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WOMEN AND THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN SCOTLAND, 1850 - 1914

By

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at the **University of Glasgow.** Faculty of Social Sciences,  
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DDUJFW	-	Dundee and District Union of Jute and Flax Workers
DMFOH	-	Dundee Mill and Factory Operatives' Herald
DMFOU	-	Dundee and District Mill and Factory Operatives' Union
GCWT	-	Glasgow Council for Women's Trades
GTC	-	Glasgow Trades Council
GUWW	-	Glasgow Union of Women Workers
ILP	-	Independent Labour Party
NFCWT	-	National Federal Council for Women's Trades
NFWW	-	National Federation of Women Workers
SCWG	-	Scottish Co-operative Women's Guild
SCWT	-	Scottish Council for Women's Trades
SDP	-	Social Democratic Party
SLP	-	Socialist Labour Party
SNAOT	-	Scottish National Association of Operative Tailors
STUC	-	Scottish Trade Union Congress
WLL	-	Women's Labour League
WPPL	-	Women's Protection and Provident League
WSPU	-	Women's Social and Political Union
WTUL	-	Women's Trade Union League
WTUR	-	Women's Trade Union Review
WUJ	-	Women's Union Journal

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ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been a concerted effort by feminist historians to retrieve women from historical obscurity and reinsert them into the historical landscape. Early research concentrated on this task of reclamation and produced a number of self-contained monographs and studies of women's lives. However, the emphasis has shifted towards viewing the sexual division of labour as a central object of study and as a tool of analysis and evaluating its impact on the historical process. It is argued that in this way feminist history can transform our knowledge of the past and contribute to a greater understanding of the process of historical change.

The present study seeks to contribute to this project by examining the lives of working women in Scotland between 1850 and 1914. It takes issue with standard accounts which assume that women's paid labour and women's organisation at the point of production will take male forms and argues that gender ideologies had a significant impact on women's experience of work.

The pattern of women's employment is examined and it is illustrated that because work has been defined according to the male norm of full-time permanent work, outside the home, the extent of women's paid labour has been seriously underestimated. It is also argued that in order to account for the characteristics of female employment it is necessary to take ideological factors into consideration and that notions of what constitutes women's

'proper' role in society had a powerful influence on the pattern of women's employment. The study identifies the important role played by trade unions in maintaining occupational segregation and confirming women's work as unskilled and low paid. It is also suggested that the model of labour organisations was influenced inter-alia by an ideology of gender which limited its ability to relate to the experience of women workers. It is argued that women's experience of work was mediated by their subordination as a gender and that this generated particular forms of resistance and organisation which did not necessarily conform to the standard male forms.

The study concludes that we have to reappraise the received view of women workers as apathetic and difficult to organise and suggests that alternative forms of labour organisations which do not reflect but challenge gender divisions are required.

## INTRODUCTION

This study is about working women in Scotland in the period 1850 - 1914 and is concerned with the pattern of their employment, their involvement in and relationship to trade unionism, and the forms of their workplace resistance and struggles. It is part of the wider project of redressing the balance of labour history which for so long has omitted the history of working women. Although the focus is on Scotland, it is intended to be more than a local study or monograph and to make some contribution to an understanding of the impact of gender ideologies and family structures on women's experience of work.

The third quarter of the nineteenth century has long been regarded as a watershed in Britain's economic, political and social history. Politically it was the beginning of a period of relative quiescence and stability, particularly when contrasted with the social upheavals and class conflict of the Chartist era, and economically it marked the consolidations of industrial capitalism, the mechanised factory system and Britain's dominance of world trade and manufacture. It also marked the emergence of new social institutions, cultural formations and ideologies. Of the latter, one of the most significant, in terms of the lives of women, was the ideology of domesticity which in its Victorian form stressed the division of the world into a private and a public sphere, which corresponded to the division between home and work. The Victorian domestic ideal regarded the family as a haven from the harsh and sinful public world and assigned to women the role of moral guardian who was to be the embodiment of Christian purity. Women, therefore, became associated with the 'private' realm of the household and the family, and men with the public world of work.

Although this domestic ideology was essentially a middle-class notion, it percolated through the social structure to the working class who adopted it in a reformulated version. The identification of women with the home and family and men with work was so powerful and pervasive that the social origins of the division became obscured so that it appeared as a natural phenomenon.

Historians have tended to view women through the filter of Victorian domestic ideology and concluded that women were firmly located in the home, had withdrawn from the public sphere and that any variation on this pattern was the exception which proved the rule. Thus one leading historian could unequivocally state :

"The fact of the withdrawal from public activity by the women of the working class is incontrovertible" <sup>1</sup>

The force of this ideology of separate sexual spheres, coupled with the symbolic significance of the machine and hard physical labour, which is associated with the Industrial Revolution, has meant that work has generally been defined as something which men do, and indeed working class has generally been defined as working men.<sup>2</sup> Women's work whether waged, or in the home as unpaid domestic labour, has until recently been neglected as a serious area of study and relegated to a peripheral role; while women have been written about primarily as the dependents of working men. Labour historians have implicitly accepted the view of working-class woman that :

"Once married, she belonged to the proletariat not as a worker, but as the wife, mother and housekeeper of workers." <sup>3</sup>

Assertions by historians that women did not inhabit the world of work or were marginal to it in the Victorian era, are usually based on the strength of assumptions rather than on systematic investigations of the historical reality. These assertions are not simply the product of slipshod scholarship, but reflect the pervasiveness and tenacity of the ideology of separate sexual spheres which imbues the sexual division of labour with the status of a 'natural' or biological fact. Consequently sexual divisions have been taken for granted rather than viewed as social constructs which are legitimate objects of historical inquiry. Historians have been content to resort to bland and unsubstantiated assertions to describe them :

"Typically it was the male who had to leave the home every day to work for wages and the women who did not." <sup>4</sup>

There have been, however, an increasing number of studies by feminist historians whose findings have questioned the validity of

such sweeping generalisations about women's role, by revealing that women's involvement in waged labour was more extensive than has previously been supposed, that usually their earnings were central to the family economy and that frequently women were family breadwinners.

Just as work has been defined according to a masculine conception, struggle has also been defined in a narrow, partial fashion. The pre-industrial struggles of the common people encompassed and reflected the heterogeneity of that category and consisted of direct action on the streets, and women's role in these struggles has been well documented. However, with the consolidation of industrial capitalism, the dominant form of proletarian struggle and organisation became trade unionism which was based on occupational categories and was therefore a more exclusive form of struggle than in the pre-industrial era when membership of the common people was the sole criterion for involvement.

Although trade unionism became the established form of struggle, historians have tended to regard it as encompassing all collectivist tendencies and women's low participation in trade unions has been taken variously as evidence of their apathy, passivity, disunity and their disinclination for collective action. Resistance and struggle which do not take male forms have been ignored or seen as insignificant, irrelevant or anachronistic. Instances of such assumptions amongst traditional labour historians are too numerous to document, but evidence of the pervasiveness of the view is its presence in the work of feminist historians who challenge other long-standing assumptions about gender divisions. For example Barrett and McIntosh in an article which seeks to debunk the myth of the male breadwinner can still assert of working women in the nineteenth century :

"Their voices were little heard in the debates, for they were unorganised and unrepresented, it was left to others to speak of their rights or of their sufferings - even when it was recognised that their exploitation at work was so great because they were unorganised and disunited."<sup>7</sup>

An important aspect of the present study is an attempt to challenge empirically such entrenched assumptions by rediscovering women in the world of work and making visible the forms of their workplace resistance.

However as feminist historians have argued, feminist history is defined by its approach rather than its subject matter and therefore means much more than researching a group or category which have previously been ignored and grafting on the acquired knowledge to an already constituted history.<sup>8</sup> Whilst there clearly has to be a concern with excavating women's history from the layers of neglect, bias and preconceptions, this should also involve theorising about the implications for our understanding of the past. Assumptions about gender divisions have remained virtually untouched and unexplored by traditional historians, and feminist history, by placing them in the centre stage of historical investigation, should raise new questions and so transform our knowledge of the past and contribute to a greater understanding of the process of historical change. It is, therefore, intended in this thesis to move beyond reclaiming and salvaging working women's past, to considering the impact of gender ideologies and family structures on women's experience of work and to question the adequacy of traditional forms of labour organisation.

Recent feminist theorising has taken issue with accounts which subsume women's experience under the category of class, arguing that it does not adequately explain the basis of women's subordination in society, the different forms which it has assumed and the differential experience of men and women of both the working class and middle class. Much of this debate has generated from critiques of The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State, the seminal work by Engels which is seen to exemplify the approach which reduces gender to class.

Engels' central task was to offer a materialist explanation of women's subordination by relating it to certain developments in private property, the state and the family. He argued that in pre-class societies there was a natural but complementary sexual division of labour with women responsible for and supreme in the household, while men had the task of providing food. This state was changed by the first major developments in the productive forces, namely the domestication of animals which enabled the creation of a surplus, and eventually the development of private property. Because it was men who hunted and procured the other necessities of life, the herd became the private property of men rather than women.

Therefore with the domestication of animals and the expansion of trade, men became the sole owners of the strategic resources of society, the women became dependent individuals :

"The division of labour in the family remained unchanged and yet it now put the former domestic relationship topsy-turvy simply because the division of labour outside the family had changed. The very cause that had formerly made the woman supreme in the house namely her being confined to domestic work, now assured supremacy in the house for the man : The women's housework lost its significance compared with the man's work in obtaining a livelihood; the latter was everything, the former an insignificant contribution." <sup>9</sup>

Engels' also argued that the overthrow of mother right, the shift to a patrilineal clan system and the development of the monogamous family, had their origins in the development of private property. As the establishment of inheritance became crucial in order to safeguard property, monogamy which applied only to women, evolved as the surest way of establishing paternity by enforcing their chastity. Engel's analysis of marriage in capitalist society concludes that it is only within the proletarian family where there is no property to preserve, that there is no material basis for male supremacy and therefore the possibility of equality. <sup>10</sup> However, crucially, he argues that a further condition of women's emancipation, which is only possible for women of the working class, is their re-entry into social production in large numbers.

This necessarily schematic presentation of Engels' theory omits many aspects of his analysis which have been subjected to a sustained critique by a number of authors, <sup>11</sup> however, the central criticism of Engels' work is his postulation of women's subordination as a side-effect of economic class relations and the uncritical insertion of this analysis into subsequent Marxist theorising. Feminists have argued that this analysis fails to account for a number of factors: the trans-historical and cross-cultural character of women's oppression, the historical and cultural variations in its form and the persistence of women's subordination in the modern capitalist working class family, when according to the theory there is no longer any material basis for it.

Feminist attempts to offer an alternative interpretation of the specific nature of women's oppression fall into two broad categories : The

first approach stresses the persistence of male domination throughout history and its autonomous nature, that is its separateness from other forms of oppression and exploitation in society.<sup>12</sup> The second or Marxist feminist approach attempts to analyse the relationship between male domination and female subordination and different modes of production or different forms of class society.<sup>13</sup> Within both approaches there are a variety of ways of conceptualising both the power relationship between men and women, and modes of production.<sup>14</sup>

The position taken in this study is that inequalities of gender and capitalist social relations are not two separate systems whether interlocking or mutually accommodating,<sup>15</sup> but that they are integrated into one single process, so that it is possible to speak of patriarchal capitalist social relationships. By this it is meant that capitalism has developed on the basis of pre-existing sexual divisions which are in turn adapted and transformed in the process of struggles between both capital and labour and struggles within the working class and become deeply imbricated into the fabric of the social relations of capitalism.<sup>16</sup>

This approach has important implications for an analysis of women's paid labour in capitalism as it refutes the orthodox Marxist definition of class which is narrowly conceived in terms of the production process or the relations of exploitation within the workplace. A central assumption of the orthodox Marxist argument is that in an industrially based capitalist society waged labour is a gender-free and age-free category and the social relations of the workplace are governed by the impersonal criteria of the cash nexus and the market. Indeed this is the basis of the primacy which Engels placed on the potentially liberating force of women's involvement in social production, as it involved the replacement of women's domination by her husband with the depersonalised power of capitalist over worker. According to the traditional Marxist analysis class experience is determined by one's position in the relations of production as waged labour. However, feminists have pointed up the inadequacy of this analysis for an understanding of the specificity of women's employment and its salient characteristics, for example :

the existence of a horizontal division of labour which concentrates women in certain well-defined sectors of the economy; the existence of a vertical division of labour which largely confines women to unskilled jobs and a subordinate position in the hierarchical structures of the workplace, and women's low pay in relation to the male workforce. It has been argued that the divergent experience of female waged labour and indeed different categories of waged labour, cannot be understood by reference to the realm of production only, but requires to be analysed in terms of the wider social relations of production which include the family and the relations between men and women.<sup>17</sup> Consequently it is posited that women's entry into the labour market and their status as waged labour is patterned by and mediated by their subordination as a gender.

As ideologies of gender and the form of the sexual division of labour vary historically, their precise impact on women's experience of work is a matter for historical investigation. It is therefore the purpose of this thesis to specifically examine the connections between gender ideologies, the family and production in the period 1850 - 1914 in Scotland and how this affected women's experience of work, their consciousness and the forms of their workplace resistance.

The first chapter charts the pattern of women's employment in Scotland between 1850 and 1914, both regionally and nationally, and examines the various factors, which shaped this pattern. It focuses on the specific characteristics of women's employment and argues that these cannot be understood solely by reference to changes in the economy and the sectoral distribution of employment but requires consideration of ideological factors. It considers the extent to which dominant gender ideologies play a role in determining women's changing participation rates in the labour force and the lower wages of women workers and in constituting certain kinds of work as 'women's work'.

Chapter 2 looks at the development and form of Scottish trade unionism in the mid-Victorian period and discusses the extent to which trade union ideology and practices were influenced by ideologies of gender. It is argued that by incorporating these ideologies into their practices, trade unions played a significant role in maintaining and reinforcing

the sexual division of labour in work and women's status as cheap labour. Women's involvement in trade unions is outlined in Chapter 3 and traditional explanations which have been offered to explain their lack of involvement are critically discussed. It is suggested that one explanation which is overlooked lies in the structure and practice of trade unions themselves which usually developed in response to the needs and interests of skilled male workers. This chapter examines the relevance of traditional forms of trade unionism to women workers and presents evidence to illustrate that far from being apathetic and docile, women workers often took collective action to resolve their grievances. However, as these forms of resistance did not conform to accepted male models of organisation and took place outside them, they were usually discounted.

Having discussed these arguments in a general fashion, the next two chapters focus on women workers in one particular industry in one town, namely the jute workers of Dundee. These chapters reconstruct the detail of working women's lives including the labour process in the jute industry, the division of labour, the culture of the mill and factory, household structures, marriage patterns and recreational life. The particular ways in which women's subordination as a gender were reflected in the workplace is highlighted, as are the strategies adopted in the workplace and the community to ensure that women's role as workers did not subvert Victorian domestic ideology and the conception of women as the embodiment of the virtues of modesty and chastity. Whilst the pervasive influence of patriarchal control is stressed, attention is also drawn to the ways in which women resist this control. Women's disputes in the jute industry are examined to illustrate how the sexual division of labour created the basis for conflict between male and female workers and contributed to the fragmentation of the working class. It is also argued that women's experience of waged labour as a gender as well as workers, generated particular forms of struggle.

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the 'new era' of trade unionism heralded by the advent of New Unionism in the late 1880's and culminating in the years of intensified industrial struggle before the First World War,

and analyse the extent to which the exclusivist attitudes of the mid Victorian movement were abandoned. It is argued that although there was some erosion of sectionalist attitudes, change was limited and that trade unions continued to pursue strategies which disadvantaged women workers and reinforced their vulnerable position in the labour market. Similar observations apply to the trade union organisation which were created specifically for women, for although they recognised the need to relate directly to women, the structure and ideology of these organisations replicated those of male unions in that they regarded women's presence in the labour market as a problem and an anomaly. Although women continued to take collective action and made a significant contribution to the upsurge in industrial militancy in the pre-war years, the dominant view continued to be that women could not be organised in trade unions because of their weakness and apathy. However it is argued that the failure of trade unions to organise around women's problems and issues explains the difficulties in sustaining organisation amongst them.

The final chapter examines how an ideology of gender divisions was reproduced in working class politics and socialist organisations in the early 20th century. It is demonstrated that whilst this ideology operated to generate struggles amongst working class women and drew them into political activity, working women were in practice excluded from working class politics as women were only related to men in their capacity as wives and mothers. It is suggested that this inhibited the potential of the early socialist movement to transcend significant divisions within the working class.

In one sense there are no purely technical problems of data collection in writing feminist history, as it is primarily concerned with peeling off the layers which distort so much of the evidence concerning women. There are, however, a number of practical problems involved in such research, the most immediate being that of invisibility. Usually women's past goes unrecorded both by others and themselves, admittedly a

common problem with the powerless. There is no cache of records which can be unearthed and simply consulted and the information is usually scattered and the nature of research piecemeal and fragmentary. The problem of invisibility, however, is compounded by the problem of bias. Labour and social historians have long confronted the bias of class which imbues so many of the sources of information on the working class and the poor, however, the study of women is often distorted by the filters of both class and gender which often has the consequence of reinforcing women's invisibility.

Although the census has been used as the major source of statistical information on women's employment, census statistics are produced and constructed according to male definitions of work, that is full time, permanent and outside the home. As much of women's work was temporary, seasonal, casual, part time and performed in the home, women are seriously under-represented as their work did not conform to the male defined norm. An additional problem is that the classification of women's work is vague and imprecise in comparison with men's work which is usually subdivided into a number of categories. Consequently one often has to approach the research from an oblique angle and supplement this information with data gleaned from sources which were designed for other purposes. As regards women's employment, I have relied on parliamentary reports, census schedules, the surveys of official bodies and philanthropic organisations to flesh out the skeletal outline provided by the census. Oral sources and the records of philanthropic organisations have been used for details of working women's daily life in the workplace and the community.

Trade union records reveal very little about the nature of working women's collective resistance; however, if one places assumptions about gender and sexual divisions to the fore of investigations, these records provide illuminating examples of the ways in which issues, policies and problems were defined according to the interests and points of view of men. In this way we can begin to question the relevance and adequacy of official trade union organisation to women,

this in turn leads to the reformulation of standard definitions and conceptions of work and struggle and points to alternative ways of interpreting the evidence. Thus trade union reports of strikes or disputes by women can be re-evaluated and these coupled with newspaper accounts of women's strikes, can provide a wealth of material on the particular forms of women's resistance and organisation.

The task of rediscovering women in the world of work is not a sterile one for the evidence does exist, however, it is to a great extent an exercise which involves asking different questions of the evidence in order to explore deep rooted assumptions about gender divisions.

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- 2 : S Alexander, "Women's Work in Nineteenth Century London; A Study of the Years 1820-50," ibid., p59
- 3 : E Hobsbawm, "Men and Women in Socialist Iconography" History Workshop Journal 6, (Autumn 1978), p131
- 4 : Ibid., p130
- 5 : S Alexander, op.cit., J Liddington and J Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us (London : Virago, 1978) A V John, By the Sweat of their Brow. Women Workers at Victorian Coal Mines (London : Crom Helm, 1980) S Taylor, "The Effects of Marriage on Job Possibilities for Women, and the Ideology of the Home, Nottingham 1890-1903," Oral History 5 no. 2, (Autumn 1977) J Lown, "Not So Much a Factory More a Form of Patriarchy. Gender Division and Domestic Ideology in a nineteenth century Essex silk mill" in British Sociological Association Volume Class, Gender and Work (London : Heinemann, 1983)
- 6 : E P Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1968) B Taylor, "The Early Socialists", in S Lipshitz (ed) Tearing the Veil (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) K T Logue, Popular Disturbance in Scotland 1780 - 1815 (Edinburgh : John Donald, 1979) D Thompson, op.cit.
- 7 : M Barrett and M McIntosh, "The 'Family Wage' : Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists," Capital and Class, vol 11 (Summer, 1980), p56
- 8 : S Alexander, op.cit., p59. Editorial, HWJ19, (Spring 1985) A Davin, "Feminism and Labour History", in R Samuel (ed), People's History and Socialist Theory (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981)
- 9 : F Engels, The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State (New York : Pathfinder Press, 1972) p152
- 10 : Ibid, p132
- 11 : R Delmar, "Looking Again at Engels' Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" in J Mitchell and A Oakley (eds) op.cit.; L Vogel, Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Towards a Unitary Theory (London : Pluto Press, 1983) Ch.6 P Aaby, "Engels and Women", Critique of Anthropology
- 12 : Perhaps the principal exponent of this approach is K Millett, Sexual Politics (New York : Doubleday, 1969)
- 13 : There are myriad contributions which take this broad approach. Both Z R Eisenstein (ed), Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism (New York and London : Monthly Review Press 1979) and A Khun and Ann Marie Wolpe (eds), Feminism and Materialism (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978)

contain a number of articles which attempt to relate patriarchy and different modes of production.

- 14 : V Beechey, "On patriarchy", Feminist Review 3, 1979 provides a useful analysis of the different ways in which patriarchy and modes of production have been conceptualised.
- 15 : H Hartmann, "Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex", in Eisenstein, op.cit.
- 16 : S Alexander, op.cit., V Beechey, op.cit., and M Barrett, Women's Oppression Today (London : Verso and NLB, 1980) all adopt this perspective.
- 17 : This argument relates to wider debates within Marxism concerning definitions of key Marxist concepts such as 'class', 'class consciousness', 'modes of production' and 'relations of production'. For a full discussion of this debate see the article by R Johnston in HWJ6 (Autumn 1978) and the responses from K McLelland, G Williams and T Putnan in HWJ7, (Spring 1979)

THE PATTERN OF WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN SCOTLAND 1850 - 1914

Developments in the Scottish economy between 1850 and 1914 obviously influenced the employment structure, particularly as these years spanned the culmination of Scotland's first wave of industrialisation based on textiles, and the crest of the second wave based on the traditional heavy industries of coal, steel, engineering and the relatively new industry of shipbuilding.

By 1850 the twin processes of industrialisation and urbanisation had advanced to the stage that Scotland had been transformed from a predominantly agrarian and preindustrial society to a robust industrial economy within the space of half a century. Despite the rapid pace of industrialisation, the transition was neither complete nor evenly spread geographically.

The prolonged survival of traditional handicraft trades and domestic outwork within the industrial structure, coupled with massive migration, was also a distinctive feature of the Scottish economy.

The spectacular developments in the industrial structure, in such a concentrated period, should not blind us to the fact that in 1831 27% of the occupied population worked in agriculture compared with 18.2% who were engaged in the various branches of the textile industry and 5.3% in heavy industries.<sup>1</sup>

The cornerstone of Scotland's industrial development was the growth of the cotton industry which also spawned and precipitated developments in a number of related industries, from chemicals to machine making.

The transformation of the industry is illustrated by the fact that in 1812 it employed 151,300 people, mainly in their own homes whereas by 1840 the bulk of the spinning labour force was employed in the 190 mills,<sup>2</sup> while capital investment in the industry had expanded from an aggregate of £65,000 in 1790 to approximately £4.5m by 1840.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly a number of diverse factors contributed to the growth of the industry, including the ability to tap the existing expertise which had been generated by the indigenous linen industry, the abundant supply of natural resources and the benefits deriving from participation in the English economy which already had a well developed industrial and commercial sector.

However perhaps the single most important advantage enjoyed by the Scottish cotton industry was the abundance of cheap labour. It was the sheer abundance of labour rather than any of its inherent qualities which determined that it would be cheap. Therefore, the flood of Irish immigrants in the late 18th century and the first half of the 19th century, (there were 207,367 people of Irish birth in Scotland in 1851),<sup>4</sup> internal migration from the Highlands and rural areas, coupled with a high birth rate, provided Scottish capitalists with a plentiful source of cheap labour. It has also been argued that the operation of the Scots Poor Law, particularly in the Highlands, encouraged labour mobility and further augmented the available supply of labour, by failing to provide legal assessment for the maintenance of the unemployed and poor.<sup>5</sup> The effects of a superabundance of labour were diffused throughout the economy so that until the last quarter of the 19th century Scotland could be described as a low-wage economy compared with the rest of Britain.

In the cotton industry, the relative advantage of cheap labour was counter-poised by the effects of competition, the restricted home market and the consequent declining level of profitability. As early as the 1820s profit margins in cotton were being squeezed<sup>6</sup> as the industry demonstrated its vulnerability to cyclical slumps. By the 1830s and 40s competition from the blossoming industries of Europe and America and the more robust Lancashire industry,

had driven the Scottish industry to search for foreign markets and to increased specialisation in higher quality goods. The switch to finer fabrics and the narrower 'fancy' market in order to obviate the competition and reliance on foreign markets such as Asia,<sup>7</sup> made Scottish cotton vulnerable not only to the vagaries of a market geared to production for fashion, but also to the volatile cycle of the export market. Therefore, from the 1840s the continued viability of the cotton industry was sustained largely by the availability of cheap labour and any further expansion was insecurely based, being dependent on this necessarily finite resource.

The textile industry, or more particularly the cotton branch, in many ways was a microcosm of the Scottish economy, and its experience and fate presaged that of the nascent heavy industries which were to provide the foundation of prosperity in the latter half of the century. Reliance on exports made industry more vulnerable to the wider fluctuations in demand of foreign markets, and specialisation, often, although not always, involved a commitment to narrower markets which did not have the same potential for expansion. The abundant supply of labour was simultaneously the basis of growth and success and also the rock on which the economy was later to founder, in that it permitted expansion without channelling investment into new production techniques. The consequence of this was the tendency of industrialists to undervalue the importance of technological innovation and technical achievement to the extent that one leading 19th century academic, critical of industry's failure to apply the latest scientific knowledge, commented :

"I find that there is not a sufficient appreciation of the practical benefits of scientific teaching among the proprietors of Lanarkshire and so, not surprisingly, the managers of the large collieries and ironworks of Lanarkshire ..... have a routine practice ..... but beyond the rule of thumb ..... They are perfectly incompetent to deal with anything that may arise ..... "8

However just the criticisms levelled at Scottish industrialists in the second half of the 19th century, it seems clear that in the earlier stages of industrialisation lack of investment in capital intensive production techniques was not a question of entrepreneurial failure or lack of initiative, but simply the rational response of competing capitals to maintain profitability by exploiting the available advantages and resources.

The middle of the century in many ways can be regarded as a climacteric in that in the economic sphere Britain consolidated her industrial hegemony : the process of mechanisation had advanced to such a stage that where there was not a complete breach of craft control of the labour process, significant inroads had been made. It has been argued that this was the period of 'machinofacture' where there was a restabilisation of the labour process based on the subordination of labour to the machine.<sup>9</sup> However the survival of traditional craft skills, the creation of new ones and the constant struggles over the machine question indicate the limitations of the description of these years as the period of 'machinofacture'.

In the third quarter of the century, Scotland experienced an unparalleled degree of prosperity largely because of Britain's industrial hegemony and her dominant position in world trade. It was during this period that the heavy industries in Scotland came to dominate the industrial structure and displace the textile industry as the leading sector in the economy. Although the decline in textiles affected most branches of the industry, apart from the finishing trades and thread manufacture, the deterioration was most marked in the cotton industry. In 1851 it had been Scotland's most important single industry whereas by 1871 it had even relinquished its position as the leading branch of the textile industry to flax and linen.<sup>10</sup>

The heavy industries, such as coal, iron, steel and heavy engineering, which had been in the ascendancy in the second quarter of the century

consolidated their position in the 1850-70 period as other countries began to industrialise and create an almost insatiable demand for capital goods. The fact that investment in heavy industry tended to be labour using, in contrast to the earlier period when investment in textiles had been labour saving and capital using, enhanced the position of those workers who were concentrated in these strategic sectors of industry.<sup>11</sup> Although the tide of immigrant labour abated in the second half of the century, a considerable reserve army of labour had already been built up, and it is estimated that Irish immigration still continued at an annual average rate of 7,500 between 1851 and 1861.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Scottish capital still enjoyed the benefits of a comparatively cheap labour force, but the tendency was for those workers in the heavy industries, whose skills were in highest demand, to push up their wages aided by the trend of investment to replace old equipment rather than to employ new techniques of production which would make some labour redundant. As most heavy industry was concentrated in the West of Scotland there was a marked regional differential in earnings within the country.

The period between 1870 and 1914 witnessed the consolidation of Scotland's economic structure, characterised by the degree of interconnection of a few key industries, (notably coal, iron, steel, the heavy engineering trades, with shipbuilding at the centre of this network) dependence on the export market and, increasingly by the end of the 19th century, large scale capital investment overseas.

This period also encompassed the years of the Great Depression, characterised by a falling off of both prices and profits. However, the factor which was most significant for the fate of the Scottish economy was a relative falling off in the demand for the products of the heavy industries to which Scottish industry was so heavily committed. This stemmed partly from the increasing self-sufficiency of foreign countries and their invasion if not domination,

of markets which had previously been monopolised by Britain, leading to a dramatic shrinking of the export market. The centrality of the export market to the Scottish economy meant that she was most vulnerable to dramatic transformation of demand patterns as market conditions abroad rapidly changed. These problems were exacerbated by the failure of industry to invest in new technologies and rely instead on more intensive exploitation of labour. Thus Scotland was declining relatively within a British economy which was itself declining in the world economy. The success story of this period was the shipbuilding industry which thrived and prospered largely because of the absence of overseas competition, and thus helped sustain the related heavy industries at a time when shrinking markets and technological obsolescence may have undermined them.

The response of capital to foreign competition was to cut prices and increase production in order to boost their share of the market. However, this strategy squeezed profit margins and, therefore, made domestic investment a less attractive option than investment abroad, where the rate of return was immeasurably greater. As Lenman has commented :

"It was a commonplace of late Victorian comment that Scotland invested abroad on a scale per head with no parallel among the other nations of the United Kingdom"<sup>13</sup>

Scottish capital fuelled the expansion of American railways and contributed to developments in India, Burma and Australia. In the short term this strategy stimulated demand for the products of heavy industry but on the basis of existing, and increasingly obsolescent methods and techniques.

By 1914 Scotland's massive capital export had created a well developed financial system but a seriously undernourished industrial system which lacked investment, was technologically obsolete and therefore singularly ill-equipped to adapt to the shifts in the world economy when Britain's industrial hegemony was challenged.

Perhaps the most striking feature of these years in terms of the sectoral distribution of employment, was the constancy of the proportion of those employed in manufacturing, which remained at about 43% to 44% throughout the period,<sup>14</sup> the shrinking of the primary sector, composed of agriculture, forestry and fishing, from 28% in 1851 to 11% in 1911, and the expansion of the service sector. As an illustration of the increase in the latter, those employed in commerce rose from 5.5% in 1851 to 13.7% in 1911<sup>15</sup> and those employed in the professions increased from 3.1% to 6.28%.<sup>16</sup>

Although the percentage of those employed in manufacture remained fairly steady, there were considerable shifts within this sector, the most significant of which was the decline in the percentage of those engaged in the textile industry and the parallel growth of those engaged in the heavy industries. Between 1851 and 1911 the percentage of the occupied population engaged in textiles fell from 18.2% to about 12%.<sup>17</sup> This represented a shift within the distribution of the industrial workforce with the percentage of those employed in textiles falling from 44% in 1851 to about 20% in 1911 and a corresponding increase in the share of the industrial workforce engaged in heavy industries from 18% to 40%.<sup>18</sup>

The changes in the employment structure outlined above had considerable implications for the pattern of women's employment. However, before looking at this pattern in some detail, it is worth discussing some of the problems associated with using the census to analyse women's employment.

The difficulties and pitfalls one encounters when dealing with census data have been well documented,<sup>19</sup> the problems ranging from straightforward methodological ones to problems of theory. This latter approach has been taken up by some sociologists of the ethnomethodological school, notably Cicourel who argues that official statistics tell one more about the statistics-producing agencies and their values and assumptions than they do about the subject of the statistics.<sup>20</sup> Cicourel's position leads him to dismiss

the validity of official statistics as reflections of the real world and to shift his focus of study to the process of statistics construction in order to ascertain what this reveals about those producing the statistics.

Whilst acknowledging that the census is an indispensable source for analysing employment patterns, it will be argued that its statistics are socially constructed, embody assumptions about the nature of work and reflect prevailing attitudes to women and their role in society. Therefore, when interpreting census data, there are two kinds of problems to be overcome; firstly, the technical problems which arise from the different ways in which the decennial census has been collated and organised, and secondly, the fact that the statistics are collected and produced according to the prevailing ideology of gender divisions and may, therefore, distort the true pattern of employment rather than reveal it.

In terms of technical problems, the most frustrating is that of vertical comparability which applies to both men and women's employment. With regard to both the industrial classification system and to particular occupations, one finds that the information is not uniformly presented from one census to another. Renaming of occupations is a frequent occurrence and often occupations are assigned to different suborders. An example of this practice is shawl-makers who in the 1891 census do not appear under 'Dress' but have probably been re-allocated to the 'Fancy Goods and Smallware' category in the 'Textile' order. This indicates the need for constant vigilance, as one could easily conclude that some occupations had disappeared when in fact they had been renamed or reclassified.

The organisation of the census changed frequently, creating further difficulties for standardising the information. The 1871 census attempted to experiment with new methods of classification and categorisation which were rapidly abandoned. In this census non-working women and children were placed in a category known as

dependants and distributed to the various orders and sub-orders to which they belonged. In the 1881 census wives classified as having no occupation were placed in the 'unoccupied' class and included with 'persons of property and rank'. It therefore became impossible to calculate the number of working wives in the population until 1911 when married women were again separately listed. Until 1901 students over 15 were allocated to the 'professional' class. In 1881, for the first time, clerks were listed separately rather than being assigned to the branch of commerce or industry in which they worked.

The 1851, 1861 and 1871 censuses placed women engaged in domestic duties in the home in the 'Domestic' class, whereas in subsequent censuses they were assigned to the 'Non-productive and unoccupied' category. This was probably a reflection of the fact that by the second half of the 19th century work was increasingly defined as activity which was carried out for a wage outside the home and which was governed by market relations. Similarly the consolidation of the ideology of separate sexual spheres with women associated with the domestic sphere, was also reflected in the construction of census statistics. The enumerator's report for the 1861 census stated that :

"As the home duties of the wife are by far the most important to the community in which a woman is engaged, every wife ought to have been tabulated under that head, no matter what trade or occupation she might occasionally follow"<sup>21</sup>

In the 1881 census and all subsequent censuses, the working population of the towns did not include shopkeepers' wives, innkeepers' wives, shoemakers', butchers', bakers' wives etc., although they had previously been included. This meant that many women who assisted in family businesses and who did not perhaps receive any formal payment, were classified as 'unoccupied'. Farmers' families were not included in the working population from 1871 onwards, with the exception of the 1901 census which reintroduced them into the employment statistics.

This under-representation of working women in official census statistics was compounded by the fact that many women were engaged in casual and seasonal work or might only work when their husbands were unemployed or underemployed. It is, therefore, unlikely that they were included in the census figures which were generally based on a conception of employment which was defined by a male norm of permanent, full time work outside the home.

The 'dark figure' of women's employment statistics was revealed by an investigation of the working and living conditions of Dundee's jute workers, carried out by the Dundee Social Union.<sup>22</sup> In 1905 the report contained the findings of a survey of the incomes of 3,039 families, commenting that they had omitted 'irregular earnings' from their calculations. As an example of this they cited the practice of 'Women taking in babies by the day' which they had found in 159 cases.<sup>23</sup> In the same report's survey of 116 women applying for outdoor relief, they found that whilst in 64 cases no other definite source of income was stated, most of the others admitted to having some form of irregular income. Nine women kept a baby or young child during the day, three earned a little by knitting and rope picking, one supplemented her income by 'keeping her brother's house' and four took in lodgers. The practice of taking in lodgers was commonplace in Dundee which had such a high proportion of migrant workers. From a sample of households in one street of the St Clement's district of Dundee, there were three households with 'boarders', one of which had four boarders, one three boarders and the other one boarder.<sup>24</sup>

Further evidence of the casual irregular nature of women's work is contained in the Scottish Council for Women's Trades inquiry in 1904 into the conditions of employment among charwomen, washerwomen and cooks.<sup>25</sup> The report noted that the sample of women interviewed fell into two classes :

'The strong, enterprising, and comparatively young woman who has a

good-going connection among well-to-do people and whose time is usually fully occupied; and the older, weaker and frequently 'feckless' person who washes, chars or 'minds' children for the neighbours round about the doors' <sup>26</sup>

The report added that :

".....this calling ..... unlike women's trades in general is a prosperous and extending one, and shares with domestic service the benefits of rising and increasingly regular conditions of work" <sup>27</sup>

However, the majority of the 40 women interviewed were engaged in casual, part time or temporary work and a few carried out their work in the home. There were also complaints from many of the women about the scarcity of work in the summer months, indicating that there was a seasonal aspect to their employment.

Of the 40 women, 32 were widows and eight were married women; the widow of a seaman who had three children took in washing and laundry work - 'When she has no engagement outside.' A mason's widow related that she could 'earn good money during the winter' another took on 'a day's cleaning or washing, here and there', whilst the widow of a tailor took in lodgers.

The married women also worked on an irregular basis, usually when they were able to get work; the wife of a labourer was 'glad to get a bit of work when she can from the neighbours' and cleaned windows etc., for small shopkeepers in the neighbourhood; another labourer's wife 'doesn't work steadily but takes a job from a neighbour sometimes when she needs it'; the wife of a coal porter was 'glad to take any work she can get round the doors.'

Therefore, despite the claim by the author of the report that these trades were expanding and providing a regular source of employment for women, they were still characterised by casuality, irregularity and seasonality.

Homeworkers were only included from the 1901 census, therefore, it is

not possible to establish a pattern for this type of employment. It is also likely that official figures underestimated the extent of homework as it was pre-eminently a casual trade and the numbers engaged in it fluctuated constantly, the pattern often being determined by the state of the husband's employment. Whilst it is clear that the extent of homework has been underestimated, this also appears to be true of its centrality to the family's income. The SCWT's investigations into homework revealed a number of cases where this kind of employment provided the sole or main source of family income. Citing the case of Mrs C, a trouser-finisher, the report noted that :

'As her husband is unsteady in his habits, she seldom gets any help from him, and she and the eldest girl, who earns 7s a week at pottery, are practically the bread-winners of the household"<sup>28</sup>

It seems fair to conclude that in addition to the usual problems associated with the census, stemming from the various modifications to the Classification systems, there are a number of problems relating to women, the overall effect of which is to underestimate the extent of their employment. Despite the fact that so much of women's work was unrecorded and under represented, the census remains the best single source available for an analysis of the changing occupational patterns of women workers.

The population of Scotland had increased by almost 2 million between 1851 and 1911 with the greatest increase occurring between 1871 and 1881 and between 1891 and 1901. Throughout the period the female population of Scotland exceeded that of the male population, a demographic phenomenon which was repeated in all the principal towns of Scotland (see Appendix 1). The number of economically active men in Scotland rose from 1,357,479 in 1851 to 1,473,757 in 1911. The pattern of female employment did not take this form, falling in 1871 and rising every census year, thereafter (Appendix 2). The decline between 1861 and 1871 can be partly explained by the fact that female workers on the land were largely excluded from the Statistics as farmers were only asked about the number

of men and boys they employed, not women and girls. Nonetheless about half the farmers did supply the figures for adult women they employed, although not the girls.<sup>29</sup>

From 1871 onwards, although the number of women entering the workforce increased, the percentage of women employed to the total number of women remained fairly constant at about 25%. A comparison of the growth rate of the female population between 1851 and 1911 and the growth rate of their labour force, suggests that the female population was increasing at a faster rate than the numbers employed. Although this suggests that employment opportunities for women were decreasing, other factors may have had some bearing on this, for example the age-structure of the population and the older age for starting employment. The 1901 census excluded all those below 10 years from the working population, whereas previous censuses excluded those under five years.

Women as a percentage of the labour force fluctuated at around one third for the whole period. In 1851 and 1861 they constituted over one third of the labour force but from 1871 to 1911 this fell to just under one third. As has been noted earlier, the percentage of economically active women declined between 1851 and 1871 but remained fairly constant thereafter. There was, however, a much greater decline in the percentage of economically active married women, although it is not possible to assess the pattern of married women's employment as in 1881 married women ceased to be classified separately. The fall in married women's employment was partly a reflection of the prevailing attitude to married women working and of the changing industrial structure but it was also partly attributed to the way in which census statistics were constructed.

Women were also engaged in many occupations which were of a seasonal or casual nature, including homework. As married women constituted a high proportion of this type of labour, one could argue that the official statistics do not give a true picture of the number of married women working.

The changes in the sectoral distribution of employment also affected the structure of female employment. In 1851 Domestic Indoor Service, Land, Clothing and Textiles employed over 90% of the female labour force and by 1911 this figure had dropped to about 60%. A major trend was, therefore, the increasing diversification of women's employment, although in 1911, it was still the case that the bulk of women's employment was confined to relatively few industries and occupations. Very few women were employed in the capital-intensive industries such as shipbuilding, heavy engineering and iron and steel.

The single most important source of employment for women in 1911 was domestic indoor service which employed 22.7% of the female labour force, followed closely by Textiles with 22.65% and Clothing which employed 12.37%. However, these three occupations were not increasing as fast as the female population and indeed by 1911 were in relative decline.

A significant feature of the developing trend in women's employment was the redistribution within the manufacturing sector away from textiles and clothing to the consumer industries such as food, drink and tobacco. In 1851 Textiles and clothing employed almost all the women in the manufacturing sector whereas by 1911 only two thirds of women in manufacturing were in these trades. The redistribution in this sector was accompanied by a spectacular increase in women's employment in commerce and the professions. It would, however, be a mistake to view this trend as opening up a whole range and variety of occupations which had been exclusively male. In commerce, for example, the increase in women's employment is almost exclusively explained by the rise in the number of commercial clerks who constituted approximately 80% of the female employment in this sector. In the professions the increase can be explained by the increase in the number of teachers, sick nurses and midwives.

The structure of the labour market during this period suggests that there were in fact two labour markets, one for 'Women's work' and one for 'men's work'.

**TABLE 1.1 NO. OF WOMEN EMPLOYED IN SELECTED (PRINCIPAL) OCCUPATIONS IN SCOTLAND : 1851 - 1911** (Percentage figure: in brackets)

YEAR	DOMESTIC, INDOOR SERVICE	TEXTILES	LAND	CLOTHING	COMMERCIAL CLERKS	TEACHERS	SICK NURSES AND MIDWIVES
1851	114,751 (22.88)	130,000 (25.92)	126,041 (25.13)	79,102 (15.77)	-	4,415 (0.88)	2,358 (0.47)
1861	135,423 (25.51)	117,731 (22.88)	120,773 (22.81)	81,290 (15.35)	2 (0.0003)	5,523 (1.043)	1,866 (0.35)
1871	122,064 (25.28)	124,930 (25.87)	85,643 (17.73)	77,481 (16.04)	180 (0.03)	6,735 (1.39)	2,149 (0.44)
1881	134,069 (26.90)	131,071 (26.30)	51,240 (10.28)	62,828 (12.60)	1,455 (0.29)	10,460 (2.09)	2,698 (0.53)
1891	164,855 <sup>1</sup> (29.62)	133,217 (23.93)	28,895 (5.19)	76,649 (13.77)	4,284 (0.76)	12,965 (2.32)	3,772 (0.67)
1901	143,699 (24.28)	131,477 (22.22)	40,581 <sup>2</sup> (6.85)	81,684 (13.80)	15,399 (2.60)	17,234 (2.91)	8,197 (1.38)
1911	135,052 (22.76)	134,418 (22.65)	32,423 (5.46)	73,393 (12.37)	29,067 (4.89)	18,778 (3.16)	10,629 (1.79)

1 : This figure includes the daughters of heads of household living in small cottages.

2 : This includes 12,402 daughters and other relatives assisting in the work of the farm.

The 1871, 1881 and 1891 census did not include daughters and other female relatives of families in the occupied class, although in 1871 approximately 35,400 farmers' wives were included.

**SOURCE :** Censuses of Great Britain and Scotland 1851 - 1911. The census is the source for all tables

This is obviously an oversimplification as there were no industries and few occupations which were exclusively male or female, but it is true to say that women were concentrated in a few occupations where there were relatively few men, or in trades where there was a sexual division of labour.

Domestic Indoor Service was almost exclusively composed of women with men never at any time exceeding 5% of the total employed. Male employment in Textiles declined during the period and never at any time constituted more than one third of the workforce. Within textiles there was a sexual division of labour with most men employed as labourers or in supervisory work. Although there were large numbers of men employed in Clothing, once again they were in different occupations as most men were tailors, shoe and boot makers, whereas women were in dressmaking, millinery and shirtmaking. The only areas where women were making significant inroads into 'traditionally' men's work were in clerical work, printing and tailoring where women were in fact displacing men.

The most dramatic decline between 1851 and 1911 was in the number of married women working, although as has been argued earlier, the census is a particularly unreliable source when attempting to reconstruct the pattern of married women's employment. By 1911 only 4.1% of married women worked and they formed 5.3% of the female labour force. Whereas in 1851 20% of married women worked and they formed 16.9% of the female labour force. Their pattern of employment was similar to that of women generally, in that, they were concentrated in a few areas and in traditionally 'women's work'.

Of the 31,465 married women employed in 1911, 5,938 worked in jute manufacture, 2,609 in domestic service, 2,133 as charwomen and cleaners and 1,138 as laundry workers.

Over half of all married working women were employed in the Cities of Glasgow, Dundee and Edinburgh, with Dundee having the highest proportion of working wives. It is interesting to note that the work participation rates for married women was much lower in Scotland than for Gt. Britain (4.1% in Scotland,

TABLE 1.2 CHANGING NUMBER OF WOMEN EMPLOYED IN SELECTED (PRINCIPAL) OCCUPATIONS 1851 - 1911 (GLASGOW)

	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
<b>Domestic Indoor Servants</b>	14,484	13,489	13,837	12,673	19,264 <sup>1</sup>	16,818	16,219
<b>Textiles</b>	27,500	32,802	29,420	24,764	20,883	18,386	15,741
<b>Clothing</b>	16,261	17,561	17,321	15,859	19,749	23,792	20,938
<b>Commercial Clerks</b>	-	-	n/a	465	1,525	4,959	8,364
<b>Teachers</b>	383	553	709	1,108	1,729	2,573	2,665
<b>Sick Nurses &amp; Invalid Attendants</b>	114	373	n/a	490	751	1,768	2,306
<b>Printers</b>	-	18	n/a	382	428	702	1,036
<b>Charwomen</b>	111	137	n/a	728	1,940	2,960	3,547
<b>Laundry Workers</b>	1,992	73	n/a	2,678		3,496	1,680
<b>Bookbinders</b>	-	36	n/a	1,322	1,513	1,837	2,121
<b>Local Govt.</b>	2	-	22	25	19	14	164

1 : This category includes the female relatives of heads of households

9.6% for Gt Britain) and yet there was virtually no difference in the percentage of economically active women (about 25% for both).

It would be difficult to argue that the decline in married women's work was the reversal of an earlier situation where they worked outside the home. Ivy Pinchbeck illustrates that in 1840 in England most married working women were involved in small family businesses or were the wives of farmers.<sup>30</sup> The census returns from Scotland in 1851 indicate a similar pattern with two thirds of married women workers coming from these sectors.

One can argue that by 1911 in Scotland there was a slight widening of the sphere of women's work, although a slight decline in the proportion of economically active women and that employment opportunities were increasing, mainly for single women particularly in the spheres of teaching, nursing and clerical work. However, the outstanding feature of the labour market was the degree of job segregation by sex, with women concentrated in a relatively small number of occupations.

Having gained this picture of the changing pattern of women's employment in Scotland, there is a need to look at this pattern in relation to principal towns in order to ascertain the extent of regional variations in this pattern.

Between 1851 and 1911, the population of Glasgow had increased by about  $\frac{1}{2}$  million to 784,416. However, the constant changes in enumeration areas with the extension of boundaries makes it difficult to make any population comparisons (Appendix 3).

The number of economically active women in Glasgow rose steadily between 1851 and 1911 from 68,472 to 112,597, although the percentage of economically active women in the population of the city gradually declined in the same period (see appended table). The three principal sources of employment for women in Glasgow in 1851 had been textiles, clothing and domestic service which collectively employed 58,000 of Glasgow's 68,000 working women. By 1911 these three sectors employed less than half of all working women, indicating the increasing variety of jobs open to women.

The most obvious change in the structure of the female labour market in Glasgow was the decline in the numbers engaged in the textile industry. Cotton was the single most important branch of this industry and the decline in the numbers working in textiles is a reflection of the contraction of this industry. There was a continuous downward trend in the cotton industry between 1851 and 1911. Twenty two thousand women were employed in 1851 and only 6,033 by 1911, although it should be stressed that the finishing trades in the textile industry were still expanding and buoyant in 1911.

It is more difficult to discern an obvious pattern for domestic indoor service, except to say that it was diminishing in importance as a source of employment and that charring was a more attractive alternative for women. The SCWT's inquiry into conditions of employment amongst charwomen, washerwomen and cooks in 1904, noted that it was an increasingly prosperous and extending trade because of the unpopularity of domestic service among working women.

This trend is also apparent in the clothing industry which employed 25% of Glasgow's female workforce in 1851 and less than 20% in 1911, possibly as a result of mechanisation. However, the picture of employment is more complex in this industry as there were branches such as tailoring where female labour had displaced male labour.

Other areas where employment opportunities were increasing for women were printing and bookbinding which had previously been monopolised by men and the food, drink and tobacco industry. Glasgow followed the national pattern in that the most dramatic increases were in teaching, nursing and clerical work. As with the pattern nationally in Scotland, there was a fairly rigid division of labour in Glasgow with women confined to a few industries and virtually absent from the principal areas of male employment such as iron and steel, engineering and shipbuilding.

There were 7,047 married women working in Glasgow in 1911, which was 5.5% of all married women and 6.3% of the female labour force.

The most important sources of employment for married women were in the occupations which could be characterised as 'women's work' that is, where relatively few men were employed, if any at all, and which were also casual, seasonal and irregular, for example, charring, shirtmaking, hawking and laundry work.

The population of Dundee more than doubled between 1851 and 1911 and reflecting the situation generally in Scotland, the female population exceeded the male population throughout the period. (Appendix 4). The pattern of female employment in Dundee was markedly different from the other principal towns in Scotland in that women formed a larger percentage of the labour force and a far higher percentage of women were economically active throughout the period (Appendix 2).

Not only did the number of economically active women continue to increase from 16,358 in 1851 to 36,835 in 1901, but the percentage of working women to the total number of women increased until 1901 when it reached a peak of 43% and then declined to 41.68%. It is, however, interesting to note that the percentage of men who worked also fell between 1901 and 1911.

The major source of employment for women was in textiles which in 1851 employed about three quarters of all working women and in 1911 about two thirds. The most obvious change in this sector was the redistribution of the female workforce from work in flax and linen to work in jute.

By the end of the century the principal source of employment for men was also jute manufacture, although only about 16% of men worked in textiles. The other main sources of employment for men were building (2,793), iron, steel and clothing. Over one third of the workforce in clothing were males but even here a sexual division of labour was in evidence as most women were to be found in dressmaking and millinery which employed very few men. The small decline in female employment in Dundee at the turn of the century could be attributed to the fact that employment opportunities in teaching, clerical work and nursing were not increasing at the same rate as elsewhere in Scotland, coupled with the relative decline in the traditional source of female employment, jute manufacture.

TABLE 1.3 NO's OF WOMEN EMPLOYED IN SELECTED (PRINCIPAL) OCCUPATIONS

1 8 5 1 - 1 9 1 1 (DUNDEE)

	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
Domestic Indoor Service	2,137	1,995	2,350	2,088	2,566	2,036	2,229
Jute Manuf.	195	1,330	n/a	10,669	18,894	23,976	23,369
Commercial Clerks	-	-	n/a	39	180	542	984
Dress	1,779	1,884	1,931	1,810	2,243	2,084	1,802
Teachers	104	148	196	270	484	428	572
Charwomen	17	22	n/a	33	180	239	381
Flax & Linen Manufacture	10,868	3,039	n/a	917	2,193	1,293	834

The pattern of married women's employment can only be reconstructed for 1911 and the figures illustrate that the work participation rates for married women were far higher in Dundee than in either Scotland or Great Britain ( Appendix 6) 6,443 married women worked in Dundee, representing 23.4% of all married women and 17.5% of the female labour force. Of these 6,445, 5,532 were employed in jute manufacture.

The number of economically active women in Edinburgh increased throughout the period (excluding 1851 when the figures are for Edinburgh and Leith). However, the percentage of economically active women declined although this decline was not so marked as in Glasgow. By the end of the century the work participation rates of women were higher in Edinburgh than Glasgow. This is probably a reflection of the contraction of the textile industry in Glasgow, whereas in Edinburgh, the principal source of employment, domestic service, was not contracting at the same rate.

In Edinburgh as elsewhere, there were occupations opening up to women which had been almost exclusively male, for example printing, clerical works and tailoring. The growth opportunities in other areas such as the consumer industry widened the sphere of female employment although it did not lead to any absolute increase in employment available to women.

Therefore, throughout the period the most outstanding feature of women's employment in Scotland both regionally and nationally was its concentration in certain well defined areas of 'women's work' although towards the end of the 19th century there was a widening of the sphere of the female labour market. The four orders which accounted for 90% of total female employment in 1851 accounted for only about 60% in 1911. However, this diversification was not accompanied by any corresponding increase in the work participation rates of women. Between 1851 and 1871 there was a decline in the percentage of economically active women and in women as a proportion of the labour force, but thereafter the figures remained fairly constant. The most dramatic decline was in the work participation rates of married women which were lower than the corresponding figure for Great Britain. This can be partly explained by the decline in homework and the relative contraction in the size of the predominantly female labour force in the textile industry. However as has been argued the census grossly

TABLE 1.4 NO's OF WOMEN EMPLOYED IN SELECTED (PRINCIPAL) OCCUPATIONS

1 8 5 1      -      1 9 1 1      (EDINBURGH)

	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
<b>Domestic Indoor Service</b>	16,199	14,295	15,762	16,198	17 367	18,257	17,035
<b>Milliners &amp; Dressmakers Staymakers</b>	4,474	3,908	n/a <sup>1</sup>	4,374	4,836	5,299	4,810
<b>Washerwomen Manglers</b>	1,944	1,754	n/a	1,445	1,988	2,156	1,707
<b>Seamstresses</b>	1,344	1,122	n/a	872	603	508	112
<b>Charwomen</b>	440	144	n/a	803	1,325	1,586	1,814
<b>Food &amp; Lodgings</b>	-	-	-	-	2,132	2,258	4,231
<b>Commercial Clerks</b>	-	-	n/a	366	970	2,829	4,467
<b>Clothing (Total)</b>	10,139	8,709	6,899	5,908	7,390	7,522	7,458
<b>Textiles (Total)</b>	392		1,048	512	900	1,495	n/a

1 The 1871 Census does not have detailed information for town districts

underestimates the extent of women's employment particularly that of married women who were more likely to be engaged in intermittent and casual work in the home. Therefore the distinctive feature of women's employment was not so much their exclusion from the labour force but their concentration in certain occupations resulting in a pronounced degree of occupational segregation on the basis of sex in the labour market.

As has been illustrated developments in the Scottish economy in the second half of the 19th century produced significant shifts in the sectoral distribution of employment as well as shifts within sectors both of which had considerable implications for the patterns of women's employment. However, economic factors alone cannot explain why women's work was occupationally segregated from men's, generally defined as unskilled and invariably lower paid than men's work.

Dominant ideological assumptions about the nature of women's role in the family and society played an important role in determining the pattern of women's employment and, crucially, in constructing certain jobs as 'women's' work and 'men's' work. In the second half of the 19th century the ideology which associated woman with the domestic sphere and defined her primary roles as wife and mother, reached its peak. Industrial capitalism did not introduce a sexual division of labour but the increasing separation of work from the home which it entailed, both reinforced existing sexual division and introduced new forms of these divisions. Women's waged work outside the home was regarded as peripheral and frequently incompatible with their domestic duties and, therefore was often the target of reforming zeal or simply outright disapproval and criticism.

The sexual division of labour in the family with its emphasis on women's domestic responsibility strongly influenced women's participation in the labour force. When women entered paid employment it was frequently in jobs which mirrored their domestic tasks and which were regarded as consistent with the Victorian ideal of womanhood as 'angel in the house'.

Two of the three main sources of women's employment in mid to late 19th century Scotland were in domestic service and in the clothing industry as seamstresses, milliners, shirtmakers and dressmakers, whilst large numbers of women were engaged in homework. The new opportunities in women's employment by the turn of the century were in the areas of teaching, nursing and the manufacture and retail of food-stuffs, again jobs which replicated women's domestic tasks.

Clearly not all women's work was of this nature : for example one of the principal sources of women's employment in the mid Victorian period was the textile industry and in the early 20th century clerical work, neither of which related to women's domestic role, and which had previously been dominated by men. However, the explanation for the process by which certain jobs came to be identified as women's work can also be related to ideological assumptions concerning women's role in the family.

Employers were usually motivated to hire women workers because they were viewed as a cheap and unskilled source of labour and the reason their work was regarded as cheap was because women were assumed to be dependants who were reliant on the earnings of a male provider, and, therefore, did not require the same level of earnings as men.

For the corollary of the Victorian cult of domesticity was the notion of a male breadwinner who earned a family wage, that is a wage which was enough to support a wife and children. Therefore, women's entry into the labour force and their level of earnings was determined not only by changes within the economy or certain industries but by the sexual division of labour in the family which allocated men to the role of breadwinner and provider and women to the role of dependant whose wages were defined as supplementary.

Similar assumptions underlay the absence of women from the ranks of skilled workers. Although there were certain practical reasons why women's work was usually classified as unskilled, for example, their lack of training, the explanation can again be related to the division of labour within the family and dominant ideological assumptions about women's role in society.

Recent feminist theorising has argued that not only is the category of skill socially constructed but that it is an ideological category which is saturated with sexual bias.<sup>31</sup> Frequently the definition of a job as 'skilled or unskilled' bears little relation to the amount of training or ability required, but is a function of the ability of certain workers to get their work so defined. Few categories of women's work have been successfully designated as skilled, not only because women lack the trade union muscle required, but because of the pervasive belief that women's work is by definition unskilled. Women's association with the domestic sphere, their consequent marginality to the labour market and their status in society generally as dependant and subordinate individuals are the most powerful factors determining the value of the work they do. This subordinate status frequently defines the nature of their work irrespective of objective technical requirements and accounts for the label of 'unskilled' to work which women do.

The development of the cotton spinning industry in Scotland in the 19th century provides a useful illustration of the interweaving of ideological and economic factors in the process by which certain occupations come to be defined as women's work, classified as unskilled and designated as low paid.

Most economic historians agree that the linen industry which developed in the 19th century in Scotland, formed the basis for the development of cotton textiles, in that it provided a workforce already highly skilled in spinning and weaving.<sup>32</sup> What seems paradoxical is that the sexual division of labour in the domestic system of production was the reverse of the division of labour produced by the industrial revolution. In the domestic system, the women were the spinners and the men the weavers, whereas with the development of technology in the early stages of the industrial revolution the spinning process was taken over by the men whereas powerloom weaving became dominated by female labour.

The transition process and the final organisation of the labour process which emerged in cotton textiles in the second half of the 19th century was a complex process which culminated in the virtual elimination of men from the industry

and its designation as a female industry. Perhaps the best way to approach the question is to look at the sexual composition of the labour force, and the organisation of the labour process in the 1850-1911 period and then trace the origins of its development.

Margaret Irwin in her report on the textile trade in the West of Scotland in 1895 claimed that a comparison between men's labour and women's labour in textiles was not possible 'as chief branches of the textile trade are confined to women'.<sup>33</sup> She also noted that:

"The great feature which differentiates the textile industries of Scotland from those of England is that, while in the latter country they are followed by both sexes, in this they are practically women's industries".<sup>34</sup>

In her investigation of two cotton spinning mills in Glasgow for the Commission, Margaret Irwin found that 685 women were employed, including 488 spinners and 197 cardloom workers. The spinning in both mills was carried on entirely by the women and the men were employed as overseers, keeping the machines in order and piecing the bands and belts. The wages of the male overseer were 36s per week and those of the female spinners 14s 9d per week.

This situation contrasted quite sharply with the composition and structure of the labour force in the cotton textiles in Lancashire, where most of the mule spinning was carried on by men, with women engaged only in ring and throstle spinning, neither of which displaced mule spinning to any great extent before 1900. The mule spinner in England performed a different function from the mule spinner in Scotland in that he had a supervisory role over his piecers and hence came to be called a minder. It has been argued that it was on the basis of this supervisory role that mule spinning on the self-actor remained a 'craft' occupation in the second half of the 19th century,<sup>35</sup> rather than the technical requirements of the job. The female spinners in Scotland had no such supervisory role and were in fact supervised themselves by a general overseer.

The weaving sector of cotton had a similar composition to spinning in Scotland in that it was predominantly female labour which was employed, although this was also the case in England, Scotland still had a higher proportion of female powerloom weavers. Margaret Irwin makes it clear how powerloom weaving was regarded very much as 'women's work' in Scotland and illustrates the rigidity of the sexual demarcation of occupations.

"But a rooted prejudice exists among the working class of Scotland against the employment of men on the powerloom. A manager of a large factory told me that he had once made an effort to introduce male labour into his weaving department, and that, after a few week's trial, the men gave it up, being unable to stand the ridicule to which they were daily exposed for taking up 'women's work'".<sup>36</sup>

The crucial question to be asked is - why did the composition of the labour force and the organisation of the labour process in the cotton industry of Scotland differ so markedly from England after 1840?

The most common argument advanced for the sexual division of labour in mule spinning before the introduction of the automatic mule in the 1820's and 30's was that it required physical strength and skill. Lazonick, however, argues that physical strength and technical skills were not so central to hand mule spinning with the introduction of power assisted spinning in the 1790's.<sup>37</sup>

This is obviously a contentious issue as there are many others who would argue that it was precisely the need for physical strength and technical skill which excluded women from mule spinning. Certainly in Scotland with its concentration on fine spinning, technical skills would be at a greater premium than physical strength and as spinning had been carried on by women they would already have developed the requisite skills.

However, what is certainly Lazonick's most contentious argument is that the basis of the sex-based division of labour in cotton spinning in England as it developed with the automatic mule was the supervisory aspect which was involved. Lazonick maintains that:

"the productivity of spinning was dependent not only on the exertion of manual labour power by the mule spinner, but also on his ability to keep the piecers and cleaners at work.

The maintenance of adequate levels of productivity usually meant beating and threatening the children..... and in general it required that the children, whether out of fear or out of cultural adaptation, would respond to the authority of the mule spinner".<sup>38</sup>

The core of this argument is that it was the hierarchical relations of the capitalist production system which in the last instance determined the division of labour and that patriarchal ideology played a functional role in that it aided the supervision of labour which was seen as crucial to the appropriation of surplus value.

In effect it is argued that mule spinning in England was secured by men because it required a supervisory function and as this was a component of patriarchal authority as it had been exercised in the domestic textile system of the 19th century, the job fell to men. However the Scottish experience suggests that it was not the hierarchical relations of the production system which determined which sex got the job, but the sex composition of the labour force which was the crucial factor in deciding what form the labour process would take and whether or not it would be hierarchically ordered.

The introduction of female labour on a large scale took place in Scotland after the defeat of the 1837 General Strike in Glasgow. It is often argued that female labour was used to depress wages:

"The pressure of costs produced strains in the Scottish cotton industry leading to the adoption of a young, female, low wage labour force".<sup>39</sup>

But this ignores the fact that wages in spinning were already being depressed before 1837, indeed it was against a reduction of about 56% that the action of 1837 was taken. Given that the defeat of the 1837 strike effectively broke the spinners' union,<sup>40</sup> it would presumably have been easier for the employer to impose wage reductions and introduce technological change without having to introduce female labour.

The self acting mule had already been introduced in England in the face of bitter opposition from the spinners' unions but this did not lead to the adoption of female labour. The evidence seems to suggest that low wages were a feature of cotton spinning before the introduction of female labour on a large scale. Brassey argues that strikes before 1837 tended to be about reductions in wages<sup>41</sup> and that an overriding concern of the spinners was restricting entry into their trade in the belief that an over-supply of spinners would depress wages.

It could perhaps be argued that low wages were both the cause and the effect of women's employment. There was certainly a high demand for cheap labour in the cotton industry. Even by the 1830's the Scottish Cotton Industry was facing competition from Europe, America and Lancashire and its continued viability was to large extent dependent upon the availability of cheap labour. As has been argued women's labour was defined as per se cheaper than men's. As one employer commented to Margaret Irwin:

"Oh well you know a woman's wage always is less than a man's".<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, the introduction of female labour into cotton spinning in Scotland coincided with the defeat of the spinners' union and the continuing high demand for cheap labour. However, an important contributory element to the recomposition of the labour force was the alternative sources of employment which were available in the West of Scotland to the male population. Margaret Irwin seemed to have no doubt that this was a significant factor:

" One obvious reason for the textile industries being abandoned to women in the northern and western districts is that the men are attracted by the highly skilled and highly paid mineral, metal and building trades".<sup>43</sup>

This contrasts with the situation in Lancashire where the textile industry was the major source of employment for both men and women, with few alternative occupations.

In the first half of the century the male spinners' unions had to fight strenuously to resist the introduction of female and child labour, however.

after the 1820's the state of the Lancashire industry was much healthier than the Scottish industry, indeed the third quarter of the century were years of unparalleled prosperity. There was little pressure on employers to cut labour costs by introducing female labour, therefore the spinning branch of the English cotton industry remained securely in the hands of the male workers.

It was the organisation of the labour process as well as the sexual composition of the labour force which differed in the Lancashire industry. Although the skill content of spinning had been eliminated with the introduction of the self-acting mule in the 1820's, the English cotton spinners successfully managed to retain their 'craft' status by virtue of their supervisory role in the production process. The male spinner or 'minder' was the leader of a team consisting of two male assistants called a 'big piecer' and a 'little piecer' and was responsible for supervising them in keeping a pair of mules operating efficiently. The minder was also responsible for paying the two assistants out of a lump sum which he received from management and was effectively a subcontractor of labour.

The organisation of the labour process in the Scottish cotton industry diverged considerably from the English model. There was little hierarchical division of labour, the female spinners occupied an analogous position in the industry, had no supervisory functions and were themselves directed by a general overseer who had responsibility for all the spinners in a department.

It is clear from the examples of the English and Scottish spinning industry that the labour process was not solely organised according to the criterion of profitability and that trade union strategies and patriarchal ideology exerted a considerable influence on the way the work was organised. The mule spinners' union in England not only resisted the entry of women into their trade but with the collusion of employers managed to ensure that work relations in spinning were hierarchially organised in a way which reflected and reinforced patriarchal authority relations, by allocating the supervisory function to adult male spinners, thereby assuring the craft status of their occupation.

The defeat of the cotton spinners' union in the West of Scotland, the continuing high demand for cheap labour and the existence of alternative employment for male labour occasioned the replacement of male labour by female labour in the cotton spinning. The weak bargaining position of the Scottish female cotton spinners and their status as cheap labour clearly inhibited their ability to impose limitations on the way employers organised work, but the embodiment of gender divisions in the organisation of the labour process ensured that women rarely occupied positions of authority or power and that their work was classified as 'unskilled'.

The different pattern of development of Scottish and English cotton spinning illustrates that any explanation for the pattern of women's employment and its salient characteristics, has to address both economic and ideological factors. Women could be drawn into the labour market when there was a shortage of male labour or they could be recruited when there was a high demand for cheap or unskilled labour, as a result of economic pressures or the introduction of new technology. However, their status as cheap labour was premised on ideological assumptions about the role of women which profoundly affected both the pattern of their employment and their experience of employment. The sexual division of labour in the family, the assumption that women's primary role was as wife and mother and the ideology of domesticity to a great extent determined the kind of work which women did, their low pay and their unskilled status.

It was not only employers' practices which incorporated this ideology but also trade union practices and these have to be examined in order to determine their significance in shaping the pattern of women's employment.

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## CHAPTER 2

### THE MID VICTORIAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN SCOTLAND

Discussions of working-class organisations in the second half of the nineteenth century have tended to focus on the history of formal organisations, usually on the history of the trade union Movement. There are obvious methodological reasons for this which arise from the availability of sources, the existence of record books, trade journals, newspaper accounts etc. In other words, it is easier to acquire information about organisations which leave written records of their activities. This concentration and preoccupation with those sections of the working class who were involved in formal organisations not only obscures this history of the 'unorganised', but leads us to define organisation and struggle in a particular way and consequently to ignore or deem irrelevant other forms of struggle which may take place outwith these formal organisations.

However any study of the 'unorganised' or those who have been marginal to the trade union movement in Scotland is only understandable in the broader context of Scottish unionism and the particular forms which it assumed. The problem is therefore to view the unorganised in a way which does not involve adopting the perspectives, concerns and prejudices of the formally organised sections, yet takes into account the impact which the trade union movement exerted on the entire working class, the influence and pervasiveness of the value to which it was committed and the relevance those values had for the unorganised sections.

Any attempt to chart the pattern of growth and development of Scottish unionism, and to delineate its key characteristics and definitive features, of necessity involves generalisations which may tend to obscure the manifold and diverse influences which shaped union development, and to dismiss as incidental those trends which do not fit the pattern or model. This does not mean that a project emphasising the broad sweep of developments should be abandoned in favour of empirically detailed accounts of individual unions. We should, however, bear this in mind as a caveat against an approach which treats the workforce in an undifferentiated fashion and assumes that certain factors will have a similar impact across all sections.

It is clear that the state of a country's economy, its relationship to the international economy, the specific conditions of industries including, inter alia, the form and level of technology employed, management strategies and the strength of employers' organisations, will have a significant influence of union growth and the pattern of industrial conflict. However the world of work is enmeshed in a complex set of social relations and is not hermetically sealed from wider social, political and cultural influences. Therefore if we are to determine the forces which shape union development, some consideration must be taken of factors which are less tangible and less amenable to quantification but which have nonetheless important implications for the way in which formal union organisation develops. Therefore in order to explain the nature and form of working class resistance, we cannot only take account of the response of the working class to exploitation at the point of production but would have to explore the cultural and political dimensions.

Although an analysis of the economic and industrial structure in Scotland will occupy a central role in the explanation of trade union development, the task will be incomplete unless it is accompanied by an attempt to locate unionism in its social and cultural context and to tease out and elucidate those aspects of Scottish society which invested unionism with a distinct identity and character.

#### Growth and Development

Although the weakness of Scottish working class organisation and resistance has often been stressed to the exclusion of the more combative episodes in working class history in the first half of the 19th century, there were undoubtedly economic, political and cultural factors in Scotland which facilitated class collaboration and contained the sharpest expressions of class conflict.

As has been argued, massive immigration from Ireland in the late 18th century and the first half of the 19th century, internal migration from the

Highlands and rural areas coupled with a high birth rate, produced a super-abundance of labour. This provided Scottish capitalists with a plentiful source of cheap labour which rendered it potentially more docile and tractable. The unevenness of industrialisation and the co-existence of different forms of manufacture endowed class relations with a fluidity which further impelled class co-operation and blurred the boundaries of class divisions. The prevalence of handicraft manufacture and the flourishing of small workshop production continued to provide the possibility of the artisan making the transition to small-master status and thus creating an identity of interests between master and workers. It has been argued that it was these kinds of factors which contributed to Scottish Chartism being a predominantly moral force and revealing only muted forms of class consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

The continued exclusion of significant sections of the middle-class from the franchise, because of the difficulties of applying the conditions of the Reform Act to Scotland, provided an additional impetus to class co-operation.<sup>2</sup> The tenets of Calvinism with their emphasis on thrift, temperance and self-help, may not have subordinated the working class completely to the bourgeois philosophy of economic liberalism, however they did infuse the working class with a distinctive ideology which had significant implications for the development of Scottish working class consciousness.

Although no accurate records exist which give detailed figures of trade union membership before 1890, it is generally conceded that for the latter half of the nineteenth century, Scottish unionism was relatively weaker numerically than English unionism. The official records are incomplete as the most important unions refused to register under the 1871 Trade Union Act. The passage of the 1875 Trade Union Amendment Act and the Master and Servant Act removed most of the legal grievances of the unions and resulted in the majority of trades registering. However, the first attempts by government to collate statistics on trades unions and present an informed picture of them, were also inaccurate, as the Labour Correspondent to the Board of Trade had to rely on the individual unions to furnish the returns and these were not always forthcoming.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the figures grossly underestimate the numerical strength of unionism, placing the total number of trade unions in the United

Kingdom at about 633,038<sup>4</sup> and the number in Scotland at about 12,331.<sup>5</sup>

We are therefore dependent on the estimates of contemporary commentators on the industrial scene and the record of trade unions themselves, if we are to gain any accurate representation of trade union membership.

The development of trade unions of Scotland seems to have followed the national pattern, in that growth was neither steady nor linear, but fluctuated according to a number of factors such as changes in the trade cycle and the state of industrial relations within particular industries. The defeat of the Glasgow Cotton Spinners in 1838 and the harsh sentences imposed on the defendants not only broke the confidence of the Spinners' Union but had considerable ramifications in that other workers were discouraged from forming unions. This was compounded by the depression of the early forties which dealt another hammer blow and further inhibited the development of unions.<sup>6</sup> When conditions were favourable to growth in the early fifties, this legacy of weakness which arose from the particular economic development of Scotland with its large reserve army of labour and relatively low wages, resulted in Scottish unions trailing behind their English counterparts, the revived unions tending to be localised and small.

It could be argued that the stress on local union autonomy, which arose largely from the structure of the Scottish economy with its concentration of industry in the west central belt was an additional impediment. Although it allowed the various unions to flourish independently, it did inhibit a major source of strength, the development of national unions with strong links, capable of acting in a unified and concerted fashion.

Trade union organisation in the West of Scotland was dominated by those workers in the heavy industries, principally engineering, shipbuilding and iron and steel, who were reaping the benefits of Scotland's prosperity. Although the 'skills' in these branches of production were newly established and not part of the artisan tradition, many of the workers who were recruited to these trades were the former blacksmiths of the iron foundries and those who had been employed in the traditional craft occupations.<sup>7</sup> However the

composition of Glasgow trades council indicates that it was the small craft societies which predominated, with shoemakers, potters, bakers etc., providing the bulk of the membership.<sup>8</sup>

The composition of Edinburgh Trades Council reflected the more variegated industrial structure of the city. The relatively minor importance of heavy industry with its myriad of new skills and the absence of any one industry which dominated the industrial economy, assured that the traditional craft occupations of crafts engaged in the finishing and building trades were numerically dominant in both the Council and trade union organisations generally in the city.<sup>9</sup>

Although the absence of accurate returns of trade union membership for this period makes it impossible to state with precision the extent of growth, a useful barometer is the development of the different trades councils in Scotland. Because of the relative weakness of Scottish unionism and its federal structure, trades councils assumed a position of prominence unequalled in England, although it should be made clear that the trades councils at no time included all the organised sections within their ranks. The problems of recruiting new members and of retaining them was a recurrent theme of Glasgow Trades Council and many devices and changes of policy were adopted in order to encourage trades to affiliate. Irregular attendance of members plagued Edinburgh Trades Council and on ten occasions before 1867 only the quorum of five were present and on several other occasions meetings had to be abandoned because they were inquorate.<sup>10</sup> The difficulties of retaining members and attracting others to affiliate was partly a reflection of the ineffectiveness of the Councils but also a measure of the weakness of some unions.

Glasgow Trades Council was inaugurated in July 1858 and by the end of the year had 21 affiliated societies.<sup>11</sup> The West Central belt of Scotland was undoubtedly the heartland of unionism and consequently Glasgow Trades Council was the leading Trades Council in Scotland with the exception of a brief period when membership plummeted in the mid 1860's to a handful of societies and the organisation became virtually moribund for the next four or five years. The boom of the 1870's generated a great upsurge in the trade union

activity throughout the country and Glasgow was no exception, the trades council experiencing a revival in its fortunes to the extent that 41 societies and branches sent delegates by 1875.<sup>12</sup>

The membership figures of individual unions indicates that trade union membership in Edinburgh was increasing markedly between 1859 (the year of Edinburgh Trades' Council inception) and 1873. For example the Amalgamated Society of Engineers rose from a monthly average of 90 in 1859 to 180 in 1873 and the Typographical Society rose from 265 in 1861 to 650 between 1868 and 1874.<sup>13</sup> Although it would be imprudent to generalise from such unrepresentative sources, it seems clear that there was an expansion of trade union membership in Edinburgh which was reflected in the composition and affiliations to the Trades Council. Of the three Scottish trades councils who sent delegates to the Trades Union Conference in January 1875, Glasgow claimed to speak for 140,000, Dundee 4,000 and Edinburgh 10,000. The experience of Edinburgh Trades Council approximated that of Glasgow with affiliations fluctuating according to the varying fortunes of the particular trades. Although there were 31 different unions affiliated between 1859 and 1873, the largest number affiliated in any one year was approximately 23 and only about six unions were continuously affiliated throughout the period.<sup>14</sup>

In the mid Victorian period, the Scottish trade union movement had an extremely narrow base, and though the core of its membership was the male skilled classes, it by no means encompassed the entire skilled workforce and of course largely excluded unskilled male and female workers. There is certainly evidence that unskilled workers organised during this period; harbour labourers and causeway labourers in Glasgow were at one time affiliated to the trades council and agricultural workers formed a Farm Servants Protection Society in Midlothian in 1865.<sup>15</sup> However the unions of the unskilled were ephemeral and rarely survived unfavourable economic conditions and they certainly did not occupy a central role in the organised labour movement of the third quarter of the 19th century.

The effects of declining profits and prices and foreign competition in the last quarter of the century, aggravated in Scotland by the collapse of the City of Glasgow Bank, had a catastrophic effect on the business community

and consequently on trade union organisation throughout Scotland. It is doubtful, as the Webbs claim, that only half a dozen Scottish trade unions survived the blow,<sup>16</sup> but certainly the number of societies affiliating to Glasgow Trades Council had declined to 32 by 1886. The general picture of trade union development until 1885 is a relatively dismal one but not uniformly so, and from the mid 1880's there was an unprecedented boom in membership which is associated with the development of 'new unionism'.

In contrast to the early 1870's when there was an upsurge in trade unionism which included the establishment of unions amongst the unskilled, the years after 1875 appear relatively moribund, but it was not a barren period. Some unions had a continuous and robust existence throughout whilst others were decimated, although it was the newly established unions of the unskilled which bore the brunt of the depression.

The real boost to trade unionism did not come until the late 1880's and was again reflected in the membership of trades councils and in the establishment of new ones. By 1890 affiliations to Glasgow Trades Council had risen to 88<sup>17</sup> and in Aberdeen the trades council had 33 affiliated unions representing 6,591 workers compared with 24 affiliated societies in 1884. representing approximately 2,000.<sup>18</sup> The task of committing oneself to accurate figures for trade union membership, is a difficult one as one has to rely on fragmentary and often impressionistic sources. The Webbs' claim that by 1891 there were 147,000 trade unionists in Scotland, is undoubtedly an underestimation of the strength of unions.<sup>19</sup> The revived fortunes of the long established trades councils was accompanied by a flowering of new ones in Dundee, Greenock, Motherwell, Falkirk, Kircaldy, Govan and Port Glasgow.<sup>20</sup> However bearing in mind the obviously flawed sources it is possible that only about 10% of workers were within the ranks of trade unionism by 1890.

The boom of the late 1880's resulted in an extension of unionism amongst the previously unorganised and the re-emergence of the organisation of the unskilled groups which had been wiped out by the years of depression and slumps. In Glasgow miners' and labourers' unions had once again affiliated to the trades councils and new unions of sailors and firemen, insurance agents and women workers had been established. However the growth in skilled unions and craft organisations was a more significant feature in Scotland

during the period which is generally regarded as the heyday of the unions of the unskilled and semi-skilled in England. Affiliations to Glasgow Trades Council were swelled by the increasing numbers of engineers, boiler-makers and those in the traditional craft trades who were re-forming unions or establishing them for the first time. Although workers in the heavy industries constituted the core of union organisation in the West of Scotland and were prominent in the revival of the late 1880's the traditional artisan trades were still important in Glasgow Trades Council. In other regions of Scotland, for example Edinburgh, the trades council was still dominated by these craft groups whilst in Aberdeen the building crafts unions, increasingly displaced the shipbuilding and engineering unions which had been the mainstay of the council in the 1870's and early 1880's.<sup>21</sup>

#### Policies, Politics and Ideology

The mid-Victorian years are often characterised as a period of social stability and political and industrial quiescence particularly when contrasted with the political and industrial strife of the 1830's and 1840's. It is generally argued that the labour movement appeared to become integrated into the capitalist system in the third quarter of the 19th century, divested of its revolutionary potential and its agitations designed to promote only limited and specific reforms. Similarly it is argued that its organisations no longer advocated collective class action, but instead became committed to defensive actions based on a narrow economism which stressed sectionalist and exclusivist craft principles.<sup>22</sup>

There have been several explanations offered for what has been perceived as the transformation of the robust combative labour movement of the Chartist era into the the quiescent one of the mid-Victorian period. However the explanation which has gained the most currency and engendered the greatest controversy is the concept of the labour aristocracy.<sup>23</sup> That is, the emergence of a stratum of workers, privileged in comparison with the mass of semi-skilled and unskilled, and who exhibited distinctive forms of political and cultural behaviour. The debate ranges over a whole series of issues which deal with the composition of the labour aristocracy; its

values and norms; its impact on the working class movement, and the development of class consciousness; its role in explaining the roots of reformism and the failure to develop a mass revolutionary movement in Britain. More recent contributions to the debate have questioned the usefulness of the concept as an explanatory tool, the validity of such contrasts between the early and mid Victorian labour movement, and whether it can be argued that such a stratum of the working class did exist. Whatever the merits of the labour aristocracy thesis the debate has drawn attention to the divisions within the working class and the social and political consequences of these divisions. Whilst the labour aristocracy is not synonymous with trade unionism an important aspect of the argument is the dominance of this stratum and its ideology within the labour and trade union movement of the period.

As has been argued the Scottish trade union movement had an extremely narrow base in the third quarter of the century, although there was a significant extension of the unionism towards the end of the century. The leading role of the heavy industries in Scotland's industrial structure ensured that the unions of the 'new' skilled workers dominated trade union organisation. However their influence was concentrated in the West of Scotland and therefore the organisations of the traditional craft trades were still of considerable importance and played a leading role in the institutions of the organised working class. The defence of sectional rights and privileges was certainly the pivot of trade union policies and for most of the period their concern was to protect the bargaining position of their trades by restricting entry.

The relatively advantaged position of those workers in the heavy industries who were able to secure gains by virtue of their strategic position in the economy was reflected in the commitment of these unions to sectionalist trade policies which relied on their own bargaining strength for success. This produced an ideology which emphasised the solidarity and interest of their particular craft rather than the common interests of the wider working class movement. This commitment to policies which entailed the confirmation and defence of craft privileges was certainly instrumental in consolidating many of the gains which had been won and obtaining others, but in terms of the development of the entire working class movement it arguably had a stultifying influence and on occasions was counter -

productive for the craft group themselves. During a four month lock-out in the Clyde shipyards in 1866, the A.S.E and other unions paid the unorganised labourers a pittance of 2s 6d per week whilst their own members received 10/- per week. Starvation drove the labourers back to work and the organised trades were easily broken after this and the demand for shorter hours defeated.<sup>24</sup> Similarly the iron moulders had succeeded in 1872 in obtaining a 51 hour week but as they were the only group in the industry to win this concession, the employers' hand was strengthened to retract the agreement when market conditions were unfavourable as they did not have to confront the combined forces of all the trades in the industry.<sup>25</sup>

The working class has never been an undifferentiated mass and the organisations which it has espoused, in order to defend and improve its position at the point of production, have always reflected the fissures and schisms within the class. Therefore the sectional character of unionism in the post-Chartist period was not a new phenomenon and frequently its policies and concerns were indistinguishable from those pursued by the unions of the earlier period. Restriction of entry into the trade was one of the major planks of the Scottish union movement in the early years of the century and both spinners' and weavers' unions had endeavoured to maintain differentials and enforce recognition of craft status and privilege. The major purpose of the General Scottish Association of Printers, established in 1836 was restriction of apprentices and the policies of the later National Association were distinguished by their continuity rather than any reversals or sharp breaks.<sup>26</sup>

The different economic and political context of the mid Victorian era may have strengthened craft sectionalism and reconciled the working class to industrial capitalism but this does not mean that it was divested of any awareness of class divisions and the sense of a separate class identity. Discussions of how to improve the wages and conditions of the working class rarely revealed a wholesale acceptance of orthodox economic principles and always contained a recognition that labour was the source of all wealth and that the fortunes of Capital were created by the toil of the working masses. The perception of an inherent conflict of interest between capital and labour permeated trade union discussions and the awareness of the divide

between the two classes and was frequently articulated even by those union officials who advocated conciliation and co-operation if not class collaboration. Thus the attempts of Edinburgh Trades Council to reduce the working week referred to the need for workers to 'influence the Labour Market in their favour' as the best means by which the working class could secure a more equitable share of the wealth which 'their labour produces'.<sup>27</sup>

James McNeal, Secretary of the Clyde Boilermakers and Shipbuilders unequivocally demonstrated a keen sense of class oppression when he wrote that :

"While labour lives in hovels and starves in rags and capital lives in palaces and feasts in robes, speak no more of the castes of the tribes of India".<sup>28</sup>

The article illustrates that the radical tradition of the earlier period had not completely disappeared even if it was not shared by all trade unionists. His claim that :

"the only pure and free labour that can exist is that system wherein the products of labour are exchanged between producers and not party in the shape of prince, lord or master, to stand between the actual producers and exchangers directly or indirectly to claim the lion's share".<sup>29</sup>

is reminiscent of the radical political tradition which sprung from the erosion of the independence of the artisan and demonstrates the remnants of the legacy from the earlier period of heightened class struggle.

Although the focus of trade union energies was directed at maintaining craft privileges and distinctions, the movement was also capable of sponsoring class action rather than craft action. Trade unions were instrumental in promoting the short-time movement which cut across occupational sectionalism and achieved a limited degree of success in uniting the skilled and the unskilled in a common cause. Although even here the organised minority demonstrated an insensitivity to the particular interests of the various sections and in assuming the leadership of the agitation, also imposed a priority of claims and a method of resistance which reflected their sectional

interests. Thus in Dundee the struggle to reduce the working week was characterised by conflicts and schisms which resulted from the refusal of the largely female unskilled workers to accept the terms and modus operandi of the organised leadership. The focus of discontent revolved around the policy of the skilled men to accept a reduction in wages as a quid pro quo for a reduction in hours and to confine the struggle to negotiations with employers. Given the large differential in earnings between the male workers and the women who earned virtually subsistence wages, this was obviously a policy which was tailored to the interests of one particular section and therefore destined to contribute to the fragmentation of the workers.

In Scotland the organised labour movement was committed from an early stage to extending trade unionism to the unskilled. Glasgow Trades Council from its inception displayed a willingness to help the unorganised, usually lacing their advice with homilies on the improvement to their moral welfare which trade unionism would bring. In 1859, the bleachers embarked on a long campaign to shorten their hours and were given every assistance by Glasgow Trades Council, including the establishment of a select committee to investigate the conditions of the bleachworkers in Glasgow.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout the period the Trades Council received a constant stream of deputations from groups of workers seeking advice, financial aid or even asking the Council to exercise their influence to resolve particular disputes. This was not a policy peculiar to Glasgow but seems to have been adopted by the majority of the trades councils in Scotland. The establishment of an agricultural union in Midlothian in 1865, was assisted by Edinburgh Trades Council and a demonstration by the Union was addressed by an official of the Edinburgh masons' union.<sup>31</sup> In 1875, Dundee Trades Council gave financial and organisational assistance to the Dundee Millworkers who had been on strike for several weeks and were also involved in the inauguration of the Dundee Mill and Factory Workers Association in September 1875.

One cannot, therefore accuse the organised labour movement of an inbred hostility to the unorganised or unskilled which provided a barrier to organisation, but unquestionably the primacy placed on the defence of sectional privileges weakened the commitment to broader class action.

It is also significant that within their own industries, the organised skilled workers clung to a policy of sectional exclusiveness from which they rarely departed nor did they attempt to organise the unskilled within these industries.

The involvement of the Scottish movement in the extension of trade unionism to previously unorganised sections, was largely a consequence of the greater influence in the labour movement of trades councils whose very basis committed them to a form of action which dissolved occupational boundaries and forced them to address issues which had a wider significance than the fate of a particular craft group or trade. However, this commitment was perhaps given additional impetus by the emphasis placed on self-improvement and self-advancement in Scottish society which in part derived from the precepts of Calvinism which provided a code of personal conduct bound up with diligence, thrift and self-help. Because economic and spiritual immiseration were inextricably linked in the Calvinistic ethic, trade unions saw their organisations not simply as the means of improving wages and conditions, but also the way for the working classes to achieve moral dignity and self-respect.

At a general meeting of miners at Maryhill, which was addressed by leading trade unionists of the district, and whose purpose was to attempt to organise the miners, the chairman remarked that :

"They would try some means to bring about a rise of wages, so as to enable them to rise from that social and moral status to which they had sunk." <sup>32</sup>

The organised sections, to some extent, saw themselves in the role of moral entrepreneurs and were therefore concerned to 'rescue' those sections of the working class whom they considered morally and socially degenerate by bringing them within the pale of the trade union movement.

The trade unions of this period have been frequently associated with industrial pacifism and advocating a conciliatory approach to industrial relations. The reports of Glasgow Trades Council clearly indicates that they favoured negotiation, arbitration and conciliation and desired to

avoid strikes at all costs and in this respect they saw their methods as sharply differentiated from the earlier unionists. Strikes were certainly viewed with distaste and regarded as a last resort, but the strike weapon would be used if all other means failed. However even when strike action was undertaken, there was great concern over its conduct and anxiety to demonstrate that those taking part were acting in a responsible fashion and refraining from indulging in the 'unruly and intimidating' behaviour which often characterised the methods of the early trade unionists. Glasgow Trades Council reported that a committee which investigated trades organisation had found that the management of strikes had greatly improved :

"Another fact which the Committee have demonstrated beyond the possibility of question is the marked improvement which may be traced in the conduct of modern strikes as compared with the reckless violence which was formerly the principal weapon employed. It is admitted with great fairness, that instances even now occur where the most malignant defamation and the most unpardonable tyranny are still resorted to..... But it is asserted - and we think with truth - that the coarser forms of violence are falling out of repute, and that the present tactics of trade societies are marked by an anxious desire to keep clear of offence which the public is determined not to tolerate....."<sup>33</sup>

The reference to public opinion is indicative of the importance ascribed by trade unionists to the favourable opinion of certain sections of the middle classes whom they regarded as potential allies worthy of cultivating. A discussion on strikes in Edinburgh Trades Councils revolved around the best means to reduce the number of strikes and ensure the success of those which were 'absolutely necessary' and so raise 'the moral tone of Trades' Unions in the opinion of those whose good opinion and co-operation are really worth having'.<sup>34</sup> The approval sought by labour organisations was not purely of an instrumental nature, but reflected a desire on their part to obtain recognition for their organisation and so raise their status within the community. Whilst on the one hand this indicated a sense of class consciousness and class pride, it also reflected a desire for acceptance within the community and thus an implicit recognition of the legitimacy of the established order.

The 'evils' of strikes were a recurrent theme in trades council discussion and although there were divergencies of opinion on the best remedies there was a unanimity in the belief that strikes were evils which should be avoided.

A member of Glasgow Trades Council opined that he:

"never liked strikes, perhaps it might be said he was prejudiced on that subject, as even when strikes were considered successful, they were often injurious by pressing too hard on the employers of labour and driving away certain kinds of employment from particular localities".<sup>35</sup>

The various trades councils throughout Scotland constantly counselled striking workers to return to work until the state of trade was more favourable and this indicates the extent to which the labour movement was influenced by orthodox economics which elevated the principle of supply and demand to the status of a natural law.

This attitude to strikes and the grip of popular political economy was perhaps a product of both objective economic conditions in Scotland and the influence of Calvinist ideology. The relative abundance of the labour supply in Scotland contributed to the enfeeblement of the trade union movement, and may have acted to dissuade workers from going on strike as there was a keenly developed awareness of the fact that employers would not feel constrained to remain in a particular locality if labour became intractable, as there was a plentiful source of cheap labour in other areas. The influence of popular political economy on trade unionists may also have been related to the increasing involvement of the Scottish economy in the export market and the consequent dependence of sizeable sections of the workforce on the continued prosperity of these sectors for their livelihood, which may have attracted them to the principles of free trade. However there were also close links between Calvinist ideology and the tenets of popular political economy and the former was almost certainly a potent force for the dissemination of belief in thrift, self-help and possessive individualism.

The influence of the abundant labour supply was most clearly manifested in the widespread support given by the labour movement in Scotland to schemes for emigration, as a means of resolving labour's problems. Alexander MacDonald of the miners' union was instrumental in setting up a number of emigration societies and in one fortnight 100 miners had their passage to America paid by these organisations.<sup>36</sup> The secretary of Glasgow Trades

Council in 1862, Mr Lawrence, a tailor argued that:

".....instead of strikes, it would be more advantageous to regulate the labour market, by the trades joining together to carry out a large and comprehensive plan of emigration and colonisation, by which means the capital invested might be returned every eight years. He thought this would be the true and practical solution to the difficulties of surplus labour".<sup>37</sup>

Distaste for strikes and the belief that they should be a last resort, was also a reflection of the fact that trade unionism was strong amongst those skilled workers whose strategic position in the industrial structure enabled them to win their demands without resorting to strikes. They were able to improve their position without breaching the rules which decreed that account should always be taken of the state of trade when contemplating whether to agitate for a wage increase. However there was another dimension to this question which was rooted in the firmly held belief amongst trade unionists that they should constantly demonstrate the 'intelligence' of the working classes to the general community. Since strikes were unfavourably regarded not only by employers, but those middle class elements whose approval the unions so desired, a rejection of them in theory if not in practice was a proclamation of their superior intelligence and differentiated them from the mass of the unorganised.

An article in the Sentinel, a political weekly which gave wide and sympathetic coverage to the trade union affairs, neatly encapsulated the spirit of, and illustrated the importance placed on moderation and 'responsible' trade unionism as indicators of a higher levels of moral and intellectual development:

"By both working men and employers it is generally conceded that a mutual understanding might be come to by a simple and less wasteful process than strikes. Indeed the more intelligent class of workmen look upon strikes as the clumsiest of all expedients, deplorable in every sense, and to be abandoned as soon as a more rational and inexpensive means of arrangement can be arrived at".<sup>38</sup>

However the organised labour movement never abandoned the strike weapon and the mid-Victorian era in Scotland could not justifiably be described as a period of industrial harmony. The struggle to obtain a shorter working week generated a number of strikes throughout industry and at

various periods, joiners, engineers, tailors, shipbuilders and iron and steel workers were engaged in bitter and protracted struggles for a shorter working week. Similarly, appeals to the state of trade by employers made little impression on unions when they felt an improvement in their wages was merited, and the law of supply and demand could similarly be ignored if its operation proved to be unfavourable to the unions.

The principle of a 'fair wage' which was frequently invoked, although implying a belief in the possibility of economic justice within capitalist society, also provided a potential area of conflict and was often inconsistent with acceptance of the 'state of trade' argument in wage bargaining.

Although certain sections of the workforce enjoyed relative economic prosperity, it is possible to exaggerate the degree to which they could be regarded as an economically distinct group. Even within the ranks of the skilled workers there was a wide range of economic experience with some trades more vulnerable to seasonal and cyclical unemployment than others.<sup>39</sup> Skilled workers were still wage-labourers and their relatively advantaged position was precariously based and always subject to the fluctuations of the trade cycle. Some trades may have achieved a *modus vivendi* with employers whereby conflict could be minimised because gains could be achieved by playing the capitalist rules of the game, but others had to contend with bitter opposition from employers. In 1868 the Master Iron Founders locked out members of the moulders' union throughout Scotland in a concerted effort to smash their organisation and declared that the 'obnoxious union must be crushed'.<sup>40</sup> After nine weeks the men returned to work utterly defeated and only managed to salvage one condition; that they did not have to renounce their union membership. In Edinburgh in 1862 the iron trades struck against a reduction in the meal hour and in one workshop the men were threatened with imprisonment if they continued to resist.<sup>41</sup>

Although the rhetoric of the trade union movement included acceptance of many economic orthodoxies and was imbued with a virulently anti-strike philosophy, in practice trade union actions often infringed economic laws and their resort to strikes confirmed the endemic conflict between capital and labour which the movement frequently acknowledged. Undoubtedly unions

espoused a particular social philosophy but in practice it was often violated and the detente which many of them had reached with employers was of fragile and unstable nature.

Between the mid 1870's and 1890, as a result of the relative decline of the Scottish economy, and with unemployment and wages cuts more prevalent than in the previous 20 years, there were a number of strikes against reductions in wages. Miners, shipyard workers, masons, joiners and iron and steel workers were involved at various times in struggles with the employers. However these years were not uniformly bleak for the labour force, and unemployment and wage cuts were by no means general throughout the period.

There was, however, a weakening of the influence of popular political economy and a challenge to the more conservative and conciliatory aspects of policies which had been so entrenched in the third quarter of the century. This was accompanied by an awareness of the growing divide between capital and labour and a sense of relative deprivation which sprung from disinclination of the labour movement to accept deterioration in their conditions as an inevitable or immutable consequence of industrial capitalism. The annual report of Glasgow Trades Council for 1886 in rejecting the argument from employers that profits were too low to grant increases and guarantee employment noted that:

" while we are every day hearing of the rapidly increasing accumulation of wealth, we know that every day the chasm between the two classes - rich and poor - is increasing in width".<sup>42</sup>

However, conciliation and arbitration were still the favoured means of resolving disputes. For example, an initiative from Aberdeen's Chamber of Commerce during 1889 to establish boards of arbitration and conciliation 'in view of the prevalence of strikes', was approved by the trades council, although there was dissension and opposition from some quarters. Similarly, references to the state of trade and the acceptance of other elements of orthodox economics still persisted.

The preoccupation of Scottish trade unionism with self-improvement, thrift, temperance and to some extent Sabbatarianism, derived from the moral code of Calvinism which was deeply instilled in the Scottish labour movement. Temperance, in particular, was a central issue and one constantly urged by trades councils who affirmed their commitment by meeting in coffee houses or temperance halls. The burgeoning temperance associations in the latter half of the 19th century took firm root among Scottish trade unionists. The Order of Good Templars which was formed in 1869 in Scotland, claimed to have many branches composed entirely of tradesmen, including lodges of carters, engineers, shoemakers and bakers.<sup>43</sup> This attachment to temperance sometimes led trade unionists to locate the cause of poverty in the relish for alcohol displayed by the working class, although they never lost sight of the structural factors which lay at the roots of economic misery. A report of a meeting of Maryhill miners noted that :

"the general feeling of the remarks was against the heartless indifference many displayed to their own well being as individuals and that of their class. Intemperance, it was remarked, has in many instances more than been keeping pace with their poverty and sore work."<sup>44</sup>

However, it was more common for trade unionists to argue that moral, social and intellectual improvement could be achieved by the collective action of the working classes to improve their standards of life and work. Commitment to temperance did not necessarily cut across class differences and weaken working class action, for usually it was combined with a strong sense of class interest and class differences. In Edinburgh, overtures made by the Temperance Electoral Association to the trades council, to co-operate over the question of the municipal elections, met with a luke-warm reception as it was argued that :

"we consider that the right men for Councillors are those who will represent the rights of labour, whether temperance men or not."<sup>45</sup>

Support for temperance was a feature of the early Scottish Chartist movement largely because of the widespread problem of drunkenness amongst the Scottish working class. But it was not so much a mark of the pervasiveness

of ruling class ideology as a desire for their politics to be taken seriously. As one leading Scottish Chartist remarked:

"Radicalism has been made a laughing stock throughout the country by reason of the drinking habits of many of its advocates; pot house politicians hiccuping for liberty (are) a revolting spectacle".<sup>46</sup>

The concern of the mid-Victorian labour movement with acceptance and recognition of their organisations led them to embrace temperance as part of that struggle and was not simply a reflection of wholesale subscription to bourgeois values.

Thrift, self-reliance and self-help were other values adopted by the movement and unions were often associated with co-operative societies and savings institutions. Their concern with intemperance and improvidence led unions to frown upon what they considered small 'unsound' local savings societies and credit; both of which were necessary to workers of irregular and low incomes. It is clear that this pattern of economic behaviour was only available to those sections of workers who had a regular, if not high, income and whose economic circumstances enabled them to plan for the future and envisage an improvement in their personal situation. In this sense trade unions contributed to the differentiation of the working class by assuming a mode of behaviour which confirmed the privileged position of the small number of relatively prosperous workers.

However Gray's work on the Edinburgh artisan class suggests that the struggle for self-improvement and the striving for respectability was usually conducted within the 'wide economic range within the skilled working class' and need not necessarily be seen as an attempt to surmount the divide between manual and non-manual occupations.

The values of thrift and self-help were usually articulated in the language of the workingclass and defined within the framework of working class life. They were urged on all sections of the working class in the belief that they would better equip the class to advance as a class in the struggle with the employers. The solidaristic methods of advancement employed trade unions, friendly societies etc, distinguished them from the individualistic methods of self-improvement which was central to economic liberalism.

Co-operative institutions were not only retail societies which mimicked bourgeois commercialism; they were often inspired by the ideal of co-operative production which had gained such currency amongst the working class during the Chartist period. They were part of the arsenal of ammunition deployed by the working classes to protect themselves from the rigours and deprivations of daily life in a capitalist society where existence was beset by insecurity and uncertainty. The ideal of co-operative production was never abandoned and there is evidence of a number of co-operative ventures arising out of bitter conflicts with employers. In Edinburgh in 1861 the masons successfully obtained a nine hour day after a three month struggle and subsequently formed a Co-operative Building Society. The foundation stone of their first tenement was laid by the Reverend Dr Begg 'amidst a great crowd composed of workers and their families' and by the end of 1863 they had built 117 houses.<sup>47</sup> At various times between 1850 and 1875 bakers, coopers, miners and engineers either debated co-operative schemes or actually established them.

The endemic conflict of interest between Capital and Labour was recognised by the trade union movement, as was the necessity for struggle at the point of production. This was not, however, linked to any overall critique of capitalist society and this coupled with the importance of the Highland question in Scottish politics, meant that the targets for reform and vilification were the landed aristocracy, the church and the monarchy. Although the political complexion of the Scottish trade union movement was still predominantly liberal for most of the period, the seeds of independent labour politics were sown in this period and culminated in the increasing desire for direct working class representation in Parliament which was independent of the two main parties.

Whilst it is clear that in many respects Scottish unionism was weaker than its English counterpart, it is by no means certain the Calvinist precepts as articulated by the union movement, invariably lubricated the wheels of class co-operation and facilitated the subordination of the working class to the dominant ideology. The influence of Calvinism may have injected into trade unionism a sense of moral dignity and self respect which translated into class terms, fuelled their desire to 'warren' the institutions of capitalism and gain recognition for the organisations

of labour. Bourgeois ideology was not unambiguously imposed on the working class, but was subjected to transformation, adaption and reformulation through the filter of working class life and experience. Therefore 'respectability' as aspired to by the mid-Victorian trade unionist often had a collective and class connotation and the emphasis on self-help which distinguished Scottish unionism could be interpreted as part of the process of weaning working class organisations away from the patronage of the benevolent middle classes.

### Domestic Ideology

An important aspect of mid-Victorian trade union ideology was its conception of the family and the role of women, for the struggle for respectability and self-improvement was also formulated in terms of the family or household. Theories of the labour aristocracy have tended to present the most significant divisions within the working class as between skilled and unskilled : however an analysis of the domestic ideology of the trade unionism highlights the existence of gender divisions which were as significant for the development of the labour movement as any other form of sectionalism.

A central plank of trade union policy was the demand for a family wage, and a hallmark of working class respectability became the family where the man was the financial provider who could afford to maintain a non-working wife, whose task in turn was the creation of a domestic environment where the spiritual, emotional and material needs of all the family members would be catered for. Trade union discussions were liberally peppered with reference to the 'proper place' of women being the home, whilst industrial work was deemed to be the province of men. This view was clearly expressed by a delegate to the Scottish Tailors' Conference who was arguing in favour of the union helping to organise female labour in the trade :

"It was well known that the vast majority of the females who go into tailoring, or any other trade, do so merely with the view of temporary employment during the period between girlhood and the time they hope to take their proper place as the wife of someone, and it should be impressed upon them that by working at low wages during this period of temporary employment they are keeping down wages of those that in after life may have to support them".<sup>48</sup>

The notion of women being associated with the domestic sphere was not a new departure, as long before the industrial revolution women had responsibility for the management of household tasks.<sup>49</sup> However, in the pre-industrial period women were expected to contribute to the family economy, albeit as supplementary earners whose work was often supervised by the male head of the family who had absolute authority over the household. Industrialisation, by accelerating the separation of home and work, stripped men of their role as supervisors and organisers of family labour and hence of the source of their patriarchal power.<sup>50</sup>

The women who were drawn into the labour market in the early years of the industrial revolution were generally supervised by men who were not their husbands or fathers and therefore to some extent became independent of patriarchal control. In addition they were usually employed for lower wages, as women and children were traditionally expected to work for half men's wages. Thus by undercutting men's wages they represented a threat to both the financial and authority status of men who were faced with the possibility of becoming dependent on those whom they had previously supported and supervised.

The response of male labour was to organise against cheap female labour by seeking to exclude women from competition in the labour market, and to argue for a wage which was sufficient to support a wife and children. This strategy incorporated and adapted pre-existing ideologies of gender divisions to the changed context of industrialisation, and not only reserved women's 'natural' domestic role and her role as dependant, but confirmed industrial work as the property of men and reconstituted patriarchal authority around the notion of the male provider and breadwinner. The division between home and work and the creation of the new role of housewife for women was noted as early as 1828 in an article on 'The Medical Topography of Neilston' by Dr G J M Ritchie who remarked that :

In families in which all the members are so far advanced as to be fit for labour the aggregate amount of their earnings is very considerable,

and is in general placed at the disposal of the eldest female , whose sole employment consists in making purchases, and attending to the household duties".<sup>51</sup>

It is interesting that the role of housewife was associated with a greater amount of leisure and lack of supervision which might make women more vulnerable to the vices of drunkenness and dissoluteness. Dr Ritchie observed that many of the women, unlike the male members of their family, who were presumably engaged in waged labour outside the home, often 'acquired habits of dram-drinking' which:

"probably depends on the comparatively little restraint imposed on these females, on their greater leisure, and on the seducing attentions of retail dealers anxious to cultivate their custom.....".<sup>52</sup>

This observation probably reflected the fear of the consequences of the removal of patriarchal supervision of women in the household, just as many of the objections to women's labour in the early factory system were based on the undermining of patriarchal authority which it might entail.

The ideology of domesticity and separate sexual spheres involved an array of roles for women, and in the context of working class culture was imbued with values and meanings which were quite distinct from the formulation of that ideology in the bourgeois family. The image of the 'angel in the house' as aspired to by the middle classes, ascribed to women the role of overseer of the household. However, essentially their womanhood, and ultimately the status of the bourgeois family, derived from women's role as ladies of leisure who possessed gentility and were the embodiment of Christian purity.

The symbol of the non-working wife was central to both middle class and working class conceptions of the domestic ideal but domesticity was constructed differently in the working class home and assumed particular connotations which were distinct from the ideal formulated in the middle class home. Domesticity and respectability were closely associated in working class life and it was viewed as the woman's role to acquire the necessary domestic skills required to provide a good and comfortable home

life for her husband thereby diverting him from temptation into a life of crime, drunkenness and impropriety. Therefore, working class women's role as moral guardians involved domestic labour and proficiency in household tasks such as cooking, baking, cleaning, sewing, washing etc. Part of the opposition to women working was based on fear of the consequence if these domestic skills atrophied when women were engaged in waged labour outside the home. This was the view expressed by one of the contributors at a meeting of Dundee's Working Men's Club on the establishment of infant nurseries. The speaker criticised those 'tradesmen' whose wives went out to work when they should be at home looking after their children and claimed that:

"many men took to bad habits because of their wives not being able to keep house, and therefore it would be a boon if some means were adopted to train operative females in housekeeping".<sup>53</sup>

The meaning of domesticity in working class culture was therefore more concerned with the acquisition and application of practical skills in contradistinction to its formulation in the middle-class home where it was associated with household management as well as manners, etiquette, gentility and 'the lady of leisure'. The same speaker illustrated that working class concern with respectability and the domestic ideal did not necessarily involve the total subordination of the working class to middle class cultural values, but could be combined with a sense of class pride. On the question of domestic training for working women, he added:

".....that others than the daughters of gentlemen would require to be instructors, as they had more need to learn themselves than they should learn others (Laughter and Applause) Those ladies who went about and lectured on politics could do far more good if they applied themselves to the improvement of their class in domestic work. (Applause).<sup>54</sup>

The trade union movement's policy of a family wage and its commitment to the domestic ideal powerfully influenced its attitude to women once they were drawn into the labour market. As women workers were regarded as out of place, they were viewed primarily as a 'problem', however the nature of the problem took different forms in different contexts. The view that trade unions' opposition to women workers stemmed solely from the

fact that women were viewed as a source of cheap competition is only a partial explanation for men's opposition to women working. Fear of the atrophying of domestic skills and the consequent threat to the material and spiritual well-being of the family was an additional concern, as was the protection of working women's morals. The latter is highlighted when examining trade union attitudes to protective legislation designed to regulate the hours and conditions of work of women and children in industries where their labour did not necessarily threaten male employment.

In such instances the concerns expressed by trade unions centred on the protection of female morality as much as excessive hours of work or appalling conditions. Indeed feminist historians have commented that the trade union movement remained silent on hours and conditions of work when it involved trades where only women were employed.<sup>55</sup> However working men seemed particularly concerned to regulate women's labour when it involved them working alongside men at close quarters, or in a state less than fully clothed.

In 1859 bleachworkers and finishers in the Glasgow area began agitations to reduce their hours of work and to extend the provisions of the Factory Act to bleaching and finishing works. The bleachers enlisted the support of Glasgow Trades Council in their campaign, and they in turn set up a select committee of the Council to investigate conditions in the trade. In highlighting the plight of women and children in the bleachfields, there was clearly an element of hiding behind the petticoats of women to facilitate legislation in which men also had a vested interest. Unlike men, women were not regarded as free agents but as defenceless creatures who required the protection of others, such as the male trade union movement or the state. Therefore support for protective legislation was justified on the basis that it was 'the duty of the Legislature to protect those who cannot protect themselves'.<sup>56</sup> However the reports of the trades council's select committee dwelled on the damage to the moral as well as the physical health of the women and children in bleachfields:

"It appears that the temperature of these works is in the general very high, rising in some cases to 120 degrees. In such cases females are under the necessity of divesting themselves of their articles of clothing, not infrequently almost to a state of nudity, otherwise they could not go about their work in such unreasonable heat.....To the question if women had

ever been observed in an indecent position through the undue exposure of their persons in the divestment of their clothing, the answer had invariably been 'yes' and that the general effect is injurious to morality.....".<sup>57</sup>

Given the excessive hours worked in the bleachfields, the lack of regularity of hours, and the intolerable heat, the trades council's reports and the comments of the bleachworkers' short-time committee displayed an almost obsessive concern with the effects of such conditions on the ~~check~~ health of the women and children. Even when expressing concern over the long hours, and the excessive amount of overtime demanded by the employers, the question of morals intruded into the discussion. The short-time committee commented that:

"Several of the witnesses stated that they had known women and children work for 36 hours consecutively, in a heat varying from 120 to 140 degrees. This, of course, caused the females to divest themselves of nearly all their clothes, therefore exposing themselves in an improper manner. Indeed one witness stated that he had seen them almost naked, only those parts which any female would hide remained covered".<sup>58</sup>

and to illustrate the deleterious effects of overtime the testimony of a witness was cited:

"from sheer exhaustion he had seen the operatives sink down on, and under the tables they were working on and sleep, all together without reference to either age or sex".<sup>59</sup>

Similar concerns were expressed by the radical Glasgow Sentinel. When the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women held a meeting in Glasgow with a view to setting up a similar society in Glasgow, the Sentinel carried a lengthy article condemning the scheme to introduce women compositors. The article stressed that they were not against the scheme in principle acknowledging that:

"there are many employments suited for women to which they might be more largely introduced than they are - service in the general run of shops we take to be one of those".<sup>60</sup>

However the work of a compositor was deemed to be eminently unsuitable for women and whilst the point was made that women's labour would be used to undercut men's wages, the bulk of the article concentrated on the immorality of such work. The primary concern seemed to be that women worked alongside men, but the fact that the work involved going out on the streets at night was also cause for concern:

"The employment of women at occupations where it is necessary they should be mixed up with men is not desirable, and , although the means of living comfortably are increased by such a practice, there is certainly no moral gain in it. We do not wish to cast any reflection on women who work in factories, seeing that in those places they work very much in groups and, therefore the compositor is that which we take to be , perhaps above all others, the least suitable for women. A very large proportion of this work is carried on in connection with the newspaper press of this country, and it may be remarked that a great deal of this work is night work, not only unhealthy in its character, but unsuited for women by the necessity it would impose them by walking the streets by night.....".<sup>61</sup>

The views expressed in the article indicate a tolerance of women's work on the condition that it did not threaten the prior rights of men to work that it arose from necessity, that is where no other means of support was available, and crucially that the chastity and modesty of women were preserved. Clearly the question of female morality was a dominant concern which pre-occupied both bourgeois commentators and the male trade union movement. However working women themselves were anxious to redeem their reputations and refute suggestions of immorality. The Sentinel published two letters from women factory workers about the morals of women cotton workers. The first letter from 'a spinster' who had worked for 45 years as a weaver in a power-loom factory maintained 'that this class was above all others who worked as cotton mill operatives', as they were the daughters of managers, foremen, clerks, engineers, mechanics etc where the others were recruited from 'the class of common labourers'.<sup>62</sup> The second letter was from a female cotton mill operative who clearly interpreted the weaver's remarks as casting aspersions on the morality of millworkers. She was anxious to display the fact that respectability defined by the possession of moral propriety, was not the monopoly of skilled workers:

".....the work is not so healthy or clean as what it is in a power-loom factory (but) the morals of cotton factory workers are just as good as others of the working classes not excepting the children of purity (the weavers)".<sup>63</sup>

Certainly trade unionists' instrumental and self-interested motives for regulating female labour could be camouflaged by appeals to morality, but the frequency of references to this question suggests that it was not a cynically manufactured concern but a very real one. Indeed the issue of the protection of female morals was used by the Secretary of the Scottish National Association of Operative Tailors to argue for a less sectional policy towards female labour. The report of the conference stated that:

"He condemned the practice of mixing the sexes in workshops more especially as our trade is carried on in a state of undress or semi-nudity, but he cautioned the delegates that they must not forget the wider aspect of the question which the morality of our large towns was affected. He went on to say that if we legislated with the view of keeping females out of our trade and other classes of the community did likewise, we would be responsible for keeping the surplus female population out of honest employment and leaving them no resort but prostitution or starvation. If suitable workshops were provided, and the provisions of the Workshop Act duly enforced, he for one was prepared to admit that equal right of the opposite sex as to gain their living at our trade as one that in many ways was suited to them".<sup>64</sup>

It would appear that concern over the virtue of women was an integral part of the trade union movement's opposition to female labour even when the more pressing concern was fear of cheap competition. It should perhaps not be surprising that female morality was a primary concern of the trade union movement, for in the Victorian period the quintessential female virtues were modesty and chastity. As ignorance was regarded as the best protective shield from sexual impurity, the means of regulating female sexuality frequently involved avoiding situations which might make women aware of their sexuality or where they might fall prey to seduction,<sup>65</sup> hence the anxiety of male trade unionists to segregate working women and men, or at least ensure that the conditions in which they worked together were closely supervised and did not involve any loss of female modesty.

Attempts to explicate the basis of Victorian sexual morality have focused on the role of female chastity in ensuring legitimate inheritance,<sup>66</sup> however this argument has little relevance to the working classes who had no property

and were presumably unperturbed by the problem of safeguarding property rights. Therefore should trade unionists' anxiety to protect women's virtue be seen as the cultural diffusion of bourgeois morality, imposing itself on the working classes? The struggle for acceptance was central to the Victorian trade union movement; however this struggle did not simply involve apeing the value of the middle classes, but involved a desire to gain recognition and respect for the organisations of labour. This could mean assertions of class pride and working class autonomy and independence from the upper classes as much as cultural subordination. As the other side of Victorian sexual morality was widespread prostitution and soliciting, working class insistence on female chastity could be interpreted as part of the struggle for male working class independence and the rights of labour to be free from the arbitrary power of the ruling classes, an assertion of their status as freemen rather than slaves. Sexual chastity and modesty would maintain working class women's sexual purity and ensure that they would not become fodder for the nineteenth century brothels and therefore would remain the property of their fathers and husbands rather than the men who were the clients of prostitution.

However, as far as the trade union movement was concerned, the main problem posed by female labour was its status as cheap labour which made it a source of competition. On this question economic considerations and ideology combined to produce a trade union strategy towards female labour which was sectional and exclusionary. It reinforced both occupational divisions along gender lines, and the vulnerability of working women by confirming their status as cheap labour.

The first time the question of female labour was discussed at the SNAOT's annual conference, an uncompromising stance was argued and the following motion adopted:

"That in any branch where female labour is introduced into a shop among the workmen, against the wish of the men, and they refuse to work beside them such men will be held justifiable in so doing, but in no case shall any of our members be justified in teaching females".<sup>67</sup>

Female labour was again a focal point of debate at the 14th Conference of the SNAOT and the contribution of a Glasgow delegate indicates the strength of the assumption that women were dependants and men providers:

".....it is a well known fact that for various reasons, females are able to work for less wages than men. They look upon their connection with the trade as being only a temporary nature, and in many instances are not entirely dependent on their own labour for their support. They never contemplate having to labour for their whole life for the support of themselves and others as the male portion of the trade have to do".<sup>68</sup>

Although there were branches within the union which argued for a less sectional policy and suggested the union should help organise the women in their own society as a means of increasing their wages, the more hard-line policy prevailed until the 1890's, with various conferences confirming the rule that expelled men for teaching women the trade.

Obviously fear of undercutting was a strong motivation to resist female labour but this was buttressed by an ideology which defined women's role as in the home and which therefore precluded alternative strategies towards female labour such as championing their right to employment and to equal pay-as these challenged this ideology. The trade union movement's conception of the appropriate sexual division of labour was clearly expressed by a correspondent to the Sentinel who used the pseudonym Cromwell:

"It is what must take place, if women are thrown discriminately into men's employment; wives will have to compete with their husbands, sisters with their brothers; whilst the woman's proper duties in the family will be left to take care of themselves. The poor man's home, then deprived of home comforts, affections and loving associations will lose its sacred character and its marvellous influence in shaping the minds of the young favourably for the entertainment of manly social and national virtues".<sup>69</sup>

As with the bourgeoisie, respectability and domesticity were intertwined in the Victorian working class value-system, however just as these notions had different meanings for the two classes, working-class attempts to achieve both respectability and the domestic ideal could not only be combined with class consciousness and combativity but could actually fuel it. For the struggle to achieve them could often bring trade unions into conflict with employers who would be reluctant to provide the material basis necessary for their realisation, that is a wage sufficient to provide

domestic comforts for a man and his family.

The domestic ideal could be interpreted as part of the attempt by the working class to obtain the best possible conditions under capitalism, as part of its 'accommodation' to capitalism.<sup>70</sup> Women, as homemakers, were to create a domestic environment governed by love, affection and harmony, and the home was conceived as a shelter and refuge from the ill winds of commercial capitalism where the cash nexus, competition and the laws of the market-place ruled. However this was an aspiration which was ideological in the sense that it embodied a conception of gender divisions, presented as 'natural' which confined women to a dependant and subordinate status to men. In the world of work women were seen as intruders, regarded as areas of work deemed to be 'suitable' and usually defined as unskilled. The incorporation of this ideology of gender divisions into trade union practice meant that trade unions played an important role in reproducing and reinforcing the sexual division of labour in both the home and the workplace by pursuing policies which sought to exclude women from certain kinds of work, and failing to challenge the ideological basis of women's status as cheap labour.

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### CHAPTER 3

#### WOMEN TRADE UNIONISM AND INDUSTRIAL MILITANCY, 1850 - C 1890

Unionism was not a new phenomenon to Scottish women, for they had been involved in the embryonic trade union movement of the 18th century and the early 19th century, as well as taking an active part in popular disturbances, for example in food riots, protests against machinery etc. Women also played an active, although usually secondary part in the general unions of the 1830's and the Chartist Movement, even forming their own female lodges.<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult, however, to gauge the extent of their participation in trade unions in the period after 1850, as the official records of governments and trade unions are of little help, being both incomplete and unreliable.

From 1874 women's trade unionism was dominated by the activities of the Women's Protection and Provident League, which was founded by Emma Paterson and whose leadership was composed of middle-class and upper-class philanthropists. Before this period references to women's trade unionism are infrequent and scattered and, particularly in Scotland, it has consequently been concluded that women failed to combine in any significant way.

It has already been demonstrated that Scottish trade unionism was weak, hardly spreading beyond the traditional craft boundaries and indeed excluding much of the skilled labour force. Therefore, any failure to combined by unskilled women and men must be seen in this context.

The majority of the half million working women were confined to a limited range of jobs, the four leading occupations; agriculture, textiles, domestic service and dress, before the mid 1870's, accounting for 90% of the female labour force. Given the organisation of domestic service and dressmaking into small scattered and isolated groups, it was likely that only in textiles would there have been any real potential to develop trade union muscle, although at a mass meeting of domestic servants in Dundee in March, 1872, Dundee and District Domestic Servants Association was formed.

Before the mid 1870's, there is evidence of a number of women's trade unions being formed. They were not, however, characterised by their longevity and frequently they emerged during or immediately after a dispute, only to quickly disappear. There are frequent references to meetings of female workers, either to discuss a particular grievance or to discuss the possibility of forming a union, but rarely were these reports followed through, therefore, we can only conclude that the meetings proved fruitless or the results did not provide interesting copy for the newspaper. Whatever the outcome, it is certain that these unions, however short-lived were rarely incorporated into the official and established trade union movement as there is no reference to delegates from women's unions being represented at the various trades' Councils.

In 1849 an Edinburgh Society of Women in the Printing Trades was established but the hostility between the sexes and the opposition of the Typographical societies, which had no intention of supporting women's society, ensured its rapid demise.<sup>2</sup>

By 1863 a union of power-loom weavers existed in Glasgow and was represented at the Seventh Annual Meeting of the Social Science Association by Elizabeth Marshall and Mrs Glasgow. A report in the same edition of the Sentinel of a meeting of female power-loom weavers and other female operatives illustrates the influence and interest of the middle class philanthropists in women's trade union organisation. The meeting was addressed by various leading trade unionists and members of the clergy, and was entitled 'The Past and Present Moral and Social Conditions of the Female Sex'. The contributions of Mr Cunningham and Mr Mathew Cullen stressed the importance of combination as a means of social elevation and a way of maintaining dignity and respectability.

"He (Mr Cunningham) then noticed the condition of the factory operatives 30 years ago the changes that had since taken place and urged the importance of a sufficient remuneration for labour as one great means of social elevation."<sup>3</sup>

The contribution of the Reverend Mr Farquar of Broomielaw Free Church was to express his gratification :

"that they had organised themselves into a society for the protection of their industry and suggested as fitting adjuncts thereto the formation of a friendly and benefit society to help their members in time of sickness or want of employment."<sup>4</sup>

It is noteworthy that it is four years later we first hear mention of a union of female cotton-spinners and yet in cotton-spinning there already existed a male union, whereas, none existed of powerloom weavers, power-loom weaving being a principally female occupation. It was universally accepted that the existence and buoyancy of women's unions in the textile trades in England was in large measure due to the efforts of the male unionists in the industry, principally the cotton-spinners, who came to represent the epitome of the strong and well-organised craft union. It seems that in Glasgow the prior existence of unionism amongst the men did little to hasten organisation amongst women, perhaps as a consequence of the less expansive character of the Scottish Cotton Industry. However the male spinners did render assistance in the formation of the Female Branch of Operative Cotton Spinners in 1867.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most notoriously difficult occupations to organise was homework which became a focus for agitation and reform for various groups towards the end of the century. It has generally been assumed that because of their isolated position, homeworkers had made little attempt to improve their wages and yet as early as 1866 there is evidence to indicate that they saw the necessity of collective action and made attempts, however unsuccessful, to improve their position. In December 1866 a meeting of homeworkers was held at New Pitaligo, Aberdeenshire, to discuss the question of prices for knitting. The patronising tone of the report of the meeting illustrates an attitude to women which casts aspersions on their ability to organise in a disciplined fashion.

'A meeting of quite an unusual kind was held at New Pitaligo, Aberdeenshire on the evening of Wednesday last, in Miss Whyte's school. It was verily a meeting of women more or less connected with stocking knitting, and although the evening was pitchy dark and rain was falling in torrents, the meeting was attended by about forty. Some of the party were over four score and had seen and helped to nurse several grandchildren. Mrs Thompson, mid-wife, one of the best knitters in the county was called on to preside and discharged the duties of the chair with great ability. She explained that the object of the meeting was to talk over the absurdly low price paid per cut if possible, to get an advance,

the present rate of wages being only from 1d to 1.3/4d per cut for Wheeling and 2d per cut for fingering worsted. After some general conversation, which by the way, was carried on with astonishing quietness and order, it was finally resolved that the best knitters could not earn above 1½d to 2d per day of 16 hours at the present scale ..... the chairwoman expressed a desire that the knitters in other places would move in the matter, and do all they could with a view to getting better wages for their essential work ..... After resolving to communicate with the manufacturers thanks was passed to the 'worthy chairwoman' and the meeting separated."<sup>6</sup>

Another example of the awareness of the necessity for organisation was an attempt by the 'peakies'<sup>7</sup> of Ayrshire to improve both their conditions and pay in 1867:

"A general meeting of the Peakies of Ayrshire will take place on Irvine Moor on Wednesday, 15th May at 11 o'clock, when it is expected that a large gathering will be there as much is needed to be done to prevent a threatened reduction that is hanging over us at present. Sisters to the wires when we hear others reading (for we have no time to read ourselves) about all other trades adopting short-time - even the miners have done it, and have reaped a fair day's wage for a fair day's work - it is time we were doing something and I apprehend that short time is the only thing that will prevent this threatened reduction amongst the Peakies of Ayrshire".<sup>8</sup>

The article was signed 'A Peakie' but as there is no further report of the activities of the 'peakies' in the newspaper, we have no way of knowing the outcome of the meeting or whether any lasting organisation emerged.

The upsurge in trade union activity of the early 1870's also affected women and before 1875 we can see evidence of growth in women's unionism. In 1872, the Edinburgh Upholsterers, Sewers Society was founded and included women in its membership.<sup>9</sup> The Dundee Mill and Factory Workers Association was inaugurated in September 1875, as the result of a protracted general strike of millworkers in the city and although the majority were males, women were also included in the ranks. By December 1875, the secretary of the association reported that there were already 3,000 paying members.<sup>10</sup>

Serious attempts to form sound and stable organisations amongst women did not really begin until after 1875 when women's trade unionism came to be dominated by the activities and philosophy of the Women's Protection and Provident League. The League had more success and influence in England, but it did make vigorous attempts to organise in Scotland, although these attempts were hampered by the fact that the organisation was based in London. The philosophy of the League had much in common with the tenets of trade unionism in that they associated trade union organisation with respectability and moral and social elevation.

At the 1885 Special General Meeting of the Committee of the WPPL 'criminal vice' amongst young children and females was the principal topic of discussion and the following appeal was issued:

'In successfully seeking to form trade unions amongst working women, the Protection and Provident League has helped to raise the material and moral tone of the classes who are most exposed to the dangers renounced by the Pall Mall Gazette. By continuing work on a larger and more extensive scale we shall simply restrict the recruiting ground of vice. Whatever view may be taken as to the causes of both ordinary and criminal vice associations for self-protection and education, in other words, trade unions, naturally suggest themselves as the most efficient remedy ..... In other cases it is not so much the prevailing poverty as the ignorant vanity, the love of show, of dress, that bring also this ruin of young girls. For this education of the higher social order is the self-evident remedy, and how better is this social and semi-political education attained than by Trades Unionism? The sense of self-reliance, of personal dignity, of pride in honest work and collective responsibility are all strongly developed within trades unions. Women who join unions soon find something worthier of their ambition than the tawdry finery which is so attractive to those whose social surroundings supply nothing better to think about".<sup>11</sup>

Their attitude to strikes was also similar, believing that they were wasteful, unproductive and they did much to harm the workers' interests. A working women's meeting in Aberdeen in 1884, was addressed by Mrs Paterson and Miss Wilkinson from the Upholsteresses' Trade Society where the virtues of trade unionism were stressed and the women urged to become organised:

"She (Miss Wilkinson) believed that trade unions were the best

preventive of strikes because they had power behind them. It was these unions and these unions alone that made real arbitration possible.<sup>12</sup>

Although the League pursued a policy of arbitration, negotiation and conciliation, it did on occasions intervene in disputes to give financial or organisational assistance. It did, however, perhaps more than the male trade union movement, accept the dominant economic philosophy and usually discouraged action against wage-cuts in periods of recession. Because the leadership of the League was dominated by middle and upper class philanthropists, it was often looked upon with suspicion by male trade unionists. It undoubtedly pursued a policy of moderation and addressed itself to employers whom it often regarded as more sympathetic to its demands than the existing trade union movement.

The ninth annual meeting of the League in June 1883 was addressed by Lady Brassey whose theme was the need for self-help, mutual co-operation and the need to bring the classes together :

"..... and, were the truth only known, it would be found that many a man, aye, and woman too, who is supposed to lead a life if not exactly of idleness, at all events of moderate ease and luxury, day after day gets through an amount of hard work at which some members of the so-called working classes would be inclined to strike (laughter). The energy and industry of the members of the Royal Family are well known (Hear, hear)."<sup>13</sup>

The contribution of Sir Thomas Brassey again highlights the economic philosophy which was accepted by the leadership of the League:

"He (Brassey) did not think that any social reformer, or the most scrupulous political economist could object to any part of the work set forth in the Report of the League now presented. There were no doubt some errors connected with Trade Unionism, but a long consideration of the wages question had convinced him that low wages were not the most economical form of production. Work was more cheaply, faithfully and skillfully done when fairly rewarded."<sup>14</sup>

It would, however, be a caricature of the League's position to represent them as pursuing a policy of class collaboration and appeasement, as they often engaged in battles with the employers on behalf of women workers, and did on occasion intervene in disputes to give

financial or organisational assistance.

Although the basic philosophy of the League had much in common with existing unionism it did come into bitter conflict with male trade unionists over the question of protective legislation. Emma Paterson, the guiding light of the League, was the principal proponent of the view that sex specific protective legislation resulted in oppression rather than protection, believing that such a policy would lead to the exclusion of women from work and was therefore more in the interests of the male labour force. The WPPL's position on this issue was a reflection of the social composition of its founder members who were middle class feminists who saw the right to employment as part of the general struggle for women's rights to be treated as free and independent beings. The case against protective legislation was succinctly put by the speaker at a WPPL meeting who argued that she :

"strongly objected to any men in the world deciding what she could do and could not. Such legislative restrictions tended to drive women workers out of the field in all occupations where they had to compete with male labour." <sup>15</sup>

Conflict with male trade unionists over protective legislation was not so widespread in Scotland in the mid Victorian years largely because woman's work was concentrated in a limited range of occupations which tended to be comprised largely of women. There was therefore less of a direct threat from women in Scotland during this period, although the areas such as tailoring, printing and rope spinning where women were making inroads into traditionally male employment became terrains of conflict between men and women workers, resulting in sectional policies being adopted by the union. Towards the end of the Century, unions modified their policy to one of encouraging organisation amongst women, albeit into separate societies, and the impetus being to control competition. Indeed, the tailors' union seems to have been instrumental, not only in aiding the formation of a Society of Tailoresses, but in setting up a Benefit Society for Glasgow Working women as early as 1876.<sup>16</sup>

There were a number of attempts to form a Society of Glasgow Tailoresses by the tailors, the Glasgow Trades Council and the WPPL but although they were initially well attended they tended to be short-lived.

It was not only in the West that attempts were made to organise women workers, and in many respects the League had more success amongst the textile workers of Dundee, Brechin, Forfar, the Borders and Aberdeen. The East Coast Unions were very much influenced by the Reverend Henry Williamson who founded the Dundee and District Mill and Factory Workers' Union in 1885. Williamson was virulently anti-strike and often intervened in disputes in order to persuade the strikers to return to work and seek to have their demands met 'without having to resort to the desperate effort of a strike'.<sup>17</sup>

There were a number of other unions in the east of Scotland, either including a substantial number of women in their ranks, or which were comprised solely of women. They were not so directly influenced by Williamson, although they usually involved the participation of middle class philanthropists or members of the clergy.

In April 1887, a mass meeting of millworkers at Hawick voted to form a union and agreed to nominate a provisional committee of 24 to draw up rules and make arrangements for the formal inauguration of the union<sup>18</sup> and in 1888, a meeting of bleachfield workers presided over by the Reverend David Macrae, voted to form a union to promote the interests of the bleachfield workers in Forfarshire.

In terms of trade union membership, the women of Scotland were hardly less active than many of the unskilled workers and even some of the skilled sections. The women's unions exhibited the same tendencies as the unions of unskilled men, forming either during or after a dispute or in a favourable economic climate, but often failing to survive the onset of economic recession.

There is, therefore, evidence to indicate that women attempted to organise before the advent of 'new unionism' and without the intervention of the philanthropic middle class men and women who were so active in establishing unions for women. However, it could not be argued that the extent of women's involvement in formal organisation can be seen as a beacon in the relatively bleak landscape of Scottish unionism but if situated in this context, it can be concluded that women's trade unionism was more extensive and vigorous than has been generally assumed. This is not to ignore the question of the lesser trade union organisation of women, but rather to question the validity of contemporary attitudes to the problems of organising women.

The literature of trades councils, individual unions, the WPPL and other interested bodies, abounds with references to the difficulties and problems of organising women. A variety of explanations were suggested which ranged from those which located the problem in the 'inherent feminine nature' to explanations which attempted to take account of the circumstances of female employment and its transitory nature.

A correspondent of the Trade Unionists writing on the question of women at work comments that :

"..... the short sentence, 'organise the women workers', simply bristles with difficulties. Many of them have been pointed out again and again. The lack of the qualities in women of self-reliance, independence and self government, through miseducation, their greater timidity, home cares, and many like objections." <sup>19</sup>

A Scottish correspondent writing in the WTUR argued that the difficult task of organising women was made more onerous in Scotland by the absence of a good organiser who would be capable of 'rousing the women workers out of their lethargy' and went on to note that :

'It is hoped the Scottish Mill and Factory Workers Federal Union will in the near future appoint an agent to keep reactionary workers from injuring their organisation.' <sup>20</sup>

This view of women as apathetic and reactionary was shared by many of the Scottish Unionists. The 1890 Annual Report of Aberdeen Trades Council devoted a special section to women's organisation but took an extremely pessimistic view of the possibilities of women combining in any significant way :

"The great need for better organisation among our female workers has been of late admitted all round. The Council has endeavoured to bring this about, but the result has been very disappointing. In the month of March under the auspices of the Council, Lady Dilke paid a visit to Aberdeen for this purpose, Lady Dilke, along with her private secretary, Miss Abraham, has been very successful in other towns in forming Unions among the Female Workers but, in Aberdeen, there is apparently an apathy, through some unknown cause, that they do not come forward in any number to join".<sup>21</sup>

A discussion at Edinburgh Trades Council on female workers in millinery and dressmaking concluded that the central problem in organising such workers was that 'girls looked beyond the workshops for their future'.<sup>22</sup>

Outright hostility of men's unions was not so prevalent in Scotland because of the degree of job segregation by sex: however there were certain unions and a small majority of trades councils who, if not obstructive, did little to encourage organisation amongst women. A Glasgow correspondent in the WTUR wrote that :

"the Greenock Trades Council have been true to their stick-in-the-mud policy by refusing to take part in any organising of the women of that town."<sup>23</sup>

The same correspondent added that the Port Glasgow Trades Council had given a great deal of support.

The rather one dimensional view of women workers as apathetic and reactionary has been somewhat modified by the application of what is imagined to be scholarly vigilance by labour historians. In other words they have attempted to take into account the objective conditions

which made it more difficult for women to organise in unions. This has included a discussion of low wages and how this created difficulties in paying union contributions on a regular basis. It has also been argued that the dependent status of most women as either wives or daughters might mean that they were not at liberty to dispose of their incomes as they wished. The long hours which women worked coupled with their domestic role afforded them few opportunities of attending meetings which were usually held in the evenings and was therefore another impediment to unionisation. However, most women and particularly married women, were involved in employment which was casual, temporary or seasonal and were, therefore, not a permanent part of the work-force and thus lacked the continuity necessary for the development of organisations in institutional forms.

These attempts to grapple with the problems of the lesser trade union organisation of women, have some validity, but despite the variety of explanations offered, they share one common feature, which is to approach the question in terms of solving a problem created by women. Women come to be viewed as deviants, as aberrations from the norm and thus the framework of the analyses is so constructed that we do not question the role of the trade union movement in creating the problems, rather we take it as given. If the problem is reconstructed so that we come to question that which we have taken for granted, then a different set of questions have to be asked and different criteria applied. For example, what was the relevance of the trade union movement to women? An organisation must in some way relate to the needs of the people which it hopes to recruit to membership. To what extent was the form and character of unionism in tune with the experience of women?

It has already been demonstrated that Scottish trade unionism was characterised by a preoccupation with respectability, self-help and to some extent Sabbatarianism. Although unionists may have encouraged organisation amongst non-union labour the nature of organisation was always defined in terms of the existing organisation amongst skilled men and was therefore more relevant to their needs and interests.

Few concessions were made for the different or particular circumstances of some groups who may not have found established policies and practices concordant with their needs or experience.

Thrift, self-reliance and self-help were not only constantly urged by the trade union movement, but unions were often associated with cooperative societies and savings institutions, urging their members to invest in these bodies. The concern with intemperance and improvidence led unions to frown upon what they considered small, 'unsound', local savings societies, and credit; both of which were necessary to workers of irregular and low income. It is clear that this pattern of economic behaviour was only available to those sections of workers who had a regular, if not high, income and whose economic circumstances enabled them to plan for the future and envisage an improvement in their personal situation. As women were amongst the most vulnerable sections of workers, partly because of the casual nature of their work and partly by being concentrated in industries such as textiles which were subject to frequent bouts of unemployment, this policy held little attraction for them and was unlikely to entice them into the ranks of trade unionism. It also assumes that women were at liberty to dispose of their income as they wished and given the dependent status of many women, this is an assumption which cannot readily be made.

Sound and stable organisation was also an integral element of trade unionism and this involved not only regular financial contributions but attendance at meetings and active participation in trade union affairs. The discussions of Glasgow Trades Council frequently centred on the need to involve more members and often condemned the lamentable attendance of delegates. If it proved a difficult task to involve men then it is understandable that women would find it even more difficult given the household tasks they were expected to perform, whether married or not. If ordinary membership posed difficulties, participation in the leadership of unions by women was even more unlikely and explains why unions which had a majority

of women in their membership, such as the cotton unions in England, rarely included women in the upper echelons or in directing and formulating policy.

It could be argued that hostility to women workers took a passive rather than an aggressive form as constant references were made to the need for the moral and social elevation of women workers. Women were usually seen as apathetic, helpless creatures who were unable to drag themselves out of the mire of indifference into which they had sunk, and required the assistance of those to 'whom the women naturally looks to for protection and support' (viz men).<sup>24</sup>

The trade union movement was not only dominated by men, but the language of negotiation and agitation was couched in terms which related to men and arguably the style of meetings conducted in a masculine mode which was alien to women. Trades Unions were a product and very much a part of the period in which they emerged and as such reflected rather than challenged the inequality of relations between the sexes. They never took up issues which related specifically to women, either as women workers, or simply as women. The Glasgow Trades Council's initial policy to enfranchisement was household suffrage. Only later did they adopt manhood suffrage as their goal, but never before 1890 did they seriously contemplate the question of female suffrage. Although lip service was paid to the rights of women to work it was generally assumed that women were capable of performing only a limited number of jobs and that where both men and women were employed, men's work was of a superior quality. No efforts were made to campaign for demands which would facilitate women's employment if it involved challenging the accepted role of women as wives and mothers. For example, creches were available in the Dundee textile industry, but they were initiated by either employers or philanthropic organisations.

It may be argued that women themselves made no efforts to challenge the dominant ideology, but there is evidence to indicate that they strongly

resisted attempts to restrict their employment and were adamant about their right to work. For example, the Glasgow Sentinel commented on a report from the Pall Mall Gazette of the Trades Union Congress that :

"..... there were several speeches from women and that so far as from being carried away by 'emotional' appeals in favour of what is regarded as 'sentimental' legislation, the women were almost the only delegates who spoke strongly against such proposals as those for the compulsory isolation of infectious disease and the restraint of female labour in the nail trade."<sup>25</sup>

Women were often chastised for their apparent passive acceptance of low wages, which was seen as a constant threat which would lead to the undercutting of men's wages. But the not unwarranted fear of women was that the introduction of equal pay would perhaps lead to their exclusion from work , as employers would choose to employ men rather than women, if both were paid at the same rates.

The organisation, structure and character of the official trade union movement did not accommodate the heterogeneity of the Scottish working classes and the different needs, experiences, and circumstances of the various strata. Trade unionists certainly saw themselves as part of the working classes, indeed they regarded themselves as the spokesmen of their class, but in order to become integrated into the movement, all groups of workers would have had to surrender their specific concerns, and embrace those of that movement. Although there was no deliberate attempt to distance themselves from the mass of working men and women, in effect the concerns of the labour movement and their adherence to a specific set of values isolated them from the majority of working people, whilst their commitment to an ideology of domesticity further impelled the isolation of women workers who were viewed primarily as an anomaly or a problem.

The foregoing discussion has revolved around the question of women's lesser trade union organisation, and although we have dispensed with some of the more simplistic explanations, it is still an approach which concentrates on

women's failure to organise and diverts our attention away from those areas where women did organise. I would argue that this approach is a product of our adoption of the 19th century trade union movement's perspectives and leads us to view non-union labour through the eyes of the official movement. The primacy placed on continuous, stable organisation, the preference for negotiation and conciliation and the desire to avoid strikes, meant that organisation was defined in a particular way, and any struggle which took place outside this narrow and partial definition, was not deemed to be organisation. Consequently ephemeral action by 'unorganised' workers was regarded unfavourably by contemporaries and has been largely ignored by labour historians.

Although the organised labour movement did not abandon the strike weapon, they prided themselves on the conduct of the strike, believing it was legitimate and justifiable action which was resorted to when all other channels of resolving their grievance had been exhausted. This sharply contrasts with their views of strikes involving non-union labour which they saw as the product of improvidence and impatience. It was not strikes per se that trade union leaders opposed but strikes without the presence of a union which would imply planning, forethought and due process having been applied, thereby endowing the action with a certain respectability. There is evidence to indicate that action by women workers was regarded in this light. The many references to the apathy of women towards trade union organisation are matched by the equally numerous references to women's impatience and propensity to strike.

The Reverend Henry Williamson's Dundee and District Mill and Factory Workers Union was formed in 1885 in the predominantly female jute Industry and aimed specifically at organising women and girls 'because women and girls were the only kind of workers who came out on strike, and threw a whole town out of employment'.<sup>26</sup>

Whilst Sir Charles Dilke found that women's unionism was feeble outside Lancashire and thought the reason was that :

"Women wanted too rapidly to see a direct and immediate return for their money".<sup>27</sup>

The fact that women were less conspicuous in the traditional areas of labour organisation has led to the assumption that they were intrinsically more conservative and less disposed to struggle, and yet the available evidence suggests not a lack of militancy but rather an impatience with the negotiating process associated with formal trade union organisation. The reports of the secretaries (usually males) of the various English cotton unions substantiates this view as they often comment that women would not take part in the proceedings of the unions and therefore had not grasped the idea of trade unionism. The secretary of the Bolton and District Card and Ring Room Operatives Provincial Association which had 10,000 women members of a total membership of 12,000 complained that :

"they only become interested when they have a particular grievance to be removed".<sup>28</sup>

It could be argued that on occasions the impetus behind the organisation of women workers was to avoid the spontaneous action they engaged in and to channel and contain their grievances within the formal union structure. The first Annual Report of the Women's Trade Union Association which was founded to promote trade unions amongst the women of the East end of London, commented that :

"It is our firm conviction that organisation among women is absolutely necessary for the prevention of those frequent and futile strikes which at present occur where women and girls are employed. Among the factories in various industries with which we have had to do in the course of the year, we have hardly met one in which there has not been one small strike or more."<sup>29</sup>

As women were not involved to any great degree in the organised labour movement, it is a difficult task to gather information about their activities

and their attitudes towards industrial relations. We therefore, have to rely on newspapers on a major source of information but this too is unsatisfactory as they were more interested in the activities of the trade union movement and long dramatic strikes. Women's strikes tended to be spontaneous and of relatively short duration, as they did not have the funds to support protracted action. There are therefore few detailed references to strikes by women in newspapers and often the accounts which do exist, are fragmentary and incomplete, rarely being followed through to the conclusion of a dispute.

For over a quarter of a century, the Glasgow Sentinel was the only newspaper which was consistently sympathetic to the trade union movement and the rights of labour. It is therefore, in the pages of the Sentinel that we would expect to find most information on women's work. However, the paucity of reports relating to disputes involving women was not necessarily a reflection of lack of activity of women, but a reflection of the interests of the newspaper. For example, wider coverage of miners' issues was a product of the miners' leader, Alexander MacDonald's involvement with Sentinel and did not reflect the true level of trade union activity by miners.

In spite of these drawbacks, it is still possible to glean from the scattered reports a picture of working women which substantiates a view of them as not only militant but capable of self-organisation and independent action.

Women in the Scottish textile industry provide the most useful source of information as 130,000 women were employed in textiles, that is about 25% of all working women. Although men were employed in textiles, it was not a major source of employment for them and they were vastly outnumbered by women. There were many branches of the textile industry in Scotland, different areas having their own specialisation but undoubtedly the two most important ones were the cotton industry in Glasgow and the jute industry in Dundee. Between them they employed about 10% of working women in Scotland.

In 1860 the Glasgow Cotton Trade employed about 35,000 workers with women outnumbering men by 10 : 1 in spinning and 20 : 1 in power-loom weaving. The majority of men in the cotton industry, other than labourers, had supervisory functions over the women. In Dundee's jute industry, there were 34,000 hands with women outnumbering men by 3 : 1.

The accepted view of women in Scottish textiles, principally the cotton and jute industries, was that the latter half of the 19th century saw a gradual but inevitable grinding down of their living standards, with little resistance from the women. The corollary of this view was that they were low paid because they were women and had failed to combine effectively to oppose reductions also because they were women. Lenman referring to the various attempts at organisation by the Dundee jute workers during the century commented that :

"real help for and by working people did not come until the organisation of the Jute and Flax Workers' Union in 1906." <sup>30</sup>

Wages and union organisations in the textile industry were often unfavourably compared with Lancashire, and attributed to the fact that Scottish textiles relied heavily on female labour, and therefore failed to develop a strong trade union system because of the absence of skilled men capable of organising the unskilled majority.

With regard to the cotton industry in Glasgow this simplistic formulation cannot be applied. The wages of cotton workers were certainly lower than in Lancashire but this ignores the fact that women were customarily expected to work for less money. The comparison becomes increasingly meaningless, if no account is taken of the fact that Glasgow was engaged in a losing battle with the Lancashire cotton industry. The history of the Glasgow cotton industry in the last half of the century was a dismal story of decline, the competition from Lancashire being compounded by the internal weaknesses of the industry and the failure to invest. The fortunes of the jute industry were equally mixed, if not so dismal and it too

had to endure competition from abroad and the fluctuations of the trade cycle.

The available evidence suggests that women in all branches of textiles did not passively submit to the demands of the employers, but continuously strove to resist wage cuts and to fight for increases. Although based only on impressionistic evidence it would appear that the women textile workers of Scotland were engaged in a constant battle with employers. The usual form of action was spontaneous and short-lived, although this general trend was punctuated by a number of protracted disputes.

As early as 1853 powerloom and handloom weavers in Arbroath were on strike for an increase. Although there is no information on the outcome of the dispute, the determination of the strikers could not be doubted.

"These working people still continue on strike for an advance of wages. Yesterday and Saturday and Friday, they paraded the streets with banners upon which were inscribed the following mottoes :  
'Ninepence and no surrender'  
'Threepence and no surrender'  
'United we stand, divided we fall' " <sup>31</sup>

In 1861 male and female cotton spinners struck at Lochwinnoch over a reduction of 5% whilst male cotton spinners in Glasgow who had been threatened with a 7½% reduction agreed to accept it because of the 'unsatisfactory state of the trade' and the fact that 'the masters have no control over the present depression'.<sup>32</sup> The Glasgow spinners complained that wages of the female piecers had advanced by 25% at the expense of the spinners in the previous 20 years but female labour was so much in demand, the piecers would countenance no reduction in their wages.<sup>33</sup>

The American Civil War created widespread distress amongst the cotton operatives, to the extent that by the end of 1862 only 6,000 of the

24,800 cotton workers in and around Glasgow were in full employment.<sup>34</sup> As there were on average one hundred females for every ten men in spinning departments and one hundred women for every five men in weaving, there was obviously a large proportion of women unemployed. The distress caused by the American War and the precarious nature of employment, with a large reserve army of unemployed ready to replace them, did not seem to deter the workers from taking action to redress grievances over either pay or conditions. This is even more remarkable, when we take into account the fact that the majority of workers in the cotton industry were labelled as unskilled and could therefore in theory be easily replaced.

In February, 1863, there was a strike of 180 female powerloom weavers and 80 handloom weavers in the employment of Ebenezer Hendry and Sons, Bridgeton. Their complaint was the refusal of their employer to receive a deputation to present their grievances and the refusal of arbitration in cases of dispute :

"So unbearable had such treatment become, that, without any organisation, the whole of the hands had left work on Friday afternoon, leaving cloth on their looms averaging £30 value in wages, due to them, but payment of which had been refused." <sup>35</sup>

Unfortunately, the outcome of the dispute is not known, as there are no other references to it in the Sentinel or any of the other leading Glasgow newspapers, and no mention of it at the Glasgow Trades Council.

In the same month that Glasgow Trades Council was discussing the state of the cotton spinners and powerloom weavers and the depression in the cotton industry, the female powerloom weavers at ex Lord Provost Galbraith's mill at St Rollox were refusing to work the looms because they claimed that the cotton imported from

China was of poor quality and they should therefore get an advance on their wages to make up for the loss they sustained by working bad materials.<sup>36</sup> A series of disputes plagued the industry for the following six months and in July a report of a meeting of Glasgow Trades Council noted that :

"from various causes, disputes existed between the operatives and Messrs Walker, Robertson and Scott, at their respective factories - which were now in a state of blockade." <sup>37</sup>

It was not only in Glasgow that textile workers took action to defend or improve their living standards. Between May 1865 and December 1866, strikes were reported at Forfar, Musselburgh, Greenock, Hawick and Kelso and although these different branches of the trade were not suffering the same depression as the Glasgow cotton trade, they did not limit their demands to defensive action against reduction. The female spinners in the flax mill at Greenock struck for an increase of 2s per week <sup>38</sup> whilst the female power-frame workers in the hosiery trade at Hawick successfully struck for an increase of 1s per week. In this instance it seems to have been the women who led the way, as the newspaper noted that :

"in the same week Mr Laing (the employer) gave the male power-frame workers an advance unasked." <sup>39</sup>

In the same month girls at the net factory in Musselburgh presented a petition resolving to strike unless they were granted an increase of 8d per net. Despite the entreaties of the manager to wait until the proprietor returned from the Continent, the women left the factory in a body, refusing to work another day at the old prices. The dispute was terminated about three weeks later when a compromise was reached and the women granted half the increase they had demanded.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout the 1870's and the 1880's there were a number of occasions when women took successful action for increases, often

the dispute being resolved in one day. In May 1870, the women employed at Airdrie Cotton Mills struck work at breakfast for an increase of 6d per cut on their warps and by dinner time their demand was granted and work resumed.<sup>41</sup> In January 1883, 300 millworkers in Ward Works, Dundee refused to resume work after breakfast till an increase was granted.<sup>42</sup> In the course of the afternoon, an intimation was made that the demand had been acceded to and most of the strikers returned. In July and August of 1883, there was a spate of strikes in Dundee mills for an advance of wages. Although the workers had already gained a 5% increase they did not consider this sufficient and demanded more.

The depressed state of the Glasgow cotton trade meant that many of the disputes in the 1880's were against reductions and the protection of existing working conditions but despite this, the frequency of disputes indicates tenacity and a determination to resist any deterioration in their standard of pay and conditions. There were, however a small number of strikes for increased wages. In 1887, 900 weavers at Grant's Mill in Mile-end struck for an advance of 10% because of complaints about bad yarn. The issue was resolved by a compromise solution which involved an increase of  $\frac{1}{2}$ d on certain fabrics and the substitution of better quality yarn.<sup>43</sup>

Women workers seemed less persuaded by the arguments of orthodox economics than the official trade union movement, and displayed a willingness to take action whatever the state of trade. They were constantly urged to be more cautious and often the role of trade unions and trades councils was to contain discontent and persuade the women to return to work.

In January 1875, over 2,000 workers at the Baltic Jute Works in Bridgeton, principally female, went on strike over a reduction which had been imposed three months previously and had been accepted because the workers had been led to believe that the wages of the jute workers in other areas would also be reduced. This had not happened,

"....and the consequence has been that a few of the men and boys and all the women and girls employed at the Glasgow Jute Co. have resolved to get their pay raised to its former rate. Twenty or thirty men employed as calenders and lappers continue working, those who are on strike being the spinners, weavers, winders and warpers. The reduction of wages, according to the statements of the workers, represents a loss to the weavers of  $\frac{1}{2}$ d per cut and also of a bounty amounting to 1d of every cut beyond 9. The spinners by the reduction lose 6d per day each." <sup>44</sup>

A deputation of the workers attended a meeting of Glasgow Trades Council and :

'After some discussion, a committee was appointed to meet the workers' committee, for the purpose of endeavouring to get the dispute settled by arbitration.' <sup>45</sup>

In the face of the intransigence of the employers, the majority of the workers acted on the advice of the trades council, although the return to work was reluctant and protracted.

In April 1870, the millgirls at T & J Ferguson's Kilmarnock, struck against a reduction of wages. The employers claimed that they had been paying more than the price paid in Glasgow and therefore intended to give only the average price paid in Glasgow, less one halfpenny per piece for carriage. A deputation of the girls visited Glasgow and found that not only were wages higher there, but that the charge for carriage was too high. Delegates from the Trades Council met with the girls and promised to give them financial support. The dispute lasted about three weeks and the final report in the newspaper which had previously been sympathetic, reminded the workers that the average experience of the weavers in Glasgow was greater than in Kilmarnock and that this probably accounted for their lower earnings. At a meeting between the girls and the trades council delegates, it was agreed that :

"a deputation of the girls accompany a deputation of the delegates to wait on the Messrs Ferguson to see if an arrangement cannot be come to in the dispute, and that they were willing to submit the whole dispute to arbitration of a competent party." <sup>46</sup>

If the role of trades councils etc in the West of Scotland, was to exercise a moderating influence on the women textile workers, the influence of the Reverend Henry Williamson on the Dundee and district workers was more explicitly to restrain and contain their action. A six-week-long strike and lockout of factory workers at Forfar in 1875 against a reduction was resolved by the Reverend Williamson persuading the workers to accept  $3\frac{1}{2}\%$  reduction as opposed to the 5%<sup>47</sup> demanded and he also succeeded in persuading millworkers in Kirkealdy who were on strike for an increase, to go back to work, form a union, and get their advance 'without having to resort to the desperate effort of a strike.'<sup>48</sup> There are innumerable examples of Reverend Williamson counselling workers to return to work and agitate by means other than strike for their demands, but he was not always successful. Blairgowrie millworkers on strike for a 5% increase were strongly advised by Williamson to return to work because of their 'want of organisation', that is, they did not belong to a union. They chose to ignore his advice, sent another deputation to the employers and received replies from two that they were willing to grant the full increase.<sup>49</sup>

However weak trade unionism was amongst the Scottish textile workers, it is clear that they did not passively submit to employers' demands and that they were neither docile nor tractable. The higher wages of cotton operatives in Lancashire cannot simply be attributed to the existence of a highly organised craft union which set the standards for others. As has already been argued, the depressed state of the Glasgow cotton industry and the general economic development of Scotland, also have to be taken into account. Wages in Scotland tended generally to be lower than in England, although the gap was narrowing towards the end of the century. The factors affecting the pattern of wages and earnings were many and intricate therefore a comparison of the relative success of Scottish and English workers in defending or improving their living standards is impossible. — George Henry Wood in his paper to the Statistical Society, pointed out that before 1850 wages in the Scottish cotton industry had always been lower than in England, therefore when the history of the industry in Scotland was borne in mind, the course of wages in the 19th century

was not so different from England as might be supposed.

"From 1833 to 1866 the advance nearly equalled that of the Lancashire spinning centres; from 1870 to 1874 a greater advance is found than in any other place; and from 1886 to 1905 the rate of increase fell in relation to Lancashire." <sup>50</sup>

According to Wood, the trend of wages was not quite so dismal as has been generally assumed and only when the cotton industry was in absolute decline by the end of the century, did the rate of increase compare unfavourably with Lancashire. Although no separate list of prices for spinning and weaving had been established in Scotland, the Scottish workers did use the existing lists in England as guides to their prices and deployed a number of other measures to ensure that their wages were protected. There are a number of cases where claims for parity with other workers were made and this seems to have been a favourite device of the women workers in the Kilmarnock mills. In 1865 the women employed in the power-loom factory of T & J Ferguson, refused to work until the employer had guaranteed they would be paid the same prices as the Glasgow weavers. The majority of the women refused to go to work until the deputation they had appointed to visit Glasgow, had returned. On this occasion they were successful in obtaining the Glasgow scale of prices although an attempt to gain parity in 1870 failed. <sup>51</sup>

In 1885 the spinners at Todd and Higgenbothams and Grants Mills in the east end struck against a reduction of piece wages ranging from 5% to 7½% or 6% overhead. As a consequence of a previous strike in cotton spinning, it had been agreed that wages in Glasgow should fluctuate according to changes in Lancashire and as there had been a recent reduction there, Grants and Todd and Higgenbotham's had attempted to impose a similar reduction. The women felt that the state of trade in Glasgow did not merit such reduction and would only agree to 3½% rather than 7½%, although the fly-frame workers had already accepted a reduction. After a week-long strike the women returned on a 5% reduction. <sup>52</sup>

It is clear that textile workers were aware of the different methods which could be adopted to protect their living standards and had no hesitation in resorting to what they considered would be the most expedient methods. Pieceworkers were particularly alive to changes in working conditions which could affect their earnings, therefore disputes over inferior material, speed ups and general efficiency measures were frequent.

Four hundred mill girls in the employment of Messrs Ferguson, Kilmarnock, took strike action in 1867 because they were adamant that they should receive the same remuneration whether the pieces were of the usual length (54 yards) or a few yards shorter. After a short strike the girls resumed work on their terms which involved the same money for less work.<sup>53</sup>

In 1889, six hundred female weavers at the same factory struck over the quality of the yarn supplied for weaving, which they claimed was difficult to work. The firm promised to remedy the defect, which they maintained was purely accidental, but the girls still remained on strike.

Whether or not their action was successful, the women did not always strike with impunity and on occasions the might of the law was brought to bear on them. Often an individual worker was made an example of and prosecuted as in a dispute of female pickers in Kelso in 1866. However, in 1873 several hundred female power-loom weavers in Nithsdale struck because of a notice posted throughout the works by the employers stating that they would have to be 'extra exacting' with reference to damages in worsted webs. In spite of the employers' assurances that this was not an innovation, and merely involved the existing rules being more rigorously applied, the weavers took this to be an innovation and immediately went on strike, throwing four or five hundred others out of work in consequence. The following Monday eleven of the workers were summoned before the Sheriff for breach of contract under the Master and Servant Act and threatened with severe penalties unless they returned to work.

Whatever the final resolution of the dispute, the threats of the Sheriff were futile, as only a few of the several hundred resumed work.<sup>54</sup>

An attempt by McPherson's mill in Calton to increase productivity by making the women weavers work 60 - 66 yards to the piece instead of the usual 56 yards was strenuously resisted. The women demanded that the cloth be measured and also that the books of the employer for the previous ten years be submitted to a neutral person in order to ascertain 'how the work had hitherto been done.' The dispute came to an end after two weeks, with the employer conceding practically all the workers' demands.<sup>55</sup>

Spinners as well as weavers were alert to changes which might affect their earnings, or conditions. A strike of about fifty weft spinners at Grant's mill in the Mile End, illustrates the more indirect methods used by the workers to maintain and improve their conditions. For nine years the spinning machines had been fitted with a 19 inch rim but in the three months before the dispute, the rim had been changed for one of a smaller size because of the softness of the cotton which was being spun. When the rims were changed back to the original size, the spinners refused to work and as a result 1,000 workers in the mill were made idle. The spinners only returned to work when 'an amicable arrangement' had been reached.<sup>56</sup>

The weavers in most branches of the textile industry, particularly Glasgow, were extremely successful in resisting the introduction of more looms per worker. Contemporaries often argued that inefficiency and obstructiveness of the female weavers in the Glasgow cotton industry was responsible for the failure to compete successfully with the Lancashire industry. Although other more important factors were responsible for the decline, it cannot be denied that the weavers directed a great many of their energies at resisting the introduction of more looms. A straightforward comparison cannot be made with Lancashire as the type of material woven, that is coarse or fine, often determined the number of looms which could be worked. It was, however, common for weavers to operate four or even six looms in Lancashire whilst in Glasgow two and three loom weaving was most common.

In 1858, four hundred women weavers at St Rollox Mill, Glasgow, left their looms when the employers proposed to change the system from 2 looms to 4 looms per weaver and thus dispense with the services of two hundred of their employees. The women were supported by Glasgow Trades Council, although they themselves mounted strenuous opposition to the proposals. The two tenters who were responsible for implementing the new arrangements were constantly harangued not only by the strikers, but also by other workers in the locality who gave their support to women:

"At the meal hours those 2 men, father and son, are escorted to their houses amidst the shouting and yelling not only of the hundreds of the 'turn-outs' but by the many of their sympathisers belonging to the factories and other public works in the same locality and not withstanding the presence of Mr Galbraith (employer) and a posse of police, they were on Wednesday cheered and yelled to and from their homes. How far the roused feelings of the young women of St Rollox may overcome their judgement in this case of dispute about the terms of employment, is very uncertain, as bills have been posted in the neighbourhood expressing 'Down with the nobs.' Nevertheless we trust that the Provost and his female workers will soon come to an amicable understanding and peace be maintained at St Rollox."<sup>57</sup>

The amicable understanding reached, was that the women returned to work on their terms and successfully resisted the introduction of 4 loom weaving. Employers' attempts to increase the number of looms per worker were not restricted to Glasgow and at a meeting of the Dundee Mill and Factory Workers Union in 1888, a resolution was passed deploring the level of spinners' wages and opposing weavers working more than one loom.<sup>58</sup>

The longest strike of women weavers reported in Glasgow involved a number of issues which related to their productivity and their refusal to work more looms. Napier's Mill in Bridgeton proposed a reduction in piece rates on all quality of goods and the firm also operated a bonus system, the women maintained that under the new scale they would not only make lower wages but to a considerable extent would lose the premium. The employers claimed that the reduction of the obstructiveness of the women in refusing to work more looms. One of the partners of the firm maintained that :

"Competition is very keen in our trade and the struggle has been interrupted by the passing of the McKinley Act and the new French tariff. Besides the Lancashire mills have had this system which we propose to adopt, in operation for some time, and as a matter of fact it has been the cause of most of the work going out of Glasgow to Lancashire.

The girls are under an erroneous impression tht the change would result in a diminution of their wages. In the process of making it, the change might result in a temporary decrease but the ultimate result would be an increase of wages." <sup>59</sup>

Given the nature of the material worked by the women, it would have been virtually impossible to operate more looms and this was acknowledged by the Trades Council and the WPPL who pledged their support to the women. As both these organisations had been involved in earlier attempts to get the women to work more looms in other firms, the reduction was undoubtedly an attempt by the employers to cut costs in the most obvious way, in the face of fierce competition. The strike lasted twelve weeks and was given widespread support, not only by fellow workers in Bridgeton, but by a number of other trades and localities. The details of the settlement are uncertain but according to the trades council, the dispute was satisfactorily terminated and concessions made on both sides.

Most disputes by the textile workers throughout Scotland, were either directly or indirectly related to wages, but there were a significant number which specifically involved conditions of work and others which were expresions of solidarity with workers who had been victimised, or unfairly dismissed. One such dispute, involved the mill workers of the east-end of Glasgow who had taken action in sympathy with a young apprentice who had been imprisoned for thirty days with hard labour, for refusing to tend more than 96 looms.<sup>60</sup> In Montrose in 1876, female workers at Messrs Richard and Company Works struck over the dismissal of four overseers who had been employed by the company for 30, 40 and 50 years but also used the incident to demand an increase in pay. Despite being told by the employer that they would have to give a week's notice if they intended to strike, the women took to the streets after work and gave vent to their feelings in no uncertain terms.

"The girls returned to work and remained quiet till the works closed in the evening, when a large mob assembled in front of Mr Holland's (resident partner) house and began to make a disturbance. Mr Holland appeared and threatened to send for the police. This led to stones being thrown and nearly all the glass in the windows fronting the streets were smashed. The stone throwing being contained, Mr Holland took refuge in the house of a friend, but he was followed by a portion of the mob who hissed and hooted but did not resort to violence. After the disturbance had lasted an hour, the police appeared in force and the mob dispersed." 61

The disputes, although concentrating on the wages question, encompassed the whole gamut of industrial relations issues and in this respect, the women textile workers did not differ from the other groups. There were instances where the women struck for equal pay or an equal increase with the men who were often awarded their advance without having to take action. Although the men were either obstructive or outrightly hostile on a small number of occasions, there is no real evidence to indicate that they did not support women in their action, although they themselves might not have before been involved. Women on occasions were more militant than men and displayed a greater reluctance to submit to arbitration or defeat. A strike of millworkers in Kirkcaldy, in 1883 came to a partial close when all except fifty girls resumed work on the old terms.<sup>62</sup>

The form of women's resistance was most frequently expressed by their refusal to work for certain wages. However they also resorted to informal methods of resistance which might be termed industrial sabotage. One such case resulted in a court case when the worker involved tried to sue her employer for unfair dismissal :

"Sarah Seally, a weaver, sued the Constonholm Weaving Company, Pollokshaws, for her wages and for a fortnight's wages in lieu of working; but as it had been clearly proved that the weaver had been working her cloth thin by having changed the pinion of her loom (this being a contravention of the rules of the factory which were produced in court), the Sheriff assoilzied the defenders and taking into consideration the serious nature of the offence, and it having been established that she had been similarly guilty on more than one previous occasion, he considered that the manager had acted very properly in summarily dismissing her from the factory."<sup>63</sup>

This was obviously an attempt by the weaver, who was probably on piece-work to ease the work process and push up her earnings. Although there is no written evidence of spinners resorting to this kind of resistance as they were not paid by the piece, it is likely that they too devised methods of resistance collective or individual, which were appropriate to their work situation. However one can only speculate on the prevalence of those informal methods of resistance amongst women workers.

It has become commonplace to describe non-union labour as 'unorganised' and yet the vast majority of disputes which involved women were characterised by a high level of organisation, although on most occasions they were not trade union members. The strikers usually held frequent meetings during a dispute, elected committees, sent delegations to employers and on occasions distributed leaflets in the vicinity to advertise their case. Although most disputes were isolated, with only one firm involved, the Dundee workers often took joint action with a number of workers striking simultaneously, and in 1874 almost twenty mills were involved in action against a reduction in wages. In 1871, Kirkcaldy mill girls at McLaren's and Swan's attempted to generalise their struggle for an increase, and successfully involved most of the mills in the district.<sup>64</sup>

In 1880 female operatives in the Glasgow cotton industry initiated their action to obtain an increase for workers in Airdrie cotton works. Their motives were not entirely without self-interest as they had found trade dull in Glasgow and blamed unequal competition from their sister operatives in Airdrie who were paid less. A deputation from Glasgow addressed a well attended meeting as spies, little progress was made as much time and energy was devoted to expelling the intruders.<sup>65</sup>

Two hundred female workers, pickers and menders at Teviotdale and Howland Mills at Hawick who were on strike over an alteration in their wages terms ensured that there would be no blacklegging, by posting bills throughout the town, warning workers against seeking employment in the mills whilst the dispute lasted.<sup>66</sup>

The Glasgow weavers' dispute in 1892 was a model of organisation as deputations from the workers were sent to collieries, engineering works etc., to plead their case and seek financial assistance. Although they were aided by the trades council and WPPL they succeeded in collecting enough funds, from collections at football parks, race courses and other works to sustain a twelve week long strike.

Obviously self-organisation and self-activity were not the monopoly of the unionised workforce but in addition the strike activities of women workers usually involved the participation of all layers of workers, with delegations having a changing composition and a variety of spokeswomen emerging in the course of a dispute. The concern of trade unionists' leaders to endow their action with respectability and dignity often meant that official strikes had none of the excitement and vitality which characterised the activities of women strikers. As negotiations with employers were often conducted by a few leaders the rest of the membership were not often called upon to take any action except when summoned to meetings, although they did sometimes initiate independent action in the community to publicise their grievance.

Women's disputes were almost without exception characterised by vitality and vigour and there are numerous references to 'gangs of women' roaming the streets during some disputes. Ridicule, derision and hooting were the favoured weapons and in this respect their action is more reminiscent of the street demonstrations and disturbances of the 18th century than the 'respectable' unionism of the late 19th century. There is even an instance of women being locked out by employers because of hooting and ridiculing their employers. Women mill workers in Greenock who had struck because their employer refused them an hour for each meal, caused considerable amusement on leaving the works as they 'were somewhat remonstrative.'<sup>67</sup>

A typical illustration of the kind of activities indulged in by striking textile workers was the antics of the Dundee workers during what amounted to a general strike in 1874.

'At an early hour in the morning the operatives on strike mustered outside their respective works and formed in procession and marched through the principal streets of the town carrying as flags handkerchiefs and pieces of cloth on the end of sticks and poles and shouting and singing as they went along. Shortly after breakfast some jubilant demonstrations there, they broke up again into procession and marched about the town. At 3 o'clock the operatives gathered in front of some of the works and hooted and shouted at everyone who attempted to go in, indeed in some cases stones and other missiles were thrown. The police endeavoured to keep order but their efforts were comparatively fruitless ..... The operatives who had come out on strike on Monday continued to parade the streets of Dundee on Tuesday forenoon and to manifest their enthusiasm by singing and shouting wherever they went."<sup>68</sup>

It would be facile to juxtapose the behaviour of trade unionists and non-unionists for the purpose of contrasting one with the other. The consistency with which the trade union leadership advocated dignified and respectable action, did not mean that the official line was transmitted and acted on by the rank and file. Indeed one of the concerns of trade union leaders was the undisciplined nature of the activities of striking unionists and they were at great pains to dissociate the movement from the incidents in 1866 which came to be known as the Sheffield outrages, being instrumental in calling for a government enquiry. There is, however, a case for arguing that because women were not integrated into the formal labour movement, they were not influenced to any degree by the dominant ideology of unionism and its concerns with respectability and responsible action. They were even less influenced by orthodox economic arguments about the state of trade and displayed a willingness to take action even when trades councils and trade unions counselled that it was improvident.

Given the propensity of women in the textile industry to strike, it is obviously necessary to reappraise the view of women as an apathetic and tractable labour force, a view which derives from our wholesale acceptance of contemporary views of women and an acceptance of contemporary definitions of organisation and legitimate struggle. Trade unionists could not have been unaware that throughout the latter half of the century, women workers were engaged in a constant struggle to defend their wages and conditions, a struggle which may not have merited the designation battle, but which could at least be termed guerrilla warfare. It is clear that the partial definitions of organisation

and struggle held by contemporary unionists, has obscured the history of those whose actions were not encompassed by these definitions and who have consequently been excluded from the historical landscape.

The activities of women textile workers highlight the various forms which independent action and organisation could take both in and out of the workplace, and that non membership of trade unions was not an index of apathy and docility. In the latter half of the 19th century, the view that a woman's role should be defined almost exclusively in terms of the home and family reached its peak, but investigations of working class women's employment have revealed that whatever ideology was articulated, economic necessity forced many women to work although this may not have been revealed in census statistics, as much of the work was casual, part-time or in the home. Similarly, once women were involved in work waged outside the home, they adopted the most expedient methods available to them to protect their wages and conditions, irrespective of whether they challenged or contradicted contemporary views of them as passive and docile. This is not to deny that women to a certain extent accepted their allotted role and the idea of a 'woman's sphere' but to argue that the mantle of passivity was discarded when it conflicted with the imperatives of social reality.

The fact that women entered commodity production on different terms from men derived from their association with the domestic sphere and their role in the family as reproducers and maintainers of labour power. This role did not prevent women organising, however, it could perhaps be argued that it affected the way that they organised. The struggle for acceptance by the mid-Victorian trade union movement and the fact that it was comprised largely of male skilled workers, involved commitment to a set of values and concern with a number of issues that were either irrelevant to women workers or against their interests, therefore not surprisingly they found it difficult to believe that their interests could best be served by these organisations. The form of actions that they chose, the short spontaneous strike, for all its limitations, was not the product of irrational behaviour,

but rather the most meaningful and relevant form of struggle available. Women workers did not supinely submit to the demands of their employers, they struggled constantly, if not always successfully, against wage cuts, for increases etc. It was not that they were silent, but that their voices could not be heard above the authoritative boom of respectable trade unionism.

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CHAPTER 4

THE MILL, THE FACTORY AND THE COMMUNITY IN DUNDEE'S JUTE INDUSTRY, 1860 - 1906

The equation of absence of institutional organisation with absence of effective opposition has led to a neglect of the variety of forms which resistance takes, at both the level of the workplace and the community. Once we are alert to this we can gain more profitable insights into the specific historical experiences of different sections of the working class; insights which should enable us to acquire a more vivid and detailed picture of working class life, and the diverse patterns of opposition and resistance which particular material conditions and ideological forces evoke. By confusing an absence of formal organisation with silence and deference, we are compelled to view these groups as totally subordinated to the dominant social order. We therefore fail to appreciate the contradictions and conflict which are inherent in social relations and fail to see class struggle as a permanent feature of these relations.

A study of the women textile workers of Dundee, their 'unorganised' action over wages and conditions and their response to trade unionism, should serve to illustrate that whilst the structural constraints on the organisation of women workers were substantial, organisation did exist, was imaginative and oppositional and that the history of Dundee's textile industry was not one of the unfettered control of employers over a passive labour force. A detailed examination of the forms of women's resistance in one industry and one town perhaps precludes generalisations, however it should enable us to say more about the ways in which women were controlled and the particular circumstances and ways in which they resisted this control.

The standard histories of Dundee's Jute industry usually portray women's docility as having a retarding effect on union organisation.<sup>1</sup> The position which has gained the widest currency, and, indeed, has been elevated to the status of an eternal truth, is that women in the jute industry were low paid because they failed to organise and were consequently subordinated to the will of capital. This lack of assertiveness is often explained by reference to women's more passive nature, her lack of interest in matters unrelated to the domestic sphere and thus her relative quiescence. Thus

it could be asserted with certainty by one contemporary commentator:

"that the true reason for the employment of women is an economic one. They lack the faculty of efficient organisation and therefore the power of systematically increasing their wages."<sup>2</sup>

But this obviously fails to take account of the objective constraints on any attempts to improve wages or conditions. The jute trade was precarious and plagued by Indian competition which provoked employers to over expand and over-produce; this must have determined the response of the workforce to some extent.

Although Dundee was synonymous with jute manufacture, the regional textile industry involved more than the production of jute, with Brechin and Forfar producing heavy linen, North Fife specialising in finer linens and bleached goods and Arbroath concentrating on canvas.<sup>3</sup> The textile industry had originally been based on flax and hemp, but its substitution by jute, a cheaper fibre, seems to have begun about 1833,<sup>4</sup> until by 1863 imports of raw jute considerably exceeded those of flax and hemp with 28,900 tons of flax and hemp imported compared with 46,900 tons of jute.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the systematic substitution of jute some firms continued to deal in flax for some time and only cautiously shifted to the cheaper fibre. Baxter Brothers had begun experimenting with jute in 1845, but it was 1867 before it appeared on the firm's monthly production statements.<sup>6</sup>

The economic fortunes of the jute industry were somewhat erratic with frequent downturns of the business cycle being punctuated by booms of almost spectacular dimensions, usually occasioned by a war which stimulated the demand for manufactured jute in its various forms. Thus the Crimean War, the American Civil War, the Franco-Prussian War and the Boer War all triggered booms in the jute trade and ushered in periods, however brief, of high demand and healthy profits.

The development of a low-wage jute industry in India, established in 1855, although initially having a marginal impact, was to be a constant thorn in the flesh of the jute industry as it steadily encroached on the

cheaper end of the market which had once been monopolised by Dundee. The consequences of this competition were probably to lower prices generally for jute products and to make it difficult for Dundee to exploit any rise in demand for jute as it was not the sole source of supply.<sup>7</sup> The industry was placed in an even more vulnerable position by the introduction of tariffs abroad, the first of which was the Morrill Tariff which in 1860 imposed a duty of between 15-20% on jute goods entering America. Although this was soon lifted others followed towards the end of the century.<sup>8</sup>

Lenman and Donaldson have argued that the competitive threat of the Calcutta mills was not so immediately irritating to Dundee manufacturers as the fiercely competitive nature of the home trade. Often those who had successfully engaged in speculation in India returned to Dundee to establish a mill or factory and attempted to undercut established rivals in order to gain a foothold in the trade.<sup>9</sup>

The vicissitudes of the business cycle were exacerbated by the effects of the general economic climate to which of course it was not immune. The industry was particularly vulnerable in a situation where prices were in a downward spiral such as between 1873 and 1896, the period usually referred to as the Great Depression. Although demand for jute goods fluctuated during this period, prices were so low as to virtually eliminate profit.<sup>10</sup>

The vagaries of the fortunes of the jute trade were only partially a product of these external circumstances which were largely outwith its control. Part of the explanation lies in the response of the industry to the variety of problems it had to confront. The ever present threat of Indian competition, the fluctuating demand for jute and cut-throat competition at home evoked a pavlovian response to produce more.<sup>11</sup>

An article in the People's Journal in 1851 argued that;

".....the remunerative nature of jute manufacture leads to its extension. To produce a few more tons a week seems to be the only course when prices will scarcely meet costs....." <sup>12</sup>

Manufacture was such a small proportion of final cost that in years when jute was cheap the reaction of the manufacturers was to produce more in order to squeeze as much profit as possible from a material which yielded such slender profit margins. Lenman argued that the roots of depression in the jute industry lay in this cycle of over-expansion, over production and glutted markets with little regard for the long term economic and social consequences.<sup>13</sup> This contention echoes the fears of A J Warden expressed as early as 1864 when he noted the tendency for profits realised in a boom period to be laid out in the erection of extensive new works and the additions to old ones, so that money was locked up in buildings and machinery which ought to have been conserved and retained in the trade. He claimed that :

"If these extensions are kept within legitimate bounds they will be profitable to the builders and beneficial to the community, but if not they will do injury to all." <sup>14</sup>

The picture of the regional jute industry was not uniformly bleak and many of the larger firms which had reaped enormous profits in the boom periods of the 1850's and which continued to maintain healthy balance sheets throughout the Great Depression, did not indulge in an orgy of building but contented themselves with a slower and steadier rate of expansion.<sup>15</sup> Vertical integration proved to be another successful strategy, for by controlling every aspect of production, some firms managed to survive the buffetings of trade depressions and more effectively exploit the boom periods.

The profitability of certain enterprises is attested by the extent of overseas investment where Lenman claims :

"Dundee and its associated textile area played a wholly disproportionate role in the remarkable expansion of British capital exports in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." <sup>16</sup>

It is difficult to estimate how far this exportation of capital directly contributed to the low wage levels which characterised the jute industry. It is clear, however, that the failure to invest at home outwith the jute trade and the consequent lack of industrial diversification exacerbated a situation already characterised by terrible poverty and periods of high unemployment.

Dundee was dominated by the jute industry; it was the single largest source of employment, employing about 34,000 from a total working population of 84,000 in 1911.<sup>17</sup> However it was predominantly a woman's industry, of the total workforce, 75% were women and in 1851 three quarters of all working women in the city were employed in jute, whilst by 1911, it was two thirds.<sup>18</sup> The population of Dundee grew from 78,981 in 1851 to 165,000 in 1911, although the rate of increase slowed down after 1871.<sup>19</sup> The demand for cheap female labour was such that Dundee became a town of migrant labour, drawing many of the workforce from the neighbouring countryside, the Highlands and Ireland. In 1861 61.5% of Dundee's population was born within the county 20.95% came from other counties and 15.67% from Ireland.<sup>20</sup>

A consequence of the mushrooming population was severe overcrowding and a chronic housing shortage. Of all the Scottish towns and cities, only Paisley had worse overcrowding than Dundee where 37% of all families lived in one room.<sup>21</sup> Although the population had risen by 30,000 between 1841 and 1861, only 568 extra houses were built in that period,<sup>22</sup> the problem being the reluctance to build houses for workers whose wages were too low to allow for economic rents.

Wages in the jute industry were notoriously low, although by no means uniform with as many variations in earnings as there were processes involved in the manufacture of the jute. The arrangement of work and the classification of tasks varied so much that it is really only possible to adopt broad definitions when describing the process of manufacture in both the mills and the weaving factories. The first stages in the process were carried out in the mills starting with the batching house where the jute was softened, combed and teased:

from there the softened and 'scutched' jute went to the low mill where it was converted into a soft rope-like material and wound round big bobbins which were taken to the spinning flats.<sup>23</sup> From the spinning flats the material went to the reelers, winders and warpers before being transferred to the weaving sheds where the final stages of the process were carried out.

In both the mills and the weaving factories there was a fairly rigid sexual division of labour. In the factories where the weaving was carried out, the division of labour was most rigid, with weaving being an almost exclusively female occupation and men's employment confined to a small number of skilled workers such as of beamers and dressers, supervisory and maintenance workers such as overseers, tenters and mechanics, and the unskilled labourers. Apart from the apprentices most men employed in the weaving factories earned considerably more than the women weavers. In 1905, overseers earned an average of 23/- per week, tenters an average of 22/- and mechanics 29/- and beamers and dressers 15/-.<sup>24</sup> The women weavers earned an average of 12/- per week, however as they were on piece rates they had greater variation in their earnings, with some weavers earning virtually nothing in particular weeks and others capable of earning 22/- per week.<sup>25</sup>

Tenters were the male workers who most frequently came into contact with the female weavers. The higher earnings of the tenters did not reside exclusively in their degree of manual dexterity. Although their task was to set up the looms, tune them and tend them when they broke down, tenters were effectively subforemen who exercised a degree of authority over the weavers and controlled the pace at which they operated. In his evidence to the Royal Commission on Labour, James Reid, a loom tenter, claimed that as 'a result of the bounty system' which involved the payment of a bonus on production over and above a certain fixed quantity, tenters had a vested interest in intensifying the labour of the weavers as they too were paid the premiums on production.<sup>26</sup> Consequently the relationship between tenters and weavers was often an uneasy and antagonistic one. Weavers frequently complained about tenters, as one weaver commented :

"that was the only thing I had against the weavin' - the tenters. You get one or two good ones, but most of them were a lot o'rotten buggers, they really were."<sup>27</sup>

Another weaver complained that the tenters were :

" a lot o' crabbit so n' so's."<sup>28</sup>

Clearly the supervisory functions of the tenters, their higher earnings and their skilled status differentiated them from the women weavers but the fact that they could increase their earnings by increasing the pace of work of the women weavers, introduced an additional dimension of sexual antagonism to these divisions.

In the mills the ratio of females to males was 2 : 1. However the prevalence of the half-time system in the jute mills, whereby children over 10 who had not attained school-leaving age were able to work alternate days in the mills and the school, and the youth of the shifters, resulted in a workforce with a relatively young average age. Therefore the ratio of adult women to adult men was about 3 : 1<sup>29</sup> (Appendix 7). Although about one third of the workforce in the mills was under 18 years of age, the largest single category of workers was women between 25 years and 45 years of age.<sup>30</sup>

There was not quite such a rigid sexual division of labour in the mills as there were a few processes which engaged both men and women. However, this was confined to the batching house and the task of 'shifting' which was usually carried out by young boys and girls. Males and females were generally paid at the same rate in the few tasks they shared. However in batching the workers were paid by the bale and the superior strength of men usually enabled them to earn more than the women.<sup>31</sup> In the low mill or preparing department, women predominated, carrying out the tasks on the carding, drawing and roving machines which converted the yarn into a fine regular material suitable for spinning. The ratio of females to males in the low mill was approximately 2 : 1 but many of the males were young boys who carried out the subsidiary tasks.<sup>32</sup> The work in the low mill was generally

said to be unskilled and therefore attracted casual female labour, often " married women in necessitous circumstance." <sup>33</sup> However an account given by a former shifter in the preparing department suggests that it was nonetheless an important part of the manufacturing process :

"The women employed in the low mill have very important matters to look after. The first supply of jute to the breaker card is under their control and the whole subsequent texture of the yarn is dependent on the regularity of their feed. To aid them in this, the jute is weighed in bunches before leaving the batching house and the speed of the card is indicated by a rough kind of clock attached to it, so many bunches being spread out on the feed cloth during one round of the clock. The feed of the roving frame is also under female control, and everything depends on that supply being regular and unbroken. The intermediate processes - not requiring such exact treatment - are generally in the hands of the boys." <sup>34</sup>

In the spinning flats the ratio of women to men was approximately 8 : 1 with adult males confined to supervision and maintenance work. In one mill the spinning department had 81 employees 72 of whom were female and 9 male. The females were either spinners, shifters or piecers, whereas the men included the overseer, an oiler, an elevator, and the boy shifters.<sup>35</sup> Of the hierarchy of spinner, piecer and shifter, the spinners were at the top although they had no supervisory powers over the piecers and shifters. As well as working one frame or a pair of frames, the women were expected to keep their own frames in good order, a regular time being set apart for cleaning them. The piecers, who were young women, went from one frame to another fixing up, or piecing up any ends which were dropped by the spinners. The shifters, many of whom would be half-timers removed the filled bobbins from the frame and replaced them with empty ones.<sup>36</sup> The shifting and piecing tasks functioned as an informal apprenticeship to spinning, as most spinners had been shifters and piecers before acquiring a frame of their own.<sup>37</sup>

The spinner and piecers were supervised by an overseer and the shifters managed by a shifting mistress who carried a light strap or tawse which she used to keep her young charges in tow and a whistle which she blew as the signal to start shifting the filled and the empty bobbins.<sup>38</sup>

The final stages in the mill were reeling, winding and warping which were exclusively female tasks, the only males in these departments being the overseers.

Apart from the half-timers and shifters, most of the males in the mill earned more than the women. Overseers could earn between 22/- and 27/- per week whilst the highest paid women were the shifting mistresses who earned 14/- per week. The piece workers such as the winders, warpers, reelers and batchers were the highest paid of the other women earning an average of 12/- per week, whilst the spinners and preparers who were on time-wages earned about 10/-.<sup>39</sup>

Effectively the jute workforce was differentiated along gender lines with men occupying the positions of authority and the higher paid jobs. The division of labour in Dundee's jute industry was not so hierarchical as the Lancashire cotton industry where authority and discipline were devolved to the male senior minders who supervised 3 or 4 workers. In the jute industry supervisory functions were exercised by a small number of male workers; in the spinning departments of mills one overseer to 50 or 70 female spinners, shifters and piecers was not uncommon<sup>40</sup> and unlike Lancashire, spinners had no authority over other workers in the squad and occupied the same subordinate status in the hierarchy of labour as piecers and shifters.

Unlike Lancashire there is little evidence of a family economy in the jute industry. Members of one family might work in the same factory or mill but husbands or fathers were rarely in a position of authority over family members in the workplace and the undifferentiated character of the division of labour usually ensured that they occupied similar positions in the structure of authority relations. Although there were some firms whose policy was to give preference to those whose family already worked in the mill, patrimonialism was not a feature of the industry and one weaver remarked that although both her father and mother worked in Halley's, it was her mother's neighbour who "spoke for her."<sup>41</sup>

Although Dundee generally had a high percentage of married women working, the skilled men and the supervisors in jute tended to have non-working wives. In a survey of 2,196 households in the east of the town, it was found that 36 out of 57 married men who worked in skilled trades in the weaving factories had non-working wives, 20 out of 25 mechanics and 9 out of 12 overseers also had wives who did not work.<sup>42</sup> When their wives did work it was frequently in the factories as weavers or in the mills as winders, although a small number worked as preparers and spinners.<sup>43</sup> By contrast the majority of unskilled men in the jute mills had working wives. Of 380 millworkers, including batchers, preparers, rove-carters and mill labourers 75% had working wives (262). The vast majority of their wives worked in the jute industry, usually as spinners and preparers; 102 wives were spinners, 72 preparers and only 23 were weavers and winders.<sup>44</sup>

Dundee had the highest percentage of married women working in Scotland.<sup>45</sup> According to the survey of the Dundee Social Union, in the west district of the town, more than half the wives were working or temporarily unemployed, whilst in the east district it was just under half.<sup>46</sup> In the jute industry about one third of the female labour force over 20 was married.<sup>47</sup> It is more difficult to establish where the married women were located in the industry. Margaret Irwin's report for the Royal Commission on Labour estimated that in one large mill, 97% of the preparers, 19% of the spinners, 32% of the warpers and reelers, 14% of the winders and 34% of the weavers were married women. However this conflicts with both oral evidence and the findings of the survey by the Dundee Social Union which indicate that spinning had a higher percentage of married women than weaving. It is possible that the percentage given for spinning in Margaret Irwin's report includes young shifters and piecers who worked with the spinners and therefore underestimates the percentage of spinners who were married. Therefore to the divisions of authority and earning between small groups of skilled and supervisory male workers and the female workers was added a further divider which related to one of the pivotal components of respectability, the ability to maintain a non-working wife. This differentiation was most acute in the mills where it would be unlikely that spinners or preparers were married to any of the supervisory workers or indeed

were their daughters, whereas in the weaving department, it would be more common for the women to be either the wives or daughters of overseers and tenters.

Despite the pace of work, which in spinning was dictated by the machine and the overseer, and in weaving by the fact that it was piecework, mill and factory shop-floor life could have a rich and robust character which was barely stifled by the level of supervision which prevailed. Margaret Irwin complained in her report that :

"one existing evil in mills is the slack time the workers have; then they gather together and talk over the experience of the previous evening's so-called pleasure or amusement, which is often not of an elevating nature ..... A division of the workers, and the oversight of a motherly matron, might obviate the difficulty"<sup>48</sup>

This informal factory culture could also be of a ribald nature as according to the reminiscences of a former factory boy, the women used to sing obscene songs which would be taught to the younger workers.<sup>49</sup> Although designed to illustrate the moral degradation of spinners and therefore undoubtedly exaggerated, he gives an account of the process of transmission of mill-girl culture :

" I have known a woman of bad character pollute the whole juvenile workers of the flat in which she was employed. She could fill their young minds with wanton and lascivious ideas, teach them to sing obscene songs; gradually introduce them to low dancings; lead them to houses of bad fame and finally accomplish their ruin"<sup>50</sup>

However the shop floor culture of the mill could also be a powerful force for generating networks of solidarity and mutual assistance. The same writer recounts the efforts made to help the family of a male worker who had fallen into ill health :

"..... a benefit concert is organised, and almost everyone appears at it. A great enthusiasm is displayed about it and frank help is afforded in disposing of the tickets, or even in platform service in order that this venture may prove a success"<sup>51</sup>

Despite the individualised nature of the work in weaving, informal networks of solidarity still thrived. One weaver described how if someone had a 'smash' when the material broke and the weaver had to put off the machine to fix it :

".....your neighbour would holler and everybody came running to help you" <sup>52</sup>

despite the fact that the stoppage would affect their earnings as they were all on piecework. Weavers talked of the friendly atmosphere in the factory and how books and magazines would be passed round. The noise level was such in the weaving sheds that weavers developed lip-reading skills and a repertoire of sign language in order to communicate. In this way information about the events of the previous evening or the impending marriage of one of the girls would be passed from one end of the factory to another.<sup>53</sup>

Although the pivotal distinctions of earnings and authority clove the jute workforce into a small group of relatively well paid men and the mass of mainly female workers, there were subsidiary distinctions and divisions amongst the workers, the most significant being between the weavers and the women who worked in the mills. In popular consciousness the division was between spinners and weavers, although in practice it was the women of the low mill and the spinning flats who comprised the category labelled 'mill-girls'.

Weavers were often accused of regarding themselves as 'a cut above' the spinners. Comments of former spinners observed that :

".....weavers thought themselves somethin', aye and the winders tae." <sup>54</sup>

"(The weavers) though they were 'it'" <sup>55</sup>

"... they (the weavers) were different from us altogether - they never looked at us ..... They thought they were something special... They used to walk past you as if you were something low and they were 'it'".<sup>56</sup>

There does seem to have been some basis for these comments, as weavers themselves confirmed that they considered themselves a 'breed apart' :

"They were a rough lot the spinners..... (but) some nice girls worked in the mill, in the winding." <sup>57</sup>

"You were a cut above the mill - you really were a cut above them." <sup>58</sup>

Undoubtedly these divisions were buttressed by the physical separation of the mill and factory which clearly demarcated the territories of the two workforces. As one weaver noted :

"I was never in a mill in my life, I'd never even seen the inside o' the mill. When you went into your work the factory was on one side, the mill was on anotherside and you'd no occasion - maybe you were allowed, maybe you weren't, I don't know, but I was never in the mill in my life. Just my own factory bit." <sup>59</sup>

There were obviously a number of concrete differences between spinners and weavers which could have formed the basis for the divisions between mill girls and weavers. The earnings of the weavers were generally higher than the millworkers. More importantly the weavers were pieceworkers and although this made their earnings dependent on their own exertions and therefore more variable, it connoted a degree of job control denied to the spinners who were paid a set wage irrespective of individual effort. This perhaps explains why those women in the mills who were pieceworkers such as the reelers and winders were more often bracketted with the weaving community. As one spinner commented :

'In the spinning flats you had to keep goin' whether you liked it or not. In the weavin' you could take your time - but then you got less pay." <sup>60</sup>

The weavers themselves acknowledged that 'they made their own wages' <sup>61</sup> Neither spinners or weavers gave much credence to the argument that weavers were more skilled, although one spinner commented that the weavers' work was 'more particular'. Although neither trade was officially recognised as skilled or paid accordingly, both had informal apprenticeship systems. In the mills the only form of upward mobility for women was through the stages of shifting, piecing and finally spinning. Indeed this was a necessary progression in order to learn how to operate the frames. The preponderance of casual female labour in the preparing departments

was attributed to the fact that this was the only kind of work which women with no skill could enter directly. Similarly the period of apprenticeship in the weaving factories prevented any horizontal mobility from spinning to better paid weaving as spinners would have to take a cut in wages whilst being 'in-giers', (in-givers), the term applied to those learning weaving.

It has been suggested that millworkers were drawn from the poorer sections of the working class as it was the mills which employed half-time labour and a likely indication of poverty in a family was having to send its children out to work.<sup>62</sup> This may indeed provide part of the explanation for the different status of the two groups, for the many widowed and deserted women who migrated to Dundee, driven by poverty, were more likely to enter the mills in the department where no skills or training were required and thus augmented the numbers in the mills drawn from the poorest section of the community. However there is also evidence that there were spinners, preparers and weavers from the same family and that the fathers of some millworkers were tradesmen. The precarious nature of employment in this period and the extent of seasonal labour makes it likely that the two groups did not represent completely distinct strata in the hierarchy of the working class community and that the family of tradesmen may have entered the mills in periods of financial hardship.

The higher earnings of the weavers and the likelihood that they were drawn from the less financially beleaguered families may have been an important factor in the formation of this caste system. However, both weavers and spinners perceived the differences in terms of the cleanliness of the work in weaving.

".....spinners work was a lot dirtier than factory workers. Ours wasna such a dirty job, no much dirt in it ..... It was a bit o' this uppity business, you know."<sup>63</sup>

One weaver remembered that the spinners used to be given the nicknames of 'snuffy spinner' :

"because long ago they did snuff, you know in the mills, they readily had to do it. Because at that time the dust was flying across the place. No now, its a' modernised now, but at that time there was nae ducts or anything to tak it awa'. Wi' the results it choked them and that's the reason they took snuff and it always got that name - the snuffy spinners."<sup>64</sup>

And in explaining why she as a weaver felt 'a cut above the spinners', she pointed out that :

"I mean we were never that you would say really dirty, the way they got dirty, because they were covered in mill dust when they came out their works."<sup>65</sup>

The weavers underlined this difference by dressing up to go to work :

"You wouldn't have dreamed of going to the factory without a hat, you would have been a scruff."<sup>66</sup>

Similarly a former spinner claimed that the weavers thought they were 'somethin' special because they did the finishin' of the jute,<sup>67</sup> by which she meant they had the clean work. She remembers their emblem of status as their hat and gloves :

"an they wore a hat an they wore gloves ..... see we were low mill hands and we used tae just come wi' wir jackets on - nae hats, nae gloves."<sup>68</sup>

The importance placed on clean work and the accoutrements of hat and gloves is not surprising when the meaning of respectability for women was so tied up with the notion of femininity and gentility, the outward manifestation being pride in one's appearance. The weavers also seemed to have aspirations of marrying men with a trade and becoming a non-working wife, that other symbol of working-class respectability. A former spinner remarked that :

"An awful lot of the weavers married a wee bitty better men - men that had good jobs. On the mill you might marry a man that had worked in the mill, but a weaver looked out for somebody who had served his time - an engineer or something. And they got on a wee bit better - that's how they classed themselves as better."<sup>69</sup>

The consensus amongst ex-weavers was that :

"If anybody got married ..... it was an awful slur if they had to go back to work ..... It was only the millworkers (that went back). Outside the mills very few women when they got married worked." <sup>70</sup>

There was also some recognition that a different code of conduct applied to the millworkers, presumably because different and lower standards were expected from this 'rougher' element of juteworkers. Again the weavers claimed that :

"Long ago it was the done thing for a woman who had worked in the mill just to go back to work ..... and often they had children - they may have left one day and had a child the next and they were back within a week - because you see, it was the done thing" <sup>71</sup>

The marriage patterns of weavers and millworkers confirm the contention that weavers tended to marry 'better men'. The majority of unskilled male millworkers married women in the mills, many of whom carried on working after marriage, whilst in the weaving factories the skilled and supervisory workers were more likely to have wives who worked as weavers if their wives worked at all. <sup>72</sup> The married women in weaving may not have been such a permanent part of the labour force as the married women in the mill, if it was the case that their partners had better jobs. Only when financial circumstances dictated, did the wives of tradesmen take up employment. A spinner whose mother was a weaver and father a tailor confirmed that the occasion for her mother seeking work was during a financial crises :

"My mother went out for maybe a month or so in the winter, but that was it finished. My father wouldn't allow her." <sup>73</sup>

Social relations between the weavers and millworkers were characterised by social distance and cultural exclusiveness, although tempered on the part of the weavers by an affectionate tolerance for the roguish antics of the millworkers whom they regarded as a 'happy crowd who liked their work'. For the weavers the memories evoked by the spinners concerned singing and alcohol. One incident was recalled when a mill had to be closed down 'because they were all tipsy'

and their example of the songs sung by spinners was the Harry Lauder tune 'How can you be happy when happiness costs such a lot?'<sup>74</sup> (This refers to the price of 12/6d for a bottle of whisky). Another memory related to a spinner who one day appeared with two black eyes because 'her man had hit her for being drunk'. No doubt these memories had some factual basis but spinners also talked of the stigma attached to women going into pubs and how drunkenness was confined to the Overgate, the haunt of down and outs, prostitutes and the 'rough' element. One spinner remembered that spectating at the Overgate was a cheap form of entertainment :

"..... If you had no money you used to say to your chum - 'Come on, we'll go down the Overgate and see how many fights there are tonight.'" <sup>75</sup>

Although there were 63 cases of disorderly conduct among female millworkers and a handful involving weavers in 1854 the number of prostitutes apprehended for this offence was 439,<sup>76</sup> indicating that in the hierarchy of respectability, spinners were probably far from the bottom rung.

It is more likely that for the weavers these activities symbolised the cultural gap between themselves and the spinners and therefore were projected as the norm rather than the exception in order to highlight these differences. According to the accounts of weavers and spinners leisure patterns for both groups were remarkably similar and consisted of promenading, dances, concerts and picnics. Weavers talked about the number of dance halls there were in Dundee and how :

"You would walk up the Perth Road - you would meet somebody and you would speak to them and then you would carry on and meet some other budy." <sup>77</sup>

The object of the exercise seemed to be :

"Lettin' everybudy see you while you're seein everybudy else" <sup>78</sup>

This was similar to the recreation of the spinners who remembered that :

"In the evenings you would walk down the town, see somebody you would talk to - have a walk around and a talk"<sup>79</sup>

Dances and concerts were alternative diversions but the ritualistic promenading meeting with friends and 'hain a gossip' seemed to be the favoured pastime, according to one spinner, 'the streets were packed at night' - possibly this was a form of recreation which was available to the married women with their families, albeit less frequently. Although leisure patterns were similar for weavers and millworkers, the social relations of the community replicated those of the workplace and therefore leisure was pursued in mutually exclusive groups. According to the weavers :

"..... we were friendly enough but we didn't go out together ..... you seemed to chum up with somebody beside you"<sup>80</sup>

Another weaver claimed that she :

"Had no friends among spinners..... it was just among the weavers, They all seemed to clan together you know with each other - we had nothing to do with the spinners"<sup>81</sup>

This exclusivity was confirmed by a spinner who detailed its operation :

"The weavers seemed to keep themselves by themselves. If I was a weaver and you were a weaver you could be my chum - we would go out together. If you were in the mill, you would go out with your chum maybe to picnics on a Saturday. There was evening drives during the summer - the mill folk would have their drive and the weavers would have theirs - a bottle of lemonade and a pie at the end and we all sang on the way back" <sup>82</sup>

The nature of the jute workers'leisure activities prompted a discussion at a conference of Dundee's committee on Public Morals, which felt constrained to try to minimise the practice of promenading which was considered unsuitable and unseemingly activity. The chief constable whilst regretting its extent felt there was little which could be done as the law was not being infringed and blamed the industrial and social conditions of the city :

"They had so many young workers of both sexes who lived in lodgings, entirely removed from parental control whatever" <sup>83</sup>

Whatever distinctions existed between millworkers and weavers the latter were an important element in constituting Dundee's reputation as a women's town, a reputation which stemmed from the dominance of the jute industry and its association with women's work. Such was the extent of women's work that men in Dundee earned the nickname 'Kettle boilers' a reference to the fact that many men remained at home while the women of the family went out to work. Poverty and the dearth of employment for men may well have been the factors driving women out to work but there is evidence that they took pride in the fact that they worked hard for their money. The weavers' allusions to the intemperate behaviour of the spinners always contained the caveat that they were hard workers. A former weaver remembered that when her husband's mother was informed that they were going to Glasgow, she said :

"That's where all the big, fat, lazy women are"<sup>84</sup>

The dominance of women's employment was reflected in the disproportionately large number of households in Dundee dependent solely on women's earnings and the large number of households rented and leased by women. In 1871 the census enumerator had noted that 'many factory girls keep independent households for themselves',<sup>85</sup> whilst a survey of the west district of the town in 1905 claimed that over one third of the 3,650 households visited were rented by women. Of these 3,650, 111 were wives living apart from husbands either temporarily or permanently, 804 were widows and 370 were unmarried women. The east district displayed a similar pattern of tenancy and it was calculated that the proportion of female householders in the whole town was about one third.<sup>86</sup>

The extent of migration to Dundee and the chronic shortage of housing meant that accommodation for many women was lodging with a family which could involve three or four lodgers sharing a two-roomed house with a family.<sup>87</sup> There were few attempts by employers to provide houses for their workers with the exception of Baxter's which<sup>88</sup> built a tenement block for about 80 families in 1866.

Although initially intended for their own workers they later rented them to those who were likely to be good tenants.<sup>89</sup> However the occupations of the heads of the households indicate that the tenants of these employer-built houses were drawn from the ranks of the skilled and supervisory workers and therefore likely to be the better paid workers. This is confirmed by the fact that approximately 80% of wives in these houses did not work,<sup>90</sup> an unusually high percentage in a town dominated by women's work. Employers clearly did not feel constrained to secure the loyalty and services of women workers whom they felt were in plentiful supply, could be easily replaced and perhaps most importantly, could not afford to pay an economic rent.

There were, however, concerns about the effect on morality and decency of Dundee's appalling housing conditions. Philanthropic organisations with the aid of funds from employers constructed model lodging houses, calculated 'to exercise a beneficial effect upon young females',<sup>91</sup> which probably referred to the desire to protect the morality of working girls. However this kind of philanthropic provision was resisted by the women, very few taking advantage of it because of the strict discipline and close supervision of their time and actions in these establishments.<sup>92</sup>

A report in the Dundee Year Book questioned 'if anywhere there is more done for the elevating and ameliorating of the lot of the working girl than in our own city',<sup>93</sup> and went on to document the extent of philanthropic endeavour in Dundee. Most schemes involved instruction in dressmaking, millinery, cookery, laundry and other home management tasks, for the permanency of women's work in Dundee and its reputation as a 'women's town' did not undermine the association of women with the domestic sphere and men with the world of work. The extent of women's employment in Dundee and concern over its effects on the moral welfare of working class families deprived of a non-working mother was a constant theme in the discussions of middle class benevolent associations. As an illustration of the beneficial effects of classes in domestic instruction one commentator quoted the case of 'an intelligent wife and mother' who had successfully managed her household budget when her husband was out of work.

On being asked how she had managed the women responded :

"You see ..... I have been at the St ..... Mission cooking classes for twa past winters and I can mak a tasty dinner noo oot o' scraps and have learned to be real economic in ither ways"<sup>94</sup>

The writer concluded that the woman intended to go to a laundrywork class in order that :

"She may learn how to do up her husbands and boy's fronts and collars, so that she may send them out decently clad to church on Sundays"<sup>95</sup>

The single women were also encouraged to take instruction in sewing, cooking etc., and in a boarding house run by the Ladies Union, girls were afforded every facility for doing their own washing, 'an occupation which seems to afford them a certain amount of pleasure, and appeals to their housewifely instincts'.<sup>96</sup>

With the exception of the provision of public parks, Dundee employers were not noted for their paternalism or philanthropy; however, their need to reconcile their employment of large numbers of women with the prevailing ideology of domesticity, prompted some of them to organise evening classes in household skills and contribute money towards the provision of crèches in the city. By 1905 there were three crèches in Dundee and one in Lochee, in the west district of the city.

The crèches consisted of three rooms, two of which were used as nurseries and the third reserved for meals. There were usually three attendants who did the cooking and housework in addition to looking after the children. Although the charge for the crèches was 1s and 6d for children over a year and 2s for babies under a year, compared with the usual 3s charged by childminders, they were not used to full advantage by working mothers. The daily attendance seldom reached the full quota and the combined average daily attendance for the four crèches was 76 in 1904 whereas the full complement was about 120.<sup>97</sup>

The migrant status of much of Dundee's labour force made it unlikely that there was an abundance of kinship networks on which women could rely for these kinds of services and it was said that husbands might look after older children but less frequently care for younger babies.<sup>98</sup>

Therefore one can only speculate that women's preference for the childminding services of neighbours signified their resistance to the kind of philanthropic provision which smacked of regulation and social control.

The centrality of women's employment to Dundee's labour market, particularly married women's work violated all the precepts of Victorian domestic ideology which was defined by the interrelationship between respectability, the domestic ideal and the ideology of separate sexual spheres. However the prevalence of women's work and the high percentage of households which were dependent, either solely or partially on the earnings of women did not undermine the dominant ideology of gender divisions, but led to its reformulation and adaptation to fit the specific employment structure of Dundee.

Women were still defined primarily as the dependants of husbands or fathers and associated with the domestic sphere; indeed it was the assumption of dependency which determined their status as cheap labour. However the notion of dependency had wider implications than financial dependence as the relation between men and women was constituted on the basis of general male dominance in society. Therefore, although substantial numbers of women in Dundee were independent of men, in the sense that there were no men in many households and women were frequently breadwinners, they were still defined by their dominant gender role of wife and mother and deemed to be subject to the authority of men. Although patriarchal authority relations had wider significance than authority relations in the family, it was universally accepted that women and girls should be subject to the control of their husbands or father. Thus the Reverend Henry Williamson, President of the Dundee Mill and Factory Operatives Association, could chastise a crowd of strikers by inquiring what their fathers thought of their behaviour, in spite of the fact that the majority of them were adult women, many of whom would be married. The potency of the ideology of separate sexual spheres is further attested by the assertion of a leading Dundee employer that :

"A woman is better employed exercising the baby than exercising the franchise." 99

In the wider community concerted efforts were made to ensure that existing gender divisions and patriarchal authority were not decomposed by women's involvement in waged labour outside the home by providing training in domestic and household skills for female operative. Similarly the efforts of various organisations to 'elevate' and 'ameliorate' Dundee's working women were designed to control their behaviour so that it conformed to their culturally prescribed role and was appropriate to their gender role.

Women's experience of work was therefore shaped by their subordinate status in society generally and their low wages and their position in the division of labour and authority in the workplace reflected and reinforced this subordination. However this did not preclude resistance and struggle to either patriarchal authority or exploitation at the point of production.

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CHAPTER 5

DISPUTES IN DUNDEE'S JUTE INDUSTRY

There was little in the way of formal trade union organisation amongst the various sections of the jute workforce before 1885, although reference is made to a branch of the Scottish Powerloom Tenters Association being in its infancy in 1874. An east of Scotland Mill and Factory Workers Protective Association had a relatively short-lived existence and was dissolved in March 1881.<sup>1</sup> The transitory nature of trade union organisation amongst textile workers must be placed in the context of the relative impotence of unionism generally in Dundee; echoing the national pattern in Scotland, the ebb and flow of trade union membership usually reflected the vagaries of the economic climate. In 1875 Dundee Trades Council claimed to represent 4,000 unionists.<sup>2</sup> Such were the fluctuations of membership that the trades council's existence was short-lived, although it was revived in 1885 when unionism throughout Britain embarked on a period of sustained and unprecedented growth.

The absence of institutional continuity in the organisation of the higher paid male workforce, should not necessarily be construed as evidence of weakness. From the 1850's until 1874 the Dundee textile industry was characterised by prosperity and booms, with the occasional hiccup which usually resulted in some short-time working. However, the labour shortage in Dundee was so acute during this period that depressions in the trade did not seriously affect the workforce and unemployment was not a serious problem. This period of almost uninterrupted prosperity resulted in a steady rise in money wages for all sections of the workforce,<sup>3</sup> but the relatively privileged position of the male supervisory and maintenance workers was further consolidated and enhanced, without the need to resort to the strike weapon or even trade union organisation. It was this advantaged position in relation to the majority of the female labour force which provided the bedrock of their respectability and shaped their attitudes to society and how they might improve their position within it.

The agitation over Mundella's 54 hour Bill in 1872 illustrates the extent to which these demands were couched in terms of moral and intellectual improvement and hence aided the struggle for respectability.

At a meeting of mill and factory workers in 1872 to support Mundella's Bill, the debate centred on the incentive to self improvement which shorter hours would provide. This view is encapsulated in the Rev. George Gillfillan's contribution :

"I am no political economist. I have never read Adam Smith through, and I have never even attempted to read Ricardo or MacCulloch. I cannot argue shorter hours upon principles I do not comprehend. But sir, I can argue them upon principles that I do understand. I can argue their advantage as a friend, to the intellectual and moral advancement of the people (Applause) I can support them on the very same principles on which I have all along advocated Free Libraries Short hours and opportunities of mental culture go hand in hand." (Applause).<sup>4</sup>

The values of respectability and moral advancement did not preclude militant action nor produce a section of workers who accepted wholesale economic orthodoxies. Indeed the above quotation illustrates how these values could usefully provide a lever for improved wages and conditions, which involved challenging the economic tenet of supply and demand. Nonetheless the pursuit of these values was a strategy which was only attractive, and indeed possible for those sections of workers whose privileged position gave them a stake in the existing organisation of society and who had opportunities to ameliorate this position within its framework. Although the small number of male skilled and supervisory workers in the jute industry were not necessarily amongst the highest paid workers in the country or indeed the most strategically central to the economy, their position in relation to the mass of unskilled labour in the industry was such that they represented an elite of labour whose ideology derived in part from their relatively advantaged economic position but which incorporated attitudes that encompassed much more than the economic dimension. A crucial feature of this ideology was the conception of the family and the role assigned to women within it. It was believed that the wages of a respectable artisan should be enough to support his wife and family and thus one of the hallmarks of respectability was a non wage-earning wife whose primary concerns were the home and domestic matters.

A meeting of Dundee Working Men's Clubs in 1875 which was called specifically to discuss the establishment of infant nurseries and the 'better education of female operatives on domestic economy', highlights some of the notions embodied in their concept of respectability, and which were adapted to the specific employment structure of Dundee's textile industry. A mill overseer noted that :

"There were plenty of tradesmen whose wives went to work that had no need to go, and they should stay at home and keep their children"<sup>5</sup>  
(Applause)

It was recognised that the low wages of some men were not sufficient to support a family and therefore economic necessity would drive some women to work. The deleterious effects of this could be offset by training the women in the habits of domestic economy.

Another contributor felt that if nurseries were established, there should be connected with them :

"classes for the instruction of mill girls in domestic cookery, washing, ironing etc."<sup>6</sup>

The conception of the family as an arena for the formulation and reproduction of the values of respectability was to a large extent posed in terms of woman as homemaker and this primary identification with the domestic sphere served to shape men's perceptions of her and attitudes to her, even when she worked in full time paid employment. Although the higher wages of the small stratum of male workers in the jute industry contributed to the segmentation of the workforce, this differentiation was further strengthened by the articulation of an ideology which identified the industrial sphere as the domain of men and imbued workplace relations with a patriarchal character.

At the workplace the objectives and demands of this section of male workers, and more significantly their mode of organisation and what they considered as legitimate activity, reflected their status within the industry. The subordinate position of women workers in the labour process and in the hierarchy of labour, produced quite a different experience and this was to have important implications for how they

organised and the issues on which they mobilised. The agitation over the extension of meal hours in the jute industry in 1871 highlights not only the conflicts of interest engendered but how the strategic position of one group of workers enabled them to get their definition of a situation accepted and their strategy and tactics defined as the most legitimate.

The movement for the extension of meal time began in September 1871 and it appears that the issue was instigated by the men in the industry and the campaign conducted by a committee of delegates composed almost entirely of male supervisory and maintenance workers. A report of a meeting of the delegates stated that there were 75 members of the committee (all male) and the contributions from the body of the hall from tenters, overseers who represented various branches of the industry and a mill foreman,<sup>7</sup> are indicative of the prominent role of the higher-paid stratum of workers in the direction and leadership of the agitation. The committee were certainly regarded as the elite of the industry by those middle-class philanthropists who supported the movement. Sir John Ogilvie addressed a meeting of the delegates and expressed his delight :

"..... in being present, and seeing such a meeting as this - such an intelligent gathering of representative men, being the elite of the factory workers of Dundee ....."<sup>8</sup>

The initial demand of the workers was for an extension of all meal times, to one hour thereby reducing the working week from 60 hours to 57 hours. From the outset the committee emphasised that its priority, indeed its sole concern was to achieve the extension of the meal hour and that this was to be achieved by conducting negotiations with the employers and without resort to strikes. However, almost immediately operatives in a number of mills and factories struck for an increase in wages. This was interpreted by those who supported the movement, and by the committee themselves, as jeopardising the negotiations with the employers and side tracking and diverting the issue. An article in a Dundee newspaper complained that :

"It is much to be regretted that a considerable number of the females and lads at several mills in Dundee, doubtless led by the foolish and unthinking, yesterday helped to embarrass the negotiations now going on between the employers and employed by striking work. This taking of the question out of the hands of their delegates is very rash and ill advised. They might surely wait a few days to see what is the result of the negotiations. The men they have appointed to represent them know best how to put forward their case if it is for the meal hour they are striking, but if it is for wages then they are really opposing what the delegates are doing, by demonstrating to the employers that they have contrary to the Committee's circular, to deal with both demands." <sup>9</sup>

It was argued by some that the women, by striking for a wage rise, were being irrational and short sighted and that they did not appreciate the value of extended time. It was claimed that an increase in wages was an easier demand to achieve as it represented no challenge to the employers, would be quickly eroded, and most importantly would result in the meal hour question being eclipsed. However it is clear that the women did not regard the two demands as alternatives but took the opportunity to capitalise on existing discontent to rally support for another issue which they considered equally important. At one works, where there were stoppages affecting 900 workers, the strikers were approached by one of the partners of the firm and offered a rise in wages. They were also promised an hour for each meal time provided it was given at the other works in the town. However they were still dissatisfied, and could not be induced to return to work unless both demands were guaranteed.<sup>10</sup> The inclemency of the weather did not seem to deter them from parading the streets to manifest their discontent.

After a five week struggle the dispute reached a successful conclusion, with the employers granting a rise of 5% and a reduction in hours, although some employers would only grant two hours instead of the requested three. The credit for the successful resolution of the dispute was given to the Committee of delegates and was seen by some as a vindication of the policy of moderation and conciliation which they had pursued and a triumph which had been achieved despite the irresponsible action of the women confounding the issue.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear that the wage increase would not have been granted without resort to strikes and that the women also had a commitment, if less firm, to the demand for an extension of the meal hours. Their stance can be explained by reference to their position in the hierarchy of labour and the economics of working class differentiation. The leadership of the movement was firmly in the grip of the minority of workers whose earnings were substantially higher than the majority of the workforce. The favourable climate of the jute industry in the previous two decades had enabled them to secure a number of increases which guaranteed them a fairly high and stable income and the operation of the 'bounty system' at a time of expansion and increased output, further enhanced their position. The unskilled mill and factory workers had also enjoyed a period of virtually uninterrupted advances in earnings<sup>12</sup> but their wages were already very low and their position in the structure of authority relations prevented them from eroding the widening differential between them and the supervisory and skilled workers in the trade. At an early stage, in the dispute the committee issued a circular stating that they did not wish to raise the question of wages at all and that they would be willing to accept a reduction in wages to allow the concession.<sup>13</sup> This obviously reflected the interests of the elite in the industry whose economic position afforded them the luxury of ameliorating conditions at the expense of earnings. In these circumstances the women who struck appeared to be responding rationally to a situation where they feared that their interests would not be adequately served by a committee exclusively composed of higher paid men who had quite distinct and different priorities.

The desire of the higher paid male workers to reduce their working hours even at the expense of a fall in earnings seems a clear cut illustration of a sectional policy which ignored the interests of lower paid workers, who might also have to intensify their labour in order to recoup some of their lost earnings. The fact that the vast majority of low paid workers were women introduced gender divisions into this sectionalism, given that women's earnings were related to the

sexual division of labour in the home and the family. There were occasions when conflicts of interest between men and women workers arose directly from their distinct gender roles. Some workforces managed to reach voluntary agreements with the employers in the pursuit of a 54 hour week, however, there was a great deal of contention amongst workers about how best to implement these agreements. The variety of schemes adopted was noted by the Factory Inspector for Dundee district who doubted the popularity of the arrangement whereby work ceased at 9.30 am on Saturdays :

"It is neither a day of work or a holiday. The time until the dinner hour is of little use to the men, who have no occupation for that period of the day."<sup>14</sup>

This seems to refer to the fact that the leisure pursuits of men were usually carried out on Saturday afternoons or evenings and therefore free time on Saturday mornings might only extend their domestic and family responsibilities. This interpretation is supported by the Factory Inspector's reference to the opinions of an engineer on the subject :

"What's the use Jock, O' gangin hame to haud the weans."<sup>15</sup>

The sexual division of labour in the home and the family powerfully influenced women's experience of work. Clearly it could also generate conflicts of interest which may have been manifested at the point of production but which stemmed from wider cultural roles, thus illustrating the potency of gender divisions in fragmenting the working class.

There was further tension between those who had assumed the leadership of the short-time movement and the women, over the conduct of the dispute. The Committee stressed the need for a conciliatory approach and insisted on moderation in respect to both the claim and the method by which it was pursued. At a meeting between the representatives of the employers and the employed their propriety was given fulsome praise by the Dundee Advertiser who advised the workforce that :

"Their cause could not have been more ably pleaded than it was by the delegates. The representatives of the employers first of all spoke in the most conciliatory, candid, temperate, and even serious manner ..... On the other hand the delegates, put their view of the question with remarkable skill and tact not giving way on the ground they had taken, remaining firm in their quest for a decided answer. .... One of the employers went so far as to say that failing the Act he would then give the hour, and this was reciprocated by one of the delegates saying that failing other towns following the example of Dundee, they would give it up." <sup>16</sup>

The extent to which the delegates were prepared to mollify the employers and perhaps the extent to which they shared their frame of reference is demonstrated by the nature of the arguments they used to justify their case. At one meeting between the two parties, one of the employees' representatives claimed that the adoption of one hour breaks would resolve the problem of unpunctuality, in the trade. <sup>17</sup> Similarly after the successful conclusion of the dispute, a meeting of the meal hour committee voted "three hearty cheers to those employers who have seen it to be their duty to come forward and grant our request in full." <sup>18</sup>

The oft-repeated request of the Committee to confine the struggle within the walls of the negotiating hall, went unheeded by the women and was a constant source of conflict and recrimination. The Committee vainly appealed to the women to return to work and frequently expressed their disapproval of the strikes, and on one occasion called upon all delegates and overseers to use their influence to prevent the 'demonstrations' whilst the dispute was pending. <sup>19</sup>

The Secretary of the Committee complained to the employers that the 'agitation' and 'uneasiness' was principally amongst the female workers and that there was little need for agitation amongst them as it was like 'putting a light to a powder magazine.' <sup>20</sup> Certainly the strikes seemed to be conducted in the time-honoured Dundee fashion of parading the streets, dancing and singing, with the inevitable foray into the Cowgate, the territory of the masters. Shouts, insults and good-natured banter were invariably hurled at employers who seemed to accept it as part of the required ritual of strike activity. One newspaper report of the strikes conveys the flavour of the demonstrations :

"Those on strike paraded the streets yesterday in grotesque processions bearing emblems of their trade, suspended from poles, such as mats, jute etc. They also indulged in shouting and singing, the latter being a peculiar sort of march, the words of which were principally intended to convey the information that they were somebody or others 'band'. Besides this, they held threatening demonstrations in front of the works where nobody had turned out. Between 2 and 3 o'clock large droves of them marched to the Cowgate, and here they held an indignation meeting, in the midst of the merchants who were assembled there in large numbers, it being market day ...."<sup>21</sup>

Whatever criticisms were levelled at the women, ranging from 'foolish and unthinking' to 'less intelligent' and 'unreasoning', the efficacy of their action seemed to have been recognised by the delegates. At a meeting of the meal hour Committee to discuss whether it should be dissolved or maintained, it was argued that it would be foolish to continue as people at the workplace had more powers than the Committee. The example was given of an employer who was requested by the Committee to grant the full hour and refused but who yielded to the women who went in a body to demand the hour. The speaker concluded that :

"the better plan would be to get the fair sex on your side and go to the employers and you will get the hour from them."<sup>22</sup>

The healthy state of the Dundee textile industry before 1874 which was in large measure due to the various wars which stimulated demand for manufactured jute, also created a demand for labour. The relative scarcity of labour ensured not only security of employment even when there was a temporary decline, but affirmed spontaneous strike action as the most apposite form of resistance to a workforce denied the status of skilled workers and the appropriate methods of organisation, and whose subordinate position in the production process provided them with no other lever to secure their interests. The series of wage increases gained by the operatives in the 1860s and early 1870s were occasionally unsolicited increases granted by the masters, but more often they were won by recourse to strike action which was characterised by spontaneity. A strike of powerloom weavers in 1872 over a demand for a day's holiday pay illustrates both the efficacy of immediate action and the extent of the labour shortage.

The head of the firm complained that the workers were getting the beef and he the bones which elicited the response from one of the women :

"Very well, I'll gie him my beef if he gies me his banes."<sup>23</sup>

The women struck and refused to recommence work whilst management made their decision. After only one day's stoppage, the employers conceded the day's holiday pay and the women resumed work with the exception of those who had obtained work elsewhere.

However by 1874 the tide was turning and short time, falling profits and eventually unemployment were to become the traits of the jute industry. That year there was a general strike in the trade, involving between 20,000 and 30,000 against an attempt by the employers to impose a reduction of 10%. The reduction seems to have been restricted to the unskilled majority of workers and excluded the male supervisory workers and the skilled and semi-skilled men. The male operatives who were locked out as a consequence of the strike held meetings to discuss the issue and debated whether or not they should give the women their support. They eventually agreed to back them but it was felt that every endeavour should be made to persuade them to accept a 5% reduction.<sup>24</sup>

The hoary issue of the conduct of the dispute was another source of irritation to the men who advised the women to conduct themselves in a quiet and orderly manner, and attempted to exercise a restraining influence on their exuberance. A particular incident which aroused the displeasure of the men involved women following two of the masters and hooting and yelling at them. One operative complained that :

"If there was another scene like that the men and women of Dundee would be disgraced (Hear, Hear). - They should treat with the masters calmly, fairly and argumentatively and not by yelling and hooting." <sup>25</sup>

This particular strike concluded in the women's favour but the next

ten years witnessed varying fortunes in the trade with the years 1879 to 1883 offering the only respite in the general trend of depression, falling wages and falling profits. The employers managed to impose some reductions but others were successfully resisted and in 1883 some millworkers managed to achieve an increase of 5%. Whatever varying degrees of success and failure the workers experienced in those ten years there was a constant flurry of activity with strikes against reductions and for increases assuming a virtual permanence of the landscape. The Reverend Henry Williamson who was instrumental in forming the first trade union in Dundee aimed specifically at the female mill and factory workers wrote that :

"When walking down Lochee Road in those days, it seemed to me that never a week passed without presenting at some part of the route the same sad familiar scene - a band of tousled, loud voiced lassies with the light of battle in their defiant eyes gathered together in the street and discussing with animation and candour the grievances that had constrained them to leave their work." <sup>26</sup>

Williamson claimed that the workers, before his intervention, were absolutely without ~~organ~~isation that they were like a flock of sheep without a shepherd and that the usual outcome of their strikes was a return to work 'without nearness to their grievances'. <sup>27</sup> This somewhat one sided and pessimistic picture of the mill girls had little bearing on reality, although it should not be denied that wages were low and that the women had no particular leader. Williamson's intention was to underline his role in ameliorating the wages and conditions of the mill girls, (The article was entitled 'Helping the Mill Girls in the Fight for their Rights') and for this purpose it was expedient to portray them as the helpless creatures of the masters prior to the establishment of his union.

The Dundee and District Mill and Factory Operatives Union (DFMOU) was formed in September 1885, in the aftermath of an extensive strike against a reduction in wages. The women strikers were holding a meeting in the Barrack Park one afternoon and the Reverend Williamson.

at the behest of several of the male workers, addressed the meeting, and succeeded in persuading them to return to work and form a union.<sup>28</sup> The concern of the men in fostering union organisation amongst the women is perhaps some indication of the measure of success the women had attained by their informal pattern of mobilisation, or at least the extent to which they had threatened the interests of the elite stratum of workers. Women's strikes impinged on men to the extent that they incurred broken time<sup>29</sup> and the portion of their wages they received would be a subject to negotiation. It has been argued that the organised male minders in the Lancashire Cotton industry stifled union organisation of the piecers, in order to maintain their dominance<sup>30</sup> but in Dundee it appears that it was in the interests of the better paid men to encourage unionism in the hope that it would exercise a restraining influence on the women and curb their inclination for spontaneous action. According to the account of Williamson the employers also welcomed the establishment of the union and favoured the policy of negotiation as a first step in any matter under dispute.<sup>31</sup>

Originally the union only permitted women as members with an entrance fee of 3d and weekly payments of 1d, but within a year of its inception, it opened its doors to male operatives. By Williamson's own admission membership was not stable, with some joining and leaving within a few weeks. In 1889 the union claimed to have a membership of about 4,000<sup>32</sup> with membership reaching a peak in 1902 at 6,020 and remaining relatively stable at about 5,000 till 1906,<sup>33</sup> although Forfar union refuted the membership figure as grossly inflated. The ratio of women to men in the union was particularly high, but this was to be expected in a workforce where women vastly outnumbered men. Initially Williamson experienced difficulties in persuading the women to become committee members, however by 1889 the Executive Committee consisted of twenty-two workers plus the President, Secretary, Treasurer and Vice President and the vast majority were women. There are no figures which provide a breakdown of the membership in terms of the relative numbers of spinners, preparers, weavers etc., however, in 1906 Williamson refuted an accusation by weavers that the union did not represent their

interests as its composition was predominantly millworkers, by claiming that pieceworkers constituted the majority of the membership.<sup>34</sup> Similarly there are no reliable sources to indicate the proportion of married women in the union but in Williamson's evidence to the Royal Commission on Labour, he stated that he thought there were few members of the union who were married.<sup>35</sup>

The policy of the DMFOU was resolutely conciliatory and had as a guiding principle the prevention of strikes at all costs. Indeed it was stated by Williamson in a lecture entitled 'A Defence of the Constitution, Principles, Methods and Aims of the Dundee and District Mill and Factory Operatives Union', that the union 'was started with the view of finding a remedy for the evils of strikes'.<sup>36</sup> The union subscribed to the major economic orthodoxies of the labour movement, principally to secure 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work' and the need to take cognisance of the state of trade in wage bargaining, but Williamson's commitment to preventing strikes was founded on a sense of Christian justice which went beyond the essential pragmatism of the established union movement.

Williamson's belief was that strikes not only caused misery amongst the working class and were an ineffectual means of improving wages and conditions, but that they caused misery, unhappiness and loss to the employers. This contrasts with the attitude of mainstream unionism of the period, which although having a commitment to moderation, was capable of resorting to the most expedient method of redressing grievances, including strike action, regardless of the social philosophy which it espoused. However for the Reverend Williamson, the economic order assumed not only a permanence and universality but had the properties of a law of nature which was outwith human control. Thus in justifying the union's action in persuading strikers to return to work he argued that :

"We, however, see no reason to regret the activities taken in advising the persons on strike to return to their employment and meanwhile submit to what could not be helped."<sup>37</sup>

Throughout the period, Williamson's intervention was characterised by either counselling workers not to go on strike, advising them to

return to work if they had already struck, or inducing them to accept a compromise which would end the strike. Although Williamson recognised the injustice of the Dundee jute workers' position, he did believe that often their grievances were trivial or fanciful and even when legitimate, certainly provided no grounds for striking. In his article of reminiscences, he recounted an incident which was to serve to illustrate the state of anarchy and disorder which prevailed in the industry before unionisation :

"The girls were winders and it was their business to place the result of their labour in buckets, each of which had to be brought up to a certain weight. It came about in the course of the Operations that many of these buckets were deprived of the handles by which they were moved about, but although the receptacles themselves were lightened to this degree, the rule was adhered to that when filled they must still come up to the specific standard in weight. It followed that the deficiency represented by the weight of the handles had to be made up by the worker in materials, and that the employer was securing character of his own appliances ..... labouring under a sense of injustice the girls 'went out'. It is inconceivable that such a thing would occur today."<sup>38</sup>

The unorthodox nature of the DMFOU under the somewhat idiosyncratic leadership of Williamson, did not endear it to the established union movement in Dundee. Their differences in approach and policies did not involve them embarking on a collision course but there undoubtedly existed tension between the two which took the form of verbal recriminations and the isolation of one from the other. Many years after the establishment of the union, Williamson complained that :

"A measure of sympathy and support might have been expected from the Trade Unionists of the Town, but they stood aloof and offered no help."<sup>39</sup>

The hostility of Dundee's trade union movement to the Mill and Factory Operatives Union derived more from the nature of its organisation than any economic heresy it subscribed to which violated the principles of trade unionism. The principal objection held by Dundee Trades Council to the Union, was the degree to which it was in the control of Williamson who being a Unitarian minister, was not employed in the trade which the union represented. For this reason Williamson, who was the honorary president of the union, was refused

a seat on the trades council and the union prohibited from affiliating. There is further evidence of the nature of their objections to the union in the advice given by the trades council to workers who were involved in a strike in 1895. They suggested that another union of millworkers should be formed which was democratic 'not autocratic'. Williamson's union was unpalatable to the labour movement in Dundee because it undermined working-class autonomy and the independence of working-class institutions from the control of middle-class philanthropists. The labour movement was not averse to the support and aid of such groups or individuals, particularly for women workers, but was inimical to attempts to control the working-class movement from outside. These criticisms did not preclude some measure of cooperation between the two particularly in relation to the thorny problem of strikes. When workers struck over the refusal of employers to maintain the rate of pay for a working week reduced by one hour, representatives of the trades council met with the Reverend 'with a view to devising some means whereby development of the strike might be avoided'.<sup>40</sup>

It was dissatisfaction with the Mill and Factory Operatives methods which led to the establishment of an alternative textile workers union, the Dundee Textile Union. This union was sanctioned by the trades council and drew the core of its membership from the skilled male workers in the industry. It claimed to have a membership of 2,000 but had a relatively short existence, its organisation in tatters after a dispute over lockout pay in 1899.

However, Williamson's union encountered dissension and criticism from within its own ranks, over what was regarded as the undue sway exercised by Williamson over the Executive Committee. The Brechin branch of the union seceded when its proposals to alter the rules in favour of a federal structure were rejected,<sup>41</sup> and subsequently combined with other disaffected branches to form the Scottish Mill and Factory Workers Federal Union.

It has been argued that the existence of Williamson's union as the

leading labour organisation amongst Dundee's textile workers was a measure of the apathy which existed among them.<sup>42</sup> It is, however, debatable to what extent the union influenced either its members, the bulk of the non-unionised workforce, or indeed had any significant impact on the workers' struggle to defend their living standards. Williamson's interventions were usually directed at dissuading the women from striking or counselling them to return to work and 'agitate by means other than strikes' for their demands. However he was by no means always successful in his exhortations, for despite his efforts to avert strike action, in 1893 there was a strike involving over 20,000 operatives against a reduction of 5%.<sup>43</sup> Similarly those involved in the general strike in 1895 for an increase in wages remained impervious to the attempts by Williamson to persuade them to return to work, and women in Dudhope Works successfully resisted a reduction of 10% in 1894 by resorting to strike action although they had been addressed by Williamson and advised against it.<sup>44</sup>

The labour force continued its tactic of spontaneous mobilisation, while the presence of the union seemed to make little impression on this time-honoured pattern, and failed dismally to contain the unleashing of disputes. This was admitted by Williamson in his address to the Ladies meeting of the TUC in 1889 when he stated that :

"At the present time the members are hopeful that a further rise of wages will be obtained though it may not be till after some of the adventurous operatives have taken the matter into their own hands and resorted to the old method of a strike"<sup>45</sup>

It is doubtful whether the DMFOU which represented by the most optimistic of estimates, 14% of the workforce, was responsible in any degree for the winning and securing of wage demands, or was necessary for the successful prosecution of a strike. There already existed an informal network of contacts which was tapped and mobilised to give support, principally financial, whenever a section of the workforce was in the throes of a dispute. Collections were an indispensable component of strike activity and in this respect the workers exhibited a level of organisation which at least equalled that of the

formal labour movement.

If the union was so peripheral to the experience of the bulk of the labour force, why then did it still attract 5,000 of their number to its ranks when the officially sanctioned union had a transitory existence and only succeeded in recruiting 2,000 members ? Part of the explanation lies in the nature of the union itself and the charismatic leadership of Williamson but part of the explanation can be located in the composition and character of the established union movement in Dundee.

The appeal of Williamson's union lay not so much in the concrete benefits for the membership but in the language and manner which Williamson pursued their claims. Williamson often deplored the fact that relations between masters and servants were increasingly governed solely by market considerations and that paternalism and mutual obligations were fast disappearing. He criticised the 'heartless officialism' of firms which dismissed women who were compelled to stay at home for a day or more as a result of illness. He chastised those who dispensed sanctimonious charity, arguing that :

"There is no reason why the poor should be treated with disrespect even by the agents of benevolence."<sup>46</sup>

He implored that workers should be considered 'as human beings and not as so many working factors'. More importantly it was his aim that the union should be 'distinctly valuable and interesting to women' Therefore a major objective was to raise the wages of those considered the lowest paid in the industry, principally the spinners and preparers. In so doing, he affirmed their worth as human beings and workers, arguing that their work should be recognised as skilled :

"Spinning is a trade; that is to say, a woman must be trained to it from childhood in order that she may become a really good worker. That means she is a spinner and nothing else. Her work is said to be very important, for although machinery can be made to do many wonderful things, it cannot get along without the human eye, hand, brain and skill."<sup>47</sup>

Williamson also spoke of women's role in a way which had a particular resonance for Dundee's working women, although he adopted a high moral tone. Recognising that the dominant cultural imagery of women's role was inappropriate and inapplicable to many working women, Williamson urged that women should be aware of and develop their self-worth and not regard themselves as mere appendages to men :

"The temptation to which our girls are most exposed is to live a surface life for a mere surface effect, to acquire those gifts and graces which please more the eye than the mind or heart of men, the cultivation of which will give them no inner resources of independent enjoyment, and will leave them to a joyless, aimless existence, should they fail in what has hitherto been considered the chief end of woman - namely the marriage state. Under existing conditions of society not every woman can reach this commonly supposed most desirable status. A very large proportion have to make a status of their own. What is of far more importance is to make a character of their own, not to be mere drones in the hive of humanity, to have within themselves in their developed minds and tastes, that which will make life good and sweet to them should they never find a husband or should the husband when found prove not exactly the ideal man."<sup>48</sup>

The concern of the union to represent the interests of the female workers and the fact that they were accorded status, dignity and respect, must have had a strong appeal to the women whose position in Dundee's jute industry consigned them to the lowest rung in the hierarchy of labour. Therefore any adherence to the Reverend Henry Williamson and his peculiar brand of unionism cannot be attributed simply to the absence of class consciousness in a backward labour force which clung to the essential individualism of religion and the pious expectation of salvation after death. Williamson himself complained how few of the operatives came to listen to him on a Sunday.

Although in the mid 1880s the trade union movement had experienced a revival which continued for at least a decade, union organisation in Dundee, reflecting the national pattern in Scotland, was still numerically weaker than its English counterpart and still remained dominated by the skilled workforce. In 1905 the total number of unionists did not exceed 15,000 which represented 18% of the working population,<sup>49</sup> and the bulk of trade union membership was concentrated in a small number of societies.

The building and metal trades had the highest union density with 30.3% and 39.4% unionisation respectively.<sup>50</sup>

The precarious nature of the jute trade in the late Victorian period had hastened union organisation amongst those sections of the workforce which had previously enjoyed relatively high earnings and regularity of employment. The tenters had formed a union in the mid 1870's and over 50% of them were unionised by the mid 1890s, however, their trade union organisation confirmed that fragmentation of the jute labour force by pursuing policies and advocating an ideology which was a reflection of their advantaged position in the labour process, albeit a position which had been marginally eroded.

The trade union movement in Dundee was taken to task by James Morton, chief organiser of the Scottish Federal Union. Morton's union seemed to have had only an ephemeral existence in Dundee, although he claimed to have aided organisation amongst women in Glasgow. He was undoubtedly one of the 'political faddists' dismissed by D.M.R. Ritchie in his presidential address to the Trade Union Congress meeting in Dundee in 1889,<sup>51</sup> in that he was a member of the Independent Labour Party and his speeches characterised by socialist rhetoric. Ritchie's remarks were aimed at refuting the criticisms of the socialists that trade unionism was 'a played-out force' incapable of adequately responding to the challenge of changed conditions which had created such discontent amongst the working class. Although Ritchie acknowledged that the movement had to 'encourage a more vigorous political policy' to meet this challenge,<sup>52</sup> the spirit, character and ideology of the established union leadership till the end of the century, continued to reflect the concerns of those skilled groups of workers who had for so long constituted the core of the union movement.

At a mass meeting addressed by Morton, during an industry wide strike in 1893, he spoke of the great need for organising female labour in Dundee and chastised the trades council for not undertaking the task of educating workers. He observed that there were those who maintained that women were difficult to organise, at which a female worker shouted :

"Gae awa' man, and dinna haver"<sup>53</sup>

But he claimed that this had not been his experience. He also condemned the practice of those organised men in the industry, such as those belonging to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers for staying at their employment whilst the women struck. Claiming that this contravened the principles of trade unionism, he maintained that :

"It was one of the ..... things which disgraced trade unionism in Dundee (Applause). Trade Unionists looked upon women as their inferiors, but in a great many cases women set an example to the best of them."<sup>54</sup>

The failure of the labour movement in Dundee to support the spontaneous strikes of the women textile workers did not breach the principles of trade unionism as claimed by James Morton, but rather was concordant with these principles. They favoured negotiation and moderation and prided themselves on their ability to meet with the employers on their terms and by dint of logic and reasoned argument to persuade them of the merits of their case. The democratic principles of trade unionism were not defined by mass action but by delegation and representation. Thus the Trades Council in Dundee advised striking women in 1899 to return to work whilst promising that their cause would be vigorously pursued by negotiation.<sup>55</sup> At a meeting of the trades council which discussed the strike of textile workers for an increase of 5%, James Reid, a power loom tenter and President of the Dundee Textile Union condemned the action of the strikers as :

"most ill-advised and ill-timed ..... if they had waited three or four weeks the advance would have been granted without striking"<sup>56</sup>

He urged the strikers to return to work and observed that the lesson of this struggle was that priority should be given to organising the jute workers into a union. He hoped that the employers noted that it was the union members who refrained from striking and that in future, they would not discourage their employees from joining unions. A former spinner who talked of a dispute in which she was involved in the early 1900s remembered that her father, a tailor, a union man and a member of the ILP was displeased at her coming out on strike and told her :

"If you come out with them, I'll kill you."

Her explanation was :

"You see he was mad at us going with a crowd of lassies, you see he said it was too gallus\*, that wasn't the right way to go about it. There was a right way and a wrong way."<sup>57</sup>

He even forbade her to sing the strike song in the house. Her father's objection to the strike seemed to be that they were not in a union and therefore 'it wasn't done properly'. His claim that if you were in a union you had something to fall back on indicates that he saw the contribution of trade unions was to making the strike more effective but his attitude was more than simply instrumental. He associated unions with a trade and hence with security and respectability illustrating the fusion of economics and ideology and the extent to which they were mutually reinforcing. If unions contributed to the successful resolution of a strike by providing financial support, they also endowed industrial action with legitimacy, dignity and discipline which were essential components of independent working class action and organisation. The trades council and the unions of skilled men in the jute industry counselled striking women to return to work, with the same consistency with which this was advocated by Williamson and his union. Women's action was usually described as 'rash', 'hasty' or even 'downright folly' but the women obdurately refused to abandon the spontaneous strike as their favoured weapon.

The pattern of intense cyclical fluctuations persisted throughout the period 1885 to 1906, with the Boer War and the Russo-Japanese war creating minor booms. In periods of depression the workers were usually

\* 'gallus' has a negative connotation when applied to women and means brazen or lacking in modesty.

engaged in battles to resist reductions in wages but there were also strikes against bad material, or alterations in working conditions. Thus there were several strikes of this nature between 1890 and 1895, the most significant of which was the 1893 general strike against a reduction of 5%. The strike originated at Tay Works in the Scouringburn district and it was here that the most violent scenes were witnessed :

"On Monday at 6 o'clock ..... the employees who had agreed to stand by the resolution assembled outside the gates, and amused themselves by hooting at their fellow workers who felt it their duty to continue at their work. Before breakfast the strikers numbered 500 after breakfast 2,000 ..... It was observed that many of the younger workers, both male and female, had come provided with wooden laths. The 10 o'clock whistle began to sound and as the shrill notes were heard a few antistrikers made their way towards the entrance. They were immediately set upon by those armed with sticks, and ran the gauntlet under a shower of hearty blows.

At the same time they were loudly hooted and subjected to remarks of a far from complimentary kind. In this way, about 100 workers, chiefly men found their way in." <sup>58</sup>

On this occasion it appears that most sections of the workforce were affected by the reduction, including the male tenters, calendars, dressers etc., and yet their distaste for strikes still prevented them from joining the struggle. The employees succeeded in gaining a compromise which limited the reduction to  $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ . There were, however, incidences of groups of workers, or individual work places who successfully resisted the imposition of any reduction at all, such as in 1894 at Dudhope works where the women struck against a reduction of 10% whilst the men in the various departments refused to take part in the protest and seemed prepared to accept the new regulation. <sup>59</sup>

The years 1895 till 1906 saw a levelling out of the depression and was characterised by a low rate of profitability but very little unemployment. Most disputes concerned attempts to gain increases in wages, with varying degrees of success. There were a number of strikes which assumed the proportions of a general strike, however the most significant of these was the 1895 strike for an increase which ended in defeat. It is perhaps testimony to the efficacy of Dundee's textile workers' industrial action, that the 1895 strike was defeated because, for the first time in the history of the trade, employers combined in an

association, collective action and unanimity ensuring success.

The favourable state of the jute industry in 1906 encouraged the Executive of the Mill and Factory Operatives Union, to submit a request for a 5% increase in February, to the employers. They were no doubt prompted by the prevailing mood of discontent which signalled the likelihood of the operatives taking action into their own hands and striking. Therefore the request was a response to pressure from the workers and an attempt to forestall any general disturbances in the trade. The statement issued to the Trade Committee by Williamson illustrates the conciliatory approach of the union and the desire to pre-empt strikes :

"In no sense is it put forward as a demand. The Mill and Factory Operatives Union was organised for the purpose of preventing strikes, and any workers who take matters into their own hands and leave their employment, thus causing serious mischief to their fellow-operatives, are acting entirely contrary to the wishes of the union." 60

The exhortations not to strike were issued in vain and the discontent was exacerbated when the workers learned of the refusal of the employers to concede the 5%, with 6,000 operatives on strike within two days of the employers' declaration. Although the action was initiated by spinners and shifters, who were on time wages, and tended to be lower paid than the piece workers, the dispute rapidly spread to include all classes of the female workforce. Williamson's response to the employers' intransigence, was to negotiate for an increase for the lower paid workers which he justified by claiming that the efforts of the union had always tended to be directed towards securing higher wages for the underpaid, whether they were spinners or piecers, weavers or winders.

Williamson lamented that the concession had not been given before 'irresponsible' workers had taken matters into their own hands, but he was to have even greater cause for censure when the winders, reelers and weavers rejected the settlement and elected to remain out.

The pieceworkers remained resolute in spite of constant attempts by Williamson to persuade them to return while negotiations continued. The efforts of the trades council too were directed at reaching a compromise, whereby the lowest paid would receive a 10% increase, the highest paid 2½% and the bulk of workers something between the two extremes. The pieceworkers were adamant that the 5% should be given 'all round'.

Much was made in the press of the hostility and friction between the time workers and the piece workers whom it was claimed represented an aristocracy of women workers. The piece workers' refusal to accept the terms of agreement was interpreted as an attempt by higher paid workers to maintain differentials and preserve their privileged position. However, the wages of weavers were subject to a great deal of variability, as breakages, broken time etc., affected their earnings. To some extent the weavers' earnings were also dependent on their own abilities and skill, therefore the range of earnings was considerable. They therefore felt fully justified in taking advantage of the recent prosperity to augment their income.

The dissatisfaction with Williamson's handling of the dispute and his repeated attempts to force them back to work, prompted a deputation from the women to approach the trades council to seek support for their claim. However, despite the intervention of the trades council, by March 8 most of the workers had reluctantly returned to work having been encouraged by the trades council to insist on the appointment of a Conciliation Committee. At Grimmond's 2,000 workers remained obdurate and John Reid of the trades council, and Mary MacArthur agreed to accompany a deputation of the women to the management, who refused to meet with them. The women were subsequently persuaded by Reid and MacArthur to return to work.

The legacy of defeat was the establishment of a union which was regarded by many as the watershed in Dundee textile workers' history.

The Jute and Flax Workers' Union seemed to represent a break with the 'sham' unionism of Williamson whose organisation was dismissed as a benefit society. The willingness of the workforce to embrace the principles of true unionism, was seen as heralding the end of the era of low wages and total subjugation of the workers to the will of the masters and the end of rash strikes. This was an exaggerated representation of the previous history of the workers' struggle and an overly optimistic view of the capacity of the union to effect change or influence Dundee's jute workers.

It has been argued that action which lacks an institutional form or basis, is destined to be ephemeral and of little historical significance.<sup>61</sup> However, this need not involve accepting the contention that the spontaneous strikes of Dundee's textile labour force was a product of their weakness or disunity. The nature of the jute industry was such that for most of its pre-war history, there was a shortage of labour. It obviously had to endure periodic bouts of unemployment but they were of very little significance in the sense that they were not protracted. The spontaneous strike, generated and extended by word of mouth, could be an effective weapon when there was a seller's market for those workers whose labour was in demand, and whose lack of skill could otherwise have ensured their easy replaceability.

The spread of disaffection during the strike of 1906 typified the manner in which strike action was generated:

"In the present labour trouble history repeated itself, inasmuch as matters were precipitated by that section of the operatives described by the union executive as 'thoughtless' leaving their places, and thus precipitating the struggle that it has been the effort of the union to avert since first the agitation for a 5% advance of wages was begun .....

At Tay works, the great spinning and weaving establishments of Messrs Gilroy Sons and Company, there was also a gathering of malcontents who 'demonstrated' according to the accepted fashion. The general body of hands seemed undecided, but most of them in the end filed past the porter's lodge. At the dinner hour, however, evidently impressed by the knowledge of what was going on elsewhere, their ranks were largely augmented."<sup>62</sup>

Although protracted disputes were not unknown, the short lightning strike was more common. The brevity of the disputes meant that the backing of an organisation which could provide financial assistance was not so necessary as for a lengthy strike. The jute workers had proved themselves capable of organising and co-ordinating action on numerous occasions and, therefore, union membership may not have seemed to offer any substantial benefits. The absence of permanent trade union organisation should not necessarily be interpreted as lacking the faculty of effective organisation, for given the objective conditions of the jute industry, it is doubtful that formal trade union organisation could have achieved more than the informal patterns of mobilisation.

The spontaneous mode of resistance seemed most appropriate to a workforce lacking the industrial muscle derived from skill or workplace authority. Decisions to strike were usually taken at the workplace, although doubtless their resolve was buttressed by informal discussions with workmates in their leisure hours. There was rarely recourse to formal meetings and the usual pattern, after the seeds of discontent had been sown, was for someone to say :

"We're no goin in. Are you goin in ?  
Naebody's goin in !" 63

The absence of a central organisation capable of coordinating action, did not seem to detract from their ability to generalise the action as disaffection rapidly spread within the work and to other works, in the streets and amongst the community generally.

Mass pickets were typically employed to persuade workers to join a strike and although their inducements were usually confined to shouting and jeering, occasionally more violent methods were resorted to.

The spontaneous action of the women could be equally interpreted as a deliberately conceived weapon rather than a reflection of irrationality or confusion. It maximised disruption by being unpredictable and as a display of united action, could also serve to heighten the self-respect and self-regard of the women and fuel the communal solidarity of the mill and factory.

Although there was rarely an identifiable leadership, the manner in which strikes were initiated, spread and enforced was also coherent and organised, and is testimony to the power of the communal basis of solidarity.

The unskilled nature of the work performed by the majority of the jute workers, and the consequent lack of any organisational apparatus which included rules regulating apprenticeships, did not mean that there was little basis for the development of group solidarity. Their shared experience both in and out of the workplace could provide a basis for united action, which was as powerful as that derived from craft autonomy, skill and pride in one's work.

To understand the form and character of Dundee's women's industrial militancy, it is necessary to take account of much more than their economic experience at the level of the workplace. The organisation of the jute industry, its labour process and the structure of authority relations in the home, in work and in society generally, all provide part of the explanation.

As has been illustrated the division of labour and authority in the workplace paralleled conventional patriarchal family relations and this was reinforced by a definition of skilled work which reflected gender divisions and patriarchal authority. However, the absence of a family economy in the jute industry meant that the supervisory role of the small number of men was not sustained or buttressed by family ties which might have confirmed its legitimacy, facilitated the subordination of the women and guaranteed their quiescence.

Although the spontaneous nature of the strikes could be seen as a rational and instrumental response to the objective conditions of the jute industry, it could also be interpreted as an assertion of independence from the control of both employers and to some extent male dominated trade unions. The unpredictable nature of the action might have been equally important as a declaration of their autonomy and a reminder to their

employers that they could not exercise unfettered control over their workforce. In his evidence to the Labour Commission on the state of the jute industry the Reverend Williamson doubted whether Conciliation Boards would meet with any success in the trade as :

"It is not easy to know what to do with women. They are governed by impulse ..... all at once, without notice 50 or 100 of them are in a state of rebellion, and it requires someone to come in just to advise them, for as a rule neither master, manager nor any other official can get anything from them." <sup>64</sup>

This defiance could equally be directed at the organised labour movement. The constant complaints of the trade union movement that the women's action was 'hasty' or 'ill-advised', are testimony to the difficulties they encountered when attempting to exercise a restraining influence. At a meeting of Dundee Trades Council in 1899 which condemned the strike action of the jute workers a motion was passed recording sympathy with the Unions :

"In the predicament in which they found themselves owing to the rash acts of individuals over whom they had no control" <sup>65</sup>

It was not only the manner in which strikes were unleashed but the tone of the protest which encapsulated a spirit of resistance and defiance. Strikes were often characterised by behaviour and gestures which challenged patriarchal authority by ridicule and teasing. A favourite ploy of strikers, was to visit the Cowgate, the business haunt of the employers and merchants and indulge in catcalling and heckling. The conscious intention of the strikers was to puncture the dignity of these prominent members of Dundee Society by subjecting them to public ridicule and mocking. Invading the territory of the manufacturers and indelibly imprinting their presence on the scene was yet another way of challenging their masters' authority and asserting their independence, so that for a brief period the terms of the relationship was determined

by the workers. An account of such an invasion in 1906 is a typical illustration of how this was enacted :

"Strikers invaded the Cowgate ..... 'in a twinkling', a circle, the diameter of which extended from the Queen's Statue to the portals of the shelter was formed, and a couple of score of shrieking, shouting spinners spun round in the gyrations of jingo ring ..... ere long Panmure Street was thronged from end to end by an uproarious crowd of lassies. Number gave them the boldness and they made a rush for the shelter, in which for the most part millowners seeking to escape personal allusion and recognition had taken refuge ..... A hooting band made a rush for the last door, but the police, who acted with commendable discretion intervened and the portals were closed."<sup>66</sup>

It was commonplace for the strikers to carry effigies of particular employers who had aroused their wrath and to dress up in a comic manner for their parades and demonstrations through the streets. The style of dress adopted was also a way of ridiculing patriarchal authority as they often ~~donned~~ men's hats and on several occasions a few of the women wore policemen's helmets.

The hilarity and dancing and singing which invariably accompanied women's strikes, sharply distinguished them from men's industrial action which was altogether a more sober and serious affair. A demonstration of men in 1909 against unemployment displayed a marked reluctance to even march in procession along the street as they felt it might do more harm to their cause than good.<sup>67</sup> The character of women's strikes bore a striking similarity to their leisure activities and commentators often noted how a strike amongst women took on the aspects of a public holiday or carnival with fun and high spirits the order of the day. They usually roamed the streets in bands or paraded them in processional order singing popular music hall songs and dancing 'jingo-ring'.

The demonstrations were not only carried on during working hours, they frequently spilled over into the evenings with crowds of women converging on the High Streets and indulging in what was usually described as 'unruly' behaviour. Parading up and down streets with workmates who were invariably leisure time companions and engaging in banter with other groups, was an integral part of 'play', especially

for the younger unmarried girls and could almost be described as a form of street life culture. It was surely no accident that the behaviour of women on strike should be analogous to their leisure activities for it was the only time they were free from direct control and supervision. Leisure involved self-expression and fun which the daily grind at work denied them and by stamping their strike action with the flavour of their leisure time, they could recapture it as their own time. Although their action had quite definite and specific objectives, it also assumed a symbolic significance. It was a flight from work, a collective expression of defiance and, however temporary, by imbuing it with a sense of fun, they underscored the fact that they were expropriating this time from the masters and repossessing it themselves.

However, subverting male authority was clearly a central part of women's actions and by using ridicule, embarrassment and sexual impropriety, they turned sexual divisions into an effective weapon which left the victims of their badinage emasculated and without redress. The converse of the dominance and pervasiveness of male power was the submission and deference of women who were expected to have respect for this power and to conform to their culturally prescribed gender roles which were largely determined by men. Therefore, not surprisingly, women's resistance symbolised a rejection of male control and dominance by subjecting them to ridicule and mocking, thus demonstrating disrespect, whilst by breaching the codes of modesty and flaunting sexual differences, they denied men's power to control their behaviour.

The organised sections' references to the state of their trade and their quest for respectability reflected acceptance of the permanence of existing social arrangements. Similarly, the informal organisation of Dundee women and their culture, reflected a perception of society as stable and class divisions and inequality as part of the natural order of things. This view is expressed in the Jute Mill Song written by Mary Brooksbank, a Dundee jute worker :

"Oh dear me, the world's ill divided,  
Them that works the hardest are the least provided,  
But I must bide contented, dark days or fine,  
There's no much pleasure living off ten-and-nine."

The weapons of teasing and ridicule may have brought authority to the point of exasperation, but they were highly unlikely to topple the edifice of capitalism. Although the ebullience and gaiety of strikes were important aspects of the pattern of resistance, they were manifestations of an essentially defensive culture where primacy was placed on fun and high spirits as a means of escaping from the drudgery of work. However, Dundee women's form and style of resistance frequently challenged the existing gender divisions in society and the dominance of masculinity. Therefore their resistance contained an additional dimension to the traditional masculine style of confrontation which confirmed sexual divisions and generally centred on demands which left the existing social relationships untouched.

Whatever the inadequacies the ideology developed by the jute workers for the purpose of mounting a significant challenge to capitalism, it is important to stress that it was oppositional and that resignation or non-committed compliance to the social order did not signify complete submission.

N O T E S

- 1 : Lamb Collection 196E (3)
- 2 : Ibid., 196E (69)
- 3 : Ibid., 196D (1)
- 4 : Ibid., 196D (1)
- 5 : Ibid., 219 (4)
- 6 : Ibid.
- 7 : Ibid., 196D (47-51)
- 8 : Ibid., 196C (85)
- 9 : Ibid., 196C (25)
- 10 : Ibid., 196C (23)
- 11 : Ibid., 196C (39)
- 12 : Ibid., 196D (75)
- 13 : Ibid., 196C (51-53)
- 14 : 40th Report by the Inspectors of Factories 1872 (Irish University Press Series of British Parliamentary Papers), p9
- 15 : Ibid., p10
- 16 : Lamb Coll., 196C (25)
- 17 : Ibid., 196C (29-33)
- 18 : Ibid., 196C (51)
- 19 : Ibid., 196C (27)
- 20 : Ibid., 196C (29-33)
- 21 : Ibid., 196C (27)
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- 23 : Ibid., 196C (83)
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THE DEMISE OF SECTIONALISM? TRADE UNIONISM 1890 - 1914

The twenty or so years before the First World War witnessed an acceleration of the processes which were undermining the competitiveness of Scottish and British industry. Although the period was punctuated by booms and the shipbuilding industry prospered, because of military and imperial expansion, the overarching feature of the period was economic retardation.<sup>1</sup>

Employers resorted to a number of strategies to maintain the profitability of their firms, ranging from the introduction of new technology, restructuring of the division of labour, the introduction of 'cheap labour', more intensive labour utilisation, to generally tighter supervision and controls over the workforce. The early years of the century have often been depicted as the struggles of labour against the 'machine menace' however unskilled workers also had to contend with the efforts of employers to cut costs in order to remain competitive. Unskilled workers in the jute and cotton industries were faced with speed-ups on spinning or attempts to get workers to operate more looms in weaving, whilst the introduction of inferior materials which inevitably broke in the process of production interfered with earnings for those on piece rates or else involved more difficult and exacting work for those paid on time wages.

However, investment in domestic industry was not a favoured outlet for British capital which was exported abroad on a massive scale in this period, and this was a particularly marked tendency of Scottish capital which proportionately was exported abroad on an even greater scale.<sup>2</sup> Therefore the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century were permeated by employers responses to relative industrial decline and when this involved cutting labour costs by whatever method, most sectors of industry and all grades of workers were affected. These problems were compounded for labour by the decline in real wages from about 1900 because of rising prices.

However the beginning of this period began more optimistically for

labour, with the great expansion in trade unionism between 1889 - 1891. The immediate reason for the growth was a period of favourable trade and the upturn in the economy in the late 1880's. Those years are usually referred to as the era of 'New Unionism' and are often viewed as involving a radically new conception of trade unionism, characterised by basic changes in ideas, tactics and organisation. The traditional account of New Unionism centres on the rise of militant new organisation committed to the recruitment of all grades of workers and inspired by more radical if not socialist ideology.<sup>3</sup> However this account has been subjected to a critique by a number of historians who argue that the extension of trade unionism involved the unions of craft and skilled workers as much as the previously unorganised and that the traditionally unionised sectors such as building, mining and metals were as involved in the upsurge in industrial conflict as the newly emerging unions.<sup>4</sup> Events in Scotland would tend to support the interpretation that the years 1888 - 92, were a period of general increase in both union membership and collective struggle and were not confined to newly emerging unions.

By 1890 affiliations to Glasgow Trades Council had risen to 88<sup>5</sup> and in Aberdeen the trades council had 33 affiliated unions representing 6,591 workers, compared with 24 affiliated societies in 1884 representing approximately 2,000.<sup>6</sup> The revived fortunes of the long established trades councils was accompanied by a flowering of new ones in Dundee, Greenock, Motherwell, Falkirk, Kirkcaldy, Govan and Port Glasgow.<sup>7</sup>

The boom of the late 1880s resulted in an extension of unionism to the previously unorganised and the re-emergence of the organisations of unskilled groups which had been wiped out by the years of depression and slumps. In Glasgow miners' and labourers' unions had once again affiliated to the trades council and new unions of sailors and firemen, insurance agents and women workers had been established. However the growth in skilled unions and craft organisations was a more significant feature and affiliations to Glasgow Trades Council were swelled by the increasing numbers of engineers, boilermakers and those in the traditional craft trades who were re-forming unions or

establishing them for the first time. Workers in the heavy industries were prominent in the revival of 1888-92, although the traditional artisanal trades also played an important role, even in Glasgow where the heavy industries dominated; while in Aberdeen the building craft unions increasingly displaced the shipbuilding and engineering unions which had been the mainstay of the Council in the 1870's and early 1880s.<sup>8</sup> Similarly the mushrooming of industrial struggles and the concomitant militancy involved the unions of skilled and craft workers as much as the unskilled.

If the terms New Unionism is interpreted as embodying a new spirit or attitude in trade unions, or being inspired by socialist ideology, again in Scotland these developments were more likely to be located amongst craft unions. For example in Aberdeen the leading socialist trade unionists were almost exclusively craft workers and in the trades council the socialist members included tailors, plumbers, shoemakers, bakers and compositors.<sup>9</sup>

Although committed socialists were not numerically dominant in trade union organisations, they exerted an influence which was disproportionate to their numbers. Socialist ideas, however, did not transform the consciousness of the majority of the labour movement which although increasingly becoming disengaged from its ties with the Liberals, expressed a consciousness which was more in the tradition of popular radicalism, with the targets for reform and vilification being the landed aristocracy, the Church and the monarchy. Aberdeen Trades Council in 1885 favoured the disestablishment and disendowments of the Church of Scotland<sup>10</sup> and Glasgow Trades Council refused to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee in 1887 as a protest against poverty and distress, arguing that it could not be productive of any possible good to the community.<sup>11</sup>

The qualitative and quantitative changes occurring within Scottish trade unionism during the last years of the 1880s and the early 1890s, signified by the extension of union organisation, the increase in militancy and the influence of socialist ideology, were important developments.

However there were also continuities in the form and content of trade unionism and many of the changes which have sometimes been presented as sharp breaks, were in fact direct lineages from the mid-Victorian movement whose political subordination to Liberalism and industrial moderation have always been exaggerated.

The political ambitions of the trade union movements in the 1890s and early twentieth century became geared to gaining independent labour representation at both local and national level, although there were a significant number of individual unions which refused to sever their links with the Liberals. In Glasgow the union movement had an unflinching commitment to independent labour representation throughout the period, at both local and national level. By 1896 the Workers' Municipal Committee, an alliance of the Independent Labour Party, Co-operative Societies, the Irish National League and trade unions was already in existence to facilitate the election of representatives of labour to Municipal Council.<sup>12</sup> At the national level the Scottish Workers' parliamentary Elections Committee held its first annual conference in the Co-operative Halls in Glasgow in 1900, with the aim of 'securing a full measure of Labour representation in the House of Commons'.<sup>13</sup>

However the demand for independent working class representation was not equated with socialism. Although the programme of the SWPEC included nationalisation of Railways and Mines, and the fixing of a minimum wage by law, the emphasis was firmly placed on the election of working class representatives to the House of Commons, and the question of formulating an alternative political programme was of secondary importance. The proud boast of Glasgow Trades Council during the elections of 1901, was that 'men of widely divergent views' were involved in promoting the election of Robert Smillie to the North-East Lanark seat and that this indicated 'the growing opinion among the thoughtful and intelligent in favour of labour representation'.<sup>14</sup>

The quest for working class representation at the level of parliamentary politics, was paralleled by a flurry of activity at municipal level to

penetrate the various institutions and associations of local politics. Although there was no coherent overall policy to distinguish the representatives of labour from the two main parties, their policies were not merely a subordinate part of liberalism. The labour delegates on School Boards, Parochial Boards and the Town Council, attempted to introduce piecemeal reforms which would benefit the working class, and offered an alternative interpretation of social and political inequalities. The rhetoric of the labour movement became increasingly couched in the language of socialism and directed at establishing the public ownership of the means of production. In concluding the 1907 Annual Report of Glasgow Trades Council, John Howden, the President argued that :

"So long as the present industrial conditons are allowed to continue so long will there be depression in trade with its consequent unemployment and the suffering and misery and poverty this entails, and the only cure to prevent these results is an entire reconstruction of our industrial system"<sup>15</sup>

However the trade union movement's conception of socialism was sufficiently muted to allow a degree of overlap between its philosophy and that of progressive Liberal thought. Indeed it has been argued that the dominant conception of socialism in the early twentieth century union movement was hardly distinguishable from the most radical stands within the liberal tradition.<sup>16</sup> A central plank of the labour movement's political programme was municipal collectivism, a policy which had been introduced to a limited extent in Glasgow long before it became associated with socialist ideology and indeed which found support from a wide range of the political spectrum. It was, however, a notion which was sufficiently vague to provide scope for a variety of interpretations and gain adherents whose political and social philosophies were widely divergent. Professor William Smart of Glasgow University who was a luminary of the social reform movement in the City and for a time, President of the Women's Protection and Provident League, espoused a version of the municipal ideal which he took pains to dissociate from socialism or an advocacy of the public ownership of the means of production.

".....As government action can never supersede, and is not intended to rival private enterprise for the innumerable things it brings, it should never be the enemy of private enterprise, nor be represented as public beneficence over against private greed ..... as is carelessly done when production for the public good is contrasted with 'production for Profit'. Under government I include both Central and local government, the latter being a branch of the former, and the functions being the same in both cases ..... " <sup>17</sup>

Whilst the object of securing labour representation at local level was to try to implement an alternative policy to the 'stern and repressive' one normally practised and to ensure 'a better and more humane interpretation of the Poor Law,' <sup>18</sup> trade unions still clung to some of the values which had been a distinctive feature of the mid-Victorian labour movement. Labour representatives on the parochial boards professed to treat applicants for relief in a more generous manner, however, they still continued to distinguish between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor and to extol the virtues of thrift and self-help. Thus it was claimed that the system of relief penalised the provident worker 'who is in receipt of superannuation ..... (and) has no more consideration paid to him than to his more improvident neighbour.' <sup>19</sup>

Although progressive middle class opinion was implacably opposed to the political aspirations of organised labour, particularly in its more radical postures, there was still some common ground between their ideologies. The precepts of Victorian evangelical social reform thinking were being called into question and reformulated so that physical rather than spiritual reform came to be emphasised, or more correctly the former was defined as logically prior to the latter. The contrast between the newly emerging thinking and what was regarded as the outmoded approach of the mid Victorian era, was aptly summed up by Robert Bremner a member of the faculty of Procurators, in an article published by the Scottish Council for Women's Trades (SCWT) :

"Fortunately for the social well-being of Glasgow, one direct result of the evangelical revival in Scotland in the middle of the 19th century,

and particularly of the great influence of Thomas Chalmers, was the development of what he called the 'territorial method' - in other words, of systematic missionary effort - for the spiritual welfare of the denizens of these slums. But for constant sympathetic intercourse between the poor outcasts who crowded the Wynds and the earnest mission workers who have tried to do them good, one feels that the dangerous mine of highly explosive material laid by the builders and owners of such infernal properties might have exploded with ruinous consequences long ago. The more intelligent viewing of the situation, however, nowadays is that these well-meaning ameliorative efforts begin at the wrong end. Physical existence comes before moral existence: and physical reform must precede moral and spiritual reform."<sup>20</sup>

This shift in policy towards more material solutions did not replace the concern with moral and spiritual enrichment, but was to be a more effective means of achieving them. Poverty was still identified as a moral problem rather than a structural one, as the constant references to improvidence, intemperance and laziness testify. The literature of the various organisations involved with social policy reflected a community of shared assumptions, about the causes of poverty, prescriptive action and the need to differentiate between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor in order to eliminate the corrupting influence of the latter.

There were therefore, still some shared assumptions between organised labour and progressive middle class opinion but increasingly the remedial action proposed by the two groups diverged and became areas of conflict. Resolutions passed in trades councils, union branches and the Scottish Trades Union Congress increasingly emphasised the structural causes of poverty and traced its roots in the inequalities of power and wealth. Thus at the ninth annual conference of the STUC a motion calling for the prohibition of alcohol was defeated by an amendment which dismissed such legislative action as a mere palliative to the problems of poverty and misery and offered as an alternative solution the more equitable distribution of wealth so that :

"conditions are so altered as to secure to every one a healthy life amidst healthy surroundings." <sup>21</sup>

In the years leading up to the First World War organised labour movement became increasingly disenchanted with Liberalism and sought more radical political solutions. This was manifested at local

level more than national politics and through the influence of more radical political parties such as the Independent Labour Party, The Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist Labour Party.<sup>22</sup> However one aspect of its ideology which did not undergo any transformation was their perception of women's role in society.

The existing sexual division of labour and the association of women with the home were viewed by labour as permanent and unchanging and explained by reference to women's 'natural' attributes. Therefore at a time when trade unionism was beginning to assume a more radical political posture and question long standing political and economic tenets, the notion of separate sexual spheres remained unchallenged and did not appear on the agenda for change. This obviously had important implications for how trade unionists would approach the question of organising women workers.

The view of organised labour was that industrial, social and political questions were to be resolved by the independent activity of the working classes, either by exercising industrial muscle or by politically induced means; however they believed that the organisation of women required the intervention of the philanthropic middle classes to help those who were deemed to be helpless. The literature of the various trades councils portrays a picture of women as downtrodden timid creatures, victims of their employers, who simply because they were women, were unable to resist, organise and fight back. It was constantly assumed that women were totally at the mercy of their employers and required to be rescued and delivered, like so many sheep, to the portals of trade unionism, by those who more naturally possessed the 'spirit of collective resistance'.

Provided they were of good character and had not transgressed the sexual code, trade unions readily slotted women into the category of the 'deserving poor' who were the object of philanthropic concern. To the male trade union movement the problems of women workers were consigned to a separate sphere which like those of children and the sick required the assistance and intervention of the benevolent outsider.

Admittedly the traditional avenues of improving industrial conditions were being supplemented by other means, as the trade union movement looked increasingly to legislative action to reduce working hours. However legislative action was never intended to supplant organisation in the male trade union movement but was simply another issue to be tackled by organised labour. Protective legislation for women, however, was usually regarded as a substitute for organisation and a legitimate tactic for those who were not capable of helping themselves. This was a view which was in keeping with traditional political economy which did not regard women and children as individual economic units but as appendages of the male breadwinner. Thus both the tenets of liberal political economy and Victorian domestic ideology, justified state intervention on behalf of women, who were not regarded as free agents.

Rising prices, the fall in real wages and the unemployment of 1907 to 1909 preceded the upsurge in industrial militancy between the years 1910 and 1914. Discontent was fuelled by increasing antagonism between rank and file trade unionists and their officials in industries with established collective bargaining over increasing bureaucratisation and centralisation of authority within unions, as this was perceived as a threat to union democracy and local autonomy. An additional source of internal conflict was the tendency of union officials to negotiate long term wage contracts during a period of rising prices.

It has been argued that the restructuring of the labour process on an industry-wide basis, from the introduction of labour saving machinery, piece rates and bonus systems, to the emergence of new divisions of labour, created the potential for united working class action as all sections of the workforce responded to assaults on their conditions of work,<sup>23</sup> and that the process of deskilling, contributed to a heightened sense of class solidarity by creating a more homogenous working class, less differentiated by skill, conditions and wages.<sup>24</sup> It would appear that contemporary trade unionists perceived a change, for the rhetoric of unionism revolved around the celebration of a new era which signalled the demise of the old sectionalist and exclusivist policies. The literature and meetings of trades councils etc.,

frequently had a 'winds of change' flavour which welcomed the new unity of the working class and was critical of the divisiveness and selfishness of the 'old' unions. This view was the theme of the Presidential address to third Annual Congress of the STUC :

"The industrial conditions which surrounded their life in the workshops were pretty much dependent upon the introduction of labour-saving machinery, which was ever changing ..... Working in sections the labour army presented a broken front to the organised forces of capital and the result was they were beaten in detail, conditions of labour being forced upon their acceptance which, if labour spoke with a single voice, would be rejected with scorn . ..... When speaking on this question it was oftentimes overlooked that there were thousands of working men whose wages never amounted to 20s a week and whose daily life was haunted by the ever present spectre of absolute want. If in extending the hand of federation friendship they failed to reach that class, then no matter how perfect their scheme might be, it would be written down as a delusion and a snare by every man who had an intelligent grasp of the facts of existence ..... The cry of the unemployed heard in the past as in a desert required that they should break down the barriers which had hitherto separated union from union, and demanded that united action should be taken to secure the workers a fair share of the profits which naturally spring from labour. The days of labour aristocracy had been swept away by the introduction of labour saving machinery..... 25

However the received view of this period as involving the constant erosion of craft skills as a result of the introduction of machinery is an inadequate interpretation of developments in the industrial arena. Extensive introduction of new technology was not the preferred method of dealing with the problem of labour productivity by British employers.<sup>26</sup> Indeed entrepreneurial failure and the lack of investment in new technologies has often been blamed for the erosion of Britain's industrial hegemony and in Scotland, there was even greater reluctance on the part of employers to renew their industrial base.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the extent to which skills had been eroded before 1914 has probably been exaggerated, for many skilled workers managed to retain vestiges of autonomy and control even when new machinery was introduced.<sup>28</sup> This, therefore calls into question the thesis that the restructuring of the labour process created an

increasingly homogeneous category of worker and laid the basis for a heightened sense of class solidarity. There may have been non economic factors and changes in the wider society which radicalised the working class and cemented disparate sections,<sup>29</sup> however at the point of production, there were still divisions of authority, skill, status and earnings within the workforce. A typical response of employers was to reduce labour costs by introducing cheap labour and increasing the employment of apprentices, and often the response of the union movement was a sectional one.

There is some evidence that attempts were made to jettison sectionalist policies in favour of a more open policy. Even those unions which continued to deploy the old lines of defence, regulation of apprenticeship, craft control of machinery etc., experienced internal conflict over appropriate strategies with sections advocating a more progressive and enlightened approach.<sup>30</sup> There were also concerted efforts made to organise the previously unorganised and in this respect particular attention was paid to women workers, the mass of whom remained outside the trade union movement. In addition to working in conjunction with the WPPL and the WTUL, in 1905 Glasgow Trades Council formed a Committee for Organising Women at the behest of a Miss Pettigrew, a delegate from the Shop Assistants' Union.<sup>31</sup> However, the organisation of women, although encouraged, was relegated to a separate sphere and usually involved women who worked in occupations which were regarded as 'women's work' and where they represented no competition or threat to men's work.

The years leading up to the First World War were littered with disputes over preserving craft control against the encroachment of 'cheap' labour substitution. Craft workers organised not only to keep women out of their trades but to resist all unskilled cheap labour, male or female. However resistance to 'cheap' female labour was fired by ideological motives which further inhibited the development of a strategy which was less sectional and more likely to lead to a united working class response to the employers' offensive. Opposition to

female labour was usually couched in terms of economic self-interest, that it undercut men's wages and was a source of unfair competition.

In spite of the trade union movement's condemnation of the sectionalist practices of the 'old' unions, it wholeheartedly gave its support to the exclusionary policies pursued by most of the skilled trades which sought to eliminate women from their trades. The 14th Annual Congress of the STUC completely endorsed the attempts of the Scottish Typographical Association to exclude women and unanimously adopted the position :

"That this Congress condemns the pernicious system of employing females as cheap labour to compete against adult male labour and heartily sympathises with the Scottish Typographical Association in its efforts to eliminate it from their trade in Edinburgh, and pledge itself to do all that lies in its powers to support the Typographical Association." <sup>32</sup>

However the arguments that opposition to female labour stemmed from opposition to their economic exploitation and the ramifications this had throughout the labour market, were buttressed by references to woman's 'natural' role and the unsexing influence of work. In 1905 the STUC expressed unanimous opposition to female labour in mines and supported a motion from the miners which argued that :

"..... the conversation which went on at a pitbank was not fitted for the drawing room, as most of the gentlemen at the Congress would understand, neither was it fitted for the ears of females employed there, and it unsexed and degraded them. When female labour was abolished underground he thought the law should have applied to females above ground too, for the degradation which accompanied the employment of women upon the pitbanks was a scandal to any civilised community." <sup>33</sup>

This desire to protect women from work which was degrading and unsexing did not extend to occupations which employed only women and which were notoriously badly paid and exacting. Therefore trade unionists' support for protective legislation which excluded women from certain types of work or restricted their hours, smacked of hypocrisy and seem motivated more by self-interest than charitable concern for fellow workers. For

years the trade union movement had tolerated women's work in textiles, the sweating trades and domestic service with barely a murmur about the unsuitable nature of the work, but when threatened by competition from cheaper female labour in their own sphere they resorted to all sorts of denunciations of women's work based on its physical and moral unsuitability. However opposition on this basis was more than simply instrumental and stemmed from the deeply-rooted belief that woman's place was in the home and her chief concern was domestic duties. Despite the recomposition of the labour process throughout the century, the majority of skilled workers had managed to retain a definition of their trade as a skill which was based on either technical expertise or certain supervisory functions. In reality the 'skill' component of many jobs had been sufficiently eroded to enable many such trades to be learned on the job. There was, therefore, little objective basis for the label of 'skilled' as applied to many trades, and their continued recognition as 'skilled' work was in part a product of their success in insisting on this definition.

Undoubtedly the struggles around definitions of skill and the tenacity with which such definitions were defended, indicates its importance as a means of maintaining sectional advantages and of strengthening bargaining positions. However there was also an ideological dimension to the question of skill. Its primary function may have been as a bargaining device, but it also provided status and was a badge of superiority which differentiated 'skilled' workers from the mass of the unskilled. An important component of this status, was the opportunity it afforded for men to be the providers and to maintain their wife and children at home without them being forced to work for wages in factory, mine or mill. A non-working wife was a measure of respectability and one of the hallmarks of masculinity.

The encroachment of male unskilled labour threatened the material interests of skilled workers but female labour substitution posed an ideological threat. Women's work could be tolerated so long as it

remained within a separate sphere and did not encroach on the territory of men. In Scotland the rigid sex segregation of jobs meant that the categories of men's and women's work were distinct and therefore reinforced rather than undermined gender divisions. When women began to invade the territory of men, this posed a threat to male material interests and provoked a sectional response. However this sectionalism was overlaid and reinforced by an ideology of gender and sexual roles which was being challenged and undermined.

Therefore the strategy generally adopted by the trade union movement was not to fight for equal pay for women or to improve their wages, or establish a minimum wage, but to concentrate their energies on eliminating female competition from their trades. The tactics employed by different sections of skilled workers to female labour substitution usually varied in relation to the degree to which women had already gained a foothold in the trade. Those trades which had already experienced the introduction of women as an accompaniment to the introduction of new technology, tended to favour a more enlightened approach which involved extending some recognition to women workers. However those groups of workers who by means of formal and informal workshop organisation, still exercised a fair amount of control of the work process, advocated the most exclusionary policies.

The Scottish tailors by 1892 had decided to modify their policy, as their outright opposition to female labour had been ineffectual, and women were entering the trade in increasing numbers. A debate on what form official union policy should take produced a number of contributions which advocated organising the women and agitating for higher wages. A delegate from Edinburgh argued :

"..... we could not eradicate the evil, so far as the abolition of work is concerned, and in his opinion the only alternative was to make a determined effort to organise the females with a view to ultimately raising their wages to the same rate as men. He was aware of the difficulties, for example, their looking forward to getting married, which no doubt made them indifferent or apathetic in this matter." <sup>34</sup>

However the question was never finally resolved or incorporated into official union policy and the union tended to respond to the introduction of female labour on an ad hoc basis. The prevailing consensus by the end of the century seemed to favour the recognition of female labour so long at the standard rate was paid. However the basis of this policy was expediency and opportunism rather than recognition of the right of women to work for equal wages. A conference debate on a particular dispute involving the introduction of female labour, was concluded by unanimously agreeing to take the position that they did not object to female labour provided it was paid at the same rate as men's 'these were the only lines to fight this question, as no woman's work was the same value as a man's.' <sup>35</sup>

The bookbinding trades were experiencing the same pressures, particularly in Glasgow where the extension of female labour had taken place on a greater scale than elsewhere in Scotland, although it tended to be concentrated in the Glasgow firm of Collins and Co. The initial policy of the union to the introduction of women, had been to insist on the complete abolition of female labour. However as this became increasing impracticable, they resorted to a policy which sought to control female labour, restrict its numbers to those already in the trade and to ensure that as 'unskilled' women left, they would be replaced by skilled men. In October 1895, the Glasgow branch issued a memorial to the master binders and rules of Glasgow which set out fairly stringent limitations on women's work including the following demands :

"That females be restricted to quarter-bound flush work (stationary) all sizes.

In ruling that females be restricted to straight through work. Stripping and setting of pens to be done by journeymen or apprentices.

In Letterpress, that females be allowed to make all cases, except those in which leather is used .....

That all machinery used in connection with bookbinding be worked by journeymen or apprentices.

That in the event of females being preferred to do such forms of work as are hereby claimed to be the legitimate work of skilled tradesmen, the Trade Union conditions be strictly adhered to ....."<sup>36</sup>

In order to strengthen its resistance to female labour, the union discarded its sectional recruitment policy in relation to other men in the trade and adopted a more open policy which encouraged minor trades and the semi-skilled to enlist in the union. Amongst the inducements offered, was the lowering of subscription rates, and the promise to fight for parity for the non-union men. The central committee of the union encouraged the Glasgow men in their campaign and made further recommendations to facilitate the recruitment of non-society men and strengthen organisation, including the appointment of a special organiser for six weeks.<sup>37</sup>

Although the thrust of their arguments were directed against the cheapness of women's work, they also couched their opposition in terms which linked the defense of their skills to the defense of manly virtues. To encourage non-associated members of the trade to join the union, they appealed to a common conception of manhood which they saw as the unifying bond in the fight against female labour :

"..... We therefore ask you to join our ranks and help in the noble work of maintaining the rights of skilled workmen - which undoubtedly are your rights as well as ours. .... Our appeal is not to purely selfish considerations, but to nobler and more manly motives - by which we hope you will be activated in becoming members of our society." <sup>38</sup>

Their arguments were heavily overlaid by references to the immorality of cheap labour and they portrayed their battle as one of justice and righteousness struggling against the greed and selfishness of employers. Part of that struggle was to restore women to their rightful place and to reassert the role of man as breadwinner and provider in the face of attempts by employers to violate the prescribed roles of men and women and undermine the Christian institution of the family. They saw themselves as the guardians of a moral code which was endangered by the untrammelled and unregulated march of industrialisation and the unrestricted competition of capitalism. In a letter to the Editor of the Daily News concerning the lockout of about 100 men from the Glasgow firm of Collins, the General Secretary of the Bookbinders complained that :

"The substitution of female labour for men's work in factories and workshops is no advantage to women generally, though it may suit the women who displace the men, this is no advantage to the wives, daughters, sisters and mothers of the displaced workmen. If there is one branch of industry in which Christian principles should prevail, and from which 'sweating' should be entirely absent, it is surely that which has to do with the manufacture and production of Bibles. Christmastide suggests thoughts of Christ and those thoughts suggest a Divine Fatherhood with an idea of human brotherhood immeasurably above the sordid and selfish spirit now prevalent in the commercial world. A gluttonous desire to accumulate wealth now afflicts the country. It is destroying true patriotism and causing the word 'religion', even in Bible loving Scotland, to stink in the nostrils of thousand of working men ..... Before lauding the cheapness of Bibles, the officials of Bible societies should make sure that they have been produced by labour for which fair and proper wages have been paid." <sup>39</sup>

In another letter to the Glasgow Herald he charged the employers with violating Christian principles and the teachings of the Bible by stripping men of their role as breadwinners and making them dependent on the earnings of women.<sup>40</sup> The definition of men as breadwinners and women as dependants seems particularly inappropriate in this case as almost two thirds of the men were unmarried.<sup>41</sup> At the heart of their opposition to women working lay the deeply embedded belief that men had prior right to work and therefore the crux of their policy centred on sectionalist policies to exclude women, rather than fighting to establish a living wage for women and men. However by continuing to press for a family wage based on the earnings of a male provider, they contributed to the persistence of women's cheap labour and encouraged the substitution of men by women. Sectional exclusiveness was essentially a short-sighted policy which was successful when the balance of forces favoured labour. In the long-term it merely accentuated the problem and weakened the capacity of the union movement to mount a united attack on employers, by incorporating existing gender divisions which aggravated the fragmentation of the working class.

The fragility of the union movement's commitment to organising women is highlighted by the refusal of the Glasgow branch of the Typographical Society to continue contributing to the funds of the SCWT 'as this body are advising women to keep themselves in touch with the printing

trade as line and mono machines is work that might come within the scope of women's work.'<sup>42</sup> The Scottish Typographical Association had for years wrestled with the question of female labour and the Union's literature is crammed with articles, correspondence, debates and letters on the issue. There was a consensus within the union that the further introduction of female labour into the trade should be controlled. However, the areas where there was little or no female labour took a more hard-line approach to the question, advocating their complete exclusion. This was the policy of the Glasgow Society who proposed a resolution at a special delegate meeting on the female question, conferring power on the Typographical Association to expel every member employed in offices where women were employed.<sup>43</sup> Glasgow eventually withdrew the resolution but argued vehemently against an Aberdeen resolution that :

"Female labour be allowed in all offices; girls being reckoned in the ratio of apprentices to journeyman."<sup>44</sup>

A further area of contention was how to relate to the women who were already in the trade; should they encourage trade union organisation amongst them, and if so, should it be in a separate society or incorporation into the Association or should they refrain from organising and pursue a policy of non co-operation. The hardline approach was advocated by an Edinburgh printer ('JTY') who argued in a letter to the union journal against organising women as he felt this would be the thin end of the wedge and perpetuate what they were all agreed should be eliminated :

"..... And not only will the organising of females be of no benefit whatever to the Association but such organising would be fraught with the gravest possible danger to the trade as a whole. There is a women's movement coming along which will seize upon and use any organised body of women to serve its own immediate ends and purposes, and no matter upon which footing we may have organised female compositors; the organised female compositors will, in their own good time, then take their stand as to them seemeth best. And while I have every possible sympathy with the women's movement, I cannot agree that success to that movement lies in the way of open competition with men in the industrial field, but rather ..... should our, and their, energies be directed to endeavouring to emancipate and banish women from the industrial field entirely and forever."<sup>45</sup>

The more enlightened approach which argued in favour of organising the women, eventually won the day and in 1911, the Edinburgh Female Compositors' Society was established. However they had no vote on the policies of the STA and could not be represented at the union's delegate meetings.<sup>46</sup> However the progressive view was not an indication of a sincere commitment to the right of women to work and support for equal pay was simply a tactic employed to ensure that more women were not taken on. As one correspondent to the Scottish Typographical Journal noted :

"Those who advocate the organisation of the females in Edinburgh are strongly opposed to the 'recognition' of cheap labour anywhere. They do not urge organisations to perpetuate that condition of things. But ..... we do say that given no further introduction the men and women in the trade may well work for the mutual improvement of their conditions of labour. This position the women themselves understand and accept. If the Edinburgh men are called upon to resist the introduction of cheap labour (again) surely we will be ever so much stronger if we have the sympathy and support of the women presently employed."<sup>47</sup>

It is clear that whatever arguments were resorted to and whatever tactics were adopted, the craft unions exhibited a common strategy which was to eliminate female labour from their trades or to control it where it already existed. Given that this opposition was underpinned by an ideology of gender and a particular conception of the family, it is doubtful whether the unions of the unskilled would have exhibited an approach which was less influenced by sexist assumptions. The introduction of labour-saving machinery of cheaper grades of workers may not have been the central threat posed to the ranks of the unskilled, who had never organised on the basis of their technical indispensability, but when confronted with large scale redundancies or an over-stocked labour market, it is possible that they may have resorted to arguments which stressed that waged work was the 'natural' provenance of men and domestic responsibilities and home the 'natural' sphere of women.

The trade union movement may have begun to question the permanence of capitalism, but they did not question the sexual division of labour

and the economic dependence of women within the family. This may have stemmed from the nature of their challenge to capitalism which was essentially piecemeal and economistic. The literature of the union movement frequently refers to the inefficiency of capitalism and its failure to provide full employment, a decent standard of living, adequate housing etc. This was to be remedied by a transformation of the economic system so that co-operation and not competition governed economic relations. This economism was complemented by a political consciousness whose critique of capitalism was partial and narrowly conceived. Consequently many of the existing social arrangements of capitalism were never called into question but taken for granted and left untouched by a socialist critique. Social relations within the family were not only consigned to the realm of the private but they remained unquestioned. Socialism may have provided a vision of human brotherhood and co-operation but the meaning of the categories of masculinity and femininity were left intact.

The insistence of the union movement in pursuing sectionalist policies reinforced by acceptance of gender division, meant that in practice the trade union movement represented the interests of male workers. As women were only related to on the basis of their assumed dependence on men the interests of the many women who were unsupported and who needed to work, and the interests of the many women whose husband's earnings had to be supplemented were seriously ill-served. On an ideological level, trade union policies and practices confirmed the sexual division of labour in the wider society and the subordinate status of women in the labour market. Arguably the tenacity of the ideology of gender divisions inhibited the development of a unified working class consciousness and the possibility of united working class action, at a time when it was possible to conceive alternative strategies.

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## CHAPTER 7

### WOMEN AND TRADE UNIONISM 1890 - 1914

Between 1890 and 1914, more women were drawn into the formal structures of trade unionism, due largely to the formation of trade unions aimed specifically at the recruitment of women. However it was still the case that the majority of women workers remained outside the ranks of the trade union movement and the perennial problem was sustaining union organisation amongst women once it had been implanted. Although there is little evidence that women workers displayed hostility towards these organisations, the fact that they remained outside the fold of trade unions which were provided specifically for them requires some explanation, particularly when women did not display any reluctance to engage in collective action to achieve their demands.

Although the trade union organisation of women fluctuated between 1890 and the first World War, one enduring feature was the continued existence of the Women's Protection and Provident League which was the organisational residue of the years of heightened industrial conflict and trade union growth. The inaugural meeting of the League in 1888 was sponsored by Glasgow Trades Council and supported by leading academics and clergy<sup>1</sup> and till the end of the century it was the focus of women's trade unionism in the West of Scotland.

Paradoxically at a time when the aspirations of the labour movement were directed at independent working class representation, the organisation of women workers was under the tutelage of middle class philanthropists, many of whom were implacably opposed to the political aspirations of organised labour. Despite the changes in middle class thinking on social reform, there were clearly differences between its philosophy and that of labour, which made it unlikely that the two groups would embark on sustained co-operative action. However the one sphere where the two groups maintained a dialogue, took concerted action and indeed where labour was happy to surrender the initiative to philanthropic elements, was in the trade union organisation of women. The view of women as helpless creatures who were suitable objects for charitable enterprise, was shared by those sections of the middle class who were interested in social policy and by organised labour. The Reverend A C Laughlin who was Organisation Secretary of the Scottish Council

for Women's Trades wrote in its annual report :

"Few realise until they try to remove them the grave and disheartening difficulties which beset any attempt to organise women's labour. To begin with, the idea of uniting as a precaution of mutual defence is a novel one to the woman worker and there are few if any leading spirits amongst them who will agitate them to combine for a reformation of the serious abuses so often characteristic of their occupations." <sup>2</sup>

It was, therefore, a common conception of women workers as weak and powerless which provided the basis for co-operation between two groups who were in other ways pursuing different and sometimes antagonistic goals.

Of the constellation of voluntary and philanthropic groups which existed in the 1890's, the Women's Protection and Provident League and the Scottish Council for Women's Trades occupied a central position. Not only were they the focal point of issues specifically concerned with women, but as they drew their membership from such diverse sources as trades councils, the Churches, academic institutions and socialist parties, they provided virtually the sole terrain for the development of links with a number of organisations which were otherwise discrete.

The Women's Protection and Provident League was based in Glasgow and its activities centred on the City and its outlying areas, although there are examples of its influence spreading to other areas, in the west and east coasts and to Edinburgh, where a tailloresses' branch and a typographical branch were established. The leading positions of the League and its governing organs were dominated almost exclusively by individuals from other organisations rather than by working women themselves. Although the trade unions played an active part in the establishment of the League and encouraged its work, it was essentially a mixed class organisation with the middle and upper classes dominating. Professor William Smart of Glasgow University was for a time honorary President as was A J Hunter, a Glasgow Baillie, and the President of its Executive Committee was Mr George Galloway, President of Glasgow Trades Council. <sup>3</sup>

The structure of the League did superficially resemble the arrangement of orthodox trade unions, in that the basic unit of organisation was the branch. Each branch was composed of women who worked in a particular trade and it was the members of the branch who elected the President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and Branch Committee. In addition provision

was made for a Central Branch, a miscellaneous grouping of those whose trade was not organised into a branch.<sup>4</sup> At this point the organisation of the League departs significantly from the established pattern sanctioned by the official trade union movement. The rules of the WPPL included the institution of a League Council 'consisting of persons taking an interest in the objects of the League'.<sup>5</sup> The functions of the Council were to assist in the work of organisation and to act as a Board of Arbitration and Appeal when invited to do so by the Executive Committee, the governing body of the League. The Council were also entitled to have four members on the Executive Committee which made most of the central decisions affecting the League including, whether or not to negotiate over the regulation of wages, hours and conditions. Decision-making was concentrated in the upper echelons of the League, thus heavily weighting the balance of power in favour of the middle classes who predominated at that level.

The primary function of the League was to encourage the trade union organisation of women, but by the turn of the century its emphasis focused more on organising women to secure legislative change in order to improve their conditions. The Reports of the League and Glasgow Trades Council indicate that its success in organising women workers followed a pattern of rapid fluctuations with years when trade organisation was virtually moribund. The peak year for membership appears to have been 1893 - 94 when the League had 11 members affiliated to Glasgow Trades Council<sup>6</sup> including delegates from branches of tailoresses, handkerchief hemmers, tobacco pipe finishers and weavers and winders. Thereafter the WPPL maintained a precarious existence and between 1885 and 1897 could not muster any delegates to the trades council from its branches. There was a modest revival in 1897 both in membership and activity but by the beginning of the century momentum had petered out and the annual reports of Glasgow Trades Council fail to mention any affiliations from the League.

The evanescence of the organising work of the WPPL did not mean that the League ceased to exist but merely that it shifted the emphasis of its work to agitation for legislation and that working women formed an ever decreasing proportion of its membership. Given the composition of the WPPL it is not surprising that its philosophy was governed more by philanthropic concern than aggressive trade unionism. Its sister

organisation in England recognised this orientation and was inclined to regard the work of the Glasgow Women's Protection and Provident League as akin to a Friendly Society rather than a bonafide trade union.<sup>7</sup> The decline of its trade union work might therefore be viewed as a natural progression for an organisation which was never fully committed to the principles of trade unionism and the independent activity of working women but whose involvement in that sphere was interpreted as an adjunct of philanthropic endeavour.

One offshoot of the League's trade union work was the formation in 1893 of the National Federal Council for Women's Trades (NFCWT), a federation of labour bodies, with a collective membership of 101,200 consisting of 16 trades councils and 35 other societies, including men's unions in trades employing women, women's unions and societies representing women's industrial and social interests. The function of the NFCWT was to publicise women's issues, to coordinate and liaise with any groups who professed an interest in the work of the federation and whose support and expertise could be drawn on to give muscle to their campaigns. However perhaps the most significant achievement of the League was the formation in 1894 of the Glasgow Council for Women's Trades, which in 1900 was renamed the Scottish Council for Women's Trades. The SCWT was the organisational expression of the League's policy of concentrating on legislative action and propaganda work. The WPPL the NFCWT and the SCWT were the central bodies in a network of organisations which were characterised by cross representation, formal affiliations and overlapping personnel.

Although the three bodies were organisationally distinct, they did work in conjunction with each other and drew on the same pool of people for their membership, Margaret Irwin who had been organising secretary of the WPPL resigned her post to take up the secretaryship of the SCWT, although she still maintained an active presence in the League and was a member of its Executive Council. Officials of the League were usually members of the various committees of the SCWT, whilst the Council was represented on the Central Executive of the NFCWT.<sup>8</sup> These formal affiliations were buttressed by the overlapping membership of the three organisations, most of whom were drawn from the Church, academic institutions and a variety of voluntary organisations. This dense and expansive network of cross representations was augmented by their affiliation to a number of social, political, educational and philanthropic bodies and mutual representation

on their respective committees. The SCWT made a concerted effort to enlist the support of what they termed 'other sections of the women's movement', in their legislative campaigns and maintained a policy of liberal co-operation with the burgeoning charity and voluntary organisations of the period.<sup>9</sup> The seventh annual report of the Council noted with satisfaction that a number of its members sat on School Boards, Parochial Boards, the Committee of the Glasgow Union of Women Workers, The Charity Organisation Society, The Association for the return of Women to Local Boards etc. They were particularly self-congratulatory about their connection with the Glasgow Union of Women Workers which was essentially a pressure group of middle class women, directed at extending women's influence and employment in public life. This was largely because the affiliated societies of the G.U.W.W. included practically all the associations in Glasgow engaged in social and philanthropic work for women and the Council would be able to draw on 'the sympathy and influence of many women who have not hitherto had this subject brought so directly before them'.<sup>10</sup>

The SCWT was spawned by the League Council's decision that the scope of its work should be extended and developed 'on lines that would include other means for remedying the difficulties and grievances of working women in addition to that the trade organisation'.<sup>11</sup> The SCWT became the fulcrum of the organisations devoted to improving the industrial conditions of women workers, concentrating on legislative solutions whilst the W.P.P.L functioned as its organising wing. Apart from the representatives from labour organisations, the Council's membership was avowedly middle class and included a smattering of titled individuals. The Countess of Aberdeen was honorary president and the membership of over 100 in 1904 included a number of academics notably Professor Edward Caird, Master of Balliol, William Smart of Glasgow and a cluster of Churchmen.<sup>12</sup>

The structure of the SCWT reflected its priorities being divided into three departments: a Department of Enquiry which was responsible for investigating and reporting on the conditions of employment among women and children; a Department of Organisation, to promote the formation of Women's Trade Unions;

and a Parliamentary Bills Committee to promote legislation in the interests of women and children. The thrust of the Council work revolved around its investigative department which produced a spate of pamphlets and reports of women's work and conditions. These included: a report on the problem of Home Work among Women; an inquiry into the conditions of Employment amongst Charwomen, Washerwomen and Cooks and a report on Women's work in the tailoring, printing and textile trades. The purpose of the reports which were based on the careful and systematic investigations of Margaret Irwin, was to build a cast iron case for legislative action to regulate women's wages, hours and conditions. The statistics gathering and investigative work were supplemented by numerous delegations to Westminster and by despatching representatives to various committees and trade union conferences, to muster support for their campaigns.

The SCWT worked in closest harmony with the labour movement over the anti-sweating campaign but it never wavered from its policy of engaging the support of the wealthy and philanthropic. One of the Council's early ventures was to try to get seats for shop assistants because of 'the terrible strain imposed on delicate women and girls of standing on their feet throughout the long, weary hours they were on duty'. It was considered that the most effective way of achieving this was if an appeal to leading shopkeepers was signed and issued by influential women who were large buyers. The Council reported that the matter was

"very heartily taken up by Lady Helen Munro Ferguson who sent out very widely among leading firms a circular - signed by her, and by the Duchess of Montrose, and other well known ladies." <sup>13</sup>

The organising work of the Council had initially been conceived as assisting the trade union work of the W.P.P.L., but gradually the latter's functions were incorporated and modified into the SCWT. This arose out of the failure of the League to make substantial headway in organising working women and the decision that their efforts should be directed at obtaining legislative change to improve industrial conditions. The Council still continued to liaise with trade unions and trades councils and frequently addressed meetings called by unions to organise women. Between 1898 and 1899 Margaret Irwin paid three visits to Edinburgh to address meetings at the invitation of the Typographical Association and other societies and as a result of her efforts, a union branch of women engaged in the

printing trades was formed. In Dunfermline she assisted in the formation of an affiliated branch of the Scottish Mill and Factory Workers' Federal Union, whilst she acted in an informal advisory capacity to the Alva and Tillicoultry Textile Unions.<sup>14</sup>

On a number of occasions the Council intervened in disputes involving women to try to hasten a settlement. During a strike to the pipe-finishers' branch of the League, a deputation from the Committee visited three of the leading employers and succeeded in obtaining an increase for the women. Usually the prime concern of the Council was to bring the dispute to a close and then perhaps try to resolve the grievance. The Council rarely pursued an aggressive or militant policy and never countenanced using the strike as a weapon. In the pipe-finishers' dispute, the deputation emphasised that their success had been in ending the dispute and the rise in wages was viewed as a bonus which rounded off the success of their efforts.

The SCWT did not challenge traditional ideas of separate sexual spheres nor did they wish to violate women's prescribed roles. It was accepted that women occupied a separate sphere which was closely identified with the home and the family, and that women's involvement in industry was an inevitable and undesirable consequence of the low wages of men. When Margaret Irwin addressed a conference of tailors, she prefaced her remarks by stating that women would not be in the trade if men were paid what they should be but since they were, the men should make the best of the situation and organise the women.<sup>15</sup> Although there were references to the objective conditions which inhibited trade union organisation amongst women, there was a general acceptance of the idea that women were unorganised because they were docile and apathetic. The Reverend Laughlin, the organising Secretary of the Council, maintained that one of the major obstacles to organising women was that they worked for 'pin money' and 'under these circumstances the amount earned is not of prime importance'.<sup>16</sup> In his view an additional impediment was the fact that most women workers were marking time until they embarked on their true vocation of marriage. The consequence of these factors had the effect of inducing women:

"to dumbly acquiesce in the prevailing state of things - inadequate pay, unduly long hours, and insanitary surroundings and to refuse, or at all events look askance, at efforts to agitate (which the very fact of joining a union implies) for their removal, and the general elevation and upraising of her class."<sup>17</sup>

Whatever explanations were afforded, the confluence of opinion was that women themselves were responsible for both their state of wages and the weakness of their trade union organisation. At a public meeting in Glasgow held to extend trade unionism amongst women, the contributions of Lady Mary Murray, Professor G A Smith and Robert Smillie of the Miners Federation, all emphasised the fact that 'the defective organisation of the women workers is largely due to their own apathy'.<sup>18</sup>

Women were very much regarded as the weak link in the chain of labour organisation, because they allowed themselves to be used as cheap labour. There was obviously genuine concern to improve the conditions of women workers, although this was often allied to a desire to improve their moral, social and intellectual condition. One cannot underestimate the efforts of individuals like Margaret Irwin who devoted a lifetime to attempts to improve the lot of working women. However the SCWT did not challenge long-standing assumptions about the nature of the sexual division of labour nor connect 'the traditionally low-wage of women' to her domestic role. Although it was acknowledged that women's domestic burdens made it more difficult for her to attend meetings to fulfill the minimum requirements of trade union membership, the pattern of her exploitation in the workplace, and the assumption that women should earn less, was never seen as conditioned by her role in the family. Women were still identified primarily in relation to the family, even when they were engaged in full-time labour and the prevailing ideology of the prior importance of men's work was never questioned. Therefore the SCWT tended to view the 'problem' of women workers from the perspective of the men and to advocate solutions which confirmed women's inferior position in the labour market. Their concern was directed as much at protecting men's wages and work from 'the disorganised competition' of women, as it was to strive to improve the conditions of women. The question of organising women produced a variety of proposals which ranged from establishing separate unions for them, to ones which advocated incorporating them into the men's unions as either equal or subordinate members. Whatever scheme was projected, cognisance was always taken of the prior rights of the male workers and was underpinned by what would best serve their interests.

The spokeswoman and the driving force behind the SCWT was Margaret Irwin who was the organising secretary of the Council throughout its 44 years

of existence. She was the only daughter of Captain James Irwin of Broughty Ferry and was educated at Queen Margaret College Glasgow, and spent some time as a student of Glasgow School of Art and St Andrews University where she obtained a degree.<sup>19</sup> Despite her close ties with labour organisations and her devotion to the cause of women workers, she never really broke with the traditions of middle class philanthropy. Her political philosophy was more Liberal than Labour and she did not display any great enthusiasm for the trade union movement's goal of independent labour representation. In industrial affairs she was equally moderate, favouring conciliation and compromise and regarding strikes as 'uncivilised'. Nevertheless she maintained a cordial relationship with both the Glasgow Trades Council and the Scottish Trades Union Congress. In 1897 the STUC altered a Congress Standing Order to enable the SCWT and the WPPL to send delegates to the Congress<sup>20</sup> and certainly until the First World War, Margaret Irwin was usually among the Council's delegation. She was unanimously elected secretary of the first STUC and at the second congress she was presented with a silver tea service in recognition of her work for the Scottish labour movement.<sup>21</sup> Glasgow Trades Council protested indignantly to the government when they claimed that Margaret Irwin's report as Assistant Commissioner to the Royal Commission of Labour was 'edited' and 'partly suppressed' by Miss Orme.<sup>22</sup> This loyalty to Margaret Irwin is particularly pertinent when her appointment as Assistant Commissioner was regarded with disfavour by some sections of the British Labour movement.

Relations between the STUC and Margaret Irwin were not always cordial and there were areas where her lack of commitment to class politics created tensions and rifts between her and the union movement. Although she was a member of the STUC's Parliamentary Committee, and for a time its secretary, she was criticised for her lack of commitment to the 8 hour Bill and for her failure, in her annual report, to give prominence to the Committee's efforts to promote independent labour representation.<sup>23</sup> She was an active campaigner for women's suffrage and a firm believer that women should receive the vote on the same basis as men. This commitment was reinforced by her belief that legislation was necessary to remove the grievances of women workers and therefore women should have some say in the making of

the laws. Although at their first Congress, the STUC gave support to a motion proposed by Margaret Irwin for equal franchise for women, they reversed this decision at their next conference in favour of universal adult suffrage. Their argument was that since the franchise was based on a property qualification, the vote of the upper and middle classes would be strengthened if it was extended to women on the same limited basis. In opposing the motion for universal adult suffrage, Margaret Irwin argued that it was a tactical question :

"They were all in favour of a large extension of the suffrage, but they did not think that the best way of bringing that about was to introduce the thick end of the wedge first ....."<sup>24</sup>

However there can be no doubt that Margaret Irwin's priorities were dictated more by her commitment to women than by loyalty to any class based organisation. She was certainly sympathetic to the general principles of trade unionism and more particularly to championing the cause of women workers, but this concern was underpinned by a philanthropic philosophy which denied the fundamental conflict between capital and labour. She saw no contradiction in arguing that middle class women should be enfranchised to allow them 'a direct vote in the making of the laws which so seriously affects them.....'<sup>25</sup> when the laws she was referring to related to industrial conditions of working class women. In time the philanthropic strain in her philosophy eclipsed her commitment to working through the institutions of labour and the mainspring of her life's work, the desire to improve the conditions of women, was expressed through works of charity. She was instrumental in securing reform for the improvement of housing conditions of women workers in potato lifting, fish curing and fruit gathering and at Blairgowrie in Perthshire, she ran a fruit farm where women could work 'under ideal conditions'.<sup>26</sup>

Although the SCWT was a good deal more than Margaret Irwin, she embodied the mentality and philosophy of the organisation. The council had been drawn into cooperation with the organisations of labour as a means of improving the moral and intellectual life of women workers, so that they would be better equipped to help themselves instead of relying on others. Trade unions were valued for their 'civilising' functions and for the contribution they could make, not only to moral elevation but to promoting the efficiency of labour. The retreat into charity work was an inevitable

result of the increasing polarisation between labour and the progressive middle classes. The industrial, political and social conflicts of the pre-war years brought to the surface the fundamental differences between the aspirations of the Council and the labour movement. As it became evident that the classes could not be reconciled by the mediation of sympathetic middle class philanthropists, the SCWT, acknowledging its irrelevance in this scenario, elected to devote its energies to philanthropic work outwith the organisations and institutions of the labour movement.

The activities of the Glasgow Women's Protection and Provident League and the SCWT, were paralled by the efforts of the London based Women's Trade Union League to organise in Scotland. The WTUL, like the Glasgow WPPL, was an offshoot of the English WPPL which had been founded by Emma Paterson in 1874.<sup>27</sup> The change of name in 1891 coincided with a shift in policy as the new WTUL shed its provident aspect and concentrated more on trade union organisation. Clementina Black was appointed Secretary of the WTUL and Lady Dilke the chairwoman, and a scheme was devised whereby any union which admitted women could affiliate to the League for ½d per year per female member. Although the WTUL and the Glasgow WPPL never came into direct conflict, they tended to have different activities and it was fairly clear that the English-based League saw itself fulfilling a different role from the Glasgow organisation. The WTUL was anxious to be accepted as a bona fide trade union rather than an organisation of middle class philanthropists. At a meeting in Glasgow in 1892, held under the auspices of Glasgow Trades Council, Lady Dilke made it clear that the purpose of organising women was to enable them to be self-supporting so that they could be free from middle class patronage, and improve their conditions by independent activity. She urged them to do away :

"..... with those ladies and gentlemen who wanted to manage them for their own ends. Use these if found useful, take their money and use them as servants..... Put these people on one side. Let the women take care. They were quite as independent as the men....." <sup>28</sup>

This was perhaps intended as a sideways swipe at the Glasgow WPPL which was holding a meeting that same evening in another hall in Glasgow. Certainly a proposal that the two meetings should combine fell through

and the comment of the Women's Trade Union Review, the official organ of the WTUL was that this was to be expected 'seeing the considerable difference existing in the character and the work of the two societies'.<sup>29</sup> If there was an absence of co-operation and joint activity between the two organisations, there was also little animosity. Amongst those on the platform of the Glasgow WPPL meeting was Clementina Blac, the secretary of the WTUL. Although the WTUL had its fair share of middle class activists they were individuals who were more committed to the labour movement and less influenced by the mentality of charity organisations, than the members of the Glasgow League. Therefore the WTUL would be reluctant to associate with an organisation so reliant on middle class patronage, lest they be tarred with the same brush and lose credibility with the trade union movement.

Until the early years of the 20th century, the WTUL combined the goal of trade union organisation of women with attempts to secure legislative reform. In the latter sphere it claimed to be instrumental in obtaining the 1895 Factory Act, the 1904 Regulation of Conditions of Home Work Act and the Shop Hours Act of 1906.<sup>30</sup> However it devoted much time and energy to trade organisation and it is a mark of its success and tenacity that a London based organisation was able to penetrate not only beyond the border, but beyond the large urban centres, and establish unions in small towns and country districts.

Although in 1892 the League claimed that the bulk of its work outside the provinces was carried on in Lancashire, Yorkshire and the West of Scotland, by 1897 it had built up a base throughout Scotland and could claim affiliated unions in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Ayr, Paisley and many East Coast towns. Textile unions figured prominently in the League's membership and amongst those affiliated were some 2,000 to 3,000 women weavers in the border burghs who belonged to a number of separate organisations.<sup>31</sup> The League also claimed to have assisted in the formation of the Tillicoultry Textile Workers' Union and the Carnoustie Factory Workers' Union. However organisation was by no means confined to textile workers and by the beginning of the 20th century, the League's membership, reflecting the widening sphere of women's employment, included women in the service and white collar sector. By 1903 the League could boast affiliated unions of

shop assistants , Warehousemen and Clerks in Aberdeen<sup>32</sup> and Edinburgh and in 1906 an organising tour resulted in the formation of branches of the National Association of Telephone Operators in Dundee and branches of the National Society of Telephone Employees in Aberdeen and Glasgow.<sup>33</sup>

The WTUL was able to boost its membership by dint of vigorous organising campaigns, which included sending speakers and organisers throughout the country. The 1891 autumn tour of the League<sup>34</sup> visited Kirriemuir, Forfar, Aberdeen, Alva, Kirkcaldy and Edinburgh and the Secretary's tour in 1906 involved a week's organising in Brechin as well as addressing meetings of most of the affiliated unions in Scotland.

In spite of these efforts, it was still the case that the vast majority of women workers were untouched by trade union organisation and although the League was often able to set up separate Women's societies, they rarely lasted any length of time. The stated aim of the WTUL was to free working women from the yoke of middle class patronage and to encourage their independent organisation. However the unintended outcome of their policies was to substitute the work of professional organisers for the activity of rank and file women. Strikes were certainly given more support than organisations such as the Glasgow WPPL had been willing to give. But they were rarely celebrated as examples of class solidarity or class action but rather viewed as potential recruiting grounds for the League's societies. It is obviously desirable that any expression of discontent or raw anger be given direction and deposit some organisational residue, but the League seemed to regard implantation of the organisation as primary. They were likely to take over the aims of a dispute and it was usually League organisers who negotiated with employers and attempted to secure settlements. Women were often chastised for going on strike too soon or too often and for placing the organisation in jeopardy. If trade union organisation was deemed not to be robust enough to cope with a confrontation, strikers were counselled to return to work rather than to mobilise more support and attempt to galvanise other workers and workplaces into action. It therefore was not surprising that the League were usually unable to sustain any union organisation which emerged from these struggles and that once a League organiser left a locality, there followed a rapid disintegration of the union.

Much of the League's dynamism was provided by Mary MacArthur and there is little doubt that WTUL organisation was given a fillip with her appointment as Secretary in 1903. She was born in 1880 in Glasgow, the daughter of a prosperous draper and by the time she was fifteen, the family had settled in Ayr.<sup>35</sup> She worked for a time as a book-keeper in her father's firm and her initial encounter with trade unionism was the product of accident rather than design or any deep seated commitment to its principles. The local Conservative newspaper asked her to write a satirical piece on a meeting organised by the Shop Assistant's Union, but the scheme backfired and she returned from the meeting totally converted to the aims of the trade union movement, as she later commented :

"I went to a meeting at Ayr to write a skit on the proceedings. Going to scoff , I remained to pray. I became impressed with the truth and meaning of the Labour movement." <sup>36</sup>

By 1902 she had been elected president of the Scottish National District Council of the Shop Assistant's Union.<sup>37</sup> As a result of the close links the Scottish group had with various socialist societies her trade unionism became fleshed out with socialist politics and she, in time, joined the Independent Labour Party. It is a measure of the WTUL's limited influence in Scotland that Mary MacArthur was unfamiliar with its work when Margaret Bondfield of the Shop Assistants' Union proposed her for the post of League Secretary in London.

Her enthusiasm and organisational skills injected the League with new vitality. She proclaimed that it was necessary to seek women workers out rather than to expect them to come to the League. Although the WTUL had a policy of organising public meetings, speaking tours, etc., under Mary MacArthur's secretaryship this was supplemented by a more informal approach and factory gate meetings, distributing leaflets and handbills became regular features of the League's activities. In an address to the American Women's Trade Union League, she explained the process of organising for a meeting :

"Bills were printed, asking such elementary questions as: "Do you want higher wages?" "Do you want shorter hours?" followed by several big query marks, and then we say, "If you want these things, come to our meeting." We had a number of tickets printed, "Admit bearer to social evening and conference at such and such a hall. Complimentary ticket, Reserved." At the end, "No seats reserved after 7.45."

With these bills and tickets we go to the factories. We are careful beforehand to find out something about the conditions at the factory. It is no good talking generalities to a number of girls who are rushing out of factories to get meals. It is not good talking about human welfare or the future of the race. They will not understand. You have got to talk about why they should be fined twopence or threepence a week or why the employer does not pay for the thread. These small things interest them more. We find out the special grievance in the factory; we get a chair, and somebody gets up on it and two people stand around with the complementary tickets. You begin: "Why are you paying for whalebone?". "Do you think you ought to have thread found?". Of course they are interested. Then we talk. We don't open with long speeches but short and to the point. We tell something briefly, about conditions in the well organised trades, and say: "if you want to hear more, come to the meeting to-morrow night. It will be very crowded, but we've got a few tickets. If you come early you will get a seat." Of course there is a frightful scramble for the tickets....." 38

This kind of effort obviously stimulated trade union organisation amongst women but the League encountered a perennial problem which was once having recruited the women, holding on to them. Although Mary MacArthur recognised the necessity of an organisation directed specifically at women workers, she regarded it as a temporary expedient which stemmed from their organisational weakness. Her frequently quoted observation was that :

"Women are badly paid and badly treated because they are not organised 39 and they are not organised because they are badly paid and badly treated."

To her women workers were the same as men, with the same problems, the same grievance and they required to same solutions for resolving them. If there was a difference between men and women, it was quantitative rather than qualitative. Women were more difficult to organise because they were badly paid. The solution therefore was to raise their wages. The catch was, that this required organisation. She never acknowledged that women's experience work was qualitatively different from men's or that it required a special approach which took account of the fact that the sexual division of labour in society patterned and condition both women's experience of waged labour and their response to exploitation.

Campaigning around women's low pay and bad conditions was obviously the central issue, but by diagnosing it as the root of the problem, rather than as a manifestation of the wider problem of women's inequality in society generally, the League never tackled the other issues which related to women and which

gave to their working life its special characteristics.

Frustration over the League's inability to sustain union organisation amongst women led to the formation in 1906 of the National Federation of Women Workers. The purpose of the NFWW was to provide national organisation open to all women belonging to unorganised trades who were not admitted to the appropriate union in their trade. It was felt that by affiliation to a central body the women would gain a sense of solidarity and overcome the demoralisation and isolation which characterised their trades. The WTUL and the NFWW maintained close links, in that Mary MacArthur remained secretary of the WTUL whilst assuming the position of President in the new NFWW, and the league was also represented on its Executive. By the end of 1906 the NFWW claimed to have over 2,000 members and 17 branches in Scotland and England. Women were always urged to join a men's trade union where it existed and when they were eligible and affiliation to the NFWW was advocated only when there was no other alternative. The Federation was affiliated to both the Trade Union Congress and the General Federation of Trade Unionists and by 1908 it claimed to have two million trade unionists behind it and funds of over  $\frac{1}{4}$  million pounds.<sup>40</sup>

The Federation was not only more firmly based in the working class movement than any other organisation which was involved with organising women, it spoke in the language of aggressive trade unionism and appealed to a sense of class solidarity. The benefits of trade unionism were not couched in terms of moral or spiritual uplift but in terms of realising the collective strength of the working class. Through the columns of the Woman Worker, the Federation's newspaper, Mary MacArthur appealed to women to join trade unions :

"..... Organisation gives courage and a new strength. By means of organisation the dumb can speak, the public can be aroused, the employers approached, factory laws enforced. Parliament compelled to move and freedom slowly won."<sup>41</sup>

Unequivocal support was given to the demand for equal pay and as always this was guided by a concern to promote working class unity. Trade unionism was seen as a vehicle for creating co-operation between men and

women workers by cutting across and transcending sex differences. In appealing to male trade unionists to support equal pay it was argued that failure to do so weakened class solidarity and undermined the potential strength of the whole labour movement:

"No justice can be imposed upon women that will not in the end re-act disastrously upon men. Take one instance. Woman was never welcomed in the industrial arena. The man wage-earner watched her entrance sullenly. He resented her intrusion into spheres of work and activity in which he had previously held unchallenged sway. He tried to close the door of his trade in her face. And sometimes succeeded. He did close the door of his Trades Union. Women got no encouragement no help to make a stand for equal wages for equal work. What happened?.....They became unwittingly the instruments whereby the wages of men were lowered. The problem of their competition grew more and more acute, until at last the men recognised the folly of this Mrs Partington policy. Now every intelligent Trades Unionist is glad to help in the work of organising women workers." <sup>42</sup>

Although there was sympathy with the aim of the suffragettes to extend the franchise the Woman Worker chose to align itself with the labour movement and support universal adult suffrage. In 1909 Mary MacArthur became Honorary Secretary of a new society, The People's Suffrage Federation which took the view that 'If the House of Commons is to represent the people truly, every man and woman must have the vote independent of property and tenancy'.<sup>43</sup> Again this policy stemmed from a commitment to class politics rather than feminism but it was also a reflection of Mary MacArthur's philosophy that to treat women differently or to identifying them as having special needs, would undermine the solidarity between men and women which she was so anxious to promote. As her biographer claimed, 'She had far too sure a belief in the comradeship of the sexes to be a feminist'.<sup>44</sup>

In the years leading up to the First World War, the Federation became the focus of women's unionism in Scotland. The Glasgow WPPL and the SCWT had more or less ditched their organisational activities and sunk their efforts into obtaining legislative reform, which left the field open for the WTUL and the Federation to work in tandem. In Glasgow in 1910, the Federation had one branch of 250 and another of cardboard box makers with a membership of 200, and branches of the League or the Federation had also been set up in Paisley, Johnstone, Dundee and Hawick. The period of 'labour unrest' between 1910 and 1914 which resulted in an upsurge of trade union

growth, was reflected in the membership of the Federation and the League. By 1911 the NFWW had appointed Kate McLean and Agnes Brown as full-time officials of the union in Scotland,<sup>45</sup> and for the first time the Federation had a delegation to the STUC's conference in Dundee.<sup>46</sup> Branches of the Federation continued to sprout up during the aftermath of a dispute and in this way branches were established in Neilston and Kilbirnie. Organising campaigns were still a feature of the Federation's work and eight separate branches with a total membership of 1,500 were established in Alexandria in 1911, after a vigorous recruiting drive. They were joined by branches in Dalry, Kilwinning, Airdrie and Larkhall, which were formed in the same year.<sup>47</sup>

Undoubtedly one of the strongest and most successful of the League's affiliated trade unions, not only in Scotland but in Great Britain, was the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers' Union. The union which had been set up in the wake of a dispute in 1906, was very much the product of the efforts of Mary MacArthur<sup>48</sup> and she was to continue to play an influential role in its affairs. Although women formed about 3/4 of the union membership and were in a 3:1 majority on the Committee, the union was very much under the tutelage of John Sime who was President until December 1907 and then organiser and secretary thereafter. The manner of his appointment as organiser highlights the close links between the unions and the WTUL, and more particularly, the influence which Mary MacArthur exercised over the Committee. Sime had been dismissed from his position at Grimmonds Works and at a special committee meeting, called by Mary MacArthur, she proposed that he receive the wages he had earned at Grimmonds. She also offered to be present at the General Meeting to present the case to the members.<sup>49</sup>

In its formative years, Mary MacArthur played a central role in organising the union and was constantly in correspondence with its officials throughout the period. In December 1906 a Committee meeting was held at her request where she dispensed a wealth of advice on how to recruit members. She proposed a bonus scheme for collectors and that they would engage the service of Mrs Marland Brodie of the WTUL, for organisational purposes.<sup>50</sup> Although the Jute and Flax Workers Union did not affiliate to the League until May 1907, Mary MacArthur frequently addressed their public meetings and on occasions the General Meeting of the union. During a strike at Gilroy's

in 1907, she was instrumental in setting up a strike committee and persuading the union to donate some of its funds, although the majority of the strikers were not in the union. She also led a procession of the strikers in a march to Gilfillan Hall where she addressed them and urged them to join the union.<sup>51</sup>

Unlike the rival Dundee Mill and Factory Operatives Union which was led by the Reverend Henry Williamson, the Jute and Flax workers were represented on the Trades Council by four delegates and maintained an active and interested presence in Trades Council affairs. There is little evidence of a high degree of political content at any level of the union's organisation, although it did affiliate to the Labour Representation Committee in 1907. In 1913 at a General Meeting, the Committee was charged by a Mr Hugh Clark with being a clique of the Labour Representation Committee and the Independent Labour Party.<sup>52</sup> In its early years, the union gave its support to some of the activities of the WSPU, without committing itself to support for its aims. However it eventually adopted a position in favour of adult suffrage rather than equal franchise for women.

The constant references to the state of trade and the union's concern to be seen as responsible and moderate, indicates that in many respects, the Jute and Flax Workers' Union subscribed to the same philosophy as the established unions of skilled workers. The union rarely initiated strikes and its role in a dispute was usually restricted to that of an intermediary or a dispenser of benefits. It did, however, contribute to the successful prosecution of strikes by giving financial assistance, in the form of a reduced rate of benefit, to those non union members who undertook to join when the dispute was over.

The union played a major role in at least two important disputes, in that its intervention influenced the manner in which the dispute was resolved. The most significant of these disputes was a seven week long struggle in 1909 by piecers and shifters at Victoria Spinning Company, where the employers had decided to dispense with a squad of 13 workers, distribute their work amongst the remaining squads, whose wages would be increased by 1/- per week. Although only 20 of the 300 or 400 strikers were union members, the Committee decided to pay 5/- per week benefit to non members

who joined, and as well as this financial assistance, they accompanied the strikers' deputations to management. Despite repeated compromises proposed by the employer, the women adamantly rejected them and refused to return to work. The union's line was to campaign for the dispute to be referred to arbitration and they regarded it as a great victory when they managed to persuade the women, in the face of opposition, to resume work once the employers had agreed to arbitration.<sup>53</sup>

As the Jute and Flax workers' Union was in its infancy in the pre war years, its central concerns were with the problems of implantation and recruitment. This struggle for acceptance was often the underlying motive in pursuing a particular course of action. It, therefore, often fastened on issues or particular disputes to support if it was felt this would attract members. The union was not only interested in courting textile workers, they were also anxious to be recognised by the employers and have their role as negotiators accepted and collective bargaining established in the trade. Thus they were more likely to approve a solution to a dispute which involved this recognition and enhanced their prestige and reputation with the employers. A protracted dispute in 1911, which involved a claim for 5% was resolved by the employers' committee and the union committee communicating via intermediaries who included the local member of Parliament and the Lord Provost. The employers' offer of 2½% was accepted :

".....because the terms offered convey recognition of our union, and provide for the mutual discussions and probable friendly settlement of our future disputes."<sup>54</sup>

Dundee was not unaffected by the general upsurge in militancy in the immediate pre war years, and membership of the Jute and Flax Workers Union accelerated to a peak of 8,500 in January 1914.<sup>55</sup> More significantly the union had to cope with an increasing number of strikes which were initiated at the workplace and a workforce who were less amenable to arguments persuading them to return to work whilst negotiations continued.

The Dundee Union's moderation and its inclination to look to outside agencies to resolve industrial problems, reflected the changes which were taking place within the WTUL and the NFWW. Although both organisations

never abandoned their trade union work, increasingly they looked to parliament rather than trade union action to promote changes in industrial life. Mary MacArthur's priorities became the anti-sweating campaign and allied to it, the campaign for Wages Boards and a minimum wage. At the end of 1908 she surrendered the editorship of the Woman Worker so that she could more completely devote her energies to these issues.<sup>56</sup> Increasingly her time was taken up with parliamentary questions and agitation around legislation rather than around organisation. This necessarily meant that activity focussed more on lobbying influential and prominent individuals rather than on mobilising mass action :

".....every day of her life she had to draft questions, scan the columns of Hansard, follow proceedings upstairs, in committee, and on the floor of the House. Very soon, she became a familiar figure in the lobbies."<sup>57</sup>

Mary MacArthur had always recognised the need for political action and her trade union work was always informed and influenced by socialist politics. She had never been a revolutionary socialist but rather had envisaged the transformation of society as the product of a gradual accretion of reforms. But increasingly her politics became less rooted in a commitment to class action and more influenced by notions of inter-class co-operation. This may have been a product of her association with the WTUL whose leadership was still dominated by the middle classes or her commitment to legislative reform which involved lobbying M.P.'s of all parties and seeking support from all sympathetic sections of the community. Certainly her biographer claimed that :

"The Trade Union League itself was an object lesson in social co-operation. Its members belonged to all parties, .....They came from all classes though the middle class decidedly predominated. Differing on many points, they came together for practical work. With them in mind, tirades against the bourgeoisie became unreal: an idle interruption of the task. If, in her early, slap-dash enthusiasm, she had been inclined to despise the members of the Executive, associations with such women as Lady Dilke and Miss Tuckwell, in whom wide culture was a spur to, not a brake on, an intense and unremitting devotion to the cause of the less fortunate, taught her much." <sup>58</sup>

The turn to legislative work also sprung from the League's conception of women workers, as essentially weak and powerless. When Mona Wilson

resigned from the secretaryship of the League in 1903, the Committee agreed that they had to find an organiser who could rouse the 'underpaid and help-less women workers', although it seemed a task which was 'well-nigh hopeless',<sup>59</sup> whilst Lady Dilke spoke of :

".....the joy of knowing that by our efforts we have brought the feeble, the ignorant and the lonely to feel that they are not alone."<sup>60</sup>

Yet women workers had demonstrated time and again by their willingness to strike that their discontent and anger could erupt into a display of collective action which demonstrated a potential for struggle and solidarity. If that potential was not harnessed to the institutions of labour and given organisational form, perhaps it was as much connected with the nature of trade unionism as with the 'weakness' of the women.

There can be no doubt that the League performed pioneering work in the trade union organisation of women. Frequently, in Scotland, this was done with the co-operation and assistance of the male trade union movement. However the sustained work of agitation and the day to day minutiae of organisation was shouldered by the WTUL and the NFWW. They recognised that the double burden of women and their domestic role made it more difficult to become involved in trade union affairs and presented obstacles not encountered by male workers. More significantly they recognised the need for special organisational apparatus and propaganda directed specifically at women. However they made no attempt to tackle the conditions which created these difficulties and were content to confine their concerns within the traditional boundaries of trade union issues. They made no demands around the question of women's productive role such as birth control, maternity rights and child-care facilities. This contrasted with the approach of the Russian women socialists to organising women. In an interview in Woman Worker in 1909 Alexandra Kollontai argued that to organise women successfully, it was necessary to address questions which specifically affected them and mentioned that maternity rights was one of the issues which they had taken up.<sup>61</sup>

Most of the leadership of the League accepted the view that married women's work was of secondary importance, that they had no inalienable 'right to work'

and that their proper sphere was the home. Married women's presence in the labour force was, for the middle class members of the League, a flaw in capitalism, a manifestation of a temporary breakdown in social organisation which could be remedied without the transformation of the social structure. Whilst for the socialist women in the League, like Mary MacArthur, it pointed up the inefficiency and the brutality of capitalism. Part of the struggle for socialism was to ensure that woman could more properly perform her 'natural' role by ensuring that husbands earned enough to support their wives and children, at home and in comfort.

It is therefore not surprising that there was no onslaught on the ideology of domesticity and separate sexual spheres. However adherence to this ideology which conceived of women as primarily dependents militated against the WTUL campaigning on the right of single women, who had to support themselves, to work for the same wages as men and from organising to facilitate employment for the many women with dependents, who needed to work. For many married women work was a financial necessity and either a permanent or intermittent part of their life, yet the League did not extend the range of trade union issues to encompass policies which would make it easier for women with children to remain in employment, such as improved maternity rights and provision of childcare facilities. The family wage was never a reality for the majority of working class families,<sup>62</sup> therefore it was a policy which only benefitted the material interests of a section of the working class, and at the expense of consigning large numbers of unsupported women to the status of supplementary earners, and hence to abject poverty. It was a policy which benefitted only the short-term interests of the few, ultimately it was divisive for it created the conditions for permanent conflict between male and female workers by ensuring that the latter were always viewed as cheap labour and therefore a source of competition in the labour market.

#### Women's Strikes

To gain a fuller picture of women's role in the world of labour, it is necessary to look beyond formal union organisation, for, as previously,

women workers continued to take collective action to redress their grievances and this commonly took place without the formal sanction of trade unionism. Indeed the pattern of women's strikes from the beginning of the 20th Century indicates that the majority of disputes involved non unionised workers, although union organisation was often established during a strike, or in the wake of one. The Dundee Jute and Flax Workers Union, the largest women's union in Scotland was a classic example of the way in which union organisers intervened in order to recruit women to the ranks of trade unionism.

The history of industrial relations in the early years of the 20th Century until the First World War, is dominated by the years 1910 to 1914 which are commonly referred to as the period of 'labour unrest'. There are a number of competing interpretations of the significance of this period.<sup>63</sup> However, the officially recorded statistics indicate an upsurge in industrial struggle which far exceeded the dimensions of the period of 'new unionism', 25 years earlier.<sup>64</sup> The number of strikers, strike days and stoppages were substantially above the peaks recorded in any previous years and this was accompanied by an unprecedented increase in the number of trade unionists which surpassed the achievements of 1889-91 in absolute if not relative terms.<sup>65</sup> The pattern of women's strikes in Scotland for this period does not indicate such a marked increase in the scale of industrial struggle, but this can partly be attributed to the lacunae in the officially compiled statistics which is a record of 'Principal Disputes' and which concentrates almost exclusively on disputes in the major textile industries in which women worked, given the diversification of women's employment by the beginning of the 20th century the number of strikes is probably underestimated. (Appendix 8). Newspapers carry many reports of strikes during this period which do not appear in the official statistics but which were often protracted and involved substantial numbers of workers. This included strikes of women woodyard workers in Bo'ness, bleachworkers in Neilston, bleach and dye workers in Cowdenbeath, cardboard box makers in Glasgow, sailcloth workers in Edinburgh and textile workers in Kirkcaldy.<sup>66</sup> The unreliability of the official statistics obviously imposes limitations on the generalisations which can be made about strike statistics during this period, however, it is possible that they can still reveal broad trends in strike patterns. The incidence

of officially recorded stoppages of women workers in the years 1911, 1912 and 1913 is certainly greater than the previous nine years with the exception of 1907, but during the last decade of the 19th Century, there were a number of occasions when the number of strikes far exceeded the peaks of the period of 'labour unrest'.<sup>67</sup> However, the statistics do reveal that women's strikes in the immediate pre war years were on average longer and involved greater numbers than the years from 1892 till 1910. In 1912 there were 42,591 women strikers and an aggregate of 800,710 strike days lost compared with the previous peak of 35,962 and 302,000 strike days in 1899, which was largely attributed to one strike in Dundee.<sup>68</sup> This pattern reflects the general trends exhibited by the rest of the industrial workforce of larger and more protracted disputes between 1910 and 1914.<sup>69</sup> There were three major issues involved in the disputes of women workers; straightforward wage demands, union recognition and resistance to the intensification of work pressure, with wage demands predominating. In 1912, nine out of eleven disputes related to wage demands and in 1913, 10 of the 13 recorded stoppages were for wage increases.<sup>70</sup>

The most striking contrast with the previous 20 years was the fact that disputes over wages were generally for increases rather than against reductions and the issue of union recognition first emerged in 1910. Strikes resisting the intensification of work pressure, changed working arrangements or disciplinary issues were a constant feature in the years between the two explosive phases of collective struggle, however they predominated in the 1890's and declined in significance in the early years of the 20th Century.

In very general terms, the contours of women's strikes corresponded with the dominant pattern in that they were protracted and involved large numbers of workers. However one of the distinctive features of the labour unrest was the unofficial nature of many of the disputes which led an official of the Board of Trade to observe that there were 'more differences between the men and their leaders than between the latter and employers'.<sup>71</sup>

Given that the majority of women were not members of trade unions and indeed were on occasion striking for Trade Union recognition, their strikes could not be described as 'unofficial' or related to growing dissatisfaction.

with existing practices of collective bargaining.

The general economic context of the unrest was the threat to British capital from the growth of foreign competition and the adoption by British employers of a number of diverse strategies in order to sustain profits. One consequence of this trend was a sustained period of falling real wages from 1900 which provoked widespread discontent over living standards.

There were, however, a complex range of factors underlying the upsurge of militancy in this period, and so it is not possible to specify a universal source of the disputes. Women's strikes had more to do with material grievances and union recognition than did the minority of disputes concerning workers who were resisting the steady encroachment of machinery and the erosion of traditional craft skills and controls. Women had never exercised any control or autonomy within the labour process, therefore their struggles could not be characterised as part of a generalised struggle for workers' control arising from the defense of existing craft prerogative and controls at the point of production.

Women continued to demonstrate that when they embarked on collective action they injected it with a spirit of fun and gaiety not normally displayed by striking men. One particular strike of Kirkcaldy textile workers in 1911 embodied all the ingredients that were commonly associated with the disputes of women workers. The weavers had struck in support of nine members of the newly formed union who had been dismissed after a number of demands had been presented to the company which included a 20% wage increase, recognition of the union and no victimisation :

"The organisation of the strikes consists in roll-call meetings, street parades, picketting the works, and in breakfast, dinner and evening meetings at factory gates and in halls, with the object of extending the strike to other firms and industries. The picketting is done with such wholehearted enthusiasm as to be joyously exhilarating. Parties of strikers meet the blacklegs at the gates and 'sing them home' from work. Naturally there is some hooting too and not a little badinage is thrown at the police who shamefacedly walk arm in arm with the blacklegs to protect them 'from the fury of the mob'." <sup>72</sup>

During the course of this dispute 15 of the strikers were fined for 'disorderly conduct', receiving a tumultuous reception from the Kirkcaldy

townsfolk when they returned from their trial. The strike was eventually won by the women and according to the correspondent in Forward, it was their example which inspired other workers in the town to organise and fight for wage increases. It was claimed that since the women weavers' strike, an increase had been sought and granted in every factory in the district, policemen and tramwaymen received a substantial weekly increase and a number of union branches had been established among the previously unorganised workers. The article concluded:

"Public opinion in Kirkcaldy says 'We owe it to our women folk'."<sup>73</sup>

It is difficult to quantify precisely the impact of women's strikes in the period of labour unrest, but it does seem clear that their disputes contributed in no small measure to the escalation of militancy in the immediate pre-war years. There were also a small number of strikes which were qualitatively significant in terms of the press coverage which they received and the support which was elicited from the broader labour movement. A more detailed analysis of these disputes may provide insights into the specific context of unrest, the attitudes and aspirations of the women and the role and relationship of various labour organisations to these struggles.

The first of these disputes took place at the thread mills of R.F & J Alexander and Co at Neilston, part of the Coats combine, on May 1910. It stemmed from an initiative from the management to reduce piece rate and speed up machinery in the copwinding department of the mill.<sup>74</sup> Given assurances by management that they would be able to maintain their wages by producing more, the women gave the scheme a trial but struck when they discovered that they could only produce the same quantity as before, resulting in a drop in earnings from about 12/9 to 11/- per week. This move by management seems to have been part of an overall strategy to reduce cost in the face of competition and shrinking markets, as several other departments had already had their rates reduced and the initial demand of the 120 strikers was for parity with the Clark Company thread workers in Paisley.

From an early stage in the dispute various flanks of the labour movement mobilised to support the strikers. The National Federation of Women Workers<sup>75</sup> drafted in an organiser to assist the women, Glasgow Trades Council sent

representatives and organised financial aid,<sup>76</sup> and the Social Democratic Party immediately held a public meeting on the dispute.<sup>77</sup> Indeed it was the presence of what management deemed to be 'outsiders' which occasioned the escalation of the dispute and extended it to the rest of the workforce. Members of the NFWW, such as Esther Dicks and Kate McLean, and Glasgow Trades Council had been instrumental in establishing a branch of the NFWW in the factory and represented the women in negotiations with management. When the demand for parity with the Clark's works was presented, the directors refused further negotiations with anyone other than the girls themselves. This provoked the other departments in the factory to strike in sympathy with the copwinders and for recognition of the Union. The Coats management responded by locking out the entire workforce.

From this point, the character of the dispute transformed from a relatively peaceful pedestrian affair to a turbulent and hostile display of collective defiance.

The targets of the women's anger was primarily directed at the manager of the works, although managers of particular departments and the mill itself did not escape unscathed.<sup>78</sup> The Paisley Daily Express reported that 'further scenes of an exciting nature' had taken place in connection with the strike:

"On Wednesday evening the force of about 30 police were unable to cope efficiently with the crowd, fully 5,000 strong (mainly window breaking). The manager of the turning shop has since Monday been a marked man and his house, which is situated near the mills, has been a target for many missiles. He has, however, now taken safety in flight (the windows of the mills are all more or less shattered)." <sup>79</sup>

The dispute continued with frequent demonstration and marches to the accompaniment of singing, dancing and banner waving. Mass meetings were held afternoon and evenings, addressed by an array of representatives from the labour movements of Glasgow, Barrhead and Paisley. The highlight of the dispute was a demonstration which marched from Barrhead all the way to the manager's house in Fotheringay Road, Pollokshields, where an 'indignation meeting' was held at the rear of his house.<sup>80</sup> The demonstration was about 2,000 strong and was composed of both men and women. According to one male participant the demonstration displayed the usual traits of high spirit and good humour.

"It can be understood that to lead such a disorderly, undisciplined horde of young girls to whom the thing was more of a joke than anything else (they were carrying effigies of the manager which were intended to be burned) was by no means an easy job .....

The march, with a great banging of tin cans and shouting and singing pursued its noisy way from Neilston to Pollokshields, where the respectable inhabitants were thoroughly disturbed."<sup>81</sup>

There appear to have been no direct attacks on the manager himself in contrast to an earlier episode in the dispute when he had to seek refuge in the booking office of the railway station to avoid a hail of missiles thrown by angry strikers.<sup>82</sup> The strike was successfully resolved in the women's favour and they returned to work having gained parity with the workers of Clark and Co in Paisley. A concert was held to celebrate the resolution of the dispute, presided over by the president of Glasgow Trades Council. The women expressed their appreciation to the men and women of the trade union movement who had assisted them by presenting them with gifts followed by a song extolling the virtues of the NFWW, its organiser, Esther Dicks and the benefits of union membership.<sup>83</sup>

There were a number of features of the dispute which coalesced to activate the labour movement to support the women. Many of the strikers were between 15 and 18 years of age and their youth combined with the heavy work of the mill underscored the inhumanity and brutality of industrial capitalism which were common themes of socialists attacks. The bulk of an article in Forward by John McLean of the Social Democratic Party was a tirade against the hypocrisy of Christians and the brutality of capitalism which 'curshes innocent girlhood merely for the sake of money'.<sup>84</sup> The fact that they were women had much to do with the fact that both the NFWW and Glasgow Trades Council played a prominent role in the dispute. Both organisations had a commitment to organising women. The youth of the girls highlighted their vulnerability and so confirmed the stereotyped image of women workers as essentially weak and helpless creatures who were 'sheepishly downtrodden'.<sup>85</sup>

Most of the girls lived in localities nearby the mills, but the majority were drawn from the mining village of Nitshill which had a highly integrated community with strong labour traditions. It has been suggested by an associate of John McLean that the strike was initiated by the daughters of socialist miners from Nitshill and that it was these same miners who sought

out McLean and the SDP to organise the girls.<sup>86</sup> Whatever the veracity of this account, the claim that it was McLean who was responsible for contacting the NFWW probably owes more to the traditions of hagiography than to the truth. McLean certainly wrote to the Glasgow Trades Council requesting their support for the girls' strike committee, but both they and the NFWW had already rallied to their cause.<sup>87</sup> The fact that demonstrations were able to attract up to 5,000 participants when the number of strikers approximated 1,700 indicates that the strikers were able to draw on the support of existing institutions of labour organisations in the locality, buttressed by the networks of family and community loyalties.

The nature of the dispute, resistance to the intensification of work pressures and a reduction in labour costs, particularly in a climate of falling real wages did much to generate support for the strike. For McLean and the SDP, versed in the tenets of Marxist economics it represented in extreme form the strategy of employers to increasingly subordinate labour to capital when profits were squeezed by intense competition. McLean warned that:

"Unless the firm is beaten on this occasion, section after section will be scientifically bled by the employers." <sup>88</sup>

He exhorted the amalgamation of unions:

"not only to fight the Capitalists but to help overthrow the capitalist system that enables a few owners of land and capital to unscrupulously rob young and old alike." <sup>89</sup>

Similarly for the ILP the dispute was interpreted as 'a struggle against the power and arrogance of Capitalism'.<sup>90</sup> The women themselves seemed to perceive the struggle in terms of self-assertion as much as economic grievance, as one woman voiced:

"We will eat grass before we will be beaten this time." <sup>91</sup>

This defiance seemed to have been fuelled by the treatment they had received from management, which included a reference to the women as 'a lot of dirty Scottish pigs'.<sup>92</sup> This might explain why the management of the firm were the targets of abuse and violence in the course of the strike. This suggests

that although the immediate demand of the strike was a narrowly economic one, it was underlaid by a desire to retrieve some vestiges of self-respect and dignity which, for so long, the women had been denied. The intervention of the SDP was partly fortuitous as they appeared to have a branch in the area and had been engaged in considerable propaganda work. However they considered it an ideal opportunity to use the dispute as a platform to propagate socialist ideas, broaden the basis of the dispute and to argue for the necessity of a political movement to transform the economic and social organisation of society :

"It would never have done had we let slip such a fine opportunity to drive home the Socialist moral to the Nitshill girls on strikes, and to the villagers generally."<sup>93</sup>

In spite of the efforts of the SDP, there is little to suggest that the experience of their struggle convinced the women and girls of the necessity of political remedies to redress their grievances, although it was claimed by McLean that the SDP had a huge turnout for one of their public meetings held at the outset of the strike and that they had 'temporarily captured the hearts and minds of the people.'<sup>94</sup> It was the refusal of the employer to negotiate with their union representatives which led to the escalation of the dispute and as the song which they sang at the victory celebration indicates, it was the process of unionisation and the recognition accorded the Union by the employers which seemed to palliate their grievances and restore their dignity and self respect.

"All the nice girls are in the Union  
All the nice girls wear its badge  
But there's something about the union  
Some fools don't understand  
But when on the strike list  
And on the sick list  
When we get the seven and six  
They will spark around Miss Dick  
Let us joint ! Let us join!"

(Sung to the tune of 'Ship Ahoy')<sup>95</sup>

Therefore one can only speculate on the validity of the claim by an SDP'er that 'a great mass of virgin minds received a favourable impression of their first real contact with Socialism',<sup>96</sup> as it appeared to be the material

benefits of unionisation which attracted them.

The longest recorded strike of women workers in the pre-war years was the networkers strike in Kilbirnie, Ayrshire which lasted from early April 1913 until September of the same year. The local economy of Kilbirnie centred on thread mills and net-making and was dominated by the firms of W & J Knox and Company.<sup>97</sup>

The strike originated among the 'treadle jumpers' in the six netmaking factories in the town. These were the women who worked the looms but this also involved 'jumping' on the treadles so that they had to 'work with our whole faculties from start to finish'.<sup>98</sup> One woman claimed that she 'jumped' 1,240 times while making a net and as she made three nets a week she estimated ~~that~~ she jumped from nine to ten miles a day.<sup>99</sup> There seems to have been a general recognition that the work was particularly arduous and the women themselves often referred to their job as 'hard' or 'fatiguing' although for the women a positive feature of the work was that it was clean. They were pieceworkers who earned between 12/- and 15/- per week although their earnings were frequently less because of breakages and time lost over breakdowns in machinery.<sup>100</sup>

The strike originated over a demand for an increase of 6d per net and initially involved 160 to 170 of the 200 'jumpers' in the six factories, with the 200 women who worked in the steam section of the factory joining the strike after a few weeks. Commentators remarked on the solidarity and determination of the women despite the fact that their sole source of financial support came from their own street collections. However within a short time a variety of trade union and socialist organisations had rallied to the women's cause to the extent that Forward commented that 'hordes of agitators have poured into the town'.<sup>101</sup> Most of these 'agitators' were there at the request of Kate McLean the Scottish organiser of the NFWW who had undertaken the task of organising support for the strikers. Glasgow Trades Council sent speakers to factory gates to appeal for donations.<sup>102</sup> the Parliamentary Committee of the Scottish Trade Union Congress played a role in the resolution of the dispute, and some 50 speakers addressed mass meetings in the town. The women also enjoyed considerable local support from the men and women in the surrounding areas. In the sixth week of the strike a procession and rally was held which according to Forward was:

"the greatest Labour demonstration in the industrial history of Ayrshire in support of strikes. There was a march of trade unionists from surrounding districts. 4,000 marched to Beith and a mass meeting of about 10,000."

The report continued :

"Strikes in Kilbirnie are akin to village carnivals - everyone takes part in them. .... Mothers with babes in their arms walked the 6 miles ungrudgingly in the cause of justice, while four brakes conveyed the older women about 80 of whom took part in their first labour demonstration..... Boys in fancy costume collected for the strike fund, and these with the cheerful costumed strikers, gave to the procession an appearance of joy and rebellion that could not have pleased the employers." <sup>103</sup>

One or two meetings were held daily during the strike and large demonstrations were held weekly. According to Forward the women had:

"made up their minds that, so far as they can make it, the whole strike shall be a picnic. Every demonstration is an outing, and they have a delightful faculty of seeing the humorous side of every incident and finding everywhere food for merriment. They disconcert the police by discovering them 'keeking' at the pickets and shouting, 'I spy Tom Allan', 'I spy John Hill' as they recognised each." <sup>104</sup>

Relations between the strikers and the police were not always conducted in such light hearted terms and several of the women were arrested for 'intimidation' which amounted to verbal abuse of the police. When six of the strikers had to go to Kilmarnock to be tried, they were accompanied by all the strikers in 'motor brakes' with pipers. Four of the women were found guilty and fined and on their return to Kilbirnie the whole town turned out to welcome them. It was claimed that the charge of intimidation had the effect of generating more support for the strikers.

At an early stage in the dispute, the issue of union recognition became the focal point of the women's grievances in the face of the refusal of the employers to recognise and negotiate with women's trade unions. The unionised men in the factories, the hecklers, held a meeting with the employers to request that they recognise the women's union but were given short shrift from the employers who argued that 'too many paid agitators had been in town for them to grant recognition'.<sup>105</sup> The women themselves

attributed the entrenched position of the employers to their reluctance to deal with women's unions and one striker maintained that:

"The employers would give in were it not necessary for them to recognise the Union" and went on to warn them "the sooner they learn to negotiate with our trade unions the better." <sup>106</sup>

The most intransigent of the employers was the firm of W & J Knox whose economic dominance of the district was so great that they were referred to as 'lords' by the local people. Their business and property interests included the local thread mills, most of the net-making factories, the local gas supply, house property, mansions and a 15 mile strip of land between Kilbirnie and Greenock.<sup>107</sup>

Knox's was part of the Linen Thread Company, an amalgamation of leading thread companies formed in 1898 in response to increasing competition and marketing difficulties.<sup>108</sup> The three principal firms which formed the core of the composite Linen Thread Company were, William Barbour and Sons of Hilden, Lisburn, Northern Ireland, Finlayson, Bousefield and Company Ltd of Johnstone and W & J Knox of Kilbirnie.<sup>109</sup> The official company history claimed that the firms involved in the merger were representative of enlightened employers who distinguished themselves in a century of great personal enterprise.<sup>110</sup> Certainly the Finlayson's and the Barbour's seemed to have been models of paternalism, establishing an array of social, material and educational provision for their workforce.<sup>111</sup> Finlayson's seemed to favour encouraging self-help amongst their employees, persuading them in 1861 to set up a Co-operative Society and in the 1870's advocating that 'some intelligent working men' be elected to the Burgh Council.<sup>112</sup> The Barbour's established a wide range of welfare and social provisions for their employees; including building a model village at Hilden with semi-detached cottages standing in their own grounds, a primary school built in 1875 and another built in 1912, dental and eye-testing clinics for children, a community hall, a children's playground and village sports ground.<sup>113</sup> The paucity of references to the Knox-family's contributions may be indicative of little paternalistic endeavour on their part, although it was claimed that the family 'enjoy the closest contact with the mill personnel'.<sup>114</sup> Reference is made to 250 houses which were built by the Company, however, it is likely that in keeping with Victorian paternalism these would have been to accommodate the male skilled grades

of workers, such as hecklers. There is therefore little evidence to indicate that the Knox family dominated the town either culturally or socially as there seem to have been an absence of the usual panoply of paternalistic employers in the sense of extensive social and leisure provisions. They built a William Knox Institute for their workforce, 'out of gratitude for all that Kilbirnie has done for them', as Forward ironically noted.<sup>115</sup>

The changing social, political and economic climate of the 1890's and early 20th Century may have served to weaken the influence of the Knox's and drive a wedge between employers and employees.<sup>116</sup> The industrial militancy of the immediate pre-war years, the growing influence of socialism over the working class and the constant threat of foreign competition no doubt had some effect on employer and employee relationships. One indication of this polarisation was the fact that the Knox family transferred their political loyalties to the Tories as a consequence of Lloyd George's land taxes, and were therefore part of the flight of wealth from the Liberal Party which occurred in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.

The economic dominance of the Knox family coupled with what may have been increasing social, cultural and political differentiation, probably explains the widespread support the strike elicited in the district. Although there is no reference to the Knox family or property being the direct targets of abuse or violence, there clearly was considerable animosity towards them and their conspicuous wealth. The strikers often justified their claim for more money by alluding to the wealth of the Knox family. One striker argued that millionaires would hardly be bankrupted by an increase of £35 in the weekly wage bill:

"Some of them spend that amount when they go for a cruise on the Mediterranean. If they can afford to maintain a fleet of motor cars, not to speak of other luxuries, they can easily afford to give us an increase."<sup>117</sup>

The list of shareholders in the Knox firm reveals that of the six members of the Knox family mentioned, five were resident in Kilbirnie at three different addresses.<sup>118</sup> Therefore the visibility of their wealth when contrasted with the meagre wages paid to the women, probably did much to heighten an awareness of economic inequalities and sharpen the sense of material deprivation.

The demands made by the strikers for more money and recognition of their union, were often expressed in terms of gaining equality with men. However the basis of their claim for 'twice the pay' rested on the arduous nature of their work which one of them described as 'not work for women, but for men'.<sup>119</sup> They justified their claim by arguing that if men were employed as 'treadle jumpers' they would receive twice the pay. The women who worked in the steam section of the factory and who operated steam power machines, earned 6/- to 12/- per week compared with 21/- per week earned by the men who worked the same machines at night. These women claimed that as the men produced the same amount of work as the women, the women should get an increase. This theme of equality with men running through their claim was perhaps stoked by the employer's refusal to recognise women's unions, which gave a feminist edge to the dispute, evinced by the comment made by one striker and given general assent :

"Wait till we get a vote."<sup>120</sup>

and the perhaps hopeful remark by the correspondent in Forward that the strikers were 'Keen suffragists, and for the most part Socialists too.'<sup>121</sup> There were certainly no references made by the strikers to the necessity of a revolutionary transformation of political and economic structures nor was there any challenge to the right of property or profit, provided it did not interfere with workers right to a 'fair wage'. However the argument of the strikers indicate an acquaintance with the economics of capitalist manufacture and an awareness of the source of profit which may be attributed to a schooling in the socialist economics of the ILP. The women informed a Forward correspondent that there was little chance of their increase bankrupting the employers as they were claiming :

"Bankruptcy! I don't think! Why, it is said they get from £1 to £3 per net. Suppose we average the price at £2. We make three nets a week. That's £6 for making these nets, we get an average pay of let us say 14/-. That leaves the employers with £5 6/- profits from each worker. There are 400 networkers which means that our employers make £2,120 from our labour every week. No doubt they have material to buy machinery and factories to maintain but that cost won't absorb all the profit ....."<sup>122</sup>

Their familiarity with this branch of economics may have stemmed from the

socialist propaganda they were exposed to in the course of the dispute from a variety of creeds including the syndicalists and the Independent Labour Party. Forward claimed that as a result of the strike a branch of the ILP had been formed in the town and sales of both their newspaper and the Daily Citizen, the official newspaper of the Labour Party had increased.<sup>123</sup>

The impact of the strike had a number of wider ranging repercussions some of which had a lasting influence on the face of labour and trade union organisations in the area. In addition to the formation of a branch of the ILP and the creation of a permanent socialist presence in the district, a number of men's trade unions increased their membership. The NFWW enrolled almost 1,000 new members, and the dispute sparked off a number of claims from other workers for increases which had Kilbirnie 'seething with discontent'.<sup>124</sup> Perhaps most significantly the strike generated an unprecedented level of support and solidarity and contributed significantly to the mobilisation of labour in the area on a class-wide basis rather than a purely sectional one, with steelworkers, miners and non wage earning members of the community participating in the women's demonstrations and the striking women giving their support to the disputes of other workers.<sup>125</sup>

It was women workers who initiated the strike at Singer Manufacturing Works, Clydebank, a strike which has been depicted as the most significant episode in the pre-war history of the Clyde. The strike originated among women in the polishing section of the cabinet over an attempt by management to increase their workload without extra payment. The women in this department were immediately supported by the majority of the 3,000 women employed in the factory, and within a couple of days the dispute had spread to other departments although the small section of skilled and unionised workers were slower to respond to the call for a total stoppage. The dispute received such widespread support in the factory, because it was the culmination of several years of grievances centering on deskilling, the substitution of labour by machines, speed-ups, increased supervision and a host of what the workforce referred to as 'petty tyrannies'.

Although the claim of the women in the polishing section was not entirely

eclipsed, the central demand of the strikers became to establish the principle of collective bargaining for the unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the factory. The women participated fully in the strike and had delegates on the 200 strong strike committee and representatives on the delegations to management. However, they were outnumbered 3:1 by male strikers and the dispute was never really defined as a strike of women workers in popular consciousness. In the annals of labour history, the Singer's strike has acquired its prominence because of its association with syndicalism, whilst contemporary commentators and the Singer management themselves were convinced that it was fomented by socialist agitators. In justifying their refusal to accede to the demands of the strikers, the manager of the factory claimed:

"it was all a matter of public interest. We are fighting a public battle when we oppose the Socialistic teaching which is at the bottom of the whole business." <sup>126</sup>

The Industrial Workers of Great Britain had established a branch in the factory the previous year and through sustained propaganda work the distribution of leaflets and pamphlets and lunch-time factory gate meetings, they claimed to have built up to a membership of 1,500<sup>127</sup> although membership was confined to a handful of the 41 departments of the factory. However, the IWGB had little influence on the outbreak of the dispute, although they perhaps played a role in extending the strike to all departments, not merely by their presence, but by dint of their patient propaganda work. Their influence on the strike committee and on the course of the strike was limited as the committee was comprised of five representatives from the 41 departments. They were at pains to stress the representative nature of the committee and its dependence from an 'outside body', boasting that 'fully one half of the committee is non-unionist and anti-socialist' <sup>128</sup>

There was certainly little evidence of syndicalist doctrines having an impact on the dispute, as the slogans and the demands of the strikers were confined to the specific issue of union recognition and general exhortations for solidarity. One demonstration of the strikers displayed a number of banners with slogans such as 'No surrender' 'Unity is strength' and 'Wha sae base a be a slave?'<sup>129</sup> The limited objectives of the strikers were

stressed by a succession of speakers at a rally in Glasgow Green who disclaimed any desire on the part of the workers 'to hamper the operations of the firm' claiming their objective was to stop the 'alleged tampering with the normal wage, of which the case of the polishers wage was a concrete example.' <sup>130</sup>

The initial upsurge of defiance and enthusiasm quickly evaporated in the face of management's tactics of conducting a referendum of the workers appealing to strikers to return to work and promising that grievances would be carefully investigated and any 'ascertained injustice would be rectified'. The success of this tactic is perhaps a measure of the uneven consciousness of the workforce and the limited influence of syndicalist ideas on the strikers whose slow drift back to work was the signal for large-scale victimisations by Singer management.

These three examples of strikes of women workers during the period of labour unrest illustrate that often underlying basic material grievances there were more intractable issues relating to dignity, self-assertion and self-respect. The demand for union recognition was to a great extent instrumental and ensured that collective bargaining was established and negotiated conditions safeguarded by trade union controls. However, the language of the struggles illustrates that for unorganised workers, unionisation was part of a protest against the pervasive authority and control of employers and therefore one means of asserting their independence and self-respect. In this sense these strikes could be interpreted as signifying deep-seated social discontent and a sense of class antagonism. However the strikes also illustrate that whilst more than material grievances were at stake, they were easily palliated and had limited demands, employer recognition of unions usually being sufficient to defuse the situation. Despite the limitation of their challenge, women workers' contribution to the explosion of militancy in the pre-war years indicates a need to revise the view that the difficulties in organising them into trade unions was rooted in their apathy, weakness and conservatism.

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- 123 : Ibid., 17 May 1913
- 124 : Ibid., 31 May 1913
- 125 : A demonstration of those on strike at Nobel's Explosive  
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- 127 : From Singer Sewing Machine Group, International Workers  
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CHAPTER 8

WORKING CLASS POLITICS FEMINISM AND WOMEN WORKERS 1900 - 1914

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, the political ambitions of the trade union movement became increasingly directed at independent working class representation in parliament. This development coupled with the revival of socialist ideas in the labour movement was the basis of an invigorated working class political movement during this period. The exclusivist attitudes of trade unionists, particularly towards women, had hampered the development of an all-embracing class movement. However, the emergence of political organisations seemingly committed to harnessing the loyalty and strength of the working class to the struggle for socialism laid the basis for a widening of the social base of the labour movement.

The general social, political and economic climate of the last years of the 19th century until the first World War, was marked by a series of internal and external threats to British society which provoked a response from the state and the different ruling groups which was by no means coherent and unified, but rather characterised by competing views over the best methods of dealing with these crises. As has been argued, Britain's economic supremacy was challenged by competition from America and Germany.<sup>1</sup> On the domestic front, there were a number of developments which were also perceived as a threat to political and social stability; the expansion of trade unionism, in what was perceived as a more aggressive and militant form, coupled with its goal of independent working class representation in parliament, and the growing influence of socialist organisations on the labour movement. Although there was no major upheaval in the national political scene before the war there was evidence at local level of the instability of the two party system, which was sufficient to convince members of the ruling groups that working class unrest and demands should not be ignored.

Imperialist rivalries and the emergence of a more aggressive labour movement provided the wider context for increasing concern over a number of related issues such as the falling birth rate, high infant mortality, the 'rediscovery' of poverty and the poor physical health of the nation.

The last concern emanated from the revelation that large numbers of volunteers for the Boer War were rejected because they were physically unfit. Consequently emphasis was increasingly placed on the need to improve and increase the physical quality and quantity of the population, as the health of the nation became inextricably linked to both the wealth of the nation and the survival of the nation as an imperial power.

Although there was general ruling class concern over political instability and national efficiency, there was no consensus as to the best methods of preserving social stability. There were numerous debates amongst the different sections of the ruling class over the nature of the measures required to solve these social, political, and economic problems ranging from schemes to introduce conciliation machinery to unite capital and labour, to private welfare schemes. However, there were a number of leading Liberals who were committed to a policy of social reform, and with the election of a Liberal Government in 1906 and the introduction of these 'New Liberals' into top government positions, the amount of state sponsored legislation increased markedly. The reforms reflected contemporary concerns with the quality of the race and national efficiency as well as a desire to palliate the grievances of the working class. They also reflected the ideology of progressive middle class thought which was rooted in the belief that state intervention should encourage and not replace self help and individual responsibility. A major concern was to minimise the cost of reform, for it was never intended to effect a radical redistribution of income between social classes. For this reason state benefits were kept sufficiently low in order to preserve the incentive to work and save, and eligibility for benefit was deemed to be the reward for a hard working, thrifty and responsible life. The major reforms introduced, the National Insurance Act and the 1908 Old Age Pensions Act, both contained conditions which disqualified applicants if they failed to demonstrate that they belonged to the 'deserving' poor. Generally legislative provision tended to help the more secure workers, whilst the most obviously needy groups, those who were regularly unemployed, the lowest paid and women were excluded from benefits.<sup>2</sup> This was partly a reflection of the Victorian practice of distinguishing between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor and the fear that in a less favourable

Economic climate the former group might sink into the ranks of the casual residuum thus creating the potential for social and political instability. However an additional factor which perhaps strengthened the policy of favouring the 'deserving' poor was the influence of eugenics on sections of middle class thought in the early years of the 20th century. This brand of social darwinism advocated intervention in order to ensure selective breeding and its attitude to the 'rough' and 'unrespectable' poor was that they should not be encouraged to thrive as their poverty<sup>3</sup> was evidence of their innate moral and physical inferiority.

The concerns about the political, military and economic implications of continuing 'national deterioration' led directly to the introduction of a variety of measures designed to reduce the infant mortality rate and to ensure that surviving children were well fed and well cared for. The 1906 Education Act permitted local authorities to provide school meals for needy children; in 1907 local authorities were required to organise medical inspection of school children, and the same year births had to be notified within six weeks so that health visitors could visit, and the Children's Act of 1908 was a major step in extending state responsibility for children across a range of areas in order to prevent deprivation in early life.<sup>4</sup> State activity on child related reforms was matched by the voluntary sector which organised a plethora of societies bent on promoting the cause of child welfare, including the National League for Health Maternity and Child Welfare and the Infants' Health Society.<sup>5</sup>

The Liberal welfare legislation was clearly designed to promote political and social stability as well as national efficiency. This view was succinctly expressed by Churchill, a leading exponent of New Liberalism, When referring to unemployment insurance, he declared that :

"The idea is to increase the stability of our institutions by giving the mass of industrial workers a direct interest in maintaining them. With a 'stake in the country' in the form of insurance against evil days these workers will pay no attention to the vague promises of revolutionary socialism."<sup>6</sup>

It has been argued that through its advocacy and practice of a programme of social reform, the Liberal Party was able to re-incorporate a dissident

working class within the Liberal electorate and successfully fight off<sup>7</sup> the challenge of the labour movement and the parliamentary Labour Party. However, it is unlikely that the Liberal Party's policy of limited social reform won the allegiance of the working class voter when the attitude of the working class to a good deal of the reforms was hostile or at best ambivalent.<sup>8</sup> The reforms were of a limited nature, did nothing to redistribute the wealth of the nation, and often involved elements of control and compulsion which were deeply resented by working people. The measures taken to improve the quality of child care, particularly those which entailed the intrusion of state officials such as health visitors and school attendance officers into working class homes, were widely perceived as a form of inspection and social control,<sup>9</sup> and there were those who objected to the medical inspection of school children on the same grounds. Those measures which did bring about some material benefits were of course welcomed but it is doubtful that they convinced the working classes of the adequacy of Liberal social reforms or were sufficient to quell working class discontent. Indeed the intensified industrial struggles of the pre war years appear to belie the contention that progressive social reform successfully curtailed class conflict.

For historians a central debate of these pre war years has turned on the extent to which there was a fusion of industrial, political and social grievances which created a crisis in Edwardian society and threatened the stability of the political and social order. Proponents of the 'crisis' school have pointed to the co-existence of significant struggles in Edwardian society, including industrial militancy, women's suffrage and Ireland, which although arising from different grievances and requiring different political solutions, created a 'mood' or climate of discontent not easily dispelled by the resort to traditional remedies and palliatives.<sup>10</sup> Others have argued that the industrial struggles alone posed demands beyond the narrowly economic end which required the creation of new forms of social and political organisation.<sup>11</sup>

However the prevailing orthodoxy emphasises the discrete nature of the struggles and the absence of any coherent political challenge to the social order, perhaps most clearly evinced by those whose allegiance to Liberalism remained staunch throughout their industrial battles of

1910, 1911 and 1912, and the patriotic fervour aroused by the outbreak of World War 1 when millions of workers rushed to defend the Empire. However, whilst Liberal hegemony may have prevailed and even been consolidated at the national level, political life at local level could assume a different hue and socialist politics and ideas often had an altogether more flourishing and vigorous existence. Local elections, municipal school boards and parochial boards were frequently contested and won by committed socialists of different creeds. There was a flowering of socialist, or more broadly labour organisations which spearheaded a number of campaigns attracting widespread popular support among the working class. The broader social issues which were raised and where socialists were to the forefront of struggles, ranged from the housing question and unemployment, to school meals and the medical inspection of school children.

In spite of the separation of workplace struggles from the campaigns on social and political issues, there was a dense network of labour organisation because of cross cutting memberships and the continuing interchange of ideas among political organisations. Thus a new socialist culture was created which found organisational expression through the formation of Clarion Clubs, Socialist Sunday Schools, socialist orchestras and choirs and a plethora of political education classes. There was an absence of rigid division and barriers between socialist organisations which engaged in a continuing dialogue with each other, despite the differences in their political ideologies and practices. The socialist movement of the early twentieth century divided into two different ideological camps; one which had its intellectual roots in both early utopian socialism and radical liberalism and which has been characterised as ethical socialism; and one whose intellectual touchstone was the 12 writings of Karl Marx and which is referred to as scientific socialism. However, even within this broad division there were currents which had sharp differences. In Scotland the major representative of labour socialism or ethical socialism was the Independent Labour Party, which was in fact the most influential of all the socialist organisations. The Marxist tradition was represented principally by the Social Democratic Federation (which in 1900 became the Social Democratic Party) and the Socialist Labour Party, although in terms of membership these organisations were tiny.

The common denominator for each of these organisations was the emphasis which they placed on education and propaganda as a means of disseminating their ideas, and frequently they shared political platforms in order to do this. The reputedly sectarian Socialist Democratic Party was equally involved in this socialist current with John McLean's lectures on history, Marxist economics and public speaking, attended by socialists of a variety of creeds. Even the courses for women co-operators and their speakers classes which were held under the auspices of the co-operative union, were taught by McLean.<sup>13</sup> Frequent overtures were made by the SDP to the ILP to amalgamate and form a United Socialist Party, and this willingness to engage in debate created a number of common forums. The emergence of Industrial Unionist and syndicalist organisations, although officially opposed by the ILP and SDP, attracted a number of their members and created another terrain for socialists from different organisations to work alongside each other free from the sectionalism and sectarianism which frequently characterised industrial and political initiatives.

In view of working women's involvement in the labour unrest and the intensification of industrial struggles, it might be expected that this would be paralleled by their increasing involvement in political and social issues. However in terms of their membership of socialist, co-operative and suffrage organisations, there is little evidence to suggest that working women were present in any significant numbers. Women generally were poorly represented in the ranks of socialist societies and organisations, particularly those of the Marxist wing of the Socialist movement such as the SDP and the Socialist Labour Party. However the ILP, which in Scotland was the dominant organisation of those forming the Labour Coalition, contained a substantial contingent of women. Indeed it was often these women who initiated the campaigns which were such a prominent feature of local politics in Glasgow in the pre-war years.

Although many of the active ILP women were working class, few of them seem to have been wage earners, and overlapping membership of trade unions and political organisations was restricted to a tiny handful

of women such as Kate McLean, the Scottish Organiser of the National Federation of Women Workers and a member of the ILP, and Agnes Pettigrew, Secretary of the Shop Assistants Union who was also active in the Women's Labour League and the ILP.

Even women's organisations such as the Scottish Co-operative Women's Guild (SCWG) and the Women's Labour League (WLL) were dominated by housewives rather than wage-earning women. The SCWG was aimed specifically at housewives and more particularly at the wives of better off sections of the working class. According to the Scottish Guild's first historian and former president, Mrs Buchan, its original purpose was to enable :

"the women of the co-operative movement to meet together in friendly converse and by so doing, help to break the monotonous existence of even a comfortable and desirable home" <sup>14</sup>

The WLL, the Women's section of the Labour Party, established its first Scottish Branch in Glasgow in June 1908.<sup>15</sup> Its first President was Lizzie Glasier, sister of Bruce Glasier, editor of Labour Leader. The correspondence of the Glasgow League indicates that positions of responsibility in the organisation were also occupied by middle class women. In letters to the Town Clerk from two members of the League responsible for preparing schemes for the relief of unemployment among women, the addresses given were in the prosperous Hyndland and Kelvindale districts of the City.<sup>16</sup> Many of the Leagues' activists seem to have been drawn from the ILP, as Miss Hanman, a member of the branch's press committee claimed that within two months of the formation of the Glasgow Branch, it had :

"a membership of 60 or 70 including the best working women in the ILP"<sup>17</sup>

The WLL, in common with the women's co-operative guild, saw their main function as recruiting housewives to the Labour movement and

regarded enlisting women wage-earners as :

"the supplementary side to the interesting of the working wives and mothers in our cause" <sup>18</sup>

Of the clutch of suffrage organisations, such as the Women's Freedom League and the Scottish Federation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, none seem to have attracted women workers in any great numbers. The Scottish Women's Social and Political Union did not embark on a campaign of militant action until 1913, and newspaper accounts of suffragette activists indicate that it was generally middle class women who were involved in these incidents, whilst their prominent members were of a similar background and included Helen Fraser, a WSPU organiser who was an ex artist.<sup>19</sup> There were a small number of women like Helen Crawford and Agnes Dolan who were active in labour politics and also members of the WSPU. This was probably a reflection of the close association between the ILP and the WSPU in its early years. However, the only working class women's organisation to affiliate to a suffrage society was the SCWG which had delegates on the Committee of the Non-militant West of Scotland Suffrage Society.<sup>20</sup> Working women were not totally unrepresented in suffrage organisations. Jessie Stephens, a member of the ILP and active in the Domestic Workers Association, was an enthusiastic WSPU'er,<sup>21</sup> however she appears to have been an exception to the general rule.

Although working class women remained aloof from the predominantly middle class suffrage organisation, there is strong evidence that the suffrage issue enjoyed wide support among working class women, including women workers.

Of the constellation of socialist and labour organisations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Women's Co-operative Guild was the first and most persistent advocate of the extension of the parliamentary franchise to women. As early as 1893 the Guild sent a petition to the Government in favour of women's suffrage and consistently passed resolutions on votes for women at annual conferences.

The predominantly female Dundee Union of Jute and Flax workers passed several resolutions in support of women's suffrage, including a resolution condemning the imprisonment of suffragettes who had demonstrated in the House of Commons,<sup>22</sup> and on one occasion a speaker from the WSPU was invited to address the women members of the Union.<sup>23</sup> However, there was dissent within the Committee of the Union over forging closer links with the WSPU and an invitation to send a delegate to a WSPU Conference in the Gillfillan Halls in Dundee, was left to lie on the table.<sup>24</sup> Support for women's suffrage was not unanimous within the committee with some of the male members arguing in favour of the adult suffrage position. Even after the Labour Party had changed its policy to opposition to any proposed extension to the franchise which did not include women, some male members of the committee remained intransigent in their advocacy of adult suffrage.<sup>25</sup> However, the women textile workers of Scotland did not organise and agitate for the suffrage on the scale of their counterparts in the North of England, in spite of the evident support for suffrage from working women in Dundee and Kilbirnie. The organisations of the Radical Suffragists of Lancashire found no parallel amongst the jute workers of the East of Scotland or the textile workers in the West.

It would appear that with the exception of a small number of women who were prominent in the trade union movement, working women seem to have been absent from the networks of political organisations which flourished in the pre war years. There were obviously objective constraints which imposed limitations on their full participation, as Hannah Mitchell, an activist in the Lancashire Radical Suffrage Association remarked :

"No cause can be won between dinner and tea, and most of us who were married had to work with one hand tied behind us." <sup>26</sup>

These constraints could equally operate for the unmarried women workers who often shouldered domestic responsibilities as either daughters or single mothers. <sup>27</sup> However, women workers shared their exclusion with unskilled male workers who similarly were not well represented in the

formal political organisations of the labour movement. The ILP's membership was predominantly skilled manual workers, although it attracted a fair amount of clerks, supervisory workers and professional people<sup>28</sup> and the small membership of the Social Democratic Party tended to draw from the same occupational background. Although there is little concrete information on the membership of the Socialist Labour Party, it clearly did not expect to recruit members amongst the poorer section of the working class, believing that 'it was useless going to slum districts as the people there seemed to be hopeless'.<sup>29</sup>

Historians and socialists themselves have long tussled with the question of the failure of socialist organisations to attract the unskilled and semi-skilled to their ranks, with few explanations avoiding the imputation of a reactionary or 'lumpen' consciousness to this substantial section of the working class. However, an important consideration in the pre-war years must be the doubtful appeal of organisations, whose politics were centred on an electoral strategy at both local and national level, to those who were excluded from the franchise, particularly when no campaign for adult suffrage was ever mounted by these organisations.

Given the absence of unskilled and semi-skilled men from the political associations of the labour movement, it perhaps should not be surprising that wage earning women, the vast majority of whom were classed as unskilled, should also be absent. And yet the ILP attracted substantial numbers of working class housewives whilst the Women's Cooperative Guild and the Women's Labour League were formed principally to introduce labour politics to women. However, these organisations related to women in their capacity as homemakers and as the 'wives, sisters and sweet-hearts of male workers'.<sup>30</sup> Women's involvement in politics and wider social questions was premised on the belief that it would develop their qualities as homemakers as well as infusing the 'purifying and elevating' influence of women into political and social life. The attitude to women workers was underpinned by the overarching assumption that women's employment was temporary, that married women's work violated the 'natural' division of labour between the sexes and that women's primary role was in the domestic sphere.

The largest of the women's organisations was the Scottish Co-operative Women's Guild which grew from an initial membership of a few hundred in 1892 to 12,420 in 1913.<sup>31</sup> The primary objective of the Guild was to promote the principles and ideals of co-operation amongst the women with the aim of making them 'better wives, better mothers and better members of society', and to train them 'to take their place in the home, in the social circle and in the Co-operative Society'.<sup>32</sup> In the early years of the Guild, the emphasis was very much on women's role as homemakers and the content of their education courses reflects a concern with training women in domestic skills. Topics for discussion and lectures in the branches included 'Home Management', 'Personal Hygiene', and 'Food and Drink', as well as practical classes in laundry work, flower making and cookery.<sup>33</sup>

However, during the early years of the 20th century, the Guild gradually extended the scope of its activities, including affiliation to the Labour Party at a time when its English counterpart declined to join<sup>34</sup> and campaigning vigorously in the 1910 General Election. However, this politicisation was still accompanied by a staunch commitment to Sabbatarianism, a belief that crime and poverty were the product of intemperance and the conviction that the Christian home was the cornerstone of a civilised society.<sup>35</sup> Guildswomen were encouraged to 'acquaint themselves with social questions such as the housing of the poor and the drink question'<sup>36</sup> and in 1910 this trend was incorporated into Guild policy when a resolution was passed arguing that :

"the time has now arrived when women should take a deep interest in social and civic questions and calls upon the Central Council to organise meetings prepare papers and addresses for the purpose of bringing the importance of citizenship before the Guild." <sup>37</sup>

Guild branches campaigned vigorously on a broad range of issues, including medical inspection of school children, school meals, minimum wages for co-operative employers, anti-credit trading, opposition to the use of the training profits for the relief of rates and equal concessions for working women travelling on public transport.<sup>38</sup> By 1912 there was

a discernable shift in their educational work towards wider political and social questions such as Poor Law legislation, Municipal and School Board work, labour exchanges and sweated labour, although domestic concerns were maintained with the inclusion of a lecture on 'Flannelette and its Dangers'.<sup>39</sup>

Although women's province was defined as the home and thus her primary duties and responsibilities related to the family, the Guild maintained that this should not preclude women from participation in public life, arguing that 'the hand that rocked the cradle was directed by a brain that notwithstanding she had to be the wife and mother and responsible for the home, was yet able to spare the time and the will to help her sister-worker'.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover it was argued that political life would be enriched by women's contribution as they possessed a number of valuable qualities, both moral and practical, which derived from their role as homemakers and mothers. Mrs Buchan, president of the Guild for several years, argued that guildswomen were more conversant with the 'inner workings of the movement' than the men, as their role of 'Chancellors of the Exchequer' in the home imbued them with the root principles of cooperation.<sup>41</sup> Whilst in a lecture on 'Women's Influence, and the Decay of Home Life', a Mr Miller stressed women's 'ability for special service whenever tenderness, love and sympathy were required'.<sup>42</sup> Women's role in the cooperative movement and her relationship to it was viewed as an extension of their role in the family :

"..... the existence of a branch or branches of the Guild in connection with a cooperative society should be guaranteed that, in that society there is a strong refining influence, leading the society to cooperative idealism, as the mother leads her husband and children in the right direction." <sup>43</sup>

For male co-operators the particular virtues which women possessed were regarded as ideally suited to the role of moral campaigner and it was believed their major contribution to the movement would centre on schemes for the 'moral and social elevation of the poorer members

(of society)' and 'the elimination of Sin and Crime.'<sup>44</sup>

However the women themselves did not predicate their public role solely on the basis of the duties of citizens but also the rights and they stressed the 'advancement of women as citizens' as much as the responsibilities of women to the cooperative movement. A concerted effort was made to get women cooperators elected on to a wide range of committees including the committees of the cooperative movement itself and by 1911, 8 guildwomen were on the boards of management and 14 on educational committees.<sup>45</sup> In spite of the rhetoric of male cooperators, the women often encountered male resistance to their attempts to extend women's influence in the internal affairs of the movement and Mrs Buchan was nominated 13 times before she succeeded in being elected to the Board of the St George Society in 1910.<sup>46</sup>

Women co-operators were exhorted to regard themselves as 'a worker, a missionary for the cause of women's progress' and to support 'all questions especially relating to women'.<sup>47</sup> Consequently there was a strong feminist strand within the Guild which could bring them into conflict with the wider labour movement as well as male cooperators. Their unflinching commitment to women's suffrage and their rejection of the adult suffrage position as 'not at all favourable to the wants and wishes of our association'<sup>48</sup> is a case in point as was their tribute to Queen Victoria on her death.

"Her vigilant attention to public affairs, her conscientious discharge of the difficult duties of her position, the tender affection which characterised her in the capacities of wife and mother, enshrined her in the heart of every woman in her wide realm."<sup>49</sup>

The formulation of this tribute succinctly captures the Guild's conception of women's role which was based both on the rights and duties of women as wives and mothers and indicates the definition of feminism which would flow from this.

In Scotland the Women's Labour League was dominated by women of the ILP and consequently its political ideology and conception of women's role was largely derived from that organisation. Although the ILP was formed in Bradford in 1893, Scottish influences on its development were significant in that three of its four leading figures were Scots.

Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald and Bruce Glasier.<sup>50</sup> However in national electoral politics, the ILP's performance in Scotland was relatively weak before 1914 and its membership tended to be concentrated in Glasgow. Of the eleven Scottish delegates to the party conference in 1905, the majority were provided by Glasgow and of the 29 branches in 1900, the vast majority were from the industrial West.<sup>51</sup>

The dominance of Scottish Liberalism in the latter half of the 19th century owed much to its capacity to address specifically Scottish concerns, principally the land question and the Irish question, and it was these issues which more than any other gave Liberalism its radical content in Scotland. No surprisingly therefore, when socialism re-emerged in Scotland in the late 1880's with the formation of the Scottish Labour Party, it displayed many of the political traits and carried on many of the radical policies associated with Scottish Liberalism, evinced by its prime target for vilification, landlordism. The continuities between Liberalism and Labour Socialism, embodied in Scotland by the ILP, were not only restricted to the land question but evident in its strongly moral and ethical tone, its association with non-conformism and its emphasis on education as the means of moral and social elevation.<sup>52</sup>

Although the ILP was virulently anti-capitalist in its rhetoric and invoked the vision of a socialist commonwealth as the solution to poverty, oppression and suffering, its specific proposals for reform were limited and pragmatic. Its economic analysis of capitalism identified the key problems as insufficient purchasing power as a result of the disproportion between production and consumption<sup>53</sup> and there was an implicit belief that British Capitalism could be made more efficient by the eradication of parasitic elements such as landlordism and state regulation of the economy.<sup>54</sup> Given the emerging current within Liberalism of commitment to state sponsored social reform, the ILP's faith in state intervention as a panacea was another strand of its politics which was not dissimilar to the more radical elements of Liberalism.

The ILP's belief in the neutrality of state institutions led to its politics centering on an electoral strategy which sought to colonise

both local and national political institutions with the representatives of labour organisations. However the ILP was distinguished by its willingness to engage in direct and radical struggles of an extra parliamentary nature and its fostering of organisations of local democracy such as ward committees and tenants' defence associations.<sup>55</sup> It directed its agitational work towards local issues, emphasising the importance of grass roots involvement, whilst casting the net of its educational activity to include women and children. The Women's Labour League established political education classes in a number of wards where women voters were 'brought together in homely way to learn the meaning of the labour movement' whilst the Socialist Sunday Schools became an integral part of recreational life for many working class children. The ILP stressed the importance of enlisting women to the socialist cause because of their role as moral guardians of the children:

"When we win the men for socialist, we do no more than that, when we get the women, we get at the same time all the men and women of the next generation."<sup>56</sup>

However the inclusion of women and children in the educational, recreational and cultural life of labour organisations was a relatively new departure which not only went some way towards breaking the sexual segregation of the cultural and leisure associations of the working class, but also served to reconstitute them on the basis of a family-wide appeal rather than a purely masculine one. Socials, dances, choirs 'at homes', day trips and concerts enabled the participation of family members on a wider basis than had been possible in the leisure associations of the mid Victorian labour movement. The creation of a new cultural nexus of working class recreational life was a hallmark of the pre-war socialist and labour movement and included socialist drama societies, choirs and orchestras as well as socialist swimming and cycling clubs.<sup>57</sup> However cultural activities were promoted to advance working class struggle with the object of attracting greater numbers to the 'cause' rather than to offer an alternative conception of culture defined in socialist terms and every branch was urged to be a centre for social life because :

"Good music and good singing and literacy classes will do more to bring the people to us than all the speeches ever delivered." 58

Indeed the Socialist Labour Party was particularly disparaging about the Socialist Sunday schools dismissing them as 'ethical schools' which were more aptly described as 'Labour Church Sunday Schools' and claimed their organisation had set up the first genuine Socialist Sunday Schools. 59

It has been argued that the ILP in Glasgow inherited the mantle of the radical traditions of radical liberalism which had dominated the West of Scotland in the latter quarter of the 19th century.<sup>60</sup> This may provide part of the explanation for the ILP's sympathetic stance to women's suffrage, as equality was incorporated into the ideology of radical liberalism; whatever the explanation, the ILP both nationally and in Glasgow was the only socialist organisation which supported the extension of the franchise to women on the same basis as men, although little was done in the way of active support for this position or the promotion of a campaign for women's suffrage. However, many of the debates on what was termed the Woman Question were rehearsed in the pages of Forward, which although nominally independent, largely expressed the views of Glasgow ILP. These debates indicate that although women's suffrage was part of the struggle for equal rights for women, sexual equality was defined as the recognition of the equal value of motherhood and the centrality of the home and the family to the health of a nation :

"First let our citizenship be recognised, and we are on the only safe and sure road to the enthronement of motherhood equally with fatherhood as the guiding principle of our national life. Then will woman, the mother and the home-maker, set about her beneficent work in the land, unhampered - no longer 'unofficially'." 61

Whilst subscribing to the ideology of a separate sexual sphere it was argued that gender relations should be governed by complementarity and women's role ascribed equal status. The corollary of this view was the idealisation of the home and the desire to resurrect the family as the cornerstone of civilised society. The destruction of the home and the undermining of the importance of the family was regarded as the product of unfettered capitalism and an index of its brutality, whilst

the task of defending the home and family was assigned to the socialists and incorporated into the working class struggle. Defence of the family was interpreted as the defence of the 'natural' sexual division of labour the maintenance of a separate sexual sphere for women, which was of course defined as the home. By drawing women into the labour force, capitalism was regarded as violating the natural order of things and destroying the 'natural' qualities of women. In an article fulminating against the extent of married women's work in Dundee and deriding a scheme for the provision of Day Nurseries, Tom Johnston, the editor of Forward asserted :

"The husbands stay at home dry nursing, the women go out to earn wages. What an inversion of civilisation ! What a damning indictment of capitalism !"

The article concluded :

"That's capitalism busily, openly unashamedly destroying the home ..... Imagine it ! After 1900 years of preached Christianity." 62

It is perhaps not surprising that the ILP should have been such staunch defenders of the domestic ideology of separate sexual spheres. Many working class struggles of the early years of industrialisation had resolved around the introduction of women to waged work in factories on a large scale and the displacement of male labour by female labour. Although there was a current within radical thinking which seized the opportunity provided by this recomposition of the sexual division of labour, to postulate new forms of relations between the sexes and the dissolution of existing sexual divisions,<sup>63</sup> the prevailing view was to restore pre-existing divisions where women's contribution to the family economy was supplementary and did not undermine her domestic role. Many of the struggles of the early 19th century were inspired by an opposition to proletarianisation and a harking back to the age of the independent producer, and a sexual division of labour where men and women occupied well defined spheres. However with the separation of

home and work accelerated by industrialisation, the restoration of this sexual division of labour now involved the expulsion of women from the labour force, their containment in the home and the creation of the ideal of a family wage. These goals of a nascent working class subsequently became incorporated into the ideology of the fully fledged labour movement of the mid Victorian period and remained the touchstone for the socialist organisations which emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

However the ILP's preoccupation with women's role as mothers was to some extent a reflection of contemporary concerns with 'The health of the nation' as well as a commitment to sexual equality and the rights of women. Labour League women and ILP socialists shared a common conception with official opinion of the pivotal role of the mother in the health and welfare of the future generation and subscribed to the philosophy that the greatness of the nation was linked to the quality of family life.<sup>64</sup> Whereas medical and official bodies tended to deposit the responsibility for infant welfare with the mother and strove to promote improved child care by advocating greater maternal efficiency, Labour league women were more likely to advocate environmental solutions and social reform, for example, blaming the quality of the milk supply for infant mortality rather than bad maternal habits.<sup>65</sup>

Whilst the ILP alone of the early twentieth century labour movements displayed an active commitment to the 'Women's question', its definition of feminism involved elevating the status and role of mothers and re-asserting the ideology of separate sexual spheres, thereby reinforcing the sexual division of labour and the subordination of women in society. The ILP did have a vision of their new Socialist Commonwealth which involved the transformation of family life and the roles of women. However, it was a vision which was still grounded in the ideology of women's domestic role and the complementarity of gender relations. An editorial in Forward argued that when women got the vote :

"Where man has rigged a scaffold and a gas pipe, woman will plant a

flower ..... the inevitable tendency will be ..... to drastic Housing and Temperance legislation.

Old Age Pensions and humanitarian fervour should immediately follow that, and in some time, a complete transformation in our notions of architecture..... We shall pay more attention to open spaces to decoration, to wider streets, probably side-walked with trees." 66

The introduction of women into politics and public life was viewed as a means of democratising and humanising society by incorporating the particular qualities women developed by virtue of their roles as wives and mothers!

"Soon for the first time, we shall set abuilding that new society, built on a true Democracy, and which absorbing as it must, the finer women feelings, and the social spirit, gives to Humanity its one last hope of rearing on Earth that happy, joyous, free life, for which we have struggled and yearned down the centuries." 67

Although the ILP's definition of feminism was conceived in terms of women's role as homemakers, it was sufficiently broad to encompass a conception of equality and freedom based on the economic freedom of women and their emancipation from the drudgery of housework. It was envisaged by Johnston that within a generation of women acquiring the vote :

"..... we shall have demands by married women that they shall be paid wages for indoor work, payment to be fixed and regular, and made direct to them by husband's employers. That payment to continue during maternity. In short the economic freedom of women. The women will demand less unnecessary home work. She will see the advantages of Cooperative housekeeping. She will see that if several families clubbed together to form a hotel company, they will all live cheaper, economise in the cooking and save the present useless wastage of coal fires and harassed feminine labour by having common dining halls and the cooking done by professional cooks." 68

However the provision of communal facilities was advocated as a means of consolidating the family, rather than undermining it, and as a way of providing the condition for women to develop to their full potential as homemakers. Municipal laundries were supported as :

"..... It would mean more leisure and less worry for wives and mothers, more comfort for the men folks, and more consideration, better attention and a brighter home for the bairns. Nor would it interfere with the family or the marriage vows one little bit, except of course to make the former less of a drudgery, and the latter less irksome and more of an abiding, mutually agreeable compact that present conditions will at all times permit in many a working man's home." 69

Although there was a strong commitment to women's rights, a woman's entry into politics was premised on her role as a mother, thus the WLL urged women to take an interest in the sanitary and education committee, in the provision of school meals by local authorities and a whole range of similar issues on the basis that :

"..... though 'Woman's place is in the home', she cannot fill her duties there unless she looks beyond its four walls, and takes her part in public affairs which affect the home and children closely." 70

Women's recruitment to labour politics was rarely expressed in terms of the rights of women or as a means of developing their full potential. The assumption of separate sexual spheres involved dependency as much as equality, and in political life could be interpreted to mean a separate and auxiliary role for women. In an article urging men to undertake propaganda work and distribute socialist literature from door to door, a woman ILP'er argued :

"Our men can do this good work if they only care. I know that if our Branch don't begin soon it won't be my fault. Because I will 'sway' the Branch into doing it. And you can bet your saucepan that my husband gives his hour per week to the cause instead of wasting his time arguing about impossible theories. Now then, you women readers, begin to 'nag' your husbands into doing some useful propaganda work for Socialism." 71

Women's role was ascribed equal value and their positive qualities accorded recognition for the part they could play in the regeneration of society, but the acceptance of the existing sexual division of labour and the ideology of separate spheres ensured that there was no discussion of these qualities being universalised or of the transformation of

men's roles in relation to the home, the family and women. Essentially women's place in the labour movement was based on their status as wife and mother and whilst encouraging female militancy it was in a way which reinforced existing gender divisions and confirmed the home as the domain of women.

The Social Democratic Party nationally is usually depicted as a sectarian and dogmatic organisation which was isolated from the mainstream of the labour movement. However the SDP in Scotland could not be accused of isolationism as they participated fully in the socialist culture of the pre-war years, due largely to the efforts of John McLean to reach the widest possible audience with his education classes. McLean, the leading light of the SDP, also rejected the mechanical version of Marxism prevalent at the time which minimised the role of working class organisation and activity in effecting change and encouraged day to day struggles. In Scotland, therefore, the SDP had a greater impact on the Scottish working class than it did south of the border, although its membership was still tiny and restricted mainly to skilled workers.

The SDP in Scotland had little to say on the specific issue of the 'women's question' therefore their conception of women's role and the relations between the sexes can only be inferred from their political diagnosis and their vision of an alternative social and political order. McLean only referred to a socialist future where classes will be abolished and no mention is made of sexual inequalities, the sexual division of labour or the role of women in a socialist society. However, there is an indication that McLean subscribed to the view that married women's province was the home and not the workplace when he exhorted women strikers in Neilston to form a union :

"We strongly advised the Nitshill lassies to get into a Union , and stay in until they got married."<sup>72</sup>

Clearly the political ideologies of the socialist and co-operative organisations and their conception of women's role within this framework

conditioned their response to women workers and their struggles. The WLL were active in campaigns to alleviate unemployment amongst women, organising demonstrations, setting up a shelter for unemployed women and petitioning Glasgow Council to set up a Women's Distress Committee. Members of the League also devised schemes for training in Domestic Work and Hygiene, elementary Sick Nursing, the establishment of a Municipal Workshop and the creation of 'similarly suitable employment', such as needlework, agricultural field-work and market gardening.<sup>73</sup> The League's support for women's right to work was confined to spheres which were regarded as 'women's work' and did not pose any threat or competition to male employment thus confirming the sexual division of labour in industry and the existence of a separate labour market for women.

An additional concern of the League was the link between unemployment and prostitution, and their demand for municipal intervention to deal with women's unemployment was couched in terms of the need for the moral regulation of women rather than their rights to work.<sup>74</sup> Support for equal pay or the right of women to work was based on the recognition that the reality for many women was providing for dependants on a wage which was intended to be supplementary. The ideology of the male breadwinner and the ideal of the family wage was never challenged, only the consequences for those women whom economic necessity and personal circumstance forced to be breadwinners.

The emphasis which the ILP placed on social and political struggles involved corresponding neglect of industrial struggles. They derided strikes for their futility and encouraged trade unions to place their organisational might behind the struggle for labour representation in Parliament which was regarded as the true battleground of the class struggle. However, the ILP could be active in support of the struggles of women workers but it was in their capacity as victims, rather than as a way of developing their capacity for self-organisation. Their support was fuelled by the belief that capitalism had plucked these women from

their natural territory which stripped them of their natural 'womanly attributes'. George Barnes, an ILP member of Parliament addressed the women strikers of Kilbirnie, denounced their employers and pledged his support for their cause on the basis that it was the iniquities of capitalism which forced them to do 'men's work'.<sup>75</sup>

The ILP saw their task as establishing the ideal of a family wage as a reality and attacking every example of its violation. It was on this basis which they related to women workers and elicited their support for the socialist movement. There were obviously women workers for whom this policy had great appeal and who were in accord with the ILP's conception of women's role. A letter to Woman Worker from a married woman weaver expressed her support for socialism on the basis that :

"..... one of the most cruel and brutal conditions is that which married women have to live under when the time comes when they have to endure that sacred duty which should be the glory of superb womanhood. A mother has to go to the mill up to the time of childbirth because her husband's wage will not keep them. Then consider the heartache that mother must endure when she has to take her baby between 5 and 6 o'clock in the morning out to nursery in all kinds of weather. This is the system that brutalises, instead of bringing out the instincts of motherhood." <sup>76</sup>

However there were many working women who defended their right to work, supported equal pay and were critical of the position taken by many trade unionists and socialists, which sought to exclude women from certain occupations. A female printer from Edinburgh wrote to Forward complaining about support given to legislation to exclude women from working at the pit-brow, by John Wheatley, a leading ILP'er and founder of Catholic Socialist League :

"If at the present time you prohibit women working at dangerous, unhealthy or unfit industries then I contend you take them wholly from the entire labour market. I challenge your readers to show me one industry where the conditions of work all round are such as could be said is fit for our future mothers ?" <sup>77</sup>

She went on to decry the hypocrisy of men who wanted to exclude women from male trades - but did not care about the drudgery and toil involved in other work such as domestic service. She defended the

right to work and condemned her containment to the domestic sphere :

"It is said prohibition would have the effect of raising the wages of men and so enabling the women to remain at home. Even were such a state possible I doubt very much if it is desirable. Women as well as men are human beings and have the same instincts and longings just as men. She wishes to express herself in other ways than being just a toy, a pet, a doll.....

Women no longer believe her one niche in life is motherhood, she longs to do her share of the world's work, to assist in its education, add to its store of literature, art and science." <sup>78</sup>

For many women workers, the demand for the right to work and equal pay was based on necessity rather than a challenge to the ideology of a male breadwinner, but the commitment of the ILP to the ideology of separate sexual spheres and the sanctity of the family frequently led them to support sectional trade union struggles to exclude women which failed to recognise this elementary right.

The ILP's commitment to a family wage was to a large extent a reflection of the material interests of the ILP constituency which was of course drawn from the upper ranks of the working class and the lower middle class. This was similar to many of the ILP policies which although generating significant struggles, neglected the material interests of significant sections of the working class. The housing struggles in which ILP activists played a leading part, tackled the issue of rents when arguably a more pressing issue was the incredibly high number of evictions in Scotland, a problem which affected the poorer sections of the working class. <sup>79</sup> Although the ILP took a sympathetic stance to women's suffrage, extension of the franchise to either women or the remainder of the adult population was never a central demand or campaign, a significant omission in a party which was wedded to an electoral strategy. The demand for a family wage may have been perceived as a sound tactic for combating working class exploitation, but at the expense of these sections of the working class, mainly women, who were forced to labour for supplementary wages. In this respect the ILP were as sectional and exclusivist as

the trade unionism they so readily dismissed. Consequently they failed to develop political strategies which embraced all sections of the working class.

The only socialist organisation which related to women as workers rather than homemakers, was the Socialist Labour Party whose emphasis on industrial struggle and class unity precluded a conception of an arena of struggle other than the workplace. The SLP were revolutionary socialists who argued that capitalism could not be reformed by electing representatives of the working class to parliament, and as an alternative advocated building Industrial Unionism to organise the economic power of the working class. This strategy flowed from an analysis of capitalism which attributed all manifestations of exploitation and oppression to the monopoly of economic power by the capitalist class and which asserted the identity of interests of all sections of the working class, irrespective of occupational, racial, ethnic and sexual divisions. Their insistence on the futility of reforming capitalism, which they argued contributed to its stability, endowed their socialism with a particular brand of revolutionary purism which could be dismissive of measures intended to lessen the hardship of working class life.

The diagnosis of all problems as class problems clearly shaped the SLP's attitude to women's suffrage and the more general issue of women's rights. Although they frequently proclaimed their belief in the equality of the sexes and women's social, political and economic emancipation, they remained implacably opposed to women's suffrage arguing :

"Socialism is in full accord with the Suffragist movement insofar as it is a protest against the present social status of women. Socialism is in accord with the Suffragists exposure of the contemptible and superficial arguments of the anti-feminists, Socialism takes no part in the howl of approbium raised against the tactics of the neo-suffragists, but gives full credit to these women for the energy and successful organisation with which they are carrying out their plan of campaign. Finally Socialism also aims at true equality of the sexes and the end of women's subjection to men.

When all is said, however, Socialism and Suffragism remain at enmity because of the basic difference in their principles.... under the existing system of society any change of laws giving the same opportunities to women as to men, would only benefit those women who belonged to the privileged or propertied class in society. Socialism in fact is a revolutionary movement, Suffrage is a mere bourgeois reform movement ..... The SLP holds that the Suffragist movement is of great importance and interest to the women of the bourgeoisie, but of none to women of the working class." 80

They buttressed this argument against women's suffrage with arguments about the misguided belief that acquisition of the vote would lead to equality :

"Women's subjection did not arise from political disabilities - these disabilities arose from women's subjection. And that subjection from the first had a distinctly economic basis, sex inequality as Morgan has shown came into being in the dim past of barbaric ages with the development of a system of society based upon private property." 81

As with other issues, the source of women's subordination and oppression was diagnosed as an economic problem which could only be resolved by the abolition of class society and the birth of socialism. Their explanation of gender subordination was grounded in a crude economism which attributed it to the fact that women were :

"not credited with the needs of men. Her labour power has a cheaper price because her cost of living is cheaper." 82

The SLP's analysis of women's subordination drew heavily on Engels' Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State which linked women's oppression to the development of private property and her subsequent exclusion from public and socially necessary labour. As there was no private property in the working class family, it was therefore argued that there was no material basis for male supremacy, particularly with the increasing employment of women in waged labour, which gave them independence. Thus women's subordination was not linked to her role in the family in reproducing labour power, as the family itself as a reproducer of the working class was not regarded as significant in the emergence of class society or the maintenance of capitalist society.

Although the SLP prescribed the equal access of women to the means of production as the basis of independence and equality, in practice they subscribed to the ideology of a family wage under capitalism, accepting that if women were married their wages would be supplementary to the man's. They attributed this to the fact that married women themselves were content to work for less money because they had other means of support, claiming that single and widowed women :

"Suffer from the competition of many less helpless wives and daughters who necessities only force them to aim at supplementary earnings." 83

This position is a variant on the theme that there are certain groups of workers who are willing to work for lower wages, and ignores the powerful ideological and social factors which determine earnings. For the SLP women's low pay was attributable solely to economic factors as they regarded the roots of women's subordination as having an economic basis. They therefore neglected the ideological basis for women's oppression and the role of the family in its maintenance.

The SLP were reticent about outlining a detailed blue-print for the new socialist order and despite their constant assertions about the equality of the sexes they give little indication of how the role of women and men might be transformed by socialism or what constituted equality. They were clearly sensitive to attacks on socialists being anti-family and argued that whilst it was impossible to predict the detailed results of freedom for women :

"..... this much can be said. If the home in its true sense is also an ideal, if monogamy in its true sense is also an ideal, these are ideals which will only be possible of realisation under socialism. There is nothing in Socialism incompatible with that true home life which Capitalism destroys." 84

The crucial issue for the SLP was the abolition of classes through the

socialisation of the means of production, the question of the family and the roles of men and women were not ones which were regarded as central to socialist strategy. Their claim that :

"Whatever ideas individual may hold in regard to (the true freedom of women) can only be more or less of guesswork." <sup>85</sup>

indicates that these matters were consigned to the private and subject to individual rather than collective resolution.

The refusal of the SLP to view women as other than members of an oppressed and exploited class whose historic mission was the overthrow of capitalism, meant that they did not subscribe to the stereotypical images of women as passive and were quick to acknowledge women's combative quality.

Their rejection of the sectionalism of craft unionism and insistence of the common interests of the working class led them to champion women's right to work in the face of campaigns to exclude 'cheap female labour'. They took Edinburgh compositors to task when they demanded that machine composition be solely undertaken by male union labour accusing them of being reactionary and divisive :

"What economic or social argument can be put forward to justify the claim that the trade is yours ? Whatever the justification there may have been in the past when a high degree of ability may have been necessary to acquire and work at the trade, that reason has forever passed away, if it ever was more than a trade guild superstition."<sup>86</sup>

However their dismissal of reforms which they considered mere palliatives and their refusal to acknowledge the specific problems of women as distinct from the class question, meant that they did nothing in practice to advance the right of women to work and indeed could be obstructive on this issue. Thus they attacked the Women's Freedom League for advocating maternity benefits because :

"..... the intention of the capitalist is to secure a healthier and more capable community of workers." 87

As the issue of women's rights was subsumed under the class struggle, the SLP did not attempt to relate to women workers as women but as wage earners whose entry into the labour force made their interests identical with other wage earners. Therefore they made no special effort to organise women workers and did not conduct any campaigns based on the specific interests of women workers, such as advancing their right to work. Women were recruited to the struggle for socialism as wage - earners, therefore all non-wage-earning women were ignored, as was the real differences in the historical experience of diverse sections of the working class.

#### CONCLUSION

With the exception of the SLP, the political organisations of the working class in the pre-war years had a conception of women's role in terms of the domestic sphere and their primary commitment to the home and the family. The housing struggles of the war years and the campaigns around school meals, the medical inspection of school children and a range of issues, is testimony to the fact that this position encouraged a definition of feminism which exploited the potential for the broadening of political consciousness and political engagement within the parameters of the existing sexual division of labour. Although this ideology generated political struggles, it reflected and reinforced the fragmentation of the working class along gender lines by confirming women's association with domestic labour and reinforcing patterns of job segregation which confined women to a well-defined sphere of 'women's employment'.

The idealisation of family life and the central place accorded to women in the spiritual and moral development of the working class were in stark contrast to the serious material disadvantages imposed on those women

who did not conform to the stereotype of the women dependent on the earnings of a male breadwinner and who were forced to sell their labour for a wage which was assumed to be supplementary.

The stereotypical image of women as homemakers treated women as a homogeneous group with identical experiences and needs, and denied the validity of their experience as waged labour. Women's place in the labour movement was based on their status as wife and mother and there was no attempt to harness them to the struggle for socialism in their capacity as workers or to encourage them to identify or organise as workers. This not only reinforced their marginality in the labour market but contributed to the marginality of working women to working class politics.

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### CONCLUSION

Clearly women's entry into social production did not release them from male domination or replace gender subordination with exploitation as waged labour, but rather their experience as workers was premised upon their subordination as a gender. Even in a town such as Dundee where female employment was widespread and many women were the major or sole contributors to the family income, the yoke of patriarchal authority and control hung heavily, defining the nature of their work, their earnings, modes of supervision and codes of behaviour. Therefore, women's identity as members of a gender was not discarded when they became workers, as in practice their work roles developed on the basis of this prior and primary identity.

Despite the pervasiveness of male power, women still created space for resistance and it would be a mistake to view them as passive victims who were completely subjugated by the patriarchal relations of capitalist production. However, because they experienced waged labour as a gender as well as workers, this generated forms of resistance which made traditional forms of organisation less relevant. For the reverse side of the coin was that the models of labour organisation which developed in the Victorian period were influenced, inter alia, by the dominant ideology of gender, which limited their ability to relate to the experience of women workers. Both work and the organisations which developed to represent the interests of the working class at the point of production were suffused with masculine connotations. "Real" work was appropriated by men and became synonymous with physical labour which was either tough, dangerous or highly skilled and which thus excluded women who were thought to be incapable of performing such tasks.

Labour historians have drawn attention to the exclusivist practices of Victorian trade unionism which sought to maintain differentials of skill and earnings within the labour force. They have ignored, however, the ways in which such practices embodied assumptions about gender roles and the familial ideology that women's place was in the home. The notion of the male provider and protector reinforced the claims of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled trade unionists to a prior right to work and their

demand for a family wage which meant that frequently their strategies disadvantaged women workers, even when other sectional policies had been eroded or abandoned. The corollary of the demand for a family wage for men, was the conception of women as economic dependants whose earnings did not need to cover their living costs. This contributed to one of the most pressing problems for working women in this period, their appallingly low wages; and yet the response of the trade union movement to a situation which they helped to create, was to view women's low pay as a consequence of their inability to organise and as a threat or a problem to be overcome by excluding them from the labour market or at least controlling their entry. Because trade unions related to women as dependants and failed to recognise the ways in which women's gender roles structured their status and experience as waged workers and created many of the problems which they faced in the labour market, they in practice represented the interests of male workers.

By concentrating on formal trade union organisations assumptions have been made about women based on their absence from these spheres, as if these areas exhausted all collectivist tendencies. Consequently the received view of non-unionised women is either one of irrationality and impulsiveness or deference and docility. However, it is clear that the history of women workers is one of struggle and opposition and that they frequently displayed a strong commitment to collective action. This is not to suggest that women's forms of resistance were superior to these of the organised trade union movement or that they displayed a higher level of class consciousness, but to reappraise the view that women represented the most backward section of the working class.

The nature of sexual divisions in society mediated women's experience of class and therefore shaped the form of their class consciousness. It would therefore be a mistake to view the form of working women's resistance in this period as outmoded, anachronistic or irrelevant simply because it did not conform to the practices of nineteenth century trade unionism.

The controls and constraints placed upon every aspect of women's lives derived from a male dominated culture, therefore, not surprisingly women's resistance often took the form of subverting male authority and challenging gender divisions. Women's collective struggles in the workplace, even when

they were expressions of economic grievances, displayed an awareness of their common experience and identity as women as well as workers. Waged-labour, by drawing women together as a gender as well as workers, created the potential for them to struggle as a gender as well as workers. Although there is little basis for the unqualified optimism of Engels' prediction concerning the liberating consequences of women's entry into social production, intensification and reinforcement of gender subordination was not the only alternative. Women's entry into waged labour generated struggles which both strengthened their capacity for self-organisation and contained implicit challenges to prescribed gender roles.

The experience of women workers between 1850 and 1914 illustrates that the problems which women faced in the labour market derived from the wider sexual division of labour in society and that if trade unions were to adequately represent their interests, the structures and practices of trade unionism would have had to recognise and challenge these divisions rather than reflect them. This would have involved developing alternative forms of organisation and moving beyond the traditional concerns of trade unionism in order to encompass issues which tackled gender divisions.

Historical debate about divisions within the British working class has largely centred on the divisions between skilled and unskilled workers and more precisely between a labour aristocracy of workers and the rest. The concept of the labour aristocracy has recently been subjected to vigorous criticism which has seriously questioned its explanatory value and drawn attention to the fact that its central weakness is that it is too simplistic to capture all the distinctions between British workers in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The present study provides further evidence of the inadequacy of an explanation of the social formation of the working class which poses a simple dichotomy between workers and fails to recognise either the complexity of divisions, or more profound divisions than skilled versus unskilled. In arguing that gender divisions were central to the formation of the workforce, it is not intended to substitute one polarity for another, but to draw attention to the interaction of class and gender and indeed to the interconnectedness of different elements of the social structure such as the family and the workplace. The orthodox Marxist definition of class which concentrates on the realm

of production and economic experience at the point of production has proved inadequate for an understanding of the differential experience of men and women in the labour market. This points to the need for a broader consideration of the social formation and an analysis of the interrelationship of production and reproduction if we are to conceptualise the position of women in the world of work.

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A P P E N D I C E S

APPENDIX : 1

POPULATION OF SCOTLAND 1851 - 1911

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	% OF DECENNIAL INCREASE
1851	1,375,479	1,513,263	2,888,742	10.25
1861	1,449,848	1,612,446	3,062,294	6.00
1871	1,603,143	1,756,875	3,360,018	9.72
1881	1,799,478	1,936,098	3,735,573	11.18
1891	1,942,717	2,082,930	4,025,647	7.77
1901	2,173,755	2,298,348	4,472,103	11.1
1911	2,308,839	2,452,065	4,760,904	6.5

Source : The Censuses of Great Britain and Scotland, 1851 - 1911

APPENDIX : 2

PERCENTAGE OF ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE WOMEN TO THE TOTAL  
NUMBER OF WOMEN 1851 - 1911

	SCOTLAND	GLASGOW	DUNDEE	EDINBURGH
1851	33.1(501,397)	39.31(68,472)	37.98(16,358)	38.59(40,552)
1861	32.8(529,460)	34.57(72,597)	40.52(20,774)	33.56(31,690)
1871	25.5(447,321)	32.56(80,071)	42.10(28,678)	34.75(38,207)
1881	25.7(498,271)	30.72(80,826)	40.10(31,617)	30.88(38,326)
1891	26.7(556,564)	29.70(100,221)	43.01(36,659)	31.43(44,623)
1901	25.7(591,624)	28.72(111,472)	41.68(37,567)	31.15(53,658)
1911	24.2(593,210)	27.93(112,597)	40.14(36,835)	31.16(55,128)

Actual numbers in brackets.

Source : The Censuses of Great Britain and Scotland, 1851 - 1911

POPULATION OF GLASGOW 1851 - 1911

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1851	154,930	174,167	329,097
1861	185,556	209,947	395,503
1871	230,995	246,737	477,732
1881	248,366	263,049	511,415
1891	320,081	338,117	658,198
1901	375,540	38,,169	761,709
1911	381,304	403,192	784,496

Note i) In 1872 the city boundaries were extended by 242 acres  
and after the 1891 census by 5,750 acres.  
NB : These figures are for the Municipal Burgh of Glasgow

Source : The Censuses of Great Britain and Scotland, 1851 - 1911

POPULATION OF DUNDEE 1851 - 1911

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1851	35,864	43,367	78,931
1861	40,395	51,209	91,664
1871	52,605	68,119	120,724
1881	61,400	75,839	140,239
1891	68,070	85,238	153,308
1901	71,048	90,125	161,173
1911	73,241	91,763	165,304

Source : The Censuses of Great Britain and Scotland, 1851 - 1911

WOMEN AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE LABOUR FORCE 1851 - 1911 (DUNDEE)

1851	42.03
1861	44.42
1871	46.50
1881	45.70
1891	45.60
1901	44.70
1911	43.80

Source : The Censuses of Great Britain and Scotland, 1851 - 1911

PERCENTAGE OF MARRIED WOMEN WHO WORKED 1911

SCOTLAND	4.1
GLASGOW	5.5
DUNDEE	23.4
EDINBURGH	5.1
GT. BRITAIN	9.6

**Source :** The Census. of Great Britain and Scotland, 1911

Number of workers employed in Mill - Various Years  
(Bowbridge Works, Dundee May 1919)

	M A L E S		F E M A L E S		TOTAL
	U 1 8	O 1 8	U 1 8	O 1 8	
APRIL 1907	183	267	153	621	1,224
OCTOBER 1907	181	266	160	622	1,229
JULY 1908	179	266	149	616	1,209
OCTOBER 1908	169	270	146	537	1,122
APRIL 1909	170	278	163	580	1,191
OCTOBER 1909	171	284	142	598	1,195
APRIL 1910	191	173	162	568	1,194
OCTOBER 1910	187	279	133	599	1,198
APRIL 1911	163	285	104	560	1,112
OCTOBER 1911	159	298	119	611	1,187
APRIL 1912	162	295	123	628	1,208
OCTOBER 1912	157	300	127	590	1,174
APRIL 1913	156	298	123	587	1,164
OCTOBER 1913	155	284	112	571	1,120
APRIL 1914	154	288	121	592	1,155
OCTOBER 1914	131	229	120	569	1,040

Source : J & A D Grimmond Limited JS 66/11/8/27 (part of the Sidlaw Industries Collection)

PATTERN OF WOMEN'S STRIKES 1892 - 1913

YEAR	NO OF STRIKES WHICH INCLUDED WOMEN	AVERAGE LENGTH (DAYS)	NO. OF WOMEN INVOLVED
1892	9	8.2	-
1893	5	5.4	-
1894	14	7.4	4,728
1895	10	3.3	33,163
1896	23	3.3	2,799
1897	19	6.5	2,319
1898	14	9.9	1,313
1899	13	8.4	35,962
1900	10	22.9	1,679
1902	7	8.0	1,278
1903	6	28.0	1,124
1904	2	6.5	600
1905	4	4.8	3,267
1906	5	6.0	22,450
1907	10	20.5	6,953
1908	No strikes recorded		
1909	3	27.7	603
1910	3	11.3	2,062
1911	8	20.6	5,582
1912	11	18.8	42,591
1913	13	26.0	4,689

Source : Reports by the Chief Labour Correspondent on Strikes and Lockouts in the United Kingdom 1892 - 1913

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