and girls working in the occupations deemed as 'blind alley occupations' or dead end work were also targeted and questionnaires were issued.³⁴ The Committee viewed the organisation of hosiery workers as 'extremely important' as hosiery had expanded as a source of employment for women by the inter-war period. Almost 90% of all hosiery workers in Scotland were female and this was an area of work where trade influence and organisation among women and girls was especially weak.³⁵ The STUC General Council took precedence over the Women's Committee during this recruitment campaign and met with the various unions recruiting female hosiery workers including the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union, NUGMW, the Dyers and Bleachers' Society, NUGMW, the Scottish Textile Workers' Union (Kirkcaldy) and the Scottish Lace and Textile Workers' Union. The STUC resolved to make 'persistent and systematic efforts....to improve trade union organisation in the trade' and unions were asked to provide up to date detailed information to the General Council on the organisation of hosiery workers and to avoid competing for the same workers. However, the NUGMW undermined the efforts to organise the hosiery workers by refusing to co-operate with the STUC.³⁶ Therefore, not even the intervention of the General Council could impel trade unions to co-operate in recruitment

³² STUC, *Annual Report*, 1923, pp. 68-69.

³³ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1937, p. 45.

³⁴ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1938, p. 45.

³⁵ C Gulvin, *The Scottish Hosiery and Knitwear Industry 1680-1980*, John Donald, Edinburgh, pp. 114-116.

³⁶ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1938, pp. 45-46.

drives. Again this must reflect the reluctance of competing trade unions to provide information on recruitment and membership or because the trade unions involved did not always appreciate outside interference. While the Women's Committee undertook the establishment of a number of organising strategies throughout the period, there was a continual debate on how best to organise women workers and a number of new approaches to organisation were discussed and implemented. In the late 1920s there was a realisation that among women:

There is a special and urgent need for educational work.....there appears to be an even greater need among unorganised women than among unorganised men for simple educational lectures and talks on what a trade union is and what it does.³⁷

The need for basic education on the role of trade unions for women existed among both women and men, especially when, as William Leonard of the Furnishing Trades Association found, 'In the workshops' the 'help...that should be expected from trade unionists' was not forthcoming and 'when men and women worked together there seemed more antagonism to trade unionism among the women than when women worked alone.'³⁸ The provision of education was to take a variety of forms, including the formation of Trade Union Women's Groups, the extension of the Committee's work to Labour Women and the Co-operative Guilds, intensive organising weeks, the use of rank and file women to give talks to groups of male and female workers on the need for women to join trade unions and the distribution of leaflets. The STUC believed that a need existed for general information and a leaflet campaign aimed especially at women to provide a brief explanation of the work of trade unions. As Bella Jobson pointed out, it was 'too readily assumed' that the activities of trade unions were

³⁷ STUC, *Bulletin*, February, 1929, p. 1.

³⁸ STUC, *Scottish Congress Bulletin*, September, 1928, p. 1, (Hereafter referred to as STUC, *Bulletin*).

within the knowledge of the women they were trying to enrol.³⁹ The STUC aimed to provide women with information on trade unionism via leaflets campaigns. Several trade unions already issued leaflets to women workers. The National Union of Clerks issued 'A Word to Women Clerks' and the Railway Clerks' Association issued an 'Office Letter'. The latter union, through these leaflets, provided potential members with examples of how the union had secured unemployment benefit and improved working conditions and pay for female members. The Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen issued 'Tracing Office Talks' for women and the Furnishing Trades Association issued a leaflet for women french polishers. The Shop Assistants' Union, NUDAW and the TGWU produced their own leaflets for women, as did the Scottish Lace and Textile Workers' Union who distributed special leaflets aimed at unorganised women workers.⁴⁰ In 1928 the STUC modified the general purpose 'Do You Know' leaflet, printed by the General Council and used to recruit both men and women⁴¹ to include an introduction aimed at women workers. On the front page the leaflet asked 'Are women's wages and working conditions of no importance?' This leaflet was aimed at practical issues which the women would readily recognise. The back page of the leaflet dealt with a common misconception about the duration of women's work and the need for organisation and advised women of the importance of trade unionism. The text read:

Some women think that because they may be in factories, shops, offices etc. for only a few years trade unions are not necessary for them. This belief is dangerous because it

³⁹ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1928, pp. 81-83.

⁴⁰ STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, July, 1928, p. 1, October, 1931, p. 1; Scottish Lace and Textile Workers Union, *Minutes*, April 14, 1934; RCA, 'Organising Women Clerks,' National Recruitment Strategies, 1938.

⁴¹ STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, March, 1928, p. 1.

keeps back improvement in wages and working conditions. During the years women are employed they need the protection and assistance which can be obtained only by being organised.⁴²

The back page suggested to women that - 'You should decide now', and requested that they should complete the form and return it.⁴³ Leaflets directed at women workers and issued throughout the 1930s included titles such as 'How to Fight', 'Plain Talk to Women Workers', 'Women Who Work', 'Trade Unionism Pays', 'The Black Coated Worker', 'There Must be Something In It' and the 'Do You Know' leaflet.⁴⁴ There is no indication as to the content of most of these leaflets. However the British TUC also issued a leaflet entitled 'Women Who Work' and it is likely that the STUC was issuing the same leaflet. The content of this leaflet was a direct, clear and light-hearted appeal to women to join trade unions to improve their working conditions. The leaflet read:

Whether blonde or brunette be fair to yourself. Good wages and conditions and reasonable hours just don't fall from the blue. If you have cause to grumble on this score just don't sit and mope. Do something! Trade unionism is working to help protect folks like you. Join up now. It pays to organise if you want good wages, more leisure, fair working conditions. Join your trade union now!⁴⁵

Another approach was attempted in the 1930s and leaflets entitled 'Common Sense Beauty Hints' and 'Many a Miss Misses Marriage' were also distributed to women workers in

⁴² STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, November, 1928, p. 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, 1936.

⁴⁵ TUC, Women's Advisory Committee, Leaflet, c. 1930s.

Scotland.⁴⁶ These leaflets had been issued by the British TUC and had been very popular.⁴⁷ The content of the leaflet entitled, 'Many a Miss Misses Marriage', is unknown but the title may suggest that trade unionism could provide a route to marriage and an escape from work or alternatively that those women who did not marry and remained in the labour force were especially in need of trade union organisation. While there is no indication as to the content of 'Common Sense Beauty Hints', a similar leaflet had been issued by the British TUC in the 1930s entitled 'Health and Beauty - A Word to Women and Girls Earning Their Own Livelihood'. This leaflet claimed that real beauty was based on nourishing food, exercise, fresh air and the avoidance of physical strain. Beauty preparations and medicines could not give you these, however, trade unionism could through better wages, shorter hours and safer and better conditions.⁴⁸ This approach may have been an attempt to replicate the style of the growing number of women's magazines in the inter-war period, especially in the 1930s such as *Woman's Own*, *Woman's Illustrated* and *Woman*. These magazines regularly presented features on how to look good and always emphasised the need for women to take care of their appearance in order to acquire a husband.⁴⁹ In addition to this, the 1930s witnessed the emergence of organisations such as the all female Women's League of Health and Beauty and the Legion of Health and Happiness. They provided young women with beauty tips, among many other things, and urged women to 'keep fit'. These were commercial organisations aimed particularly at young working class and lower middle class women clerical workers, and their popularity peaked during the 1930s.⁵⁰ Boston suggests that the health and beauty leaflet was a reflection of the attitude of the British TUC and its Women's Advisory Committee

⁴⁶ STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, 1936.

⁴⁷ Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, p. 208.

⁴⁸ Boston, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

⁴⁹ Pugh, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-213.

⁵⁰ J J Matthews, 'They Had Such a Lot of Fun: Women's League of Health and Beauty Between the Wars', *History Workshop Journal*, 30, Autumn, 1990, pp. 23-49.

towards the women they were attempting to organise. As she rightly points out, better wages and shorter hours would have contributed to better health but this form of propaganda reinforced the idea that women could only be interested in their appearance.⁵¹

While there is no indication as to how women trade union members in Scotland received the health and beauty style leaflets, this approach was derided by women trade unionists in England. For example, Miss D Eastwood of the Weavers' Amalgamation, 'struck a lively note of criticism' at the TUC congress. She attacked the TUC publicity department for issuing leaflets which she claimed 'camouflaged trade union propaganda.' She described the 'Many a Miss Misses Marriage' and 'Beauty Hints' leaflets as an 'insult to the intelligence of women and girls.' However, these leaflets were apparently very popular and were in circulation for a number of years in the 1930s.⁵² The concept that a woman could improve her appearance by joining a trade union was not new and potential women members and existing women members had been approached by trade unions in this way before. For example, in the late 1920s a series of articles appeared in *The Garment Worker* written by Annie Loughlin, the women's national organiser with the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union, entitled 'Women and the Home' and 'What To Do With Eggs.' A range of other articles appeared that were concerned with make up, cooking, beauty, (fingernails, rough elbows), and how to maintain your appearance. Miss Loughlin later admitted that other trade unionists had criticised her for this approach and she recognised that her attempts to appeal to women in this way were inappropriate. This column was replaced by the 'Women Organiser's Notebook' featuring

⁵¹ Boston, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

⁵² *The Garment Worker*, September, 1935, p. 14.

articles that addressed the need to organise women and other more weighty articles of interest to women trade union members, such as book reviews also appeared.⁵³

The Shop Assistants' Union used this recruiting strategy and in an advert aimed specifically at women it was stated that, 'The appearance of a woman goes a long way towards her success in commercial life' and furthermore 'a good appearance rightly adds to one's own self-confidence'. In order to look good the leaflet suggested that you need to 'dress well, to get plenty of nourishing food, to have money and leisure for congenial recreation (and) to live in healthy surroundings.' Low wages and long working hours, poor, insufficient food and no opportunity for recreation resulted in a 'sallow complexion' and 'shabby clothes'. In order to enhance her opportunities for a living wage and make 'for herself a position worth having and a life worth living', it was proposed that a woman join the trade union.⁵⁴ A similar advertisement appeared in the *Shop Assistant* three years later in 1929. It read:

a woman who has to make her way in business must be up to date in her appearance if she wishes to win a good place for herself. This applies with special force to those employed at the counter in showrooms and in offices but there is something even more important than to know what is fashionable. That is to be able to keep up a smart appearance.⁵⁵

Again it was claimed that by joining the trade union a woman would have some control over her wage which would enable her to improve her appearance and therefore her position at

⁵³ *The Garment Worker*, October, November, December, 1929, January, February, May, June, November, 1930, September, 1935, p. 14.

⁵⁴ *The Shop Assistant*, November, 1926, p. 977.

⁵⁵ *The Shop Assistant*, March, 1929, p. 212.

work.⁵⁶ As noted in chapter one, a young appearance was often essential for shop work, particularly for shop assistants working in high class establishments and presumably the lack of a youthful appearance and stylish clothes could undermine work opportunities. Therefore, this kind of advert would have focused in on genuine concerns among women shop assistants. The union was particularly keen to organise the women, whom they described in a derogatory way as the 'snob type' or 'high falutin' and 'superior' type and presumably this was a reference to the women employed in the shops and department stores, as in Edinburgh, who were least likely to be organised and most likely to identify with the middle classes whom they served. It was these women the union believed, who had benefited, (in terms of wages and conditions), from the unions' activities without ever joining the union themselves.⁵⁷

In the late 1920s Labour Exchanges were viewed as locations where trade union propaganda was especially needed, more so than the home or the workplace. Usually the jobless 'signed on' at Labour Exchanges twice weekly, and often, as Croucher notes, the unemployed were concentrated together in large numbers for long periods of time allowing a Labour exchange 'sub-culture' to develop where people could exchange greetings and complaints⁵⁸ and in times of high unemployment and depression Labour Exchanges could be 'fertile ground' for organising women workers, 'where feelings of injustice and dissatisfaction existed'.⁵⁹ Subsequently, two Labour Exchanges were visited in Glasgow. The General Council 'Do you Know' leaflets were distributed to women at the Labour Exchange door prior to and on the day of the visit by women organisers. Following this, four 45-minute meetings were held in nearby halls. The women attending the meetings were informed that individual

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *The Shop Assistant*, February, 1925, p. 102, p. 126.

⁵⁸ Croucher, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁵⁹ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1928, pp. 81-82.

complaints of non-payment of benefit would not be considered and were presented with 'simple statements' on the features of the new Unemployment Insurance Act, the role of trade unions in the administration of the Act and how unions safeguarded the interests of their members when unemployed. Women were told what a trade union was and their function. The women were not expected to join while unemployed, but they were asked to apply for union membership as soon as they secured employment.⁶⁰ The four meetings attracted a combined attendance of 214 women. Even though the Committee recognised that this was a small proportion of the women signing on, these meetings were considered a great success in attracting women in comparison with the usual evening meetings. As will be shown below, smaller numbers of women were drawn to the Trade Union Women's Groups or to other Women's Committee or trade union meetings. Therefore, the attendances at the Labour Exchanges were reasonable.⁶¹ Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine if this strategy was continued by the STUC or if this was a one-off experiment. The Committee hoped to extend this strategy to Trade Union Councils and Committees and Edinburgh, Kilmarnock, Clydebank and Aberdeen Trades Councils all made arrangements to start meetings to discuss this form of propaganda. However, Rutherglen, where large numbers of women were employed in the Burgh in the laundry and the baking trades, and Grangemouth Trades Councils rejected this approach to trade union organisation. The latter Trades Council rejection of this proposal may have reflected their attitude to the recruitment of women workers in an area of Scotland which was a centre of heavy industry. The Galashiels Trades Council was not persuaded by the relative success of this recruitment strategy and claimed that 'no good purpose could be served' by doing this⁶² possibly because they were satisfied by trade union

⁶⁰ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1929, p. 77; *Bulletin*, September 1928, p. 2.

⁶¹ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1929, p. 77.

⁶² STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, November, 1928, pp. 1-3.

organisation among women in the area. Woollen textiles dominated women's employment in the town, and as shown in chapter two, trade union organisation among women in the Borders was higher than elsewhere. However, the reticence of the some Trades Councils to get involved in this work may have been a reflection of their opposition to outside interference from the STUC and a disregard for the need to organise women workers. As Lewenhak notes, one of the reasons for establishment of the Organisation of Women Committee in the first place was because trades councils were more concerned with political issues and had neglected trade union organising work.⁶³ The STUC Women's Committee also suggested that trade unions could use this form of recruitment especially where it was known that workers in trades covered by a union were signing unemployment books.⁶⁴ However, it is not clear if this was ever attempted.

Coupled with these recruitment strategies aimed specifically at women workers, an important new strategy to emerge in the late 1920s, in response to declining trade union membership, was the development of special educational provision for women trade union members. This was provided through Day schools and Weekend Schools. Previously, women members had attended mixed schools with male trade unionists and women were much less likely to be nominated by their union, hence the need for special schools for women.⁶⁵ The first of these Day Schools took place in Glasgow in 1928 and the 23 women delegates from the RCA, TGWU, the Workers' Union and the National Union of Textile Workers, none of whom were full time union officials, who attended this informal meeting discussed 'organising activities' to 'increase trade unionism' and other questions of particular relevance for

⁶³ Lewenhak, (1973), *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, pp. 203-204.

women.⁶⁶ This was successful, in terms of attendance, encouraging further day schools to be established in Dundee in 1929, Edinburgh and Aberdeen in 1930, and Kilmarnock and Falkirk in 1934. Attendances at the Dundee Day Schools were fairly low, only 14 women attended the first day school, nine of these women were from the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers' Union, (the largest union in the city), three were from Dundee Calender Workers' Union, one member represented the Shop Assistants' Union and one came from the TGWU. A following meeting proved more successful in terms of the number of delegates as 21 women representing five trade unions were attracted to the second Day School.⁶⁷ However, the Edinburgh and Aberdeen schools attracted 31 women from six trade unions and 35 women from three trade unions, respectively, to their first Day Schools.⁶⁸ The first Kilmarnock day school met in April 1934 and 20 women attended this first meeting, 13 of whom were members of the Ayrshire based Scottish Lace and Textile Workers Union. Other women represented the TGWU, the RCA, the National Union of Clerks and NUDAW.⁶⁹ This Day school method of organisation was subsequently taken up by the British TUC and individual trade unions.⁷⁰ In 1936, a weekend school for women trade unionists took place at a hotel in Perth, and 11 unions sent 41 students with the aim of developing trade unionism.⁷¹

There was some success in the Committee's attempts to set up local Trade Union Women's Groups which developed from the interest aroused by the Day schools. It was hoped that the work of the Committee could be 'usefully supplemented' by local women's committees who could specialise in local organisation problems.⁷² These groups met monthly with one member

⁶⁶ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1928, p. 79.

⁶⁷ STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, March, 1929, p 1, December, 1929, p. 1.

⁶⁸ STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, March, 1930, p 1, May, 1930, p. 1.

⁶⁹ STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, April, 1934, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, p. 203.

⁷¹ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1936, p. 86.

⁷² STUC, *Annual Report*, 1928, p. 79.

of the Committee in attendance, no contributions were taken from the women and the meetings were meant, not for full-time union officials, but for individuals who wished to further trade unionism among women.⁷³ Attempts had been made to set up a Trade Union Women's Sub-Committee in Edinburgh in 1928, but establishing this group had been hampered by local trade unions who did not sufficiently support it and some union branches declined to send a women representative. Only five female representatives were appointed at the outset, but the group carried on and would have been superseded by the Edinburgh Trade Union Women's Group.⁷⁴ It was intended that the members of the Trade Union Women's Group would take part in discussions on the topics of which they had knowledge. The groups would be educational and social in character, they would be used for propaganda work and they would report to the Women's Committee on the problems of organising women in their own area.⁷⁵ To encourage the broadest possible participation these groups did not take contributions from their members and also met on a Sunday afternoon.⁷⁶ Several groups met in hotels, (Kilmarnock and Edinburgh Groups), possibly to provide a more attractive environment for the women than could be provided by trade union halls.⁷⁷ The Women's Committee circulated trade union branches in the cities and contacted all male trade union branches in the hope that those men with unorganised female relatives would encourage them to join a group.⁷⁸

The first of these groups seems to have been established in Dundee in February 1930, with Eleanor Stewart and Bella Jobson in attendance, but there is no indication from the

⁷³ STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, May, 1930, p. 1.

⁷⁴ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1928, p. 84.

⁷⁵ STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, May, 1930, p. 1.

⁷⁶ STUC, *Bulletin*, December, 1930, p. 1.

⁷⁷ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1929, p. 83.

⁷⁸ STUC, *Bulletin*, February, 1930, p. 2.

Committees' reports on the agenda of this first meeting.⁷⁹ The activities of the groups were more fully reported from 1933 onwards, and up to ten sessions, including the outings, day schools and lectures were held within any one year running from September or October to the following June. The groups provided a balance of topics so as not to discourage women from attending meetings and the wide range of topics covered by the lectures and activities sponsored by these groups were an attempt to educate, entertain and organise women with the view to training these women to recruit the unorganised women they came into contact with and educate their already organised colleagues. The Trade Unions Women's Groups drew in representatives from government departments, academia, the trade union and Co-operative movement and from medicine and other health and welfare bodies to help with their educational work. Women delegates were addressed by a range of speakers on the subject of the trade union movement, the Co-operative movement and public speaking. Many of the ideas for the women's groups appear to have been inspired, to some extent, by the educational programmes provided by the Scottish Labour College in the west of Scotland in the early 1920s for full time workers on residential courses. While the women's programmes may not have been as rigorous as the courses offered at Labour Colleges, the women's groups included in their syllabuses the issues of trade union law, the co-operative movement, trade union practices and were concerned with improving the women's public speaking and communication skills. As Duncan notes, such issues were key elements of the Labour College education.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ R Duncan, 'Independent Working Class Education and the Formation of the Labour College Movement in Glasgow and the West of Scotland, 1915-1922', in R Duncan and AJ McIvor, (eds.), *Militant Workers: Labour and Class Conflict on the Clyde, 1900-1950*, John Donald, Edinburgh, 1992. p. 111, p. 121.

During 1933-36, the syllabuses for the Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen and Ayr groups covered general issues of interest to trade unionists. The women listened to reports from the STUC women's conferences and lectures presented to the women included a talk from William Elger, the STUC secretary, to the Glasgow group on trade union law. In Dundee, Miss J Spence of the Jute and Flax Workers' Union gave presentations on the 'British TUC' and 'Socialism in our Time'. The theme of a talk from a NUDAW member, given to the Ayrshire group, was 'Trade Unionism in Russia'. Representatives from a broad range of bodies participated in the activities of the Women's Trade Union Groups. For example, a member of the National Council of Labour Colleges gave a talk on trade union history in Edinburgh, a Ministry of Labour official gave a lecture to the Glasgow group on industrial relations and Robert Murray, director of the Scottish Co-operative movement, gave a lecture to the same group on 'Co-operation and the Labour Movement'. Mary Paterson, an ex-inspector of factories, spoke to the Edinburgh group on the factory acts and a range of other relevant topics were covered by the groups including 'methods of wage regulation' the shorter working week, unemployment insurance and the 'two shift system.'⁸¹ Contemporary political issues were also considered by the groups, for example a National Council of Labour Colleges representative gave a talk on fascism to the Glasgow group. The group also received a presentation on pacifism. Various historical figures were the subject of talks, and presentations were given to the Glasgow and Ayrshire groups on Robert Owen, Keir Hardie and Charlotte Bronte. The women were encouraged to improve their public speaking and communication skills. This kind of education, as Duncan notes, referring to the Labour College movement, would have compensated to some extent for the lack of schooling as the majority of working class children left school in their early teens.⁸² This was obviously essential if they were to

⁸¹ STUC, *Bulletin*, October, 1935, pp. 2-3, October, 1933, p. 2, October, 1934, p. 2.

⁸² Duncan, *op. cit.*, p. 111, p. 121.

recruit other women into trade unions. For example, a public speaking tutor from the Edinburgh Corporation education committee gave a talk to the Edinburgh group on 'education, life thought and speech' and Edinburgh University lecturer, W H Marwick, gave a talk on 'adult education' perhaps in an effort to encourage the women to consider other forms of study.⁸³ In addition to these lectures, the women attending the groups were presented with information of relevance to their own health and welfare. Health and medical topics covered by the groups included a lecture given by Dr Amy Fleming, a Gynaecologist, to the Glasgow group in 1934. The Edinburgh syllabus for 1934 included a talk from Dr Christine Mayne from the Industrial Health Education Society entitled 'The Woman Worker's Health and its Care'. The following year, Dr Charlotte Fleming gave a talk on 'difficult children' for the Glasgow group and the same group were lectured on 'safer motherhood' in 1937. The groups covered practical issues, a woman official from the Ministry of Health lectured the Glasgow group on health insurance, the Ayrshire syllabus for 1935 included a talk on nutrition and food, while the Aberdeen group syllabus included a talk on family allowances.⁸⁴

Efforts were made to entertain the women through a range of social activities. Group outings usually took place during the summer months and women from the various groups were brought together through social activities. In the early 1930s the groups held joint picnics, went to the theatre, held social meetings and outings and the Edinburgh group even appears to have attended a garden party at Holyrood House.⁸⁵ To 'avoid the possibility of members losing touch with the group during those months' the Edinburgh group's summer programme for

⁸³ STUC, *Bulletin*, October, 1933, p. 2, October, 1934, p. 2, April, 1937, p. 2, October, 1935, pp. 2-3; Duncan, *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ STUC, *Bulletin*, October, 1933, p. 2, October, 1934, p. 2, April, 1937, p. 2, October, 1935, pp. 2-3.

⁸⁵ STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, May, 1930, p. 1, January, 1931, p. 1; STUC, *Bulletin*, October, 1934, p. 2, April, 1937, pp. 2-3.

1937 included excursions, walks, picnics and whist drives.⁸⁶ Day schools were held at Dalnacouther in Airdrie, the activities at the school in 1933 included a talk from a representative of the Scottish Farm Servants' Union and entertainment from the William Morris Choir as well as a general discussion. Three 'Open Sundays' were held by the Glasgow group during 1933-34. There is no information on their content, but it is likely that open days were designed to encourage potential women delegates or even unorganised women to join the women's groups. The members of the Glasgow group affiliated to the Mental Hospital Workers' Union and those in the printing trades were also encouraged to give talks to their fellow delegates at the women's groups.⁸⁷

However, encouraging women to set these groups up in the first instance seems to have been difficult and many of them foundered. Those women who attended the Day Schools in the cities did not always participate in the formation of a Trade Union Women's Group. Of the 35 women who attended the first Day School in Aberdeen, only 17 of these women, for unknown reasons, wished to continue with a group.⁸⁸ A further problem noted by the Committee was that where groups were set up, there was often a heavy concentration of women from one industry or that trade unions were unwilling or unable to send a woman delegate to the groups. When the Aberdeen group was first established in 1930, only three trade unions, the Shop Assistants' Union, the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union and the NUPBPW were represented.⁸⁹ This meant that the groups were narrowly focused on a few trade unions and their effect was limited. Of the Dundee group, only two of the 16 unions asked to participate would give the Committee names of potential members. This group had

⁸⁶ STUC, *Bulletin*, October, 1933, p. 2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1933, p. 75; OWC, *Minutes*, May, 1930, p. 1; Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, p. 204.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

difficulties in the early 1930s in pulling in women from the TGWU, the RCA and other unions to participate in the workings of the group and this resulted in the over-representation of textile workers.⁹⁰ This is unsurprising given that the textile unions were so dominant in the city, even during the 1930s when female membership of textile unions in Dundee was in decline.

Maintaining interest in the women's groups in the 1930s seems to have been laborious and the number of women attending meetings was frequently low. The Glasgow and Dundee groups seem to have been relatively stable while the Aberdeen, Kilmarnock and Edinburgh groups experienced many problems in the mid-1930s. Frequently groups would need 'resuscitating' and a Women's Committee member would visit groups and make an attempt to arouse enthusiasm and encourage greater planning within the group. Even in the late 1930s when trade union membership was increasing in the UK and among women in Scotland, this was not reflected in the number of women participating in the women's groups and the problems persisted. In 1936 the Aberdeen group requested help from the Committee, as did the Kilmarnock group in 1937, where attendances had been poor. The Committee sent Eleanor Stewart to the group to 'improve matters'. Both the Aberdeen and Kilmarnock groups were beset with problems in 1938 and again a Committee member was despatched to the groups to improve the situation. The groups themselves would organise 'special drives' with a view to recruiting new members and the Women's Committee continually sent letters to local trade union branches to encourage women to join their local group.⁹¹ Women in the Borders were more likely to be trade union members than women in the other counties of Scotland,

⁹⁰ STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, October, 1931, p 1; *Annual Report*, 1932, p. 61.

⁹¹ STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, June, 1936, p. 2, November, 1936, p. 1, May, 1937, p. 1, December, 1937, p. 1; May, 1938, p. 1.

(according to STUC figures), but even here in the late 1930s an attempt to set up a group in the area in 1937 failed. Those trade unions circularised by the Committee could not attract a sufficient number of women members. Of 35 trade union branches in Hawick, Jedburgh, Peebles and Selkirk, who were invited to appoint any number of women to the group, only six women were appointed from the TGWU, NUGMW and the Dyers Bleachers and Textile Workers Union. As a result the plans to form a group were abandoned.⁹² In 1935 an attempt was made to set up a local Women's Committee in Falkirk, an area dominated by heavy industry, particularly foundry work and coal mining, but this also met with little response. The following year an effort was made to set up groups in Haddington, St. Andrews and Lanark, but it is unclear if these groups ever met. In 1936 the Kirkcaldy Textile Workers' Union requested that a Trade Union Women's Group be established in Cupar and again it is unclear if a group was ever formed in this town.⁹³

There are a number of possible explanations for the failure and problems experienced by these groups. Many married and single women are likely to have been unable to attend meetings due to domestic responsibilities and for married women with children, a lack of child care was an additional problem which may have prevented these women from attending meetings. Women working throughout the week and possibly on Saturday mornings may have been reluctant to spend time discussing trade union affairs on their one day off from work. Women wishing to participate in the groups may also have been prevented for financial reasons, perhaps because they were unable afford to travel to venues and take part in the groups activities. Low levels of participation in the groups must also have been a reflection of the failure of trade unions to encourage and support their female members. It is likely that in

⁹² STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, December, 1937, p. 1.

⁹³ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1935, p. 88; OWC, *Minutes*, June, 1936, pp. 2-3;

the unions where there was a forum for women to discuss trade union issues or where women members met alone, greater interest would be shown in the work of the STUC Women's Committee and Trade Union Women's Groups. However, as Lewenhak points out, trade unions often resented the STUC Women's Committee's activities cutting across their own and would resist the Committee's attempts to force them to support the new women's committees and take more account of the problems faced in bringing women into the unions.⁹⁴ This seems to have been the pattern elsewhere in the rest of the UK and attempts by the TUC's Women Workers Group to recruit women were often met with apathy by local trade union officials. Local trade union organisers frequently refused to serve on local women's organising committees because they did not want to divulge their organising methods. Indeed, as Soldon wonders, it is unlikely that they had anything to divulge.⁹⁵ It is difficult to determine how much attention the activities of the Trade Union Women's Groups received from trade unions and the extent to which unions were involved in encouraging their women members to participate in these groups. Certainly the unions who sent women to the Trade Union Women's Groups were aware of the work to organise women. However, much of this may have been dependent on an STUC Women Committee member urging women to join. For example, Betty Lamont (a Women's Committee member) and RCA member, on a visit to the Women's Auxiliary Section of the Scottish Typographical Association urged the women there to join the Edinburgh Trade Union Women Group 'who held meetings of interest to women folk.' Presumably she was encouraging the women in her own union to do the same.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, p. 204.

⁹⁵ Boston, *op. cit.*, p. 157; Soldon, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

⁹⁶ ETS, Edinburgh Branch, Female Auxiliary Section, *Minutes*, August, 1933.

From the late 1920s onwards, rank and file women trade union members were encouraged to give talks to trade union branches to educate other rank and file women about trade unionism and to branches where unionisation was low or non-existent. This approach was a move away from the practice of a top official lecturing trade union branches and stewards on the possibility of recruiting women.⁹⁷ Women organisers were encouraged to give talks to other trade union branches and women's groups using notes prepared by the Women's Committee entitled 'Notes for a Talk on Trade Unionism'.⁹⁸ There was a modest response to the attempt to attract women speakers. When Trades Councils and Trade Union Committees throughout Scotland were first circularised in 1928 and were requested to name women who would be able to visit trade union branches, 29 women speakers volunteered. While four women speakers from Motherwell and Wishaw Trades Council, five from Glasgow Trades Council and seven from Aberdeen Trade Union Committee would give talks, Edinburgh, East Fife, Markinch, Kinross could attract only one woman speaker each.⁹⁹ The scarcity of women speakers in Markinch and East Fife may be attributed to the dominance of coal mining in the area and no doubt the dominance of unions recruiting men in these trades. In Kinross, the poor response is surprising given that the town was a centre for textiles production where trade union organisation among women was likely to have been higher than the national average. The lack of women speakers for Edinburgh is also surprising. However, as noted above, the Trade Union Women's Sub-Committee in the city was hampered by local trade unions who did not fully support it and branches declined to send a women representative. This may have reflected a similar attitude on behalf of the Trades Council. In 1931, trade union branches were approached and of 384 union branches in Glasgow only 27 deputations were arranged. In

⁹⁷ A Tuckett, *The Scottish Trade Union Congress 1897-1977*, Mainstream, Edinburgh, 1986, p. 271.

⁹⁸ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1929, p. 78.

⁹⁹ STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, November, 1928, p. 1.

Edinburgh, 101 trade union branches were approached while only nine were visited, and in Dundee of 59 union branches approached only nine visits were made. While few organising meetings took place, according to the Committee, these were well attended. When this recruitment strategy was debated by the Women's Committee in 1930 and 1931, the lack of encouragement given by male trade unionists was deemed to be the main reason why this strategy was not more successful. As Martha Frew, a representative of the Dunfermline Textile Workers' Union pointed out, it seemed to her that women 'required greater encouragement' and while male trade unionists 'did not push them (women) aside' they did not encourage women to come forward for responsible positions. As a result, 'the response women had made to the attempts to get them to take an active share in the work of organisation had been rather regrettable.'¹⁰⁰ However, Agnes Gilroy, though realising that criticisms could be made of the response of the trade union branches to the offer of deputation's from women's groups, the experiment had been 'worthwhile'. Branch attendances were good, the discussions held were of interest to the women and the 'rank and file women had developed as speakers and had extended their activities to other sections of the movement'.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, in her experience, while women came forward as trade union secretaries and treasurers very few came forward as speakers and she blamed the 'lack of encouragement from the official element in the unions' for these difficulties.¹⁰² Betty Lamont of the RCA agreed that 'Men trade unionists were not inclined to treat women trade unionists so seriously as they did their men colleagues', however the 'deputation's had helped to change this.'¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1929, p. 81, 1931, pp. 60-61.

¹⁰¹ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1931, p. 66.

¹⁰² STUC, *Annual Report*, 1930, p. 75.

¹⁰³ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1931, p. 66.

The Scottish Union of Bakers and Confectioners had some success when they encouraged rank and file women members to give talks to other branches in 1930. Both members and non-members were circularised prior to the meeting and the outcome was that 'a greater interest in union affairs had been re-created or greatly improved'. The SUBC recommended that other unions adopt this method of organisation as the attendance of women speakers from other branches, (who made a few remarks rather than long speeches), had tended to increase the number of women attending branch meetings.¹⁰⁴ For example, in Cowdenbeath and Alloa 110 women attended meetings, whereas the usual combined attendance was 40. This success was repeated elsewhere in Leven and Dunfermline.¹⁰⁵ The union described this experiment as an 'unqualified success' which had resulted in the organisation of 40 women workers in Fife.¹⁰⁶ This seems to be very successful, but this success must have been an exception as the female membership of this union was never more than a few hundred members in this period. This approach was also used by the RCA in the West of Scotland. Miss Leishman, women's organiser of the Scottish Western Division, inspired by the Conference of Unions Enrolling Women, arranged 'one or two small social meetings' which were held, not at a trade union hall, but at the Christian Institute in Glasgow. A woman worker from another trade union gave a short address. According to the organiser, these meetings were very successful in attracting young women in particular to join the union. Later in the year the union set up a woman's group in Glasgow.¹⁰⁷

The Women's Committee of the STUC recognised that attempting to improve trade union organisation would be difficult and that increases in trade union membership among women

¹⁰⁴ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1930, p. 72.

¹⁰⁵ STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, September, 1929, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1930, p. 72.

¹⁰⁷ *Railway Service Journal*, February, 1933, p. 81, March, 1933, p. 120, June, 1933, p. 244.

were, in part, dependent on economic improvements. The Committee hoped that the various activities would be of more benefit to women workers when the economic situation improved. In 1929 Joe Duncan, Women's Committee chairman, reported that following the formation of the Committee, the proportion of women attending the annual conferences had increased but that they could not look for 'spectacular results or any tangible evidence that organisation among women had increased.' However, as the STUC was devoting special attention to organisation among women, they would 'reap the results' when the industrial situation improved.¹⁰⁸ This was also stressed by his successor, Bella Jobson, who realised that it was difficult to show definite results in the organisation of women and she claimed that the work being carried out was mainly for the future, in preparation for the expected growth in trade union membership which would follow an improvement in trade.¹⁰⁹ The STUC Women's Committee, the British TUC Women's Advisory Committees and the trade unions recognised that the meetings, propaganda and activities were not attracting substantial numbers of women into the movement.

As a consequence, the parents and male relatives of unorganised women were viewed as an ideal vehicle for the recruitment of young women workers in particular. It was believed that the responsible parent who was aware of the activities of the trade unions would ensure that their daughters or other female relatives were organised into a union. This method of organisation drew on a recruitment strategy already used by textile trade unions in the North of England. Many branches of the Cotton Weavers' Association often relied on the influence of male workers, especially husbands and fathers in a household, in persuading their wives and

¹⁰⁸ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1929, p. 73.

¹⁰⁹ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1932, p. 60.

children to join the trade union.¹¹⁰ Women in the Yorkshire textiles industry were recruited in this way up to and beyond the First World War. For example, male members of the General Union of Textile Workers, who were either fathers or uncles of unorganised girls or young women workers, were often central in persuading the female members of their family to join the trade union.¹¹¹ In the mid- 1920s, the British TUC stressed the importance of organising women through male trade unionists and the Women's Advisory Committee issued a leaflet called 'To Parents' specifically addressed to parents who were trade unionists.¹¹² In Scotland, prior to the formation of the Women's Committee the STUC had adopted this form of recruitment. As Joe Duncan, leader of the Scottish Farm Servants' Union and chairman of the General Council stated in 1925:

Throughout the country there are thousands of girls, daughters of trade unionists who are seemingly unconscious of the protection their fathers gain by their trade union membership and I trust that they will not be left in that ignorance much longer but that all our members of the various movements give council where it is needed.¹¹³

Interest in this form of organisation among members of the STUC Women's Committee was rekindled in the late 1920s as a potentially worthwhile recruitment strategy particularly when, as Martha Frew of the Dunfermline Textile Workers' Union found, there were many problems in recruiting female linen workers in the town and even though 'they were in the heart of a mining area and most of their girls were drawn from mining families, yet they found

¹¹⁰ This union would not allow its members to work in an official position if their wife or children working in the industry were not in the union. (Drake (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 119, p. 202).

¹¹¹ J Bornat, 'Textile Workers in Yorkshire, 1888-1922', in L Davidoff and B Westover (eds.), *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1986, pp. 92-97.

¹¹² Boston, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

¹¹³ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1925, p. 101.

great difficulty in organising them' and while the miners were 'keen trade unionists themselves' and ensured that their sons were members of the miner's unions, they 'paid no attention to whether their daughters were trade unionists or non-trade unionists.' While canvassing girls in the Dunfermline area, Miss Frew had 'often appealed to the fathers and had been told that they just let the girls please themselves.'¹¹⁴ The STUC Women's Committee was influenced by successful visits of a panel of speakers to branches of male trade union members in an unnamed district in England to prompt male trade unionists to take more interest in the question of their daughters' relationship to the trade union movement and responsibility for organising of the young female worker.¹¹⁵ Therefore, it was recommended that women speakers be sent to all male branches to encourage men to organise their non-unionised female relatives as there were 'hundreds of cases where men were active trade unionists but didn't make any effort to see that female relatives were in their respective unions'.¹¹⁶

There was often a belief that unionised male workers would have automatically organised their female relatives. For example, Charles Gaillie of the RCA opposed expending more effort on this form of organisation in the belief that little could be gained from this as the loyal and active male trade unionists would have already organised their female relatives.¹¹⁷ However, as Bella Jobson pointed out, it was not always the case that men who attended meetings would encourage organisation among their female relatives and 'so many so called trade unionists never mentioned trade unionism in the home'.¹¹⁸ According to Eleanor Stewart, there were many instances where prominent male trade unionists, who were in the best

¹¹⁴ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1928, p. 151.

¹¹⁵ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1929, p. 82.

¹¹⁶ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1930, p. 77.

¹¹⁷ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1930, p. 77.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

position to unionise their female relatives, had approached her to take up questions on behalf of their unorganised daughters.¹¹⁹ It is somewhat ironic and shortsighted that rather than encouraging their daughters to become organised the fathers were pursuing issues for them with a prominent female trade unionist. National trade unions were also recruiting young women workers in this way. In 1926, the Shop Assistants' Union urged their members, who were parents of unorganised male and female workers in distribution, to encourage them to join a union and ultimately strengthen their own position. It was also suggested to parents that by allowing their daughters to remain unorganised they were effectively subsidising employers. The Glasgow branches of the RCA adopted this form of recruitment, social meetings were arranged and the *Railway Service Journal* urged the parents of the girls employed in the service of either the LMS (London Midland Scottish) or LNE (London North Eastern) railway companies to encourage their daughters to attend these meetings or 'happy gatherings' as they were described by the union.¹²⁰ In the 1930s the NUGMW pointed out to its members that 'in every badly organised occupation there are thousands of girls from trade union homes with trade union and labour traditions behind them who were outside the movement' and trade unionists were urged to 'make it his business to bring the workers under his own roof into the movement' and the women of the Labour Party and the Co-operative movement were asked to 'take a stand and insist on Trade Union membership in their own households.'¹²¹ In an appeal to the parents of the unorganised it was pointed out that:

Many young people to day are taking up work that differs in every respect from the work of their fathers and men who would not dream of working without a union card

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *The Shop Assistant*, March 27, 1926, p. 270, April 10, 1926, p. 322; *Railway Service Journal*, March, 1933, p. 120.

¹²¹ NUGMW, *The Journal*, June, 1932, p. 165.

send their girls into badly organised occupations and tell themselves that things are different there. Perhaps they are secretly afraid of the girls making themselves conspicuous by trade union activities.¹²²

Four years later, Miss V Donnet, recruitment officer for the Scottish district, deduced that 'the problem of the scarcity of youth in the trade union movement which concerns us today' would not have been so acute if the organised parents of the young and unorganised workers talked about the benefits of trade unionism at home. She went on to say that 'I do not blame the youth of today for their apathy but their parents and the sooner this fact is acknowledged and remedied the better.'¹²³ Annie Loughlin, women organiser for the Tailor and Garment Workers Union, likewise believed that it was the parents duty to ensure that their children joined a union upon entering work and she appealed directly to women by suggesting that every woman can 'use her influence' to protect her family by ensuring that her children join a union.¹²⁴ Even when parents of unorganised girls were organised themselves large numbers of young women would not join trade unions and a primary cause of this, according to the TUC Women's Advisory Committee in England, was the entrenched belief among many female workers that their jobs were only temporary and a 'stop-gap' between school and marriage.¹²⁵ The idea of recruiting women through their relatives, and in particular their male relatives, appears to reflect the dominant patriarchal views of the time. There is a clear implication that women workers could not accept the ideas of trade unionism expressed at work unless they were introduced in the home and by a relative (presumably some kind of authority figure - father, older brother, uncle.) As Bornat points out, in reference to female textile workers in

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ NUGMW, *The Journal*, January, 1936, pp. 31-32.

¹²⁴ *The Garment Worker*, May, 1935, p. 7.

¹²⁵ TUC, Women's Advisory Committee, Trade Union Membership Survey, c. 1939.

Yorkshire, the outcome of approaching parents, particularly male relatives was that the appeal of trade unionism was made to the male relatives and therefore went 'over the heads' of the female workers they were trying to recruit. She also cites instances of fathers and mothers or other relatives paying for trade union subscriptions on behalf of young women living at home. Therefore, the relationship of the primarily young women worker to her trade union would have been indirect and this served to reinforce the idea that women workers were on the margins of the trade union movement.¹²⁶

A common way, the most direct means of recruitment, and possibly the most successful involved trade union organisers visiting workplaces and pursuing unorganised women and girls by either distributing leaflets, having 'personal talks' with the unorganised or encouraging women and girls to attend meetings. This could be a very effective way of recruiting non-unionised women and most unions had already adopted a more personal approach to unionising women. The Glasgow Branch of the Railway Clerks' Association also tried to recruit women workers using this method. A number of visits were made by women organisers to St. Enoch's railway station engineering accounts department to organise the women typists employed there. However, it is unclear how successful this was.¹²⁷ The Edinburgh women's section of the NUPBPW pursued women non-members. Wherever women were unorganised, for example at Edinburgh bookbinding firm McNiven, Cameron and Andersons, the benefits of unionism were explained to the women and those who were organised pledged to do their utmost to bring the remaining women into the union. This was attempted at other firms in Edinburgh where 'strong action' was needed to bring non-unionised women into the union. Organising meetings were held with employers and women already in the union and this was

¹²⁶ Bornat, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-97.

¹²⁷ RCA, Glasgow South Branch, *Minutes*, December, 1937.

apparently quite successful in recruiting women members.¹²⁸ The Scottish Lace and Textile Workers' Union recruited women in this way by holding mid-day meetings at factory gates, mass meetings at night and by distributing leaflets to encourage organisation among women. They also took more direct action by visiting the homes of unorganised women.¹²⁹ Perhaps the women of the STUC Women's Committee, while not a trade union, may have had more success if they had approached women at this level rather than through their other recruiting strategies which were heavily dependent on the co-operation of trades unions, trades councils or other bodies who could obstruct recruitment drives or simply be disinterested in recruiting more women into the trade union movement.

This method of organisation was used by the Edinburgh machine branch of the STA who sent deputations to many offices where the women and girls were largely unorganised and the Glasgow printing section branch of the NUPBPW used their own organising committee to 'interview' unorganised women at firms in the city.¹³⁰ The Edinburgh branch of the Shop Assistants' Union attempted to organise drapery trade workers, large numbers of whom were women, in principal city firms by holding early morning meetings and 'conversations' with the unorganised.¹³¹ The union invited non-union women in Edinburgh to meetings and the first of these meetings was relatively well attended by 16 unorganised women. However, according to woman organiser, Isa Davidson, (an STUC Women's Committee member), the second meeting was poorly attended and only eight women attended the final meeting and it was decided that it was 'practically futile to carry on.' The names of the non-union women were passed to the branch secretaries in Edinburgh and a meeting followed attended by only eight

¹²⁸ NUPBPW, Edinburgh Branch, Female Section, *Minutes*, July, 1919, p. 26, August, 1919, pp. 27-28.

¹²⁹ Scottish Lace and Textile Workers Union, *Minutes*, July 14, 1928, April 14, August 11, 1934.

¹³⁰ NUPBPW, Glasgow Branch, Printing Section, November 1926; ETS, Edinburgh Machine Branch, *Minutes*, September, 1925.

¹³¹ Shop Assistants' Union, Edinburgh Branch, *Annual Report*, 1931.

women. However, it was hoped that the formation of women's group within the union would help organisation. Shop Assistant Union women's groups were operating in a number of towns in the Lothians and Borders in late 1932 and while attendance's at the Portobello and Tranent group meetings were well attended, in Galashiels and Penicuik the attendance at meetings was very poor.¹³² However, many problems existed for those wishing to recruit the unorganised in this way. Anna MacDonald, a member of the Glasgow District Council of the Shop Assistants' Union Woman's Council, comprised of women members from every branch in the city, recalled the problems in recruiting women in the confectionery trade in the city during 1919-1920. As these women worked up to 72 hours a week and often did not finish work until 11pm, organising meetings had to be held at midnight. In addition to these problems, the organisers, incredibly, were often required to use their own money in order to continue with their organising work.¹³³ The women recruiters working for the Glasgow Factory Branch of the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union in 1929, in the run up to the General Election of that year, had many problems in recruiting women clothing workers and they found that when visiting the unorganised women and girls at factories, they had competition from the Conservative Party who were out canvassing for votes. According to the women organisers:

Leaflets giving reasons why they should vote Tory and an invitation to some social club are being issued round the various factories. Result- the organisers are being met by the Miss-with-the-superior-air and confidential manner who informs us that the only real trade union belongs to Havelock Wilson¹³⁴ and that the other trade unions are only out to cause strife and trouble and bring down the wages of the workers.¹³⁵

¹³² Shop Assistants' Union, Edinburgh District Council, *Minutes*, October, November, 1932.

¹³³ Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, pp. 166-167.

¹³⁴ Havelock Wilson's union, The National Union of Seamen had, according to Pelling, become by the 1930s a 'company union' - a union controlled by the employers. (Pelling, *op. cit.*, p. 203).

¹³⁵ *The Garment Worker*, April, 1929, p. 9.

The Glasgow Branch of the same union, following several years where attempts to organise female clothing workers had met with little response, employed a novel method of organisation. The union in Glasgow travelled to factories where women (and men) were unorganised and using a 'loud speaker' they sent their 'message through the windows to the workers who were to say the least discouraged from leaving the factory during the dinner hour'.¹³⁶ This approach was very successful and 300 men and women were recruited in this way. The following year the Glasgow branch visited various factories on a lorry and played a Gracie Fields song entitled '*Sing As We Go and Make the World Rejoice*' through a loud speaker. *The Garment Worker* reported that 'the factory lassies are being roused from their lunchtime cup of tea to hear the reasons why they should join the union.' The Glasgow branch reported that 'enthusiasm' and 'interest' ran high and they hoped that at the final rally they would be able to 'rejoice.' The result of this campaign was a 'steady flow' of new members rather than a huge influx. Similar visits may also have taken place in Edinburgh where there were attempts to recruit up to 100, 14 and 15 year old female factory workers.¹³⁷

In the late 1920s, the STUC Women's Committee endeavoured to include women in the wider labour movement and in other women's organisations and it was hoped that while many of the women in these organisations were not working themselves, they would influence their working and unorganised female relatives. Greater co-operation between trade unionists and the women's section of the Labour Party and the Scottish Co-operative Women's Guilds was deemed to be necessary in order to improve organisation among women. There was a strong belief that these organisations should have promoted trade unionism amongst women to a

¹³⁶ *The Garment Worker*, May, 1937, p. 13.

¹³⁷ *The Garment Worker*, October, 1936, p. 13, May, 1937 p. 13, June, 1937 p. 13, August, 1936, p. 13.

greater extent than they did. The Scottish Co-operative Women's Guild was the largest of the working class women's organisations and was aimed primarily at housewives, particularly the more prosperous working class housewife. In the immediate pre-First World War period, as Gordon points out, this organisation had moved away to some extent from training women in domestic skills to educational work covering subjects such as the poor law, sweated labour and labour exchanges.¹³⁸ However, at the Co-operative Guilds trade unionism had become merely a 'subject of interest' on lecture nights and therefore, it was essential that all Co-operators also be members of a union and ensure that their children were also unionised. It was believed that there was potential for recruitment at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), especially when few women in the organisation knew little about trade union activities.¹³⁹ This organisation, following the end of the First World War, had become more involved with political and feminist issues and had expanded their links with working class women.¹⁴⁰ The Women's Committee also made contact with the British Temperance Association, The Church Guilds, the British Legion Women's section, who made little response and the Scottish Girls Friendly Association who believed that trade unionism was an issue that was too political for their members. Again the main reason for making contact with these organisations was to convince working class women and girls of the need to join a trade union or in the hope that the women with unorganised female relatives would ensure that they would join a trade union.

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Following a proposal from Agnes Gilroy, the principle of visiting trade union branches was extended to all sections of the Labour Party and Co-operative Women's Guilds in order to

¹³⁸ Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-267.

¹³⁹ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1928, p. 82.

¹⁴⁰ J Rutter, *The YMCA of Great Britain, 1900-1925*, Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Warwick, 1986, pp. 105-119.

¹⁴¹ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1929, p. 78, 1933, p. 60; *Bulletin*, February, 1929, p. 1.

further promote trade union membership among their members, who needed 'enlightenment' on trade union activities. In 1932, speakers were sent to women's groups and leaflets distributed at meetings of the Women's Co-operative Guilds. Of 45 Women's Co-operative Guilds approached in Glasgow, 19 visits were made by women organisers. Of the 18 women's Labour Party sections approached, 7 visits were made.¹⁴² This is a reasonable outcome given that the membership of many of these groups would not have been working women, particularly the members of the Co-operative Guilds and the Women's Committee was very satisfied with this outcome. The Women's Committee undertook a leaflet campaign in 1932 and around 100 Labour Party women's sections and 300 Co-operative Women's Guilds were supplied with leaflets. The Govan Guild requested 200 more leaflets while the Bridgeton Guild returned these leaflets stating that its members were not interested in trade unionism. The Perth Co-operative Women's Guild suggested that as its members were married women little organising work could be done. The Tranent group were also unable to take leaflets because all of their working members were already union members.¹⁴³ There was some success when this method of organisation was attempted in Bo'ness. In this town, women's trade union membership, as compared with male trade union membership, was especially low. The Co-operative Women's Guilds were approached and this led to trade union organising work in the area. Successful meetings were held between unorganised women and trade union organisers, resulting in the organisation of two previously unorganised hosiery factories in the area by the NUGMW.¹⁴⁴ This success seems to have been isolated as there are no other references to the STUC Women's Committee organising in this way. One of the outcomes of greater co-operation with the labour and co-operative movement was the establishment of the Scottish

¹⁴² STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, May, 1930, p 3; *Annual Report*, 1931, p 66, 1932, p. 60.

¹⁴³ STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, September, 1932, p. 1, November, 1932, p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1935, p. 90.

Committee of Co-operative, Labour and Trade Union Women in 1933. This body was formed to promote combined action on women's issues and recruitment. This group also held its own conferences, for example, at the 1939 conference the group held discussions on nursery schools, the factory acts and the raising of the school leaving age.¹⁴⁵ As Aitken notes, in the long term this prompted the STUC to build alliances with a number of different bodies that still exist today.¹⁴⁶

The Women's Committee also set up intensive 'organising weeks' to boost organisation in specific areas of Scotland. Two of these took place in Ayrshire and Aberdeen in 1934 but little is known about these weeks and if they were successful. However, a large-scale organising week also took place in Kirkcaldy in 1936, a joint effort organised by the Committee, the Kirkcaldy Trades Council Organising Committee and the local trade unions. This was viewed as an important experiment and this town was chosen as it was both 'industrially suited for a campaign' and there was a need to make young women 'appreciate the need for and benefit of trade unionism.' Women working in the linen, linoleum, laundry, hemp and paper industries in the town tended to be young, semi- or unskilled and most had 'little knowledge of trade unionism except that gleaned from older workers.'¹⁴⁷ The Kirkcaldy Trades Council Organising Committee undertook this organising week with the co-operation of eight Committee organisers and local unions. Circulars were sent to Co-operative Women's Guilds, Labour Party Women's Section, the Independent Labour Party and the Labour League of Youth. Works were canvassed, including St. Mary's Canvas Factory, Smeaton Roperie and a range of other works and mills and more than 600 workers were issued with trade union

¹⁴⁵ Lewenhak, (1973), *op. cit.*, p. 16; STUC, *Annual Report*, 1939, p. 105.

¹⁴⁶ Aitken, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

¹⁴⁷ Kirkcaldy Trades Council Organising Committee in *Minutes of the STUC, OWC*, 1936.

membership cards. A great deal of effort was made during this organising week as 50,000 leaflets were produced and distributed to 8,000 homes in the area. In order to determine the level of trade unionism in the town, 'house to house' checks were made and the activities of the organising Committee were advertised on posters around the town.¹⁴⁸

Leaflets aimed at women workers were issued up to three weeks beforehand and covered titles such as, 'Plain Talk to Women Workers', 'Women Who Work', 'Trade Unionism Pays', and the 'Do You Know' leaflet. Indoor and outdoor meetings were held and included talks from Women Committee members, but the attendances seem to have been low. A meeting at the Dysart Welfare Hall with a capacity of 200 attracted 38 people; a meeting at the Co-operative Hall with a capacity of 250 attracted 43 people and a meeting at the Pathead Hall with a capacity of 600 attracted 88 people. A special meeting aimed at organising shop assistants at the Beveridge Hall attracted 50 people. However, a meeting organised at the Labour Hall attracted 350 people, but as Frank Kelly of the Kirkcaldy Trades Council pointed out 75% of those attending were regular Sunday night attendees anyway.¹⁴⁹ As a result, up to 100 men and women joined trade unions including the NUGMW, who recruited 45 workers, the Scottish Textile Workers Union, who recruited 31 workers and the Shop Assistants' Union, who recruited 25 workers.¹⁵⁰ This is not too successful when compared with a similar strategy in 1934, organised by a local branch of the Scottish Textile Workers' Union in Kirkcaldy. This apparently resulted in 400 new women workers being enrolled in the union following door to door canvassing and chats with parents of the unorganised.¹⁵¹ Frank Kelly

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ This trade union had previously paid their organisers 6d. for every male worker they recruited into the union and 3d. for every adult female they recruited. Scottish Textile Workers Union, Kirkcaldy, *Minutes*, June 1920; STUC, *Annual Report*, 1934, p. 89.

pointed to a number of factors which had hindered the organising week and he concluded that 'the appeal of trade unionism as a subject in this town was below moderate.' Furthermore, 'Young female persons generally do not understand trade unionism or are apathetic.'¹⁵² More importantly, he blamed the lack of co-operation among local trade unionists. While he did not elaborate on this claim, it is likely that he meant that they were opposed to outside attempts at organisation or were unwilling to provide the organising Committee with the information they needed to plan where to recruit. He claimed that there had been too little time to set up the organising week and that six months were needed to get details of the names of non-unionists. It seems that the organising week may have become a more general recruitment week aimed at both men and women who appear to have been attending meetings together instead of meetings aimed at solely at unorganised women. This may have dissuaded potential female recruits from attending these meetings. Nevertheless, the Organisation of Women Committee was pleased with the results and concluded that the Kirkcaldy organising committee had done 'exceedingly well particularly with regard to the distribution of leaflets'. The STUC viewed this as an experiment and a guide for other localities to follow.¹⁵³

As noted above, an important element of the STUC Trade Unions Women's Groups was their social function, organising successful whist drives and dances usually in order to raise money to send members to the STUC Annual Conference, bringing different groups together and maintaining the link between women delegates when lectures had ended. There was a recognition during the inter-war period that women could be attracted to trade unionism if they were provided with some form of entertainment. As male workers already had a focus for social activities centring around pubs, trade union organisation could utilise these venues

¹⁵² Kirkcaldy Trades Council Organising Committee in *Minutes of the STUC, OWC, 1936*.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*; STUC, OWC, *Minutes*, June, 1936, p. 2; *Annual Report*, 1936, p. 51.

outside the workplace for organising activity. However, pubs were a predominantly male preserve and given the lack of social activities for low-paid women, the use of social activities to promote trade unionism was a sensible organising strategy. Trade union organisers realised that they were in competition with other more attractive past times for men and women workers and it was recognised that most teenagers and young women were interested in music, dance halls and the pictures and that trade unions needed to organise social activities as a method of attracting new members.¹⁵⁴ As Soldon describes, social activities had become essential to recruit workers as 'trade unionism to some became as dull as religion and earnest recruiting agents were seen as bores or mere collecting agents for subscriptions'.¹⁵⁵

Trade unions were also in competition with the large employers who provided their staff with welfare schemes that worked against trade union organising campaigns. As well as the provision of recreational facilities and hobbies many employers provided educational, health and profit sharing and co-partnership schemes.¹⁵⁶ Such schemes were undertaken by large, well-organised and successful firms. Pensions were also provided as were holidays with pay, recreational facilities, clubs, work councils, canteens, first-aid courses and a variety of other amenities. There was an extension in the use of welfare workers and supervisors who had been introduced during the First World War to control the number of girls entering munitions work and these women were especially loathed. Such schemes served to promote discipline within the workforce and the fear among trade unionists was that these schemes would detract from trade union strength and increase workforce dependence on employers. However, as Jones suggests, the hostility among trade unionists to such schemes may have lessened in the 1930s.

¹⁵⁴ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1928, p. 83, 1933, p. 74.

¹⁵⁵ Soldon, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

¹⁵⁶ TUC, Women's Advisory Committee, 'Difficulties in Organising Women', 1936, p. 2.

In Scotland, linoleum manufacturers and paper employers in Fife ran welfare schemes for their employees¹⁵⁷ and a number of other large employers were providing similar welfare schemes for their employees. Wallace and Weir clothing manufacturers in Glasgow provided staff with a canteen and a sports field¹⁵⁸ and the Singer Company provided its workforce at Clydebank with sports clubs and facilities including sewing, music, elocution, dance and arts and crafts groups and drama groups and literary societies.¹⁵⁹ The India Tyre Company at Inchinnan in Renfrewshire, where substantial numbers of women were employed, provided sporting facilities such as a tennis club and also held social events for female workers such as 'beauty queen' competitions.¹⁶⁰ Employers in the jute industry in Dundee provided their employees with welfare schemes and employed 'welfare officers', (for example, at Cox. Bros. in Lochee). There was much opposition to these welfare schemes from the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers' Union on the grounds that 'The whole welfare scheme has behind it ulterior motives which the operatives who have given any thought to the matter will be able to name.' In response, the union provided their own clubs for members, including a swimming club, established at Dundee public baths, a football team, a hockey team and held social dances and whist drives for male and female workers. These were established to entice non-members to join the union and dissuade those already in the union from participating in the welfare schemes provided by their employers and the union, via its newspaper, the *Dundee Jute and Flax Workers Guide*¹⁶¹ directed a number of attacks at the welfare supervisors employed at Cox Bros., in particular, in the city.

¹⁵⁷ H Jones, 'Employers' Welfare Schemes and Industrial Relations in Inter-War Britain', *Business History*, 25, 3, 1983, pp. 62-71.

¹⁵⁸ Oakley, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

¹⁵⁹ Glasgow Labour History Workshop, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

¹⁶⁰ *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette*, May 23, 1936.

¹⁶¹ Dundee and District Jute and Flax Workers' Union (DDJFWU) Circular to Members, 1937; Dundee Jute and Flax Workers *Guide*, (Hereafter referred to as DJFW Guide), September 1923, pp. 2-3, October

In view of the competition from employers' schemes and outside attractions for women, the STUC Trade Union Women's Groups and trade unions had to provide social activities to recruit and maintain union membership. According to Helen Wilson, secretary of the Edinburgh group, social activities definitely had an effect on encouraging group membership.¹⁶² The Shop Assistants' Union in Edinburgh was active in organising outings and arts and crafts exhibitions and the growing popularity of the cinema with its mass working class audience was also utilised by this union who ran cinema advertisements. This union hoped that by bringing members together at whist drives and dances the membership would be consolidated and a spirit of comradeship would be created. While it was not the function of a trade union to 'provide amusement', it was realised that social activities were more attractive than meetings and it was believed that such activities would encourage new members to join the union, maintain existing membership and perhaps get members involved in more important union activities.¹⁶³ As noted above, the RCA held socials at the Christian Institute in Glasgow to encourage unorganised girls to join and these were viewed as successful by the women organisers in attracting young women to join up. The Glasgow Branches of the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union held many social events including whist drives and dances, as did the Women's Auxiliary Section of the STA in Edinburgh.¹⁶⁴ Members of the Edinburgh Case Branch and the Women's Section of the STA held informal tea dances for women only and the union promised potential recruits and existing members that there would be 'no chair, no formality, no men' and 'nothing but enjoyment from beginning to end.'¹⁶⁵

1923, p. 2.

¹⁶² STUC, *Annual Report*, 1935, pp. 70-71.

¹⁶³ Shop Assistants' Union, Edinburgh Branch, *Annual Report*, 1927, 1929, 1932.

¹⁶⁴ *Railway Service Journal*, March, 1933, p. 120; *The Garment Worker*, October, 1928, August, 1929, July, 1930; ETS, Edinburgh Branch, Female Auxiliary Section, *Minutes*, June, 1927.

¹⁶⁵ *Scottish Typographical Journal*, December, 1922, October, 1923

One of the final organising initiatives undertaken in 1938 by the STUC Women's Committee was to send a questionnaire to trade unions recruiting women to determine if their women members participated in the administration and organisation of trade unions and if they were employed in executive positions in proportion to female membership. Unions were asked if they provided special representation for women and if women were able to meet by themselves. This seems to have been the last and only comprehensive questionnaire issued by the Committee in the inter-war period.¹⁶⁶ As shown in chapter two, the STUC and the Women's Committee often had problems in gathering the information needed from trade unions and the Committee continued to experience these difficulties as not all of the trade unions responded to the questionnaire issued by the Committee. Of the 34 trade unions contacted only 22 responded and even many of these unions returned incomplete questionnaires, possibly reflecting either an unwillingness to provide the Committee with the information they needed or because they were not in possession of information on the position of women within their own trade union. Nevertheless, the outcome of this questionnaire showed that after more than ten years of work and education by the Women's Committee, women were still grossly under-represented in the trade union movement at local and national level.¹⁶⁷ Only five of the unnamed unions which responded, provided special representation when electing women at local and national level. Of 17 unions who responded, only five had female executive members even though the other twelve trade unions had a considerable number of female members. Of the five unions with women in executive positions, women were still poorly represented at this level. For example, in one trade union, where 55% of the members in Scotland were women, only four of 24 executive positions were held by women.

¹⁶⁶ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1939, pp. 102-103.

¹⁶⁷ Esther Brietenbach found more than forty years later, in the early 1980s, that the under representation of women in large trade unions in Scotland continued. Women were under represented at branch level, on committees at all levels of trade union organisation or as full time officials in proportion to their share of the membership (Breitenbach, (1982), *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51).

In another union, where 77% of its members in Scotland were women, two of eight executive positions were held by female members. Likewise in another trade union, where 41% of the union members were female, only one of the 24 executive places was held by a women. Of two other unions where 34% and 17% of members were female one of the 12 executive places was held by a woman and in the second union only one executive position from 24 was held by a woman. The Mental Hospital and Institutional Workers' Union was the only union named in the report and the only unions which could claim that women bore their share of management in proportion to their membership.¹⁶⁸ The questionnaire also found that few of the responding unions provided female members with the opportunity to meet by themselves for special purposes. There were few branch chairwomen, women secretaries and financial secretaries. Across 427 branches of twelve unions, where the combined female membership was 20% of all union members, only 16 women held the position of chairwomen, 15 women acted as financial secretaries and 37 women were branch secretaries and in the latter two positions often one woman acted as both financial and branch secretary.¹⁶⁹ The findings of this questionnaire led the committee to conclude that 'it may safely be assumed that women trade unionists, in proportion to their numerical strength, do not bear their proper share in administration.' They called on trade union branches to make a 'systematic effort' to provide opportunities for women to participate in trade union administration. They concluded that trade union branches had to ensure that the branch committees contained a certain number of women in proportion to the number of women in the branch and they believed that any

¹⁶⁸ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1939, pp. 102-103.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

difficulties in finding women to do these jobs would be overcome in time. The outcome they hoped would be a 'healthy effect' in securing more women trade unionists.¹⁷⁰

To conclude, this chapter has shown that the STUC Women's Committee was very active between the wars in drawing up new ways to promote trade union membership among women in Scotland and the Committee appears to have been satisfied with the outcome of many of these strategies. The STUC General Council was also impressed with the activities of the Committee and the success of the annual conference.¹⁷¹ It is almost impossible to determine the effect of the various strategies employed by the STUC Women's Committee on the overall level of trade union membership among women in Scotland. Perhaps an indication of the success of the Committee can be shown in the increase in the number of trade unions taking copies of the STUC women's annual conference report proceedings. According to STUC figures, in 1931 the number of copies bought by trade unions was 312. By 1934, this had increased to 1,184 before almost doubling to 2,209 in 1937, while the number of trade unions taking the report increased from nine to 23.¹⁷² Furthermore, it is evident from the records of a number of trade unions that there was some interest in the work of the Committee and the yearly conference. For example, the Railway Clerks Association, various branches of the Scottish Typographical Association,¹⁷³ the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union, the Scottish Lace and Textile Workers, the General and Municipal Workers' Union, the Scottish Textile Workers' Union in Kirkcaldy and the Scottish Union of Bakers and Confectioners all make

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, p. 204.

¹⁷² STUC, *Annual Report*, 1939, p 106. However, this would have been a small number of trade unions in relation to the total number of trade unions recruiting men and women in Scotland.

¹⁷³ For example, the *Railway Service Journal* and RCA, Glasgow South Branch, *Minutes*, various dates, 1928, 1929, 1930, 1934, 1935; ETS, Female Section and Female Auxiliary Section.

references to the work of the Women's Committee.¹⁷⁴ Women in these unions were made aware of the existence of the STUC Women's Committee or were encouraged to attend the conferences and take an active part in the Trade Union Women's Groups. Several unions formed their own women's groups or 'organising committees' from 1926 onwards, such as the National Amalgamated Union of Labour in Edinburgh in 1926 and the RCA in Glasgow in 1933. The Shop Assistants' Union had a number of women's groups operating in the Lothians and Borders area in the 1930s and the Printing, Bookbinding and Paperworkers' Union in Glasgow set up their own 'organising committee' in 1926.¹⁷⁵

Additionally, the STUC Women's Committee attempted to organise women earlier than their British TUC equivalent. In England, the TUC Women Workers Group did not meet in the late 1920s and a Women's Advisory Committee was not elected until 1930.¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, weekend schools aimed at women were set up in 1933, five years later than in Scotland and discussions on greater co-operation between the trade unions, the Labour Party and Co-operative movement only began to take place in 1933 which was also considerably later than in Scotland.¹⁷⁷ However, throughout the period there seemed to be no overall strategy on how women workers could be effectively organised. Committee organisers were still debating how best to organise women into the late 1930s. Few of the approaches described above were very successful in encouraging women to be active in trade unions or Trade Union Women's Groups, which had difficulties in recruiting women trade unionists.

¹⁷⁴ For Example, *The Garment Worker*, various issues, 1928, 1930, 1935; Scottish Lace and Textile Workers Union, *Minutes*, March, 1933; NUGMW, *Minutes* Edinburgh, No. 5 Branch, January, 1935; Scottish Textile Workers Union, Kirkcaldy Branch, *Minutes*, January, 1936; SUBC, *Journal*, May 1931, pp. 11-12.

¹⁷⁵ National Amalgamated Union of Labour, Branch No 292, *Minutes*, Edinburgh, June, 1926; *Railway Service Journal*, March, 1933, p. 120; Shop Assistants' Union, Edinburgh District Council, *Minutes*, November, 1932; NUPBPW, Glasgow Branch, Printing Section, *Minutes*, November, 1926.

¹⁷⁶ Boston, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

¹⁷⁷ TUC, *Annual Report*, 1933, pp. 103-104.

Recruitment campaigns seem to have had little effect on the numbers of women joining trade unions and localised successes were the exception rather than the rule. There were few long running recruitment drives and a number of these drives appear to have been one off experiments. It has also been shown that several of these recruitment strategies may not have been suitable, such as approaching female workers via their relatives and by appealing to women to join trade unions in order to improve their appearance. The Trade Union Women's Groups continued throughout the 1930s, but as shown above, these were beset with problems. The work of the STUC Women's Committee seems to have had little influence on women outside of the major cities, as organising strategies were not Scotland wide and almost no Trade Union Women's Groups existed outside of the cities and major industrial areas. No recruitment initiatives took place in the North of Scotland, the South West or even in central Scotland where trade union membership among women, according to STUC figures, was low.

However, one of the biggest obstacles to organisation was that the Women's Committee did not always receive the full support of the trade unions and trades councils who appeared not to appreciate the interference of the STUC Women's Committee. It has also emerged that trade union officials and male trade unionists did not always offer their support to women workers who were outside of the movement or to those who were keen to recruit more women into the movement and encourage women members to get involved in trade union affairs. The women of the Co-operative Guilds or Labour Party were often unable or unwilling to participate in the Committees' work, particularly when gathering information on trade union membership among women. Without the necessary information, the Women's Committee could not plan recruitment drives. As McIvor points out, without the support of the local trade union branches, women Co-operators and Labour Party members the more difficult it became

to promote trade unionism among women.¹⁷⁸ However, these problems were not unique to Scotland and the problems experienced by the STUC Women's Committee mirrored those of the TUC Women's Advisory Committee in England. The TUC Women's Advisory Committee remained a marginal body and the problems of women workers never found a proper forum.¹⁷⁹ As already noted, women's trade union committees in England were frequently unsupported by local trade union branches. Therefore, when female trade union membership did begin to increase in Scotland in the late 1930s, following the trend among men and women workers in the rest of the UK, this can perhaps be attributed to the reduction in unemployment and economic growth preceding the Second World War rather than the efforts of the STUC or individual trade unions.

Thus far it has been shown that trade union organisation among women in Scotland in the inter-war period was weak and the trade union and STUC Organisation of Women Committee attempts to improve organisation among women workers were spasmodic and experimental. Ultimately, it would appear that these efforts to recruit women workers into the movement failed to result in a substantial increase in trade union organisation among women. It has been suggested in this chapter and in chapter two that one possible explanation for the low levels of trade union organisation among women workers in Scotland stemmed from the lack of support given by trade unions and trade unionists to the need to organise more women workers. Therefore, the following chapter will focus on the role of trade unions and their attitude to women workers across a range of issues and attempt to determine if these institutions themselves in some way discouraged potential women recruits from joining trade unions or already existing members from participating further in trade union activities.

¹⁷⁸ McIvor, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

¹⁷⁹ Lewis, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 176.

CHAPTER FOUR: TRADE UNION ATTITUDES TO WOMEN WORKERS

The previous chapter has shown that the Women's Committee of the STUC and individual trade unions were striving to bring about an increase in the numbers of organised women workers in Scotland in the inter-war period, but despite these efforts there appears to have been no significant increase in female trade union membership in Scotland in the inter-war period. As has been demonstrated in chapter two, trade union membership among women in Scotland remained at low levels almost throughout the entirety of the inter-war period and a number of explanations have been advanced to explain why organisation among women was so weak. The factors identified as having an adverse affect on the level of trade union membership among women included high labour turnover among women workers and the concentration of women in work where union organisation was traditionally weak, the existence of a largely young workforce, the short-lived nature of work for many women, domestic responsibilities and low pay. Brief consideration has also been given to the unfavourable views expressed by trade unionists in Scotland to the organisation of women and the intention of this chapter is to focus more fully on the opinions expressed by both male and female trade unionists towards their fellow female union members and women workers in general. This chapter will consider how far, in spite of the recruitment strategies pursued by trade unions and the STUC, the views of this movement on the employment of women undermined trade union organisation among these workers. The position of the trade union movement in relation to married women and paid employment in Scotland will be the first consideration. Increasing numbers of married women were drawn into work in Scotland in the inter-war period, but many of these women were subjected to a great deal of pressure from the media, the government and employers to leave the labour force, particularly after the First World War, and return to the home. The marriage bar was firmly in place between the wars across a range of occupations and married women could be driven out of work. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the extent to which

the trade unions and the wider labour movement reflected and supported the view that male workers had the first right to employment and that the sole role of women, particularly married women, was as wives and mothers.

In the inter-war period the campaign for family allowances received attention from the trade union movement. Therefore, the position of the national and Scottish trade unions, in relation to the campaign for family allowances will also be examined. It is considered here, because of the expectation among some trade unionists that family allowances would help to remove married women workers from the labour market. Consideration will also be given to the level of support for equal pay for women from the trade union movement and from women workers themselves. The second part of this chapter will go on to examine the concerns expressed by the trade union movement in the inter-war period that technological changes were permitting ever greater numbers of women into the areas of work which had previously been the sole preserve of male workers and that women workers were, therefore, forcing men out of work and into unemployment. Attention will also be given to several instances of trade unions attempting to eliminate women workers from employment, such as in the baking trade in Glasgow and in the printing industry in Edinburgh. This chapter, for comparative purposes, will include trade union records referring to both Scotland and the UK.

Before considering the views of trade unions on the employment of women in Scotland it is necessary to examine some of the debates concerning the impact of the First World War on the position of women workers in the UK and the climate of opinion in which trade union opinions were formed. Female commentators had expressed optimism that the economic and political position of women would be improved after the war. There were some political

reforms, in particular the Representation of the People Act in 1918,¹ which granted the vote to women householders and graduates over the age of 30. This legislation has been perceived as a reward for women for war work.² However, considering that boys of 19 who had served in the army also won the vote, the extension of the franchise to women was very limited, many of those young women who were employed in munitions factories were not granted the vote and it is possible that the Suffragettes were on the verge of winning the vote for women immediately preceding the First World War anyway.³

Chapter one has shown that women's workforce participation increased during the First World War in the UK. Some of these women performed a greater number of tasks and benefited from better pay, more freedom, greater independence and this was combined with increased trade union organisation. However for the vast majority of women workers, these gains were temporary and most women who had entered war work were expelled from this work in the immediate post-war period, partly as a result of the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act that had been implemented following trade union pressure.⁴ The traditional industries declined further in the inter-war period and there was some extension in the employment of women, particularly in clerical and retail sectors, in the inter-war period in Scotland. These changes were encouraged and accelerated by the war, but they were already underway prior to the First World War. The war had also drawn many women away from domestic service, but this was a temporary phenomenon and the employment of female domestic servants actually increased in Scotland in the 1920s. The range of jobs available to

¹ Legislation brought some improvements for women in the UK, particularly in the 1920s. The 1922 Criminal Law Amendment Act raised the age of consent for girls from 13 to 16. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923 enabled women to sue for divorce and the Widows', Orphans and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act in 1925 provided pensions. (Smith, (1990), *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55).

² Woollacott, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

³ Lewis, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 97; Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 726; Alberti, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁴ Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 720; B Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980*, OUP, Oxford, p. 178.

Scottish women remained limited and women were almost always confined to the poorest paying semi- and unskilled work.

There has been a great deal of interest in the effect of the First World War on women in general and women workers in the UK and a number of historians have suggested that the First World War actually strengthened antagonism against women workers and reinforced, rather than modified the view that women were secondary or meantime workers and that women, particularly married women, should remain at home.⁵ In the long term, the increased visibility of women workers employed in a range of industries during the First World War may have been a 'tiny step' in the movement of women towards becoming regarded as 'workers'.⁶ However the inter-war period is frequently regarded as a period characterised by an anti-feminist backlash. Kent suggests that in the UK, post-war society sought, above everything else to re-establish a sense of peace and security in an unfamiliar and insecure world and a society in which women did not compete with men in the public sphere and there was a strong belief that if society was to return to normal, separate spheres for men and women had to be reconstructed.⁷ As Smith argues, the war unleashed a 'powerful current of cultural conservatism' and the perception that sex roles had changed as a result of the war only strengthened the views of those who sought to restore traditional roles and the desire to re-establish the pre-war pattern of women's employment was coupled with the increasing preoccupation with marriage, motherhood and femininity in the UK from the 1920s onwards.⁸ It has even been suggested that the post-war slogan 'Homes Fit For Heroes' was just as much concerned with the reconstruction of family life after the upheavals of the war and a return to

⁵ Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 721; Thom, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

⁶ Simonton, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

⁷ S Kinglsey Kent, 'The Politics of Sexual Difference: World War One and the Demise of British Feminism', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 27, 1, 1988, p. 235.

⁸ Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

the pre-war domestic role for women as it was about the provision of housing.⁹ In the immediate post-war period in the UK women workers were attacked, mainly in the press, for hanging on to their war time jobs and were urged to return to the home or the traditional women's occupations. The 'good humoured contempt' which had characterised much of the criticism of women before the war was replaced by out-and-out hostility and a resolve to keep women out of men's jobs at all costs, particularly as many women had shown themselves capable of doing 'men's work'.¹⁰ The *Glasgow Bulletin* accused women who had been employed in factories in Glasgow of being unpatriotic for not returning to their pre-war jobs, particularly domestic service and the unemployed women who were looking for work at employment exchanges:

shake their heads when employment is offered to them if it does not happen to be exactly what they want - they are apt to declare that they will not go back again to the work they used to do before the war and generally fail to see that the need for women workers to be patriotic is as great today as ever it was in the early days of the war.

These women were advised that 'they must be ready to do what ever necessary work comes their way' and if they refused to 'take up suitable employment as judged by their pre-war abilities they will not continue to be entitled to the donation unemployment insurance'. It was imperative that these unemployed women remember that employment in textiles, clothing, laundry, domestic service and waitressing were the most suitable forms of employment for women workers, particularly domestic service which suited women's natural abilities, was an

⁹ J Giles, 'Playing Hard to Get': Working Class Women, Sexuality and Respectability in Britain, 1918-40', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 1, 2, 1992, p. 240

¹⁰ Braybon, *op. cit.*, p 208.

extension of their domestic role and of course could provide a good training for future housewifery. These jobs were all 'women's jobs before the war. They are still women's jobs and women are wanted to do them. They are among the country's industries which must be kept going- by women.'¹¹ In early 1919 the *Glasgow Bulletin* described the unemployment among 26,000 former munitions women who were in receipt of unemployment benefit as a 'free holiday' particularly when there were many domestic service and sewing jobs to be filled.¹² The *Edinburgh Evening News* described women working in the public sector offices and hanging on their jobs as a 'class of social scroungers' especially those married women whose husbands were in work.¹³ As Margaret Cole, socialist and wife of GDH Cole, put it, 'Public opinion less than a year after the war was calling these women limpets and urging in a slightly mixed metaphor that they should be combed out.'¹⁴ The women who had helped to win the war, were deserted by public opinion and were frequently disapproved of as women who deprived male breadwinners of jobs.¹⁵ And as Ray Strachey¹⁶ commented in 1928:

The same people who had been heroines and the saviours of their country a few months before were now parasites, blacklegs and limpets. Employers were implored to turn them out...and their last weeks in their wartime jobs were made miserable by the jeers and taunts of their fellow workers.¹⁷

¹¹ *Glasgow Bulletin*, December 19, 1918.

¹² *Glasgow Bulletin*, February 27, 1919.

¹³ *Edinburgh Evening News*, cited in Pugh, *op. cit.*, p 81.

¹⁴ C Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family in England*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p. 104.

¹⁵ M Zimneck, 'Strategies and Stratagems for the Employment of Women in the British Civil Service, 1919-1939', *The Historical Journal*, 27, 1984, p. 902.

¹⁶ Ray Strachey was adamantly opposed to the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act and she described trade union attitudes to the removal of women from work after the war as 'barbaric'. As a result, her relationship with the trade union movement and the Labour Party was frayed. (Harrison, *op. cit.*, p 165.)

¹⁷ R Strachey, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain*, Bell and Sons, London, 1928, p 345

In the immediate post-war period, the perception that women who held on to their jobs were 'depriving men of their rightful jobs' was focused initially on the needs of ex-servicemen. The government appealed to authorities to employ ex-servicemen, who received the greatest sympathy from the public, in preference to women, and female workers were encouraged to accept the definition of themselves as having no right to paid employment. However, in the following two decades it was interpreted much more widely to involve any extension in the employment of women into the work that had formerly been a male preserve.¹⁸ And, as will be shown, women who were employed in work that had never been performed by men were subject to the accusation that they had encroached on work that rightfully belonged to male workers. Married women workers in particular were targeted as those who deprived both men and single women of work. The First World War may have temporarily 'dampened' down criticism of married women who were needed to work in factories. However, there were concerns, voiced by the media, that married women who worked damaged their children and the importance of home and motherhood was not abandoned during the war. In many communities married women's work was only tolerated because of the war emergency.¹⁹ As Caine points out, far from demonstrating the potential for women to manage family life and paid employment the war suggested that this would only be possible during an emergency and when 'normal' life was re-established the family should take priority.²⁰

In the inter-war period, married women continued to be prevented from fully participating in the labour market as the marriage bar was strengthened. The Sex Discrimination (Removal)

¹⁸Croucher, *op. cit.*, p. 16; Banks, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

¹⁹ Land, (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 62; P Horn, *Women in the 1920s*, Allan Sutton, Stroud, 1995, p. 15; Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 720.

²⁰ Caine, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

Act of 1919 appeared to fulfil feminist demands that women workers, mainly small numbers of middle class women, be granted admittance to professional occupations previously denied to them. However, it failed to prevent the dismissal of married women from work.²¹ Britain in the inter-war period did not have the paramilitary organisations, as in Germany, or as many organisations calling for the return of women to their domestic functions and hailing the virtue of large families, but it did participate in celebrations of motherhood, large families, Mother's Day and prize-winning babies. This desire to encourage women to become mothers was partly driven by public concern over the declining rate of population growth, but there was a firm belief, as the extension of the marriage bar showed, that family life and paid employment for women conflicted and that it was only during emergencies, like war, that women could combine the two.²² As Ray Strachey noted in 1934:

At the present moment there is a great deal of bitter antagonism to the employment of married women. Two ideas of the utmost simplicity inspire it. The first is that if a married woman works she is taking a job which a man or a single woman could have and the second is that a married women's place is in the home. A further argument is that it is wrong for two incomes to go into one house.²³

During the First World War, trade unions were frequently hostile to married and single women workers when the work they performed encroached upon their own work. The dominant view among trade unionists was that the proper place for women was in 'women's work' or in the home. At the end of the war, the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act allowed

²¹ Smith, (1990), *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.

²² Caine, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-182; Smith, (1990), *op. cit.*, p 47.

²³ Strachey, (1934), *op. cit.*, p. 332.

trade unions to force large numbers of married, and single women, out of work to make way for returning ex-servicemen.²⁴ Leading women in the labour movement endorsed the official view that it was necessary to dismiss women from government work, particularly married women of independent means and those supported by husbands.²⁵ However, many married women, who had endured the double burden of looking after children, homes and working, would also have wanted to leave the workforce. In the 1920s, there was clear difference of opinion between those who supported married women's right to work and those who opposed it on the grounds that married women obtained jobs at the expense of men and single women workers.²⁶

Many middle-class 'equality'²⁷ feminists, such as those represented by the Open Door Council²⁸ and the Six Point Group, working outside the trade union movement, believed that to deny the opportunity to work was an infringement of rights and would perpetuate the low pay and status of women as employers would be less willing to train women who would then leave work upon marriage.²⁹ Led by Eleanor Rathbone, the National Union of Societies for

²⁴ Boston, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

²⁵ Pugh, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

²⁶ Graves, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

²⁷ In the 1920s, the feminist movement was split roughly between 'new' and 'equality' feminism. 'New' feminists, such as Eleanor Rathbone, emphasised women's domestic role and argued that only when women's needs as mothers and their economic dependence within the family were addressed that equality with men would be attained, they advocated discriminatory social welfare legislation such as family allowances, nursery schools and birth control. 'Equality' feminists, such as Vera Brittain, supported some of these measures, but opposed the emphasis on home and motherhood which they regarded as a retrograde step, making it more difficult for women to escape traditional roles. They sought equal pay for women and argued against special privileges that they believed undermined women's claim for equal status. (Banks, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15; Hannam, *op. cit.*, p. 235). As Jeffries argues, 'new' feminism was a symbol of the failure of feminist energy in the 1920s and represented a movement away from the feminist aims of equal pay and legal equality because they were unpopular and difficult to achieve. Rathbone was scathing about 'equality' or 'old' feminism that she believed was difficult to attain and would alienate men in the process. (S Jeffries, *The Spinster and Her Enemies*, Pandora, London, 1985, p. 153).

²⁸ Married women who resented being removed from work in the UK often co-operated with the Open Door Council, (Banks, *op. cit.*, p. 114), and as chapter one shows, married women in Scotland were supported by feminist groups, such as the Open Door Council, against dismissals from work.

²⁹ Graves, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

Equal Citizenship, defended the right of married women to work on the grounds of individual rights and urged in 1919, via their newspaper, *Common Cause*, that 'On all grounds we urge that there should be no exclusion of married women as such from government posts or from any other posts...'³⁰ However, many so-called 'new' feminists such as Rathbone, still maintained that married women with young children should stay at home and be helped to do so through the payment of state-paid family allowances. Payments would be made to mothers in recognition of their work in the home and these would remove the financial necessity to work and help eliminate child poverty.³¹ The campaign for allowances and the position of the trade unions on this issue in the inter-war period will be discussed later in this chapter.

The position of the trade union movement and the Labour Party on the issue of married women workers reflected prevailing views in society that married women's place was in the home. *The Employment of Married Women* report published in 1922 by the TUC and the Labour Party, and drawn up by the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations (SJC), comprised of Labour Party, NFWW, TUC and Women's Co-operative Guild representatives, condemned the practice of firing married women and was 'against any discrimination against workers on the grounds of sex or marriage'.³² The dismissal of highly trained married women employed as doctors by Councils, as in Glasgow, was also criticised in the report. However, there was little defence of less skilled married women and little support given for the principle that married women had the same right to work as anyone else. The report only objected to the operation of a marriage bar on the grounds that it was difficult to operate fairly, as to determine if a woman was supported by her husband would involve an

³⁰ *Common Cause*, May 9, 1919, p. 34.

³¹ Graves, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-128.

³² *Ibid.*

invasion of privacy. The report concluded that widespread unemployment was forcing married women into work and that the solution lay in the payment of mothers' pensions where the male breadwinner was absent. Women delegates at the 1922 British TUC conference attacked this report for not defending the right of married women to work and they objected to the TUC passing this important issue on to another organisation, the SJC, which they believed did not necessarily reflect the views of the trade union movement.³³

However, in the main, trade unions believed that there would be little need for married women to work if they were supported by their husbands and unsupported married women were given a pension to help them stay in the home. This view failed to consider the fact that many married women workers had husbands whose wage could not adequately support a family nor did it consider the position of married women with grown up children. Furthermore, that married women may want to work and have a choice between work and home was often overlooked by trade unionists, as it was assumed that staying at home was the natural choice for women. Throughout the inter-war period many married women workers faced hostility from male and female trade unionists who frequently reflected the prevailing ideology that married women belonged at home and not in the workforce, even if the arguments made against married women workers were without foundation. Unless married women were in employment that was regarded as too low paid for male workers such as charring, they were attacked for working. Even in areas of the UK where it was the norm for married women to work in mills and factories, there were still pressures on them to stay at home.³⁴ As Glucksman points out, the traditional view of the skilled male worker was that having a wife in work was 'almost as degrading as being unemployed'. Trade unions also held

³³ Boston, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-144.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 171, pp 143-144; Summerfield, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 16.

the view that married women workers 'took' jobs from male workers and from single women in order to make their own families richer.³⁵ However, it has to be recognised that large numbers of married women were also likely to have held these views.

Two of the trade unions pushing for the elimination of married women from work were the National Association of Local Government Officers (NALGO), who opposed the employment of married women in local government work³⁶ and the Union of Post Office Workers, (UPOW). The General Secretary of the latter union opposed the retention of married women in the post office after the First World War as 'the double income of the married couple constituted an unequal distribution of the wealth of the country and was prejudicial to those who maintained the ordinary accepted ideas of the home.'³⁷ The Public Works and Constructional Operatives' Union (PWCOU), who had no female members in the 1920s, also pushed for the removal of married women from work. This union belonged to the National Federation of General Workers, comprised of a number of general unions including the Workers' Union and the TGWU with large female memberships. In 1919, it put forward a resolution at the Annual General Council meeting of the Federation, stating that, 'the employment of married women in industry is a factor in keeping down wages and relieves the state of its obligation to make proper provision for disabled men.'³⁸ A similar view was held by the Leytonstone branch of the National Union of Railwaymen in England. In 1930 the branch claimed that married women also undermined the economic position of single women workers. The branch complained that:

³⁵ Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

³⁶ A Spoor, *White Collar Union: 60 years of NALGO*, Heinemann, London, 1967, p. 467.

³⁷ Grint, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

³⁸ NFGW, *Annual Report*, 1919, p. 67.

Despite the fact of there being 1.5m unemployed....thousands of married women are employed in industry and we call upon the government to.....eliminate this class of worker as they are a direct menace to economic and moral conditions of the single women.³⁹

Many leading women trade unionists were opposed to these views. Eleanor Stewart, STUC Organisation of Women Committee member, writing in her position as the senior women's organiser for the Scottish division of the Workers Union, in response to the resolution put forward by the PWCOU, commented that:

we are entering upon a dangerous policy in endeavouring to restrict the employment of women and I am not sure that we can prove that the employment of married women in industry keeps down wages. Certainly we must fight for the disabled man.....but certainly the endeavour to restrict women from employment whether married or not is one that we should not take up.⁴⁰

This received support from the Women's Advisory Committee of the National Federation of General Workers who maintained that 'women whether married or single ought to have perfect freedom with regard to industrial or other occupations'.⁴¹ Dorothy Elliott, a prominent member of the NUGMW echoed this view and stated that 'women, whether married or single, had the right to develop their capacities and put their creative powers into that work which they could best perform.' However, other women trade unionists could be hostile to the

³⁹ Letter from NUR Leytonstone Branch to Walter Citrine, February 1930, in TUC Women in Industry Files.

⁴⁰ NFGW, *Annual Report*, 1920, p. 69.

⁴¹ Workers Union, *Record*, February 1921, p. 2.

employment of married women, particularly those married women whose husbands were in employment. In 1925, the Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries,⁴² (AWCS), with the support of UPOW and the Civil Servants Clerical Association (CSCA), called for a ban at the National Conference of Labour Women on the employment of married women with other means of support in times of economic depression, arguing that during depressions preference for employment should be given to married and single women who had no other sources of income. In their opinion, married women with working husbands deprived young single women and school leavers of work.⁴³ This proposal proved to be so unpopular with other trade unions that it had to be withdrawn. The AWCS later modified its position to include all men and women with other means of support and stated that 'the union affirms the right of married women to paid employment and considers that marriage as such should not be a ground for the exclusion of women from employment'.⁴⁴ The trade unions, (UPOW, AWCS, CSCA), which expressed the greatest support for the exclusion of married women with working husbands from work were white-collar unions. Women employed in this sector worked under the marriage bar themselves, perhaps to a greater degree than women employed elsewhere. Many of the women members of these unions would have been breadwinners supporting parents or other relatives, and the competition from married women who were supported by a male breadwinner for jobs would have undermined their own attempts to secure equal pay with men. However, many other female trade unionists were also in this position and there may have been other explanations for the position adopted by these unions. Referring particularly to the female members of UPOW, the marriage bar, Grint suggests, tended to hinder widespread

⁴² In the UK, by the 1920s, few women's trade unions remained in existence. These included the AWCS, several societies of women civil servants, the National Union of Women Teachers and in the manual occupations several small societies recruiting women workers only, remained. Cole, (1924), *op. cit.*, p 97.

⁴³ Graves, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-130.

⁴⁴ Letter from Miss D Evans of the AWCS to the TUC, Women's Advisory Committee, April 1929 in TUC Women in Industry Files.

feminist action among women in this trade union. Women members were also divided between different grades in the post office and had their own separate interests. They were in a minority in the post office and even more so in UPOW. Many women post office workers, secretaries and civil servants would have also aspired to middle class status and preferred to avoid the social stigma of continuing to work after marriage.⁴⁵ Many female white collar workers were better paid than women employed in other sectors and possibly more conservative and may have identified more strongly with the stance taken by their employers on the issue of the employment of married women.

Nevertheless, there are examples of British trade unions defending the right of married women to work. In 1920, following calls from a London branch of the Railway Clerks' Association for the removal of married women from work, the *Railway Services Journal* defended the right of married women to work in times of high unemployment. It was argued that as women had done their "bit" in the war, they had the right to work and the responsibility for providing unemployed men with work rested with the government. At the 1935 national annual conference of the Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers, a motion demanded that the union refuse to employ married women to set an example to employers and some delegates argued that married women should 'mind their own business at home'. This motion was overwhelmingly rejected, some delegates fearing that it contained the 'first seeds of fascism' and that the union would become a laughing stock among movements promoting equality for women.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Grint, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-101.

⁴⁶ Boston, *op. cit.*, pp 140-141, p. 170

In the inter-war period in Scotland, a number of trade unions opposed the employment of married women. Those married women with other means of support, usually a working husband, could be refused trade union membership. This was particularly notable in the paper and printing unions, where a policy of denying membership to married women with working husbands ensured that married women could not secure employment in businesses recognised by trade unions. Scottish printing trade unions, particularly the STA and the Edinburgh section of this union, the ETS, had a long history of trying to exclude both married and single women from work altogether or confining them to the lowest paid jobs.⁴⁷ The Edinburgh printing trade contracted from the early 1920s onwards. There was a partial recovery in the mid 1920s, but considerable levels of unemployment were experienced among male and female workers and this remained a feature of the trade throughout the inter-war period.⁴⁸ The exclusion of married women compositors from work by the ETS was usually supported or implemented by the Female Section of this union in Edinburgh. These exclusions took place against a backdrop of high levels of unemployment, among male workers especially, in the Edinburgh printing trade. In the immediate post-war period the *Juvenus* column in the *Scottish Typographical Journal*, aimed at women members of the STA, left female readers in no doubt that male workers or the 'predominant sex' in the trade had the first right to work as compositors. That women worked while 'many men compositors are going idle (and) many others have had to take labouring work' was viewed as a great injustice, particularly as many of these men were 'demobilised after fighting for freedom, liberty and British trade.'⁴⁹ According to *Juvenus*, in the early 1920s the unemployed men in the trade were 'a greater army than ever.'⁵⁰

⁴⁷ McIvor, (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 154.

⁴⁸ Gillespie, *op. cit.*, 191; Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁴⁹ *Scottish Typographical Journal*, July, 1919, p. 102.

⁵⁰ *Scottish Typographical Journal*, October, 1921, p. 160.

In the early 1920s, women union members who left work to marry were allowed to re-apply for a union card in certain circumstances, mainly widowhood or if their husbands were ill.⁵¹ Between January 1919 and December 1920, 21 married women, mainly widows or those separated from their husbands or whose husband's wages were low, returned to work. However, this policy was not extended to all married women who wished to return to the trade and 'during the abnormal unemployment situation', two women were refused cards as their husbands were working.⁵² In early 1919, the Female Section of the ETS rejected an application from two married women. One woman, who wanted temporary work was denied membership on the grounds that 'a great many men were idle' and the second woman was denied membership as her husband was demobilised and working and it was felt that it would be:

most unfair to allow such an introduction of labour at a time when there was so much unemployment. It was made clear that this only applied to married women whose husbands were in civil life and who were not presently in the trade.⁵³

The Female Section claimed that any other female compositors wishing to work would be allowed to do so. The rule which prevented married women whose husbands were in employment and not in the trade from working seems to have been suspended briefly between late 1919 and early 1920 and then re-introduced in May 1920 due to 'high levels or rising levels of unemployment among the male compositors'. Chapel officials were also required to send a list identifying married women employed in the trade whose husbands were in employment to the Joint Committee of the ETS.⁵⁴ This was clearly information on the personal

⁵¹ Reynolds, (1989), *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110.

⁵² ETS, Female Section, *Minutes*, February, 1919.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, March 1919, p. 2, pp. 6-11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*; ETS Female Section, *Letters and Notes*, May; September; 1920.

circumstances of married women not required of other workers. Reynolds also cites two examples of women with able-bodied husbands being refused re-entry to the trade and refused trade union membership during 1919. One married women worker, whose husband was a miner who had been unemployed for nine months, was refused a union card. A second woman, the wife of a minister whose earnings had declined, was also refused a union card.⁵⁵ In 1927, the Female Section of the ETS prevented the wives of men in work from being admitted to the union. This policy was still in practice in 1930 and a married woman whose husband had been unable to work due to illness was forced to resign her union membership upon her husband's recovery.⁵⁶ In 1931, the STA ruled that 'married women living with their husbands who have no physical disability which prevents them from working shall not be employed unless under exceptional circumstances.' Those married women exempt from this included those engaged in seasonal work or married women working at the time of the signing of the rule.⁵⁷ In 1932 the Female Auxiliary Section of the ETS prevented married women from joining the union on the grounds that preference was to be given to single girls. In 1933 another Edinburgh branch of the union received an application from a married woman to work and this application was rejected on the grounds that 'single girls should take preference'.⁵⁸

A similar approach was adopted by the NUPBPW. In 1921, the Glasgow branch of this union complained to the Edinburgh branch that while single girls were 'walking the streets' looking for work, a number of married women with husbands were working. The Scottish Alliance of this union later advised the branches that 'where such women were employed and where it was deemed necessary to dispense with workers that these women be the first to go'.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Reynolds, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110.

⁵⁶ ETS, Female Section, *Minutes*, September 1927, February, 1930.

⁵⁷ STA, *Annual Report*, 1931, p. 11.

⁵⁸ ETS, Female Auxiliary Section, August, 1932; Edinburgh Machine Branch, *Minutes*, January, 1933.

⁵⁹ NUPBPW, Edinburgh Branch, Female Section, *Minutes*, February 25, March 31, 1921.

The Edinburgh branch of the union subsequently received a letter from members of the union in London who disapproved of the stance taken by the Scottish trade unionists on the issue of married women workers. However, the Edinburgh branch remained uncompromising in its support for the policy of excluding married women and in response the committee 'agreed however that the step was to our benefit not our detriment and that we were not going back on what we considered right.'⁶⁰

Women trade unionists in Scotland often held conflicting and contradictory views on the issue of married women workers. Miss M. E. Sutherland, women's organiser of the Scottish Farm Servants Union, supported the right of married women to work, but maintained the belief that it was more desirable for women to stay at home rather than work. Like many other female trade unionists she supported the demand for the family wage, which she hoped would enable married women to remain outside of the workforce. In response to a letter from a male secretary of a branch of the SFSU, who argued that 'a woman's place is in the home attending to her family', Miss Sutherland defended the right of married women to work and remarked that:

it is outrageously funny to have the familiar parrot cry shouted at you from a district where it is customary for the married women to be employed regularly at farm work and have little or no time to devote to their homes.⁶¹

She opposed the 'economic conditions which force married women to work when they have all the work of a home to do as well' and went on to attack male workers whose wives

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, *Minutes*, May 13, 1921.

⁶¹ *The Scottish Farm Servant*, April, 1921, p. 246.

were in employment for failing to 'make an effort to get the living wage for themselves.' In her opinion the male farm workers preferred to 'hive' their wives out to work in order to supplement their 'inadequate earnings' instead of making 'a fight for decent wages'. The idea that married women contributed to the low pay earned by single women because of their willingness to work for lower wages, prevailed among trade unionists in Scotland in the inter-war period. According to Miss Sutherland, the 'people who suffer most from the employment of married women are the independent women workers because they have to exist on the miserably low rates that the married women are prepared to accept.'⁶² Agnes Lander, a former organiser of the National Federation of Women Workers shared this view. Writing in the *Saint Mungo*, (the newspaper of the Glasgow branch of the Union of Post Office Workers), she reflected the view of the national leadership of UPOW who opposed the employment of married women in the post office on the basis that 'there would be a general wage depression if married women were in service in large numbers as they would be prepared to accept lower wages than single women could afford to take.'⁶³ Mrs Lander re-asserted these views in the *Saint Mungo*:

The married women who go out to work to augment the family income....are an ever present menace to the unmarried women because they can be induced to accept lower wages and...will not join a trade union, excusing themselves on the ground that their employment is but a temporary expedient to tide over a period of financial stringency at home.⁶⁴

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Grint, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

⁶⁴ *Saint Mungo*, (*The Official Organ of the Glasgow Branch of the Union of Post Office Workers*), March, 1926, p. 3.

Among the union representatives at the STUC, the lengthiest discussion on the subject of married women working during periods of high unemployment took place at the Conference of Unions Enrolling Women Workers in 1931. William Leonard of the Furnishing Trades Association introduced the discussion on 'whether in the present condition of industry and widespread unemployment the unions should adopt any policy under which preference of employment would be given to women workers entirely dependent on their own earnings.'⁶⁵ Interestingly, this question was raised by Leonard on behalf of an all-women branch of the Furnishing Trades Association. According to the report of this discussion, Leonard accepted the principle of complete economic freedom for married and single women alike, but he argued that it had to be accepted that 'the structure of domestic life was based on the assumption that the man should receive sufficient payment to keep his wife and family.' Furthermore, he doubted 'the expediency of married women whose husbands were working being employed when single girls entirely dependent on their own earnings were unemployed.' In many dual income households Mr Leonard doubted the need of many married women to work. He claimed that many women were motivated to work:

due to a personal desire to express their own individuality. In some cases he could not avoid the suspicion of greed entering into the question, because he saw in some cases no apparent desire to raise the standard of life with dual incomes.⁶⁶

In addition to this perceived greed among married women workers and their negative affect on the earnings of single women, in Leonard's experience, married women also hindered attempts to organise single girls into trade unions. According to Leonard, when married

⁶⁵ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1931, p. 69.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

women refused to join a trade union, single girls also declined trade union membership. Apparently the all-female branch of this union, who presumably would also have held these views, had entered into a number of agreements with employers in the furnishing industry to ensure that the number of women who were not dependent on their own earnings, such as married women with working husbands, would be reduced to a minimum and would be the last to be employed.⁶⁷ This provides an interesting example of collusion between women workers and employers in an attempt to prevent other women from securing employment in the trade. It seems that married women workers were virtually excluded from the trade and the Scottish Furniture Manufacturers Association preferred to employ unmarried women and married women with no other source of income.⁶⁸

William Leonard's proposal received some support from STUC delegates. Mr W T Airlie of the NUPBPW declared that single girls should get preference over married women. As noted above, this union in Scotland opposed the employment of married women whose husbands were in employment. This received support from Jenny Marchbank a representative of the Tailor and Garment Workers Union. Despite being an Organisation of Women Committee member, and therefore, involved in encouraging women to join trade unions, she could still echo the view that the presence of married women in the labour force should be limited. In her opinion, married women workers somehow 'hindered' the opportunities for single girls to work and it was the presence of married women who could be re-employed by employers whenever necessary that meant that many employers had no need to teach the majority of single girls the trade. However, several male and female trade unionists did not support

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ National Confederation of Employers Organisations, *Questionnaire on the Forty Hour Week and the Absorption of the Unemployed*, 1933.

Leonard's proposals. Representatives from the Laundry Workers' Union and NUDAW did not support attempts to limit married women's work. Mr J Dougherty, representing the Amalgamated Society of Dyers, supported the right of married women to work as large numbers of married women were employed in the dyeing industry along with their husbands. As wage rates were generally low for both male and female workers employed in the industry, 'economic circumstances compelled both man and wife to work.' In his opinion, married women were also good trade unionists and he found that those who were most difficult to organise were young male and female workers.⁶⁹ Bella Jobson also rejected Leonard's proposal on the grounds that many single women in employment were not wholly dependent on their own earnings, especially single women employed in offices who were supported by well-to-do parents.⁷⁰ Eleanor Stewart, likewise, did not support attempts to exclude married women from the labour market. The married women workers she had come into contact with stated that one of the reasons for working, even though many of them had to pay for childminders, was that they 'had the turn of the money'. While she asserted that those who wished to remove married women from industry and 'objected to her in the workshops....must also take exception to her going out to do daily charring', she too concluded that it was desirable for married women to remain at home. She was committed to the principle of the family wage and looked to improvements in male wage rates to push married women out of work, who, she believed would prefer to devote their time to bringing up their families.⁷¹ This viewpoint was also expressed by the British TUC Women's Advisory Committee:

⁶⁹ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1931, pp. 70-71.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ STUC, *Annual Report* 1929, pp. 86-87.

It is a sad commentary that 30% of the insured women workers in Britain are married. Practically none of these wives go to work from choice. They are driven to work because their husbands earnings are insufficient to run the home. And yet the inevitable result of the wives going to work is that their men folk will receive still further cuts in their wages.⁷²

Therefore, a variety of views were expressed by the trade union movement either in support or in opposition to the right of married women to work. In opposition to married women workers it was argued that they contributed to the low pay of other male and female workers and that married women workers, especially those with working husbands, were undesirable during high levels of unemployment as they deprived other young women and, more importantly, men of jobs. Additionally, married women could be accused of being greedy and working only to express their individuality and independence. It was also argued that married women workers could undermine trade union organisation among other women. Nevertheless, among those male and female trade unionists who defended married women workers, there was a recognition that married women should have the freedom to work and earn their own money. It was also difficult to prove that married women workers undermined other workers wage levels. However, even those who defended married women workers could still maintain the idea that married women should be in the home and they tolerated married women's employment because they realised that male wage levels were frequently too low to provide for the needs of a family without also relying on the contributions of a wife.

⁷² TUC, Women's Advisory Committee, Meeting of Delegates, January 1936, pp. 2-3.

It was this realisation that male wage levels were often too low to provide women and children with an adequate standard of living that led that to the campaign for family allowances which gained some support from trade union and Labour Party women, (and men), in the inter-war period. The discussion within trade unions on this issue in the inter-war period, following the publication of *The Disinherited Family* by Eleanor Rathbone in 1924, is considered here because these discussions often highlighted the opposition of trade unionists, many of them female, to the employment of married women outside the home. Eleanor Rathbone first advocated family allowances, a cornerstone of new feminism, prior to the First World War. Her support for allowances for each child and a minimum wage for a single person stemmed from her recognition that men's wages were often insufficient to support their families and that the family wage also made no distinction between men with families, childless couples and bachelors. The idea that women workers, many of whom had dependants, should receive a subsistence wage would also be challenged. She believed that the provision of allowances would strengthen the argument for equal pay for equal work if family needs were met outside the wage system. Allowances would redistribute income in favour of the poorest families, help to alleviate child poverty, enhance the status of women as workers and as mothers and ensure that wives were less financially dependent on their husbands. Women would be liberated as the economic necessity of working outside the home was removed and Rathbone was convinced that the payment of allowances would make feminism more relevant to working class women.⁷³

⁷³ Land, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63, p. 68; V Brittain, *Lady into Woman: A History of Women From Victoria to Elizabeth II*, Andrew Dakers, London, 1952, p. 174; Thane, (1982), pp. 216-217; Smith, (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 57.

Working class men and women were divided on the issue of family allowances. Sections of the trade union and labour movement supported allowances as a means of reducing unemployment, increasing the purchasing power of the workers, as a benefit for children, as some remuneration for housewives performing domestic tasks and as the provider of economic autonomy for housewives from their husbands.⁷⁴ The payment of allowances was also attractive to male and female trade unionists alike who hoped that their implementation would remove substantial numbers of married women from work and propel them back into the home. For example, in England, Ben Turner, Textile Workers' Union leader and TUC General Council chairman in 1928,⁷⁵ supported allowances as a means of forcing married women to 'stop at home and be decent housewives.' As Pedersen points out, a great deal of support existed for allowances in the declining industries and where male workers were especially hostile to the employment of women.⁷⁶

The STUC Organisation of Women Committee briefly debated the issue of family allowances in the late 1920s. The STUC women were most interested in the possible effects of the introduction of family allowances on the numbers of married women in work in Scotland. The tone of the discussion reveals that the dominant view was that the primary role of married women was as wives and mothers and that married women should be encouraged to remain in the home. Support for the payment of family allowances was based on the belief that they would improve the poor position of women once they had married and left the labour market. Miss J Spence, the representative of the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers' Union, supported allowances if they 'would keep married women out of industry' and disapproved of such a

⁷⁴ Land, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66; Pedersen, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-211.

⁷⁵ Pelling, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

⁷⁶ Pedersen, *op. cit.*, pp. 211-212.

scheme if married women were to continue in industry. This is interesting, as Miss Spence represented a union which recruited women from an industry where substantial numbers of women were married and it is likely that this union had a higher proportion of married women members than other trade unions in Scotland.⁷⁷ However, she reflected the opinion of her union that it was more desirable for married women with children to be prohibited from working in factories and mills and as the union newspaper, *The Guide*, commented, 'the place of the mother is home beside her children.'⁷⁸ However, the likelihood is that many married women members of this trade union would have opposed these views fearing that they would be removed from work and pushed back into the home. In the rest of UK, as Pedersen notes, trade union branches which recruited married women workers, such as the Leicester Women's Branch of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, where 63% of all members were married women, were often opposed to family allowances, fearing wage reductions.⁷⁹

The opinion of married women trade unionists on the issue of allowances is hard to identify within the Scottish trade union movement. The STUC representatives discussing the issue seem to have been single women. Not all STUC women supported family allowances, but this was not because they had concerns about the potential of an allowances scheme to limit married women's work opportunities. Instead they were concerned that an allowances scheme would be ineffective in removing married women from work. For example, representatives of the Dunfermline Textile Workers' Union and of the Transport and General Workers' Union objected to a family allowances scheme if it would not keep married women out of work and they expressed concerns that employers would be able to declare that the work of married

⁷⁷ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1930, p. 1.

⁷⁸ *DJFW Guide*, March, 1919, p. 5.

⁷⁹ Pedersen, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

women was essential to their businesses. As a solution to this problem Eleanor Stewart suggested that the payment of family allowances be made conditional upon married women leaving work.⁸⁰ However, as Braybon notes, other female trade unionists, and women in the Labour Party, were wary of family allowances, fearing that they would be used to bolster the idea that women were automatically responsible for children and to push married women back into the home.⁸¹ This was not a new issue and prior to the First World War the discussions on family allowances had taken place amid the fear that women were taking men's jobs.⁸² Trade unionists were suspicious of an allowances scheme for other reasons. For example, it was argued that as part of the subsistence cost of the family would be met from outside the wages system, wages would fall, the family man's will to bargain would be lost, trade union power would be undermined, and the interests of single men and married men with families would be divided. State assistance also tended to be viewed as an attack on the ability of men to support their families. As family allowances might have involved pay cuts to childless couples it was not a popular measure among trade unionists fighting against wage cuts in the 1920s.⁸³

Therefore, some male and female trade unionists supported family allowances because they viewed such a scheme as beneficial for children or because allowances would represent a payment for the work of the housewife. More importantly, male and female trade unionists alike viewed such a scheme as being a suitable method by which to help married women to leave the labour market and return to the home. However, the trade unions, and the Labour Party, largely rejected a family allowances scheme and instead favoured the development of

⁸⁰ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1930, p. 81.

⁸¹ Braybon, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-103.

⁸² Land, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁸³ Graves, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-128; P Thane 'The Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism, 1906-1945', in H L Smith, (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 132, p. 139; J Macnicol, *The Movement for Family Allowances: A Study in Social Policy Development*, Heinemann, London, 1980, p. 3; Pedersen, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-211.

universal social services, such as improved housing, nursery schools and health and welfare services which would directly benefit children. This reflected concerns that the payment of allowances to women in the home would encourage the idea that children were the sole responsibility of women. However, more importantly, there were concerns that trade union power would be diminished, that the position of employers would be strengthened, that wage levels would fall and that state assistance undermined the ability of men to support their families.⁸⁴ Rather than family allowances, improvements in living standards had to be provided by the family wage. In Scotland, STUC Organisation of Women Committee chairman, Joe Duncan, opposed a scheme for family allowances. He argued that while children had the right to maintenance, the provision necessary for the welfare of the child had to be provided through the payment of a family wage. If this was not possible, it had to be provided through an extension of the social services. In the inter-war period, the economic climate, characterised by depression and mass unemployment, reinforced the support for the concept of the family wage for the male head of the household. High levels of unemployment undermined the position of male breadwinners and therefore, it was not surprising that trade unions were opposed to any demands that placed the role of male breadwinners in jeopardy.⁸⁵

In the inter-war period, trade unionists, (and the Labour Party), were particularly hostile to feminist demands for sex equality. Among these feminist demands were the removal of protective legislation and equal pay for women workers. Middle class feminist groups, such as the Open Door Council, NUSEC and the Six Point Group, were opposed to protective legislation on the grounds that women lost their right to compete with men for work on equal

⁸⁴ P Thane 'The Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism, 1906-1945', in H L Smith, (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 132, p. 139; Land, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66.

⁸⁵ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1930, pp. 84-85; Banks, *op. cit.*, p. 113, p 117; M Pugh 'Domesticity and the Decline of Feminism, 1930-1950', in H L Smith, (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 147.

terms, that it confirmed women's lower status in the labour market, limited their job prospects and pushed them into certain types of work. Furthermore, protection was given to women who were rivals of male workers and not in the classic women's trades.⁸⁶ Among men and women in the trade union movement and the Labour Party, protective legislation was viewed as something that had benefited working class women, improved women's status, spread the benefits of industrial protection to male workers and was necessary in order to protect women from exploitation by employers.⁸⁷ At the end of the First World War, following the extension in the employment of women, there was some movement away from this position among some sections of the labour movement in the UK. For example, at the STUC, there was some support for the removal of protective legislation and a shift away from pre-war restrictions on women's wage labour. This was in line with the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations and Beatrice Webb's *Minority Report on Women in Industry* which recommended that there be no more 'special provisions differentiating men from women' in any future factory act.⁸⁸ For example, Edith Hughes of the Glasgow Trades Council argued that 'men had no right to specify what were and what were not suitable industries for women'. The remedy for unhealthy trades was not to exclude women from them but to improve conditions in them. Of course, there was opposition to this. For example, John Heenan of the General Textile Workers' Union argued that protective legislation was necessary to protect women against 'exploitation by capitalism'. While a Motherwell Trades Council representative, not only opposed the removal of legislation to protect women but he also

⁸⁶ Braybon, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

⁸⁷ Graves, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁸⁸ Graves, *op. cit.*, p. 140

argued that women's work, especially during the war, had a demoralising and depressing effect on 'public morality'.⁸⁹

However, rising unemployment in the 1920s strengthened support for further protective legislation among women in the trade union movement in the UK. Further state protection for women seemed the only way to protect women's wage levels and to prevent them from falling below subsistence level. Women workers became increasingly vulnerable as basic wage rates were cut by employers and hours continued to be excessively long. Additionally, trade boards, which had established minimum wage rates in the poorest sector of women's employment were axed and trade union membership among women declined.⁹⁰ One outcome of these demands for more protective legislation was a distancing of trade union women from feminist concerns. In the inter-war period, women in the labour movement were able to argue that middle class feminists were hostile to the interests of working class women and opposed benefits for working class women. Feminism became associated with an anti-labour position and links with feminist groups were broken. As Banks notes, the disagreements between feminists and the labour movement over the issue of protective legislation 'drove a wedge between feminism and labour women for many years.'⁹¹

On the issue of equal pay for women, there was also considerable disagreement between women trade unionists and feminists. Among male and female trade unionists the debate on equal pay for women became more pressing during the First World War, as they were keen to ensure that women employed on men's work received the male rate so that the potential for

⁸⁹ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1918-1919, pp. 84-85.

⁹⁰ Graves, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-141.

⁹¹ Banks, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

women to undercut the male wage rates was reduced. However, there was little change in women's pay during the war; government and employers did not want to raise women's wages and trade unions turned a blind eye as long as men's wages were not threatened. Whenever the issue of equal pay was taken up by craft unions and, incredibly, women's unions such as the NFWW, before and during the First World War, the aim was to make female labour expensive and unpopular in order to protect men's jobs. Their demands were not about securing justice for women workers and equal pay for women ran against the idea that male workers deserved higher wages as breadwinners and women lower wages as subsidiary workers and dependants.⁹²

In the inter-war period equality feminists, in particular, viewed equal pay for women as a question of justice. They concentrated the pressure for equal pay on teaching and the civil service. Many female civil servants were employed to do the same work as men and the traditional argument that women did unequal work could not be used to deny women equal pay. The middle class liberal feminist groups, particularly the Open Door Council and the Six Point Group, were concerned mainly with white-collar women and they tended to view industrial women as the concern of the trade union movement. Trade union and Labour Party women tended not to share the views of the equality feminists on this issue. In the Labour Party, a small group of older pre-war suffragists argued for equal pay in very similar terms as the middle class feminists, but most labour women leaders followed the party leadership and their stance on the issue of equal pay was dictated by a concern that male wage levels should be protected.⁹³ Both the TUC and the STUC were committed to the principle of equal pay for

⁹² Woollacott, *op. cit.*, p. 115; Braybon, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁹³ H Smith, 'British Feminism and the Equal Pay Issue in the 1930s', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 5, 1, 1996, p. 98, p. 102; Graves, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-135.

equal work and the STUC re-affirmed its support for 'equal pay for the same kind of work irrespective of sex' in 1921 and called upon 'affiliated organisations to work for this object.'⁹⁴ However, demands for equal pay rarely featured in STUC reports or minutes or in the records of unions affiliated to the congress. It would appear that in Scotland, the women trade unionists at the STUC who advocated equal pay were usually employed in clerical work. During the inter-war period, the number of low paid female clerical workers increased in Scotland and the women representatives of the Railway Clerks' Association at the STUC, Betty Lamont, Isa Leishman and Jean Jeffrey, were concerned that the mechanisation of clerical work such as the introduction of typewriters and adding machines had created a 'serious menace to the standard of life among women clerks'. Cheap female labour had replaced male labour and 'bright blouses' had replaced 'black coats'. In order to improve the circumstances of these women the representatives were keen for more women to be organised and for equal pay to be introduced. At the STUC the female representatives of the National Union of Clerks and the RCA stood out among the few women representatives who supported equal pay.⁹⁵

The principle of equal pay received most support from white-collar unions not affiliated to the TUC and STUC, such as teaching and the civil service unions, and it was in these professions where the campaign made most progress. Outside of the white collar occupations in the traditional women's occupations, equal pay for women would largely have been an irrelevance as there were very few occupations where men and women were employed to do the same or similar work and women were usually segregated from male workers. However, as Anthony found in the 1930s, only lip service had been paid to the ideal of equal pay for

⁹⁴ Lewis, (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 203- 204; p STUC, *Annual Report*, 1921, p. 74.

⁹⁵ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1932, p. 71.

women among trade unionists and in practice little attempt had been made to secure the principle.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the depression and the resultant high levels of unemployment among men in the UK actually strengthened support for equal pay, especially among those trade unionists who viewed it as the best means of pushing women out of employment and of enhancing male employment opportunities.⁹⁷ Some examples of trade unions pursuing this strategy in the inter-war period in an attempt to encourage the exclusion of women from work in Scotland and in the rest of the UK will be provided below.

The virtual absence of demands for equal pay among women within the Scottish trade union movement may have been shared by many women workers themselves. As the feminist Sylvia Anthony noted, women workers were often very reluctant to issue demands for equal pay primarily because they were the daughters, wives or prospective wives of male workers and they sympathised with male demands for preferential employment and higher pay.⁹⁸ As Alberti notes, many feminists were baffled by the lack of response from women in the trade union movement on the question of equal pay. Nevertheless, there was a recognition that women trade unionists were in a weak position in the trade union movement.⁹⁹ The equal opportunities and equal pay demands advocated by groups of feminists in the inter-war period in the UK, as Giles notes, failed to receive widespread support from working class women and she suggests that one of the main reasons for this was that most women workers intended to remain in paid employment for a relatively short period of time before marrying.¹⁰⁰ Much of the debate concerning equal pay for women revolved around the question of whether women's work was worth that of male workers. Women workers and those concerned with the concept

⁹⁶ Anthony, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁹⁷ Smith, *op. cit.*, (1996), p. 106; Graves, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

⁹⁸ Anthony, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

⁹⁹ Alberti, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

¹⁰⁰ Giles, (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 241.

of equal pay for women frequently accepted the idea that women were naturally inferior to men and women feared that if they were less productive, in comparison with men, they would begin to lose their jobs if equal pay was introduced.¹⁰¹ Among female trade unionists in Scotland one of the best examples of women rejecting the ideal of equal pay for themselves occurred among the members of the Female Section of the Edinburgh Typographical Society. Women compositors were keen to improve their wage levels to reduce the disparity between male and female workers in Edinburgh. However, as Reynolds shows, in the early 1920s there was no support among women in the trade for equal pay. The women claimed that their work was worth only around 70%- 85% of the male wage rate as 'physical disability' depreciated their work and this percentage, 'meant justice to employers and fair competition with male operatives.' They believed that if they claimed more than they thought was a fair wage for the work they performed they would begin to lose their jobs. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the women's rate was 70% of the male wage and it was the Second World War that narrowed the gap from 30% to 15%, but women compositors never won equal pay.¹⁰²

This section has shown that despite the fact that there was a growth in the number of married women in employment in the inter-war period in Scotland, albeit small, many trade unionists continued to view these women as marginal workers. The assumption that married women should be in the home was rarely challenged and where support existed for the presence of married women in the workforce, usually expressed by female trade unionists, it was because there was a realisation that their earnings were essential in supplementing low male wages. The evidence has also shown that female trade unionists, rather than seeking to improve the low wages earned by the majority of married women workers, frequently

¹⁰¹ Lewis, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 203; Barrett and McIntosh, *op. cit.*, p. 52

¹⁰² Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

preferred to defend the concept of the family wage and to press for wage improvements for sections of the male workforce rather than for the married and single female workers they were keen to recruit into the trade union movement. As most feminist historians¹⁰³ have argued, the demand for the family wage, an ideal never realised by the majority of working class male workers, reinforced the idea that male workers were breadwinners and helped to perpetuate the association between women and domesticity. As Gordon argues, the upshot of the demand for the family wage for men was the conception of women as economic dependants whose earnings did not need to cover their own living costs.¹⁰⁴ Female trade unionists looked to the realisation of the family wage which they hoped would allow married women to remain at home and even on the occasions they defended the right of married women to work they still argued that married women's primary responsibilities lay in the domestic sphere. In addition to this, Eleanor Rathbone's proposed scheme for family allowances received support from women trade unionists as a suitable means by which to alleviate the double burden of paid work and domestic responsibilities by removing large numbers of married women workers from the labour market. However, this scheme was rejected by the trade union movement in the inter-war years in preference for demands for a family wage.

It is difficult to identify the views of married women workers in the trade union movement in Scotland. However, it is likely that many married women particularly those with children, who combined paid work and domestic responsibilities continued to accept the trade union view that it was preferable, wherever possible, for married women, to remain in the home. It has been shown that in the inter-war period the notion that married women workers were a

¹⁰³ For example see, Barrett and McIntosh, *op. cit.*, p. 59; Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 44-45 and H Land, 'Women: Supporters or Supported?', D L Barker and S Allen, (eds.), *Sexual Divisions and Society: Process and Change*, Tavistock, London.

¹⁰⁴ Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 44; Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

cause of male unemployment, that they pushed down male and female wage levels and undermined the employment opportunities available to single women, appears to have been widely accepted by trade unionists. As will be shown below in greater detail, the idea that married women workers were a cause of male unemployment was extended to include all women workers in the inter-war period. The right of married women to remain in paid employment was questioned particularly during times of depression and high unemployment and, as shown above, several unions, in response to high unemployment among male workers, exercised considerable control over the ability of married women with working husbands to secure union membership irrespective of the need of the women concerned to find work. Furthermore, it is likely that those married women who were refused trade union membership were excluded from work in the area, possibly leaving these women with few alternative sources of employment. In the inter-war period there was little concerted effort to improve the wages of married (or single women) workers in Scotland and there was little support expressed by women in the Scottish trade union movement for equal pay for women workers. As the following section will show more fully, demands for equal pay usually came from trade unions who wanted to discourage employers from using cheap female labour and to protect the position of male workers. Therefore, perhaps it is not surprising, given the failure of trade unions in Scotland to address the fundamental problem of low wages among married women workers, the support given to the marriage bar, the instances of trade unions expelling married women from trade union membership and thereby undermining their opportunities for finding work, that trade unions in Scotland had great difficulties in trying to recruit married women (and women workers in general) into the movement in the inter-war period. It would seem that the trade unions wanted to simultaneously attract married women into the trade union movement, where possible, but offered them few incentives to join.

In the inter-war period in Scotland, it was not only married women workers who were open to trade union hostility. Greater numbers of women had been drawn into work in the clerical, commercial and professional occupations, and in certain areas of the UK into the new industries. This expansion, combined with changes in the accepted sexual division of labour in industries which had traditionally employed women, such as the clothing trade, led to concerns within the trade union movement that technological changes and new working methods were allowing greater numbers of women into occupations which had previously been the preserve of men. According to this view, not only were women taking men's jobs, but they were also a direct cause of the high levels of male unemployment experienced during the inter-war period. As Banks points out, the effect of periods of high unemployment in the inter-war period was to harden trade union attitudes to women workers.¹⁰⁵ Technological change and the increasing use of female labour was not a new concern within the trade union movement, but the depression and the high levels of male unemployment experienced in the inter-war period gave the debate a new impetus. Before considering these debates, the attempts made by a number of trade unions in Scotland to exclude women workers from employment in the inter-war period will be examined first.

At the end of the First World War trade unions, especially the ASE, were keen to re-impose their restrictions on female labour and remove female dilutees from the work they had entered during the war. The outcome was the Restoration of Pre-war Practices Act in 1919. This was enforceable for one year; employers had to comply with this legislation, which they were prepared to do so that production was not interrupted and it was designed to enable a partial

¹⁰⁵ Banks, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

return to the pre-war pattern of employment. The National Federation of Women Workers,¹⁰⁶ the Women's Trade Union League and the large general unions, which had recruited women during the war, supported this legislation.¹⁰⁷ The support for this legislation from many women trade unionists, as Walby suggests, reflected the weakness of feminist ideologies in the movement and the fact that women trade union leaders did not want to alienate male trade unions even if it meant their own members lost work. They were also not prepared to risk losing the occasional assistance they received from male trade unionists and was a reflection of the power of what she describes as a 'patriarchal labourist ideology' within the trade union movement. Women trade unionists, given their lack of resources, in terms of their finances and weakness of organisation among women workers meant that they were unable to resist this.¹⁰⁸ It would appear that the most vociferous critics of this legislation were middle class feminists, particularly the 'equality' feminists. This legislation meant that female dilutees employed in old factories and women employed in new factories that had not existed before the war would have to vacate their jobs. Most women accepted that they ought to relinquish their jobs, but protested when it was not clear that their job was one that a returning serviceman would want. Women clerks in the public sector, particularly AWCS members, while not objecting to men returning from the front to claim an old job, protested at their removal from work at the end of the war. The AWCS complained that women were being expelled to benefit men who had not seen active service.¹⁰⁹ At the end of the war the position of the women dilutees was extremely weak and there was a great deal of pressure on those women who had retained war work to return to the home or to the traditional women's occupations to make way for returning unemployed ex-soldiers and for male workers even if they had not been servicemen. The

¹⁰⁶The NFWW simultaneously supported the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act and asserted women's right to work and initiated a campaign entitled 'work, not doles'. (Croucher, *op. cit.*, p. 16).

¹⁰⁷ Drake, (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 106-7; Walby, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-163.

¹⁰⁸ Walby, *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Walby, *op. cit.*, p. 164; Pugh, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

economic slump of 1920 further undermined the position of women workers who wished to continue to use the skills they had acquired during the war and by 1920 several trade unions in the UK, for example the ASE and the NUPBPW, had been successful in removing women who had managed to hold onto work they had entered during the war.¹¹⁰

In Scotland, the best example of a trade union endeavouring to remove women from work after the First World War involved the Scottish Union of Bakers and Confectioners (SUBC). By embarking on strike action the SUBC was partially successful in removing a number of women bakery workers from both the work they had been employed to do before the war and from work they had entered during the war. These exclusions followed a dispute between the SUBC, the Glasgow Master Bakers and the Scottish Bakers Industrial Council. The attempt to exclude women from bakeries after the war was the culmination of a long campaign to eliminate women from bakeries. The SUBC had been unable to do this before and during the First World War. In 1906 the Aberdeen branch of the union complained that women 'were becoming nuisances in bakehouses. Such labour....was out of place in bakeries. They were taking the place of Journeymen bakers'.¹¹¹ During the First World War the recruitment of women workers was extended, particularly in small bread and pastry making. The union grudgingly accepted that female labour could not be abolished while the war was in progress, but union President, Robert Murray reassured union members that 'the employment of women will be discontinued after the war.'¹¹² In their submission to the *Report of the Committee on Women in Industry* in 1919, the union stated that 'in the factories where females are employed,

¹¹⁰ Summerfield P, 'Women and War in the Twentieth Century', in J Purvis, *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945*, UCL, London, 1995, p. 28; Banks, *op. cit.*, p 30, p 89; *Common Cause*, January 15, 1920, p. 518.

¹¹¹ Operative Bakers of Scotland, National Federal Union, (OBSNFU, subsequently the SUBC), Report of the 19th Annual Delegate Meeting, Hawick, 1906, p. 37.

¹¹² OBSNFU, Report of the 28th Annual Delegate Meeting, Edinburgh, 1915, pp. 11-17; Report of the 29th Annual Delegate Meeting, Dundee, 1916, pp. 7-8, pp 36-37.

a process of deterioration sets in very quickly and generally speaking we have been strongly against recognition for them altogether.' The union was 'strongly in favour of equal pay for equal work in relation to female labour'. The union was explicit about its motives for supporting equal pay for women in the bakery trade and hoped that this would 'solve the problem for us as tradesmen and thereby reduce the numbers employed (of women) to a very small minimum.'¹¹³ Their hostility to women workers in the trade in 1919 has to be put into the context of the time. In this period the status of skilled men had begun to be undermined. The war had also given employers the opportunity to introduce new methods of control and work organisation while trade unions were unable to fight changes effectively and strikes were illegal.¹¹⁴ It is unclear if these changes were applied to the bakery trade, however it is clear that skilled male workers in this trade did have concerns that the introduction of female labour would result in a loss of work for skilled men and the permanent lowering of wages in the trade.

After the war, Scottish baking employers continued to lower their labour costs by retaining female dilutees and adding to the already existing pool of female labour in the bakeries. During 1919-1920, union antagonism towards women bakery workers hardened and the union demanded that employers in Scotland remove all female dilutees from work. The SUBC was initially keen for employers to dismiss women from bakeries that had not employed women prior to the war. However, the union also targeted the women who had been employed in bakeries prior to the war, but who were now working in bakeries that had not employed women before the war, even though they were employed on work traditionally performed by women. Eventually, the union demanded that all female labour be removed from bakeries. The

¹¹³Cmd, 167, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

¹¹⁴Braybon, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

SUBC was particularly irritated by the failure of employers to comply with the findings of the Scottish Bakers Industrial Council. The Council had found that employers had failed to revert to pre-war conditions and remove female dilutees from bakeries. The union accused both private and Co-operative employers of forgetting 'their obligations to their men who have sacrificed so much for them,' despite giving assurances that their places would be retained when they returned from war.¹¹⁵ By early 1920, the removal of women from bakeries had become imperative for the union and the women who were:

employed in the various bakeries as a war emergency measure to assist while male labour was scarce (were) causing a considerable amount of feeling and trouble amongst the members. Although it is a considerable time since the Industrial Council recommended the removal of diluted labour from the bakeries we find the employers still retaining them.¹¹⁶

The SUBC demands appear to have been partly driven by the need to provide unemployed male bakers, many of whom were ex-soldiers, in Glasgow with work and according to the union, the problem of unemployment among these men was exacerbated by the fact that when they went looking for work in bakeries, they were confronted with 'women doing the work that they had formerly done.'¹¹⁷ The union needed to help provide unemployed male bakers and those returning from war with bakery work by ousting women from bakeries, but frequently trade unions, such as the SUBC, who reacted to the introduction and the extension in the use of female labour by attempting to exclude women and by striking to ensure that

¹¹⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, September 18, October, 1, 2, 1920; SUBC, *Quarterly Report and Financial Statement* (QRFS), December 31, 1919, p. 9.

¹¹⁶ SUBC, *QRFS*, March 29, 1920, pp. 11-12.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

women were expelled from work altogether were motivated to do so because it was female and not male workers who were their competitors for employment.¹¹⁸ Gordon shows that whenever Scottish trade unions had expressed concerns about the use of female labour during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and endeavoured to exclude women from work they would allude to the problem of female labour as a source of cheap labour, the possible loss of men's work to women and a reduction in male wage levels. However, the opposition of trade unions, such as the SUBC, to the entry of women into certain areas of work was not just about protecting the material interests of male workers, but the use of female labour was frequently perceived by trade unions 'as a threat to the important categories of masculinity and femininity.'¹¹⁹ And has been noted above, in the period immediately following the First World War it was deemed to be particularly important that women workers stepped back into their customary roles and that traditional masculine and feminine roles were reasserted.

The action to be taken by the SUBC to deal with the problem posed by the continued employment of the women bakery workers was discussed at the 1920 SUBC annual delegate meeting in Glasgow and a diversity of views were expressed by branches at this meeting. The Kirkcaldy, Irvine and Leith branches recommended that female labour in bakeries be abolished. The Glasgow branch proposed that women's work be confined to certain operations that they had been employed to do before the war. Only Bellshill and Coatbridge delegates held more tolerant views, suggesting that women bakery workers be organised and that they press for women's wages to be levelled up to those of their male colleagues. The views

¹¹⁸ S Rose, 'Gender and Class Conflict: Exclusionary Strategies of Male Trade Unionists in Nineteenth Century Britain', *Social History*, Vol. 13, 2, May 19388, pp. 201-202.

¹¹⁹ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

expressed by these two branches may not have reflected a genuine desire to see the status of women bakery workers improved. Nevertheless, the seemingly more moderate approach advocated by these branches was rejected and the union resolved that all female labour in bakeries be eliminated.¹²⁰ To fulfil this aim, an SUBC organiser became active in attempting to force employers to remove women from bakeries mainly in the east of Scotland. Kirkcaldy, Musselburgh, Dunfermline and Cowdenbeath bakeries were targeted and four women workers in Tranent were subsequently dismissed from a bakery. At Armadale Co-operative, where women had not been employed before the war, male workers went on strike to force the management to remove three new women workers employed as scone, pancake and oat cake bakers. According to the union, one man had been employed to do this work before the war.¹²¹ The union made it clear that male bakers had the first right to work, even if the women were sole earners or had dependants on their earnings. The union could tolerate the employment of female labour as long as it was restricted to the traditional areas of women's work and not a trade dominated by male labour such as the bakery trade. The SUBC bitterly criticised the women bakery workers for their desire to hold on to their work, particularly when they had not undertaken an apprenticeship, asking that:

dilutees should consider in fairness to the men's places they filled that the time has come for them to go back to their previous employment or find any other occupation such as females have to do and not be limpet like clinging to the baking irrespective of

¹²⁰ *Glasgow Herald*, June 17, 1920.

¹²¹ SUBC, *QRFS*, March 29, pp. 11-12, June 28, 1920, p. 3.

the injury they may be doing to those who are justly entitled to be employed at the trade namely those who have served their apprenticeships.¹²²

By September 1920, at least 70 women had been removed from baking work and at a time when unemployment was rising among male SUBC members, the dismissals of these women was viewed as 'an achievement worthy of the men...all over Scotland where drastic action was necessary.'¹²³ Where women had retained work, the SUBC advised their members to hand in their notices and if necessary, embark on strike action. The employers capitulated to SUBC demands and discharged an indeterminate number of women, 'with the usual weeks notice.'¹²⁴ The SUBC must have been conscious of the fact that there were few instances where women bakery workers were a direct threat to male bakers and had displaced male bakery workers. Few women workers were employed in the bakery trade in Scotland and those women who were employed were not generally employed on men's work and were confined to a narrow range of occupations. These occupations included oatcake making, deemed to be skilled work, lighter work such as icing, pie shell making and cleaning. In comparison, male workers largely retained the heavy work and bread and pastry baking.¹²⁵ It also appears that most of those women affected by the actions of the union and the employers were not dilutees who had entered bakery employment during the war, but were mainly, as the *Glasgow Herald* noted, 'workers who have been in the baking trade for many years and.....(were) not taking the place of men as argued by the baker's union.'¹²⁶ While the women bakers intended 'to keep the lighter work' they were prepared to concede to some of the demands of the male bakers and where women were employed on work once performed by men these women offered 'to give

¹²² SUBC, *QRFS*, September 27, 1920, p. 7.

¹²³ SUBC, *QRFS*, September 27, 1920, p. 8.

¹²⁴ *Glasgow Herald*, October 1, 4, 1920.

¹²⁵ Cmd 3508, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

¹²⁶ *Glasgow Herald*, October 13, 1920.

up their jobs to the ex-servicemen who previously held the particular posts now held by the women.' However 'once all the ex-servicemen are at work again' the women claimed that they had 'as much right to earn a living wage as the men' and they held the members of the men's union are not taking a reasonable view of the position.'¹²⁷

The women bakery workers were not prepared to meekly relinquish their right to work and the attempts to give men's employment priority over women were met with resistance. As the *Glasgow Herald* reported 'A movement is on foot at present with a view to preventing a number of women workers in bakeries in Glasgow from being thrown out of employment'. The SUBC itself observed that it was in Glasgow where the women were 'objecting strongly against being removed from the bakeries' and in 'the face of a growing army of unemployed some of whom are ex- servicemen...'¹²⁸ In order to get support for their campaign, the dismissed women sent a deputation to the executive committee of the Scottish Council for Women's Trades in November 1920, who were already conducting their own investigation into the dismissals. The women also sent a telegram to the Minister of Labour, Dr Macnamara, declaring that 'Unemployed women bakers are starving and as work is waiting for them, can you instruct that they be re-employed pending negotiations.'¹²⁹ The Minister of Labour refused to intervene.¹³⁰ A public meeting to discuss this issue followed in Glasgow. Miss Mary Connell of the Women Baker's Committee, which presumably was established by the dismissed women, stated that the women bakers 'did not want to take the men's places. They could do work defined by the union. They had been four weeks idle and were simply fighting

¹²⁷ *Glasgow Herald*, October 13, 1920.

¹²⁸ SUBC, *QRFS*, September 27, 1920, pp. 6-7.

¹²⁹ *Glasgow Herald*, November 2, 1920.

¹³⁰ *Common Cause*, November, 1920, p. 875.

for their bread and butter.' The women 'felt very much the injustice done to them', but they were prepared to accept the SUBC view on the type of baking work that was suitable for women. Miss Phyllis Ayrton of the Women's Guilds of Empire also addressed the meeting. She defended the right of women to work and she considered it,

tyranny that any trade union should have the right to deny the means of earning a living to anybody either men or women. Labour should protect women not hamper or victimise them. The women bakers in Glasgow were not only fighting for themselves but for those in every trade in the UK because once the policy began of turning women out of employment they did not know where it would stop.¹³¹

The campaign by the women in Glasgow to retain their jobs also drew attention from the national feminist journals, *Time and Tide* and *Common Cause*. The former journal, *Time and Tide*,¹³² reported that the women, with outside help, were optimistic that they would 'not be thrown out of work without a vigorous protest. Each such protest will help to prevent similar displays of the misuse of the power of might.'¹³³ The opinion of the latter journal was that 'the bakers dispute is a glaring example of the unfair treatment of industrial women' particularly as some of the dismissed women had been employed in bakeries in Glasgow for more than 15 years.¹³⁴

¹³¹ *Glasgow Herald*, November 13, 1920.

¹³² This journal was established in 1920 and owned by Lady Rhondda. Staffed by women, it sought to improve the position of unmarried mothers and widows and protested against unequal pay for teachers and civil servants. Distinguished feminists such as Vera Brittain, Winifred Holtby and MA Hamilton contributed to the journal. (S Rowbotham, *A Century of Women; The History of Women in Britain and the United States*, Penguin, Middlesex, 1999, p 125; Smith, (1990), *op. cit.*, p 50).

¹³³ *Time and Tide*, cited in D Spender, *Time and Tide Wait for No Man*, Pandora, London, 1984, p. 206,

¹³⁴ *Common Cause*, November, 1920, p. 875.

In the immediate post-war period there was a great deal of pressure on women to return to their traditional areas of work and the view that the pre-war order should be re-established and that women workers should not compete with men for work was widely accepted. The SUBC reasserted these beliefs. However, the attempts made by the SUBC to remove women from work in bakeries were only ever partially successful. Many of those women the SUBC was determined should be removed from work were still in employment in December 1920. The policy to remove women from bakeries was only ever successful in the short term and within less than a year of the dismissals of the women workers the Scottish Association of Master Bakers had reversed the policy of not employing women and it has to be assumed that the SUBC was finally forced to accept the presence of women in the bakeries.¹³⁵ This is unsurprising, as the SUBC had failed to address the reason why women workers were attractive to employers in the first instance. The SUBC did not organise the women workers already in the trade and had chosen not to campaign for equal pay for genuine reasons or even for an improvement in women's wages in the trade either before or after the First World War. Therefore, employers could continue to draw upon a completely unorganised and cheap pool of female labour. However, the bakery trade in Scotland remained a predominantly male trade in the inter-war period. Nevertheless, in the 1930s the SUBC accepted the need to organise the women who were employed in the bakery trade and the calls for the exclusion of women from the trade ceased. Perhaps, unsurprisingly given the SUBC's previous policy to women in the trade, the recruitment attempts, as shown in the previous chapter, met with little success.

The action taken by the SUBC is not the only example of the unfavourable treatment meted out to women workers by Scottish trade unions. Other trade unionists in Scotland pursued the

¹³⁵ SUBC, QRFS, December 27, 1920, p. 9; *Glasgow Herald*, March 29, 1921.

same SUBC strategy that was not to fight for equal pay for women or to better the position of women in work, but to focus on expelling women from work. The threat and the use of strike action designed to force employers to dispense with female workers was a tactic used again in the inter-war period by male trade unionists. For example, the strength of opposition to women foundry employees resulted in strike action among men in West Fife in 1921. The men employed at the National Steel Foundry, reportedly members of the Moulders Union¹³⁶ which would not have recruited women members, went on strike to protest at women working at the foundry and demanded that the women be dispensed with. Local newspaper reports of this strike are scant, however it is possible that these women had retained work they had first entered into during the First World War as dilutees. Nevertheless, it seems that the women might have managed to retain their employment and that some of the striking men were forced to look for work elsewhere in Fife.¹³⁷ In another example of this type of action male workers employed as packing case makers in Aberdeen in 1926 attempted to force women employed as 'bench' workers out of work via strike action. In this instance they were successful and the women were removed from work.¹³⁸

Another union that continued to exclude women from membership and control the entry of female labour into the trade was the Scottish Typographical Association and the Edinburgh branch of this union in particular. This union, as has been noted, had a record in obstructing attempts by married women to secure employment in the printing trade in the inter-war period. In addition to this, an agreement with employers in 1910 ensured that new female apprentice compositors were barred entry to the trade and as Gordon notes, this agreement was the most

¹³⁶ The union's title is unclear, but it may have been one of those unions that later amalgamated with the National Union of Foundry Workers in the 1920s.

¹³⁷ *West Fife Echo*, May 11, 1921.

¹³⁸ STUC, General Council, *Minutes*, 1926.

‘convincing evidence of the entrenched resistance of the STA to woman workers.’¹³⁹ The agreement meant that all new keyboards of composing machines were to be operated by male union labour until June 1916. When this ban ended there was no recruitment of female apprentices into the trade and the ban persisted into the inter-war period and as a consequence, the number of women compositors, particularly in Edinburgh, dwindled.¹⁴⁰

In the inter-war period there were further attacks on women compositors as unemployment increased among men employed in the Edinburgh printing trade. During 1929 and 1930, ETS records show that six women compositors employed at Simpson Label Co., a tag and label firm in Edinburgh, were forced to sacrifice their union membership and possibly their jobs at the insistence of the ETS machine-men’s branch. The six women had been employed at the firm for more than 55 years in total and the combined duration of their ETS membership was 74 years. The origin of these exclusions was the failure of Simpson Label Co. to employ machine-men. These workers were employed to set and control the printing machines.¹⁴¹ The machine branch of the union was keen to secure positions for its members in order to alleviate high levels of unemployment and they were ‘unsatisfied at offices employing compositors, but no machine-men.’¹⁴² The official explanation given for the position adopted by the machine-men by the STA was the failure of Simpson Label Co. to employ ‘letterpress machine-men in place of engineers to print from type set up by our female compositor members.’¹⁴³ As a consequence, the Executive Council of the union refused to accept union subscriptions from the women at Simpson Label.¹⁴⁴ This decision was reversed and the STA opted to make a

¹³⁹ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

¹⁴⁰ Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 85, p. 116.

¹⁴¹ Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁴² ETS, Machine Branch, *Minutes*, 1929-1930.

¹⁴³ STA, *Annual Report*, 1930, p. 36.

¹⁴⁴ ETS, Female Section, *Minutes*, February, 1930.

‘strong protest’ to the firm and ‘demand that a machineman be employed.’ However, Robert Watson, STA general secretary then insisted on making the firm non-union and demanded that the female compositor members employed by the firm ‘tender their notice forthright’ as the firm would not agree to employ ‘machine-men members to print from type set up by our female compositors’¹⁴⁵ This attempt to exclude women from work lead to strong protestations from the female section of the ETS and Eliza Bagley, secretary of this section wrote to Robert Watson stating that the:

members of the section consider the decision unjust to the women affected who loyally supported the STA in the General Strike and have paid the same for protestation as the machine members through whom they are now uselessly sacrificed.¹⁴⁶

The precise outcome of this dispute is unknown, but the STA eventually decided that ‘the only action which was possible under our rules’ was that the Simpson Label Co. ‘could no longer be recognised where members of our association can be employed.’¹⁴⁷ Therefore, six women would have lost their trade union membership and if they wished to remain within the union they would have had to leave their jobs at Simpson Label Co. This shows that the union was prepared to sacrifice female work opportunities when one machine man was unable to secure work at Simpson Label. While the views of the machine branch were not explicit it is possible that the subtext of this dispute was that male unemployment could not be tolerated as long as women were employed and women’s jobs could be jeopardised if need be.

¹⁴⁵ ETS, Machine Branch, *Minutes*, June, October 1930; Letter from Robert Watson, STA General Secretary, to WG Hampton of the ETS, (c.1930).

¹⁴⁶ Letter from Eliza Bagley, Secretary of the ETS Female Section to Robert Watson, STA General Secretary, October 23, 1930.

¹⁴⁷ STA, *Annual Report*, 1930, p. 36.

The exclusions of women from work may have only affected small numbers of women in Scotland in the inter-war period. However, a great many more women workers came under attack from the trade union movement in the inter-war period as they were frequently accused by trade unionists of encroaching on men's jobs. This view was particularly evident among trade unionists in the early and mid 1930s and this is unsurprising given the deep depression and high unemployment levels experienced during this period. As Rowbotham notes, rationalisation and wage cuts, speed up and the reduction in the power of trade unions as unemployment increased meant that there were objective reasons for antagonism between men and women workers and there was a belief that women had actually caused unemployment. Women workers were obvious scapegoats.¹⁴⁸ Male antagonism towards female workers seemed justified as the traditional male industries declined and the new industries employing large numbers of women boomed. The response of trade unions to women workers can be understood as a defence of skilled workers and men's jobs at a time of high unemployment and when the labour movement in general 'had its back against the wall'.¹⁴⁹

In the clothing trade the notion that female workers had gained employment at the expense of male workers was discussed frequently by the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union at local and national level. The effect of mass production and the introduction of the conveyor belt in the ready-made sections of the industry in the inter-war period increased the ratio of women to men employed in the industry. The number of women sewing machinists had expanded and more women were drawn into work which had previously been the preserve of men, such as cutting using newly introduced electrically propelled knives. In the 1930s, a larger percentage of men were unemployed in the industry in the UK than women and this gave the impression

¹⁴⁸ Rowbotham, (1973), *op. cit.*, p. 129.

¹⁴⁹ Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 224; Seldon, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

that women were taking the place of men.¹⁵⁰ This aroused concerns from trade unionists that the apparent increase in the number of women in the industry was having a deleterious effect on the trade. For example, in 1935, Mr J Macmillan of the Glasgow trades branch of Tailor and Garment Workers' Union commented that the male worker in the clothing industry is:

getting ousted by the cheaper labour of the women. We know that certain operations in factories and workshops have hitherto always been regarded as men's work and are moreover unsuitable for girls as, for example, pressing. The wages of women in the clothing trade are too low for the work performed and men should be engaged for the heavy operations in the industry. This can be accomplished if non-unionists join with us in our demands for better conditions and regulations.¹⁵¹

The fears expressed by the Glasgow branch were taking place against the increasing use of the conveyor system in the city that was in operation in at least three factories in the mid 1930s. Mr J Dickson of the Glasgow factory branch called for the abolition of this system on the grounds that if it was universally adopted the 'clothing trade will develop into the same sort of trade as the light engineering trade, where there is a mass of young female and male labour at very low wages.'¹⁵² It was true, as Beauchamp found in the late 1930s, that young girls were increasingly employed on the conveyor belt at the learner rate and they were frequently sacked before they could be paid the adult rate.¹⁵³ The Labour Research Department also discovered examples of employers hiring large numbers of unemployed girls at very low wage rates.¹⁵⁴ However, the idea that women workers were ousting men from work, as

¹⁵⁰ Beauchamp, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23. Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 201;

¹⁵¹ *The Garment Worker*, April 1935, p. 15.

¹⁵² Tailor and Garment Workers Union, *Annual Conference Proceedings*, 1935, p. 100.

¹⁵³ Beauchamp, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁵⁴ Rowbotham, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

expressed by the Glasgow branch of the union, did not go without criticism from inside the Tailor and Garment Workers Union. As Annie Loughlin, a national general organiser noted in *The Garment Worker*:

I have the uneasy feeling that the opinion is gaining ground that the women are taking employment from the men. The suggestion is sometimes made that women should be excluded from industry on the grounds of expediency as there are only so many jobs to go round and men are the breadwinners. Whereas supposedly women workers are not breadwinners but working for their own amusement and they could give up their employment for men.¹⁵⁵

Nevertheless, these views went unheeded by the national leadership of the union. Instead of attempting to secure an improvement in the earnings of females working in the clothing trades the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union preferred to harden its views on the employment of women and to control the entry of female labour into the trade wherever they could. For example, in 1936 the union sought to obtain an agreement with the Wholesale Clothing Employers Federation to prevent female workers from securing work, particularly in cutting and pressing and to ensure that the 'existing male labour shall not be replaced by female labour and where vacancies occur they shall be filled by male workers.'¹⁵⁶ In the late 1930s the union conference carried a resolution to exclude women from processes hitherto confined to men on the grounds that the expansion in the use of lower paid female labour would lead to the expulsion of men from the trade.¹⁵⁷ While there had been an extension in the work women

¹⁵⁵ *The Garment Worker*, August, 1935, p. 7.

¹⁵⁶ *The Garment Worker*, April, 1936, p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ Beauchamp, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

could be employed to do in the clothing trade, the concerns of the union were misplaced to a great extent. For example, a 1930 Home Office report found that men had been retained on the majority of skilled work within the clothing industry.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, in the inter-war period, the number of skilled women had fallen as well as skilled men as the bespoke and dressmaking trades declined.¹⁵⁹ A British TUC Women's Advisory Committee survey in 1935 also showed that women clothing workers were barred from working on up to 37 different processes by clothing trade union agreements with employers.¹⁶⁰

Debates concerning the employment of women were not confined to unions recruiting clothing workers, but also sprang up within the white-collar trade unions. In the 1930s the Union of Post Office Workers (UPOW) was faced with increasing numbers of women entering post office work as cost cutting measures resulted in a greater use of female labour. Part of the explanation for this increase in the employment of women was the failure of UPOW to support improved pay or equal pay for women, whose pay scales were considerably lower than those of their male colleagues. In the 1920s, UPOW rejected post office management proposals to improve female pay to overcome a labour shortage, fearing that male earnings would be reduced to narrow wage differentials and the privileged position of male workers would be undermined.¹⁶¹ However, by the 1930s, UPOW became increasingly alarmed at the increasing use of women in the post office. In 1935 the general secretary of the union held that the 'Division, segregation, de-amalgamation, redundancy and most of our present ills are traceable to the policy of employing less men and more women'.¹⁶² At the 1935 union annual conference, women workers were attacked as the cause of economic ills and Hitler and

¹⁵⁸ Cmd 3508, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁵⁹ Glucksman, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-201.

¹⁶⁰ TUC, Women in Industry, 'Processes Women Barred From', 1935.

¹⁶¹ Boston, *op. cit.*, p. 169; Grint, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

¹⁶² Boston, *Ibid.*

Mussolini were praised for their defence of the male against the female.¹⁶³ German and Italian governments of the 1930s were involved in experiments in family policy that had enormous implications for the status of women. In Germany, the National Socialists encouraged women to do work more 'biologically' suited to their sex, such as domestic work and were opposed to women who worked to be independent and married women workers, who, it was claimed, deprived men of jobs and endangered the family. Employers were free to dismiss these women and replace them with married men.¹⁶⁴ As Boston points out, it was a

sad reflection on the trade union movement that many of its members, not just in the UPOW, but elsewhere, looked to Fascist ideas as a solution to the problems of unemployment.¹⁶⁵

The views of the Glasgow branch of UPOW mirrored those of the national leadership and women workers in the city were held accountable for the unemployment experienced by male post office workers. In 1935 the Glasgow branch newspaper, *Saint Mungo*, claimed that the staffing arrangements of the telegraph service were 'affecting the interests of the men to such an extent as to become a serious national question.' In their view, the interests of men were being surrendered due to 'a steady loss in the numbers of men and a growing and disproportionate preponderance of women'.¹⁶⁶ The branch protested that in a time of high

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ R Munting and BA Holderness, *Crisis, Recovery and War*, Philip Allan, Hemel Hempstead, 1991, p. 140; L Pine, *Nazi Family Policy, 1933-1945*, Berg, Oxford, 1997, pp. 20-21.

¹⁶⁵ Boston, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

¹⁶⁶ *Saint Mungo*, June, 1935, p. 7. While it seems that more women were being brought into the post office in greater numbers in the 1930s, the number of women employed in the post office had actually fallen during 1921 to 1931 from 6,837 women in 1921 to 5,815 in 1931. (Lee, *Ibid.*). Additionally, Elizabeth Cramb writing in the *Saint Mungo* was able to comment in 1933 that in the post office, women were confined to the poorest work and generally had a harder time of it than male colleagues. Women had to be experienced counter clerks, expert teleprinter operators, and efficient phonogram workers. At busy periods they were usually allocated the most heavily loaded circuits and male workers, by comparison, worked better hours and had the 'best of it.' (*Saint Mungo*, No 131, September 1933, p. 12).

unemployment the existence of 'employed sisters and unemployed brothers is surely a most bitter condemnation of the mechanisation both inside and outside the service'. Additionally, that male workers were unemployed while women were able to retain their employment was 'a direct assault on the basis of national life, the family and arises not merely because women are employed but because their labour is being exploited to false economy'.¹⁶⁷ In response to such concerns, UPOW reversed the policy of not supporting equal pay and called for its immediate implementation. Genuine support for equal pay for women seems to have been limited to a minority of the membership and most of those members who supported this policy did so in the hope that equal pay for women would prevent any further movement of women into post office work.¹⁶⁸ Supporting equal pay for women for cynical reasons was also the favoured tactic of the National Association of Local Government Officers (NALGO). In the 1930s NALGO was confronted with an expansion in the number of women employed in local government work, mainly as low paid clerks and typists. Sections of the union, including the Dundee branch, called for a policy to be evolved to prevent local authorities substituting women for men at lower rates of pay. By 1936 the union had adopted the principle of equal pay for equal work.¹⁶⁹ As Spoor notes, only a minority of union members supported this policy for genuine reasons. Sections of the membership supported the policy believing that if they paid lip service to a policy of equal pay they would be able to attract more women members. However, many union members viewed the pursuit of equal pay as the best means by which to ensure that large areas of local authority work would not be permanently closed off to men and, if implemented, would dissuade employers from recruiting women and paying them the same wage as a man.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ *Saint Mungo*, June, 1935, p. 7.

¹⁶⁸ Boston, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

¹⁶⁹ NALGO, 19th Annual Conference, *Minutes of Proceedings*, Aberdeen, 1936, p. 36; Spoor, *op. cit.*, p. 467.

¹⁷⁰ Spoor, *Ibid.*

Similar debates were taking place within trade unions recruiting women employed in the light engineering trade. Even if the light engineering trade did not develop in Scotland to the same extent as in the rest of the UK in the inter-war period, it can be shown that the concerns aroused within the trade unions recruiting women in the light engineering trades, about the increasing employment of women and the supposed negative effect of this on male workers, were often invalid. For example, at the NUGMW 1931 annual conference, it was claimed that in the light engineering industry the 'tendency of modern machinery to simplify methods of production' had led to an 'increasing number of women and young persons performing work formerly done by men.' This, in turn, lowered the 'rates of wages of all workers' and decreased the 'spending capacity of the workers....adding to the number of unemployed'.¹⁷¹ The notion that women were encroaching upon men's work was rejected by a NUGMW woman officer. She recognised that women in the light engineering trade were not employed on work formerly done by men.¹⁷² This was because women in engineering work were largely employed in new forms of work, much of it created during the First World War, and this work had not been performed by either men or women before. Women were also largely segregated from male workers and employed in a narrow range of occupations, and could not, therefore, displace male workers.¹⁷³

The trade union assertion that women were securing employment at the expense of men and were a direct cause of high levels of male unemployment did not go unchallenged by women trade unionists. TUC and STUC representatives frequently defended women against the claims that they had found employment at the expense of men. The inadequacy of the view held by

¹⁷¹ NUGMW, *The Journal*, March, 1931, p. 379.

¹⁷² NUGMW, *NEC, Minutes*, June 1936, p. 109.

¹⁷³ Walby, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-185; Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

many trade unionists that there were 'too many women in industry' and that 'large numbers (of women) can be dispensed with and their places taken by men' was highlighted by Eleanor Stewart of the STUC in 1935. As she rightly pointed out it was 'mainly in heavy industry where few women are employed that the numbers of males have declined.' The Women's Advisory Committee of the British TUC also reiterated the observation that men were most affected by unemployment in the heavy industries, where women were not generally employed, while in the new industries women workers could not displace men.¹⁷⁴ However, even this Committee continued to perpetuate the idea that women were taking men's jobs and were a cause of male unemployment and commented in 1936 that 'it is a feature of post war England that women and youths are replacing an ever increasing numbers of adult male workers' and the result of this was that 'the demand for highly skilled and relatively well paid artisans declines and instead women and youths are engaged'.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, in Scotland, Eleanor Stewart, in response to trade union pressure to remove women from work also pointed out to STUC members that 'in the more important sections of the textile industries where large numbers of both women and men are employed the decline in the numbers in work are greater in the case of women than men.'¹⁷⁶ This was most obvious in the changes underway in the jute industry in Dundee in the inter-war period where the employment of women had fallen and male workers had largely been retained. Eleanor Stewart warned those trade unionists who advocated the policies of the fascist German and Italian governments against following their example as 'putting men in women's jobs cannot solve the problems of the workless.' The solution she proposed to alleviate high unemployment levels among men and, presumably release more jobs for adults, involved raising the school leaving age and removing children

¹⁷⁴ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1935, p. 85.

¹⁷⁵ TUC, Women's Advisory Committee, Meeting of Delegates, January 1936, pp. 2-3.

¹⁷⁶ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1935, p. 85.

from the workforce.¹⁷⁷ From the late 1920s onwards, many of those within the trade union movement, including Annie Loughlin of the Tailor and Garment Workers Union, advocated the raising of the school leaving age to 16 as a weapon against high levels of unemployment among adults and juveniles in the depressed areas.¹⁷⁸ However, it is likely that this 'solution' would only have resulted in greater financial hardship for those families dependent on the earnings of young workers.

Contemporary commentators such as Marguerite Thibert similarly pointed to the weakness of the explanation that women workers were somehow a cause of the high levels of unemployment experienced among men in the UK and Western Europe in the 1930s. Thibert criticised the simplicity of this view and argued that the increased employment of women was cited 'as one of the causes of the wave of unemployment which has swept over the economic world. This view...is too short sighted to be taken seriously by anyone with some understanding of economic and social science.' As she noted, the idea that work should be 'reserved for men' and that married women in particular should be excluded from the labour market, represented nothing more than a 'frantic search for a way out of present difficulties'.¹⁷⁹ Removing women from work would only shift the incidence of unemployment from one group to another.¹⁸⁰ Another contemporary, Sylvia Anthony, shared this view, noting that academic studies undertaken in the early 1930s had found that the 'purposeful substitution of men by women workers had not been an important factor in causing the high unemployment rate of men compared with women.' One of the main reasons for this was because employers in the

¹⁷⁷ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1935, pp. 66-68.

¹⁷⁸ W R Garside, 'Unemployment and the School Leaving Age in the Inter-War Period', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 26, 1981, pp. 159-169.

¹⁷⁹ M Thibert, 'The Employment of Women: 1', *International Labour Review*, Vol. 27, April 1933, pp. 443-444.

¹⁸⁰ M Thibert, 'The Employment of Women: 2', *International Labour Review*, Vol. 27, May 1933, p. 621.

UK were largely 'reluctant to dismiss men and substitute women at the present time even where some financial advantage might be expected from the change because of their view of their responsibilities during the crisis.'¹⁸¹

While the number of male workers declined in the UK between the wars and work classed as 'women's work' underwent an expansion, and new automated processes in industry, as in the clothing industry had allowed for the introduction of greater numbers of low paid young women and girls into various trades, many trade union leaders were aware that the labour market was segmented on a sexual basis and that there had been no actual substitution of men by women. Nevertheless, trade unionists maintained the view that men and women were competing for the same jobs and that men were losing.¹⁸² It is also important to note that the idea that women workers were the cause of male unemployment concealed the real problem of female unemployment. The employment of large numbers of women in the expanding industries helped to offset the very high rates of unemployment among women in the traditional industries, such as textiles. This gave the false impression that women were not affected by severe unemployment and obscured the extent to which the employment of skilled female workers had declined. In Scotland, men were more prone to unemployment but unemployment among women was not low. The female unemployment figures for Dundee show that the annual average rate of female unemployment in 1931 was 41.2%, (reflecting the effects of decline and depression on the jute trade), and for male workers the figure was lower at 37.6%. Female unemployment rates in Dundee were also substantially higher than the national average for male and female unemployment and female unemployment in the city did not fall below 20% until 1938. In Glasgow, as in many other Scottish towns and cities, male

¹⁸¹ Anthony, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

¹⁸² Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

unemployment was, according to official figures, higher than unemployment among women. For example in 1931 the figure for male workers was 36%, but the female rate was still 20%.¹⁸³ While the rate of unemployment among male workers was higher than for women, unemployment statistics excluded huge numbers of uninsured workers such as domestic servants, a substantial employer of female labour, casual workers and those working for more than one employer. Furthermore, many women, such as married women, who had little chance of receiving unemployment benefit, did not register as unemployed. Therefore, these statistics failed to accurately reflect the level of unemployment among women and the real level of unemployment among women workers could have been much higher.¹⁸⁴

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that the trade union movement could not be relied on to defend the right of women to work, even well into the twentieth century. They continued to question whether women, especially married women, should be in the labour force. Trade unions could collude with employers to exclude married women and also single women from work, as the example of the SUBC shows. They continued to exert their power to exclude women from union membership and pursued short-sighted ends to control the entry of women into skilled occupations or into work of any kind in several trades. That men should have the first right to employment particularly during the bouts of high male unemployment was openly expressed by trade unionists in the inter-war period. The depression and high unemployment between the wars served to highlight the divisions between those trade unionists who condemned the employment of women, especially married women, in the belief that these women were the source of unemployment and all other ills affecting male workers,

¹⁸³ W Carrick Watson, *Clydebank in the Inter-war Years: A Study in Social and Economic Change*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow, 1984, pp. 61-62; Smout, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

¹⁸⁴ Thibert, (April 1933), *op. cit.*, pp.457-468; Lewis, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 182; Beddoe, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

and those trade unionists, usually women, who defended women against frequently misplaced attacks that women were pushing skilled men out of employment. These views took no account of the fact that women were excluded from skilled work or were employed in work which men had never been employed to perform and that high levels of unemployment affected women workers too.

While the evidence provided in this chapter is not conclusive it has been shown that the trade union movement in Scotland contributed to the post- First World War backlash against women workers and this was particularly evident in the trade union views on the employment of married women. Rather than considering how the position of these women workers in the labour market could be improved, sections of the movement preferred to press for the exclusion of these women from work, even though the likelihood that they would be removed from the workforce was remote. There was a strong belief that two wages should not go into one home during periods of unemployment and leading female trade unionists, while not condemning married women, could reflect the view that it was undesirable for married women to work. These views diverged little from media and government views, as expressed through state unemployment legislation in particular, that married women should be supported by their husbands rather than work. It would seem that there were no calls from Scottish trade unionists for the removal of the marriage bar and trade unions encouraged the discriminatory practices against married women by pursuing agreements with employers to exclude these women from work. They also practised their own exclusions of married women from trade union membership and thereby from work. It has also been shown that support among male and female trade unionists for equal pay for women remained elusive. Women workers were not united on the issue of equal pay, fearing their removal from work and often regarding their own work as inferior and among Scottish women trade unionists there were few calls for equal

pay for women and there was little deviation from support for the ideal of the family wage. However, sections of the Scottish female membership of the STUC were committed to demands for equal pay. Nevertheless, wherever trade unions expressed support for equal pay there was very little genuine commitment to this policy, which they frequently pursued in response to the increasing use of cheap female labour in certain occupations, and it would seem that this issue would often only engage the attention of male workers when they hoped that its implementation would undermine the employability of women workers. In the inter-war period, the Scottish trade union movement attempted to organise women into the movement wherever possible but the movement seemed to offer little incentive to women to join in terms of initiating campaigns to improve women's low wage levels or by actively supporting equal pay for women. Even if women trade unionists in Scotland defended women from attacks, it appears that they were overwhelmingly committed to the dominant policies of the trade union movement and at the STUC they did not deviate far from leadership views. It would seem that during the inter-war period the difficulties presented by wage cutting and the bouts of high unemployment for the trade union movement meant the problems experienced by women workers were almost entirely overlooked. The effect of the trade union movement's failure to support women workers by fighting for fair wages for all workers, irrespective of sex or family status meant that the movement was restricted to fighting for equality for a narrow group of workers.

Thus far, it has been shown that trade union organisation among women workers in Scotland was generally weak despite the wide range of organising strategies employed by the STUC Organisation of Women Committee and its affiliated unions. The difficulties in recruiting women workers into trade unions arose for a variety of reasons and this chapter has suggested that part of the explanation, in combination with a range of other factors was the

antagonistic views held by Scottish trade unionists towards married and single women workers. It is against this background of low trade union membership and the opposition to women workers displayed by the trade union movement that the following chapters will attempt to consider if the weakness of trade union organisation among women was reflected in the propensity of women to strike. The extent of strike activity among both organised and unorganised women workers in Scotland will be examined as will the response of trade unions to women workers whenever they embarked on strike action.

CHAPTER FIVE: WOMEN WORKERS AND STRIKE ACTIVITY IN NON-TEXTILE OCCUPATIONS

The previous chapters have shown that women workers in Scotland remained largely outside of the trade union movement whilst the STUC Organisation of Women Committee and trade unions in Scotland met with serious difficulties in their attempts to recruit women workers, in spite of using a variety of recruitment methods. As a consequence, the number of women trade union members remained low and the participation rate appears not to have risen above 10-15% of the total female workforce during the inter-war period. However, the purpose of this chapter will be to show that women workers, including those women organised into trade unions and those outside of the trade union movement, embarked on strike action to secure improvements in wage levels and working conditions. This chapter will identify and consider the total level of strike activity among women workers in Scotland in the inter-war period before considering the extent and nature of strikes and where possible, the origin, duration, outcome and the demands and concerns of strikes in the non-textile occupations. Particular attention will be given to the forty hours dispute on Clydeside in 1919 and the General Strike of 1926 as the role of women in these strikes, like the majority of strikes presented in this chapter, have received little attention thus far.¹ The extent of trade union involvement in strikes and the response of trade unions to women workers who attempted to improve wages and working conditions through industrial action in the inter-war period will be examined.

As Purcell notes, it has generally been assumed that as women workers have in the main not been trade union members that they were somehow more 'passive' and 'exploitable' and

¹ There has been very little research undertaken on strikes among women workers in the inter-war period in Scotland. Several books contain very small amounts of information on Scottish women's strike activity particularly Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Unions* and Young, *Women and Popular Struggles*.

hence a reduced propensity to take collective action.² However a number of historians including Gordon, Bottomley, Tolliday, Lee Downs and Boston³ have successfully challenged the idea that as women were largely excluded from the trade union movement they were less likely to take industrial action and while collective action among women could result in trade union membership, it was not dependent on trade union organisation. As Gordon shows, women in Scotland throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resorted to collective action on many occasions principally in the textile trades, to improve wages and conditions irrespective of their lack of trade union organisation. As she points out 'non membership of trade unions was not a reflection of apathy or docility.' Strikes involving women workers in Scotland, both inside and outside of the trade union movement, were also significant in the rise of industrial action during the period of industrial Labour Unrest⁴ between 1910-1914.⁵

It has also been argued, that women have been less inclined to strike due to their different occupational and industrial distribution. Traditionally, women in the UK have been confined to work in sectors such as clothing, distribution and catering where trade unionism and militancy have been weak. Small firms have predominated in these sectors, labour turnover

² K Purcell, 'Militancy and Acquiescence Among Women Workers', in S Burman, *Fit Work for Women*, Croom Helm, London, 1979, p. 113.

³ Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement*; M Bottomley, 'Women and Industrial Militancy', in JA Jowitt and AJ McIvor (eds) *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries 1850-1939*, Routledge, London, 1988; S Tolliday, 'Militancy and Organisation; Women Workers and the Motor Trades in the 1930s', *Oral History*, Vol. 11, 2, Autumn, 1983; L L Downs, 'Industrial Decline, Rationalization and Equal Pay: the Bedaux Strike at the Rover Automobile Company,' *Social History*, Vol. 15, 1, 1990; S Boston, 'The Rego Strike', *Labour History Bulletin*, 38, Spring 1979.

⁴ There is a continuing debate as to the causes of the Labour Unrest of 1910-1914. It would appear that a combination of the effect of syndicalism, industrial unionism and socialism on rank and file opinion and the rejection of the traditional labour leadership, growing dissatisfaction with the Liberal government, high prices, lower real wages, work intensification, persistent unemployment and underemployment all contributed to the strike wave. (Glasgow Labour History Workshop, 'Roots of Red Clydeside: The Labour Unrest in West Scotland, 1910-1914', in R Duncan and AJ McIvor (eds.), *Militant Workers: Labour and Class Conflict on the Clyde 1900-1950*, John Donald, Edinburgh, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-97).

⁵ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 118; p. 136; pp. 239-240.

has usually been high and as a consequence, trade union organisation has been more difficult to encourage than in large firms. Women employed in small firms have often had more direct contact with employers and, given the often-precarious market conditions of industries where women have predominated; taking strike action has often been viewed as ineffective. Exceptions to this have been large food and tobacco firms with weak trade union organisation and textile firms where trade union organisation among women has generally been higher.⁶ However, as Purcell notes, research on strike activity among male and female workers has shown that trade union membership and the propensity to strike in the industries where women have largely been employed are generally lower among both male and female workers and that men and women strike according to the traditions of their industry rather than according to their sex. Therefore strike activity has been lower where women have commonly been employed not because large numbers of women are employed in these sectors but because the factors noted above (such as high labour turnover, small firms) have acted as a depressant on militancy and industrial action for all workers.⁷ A further explanation, as Gordon notes, for the behaviour of women workers and their supposed acquiescence in the workplace has been based on the poorer position of women in the labour market, as low paid and low status workers and on the notion that women's position in the labour market has been secondary to their role within the family. According to this view, women's work outside of the home has been of secondary importance and has undermined workplace militancy among women. The effect of this has been to view women's work as peripheral and to stress the different experience of work for men and women. As Gordon argues, women workers in Scotland, irrespective of their domestic responsibilities, went on strike during the nineteenth and early twentieth century to protect their pay and conditions and that workplace conditions and

⁶ Tolliday, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52; Purcell, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

⁷ Purcell, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-123.

circumstances were just as important in explaining collective action among women workers as it was amongst their male counterparts.⁸

In addition to women's participation in strikes in Scotland in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a brief survey shows that women's strikes did not disappear during the First World War. While there has been little research on women's strikes during this period in Scotland, women struck on a number of occasions running the risk, especially those in munitions work, of being accused of being unpatriotic. Strikes in war related industries were also illegal, usually disobeyed official trade union leaderships and were attacked in the press.⁹ In 1915 Dundee jute workers went on strike and in May and June 1916, there were a number of strikes among women employed in flax, laundry and in the clothing trades to secure wage increases. In 1917, sections of the female workforce at the West of Scotland Shell Filling Factory struck to improve wages and were accused of 'rowdyism' by the *Glasgow Herald*. In November 1917, women employed at Beardmore's East Hope Street factory went on strike following the dismissal of four female colleagues and in the following year women employed at the Scottish Shell Filling Factory at Renfrew were involved in a dispute to reduce working hours.¹⁰ In 1917 female dyers and bleachers at Pullars in Perth took part in a large strike and enormous demonstrations in the town. In Edinburgh, women employed at the Middlemas biscuit factory also went on strike to improve pay in 1917, as did a large number of dressmakers in the city in the same year. In 1918, women and men employed at Slateford Market in the city struck to reduce working hours.¹¹

⁸ Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.

⁹ J Foster, 'Strike Action and Working Class Politics on Clydeside 1914-1919', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 35, 1, 1990, p. 47.

¹⁰ *Glasgow Herald*, May 26, 28, 1917; Seldon, *op. cit.*, p. 95; STUC, *Parliamentary Committee Minutes*, October 1918.

¹¹ Thom, *op. cit.*, p. x; Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 40. *Glasgow Herald*, July 25, September 6, 1917; Holford, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-109; Shop Assistants' Union, Edinburgh St Cuthbert's Branch, *Annual Report*, 1918, p. 3.

Before considering women's strikes in the inter-war period, there are a number of problems involved in determining the number, duration, objectives and outcomes of strikes in Scotland involving women in the inter-war period. Firstly, much of this chapter relies on newspaper reports of strikes and where strikes did receive press attention this was frequently incomplete and the outcome of these strikes, in many cases, remained unreported. Furthermore, official statistics, including the *Abstract of Labour Statistics of the UK* provided by the Ministry of Labour, do not supply a breakdown of strikes in the UK either by sex or by region and therefore, from these figures, it is difficult to determine the propensity of women to strike in relation to male workers or the propensity of men and women to strike in the same industry. It is also difficult to determine if the level of men's strike activity compared with female strike activity in the areas of work where women were heavily concentrated. In addition to these problems, the official recording of strikes as in the *Ministry of Labour Gazette* is incomplete. The *Gazette* provides information only on 'principal' disputes and while many of the strikes presented in this chapter fulfilled the requirements for official recording, in that they involved more than ten workers and lasted for more than one day, they do not appear in the *Gazette*. To compound this problem, trade union records for this period often provide very little information on strikes involving their own members. Nevertheless, while sources are limited, it is possible to find evidence of women striking alone or with their male colleagues in a number of occupations and the sources used in this chapter include national and local newspapers, the *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, trade union records and various employer association records. It is first necessary to begin by assessing the national pattern of strike activity in the UK as the background to the Scottish material before going on to discuss strike action among women in Scotland. As shown on Table 1 below, strikes increased in the immediate post war period. More days were lost through strike action in 1919 than were lost during the period of the 'Labour Unrest' of 1910-1914 and the greatest ever number of strikes

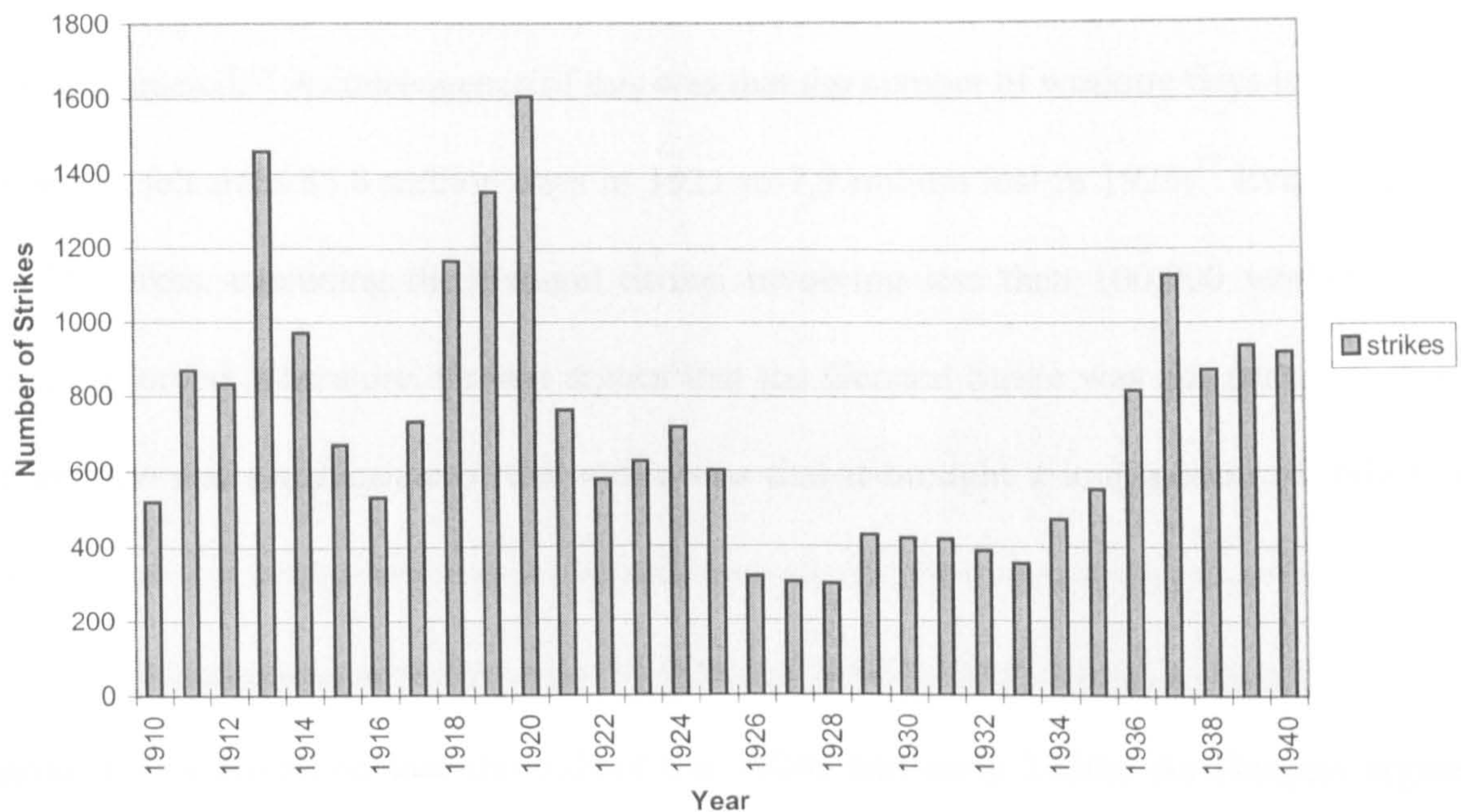
were recorded in 1920. There are a number of reasons for this. According to Clegg, increased strike levels were to be expected as high labour demand in the post-war boom was accompanied by the relaxation of wartime controls and as production levels switched from war to peacetime. The majority of strikes in 1919, in particular, resulted from the movement away from district to national agreements on pay and hours and the application of the shorter working week.¹² Many of these strikes stemmed from unfulfilled demands during wartime. Trade unions, benefiting from larger memberships, were in a stronger position to demand improvements in pay and conditions. A major concern among the workforce was the state of the labour market in the post-war period and this was an element in the forty hours dispute on Clydeside in 1919, which, as will be shown, involved many women.¹³ While the relationship between strikes during the 'Labour Unrest' of 1910-1914, shown on Table 1, and strikes in the immediate post war period is complex, Cronin suggests that the strikes of 1919-1920 can be viewed as a combination of the 'last act' of the Labour Unrest and the political and economic changes caused by the First World War.¹⁴

¹² Clegg, (1985), *op. cit.*, p. 266.

¹³ C J Wrigley, 'The Trade Unions Between the Wars', in C J Wrigley (ed.), *A History of British Industrial Relations, 1914-1939, Vol. II*, Harvester, Sussex, 1987, pp. 75-76.

¹⁴ J E Cronin, *Individual Conflict in Modern Britain*, Croom Helm, London, 1979, p. 52.

Table No. 1: Industrial Disputes in the UK 1910-1940



Source: Adapted From A H Halsey, (ed.), *Trends in British Society Since 1900*, Macmillan, London, 1972, p. 127.

In the early 1920s the number of strikes fell as severe economic conditions and high unemployment caused by the post war recession resulted in a heavy loss in trade union membership. Furthermore, an employers counter offensive during 1921-1922 isolated the best-organised and most militant workers. For example, the miners strike was defeated in 1921 and in 1922 engineering employers, following a national lockout, made use of large numbers of unemployed and refused to employ union members and victimised known militants.¹⁵ Employers were in a stronger position to force through wage reductions and as unemployment levels continued to rise, stoppages arising from industrial disputes in the UK declined. As unemployment increased in the early 1920s, the trade union leadership in the traditional industries, while trying to moderate wage cuts accepted wage cuts in principle nevertheless in

¹⁵ K Burgess, *The Challenge of Labour*, Croom Helm, London, 1980, pp. 210- 213.

order to promote their industries competitive position. As disaffection with this policy became more apparent among the rank and file, trade union membership among men and women in the UK plummeted.¹⁶ A consequence of this was that the number of working days lost through strike action fell from 85.8 million days in 1921 to 7.9 million lost in 1925.¹⁷ Even in 1926, only 321 strikes, excluding the General Strike, involving less than 100,000 workers were officially recorded. Therefore, Cronin argues that the General Strike was not part of a strike wave and the real significance of this strike was that it brought a long period of industrial peace.¹⁸

Strike levels remained low throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. As Burgess argues, nearly full employment had sustained militancy on Clydeside, in Lancashire, Fife and South Wales between 1914 and 1920. However militancy vanished in the wake of high unemployment, defeat in industrial disputes, victimisation and demoralisation during the 1920s. The defeat of the General Strike discredited militancy and economic depression and high unemployment eroded union membership among men and women. As Hinton notes, mass unemployment forced workers to 'hang on for better times' rather than opting for revolt¹⁹ and during the recession the unions concentrated their energies in lessening proposed wage cuts rather than taking industrial action.²⁰ The trade union leadership, strengthened by restructuring and reforms at the TUC, such as the use of the bloc vote also consistently attempted to prevent militancy.²¹ As Knowles noted, between 1926 and the post Second World War period, trade union leaders became 'more active in preventing, restricting and curtailing

¹⁶ A Friedman, *Industry and Labour*, Macmillan, London, 1977, p. 71.

¹⁷ Halsey, (1972), *op. cit.*, pp. 127-128.

¹⁸ Cronin, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53, p. 60.

¹⁹ J Hinton, *Labour and Socialism*, Wheatsheaf, Sussex, 1983, p. 128.

²⁰ Wrigley, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

²¹ Cronin, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53, p. 60.

strikes than in encouraging them' and they 'tended increasingly to assert that they were clumsy, outmoded and unnecessary even in the last resort.'²² It is also important to note that post- General Strike, the chairman of the TUC General Council and the Chairman of ICI entered into the Mond-Turner talks and this signalled the beginning of closer employer and trade union collaboration during peacetime.²³

Greater economic stability in the late 1920s in comparison with the early 1920s, with stable unemployment and slight deflation allowed employers to contain costs without wage reductions and this may have reduced the propensity to strike. In the late 1920s employers also concentrated on parliamentary action rather than industrial action and the outcome was the Trades Disputes and Trade Union Act in 1927. This made sympathetic strikes outside the industry concerned illegal, prevented Civil Servants from joining TUC affiliated unions, restricted picketing, changed the system of trade union members paying a political levy to the Labour Party to a system of contracting in rather than out and removed protection of union funds from claims for strike damages.²⁴ As Burgess argues, the Act sought to redefine and make clear the functions of trade unions but the impact of this was only of marginal significance on the practical conduct of industrial relations.²⁵ Nevertheless one of the outcomes of this Act on women's trade unionism was the loss of many militant and influential women from the public service unions that could no longer be affiliated to the TUC. This

²² K G J C Knowles, *Strikes- A Study in Industrial Conflict*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1952, p. 150.

²³ Friedman, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

²⁴ P Dewey, *War and Progress, Britain 1914-45*, Longman, London, 1997, pp. 140-141; Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

²⁵ Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

meant that these women were unable to take part in TUC debates at a time when trade unionism among women (and men) was in decline.²⁶

Even when trade union membership increased in the mid 1930s there was little large scale strike action. There are a number of possible reasons for this. As Cronin points out, much of the economic recovery at this time was centred on the new industries where trade unionism was especially weak. The trade union movement also continued to suffer from the defeat of the General Strike. Additionally the resignation of the 1931 Labour government left the parliamentary Labour Party in disarray.²⁷ Nevertheless, as Burgess argues, the failure of the General Strike had not completely discredited direct action and while conservative trade union leaders were often hostile to strikes this was not shared by the rank and file to the same extent, giving rise to an increase in unofficial disputes, particularly in the 1930s.²⁸ In the mid- 1930s the number of days lost through strikes began to rise as trade union membership increased and as the economy in parts of the UK recovered. As shown on Table 1 above, strike activity increased from 1934 onwards before peaking in 1937 and then declining again in 1938. However, while the number of strikes increased the number of working days lost remained low.

Despite the decline in the general level of strikes in the 1920s and 1930s, because of the factors identified, this chapter will show that women workers in Scotland continued to strike in the inter-war period to improve wages and conditions. The majority of these strikes occurred in the various textiles industries and these will be examined in the following chapter. However

²⁶ Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, pp. 195-197.

²⁷ Cronin, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-132, p. 137.

²⁸ Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

women also embarked on collective action in areas of work where they predominated such as the laundry trade, catering and shop work as well as in sectors where women workers were either in the minority or were employed in similar numbers to male workers such as in rubber goods manufacture, agriculture and metals. The numbers and outcome of strikes in Scotland involving women workers, striking alone or with male colleagues, employed in both the non-textile and textile industries are shown on Table 2 below.²⁹ As there are no official disaggregated figures for women's strikes in Scotland, Table 2 has been constructed from national and local newspaper reports, the *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, various employer association records and trade union records. As a consequence, this cannot be viewed as a comprehensive survey of women's strikes. It is not possible to draw a comparison between the number of male and female strikes and the total number of strikes in Scotland. Nevertheless, while the absolute level of strikes presented in this table is small some comparisons can still be drawn with the UK pattern of strikes involving male and female workers.

As shown on Table 2, the number of strikes involving women in Scotland appears to have been at their highest during 1919 and 1920 and this is similar to the national pattern of strikes, where both 1919 and 1920 recorded the highest number of strikes in the 1920s, as shown on Table 1. Additionally, virtually no strikes involving women in Scotland appear in the sources used in the late 1920s, especially during 1927 and 1928 and this corresponds with the low levels of strikes experienced nationally in the UK during these years. However, in the 1930s the propensity of women to strike in Scotland increased from 1933 onwards reaching a peak in 1936. This broadly reflected the trend in the UK as the number of strikes involving

²⁹ Strikes, where the involvement of women is not clear from the sources consulted, have also been included if they were in areas of work where women predominated such as the clothing industry or the textile trade.

male and female workers more than doubles in this same period. While the outcome of many of these strikes in Scotland is unknown, as shown on Table 2, it is probable that most of these would have resulted in a compromise or a successful outcome for the employer. Where the outcome is known, strikes frequently ended in a compromise and therefore, a partial victory for the workforce involved.

Table 2: Number and Outcome of Strikes In Scotland Involving Women Workers in the Non-Textile and Textile Industries, 1919-1939

Year	Number	Workers' Victory	Employers' Victory	Compromise	Outcome Unknown
1919	9	1	4		4
1920	9	2	2	2	3
1921	1		1		
1922	1		1		
1923	5	1	3		1
1924	2		1		1
1925					
1926	1		1		
1927					
1928					
1929	1			1	
1930	2				2
1931	2		1	1	
1932	1	1			
1933	5	1		2	2
1934	5		3	1	1
1935	6	2	2	1	1
1936	9		1	2	6
1937	3	1			2
1938	6	1		4	1
1939	1				1
Non - Textile	26	5	8	6	7
Textile	43	5	12	8	18
Total	69	10	20	14	25

Of the 69 strikes presented on Table 2, 26 took place in trades outside of the textile industry, 27 were in the jute industry in Dundee and 16 occurred in other textile industries. Half of all these strikes centred on attempts to prevent wage reductions or to secure wage increases and most attempts by workers to increase wage levels took place outside of the textile industry. In these sectors one half of all strikes were caused by demands for wage increases. That few strikes in the textiles industry centred on demands for wage increases must reflect the decline in the textiles industry and fewer opportunities presented for workers to increase wages levels. A considerable number of strikes involving women centred on the improvement of working conditions or resulted from changes in working conditions which, in the textile industry, included changes in the size of looms or the introduction of new machinery. Solidarity strikes following the dismissal of a colleague were also relatively common among women in both textile and non-textile employment. Demands for trade union recognition also featured in at least six disputes in the inter-war period. As Gordon notes, this issue had first emerged among women in Scotland in 1910 during the period of 'Labour Unrest' between 1910-1914.³⁰ Demands by women for trade union recognition virtually disappear in the 1920s, but resurface again in the mid and late 1930s and this follows the national trend as the number of strikes caused by demands for trade union recognition among men and women increased during 1936-1938.

The first large strike and one of the most significant strikes of the inter-war period to involve women was the forty hours strike on Clydeside, which lasted for a fortnight during January and February 1919. The strike was brought about by the socialists in the Clyde Workers Committee, an unofficial body of shop stewards who had secured support for the

³⁰ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

strike from the Glasgow Trades Council and the STUC.³¹ The strike was designed to cut the working week from an average of 48 to 40 hours per week without a cut in pay to spread the work available during the high levels of unemployment following the end of the First World War.³² As Whiteside notes, there had been a number of attempts by labour during the nineteenth century to shorten the working day and thereby alleviate the effects of unemployment by sharing work and preventing redundancy.³³ One of the objectives of the strike, which involved more than 100,000 workers mainly dockers, engineers, electricians, steel workers, builders and also spread to coal mining and the iron trades,³⁴ was to prevent the re-emergence of a reserve army of the unemployed and to ensure that soldiers were found jobs in industry. This strike was part of the rise in strike activity on Clydeside during 1918 and 1919, concentrated mainly in shipbuilding, steel and coal mining, but unlike the other strikes which revolved around wage levels this strike was centred on the issues of unemployment and working hours. This strike involved all sections of the workforce, was bigger than any other strike that had gone before and was more radical in terms of tactics and demands made. It was political in that it wanted to place pressure of the government and influence the balance of power between capital and labour. As Foster notes, there has been very little research on who precisely was involved in the strike and the workers who led the strike.³⁵ This is also true in relation to the involvement of women in the strike and while few of the industries directly involved in this strike employed women and newspaper reports provide little information on their involvement, there are, nevertheless, a number of references to women as pickets, strikers and supporters of the strike in the *Strike Bulletin*, the official organ of the forty hours

³¹ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

³² M Ackrill, *Manufacturing Industry Since 1870*, Philip Allan, Oxford, 1987, p. 116.

³³ N Whiteside, *Bad Times: Unemployment in British Social and Political History*, Faber and Faber, London, 1991, p. 54.

³⁴ T Bell, *Pioneering Days, 1941* cited in R and E Frow and M Katanka, *Strikes: A Documentary History*, Charles Knight, London, 1971, pp. 172.

³⁵ Foster, *op. cit.* P. 41, pp. 53-55.

movement published by the strike committee. The *Strike Bulletin* claimed that women would also benefit from the strike for the forty- hour week as it:

would give every worker a chance. It will provide jobs for the men coming back from the war and it will save our women from the horrors of unemployment. All the 30,000 men and women in Glasgow on the unemployed register will get useful work when the forty hours week is in operation. So will the thousands of unemployed in other centres in Scotland.³⁶

Furthermore, the implementation of the forty-hour week would result in a 'safer industrial life for women' and provide employment for the 22,000 women who were registered as unemployed in Glasgow in early 1919. It is likely that some number of these women had been thrown out of work following the end of the First World War and the *Strike Bulletin* stated that 'the strikers are going to fight for the women.'³⁷ Some sections of the female workforce called on to strike did not join, such as the tramway women (and men), employed by Glasgow Corporation. As John Maclean commented, 'The women who had been introduced on to the cars for the war period, had neither interest in the union as a rule nor any fight for a shorter working week.'³⁸ This perception of women workers is to some extent unfair given the support from other women for the strike. For example, one group of women workers who were definitely involved were those employed at the Singer sewing machine works in Clydebank,

³⁶ *The Strike Bulletin*, January 31, 1919, reproduced in *Glasgow 1919: The Story of the 40 Hours Strike, With An Introduction by Harry McShane*, The Molindar Press, Glasgow, 1974.

³⁷ *The Strike Bulletin*, February 4, 11, 1919.

³⁸ J Maclean, *In the Rapids of Revolution*, Allison and Busby, London, 1978, pp. 152-153.

where trade union organisation was weak.³⁹ The *Strike Bulletin* reported that a mass picket had been successful in inducing the 11,000 or 12,000 male and female workers employed at Singer to stop work.⁴⁰ The first to strike at Singer were the plumbers and the electricians who were followed out on strike by the tool room operatives.⁴¹ The *Clydebank and Renfrew Press* later reported that the workforce at Singer were locked out and 'large crowds of girls swelled the numbers of men who are now out of work.'⁴²

During the strike, district strike committees were formed representing all workers in each area regardless of their occupation. They represented the unemployed, trade unionists, the unorganised and housewives.⁴³ A number of meetings were also aimed especially at women strikers, women workers and supporters. At Clydebank, the strike committee held a special meeting for women in a theatre in the town. Short speeches were presented to the women who 'decided to support the strike' and a 'variety entertainment' was also included. The *Strike Bulletin* urged other districts to copy this idea as many women speakers were willing to assist. Meetings were held for women workers and strikers in Paisley at the Central Halls and in Bridgeton and Anderston; the Bridgeton women congratulated the workmen on 'their splendid fight for the forty hours as a means of settling the grave unemployment problem.'⁴⁴ Many other meetings of women passed similar resolutions. There were attempts to encourage mill workers in Paisley to join the strike, the majority of whom were women. However, there is no evidence in the *Strike Bulletin* and local newspapers that they actually took part. According to

³⁹ Singers was the largest branch of the Workers' Union in Scotland in 1920. The firm would not recognise the union and according to the Union this branch was the weakest in Scotland. The union blamed the workforce claiming that this situation was the 'fault of the workers entirely and is due to their lack of interest and generally apathy'. (Workers' Union, *Record*, October, 1920, p. 5).

⁴⁰ *The Strike Bulletin*, January 31, 1919.

⁴¹ Glasgow Labour History Workshop, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁴² *Clydebank and Renfrew Press*, February 7, 1919.

⁴³ Frow et. al., *op. cit.*, pp. 172-173.

⁴⁴ *The Strike Bulletin*, February 6, 8, 1919.

the *Strike Bulletin* workers employed in linen production in Johnstone were involved in this strike and again a substantial number of workers in this trade in Johnstone were women.⁴⁵

Women were also very conspicuous as pickets. As Foster notes, during this strike mass pickets were 'genuinely mass' and involved women and young people. They were almost carnival like with marching and drums and other musical instruments.⁴⁶ A contemporary account of the strike shows the strength of women's support for the strike, as Morton noted:

Another feature of the strike was the use of the strikers' wives as pickets. District meetings were held for women, and the strikers' wives were invited. Addresses were delivered explaining the position to them. They were afterwards invited to supply pickets for work gates, and we have had as many as five thousand females forming one of our massed pickets.⁴⁷

The activities of the female pickets attracted some press attention. The *Scotsman* noted that the presence of strikers' wives, some of them with children, on the picket line in Govan during the strike was 'novel'. The women pickets stood at the gates of the shipyards and subjected the men passing in and out of the works to considerable 'chaff'.⁴⁸ The behaviour of the women pickets during this strike was illustrated in a cartoon published in the *Glasgow Evening Times* (reproduced in Appendix I), which depicted a woman carrying a small child attacking a male worker attempting to get to work. The caption read, 'Between him and his work: The willing worker- Guid save us! Women pickets- We used to get driven to oor work. Noo we get dogs

⁴⁵ *The Strike Bulletin*, January 31, 1919.

⁴⁶ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁴⁷ D S Morton, *The Forty Hour Strike, Clydebank, 1919*, p. 9, cited in J McKay, 'Red Clydeside After 75 Years: A Reply to Iain McLean', *Scottish Labour History Society Journal*, 31, 1996, p. 91.

⁴⁸ *Scotsman*, February 10, 1919.

abuse if we luik near it.’⁴⁹ The wives of strikers successfully picketed workers in Clydebank where they resolved to keep the area ‘blackleg proof’. The women were described in the *Strike Bulletin* as ‘eloquent’ and as being able to talk in a manner that ‘makes a blackleg feel blue and red in turn’. They also verbally abused the ‘truncheon swingers’ who were present.⁵⁰ The women at a meeting at the Picture House in Govan were equally militant and formed a strike committee and organised women pickets. In Govan, women were effective as pickets and were described as being in ‘good form’ and as the *Strike Bulletin* noted the ‘Govan women mean to fight on with the men until the last and to share in whatever sacrifice is necessary to secure victory.’⁵¹ Women also participated in the George Square riot in Glasgow during the strike when the police charged at strikers demonstrating in the square and a number of women workers were among those injured when the police charged the crowd.⁵² Upon the cessation of the strike, an article in the *Strike Bulletin* entitled ‘Hats Off Boys’ congratulated the women for their support during the strike. The piece read:

the working class women have proved themselves heroines in the fight! Strikers never had better supporters than the women who have helped us in the struggle and their making common cause with us marks a new era in the conflict for the industrial emancipation of the workers from wage slavery! Whether as pickets, strikers or counsellors the women have given sterling service and have shown a rebel spirit which has sustained all of us in the darkest hours of the struggle.⁵³

⁴⁹ *Glasgow Evening Times*, February 11, 1919.

⁵⁰ *The Strike Bulletin*, February 8, 1919.

⁵¹ *The Strike Bulletin*, February 9, 11, 1919.

⁵² *The Strike Bulletin*, February 1, 1919.

⁵³ *The Strike Bulletin*, February 12, 1919.

While the majority of women involved seem to have been the wives of strikers, there is enough evidence to suggest that women workers came out on strike in support of the predominantly male workforce and that women as strikers or supporters were militant during this strike. One of the reasons why so many women were involved in this strike may have been because this unofficial movement was perhaps more attractive to women workers than the official trade union movement. Trade unions had not always supported women when they went on strike or supported the right of women to work, and in 1919 trade unions were successfully removing women from the work they had entered during the war. The Clyde Workers Committee and the trade union movement in general, had been hostile to the extension of semi- and unskilled female labour on Clydeside during the First World War, but at the end of the war, the strike committee appears at least to have supported the right of unemployed women to work and therefore that women workers should not sacrifice their own employment for returning soldiers. It appears that one of the aims of the strike was not only to provide women as the wives of strikers, with improvements in their living standards, but was also directly aimed at women workers by claiming that the forty hours week would not only improve their working conditions but would be able to offer employment for unemployed women. Additionally, the strike committee made efforts to incorporate the women into the strike via the *Strike Bulletin* and a good number of references to meetings for women, women pickets and letters from women appear in each issue of this strike newspaper.

However, strikes involving women in the immediate post-war period were not just confined to the industrial sector. Female shop assistants went on strike on two occasions in 1919. At Morrisons Economic Stores in Aberdeen, female shop assistants, who seem to have been unorganised, went on strike in support of two other girls who had been dismissed from their jobs for reasons the striking women believed to be unsatisfactory. The outcome of this strike is

unknown but the girls received the support of their male colleagues who threatened the shop management with strike action if the dismissed girls were not reinstated.⁵⁴ Female shop assistants were also involved in a three month long strike with their male colleagues at the Buttercup Dairy Company in Edinburgh to secure the recognition of their union's minimum wage scale. This strike was unsuccessful and the women and men, after three months of campaigning, were forced to seek employment elsewhere.⁵⁵ Additionally, in late 1919 tailoresses struck with their male colleagues in the Lanarkshire towns of Motherwell, Hamilton, Coatbridge and Airdrie in an attempt to secure an advance in piece rates of one shilling per hour and advances for time workers. This strike lasted for three weeks and involved 250 workers and was successful, the workers demands being granted.⁵⁶

In the catering trade, waitresses and kitchen staff went on strike in Glasgow in early 1920. Unlike the majority of strikes involving female workers, this strike received a good deal of coverage in various Glasgow newspapers. This is perhaps unsurprising given that there appears to have been no other instances of women in the catering trade taking strike action in Scotland either before or during the inter-war period. Female catering trade workers were also among the least organised of all workers in Scotland during the inter-war period and were viewed as being difficult to organise because they were poorly paid, worked very long and unsociable hours and were usually very young. As the Glasgow Trades Council, who attempted to intervene in this dispute, noted, there was a great need to organise catering workers in Glasgow at this time. Even in 1930, according to STUC figures, only one in every thousand catering workers was organised in Scotland.⁵⁷ The National Federation of Women

⁵⁴ *Glasgow Herald*, February 31, 1919.

⁵⁵ Shop Assistants' Union, Edinburgh St Cuthbert's Branch, *Annual Report*, 1919, p. 7.

⁵⁶ *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, December 1919, p. 526.

⁵⁷ Glasgow Trades and Labour Council, *Annual Report*, 1919-1920, p 11; STUC *Annual Report*, 1930, p. 79.

Workers (NFWW) had organised many women and girls working in tearooms and restaurants in Glasgow in late December 1919. Around 250 female workers had gathered at meetings organised by the union to hear speeches by William Shaw of the Glasgow Trades Council and Councillor George Buchanan. In one week of organising the NFWW reported that 100 females working in tearooms and restaurants in the city had joined the union.⁵⁸ Miss Agnes M Adam, local secretary of the NFWW, reported to the *Glasgow Forward* that the union had been very successful in organising girls preceding the dispute and 1,000 girls in Glasgow had been organised.⁵⁹ The strike in 1920 occurred among waitresses and kitchen staff employed at Carlton tearooms owned by W & RS Kerr who had recently been organised by the NFWW. The kitchen staff and waitresses 'unanimously decided to strike in order to secure the reinstatement of Miss Lucy Cowie who they allege had been dismissed from the Carlton restaurant because she was the Federation shop steward there.'⁶⁰ Girls at the W & RS Kerr's' Regent and Grand Central Tea Rooms joined the strike with the female staff at The Burlington and The Marlborough, both venues used by the company. Four female workers at Marlborough house refused to blackleg at the Carlton tearooms and were dismissed without their weeks' pay. Eventually 100 female café workers were involved in the strike. In the weeks prior to the strike, the girls working at Kerr's' cafés, with the support of the NFWW had secured some improvements in their working conditions. However, further attempts to improve wages, working hours and general conditions of labour were rejected by the employers association, the Glasgow and District Hotel Keepers and Restaurateurs Association, who refused to recognise the NFWW and would not meet a deputation from the Glasgow

⁵⁸ STUC, *Annual Report*, 1930, p 79; *Glasgow Herald*, December 22, 1919.

⁵⁹ *Glasgow Forward*, January 31, 1920.

⁶⁰ *Glasgow Forward*, January 24, 1920.

Trades Council. The Ministry of Labour then intervened but before negotiations were started the management dismissed Lucy Cowie.⁶¹

The NFWW were very supportive of the girl strikers and went as far as printing a leaflet during the strike entitled 'Sweated Workers In Glasgow', (reproduced in Appendix II), which appealed to the general public to give their support to the strike and explained that the waitresses and kitchen staff were working a twelve hour day and earning only 12s. per week. These low wages were typical among catering workers. In many provincial towns in the UK, wage rates among women working full time in cafés and restaurants in 1921 were as low as 4s. to 10s per week. Only women employed in Co-operative owned cafés earned substantially more. The Women's Trade Union League found many instances of women catering workers earning as little as 9s. per week in the UK.⁶² Even ten years later, women employed in the catering trade in Scotland could earn as little as 12s. to 18s. per week.⁶³ The waitresses and kitchen staff employed at these cafés were also subject to fines and deductions and wages would be reduced by a shilling for breaking a plate, nine pence was deducted for breaking a cup, six pence for a saucer, two shillings for a wine glass and three pence for being late in the morning and given that wage levels were so low these fines were sizeable proportions of an already low wage.⁶⁴ Working conditions at Kerr's seem to have been especially poor, and as Miss Agnes Adams stated in an interview with the *Glasgow Forward* during the strike, 'The girls in the Carlton even have to provide their own soap and towels for washing and in addition they have to do all the cleaning work which is usually done in other restaurants by

⁶¹ *Glasgow Forward*, January 24, 31, 1920.

⁶² B L Hutchins, 'The Present Position of Industrial Women Workers', *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 31, 1921, p. 462.

⁶³ National Federation of Women Workers, (NFWW), Leaflet, 1920; STUC, *Annual Report*, 1930, p. 79.

⁶⁴ The imposition of fines on workers was still relatively common in the UK in the inter-war period particularly in retail work. (P Pagnamenta and R Overy, *All Our Working Lives*, BBC, London, 1984, p. 108).

charwomen.' The tips the girls earned also 'amounted to nothing' and contributed little to their overall wage and as Miss Adams argued, it was unreasonable for the girls to be dependent on the 'charity of the public.' Nevertheless, these very poor conditions were an improvement on working conditions before the women joined the NFWW. Prior to their organisation the girls earned 9s. and 8d. per week and incredibly, had also been required to purchase their uniforms from their employer.⁶⁵ Another reason why this strike received coverage in the press may have been because the girl strikers were very active throughout the dispute. As Miss Adam explained to the *Forward*:

Pickets were placed on duty from 7am and till about 10.30pm. Meetings were held at mid-day and in the evening outside the Carlton and the Regent to explain to the public the cause of the dispute and to ask them to boycott the Kerr's establishments.⁶⁶

The *Glasgow Herald* reported that the girls were also joined in these activities by their friends, which attracted a good deal of attention. The girls further alerted the restaurants' customers and members of the public to the strike by distributing leaflets and displaying placards that stated the reasons for the strike. This led to the intervention of the police following a dispute between the pickets and a customer. The strikers were also successful in gaining the support of the wider labour movement and when a strike fund was set up, in three days of collecting from the general public and at labour and socialist meetings, the girls had collected around £110. Nevertheless, the girls were dismissed as their places were gradually filled by female blackleg workers, and the strike, which had lasted for at least a month was

⁶⁵ *Glasgow Forward*, January 31, 1920; NFWW, *Leaflet*, 1920.

⁶⁶ *Glasgow Forward*, January 31, 1920.

abandoned when the girls found employment elsewhere.⁶⁷ As the Glasgow Trades Council pointed out, 'The girls kept up the fight at three restaurants involved for a number of weeks but were beaten by their own class, other girls not in the union taking their places' and the Trades Council recommended that 'trade unionists should encourage all waitresses to organise and thereby abolish sweated conditions in city restaurants.'⁶⁸

Even though this strike was unsuccessful, it shows that even where young women had only recently been organised by a trade union and probably had little experience of organisation, realised that they could be easily replaced by other women and had little chance of winning their strike, they were able to mobilise themselves effectively into a form of industrial action. Furthermore, they seem to have been successful in bringing the attention of the labour movement and the general public to the strike and thereby attempting to gain wider support for their dispute. This strike, even though it was unsuccessful, and the earlier organising successes of the NFWW, appears not to have translated into greater trade union organisation among the tea shop girls in Glasgow and attempts to organise catering workers in the city during the following year met with little success. According to a report in the *Glasgow Herald*, a trade union, possibly the NFWW, distributed 3,000 leaflets to tearoom girls in the city in 1921 that advertised meetings. Very few women attended these meetings and according to the union involved, only those women who had experience of trade unionism as munitions workers during the First World War attended. The report highlighted some of the problems the trade union concerned had in attempting to recruit tea room girls. In particular, the union cited the combination of low wages, high labour turnover and the reluctance of teashop girls to give

⁶⁷ *Glasgow Forward*, January 31, 1920; *The Glasgow Bulletin*, January 21, 1920; *Glasgow Herald*, January 21, 23, 28; February 17, 1920.

⁶⁸ Glasgow Trades and Labour Council, *Annual Report*, 1919-1920, p. 11.

trade union organisers information on their working conditions. As a consequence, the trade union organisers believed that these workers could not be organised.⁶⁹ Perhaps given the outcome of this widely publicised dispute in 1920 female catering workers in Glasgow viewed trade union membership as pointless.

In the same year, at least 1200 female clothing workers, mainly dressmakers, went on strike in a number of towns and cities including Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Glasgow, Dundee and Falkirk. However, there is little information on this strike in newspapers and it was not officially recorded in the *Ministry of Labour Gazette* as a 'principal dispute' even though it involved a huge number of women and girls employed in many dressmaking shops and appears to have satisfied the requirements for inclusion in the *Gazette*. As *The Falkirk Mail* noted during the dispute, 'though the strike of dressmakers in various parts of the country is not getting the prominence that labour disputes generally receive there is no doubt that it is rapidly disorganising that branch of business.'⁷⁰ The strike seems to have been concentrated in Edinburgh where at least 1,000 women and girls employed in more than 20 shops were in dispute with the Scottish Garment Makers and Millinery Trades Federation over wage levels. The extent of organisation among the dressmakers is unknown but in Edinburgh around 200 of the strikers were Shop Assistants' Union members. All dressmaking shops in Dundee took part and 150 dressmakers in Falkirk joined the strike, as did women and girls in Glasgow.⁷¹ As the strike progressed, the dressmakers held meetings at the Synod Hall in Edinburgh and many of these women continued to make and sell clothes direct to the public through the

⁶⁹ *Glasgow Herald*, August 27, 1921.

⁷⁰ *The Falkirk Mail*, June 26, 1920.

⁷¹ Many of these women had been organised into the trade union following a strike to improve wage levels in Edinburgh in 1917. (Holford, *op. cit.*, p. 108); *Glasgow Herald*, June 1, 1920; *Edinburgh Evening News*, June 1, 1920; Shop Assistants' Union, Edinburgh St. Cuthbert's Branch, *Annual Report*, 1920, p. 7; *DJFW Guide*, June 1920, (Hereafter referred to as *DJFW Guide*); *Glasgow Herald*, June 15, 26, 1920.

'Dressmakers Guilds'⁷² and thereby avoiding the dressmaking shops. The strike continued for at least five weeks and it seems that some women secured an improvement in working conditions. According to the Shop Assistants' Union in Edinburgh, their women members had 'fought to win' and were successful in securing improved conditions.⁷³ However, in another version the *Edinburgh Evening News* and the *Glasgow Herald* claimed that the majority of women in Scotland had gone back accepting employer's terms.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, this large scale strike in Scottish towns and cities shows that women and girls, the majority of whom were unorganised, employed in the dressmaking trade, where labour turnover was high, who were spread across a large number of small shops and firms were able to organise effectively in an attempt to improve wage levels.

In the UK, women clothing workers displayed similar militancy and featured in large and well-publicised strikes in the inter-war period. For example, 600 poorly paid girls employed at Rego Clothiers in London went on strike in 1928 to improve wages and conditions without the support of the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union. This led to the formation of an unofficial or 'red' break away union, the United Clothing Workers' Union, supported by the Communist Party and there is evidence, as Leeson shows, that members of this unofficial union in Glasgow were locked out by employers at roughly the same time as the Rego strikers. Unfortunately, local newspapers do not verify this. Nevertheless, it is feasible that female clothing workers in Scotland were just as dissatisfied with the official trade union movement who often failed to grasp the level of discontent among women workers, preferring instead to

⁷²This was possibly the National Tailoring and Clothing Guild, which was controlled by the Tailor and Garment Workers Union, who produced clothes to sell directly to the public.

⁷³ *DJFW Guide*, June 1920; STUC, *Annual Report*, 1925, p. 1; Shop Assistants' Union, Edinburgh St. Cuthbert's Branch *Annual Report* 1920, p. 7.

⁷⁴ *Edinburgh Evening News*, June 7, 1920; *Glasgow Herald*, June 7, 1920.

support breakaway unions who challenged the sectionalism and restrictive practices supported by the official trade union movement.⁷⁵

In the shipbuilding industry on Clydeside, women french polishers were involved in a dispute during 1920 with their male colleagues. While this dispute received no attention in the press and all of the evidence presented is drawn from employer association records, it provides both an example of a dispute which involved male and female workers in an industry where women had only recently been introduced and the first example of a dispute in the inter-war period in Scotland where the central demand was equal pay. Dilution on the Clyde during the First World War allowed for the introduction of women into work formerly barred to them and french polishing was deemed to be suitable work for women in the shipyards. Many of these women were retained in the shipbuilding industry and in September 1920, around 17 shipyards, all members of the Clyde Shipbuilders Association (CSA), employed at least 214 female french polishers. A number of these firms seem to have employed only female french polishers, including journeywomen, improvers and apprentices. According to CSA records, many more women than men were employed as french polishers in the industry, as was the case in french polishing outside of the shipbuilding industry.⁷⁶ The origin of the dispute was the submission of a claim in May 1920 by the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association to the CSA, that male polishers' wages should be applied to female french polishers. This claim was rejected by the CSA on the grounds that the rates for female french polishers on the Clyde were too varied. The French Polishers Union claimed that female french polishers were being used as 'cheap labour' and their employment had been extended

⁷⁵ R A Leeson, *Strike: A Live History 1887-1977*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1973, p. 119; Boston, (1987), *op. cit.*, pp. 176-178.

⁷⁶ CSA, *Dilution of Labour, Views and Suggestions*, March, 1916; CSA, September, 1920.

on the Clyde since the end of the First World War as a result. Therefore, an advance on women's wages was justified.⁷⁷ CSA records show that women french polishers were in some instances earning less than half the wages earned by male polishers. Records are patchy, but it seems that between June and September 1920, there were at least five disputes. At Barclay Curle, 13 male french polishers handed in their notices demanding that female french polishers wages be levelled up. Male and female polishers were involved in disputes at Fairfields and at Dennys in Dumbarton and ten female french polishers employed at Beardmores each handed in their notices. A number of women involved in these disputes seem to have attempted to secure employment at another shipbuilding firm (John Brown) who paid advances to female french polishers and higher rates of wages than those paid to female polishers at other firms. The firm claimed that the result of not increasing women polishers wages would have been a strike engineered by male polishers 'amongst the women and girl polishers whose competition they naturally would gladly dispense with' and who would also have gone on strike in sympathy with the women. John Brown also wanted to employ the women who had handed in their notices at Beardmores, but appear to have been prevented from doing this by the CSA and the Shipbuilding Employers Federation who were opposed to John Brown paying women advances. When John Brown withdrew these advances 16 female and 20 male french polishers either went on strike or left this firm.⁷⁸

While the CSA referred to these disputes as strikes, the French Polishers Society, the Boilermakers Society and the Furnishing Trades Association denied that strikes had actually taken place. A Boilermakers Society official stated that the women who had handed in their notices had taken the 'usual course which any worker would take of giving the usual weeks

⁷⁷ CSA, *Letter to Members of the Association*, May, 1920; CSA, September, 1920.

⁷⁸ CSA, 'Female French Polishers', June-September, 1920.

notice and terminating their employment and going to another firm where they got better wages.' Their claim was that the CSA and its members had caused the disputes by preventing women french polishers from securing employment in other firms paying higher wages.⁷⁹ Even if these disputes cannot be classed as strikes, they still provide evidence that the women were expressing their discontent by withdrawing their labour and seeking employment elsewhere in an attempt to improve wage levels. The female polishers may also have been victimised by employers following the strikes. During other disputes on the Clyde the CSA circulated lists of striking workers to all members and the names of women who had struck work at Beardmores were 'circulated in the usual way'.⁸⁰ Women strikers at John Brown were later refused other employment on the Clyde and the Furnishing Trades Association claimed that a woman who had moved from Beardmores to John Brown was victimised and then sacked because of her participation in the dispute at Beardmores. Unfortunately, the outcome of this strike is not clear. It appears from the CSA records that the various trade unions involved tried to prevent male and female french polishers from working in the firms affected by the strike and placed adverts in Glasgow newspapers advising french polishers that they should not accept work on Clydeside.⁸¹

It is difficult, given the limitations of the sources, to ascertain the intentions of the various unions involved during these disputes. However, there are two possible explanations for the trade union demands for equal pay for women. Firstly, this may have been a response to male workers fears that the greater demand for cheap female labour would result in a lowering of their wages and their gradual replacement by female workers. Therefore, trade union demands

⁷⁹ CSA, Grand Conference Between Shipbuilding Employers Federation and the Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades of the UK, London, September, 1920.

⁸⁰ A J McIvor and H Paterson, 'Combating the Left: Victimisation and Anti-Labour Activities on Clydeside, 1900-1939', in R Duncan and AJ McIvor (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 132; CSA, August, 1920.

⁸¹ CSA, 'Female French Polishers', c. October, 1920.

for the implementation of equal pay would have been made in the hope that employers would give preference to male workers and would dispense with the female french polishers.⁸² However, the trade unions and male workers, a number of whom were also involved in handing in their notices with their female colleagues, may have genuinely supported equal pay for women. As *Common Cause* reported in 1919, the general secretary of the Furnishing Trades Association, interviewed by this paper did support equal pay for women workers and supported the right of women to work.⁸³ That women french polishers, albeit a small proportion of the total number employed in Clyde shipyards, were also prepared to take some form of action to improve wage levels when these were not granted by employers must indicate a degree of support for the trade unions. As noted in chapter four women workers did not always support equal pay for themselves fearing that the implementation of equal pay would result in their being made unemployed.

In the same year, 600 male and female workers employed at bonded warehouses and a distillery in Edinburgh and Leith struck together to secure wage increases and trade union recognition. They appear to have been successful in winning wage increases. In the succeeding years, women in a diversity of trades went on strike to improve wages and conditions. Around 50 women workers employed in a rubber works on the south side of Glasgow went on strike against a reduction in wages in 1921. The reductions were sizeable amounting to 5s. for those over 18 years and just over two shillings for juveniles but it would appear from newspaper reports that they were unsuccessful in preventing these reductions. Female agricultural workers struck with their male colleagues in 1923. Approximately 1,200 workers in a number of small

⁸² It should be noted that the Glasgow branches of the Furnishing Trades Association, responsible for the initial wage claim did not have a good record in supporting the right of married and single women to work during periods of high unemployment.

⁸³ *Common Cause*, May 16, 1919, p. 46.

towns in Mid-Lothian went on strike in an attempt to reduce working hours and improve wage levels, which in agriculture were extremely low, especially for women. Women picketed during this strike, for example in Drem, where they were photographed by the trade union journal the *Scottish Farm Servant*. According to the union journal this strike was lost and the strikers resumed work accepting the old conditions.⁸⁴

In 1923 the *Annual Report* of the Scottish Typographical Association noted that male and female workers in a printing firm went on strike together to level the women's pay up with their male colleagues. Unfortunately, the town or company where this strike took place is not referred to in the trade union records. Again, support for equal pay could have been a strategy to force the firm involved to dispense with female workers in preference for male workers. However, the women employed in this firm do appear to have supported the aims of the strike. As shown in chapter three, the STA did not have a good record in defending women workers in the printing trade. Additionally women members of the STA and the Edinburgh Typographical Society in particular did not fully support equal pay for themselves, particularly compositors who supported a 'fair wage' rather than equal pay.⁸⁵ However, as Reynolds shows, female STA members could support male workers during disputes even if the aims of a dispute would have a detrimental effect on women workers. For example, female compositors in Edinburgh supported the STA agreement with employers in 1910 to prevent the hiring of new female workers into the trade for the following six years. Half of the female membership of the union in the city supported this ban and had agreed to come out on strike with their male colleagues in order to limit the number of women in the trade if a strike was needed. As

⁸⁴ *Edinburgh Evening News*, June 10, 1920; *Glasgow Herald*, September 10, 12, 1921; *Scottish Farm Servant*, July 1923, p. 56.

⁸⁵ STA, *Annual Report*, 1923; Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p 129, pp. 138-139.

Reynolds notes, working class women such as these compositors were under 'peculiar pressure' in the workplace as they were often working alongside fathers, husbands and brothers and they were forced to choose between gender and class solidarity. Many women chose the latter or risked being viewed as a class traitor or 'hob-nobbing' with the middle classes.⁸⁶

In the laundry trade, women working at St Cuthbert's Co-operative Society, the largest single employer in Edinburgh in the inter-war period, went on strike on two occasions, the first in 1924. While wages levels and working conditions in Co-operative societies were regulated by workforce trade unions and were generally better than those in private business, as Knowles notes, employer and employee relations in the Co-operative movement were not necessarily better.⁸⁷ Co-operative workers went on strike on a number of occasions in Glasgow in the 1920s. For example, 1,000 boot and shoe operatives employed by the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society struck over pay levels in 1920 and more than 1,000 workers employed in dairies, butchers and grocers shops owned by the St. George's Co-operative Society went on strike over proposed reductions in wages in 1923. The laundry strike was an attempt by the women, with the support of the NUGMW, to reduce the number of working hours, which were extremely long. On weekdays, these involved working from eight o'clock in the morning until seven or eight o'clock in the evening. The women were successful in securing a reduction in the number of hours to be worked and were to finish at either five or six o'clock during weekdays.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ S Reynolds, 'Women in the Paper and Printing Trades in Edwardian Scotland', in Gordon and Breitenbach, (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁸⁷ Knowles, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁸⁸ *Glasgow Herald*, February 16, 1920, February 10, 1923, June 18, 1924; *Edinburgh Evening News*, June 21, 1924.

Nationally, the largest and most significant strike of the inter-war period was the General Strike. However, there are remarkably few references in local and national newspapers or trade union records to women either as strikers or as supporters during this strike in Scotland. The *Scottish Worker*, the official newspaper of the STUC during the strike makes almost no mention of women strikers and only a brief mention of women supporters. This is perhaps unsurprising as the areas of work where women were most concentrated such as textiles and clothing were not called out on strike. In the UK, the largest group of women to be directly affected by the strike were women members of the Paper Workers' Union who made up half of the unions 70,000 members. The Railway Clerks' Association also took part in the strike and included a substantial number of female members.⁸⁹ This union congratulated women members for their response during the strike and the organiser in Scotland reported that:

The response was magnificent from station dock and depot men and women rolled up prepared to play their part in the great effort to see justice applied to an heroic and long suffering section of the workers...In days gone by a strike was too frequently a man's affair. This time we saw a transformation. The women folk were devoted and solid too.⁹⁰

In Scotland, women members of the STA and the NUPBPW were involved in the strike. In 1930, 5,516 women were members of paper and printing trade unions affiliated to the STUC and it is likely that a considerable number of these women would have been directly involved.⁹¹ Female transport workers such as tram and omnibus conductors in the towns and

⁸⁹ Lewenhak, (1977), *op. cit.*, p. 192; Boston, (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 174.

⁹⁰ Boston, *Ibid.*; *Railway Service Journal*, June 1926, p. 198.

⁹¹ STUC, *Annual report*, 1930, p. 76.

cities would also have been involved in the strike, even though the number of women in these occupations was relatively small. The few thousand women working in mining occupations may also have participated in the General Strike. Most of these women were employed as workers above ground, particularly in Fife, Lanarkshire and the Lothians. In Fife, women workers or 'pit lassies' performed tasks above ground such as pulling hutches of coal off the cage, picking stones out of the coal and working coal- washing equipment. As Macintyre notes, these women, and the wives and daughters of miners were very noticeable during disputes and would organise separately to harass 'blacklegs'.⁹² As Young points out, women are often portrayed in subservient roles during the General Strike serving tea and soup but women were especially militant in the Scottish coalfields.⁹³ David Proudfoot, general secretary of the United Mineworkers of Scotland noted that women in Fife were very prominent among the thousands who attended meetings in the evenings designed to put pressure on dock workers to come out on strike in early May 1926.⁹⁴ As Abe Moffat, the President of the Scottish Area Union of Mineworkers recalled of the women in Fife:

The women in fact played a vital part in the councils of action that were set up all over West Fife during the General Strike and the lockout. This was most important because involving the women helped ensure that the strike stayed solid. And so it did it was complete.⁹⁵

⁹² Macintyre, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-145.

⁹³ Young, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

⁹⁴ Letter from David Proudfoot to G Allen Hutt in I MacDougall (ed.), *Militant Workers: Recollections of J McArthur, Buckhaven and Letters, 1924-1926 of David Proudfoot, Methil to G Allen Hutt*, Edinburgh Polygon, 1981, p. 282.

⁹⁵ Leeson, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-108.

During the General Strike, money was raised from factories and workshops. According to John McArthur of the Fife branch of the National Union of Mineworkers, the factory workers in Dundee, who were mainly women, provided financial support to the miners in the Fife coalfields during the strike and in other disputes.⁹⁶ Elsewhere, in Govan, the strikers' wives held a daily matinee 'to maintain order and to watch local food prices'. It would seem that some women workers (and men) employed in the lace and muslin making trade in the Ayrshire towns of Darvel, Newmilns and Galston, within close proximity to the central Ayrshire coal fields, were locked out by employers during the General Strike for supporting the strike. The *Scottish Worker* noted that 'the textile workers are all now out and as a result the villages are quiet.'⁹⁷ Female textile workers in Scotland were also indirectly involved in the strike. For example, the transport strike and disruptions in the supply of electricity affected workers in the linen industry in Dunfermline and textile workers in Haddington in East Lothian worked a three day week as a result of the strike.⁹⁸ At Singer sewing machine factory in Clydebank, half of the workforce, a substantial number of whom were women, joined the strike and by the end of the strike 87% of workers were out. As in the forty hours movement strike of 1919, Singers locked out 1,000 workers for joining the strike. Women also picketed during the strike, and mass picketing in Glasgow involving men and women occurred frequently throughout the strike in an attempt to prevent strike breaking. Thousands of women were also involved in riots in Edinburgh city centre during the strike. In Dundee hundreds of women, including textile workers, attempted to prevent volunteer students from working, the women threw stones, booed and heckled the students and a number of these women were fined for their

⁹⁶ MacDougall, (1981), *op. cit.*, p. 282.

⁹⁷ J Mair, *The Origins and Establishment of the Machine Lace Industry in Ayrshire*, Unpublished M. Litt. Thesis, University of Glasgow, 1973, p. 173; *The Scottish Worker*, May 12, 1926.

⁹⁸ Tuckett, *op. cit.*, p. 212; I MacDougall, 'Edinburgh', in J Skelley (ed.), *The General Strike*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1976, p. 153.

involvement in these demonstrations.⁹⁹ The *Scottish Worker*, in an article aimed at the wives of strikers, praised them for their 'loyalty and courage', furthermore, 'In this fight our women have been splendid, they have faced privation and hunger with a smile and put encouragement and heart into the men. They have been comrades who have not failed.'¹⁰⁰

Workers were severely victimised after the General Strike and there is enough evidence to suggest that women workers were forced out of work for their involvement in the strike. For example, approximately 100 female and 28 male bookbinders were locked out by a firm in Edinburgh following the end of the strike. The female workers received strike benefit of 16s. and male workers 35s. Other female and male transport workers in Falkirk were only reinstated on the basis that they would accept wage reductions of one pence per hour for male workers and a half pence reduction for female workers.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, at Singers in Clydebank many of the workers, presumably some of whom would have been women, who joined the General Strike were either sacked or victimised. Many workers were forced to leave trade unions following the end of the strike. In papermaking, where 40% of the workforce was female, non-unionism was forced on hundreds of workers following the strike.¹⁰² The STA lost one-tenth of its membership as employers forced members to leave the union. In Glasgow, female workers employed at a printing firm were not reinstated following the end of the General Strike and a letter from their union, the STA, to the company asking them to re-employ the girls was without success.¹⁰³ As already noted, there has been little attention

⁹⁹ I MacDougall, 'Some Aspects of the General Strike in Scotland', in I MacDougall (ed.), *Essays in Scottish Labour History*, John Donald, Edinburgh, 1978, p. 196; S Bhaumik, 'The Strike in the Regions: Glasgow', in M Morris (ed.), *The General Strike*, Penguin, Middlesex, 1976, p. 405; MacDougall, (1976), *op. cit.*, p. 150; *Dundee Advertiser*, June 8, 1926.

¹⁰⁰ *The Scottish Worker*, May 13, 1926.

¹⁰¹ NUPBPW, Edinburgh Branch, Female Section, *Minutes*, May 1926; MacDougall, (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 176.

¹⁰² Glasgow Labour History Workshop, (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 52; MacDougall, (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 197.

¹⁰³ MacDougall, (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 197; *Scottish Typographical Journal*, August. 1926, p. 312.

given to the role of women workers in the General Strike, and although evidence of their involvement in this strike is sketchy, the evidence presented suggests that many women supported the strike either by picketing or by providing strike funds or by embarking on industrial action either on their own or with male colleagues.

In the period up to and including the General Strike, while the national pattern of strike activity declines and the number of strikes among Scottish women follows this trend, there is nevertheless, significant evidence of women workers in various industries and sectors striking alone or with their male colleagues in Scotland. There were also a number of strikes involving women textile workers in this period and these will be discussed in the following chapter. As already noted, one of the outcomes nationally of the defeat of the General Strike was the negative effect on the number of strikes both nationally and among women in Scotland. As shown on Table 1, the number of strikes in the late 1920s declined among workers nationally and this is reflected in the virtual absence of strikes involving women workers in Scotland during this period as is shown on Table 2. However, this is not to say that women workers were not expressing discontent. As Young notes, women were involved with male workers in the *ca'canny* working practices, for example, by limiting the amount of work done, and the *go slows* of the 1920s, often preferring this form of action to going on strike.¹⁰⁴ As Knowles argued, strikes were not always the only evidence of industrial unrest. High labour turnover, high levels of absenteeism, accidents and sickness, inefficiency in the workplace and intensive political activity were also signs of this. Furthermore, as he noted, a decline or a reduction in the number of strikes did not necessarily mean that discontent among workers was less.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Young, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁵ Knowles, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

Unfortunately, it is very difficult to provide evidence of women in Scotland participating in these forms of unrest during the inter-war period.

Nevertheless, in the 1930s, the number of strikes involving women in a variety of industries began to increase, especially from 1933 onwards. In the 1930s, the introduction of various systems of work management including the Bedaux system was increasingly a major cause of strikes among male and female workers in the UK. The Bedaux system was the most commonly used system of managerial control particularly in the new industries, (food processing, motor components, light engineering), but also in the traditional industries, (iron and steel, textiles, hosiery). Such systems were used in order to promote efficiency, eliminate waste and increase management control over all aspects of production resulting in the intensification of work, changes in, and the deterioration of working conditions. The Bedaux system did not require a costly overhaul of tools and plant and placed the responsibility of raising productivity on the workers shoulders.¹⁰⁶ This system met with a good deal of rank and file hostility, the primary cause of which was fear of unemployment and women workers were often at the centre of this opposition. Women in England went on strike on a number of occasions against the introduction of Bedaux including at Amalgamated Carburettors, at Rover in Coventry, at Lucas motor components in Birmingham, at the Wolsey hosiery factory in Leicester and in London at Venesta Plywood Co. and Elliotts Engineering. There were also other anti-Bedaux strikes involving women elsewhere, including at clothing firms.¹⁰⁷ In Scotland, two strikes which centred on the introduction of the Bedaux system involved women at the North British Rubber Company in Edinburgh in 1933 and 1935. The extent of the

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 231; C Littler, 'Deskilling: Changing Structures of Control', in S Wood (ed.), *The Degradation of Work? Skill, Deskilling and the Labour Process*, Hutchison, London, 1982, p. 139; Glucksman, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-193; Downs, *op. cit.*, p.58.

¹⁰⁷ Littler, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-142; Downs, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-73; Glucksman, *op. cit.*, p. 76, pp. 191-193.

resistance to Bedaux in Scotland between the wars among both male and female workers is not fully known and this strike appears to be the only example of a strike concerning this issue involving women.¹⁰⁸ The lack of similar strikes resulting from this issue may be a reflection of the industrial structure in Scotland that did not experience the same growth in the new industries as in the Midlands and south east of England where many of the anti- Bedaux system strikes were centred.

At the North British Rubber Company in the early 1930s, at least half of the 4,000 strong workforce were women employed primarily in the assembly and finishing departments, producing consumer goods such as hot water bottles, shoes and golf balls. The first strike in 1933 began when the management at the company attempted to introduce a new wage system following a 'scientific study' of all operations. The male workers in the shoe department claimed that the times they were given in which to complete their various tasks, following this study, were insufficient. The men went on strike and were then successful in inducing the 350 female workers in the boot- making department to strike.¹⁰⁹ While this strike was instigated by male workers, substantial numbers of women joined the strike or supported their male colleagues and eventually up to 4000 male and female workers were either on strike or had been thrown idle due to the lack of materials. The *Edinburgh Evening News* reported that only 400 of these workers were trade union members.¹¹⁰ Trade union membership was weak at this firm and, according to the *Labour Standard*, only 25% of workers at the company were union members in 1925 as the 'trade union organisers find it extremely difficult to organise the men and almost impossible to organise the women.'¹¹¹ Organisation among women was hindered

¹⁰⁸ One other example of an anti- Bedaux strike in Scotland involved male engineers in Kirkcaldy in 1935. (STUC, *Annual Report*, 1933).

¹⁰⁹ Milnes, *op. cit.*, p. 244, p. 250; *Glasgow Herald*, June 22, 1933.

¹¹⁰ *Edinburgh Evening News*, June 22, 1933.

¹¹¹ *Labour Standard*, June 13, 1925.

by a high labour turnover, the enforced retirement of women upon marriage at the mill and the distinct socio-geographical backgrounds of the female workforce. There were occasions when the workforce was almost fully organised, especially in the early 1920s. However, by the mid-1930s the management of the company was involved in encouraging the workforce to join a trade union. Not only were the women viewed as being 'unorganisable' but, as Holford noted, the management at the rubber firm exploited conflict between the male and female workers on occasions.¹¹² Nevertheless, low levels of trade union membership among the women and the tensions between men and women at the firm did not dissuade women from striking in support of their male colleagues. Furthermore, female workers, far from accepting the introduction of the Bedaux system, were more forceful than their male colleagues in their attempts to get those who continued to work to follow them out on strike. The *Glasgow Herald* reported that hundreds of striking workers, mainly women, forced their way past the police into the rubber mills where male workers were employed in the manufacture of motor tyres, rubber coats and rubber flooring. When they were approached by the crowd they 'put down their tools and left the building'. A young female worker who had not joined the strike was also attacked by this crowd.¹¹³ According to the *Edinburgh Evening News*, it was the women rather than the men who were the most vocal on the picket line and they hissed and booed the non-strikers. By comparison, the striking men remained peaceful.¹¹⁴ The introduction of systems such as Bedaux often had the effect of displacing female rather than male workers and this could explain the willingness of women to join the strike and their behaviour on the picket line. As Walby points out, the introduction of the Bedaux system in factories usually led to the lengthening of the working day and the introduction of the night shift, which women could not

¹¹² Holford, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.

¹¹³ *Glasgow Herald*, June 23, 1933.

¹¹⁴ *Edinburgh Evening News*, June 22, 1933.

work due to protective legislation. Many women in clothing and textile factories were dispensed with for this reason.¹¹⁵

The workforce was partially successful and after the weeklong strike they voted for the resumption of work on modified conditions. They were to be allowed to form a workers committee to discuss their grievances with the management. The workforce must have accepted the introduction of Bedaux, as less than two years later the entire workforce attempted to prevent the extension of this system to other departments.¹¹⁶ Prior to the second strike the operatives again were 'scientifically time studied' and a 'minute value' given to each operation to result in changes in wage levels. The strike again originated with 100 male workers in the shoe and solvent departments who objected to the extension of the Bedaux system to more departments over concerns that attempts to increase production levels would lead to job losses. Almost 300 female workers in the boot and shoe departments joined the strike by refusing to work. This five week long strike finally involved up to 3,000 male and female workers and was not recognised by the NUMGW, who advised the workers not to demonstrate, (perhaps fearing a repetition of the events of two years before), and refused to pay benefit to the workers during the strike.¹¹⁷ As Littler notes, many trade union officials in the UK in the 1930s began to accept Bedaux and other similar systems and had shifted their position from one of opposition to 'collaboration and compromise'.¹¹⁸ Perhaps this could explain the reticence of the NUGMW officials in Edinburgh to support the strike as they recognised that the scheme would have to be accepted. While there is no indication as to the eventual outcome of this strike in newspaper reports, Clegg found that the system was finally

¹¹⁵ Walby, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

¹¹⁶ *Glasgow Herald*, June 28, 1933.

¹¹⁷ *Edinburgh Evening News*, March 7, 1935; *Glasgow Herald*, March 7, 1935.

¹¹⁸ Littler, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

accepted by the workforce and the union, with alterations, and the outcome was a workforce estranged from their trade union. Trade union membership declined and only recovered slowly in the following years.¹¹⁹ Therefore, while the strikes in Edinburgh originated with male workers, substantial numbers of female workers protested vigorously against the Bedaux system to stop the potential erosion of their working conditions and were just as militant as their counterparts in England who fought against the introduction of the Bedaux system.

In 1938 female rubber workers were again involved in a strike at the India Tyre Company at Inchinnan in Renfrewshire in 1938. Around 80 male and female workers, the female workers were members of the TGWU, went on strike for one day following the dismissal of a worker. Discussions between the management and the union took place and a return to work followed. In late 1939, more than 500 rubber workers employed at Ioco Rubber and Waterproofing Co. in Glasgow, which specialised in producing rubber proofed garments and consumer goods, went on strike to secure higher pay and trade union recognition.¹²⁰ It is unclear if women were involved in this strike, but as women were generally employed in making waterproofed garments, which involved the use of sewing machines, it is probable that many of these strikers were women.

Women outside of industry were also attempting to improve wages and working conditions through industrial action. Female agricultural workers in Kintyre went on strike in 1935, supported by male workers. Almost 400 men and women took part in this strike, some of whom were TGWU members, which originated with women milk workers, who were then

¹¹⁹ H A Clegg, *General Union: A Study of the NUGMW*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1954, p. 240.

¹²⁰ *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette*, May 21, 1938; *Glasgow Herald*, November 15, 1939.

followed out on strike by male farm workers. Their demands included wage increases from 7s. to 10s. per week for women milk workers, full trade union recognition, overtime payments and that Saturday afternoon be recognised as a holiday. Not all women joined the strike at Campbeltown and local unemployed girls were used by some farmers as blackleg workers. When a trade union deputation was sent to the farms the police intervened to prevent trouble. This strike also won the support of dockers at Campbeltown who refused to handle livestock from farmers involved in the strike. This strike appears to have been one of the most successful strikes involving women in the inter-war period. All the workers demands were met, dismissed workers were to be reinstated, paid overtime and were to receive payment for the time lost during the strike. Women employed by the half year were to obtain increases of £5 per year. Milkers were to be paid a minimum of 10s. per week and more time off. Trade union recognition was also granted.¹²¹ When the strikers returned to work they then began attempts to secure increases in the wage levels of creamery workers. The intervention of the dockworkers may have forced farmers to concede to the demands of the workforce. However, it is likely that one of the reasons why this strike was so successful was because agricultural work had become deeply unpopular among women workers who had a choice of working elsewhere. As shown in chapter one, the number of women employed in agricultural occupations had declined substantially between 1921 and 1931, while the number of male workers remained almost unchanged. The number of women working in agriculture had been in decline since the late nineteenth century, but the shortage of women entering agricultural work appears to have been especially acute during the 1920s and 1930s. The *Scottish Farm Servant* noted in 1924 that the supply of women workers across Scotland, particularly in the West of Scotland where they were employed primarily as dairy maids, had been in decline for

¹²¹ *Glasgow Herald*, August 19, 20, 21, 22, 1935.

a number of years and wage increases were ineffective in attracting women into agriculture. As they acknowledged, this was unexpected given the conditions of work. As well as being poorly paid, rough, arduous and isolated work, women usually worked long hours, had little time off and few leisure opportunities. Consequently, it is likely that by the mid 1930s farmers could not be guaranteed a female workforce who would be prepared to work under these conditions. Elsewhere in the UK, farm workers were also securing improvements in working conditions, particularly through the introduction of paid holidays, as farming recovered from the depression.¹²²

In the metal trade, unorganised female workers were involved in a strike in 1936 at Bruntons wire mill in Musselburgh, where more than 1,000 workers manufactured steel wire and ropes. Unfortunately, the origin, outcome and the number of women involved is not apparent from the Amalgamated Engineering Union minutes and given the brevity of this strike the local and national press provide no information. However, it is evident that at least 40 young female workers were involved. These workers were not content to remain unorganised and expressed their desire to an AEU shop steward to become trade union members. As this union excluded women from membership the shop steward agreed to contact the TGWU¹²³ who had an agreement with the AEU for the 'joint working in the organisation of women' but as the TGWU admitted the 'value of this is often overlooked'.¹²⁴ The outcome of this strike is unknown. However, it shows that women workers in the engineering and metals industries would have been dependent on the co-operation of the AEU, who did not recruit women and were often very hostile to women workers, and the TGWU, to support

¹²² *Scottish Farm Servant*, December 1921, p. 406, May 1924, p 32; Pagnamenta and Overy, *op. cit.*, pp. 204.

¹²³ Amalgamated Engineering Union, (AEU), Edinburgh District Committee, *Minutes*, October, 1936.

¹²⁴ *The Record*, Official Organ of the TGWU, March 1937, p. 203.

organisation among women. This dispute may even have been an attempt by the young women to prove to trade unionists at the mill that they did want to join a trade union.¹²⁵

Male and female workers continued to strike in support of one another and in 1936 male and female workers went on strike together on two occasions in solidarity with dismissed workers. More than 100 male and female workers struck at John Haig and Co. Distillers at Markinch in Fife following the dismissal of 12 female workers and for wage increases and trade union recognition. The strikers took the unusual step of conducting a door-to-door canvass in the local area to generate support for their strike.¹²⁶ The second strike involved more than 500 male and female workers at Inveresk Paper Mills in Musselburgh, Mid-Lothian who struck for two days in support of a male worker who had been given less skilled work due to defective work and for wage increases. However, despite the women's support for the strike, they did not benefit in the settlement and only the male workers secured a wage increase.¹²⁷ Women were also capable of striking on their own to improve wage levels in the paper industry. Roughly 100 women overhaulers, employed to inspect paper for flaws, at Caldwells Paper Mill Company at Inverkeithing in Fife, who appear to have been unorganised, went on strike for at least five days when the management refused to restore wage cuts made some time before. As a result of the dispute, male workers who either did not support the strike or were not directly involved were thrown idle. The women appear to have been partially successful and agreed to return to work when the management of the company offered to negotiate with them.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ AEU, Edinburgh District Committee, *Minutes*, October, 1936.

¹²⁶ *Edinburgh Evening News*, September 24, 1936.

¹²⁷ *The Musselburgh News*, July 17, 1936; *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, August 1936, p. 306. (Hereafter referred to as *Gazette*).

¹²⁸ Milnes, *op. cit.*, p. 217; *Fife Free Press*, August 13, 1938; *Edinburgh Evening News*, August 9, 1938.

In the 1930s, laundry workers also attempted to improve working conditions through strike action on at least two occasions. This was a predominantly female trade, around 90% of workers were female, which had undergone an enormous expansion between the wars and where wage levels were very low. As Milnes notes, there had been progress in working conditions in the laundry industry, wage levels had increased by the mid 1930s, conditions were more sanitary than they had been in the past and, according to Milnes, this had attracted a better class of worker and the 'very rough unskilled type' of woman was less common.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, as Beauchamp found, laundry work remained heavy and 'physically repulsive' most of it performed standing in a hot and humid atmosphere. While not the cause of the disputes presented below, many employers had also introduced speed-up methods based on the Bedaux system, putting more pressure on the workforce. Women laundry workers were also badly organised. In the UK, while general unions recruited laundry workers, the female membership of the National Laundry Workers Union¹³⁰ numbered only 228 in the late 1930s.¹³¹ In Scotland, in the late 1920s, the STUC expressed concern at the decline in organisation among female laundry workers and their lack of interest in trade unionism. According to the STUC, this was because the women believed that they would have little influence in increasing wage levels as the Trade Boards operated to set wage levels in the industry.¹³² However, women laundry workers, albeit organised women, struck twice in the 1930s. The first strike occurred in March 1935 at the Richmond Park Laundry Company at Cambuslang, the largest single laundry in Britain at this time employing 1,000 workers.¹³³ This strike appears to have been one of the largest and certainly one of the most turbulent

¹²⁹ Milnes, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-256.

¹³⁰ It would appear that this union had an Edinburgh base. J H Moore, a former Edinburgh town councillor was the national organiser. (Marwick, (1967), *op. cit.*, pp. 94-95).

¹³¹ Beauchamp, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.

¹³² STUC, *Annual Report*, 1928, p. 78.

¹³³ Oakley, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

strikes involving women in the inter-war period. The strike began when the laundry management refused to recognise the trade union, NUDAW (National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers). As the NUDAW journal *New Dawn* reported, following the strike, 'The intimation of non-recognition coupled with one or two other irritating incidents roused our members to the pitch which demanded immediate action.'¹³⁴ The workforce had also recommended a general increase in wages and two weeks holiday with pay. When the management refused these demands the workers went on strike. At least 500 workers were involved in this one week long strike, the vast majority of whom were young women who struck with boys and men employed at the laundry. In the course of this strike the young women attended outdoor and indoor meetings, picketed the laundry with large numbers of their supporters and marched through Rutherglen and Cambuslang. As the *New Dawn* reported:

It was a positive delight to see the strikers march from the laundry after the mass picket duty in real disciplined fashion to the daily meeting place.....Fully 500 bonnie lassies took part in the demonstrations singing as they marched, 'Roll along revolution roll along, Roll along revolution roll along If you don't come out on strike, well throw you o'er the dyke, Roll along revolution roll along.'¹³⁵

In order to prevent other laundries carrying out the work of Richmond Park Laundry, deputations of girl pickets were dispatched to laundries across the West of Scotland with national organisers from NUDAW to distribute leaflets to fellow laundry workers. According to the *New Dawn* they won the support of these workers who 'although unorganised, they

¹³⁴ *New Dawn*, March 23, 1935, pp. 164-166.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

immediately responded and....let their respective employers know that any attempt to get this work done would lead to trouble and consequently working class solidarity triumphed.’¹³⁶ It seems that the laundry management made a number of attempts to intimidate the girls into returning to work, going as far as to write to the parents of the striking girls, presumably to urge them to exert pressure on their daughters to return to work and the management also threatened to dismiss all of the strikers. Despite management intimidation the strike continued and, as the *New Dawn* reported, the threats of dismissal only resulted in greater support from the local community for the strikers.¹³⁷ This strike was especially tumultuous and the police intervened as strikers and their supporters gathered on the second day of the strike and a tramcar was smashed by the crowd. On the following night the crowd stopped tramcars and buses, attacked the police, threw stones and ‘howled’ at blacklegs, which resulted in the police charging the crowd. Later 600 strikers and supporters gathered at Cambuslang where house windows were smashed.¹³⁸ A number of altercations took place between the management, the strikers and their supporters and the police. As the *New Dawn* reported:

In addition to fighting the employers our members also had to fight the police who showed in no unmistakable fashion ‘upon which side their bread is buttered’ our pickets were batoned by the police on two successive days and for cowardly brutality we haven’t seen the like of it. Heads were smashed by the ‘keepers of the law and order’ and of course it goes without saying that the casualties were not all on one side.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ *New Dawn*, April 6, 1935, pp. 217-218.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Glasgow Herald*, March 5, 6, 7, 11, 1935.

¹³⁹ *New Dawn*, March 23, 1935, pp. 164-166.

An important feature of this strike was the support the strikers received from large sections of the local community and the unemployed who joined with the strikers in their demonstrations. According to the *New Dawn*, 'The townspeople were not long in appreciating what was happening and at times we had a mass picket of 4,000 people who gathered at the gates to bid the blacklegs good evening.' The intervention of the police, the baton charges and protection given to blacklegs by the police 'brought the whole working class and organised unemployed into the fight in support of the strikers'. The *New Dawn* praised the local organised unemployed who despite poverty 'not only stand blackleg proof but are always ready to throw their weight behind their fellow workers in dispute.' The unemployed demonstrators also 'assisted in every possible way and incidentally gave the lie direct to the oft repeated fear that the unemployed are a menace to the workers engaged in a trade dispute.'¹⁴⁰ While not apparent from reports of the strike, the 'organised unemployed' is likely to have been a reference to the National Unemployed Workers Committee Movement (NUWCM). The NUWCM was launched in 1920 by the Communist Party of Great Britain and throughout the inter-war period this organisation campaigned on behalf of the unemployed and protected the position of those in work by preventing mass strike breaking.¹⁴¹ As Callaghan notes, the official trade union movement and the Labour Party often displayed great animosity towards the NUWCM which they denounced as a front for Communists.¹⁴² However, as will be shown in the following chapter, the NUWCM also aided striking women textile workers in the early 1930s.

¹⁴⁰ *New Dawn*, April 6, 1935, pp. 217-218.

¹⁴¹ Croucher, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁴² Callaghan, *op. cit.*, p. 101, p. 130.

This strike was successful and following an agreement between the laundry management and NUDAW, the workforce was granted trade union recognition and some improvement in their wages and working conditions. Given the coverage this strike received in the *New Dawn* the success of the strike was of immense importance for the trade union who were struggling to recruit female workers and laundry workers in particular. The union was keen to stress that the strikers, despite their relative inexperience were well organised and, more importantly, well behaved whilst on strike and claimed that ‘so well were our members disciplined that any of our officials could get them to comply with any request.’¹⁴³ NUDAW may have been especially anxious to emphasise the importance of discipline among members and the unity between the women strikers and the trade union for a number of reasons. Discipline among workers while on strike was traditionally important for trade unions.¹⁴⁴ However, the mid 1930s also witnessed a dramatic increase in unofficial strikes as rank and file movements emerged in opposition to trade union leaders, for example, the London Busmen who denounced the recommendations of TGWU and embarked on a series of unofficial strikes across Britain in the 1930s. Unions, such as the Tailor and Garment Workers Union, as already shown, also lost members to breakaway unofficial trade unions.¹⁴⁵ The union also commented that while the strikers were ‘mainly girls’ they were ‘imbued with correct trade union spirit’ and ‘Although only a matter of months in the union membership these members girls, boys and men conducted themselves like old campaigners.’ Following the strike, NUDAW heaped even more praise on the largely female workforce commenting, ‘What a display of solidarity...Hail Richmond Park Laundry lassies’ and for ‘splendid solidarity and keen

¹⁴³ *New Dawn*, March 23, 1935, pp. 164-166.

¹⁴⁴ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

¹⁴⁵ Wrigley, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-114.

excitement this strike will live forever in our memory.' At the end of the strike the union applauded the strikers: A word must be said about the girls themselves. Newly members of a trade union,

inexperienced and never before having participated in struggle, very quickly they became active participants in the fight and played a decisive part in obtaining the victory. These girls have learned the importance of being members of an organised fighting trade union....I am convinced they have carried this back into Richmond Park Laundry and will....make the branch a proud and powerful part of NUDAW.¹⁴⁶

This strike seems to have been followed by intense organisation efforts by NUDAW in the months succeeding the strike. The *New Dawn* described how the female workers they approached in a number of laundries in Scotland were 'showing the greater interest and definitely demonstrating that they desire to be organised'. The union later went on to organise more women at various laundries in the west of Scotland.¹⁴⁷ This strike was also the subject of a debate in parliament. The violence and the behaviour of the police during this strike was subsequently criticised by the Labour MP for Westhoughton, Greater Manchester, and the Independent Labour Party M.P. for the Gorbals who called for a report from the Secretary of State for Scotland on the violent conduct of the police during the strike and their attempts to prevent the workers from picketing within a one mile radius of the laundry.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ *New Dawn*, April 6, 1935, pp. 217-218.

¹⁴⁷ *New Dawn*, April 30, p. 248, May 4, 1935.

¹⁴⁸ *Glasgow Herald*, March 5, 6, 7, 11, May 8, 1935; *Gazette*, April 1935, p. 158.

In the second dispute in the laundry trade in the 1930s, the women workers were not supported by their trade union. This second and unofficial, laundry strike took place at the St. Cuthbert's Co-operative Association Laundry in Edinburgh in 1938. Of the 320 strikers, 250 were female, and their complaints centred on management dismissals of eight adult laundry workers who were then replaced by juvenile workers, whose wages would have been lower.¹⁴⁹ This was an attempt by the workforce to prevent wage levels being depressed further in an industry where wage levels were already among the lowest. As Beauchamp noted, one of the features of laundry work in the inter-war period in the UK was the gradual replacement of adult workers by juvenile females who were employed to displace older and better-paid women workers.¹⁵⁰ This strike was not supported by the NUGMW. According to the *Edinburgh Evening News*, the union had urged the women to 'hold off' from striking, the women were not prepared to do this and went on strike for one week without the support of their union. They were urged by their union to return to work and even though a trade union official claimed that he was 'going to work for the workers' the dispute remained unofficial. Not all workers supported the strike and as the trade union did not consider this a legitimate dispute, the laundry management were able to undermine the women's strike by claiming that a 'staunch trade unionist' would not take part in the strike due to the unofficial nature of the dispute.¹⁵¹ The women strikers were described by the *Edinburgh Evening News* as being 'in good spirits' and they picketed at the gates of the laundry and entertained themselves by skipping with ropes to pass the time. This pattern of behaviour features in a number of strikes presented in this chapter and as Gordon points out, this was traditionally not uncommon among women strikers in Scotland. As she notes, women often behaved differently from men

¹⁴⁹ *Edinburgh Evening News*, August 10, 1938; *Glasgow Herald*, August 11, 1938.

¹⁵⁰ Beauchamp, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

¹⁵¹ *Edinburgh Evening News*, August 10, 1938.

while on strike, they were usually more lively than striking male workers and were more likely to turn the event into an opportunity to have fun, which included singing and shouting and booing blacklegs and this was often against the wishes of trade unions who urged women workers to behave in a respectable fashion during strikes.¹⁵² The women tried unsuccessfully to enlarge the strike by appealing to other Co-operative Association employees to join the strike, and following discussions between the trade union and the management the women returned to work. However, even without the assistance of their trade union, the women were partially successful in securing their demands. While the dismissed workers were not to be reinstated, the laundry management intended to re-employ the most senior workers who had been dismissed when vacancies became available. Negotiations were also to take place to ensure a permanent settlement of the strike.¹⁵³

Women employed in Co-operative work struck on other occasions in the 1930s. At the Hawick co-operative society, men and women struck together in 1932 for three days following wage reductions and for trade union recognition, mass meetings were held and pickets formed. At the end of the strike, NUDAW expressed 'gratitude to our lady members for their work on the social side and for singing their beautiful songs. All did splendidly.' Five years later men and women employed at the Newmains Co-operative Association embarked on a brief 'lightening strike'. They marched through the streets of the town, displaying banners and distributing 2,000 leaflets to townspeople.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 133, p. 241.

¹⁵³ *Edinburgh Evening News*, August 10, 1938; *Glasgow Herald*, August, 17, 1938.

¹⁵⁴ *New Dawn*, March 12, 1932, pp. 127-128; March 6, 1937, p. 145.

In Conclusion, whilst the quantitative evidence on women's strikes presented in this chapter cannot be comprehensive and the number of strikes involving women workers in both the non-textile and textile industries was low, it is clear that the pattern of women's strike activity between the wars in Scotland did conform to the UK pattern. The level of strike activity among Scottish women declined in the early 1920s, as in the rest of the UK, and remained low into the early 1930s. The low levels of Scottish women's strike activity during the late 1920s and early 1930s reflected a combination of a number of factors. In particular, the impact of economic depression and high unemployment, the stronger position of employers, the loss of trade union membership, the defeat of the General Strike, the effect of government legislation and the desire of the trade union movement to limit strike activity. However, all of these factors would have undermined the propensity of men and women to strike in the UK in the inter-war period. When the level of strike activity eventually increased among men and women during the mid to late 1930s in the UK, this was reflected in pattern of strike activity among Scottish women.

The strikes presented in this chapter show that women employed in many non-textile industries embarked on industrial action to improve their wages and working conditions irrespective of their lack of trade union organisation. Women were involved in strike activity in the laundry trade, dressmaking, catering and shop work characterised by low levels of trade union organisation, low pay and high labour turnover. In all these sectors large numbers of women workers predominated usually in work deemed to be unskilled and who, therefore, could be replaced by other women workers. All of these factors could act as depressants on strike activity. Nevertheless, as this chapter has shown, substantial numbers of women employed in these industries, could overcome these impediments to strike activity. The strike evidence shows that women workers struck either alone or with male colleagues for a variety

of reasons in sectors where they were both heavily concentrated or were in a minority. Many examples have been presented in this chapter of women striking with male workers and this must show that women reacted to changes in working conditions in the same way as male workers in the same circumstances. Women workers, like men, reacted to the circumstances in the workplace and struck over wages, unfair dismissals, changes in their working conditions and practices, trade union recognition or any combination of these factors. It has also been shown that even in the instances where the strike did not originate with women workers they could, nevertheless, be to the forefront in strike activity.

Crucially, it is likely that the majority of women involved in the strikes presented in this chapter were not trade union members and therefore, the absence of trade union activity did not prevent women from taking action. Furthermore, even where trade union involvement is known not all strikers would have belonged to the trade union. It has also been shown that women were not always given full trade union support during their strikes. However, this confirms the argument that women workers were not dependent on trade union support to defend wage levels and to improve working conditions and were capable of acting successfully on their own. Women workers also effectively used a variety of methods of action to advance their cause. It has been shown that women were often well organised while on strike even where trade union organisation was weak or non-existent and they could successfully picket, distribute leaflets and meet during strikes. This chapter has dealt with strikes among women employed in a variety of non-textile industries and the following chapter will examine the level of strike activity in the textile industries. The textile industries experienced the greatest number of strikes among women in the inter-war period and there was a long history of women taking collective action to improve wages and conditions in this sector prior to the First World War.

Therefore, the following chapter will consider and evaluate the strike activities of female textile workers in the inter-war period.

CHAPTER SIX: WOMEN'S STRIKES IN THE TEXTILES SECTOR

The previous chapter has provided many examples of women employed across a wide range of non-textile occupations embarking on strike action. The level of strike activity in many of these occupations was relatively low, nevertheless women workers were able to strike either alone or with male workers to secure changes in working conditions. Crucially the involvement of women workers in strike activity was frequently not dependent on there being trade union members. The purpose of this chapter will be to examine the incidence of strike activity in the textile sectors, where the majority of strikes involving women workers took place in Scotland in the inter-war period. Trade union organisation among female textile workers would have been more extensive than among women employed elsewhere. However, there was a considerable decline in the number of women employed in textiles production and as chapter two has indicated, trade union organisation among female textile workers is also likely to have decreased substantially. Therefore, as well as examining the demands and outcomes of women's strikes in the textiles sector, it will be necessary to consider the effect of the impact of the decline in textile production, trade union membership and high unemployment on the propensity of women to strike in this sector.

This chapter will firstly consider the total level of strike activity among women employed in all branches of the textile trade in Scotland and will also attempt to determine if the pattern of strike activity among women employed in the textile trades in Scotland corresponded with the pattern of male and female workers in the industry in the UK. This chapter will then move on to examine the pattern of strike activity in the Dundee jute trade. It is important to focus on the jute trade in Dundee as this industry continued to be a substantial employer of women in the inter-war period and because women employed in the jute factories and mills in the city had an established record of striking during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

However, throughout the inter-war period as jute production waned, the number of women employed by the industry declined and the high level of trade union organisation among women textile workers in the city was gradually eroded. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the effect of these changes on the propensity of women to strike. Large numbers of women continued to be employed across a broad range of non-jute textile trades in Scotland in the inter-war period, particularly in the south and the eastern counties. Therefore, the second part of this chapter will consider strike activity among women employed in lace, cotton, linen, wool and hosiery production, the dyeing and bleaching industries and net-making. In most of these trades women had also embarked on strike action on numerous occasions prior to the First World War. However, almost all of these trades declined in the inter-war period and the effect of this decline on the extent of strike activity will be considered.

Most branches of the textile industry in Scotland contracted in the inter-war period, as export markets were lost, and yet it was the textile industries which experienced the greatest number of strikes involving women in the inter-war period, a fact which must reflect the continuing importance of this sector as a source of employment for women. Tables 1 and 2 below show that there were approximately 43 strikes involving women working in the textile trades in the inter-war period, 27 of these strikes took place in the Dundee jute industry and the remaining 16 were scattered across the other textile industries. These 43 strikes represented around two thirds of all strikes in the inter-war period among women in Scotland. However, as there are no official statistics for women's strikes in the textiles sector in Scotland, Tables 1 and 2 are based entirely on strike reports drawn from local and national newspapers, trade union records, employer association records and the *Ministry of Labour Gazette*. They are as comprehensive a survey of strikes as can be presented. The pattern of strikes among women employed in the textiles trades in Scotland, shown on Table 1, broadly reflected the national

pattern of strikes in textiles in the UK. For example, in the UK the number of strikes increased from 65 in 1919 to 126 strikes in 1920 before falling to a mere 28 strikes in 1921. Therefore, women workers in Scotland were part of this rise in strike activity in 1920 experienced in the UK.¹ Similarly, the absence of strike activity among women employed in textile trades in the mid to late 1920s in Scotland reflected the general decline in the overall level of strike activity in the textiles industry in the UK in the same period. For example, during 1926-1928, the number of strikes involving men and women in the UK textile trades averaged around 30.² The number of textile strikes in Scotland involving women during the period 1929-1932 is small. However, in the same period in the UK, while the number of strikes among male and female textile workers is small, there was a considerable increase in the number of working days lost through textile strikes in this period. Table 1 also shows that there was a slight upturn in strike activity among women textile workers in Scotland in the mid 1930s and that there were more strikes involving female textile workers in the 1930s than in the 1920s. This Scottish trend corresponded with the national trend in strikes among male and female textile workers as in the UK, there were more officially recorded strikes involving male and female textile workers in the 1930's than there had been in the 1920's.³

¹ Knowles, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

Table 1: Number and Outcome of Textile Strikes in Scotland Involving Women Workers, 1919-1939

Year	Number	Workers' Victory	Employers' Victory	Compromise	Outcome Unknown
1919	5		2		3
1920	5	1	1	1	2
1921					
1922	1		1		
1923	3	1	2		
1924	1				1
1925					
1926					
1927					
1928					
1929	1			1	
1930	2				2
1931	2		1	1	
1932					
1933	4	1		1	2
1934	5		3	1	1
1935	3		1	1	1
1936	6		1	1	4
1937	2	1			1
1938	3	1		1	1
1939					
Jute	27	-	8	2	17
Other Textiles	16	5	4	6	1
Total	43	5	12	8	18

It is shown on Table 2 below that the majority of strikes involving women textile workers in Scotland centred on attempts by the workforce to increase wages or to protect existing wage levels. However most of these strikes were attempts to prevent, often substantial wage reductions rather than increase wage rates and this must reflect the fact that the textiles sector declined in the inter-war period and that the workforce was presented with fewer opportunities to increase wage levels. Almost as many strikes were attempts to improve working conditions or followed from changes in working conditions. Other significant causes of textile strikes included the dismissal of a fellow worker, the rejection of bad material by sections of the workforce or were endeavours by the workforce to reduce working hours. Although it would appear that trade union recognition was not the central demand in any of the textile strikes

presented in this chapter, this issue did surface as a demand in at least three textile strikes. The outcome of many of these strikes, particularly in the jute industry in Dundee, is frequently unknown, but where outcomes are reported in the sources used, most strikes were either unsuccessful or were only partially successful. In the jute industry in Dundee, the majority of strikes were the result of wage disputes, others were concerned with changes in working conditions, such as increases in the number of spinning frames or looms to be operated. Most of these strikes were confined to female spinners, weavers and winders and were relatively short lived and localised and confined to one firm or in some cases two or three firms. Three large-scale strikes, involving many mills and factories in Dundee, also emerged.

Table 2 Table 2: Causes of Strikes Involving Women in the Textile Industry in Scotland, 1919-1939

Issues	Number	Workers' Victory	Employers' Victory	Compromise	Outcome Unknown
For Increased Wages	5	1		1	3
Against Wage Reductions	13	2	4	5	2
Bad Material	7		1	1	5
Changes in Working Conditions	9		5	1	3
To Reduce Working Hours	1		1		
Dismissal of Worker (s)	4	2	1		1
Unknown	4				4
Jute Strikes Total	27	-	8	2	17
Other Textile Strikes Total	16	5	4	6	1
Total	43	5	12	8	18

As Gordon shows, the presence of large numbers of female mill and factory workers in the jute industry in Dundee and the low levels of trade union organisation among these women during much of the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century did not obstruct strike activity among these women. In fact, Gordon shows that a large number of strikes took place in this period, the majority of which involved women workers only and were very often spontaneous affairs. These strikes were often successfully prosecuted without the aid of a trade union and frequently took place against the wishes of the trade union movement and without the support of the skilled male operatives in the city.⁴ However, in contrast with the high levels of strike activity among women in the jute industry in Dundee during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the number of strikes in the inter-war period was very low. In Dundee between 1889-1914, 103 strikes in the jute industry were recorded in the official statistics for this period and as Gordon notes, this figure is likely to have been an underestimation.⁵ By comparison, in the period 1919-1939 just 11 strikes are recorded in the *Ministry of Labour Gazette* as 'principal disputes'. When those reported in local newspapers, trade union and employer association records are included, the number climbs to 27. The majority of these inter-war strikes were initiated by spinners and considerably fewer originated with women weavers and this corresponds with the pattern of strike activity among women in the jute trade prior to the First World War.⁶ Strikes also originated with winders, reelers and preparers. When those strikes that involved male workers striking alone are included, the total is carried to 31. There are instances, as will be shown below, of male workers, such as spinners, embarking on strike action with women and a rare example of skilled male workers in the trade striking with female workers. However, it would appear that in the inter-war

⁴ Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-211.

⁵ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

⁶ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

period there may have been as few as four strikes involving men only. For example, in 1920 semi-skilled and skilled workmen and mechanics went on strike at an unnamed jute works. During 1934-1935 male spinners employed on the night shift and therefore not working alongside women, struck at Angus jute works over working conditions, they also struck at Walton works over bad material and also at the works of W.G. Grant.⁷ While the total figure of 33 strikes involving men and women is also likely to have been an underestimation, nevertheless, this is considerably lower than the figure for 1889-1914. As Gordon notes, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century there had been a great demand for labour in the Dundee jute industry. There were episodes of unemployment, but this was not sustained and the workforce, who could not easily be replaced during periods of high labour demand, was in a strong position to resort to the strike weapon.⁸ However, by the inter-war period the jute industry in Dundee was clearly in decline and the workforce were in a weaker bargaining position.

In the inter-war period the jute industry in Dundee experienced extremely high levels of unemployment and a great deal of female labour was shed. The number of men and women employed in the industry fell from 41,220 in 1924 to 27,980 in 1938, representing an overall decline of 32% and a decline of 39% for female workers. Between 1924 and 1939 the number of jute spinners and weavers declined from 35,000 to 26,000 and as chapter one has shown, between 1924 and 1939 the number of female spinners and weavers fell from 24,000 to 16,000. In comparison, the number of male spinners and weavers fell from 11,000 to 10,000 in the same period.⁹ These figures show that the employment of male spinners and weavers

⁷ *DJFW Guide*, July 1934, September 1935, October 1936; Association of Jute Spinners and Manufacturers (AJSM), *Annual Report*, February 1921.

⁸ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

⁹ Home, *op. cit.*, p. 13; Maclean, (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 23.

remained relatively constant while the number of female workers underwent the most significant decline. Unemployment levels among textile workers in the city were also exceptionally high. In 1931, more than half the workforce was unemployed, this was twice the Scottish average and this figure may have risen further in the early 1930s. Throughout the rest of the decade the figure remained at between 20% to 30%. Female unemployment levels were particularly high and in 1930, 74% of the 13,500 jute workers registered as insured unemployed were female.¹⁰

The drop in the numbers of women employed in the industry reflected the trade depressions, increased foreign competition, particularly from India, and a slump in exports, combined with the modernisation of the industry and the introduction of new machinery.¹¹ By the 1930s exports had slumped from 75% in the late nineteenth century to 20%. A slump in demand for jute in 1921 followed a brief post-war boom during 1919-1920 and according to the Association of Jute Spinners and Manufacturers (AJSM) in Dundee, this slump left the industry 'practically at a standstill'. Most mills and factories opened for three days a week and some may have closed for short periods. In the late 1920s, another slump closed a large part of the industry. To combat this decline, the inter-war period witnessed a number of attempts to improve efficiency and it was expected that a slimmed down and modernised industry with improved productivity, concentrated on the quality end of the market, would generate higher returns.¹² Several family firms amalgamated in the early 1920s in response to foreign competition. For example, the Low and Bonar partnership was formed and Jute Industries Ltd.

¹⁰ CA Whatley, DB Swinfen and AM Smith, *The Life and Times of Dundee*, John Donald, Edinburgh, 1993, pp. 160-161; Lenman, *op. cit.*, p. 219; Maclean, (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 27.

¹¹ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 529; Home, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹² AJSM, *Annual Report*, February 1921, p. 5; Home, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

was formed from seven large family firms. These amalgamations were also partly responsible for the contraction in the number of women employed.¹³

Another feature that contributed to the shedding of female labour in the industry in the inter-war period was the displacement of women workers by men. Weaving factories in the inter-war period adopted new technology, changed the number of looms in use and increased the size of shutters and beams and the number of women weavers declined. Perhaps an explanation for the declining use of female weavers in the 1930s, as one former woman weaver suggested, was that "the machinery became more difficult for the women tae handle, far too heavy in some cases and the machine charges got greater.....and the women just weren't able to cope."¹⁴ High-speed spinning machines were also introduced into the industry to improve efficiency and this was accompanied by a shift system to maximise returns from the new machinery.¹⁵ As protective legislation meant that women could not be employed as night shift workers and employers claimed that the new machinery required the greater use of male workers who could work on both night and day shifts, a change in the proportion of men and women employed in the industry was initiated. A 1930 Home Office report found that in one firm where new spinning frames had been introduced, female spinners employed as day-shift workers were replaced by men. The employer claimed that to continually employ male workers on the night shift and employ women during the day would be unfair to the men concerned. Consequently, the women, with the exception of six female winders, were replaced by male workers.¹⁶ However, as Smith argues, the substitution of women for men could not only be attributed to the convenience of employing men on both the day and night shift or

¹³ J Doherty, 'Dundee: A Post Industrial City', in CA Whatley (ed.), *The Remaking of Juteopolis, Dundee 1891-1991*, Abertay Historical Society, Publication No. 32, Dundee, 1992, p. 27.

¹⁴ Interview of former weaver by *Dundee Oral History Project*, Dundee Central Library, Ref. 040/A/1 p. 7.

¹⁵ Maclean, (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 21.

¹⁶ Cmd. 3508, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

because men were more skilled. Instead, Smith suggests that the new spinning machines provided managers of jute works with the opportunity to dispense with women because female labour was more likely to move from one workplace to another in an attempt to improve wage rates and working conditions. This was a traditional feature of the jute industry that had experienced high labour turnover during times of high demand for labour, as women took advantage of varying wage rates in the industry.¹⁷ Secondly, women were involved in strikes more frequently than their male colleagues and this is certainly true for the decades prior to the First World War and the inter-war period. Thirdly, managers of jute works often complained that women were more likely to be late or absent from work, (no doubt reflecting domestic responsibilities), in comparison with male employees. Various social reform groups in the city such as the Dundee Social Union and the British Medical Association also exerted pressure on jute employers to limit the number of women employed.¹⁸

The decline of the jute industry and the number of women employed is reflected in the decline in the female membership of the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers Union. In 1920, 15,000 of the union's 20,000 members were women and by 1923 the entire membership of the union was approximately 11,400. Between 1931 and 1935, female membership fell from 10,000 to 9,000. The greatest loss of membership occurred during the mid to late 1930s. In 1938 only 6,300 female members remained and by 1939 the entire membership was 3,500.¹⁹ While women in the Dundee jute trade went on strike on fewer occasions between the wars as compared with the pre- First World War period, the lower strike record in the inter-war years may not have been a consequence of the decline in trade union membership. As Gordon has

¹⁷ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

¹⁸ Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-278.

¹⁹ Drake, (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 130; TUC, Women's Advisory Committee, Trade Union Membership Survey, c. January, 1939; Maclean, (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 32; Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

shown, many women workers in the jute industry in Dundee prior to the First World War had not been dependent on trade unions in the city to support and finance their strikes. Women had frequently relied on informal networks for financial support and could achieve levels of organisation and co-ordination despite remaining outside of the Dundee trade union movement.²⁰

Before considering the demands, duration and outcomes of strikes among women employed in the jute trade Dundee in the inter-war period, it is important to note that the jute industry in the city continued to be the major source of employment for single and married women. In Dundee in 1921, 71% of all textile workers were female and the majority of these women were jute workers. More than 90% of all weavers, spinners, piecers, winders and reelers were female and therefore, all of the strikes presented in this section would have involved mainly women workers. The first of the jute strikes in the inter-war period, involved workers at Sandeman mills, winders at Grove Mills and weavers at Dudhope works in 1919 who struck to secure wage increases. Strikes were not always the result of wage disputes and in October 1920 approximately 600 weavers and tenters embarked on a three week long strike at the Bowbridge works of J & AD Grimmond following difficulties between a new foreman, employed to hire, supervise and dismiss workers, and the rest of the workforce. The origin of this strike was the dismissal of a male tenter who had been employed by the company for 37 years.²¹ The largely female workforce struck work in sympathy with the tenter and packed the

²⁰ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

²¹ *DJFW Guide*, April, June 1919, October 1920.

entrance to the works to 'express their determination to remain on strike until the dismissed man had been reinstated'.²²

This strike is unusual as there were few instances of women striking in support of skilled male workers, or of skilled male workers, such as tenters and mechanics, supporting female workers whilst on strike. Skilled male workers, such as tenters, and those in supervisory positions were the labour elite in the jute industry in Dundee in comparison to the large numbers of unskilled women in the trade and as Gordon shows, prior to the First World War these workers did not have a good record in supporting women workers who embarked on collective action. They did not usually get involved in women's strikes and they did not strike with the same frequency as the women workers. There is evidence that even when skilled male workers, such as tenters, were affected by changes in working conditions and pay reductions they did not strike with the female workforce. The relationship between women weavers and male tenters was often problematic. This stemmed from the fact that tenters were employed to maintain weavers' looms, and these workers were really sub-foreman who could control the amount of work performed by weavers and could improve their own earnings by intensifying the pace of work performed by women weavers.²³ Therefore, that almost 600 female weavers were prepared to strike in support of this tenter may be an indication that the women had a particularly good working relationship with this particular tenter. Unfortunately the eventual outcome of this strike is unknown.

²² *Dundee Advertiser*, September 27, 1920

²³ Gordon, *op. cit.* pp. 147-148, p. 171, pp. 190-192.

The most extensive strike in the immediate post-war period centred on the issue of working hours. Between September 1918 and March 1920, spinners²⁴ and preparers employed throughout Dundee refused to work more than five days per week. In 1918, working hours were reduced from 55 to 40 hours per week and the workers were given Saturday and Monday off in order to curtail jute production. In September 1918, employers planned a return to the 55-hour week and jute workers who had been 'given a taste of weekend leisure' did not want to resume Saturday working. The attempt by the workforce to prevent this resumption of work failed, but the jute workers later went on to accept a working week of 48 hours across five and a half days. During this lengthy strike, as on other occasions prior to the First World War, skilled male workers, especially the tenters, refused to support the mainly female spinners, weavers and preparers, and significant numbers of tenters presented themselves for work on Saturdays.²⁵ Therefore, the issue appears to have divided the interests of the men and women in the workforce in Dundee and the desire by the largely female workforce to reduce working hours was not shared by their male colleagues. However, there had been disagreements over working hours among male and female workers during the late nineteenth century particularly over Saturday working and male workers often preferred shorter working days as opposed to a shorter working week.²⁶

The male tenters who refused to support the women during this strike incurred the wrath of John Sime, secretary of the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers' Union that tended to recruit the

²⁴ Jute production was divided between spinning mills and weaving factories. The first process in its production was 'batching', where jute bales were unloaded and softened. Preparers then processed the jute before it was spun and converted by 'carding', 'doubling' and 'drawing' into soft rope-like material and wound around bobbins. In the spinning depts. Female workers were also employed as 'piecers' (fixing up ends dropped by spinners) and 'shifters' (removing empty bobbins from frames). Jute was then transferred to reelers, winders and warpers and then onto the weaving sheds. For more extensive descriptions of these processes, see Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-147 or L Leneman, 'Lives and Limbs: Company Records as a source for the History of Industrial Injuries', *Social History of Medicine*, 1993, Vol. 6, 3, December 1993.

²⁵ Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 400-415, p. 418.

²⁶ Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-176, p. 192.

unskilled women workers rather than the skilled male workers, such as the tenters, who usually belonged to separate craft unions. Sime was especially critical of those male workers who had failed to support attempts to reduce working hours and writing in *Dundee Jute and Flax Workers Guide*, he described the tradesmen as 'looking down from their high pedestal' and treating the jute workers in Dundee in the same manner as they had done when the women jute workers were unorganised. He claimed that the jute workers had 'fought their own battle during the last ten years without the slightest help from the tradesmen.' On the question of Saturday working the jute workers had 'fought the Saturday question as no tradesmen's union in Dundee have ever fought any question'²⁷ and when it came to fighting for a principle he asserted that there were 'female workers in the jute industry whose shoe laces certain of the Dundee tenters are not fit to untie.'²⁸

A further dispute developed within this dispute over working hours. In August 1919, 10,000 men and women went on an unofficial six day long strike, demanding that their wages be paid on Friday instead of Saturday. As Saturday work had been suspended, collecting wages on a Saturday was obviously an inconvenience.²⁹ The unsuccessful strike occurred principally at six works in the city including Camperdown and South Dudhope works and during this strike, 'bands of jute workers paraded the centre of the city' and in Lochee a 'certain liveliness prevailed, the strikers roaming around and singing popular songs.'³⁰ This is a rare example of women strikers in Dundee behaving in this manner during the inter-war period. As Gordon notes, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries jute strikes involving women in the city 'encapsulated a spirit of resistance and defiance' and were frequently characterised by

²⁷ *DJFW Guide*, January 1920, cited in Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 415.

²⁸ *DJFW Guide*, February 1920, cited in Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 418.

²⁹ *Gazette*, September 1919, p. 389.

³⁰ *Dundee Advertiser*, August 30, 1919.

behaviour which challenged the authority of the employing class in the city and a favoured tactic of women strikers was to heckle and ridicule employers. Women's strikes often took on the character of a public holiday or a carnival and they provided women with the opportunity to escape from the grind and the drudgery of the work place. Their strikes were usually accompanied with dancing and singing and the women roamed and paraded through the streets. Men's strikes in the industry, in comparison, tended to be sober and serious.³¹ In contrast to the behaviour of women strikers before the First World War, strikes in the inter-war period appear to have been subdued and restrained affairs and they had lost the liveliness of those before the war and there are very few references in newspapers to either women or men demonstrating, marching through the town or picketing during disputes.

Following a dearth of strike activity in 1921³² and 1922 the most significant jute strike of the inter-war period arose in 1923. This followed attempts to rationalise spinning operations at the Jute Industries Limited owned Camperdown works at Lochee. Camperdown operated neither double nor single spinning, but a system whereby three spinners attended four frames and this was an unusual practice in Dundee. The management proposed that there should be a conversion to double spinning whereby a spinner attended two frames instead of one. It was claimed that the benefit of this for the spinners would be higher wage levels and those spinners who were displaced would be re-employed elsewhere. The spinners rejected this proposal and embarked on strike action. In response, the management closed the Camperdown works and the strike expanded to include other Jute Industries Limited owned works. Work was resumed in mid-March, apart from at Lochee. A lock out of all jute workers in Dundee followed in late

³¹ Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-210.

³² Despite the lack of strike activity during 1921, unemployed men and women in Dundee, many of whom are likely to have been jute workers, took part in mass meetings, processions and other disturbances over delays by the Dundee Parish Council to pay relief to the unemployed. (*Newspaper Cuttings Book*, No. 5, September 7, 9 1921, Dundee Central Library).

March ending in late April. The widespread nature of this strike and the involvement of all jute employers in Dundee can perhaps be explained by the fact that this strike was an important 'manning' issue that would have affected all jute employers, all of whom were anxious to cut costs and remain in business.³³ This strike, the lockouts and the resulting financial hardship endured by the workforce were deeply unpopular among the women and the men who were not directly involved in the dispute, a substantial number of whom were already employed as double spinners. This was compounded by the fact that Dundee Parish Council also refused to pay benefits to the strikers and this led to demonstrations by 50,000 men and women.³⁴ In June 30,000 workers in the city were locked out. The strike at Camperdown continued until August 1923 and was ultimately unsuccessful. The failure of the strike at Lochee allowed employers to continue to modernise, rationalise and introduce new machinery.³⁵

The defeat of this lengthy strike was important as it contributed to the virtual absence of strikes among women or men in the Dundee jute industry during the rest of the 1920s. There may even have been as few as two strikes during 1924 to 1925. The first of these daylong strikes involved weavers and the second involved batchers.³⁶ The previous chapter has shown that women textile workers in Dundee were involved in disturbances during the General Strike in 1926 and that female factory workers in the city, presumably jute workers, provided financial support for Fife miners during the dispute. However, there is no evidence that any jute workers in the city were involved in strike action during the General Strike. Nevertheless, it is possible that the defeat of the General Strike also contributed to the lack of strike activity in the jute trade in the city in the late 1920s. With the exception of a strike in 1929, no other

³³ Clegg, (1985), *op. cit.*, p. 337.

³⁴ Walker, *op. cit.*, p 488, pp. 496-498; Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 264-265.

³⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, June 6, 1923; Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 529

³⁶ *DJFW Guide*, June, 1924; DDJFWU, March 1925.

evidence of strike activity appears in the official statistics or in employer and trade union records, or newspapers in the late 1920s. However, women workers may have chosen to use other forms of workplace resistance that did not involve embarking on collective action.

Another possible reason for the lack of strike activity in the Dundee jute industry in the late 1920s was the closure of jute works for long periods of time. For example, in 1927 Polepark jute works was closed for twenty weeks and when work was resumed the works operated for only three days of the week.³⁷ While strike action was rare in the late 1920s, the most common way for women to improve their earnings was to move from one jute works to another and female jute workers may have chosen to do this rather than go on strike, but given the depressed state of the jute industry and the temporary closures, short time working and amalgamations, opportunities to do this would have been restricted. Nevertheless, a woman who began work in the 1930s as a weaver in Dundee recalled that workers continued to move from one works to another to secure full time work:

durin' the thirties you changed from one work to another. It was short time, the other one mebbe was full time and you'd go and work there you see.³⁸

There are only two references to strikes in the Dundee jute industry in 1930 and no references to strikes during 1931-1932³⁹ and this low level of strike activity coincides with the extremely high levels of unemployment experienced in the industry at this time. During 1933,

³⁷ *Dundee Advertiser*, September 1, 1927.

³⁸ Interview of former weaver by *Dundee Oral History Project*, Dundee Central Library, Ref. 43/A/2, p. 21.

³⁹ While there seems to have been an absence of strike activity in 1931, unemployed workers in Dundee organised processions and demonstrations in the city, they smashed windows and clashed with the police. It seems likely that some of these workers would have been women drawn from the jute trade. (*Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, February 25, 1931).

when the output was 'abnormally low' a great deal of the industry in the city operated on short time. At some jute works the machinery was turned off and the effect of this, unsurprisingly, was a reduction in the number of employees. Other jute works operated on a three weeks on and one week off basis and in some instances jute works operated only on alternate weeks.⁴⁰

However, from 1933 onwards, strike activity increased. While the number of strikes remained low, the majority of jute strikes in the inter-war period in Dundee took place between 1933-1938. There were at least 19 strikes involving women between 1930-1938 and 17 of these took place during 1933-1938. In contrast, there appears to have been as few as 3 strikes in the 1920s, all of which took place between 1920-1924 and 5 strikes took place in 1919. Therefore, while the jute industry underwent its greatest decline in the 1930s and unemployment was highest in the early 1930s and the workforce and trade union membership declined more rapidly in the 1930s than in the 1920s, many more strikes took place in the 1930s than in the 1920s. Several of these strikes involved large numbers of workers employed across a number of separate works and seem to have spread quickly from one works to another. This increase in strike activity in the 1930s mirrored the rise in the number of officially recorded strikes among male and female textile workers in the UK, particularly during the period 1934-1939.⁴¹ A principal cause of strikes in the 1930s stemmed from alterations in working practices, particularly the introduction of new spinning frames, which had the effect of displacing women workers, and the consequent fall in wage rates following the introduction of this new machinery. In May 1933, men and women attending new spinning frames struck at the Low and Bonar owned Eagle jute works and the J Scott owned Dura

⁴⁰ National Confederation of Employers Organisations, *Questionnaire on the Forty-Hour Week and the Absorption of the Unemployed*, 1933.

⁴¹ Lenman, *op. cit.*, p 219; Knowles, *op. cit.*, p 307.

works to prevent wage cuts of 5-10% in line with Trade Board reductions for adult pieceworkers and juvenile workers. Almost the entire workforce at these jute works participated in the six daylong strike. Male spinners at the Eagle jute works employed as night shift workers struck first, the women spinners then sent a deputation to interview the management on the issue of the wage cuts and when their demands were not met they left the factory and joined the strike. The workforce employed at the Dura jute works also joined the strike. The outcome of the strike at Dura is unclear, but the women at the Eagle jute works failed to prevent wage reductions. Only male spinners employed at Eagle jute works as night shift workers were successful in securing wage increases. It has been shown that male workers were increasingly employed as spinners employed to do night shift work. As women could not be employed to work night shift these male workers could be less easily replaced and this may be an explanation for the success of the male spinners at Eagle jute works.⁴²

The following year a month long strike at Cairds' Ashton works stemmed from management attempts to persuade spinners to attend high-speed spinning frames in order to reduce costs by half. The female spinners were expected to attend the frames for less than double the wages.⁴³ The wage for attending one frame was around 36s. and for two frames, 43s., and as the *Dundee Jute and Flax Workers Guide* wryly noted the women refused this 'generous offer'. The efforts of the Jute and Flax Workers' Union to make the firm abandon this idea were fruitless and the spinners struck, 'all the spinners on old and new frames acted together'.⁴⁴ Seven spinners 'cut work off' by halting the double frames when they were set in motion by the overseers. Spinners, weavers, batchers and preparers struck in sympathy and at

⁴² *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, May 20, 1933; *Gazette*, June, 1933.

⁴³ Whatley, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-165.

⁴⁴ *DJFW, Guide*, February, 1934.

its height between 500-900, mainly unionised, workers were involved. There is some confusion as to the outcome of this strike, in one version, spinners at Ashton returned to work on double frames, accepting the proposed wage reductions.⁴⁵ However, according to the *Dundee Jute and Flax Workers Guide* the women were partially successful and the spinners returned to work on the basis that they would work on only one frame each. The strike was 'an outstanding example of what can be done by common action' and had the strike been lost, all spinners in Dundee would have attended two high-speed frames.⁴⁶ Strikers at the Walton, Caldrum and Camperdown works, all part of Jute Industries Ltd, were less successful when they embarked on strike action following the introduction of high-speed spinning frames in 1934. The month long strike originated with winders who were dissatisfied with wage rates and working conditions applicable to the operators of high-speed spinning frames. At least 600 workers were involved in this unsuccessful strike and work was resumed under the old conditions.

In 1935 spinners and juvenile male workers struck together at the Seafeld works following the dismissal of 16 year old male workers.⁴⁷ It is unclear why the management were keen to dismiss these workers but the introduction of modern machinery had allowed the industry to dispense with many juvenile workers as well as allowing the introduction of more men into the industry. For example, according to AJSM figures the number of juveniles employed in the industry in Dundee was halved from 2,167 workers to 1,080 between 1929- 1933.⁴⁸ The support for the juveniles from the adult spinners can perhaps be explained as an attempt to

⁴⁵ *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, January 27, February 22, 1934.

⁴⁶ *DJFW, Guide*, July 1936.

⁴⁷ *DJFW, Guide*, April 1934; *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, March 20, 1934; *Gazette*, April, 1934, p. 144, March 1935, p. 158, October 1935, p. 400.

⁴⁸ National Confederation of Employers Organisations, *Questionnaire on the Forty-Hour Week and the Absorption of the Unemployed*, 1933.

prevent the loss of extremely important contributions made by juvenile workers to family incomes. Attempts to prevent the dismissal of young workers may have been a feature of other inter-war jute strikes. At Seafeld it seems that the employers were successful in dispensing with the young male workers. In 1935, the only other example of a strike involved winders, reelers and twisters who embarked on a weeklong strike to secure an improvement in earnings and working conditions for pieceworkers.⁴⁹ During 1935, John Sime, secretary of the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers Union, sought to encourage workers in the industry to strike on a large scale, but meetings called by the union to discuss strike action were poorly attended by the workforce. Nevertheless, workers were involved in a series of strikes in 1936. The first involved spinners at Seafeld Works, the origin of which was bad yarn.⁵⁰ Unsatisfactory working conditions, primarily bad material, which usually had the effect of reducing earnings and increasing the workload,⁵¹ forced spinners at Caldrum jute works to strike. The strike was not confined to one mill and more than 300 strikers from Caldrum works gathered at the main entrance of the Angus jute works to persuade the workforce to join the strike. The deployment of mass pickets to encourage workers in other mills and factories to join a strike was a favoured tactic of the women workers in the industry.⁵² Disaffection also spread to the workforce employed at the Camperdown works and they too joined the strike. During the course of this dispute the Jute and Flax Workers' Union requested a 10% wage increase for these workers which was rejected by the AJSM on the basis that the state of trade in the industry did not justify any wage increases.⁵³ In at least one of these works, Caldrum, the strike seems to have been lost and worked resumed as before. In 1936, spinners struck work at William Halley & Co. owned Wallace Craigie works. Despite management claims that the

⁴⁹ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 529; Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 200; *Gazette*, October 1935, p. 400.

⁵⁰ Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 201; *DJFW Guide*, October 1936.

⁵¹ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

⁵² Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

⁵³ *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, October 5, 21, 1936; *DJFW Guide*, October 1936.

workers had given no reason for their strike, simply walking out after lunchtime it seems that the justification for the walk out was the poor quality of yarn supplied to the spinners.⁵⁴

That there were not more strikes during the 1930s, particularly among weavers and winders, seems to have been to the dissatisfaction of the Jute and Flax Workers Union. In the inter-war period weaving factories adopted new technology including new looms with larger shutters and beams. An article in the *Guide* in 1936 berated the weavers for 'foolishly' taking on two wider looms than had been the custom.⁵⁵ It seems that only one strike of weavers followed from modifications in the size of looms and this took place at Thomas Bell's Heathfield works in 1924.⁵⁶ However, there is no evidence that weavers struck work for this reason again. Dundee winders were also described as being 'foolish' for not resisting attempts to make them work more ends. The *Guide* maintained that the outcome of this inaction by weavers and winders had been that fewer workers were required in the jute industry. The article went on to say:

had they (the workers) the proper spirit of defence of their own interests and those who were workmates, they would have as a body refused to attend the extra ends or the wider looms doubled, even if they had to cease work.⁵⁷

Nevertheless while female weavers were involved in strike activity less frequently than female spinners, they did strike on a few occasions in the inter-war period. For example, in 1919 weavers at Dudhope works struck for wage increases and in 1920 weavers at

⁵⁴ *The Gazette*, November, 1936, p. 427; *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, February 29, 1936.

⁵⁵ Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 275-276; *DJFW Guide*, July 1936.

⁵⁶ *DJFW Guide*, June 1924.

⁵⁷ *DJFW Guide*, July 1936.

Grimmonds' Bowbridge works also went on strike. Unfortunately the demands of the strikers are not known. As noted above, weavers at Heathfield works struck in 1924 and in 1934, weavers struck at an unnamed jute works and this led to the closure of the works for ten days.⁵⁸ While the lack of strikes among weavers was a source of complaint from the Jute and Flax Workers Union, weavers could not be guaranteed that the union would support them if they did strike. For example, in 1935 almost 400 weavers and spinners went on strike at the South Anchor works. The strike originated with weavers who were dissatisfied with the quality of the yarn supplied, claiming that it would not allow them to earn a reasonable wage.⁵⁹ This was compounded by the dismissal of a woman weaver whose colleagues struck work in solidarity. The union refused to recognise this three week- long strike and the dispute ended when the strikers agreed to accept payments from the management of the works of 10s. for weavers and 5s. for spinners. Presumably these payments were an incentive to return to work, and possibly to prevent the strike developing further before the trade union could recognise the strike and a campaign could begin.⁶⁰ Weavers at Caldrum works in late 1937 and early 1938 organised two one daylong 'stay in' strikes. The first stemmed from dissatisfaction with supervision methods and the second from the inferior quality of yarn supplied to the weavers. Both of these strikes appear not to have been supported by the union.⁶¹

While, there were many strikes during the mid-1930s, in the late 1930s, particularly during 1937-1939, strike activity in the jute industry virtually disappeared. This may have partly reflected marginal improvements in pay and conditions. For example, in December 1936 strike plans were made for January 1937 following the rejection of demands from textile unions,

⁵⁸ AJSM, *Annual Report*, 1935, p. 4.

⁵⁹ *Gazette*, March 1935, p. 117.

⁶⁰ *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, February 20, 25, 1935; Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

⁶¹ J Sime, Union Secretary, Circular to Weavers, December 30, 1937; January 14, 1938.

including the Jute and Flax Workers Union, for a 10%-12.5% increase in wages. Jute workers voted in favour of a general strike in support of these demands, but before a strike could take place, the AJSM offered the workforce a small wage increase that was accepted by the unions and the workforce. This was the first occasion, following eight attempts to increase wage rates that jute workers in Dundee were successful in securing wage increases.⁶² Despite these increases extremely low wage levels persisted into late 1930s. Men earned the lowest legal minimum male wage in the UK and women's earnings were among the lowest. The Trade Board set minimum rates for jute workers remained virtually unchanged in the inter-war period. In 1923 the minimum rate for adult females and males was 25s. and 39s. respectively. In 1939, this had barely increased to 26s. and 43s. These increases were still short of demands in 1939 for a 15% wage increase made by the Jute and Flax Workers' Union to the AJSM. However, in 1939, jute workers were successful in securing six days holidays with pay even though this offer by employers fell short of the workers' demands.⁶³ However this was not a considerable concession to the workforce as employers in the UK were increasingly unable to resist the demand for holidays with pay from trade unions in the late 1930s and by the Second World War, paid holidays were almost a universal social right.⁶⁴ In October 1939, the Jute and Flax Workers' Union attempted to secure wage increases by 25% in order to meet the rising cost of living and jute workers were advised by the Union to prepare for strike action in November.⁶⁵ Again there are no references to any strike taking place.

⁶² *Glasgow Herald*, December 5, 1936; DDJFWU, Leaflet, 20 December, 1936.

⁶³ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 95; *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, April 20, March 20, 1939, November 9, 1938, February 10, June 15, 1939.

⁶⁴ S G Jones, 'The British Trade Unions and Holidays With Pay', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 31, 1986, p. 67.

⁶⁵ DDJFWU, *Leaflet*, 1939.

This section has shown that strike activity in the Dundee jute trade remained at low levels throughout the inter-war period in comparison with the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when female jute workers in the city resorted to strike action frequently. However, there were a significant number of factors militating against strike action in the inter-war years. In particular, the defeat of the strike at Lochee in 1923 appears to have had a profound effect on the workforce who appear to have largely rejected strike action during the rest of the 1920s. In the inter-war period a number of factors led to substantial falls in the number of women employed in the industry. The decline in the demand for jute, the attempts at modernisation and the adoption of new machinery, led to the displacement of female by male workers. It is likely that all of these factors would have contributed to the decline in strike activity between the wars. The exceptionally high levels of unemployment and the consequent fear of being unemployed and, possibly, the subsequent fall in trade union membership among women, combined to depress strike activity between the wars. Nevertheless, in the 1930s, particularly between 1933-1936, women employed in the jute industry continued to embark on strike action, irrespective of the declining fortunes of the trade and it has been shown that when unemployment levels were at their highest and when striking workers could be more easily replaced by the army of unemployed jute workers in the city, the largely female workforce in Dundee still took strike action. They were prepared to respond to management attempts to reduce wage levels or against changes in working conditions that led to wage reductions. However, where women went on strike against wage reductions, there were few successes and women were forced to accept very low wages, wage reductions and a contraction in the numbers of workers employed.

In the inter-war period, female spinners embarked on strike action more frequently than female weavers and this was a continuation of a pre-war trend. It has also been shown that

female jute workers continued to exhibit a greater militancy than their male colleagues and they were involved in strike activity to a far greater extent than male workers, particularly those classed as skilled. As this chapter has shown, skilled male workers, such as the tenters and mechanics, embarked on strike action with even less frequency than other men employed in the industry and very rarely were they involved in strike activity with women workers. This was a continuation of the pre- First World War trend in strike activity in the jute industry in Dundee. Additionally, the disputes that did arise in the inter-war period were not always fully supported by the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers Union, despite the union berating the workforce for not embarking on strike action frequently enough. This meant that the largely female workforce did not rely on the co-operation of skilled male workers who seldom supported women during disputes or on the support of a trade union.

Chapter one has shown that substantial numbers of women in Scotland continued to be employed in a diversity of textile industries in the inter-war period and this section will consider the extent of strike activity among women employed in the cotton, hosiery, lace, wool, linen, net-making and in the dyeing and bleaching industries. These sectors, like the jute trade, underwent a similar contraction as exports declined and foreign competition and unemployment levels increased, particularly in the 1930s. The number of officially recorded strikes in these textile industries was low. Outside of the jute industry, only six textile strikes are officially recorded as 'principal disputes' in the *Ministry of Labour Gazette* in Scotland in the inter-war period.⁶⁶ However, when references to strikes in trade union records and local newspapers for these industries are included, the figure is considerably higher at approximately 16 strikes. This is shown on Table 2. A number of strikes not officially recorded in the

⁶⁶ *Gazette*, 1919-1939.

Ministry of Labour Gazette often involved hundreds of female and male workers and lasted, in some instances, for many weeks. As in the Dundee jute industry the majority of the disputes in the various non-jute textile industries were the outcome of attempts by employers to reduce wage levels or were attempts by women workers to improve wage rates. Trade union recognition, solidarity issues and proposed changes in working conditions were also a cause of strikes. Where the outcome of these strikes is known, the majority of these disputes seem to have ended with a compromise.

Strike activity among men and women employed in the textile industry in the UK increased dramatically in 1920 (although the number of working days lost through strike activity actually fell) and women workers employed in the hosiery, linen and lace trade in Scotland were part of this rise in the number of strikes in the UK.⁶⁷ In February 1920, women employed in the hosiery trade embarked on strike action. The 70 female hosiery workers at the Falkirk Hosiery Company were 'not out for better wages' and the strike had stemmed from the dismissal of three female workers involved in an earlier dispute caused by other 'alleged grievances'. It was claimed that these workers were given 'hot time' by the management before their dismissals. The Falkirk Trades Council supported the strike both 'morally and financially', as did Miss Innes, a trade union organiser, possibly from the TGWU. However, there is no evidence from the reports of this strike that the girls were organised by the TGWU or any other trade union. The negotiations between a local Provost and a Bailie, Miss Innes and the employer's representative led to the conclusion of the strike. This strike was successful and the factory management agreed to the women's demands, the dismissed workers were to be reinstated and no further victimisation would take place.⁶⁸ This strike is relatively unusual in that the women

⁶⁷ Knowles, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

⁶⁸ *The Falkirk Mail*, February 28, 1920; *Glasgow Evening Times*, February 20, 1920.

struck in solidarity with dismissed female colleagues and the demands of the women workers did not centre on attempts to increase wage rates or prevent wage reductions. The majority of women's strikes in the textile sector in the inter-war period, as before the First World War, continued to revolve around wages issues.

In the same year, 600 mainly female hosiery workers, in the Dumfries area, embarked on a six day long strike to prevent substantial wage reductions of 15% for pieceworkers and of 8s. and 5s. for male and female timeworkers, respectively. These proposed wage reductions represented the loss of an award made in July 1920 to hosiery workers in Scotland issued by the Industrial Court.⁶⁹ At Dumfries, the largely young female workforce picketed outside of the mills and factories and 'at some of the mills there was a certain liveliness, the trade unionists booeing and shouting at the workers who were continuing'.⁷⁰ Seven hosiery factories were closed for the duration of this unsuccessful strike and the workforce voted to accept wage reductions and this was also accompanied by a temporary loss of work for the strikers. The majority of the striking women were prevented from resuming work over the Christmas period due to the depression in the trade and the consequent shortage of work.⁷¹ This may have provided the management of the hosiery firms involved the opportunity to dispense with a considerable number of those workers involved in the strike.

Female yarn winders employed in the linen industry similarly attempted to prevent wage reductions during 1920 at the Hay and Robertson owned St. Margaret's Linen Factory in

⁶⁹ *Glasgow Herald*, July 31, December 18, 1920.

⁷⁰ *Dumfries and Galloway Courier and Herald*, December 15, 1920.

⁷¹ *Dumfries and Galloway Courier and Herald*, December 1, 22, 1920; *Glasgow Herald* December 18, 1920.

Dunfermline⁷² and they defied their trade union in the process. The strikers sought to increase wage levels and to prevent the employment of non-union labour through strike action. The women met to consider how the strike should be conducted prior to and during the one-week long strike. The strikers did not receive the support of the women weavers and 700 workers, principally women, were thrown idle when the factory closed during the strike. While the women winders opposed the employment of non-union labour, they could not attain the support of their union, the Scottish Textile Workers Union, and they had acted against the leadership of their union, which did not authorise or support the strike. As a consequence, the women winders involved were censured by councillor John Heenan, the General Secretary of the Scottish Council of Textile Trade Unions and they were warned of the 'inadvisability of workers downing tools without authority.' However, even without the support of their trade union the women winders were partially successful and they returned to work following an offer of new terms.⁷³ Women employed in the various branches of the linen trade, as will be shown below, seem to have struck on only two other occasions in the inter-war period, but this industry was hit especially hard by the depression of the early 1920s. In Dunfermline, Aberdeen, Brechin and Dundee, linen works were either forced to close or operate on only one or two days per week in 1920. In the 1920s, often less than two-thirds of looms in Dunfermline, a centre of fine linen production, were in operation and the workforce declined. By the 1930s, foreign competition, a decline in exports and competition from cheaper cotton goods forced many linen factories to close or to modify to produce other textiles.⁷⁴

⁷² Young notes that women were involved in prolonged strikes in Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy during 1921. Unfortunately local newspapers fail to verify this. (Young, *op. cit.*, p. 149).

⁷³ *The Dunfermline Journal*, May 29, June 5, 1920; *Edinburgh Evening News*, May 31, 1920.

⁷⁴ *Glasgow Herald*, December 17, 1920; P K Livingstone, *Flax and Linen in Fife Through the Centuries*, Kirkcaldy, 1952, pp. 20-23.

Women employed in the Ayrshire lace making industry were also part of the rise in strike activity among textile workers in Scotland in 1920. They struck between February and April 1920 with male lace workers in Kilmarnock, Newmilns, Darvel and Galston, most likely to prevent wage reductions.⁷⁵ Two years later women employed in the hosiery trade in Stewarton in Ayrshire struck again. The young women went on strike in order to prevent wage reductions of up to 12.5% and they were described by their union, the Newmilns and District Textile Workers' Union, as being 'very much against' this reduction. As the strike progressed, in addition to wage improvements, the girls also demanded trade union recognition. The women successfully secured suitable minimum piecework and time rates and trade union recognition.⁷⁶ It seems that there was little strike activity among female hosiery workers until the late 1930s, when the incidence of strikes in this sector increased in line with the pattern of strike activity among women in Scotland. There are a number of possible explanations for this. Firstly, as Gulvin suggests, a lack of strike activity and trade union apathy among male and female hosiery workers in Hawick, one of the main centres for hosiery production, could be attributed to changes in the way wage agreements were settled. Negotiations were replaced by a formal mechanism of adjustment and wage levels were adjusted every six months or left at current rate. Therefore, there was no real negotiation between employers and trade unions and the relationship between the two groups in Hawick was deferential.⁷⁷ In addition to this, in Hawick, the most dominant trade union, the Hawick Hosiery Union, virtually excluded women from its membership. While many textile and general trade unions recruited and represented hosiery workers,⁷⁸ organisation among women, especially in the west of Scotland, was also weak. Chapter three has shown that the STUC was especially keen to encourage unions to

⁷⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, February 14, April 17, 1920.

⁷⁶ Newmilns and District Textile Workers Union, *Minutes*, March 18, April 22, 1922.

⁷⁷ Gulvin, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

⁷⁸ Such as the NFWW, Workers Union, NUGMW, TGWU, and the Scottish Lace and Textile Workers Union.

recruit female hosiery workers, but this appears to have been with limited success. However, low trade union membership among women was not necessarily an impediment to strike activity, and it is likely that many of the women involved in hosiery strikes presented in this chapter were not trade union members. While the hosiery industry was the only textile industry in the inter-war period to undergo an expansion, the depression in the trade, especially in the 1930s, would have afforded hosiery workers few opportunities to raise wage levels. It is also possible that high labour turnover in the industry may have acted as a depressant on strikes. In the 1930s in particular, women tended to leave hosiery work during slack periods, but also at other times if they had the opportunity of working elsewhere, such as in retail work or in other forms of manufacturing.⁷⁹ Therefore, women hosiery workers who had the chance to secure work elsewhere may have expressed their dissatisfaction and attempted to improve their earnings by moving to other occupations, thereby reducing the likelihood of strike action in the hosiery trade.

In 1922, women employed in the woollen trade in the Borders were also engaged in attempts to prevent wage reductions. Up to 1,000 weavers, most of whom were women, embarked on strike action across 14 factories in Galashiels and Peebles. The women's demands did not centre on attempts to improve their own wages and conditions but those of their skilled male colleagues, principally power loom tuners whose wage rates were to be reduced. The ten day long strike was ultimately unsuccessful and the wage reductions were enforced. There is no indication that women in the woollen trade in Scotland went on strike again and even wage cuts of 10% in 1932, which represented losses of up to 4s. for female workers resulted in no action being taken by the workforce or their trade unions. This apparent

⁷⁹ Gulvin, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

lack of strikes could be attributed to the effects of foreign competition, declining production and exports during the early 1930s and the decline in the number of workers employed by the early 1930s. In addition to this, the production of high quality exports in Scotland was badly affected by hostile tariffs in the early 1930s.⁸⁰

Another example of women workers supporting male colleagues and embarking on strike action in order to win improvements for men, involved women employed in the net-making trade at the J & W. Stuart owned Esk Mills in Musselburgh, Mid-Lothian in 1938. The one week- long strike involved 300 of the 400 strong workforce, mainly women spinners, employed at the mill. Initially, the women did not strike to advance their own wages and working conditions but to secure wage increases for three male colleagues. Their grievances stemmed from the failure of the management to pay a trade board wage increase to the male workers employed at the mill and the women 'met outside the mill gates during the lunch hour' to discuss the position of their male colleagues and they resolved not to return to work until the increases had been assured. The women spinners, who were to the fore in this strike while the weavers remained at work, were well organised and they formed a deputation, but the manager of the mill, William Stuart, declined to meet with them to discuss their grievances. However, like other women's strikes presented in this chapter, other grievances surfaced and the women demanded the full recognition of their trade union, the TGWU, who supported the strike, and no victimisation of those involved. The strike was a boisterous affair and the women met at the local Labour Hall each day and outside the mills during the lunch hour and at the close of the day to discuss the strike and demonstrate. The women gathered 'outside the mill gates during the lunch hour and at the close of the days work they

⁸⁰ *Gazette*, August 1922, p. 337; *The Border Telegraph*, July 18, 1922; *Glasgow Herald*, July 12, 1922, October 18, 1932; Ackrill *op. cit.*, p. 86; Lenman, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

demonstrated in the form of loud derogatory cries against employees still at work'; this led to the intervention of the police to prevent trouble. Following the intervention of a conciliation officer from the Ministry of Labour, the strike was partially successful and the women were granted full trade union recognition. Discussions concerning their other demands were also to take place.⁸¹

Women in the cotton trade in Scotland, as Gordon has shown, struck on many occasions in the late nineteenth century,⁸² but it is difficult to find evidence of strikes in the cotton industry in the inter-war period. However, the steep decline in the cotton industry in the west of Scotland meant that by the 1930s only highly specialised branches of the cotton industry, such as the Paisley thread mills, the weaving of muslins in Glasgow and Ayrshire or very unusual mills, such as Catrine Mill in Ayrshire, where the entire spinning, weaving, dyeing and making up process was carried out,⁸³ remained. There may even have been as few as two strikes in the various branches of cotton manufacture in the inter-war period in Scotland in comparison to at least 26 strikes in the Glasgow cotton trade alone during 1850-1890.⁸⁴ The virtual absence of strike activity is likely to have been a reflection of the great decline in the cotton industry in Scotland. Cotton workers in Scotland, as in other parts of the UK, were likely to have witnessed a gradual erosion of wage levels in the industry in the 1920s and 1930s. The imposition of wage reductions was a major cause of strikes among cotton workers in the UK in the 1920s and early 1930's, when a huge number of working days were lost, especially in the

⁸¹ *The Musselburgh News*, October 21, 28, 1938; *Glasgow Herald*, October 26, 1938; *Gazette*, November, 1938, p. 452.

⁸² Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-132.

⁸³ J Strawhorn and W Boyd, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland: Ayrshire*, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1951, p. 101.

⁸⁴ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

period 1929-1932.⁸⁵ In Scotland, the two strikes identified involving female cotton workers in the inter-war period were attempts to prevent wage reductions.

The first of these strikes lasted for six weeks during 1923 and involved up to 600 'mill girls' and 100 male workers producing Muslins at eight of the 30 factories in Newmilns, Darvel and Galston in the Irvine Valley. The origin of this strike was a proposal from the Madras Manufacturers Association that wages be reduced by 10% and that weaver's bonus payments be reduced from 50% to 33% representing losses of more than 6s. per week for time and piece workers. The employers justified these reductions for two reasons. Firstly, wage reductions would lower production costs and competitiveness would be improved and secondly, they claimed that female cotton workers in Glasgow earned up to 30% less than their counterparts in Ayrshire and therefore, these wage reductions were fair.⁸⁶ The unfavourable comparison between women's wages in Ayrshire as compared with those earned by women in Glasgow was not new and cotton manufacturers in Ayrshire had forced women's wages down before during the late nineteenth century on the grounds that women in the Glasgow cotton industry earned less than Ayrshire women.⁸⁷ The female strikers were supported by the Newmilns and District Textile Workers' Union and the union secretary, John Paterson, objected to the reductions on the basis that the Ayrshire 'girls' were of an 'exceptionally good class', they were organised into a trade union, whereas the Glasgow women were not and the employers were capable of continuing to pay the existing rates. Picketing, meetings and demonstrations appear not to have accompanied this strike, and as the *Glasgow Herald* reported, even though the dispute involved a large number of women and had been underway

⁸⁵ A Fowler, 'Lancashire Cotton Trade Unionism in the Inter-War Years', in JA Jowitt and AJ McIvor (eds.), *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries 1850-1939*, Routledge, London, 1988, pp. 122-123; A J McIvor, *Organised Labour*, CUP, p. 201.

⁸⁶ *Glasgow Herald*, April 6, 19, 1923.

⁸⁷ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

for a number of weeks it was 'one of the quietest ever despite being in its sixth week'. It is possible that the absence of disturbances during this strike may have reflected a request from trade union officials that the strike be conducted in an orderly fashion. Following the intervention of Ministry of Labour officials, the strike ended and was ultimately unsuccessful, the workforce accepting the reductions.⁸⁸

In the mid- and late 1920s, aside from the support given by men and women employed in the Ayrshire lace trade for the General Strike and the subsequent week long lock-out of these workers, there is little evidence that women employed in textiles production outside of the jute industry were involved in strike action until 1929. In 1929 a second strike in the cotton industry stemmed from attempts to prevent wage reductions at the James Findlay & Co. Catrine mills in Ayrshire. Approximately 500 ring spinners, weavers and bleachers struck against substantial reductions of 25% for ring spinners and reductions of 6% for other workers. Newspaper reports provide no indication as to the number of men and women involved. However, as the majority of workers employed in the Ayrshire cotton industry were female and ring spinning was also a typically poorly paid woman's occupation in the cotton industry in the UK between the wars,⁸⁹ it is likely that most of the strikers were women and that the greatest wage reductions would have affected mainly female ring spinners. The failure of skilled male workers to support strikes involving women was not confined to the jute trade and during this dispute skilled male workers, principally tenters and joiners, employed at Catrine, did not join the strike. They may not have been opposed to the actions of the rest of the workforce but many of these male workers continued to work or present themselves for work throughout the dispute, supported by the Scottish Lace and Textile Workers Union. This three

⁸⁸ *Glasgow Herald*, April 6, 19, 1923.

⁸⁹ Fowler, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

week long strike was only partially successful and ended when the workforce accepted modified, but still substantial reductions of 20% for ring spinners and reductions of 4% for all other workers.⁹⁰

In the 1930s strike activity among male and female textile workers increased in the UK, although with the exception of the early 1930's the number of working days lost remained low. In Scotland, women textile workers contributed to this increase in strike activity in the 1930's. As in the Dundee jute industry, it would appear that there were more strikes in the non-jute textile industries in Scotland in the 1930s than in the 1920s. Several of these non-jute textile industries had declined by the 1930s, unemployment was particularly high in the early 1930s and the number of women employed had declined. However, this shows that unemployment and the fear of being unemployed did not always impede strike activity among women workers. For example, in 1931, following mass meetings in Newmilns and a ballot of Scottish Lace and Textile Workers' Union members, men and women employed in the Ayrshire lace producing industry went on strike against proposed wage reductions of 25%. In 1931 more than a quarter of all insured lace workers in Ayrshire were unemployed. The lace industry had slumped following the post-war boom of 1920 and changes in fashion and demand for lace goods meant that lace production was well below capacity until the Second World War and in this period working conditions gradually deteriorated.⁹¹ Therefore, even against this background of high unemployment, the workforce did not consider resorting to strike action as imprudent and were prepared to take action to prevent substantial wage reductions. Lace employers justified these extensive reductions, which ranged from 4s. to 21s. per week, on the

⁹⁰ *Gazette*, December 1929, p. 200; *The Ayr Advertiser*, November 21, December 5, 1929.

⁹¹ Knowles, *op. cit.*, p. 307; Scott and Cunnison, *op. cit.*, p. 87; Scottish Lace and Textile Workers Union, *Minutes*, May 3, 1931; Mair, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-170.

basis that they reflected the fall in the cost of living during the 1920s and were required to combat the negative effects of foreign competition. Eventually, 2,000 men and women in Ayrshire, and in Glasgow and Nottingham joined the strike leading to the temporary closure of many factories. This lengthy, 15 week long dispute was partially successful, and the workforce accepted modified wage reductions of up to 5% for pieceworkers in Ayrshire and reductions for those earning more than 40s. per week in Glasgow.⁹² There is little evidence that female lace workers were involved in strikes in the 1930s.⁹³ However, the lace industry was affected by foreign competition, the level of exports fell and the industry continued to decline during the 1930s.⁹⁴ Trade union membership of the local lace and textile workers also underwent a considerable decline towards the end of the inter-war period.

Women workers and their male colleagues employed in the textile dyeing and bleaching trade was also engaged in attempts to prevent wage reductions in 1931 at the United Turkey Red Co. (UTR) in Renton in the Vale of Leven. UTR had contracted sharply after the First World War and by the 1930s, the Turkey Red dyeing process was defunct and the company had become reliant on calico printing. Large numbers of women, who made up the majority of the 3,000 strong workforce, still continued to find work at UTR. However, high unemployment and short time working were constant features throughout the inter-war period. In the 1920s, those workers fortunate enough to retain their jobs in dyeing and bleaching accepted national agreements between the unions and employer associations and there were

⁹² *Glasgow Herald*, June 10, July 22, 1931; *Gazette*, July 1931, p. 281, p. 400.

⁹³ Weavers in Ayrshire struck on another two occasions during 1937-1938. In Darvel, lace weavers at Dobsons & Browne struck in support of a dismissed male tenter and weavers at Smith & Archibald also went on strike. It is unclear if women were involved in these strikes as large numbers of lace weavers were men. (Scottish Lace and Textile Workers Union, *Minutes*, September 1937, January 1938).

⁹⁴ Scott and Cunnison, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

small wage increases as profit levels were maintained.⁹⁵ However, price and wage fixing arrangements collapsed as foreign competition increased and attempts by employers to cut costs via wage reductions of up to 10% led to the month long strike at four of the UTR works and this was the largest strike since 1911. It seems that the bulk of the workforce joined the strike, supported by the Amalgamated Society of Dyers. A great deal of disorder accompanied the strike as pickets gathered at works to prevent blacklegs from entering. The strikers and their supporters held mass meetings and marched through Renton led by a flute band and several thousand strikers and supporters gathered at the UTR works to heckle those who remained at work. Strikers smashed the windows of buses carrying blacklegs, the pickets fought with the police and arrests followed. Later, the women strikers opened a soup kitchen. The strike also broadened out to include men employed as dyers, printers and bleachers in Paisley and Airdrie.⁹⁶ However, as support for the strike in the Vale of Leven died away and the strike fund dwindled, the workforce returned to work on the company's terms and wage reductions of up to 3s. per week for men and 1s. for women were imposed. As Macintyre notes, one of the outcomes of this strike was that the trade union officials who had pressurised the workforce into returning to work by threatening to cut off financial support lost the support of the strikers and the strike committee. The failure of the trade union to adequately support the men and women appears to have drawn many of the disaffected strikers to the National Unemployed Workers Committee Movement (NUWCM) and the Communists in the Vale of Leven. A closer relationship developed between many women workers at UTR and the unemployed in the Vale of Leven. One of the biggest groups of the NUWCM in Scotland was

⁹⁵ N Tarrant, 'Turkey Red Dyeing in the Vale of Leven', in J Butt and K Ponting (eds.), *Scottish Textile History*, AUP, 1987, p 47; *Glasgow Herald*, April 17, 1931; Macintyre, (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 101, p. 113; S Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science*, CUP, Cambridge, 1980 (b), p. 42

⁹⁶ *Glasgow Herald*, April 20, 22, 23, 24, 1931; *Lennox Herald*, May 2, 16, 1931; Macintyre, (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 101.

based in the Vale of Leven and many of its members had picketed with the strikers.⁹⁷ At the end of the strike, the unemployed and the Communists in the area targeted meetings and other activities at the women workers.⁹⁸

Women workers were more successful in resisting wage reductions at J. Pullar & Sons in Perth in 1933, one of the largest textile cleaning and dyeing works in the UK at this time. Approximately 1700 male and female dyers embarked on a lightning strike. It is possible that the majority of strikers were women, certainly hundreds of women at Pullars were employed as seasonal workers. The brief 'stay-in' stoppage centred on management attempts to reduce male wage rates by 2s. 6d. and female wage rates by 2s. Given that wage rates were generally low for both male and female workers in the dyeing and finishing industry, the average female wage in the industry in the UK in the late 1930s was between 26s. and 28s. per week, these reductions were not inconsiderable. Backed by the Amalgamated Society of Dyers, the strikers were successful, the existing wage rates being stabilised following negotiations between the union and the management.⁹⁹

In the 1930s women employed in two separate branches of the linen industry embarked on strike action. In 1934, women and girls employed in the production of linen shoe threads at

⁹⁷ The NUWCM, which often played an important part in protecting the position of those in work as well as the jobless, often intervened in strikes in the inter-war period to prevent mass strike breaking. (Croucher, *op. cit.*, p. 11.)

⁹⁸ *Gazette*, May 1931, p 238; Macintyre, (1980), *op. cit.*, pp. 100-102.

⁹⁹ *Glasgow Herald*, April 5, 1933; *Perthshire Advertiser*, April 5, 9, 1933; Beauchamp, *op. cit.*, p. 29. There is evidence that dyeing and bleaching workers embarked on similar action in the 1930s. For example, in 1934, 400 British Silk Dyeing Co. workers in Balloch struck for wage increases and union recognition. The involvement of women in this strike is unclear, but women members of the NUWCM were certainly involved in demonstrating with the strikers. Bleachfield workers also struck in Newmilns in 1932, unfortunately the involvement of women in this strike is unclear. *Glasgow Herald*, August 2, 1934; Macintyre, (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 102; Scottish Lace and Textile Workers Union, *Minutes*, August, October, 1932.

Finlayson & Bousfield & Co.,¹⁰⁰ in Johnstone, Renfrewshire, went on strike against changes in working conditions. This ten day long strike followed from management attempts at the mill to persuade female thread spinners to attend 200 spindles rather than the usual 140. Despite management assurances that wages would rise, the spinners, fearing their dismissal as a consequence of these changes, refused to work under the new conditions and embarked on strike action. Almost 230 female spinners and twisters were directly involved and 230 finishers and dyers were thrown idle during the strike. The predominantly female workforce was supported by the NUGMW and James Rogers, the Scottish organising secretary, addressed the meetings held by the striking women at the town hall during the dispute. According to Rogers the entire workforce at the mill was organised, that 'discontent' had been 'simmering at the mill for some time' and the introduction of a 'labour saving device' in the polishing department had already caused a dispute involving six women and seven boys. Women's strikes continued to be lively affairs and this strike was especially tumultuous and female twisters and spinners amassed a great deal of support for their action. The *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette* reported that 'remarkable scenes' accompanied the strike, particularly during lunch breaks and in the evenings when up to 1,000 women and girls and their supporters 'demonstrated outside the gates of the factory and a noisy reception greeted employees at work and firm officials.' That three young female strikers appeared at the police court charged with behaving in a disorderly manner by following non-strikers home, causing a breach of the peace and assaulting non-strikers at the end of the strike provides an indication of

¹⁰⁰ In 1924 male workers struck for 5 months against wage reductions at this firm and at W & J Knox, in Johnstone, Kilbirnie & Beith. Women did not strike, but 1200 women were thrown idle. They endured financial hardship and were anxious for a settlement especially as in many families more than one female member was employed in the mills. (*Glasgow Herald*, May 28, June 7, October 17, 1924; Gordon, *op. cit.*, p 249).

the turbulent nature of this dispute. The strike ended when the women agreed to return to work pending negotiations between the mill management and the trade union.¹⁰¹

A less disorderly, but nevertheless partially successful strike in 1938 involved female winders employed at John Shield's Wallace, a linen factory in Perth. The strike originated with seven female cone winders working in the preparing department and described as 'key operatives' refused to attend work and 'walked out' against the introduction of new piece rates. More than 300 fellow women workers did not join the strike and were subsequently thrown out of work when the management closed the factory. The ten day long strike was partially successful, the female winders, following a meeting with the management, agreed to accept the new wage rates for a month long trial period. The extent of trade union organisation among these women is unknown, but a trade union official was also to be allowed into the factory as an observer.¹⁰²

In the late 1930s strike activity seems to have resurfaced among women and girls employed in hosiery production and they embarked on collective action on at least two occasions. In 1936, 250 of the 275 employees at the Armadale Hosiery Co. went on strike in order to secure wage increases, improved overtime wage rates and reductions in hours. Newspaper reports provide little information on this three weeklong strike, but it is likely that most of the strikers would have been female. The strikers were involved in demonstrating against 25 fellow workers who did not join the strike and when the workforce, officials from the Ministry of Labour and the management came to an 'amicable agreement', the strike ended.¹⁰³ In contrast,

¹⁰¹ *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette*, March 3, 17, 24, 1934.

¹⁰² *Fife Free Press*, August 13, 1938; *Glasgow Herald*, August 10, 19, 1938; *Perthshire Advertiser*, August 10, 1938; *The Perthshire Constitutional and Journal*, August 12, 1938.

¹⁰³ *Edinburgh Evening News*, September 18, October 25, 1936.

one of the most significant strikes in the 1930s, in terms of newspaper attention and trade union support, also occurred among female hosiery workers in Falkirk in 1937. Around 100 of 130 'girls' employed at the Falkirk Hosiery Co. were involved in this three week long strike, the origin of which was the suspension of a female stitcher, who had been employed at the company for 12 years and acted as the TGWU representative, collecting union dues from her colleagues. This suspension took effect at a time when the factory was working overtime and it is likely that this was viewed by the workforce as an attempt by the management to undermine their trade union organisation. This strike, like others presented in this chapter, broadened out to encompass a catalogue of other demands and the strikers also demanded trade union recognition, a 5s. per week wage increase for time workers and corresponding increases for pieceworkers. In addition to these demands, the women recommended the abolition of fines, imposed when a defective garment had to be repaired, an alteration in the system of suspensions during slack periods and assurances that when redundancies were made, those employed last would be the first to be dismissed. *The Falkirk Mail* described the strikers as being 'determined to stay out until the proprietor, Mr Angus Livingstone, would recognise the TGWU' and their other demands had been met. The women also successfully withstood management attempts to intimidate them into returning to work. This attempt to weaken the strike took the form of letters delivered to the entire workforce that threatened to dismiss the strikers and replace them with other women.¹⁰⁴ The women were very active and well organised and employed a number of strategies in order to win the strike and this could explain the attention the strike attracted from the local press. The women picketed the works, working in two-hour shifts from 6.45am until closing time and *The Falkirk Mail* could report that:

¹⁰⁴ *The Falkirk Mail*, March 5, 1937.

Exciting scenes have also been witnessed at the stopping hour the strikers gathering at the works gates and booing the girls as they leave their work. The operatives still at work have been taken from the premises at nights by private taxis to the Callender Riggs bus station so as to elude the strikers.¹⁰⁵

In the aftermath of the strike, James Thornton, a TGWU official and the local secretary of the hosiery section of the union was charged, and subsequently found not guilty of threatening violence and verbally abusing non-strikers. It has been noted that women workers were often very exuberant when they went on strike, and the women involved in this particular dispute chose to pass the time with 'community singing'.¹⁰⁶ At the outset, the hosiery strike was unofficial, but was then fully supported and financed by the TGWU and Eleanor Stewart, TGWU organiser and STUC Women's Committee member addressed the women at the Iona Hall in the town during the strike. The TGWU appealed to other workers in the Falkirk area to support the girls, possibly to generate solidarity from bus and foundry workers in the town who were also on strike and the union took the relatively unusual step of distributing a leaflet entitled 'Better meddle wi the devil than the trade unions in Falkirk' and went on to say on behalf of the girls:

Fellow Workers, we are on strike for trade union recognition, reinstatement of our union collector, abolition of fining system and improved wages and conditions of

¹⁰⁵ *The Falkirk Mail*, March 5, 1937.

¹⁰⁶ *The Falkirk Mail*, March 5, 26, 1937.

service. We ask your co-operation in keeping workers away from the hosiery during the dispute and thus help to resist this challenge to trade unionism.¹⁰⁷

Various trade unions, supported by the STUC, had made an attempt to organise the largely unorganised female workforce employed in the hosiery industry in the late 1930s. The efforts made by the TGWU might be partly explained as part of the longer-term endeavour to organise and influence the women in the trade. It could also reflect the intervention of Eleanor Stewart who was one of the leading female trade unionists in Scotland. These efforts might also have been made to capitalise from the bus and foundry workers strike in the town that was underway at the same time. The extent of the support from fellow workers and other strikers in Falkirk for the hosiery strike is not known, but the women did receive support from Grangemouth hosiery workers who attended meetings in Falkirk during the strike. Therefore, even in an industry where the vast majority of workers were women and trade union organisation was weak, the women exhibited impressive levels of solidarity. This strike was ultimately successful and the management of the company gave assurances that the strikers would not be victimised and agreed to recognise the trade union, to reinstate the girl stitcher and to meet with a committee of the girls to discuss wage levels. However, for many of the women and girls involved this was a hollow victory and few of them were re-employed as the employer claimed that little work was available for the women.¹⁰⁸ Again, this may have provided a convenient opportunity for the management of the hosiery company to dispense with those female workers who were involved in the organisation of the strike. The strikes involving women in the hosiery industry show that despite their youthfulness, the absence of extensive trade union organisation among women hosiery workers and the fact that the vast

¹⁰⁷ *The Falkirk Herald*, March 13, 1937

¹⁰⁸ *The Falkirk Herald*, March 6, 1937; *The Falkirk Mail*, March 18, 20, 26, 1937

majority of employees in the industry were female, the women employed in this industry were still able to overcome these potential impediments to collective action and organise effectively on at least five occasions in the inter-war period and with some success.

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that while strike activity among women employed in the textile sector was relatively low in the inter-war period, women textile workers, like their counterparts in the non-textile sector, were still prepared to embark on strike action to improve or defend wages and working conditions. Strike activity among women employed in both the textile and non-textile sectors, was particularly low during the mid to late 1920s and during the early 1930s. This would suggest that the failure of the General Strike and subsequent drop in morale among trade unionists had a considerable adverse affect on strike activity among women in Scotland, as was the case with the rest of the UK. In the early 1930s during the worst of the depression, strike activity among women employed in all sectors, both textiles and non-textiles, was extremely low and it would seem that the high levels of unemployment experienced at this time acted as a deterrent to strike activity. However, the example of the Dundee jute industry in this chapter shows that despite the depression and high levels of unemployment in the trade in the 1930s, women workers were still prepared to take industrial action and high unemployment did not entirely undermine strike activity among women in this trade.

The survey of strikes involving women in the Dundee jute industry and in rest of the textile industry in the inter-war period presented in this chapter cannot be viewed as comprehensive, but it would seem that the pattern of strike activity in Scotland among female textile workers broadly reflected the trends in strike activity among men and women employed in textiles production in the UK and the trends in strike activity among women employed in other sectors

in Scotland. Despite the gradual decline in the importance of the textile sector as a source of employment for women in Scotland, the high unemployment in all branches of the trade, particularly the jute trade, coupled with declining trade union membership and the contraction in the numbers of women employed, women continued to embark on strike action in this sector more frequently than women employed in other sectors. However, in comparison to women employed in other sectors of the Scottish economy, women textile workers were presented with very few opportunities to raise wage levels and were forced to defend themselves against wage reductions more frequently than women employed elsewhere. More than half of women's strikes in the non-textile sector involved demands for wage increases, whereas in the textiles sector few strikes centred on this demand and many more strikes were in opposition to wage reductions. Nevertheless, women textile workers, particularly those employed in the jute industry, also continued to embark on sympathetic action, for trade union recognition and against changes in working conditions.

This chapter has also shown that, as in the period before the First World War, women textile workers could not always be guaranteed the support of skilled male workers when on strike and that male textile workers, particularly those employed in the jute trade, did not embark on strike action to anywhere near the same extent as women employed in the trade. It would seem that strikes in the inter-war period were less exuberant than those in the pre-war period, particularly in Dundee, possibly reflecting the declining fortunes of the textile trades. However, women textile workers, like other women workers, could be well-organised and very active while on strike even without the support of a trade union and on several occasions women textile workers were able to draw very effectively, on the support of the wider community. This chapter also shows that while there may have been a higher trade union density among women textile workers, particularly in Dundee, many of the strikes presented

are likely to have involved women workers who were not trade union members. It seems that while at least half of the 43 textile strikes presented in chapter 6 would have involved some women who were trade union members, a substantial number, possibly as many as 17 strikes, involved women who seem to have had no trade union support. Additionally, it is possible that many women involved in strikes where trade union organisation is known were not actually trade union members. This chapter and the previous chapter, have shown that women workers could embark on strike action whether they were trade union members or not and that being militant did not require any prior knowledge of trade unionism. Even where trade union organisation among women workers was weak, as in the hosiery trade or in catering, pockets of both organised and unorganised women workers could still be involved in strikes.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has been concerned primarily to give an account of women's work, trade union organisation and participation and to consider the incidence of strike activity among women in the period 1919-1939. The evidence presented has shown that the weak position of women in the labour market was carried over into their position in the trade union movement. It is important to note that working class women in Scotland were not a homogeneous mass who shared the same experiences of work, either during the First World War or in the inter-war period, and their work experiences would have differed according to geographical location, prevailing attitudes to work in their locality and the type of work performed, among a range of other factors. However, some general conclusions can be made about the position of working class women in employment in the inter-war period. Firstly, it has been shown that the First World War may have brought a relaxation of women's customary roles but their employment in new jobs was based on the understanding that this was temporary. Despite the massive increase in women's employment and trade union organisation, any aspirations women war workers may have had about remaining in new areas of employment were thwarted by the Restoration of Pre-war Practices Act. This Act, supported by the state, employers and male and female trade unionists, helped roll back the gains women had made during the war. The war re-affirmed the main role of women as wives and mothers rather than workers. Secondly, the war did not impact greatly on the range of work available for women or radically improve their working conditions and there were many continuities with the pre-First World War period in terms of the range of work available. It has been shown that the marked concentration of women in a few sectors persisted into the inter-war period and significant numbers of women continued to be employed in the traditional industries, particularly domestic service, encouraged by government policies. Nevertheless, there was an extension in the employment of women particularly in shop and

clerical work and it is also possible that more Scottish women moved into work in the 'new industries' towards the end of the inter-war period. However, irrespective of the industry, women workers were systematically paid less than men, (the war did not usher in sexual equality in pay), and they were generally excluded from 'skilled' work and positions of authority. Therefore, the labour market was not particularly encouraging for women seeking work.

Against this background it has been shown that in a continuation of the pre-First World War period, trade union organisation among women in Scotland was generally weak in relation to their participation in the labour market, male workers in Scotland and women workers in the rest of the UK. Any trade union strength among women that may have existed during and immediately after the First World War was eroded in the inter-war period. However, it is likely that more women were in the trade union movement in Scotland than had been before the First World War. Women trade union members were also underrepresented in official posts in the movement. Despite a wide range of new and imaginative organising initiatives employed by the STUC Organisation of Women Committee and its affiliated trade unions, organisation among women workers did not appear to have substantially improved in the inter-war period. It is possible that this was a reflection of the lack of support given to these recruitment drives by various branches of the labour movement, the unsuitability of the recruitment strategies used and the erratic nature of recruitment drives. Additionally, recruitment strategies were not wide ranging enough in that they were usually centred on cities and were never directed at women employed in domestic service, the largest single employer of Scottish women in the inter-war period. A main consideration of this study has been to explore the reasons why the vast majority of women workers remained outside of the ranks of the trade union movement in the inter-war period.

It is clear that encouraging trade union organisation among women workers was difficult for a wide variety of reasons and a number of factors played a part in contributing to the lack of trade union organisation among women, particularly the concentration of women in work where trade union organisation was difficult, due to high labour turnover and the employment of women in large numbers of small units. A number of other possible factors which affected the propensity of women workers, in particular, to organise, included women's commitments in the home, the often temporary nature of women's working life and very low female wage levels. While the hostile attitudes of Scottish trade unionists on the issue of women and work would not have been the sole explanation for the low levels of organisation among women, it would, nevertheless, have been a factor. Furthermore, it has been argued that the failure of the trade union movement to offer women workers an invitation to struggle for equal pay or improved pay and access to better jobs is one of the reasons why trade union organisation failed to develop more extensively among women workers in Scotland between the wars. Women workers were invited into a trade union movement that viewed women as unequal workers and second class union members and which represented the interests of the skilled male working class far more adequately than the broad mass of working class women and unskilled men.

The focus, in chapter four, on trade union attitudes on the issue of women and work, particularly married women and work, the right of women to work during the depression, equal pay for women workers, protective legislation and the campaign for family allowances, has highlighted the deep seated attachment to the family wage and the strength of the idea that men had the first right to work. It is clear from the evidence presented that women workers, particularly married women, were held partly responsible for the high levels of unemployment among men when labour markets were slack between the wars and their

right to work during periods of high unemployment, particularly among men, was open for debate by the trade union movement. While women would have obtained jobs more easily than men given that they were cheaper to employ, they were employed in the expanding areas of work and were mainly non-unionised, the trade union movement in Scotland virtually ignored the fact that the depressions and the consequent high levels of unemployment impacted on women not just as wives and mothers of unemployed men but women workers also. The extremely high rates of unemployment among women workers in Dundee provided a good example of this. In several trades, trade unions employed a number of strategies to ensure that men had the first right to work. Trade unions could press for the exclusion of women from industry or at least segregation within an industry, in order to protect themselves from the threat of women's competition in the labour market and to hold on to the best work. Trade unions, as the example of the Scottish Union of Bakers, the Post Office Workers' Union and NALGO showed, could simultaneously demand the expulsion or limited recruitment of women into certain trades and equal pay for women. The latter demand could be issued in an attempt to protect male members interests against what was viewed as the danger of cheap female labour and was not about supporting improvements in pay for female colleagues. This study has provided examples of trade unions colluding with employers to control the entry of women into a trade, as the example of the Scottish Typographical Association showed, which led to eventual exclusion of female compositors from the printing industry. Trade unions could push for the complete removal of women from work via agreements with employers, as the Scottish Union of Bakers attempted to do, even though this strategy was a failure and baking employers eventually restored women to the trade. Elsewhere, for example the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union, pursued agreements with employers to segregate women into certain areas of work, usually less well paid and

deemed to be less skilled, and agreements with clothing industry employers which would have given preference to male workers rather than women when job vacancies arose.

In the inter-war period the idea that a married women's role was as a wife and a mother was increasingly emphasised and an important strategy employed by the state and private and public sector employers to hinder work opportunities for married women and push them back into the home upon marriage was the imposition of the marriage bar, which had been strengthened in the inter-war period. Given that there appears not to have been any criticism or even any discussion of the operation of the marriage bar within the Scottish trade union movement, it has to be assumed that men and women in the movement in Scotland were generally in favour of this. However, married women workers were still not accepted as a permanent and desirable presence in the labour force and the right of these women to work was still clearly open for debate in the inter-war period. Sections of the trade union movement also sought to inhibit the further entry of married women into the labour force and it has been shown that trade unionists, (male and female), in Scotland could also pursue their own agreements with employers to prevent married women from working, as the example of the furnishing trades union showed. Additionally, it has been shown that men and women in clerical, civil service, post office unions, NALGO and NUDAW could call for the removal of married women from work or actively exclude women from trade union membership and therefore, from work in their chosen trade, as the examples of the Edinburgh Typographical Society and the Printing, Paper and Bookbinders Union, provided in chapter four, showed. The trade union attitude to married women workers, as expressed through the support for the marriage bar, the belief that married women workers were a cause of unemployment and the attempts to exclude married women from work, was founded in the belief that the lives of married women should revolve around the home and the family. These views were an

affirmation of the dominant view within the trade union movement that the proper position of married women was in the home and not at work. However, as has been noted, married women would also have been convinced that their identities were founded on being housewives and dependants and would have viewed marriage as a time when paid employment had to stop. Women in the trade union movement in Scotland were also unable to overcome traditional views about the role of married women and they too propounded the view that it was undesirable for married women to work. However, it has been shown that women in the movement in Scotland tended to reject the feminist position on a range of issues preferring class solidarity with working class men in the movement rather than gender solidarity with middle class liberal feminists. Women in the trade union movement in Scotland appear to have been particularly loyal to the demands of the movement especially the demand for the family wage.

The trade union movement believed that the removal of married women from work would be best achieved through the struggle for the family wage. The commitment to the concept of the family wage, which was embedded in trade union philosophy, was strengthened in the inter-war period and reinforced by the economic climate of the inter-war years. In theory, the idea was that the main role of women was to be in the home and dependent on the earnings of her husband, the main breadwinner. However, in practice, in Scotland as in the rest of the UK, the ideal of the family wage was not realised for majority of working class families and a substantial and indeterminate number of married women either had to work in the formal or informal economy in order to supplement low male wages. As Coote and Campbell argue, the demand for the family wage meant that women's work was regarded as being of secondary

importance and her wages a mere extra to the earnings of the main breadwinner.¹ The continued popularity of the concept of the family wage allowed male trade unionists to demand the first right to work because married women's earnings were viewed as a supplement to the family income and single women workers could expect to marry. Demands for the family wage were incompatible with genuine demands for equal pay for women workers wherever they were employed on the same work as men. The reluctance to fight for equal pay for women and the belief that women workers were inferior and did not deserve equal pay, a view seemingly shared by women workers and women trade unionists as the example of women compositors in Scotland showed, and the failure to devise strategies to improve women's pay in the classic women's trades, meant that women continued to provide employers with a pool of cheap labour and their low pay was obviously economically advantageous for employers. As Barrett has argued, the failure of the trade union and labour movements to fight for improvements in women's pay and instead to demand the family wage rather than a suitable minimum wage which would have benefited low paid women, and men, not only resulted in the exploitation and oppression of women, but also, as she argues 'militated against a unified working class consciousness and unified militant action'.² The trade union movement merely reinforced rather than challenged the divisions imposed on the working class by capital.

However, despite the failure of the trade union movement in Scotland to push for significant improvements in women's pay and working conditions in the inter-war period and the weakness of women's trade union organisation, unorganised, as well as organised women were able to embark on strikes on many occasions often in the most adverse

¹ A Coote and B Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, Picador, London, 1982, p. 57-58.

² M Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today*, Verso, 1988, p. 171.

circumstances accompanied by the clear formulation of demands to improve their own pay and working conditions. It has been shown that women in Scotland were involved in at least 69 strikes, contributing to the increase in strike activity in the UK, in the early 1920s in particular. It is also possible that women were also involved in other forms of industrial action, such as absenteeism. It is probable that given the different occupational and industrial distribution of women workers and their employment in industrial sectors characterised by high labour turnover, small units and low pay, that female strike activity was less frequent than men's strike activity in the inter-war period in Scotland. However, it would seem that where men and women were employed together, particularly in non-textile employment, women were just as militant as their male colleagues and many examples have been provided of women striking with men. This evidence has further challenged the idea that women workers were docile and apathetic in the workplace. Nevertheless, despite several large and well publicised strikes and numerous smaller strikes the perception that it was difficult to get women to take an active interest in their working conditions and that not joining trade unions was given as an indication of this, persisted among trade unionists in the inter-war period. It would have been useful for the trade union movement to tap into the concerns and grievances and the militancy displayed by women workers while on strike. While this would not have solved organisational problems and led to a massive influx of women workers into the movement it would have been a logical step forward.

Trade union membership among women in Scotland remained low in the inter-war period and the position of women workers in the trade union movement would require a further expansion in women's work during the Second World War to provide a significant growth in trade union organisation among women. However, in Scotland it was the 1960s that witnessed the greatest expansion in women's trade union organisation and by the early

1970s more than a third of Scottish women were trade union members.³ It is possible that this growth reflected the fact that sections of the trade union movement implemented policies which were of benefit to women workers coupled with wider societal changes in attitudes to women's work. However more recent research, cited in this thesis, has shown that many of the factors identified as preventing women from joining trade unions in the inter-war period continue to hinder trade union organisation among women workers in Scotland.

³ McIvor, (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 161.

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BETWEEN HIM AND HIS WORK.



The Willing Worker:—Guid save us! Women Picketers. We used to get driven to oor wark. Noo we get dog's abuse if we luik near it.

APPENDIX II

Sweated Workers in Glasgow

STRIKE OF WAITRESSES AT KERR'S CAFES

Citizens of Glasgow, your attention is drawn to the conditions which prevail at above establishments:

Waitresses and Kitchen Staff are receiving the following Wages and Conditions:—

12/- per week for 12 hours per day

1/- deducted if girl breaks a plate

9d " " " cup

6d " " " saucer

2/- " " " wineglass

3d " for being late in morning

The Girls decided to join the Union, with the result that the Shop Steward was dismissed, which is quite evidently an attempt to undermine the Girls' Union.

Previous to joining the Union, the minimum wage of restaurant workers was 10/- per week, and they had to purchase uniform from the firm

We are asking the public to

SUPPORT THE GIRLS

A. Fleming & Co., Printers, 25 Gt. Hamilton Street, Glasgow

National Federation of Women Workers, Strike Leaflet, 1920